Death in Dresden

Poem by Gerd Honsik

Translated by gv

(Eyewitness Report)

On wheels, on hooves, on axles crawls a worm.

In but a thousand wagons, carriages, and carts

Come they tottering, crawling and walking,

Driven on by a great storm.

The city on the Elbe takes on all the refugees!

They are settled down in streets, squares, gardens,

With children, carts, pottery and horses.

Fine smoke rises from cooking fires.

At all hours in hills and valleys

Near and far battle German soldiers

To buy time in the fire light

Of the battle that lusts after death and action.

But for the refugees, there is already lurking Cain

In the sky, already near in somber shadows.

Suddenly the sirens howl!

But senseless seems the howling in this place,

In the lap of the churches and hospitals!

But merciless destiny takes its course.
Is there not a strange sound in the West?

Is there not in the distance a quiet hum?

Already, it swells to an evil, loud drone and

Then grows into a wild roar.

The biggest army that ever drew in the sky,

The fleet of the "United Nations,"

Steps up to the murder of civilians,

As it flies over the river Elbe with a thunder.

High from the sky howl

Incendiary bombs and whiz down - thousand fold.

Over them in silver plumage,

Circle coldly the murderers who stampede the nest.

An agonizing groan later: "Dresden's on fire!"

Rows of homes tumble down

As fire and phosphorus spray

And stone burns like timber!

It staggers the earth and the sky.

A hundred thousand die on the spot in the force

Of the First hit.

But surging comes the next wave

And hits the heart of wild, confusing flight.

Order's invisible reigns tear apart:

Horses tear into the crowds pulling after them
tattered strands of something.

A crowd rushes and races and yet has no more goal.

   From bomb explosions the air is filled.

   The masses rage in panic through the streets,

   Burned and mutilated they move across the heaps,

   And trample down what stumbles.

   The children's blond hair turns to ash,

   And blue eyes melt out of their sockets.

As fast as a thought, people's heads turn into charcoal

   In the robber's heat.

   Against this tornado

   The Firemen of the city stand loyally and true.

   All fell, except one man.

   A small child begs for its doll,

   In a hallway lost and forgotten -

No longer understands the world and cannot fathom,

   Her eyes blind with tears.

   Soon, houses, trees and asphalt burn,

   The whole city is already prey to flames,

   And people burn, helplessly, young and old,

   And rising into the vast, desolate sky

   Are gigantic billows of ash and smoke,

   Crawling black and viscous flags.
In the meantime, phosphorus sprayed down on them,

There follow a hundred thousand a call:

"To the Elbe river! There we are protected!"

Lions mingle with the children running!

The Zoo is burning, the predators' enclosures are gone.

Animals and people follow the same path,

Because smoke and death remove all barriers.

Survivors cram onto the Elbe meadows,

But the murderers from the air have long spotted them

And swift "fighter jets" soon execute the fleeing with their guns.

The stream of people is surrounded by firing light!

The silver birds plunge down again and again

Upon this sea of women and children

And hand out their death sentences.

High above all the roar is a shout

From a hundred thousand throats of children: "Mother!"

But they are long cannon fodder,

Condemned and mowed down like dry chaff.

And mothers cry, heartbreakingly and wild,

For Hans and Gretchen, Walter, Fritz and Liese.

But on goes the killing on the big meadow,

Where blood swells into creeks on the lawn.

By the ten thousands, women throw their bodies protectively
Upon their loved ones - obeying ancient impulses

In a delusion to rescue them.

The German woman dies here the hero's death.

The kingdom's doom, the fall of the Fuehrer -

The near overthrow of the struggling German armies -

That is not enough! The mothers' hellish pain,

The last sobs of German children's souls,

Are demanded here insatiable by the enemy,

So it may henceforth brighten these murderers' face.

In the heart of the fire of many thousand degrees,

Grows the fires' wild glowing,

And in a funnel perpendicular it rages into the sky

Burning up all air in a red path.

