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*The Bayou Review*

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*The University of Houston—Downtown  
Visual and Literary Arts Journal*

Spring 1994



University of Houston—Downtown  
One Main Street  
Houston, Texas 77002

## *For Fabian*

# *The Bayou Review*

The University of Houston—Downtown Visual & Literary Arts Journal

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## Acknowledgments

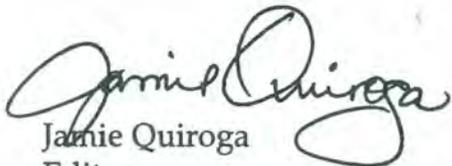
A creative publication often takes on the attributes of a living being. *The Bayou Review* has been no different. Our deepest thanks go to Dr. Robert Jarrett, our head; Mr. Lorenzo Thomas, our hands; and Dr. Fabian Worsham, our heart.

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*C'est très jolie la vie, mais cela n'a pas de forme. L'art a pour objet de lui en donner une précisément et de faire par tous les artifices possibles—plus vrai que le vrai.* • Jean Anouilh—*La Répétition*



Jamie Quiroga  
Editor

*Life is very nice, but it has no shape. The object of art is actually to give it some and to do it by every artifice possible—truer than the truth.* • Jean Anouilh—*The Rehearsal*

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**Dr. Fabian Worsham** is an Associate Professor in the English Department at the University of Houston—Downtown. Her third collection of poetry, *Vulture Woman*, was recently published by Mac\*Kinations Press.

**Tamara L. Taylor** is the Winner of *The Bayou Review's* Spring 1994 Poetry Award for her poem "Lineage." She is a Professional Writing Major at the University of Houston—Downtown.

**Cassandra Harris** is the Winner of *The Bayou Review's* Spring 1994 Prose Award for her essay "History of Life." She is a Professional Writing Major at the University of Houston—Downtown.

**Susan K. Boot** is the Winner of *The Bayou Review's* Spring 1994 Art Award for her original creation "Smoke." She is a Professional Writing Major at the University of Houston—Downtown and will be the Editor of the Fall 1994 and Spring 1995 editions of *The Bayou Review*.

**David Wawrzyniec** is the Winner of *The Bayou Review's* Spring 1994 Editor's Choice Award for Humor for his poem "Writer's Bar." He is a Professional Writing Major at the University of Houston—Downtown.

## Table of Contents

<i>Hillbilly Insurance</i>	Lorenzo Thomas	1
<i>Still Frame</i>	Dr. Fabian Worsham	2
<i>Nude Computing</i>	Dr. Fabian Worsham	3
<i>Last Instructions</i>	Dr. Fabian Worsham	4
<i>The Chair</i>	Mary Ellen Branan	5
<i>Lineage</i>	Tamara L. Taylor	6
<i>Goodnight Willie</i>	Steven Nassar	7
<i>History of Life</i>	Cassandra Harris	8
<i>A Salute to Hope</i>	Adia Kilpatrick	10
<i>Smoke</i>	Susan K. Boot	13
<i>Blandine and Axel</i>	Eric Burnod	14
<i>Writers' Bar</i>	David Wawrzyniec	15
<i>Can You Coin a Corny Cliche?</i>	Terry W. Ladner	16
<i>Beards</i>	David Miller	17
<i>Gentle Tiger</i>	Susan K. Boot	19
<i>With Apologies to Will</i>	Hypatia Shakespeare	20
<i>Meanings to Let</i>	Steven Nassar	21
<i>Meet Me In My Element</i>	Terry W. Ladner	22
<i>Poetic Justice</i>	Marcia Thompson	25
<i>He Sees Far</i>	Susan K. Boot	27
<i>Lotto Texas</i>	Tamara L. Taylor	28
<i>Sweepstakes</i>	Cassandra Harris	29
<i>Dispose-All</i>	Cassandra Harris	30
<i>Swimming Pool, NY NY</i>	Eric Burnod	31
<i>The Cloud in the Silver Lining</i>	Karen Geiger	32
<i>Before It's Too Late</i>	Eric Burnod	35
<i>A USA, CPA, MBA, EVP, SOB</i>	Tamara L. Taylor	36
<i>Twister</i>	Leavery Y. Davidson	37
<i>Wall Street</i>	Eric Burnod	38
<i>The View</i>	Michael Mackin	39
<i>The Old Harris Cemetery</i>	Tamara L. Taylor	40
<i>No End To Eternity</i>	Ronald M. Bailey Jr.	41
<i>the redactor (or the scribe)</i>	Anne Marie Sherlock	42
	Sergio Pernas	43
<i>Hate</i>	Cassandra Harris	44
<i>A Heavy Load</i>	Ada Jaimes	45
	Sergio Pernas	48
<i>Facade</i>	Tommy N. Thomason	49
<i>Obstacle</i>	Tommy N. Thomason	50
<i>Curtain Call</i>	Christine King	55
<i>Race's End</i>	Dr. Dan Jones	56

## HILLBILLY INSURANCE

We don't know much about nothing  
What they think

And I'll admit  
I don't know how  
They live in the City  
Stopping strangers on the corner  
Asking what time is it

In the flatlands  
They tell me  
What I don't rightly understand  
About stopping the clocks  
Until the new owner arrives  
To keep the plantation running

Round here  
All's you got to do is look up  
That's what time it is

My way of thinking  
Ain't much to it

Watch  
What you do do what  
You say

God has never been nowhere  
To have to come back

*Lorenzo Thomas*

## Still Frame

In the courtyard my companion,  
the geranium, flaunts alizarin petals—  
waiting, as I do, while dusk  
bleeds into the sky's blue canvas.

