

## **To the Homeless Man Outside of Trader Joe's**

Your stuttered shuffle  
displayed a history of  
drugs and the tattoo all down your jawline  
completed the story. You  
leaned against the baby oak tree with your neck craned forward  
and your gaze on the pavement,  
frozen stiff in  
the chill with two beanies, a hoodie, and a trench coat,  
like a condemned man  
who hung off a branch from an imagined noose.  
You said you had a spot.  
A spot with blankets and sleeping bags. A spot where you could stay  
warm, but right now you needed money.  
You hung by your need for money in the  
Growing cold, so I gave you a twenty.  
I rifled through a  
hundred, a ten, and a collection of ones,  
but someone told me right then to  
give you that twenty.  
I almost branded myself for a twenty last week.  
I almost jumped into a fish hatchery for a twenty.  
I dove into an iced-over scummy pool for a ten, but I almost called an ex-lover for a twenty.  
My insistence was not able to convince you of a meal,  
or perhaps someplace  
warmer.  
Instead, your eyes were  
trained on a grocery store attendant with the thought that she was going to  
shoo you away.

Shoo you away like a rat or a bird, some kind of vermin,  
not someone's child, someone's son, someone's boy.  
I gave you that twenty and all I can think about is  
how I'm going to make money, what I'm going to do.  
You're waiting on your  
obstinate background check  
to go through, and you've been applying to jobs for three months now, but so have I.  
You dread the cold, well so do I.  
No sense of direction? Same with me.  
Confused on how this big machine seems to work? My words exactly.  
I see your milky glacier eyes  
and there are 40 to 50 winters in your crow's feet.  
The way your forehead  
wrinkles shows me a boy  
who's curious and sincere, wide-eyed and awake  
while your knobby fingers  
hold the universe and a handful of rusty nails.  
I love you and I hope you find it,  
because I have been that man.  
Maybe that's who told me to give you the twenty.  
I almost jumped off a three-story building for a twenty,  
but I saw you,  
and I gave you a twenty.