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Dramatic Publishing

I NEVER SAW ANOTHER BUTTERFLY

A Play

by

CELESTE RASPANTI



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(I NEVER SAW ANOTHER BUTTERFLY)

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For Raja

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Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois

I Never Saw Another Butterfly

A Full-length Play
For 4m., 7w. and 4 children*

CHARACTERS

RAJA ENGLANDEROVA from Terezin
FATHER. her father
MOTHER her mother
VERA her aunt
PAVEL her brother
ERIKA a neighbor
IRENA SYNKOVA a teacher
RENKA. her assistant
IRCA Pavel's fiancée
HONZA a friend of Raja
RABBI at Terezin
CHILD I
CHILD II children of Terezin
CHILD III
CHILD IV
LOUDSPEAKER a voice
THE YOUTH OF TEREZIN

*A variable number of children and young people may participate, although only four have speaking parts.

SOME INTRODUCTORY NOTES

From 1942 to 1945 over 15,000 Jewish children passed through Terezin, a former military garrison set up as a ghetto. It soon became a station, a stopping-off place, for hundreds of thousands on their way to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. When Terezin was liberated in May 1945, only about one hundred children were alive to return to what was left of their lives, their homes and families. The story of those years at Terezin remains in drawings and poems collected and published in the book, *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*.

The appendix to *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* briefly notes the names of the children, the dates of their birth and transportation to Terezin. For most of the children whose work appears in the book, the brief biography ends, “perished at Auschwitz...” But one child, Raja Englanderova, “after the liberation, returned to Prague.” This play is an imaginative creation of her story from documentary materials: poems, diaries, letters, journals, drawings and pictures.

The play and its production have come into existence only with the interest and assistance of: Karel Lagus, curator of the Jewish Museum in Prague; Robert G. Pitman, creator and director of the first production; and Walter J. Johannsen, a personal friend. Each will recognize his part in this work and, hopefully, accept the author’s sincerest gratitude.

I Never Saw Another Butterfly

(An open stage. Projection screen. The stage is set with various levels and steps. As the house dims and the music comes up, butterflies are projected over the entire stage area. [See production notes.] The music grows in intensity until a train whistle in the distance drowns it out. As the train sound increases, the butterflies disappear. As the train sound fades, lights come up on RAJA, who stands downstage facing the audience. She is carrying a school bag and a bundle whose outer covering is a black shawl.)

RAJA. My name is Raja. I was born in Prague. I am a Jew—and I survived Terezin. *(She sets down her belongings, sits down and removes her scarf, looking out over the audience.)*

LOUDSPEAKER. Zuzana Winterova, 11 years old—perished at Auschwitz, October 4, 1944. Gabriela Freiova, 10 years old—perished at Auschwitz, May 18, 1944. Frantisek Brozan, 14 years old—perished at Auschwitz, December 15, 1943. Eva Bulova, 15 years old—perished at Auschwitz, October 4, 1944. Liana Franklova, 13 years old—perished at Auschwitz, October 19, 1944. Alfred Weisskopf, 16 years old—perished at Auschwitz, December 18, 1944. Honza—Honza Kosek, 16½ years old—perished at Auschwitz, January 21, 1945...

RAJA (*stands to face in the direction of the voice; she walks slowly downstage and speaks*). My name—is Raja. I was born in Prague. Father, Mother, Pavel, Irca—Irena, Honza—they are all gone, and I am alone. But that is not important. Only one thing is important—that I am a Jew, and that I survived. Terezin was a fortress built by Emperor Joseph II of Austria for his mother Maria Teresa. About sixty kilometers from Prague it slept quietly in its green valley under blue skies until...

LOUDSPEAKER (*an arrogant, military voice, interrupting*). March 5, 1939. German Wehrmacht enters Prague. (*Martial music under the following announcements.*) December 1, 1939. Jewish children excluded from state elementary schools. June 14, 1940. Auschwitz concentration camp set up. September 27, 1941. Reinhard Heydrich orders mass deportation of Jews and establishes Terezin as a Jewish ghetto. October 16, 1941. (*Train sounds start and accelerate.*) First transports leave Prague for Terezin. (*Train sounds.*) Among them were children...

