

## Indulgences

All that'll save me from the fiery furnace  
is the small servanthood  
of replacing the toilet paper roll  
in the office rest room.

Or maybe handing a buck  
to the shave-headed boy at Kmart,  
caught mute at the difference  
between his desire and his crumpled means.

Alms given without tax deduction  
might put a thumb on the scales of justice,  
but I believe that what'll free me  
is moving turtles to the side of the road:

Soles scorched on hell's fresh asphalt,  
lungs filled with sulfur,  
I'll be caught up, unburdened,  
by something given sometime I don't recall.

**Valerie Nieman © 2012**

Valerie Nieman is the author of a new novel, *Blood Clay*, as well as collections of poetry (*Wake Wake Wake*) and short fiction (*Fidelities*). Her awards include an NEA creative writing fellowship and the Greg Grummer Prize in poetry. A reporter and editor for many years, she now teaches creative writing at North Carolina A&T State University and is poetry editor of *Prime Number*.