**1969**

By Alex Dimitrov

The summer everyone left for the moon  
even those yet to be born. And the dead  
who can’t vacation here but met us all there  
by the veil between worlds. The number one song  
in America was “In the Year 2525”  
because who has ever lived in the present  
when there’s so much of the future  
to continue without us.  
How the best lover won’t need to forgive you  
and surely take everything off your hands  
without having to ask, without knowing  
your name, no matter the number of times  
you married or didn’t, your favorite midnight movie,  
the cigarettes you couldn’t give up,  
wanting to kiss other people you shouldn’t  
and now to forever be kissed by the Earth.  
In the Earth. With the Earth.  
When we all briefly left it  
to look back on each other from above,  
shocked by how bright even our pain is  
running wildly beside us like an underground river.  
And whatever language is good for,  
a sign, a message left up there that reads:  
here men from the planet earth  
first set foot upon the moon  
july 1969, a.d.  
we came in peace for all mankind.  
Then returned to continue the war.

Source: *Poetry* (August 2018)

**Here’s an Ocean Tale**

By Kwoya Fagin Maples

My brother still bites his nails to the quick,  
but lately he’s been allowing them to grow.  
So much hurt is forgotten with the horizon  
as backdrop. It comes down to simple math.

The beach belongs to none of us, regardless  
of color, or money. We all come to sit  
at the feet of the surf, watch waves  
drag the sand and crush shells for hours.

My brother’s feet are coated in sparkly powder  
that leaves a sticky residue when dry.  
He’s twenty-three, still unaware of his value.  
It is too easy, reader, for me to call him

beautiful, standing against the sky  
in cherrywood skin and almond  
eyes in the sun, so instead I tell him  
he is handsome. I remind him

of a day when I brought him to the beach  
as a boy. He’d wandered, trailing a tourist,  
a white man pointing toward his hotel—  
all for a promised shark tooth.

I yelled for him, pulled him to me,  
drove us home. Folly Beach. He was six.  
He almost went.

Source: *Poetry* (July 2021)

**Abandoned Farmhouse**

By Ted Kooser

He was a big man, says the size of his shoes  
on a pile of broken dishes by the house;  
a tall man too, says the length of the bed  
in an upstairs room; and a good, God-fearing man,  
says the Bible with a broken back  
on the floor below the window, dusty with sun;  
but not a man for farming, say the fields  
cluttered with boulders and the leaky barn.

A woman lived with him, says the bedroom wall  
papered with lilacs and the kitchen shelves  
covered with oilcloth, and they had a child,  
says the sandbox made from a tractor tire.  
Money was scarce, say the jars of plum preserves  
and canned tomatoes sealed in the cellar hole.  
And the winters cold, say the rags in the window frames.  
It was lonely here, says the narrow country road.

Something went wrong, says the empty house  
in the weed-choked yard. Stones in the fields  
say he was not a farmer; the still-sealed jars  
in the cellar say she left in a nervous haste.  
And the child? Its toys are strewn in the yard  
like branches after a storm—a rubber cow,  
a rusty tractor with a broken plow,  
a doll in overalls. Something went wrong, they say.

**Keeping Things Whole**

By Mark Strand

In a field  
I am the absence  
of field.  
This is  
always the case.  
Wherever I am  
I am what is missing.

When I walk  
I part the air  
and always  
the air moves in     
to fill the spaces  
where my body’s been.

We all have reasons  
for moving.  
I move  
to keep things whole.**Eating Poetry**

By Mark Strand

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.  
There is no happiness like mine.  
I have been eating poetry.

The librarian does not believe what she sees.  
Her eyes are sad  
and she walks with her hands in her dress.

The poems are gone.  
The light is dim.  
The dogs are on the basement stairs and coming up.

Their eyeballs roll,  
their blond legs burn like brush.  
The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet and weep.

She does not understand.  
When I get on my knees and lick her hand,  
she screams.

I am a new man.  
I snarl at her and bark.  
I romp with joy in the bookish dark.

**Caged Bird**

By Maya Angelou

A free bird leaps  
on the back of the wind     
and floats downstream     
till the current ends  
and dips his wing  
in the orange sun rays  
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks  
down his narrow cage  
can seldom see through  
his bars of rage  
his wings are clipped and     
his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings     
with a fearful trill     
of things unknown     
but longed for still     
and his tune is heard     
on the distant hill     
for the caged bird     
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze  
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees  
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn  
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams     
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream     
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied     
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings     
with a fearful trill     
of things unknown     
but longed for still     
and his tune is heard     
on the distant hill     
for the caged bird     
sings of freedom.

