

Grab the Tissu*

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An enormous umbilical cord made of deep red swathes of doubled cloth is attached to the warehouse roof. Lilly wraps the fabric around her foot; locked and secure. She grabs the silk and pulls herself up, then wraps, locks, secures and pulls.

Again.

When Lilly's mother was born, her umbilical cord broke. She whooshed out of the womb onto the padded floor before anyone could catch her. She hasn't fallen since.

At height, Lilly pauses. Suspended. Thick floor pads lie ready to break her fall. She wraps the silk around her right thigh and threads her left leg between the two swathes and twists, and twists again. She corrects and sits upright, cradled in a silken seat; Girl in the Moon[^]. Then she spreads one swathe behind her back and sits in the cup of cloth. She pulls the front swathe around her body. She is suddenly cocooned. A life size chrysalis hanging in midair.

As a small child, Lilly's mother would carefully pick her way up the playground climbing frames. She'd proudly take in the view then call for help to get down. Then she'd start the climb again. Each night before bed, she'd cuddle herself in a nest of soft toys and blankets. Protected and safe.

Lilly emerges from her scarlet cocoon[^]. She wraps and straddles and flips until she is an upside-down star, ready to fall to earth headfirst. There are stories of babies being collected from the stars when they are born.

In visions brought on by heavy contractions and an endorphin overload, Lilly's mother was called out of her constellation to land unceremoniously on the hospital floor. The ceiling lights twinkled above her as the shock set in.

'This is the difficult part,' Lilly says. 'I have to reach up, wrap the silks around my legs then do a somersault, let go and drop. Then I change into the Butterfly[^]'

When Lilly was three, her favourite book was *The Hungry Caterpillar*. She could recite the story word for word. When she was four, she would 'read' the story by matching her recitation to the pictures. Then she'd linger over the picture of the butterfly on the last page. 'Ah...it's so bootiful'

When Lilly's mother was three, she was afraid of butterflies.

Lilly drops. She wraps the silk around her chest, a length of cloth under each arm. As she hangs, held by the sturdy silks in midair, she unfurls the cloth wings.

She grins.

She flaps her wings back and forth, a giant butterfly fluttering under the warehouse lights.

Beautiful.

She lowers herself to the floor and runs over to me with an excited flush of joy in her seven-year-old face, 'Grandmother, can you come to Circus again next week? I didn't show you my Britney Spears.[^]

*A Tissu or aerial silks are double length red cloths suspended from the roof for climbing and acrobatics.

[^]These are the names of aerial silks or Tissu tricks.