

Pál Dániel Levente's Poems

Butterfly-Wing Housecoat

I said I want to catch butterflies.
You said you want to paint their wings.

The street lay empty,
doorways nothing more than shadows—
until she stepped out,
her face creased like a raisin,
stripped of sympathy
for the species that passed her by.

It was the dress that stopped us—
a burst of color against the gray,
as if a butterfly had wrapped her
in the soft hush of its wings.
Or maybe she was the butterfly,
folding her wings tight around her
in the shape of a button-front housecoat.

You said you'd paint this one.
I whispered I'd rather pin it.

And you laughed.
And that was the cue
for the sky to break.

Our foolish fantasies soaked through,
grew heavy like sponges,
and spilled toward the gutter
among all the other sidewalk dreams.

We ran for cover.
But I looked back.

The woman was still there.
Time had become a curtain of rain.
She stood behind it.

Color was bleeding from her into the street,
a puddle of swirling hues around her feet.
Her body, not naked, but wingless,
glowed in the abandoned street.

Birds

Decades of nights
settle like crows
round the once-upon-a-time of our hopes,
pick the old ones clean,
leave the newborn be.

Yet life is more than this—
an old crone strews betrayal-crumbs
among the shivering pigeons;
they gulp the fragrant grain—
then homeward she turns,

and the birds, left to themselves,
bloat and die.

Come morning, a hazel-eyed child
gathers their stiff bodies on his way to school—
clean death out of yourself,
your life still lies ahead.

We sit on one bough,
just above the path;
our severed wings meet.

If you grow cold, my breath will fold around you;
if fear comes, on the zither of dry leaves
I'll hum to you;
if you would fly with the birds of passage,
I'll bear you on the wings of my tales—
I'll bear you,
I'll bear you,
I'll bear you
away from here—anywhere at all.

At last the sun rises,
long shadows freeze into the ground,
with you, even unlived time is fair—
after every winter, spring comes.

Pál Dániel Levente has received numerous literary, artistic, and professional awards both in Hungary and internationally. He is a bilingual author, writing simultaneously in Hungarian and English. He has authored eight books in Hungarian, and his work has been translated into more than 20 languages. He is currently the dramaturg and librettist at the Capital Circus of Budapest.