I listen for your footsteps in the sedge,  
light and sibilant, for your voice behind my head,  
casual as the stream's perpetual muttering  
in the valley.

Trillium wave stalks of lavender  
on the hillside, while one yellow spider,  
caught in a whirlwind, spins  
on its mucous thread.

There will never be a time like this again,  
though each day one moment is poised  
between sunset and darkness, stunned  
as I would be

if your cool palm touched my shoulder,  
while the last light holds tentative  
in oak and dogwood, leaves briefly luminous,  
soon to fade toward monochrome.

*Fabian Worsham*

## Nude Computing

Shaved to the skin,  
smelling of Dove and Nexxus,  
hair dripping on my shoulders,  
I open menus, click on  
"Preferences," choosing  
"Smart Quotes" and  
"Wide Insertion Point,"  
rubbing the hard ball  
of the mouse across  
my thigh, manipulating  
the blinking rate  
of the cursor.

In this environment  
I snap to grids I  
never imagined possible,  
bathed in whatever light  
I choose, blue for background,  
a foreground of purple prose.

*Fabian Worsham*

## Last Instructions

O bury me in my jacuzzi—  
the sight of coffins makes me woozy,  
and thoughts of lids and mitered corners  
lead me to the borders  
of insanity.  
Do this for me:  
Turn it on and dump me in,  
dressed up for a little spin,  
and let me roil and churn and rumble  
until I just disintegrumble—  
which, if I must tell the truth,  
has occupied me since my youth  
and led me to an early grave,  
this tendency to misbehave.

*Fabian Worsham*

## The Chair

The chair holds us above the floor  
at the height of our knees. If it didn't,  
we wouldn't allow it. It supports  
our bottoms and the middles of our backs.

If it didn't, we wouldn't call it a chair  
and wouldn't give it space around  
the house. Or offices either. We press  
against them, fall down in them. Sometimes

we tip with one backwards on two  
of its legs, one forefinger pushing  
ourselves and the chair together  
out from the edge of the table.

In a roomful of people and one chair,  
the one in the chair has the most power.  
Or the least.  
We rise from a chair heedlessly,

walk away little distances,  
and resume shortly (so fickle) our posture  
in another reliable chair.  
With our knees bent, back up,

lap perpendicular,  
from sitting on a rock in caves,  
or leaning on a log in the forest,  
we assume the shape of a chair.

*Mary Ellen Branan*

## Lineage

Two spectres sweep through the sable night  
Down paths of time, through ancestral relations.

Wisdom's wispy white hair flies freely awry, her  
Knobby knuckles clutch secrets from all generations.

And Intuition, the elder, flies alongside the hag  
Cradling instinct—gifts from ancient sisters wild.

Their cycle complete, the crones silently slip in  
To the innocent ovaries of a slumbering girl-child.

*Tamara L. Taylor*

## Goodnight Willy

Sample cases of mis-  
placed  
Truth's; Pack'em up in  
A trunk that smells of  
Travelled highways  
And dusty roads.

Wrinkled suit,  
Sweat-drenched-shirt,  
Press'd against a  
Leather seat.

Dry throat,  
The kind you have in  
Mid-Summer Sun  
Longing for that  
Ten cent Coke  
From a gas station.

This week'll be good,  
no,  
No, Great!

There's always next week,  
Next month,  
Next year.

*Steven Nassar*

## From my "Journals of Absurdity" History of Life

**M**y youngest asked me why was it necessary to study History. You get these "why" questions often when bright (intelligent) children don't want to do something. This time it was homework.

After a moment of silence I told him it's necessary to understand where you've been to know where you are and plan where you are going.

His remark to that was he'll never use half the stuff he learned. Then I told him that was the way of the world; be content and conform.

Later I thought about it. The importance we attach to history is laughable. We have no history, save what we record of our passing. At best we are clones of a manipulative society that has chiseled away our identity. The truth must lay hidden beneath the soil.

We have been dispossessed of our heritage and the family ties have disintegrated to the degree that we hold each other in such disregard as to look upon one another with disgust.

Perhaps Heaven is the only hope we have. But not a heaven conceived of by men of any particular race, where they will inhabit an afterlife that is a mere reproduction of the existence they know now.

What would you expect of individuals who believe they have an obligation to save everyone outside their "community" by either absorbing them or destroying them, whatever they perceive the greater good to be at that particular time.

I guess I am so fired because I long for answers or at least clues. Some hint of who I am may be tucked away in someone else's closet or attic or mind.

We have succumb to the propaganda that would have us believe we are minorities. So we've begun to label each other. We're like the "old lady that swallowed the fly..." We don't know why, perhaps we'll die. We continue to swallow the deceptions. They shovel the chicanery down our throats and we just open wider.

Kings and queens would never act this way, but the sons and daughters of slaves are demented.

Our history is not that of "up from slavery," reflecting a brief period in time. Our history is the history of man...up from the clay, mirroring the image of an omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient God.

Now we want recompense. But we shout below a whisper, afraid of the oligarchy that we help to empower. We want recognition but we continue to fade into the background, becoming less distinct, bordering on invisibility.

I lament because I am distraught, not angry. The chronicles of my people distress me. □

*Cassandra Harris*

## A Salute to Hope

I look at you, my fellow students, my friends my future competitors, and I'm proud of what I see! I love your idealism, your fresh perspectives and your faith in life. I also worry about you because the pressure you're under to be your best can make you vulnerable. It's my nature to worry, you know — I'm a mother. That's why you who are fired from jobs that pay your tuition, you who receive failing grades despite doing your best, and you who despair of your goals because of divorce or pregnancy intuitively lean on my understanding. It is with you, the hopeless, I share my unique experience to prove the lesson I almost didn't live to learn: so long as you have Life, you have Hope!

