

# Perfect Strangers

*Philip Miller*

I've known them all my life,  
the people I meet on the way  
down the street, to my job,  
toward some plan they halt  
fleetingly as I walk past:  
the lawyer across the hall,  
the cigar store man,  
the woman wearing costume jewels,  
jade shadow on her eyelids,  
fingernails blood-red,  
a thin, snake-link chain  
running through her hands.

And I know them only by short nods,  
by passing glances,  
by the perfunctory salutes  
of perfect strangers,  
by the way their eyes meet mine,  
then turn back  
quickly to the world,  
half-smiling, a shadow of regret  
crossing their faces  
at these poised, thrown away  
gestures: the barmaid, the milkman,  
the cop on the corner,  
the woman behind horn rims  
waiting as I  
fill the forms out wrong.

But they stay with me,  
sometimes crowd into my dreams:  
the cool-eyed banker,  
the firm-lipped waitress,  
the boy who throws the paper.  
And we are growing old together,  
day after day, we meet at bus stops,  
wait in line for tickets,  
and we never shake hands,  
never touch beyond the moment  
our eyes meet, catch, shift,  
but I know each face  
perfectly as my own  
as I turn back to a world  
grown ever stranger.