

Summer Night, A Small Town, From a High Window

After a while tomorrow comes back,
from work, from overseas,
the last soldier,
it comes home having made a world safe,
prepared the season of plenty. It rests and lets
the children ripen. From the branches nearby
plums, like gleaming heads,
hang loosely. Generals
chirp to one another in the dusk.

Only at night the war begins.
The children change,
they slip out through the windows,
through the meadows wearing small bright uniforms.
Crickets smother for them under lids
they never think of poking
holes in. Streets shrink sharply down to
pools of isolated yellow light.

Now it is only the children who are out and active.
Heat flies up around them,
a swallow they've kept trapped,
terrified, between their cupped hands.

How long does it take
to outlast the ordinary in our lives?
The industry we bring to the tiniest everyday occurrence.
House lights climb the worn red
carpet of the hall stairs,
up toward the bedroom.
It's 11:00 already they explain.

Outside a streetlamp splutters, comes to rest
in the plum boughs, then splutters once again
and darkness comes flapping to the ground
like a small bird,
a tent with its poles snapped.
It makes you notice the rustle
springing up in the plum branches,
a sound like the one you might hear
if tomorrow had arrived,
were actually arriving,
had sat down outside your window
to strip down its already immaculate carbine.

—Kim Maltman