

Siren Song (7-8 October 1943)

By Tony Dawson¹

The wail of the siren always filled us with dread
as we huddled inside our Morrison shelter,
lit up by the glow of the living-room fire.
That night, a bright gibbous moon
guided the bombers towards their targets.

The warning had put my aunt Edie on edge.
Although she lived in the very next street,
it was safer to wait until the all-clear.
Nonetheless, she was scared for family
cowering in the Anderson shelter outdoors.

The Dorniers droned, the ack-ack boomed,
as the bombs whistled on their way down.
I was six and afraid, though my lucky new boots,
a child's talisman, were under my pillow

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while I tried to sing my little brother to sleep.

Next, a loud bang! An enormous explosion
shattered windows in the bedroom upstairs,
where I had been sleeping half-an-hour earlier.
Clouds of soot poured down the chimney
billowing into the shelter to choke us.

My terrified aunt let out a scream
and fell in a faint across my small body.
When she came to, she was out of control,
convinced that her family were dead,
since the bomb had dropped in her street.

By a happy chance, her worries were groundless.
Although the bomb landed in Ellington Road,
it blew up in a garden some way from her home,
demolishing a group of three terraced houses,
and leaving a tangle of rafters and bricks.

The following day I was drawn to the crowd
of horrified onlookers, all secretly glad
that it wasn't them who had lived there.
The Pemberton family were those who had died,
including their daughters, who went to my school.

Long after the war, my aunt's daughter, Norah,
who'd spent that night in the Anderson shelter,
got married and wanted to live near her mother.
So, she and her husband bought the new house

that stood on the site of the Pembertons' home.

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