

# Between Lines

By [Diane Webster](#) (December 2023)



Seated Woman in Red Skirt and Striped Blouse- William H. Johnson, 1939-40

## **Between Lines**

Only Dolly can wear red and white  
striped matching pants and blouse  
as she waits to cross the street  
between pedestrian white lines  
as the stoplight times into red.

Dolly merges into the crosswalk,  
a blur between halting crimson  
and light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel white  
when reading between the lines  
Dolly smiles in her new outfit  
safe in the crosswalk arms like a baby  
struggling to walk to outreaching mom.

## **Turns Around**

While standing in line at the grocery store  
he turns and studies the behind people  
like a kid in a restaurant booth  
who hangs over the back of the seat  
and stares at the diners behind.

Itchy, squirming stare-fest  
as if each basket contains weapons of mass destruction,  
kilos of today's drug choice  
or kidnapped babies waiting for the pointed finger  
to single someone out to security cameras.

Not making eye contact in anonymous  
gaze out front windows gives no freedom  
from out-of-the-corner-of-the-eye glances  
confirming they are seen by this man  
backward in the grocery store checkout line.

## Open Curtains at Christmas

Driving down the neighborhood road  
at night like strolling down aisles  
in a museum viewing real-life dioramas.  
In this house an old man  
resembles Santa Claus in street clothes  
as he stands by his kitchen sink, washes  
one plate, one glass, knife, fork, spoon  
as his meal is done, and night  
stares in his window leaving frosty breath  
as it shouts silent warning,  
“Shouldn’t you be at the North Pole?!”

Next exhibit features  
a TV giving high definition  
to Frosty the Snowman  
as the husband stretches out on his recliner,  
and the wife knits on the couch,  
knits memories of kids  
pleading to stay up all night  
until they are told each year  
Santa won’t come until they’re asleep.

Next house reveals grandma and grandpa  
reading in chairs  
reluctant to close curtains for fear  
grandchildren might whisper, “They’re sleeping”  
as headlights drive by without stopping  
as grandparents smile and stand  
when headlights pan them, stop and darken.  
They anticipate doorbell with hand on the doorknob.

The next house is lit like a puzzle for sight.  
Keep searching, keep looking for form, for movement.  
The eye must be missing something. Where? Where?

but gone to the next house  
privately curtained, containing light inside,  
depriving darkness its voyeur view.

### **Current Goodbyes**

The rowboat drowned  
beneath the tsunami weeds  
grabbing like octopus arms  
sneaky in horror-film slowness  
over hull inside, around,  
over until hidden, swallowed.

The lake laps against the shore  
beckons, calls its partner  
gone as trout ripple the surface  
like dips of oars propelling  
the rowboat across weeds  
sunken by flood water,  
waving in current-driven  
good-byes.

### **City Bench**

On the swarming sidewalk  
the bench offers respite  
for tired, for tired  
tired of elbows and shoulders  
nudging like revolving doors  
allowing in and out but no standing.

The bench faces the street  
with traffic wind whooshing  
past with accents of honking  
while behind shoes click,

clothing swishes  
in a surround sound of the crowd.

On the bench a man sits  
quiet as a miniature tree  
potted in a go-around holder  
on the edge, in between,  
in the median space of immobility;  
on a sandbar in the city's river.

## [Table of Contents](#)

**Diane Webster's** work has appeared in *El Portal*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *New English Review*, *Verdad* and other literary magazines. She had a micro-chap published by *Origami Poetry Press* in 2022, 2023 and 2024. One of Diane's poems was nominated for Best of the Net in 2022. Diane retired in 2022 after 40 years in the newspaper industry.

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