You see, my ex had believed our divorce was temporary. When he learned I was to remarry, he flew first into a jealous rage and then to Israel with our children (ages three, five and ten) without telling me. His cruel plans were timed so I would discover my loss upon returning from my honeymoon.

Words forsake me when I try to describe what it feels like to lose your children. Suddenly the Crayola drawings on your walls that once made you so angry become masterpieces! Within months you're crawling on your knees with a magnifying glass, searching for any smudge a precious dirty hand may have left on a wall. You kiss each one you find. As the quiet you once prayed for grows deafeningly loud, you strain to hear echoes of noise you once struggled to suppress. You can never again walk through the children's department of a store without crying — the doors of Toys R Us are closed to you forever. Memories invoked by playgrounds, tricycles, the sights and sounds of other children are too painful to bear. Mothers enjoying their children eye with suspicion your tormented stare intruding upon their Kodak moments. Friends soon suffer the discomfort of your grief, and your family despairs

of your helplessness. Slowly you isolate, quickly you disintegrate.

I was still in shock when letters of condemnation from my ex's family arrived. I assumed guilt to justify my pain and the combination was intolerable. I lost all sense of time, refused to leave the house, sat in a catatonic anguish and stopped believing in God. I didn't want to live anymore.

Living itself became the epitome of pain. The slow rending of my heart sometimes left me screaming aloud in an empty home. When the pain pushed me into mental illness, I literally tried to cut it out with a scissors. The doctors at the hospital admitted they could not treat the real problem, so they placed me on antidepressants. From morning to night, behind closed eyes, I just stared at memories.

Hope leased itself to my mailbox for a while, but was eventually evicted for non-deliverance. There was never a single response to my daily letters and numerous gifts. The loss of my children seemed as final as it was complete. In despair, I took all of my antidepressants and awoke in a hospital after a three day coma. I was furious with those who had saved my life. Hope of ever seeing my children again had died and I didn't want to live without them.

You know, dear friends, Time truly does heal all wounds. After four years of grief and self-pity I finally accepted the fact that I had lost my children forever and had to make a new life for myself. I enrolled in a paralegal program, graduated with honors, and determined to become a lawyer who would bring, perhaps, a measure of justice to a world that isn't fair. I enrolled here at University of Houston—Downtown in the Fall of 1990 in pursuit of that goal.

Out of the blue that following December, my ex called for the first and only time in five years. The clouds of the Persian Gulf War had started to form over Iraq and, as you

remember, Saddam Hussein promised to attack Israel using chemical warfare. My ex said the children were in grave danger and must come to me at once for safety. The gas masks they had to wear for protection against Saddam's threat pulled their hair so hard they screamed and refused to put them on.

My children were back in my arms and my life ten days later!

Would you believe they arrived during finals? My psychology professor must've accepted the theory of craziness when every sounding airplane had me jumping from my desk to gaze up out of the window! Finally, under the pressure of too many inquisitive gazes, I could contain myself no longer and gushed my excitement to the class. Mine was not the only face from which tears of joy were streaming!

Life is so ironic! Because of Saddam Hussein, thousands of mothers lost their children and today sit in the silent anguish that once enveloped me. Perhaps many of them, as I write, are kissing smudges *their* dead children left on their walls. Yet, because of Saddam Hussein, I have mine back. I owe so much of my happiness to this evil man the world despises, I would have to shake his hand before I shot him.

You see, Life kept me alive when I didn't want to live because my dreams would be realized. But thousands died *fighting* for their dreams. *They* held onto Hope until the last second, and taught me that failure has more merit than giving up.

My fellow students, may this lesson sustain any of you in *your* darkest hour. Believe that, so long as you have Life, you have Hope! □

Adia Kilpatrick



Smoke

Susan K. Boot



**Blandine and Axel**

*Eric Burnod*

## Writers' Bar

BARTENDER!!!! Giveme another metaphor  
andsalt the rim....and I'dlike to buy the lady  
down there a pink simile.

I just sit here on my predicate  
Looking — with bleary eyes — at my empty glass

I hear the scurrying of conjunctions  
in the dark shadows along the baseboards.

And I wonder if a rabbit would appear  
from a hat  
were I to dangle a tasty participle.

Some rye youth takes the seat  
just up from me...and as he comes  
to rest there rises an...onomatopoeia

On the jukebox Patsy begins to wail  
— I rise to leave — and see yet another sentence...  
in the passive voice lurking in the corner...  
waiting for some innocent to fall prey.

*David Wawrzyniec*

## Can You Coin a Corny Cliché?

When the time comes to coin a cliché, just go with the flow,  
But remember, you can't have your cake and eat it too, you know.  
Don't just lie there like a bump on a log, pushing up daisies,  
Lay it on thick, till I'm blue in the face and shoot the breeze.

Give me something I can sink my teeth into, and be quick about it,  
Just don't put your foot in your mouth like a lying hypocrite.  
I don't have forever if you're going to start, so put up or shut up.  
You're up a creek without a paddle, if you can't get it to develop.  
So think with your head and not your heart, and give it to me,  
Just don't put all your eggs in one basket, like a bird in a tree.

But please, ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies.  
If it's too good to be true, it probably is, that's no surprise.  
Maybe you should hit the sack and sleep on it awhile,  
As your head is spinning because it cramps your style.

Make me eat my words and make me come unglued,  
Throw me a line (something to chew on), even if it's crude.  
If you can't seem to give me something to shake a stick at,  
I'll smile and take it, till we have another chance to chat.

Like they say, a friend in need is a friend indeed,  
And if the shoe fits, wear it, with these I am agreed,  
But don't blow your top if I need to hear a witty chant,  
And it's a long story you say, but right now you just can't.

