

# Poem about People

By Robert Pinsky

The jaunty crop-haired graying  
Women in grocery stores,  
Their clothes boyish and neat,  
New mittens or clean sneakers,

Clean hands, hips not bad still,  
Buying ice cream, steaks, soda,  
Fresh melons and soap—or the big  
Balding young men in work shoes

And green work pants, beer belly  
And white T-shirt, the porky walk  
Back to the truck, polite; possible  
To feel briefly like Jesus,

A gust of diffuse tenderness  
Crossing the dark spaces  
To where the dry self burrows  
Or nests, something that stirs,

Watching the kinds of people  
On the street for a while—  
But how love falters and flags  
When anyone's difficult eyes come

Into focus, terrible gaze of a unique  
Soul, its need unlovable: my friend  
In his divorced schoolteacher  
Apartment, his own unsuspected

Paintings hung everywhere,  
Which his wife kept in a closet—  
Not, he says, that she wasn't  
Perfectly right; or me, mis-hearing

My rock radio sing my self-pity:  
"The Angels Wished Him Dead"—all  
The hideous, sudden stare of self,  
Soul showing through like the lizard

Ancestry showing in the frontal gaze  
Of a robin busy on the lawn.  
In the movies, when the sensitive  
Young Jewish soldier nearly drowns

Trying to rescue the thrashing  
Anti-semitic bully, swimming across  
The river raked by nazi fire,  
The awful part is the part truth:

*Hate my whole kind*, but me,  
Love me for myself. The weather  
Changes in the black of night,  
And the dream-wind, bowling across

The sopping open spaces  
Of roads, golf courses, parking lots,  
Flails a commotion  
In the dripping treetops,

Tries a half-rotten shingle  
Or a down-hung branch, and we  
All dream it, the dark wind crossing  
The wide spaces between us.

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