

Catherine Chandler

Memento

The afternoon has hushed its radiant
bravura as the sun's long arc
spins out its gradient
in one last
spark.

It is as if the world has been recast.
Supplanted by the owl, the hawk
will slumber hard and fast
till morning light.
A clock,

cosmic, chronometric, with a sleight
of hand, may, in its measured sway
admit the coming night
and so compose
the day

or devastate the angle of repose—
a sudden avalanche of thought,
of wild scenarios
where things that are,
are not.

And while the unremitting repertoire
plays out with every toss and turn,
the star that's not a star
will advertise
and burn.

A half a century of lost Julys—
an old *Old Farmer's Almanac*,
circled, certifies
the Thunder Moon,
the track

of tides, and how and when and what to prune.

Lessons at Fall Kill Creek

Altissima quaeque flumina minimo sono labi.

—Quintus Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni*

It's been sixty years, but I've not forgotten.
You and I set off as we do each morning.
Hand in hand, we walk in the April sunshine,
father and first-born.

Halfway to the Samuel Morse School, we would
sometimes stop to see how the creek was faring—
Fall Kill Creek that runs through Poughkeepsie, draining
into the Hudson.

Rain from upstate wetlands and marshes — seeping,
racing southward, coursing through stonewall channels —
forms a perfect habitat for the bluegill,
darter and minnow.

Now we're at the Catharine Street and Mansion
crossing, looking over the iron railing
at the water, higher than ever, flowing
silent and placid.

Then your quiet words — how it is that stillness
mustn't be confused with a lack of passion,
how it is that rivulets lead to rivers,
rivers to oceans.

The Woodlot

Eleven years ago we bought this house,
a cottage on a quiet lane, where trees
dominate the landscape, where the Town
of Beaconsfield protects its woods and wetlands
with an environmental bylaw bible
thicker than the girth of any oak
or sugar maple sapling one may wish
to cut without a permit from a stern
and rigorous inspector. So it was
we moved into our house one mid-October
and filled over a hundred bags with leaves
we'd raked until our backs and hands could take
no more of it. There were about a dozen
trees in our backyard, but the lot behind
was brush and bramble underneath a stand
of ash and linden, ironwood and one—
just one—white birch. It was a wooded lot,
and it had been the clincher on the deal:
no rear neighbors. We'd have bought
it if we could. Some day. Or so we thought.

You and those trees, he grouched, a mild reproach,
because he, too, enjoyed the privacy
and loved the flocks of chickadees who fed
from outstretched hands, the squirrels and rabbits, too,
who built their dreys and burrows in that wood.
Wild raspberries were plentiful in summer;
each spring trillium and columbine
shot up to ease the slap of April snow;
and often frigid Januaries seemed
less so, as northern cardinals' wheet! wheet! wheet!
whistled through the branches of the lot
that bordered on our dog's last resting place.
Last year in early May the land was sold,
and all the trees, including the lone birch,
were felled, chain-sawed and hauled away. The laws
I mentioned don't apply (so I've been told)

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to new construction, and a house was built.
A matching shed. A five-foot chain-link fence
secures new neighbors from the likes of me—
the one who trespassed. She who hugged that tree.