Please forgive me if it eats your lunch, I'll go away,  
Just say hit the road Jack, and don't come back, okay?  
And I'll make like a tree and leave, or say adieu.  
Because every dog must have his day, so will you;  
You'll have a chance to coin some more clichés someday,  
Because all the world's a stage, and you'll do it your way.

Terry W. Ladner

## Beards

Hemingway had a beard—not Mariel, Papa.  
He was a writer.

Many people have beards.

Lenin had a beard—I think he was a Papa,  
But I don't think he was much of a writer.

He's in a tomb.

Lennon's also in a tomb—but not the same kind of tomb.  
He was a writer and a Beatle.  
So was Paul—but he played bass.

At times they both had beards—  
but what does that matter?

There was a Saint Paul—but not the same Paul.  
He was a writer.

He probably had a beard.

St. Paul died long ago,  
but people still remember him fondly.

The ex-Beatle Paul is still alive,  
and even though he's not as important,  
more people revere him—more than St. Paul.

Strange....

Maybe when he dies, he'll be less worshiped?

There's a St. Paul in Minnesota.  
There's a Duluth there, too—  
but what does it matter?

It matters because there's a St. Luke there—  
but not another Saint like St. Paul.  
St. Luke is a hospital,  
the hospital where I was born.

See, I'm a writer.

Not like Hemingway—yet—but I have a start.

I have a beard.

*David Miller*



**Gentle Tiger**

*Susan K. Boot*

## With Apologies to Will

My skill with meter, rhyme and foot,  
I think it's safe to say,  
Really isn't very—goot.  
(Let words fall where they may.)

The terms I know, I spit them back  
In English Literature.  
It's talent that I fear I lack.  
My poetry's manure.

I write a line and make it rhyme,  
It goes from bad to verse.  
Such doggerel should be a crime.  
It is my family's curse.

A poet? Me? The very thought is totally absurd.  
I fancy prose because, you see, I get paid by the word.

*Hypatia Shakespeare*

## Meanings to Let

We words wait;  
Wait to talk to each other,  
Socially speaking.

That is, we wait  
To fill empty pages,  
Where we can mix and mingle,  
Weave and unweave,  
Mutable meanings.

On/Upon ourselves we pun,  
Depending upon one's trade;  
A metaphor in our madness  
If you will.

Prick, do you not bleed?  
Wronged, shall you not avenge?  
Actions do not speak louder  
Than words, for they could not  
Speak at all without us.

When we come to,  
Or rather from, our purpose  
Is realized. We are parlance.

Our price you ask?  
A mere bargain.

*Steven Nassar*

## Meet Me In My Element

I said I would Meet 'er down at the country store,  
So I got started on m' way out the front door.

I took the shortcut that bro't me past the pond,  
Where I saw a Pair o' ducks swimmin' in the water so fond.

How could I not stop an' enjoy myself, I tho't,  
By sittin' on Harry's sTone an' dreamin' a lot.

I dream'd about a fish that I saw in Som' bowl,  
But it grew some tiny wings an' flew to a waterhole.

I guess I better make a move on b'fore it gets chilly,  
So I got m'self together an' I went to See Emily.

I crossed the Czar chasm without any trouble,  
An' I started to try an' set my pace on the double.

I hope I reach the East cape in a little more time,  
'Cause I ain't no longer a man in his prime.

An' I gotta be careful 'bout bein' out late at night,  
Somethin' weird out there's been maKin' flicks o' light.

Ms. Terri's been tellin' me 'bout what looked like an ape,  
But I wouldn't know better 'cause I never saw the shape.

She keeps tellin' me an Ape's trophy is what these bones are.  
But I won't believe til I see somethin' more bizarre.

So I kept thinkin' as I was walkin, all about her story,  
But what I seen, in my mind, it just wasn't All a gory.

Lo, an' behold, as I was tryin' to avoid a tree,  
I saw somethin' move, an' hiS áttire was like a refugee.

This really big feller, as he was pumpin' Iron he ate a chick'n leg.  
An' I noticed what he drank from was as big as a keg.

I got a closer look, an' I felt more content to ask 'm his name.  
He said Al, an' I knew he was one of those sports Pro's with fame.

We talked for a real long time an' I got to know 'm purty good.  
He said he's a Person of Icarian passion, an' he liked bein' in the wood.

Regardin' my friend, her Image recalls...this must be  
That ape which was seen in the distance by so many.

Surely, he must o' been what they saw in the night,  
I know he couldn't conForm to the dark without a light.

As we talked he told me how he lost some muscle man contest,  
Y'know I just couldn't see Al losin' it, but he was purty distressed.

As a man Stands away and sees himself in the lookin' glass,  
He never really sees all the good he's done in the past.

It's just like how On a matter peers will consider what's right,  
Even when they don't have people's best in their sight.

I told Al he shouldn't hide himself in the woods like 'is,  
I know that even with his eyes, hiS can see another bliss.

I told 'm that his health was somethin' wonderful to own.  
He said that I was right As on ants he threw another bone.

I got 'm to come with me to the store so we could talk.  
He tells me all about his Cousin, aunts n' family as we walk.

I finally got to the store with my new found friend.  
I better Dial Emma to tell her sister that I'm in.

I found I Could call phony numbers jus' by accident.  
I finally got Emily on the phone an' tol' her not to print.

'Specially not that story 'bout a man eatin' ape.  
The 'musing part is he's a big man in a little scrape.

When her boss asked her if the first edition was ready,  
She paused for a moment an' said it's in the Trash Eddie.

When Emily wrote her story it was the most Read article,  
Even by those people who were mostly just comical.