**Kin**

By Maya Angelou

*FOR BAILEY*

We were entwined in red rings     
Of blood and loneliness before     
The first snows fell  
Before muddy rivers seeded clouds     
Above a virgin forest, and     
Men ran naked, blue and black     
Skinned into the warm embraces     
Of Sheba, Eve and Lilith.  
I was your sister.

You left me to force strangers     
Into brother molds, exacting     
Taxations they never  
Owed or could ever pay.

You fought to die, thinking     
In destruction lies the seed     
Of birth. You may be right.

I will remember silent walks in     
Southern woods and long talks     
In low voices  
Shielding meaning from the big ears     
Of overcurious adults.

You may be right.     
Your slow return from  
Regions of terror and bloody  
Screams, races my heart.  
I hear again the laughter     
Of children and see fireflies     
Bursting tiny explosions in     
An Arkansas twilight.

**Kitchen Fable**

By Eleanor Ross Taylor

The fork lived with the knife  
     and found it hard — for years  
took nicks and scratches,  
     not to mention cuts.  
   
She who took tedium by the ears:  
     nonforthcoming pickles,  
defiant stretched-out lettuce,  
     sauce-gooed particles.  
   
He who came down whack.  
His conversation, even, edged.  
   
Lying beside him in the drawer  
     she formed a crazy patina.  
The seasons stacked —   
     melons, succeeded by cured pork.  
   
He dulled; he was a dull knife,  
while she was, after all, a fork.**Fairy-tale Logic**

By A.E. Stallings

Fairy tales are full of impossible tasks:  
Gather the chin hairs of a man-eating goat,  
Or cross a sulphuric lake in a leaky boat,  
Select the prince from a row of identical masks,  
Tiptoe up to a dragon where it basks  
And snatch its bone; count dust specks, mote by mote,  
Or learn the phone directory by rote.  
Always it’s impossible what someone asks—

You have to fight magic with magic. You have to believe  
That you have something impossible up your sleeve,  
The language of snakes, perhaps, an invisible cloak,  
An army of ants at your beck, or a lethal joke,  
The will to do whatever must be done:  
Marry a monster. Hand over your firstborn son.

**Father**

By Edgar Albert Guest

My father knows the proper way  
The nation should be run;  
He tells us children every day  
Just what should now be done.  
He knows the way to fix the trusts,  
He has a simple plan;  
But if the furnace needs repairs,  
We have to hire a man.

My father, in a day or two  
Could land big thieves in jail;  
There’s nothing that he cannot do,  
He knows no word like “fail.”  
“Our confidence” he would restore,  
Of that there is no doubt;  
But if there is a chair to mend,  
We have to send it out.

All public questions that arise,  
He settles on the spot;  
He waits not till the tumult dies,  
But grabs it while it’s hot.  
In matters of finance he can  
Tell Congress what to do;  
But, O, he finds it hard to meet  
His bills as they fall due.

It almost makes him sick to read  
The things law-makers say;  
Why, father’s just the man they need,  
He never goes astray.  
All wars he’d very quickly end,  
As fast as I can write it;  
But when a neighbor starts a fuss,  
’Tis mother has to fight it.

In conversation father can  
Do many wondrous things;  
He’s built upon a wiser plan  
Than presidents or kings.  
He knows the ins and outs of each  
And every deep transaction;  
We look to him for theories,  
But look to ma for action.

**The Chimney Sweeper: When my mother died I was very young**

By William Blake

When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue  
Could scarcely cry ” ‘weep! ‘weep! ‘weep! ‘weep!”  
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

There’s little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head  
That curled like a lamb’s back, was shaved, so I said,  
“Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head’s bare,  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.”

And so he was quiet, & that very night,  
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!  
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,  
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,  
And he opened the coffins & set them all free;  
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,  
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.  
And the Angel told Tom, if he’d be a good boy,  
He’d have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark  
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.  
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;  
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

**The Tyger**

By William Blake

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,   
In the forests of the night;   
What immortal hand or eye,   
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.   
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat.  
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp.  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears   
And water'd heaven with their tears:  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,  
In the forests of the night:  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

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