

The Courtesies

What a night, and what a neighbourhood,
to be out in – out and up to no good!
Edge-of-town dinge and darkness,
where an intermittent wind
chafes leaves and litter
into a listless skirmish of dancing
and drives a shaft of ice
straight to the bones of any creature
wild enough to be chancing
such a late hour.

Here's one: frail, farouche,
dressed in a coat she hugs tight
and too little underneath,
pacing on tip-tappy heels
between safety zones of lamplight,
every halt and about-turn
charged with a chemical mix
of wariness and weariness.

Here's another: more shadowed,
more in ambush,
but just as strung, as he waits
either to press his advantage
or to retreat.

It isn't decided yet, and won't be
till certain signals are exchanged,
courtesies so discreet –
such a matter of fine negotiation
between fearful and bold –
it's anyone's guess
whether these two night scavengers
will gain the respite they long for
from the persecuting cold.

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