

Three Poems · James Tate

WE GO TO A FIRE

Great blasts of hot air are pouring through broken windows
out into the night, a whistling contest for devils.
A powerful smoke ejector rolls up. Its huge, thick hose
looks like a giant caterpillar as it reaches into the warehouse
to suck out the smoke which is blinding the firemen.
Wearily, the firemen drive back to the station house and sleep.
“I suppose they dream of knot tying and gas masks
and tumbler locks, but what do I know?” I said, feeling
a chill come on. We walked on down the street to the café
and sat there contemplating. When, at the next table,
a young girl strikes a match, we dive for cover.
She’s reading *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and ignores us.
Rolf claims he is in love and crawls around under the table
for a better look, and in this way we are preserved
from stultification. We are much impressed with the disharmony
of things, and, likewise, the occasional harmony,
such as when a fire chief gives orders to his men.
The serious problems of life, however, are never solved,
and, later, when Rolf asked for her hand in marriage,
she reported us to the authorities, and our flight-plan
was ultra-contemporary in no particular fashion.
“She’s dark but her children will be blond,” Rolf whispered.
And as I looked back at her, she began to darkle,
a rare, almost imperceptible, darkishness began
to tease her little fingers as we entered a murky cave
and bade farewell to the darling of this café society,
daughter of the dawn patrol, moccasin flower of radio-
luminescence, because nobody seems to worship her but ourselves.