

“A Beggar Muses on His Good Fortune”

I earned a living, once upon a time,
But now I roam the evening streets while folks
Maneuver past my eyes, for if we meet,
They know that they're obliged to reach inside
Their pockets to retrieve those little coins
They'd hoped to plug the parking meter with,
Or save to buy the kids a gum ball since
They were so good while Mom and Dad were out.
I make them feel guilty down inside;
They know they're better off than I am, so
They have responsibilities—to me.
But they don't know that I, of all the beggars
Downtown tonight, am better off than any;
I'm nowhere near as needy as the rest,
And that's why I must work so hard to beg
My way through life: to keep the real beggars
Away from those who give so easily.
See, I could work, if I were so inclined;
I have a university degree,
And I could make good money—I have before—
I could, say, find a job, pay my bills,
Buy a house or rent, feed myself
And even feed my family—if I wanted,
But then I'm forced to ask myself, “Why?”
My income stood a stout six figures strong,
And I was kind with it; I'm not a Scrooge.
So when a family came to me to beg
For finances to save their dying child,
Did I hold back? Not on your life! I gave
Them every cent they needed, even more!

But when my weakness got found out, the
Came hoarding by for money, “Help me pay
Them off!” “Give me money for tuition!”
“I have a dying grandma!” I gave and gave,
And they kept coming, like bad songs played time
And time again on some new radio station
That hasn't any decent tunes to play.
So then, one day, I kissed my wife and kids
Goodbye and walked away from everything.
I still have on the same old clothes; they're little
More than rags by now, but I don't mind.
The only thing I worry for is food,
And these good folks have paid for every meal.
By simply holding up an empty palm,
I reach inside a man more deeply than
The hand of God; I grab the heart and squeeze
Out all that stingy generosity.
And they're the ones who used to beg from me.
I used to bless them with my money; now
I bless them with an altruistic heart:
“God love you, sir.” “You're Grace incarnate, sir.”
I help myself and help them see themselves
As people kind and caring. It's not as tho'
I'm stealing, God forbid! Consider this:
I only take what's mine; if this were stealing,
Who better could I steal from than beggars—
From those who need it so much more than I,
And, really, who would give a cent for them?

~ A.J. Mittendorff, CNC Faculty



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