

Rescue, 1940 (a poem for Sarah)

The air raid sirens throb and hum
As she rushes through rubble,
Moving like a ghost
In clouds of dust.

The air raid sirens throb and hum
As fairy light firebombs
Make her shadow dance
On curtains of smoke.

The air raid sirens throb and hum
As the delicate finger of her torch
Feels for the trembles
Of a child.

The air raid sirens throb and hum
As she taps at Teddy-bear
Stones that used
To be a home.

The air raid sirens throb and hum
As she stops, and puts
A blackened ear upon the
Whitened ground.

The air raid sirens die and fade
“Don’t worry now, I’m here,”
She says.

John Birchall

THAT NIGHT OF DEATH

by John J.Rattigan, November 1940

Who can forget that night of death,
Wrought by the sky devil's fiery breath,
Who can forget that night of pain,
Dealt out by a madman's twisted brain.

We shall not forget as our homes we rebuild,
On bomb-scarred ground where innocent were killed,
We shall not forget as we look at the land,
Where once stood a building so stately and grand.

Even God's house is not safe from this Hun,
Who bombs and destroys at the setting of the sun.
So let him send over his cowardly hordes,
Who shatter the homes of paupers and Lords.

That night was severe, there is no doubt,
We had a hard blow, but they can't knock us out.
For our men are of steel, our women won't kneel,
Nor children for mercy plea.
A new hope will arise, when the world is free,
From the rubble and ashes of Coventry.

Poem for Black Saturday by Len Smith

The seventh of September
Was a warm and humid day,
The air so still and peaceful,
The war seemed far away.
But this was an illusion
For on that fateful afternoon
As the East End basked in sunshine
The peace would be ending soon

The wailing of the siren
Heralding the coming raid,
Distant gunfire coming nearer
It was time to be afraid.
'Come on get down the shelter!'
I heard my father cry,
As a droning air armada
Approached across the sky.

Huddled in the Anderson shelter
We shielded our heads in fear,
As bombs rained down around us
It seemed our end was near.
Shrapnel from the bursting shells
Fell crashing on the tiles.
The ground shook with explosions
That could be felt for miles.

After three long hours of terror,
We heard the all-clear sound.
And shakily we climbed out
From our dug-out in the ground.
All around the sky glowed red,
Dense smoke lay in the air,
Acrid fumes from nearby fires,
Smashed windows everywhere.

We prepared sandwiches and flasks of tea,
Blankets and pillows as well,
For we knew the bombers would come back
As soon as darkness fell.
And sure enough by 8pm
We heard the siren sound
And quickly we retreated to our dug-out in the
ground.

All night long the raid went on;
It lasted till the dawn.
So many died that day and night,
So many deaths to mourn.
But this was only just the start,
The real war had begin,
And raids like this would carry on
Through nineteen forty-one.

Bombs hit the docks and factories
Along the Thameside shore,
Churches, schools and hospitals,

And the dwellings of the poor.
From Silvertown to Stratford
And from Mile End to Millwall
The destruction was extensive
And the East End bore it all.

Few of the heroes who served us well
Are still around today,
The wardens, rescue teams and firemen
Who kept the flames at bay.
Many died in action,
As official lists relate,
Their names enshrined forever
On a Canning Town estate.

Mass graves and crumbling tombstones
Tell their story of the war,
When the mighty air armadas
Smashed the dwellings of the poor.
Though more than sixty years have passed
I always will remember
That dreadful day it all began
The seventh of September.

By Len Smith

