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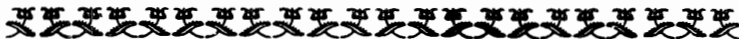
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Dramatic Publishing



I Never Saw Another Butterfly

A one-act cutting
by
the author of the
full-length play
CELESTE RASPANTI



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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(I NEVER SAW ANOTHER BUTTERFLY)

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TO RAJA

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

*A One-Act Version
of the Full-Length Play*
by
Celeste Raspanti

For Two Men, Two Women and Extras*

CHARACTERS

RAJA ENGLANDEROVA a young woman

IRENA SYNKOVA. a teacher

HONZA. a young man, friend to Raja

YOUTH OF TEREZIN . a variable number; four have
. speaking parts

LOUDSPEAKER. a man's voice

*a variable number of adults and children may be used in the camp scenes.

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.)

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, 16 years old — perished at Auschwitz, January 21, 1945 . . .

RAJA (faces in the direction of the voice, then walks slowly downstage). 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. 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. She is seen guiding a group of children, reassuring, gentle. She leads them from one side of the stage to the other, busy and caring in her manner. RAJA, who has been watching from the distance, steps out of the area and takes her place in line with the children. IRENA 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. IRENA, finally understanding.) 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 — 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 . . .

(Lights up on the upstage area where IRENA and the children are gathered.)

IRENA (calming them). Quiet, now. Don't be afraid! Remember, you are not alone. Whatever you see or hear, whatever is done, remember, we are together — and then you will not be afraid! (She walks them into a lighted area set with steps

and stools, her “classroom.”) Come, sit close together.

(The children take places on the steps and stools, facing away from each other. They hold drawing and writing materials. They are still as the light comes up on the group and move only when they speak. RAJA observes them from the distance and then, as if in a dream, she walks through the scene, standing over each child for a moment. Finally she returns to the edge of the lighted area and speaks.)

RAJA. I was one of them — the children of Terezin, one who saw everything, the barbed wire fence, the rats, the lice; one who knew hunger, dirt and smells; one who heard trains arrive and leave, screaming sirens, and the tread of heavy feet in the dark. I sat in Irena Synkova’s classroom to write and paint the story of those days. (She takes her place in the group.)

(During the following, while the poems are being recited, various paintings from the book *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* may be projected on the screen.)

RAJA.

I never saw another butterfly . . .
The last, the very last,
so richly, brightly, dazzling yellow.
Perhaps if the sun’s tears sing
against a white stone . . .
Such, such a yellow

Is carried lightly 'way up high.
It went away I'm sure because it
wished to kiss the world good-bye.
For seven weeks I've lived in here,
Penned up inside this ghetto,
But I have found my people here.
The dandelions call to me,
And the white chestnut candles in the
court.
Only I never saw another butterfly.
That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live here in the ghetto.

CHILD II. It is weeks since I came to this ghetto.
I did not know that such a thing could happen to
me. When I go home, I'm going to eat only white
bread . . .

CHILD III. When I go home, I'm going to make my
bed every day, clean . . .

CHILD IV. When I go home, I'm going to drink hot
chocolate in the winter, lots of it . . .

CHILD I. When I go home, I'm going to have pretty
white curtains — rugs, too.

CHILD II. I'm going to play ball in the courtyard
when I go home and shout if I want to . . .

CHILD III. I'm going to sit very quiet and read
story books as long as I want to when I go home
— all night maybe . . .

CHILD IV. I'm going to play the piano when I go
home and everyone will sing and we won't care
how noisy we are . . .

RAJA. When I go home . . . (She walks away from
the group and faces the audience as she speaks

her poem.)

I've lived here in the ghetto more than a
year.

In Terezin, in the black town now,
And when I remember my old home so dear.
I can love it more than I did, somehow.

Ah, home, home,
Why did they ever tear me away?
Here the weak die easy as a feather.
And when they die, they die forever.
I'd like to go back home again.
It makes me think of sweet spring flowers.
Before, when I used to live at home,
It never seemed so dear and fair.

CHILD III.

In Terezin in the so-called park
A queer old granddad sits
Somewhere in the so-called park.
He wears a beard down to his lap
And on his head a little cap.
Hard crusts he crumbles in his gums.
He's only got one single tooth.
Instead of soft rolls, lentil soup.
Poor old greybeard.

CHILD I. May I call you "grandfather?" You have
no little girl and I have no grandpa.

RAJA. Tuesday, March 16, 1943. Today I went to
see my uncle in the Sudeten barracks; there I saw
them throw potato peelings, and people threw
themselves on the little piles and fought for them.