

**In Those Years, No One Slept**  
by Claudia Serea  
BROADSTONE BOOKS  
Paperback, 116 pages  
ISBN: 978-1-956782-31-8, \$21.50

*Reviewed by Preeti Shah*

Claudia Serea introduces a poignant and haunting world in her latest poetry collection, *In Those Years, No One Slept* (Broadstone Books, February 2023). The collection chills with deep insights of a time of war, unimaginable atrocities, the unforgettable silences in their aftermath, revolution, and the comparison between the immigrated home and homeland.

In the poem that gives the collection its title, Claudia's voice resonates with the reader because her lines of mourning maintain the raw emotions remembered vividly from childhood, while establishing authenticity through years of reflection. We believe her when she says "the woods were full. So were the cemeteries," which is what make her poems most frightening of all—the unabashed innocence of her honesty:

*Some, like my grandfather,  
slept standing,  
hiding among corn stalks  
and listening for dogs.*

The woods were full of women dressed in black.

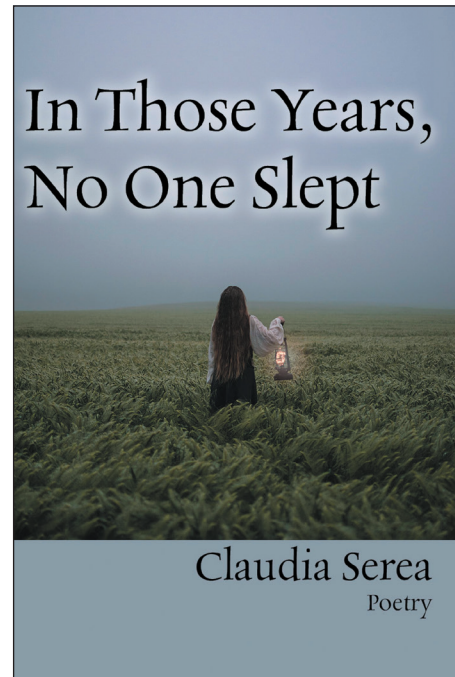
*The woods  
were full of veiled women  
who'd come to him and ask  
Did you see my son?  
Is he still alive?*

*The woods were full of veiled women  
and young men sleeping,  
standing  
behind every tree trunk.*

*The woods were full.*

*Young men wore rifles  
and slept standing  
behind every tree trunk.*

*The women were dressed in black  
with large wings on their backs.*



## Wilderness House Literary Review 18/1

*Did you see my son?  
My husband? Brother?*

*The woods were full.  
So were the cemeteries.*

*Everyone slept standing.*

This collection asks for us to process the years no one slept, as Claudia has, and to listen to the “only the clarinet [that] kept wailing in the cold wind.” With great care, Claudia evokes the reality and dreamlike state of nightmares, while offering dignity to a time when “tears [were collected] in a tin cup [to be thrown] into the fire:”

*I could taste the ashes in my mouth.*

*And the smell,  
the clinging odor of smoke  
I wore in my hair,  
a mourning headscarf,  
for days.*

*I collected tears in a tin cup  
to throw them into the fire.*

*A cinder bird flew  
through the open window,  
bringing a message,*

*a spark.*

*I saw it,  
rising to the ceiling.*

The poet also meticulously writes of the abundances and scarcities of her landscape from train commutes, obtaining and cooking meals, and time with loved ones. She eloquently writes of dual realities, the reality she experienced in Romania and what she re-experiences as core memories after immigrating to America. Still, without hesitation, Claudia reminds us of “isn’t this light, this late light, the prettiest you’ve seen?” and opens a mirror into her soul, that we may journey to the hopeful core within our own humanity:

*While I slept,  
Death made the beds,  
washed the linens,  
and pinned them on the clothesline.  
in the breeze.*

## Wilderness House Literary Review 18/1

*She was a quick, slender woman  
who baked bread and made stew  
with the few red onions  
she found in the pantry.*

*I guess she wanted to be a good houseguest.*

*She mended my socks,  
walked around the house in my slippers,  
soft as bunnies,*

*and cut the last mums from the garden  
for my room.*

*I was awakened by their scent.*

*And she asked me,  
shears in hand:*

*Isn't this light,  
this late light,  
the prettiest you've seen?*

In this exciting new collection, Claudia Serea fluidly connects to the ominous and the miracle in life, as if she were sharing the blights and blooms in her poems. I came away from her collection feeling that I not only have read but have experienced a deeper course that wants better for the world and its people.