

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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