



A SERIES OF black-and-white photographs: set on the streets of a city. The streets are background, out of focus. But in each we see a haze of old brick and old cut stone. In some of the pictures, windows mirror the streets and the people who pass on them. In corners or in the distance, we see cars and buses. These are busy daylight streets. They throb with poverty; they shimmer with human density.

The photographs are all of the same person, a woman. It seems they were all taken on the same day. In some she appears to be almost a child. In others she seems to be very old, very hard. She might be from these streets; she might have her home in some other place. Anything made clear in one picture is undone and redefined in the next.

The subtle muscles around her eyes seem tense; she seems at once to look and look away. Below each eye is a thin gray moon.

A hint of bruising? Worry? Days without sleep? Drugs? Could we give those dark places a name or a history?

In each she wears a peacoat. So the weather was cool when the pictures were taken. But it was not winter. Some of the people walk by in light jackets. No one hunkers his shoulders against the hawk of a wind. No one blows into her hands for warmth.

Something in the light says November. Something in the light hints of the sea. The light sandy grays in the walls and sidewalks contrast with her peacoat and the dark moons under her eyes. She stands

at or near the center of each photograph, a clear darkness, painfully sharp against the background of streets, against staircases, gangs of people, signboards.

In one picture she leans back against a blank brick wall. Her eyes gaze off camera, her dark hair falls loose to her shoulders, her mouth is slightly open. Her tongue just touches her teeth as if she has just lost the word she would have spoken. Her hands at her sides are flattened against the wall. The peacoat is buttoned. Heavy, it makes her dark, breastless, a bell.

Another: A torso shot. The same peacoat. The same streets surrounding. She stands against a wall covered with tattered bills and posters. Her face turns toward her shoulder. Her eyes are cast to her left, and down. Her collar is open and we see the muscle and shadow in her neck. Her skin is smooth as stone, shadowed in the cheeks and eyes. Strands and wisps of her long dark hair trail back, pulled perhaps by the wind. But for the coat with its dark fraying collar and the hair that crosses her cheek, she could be taken for a museum marble. But the eyes are not the passive eyes of the museum woman. The brows are cinched together in a knot. The eyes are determined; they brood and pierce.

Another: She wears a wide Kansas-girl straw hat. It frames her face like a ball of sun. Her face is open in a wide sunflower smile. The smile cinches the hollows under her eyes into wrinkles like an old woman's or like a small child's squinting into the light. The wall, her face, and her hands are full of light. Light dances under the hat. Light dances even against the darkness of her eyes. Her eager shoulders lean forward. Her hands fold around a coffee mug. The picture carries a sound of laughter.

Another: The hat is gone; she embraces a child. Her arms cross the little girl's back. The girl's face is half-buried in the peacoat. The woman's hair is tousled, roped up, thick. One hank has fallen across her face and partially obscures it. But we still see her worried eyes. Her brows, very black, flex together. Her lashes, very black, hang low. Her hair stretches across the face of the child like a raven's broken wing. Has she embraced the child? Has she staggered and fallen against her?

Another: Alone: freeze-frame: in profile: hatless, head back, her hair strung back over her shoulders. She holds a bottle of cheap wine aimed like a pistol at her mouth.

FALL 1995.

Every day, Amy Taylor hiked the same stretch of streets to get to school, streets that were first broad, then narrow: first rational and stark, then crazy with living patterns. Every morning, she traveled with her mother from the almost-suburb where they lived, downtown to where she went to school and where her mother worked. She was seventeen and studied at a special high school for the arts and was destined to study in New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago. Anywhere would do, just so it was big and would get her out of this cramped city. She was eager to get on with living, eager to get moving. But for now she trudged every day with her books and portfolio through the vivid, dense, transforming streets.

Her mother could have dropped her off each morning at the front door of her school, but they had settled into this pattern a year ago when she transferred to the special school in the neighborhood called New Town, just north of the central city business district. Their schedule was so tight and the parking garage was so near the same building that housed her mother's office and those tiny neighborhood streets were so complicated that she finally said, "Oh, Mom, I can walk. Just drop me off at your work."

