

Phillip Mandel

CUTTING DOWN TREES

the air was crisp, but not cold, t-shirt and jeans weather;
and the ground was hard, blooming with fallen leaves
shades of red and gold.
the porch was a target, tethered under a flurry
of acorns like fat raindrops or pennies thrown by thieves
from the tops of buildings, or maybe furry squirrels
were just teasing my mother as she read the local news.
the new york times was unfolded and refolded,
with two or three coffee rings already on the crossword,
from my father, who was in the woods with me, cutting down
dead branches, throwing them in piles near our shovels
stuck fast in soil; we sawed through steel branches
and snapped them off, bloody fingers, whatever the cost.
the stitching on his college t-shirt was coming undone,
and mine was fading already from a few years' washing,
and tight since freshman year. the air was crisp
but not cold as we worked together and talked
about girls and getting old, about football and robert frost.
'how would you interpret after apple picking?' i asked
and he answered by handing me the saw and picking up leaves.
it was crisp but not cold as we cut down trees.

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