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Community of a Line

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Community of a Line

Jenny Iverson

Silent. Except for the rare bell
and the take-a-number ticker.
Thirteen people now crowded in
as close as they can get without eye contact,
clutching their letters
like gloom.

Woman Number Four rocks
in heavy lefts and rights,
swinging her mass like a clock chime.
She loudly checks her watch:
Already Half Past Three?
Maybe someone will notice her arms yawning.
Hopefully.

Another woman, smaller, grayer, purses
her rigid lips and without moving them
mutters, If we ever get through this line . . .

Four heads around her nod,
synchronized, in time
with Number Four's sullen rocking.
Number Four takes the invitation
to blab and blurb, her blubber
also nodding as she drags her wails:
My daughter hates waiting at dance practice
outside, Mom you are Late, she always moans.

Oh brother, another voice butts in—
Number Seven—a man’s voice.
You want to hear late? My anniversary
and no flowers yet and this bill
needs to be overnighted.

Your anniversary?
Are you kidding me?
Disgusted female looks converse
And a late fee
more important than flowers?

Intuitively, a line of thirteen
breaks into two groups of three,
three twosomes, and one lone, pompous starrer.
Their voices and gestures fill an animated din:
My husband forgot I never get flowers
My son, you know That’s why Valentine’s
I’ll bet she’s waiting My ex-boyfriend

Soon strangers are agreeing,
nodding together, pulling out strings
of wallet photos, bragging.
And still the occasional gripe: they really should
have one more person at the window.
The ticker ticks and buzzer raids,
next number please.
Number Four makes her mayoral pageant
to the window. All quietly cheer.
They resume their own public duties:
debating, voting, corresponding,
complaining.