

Panhandlers

Peter Colson

He appears Easter morning ungodly
on your way to Target. Late for church,
you barely judge his whiskers and mane
under a Joe Camel cap, his trespasses recorded
on cardboard: *homeless, jobless, God bless.*
None apply, so you cast your stare ahead
and speed toward your lot.

Departing, you crack the window, inch out
a few ones and the confession, *it is all I have.*
Your angry spouse tears open the wipes.
You palm fifty from the collection plate
and buy more wipes and Prozac.

In July heat, you spot him in flocks
sharing Perrier and bags of cheeseburgers.
They grin as the Tesla slides-by. You crank
an evangelical station, tint the windows darker.
The assemblymen you grease
spin taxes on fast food and bottled water,
offer endless rides in Jaguars and Bentleys.

He vanishes late fall, and you robe
your conscience in the gospels: *he owns
a house in Arizona, spent it all on booze,
...won't be back.* In a nightmare, he spurs you
naked into a desert, dismounts and switches
your backside to wander free.
You console yourself counting threads
in the sheets then invest all in Egyptian cotton.

In winter's recession, you hoard Amazon
boxes and black and brown crayons
the kids never color. When the market crashes,
you trace sin after sin but cannot spell *poor*.

The bottles of Rothschild's never turn.

Like margin calls, you dread Lent
and a second-coming. He catches you driving
out the back gate, you pray you go blind.
The words he mouths you cannot read,
but the question burns from the speakers,
and when it is your time to pass through the eye,
are you the camel or the rich guy?

On Donating My Body to Science

Peter Colson

As in life, I seek in death
not to pointlessly occupy space
 so, I consider options –
mushroom suit, tree pod, body farm –
fitting but without the legacy I crave.

Time expires, and I commit my body
to science and a tattoo parlor inking a life
hereafter, a colorized script for perpetuity
then chill until I roll out in a theatre.

A first-year med student undrapes me,
her red hair lights our proclivities.
She reads aloud *Love me Forever*
and a Day illustrated below my waist.
Women google incantations resurrecting
 the defunct, the men grow still.
The dissection ends unconsummated,
but that night she wakes naked clutching
vegetables in front of an open frig,
her scruples thawed.

Word gets out, and liberal arts and animal
science profs pack the cooler, share
readings of Plath's *Daddy* descending
my torso then exit coupled like species
joined in jest. The PhDs persist unrequited.

Underclassmen bootleg my designs,
but imitation breeds homogeny,
and coeds bore quickly reanimating
the living dead. The university president
departs when TikTok challenges post,
and the regents terminate the gift.

At the crematorium, the mortician hangs
my tramp stamp *I Knew Your Mother*
in her gallery of carnival sideshows
and circus tragedies, tempers the flames
before flattering, *Well-done, mon chérie* —
there is no gratitude like hers.

And after I am gone, I query their dreams,
How do you miss me? — steady respirations
from lovers precariously annoying.