We Go to a Fire

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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.