As we talked on the phone, she said "what's the matter Joe?"  
Why she said what's a Matter for, I really don't know.

With all of the excitement goin' on concernin' Al,  
Don't know if eveR I'm gonna have 'at date with my gal.

I was so late, an' she was so busy at her station,  
We couldn't seem to see each other after All iteration.

I went back home to m' dogs on the' farm an' I slep'.  
An' the next day we finally Met on'a me doorstep.

*Terry W. Ladner*

## Poetic Justice

i am a 22 year old  
female college student  
angry over the ignorance  
of this world  
write essays about  
**destruction**  
if i self-destruct  
it won't end  
the war

i have been abandoned  
they took my valuable  
**possessions**  
my love  
my heart  
my spirit  
if they take my soul  
it won't end  
the war

people are beaten  
justice is a failure  
social prejudice  
**increases**  
systematic unity  
**decreases**  
if i hate all people  
and all were to hate me  
it won't end  
the war

i hesitate to speak  
of who i am  
not for fear of unacceptance  
but for fear of misunderstanding

people don't  
**understand**  
how i have arrived  
because they don't know  
where i came from  
if i take the time  
to tell  
it won't end  
the war

if all my dreams are deferred

if i never become the next Maya Angelou or Toni Morrison  
if i never get my masters  
if i never get married  
or accomplish another  
**self-fulfilling act**  
it won't end the war

this war is inevitable  
society has denied  
it's destiny  
if i were to know  
**my mission**  
and were to fulfill it  
my life would still  
be  
**incomplete**  
because the war  
will continue  
to go  
**ON**

*Marcia Thompson*



**He Sees Far**

*Susan K. Boot*

## Lotto Texas

A black-armored knight arrived with much cheer  
Astride a great, snorting steed.  
He promised to lead the assault on reform  
By producing the weapons we'd need.

"I'll solve your dilemma, my tactics are sure,"  
He covertly whispered, "Queen Ann,"  
"The schools WILL BE EQUAL—your historical fame  
Is right here in the palm of my hand!"

So began the attack, all across the fair land  
On the hopeless, the lonely, the poor.  
They wielded their wages against the black knight  
Losing all to his shiny allure.

"One dollar for millions," the knight's battle cry,  
While the Queen wondered, "where's my fame?"  
And the weapon he promised to equalize schools  
Was somehow lost in the midst of the game.

*Tamara L. Taylor*

## Sweepstakes

The bills I have are oh so many  
I dream of winning money plenty.  
I've mailed each and every sweepstakes card,  
It seems forever I've tried so hard.  
I pray each night before I retire  
I'll be awakened to what I desire.  
Please Mr. McMahon won't you call my name  
So I'll be endowed with fortune and fame.  
I'm not so greedy as to want it all  
Just a million or two, I can have a ball.  
It's not just bills I have to pay  
But people who depend on me day-to-day.  
My poor old granny so helpless and frail,  
My father I'd like to get out of jail.  
My mother who has her house to remodel,  
My brother who can't work cause he's on the bottle.  
Of course my kids are in need too  
With so many bills what's a girl to do.  
My teenage son doesn't understand  
That clothes still fit if not namebrand.  
And my little one has a song you see  
It starts with "I want" and ends "buy me."  
If all these demands could be met with my pay  
I wouldn't be begging and pleading this way.  
I'm sure my plight you can understand  
And I know you're a kind and generous man.  
Of course I'd like a few simple things  
Like cars and minks and diamond rings.  
If not, maybe just a thousand or so  
To cover the last three months rent I owe.  
It won't buy that red convertible Benz, with car phone  
But it might keep my gas and lights turned on.  
Can I win just a little of that money please  
Or stop sending those damn letters being such a tease!

*Cassandra Harris*

## Dispose-All

I live in a disposable house, modular phones and movable walls,  
A push of a button, a flip of a switch will rearrange it all.  
Collapsible beds, throw away towels, paper plates and plastic utensils,  
Nothing expensive, nothing original, every piece is cut out of stencils.  
I drive a car with a year guarantee, disposable parts every one,  
My Astroturf lawn doesn't take well to water, but its lots of fun in the sun.  
I guess you could say in my own special way I couldn't be more content,  
What more do I need, all the necessities of life and so little money spent.  
Throw away this, disposable that, emotions seem disposable too,  
Compact and discreet, seldom used and easily discarded when through.  
No, I won't be surprised when I close my eyes just what the end will be,  
They'll dress me up right, pack me in tight and kindly dispose of me.

*Cassandra Harris*



**The Swimming Pool, NY NY**

*Eric Burnod*

## The Cloud in the Silver Lining

I have always been a confident, independent person. That is, I was before I met Bill Chesley.

The first time I saw Bill, he was leaning against the bar, sipping a Rusty Nail (Chivas and Drambuie on the rocks, in that order). He was not a very attractive man. His thin, straight brown hair revealed a bald spot forming on his crown. Although he was the right weight for his height, he gave the impression of being fat. The skin he inherited from his English ancestors was pale and easily sunburned. Even so, he was magnetic and attractive in some mystical sort of way. He was dressed in a hand-tailored suit, made from the finest of imported English cloth, with buttons on the sleeves that really unbuttoned. His shirt was also hand-tailored and of the purest white cotton—never starched. He wore no jewelry, not even a watch. The only gold he sported surrounded the thick, bifocal lenses that made his eyes appear a little less beady.

As particular as he was about the way he looked, he was even more so about me. Three months after we started dating, I gained five pounds, shooting up to 119. He handed me a pair of shorts in a size twenty. "You look like you're about six months pregnant." I was innocent enough at the time to take it as a joke and laugh it off.

