

Should cans stop being made?
Should all factories immediately close down?
What solution do you provide? If everyone's a poet
and no one works, how do we survive?
The way St. Theresa survived on Light?
Love becomes a full-time job?
But where do we get the money
to pay people not to work?

Slaves in Ancient Greece and Rome
had 115 holidays a year!
Hey, wait a minute, that makes us
more slaves than them!



Richard Barsotti

OAK AND RAIL

Golden Towers, Moravian House, Leisure Village,
call them such; go ahead, euphemize,
they will remain what they are, pre-fab
holding tracks; shunted mono-cultures of
old freight.

For two years my grandmother has lived on this line.
Couldn't afford to maintain her home of sixty years,
what with taxes and inflation, on 103 dollars
monthly pension. Worked for it, that's all she did
—work. Measured her worth by work, hard work
to boot, like a boxcar.

I visted the other night. She can't mingle,
that is, play games: bingo, parcheesi,
crafts, the rest—it's not in her.
"There's no art here," she said. "they make little
things to set on furniture. Every morning I breathe
deep at the window. I miss the yard, even if I bobble
around. Others go by pairs, like swans, in the jitney,
downtown to see what's hoppin'."

She goes by quadra-cane, alone, to buy vegetables and fruit on Cherry St.—a one-way street, easier to cross at ninety. She waits like the railroad ties. The cop directing traffic yells, "Come on, come on, do you think I can wait all day!" She smiles, replying, "Why, if I'd known you were waiting for me, I'd of run across." he'd wait all day if she were nineteen.

After a few hours talking, we settle into silence. I write, she knits, with pencil-thick needles now; with knuckles like crossed roots. Still the motion is smooth as a train over the prairie, tapping. Oak and rail gently rising, falling—breathing—breathing.



S. L. Berry

IN A RESTAURANT WITH WALT WHITMAN

Just coffee, I tell the waitress
and Walt says,
"I think I could turn and live
awhile with the animals. . ."

Darla's not comin' in, I overhear,
She's too upset he just up and
left,
and I blink pouring cream

into the steaming cup
"They do not lie awake
in the dark and weep for
their sins. . ."