

pulsate at a different pace than real time. She flies with great difficulty for one of her wings is defectively larger. She struggles to maintain her flight, to maintain her dignity, even in the face of certain doom. The oversized, deformed wing flutters harder to compensate for the fallacy of her birth. A lesser creature in a world that orders the survival of the fittest. Her body writhes and turns with the blowing wind, nine stories above the Earth. Never has this butterfly flown so high and so far. She is now alone in the world. But still, the little creature, full of spirit and beauty, maintains her dignity. She is determined that her deformity, her difference, will never affect her flight.

TESSA. I can see the faces of my past.

VINCENZA. My relatives.

YETTA. My friends.

TESSA. I can see the images as if caught in a photograph. Near the bottom of the elevator shaft, a sea of flames has engulfed the tangled, aching, mourning bodies. I am falling, falling, down into a maelstrom of blood and tears. The golden flames are like a creature's tongue as it licks my feet and quickly sucks me into its mouth. Now enveloped, I broil within the confines of my own skin.

YETTA. As children, my sister and I imagined how we could dance on the evening clouds that settled low over the horizon. My sister and I would laugh until the last of the sunlight was gone, and the hungry moon would make its entrance. We would laugh and ...

YETTA & LENA. Laugh ...

LENA. And laugh. My sister and I would stare off into the golden orb that was the moon and dream of the sweet taste of chocolate. And I would stand beside her ears and make up tales of lands of opportunity.

YETTA. It's there, my sister! Look! Look! The little butterfly! I see it! Its contour seems to transform while it morphs into a liquid beast. I can see it!

LENA. And so my sister will fly.

VINCENZA. As my sinews snap and the layers of my flesh and muscle melt into themselves, I could only ask one question. ALL. Why?

TESSA. Was this the worth of my life?

*(TESSA steps off her platform and dances to the dark music.)*

TESSA *(cont'd)*. I had always wanted to be a ballerina.

MYSTERIOUS MAN. You can be whatever you like here.

TESSA. A dancer?

MYSTERIOUS MAN. Yes!

TESSA. A chocolate maker?

MYSTERIOUS MAN. Yes.

TESSA. A daughter?

MYSTERIOUS MAN. Yes.

TESSA. A mother ... one day?

*(Pause.)*

MYSTERIOUS MAN. You will be anything that you want to be.

TESSA. When can I choose what I want to be?

MYSTERIOUS MAN. Very soon. Very, very soon.

TESSA. I'm looking ... But ... I'm scared.

MYSTERIOUS MAN. It's OK. I'm with you now.

TESSA *(becoming frightened)*. I'm ... I'm ...

MYSTERIOUS MAN. It's OK.

VINCENZA (*crossing to TESSA and holding her*). It's OK. TESSA. I'm so very scared.

VINCENZA. I know. We all are.

YETTA. Swaths of beautifully rich fabric now lay scattered at my feet. Fluid material squeezes up through the holes between my toes. (*Beat.*) Oh, that blazing summer day my sister and I went to Brighten Beach. The warm sand curled between my toes. The sun beat down upon my sluggish, worn body from the week's work. I closed my eyes, protecting them from the harsh beams of light. I can still feel the tiny pebbles of the sand massage my exposed skin. It sends pleasurable tingles up my spine and chills my head. With all my strength, my fingers now plunge into the rich felt. I attempt to grasp the material but it simply slips through my fingers. I try to grasp with all my strength, but I can't seem to grab hold. My fingernails are tearing. Blood is pooling under my nails and streaming down my hands.

The fabric of my existence is tearing apart!

TESSA (*in a stage whisper*). Tear the flesh—

YETTA. Along with the metal fire escape, my body careens down through the black cavern, toward the cornucopia of colored terrain. An overflowing profusion of images snare my eyes as the gnarled metal sled courses through my veins. The wrested piece of iron punctures my skin, enters my arms, my torso and finally rests unapologetically above my abdomen. Still conscious, the bloody, burning bodies of broken flesh rain down around me like the leaves of the copper beech tree. The bodies seem to cascade as they slowly rock back and forth, back and forth, before they hit the ground with a soft thud. It's raining. It's raining hot blood; hot, delicate, purple blood. My blood.

(*The blocking has culminated into the staging of a triangle. TESSA is one point. VINCENZA and MALE ENSEMBLE are another point and the two sisters, LENA and YETTA, form the final point.*)

TESSA (*direct address*). The fire started at four thirty in the afternoon.

VINCENZA (*direct address*). And spread up from the eighth floor.

YETTA (*direct address*). We were on the ninth floor. No one told us. No one warned us.

LENA (*direct address*). The doors were locked.

ALL. Locked.

YETTA. We were locked in.

TESSA. Like animals on a spit of fire.

VINCENZA. The fire.

YETTA. The fire.

FOREMAN. The fire.

LENA (*direct address*). The workers strike of 1909 resulted in a signed agreement for all the clothing factories in New York for safer working conditions.

FOREMAN (*direct address*). The United States government had no authority over who signed the agreement.

VINCENZA (*direct address*). Every major company signed the agreement out of good faith.

TESSA. Except—

ALL (*direct address*). The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory.

VINCENZA. March.

TESSA. Twenty-fifth.

LENA. 1911.