**“Kristallnacht”**

**Kenn Allan**

*On the night of November 9, 1938, the Nazis unleashed a wave of orchestrated attacks against Jews in Germany and Austria. In the space of a few hours, thousands of synagogues and Jewish businesses and homes were damaged or destroyed. Nearly 100 Jews were beaten to death and 30,000 arrested and sent to concentration camps. This dark event came to be called Kristallnacht - the "Night of Broken Glass."*

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From adolescent dreams, I wake,
No hope for blessed sleep remains—
Embracing silence in the dark,
I search for light past shuttered panes.

But no, my window is secure
Against this chilly autumn night;
On anxious footsteps, Mutter came
To stroke my brow and locked it tight.

Where is the drone of Vater's voice
Recounting speeches word for word?
Instead, my mutter's gentle sobs
Intone her sorrows yet incurred.

I risk a peek despite her plea
To stay in bed once I retire;
Two chairs sit empty, poised between
The radio and raging fire.

But as I ponder this, it comes—
A vengeful thunder in the street;
The pounding of ten thousand drums
On cobblestones by marching feet.

I seek the solace of my bed
And pull the bedclothes o'er my eyes,
But angry shouting fills my head
Amid foul shrieks and pleading cries.

The crash of glass is all around—
From where it comes, I cannot tell;
The wail of sirens soon surround,
And join this chorus born of hell.

No longer can I listen blind;
I must know what unfolds outside!
With trepidation, I unwind
The tepid sheets in which I hide.

As I undo the shutter's latch,
A fiery glow seeps through the chinks;
I open wide perdition's hatch
And look beyond...

...My spirit sinks.

Outside, my world erupts in rage
As zealous men and boys my age
Pursue a vengeance to and fro—
Most are strangers. Some I know.

I hear them crunching down the street
On crystal carpets at their feet;
Their hate continues to amass
The shattered lives among the glass.

As men are dragged into the night,
Their screams invoke perverse delight;
Not one is spared or dares resist
The blows from rods or doubled fist.

A few who watch the cruel reprise
Reveal compassion in their eyes;
But fearing those who may deride,
They pass by on the other side.

I watch the swath of carnage spread
Beyond the living to the dead
As graves deemed worthy of disdain
Are stripped of peace in death's domain.

Behind, a raging chaos churns—
A foreign house of worship burns
Adorned with scrolls unfurled in haste
Of old commandments once embraced.

As flames ascend and minutes pass,
Their glow ignites each shard of glass—
This morbid beauty pleased my eye
Like stars unnumbered in the sky.

Then just outside my vision's reach,
A 'Voice of Reason' starts to preach;
He quotes a treatise, cold and stark,
Espousing doctrines in the dark.

His words go spinning through my head,
My conscience balks with icy dread...
Which voice will earn my trust again—
My childlike heart or tongues of men?

No longer can I bear the sight
Of fates unfolding in the night;
I flee the room in which I sleep,
Collapse in pain...

...And then I weep.

As daylight stirs my weary mind,
I hear the rattle of the door;
Could this be Vater, out all night,
Who treads the shadows on the floor?

He sighs and sinks into his chair
As if enduring tortured loss;
He pulls an armband from his coat
Emblazoned with a twisted cross.

A floorboard creaks, he spins around
And spots me in the light of day;
He trembles at my anxious gaze,
Then drops his eyes...

...And looks away.