

**. . . I never saw another  
butterfly . . .**

**For Voice and Piano**

**Poems by Children from Terezin Concentration Camp, 1942-  
1944**

**The Poems come from the collection of the Jewish Museum in Prague**

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*SOAM Music Publishing*

31 Primrose Hill Road  
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### **Birdsong**

He doesn't know the world at all  
Who stays in his nest and doesn't go out.  
He doesn't know what birds know best  
Nor what I want to sing about,  
That the world is full of loveliness.

When dewdrops sparkle in the grass  
And earth's aflood with morning light,  
A blackbird sings upon a bush  
To greet the dawning after night.  
Then I know how fine it is to live.

Hey, try to open up your heart  
To beauty; go to the woods someday  
And weave a wreath of memory there.  
Then if the tears obscure your way  
You'll know how wonderful it is  
To be alive. *1941 Anonymous*

### **At Terezin**

When a new child comes  
Everything seems strange to him.  
What, on the ground I have to lie?  
Eat black potatoes? No! Not I!  
I've got to stay? It's dirty here!  
The floor – why, look, it's dirt, I fear!  
And I'm supposed to sleep on it?  
I'll get all dirty!

Here the sound of shouting, cries,  
And oh, so many flies.  
Everyone knows flies carry disease.  
Oooh, something bit me! Wasn't that a bedbug?  
Here in Terezin life is hell  
And when I go home again, I can't tell.  
*Teddy L 410, 1943*

### **Night in the ghetto**

Another day has gone for keeps  
Into the bottomless pit of time.  
Again it has wounded a man, held captive by his  
brethren.  
After dusk, he longs for bandages,  
For soft hands to shield the eyes  
From all the horrors that stare by day.  
But in the ghetto, darkness, too, is kind  
To weary eyes that all day long have had to watch.

Dawn crawls again along the ghetto streets  
Embracing all who walk this way.  
Only a car like a greeting from a long-gone world  
Gobbles up the dark with fiery eyes –  
That sweet darkness that falls upon the soul  
And heals those wounds illuminated by the day....  
Along the streets come light and ranks of people  
Like a long black ribbon, loomed with gold.

*Anonymous 1943*

### **Fear**

Today the ghetto knows a different fear,  
Close in its grip, Death wields an icy scythe.  
An evil sickness spreads a terror in its wake,  
The victims of its shadow, weep and writhe.

Today a father's heartbeat tells his fright  
And mothers bend their heads into their hands.  
Now children choke and die with typhus here,  
A bitter tax is taken from their bands.

My heart still beats inside my breast  
While friends depart for other worlds,  
Perhaps it's better – who can say? –  
Than watching this, to die today?

No, no, my God, we want to live!  
Not watching our numbers melt away.  
We want to have a better world,  
We want to work – we must not die!

*Eva Pickova, 12 years old, Nymbur*

### **The Butterfly**

The last, the very last,  
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.  
Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing  
against a white stone....

Such, such a yellow  
Is carried lightly 'way up high.  
It went away I'm sure because it wished to  
Kiss the world goodbye.

For seven weeks I've lived in here,  
Penned up inside this ghetto.  
But I have found what I love here.  
The dandelions call to me  
And the white chestnut branches in the court.  
Only I never saw another butterfly.

That butterfly was the last one.  
Butterflies don't live in here,  
in the ghetto.

*4.66.1942 Pavel Friedmann*

## A Letter To Daddy

Momma told me to write to you today,  
but I had no time. New children arrived  
with the latest transport, and  
I had to play with them.  
I didn't notice time pass.

I live better these days.  
I sleep on my own mattress on the floor,  
so I will not fall down.  
At least I don't have much work to fix up my bed,  
and in the morning I see the sky from my window.

I was coughing a bit, but I don't want to get sick,  
for I am happy when I can run in the courtyard.  
Tonight there will be a gathering  
like the one's at Scout camp in the summer.  
We will sing songs we know,  
a girl will play the accordion.

I know you wonder how we fare here,  
and you would surely like to be with us now.  
And something else, Daddy. Come soon  
and have a more cheerful face!  
When you are unhappy, Momma is sad,  
and then I miss the sparkle in her eyes.

You promised to bring me books  
because, truly, I have nothing to read.  
So please, come tomorrow, right before dusk.  
I will surely be grateful for this.

Now I must stop. Momma sends you her love.  
I will rejoice when I hear your footsteps  
in the hall. Until you are with us again,  
I send you my greetings and kisses.

Your faithful son. *Anonymous.*

## Dusk

The dusk flew in on the wings of evening. . .  
From whom do you bring me a greeting?  
Will you kiss my lips for him?  
How I long for the place where I was born!

Perhaps only you, tranquil dusk,  
Know of the tears shed in your lap  
From eyes that long to see  
The shade of palms and olive trees  
In the land of Israel.

Perhaps only you will understand  
This daughter of Zion,  
Who weeps  
For her small city on the Elbe  
But is afraid ever to return to it.

*Anonymous*

## It all depend on how you look at it

I

Terezin is full of beauty,  
It's in your eyes now clear  
And through the street the tramp  
Of marching feet I hear.

In the ghetto at Terezin,  
It looks that way to me,  
Is a square kilometre of earth  
Cut off from the world that's free.

Death, after all, claims everyone.  
You find it everywhere.  
It catches up with even those  
When ear their noses in the air.

The whole, wide world is ruled  
With a certain justice, so  
That helps perhaps to sweeten  
The poor man's pain and woe. *Miroslav Kosek*

## Homesick

I've lived in the ghetto for more than a year,  
In Terezin, in the black town now,  
And when I remember my old home so dear,  
I can love it more than I did, somehow.

Ah, Home, home.  
Why did they tear me away?  
Here the weak die easy as a feather  
And when they die, they die forever.

I'd like to go back home again,  
It makes me think of sweet spring flowers.  
Before, when I used to live at home,  
It never seemed so dear and fair.

I remember now those golden days. . . .  
But maybe I'll be going there soon again,  
When we'll go home again.  
People walk along the street,

