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Mobile Airport Gate #2, 3;37

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What’re you doing? She frowns as if
I’m a loafer, a do-nothing, never-do-well,
or just a lazybones,
Coloring?
No ma’am. It’s calculus, I say,
but she just stares at me, then at
the curves on my lined paper,
and then back at me
while sitting real tall,
stiff and straight,
as if she’s a ballerina,
a panjandrum,
a painted horse in a parade,
a name in chalk unwilling to fade.

And I bet she’s got a magniloquent,
old southern name,
like Clementine or Adelaide,
and I bet she won’t bother asking for mine,
since to her I’m just some bum
scratching my initials on
the terminal’s plastic armchair
and drawing curls
and shading in partial squares
with a blue ballpoint pen,
leaving my stain.

by Catherine Kapples