Her mother objected, but did not insist. So, unless the weather was very bad, Amy hustled through the blocks from the downtown parking garage to her school, a daily routine. She had even grown to like it, in spite of the heavy portfolio she had to carry some days and the camera bag she carried for photography class on others. And in spite of her uneasiness about the winos and the crackheads and the young men on the corners who watched her with half-lidded, predatory eyes.

It was a borderline neighborhood, White to one side, Black to the other. But here, in these few blocks, it was a meeting ground where Black and White and Hispanic and Asian all crossed, as well as artists, musicians, and other people of the fringes. Nothing here was bland; nothing was borrowed from fashion. When she crossed into the neighborhood, she entered into something vibrant and primal. She felt she entered into the roots of all things.

Even the weather did not bother her. She lived in a city known for its sudden turns of season, where summer and fall can sweep in with day-long rains, where winters alternate periods of cold,

brilliant, bitter snow with long stretches of slush and damp, where spring means bursts of flower and leaf constantly threatened by sudden frost. Winter was hard. Spring was tenuous. She embraced it all.

Her walk started outside the door of the parking garage, cut past the last of the downtown office towers, switched across a wide parkway split by traffic islands full of flowering trees and park benches, then plunged into a dark canyon of small brick buildings where the upstairs windows were tightly shaded and little bars and carry-outs and cluttered laundromats and furniture stores and storefront churches occupied the first floors.

On her route, she crossed Broad Street, where the little shops and neighborhood bars had died and been reborn as art galleries, coffee shops, and nightclubs, which all, at the hour she daily passed them, were deathly silent, as if sleeping off a hard night. At the far end of Broad, she could just catch a glimpse of the bus station. On winter mornings, when it was still not fully light, she could see the glow of the neon running dog and the big block letters. She crossed Broad quickly, then walked three more blocks through the narrow, dense streets before she reached her school.

The denseness of these streets ran right up to the door of her school like a crested wave. Her school, a massive brick headland, stood alone in its block, surrounded by a wide concrete yard. Stone curbs fitted with wrought-iron fences protected the yard.

The alleys that broke off from her route glittered with broken glass; they darkened with brick and shadow. She knew better than to use the alleys. She stayed out on the streets, where there were more people and therefore greater safety. But some mornings even the main streets were nearly empty. If the weather was cold or harsh or if the winter darkness was still on them, she might see no one at all but for an early morning prostitute, or children running to school, or the little boy named Jonathan, or the one she liked to call the Rag Man. Or the one she knew as the Dealer. She was afraid on those days (though she never told her mother), for even though she saw no one and heard no step, she felt herself watched and followed.

But if the sun was out or if it was warm or—as she later learned—it was check day, or even for no good reason at all, the streets could swarm with people of all ages and colors. The tightly shut windows would fill with elderly watchers. Children—who should have been

heading toward school just as she was—might sit on the stoops or jump rope in those same alleys that had loomed with threat just two days before.



The first time Amy saw the Rag Man, he had blocked her sidewalk with his cart. He was a large man in a heavy coat with large white hands and wide, pasty eyes. But he seemed so soft and so intent on what he had found in a large wire waste can that she saw no threat in him. She stopped, unsure whether to go out into the street to get around him or to wait. He was dissecting an old radio, for the copper, she supposed. His face was pale as butter, passive and unperturbed. Two men came up from behind him, talking loudly and gesturing widely and emphatically with their hands.

“Crazy motherfucker,” one said. “Blocks the fuckin sidewalk like he owns it.”

The other pulled back his fist, shifted into a boxer’s stance, and faked three, four quick punches at the Rag Man’s head. She winced.

The Rag Man, as if deaf to all, as if blind to all but his work, continued to pry into the metallic heart of the radio.

Furious at the two men, Amy shouted at their backs, “Bullies!”

They glanced back. Would they come back at her? She caught her breath for fear. But they laughed. What she said had struck them as hilarious. One of them pointed at her and they laughed even louder; they strutted down the street, laughing and gesturing widely. Her word bounced off their backs and broke up in the street.

