

ÜSTÜN DÖKMEN

Butterflies and People



Remzi Kitabevi

novel

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and People*



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*All characters in this novel
And events are fictitious,
Only sentiments are real,
May everyone be warned.*

*To all butterflies and to people
who love them with no harm;
To all handicapped people
And to people – in their own way-
Who endure and collect blue caps for them,
To those who try to act with solidarity...*

Against All Odds

A Novel on Butterflies

When I decided to write the tale of a butterfly, everybody objected. No one cheered, no one liked the idea, no one supported.

At first my friends got angry, they said: "What good is it? Never mind the butterflies, go grow organic bananas, we will eat them." And I said to myself: "I haven't gone bananas yet; I want to try something new."

Then my wife's eyes blazed with anger. The night I told her that I had decided to write a novel on the life of a butterfly, with one hand on her hip, she started to talk without breathing:

"Butterflies are none of your business, you should mind your family, your children. Your son broke a window in the school while he was trying to hit one of his friends with a slingshot. I am sick and tired of being called to school all the time. May Lord take my life and unburden me, how many times did I tell you to go to parent-teacher association meetings, so people might learn that I am not a single mom. Haven't I been telling you to fix the door for more than a year by now? For god's sake repair it; one of us will be squashed under it one day. Then I can tell myself that I have a husband, one day you will drive me out of this house. Lord knows, one day you will make me leave you!"

At that very instant, a thought flashed through my mind, our main door with its double wings resembled a butterfly, although

worn out in time, barely functioning and old. Nevertheless, it resembled the wings of a butterfly all right. I know it is not right to think such things when my wife was angry, but I could not stop myself. Since my childhood, such compulsory and unnecessary thoughts invade my mind. (I guess psychologists call this “obsessive thinking.” I am not a psychologist; I have no idea about this obsessive thinking, maybe it has something to do with obesity that I don’t know.)

As my wife kept grumbling, her eyes started to sparkle with anger. As I realized her eyes starting to fill with tears like the sky clouding over before the rain, I tried to stand up and go out. But the door would not give in. When I returned, I found my wife crying, rain has started.

The only thing I remember from that quarrel was the fact that; my wife did not want me to write a book on butterflies. I totally forgot about the door and the parent-teacher association meetings for a long time.

One of the following days, my wife said:

“The other day you said something about butterflies, if you are planning to collect butterflies, give it up! You have already stuffed the house with filthy old things you call antiques, I don’t need my walls to be ruined by a butterfly collection. ”

“Sweetheart, I did not say that I was going to collect butterflies. I object to collect live beings, I collect objects. I was talking about writing a book on butterflies. Of course, in the novel, there will be people too, not only butterflies,” I replied.

My wife objected:

“Since you are going to write about butterflies, why include humans?”

I tried to explain saying:

“Darling, I will relate and compare Butterflies and people, butterflies are very inspiring to me.”

My wife would not back off:

“Husnu, if you need inspiration, here I am. I fly between work and the house like a butterfly, with all of my fragility. Write about me!”

I was rather hurt, but I did not say anything, it was not the butterflies. She called me Husnu instead of Huseyin. She did this frequently enough. Of course, this was just a slip of the tongue. Same thing happened to me as well. She claims, I sometimes call her Nebahat instead of Melahat. Well, of course I don't do it on purpose, she warns me after each time I make this mistake.

Maybe there is a tacit power struggle between us, deep inside. Indeed, I feel as if she is always right and mighty. I never tell this to her. God forbid, she already feels right enough. If I tell her how I feel on top of this, all of the work, the door and other stuff will drown me up and I won't be able to write my book.

Anyway, my wife did not like the idea of a novel on butterflies.

My mother in law objected to my novel on butterflies as well:

"Butterflies! What is it to you? Write a book about the history of Kayseri." (She is of course, from Kayseri.)

My brother in law, I suppose he is mutated somehow, is the only communist in Kayseri and in our family. He objected my project:

"Never mind these bourgeois fantasies, butterflies are none of your business, write a book on marabas, who lost their jobs because the lands were sold." (Maraba, is the Anatolian version of Russian mujik, that is to say serfs. When the fields were gone, maraba was left unemployed and suffered. They flew towards the bright neon lights of the big cities just like butterflies and moths, and burned away.)

