**Ballad of Birmingham**

BY [DUDLEY RANDALL](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/dudley-randall)

*(On the bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama, 1963)*

“Mother dear, may I go downtown

Instead of out to play,

And march the streets of Birmingham

In a Freedom March today?”

“No, baby, no, you may not go,

For the dogs are fierce and wild,

And clubs and hoses, guns and jails

Aren’t good for a little child.”

“But, mother, I won’t be alone.

Other children will go with me,

And march the streets of Birmingham

To make our country free.”

“No, baby, no, you may not go,

For I fear those guns will fire.

But you may go to church instead

And sing in the children’s choir.”

She has combed and brushed her night-dark hair,

And bathed rose petal sweet,

And drawn white gloves on her small brown hands,

And white shoes on her feet.

The mother smiled to know her child

Was in the sacred place,

But that smile was the last smile

To come upon her face.

For when she heard the explosion,

Her eyes grew wet and wild.

She raced through the streets of Birmingham

Calling for her child.

She clawed through bits of glass and brick,

Then lifted out a shoe.

“O, here’s the shoe my baby wore,

But, baby, where are you?”