She looked around. Had anyone seen her? The Rag Man had dropped the black magnet and copper heart of the radio into his cart and started pushing toward the next waste can. She cast her eye down the long valley of the street. A prostitute sighed and stepped to the corner. A group of children argued fiercely past her, dragging their coats and backpacks. A wino sat in a doorway and measured the remains of his bottle. A tall boy, about her own age, leaned against a wall and gazed out to the street with a steady eye that seemed to stare past her and yet to see everything of the street, an eye that did not blink or deflect all through her encounter with the Rag Man and the two cursing men. He wore a thick jacket zipped up to the neck and a stocking cap pulled down to his eyes. She looked back; he turned

toward her and the morning sun came full in his face. His lip rose to expose a tooth and a spike of gold shot from it.



“Hey, wassup,” she heard a man call to the gold-tooth boy one morning. The man limped down the sidewalk toward the boy like the prodigal come home. “Wassup, my brother,” the man called again when the boy did not look his way. She was right behind the man, so she could not see his face, but she could sense the nervous need in the jerkiness of his elbows and the shaky give in his knees. “What you got . . .”

A movement of the boy’s eyes silenced the man, who looked back over his shoulder, not so much at her as at the whole threatening street. The man huddled next to the boy on his wall, muttering into his ear and darting his eyes to each side.

She passed them, moving to the curb to give them as wide a berth as she could. But still she felt the tension rise off them. She felt their eyes all the way past Broad Street and up to the door of her school.



After that, she saw the gold-tooth boy nearly every morning, standing in nearly the same place, grim and immobile as the stone facings of the buildings around. She tried to ignore him, for she soon figured out what he was doing. She saw the lean and desperate people who came to him. She saw him count the money. She saw the gold chain at his neck and the glinting gold tooth.



On another morning, one of the winos she had come to recognize stumbled into the gold-tooth boy just as she came near. The boy drew up as if to gather energy. His lips wrenched small and his nose twisted into a sneer. His brow narrowed. He erupted with curses.

“Cheap winehead motherfucker. Don’t you *ever* bump your pissy self into me.” He flashed back his fist and the man ducked and stumbled. The boy shot six hard punches to the air behind the man’s head.

“Cue-ball-headed, red-nose, snot-sleeve bum,” he spat. “Keep your dribbling ass off my block.”

The man, still veering side to side down the sidewalk, kept his head down and his shoulders pulled tight as if he ran under a hard rain.

The boy, in turning on the wino, had blocked the sidewalk. She waited until he went back to his wall, then started around him to pass. She wanted to speak. But this close, and given the outburst she had just heard, she felt safe only to glare. She met him eye to eye and held her pose as she passed him.

He raised his lip, exposing the gold. She turned and continued her march to school.

Across the street, she saw a smaller, younger boy, his hand in a bag of chips. He had dark hair that slanted across his dark and narrow eyes. His mouth was pulled to one side like that of a hooked fish. She saw that he watched her until she crossed Broad Street, that his dark, narrow eyes switched back and forth from her to the Dealer.



The children in these streets amazed her. Singly and in clusters, they trudged to school like soldiers in an army that had been, not yet defeated, but shot up and scattered. Undaunted by the harshest winter days, some passed by her in the thinnest of jackets slung back on their shoulders. Others were bundled into thick pneumatic winter coats like pieces of fine china packed for shipping. They ran, or slogged, dragging backpacks torn at the corners, complaining or laughing, daring one another to fight or whispering together, and—something which always amazed her, having been schooled on the virtues of proper nutrition—munching, first thing in the morning, on candy bars or potato chips or even pickles, or sucking on bottles of pop.

She began to know and recognize some of them as, day by day, she passed them on her way to school. “Wassup,” one might say.

“What’s happening,” she might call back.

One morning, the large black leather portfolio slung from her shoulder caught the attention of one smallish boy. He separated himself out of a group to turn and follow her.

