



Ruth Moore

The Offshore Islands

The offshore islands belong to themselves
 They stand in their own sea.
 They do not inherit; they leave no heirs.
 They are no man's legacy.

Blazing volcanoes, cooled and dead,
 Marked nowhere a boundary line.
 The rise and fall of oceans left
 Not one no trespassing sign.

The money was never minted,
 The clutch of its greed so strong
 It could honor a deed: TO HAVE AND TO HOLD,
 And keep these wild lands long.

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The first summer people were Indians.
For some five thousand years
They built up shore-line shell heaps before
They lost to the pioneers.

The white man took what he wanted.
He had privilege, laws, and guns.
He made fast his own boundary lines
And his property went to his sons.

From the west they sailed in Chebacco boats,
And the high-sterned pinkys, Essex-made.
In harbors where water was deep enough,
Their schooners carried a coast-wise trade.

The homesteads they made were sturdy,
But those who built near the shores
Had to dig, if they didn't want Indian shells
All over their cellar floors.

Then time slipped by, as inheritance does.
They felt the mainland's pull.
They abandoned their homes to rot away,
And their cemeteries full.



Theirs was the time of history
And written records show
That their hold on the offshore islands began
Less than four hundred years ago.

Now comes the era of real estate,
Of the hundred thousand dollar lots,
Of the condominiums, side by side,
Along the shoreline choicest spots.

What follows the time of developers
No human voice can tell.
But the silent offshore islands know,
And they handle their mysteries well.

They speak with a voice that is all their own,
And this is what they say:
That they talk in terms of a billion years
That their now is not today.
And the ghosts they brought along with them
Have never gone away.

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Rocks

The rocks of the earth are its history.
Dinosaur tracks they hold,
They tell what's known of who got here first,
They say how old is old.

Fossil shells on mountain sides
Mark there the depth of seas
That rose and fell without the changing tides
Of numberless centuries.

Creatures came, but not to stay.
Diplodocus lies in his deep.
Time-tried and tossed away
The ammonides sleep.

But not the same are the fossils found
In the Age of Inquisitive Man,
For the tallest mountains wore down to the ground
Three times and are rising again.

Who can write on Time's dust
The secret ebb and flow
Of what roared over the earth's crust
Billions of years ago?



Fierce fires still rage on earth, and within
Rocks shift and fissures crack
What difference now to who started in
And never did come back?

For the home of Man is already rock,
While his triumphs are shouted and sung,
Whatever volcano or earthquake shock
Tell him how young is young.

The rocks of the earth hold secrets,
Weathered, battered, brown.
Yet a pebble found in a wayside ditch
Might be cut for a king's crown;
And a certain beach-rock, tossed by the tides,
Holds a shimmer all its own.
It takes a polish of silent dark,
As if a black moon shone.

The lapidary who cuts a gem,
Slices his agates thin.
With professional care he handles them,
Finds out what lies within.
For the outside crust of an agate stone
Looks dingy—of little worth.
But inside, when shaped and polished, are some
Of the loveliest colors on earth.



Design is there—mathematical—
A scientist wouldn't be fooled
Over what happened inside a rock
When the gases stiffened and cooled.
But sometimes a difference creeps in,
As the lapidaries know,
When polish shows up a landscape of trees,
With a background of snow.

Or a perfect scene of a big white owl
Sitting poised on the limb of a tree.
What of scientific logic then?
For how could this *happen* to be?

Does some hidden consciousness live in rocks,
Who pokes fun at the human race,
And leaves a portrait for someone to find
Of the devil in hell with flames at his back
And a horrible monkey face?

The lapidary who found this scene
Is thinking, wondering still.
But nobody has an answer to this,
And I don't think anyone will.

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