(Train noises die down as light flashes on in upstage area. IRENA SYNKOVA, one of the first inhabitants of Terezin, stands in the light with her back to the audience. She is holding a sheaf of odd-sized papers. She is a strong woman; one knows this by her voice and by the way she evokes strength in others. She has taken responsibility for the children in the camp, organized them into groups, planned lessons in a makeshift school for them. She is obsessed with their survival, and the survival in them of what is best. RENKA, a young woman who as-

sists IRENA with the school and the care of the children, speaks from the darkness.)

RENKA. Irena, Irena Synkova—it's Renka...

IRENA. Here—in the back. *(She approaches the outer rim of the dark circle that circumscribes the classroom. She extends her hand to RENKA.)* Have the children arrived?

RENKA *(coming into the light, followed by a small group of children)*. Yes, nearly four hundred—more than the earlier transport. *(She turns to the children who are now surrounding her, speaking warmly and kindly.)* Come, come along—we'll go with the others.

IRENA. Later, when the workers return—and the older children, we'll find places for them in the barracks—each one must have a place.

RENKA. And tomorrow, when another trainload arrives?

IRENA. We'll find a place for them—in the barracks and— *(With determination.)* —here in the school. They must start living again. *(To the children huddled around RENKA.)* School—yes, you will go to school again... But go along now with Renka...to the bathhouse and then supper... I promise...

RENKA. Come. *(She leads the group off. They seem to walk more quickly now.)*

(RAJA, who has been watching from the distance, steps out of the area and takes her place in line with the children. IRENA has returned to folding and arranging papers when she notices the child.)

IRENA. You must go along now to the bathhouse, dear.

(RAJA remains tense, staring. There is a shrill, siren-like sound. She sits on the ground clutching her bag to her, following the children with her eyes.)

RAJA. They told Papa, “Come along now to the bathhouse...you must take a shower so that we don’t get any sickness in the camp.” They told him to leave his clothes in the yard on the ground in front of him. They told him to put his shoes next to his clothes so he could find them again...but they took him to the gas...he never got his shoes...

IRENA *(walking to her)*. Don’t be afraid. *(She sees that RAJA is staring after the children.)* This is a real bathhouse. You can have soap and take a shower.

RAJA *(pulling away, frightened)*. They took him to the bathhouse—he never got his shoes...

IRENA *(finally understanding)*. That was Auschwitz. Here you are with friends. What is your name? *(RAJA shakes her head and pulls away.)* I am Irena Synkova. I’m a teacher here in Terezin. You’ll come to school with us, won’t you? *(RAJA turns and drops to the floor, covering her face with her hands. IRENA kneels at a distance from her, talking very quietly.)* You are from Prague? I once taught in Prague. It’s a beautiful city. When I first came to Prague, I was about your age. I remember how frightened I was. But after I made some friends, I was happy to live there. Now you are not alone, and you must not be afraid either. *(She reaches for her gently. At the first touch, the child recoils, but does not move away. She allows IRENA to remove her scarf and to take the sack from her clenched fist. She watches IRENA’s face.)* Now that you know my name,

you must tell me yours. How can we be friends? I won't know what to call you.

RAJA. My number is tattooed here. (*Still watching her, RAJA stretches out her arm and shows a number tattooed on her arm. IRENA, touched by this, caresses her arm gently and smooths her hair. She begins to look through the pack and finds an identification tag.*)

IRENA (*reading the tag*). Raja Englanderova. (*RAJA watches silently as IRENA carefully replaces the tattered clothes, the box, etc., in her pack. IRENA rises.*) Come, Raja, Raja Englanderova. Let me tell you about our school. (*When the child does not respond, IRENA walks to the side and kneels to sort the papers she had with her. She is very much aware that RAJA is watching her.*) There's so much to do here in school. You will be coming here, tomorrow, perhaps. There are many children here. We have few books—but we have many songs: every day if you wish, you may paint and draw; here, see, each of the children has drawn a spring picture. Would you like to paint? I'll find some paper for you, then tomorrow—you may begin. (*RAJA has been watching IRENA from a kneeling position. She rises slowly and walks up behind IRENA, who is busily sorting and folding papers.*) See, we save all the paper we can find: forms, wrapping paper—and some of the children brought their own. And when there's enough, the children draw and paint. Would you like to choose a piece—of your own, Raja? (*She turns and very gently touches the child's hair, her cheek, her arm. RAJA does not move.*)

RAJA (*at a level with IRENA's shoulder, she timidly imitates her action as if she were trying to convince herself*

that this gentle person is real and not a lie; with her hand on IRENA's arm, RAJA finally speaks). My... name...is...Raja... (She leans her head wearily on IRENA's shoulder. IRENA embraces her gently. Music.)