“What’s that big thing?” he asked. He was dark-haired and squint-eyed, the same boy, she realized, who had watched her encounter with

the Dealer. His mouth was still pulled to one side, the side with which one eye squinted. His brow was furrowed.

She did not answer right away, so he said, "It's okay, man. I ain't gonna do nothing. What is it?"

"It's a portfolio."

"A poor what?"

"Aren't you supposed to be going to school?"

"It's okay. I got time. What did you call that thing?"

"A portfolio."

"A port-o-foldo."

"Something like that. Don't you know you're going the wrong way?" Her school, the special school for the arts, lay on one side of New Town. The school for the neighborhood children waited on the other.

He dismissed the notion with a wave of his hand. She had expected the sideways pull of his face and the wrinkling and furrowing of his brow to have relaxed by now. But his forehead seemed etched into position and his mouth seemed permanently pulled to the side. "I'm cool," he said. "What's in that port-foldio thing?"

"It's my art."

"You mean, like, pictures and stuff."

"Yeah, I put my pictures in it."

He nodded impressively and continued to walk alongside her. "You must have some big pictures, man. When we do art, it's like these little pictures, like . . ." He held up his hands in a letter-size frame.

"Here's my school. Where's your school?"

"It's over there." He pointed vaguely back in the direction they had just come.

"Don't you think you need to get going?"

"Let me see some of your pictures, man."

"I don't have time. First bell is coming up. Your first bell is coming up too."

"I'm all right. I got excused from first bell. Come on, man."

"Why do you always call me man? I'm a girl."

"Come on, man."

She had to wait for a WALK light before she could cross to the front lot of her school. A group of her friends was gathered on the

wide front steps. In a moment, first bell would ring. The boy began to pry with his fingers along the edges of the portfolio, looking for a latch. It had a zipper that started at the bottom, but he didn't know that. She pulled it away from him.

"Come on, man."

"You don't just put your hands on other people's stuff," she said. The traffic light was a long one; it still had not turned.

He waved his hand again. "You just don't want to show me." The light changed and she started across. He continued with her as if he intended to follow her all the way to school. "That's cool," he said. He shrugged his shoulders and looked deliberately ahead. "Be like that."

The kids perched on the steps of her school, with their own backpacks and portfolios, watched her with this strange little boy from the neighborhood in tow. And she was sure they wondered, *Where did she pick up that little thug, that little grit from the neighborhood?* But she decided she did not care. *People can be such snobs*, she thought. She figured she would lose the boy at the school door, where the security guard stood.

But suddenly, in the middle of the crossing, the boy turned on his heel.

"Later, man." He slapped her on the shoulder and disappeared into the streets that ran toward his own school.



She liked these streets for their liveliness and for the little dramas that played across them: arguments, celebrations, drug deals, intoxication, romance, struggles for survival, loneliness, supplication. She had come to hate her static and set-piece home.

Gradually, she felt herself become a part of the life of these streets. Old winos would tap their foreheads, say, "Good morning, missy," and did not even bother to bum her for change anymore. Little kids might slap five with her or invite her to watch them in double Dutch. The skinny balding man who played the same scratchy bluegrass records over and over would bob his head and wave from his window. The prostitutes would eye her coolly and, just barely, nod. And the Rag Man, pushing his enormously stacked cart full of rescued trash, would steadily, and in spite of all her attempts to say a friendly word, ignore her as if she were air.

In just the year that she had been going to the downtown school, she had seen little shops spring up and die. Others, like the barber-shop that seemed it had always been there, suddenly stood vacant, padlocked, and bare. Storefronts were boarded over with plywood sheets that looked fresh one week and the next week were covered over with graffiti and the next week chipped and buckled with weather and the next week ripped off altogether and the shop window shattered.

She knew now, when she saw such a one, that if the shop were not filled soon, it would stand emptier and emptier and the apartments above would begin to empty out and the building itself would die like a tree blighted in a forest.

It was in one of those storefronts, where he had recently set up shop, that she first met the photographer who was to become her teacher. And it was in that shop that she had first been startled by the series of photographs of the woman in the peacoat.

