

THE FIRE by Lillian Pollak, from *The Sweetest Dream: Love, Lies, Assassination & Hope*, A novel of the Thirties. (p95-98). 2009. Bloomington IN: iUniverse.
Read by the author at the Clara Lemlich Awards Ceremony, New York City, March 21, 2011.

THE FIRE

*I died
Seventy-five dollars for my life
Mama, they gave you seventy-five dollars for my life
I died
But I will never die again
It will be different from now on
Listen-listen
Let me tell you how it was*

*Late in the afternoon
We were tired – too tired to talk
Murmurs – machines humming
cloth rustling – needles singing
clicking
stiching castanets*

THEN

SCREAMING – SHRIEKING

FIRE!!!!!!

BLACK SMOKE

FIERY FLAMES

BLAZING CLOUDS

HELLISH SICKENING FUMES

RED AND BLACK COBRAS COILING UPWARDS

EVERYWHERE – ENGULFING

FORESTS OF FIRE

EVERYWHERE –

TERROR – HORROR – PANIC –

RUN – ESCAPE – ESCAPE

NO

NO

NO ESCAPE

FIRE ESCAPE DOORS ARE LOCKED – WE WILL DIE

WE ARE GOING TO DIE

GOTTENU – JESUS – GOD

We cannot breathe – we are choking – we are dying –

TRAPPED – STRANGLING

ENGINES – FIRE ENGINES

COMING – WITH LADDERS

WE ARE SAFE

THE ENGINES ARE HERE

GOTTENU –

WE WILL BE SAVED WE WILL LIVE

OH JESUS – THEY CANNOT REACH US –

We are too high

We must jump – JUMP INTO THE NETS

NO

NO

WE WILL DIE –

WE ARE TOO HIGH

BUT WE WILL BURN ALIVE

WE MUST GO – GO – OUT –

OUT FROM THIS BLAZING HELL

Black skirts flutter – circle in the air

Black parachutes at a death party

THEN – FAST – PLUNGING DOWN – DOWN

SMASH!

Someone says – she is not dead

They do not know – they cannot see me

I arise

From still, silent sleepers

On their pavement grave

I shake my fist –

I AM NOT DEAD!!