

Lucy Biederman

The Last Act

The lights strung to the fence round the yard,
the night sat down. Pitchers of something passed around,
a large platter of dinner cashed and picked over,
schoolteachers smoking pot in plastic chairs,
bearded men palming their bottles.
Their marriages were flatly factual backstories.
Some of the men opened their mouths and emitted
surges of trivia that crossed each other at intervals
like the lattice top of a pie.
Their faces were closed, superserious as children's.
When it started to be time to go
the thin husbands stretched their arms around the women.
The women didn't smile. On the way home
the night curled up in the backseats of their cars,
collected in its crevices Thanksgiving-heavy vestiges
of every night before it. Histories of history,
long relationships with other cities, advanced
shopping lists: flour, cat food, lighter fluid. Months
may have had to go by, years, but then
there would have been something. If that wasn't true,
then nothing. The settling night was
streaks of lipstick above the little vista at the end of the block.

Came several deathly single-purpose days, no correlation.
The yard would have been empty for a while, then full again,
but never a middle ground from housebound to the trick
sound of a song uninterrupted, the night stretched thin
as a curtain from then to the disembarking now, the coming
days' late-afternoon bars, Shakespeare in the park, whatever.

The Portrait of a Lady

He flicked his wrist and roman candles tossed stars
like maids pouring rotten milk into the alley.
Thirty years of Thursdays are turned sideways,
stacked like ironed napkins in a cabinet.
The days surrounding go from errand to
errand like leaping between rocks
in a livid river. This city is a history of disasters,
its churches driving out worshippers,
the reverse of the firmament. Living on the long side
of our lives, we are ruins, our bodies upright
because they're too tired to collapse entirely. Our thoughts,
wrung out and public, we drop
into any available hole in the ground.

Lucy Biederman is a copy editor at a tax magazine in Falls Church, Virginia. Her poems and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *The New Delta Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Typo*, and *Barrelhouse*.

"I am currently allergic to my front porch due to record-breaking pollen counts in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area."