



The First Akcja

*In nocturnal spasms that day was ripped –
Anguished the hearts, as if by teeth bitten.
On the day after Yom Kippur – let it be written –
A city did sink, and in tears did it perish.*

*Father and Mother, by the Kol Nidrei² candles first,
Over the little heads and faces of [their] children weep,
That they should live to raise them as people [of worth],
That they should live to bless them at [their] chuppah³.*

*The little bundles ready, with the children and old –
This gaping disaster none of them spares.
The birds, ready for their autumn song,
Are left with their beaks open, with no song coming forth.*

*A Yom Kippur candle, miraculously unextinguished,
Burns and weeps before the congregation of martyrs –
The ones who depart with the first of the akcje,
Which are commanded by Degenhardt the ruler.*

*The dollies, afraid, cling to each other in corners –
There are no longer any mothers to lull them asleep.
They enter the dreams of the children,
To leave those dreams with the smoke of the chimneys.*

*A city [once] worked, boiled and was seething,
Blooming with householders so proud.
What has scarcely remained are the empty houses,
With darkened windowpanes like pits – like pits.*

*Night falls, astonished and trembling –
It fears engaging the storm.
That stillness of the streets, oppressed by the agony,
Will scream louder than the thousands of murmurs of life.*

¹ [TN: Rivka Kopé (1910-1995), originally Rywka Kopelowicz, was a Yiddish poetess and storyteller; she was born in Warsaw and emigrated to France in 1931.]

² [TN: "All Vows"; opening prayer of the first Yom Kippur service, which is held on Yom Kippur Eve at dusk.]

³ [TN: Traditional Jewish wedding canopy.]