

THE BRIAR PATCH



J. Kates

The Hobbleshush Granite State Poetry Series, Volume V

HOBBLEBUSH BOOKS

Brookline, New Hampshire

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HOW IT WAS

In the beginning was the word,
and the word was without form and void.
Darkness played on the surfaces of water
while light gathered in the refractions of waves
like a congregation awaiting the hour of worship
or stars lining up into constellations.
Slowly the sun lifted itself over the horizon,
a vast red beast stirred by elements of hunger and love.
Behind it at a respectful distance jackalled a spotted moon
until evenings and mornings circled around each other
like a well-greased bicycle wheel that won't stop spinning.
Dry earth burgeoned and blossomed,
animals cautiously snouted out from thickets of metaphor
onto the vistas of savannah
and a predatory existence.
The clay shed sand to compose as Adam
who held everything in the palm of his tongue
and named the names of Creation.
Mock orange.
False Solomon's seal.

SIX-DAY WONDER

By the seventh day it was all over,
a thing to turn away from
and get some rest, as a kind of favor
for having created the humdrum.

Earth was a matter of fact. Flight,
creeping and swimming were other ways
of running around. The celebrated night-
and-day dichotomy had praise

from man, the delegate, whose chief end
was to make glory of all this
orderly chaos and pretend
that a small part of it was his.

The sun in place, nothing was new
under it. The stars were moved
because there was nothing else to do
but love, and be loved.

OPENING CHORUS

And through it all,
while we waited for the ship to arrive
with a black sail or a white sail,
while we made our own kind of love
in the morning and buried
our dead before nightfall,
the hair on our heads kept growing,
and our fingernails,
and without thinking
we cut them back, inch by inch,
and fell into bed again, or ditched
square holes in the lengthening shadow,
or stared unavailing at the silent horizon
while the hair on our heads kept growing
and our nails dug
into our hollow hands.

Quintus Horatius Flaccus

ODE 1:4

Solvitur acris hiems grata vice veris et favoni . . .

(To Sestius)

Bitter winter this year is finally cracked open
by the south wind. Fishing boats slide down their rails
into the lake. Livestock kick at the barn-door
to get into pastures turning green.

There will be dancing now lit by the moon,
you'll feel the softened ground shake under the feet
of magical girls circling hand in hand
heedless of distant thunder.

Now is the time to go after flowers, and pick
your sacrifices for the burgeoning year.
Whatever the gods ask for, a lamb or a kid
dedicated to the shadowy groves.

Colorless death kicks in the door of a hovel
as quick as a royal bastion. O my fortunate friend,
the span of life is too small to keep adding hope on hope.
Night crowds in, with its storied ghosts,

and that echoless realm of the dead, where wine
has no taste and the dice are all blank, and where
you are indifferent to Lycidas, stud that he is,
keeping the young girls warm.