And it was on those same streets that she first saw the woman herself.



The boy with the strange mouth told her his name was Jonathan, though he told her many things she could not trust. In spite of her lectures about truancy, he continued to follow her to school once or twice a week like Mary's little lamb. He called to her when he saw her on the streets and gave her a special cool-guy wave when she responded.

"Come here," he waved to her one day.

"You come here if you want me." She had a good two hours between the end of school and the time she had to meet her mother.

Usually she stayed at the after-school study hall her mother paid for; she could do most of her homework and kill the time with her friends. But lately she had begun to find excuses to sneak out early, to take her time walking down to where she met her mother. Today she was looking for a store where she could buy a pop and some chips.

The boy was studying something like a book in his hands. When he saw she really did not intend to come over, he complained, "Aw, man." But he crossed the street to her. "You got to check this out," he said.

“What?”

“Look at these old pictures I got.”

She was skeptical.

“For real, man. Look.” He held out a stack of twenty or more sepia portrait photographs. Individuals, couples, and families, shots that went back, judging from the styles of clothing and hair, to the thirties and forties. Some had been hand-tinted: blushes of red on the cheeks of the Whites, brown shine on the faces of the Blacks. None of the people looked prosperous or sophisticated; they all looked as if they had been brushed up and dressed up to their best for the portrait. Each had put on his bravest, her most hopeful face.

*Cool*, she thought. The photographs in her fingers were like living things.

“Where did you get these?”

“That old man up on Main Street’s gonna close up. He said I could have them. ‘I’m gonna cash in,’” the boy quoted in deep mock solemnity, “so you might as well have these.”

“Come on.”

He showed her the portrait studio on Main Street that had closed. A painted sign above the door still read,

### FRANK CARLUCCI

PHOTOGRAPHER

Through a window, she could see pale patches on the walls where framed portraits, samples of his work, had once hung. A pile of dusty prints lay on a table.

*What a piece of history*, she thought. “Where is he now?” she asked.

“Where’s who?”

“The photographer! The guy who ran this shop?”

“He’s gone. I ain’t seen him since the day he give me those pictures.”

“So what are you going to do with them?”

“Keep them.”

“Just keep them?”

“For real. I collect old stuff, man. I got all kinds of stuff. Pictures, old books, old keys, nickels with Indian heads on them. I got stuff you never even heard of.”

“And you didn’t steal any of it?”

He shook his head derisively and waved his hand. “What you take me for?”

“I don’t know, but I just know that last week you told me you lived in Alaska for five years and California for seven and since you’re no more than ten—”

“Eleven.”

“Whatever you are, it doesn’t add up. So: I got to wonder.”

He looked at her with his odd, side-twisted look and said, “Man, you’re a trip.”



A week later, at the beginning of second term, the boy flagged her down again. “What’s in there?” He pointed to a bulge in her backpack.

“It’s none of your business.”

“Come on, man.”

“It’s a camera. And don’t follow me or you’ll be late for school again.”

“Let me see it.”

“And if you’re late for school again, then you’ll have the truancy people all down on you again and you’ll have to spend another six months in lockup.”

“Who told you that?”

“You did. Just last week. Not that I believed you.”

“So take my picture.”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because I’ve got to get to school and so do you and if you keep following me to school I’m going to get a boyfriend just so he can beat you up.”

“Aw, man.”



“So hey. Come here,” he called on a sunny day after school.

“You come here,” she said. “You want me. You come here.”

“No, for real. I got something to show you.”

She was less inclined to doubt him this time, so she followed. At the corner, he raised his hand to stop her.

“Come on,” he said, pointing back down the street they had come. “We can’t go this way.”

“Why not?”

“That’s my cousin.”

She recognized the Dealer, standing in his usual place.

“I ain’t supposed to go around him.”

“Because?”

“Cause he tried to get me to sell drugs.” He took her down side streets she did not know to another row of shops—small shops, dingy shops—until he stopped in front of one and said, “Here it is.”

Whatever it was did not look like much. “So?”

