



## Tremor

Alarna woke with a start. Instinctively, she knew something was wrong. She'd fallen asleep on her sofa as soon as she'd got home from work, but that wasn't it. Cold beads of condensation had formed on the glass of water by the side of her bed. Each droplet shook and shimmered as she watched. Specks of dust tumbled from the ceiling tiles. The room seemed to be swaying around her. She carefully stepped out of bed and made her way over to the window.

There was a half-moon pinned to the darkening sky, but there was still some light to see by. Alarna stared down at a street in chaos, twenty-five floors below. She struggled to keep her balance. The floor seemed to be buckling under her feet and time seemed to have slowed down. Ever since she'd moved to San Francisco the year before, she'd lived in fear of what was now happening.

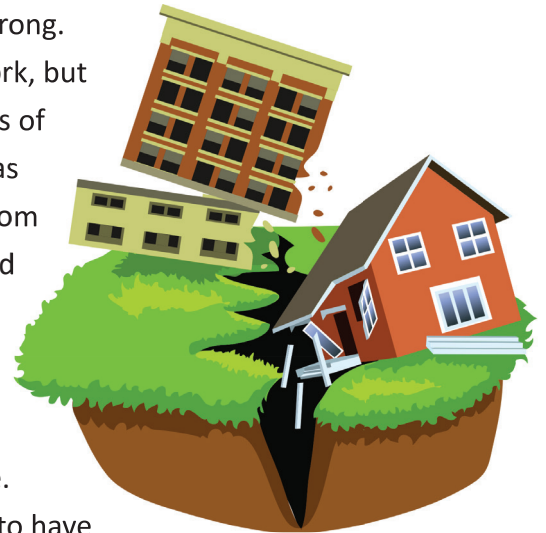
When she'd moved out west, her parents had warned her that the city was sat right on the edge of two tectonic plates. She knew that when they ground together, the pressure would build up until it was released. She'd learnt how earthquakes happened in junior school, but until now she'd never experienced one.

There wasn't time to collect her possessions. Alarna grabbed a pair of slip-on shoes and raced out into the hallway. Mrs Dubois from down the hall was desperately trying to drag her terrified poodle to the stairwell, but it wouldn't move. Alarna raced over and grabbed up the dog. She took the stairs two at a time until her lungs hurt and she felt sick. She wasn't sure if that was because of the exercise or the swaying building.

Once she hit the ground floor, she didn't stop. She'd seen enough television to know that the basement was likely to be safer than the streets. Who knew what was falling outside. She wrenched open the metal door into the basement and stopped. Everybody else in the building had beaten her there.

A blond-haired boy who Alarna recognised as her neighbour waved her over. She blushed and dragged the whimpering dog on its lead across the concrete floor. "Corey," the boy said, shuffling over to make room for both of them.

Alarna shook his hand and introduced herself. "I'm not sure what this one's called," she said, pointing at the dog. "He belongs to Mrs Dubois."



"This feels like a big one," Corey said. He looked up towards the ceiling as he spoke. "We get quite a few small tremors around here, but nothing like this."

"I reckon this one will be nearly a 7," said an old man who. He was sat holding his wife just across from them.

"Oh easily," his wife confirmed.

"Did you know," the old man continued, desperate to share his knowledge and take their minds off the disaster, "that the Richter scale-

"That's how they measure earthquakes in the newspapers," Corey interrupted for Alarna. She smiled, even though she already knew that from school as well.

"Right." The old man seemed annoyed at the interruption. "Well, it's logarithmic. That means it gets ten times more powerful with each number. So a magnitude 6 'quake would be ten times more powerful than a 5, and so on."

"I didn't actually know that," Alarna said with a grin. "I'm not sure it makes me feel any better, though!" They all laughed and agreed.

Moving through the crowd was a young couple with a big basket filled with fruit and bread. "We're going to be here for a while, better get some food in us," the man said and handed Alarna a chunk of white bread. Suddenly, she felt very far from home.

## INFERENCE FOCUS

1. Why do you think she felt like time had slowed down?
2. How do you think Alarna felt when she first woke up? What evidence is there to support this?
3. Why do you think Alarna saved Mrs Dubois' poodle?
4. What time of day is it? How do you know?
5. Why was the old man desperate to take their minds off what was happening?

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**S**

What signs were there that an earthquake was happening?

**R**

When did Alarna learn about earthquakes?

**E**

Why has the author used dialogue to explain the Richter scale? What effect does this have on the reader?

**S**

What does the Richter scale being logarithmic mean?

**V**

What does the word **wrenched** tell you about the metal door?

Answers:

1. Because she was panicking
2. Scared and worried. She woke with a start and knew something was wrong
3. She might like dogs or feel sorry for the lady. She wanted to help the lady to get to safety as well.
4. It is early evening. The sky is darkening and she can see the moon but it isn't fully dark yet. (The actual earthquake was just after 5pm on October 17th)
5. It was scary and he wanted them to be able to relax/not be scared

S: Droplets were shaking, specks of dust falling, room swaying, floor buckling

R: Junior school

E: It is more natural and makes it more interesting for the reader. Accept explanations that are well reasoned and link to avoiding lots of information being dumped in the narrative

S: Each time you get one number higher, it is ten times more powerful. A 5 is ten times more powerful than a 4.

V: It was stiff or stuck/wasn't easy to open. Alarna opened it with force.