

CATHEDRAL OF NERVOUS HORSES



W. E. Butts

The Hobblesh Granite State Poetry Series, Volume IV

HOBBLEBUSH BOOKS

Brookline, New Hampshire

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THE INHERITANCE

I was eight when my uncle died.
A year later, my parents and I
buried the family dog in our back yard,
by a patch of lilies-of-the-valley.
I was always conscious
of stepping over those bones,
but it was not for ten years,
the day I found my father fallen
on the floor, too weak
to climb into his bed,
that I was finally afraid.

I watched him at the hospital,
his frail body curled
like a fetus, and realized
he was going back, and I wanted
to take hold of those shrunken hands
and lead him there myself.

When his breath left him, my mother's eyes shut.
The geography of her life became
a small, hard planet spinning inside her.
Galaxies collapsed, worlds were thrown
from their arcs, her hands went limp,
stars exploded, constellations were rearranged
and I understood, I was now the man she loved.

SILVER LAKE

The first time I saw it, I was
five years old, and every day
there the sun exploded
into bright red strawberries.
Mother fed us with sweet milk,
while Father swam the cool morning.

Afternoons, I would walk along
the shore, stop and bend to the glitter
of the lake, as he stood, just
close enough in the white sand.

Our summer trips to the cottage
always began with a slow drive
in Uncle's '49 gray Pontiac.
Year after year, at the end
of vacation, he returned
to bring us home. We went,
not sure that's what we wanted.

I live in a city I didn't know
about then. My father and uncle
are both dead. Mother writes
often from the nursing home,
and I remember the shine of trout
beneath circling pools.

THE CANAL

My daughter and I sit on a bank
by the canal where, a hundred years
ago, my great uncle drove barge.
We have walked through tall grass,
weed and disordered wood to come here.
Together, we select small, flat stones
to skip across the water.
For a while, we watch their brief lives
leap and disappear. Then we make a game.
I toss a stone that creates a ring
over the surface. She tries to throw
hers within its center. She notices
the circles cross one another.
I am reminded of cells in the body,
and how each precisely duplicates
its elements. We return
to the dense, difficult path. Beneath
our concentric circles, stones sink
like the dead into their graves.