The mouth of the fire, hungry for new food,

Insatiably tears close to the ground

Sucking mountains of fresh air in its breath,

Repeating it hungrily without ceasing.

So steals a foreign murderer himself a prey.

Like a bullets, dashes through the gorges of the streets

The fiery vortex grabbing people and horses,

and sweeping them off like autumn’s dry leaves.

In a wild and crazy haste,

Now a sea of people crawls down into basements!
But the fiery death is faster:
The air is gently sucked away.
One finds them later - as if intact
And hardly touched by fire's death trap -
Upright in crammed cellars with mouths unlocked,
And distraught eyes.
While standing, they slowly suffocated!
There was no room to collapse in their death.
And clinging to the mother’s neck,
The greedy tongue of the fire wall
Has now stretched for the birth clinic:
Heavily pregnant women, frightened to death,
Are diving - half naked - out from smoke and haze.
There is life, long condemned to death!
Women kneeling down in the hell of fire,
Give birth to children, tiny, wet and red.
They hurry off with the tender brood,
But frost and heat, they know no mercy:
Frozen newborns in their arms
So mothers die in the flames!
Here! Again, one woman staggers!
A splash of phosphorus gave her deep wounds.
The child in her arms she is still connected to
    In agony by the umbilical cord.
The smiles that we love, that face,
That father, brother, son seen as sacred,
    Crushed, trampled under fire storms,
    Crushed by debris that comes down roaring.
Now the hospital is bursting in bomb blasts
And a thousand war cripples hobble, scurry, crawl away!
    On his back a blind man drags a hospice,
    Pointing him the way - to the Last Day!
Just like wasps escape from a scorched nest,
    Wounded soldiers crawl from windows.
    They crawl or hop or dance like ghosts,
    With bloody stumps in this horrible devour.
    As the wall of fire closes in,
    Their twitching, rushing, urging grows quieter,
    And it dies out when the fire shows itself hotter and
    Proves itself the winner.
At the same time, people come from everywhere to
Jump into the castle's lake and throw themselves into the water
    They are seeking relief on their cooking skin-but
    Phosphor - no water can still...
    ...They are struggling to cool the burning membranes,
But phosphorus’ burning no water can end.

There are struggles, urgings,
And crazed women crying shrill and loud.
They fill the pond - it swells to the brim.
The lowest crushed and drowned,
The above already suffocated in the sparks of the storm,
And around the giant cooking pot roars the firestorm.
A dozen kilometers squared,
Belong now to fire and death,
Where just hours ago there was a German city.
Smoldering debris and ruins reach
Upward to the gate through which the murderers came,
And as shameful silent witnesses, accuse them. Witnesses.
All around the day's work of horrible hate:
Fused children onto charred bosoms,
Dislocated, a sea of limbs, shoulders, hips,
Steeped in boiling blood.
For many days has it been smoldering,
Here on the battlefield, after the great firestorm.
Inconsolable in pain and tears remain
All those who death has missed.
Why are they all, you ask, dead and silent?
Why the youth of Germany killed?
Not for religion did we go to war:
The world moved out in the shadow of noble flags,
But it was envy and jealousy that drove them,
Since they took from our kingdom land and unity.
Cain struck Abel, and the murderer's victory,
Carries deep in the castle of revenge an iron seed.
When the day thereafter with a calm and sturdy step,
Faithful to their duty and full of anxious premonition,
The rescue workers from the surrounding area came,
I held as a disabled veteran laboriously step.
As lay an army of corpses strewn about,
Embracing in death, children and women,
And I was ordered - a witness to all the horror -
To dig their graves, long before their time,
I came in blond locks,
But my youth died! It died not from death,
But from the sorrow that death would spare.
White was my hair,
When I finally escaped the exertion
And returned home - to the front -
To face the enemy that came at us from the East.

Von “Der Blumenkrieg” Gerd Honsik