

god america i

Sue Eisenfeld

To my right: the glowing red, white, blue, pink, and green star-spangles erupt like volcanic ash over the rise and fall of mountain ridges rimming the open field, hailing over the snow cones and funnel cakes, and then disappear from the sky. Amid broad stripes and bright stars, the Virginia Blue Ridge foothills in 360-degree panoramic views encircle the sky-lava like a caldera. We are high atop a perch overlooking the moonbounce and antique tractor display—city folk come out to the country for the annual Volunteer Fire Department Fourth of July celebration. A picnic of potato salad and gazpacho on itchy blankets: bursts of salty and sweet, like Pop-Rocks in my mouth, mirror the electric night.

I turn my gaze to the left: nature's fireworks—ghosts of cloud forms appear and disappear against the silhouette of mountaintops, a figment flicker like a light switch gone bad. A finger through the electric socket of the night shoots out silent neon-pink curly-cues and tree branches, like an X-ray film of blood vessels, with the mounting storm. One moment, the sky shimmers its glittery glow in unison with man; the next, it allows each to take its turn in the spotlight.

A rising red moon oversees it all, the fireburst of God and America.

Later, on the last day of the year, in the last second of the last minute of the last hour of the year, we usher our friends, new and old, city and country, who've come to our cabin for the evening, out into the darkness. "We're about to hear some fireworks," we tell them, which is what Neil had said one year ago, when he introduced me to the country ways of New Year's Eve. On the stoop, we look out at the black night, Orion the hunter overhead with his sword in its scabbard and the Milky Way halo hovering like a nighttime rainbow as we breathe in the clear mountain air like icy fire. Nobody believes what we might see or hear. We are at the end of a dead-end road and no light of man within view; what kind of show will we witness and where?

In the hollows, a moment later: Boom! Boom boom! Boom boom boom. Boom boom boom boom. For twenty seconds and then thirty, and maybe a minute, the group is stunned by the blind show of shotgun blasts echoing through the wide night: our free, wholesome, American, country entertainment to welcome in the new year.

I've still got my hand over my heart.