

Country Matters

Poems by Steve Mainwaring (b. 1951)

[5] I Heard They Were Opening The Zoo

When I heard they were opening the zoo
It wasn't a thing I thought too much about.
I thought they were letting the public in,
Not letting the animals out.

The first I knew I was in the house.
I was lying fast asleep on the lino.
When someone shouted 'Don't get carried away'
And I found I was riding a rhino.

There was a panther in the telephone booth,
Walking around and licking his chops.
There were elephants climbing up the trees,
Monkeys running the tea-shops.

A tiger was chasing after me
With the scowl of a lion in his teeth,
But I didn't worry too much at first
Because I still had the rhino underneath.

'Hippopotami take over Glastonbury'
Was on a placard I observed
Apparently they'd been in the cafes
Even the ones marked 'Hippos not served'.

I thought I ought to tell a policeman
But they said they didn't care two figs,
Then one gave a grunt and one gave a snort
And I saw it was only a couple of pigs.

So I put on my coat and my hat
And was spat at by a llama from distant Peru,
And a hyena said 'Will you tell me a joke?
I've been looking all over for you'.

My steed was going on a human hunt
With foxes and other rhinos
And birds were talking their way into movies
Not supposed to be seen by mynahs,

When suddenly people and animals got caught
By a whacking great net falling down
And though we all kicked and bit to get out
It was over the entire town,

And everyone was taken to the zoo
Tied up in this massive net
Where humans and animals were separated
By a specially qualified vet.

We humans were given to an elephant,
Who it transpired was the zoo-keeper,
And I went to my cage where I dropped off again
Well I've always been quite a heavy sleeper.

[6] Bird Song

I know I'm only a silly little bird
But I'll try not to keep you too long.
I've travelled here through all sorts of weather,
Through the rain and the wind that ruffled my feathers,
And now I'd like to sing you my song.

But if you break my heart
Then I shan't be able to sing,
And I shan't be able to fly away
If you break my wing.

The sense is very simple,
So simple it's absurd,
But I thank you not to block up my beak.
Just like you I've a right to speak,
Even if I am a silly bird.

But if you break my heart
Then I shan't be able to sing,
And I shan't be able to fly away
If you break my wing.

So if you'd like to go away
Climb on my back and strap yourself on,
Give me a smack and soon we'll be gone
On a beautiful mystery ride.

But if you break my heart
Then I shan't be able to sing,
And I shan't be able to fly away
If you break my wing.

So let's fly to somewhere new.
Let's forget everything.
How would you like to be flown to the sun?
Gently, now, gently – now look what you've done.
You've broken my heart by breaking my wing.

[7] Pleasures Past

I was going down the hill and looked back over
my shoulder.
Saw the sun which was shooting a ray through the
clouds
And slowly yet quickly the cloud closed in,
Enveloping, smothering the light to be lost for the day.
I would have pointed it out but there was no-one to
show.

Once upon an evening we drank and danced on
Priddy Green,
Yokels hokey-coking until eleven o'clock.
No doubt passers-through said "How unusual"
and laughed.

I only hope they enjoyed it too.
Oh no, they can't take that away from me.

Then I was walking into Wells early in the frost.
The sun was rising and steadily climbing the trees
And the horizon split the world in two, the top
half blue, the bottom green,
Held together by a huge yellow drawing pin.
I would have let you know, but you weren't there.

And those were the days on old Weston pier
With a handful of greasy chips,
Watching the sea come home again
While the wind parted my hair.

With wetting my nappies
And messing my bed up,
And when I'm a grownup
I'm going to be a baddy
And when I'm bigger than my daddy
I'm going to beat him up.
Yes, I'm going to lick my own paw.
But now I'm a grownup
Blood and thunder
Wake me up,
Break me into pieces.

Peace is what I want
Instead of all your thud and blunder.
I have been cut by the sharp edge of shame.
I have been drowned in the tears of my mother.
I have been thrown over the cliff of my imagination.
I was overrun by a taxi,
Overridden by taxi passengers.
I have been smelt as incense and compost.
I have been screwed in the vice of life.
I was killed in the death of love.
Turn your back to the war.
War is more death than breath.
Peace is what we want
Instead of this
Blood and thunder.
In the City of Wells
I can hear bells clanging
Hanging in the streets
On the walls
Of the City of Wells.
Ding dong bell,
The cat
 has gone
 to hell.