(Getting up slowly, RAJA turns from her past and returns to the lighted area downstage.)

RAJA. Slowly I began to heal, I and hundreds of children who passed through Irena Synkova's school. It was months before I could say anything but "My name is Raja." I said it over and over to hear the sound of my voice—perhaps just to make sure I still knew my name—Raja. It was an achievement for me. Irena knew it. She gave me paper and paint and I wrote my name in stiff, crippled characters: Raja, Raja, Raja! It helped me to be sure I was still alive. One day, I suddenly wrote another name: "Irena." Then I knew I was healed. I could paint and draw and speak again. I could tell Irena the things I was remembering. I was no longer afraid to remember...

(RAJA turns to observe the scene upstage coming to life as the lights come up. She sees her MOTHER readying the table for the Sabbath. When her MOTHER calls, RAJA enters and takes her place in the scene.)

MOTHER *(as she enters carrying the candles, speaking over her shoulder)*. Raja, cover the bread—and close the door to the kitchen; the candles will go out...

RAJA (*entering the scene from the darkness*). Papa's coming up the street—Aunt Vera is with him. I can see them from the back window.

MOTHER (*sharply*). Raja, you must not open the back shutters. I've told you that...do you hear?

(PAVEL enters.)

PAVEL. She'll get us all in trouble!

MOTHER. She'll be careful. (*Calling.*) Raja, come, it's time to light the Sabbath.

RAJA. Without Papa? He's coming...

MOTHER. Then he will be here. Come away from the window, now.

(MOTHER turns, relieved, as FATHER and AUNT VERA enter.)

MOTHER. Papa, at last!

FATHER (*with false ease*). All right, Mama, all right. I'm late, but...

RAJA (*running to him*). I saw you from the window, so you weren't really late, Papa.

FATHER (*kissing her and looking around at the others with a knowing look*). Of course not—as long as I am in sight, I'm not late. Besides—I was delayed by your Aunt Vera.

AUNT VERA. I knew I would be blamed for it all. (*To her sister.*) It's true this time, Anna. I kept him waiting... you'll understand.

MOTHER (*smiling, but exasperated*). Of course, you would protect him... (*There is a kind of communication*

going on between the adults in the room, but an intended carelessness in their voices.)

FATHER (*who has removed his coat, stepping into the center with an affectionate but tired embrace for MOTHER*). Now, Anna, I'm here. (*MOTHER begins to light the candles, and suddenly the room is filled with the sounds of low-flying planes. They are dangerously close and the family cringes, following the sound of each plane as it flies over the roof. PAVEL runs to the window to look. MOTHER quickly draws him back.*)

MOTHER. Pavel, come away from the window. We must keep the shutters closed...you know that.

PAVEL. Nazis. So close you can see the damned swastikas on the wings.

MOTHER. Pavel! The Sabbath!

PAVEL. Sabbath Eve—and the Nazis about to join us!

VERA. Pavel, if you...if we are not careful...

RAJA (*attentive*). They're gone now...

FATHER (*intently, to his son*). Be careful—we must all be careful. Tonight, the planes; tomorrow, tanks...

MOTHER. Tomorrow? Josef, what do you mean?

FATHER. Mama, Pavel—all of you... (*Almost in tears.*)
Mama, today—today, I lost my place...

MOTHER. Josef, it can't be true...

FATHER. We all knew it had to come!

MOTHER. But you were promised!

FATHER. Promises! What do they mean? I must report to work at Litomerice—they are building a station...

RAJA. But, Papa, you're not a carpenter. You're a teacher.

VERA. Hush, Raja! Let your father explain...

FATHER. I must learn manual labor. Imagine—all of us at the school—all of us.

PAVEL (*contemptuously*). Building a station!