Joke or not, I lost the weight and Bill began to fill up my wardrobe. He had very specific tastes. St. John knit dresses that sculpted my figure were his favorites, and at about five-hundred dollars each, I put up little resistance to him. My closet abounded with silk suits, matching purses and shoes. With every outfit, I was created more in his image of the ideal woman, my own identity being creatively replaced.

I took him to meet my mother that first year. We ate lunch surrounded by pictures of my family, white lace doilies, coffee mugs with pictures of geese on them and all her other country knick-knacks. After lunch, Bill and mother were seated on the couch, looking across the room at me.

Bill remarked to her, "Karen has so much class. I just don't know where she gets it." Mom smiled and turned to him to share the joke. He wasn't laughing. Seeing his expression unchanged, the smile faded from her face, replaced with a hard, disbelieving stare that would forever appear in his presence.

Knowing how much he liked dark hair, I surprised him one day and dyed my blond hair blue-black. We were going to dinner and I dressed in my finest knit dress. It was a red St. John with long sleeves and a sculpted neckline. The skirt draped the curves of my body like water flowing gently down a hill. It was something that Nancy Reagan might have worn for tea on the White House lawn. With my black hair, youthful figure and red spiked heels, the dress looked more, on me, like the attire of a high-fashion model on a *Cosmopolitan* Cover.

We went to Harry's Kenya, a fine restaurant in downtown Houston, popular with the theater crowd. We entered the archway, my arm on his. I felt a hush fall over the restaurant. For just one minute it seemed as if every eye turned my way. As we followed the waiter to our table, I was careful to keep my attention straight ahead, trying not to glow with pride. For that one night at least, I was royalty.

I stayed with Bill for five years. I was his prize and he flaunted me in many exciting places: Las Vegas, Acapulco, Club Med. Then I committed an unpardonable crime. I injured his creation. The call came at dusk.

"Your wife has been in an accident. She's asking for you."

I was covered in blood. My nose was broken and bleeding, clothes stained, lip smashed with skin and muscle lost. He glanced at me once, not showing any emotion and said, "When they're through fixing you, you'll look even better than you did before."

When I was released from the hospital, he went with me to visit my plastic surgeon, Dr. Stal. I had chosen Dr. Stal

because he was genuine and honest with me. He had already told me that it would be at least six months before he could do anything to fix my lip. My body would have to do most of the healing itself. Bill sat with his arms tightly folded against his stomach, not looking at me or bothering to hide his disgust as he asked the doctor, "Can you fix it? How long is she going to look this bad?"

I wanted to find the nearest hole to crawl into. What right did I have to show my torn face in public? I was a disgrace. Then slowly, like a ship lost in the fog coming finally to port, I heard the truth as Dr. Stal looked straight into Bill's eyes and spoke.

"Karen has been through a very traumatic experience."

My eyes began to water.

He continued, "Your attitude isn't helping her. She needs your support to heal the emotional trauma as well as the physical scars."

My heart broke, releasing all the unshed tears in streams down my wounded face. I realized that Bill's support was something I would never have. My heart was touched with the almost forgotten knowledge that someone could still care about me. Those simple words that Dr. Stal had spoken cleansed my soul and gave me strength. I knew what I had to do.

I loaded the last box on to the U-Haul. The cardboard cube was filled with mixed memories: pictures of my family next to postcards from Club Med; silk lingerie from Victoria's Secret being cuddled by the teddy bear my daddy had given me on my fifth birthday. As the doors of the moving van slammed shut, the sun seemed to break free from its prison of clouds and I knew that I was free to create a new me. □

*Karen Geiger*



**Before It's Too Late**

*Eric Burnod*

## A USA, CPA, MBA, EVP, SOB

Flicking an imaginary speck of dust  
From his tastefully tailored suit,  
His voice rumbles through the intercom  
"Linda, run and get the new figures from  
the budget group right away."

His wife and two point three children  
Smile toothily at seated guests  
From their glassy vantage point  
Atop an immaculate mahogany desk.

Sacred scrolls on the walls sing praises  
With great pomp and circumstance  
Spouting his numbers and letters  
Under wooden frames and cardboard mats.

A picture window then a Western picture  
And a tidy bookcase of course  
No plants, no ashtrays, a brass business card holder  
No magazine, two guests chairs, and no warmth.

*Tamara L. Taylor*

## Twister

Your're a whirlwind  
dancing down the street  
Whistling at everybody you meet.  
Sliding by with your head up high  
Twisting and throwing trash  
over here and over there.  
Powerful and wet, blowing dust  
in folks hair - We know you don't care;  
You're a whirlwind dancing down the street.

*Leavery Y. Davidson*



## Wall Street

*Eric Burnod*

## The View

Inside a steely spire  
That rises through the city's heart  
I pause to press my nose against a pane.

And I must catch my breath;  
For from this lofty height I view  
A universe much different than my own.

A planned and ordered place  
That shimmers and reflects itself:  
A vast expanse of mirrored glass and steel.

And I have left below  
Thick walls of grey and oily soot,  
Cascading with kaleidoscopes of noise,

To reach this airy room,  
With an omnipresent silence  
And its unblinking blue-eyed overlook.

*Michael Mackin*

## The Old Harris Cemetery

A thin dirt road lies on the hill  
Like a horseshoe, its charm drained away.  
The procession now silent, air deathly still,  
Fills the lane. All is pinched and gray.

Great gnarled oaks and passing clouds  
Cast a pall on the hilltop scene.  
A rusted arch admits today's crowd  
The living, the dead, in between.

O God its up, the dreaded green tent  
Pathetic fake grass near the hole.  
Cold folding chairs, one pole that's bent  
Greet mourners of a fresh absent soul.

