
JEFFREY HARRISON

Girl Carrying a Suitcase

New York, ca. 1960, by Garry Winogrand

Younger in the photo
 than my daughter is now—
 eighteen or nineteen,

the same age as my wife
 when I first met her—
 she would now be not quite

old enough to be my mother,
 more like an older cousin
 I saw only in summer

and would steal glimpses of
 or find ways to be near . . .
 just as I kept circling back

to this girl's photograph
 at the exhibition
 to study again

the way her body bends
 slightly to the right
 to offset the weight

of her fabric-covered suitcase
 against the lighter raffia bag
 in her other hand;

the tapered cut
of her sleeveless dress
printed with black-eyed Susans

(one centered over a breast);
and the way her silver bracelets
gather at her wrists

below the almost-dimples
on the inside of her elbows,
the photo's shadowed foci.

And since bringing home
the postcard I bought
at the museum shop,

I've been searching her image
like a figure recovered
from my own past,

someone I almost recognize,
though her head
is veiled in glare,

and her hair coming loose
from her braids conceals
the right side of her face.

She gazes downward,
toward the sidewalk she
has just stepped onto

from the busy crosswalk,
unhurried and alone
amid the crowd

of the city she is either
 leaving or returning to
 but not arriving in

for the first time
 (she is too unguarded),
 lost in herself,

thinking perhaps of whoever
 she has just been staying with
 or is about to visit,

someone who—whether cousin,
 friend, parent, or lover—
 must surely adore her.

If only I could find her
 and show her this photograph
 which, almost certainly,

she has never seen,
 since it was printed for the first time
 only recently,

decades after
 the photographer's death . . .
 or at least send her this postcard

I've been keeping on my desk
 these last few weeks,
 giving this stolen

glimpse of her past
 back to her, so she too
 might be taken

by this young woman
 who was once herself,
 like someone held dear

who left long ago
 then one late afternoon
 shows up at the door.