I encountered my brother in law saying: "There are lots of books on Anatolian peasants but no books on Anatolian butterflies." He would not listen, he revolved his hand in a revolutionary manner and left.

Even my mother objected: "Why in god's name, my lion son is fiddling with butterflies and sheep (she was referring to my other book titled *The Lambs of Miyase*), if you really have to write something, write a novel on lions."

Among this vast number of the opposed, my publisher depressed me the most. When I opened up to him, he said: "Butterflies live only a day, a book on them will have to be short,

a sentence or a page at most. You cannot have a one page novel.” (Maybe he was thinking the cartoon saying; “We won’t be publishing *Autobiography of a Butterfly* because it is only one page.”) Briefly, he very clearly stated that; such a book could not be written, if written could not be published.

The only support I received on this subject came from my son. Even though he is a rather naughty boy, he is smart. (I mean he is smart when he spares time to think. The only problem is he does not spare for it.) While I was brooding, something he said brightened me.

“Dad, quality is more important than quantity. It is not the life span that matters; it is how you spend it. Never mind the people who criticize you, to a person who knows where he is going, the whole world will step aside and make way,” he said. Yes this is what he exactly said, my eyes filled with tears, I asked; “Son, are all these your opinions?” “No dad, I remember these from the notes I prepared for cheating,” he said.

He was preparing these notes for the writing course; whatever the subject may be; if someone writes such things, the teacher liked it. Believe it or not; it worked for me too. Obviously, cheating has its own merits in life.

Well, back to the subject; eventually I decided to write a book on butterflies. It could be a one day long life and a one page book. What mattered was that I told the tale.

But how to tell the tale the right way, what is the right way in this world? Are we supposed to believe what we see or are we trust to our knowledge? I suppose, our knowledge fails without us knowing it. If you ask me, I’d say the sun is revolving around the earth. But intelligent men say just the opposite, for some time by now. They say the earth revolves around the sun. Whom should we believe, the thing we see or the thing our intellect tells us? If someone stepped up and said that the sun was cold, and if he repeated this persistently, some people would definitely believe him. If these believers repeated the same thing, the number of people who believed the sun was cold would increase day by day. (Some people learn by mind and some learn by heart.)

How do you feel about butterflies?

All of us I think they are beautiful, pleasant, they give joy and live only a day. Is it true really?

I have an intelligent friend, while he was studying at METU, he joined lots of clubs. He observed lots of birds and butterflies in the forest of the university. (METU is a university that has grown its own forest, contrary to other universities which were built in a forest by cutting down trees in order to make room for it, that is why the roots of METU reaches deeper than most of the other universities.) He still wanders about with a binocular in one hand, and a book in other.

He told me that, some butterflies lived only for one day, but many of them lived longer. There were some that lived for a season and there were many that migrated during the migration season. They flew to warmer countries just like birds. The migration of many was one-way, but there was a species that returned afterwards. There were even butterflies that hibernated. In short, lifespan of butterflies was not that short. The butterfly whose story I will tell you about will have a week's lifespan, I guess.

Before we start our tale on butterflies and people, let's take a look at the valley they live in.

The History of Our Tale's Geography

In this novel, there are butterflies with beautiful wings; there are youngsters with disproportionate bodies and but minds with golden proportion; there are lands with scent of grass and drips of honey.

The land has past and the geography has history. The souls, the living and the greenery of today have sprouted over the history of hundreds thousands of years. The land and the living it nourished evolved for thousands of years and reached today.

When I was in high school, I did not like geography; there were black and white photos of the mountains, meadows, trees and flowers in the books. When I had a chance to see Anatolia and the world, a connection was established between the black and white face of the books with the multicolored earth, then geography exploded with colors in my mind and I loved geographies.

Somewhere or everywhere in Anatolia, there is a place; a place with grass, trees, roads, furnaces and people, there is a place with its mountains, valleys, meadows and uplands; a geography told in two lines in a book; but under the blue sky, it is a place with thousands of colors and scents. (It is up to you to find where it is.) Maybe it is Akdag, Akcadag; maybe Arhoy, Yaylacik; maybe Gulova, Gunova, or Kazova. Wheresoever it may be, it has a big river and a long valley in its bosom.

