

*Roberta Bailey, a UNL graduate student in English and mother of six.*

**Welfare Lines**

the veins on that woman's legs crawl  
upward like halloween trees purple claws that milk  
life into swollen ankles before draining  
it altogether i think

no cheese again i can't use more  
grapefruit juice you'd think we could get  
good food

the poor must never sleep it fades them crooked  
faces even the children are faded ancient

hope you brought bags today there ain't  
any boxes stack those cans sideways  
in that cart lady they won't fall out

cigarette smoke acid sweat close  
my sinuses only two more and i am  
next but that white haired woman

i'll be a minute ed after velma there

lied to her husband i feel a growl in my  
throat like a dog i want to protect  
that last box in the corner the women

i'm sorry lady the sign says be sure  
you got all your food the first time

don't look nearly as embarrassed to be  
here i can't get clean enough when i leave i  
keep wiping at my clothes and looking

don't you think you could keep that child  
still he stepped on my foot i have  
arthritis and he just came over and hurt  
me.

for reflections is there any color in my face her  
veins creep toward me until the legs i  
stare at are my own

*Trish Martin is a junior English major. She has been published in the 1991 and 1992 issues of Laurus.*

**Mel**

You in your paper skin, thin as onion skin and you  
are beautiful still; butterfly wings, if I touch you, you will  
come off on my fingers. Old man do you miss your life?  
Your hands are the color of red plums and they are crossed  
with veins; you have the skin of an unborn baby,  
iridescent and glowy in a near-dead way.

You sing a hymn for us on Saturday afternoon, and that is  
all you do, you cannot find the strength to speak.  
Your wife visits for you, while you make small, pathetic noises,  
high and girlish and painful. You wipe your eyes, your  
hands shaking and goofy and what can I do but look at  
you and try not to cry and try not to stare and try not to  
be so young and able. My body is clear-headed and smart.  
It thankfully does what I tell it to do.

I tell it to leave you here now, to follow your grandson out the  
door and to the car, remembering your bewildered eyes.  
I tell my body to forget that I am dying just as fast as you are, you  
just began your slow climb 70 years earlier than I did.

Then later, in the quiet of your grandson's breath and the  
care against the road, I think, what does it all matter?  
Now, death no longer frightens me, and I see that it has lost its  
sting for you also, you with your skin looking almost blue, like  
a baby's, and absolutely sunken in, your bones absorbing your flesh.  
What can be more than faith? I wonder. We are on the same journey  
to the source, old man, and we just try to be content and  
hopeful along the way.

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