“Check it out, man.”

To her first glance it looked abandoned, emptied out like the Italian photographer’s studio. There was nothing on the walls. There were shelves, but only half full. There was furniture, but all in a jumble.

“It’s another picture store,” Jonathan said finally, tired of waiting for her to figure it out.

She looked again. Behind the wide, empty windows, the shelves were stacked with boxes of paper and chemicals that had become familiar from her photography class. And among the furniture were filing cabinets and a light table. And on the floor and leaning against the walls were photographs matted or framed and not yet hung.

“He’s pretty cool,” the boy said with a shrug. “He don’t let you skip school or bring in no food.”

“Who?”

“The guy who runs this place.”

“Where is he now?”

“I don’t know. He don’t tell me where he’s going.”



The photographer’s shop had nothing to advertise itself. That was no big deal. Several stores in the neighborhood bore no sign or title, and it was only by watching who went in or out that she could recognize each as a place where she could get snacks or bottles of pop. So she was curious about this new shop that was neither thrift store, candy shop, furniture store, wine store, nor shooting gallery.

She began to cut past it on her way back downtown from school. Gradually, she saw the shop take shape as a studio: More photographs went up on the walls. Equipment emerged from the jumble of crates and wrappers and stood on tables and shelves. Eventually a few photographs looked out from the windows. Twice she saw the man who ran the shop. Once he was tacking together frames; a second time he was holding a set of negatives up to the light. He was a smallish, thin man with a thick, droopy mustache and hair to his shoulders. He wore blue jeans and a black shirt with the sleeves rolled up. His hands were slender and red as the claws of a bird.

Jonathan stepped to the door. "Come on in, man."

"No, not now," she hissed.



Twice more they stopped at the door and twice more Jonathan urged her to go in. The third time, he said, "Forget you, man." He pushed the door open with a sweep and went straight to the bench where the man was working. Dying of embarrassment but afraid to leave, she watched as Jonathan talked briefly to the man, then waved to her to come in. *Omigod*, she thought, but she stepped up, opened the door, and entered.

The man's name was Paul Lewis. He was not particularly friendly, but that was all right, because he showed her his work and what he was doing to prepare for a show, his first major recognition after many years of work. That he was gruff and spare with his words and with his time mattered less than that he was willing to teach her things about photography she did not realize she wanted to know. In fact, she had become hooked on photography. And now for the first time she had a chance to know a live, genuine artist. She had her teachers, of course. But this man had been around for years—and he was *doing* it, not just drawing a salary as a teacher. And he wasn't like the photographers who worked for her mother, who just did what they were told. He was independent. He was an artist. It changed her. Where before she had seen photography as a sideline, now it was to become her focus, her aim. She had yet to shoot more than a few rolls of film, but she began to love the smell of stop bath and fixer and the feel of a good, crisp print. She began to imagine the pictures she would do once she had learned all she could and went to work in the real world.

She arranged school credit for working with him, and after that spent every day after school and before her mother got off work helping him prepare his show. She liked his work. It was so . . . committed. And it had power too. And yet he was an unknown who made his living driving a forklift or something and had kept a darkroom in his closet until he got the grant that allowed him to rent this shop.

She thought his work was as good as anything she had ever seen. But she was not prepared for what she would feel when she came across a set of photographs by accident. He had sent her to his files to look for another set of prints when she found (and was struck dumb by) the woman in her peacoat: the black bell of her, that smile full of sun, the black wing of her hair, that bottle like a loaded pistol.

THE young man watched his street like a hawk perched on a post. He had mastered the art of seeing without seeming to look. A wire ran up from the pocket of his coat to a set of headphones that crossed from ear to ear. He had the face of a very young man, pale, clouded by acne, and tufted with blond hairs at the lip and chin. Up close, you might hear the dead-steady beat of the music that escaped the speakers. You might see the slight, nearly imperceptible nod he gave to each beat. But you could not know that he watched the street without seeming to move his eyes from the single spot on which he had fixed them. That spot might be the cracked stone step of an abandoned building, a kicked-in garbage can, a dope fiend gone to rags, a stop sign flaring with spray paint, or a stoned-out streetlamp. You could not know how, without moving, he could see the entire streetscape or any change on it, from the intersection at Broad, down the line of shops and vacant lots and empty buildings, to the bus station with the white running dog in its stiff neon stride.

