

Fences

Day 1

There is a pine tree. I cannot tell you of what kind
but know that I have seen others the same. Branches
drooping; needles hanging as if the tug of gravity
is too much to resist. I find this one
on Thieriot Street in the Bronx (between
Archer and Guerlain), imprisoned
by paving stone and chain link.

There it stands, threadbare, yet reminiscent still
of a cousin I once knew whose full skirt grew
low enough to return the caress of the earth.
A child of the country—at least for each summer
some half-a-century-and-more ago—I would hide,
sit in quiet contemplation beneath its full canopy.
Brown needles, fallen, weaving a soft blanket beneath me.

No one, today, will hide underneath the skirt
of our Thieriot tree. It's first branch emerges
eight feet up the trunk (lower growth pruned
long ago) with fallen needles swept away.
If I could transport this tree to a new home
in the country, I decide, it would no longer be
the same tree.

And my walk is different here too,
of course.

Day 2

On Bronxdale Avenue, at its intersection
with Pierce, I pass a "New York Sports Club."
Inside a few stride toward their destination
by way of treadmills. Some watch TV
as compensation for the boredom.
"I am getting the same exercise outside
as they are inside," I tell myself, "yet
have no membership fee to pay."

And, boredom never seems to be a concern
when I am walking on this side of the fence.

Day 3

I'm dismayed to find myself on Commerce
Avenue—an apt name for the kind of street

I always try to avoid while planning my route.

Today, however, the search for paths
never before taken guides me here.
And so, just before reaching Westchester
Square—tucked between litter-strewn
parking lots each also surrounded by
chain link (this time topped with razor wire)—
I spy a small sad plot, perhaps twenty yards
by ten. It is overgrown with weeds,
contains a few weathered headstones.
I read the only one I can: "Cornell
Ferris, Deceased June 13, 1861."

A fence also guards this plot—stainless-steel
spikes (shaped to imitate an antique style of painted
cast iron, I decide). Hanging upon it, a sign
tells me I have discovered the "Ferris Family
Burial Ground," but fails to offer additional detail,

for example that in 1861 no road nearby
was named "Commerce Avenue," nor had the land
surrounding these headstones yet become
the province of parking lots and warehouses.

I imagine pine trees,
with full skirts.

Day 4

I pass a church. This time I do not reveal
coordinates in order to shield the sinners.
Search for it on your own if you like, among
the streets between Thieriot and Westchester
Square, somewhere south of Bronxdale Avenue.

And if ever you run across this house of worship
you will notice, hanging on a quite elegant fence
with still another paved lot on its far side
(this one kept exquisitely free of debris) the following
notice: "ILLEGALLY PARKED VEHICLES WILL
BE TOWED AT VEHICLE OWNERS EXPENSE"

to which my mind's ear adds:
"SAYETH THE LORD."

Steve Bloom
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