

...skin... by Peter Longden

Do they have time on their hands for their thoughts? As they sit on their hands to warm them,
legs crossed, perhaps wondering where they will be tonight;

if comfort be found, how will they dream? To lose themselves in those of childhood:

false security pulls them, leads them into and out of where they once lived in Autumns past

skins the trees of their outer coating leaving behind its skeletal remains;

skin the knees of those who climb them, young, lithe, limbered limbs against the elders,

awkward in their youthfulness scraping on the hard strength of wooden skin;

skin the fruit of scrumping pleasure, taste the sweetness of the heart of the illicit harvest;

skin the more illicit stuff even as it gets under it and cuts through to the bone

in malnutrition, only habit to feed as under the skin, under the noses, under the radar

a waiting underclass sits: invisible arms outstretched for alms ungiven;

those walking by, thick skinned against empathy, sympathy the bounty shy,

rejection enough for frustration to boil over from the soup of destitution

into the anger against the systemic neglect:

sixth richest inhumanity that doesn't care or provide.

Not of a forest grown through the skin of acorns,

yet they are part of someone's family tree,

far away, not near neighbours,

the doorways, though not their own, they have neighbours,

not always the ones who care or share:

these who are corps of society, look down as they pass,
on those they see as the rotten core of the community.

Are they begging for it: how they are treated and ignored?

Falling through the welfare cracks they sit on,

wrapped in all they can, all they have:

a skin cold to the touch, frozen to the bone;

is their life work too much hard to work for a life?

They carry theirs in two Sainsbury bags for life,

few possessions or rewards to show for the struggle they have made and will make made
hard as trees have their outer skin peeled, Autumn's calling card presents itself,

to add to the litter shared upon the street,

under knees, taut skinned, they sit in wait of succour that rarely comes, from

a charitable source? A neighbourly gesture?

The thickened skin of insensitivity finally slackens into a gift, repeated as a gif,

not just in comic relief but for a life: by the skin of their teeth;

they all have roots in someone's family tree,

skin hardened against the dispassionate cold of the air and those who pass by

in their blissful, ignorant that a neighbour is there:

on the edge where compassion, welfare and charity shudder and waver,

are they husks of life with skin dry, weathered and peeling? Or are they neighbours?

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