FATHER. Today they came to the school. We were given one hour to clear away—books, papers, everything. One hour after all those years!

MOTHER. And the school?

VERA. Anna, wait, there is still more.

FATHER. Mama, it may be that— (*PAVEL stares at his father.*) —that we will have to move—again... (*Helplessly.*) It may be that...we must do so. The landlord is German—and we are...

PAVEL (*angry*). Jews!

VERA. Pavel...try to have patience...

FATHER. We...are...Jews... They are relocating the boundaries—twelve blocks on either side—and we must all of us move into the area of the old ghetto.

MOTHER (*unbelieving*). So...once again.

RAJA. But, Papa, they promised!

MOTHER. How soon?

FATHER. Tomorrow.

VERA. By sundown, Sabbath sundown, Anna.

PAVEL. They give us the Sabbath to get ready—it saves a working day! What did you tell him, Papa?

FATHER. What should I have told him? (*Hopefully.*) Some say it is the last order.

PAVEL. Someone always says this will be the last order but every month the ghetto grows smaller.

FATHER. What should I tell him? What does a Jew tell his German landlord?

PAVEL. They can't expect us to...

MOTHER (*trying to understand the whole impact of the orders*). And Vera?

FATHER. The women, too...they were released to work in the streets.

VERA. All unmarried women must report to work in the streets...with the men.

PAVEL (*realizing the import of this*). Irca!

FATHER. Irca, too... (*Then gently, to MOTHER.*) Mama, you must give up the school. Jews are no longer allowed to teach...

PAVEL. Irca? Where is she?

FATHER. They were turned out in the streets—with the rest.

PAVEL. But we thought the council was going to appeal? Why does the council sit waiting while the whole Nazi army walks in?

FATHER. There have been...meetings.

PAVEL. Talk!

FATHER. There are—considerations... (*He is beginning to show his anger.*) So, you will attack, shout slogans, you—and your friends— (*Derisively.*) —be brave!

PAVEL. Better than hiding behind our prayer shawls! (*FATHER rises, affronted, and stands staring at PAVEL.*)

MOTHER. Pavel, you go too far.

PAVEL. At least shouting lets the Nazis know we're alive.

FATHER. You go too far...too far... (*He is limp with controlling his anger. He sits wearily and then turns to speak directly to PAVEL.*) You think we don't know—last night, your joke, at the Regional Theatre...

MOTHER (*looking at her son*). The Regional Theatre? Pavel, you know Jews are not allowed to...

PRODUCTION NOTES

1. The play was written to be performed without intermission.
2. Although the first production of this play utilized various theatrical media to reproduce Raja's past, the play can be done quite simply without such technical devices. Perhaps the only essential sound effect is the train, since it sets the mood and establishes the tense and expectant atmosphere of life in a concentration camp.
3. This is basically a memory play, narrated by Raja. The actions she remembers, the sounds she hears, take on reality for her—and for the audience.
4. There are three acting areas on the stage, each area defined only when the lights come up on it. The first area represents the present, in which Raja stands, and from which she moves freely in and out of her past, as represented by the other two areas.
5. Although the cast calls for only four children, there can be as many children and young people as desired. The young people who play Honza, Erika and Renka, Pavel and Irca might also double in some of the classroom scenes, since some of the poems and drawings were the work of adolescents.
6. There is an abundance of music in public domain available as background music. The well-known motif from

Smetana's *Moldau* is the basis of the Czech national anthem. A variation of the theme is also used in the national anthem of the state of Israel. As such, it makes a good evocation of both the Czech and Jewish elements in the play. Almost any collection of Czech or Hebrew folk songs will contain enough varied simple songs from which to draw music for the many moods of the play.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Various steps and platforms, stools.

RAJA: School bag; bundle containing tattered clothing, a book, a small box, and an identification tag, all wrapped in a black shawl; small package containing a sausage.

IRENA: Sheaf of odd-sized papers; shabby jacket, paper, stub of pencil, rolled package of papers.

MOTHER: Sabbath candles, matches, wedding ring on finger.

AUNT VERA: Glass, kerchief.

CHILDREN: Drawing and writing materials.

WEDDING GROUP: Ritual canopy, cup of wine.

HONZA: Sheet of paper (camp newspaper), poem written on sheet of paper.