Angels hover over bowed heads  
Ancient phrases give up the dead.

*Tamara L. Taylor*

## No End To Eternity

The clouds, oh how they break at morning.  
For it is my life and soul that conquer thee.  
The blood does drip, but I am not wounded.  
I shall suit up for battle, but God fights the war.  
My life is Christ and my soul is for eternity.  
To the extremes are my heart's desires.  
For the edges of these extremes is heaven.  
These edges have no end.  
My soul has never ending edges.  
Love, romance and challenges, heaven is to be.  
I am sent on my mission.  
I ride off in to the dark night.  
But, at the end of the ride I shall travel in to the sun rise like a hero.  
I now have heaven.

*Ronald M. Bailey Jr.*

**the redactor  
(or the scribe)**

one shoe is black  
the other white  
both of his socks are white

with a writing instrument in his right hand  
he makes broad strokes across the greying pages  
from left to right  
of a black bound book  
from left to right

is he highlighting passages  
(I cannot see the color of the ink)  
for future reference  
(too many strokes)

rewriting it, (in what strange script)  
translating it into barcode

taking cover from the rain in a bus stop shelter  
he wears a shower cap  
and a baseball cap on top of that cap

how many hats can a man wear  
will he love one and hate the others

how many faces can a man hide  
before he can no longer see the light

legion?

*Anne Marie Sherlock*



*Sergio Pernas*

## Hate

Runs like an ocean of destruction  
Sweeping over our children —  
Tides of emotion, torrents of rage  
Pouring from media, art, music, and minds  
Flooding our souls with anger and pain  
Drowning all hope by polluting the future  
....Please hold back the water

*Cassandra Harris*

## A Heavy Load

She felt like a foreigner in a foreign land, speaking a foreign language, and contemplating foreign ideas. She felt isolated in a world that was not her own. But things like these had been happening for ages. It was an old dilemma with no new solutions, just new players. The only new thing was that now it was her dilemma.

She felt as if she didn't belong in the world but even this was an old dilemma. Her mother and her mother before her, had felt the same, thought the same, had been in the same way.

She felt lonely — betrayed — abandoned.

Warm scents from the kitchen penetrated the walls, impregnating the house with tradition; the tradition of marriage, the tradition of domination, the tradition of fitting into a mold.

Upstairs, in her bedroom, as she stood by the window, she saw a bird leave tracks on the virginal snow that had fallen the night before, as the summer had left tracks on her.

The white snow, the black sill, all that was needed was the red blood. That would come soon enough. But it would not have the same outcome as that old and enchanting fairy tale.

Life was not enchanting.

Life was hard.

It was a hard realization for someone so young, almost a woman, in that awkward stage of leaving her youth, but her decision had been made with a new maturity. She had heard the crude and vicious voices of past propriety: the correct way of walking, talking — living. And she felt the cold and bitter future. A future uncertain, full of remorse and loathing, for herself, her family, her body.

She felt old and battered. Used.

With a sad smile she remembered when it had all begun. It was so present within her.

She could still feel the warmth of that day embracing her. The movement of the summer breeze that had carried her. She remembered the trees, strong with life, swaying in the wind. The rounded hills adorned with their fresh flowers, ready to be picked. She remembered the fluidity of the climactic events. It had entrapped her in an intense moment of that summer day and had ripped the joy out of her youth.

The frenzy to be young and free had only trapped her in a sea of lies and deceits where she desperately struggled against the undertow.

She remembered when it had all ended. The moment that had led to this. The trees with autumn color, in that chilly Fall morning, had reminded her of a kaleidoscope, a pandemonium. A step toward an end. The blue of the sky, seen from his loft window, was a dark icy blue. But as she saw the disinterest, the indifference, the cold in his eyes as she told him, she felt as if she would drown in her own sorrow. It was a glimpse of what was to come.

Only her innocence had drowned. She was alive. She was alive and she understood. She understood the placated anger in her mother. She understood the hopeless, vacant, and barren eyes of grief and desperation. She understood the anger of carrying a heavy load. The anger of broken dreams and broken promises.

Her thoughts were broken by the sound of her mother's voice calling her to breakfast. She did not answer her mother. She would not — could not — eat. She walked away from the window and got ready to leave.

Quietly, so as not to be heard, she slowly and cautiously descended the stairs. She didn't want to confront her mother, to be questioned and talked to. Her mother did

not know and she might break her down and make her not go through with it.

As she stepped out of the house, the cold of the day slapped her with a sharp gust. With that startling wind, she gathered her coat about her and her courage as well. She walked toward the nearest bus stop and she boarded the bus that carried her to her destination. She felt lost in a crowd, just another face with another problem. As she reached her stop, she rang the bell and got off. But as she reached the building she knew she would be all right. Everything would be all right. She would undertake her life.

She would make it. Make it through this maddening moment.

