The Welfare State

by Betty Kreinik

Emergency room in the city hospital
Pulses in spasmic opening and closing doors,
Collecting assorted pain of the uninsured shadowless,
Hushing the moaning hysteric, who has no dignity,
Jarring the junkless body shaking warm,
Squeezing the hell in his stomach.

I am dying here, bloodless, perspiring
Unseen rivulets of pale plasma.
Mounds of flesh wheeze stale breath
Around me, marrying the fetid air of the Bowery bum,
Beaten bloody for his pint of dago red,
Picking the hairs In his ears, measuring his life's minute.

Raucous siren heralds the newcomer,
DOA. He goes to the head of the line.
Stilly, gunshot and knifed bodies take priority
To satisfy the paper of the law.
I fade, oozing toward this coat-hanger death,
An unseen phantom.