

# THE CITY IN ITS PIECES

By Rachel Gaddis

**A** MOSAIC OF CRUSHED bottles and marbles imprints the concrete wall of the city. Translucent glass forms curvy, cherry soda lips, green Coke-bottle eyes, and a beer-brown Brazilian hairstyle. It stares silently into the street rimmed with light posts, shops and restaurants, capturing every movement in the glass of its jagged face.

We walk the length of the street before turning the sharp edge. It looks and feels the same as the last: street, lights, shops, restaurants. A bar is on the left, a club on the right. Smells float to my nose all at once, but I have to classify them one at a time: fried food, gasoline, cologne, trash and cigarettes. We continue, hiking our way up and down the hills and around the bends.

Buildings seem to pull grey wads of cloud cotton from the sky's black quilt. Stars, Jupiter and Mars are the stitches, and the moon the center point. Where does it end? How much longer until dawn pulls back the covers? My eyes are droopy and smoky from smeared mascara. I long for a good wash and puffy pillow.

People pass on feet strapped in heels or snug in tennis shoes. Some ride by via skateboard, scooter, taxi, bus, horse and carriage. I know no face, know no names. I peak into square fishbowls—exposed—to see the swimming people. I find them oblivious to me, their breathing and words muffled by glass. I hear only the bubbling of music and laughter.

I fear for the young girls walking by me, arm in arm and alone. They hardly look eighteen even in their dresses and thick makeup. Smoking men follow them only with their eyes, but I silently will them home.

The abstract art, mellow music, close transportation, yuppie food, up-town shopping, bustling ambience, questionable characters. It's a city packed with 200,000 people, ten times the population of any southern town I've lived in. Green grass and thick trees have always been a comfort, more than sleek walks and tall towers, but I feel a ripple of pleasure as I wind through the cityscape. This is the city's allure, but is it potent enough to keep me here? A shy love prickles within me.

Something familiar comes back into view, the one face, one feature, I know. The jagged, pastel pieces—though not individually beautiful—manage to form a pretty picture of what city life could be for me.