

Butterfly—Nabokov

These smallest most iridescent Lolitas
Held a needling scream inside their mouths
The air a microscope looking over the deep hidden glimmering tiger's teeth

 You're getting fatter accent still slow as snowflower
 Holding high the weird collecting net, the streetlamp
 To make the tryst in a specimen volume

A microscopic passion is always pouncing on sketches of wings
Always twisted & broken left behind in an emptied room
Next to every poet is a Tamara, dancing flying

 Like powder brushed off a daydream Uncle
 A butterfly is sometimes more difficult to understand than a catastrophe
 Your blissful shouting & high style is not so innocent

Turn the page the bullet heading straight for the father is locked in the air
And hatching to become the colorful textbook the same snow still falling
The dead in orbiting flutter around the pistil of youth

 And the eyes in the photos staring on the longest moment
 It's sure not enough to fly to the age of sky
 You must learn to be the pages of a book to molt the human skin

Then to recognize the exquisite cosmic explosion from a single egg
The past, a daisy that hugs you tightly
Tamara always carries trees lightly darker tremulously beating wings

 The transmutation you cherish elegantly laid down in layers
 Holding up the world in its mouth nailed on high by a needle
 A tiger roars indifferent to deaf-mute memory

Butterfly—Berlin

The father's grave sinks deeply into many more graves
Covered stone crushing like cloud
A great weight tamping down and surprisingly out from under it a thin wing

Leaping to find you when you were still comely
Slender captivated by the swaying flower fanning itself
In the park one organ burning another, a kiss

The obstruction of the air must be learned
The wall tightly pressing the colorful painted shoulder
The falling evening color sets off a little shining leap

When your heart suddenly feels this moment
This city holds tightly your ancestral origin, your fated ending
Old age has no words but only the choked back moan

Then to know the thinner betrayal is the more extreme
One kind of force driving the golden yellow eyespot to grow
Pushing open the concrete waves floating above the world only by an inch

The sea butterfly doesn't dream of migrating far from Terror
Flying Tamara and the father flickering
Carrying bodies lightly pat to sleep the next generation of exiles

The ashes' contents has no horizon
You perch at the address where upon waking you shrug off the weight of home
The leaves' dark green lampshade moves closer

When you don't fear to be caught by a thread of fragrance
You yourself are becoming the fragrance delivering back the letter the dead left
Bearing its stamp of ocean waves: Berlin

Butterfly—Old Age

The ocean's scaled wing is also slightly dried
to fan cooler the hotel window frame you stand by
a foreign land under the ribs, spreading out, a dry rustling leaf

A cold blue silk line connected to a distant cocoon
traveling far even as it's pulled back
to another day fully loaded even as it's emptied

Riding on the butterfly's back like riding a white crane
Under the microscope the insect's fine hairs polish up
the style of destruction Behind the ten thousand things is a boat

rising abruptly the harbor
doesn't open to all directions a chessboard
that lets you see you are already everywhere located

Waiting your own smell wafting back in the original smell of smoke
the flesh like pupa choking again
Tamara the Absolute of Flight rises up against the dark pressing down

Writing a brightness exacting from all other writings
muffles the sound of wings outside the window
crashing against every word where you sit alone on the cliff

The stars are above and also below
This moment marks your transformation A wearied golden eye
wearied further from the wind threatening to grind down to dust

Standing by one and one thousand horizons
curling trembling struggling to be born in the interior
the next ocean—a finally returned pure poetry

--Yang Lian
translated by Joshua Weiner and the author