

LENA (*cont'd*). As I put my hand on the outer wall, it simply gives way, nine stories down to Greene Street. I look out over the abandoned confines, My long, auburn hair whips across my mouth. Sweat and smoke pollute my brain. Yetta is in my arms. Stiff, still, like a porcelain doll. Down below, I can make out a circle. A group of men hold a massive net. TESSA. A circular net.

VINCENZA. Like fishermen. They have come to take us home. TESSA. They can catch us like butterflies!

VINCENZA. The fishermen are strong. The muscles in their backs undulate and spasm from hauling massive fish in from the depths of blue. Day in and day out these men provide for their families. They look after the family. It is the way of things in Italy. It has always been that way.

LENA. Yes. I can see them. The men are wearing bumblebee-striped hats and heavy wool coats. Their strapping voices rise up through the ebony smoke and winding soot. Their resonance is garbled, but solid.

FIREMAN. Jump!

LENA. We must jump.

ALL WOMEN. Jump!

VINCENZA. Like creatures of the ocean who want to be caught.

TESSA. But the women are terrified, frightened.

FIREMAN. You must jump!

LENA. Our spirit is undeniable.

YETTA. Yes.

LENA. I am reminded of the Torah. Inside our temple is stained glass. Across the luminescent rainbow patterns, I see a woman. A mature woman. Her back is arched, she smiles with a rose in her teeth. I cannot see her face.

YETTA. I can see her. She is looking for Adonai.

LENA. She gently turns towards me, the woman looking back at me is—

YETTA. Gazing and staring—

LENA. Fixing on my face. It is me. My face. I am old.

YETTA. You will grow old, Lena. You will be the most beautiful babushka in the world.

VINCENZA. And now we are the fish waiting to be caught in the net below. A girl's body pushes me out over the edge. I didn't know who she was. I never got to look upon her face. And without another thought, another word, another human being to touch, I am diving straight toward the earth. Toward Greene Street.

FIREMAN. Greene Street. You must jump onto Greene Street!

TESSA. The mere word brings a smile to my face. Greene. Green! I am reminded of the summers in Hannover.

VINCENZA. The summers in Innsbrook.

YETTA. The summers in Slovakia.

(*TESSA's older BROTHER enters and sits down, picking grass.*)

TESSA (*smiling*). The luscious blades of towering grass. I would try to hide from my brother, as we would play childish games while my parents would try to find us. The succulent blades of towering grass. In a childish game we loved so much, I would hide from my brother and he would hide from me deep in the grass behind the weeds, silent and motionless until—

BROTHER. Here! Below this tree! Come on!

(*They laugh and play as they run for the tree and hide.*)

TESSA. A spider.

*(BROTHER captures the imaginary spider in his hands.)*

BROTHER. I have it.

TESSA. It bites.

BROTHER. So do I.

TESSA *(laughing)*. It will bite you!

*(He releases the spider.)*

BROTHER. It's just as much afraid of you as you are of it.

TESSA. I feel when I am here. Nothing else matters. The fighting, the pain. Promise me when you get married one day that you would will be good to her.

BROTHER. Who?

TESSA. The one you will love. *(Beat.)* Never strike her. Never hurt her. Promise me.

BROTHER. I promise.

TESSA. Protect me from the world.

BROTHER. I'm your brother. I will always protect you.

TESSA. Even against ... him?

*(Beat.)*

BROTHER. When I am big and strong enough ... yes.

*(She hugs him.)*

TESSA. He hurts me. Father hurts me in ways—

BROTHER. I know. But I promise you, when I am strong enough ... he will never hurt you again.

*(They hug. The MALE ENSEMBLE then goes back to his block, leaving TESSA alone. She looks out upon the green field.)*

TESSA. They never knew where we went ... To escape the pain. We would escape into the green. The beautiful, rich fields of emerald, jade and malachite. It seems so simple, but he never came after us, after me ... while we were here, among nature. It was only in the confines of the house, the confines of that building that held my soul captive.

LENA. As the wall disintegrates, I gaze across Manhattan's skyline. *(Pause.)* The black, braiding smoke has cleared for a moment allowing, finally, the snowy clouds to almost reach out and caress my hand, alluring me, inviting me. With my sister's head buried in my chest, we jump. And for an instant ... *(Smiling.)* We are flying. We have wings. And we can fly, our wings will take us. In a fraction of a second, our world has become a microcosm. My entire life fits on the head of a pin.

VINCENZA. So many pins.

LENA. Our lives are threaded to this moment, to this place. The pattern of our lives is now exposed.

YETTA. As I peer through the crumbling edifice, I can now hear the cacophony of languages sifting through the haze of confusion. For the sixteen years I have lived in the United States, I have not spoken a word of Russian. I speak in English, I read in English. In Russian, the words are harsh and bitter. In this new world the words flow and fly. For English is now my tongue. This is how I will remember. My father instructed us.

FATHER. Gather around now. Gather around, girls. Come, come.

YETTA. Mother had passed before the journey, but my father held such a warm heart and, against all odds, brought us to this land of new.