In the history of this geography, deep under the sea, Upper Permian limestone was formed. As the Alpine folds gradually increased, the layers under the sea were elevated over the water and formed earth.

There came a day when earth heaved and formed hills and mountains; there came a day when layers of clay, sandstone, cobble and gypsum were formed and there came a day when the land was eroded thousands of times by wind and rain. Later, in the areas close to faultlines, depression areas were formed due to tectonic movements. (It seems according to geographers, just like among people and animals; earth can have depressed regions too.)

As the sun rose and set, these lands were shaped with the plants and animals.

These mountains have seen lions, tigers, deer, bears, wolves and lots of different animals. These mountains have seen Hittites, Romans, Latins, Galats, Greeks, Arabs, Turks and Mongols, and they have also been seen by them.

The map of this geography that is covered with roads and lines: The one waiting for the passengers with its broken and eroded stones, Hittite road, King's road, Roman road, Byzantium road, Seljuk road, Ottoman road and brand new motorways of the Turkish Republic. Fields, pastures, gardens, vineyards and towns and villages. Tatlicak, Uzumoren, Ovali, Cerci, Ulas pastures; Akbugday, Cariksiz, Derekoy, Taslik, Tatar, Utuk, Ogulcuk, Yazibagi, Kusoturagi pastures. Lovers and beloveds lived in houses with mudbrick walls, flat tops, in wooden or stone or concrete houses. Some villages were far, some were close; Kicilli, Eskiyyapar, Avutmus, Unalan. Zile with its vineyards and grape molasses, Niksar with Yagibasan Madrasa, Erbaa with its name referring its relocation for four times. (First it was Horoztepe, after the first earthquake it was relocated to Sonusa, after the second earthquake it was again relocated to Herek and finally, after its total destruction with Erzincan earthquake, it was relocated for the last time and named Erbaa.)

Did we really love the flowers and plants of this geography? Love is to protect, for sure. I guess we did not love enough.

We have let numerous animals and plants be stolen. We have let that colourful flora be looted; we have turned a blind eye, we haven't seen. We have used plants from far countries, which were neither flower nor vegetable, in our parks and streets.

However, the names of the flowers in this geography live not only in our mountains and meadows; they live in our own names as well. Countless people who live in villages, towns or cities are called Gul, Gulhan, Aygul, Birgul, Aysegul, Gullale.^(*) Our people immigrated to far countries to make a living. I guess our flowers did, too.

However there are also flowers that belong to these lands with their souls and names. Maybe they were born in Anatolia, maybe they were brought to Anatolia from far places; but they all belong to this geography. Some of these are: gul (rose), lale (tulip), hanimeli (lady's hand – honeysuckle), gelincik – shepperd's rose (little bride – corn rose), civan perçemi (young man's forelock – compositea), aslan agzi (lions jaw – anthirium), kaynana dili (mother-in-law's tongue – dumb cane), koyun gozu (sheep's eye – gazania rigens), pasa dugmesi (general's button), yedi eltiler (seven sister-in-laws – verbena), zakkum-ahu (gazelle, beautiful girl - oleander), ana kokusu (mother's scent – gillyflower), gelin serpmesi (bride's cast), mum cicegi (candle flower – waxplant)^(**) and many more.

The history of our geography has been tied with bridges from past to today. Some of these bridges are Hidirlik, Talazan, Karasu bridges and besides these, with its engraved stork holding a snake in its beak, Leylek Bridge.

There is geometry in the sky, the angles of the stars, for example; rivers of the earth are sometimes straight and sometimes

(*) The author refers to names for people, derived from flower names which could be translated as; Rose, Rosequeen, Moonrose, Onlyrose, Ayserose, Rosetulip etc.

(**) Direct translations of the flower names are provided next to each flower name, in order to give reader an understanding of their connotation in Turkish.

meandering. Geometry is everywhere. The term geometry comes from geography or vice versa. History, geography and geometry are tied together in the lands where our tale takes place; and people, animals, plants...

***Maybe our biggest disability
is our prejudices...***

While telling the story of a disabled young couple,
Üstün Dökmen invites the readers to face with
their own deficiencies.

This is a story about falling in love. The love story of
two perfect butterflies and two disabled young
people, with all the similarities and differences.

And the key question to be answered is whether
you would prefer to live a long yet colorless life
or a short but colorful one...

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