

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. . ."

while someone says, He just bought her
that ring three weeks ago and he left
on Friday 'bout two in the mornin'
and never said nothin' 'bout why.

And dishes clank and spoons click,
"Not one is dissatisfied. . ."

He never said a *word* to her
and she's *so* upset,
and Walt crooks his head,
"Not one kneels to another. . ."

And the register rings up
pancakes and sausage
and Darla doesn't show up
even when I fish the change

from my pocket.
He *musta* just been tired
of it, echoes over plates
of eggs,
and Walt winks,

"Not one is respectable
or industrious over the whole
earth."