

◆ JIM CARRUTH ◆

The Walk

Father, the animal is penned in the passageway.
One end of the rope is a slip knot around the hock;
the other is thrown over the bar, pulled down on
and tied so that the raised back leg's held tight
to limit wriggle and kick as you move in closer.
Pulling hard on long handled clippers, you slice
and wrench away a bit of tough overgrown toe.
The front edge of her hoof rests on your knee
sole facing up. With a small hoof knife,
its curved wooden handle and blade,
your artist's grip works the cloven claw
as thin keratin shavings fall moonlight white.
Sweating with the effort of the warm day,
careful not to pare too far and bleed the beast
you search for hidden ulcers, remove the pus;
picking out too, the gravel of the hard road.
In sculpting and squaring off the weight bearing,
you are shaping the future steps of this animal:
take-off and landing, the distance left to go.
Later you follow her tender walk to the fields
falling behind, struggling to straighten your back.