Peter Meinke

Peter Meinke has published twelve books of poetry, including Scars (1996) and Liquid Paper (1991). His most recent, Zinc Fingers, received the 2001 SEBA Award from the Southeast Booksellers Association. Recently he was Distinguished Visiting Writer at Converse College, in South Carolina; he lives in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Supermarket

My supermarket is bigger than your supermarket. That’s what America’s all about. Nowhere am I happier, nowhere am I more myself. In the supermarket, there you feel free. Listen: the carts roll on their oiled wheels, the cash register sings to the Sound of Music, the bagboys are unbearably polite! Everywhere there are lies, but in the supermarket we speak truth. The sallow young man by the cornstarch bumps my cart, I tell him, There are always two brothers. One is hardworking, serious. The other is good-looking but worthless; he drinks, he is a natural athlete, he seduces Priscilla Warren whom the older brother loves, and then abandons her. Yes, cries the sallow young man, O my god yes! Everywhere there are lies, I lie to my classes, I say, Eat this poem. Eat that poem. Good for you. I say, Sonnets have more vitamins than villanelles, I give green stamps for the most vivid images. But in the supermarket truth blows you over like a clearance sale. I meet Mrs. Pepitone by the frozen fish, dark circles under her dark eyes. I tell her, If we had met 16 years earlier in the dairy section perhaps, everything would have been different. Yes! Mrs. Pepitone cracks a Morton pie in her bare hands, lust floods the aisles, a tidal wave, everyone staring at everyone else with total abandon; Mr. Karakis is streaking through the cold cuts! Outside, the lies continue. We lie in church, we say Buy Jesus and you get Mary free. If you have faith you can eat pork, dollar a chop. We give plaid stamps for the purest souls. I meet Sue Morgan by the family-sized maxi-pads. Or is it mini-pads?--Or is it mopeds? In the supermarket everything sounds like everything else. I tell her, You can see azaleas in the dark, the white ones glow like the eyes of angels. I tell her, Azaleas are the soul of the South, you kill all azaleas
Jimmy Carter will shrivel like a truffle. Yes, she exclaims, Hallelujah! And still the lies pile up on the sidewalk, they’re storming the automatic doors. Mr. Hanratty the manager throws himself in front of the electric beam, he knows this means he will be sterile forever, but the store comes first: the lies retreat to the First National Bank where they meet no resistance. Meanwhile, in the supermarket I am praising truth-in-advertising laws, I am trying to figure the exact price per ounce, the precise percentage of calcium propionate. And for you, my tenderest darling, to whom I always return laden with groceries, I bring Spaghetti-O’s and chocolate kisses, I tip whole shelves into my cart, the bag boys turn pale at my approach, they do isometric exercises. But I know this excess is unnecessary, I say, My friends, think Small, use the 8-item line, who needs more than 8 items? All you really need is civility, honesty, courage, and five loaves of wheatberry bread. Listen friends, Life is no rip-off, the oranges are full of juice, their coloring the best we can do, why do you think we live so long? So long.

My dear friends, the supermarket is open. Let us begin.

**Atomic Pantoum**

In a chain reaction
the neutrons released
split other nuclei
which release more neutrons

The neutrons released
blow open some others
which release more neutrons
and start this all over

Blow open some others
and choirs will crumble
and start this all over
with eyes burned to ashes

And choirs will crumble
the fish catch on fire
with eyes burned to ashes
in a chain reaction

The fish catch on fire
because the sun’s force
in a chain reaction
has blazed in our minds

Because the sun’s force
with plutonium trigger
has blazed in our minds
we’re dying to use it

With plutonium trigger
curled and tightened
we’re dying to use it
torching our enemies

Curled and tightened
blind to the end
torching our enemies
we sing to Jesus

Blind to the end
split up like nuclei
we sing to Jesus
in a chain reaction

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