It was morning. The air was full of traffic noise and diesel fumes. The sidewalks were crowded with children dragging their way to school or people stalking downtown to work, and he took it all in without seeming to see anything at all. Everything around him was in motion, but he seemed to have been carved in stone.

A girl in a loose black coat had just entered the street, lumbering down the sidewalk with her books in a knapsack strapped to her shoulders and a big black case at her side. His eyes were tagged to a fat set of intertwined initials, intricately drawn in white on

the black iron tail of a dumpster. Anyone watching would have thought that the tag was all he could see. But he could see all this street. No one watching him could know it, but he followed the clumsy path of the girl in the loose black coat, clear and dark as the outline of a flying bird.

To watch the girl, he leaned back against the window of what used to be a machine shop. With the ghosts of the gray lathes behind him, he mouthed the words *Prissy little preppy bitch*.

In her loose black clothes and her backwards ball cap, the girl looked like a small black bird. Not a crow, for she had none of that sleekness, gloss, and balance. She was like some awkward, small, nervous, loosely flapping bird he had no name for.

He had watched her before; he had watched her nearly every day. And nearly every day she lugged the large black case that, with its handles, zipper and clasps, looked like a regular suitcase flattened by a steamroller. Once, on a windy day, a gust skipped her off the curb and into the street as if it were a sail. He watched her fight her way back to the curb with it and watched her fight her way down the street with it.

But on most days, as she did this day, she walked straight down the sidewalk with her face cut straight into the wind. She glanced at the winos, glanced into the windows of Ma Barret's restaurant or the no-name secondhand store or the drug store where the dope fiends bought their crack pipes; she glanced at the whores at the corner of Broad and at the little kids dragging their books to school. Her wide eyes shot here and there, to the right and left, up into the windows of the second-floor apartments, down into the alleys and the doorways. But all the time her face pointed straight forward like the point of a plow.

She was part of what he watched every day, part of what he saw without seeming to look. He knew she watched him each day, ever since that day she saw him go off on that wino. She watched him with a nervous quick glance, as if she were afraid he might go off on her as well. *Prissy little prep*, he silently scoffed at her for such a face. Day after day, he pondered such labor by such a small person, by such a black-coat sparrow, a person of such little weight that she could be blown about by any little sailboat wind.

But he was sure she did not know that he watched her. He was sure she thought he gazed right past her.

A dope fiend all gone to bones and rags emerged from between two buildings and looked over with his scarecrow eyes. The dope fiend was careful not to look too long or too directly. He scanned the street and, as his eyes passed over the young man, raised his eyebrows slightly, almost imperceptibly. The man was wearing a jacket with arms too short by an inch. The cuffs of his jeans were ragged from catching under his heels. The young man smiled a little, but he did not move his eye from the tag on the tail of the dumpster. *Rag-head*, he muttered. *Dope-fiend fool*. By the series of nods and looks, the young man knew that the man had pawned his clothes. Or stolen a VCR. Or sold some blood. And now he had his money and was ready. But the young man remained still as stone, oblivious to the man who now sagged, leaned against the hood of a truck, and cast his craving eyes over the young man several more times, to implore him for a signal.

The girl came closer. Her eyes ran from the dope fiend, across to the young man, and back. His face curled up into just a touch of a sneer.

He continued to nod with the music wrapped around his skull. One nod was special, for the dope fiend waiting, and the dope fiend knew it. He looked all around him, pushed himself up off the hood of the truck, pumped swiftly down the street, and disappeared into an alley.

But the young man waited before he moved to follow the dope fiend to the alley. He continued to stare a moment more into the tag, and to nod in time with the heavy beat of the bass line.

The girl glanced again with her little quick glance. He raised his head back with a face of stone and nodded once more, just for her.