

Until We Were No More

The sun was shining and the flowers bloomed
The children laughed and danced; the women sang
A smile was on every face as peace and love prevailed.

We gathered in our houses for the night
To sing and celebrate our monthly feasts.

Nothing was amiss until
A warning breeze began to blow

The winds brought urgent warning as
The foreboding sound of marching boots
Began to echo in the streets,
Drowning out the joyful music;
And the children fled from them.

The joyous singing ceased and the children's laughter faded

The gentle wind blew harder as
A soldier's axe brought down a bough.
He dragged it to the city square
And called for the people to gather there.
A match was struck and a fire begun,
The soldiers dispersed throughout the streets
In a careful search.

The men returned with manuscripts
They'd taken from the citizens
Then the first was tossed into the flame
The first of many to be burned.
"Obliterate the Jews!"

The soldiers purged the cities of Germany
Of any trace of Jewish thoughts
And when they turned to leave,
They left the fires burning to consume remaining few

Though for a time we grieved, the memory began to fade
The grasses swallowed up the ash and the wind blew the smoke away.

The winds blew harder as soon another fire roared
Only this time it was the Reichstag building it devoured.

No one knew who struck the match that burned the German property
But somehow they found us Jews guilty for the catastrophe.

The Nazi soldiers stormed into every German city
To carry out revenge for the mysterious fire

Only later did I realize that the wind

Was a subtle warning in the skies.
“All Jews unwelcome!” came the cry.
We were deprived of German citizenship
Papers were thrust into our hands; for now we could go nowhere
Without “identity papers.”

They arrived in cities heavily armed
And carried and distributed signs
That read malicious things.
They pierced into the ground with poles
And bound dyed cloth and paper to them.
And then they disappeared.
“Annihilate the Jews!”

“No Jews allowed,” “All Jews unwelcome,”
We left early each morning in search of occupation and a chance to earn our way
But at every place we were rejected, because our papers bore a Jewish name
We were broken in spirit; our food and money was no more.
Still the biting wind reminded us a storm was near upon us.
We prayed and hoped that peace would return
But then the Nazis came.
“Rid the Jews from us!”

They came slowly first, taking us one by one
They tore us from our families and took us unknown places
We were taken to prisons and to ghettos
Where we never saw the sun
And I prayed it all would end.

The Nazis rounded up our brothers and their families
And brought them to the ghettos
Trying to fit as many as they could
Into the tiny living spaces

Illness grew rampant and there was no such thing as cleanliness
Dirt clung to everything and rats took everything left unguarded
We raised our hands and voices to heaven, pleading,
“Why have you forsaken us?”

Then one day, they came again
The water and air were stagnant and many lay dead in the streets
But the Nazis didn't care
They pulled us from our shacks again and separated families
They packed us in empty trucks and drove for hours
“No Jews allowed, they're responsible for hate!”

Thus they continued driving
For endless days and nights we suffered in the airless trains
We could hardly breathe the cold, dank air
When we finally arrived, we staggered from the misery
We gasped for real fresh oxygen
But our relief was short-lived,
For the Nazis dragged us toward a building
They called it a prison and threw us in
But we soon realized it was not a prison
It was death, crouching to pounce
We moaned in anguish, waiting and hoping,
But no one could hear us.

“May they be thrown in darkness, never to emerge!”

The first day we remained in the cell as the soldiers brought more Jews

The first night I couldn't sleep,
Groans from the sick injured and haunted me
The floor was hard and cold, and Papa wasn't there
The soldiers had taken him away
I missed him then more than I ever had
Hoping, praying, that joy soon would come
From a time of darkness

The second day, before the sun had left the horizon
Angry shouts and frightened cries forced me from my troubled sleep
The soldiers forced us to the yards to labor hard until the night
That night was filled with sighs and groans of the people suffering
And again I couldn't sleep.

For days and days and days and days
We worked, hauling, building, washing, starving.
The Nazis demanded strength from the weak.
They withheld food and consumed it right in front of us
All because we were born as Jews
And somehow we had caused disaster
And our very lives were threatening.
We moaned in anguish, but still no one could hear us.

I remember the day it began;
The sky was harsh and raining,
Again reminding us a storm was now upon us
And suddenly it was.

Without a warning then, a nameless brother disappeared;
No one knew where he had gone.
We never heard from him again;

Another disappeared, and another followed
Slowly one by one they diminished our numbers,
Until we were no more.