

## Ode to Fireworks

In autumn my mother drove us to the edge of the field  
where the fair was set up year after year:  
the carousel, the bumper cars, the long, low sheds  
filled with prizewinning animals.

5 We—my sister, my cousin, and I—were ready for bed,  
already in our pajamas. This was a treat we waited  
all year for. We waited in the darkness  
for the first low, dull *thwumps*, like someone  
beating an old, filthy rug hung on a wash line.  
10 Then we counted the seconds between the lightning  
and thunder, as we also used to do, until the sky  
lit up: red, blue, green, gold. In my mind's eye  
I can still see the straggly, ancient oak whose branches  
reached up past the exhibition halls, silhouetted  
15 against the spectrum of stars that cascaded behind it.

It was one thing to look up into the sky  
and imagine yourself in it or to make out pictures  
among the clouds, which my sister liked to do.  
No, I would tell her, that cloud

20 does *not* look like an elephant, a hat, an umbrella.  
But it was another thing to see  
the sky at night written upon  
with those jewels. (We lived in the country:  
night was *night*.) All around us, crickets  
25 stridulated in the stubble of what had been  
somebody's cornfield, their song rising and falling.  
You could smell winter on the air's edge.

Now, in the city, when the sky dips into shadow  
at New Year's or on the Fourth of July, I find myself  
30 craning my neck upward at odd moments.

The city sky is always lit up. This is where we live now,  
and it is how we live now, awash in light  
of every hue. Everything is a constant celebration:  
picking up washing at the cleaner's or stopping by  
35 the corner market for a loaf of heavy bread.  
And the music around me is the music of people,  
their voices rising and falling in a hundred languages.  
But beneath the yellowish glow deep in the sky  
of all our city lights pelting out into the universe,  
40 I remember the feel of the pickup truck bumping  
across the ridged field, as I kept waiting for those  
childhood bursts, watching as they escorted us home.