

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.

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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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