

4TH OF JULY

by Caleb Mannan

In the morning a cool wind blows the carillon carols of St John's
through the wind rustle of the tall sentinel trees lining the street.
Jenny Anne bakes apple pies in cast iron skilletts,
beautiful in an antique apron of red roses
that our neighbor across the street gifted her.
I set up the foosball table Robert two doors down gave to the kids,
his boys grown, one of them has died too young in an accident a few years back,
Robert has kind eyes and walks Trapper the white lab
every night, Odin the neighborhood wanderer.
After the foosball table is set up in the basement,
Waylon and I take on Violet and Tennessee,
a raucous affair, we avenging the still stinging defeats
of Italy and valiant Iceland in the Euros,
I wildly commentating the whole affair until the stone walls
of the basement ring with our roars.
In the evening the family arrives,
all the cousins buck wild,
people circle lawn chairs, swarm the big porch,
brother in law Andrew silhouetted in smoke
manning the grill on the back deck like a lineman in midair,
every nook and cranny of this big old house on 14th avenue is full,
it being well acquainted with this, seeing over a hundred 4th of Julys.
Talk is talked, too much to eat, too much to drink,
children are chased,
talk of the country, God, home, lawns family
books music movies fitness, standard family fare,
in the entryway talking what I'm writing,
The Kid talking what he's picking and singing
while we're drinking.
Dusk is coming on, lets get going, hollering at the kids,
cups in hands chairs on backs we cross 14th in a pack,
a couple of blocks down, a couple of blocks over
to the bridge overlooking downtown,
setting up chairs and a blanket,
all the cousins buck wild,
me and Uncle Jakey walk them down the road through the throngs of arriving people,
even little Macs the youngest cousin chases after us
and we include him in the fold
of rock climbing children going too close to the basalt ledge
and unknown homeless hideouts below.
We see planes arriving and blue mountains to the north,
the city winking, stars start blinking,
the Children of the Sun used to look from here
out onto glorious nothing for miles,
and even before this they say this used to be one big lake,
bigger than Lake Pend Oreille, perhaps,
Mount Spokane nothing but an island.
Children impatient it grows dark and the mass of people move
to the front of the bridge talking,
speaking in low tones of the city, of one another,
of people, their people, our people.
The fireworks began just after ten,

a dull primal thud in the chest resulting in a colorful explosion
in the valley bellow above the river in the middle of buildings downtown,
after the children shouting and jabbering, pushing to the front,
June just three meandering up to get a better look,
Waylon too tired out from the day's festivities
sits beside me in June's stroller,
his face lit in distant color,
hollering and yawning.
With a flourish and a flurry the cannons din
and the crowd shifts together in the dark towards home,
the spires of St Johns lit up and looking down.
"Buddy up," Uncle Jakey says,
I grab Waylon's hand, Tennessee and Kidd arm in arm,
Jack and Violet holding hands and singing,
all talking their favorite fireworks all the way home,
in the middle of the street, crowding the sidewalks,
shouting for cars to slow down,
winding our way through the dark streets
past the jutting basalt outcroppings under hanging trees
and the ghost of trees taken in last fall's windstorm
until down Browne we see the house alight flags stirring,
goodbyes, hugs, hollers,
the kids shift to bed, the boys asleep before I can tell them goodnight,
June and Violet sleepy in their room when I kiss them,
Jae and I have one last drink on the big porch together
to the distant thump of fireworks and the train passing
through downtown by the river in the valley below.