

Catherine Chandler

Ending

Nothing to reproach or to forgive.
Nothing to unwind or to unweave.
No arguments to prove or to disprove.
No wrongs to right. No rights to claim or waive.
In retrospect, it's all so relative —
seasons, space-time, truth and make-believe.
I've left the northern hemisphere, but you've
a motto: *plus ça change* . . . I hear you;

save

that here the jasmine is in bloom. Above,
Crux reappears to complement a mauve
and apricot tableau. The men arrive,
back from the long November cattle drive,
while in a nearby eucalyptus grove
a golden-eared paloma coos his love.

My Father's Shirts

I've dusted, vacuumed, mopped the kitchen floor,
hung out the wash, swatted every fly —
it's Saturday, and yet there's one more chore.

The eldest child of seven, it is I
who've been entrusted with his shirts. Last night
I sprinkle-dampened them, then rolled them tight.
Today, from collar, yoke and cuffs, to sleeves,
to pocket, placket, front and back, the dry,
hot iron makes the cotton steam. Nearby,
my mother checks for creases. As she leaves,
a side-glance at the gussets and the pleat.

I bristle, being too young to know that she
just hopes and prays I'll learn to take the heat,
and maybe live a good life, wrinkle-free.

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Nines

“The metric system did not really catch on in the States, unless you count the increasing popularity of the nine-millimeter bullet.”

— Dave Barry

When I was in first grade

— *Catherine* —

we had regular fire drills, just like now,
orderly evacuations onto the schoolyard,
usually on a fine fall or spring day.

The teachers did a roll call
as we shuffled back to class

— *Allison, Avielle, Caroline, Charlotte, Chase,
Dylan, Emilie, Jack, Jessica, Josephine, Kyle, Olivia* —

Later, when I was a little older

— *Cassie, Corey* —

there were duck-and-cover civil defense drills.
We’d practice hiding under our desks

— *Kelly, Kyle* —

in case of a nuclear fireball from an atomic bomb.

Maybe your grandparents
told you stories about those times

— *Lauren, Lena, Steven* —

Now they have lockdown drills

— *Ana, Anna, Daniel, Daniel, Daniel* —

color-codes, metal detectors

— *Madeleine, Marian, Mary, Matthew, James, John* —

designated hiding-places

closets, corners

where active shooters

can never, ever, find you

— *Noah, Rachel, Benjamin, Jesse, Naomi, Isaiah,*

Grace —

Note: The names in this poem are the first names of the thirty-seven children murdered at Columbine High School, West Nickel Mines School, and Sandy Hook Elementary School by hostile intruders with 9 mm weapons. Nine millimeters is equal to slightly less than three-eighths of an inch.