

Kate Braverman

Ladies Night at Club Lobotomy

This is not dusk but a gravity
of twilight, air a moist pewter
no one could breathe. The old man
waving his T-shirt on the wharf?
He's waiting for your ship.
Contagion stalled it at sea.
It's abandoned but for caskets
in rows like April hyacinths.

You've made dirty dreams a career.
You've planned your grave for decades.
An open hole, a wound, a picked sore,
a door into a nightmare,
one final O like a rouged mouth
with a sordid vocabulary.

All those spelling tests
and optional extra credit lists.
What did it get you, really?

Tax season. A storm due.
And that spasm? It's the mutiny
of your heart or stray unsullied
thunder loitering above the harbor
strung with sodden banners
announcing *Poetry Week*.
You missed it. Again.

Some women are like old lamps
stained, discarded in thrift shops
and attics. Two bucks.
Some women are lost cargo
adrift on the border
between intimacy and violation.

They are bad swimmers.
They have a diabetic's thirst,
swallow bilge, oily kelp, an enormity
of salt. Bloat shuts them up.
We call them stitch-mouth.
They open like melons, no bones
just an anatomy of glittering cruelties.

They scar everyone like radiation.
Husbands. Infants. Failure makes
them narrow and raw. They confuse
magnitude with definition. They become
vague to themselves, disappear and no one notices.

Some women are like bulbs going bad
infiltrating rooms with a damp leak
and sense of imminent ghastly weather.
You hear it coming like an ocean.

Some women smell like cancer.
Some women have skin
the color of disaster.
Rashes. Lice.
That's the least of it.
They can't scrub the ruined
linoleum off, trailer park
faux wood plastic paneling.
Food from a can like a dog.
Remember?

The carnival is in the plaza.
The cops are out. The social
workers who take your kids.
It's Ladies Night at Club Lobotomy.
And some women go for a sail
fall from the brow with the ease
of rained on autumn leaves.