

## *The Afternoon Half-Moon*

PHILLIP WHIDDEN

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After spending my whole afternoon in the fortresslike  
Orlando library (in warm wooden and cool air-conditioned comfort)  
I strolled out to the street to wait for my ride.  
I stood on the sidewalk reading a novel.  
He appeared with a light touch of fingers on my arm.  
“Buddy, could you spare me a dime?”  
(My hand was in my pocket when he started.)  
“I’m weak — I haven’t eaten for two days.”  
(I was already fingering the round silver coins in my pocket.)  
He looked at me from a face eclipsed by emaciation  
And partially darkened by inferiority.  
Craters of acne, too.  
The coin I gave him was a quarter. I am a full fool  
When it comes to beggars. Especially young ones.  
The afternoon moon had been up for hours —  
It tried to be benign about the transaction.  
I tried to return to my novel, and supposed him gone.  
He stuck his hand out toward my novel. I stared  
And realized he wanted to shake my hand.  
“My name is Andy.”  
“My name is Phillip.” I almost stuttered.  
A pause. Time rolled between us.  
“Have a good life, Phillip,” in a quarter-moon voice.  
A pause. More than time rolled.  
“The same to you.” I did stutter.  
He walked away, and I said, “That’s some line.”  
The moon was not wounded to the core,  
But the light space around it shivered.