

Perfection in Scottsdale; or, Unneeded Armor

—for James Baker Hall

by Harry Brown

I watched a Latino woman walk along in Old Town; her dark blond hair,
perfectly sculpted, spread wide across shoulders and back,
cut off straight as Arizona interstate just above
her hips. Plank starched and knife creased without a wrinkle, her blue jeans touched
but didn't the sidewalk as if levitating in contact with concrete
but showing no disturbance, no thread touched—full foil to the holey,
washed-out jeans hanging on youth slouching about in the post-Christmas crowd,
proud of their high fashion. Thirtyish and stiff upright
as a new-set locust post, the woman must have worn spikes, for measured
and almost slow, she had a loping step like the arm of a metronome
moving in one direction only. Slender, she wore a fitted
camel coat that came below her waist; solemn-faced
with light brown skin and dark red lips, chin lifted and eyebrows
slightly arched, she looked straight ahead as if above—
and ignoring—a staring world.

I alone watched.

The tone,

imperiously sullen, seemed an aloof tank against
the confident holiday bustle that didn't know she breathed.