

## 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

