

There was a college north of my child memories,
a pastoral place of good architecture
with fine masonry, a gothic tower,
and red tiles that make the roofs.
Broad fields of mowed grass separated
the buildings from the roads.
At one corner of the gentle campus
stood a hardwood of oak and maple
with birch and stunted spruce
where I went long summers ago to visit with
a stone statue of the seated Christ.
He sat beneath the apostolic trees
as though conversing with His friends.
The sculptor, unknown to me, chiseled love
in the quarried face. Songbirds vied
to sit on his hard shoulders, as though
His grace drew them near. I always felt within a sphere
of peace when I was there,
so unlike the cruel playground of my school.

When I was twelve, I saw an assault.
Two seventh graders attacked another boy
who screamed, as he struggled hopelessly
to protect his tender genitals. I was
too small to help and feared those boys.
Once a little guy hit me in the eye.
Once, showing off, I was thrown from a wagon;
my head slammed the asphalt so hard I thought I'd die.
Girls mocked us. A bully classmate brought dirty pictures
that drew a crowd of dirty boys.
Even some of the Sisters were mean and loud.

Now the hardwood is a stand of mature trees,
oak and maple and towering spruce;
the brush, the wild flowers, all the secret flora cleared away.
The stone statue of the seated Christ is gone.
Chain-link fences on the north and east border the neat space
of the secular trees. But the campus is still a splendid place
of fine architecture, graceful masonry, and red tiles
on the roofs. Down the road, to the south,
is still the playground of my old school.

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