

COLE STREET SAINT

Walking down Cole Street
any sunny day,
no one knows for how long,

you can see,
if your eyes are open,
Charlie, the Cole Street saint,

usually hanging in
on a bench or stoop,
or rolling down the street

toward the ice cream parlour,
or waddling up the street
to the Zen bakery.

He looks like Humpty Dumpty
hastily put back together again.
But if you're addicted to appearances,

you might see what is rudely called
a Mongoloid Idiot and feel
a twinge of pity and walk away

into the obsession of your own darkness.
But if you walk right up to Charlie,
he will light you up

like a candle in a dark room –
He will pierce your street armour
and you will be a naked child again.

Red faced, smiling, tongue hanging out
he will take your hand and
throw his arms around you,

as if you were his prodigal son returning.
He will press you firmly against his body
and if you close your eyes

you will be immersed
in the glow of selfless love.
Then he will ask you for a quarter

for ice cream or a cupcake
and when you give it to him
he will bubble and bounce with joy.

He will hug you again until
there is enough sunlight within
you to melt the most frozen heart.

Charlie is the cheapest saint in town
and he is accessible to all
dispensing innocence to his sidewalk flock.

But be discreet –
there is a fragility to goodness –
and Charlie will be your friend

and you will be close to the heart of life.