

LEXINGTON, N.Y.

Coming back after almost thirty years
is like walking into a rediscovered room
where the furniture is old with memories, and the only light
is the lazy amber of late afternoon.

But it's not a room I come back to—it's a mountain,
a river, a bridge, and acres of pasture,
a maple tree where my father carved my initials
when I was too young to carve them for myself.
We used to vacation here, at my uncle's hotel.

When I last saw this town, I was seventeen.
Now I'm pushing fifty. The creamery is gone,
done in by fire. Cows still browse in the open field,
but the store where I bought nickel candy
has been torn down. The old people who used to live here
are buried at the edge of town. I remember
tough yankee farmers with pinched faces
drinking whiskey at the bar, my uncle matching them
drink for drink. And the hotel guests
who stayed a week or two—loud, impulsive Italians
dancing the tarantella on the unpaved tennis court,
under Japanese lanterns. The farmers seemed bewildered,
but they joined in. Accordions and banjos, mosquitos,
fireflies. Beer and liquor spilling on the lawn.

Years ago, my uncle died of cancer.

They pulled the hotel down and cleared the ground,
planted grass. Now there's another place, across the road,
owned by Ukranians. Halfway up the mountain
there was a turkey farm, it's gone to ruin.

The bridge I took a picture of
is still there, spanning the narrow river. The terrain
is much as I remember it, though strangely smaller,
shrunk with time. A two-lane highway
cuts through the pasture, but the barn
that stood behind the hotel
holds its own, gray and definite,
asserting itself in the remembered landscape.

The trees grow and the river runs,
and the cows, neighbors now to streams of passing traffic,
still own the fields.