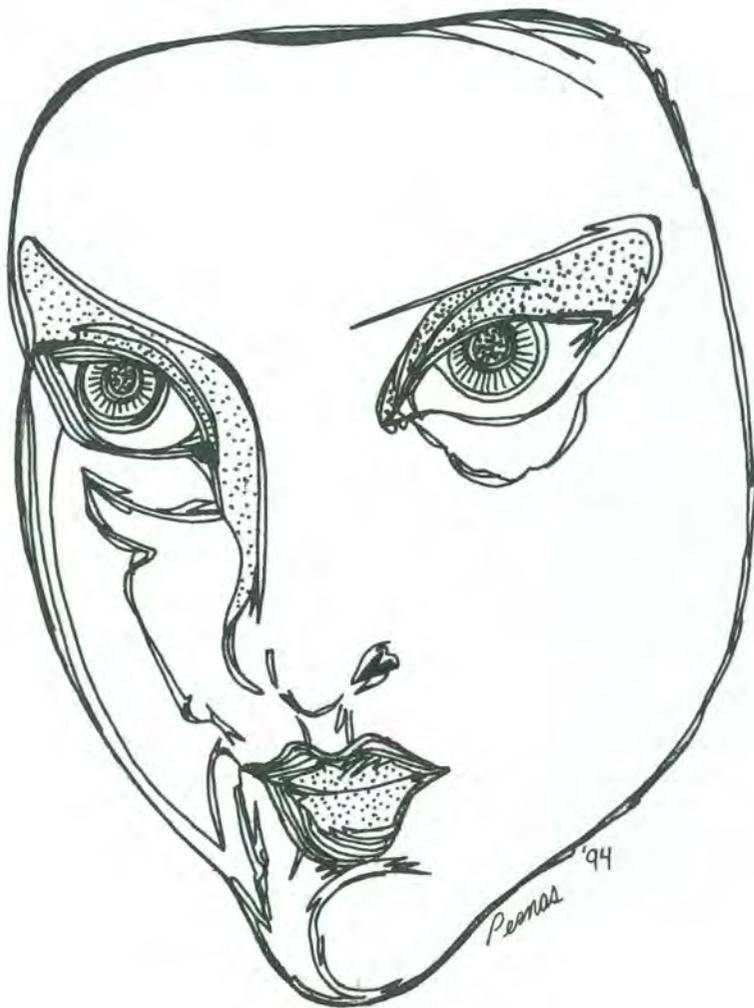
She would always carry a heavy load. One unlike her mother's perhaps, or her mother's before her, of sadness and betrayal. Unlike them, it was a load she had chosen to carry.

She was shown into a room and given some instructions. As she waited in the white, cold, stark room she mourned everything she had lost; her past, her innocence, her confidence — her trust.

What else could hurt her now? The biggest pain of growing up had engulfed her, possessed her. She matured and understood. All that was left were resolutions — her inception into adulthood.

"Are you ready?" the doctor asked. □

*Ada Jaimes*



*Sergio Pernas*

## Facade

Put on your Jesusmask and meet us at the clinic.  
Don't forget your sign, we're gonna make some noise.  
Call the Roberts and the Joneses, we're gonna be on TV.  
We need some more sad faces, crowds of people,  
Lots of people to stand around and look concerned.  
We gotta stop this baby killing, we gotta do what's right.  
It's a peaceful demonstration, no one will get hurt.

Put on your Righteousmask and meet us at the clinic.  
Don't forget to say your prayers, they're demonstrating too!  
Their "choice" is our posterity—How many have they killed?  
They're criminals, they're murderers, They're liberals and liars.

Put on your Sundaymask and meet us at the church.  
Don't forget your Bible, or your holy ten percent.  
We're gonna have a time, we're gonna have some singin'  
The preacher's gonna tell us how the Savior cleared the temple.  
How we gotta wake the nation to the killin' of the innocent.

Put on your anonymask and meet us at the courthouse.  
Someone shot a doctor, shot him in the back.  
We wish he hadn't done it, still, babies' lives were saved.  
We're sorry for the doctor, but God works in mysterious ways.

*Tommy N. Thomason*

## Obstacle

*The wall.*

*Gotta get to the wall, a little farther, a little farther, a little more. I know I'm gonna break the record this time. Almost there, almost there...*

"Daddy, David's picking' on me!" The baby.

"No I'm not, he's just acting like a baby."

"He is a baby, dammit!" The old man was angry.

"No I'm not a baby, David's pickin' on me!"

"Just shut up! Both of you!"

"Daddy, can you fix us something to eat."

"Momma'll be home in a minute."

The two boys turned back to the TV. While Dick Van Dyke talked to himself on the small black and white TV screen, the old man poured the last of the warm, brown liquid from the half pint bottle into the small glass, gulped it down and took a long, slow drink from the glass of ice water on the old, wobbly end table. The drink slowly coiled around his insides and gently squeezed out sensation. He looked at the now quiet boys and at the noisy television: The Danny Thomas show was playing now. "Make Room for Daddy." Yeah, right. Make room for Daddy, make room for a case of Jack Daniels, and make room for plenty of ice water.

What the hell happened?

The boys went on watching TV. Outside somewhere an old, sick dog barked a tired, raspy bark and the old man closed his tired eyes and blocked out the kids, the television, and the dog, and went back to what he was doing...twenty years before.

*"48 seconds, Franklin, you're close to the company record."*

*"I can beat it. A few more days and there'll be a new company record."*

*"You can beat it tomorrow, Sergeant. Right now, you gotta get ready for your meeting with the Colonel."*

*"Yes Sir."*

*I go and change clothes and head for the Colonel's office. I don't know what he wants, but I know that I haven't done anything wrong so it must be good. I get to the Colonel's office and I tell the secretary my name.*

*"Col. Ashford is expecting you, you may go in now."*

*"Thank you."*

*The office, small and utilitarian...*

*"Momma's home!" the baby wailed. "Momma! Momma! David's been picking on me."*

*"Momma, I'm hungry!" David whined when he talked. The old man thought that David sounded like an old woman. "Can you fix me something to eat?"*

*"Let me sit down for a minute." She looked tired. She sat down on the end of the worn out sofa and took off her ugly, black work shoes. "I've been on my feet all day."*

*The old man hadn't said a word. He just looked longingly at the small, brown paper bag peeking out shyly from the top of the woman's purse. After a few moments passed, the woman picked up the brown bag and handed it to the old man. Still silent, he took the small, brown bottle out of the bag, broke the seal and poured some of the whiskey into his glass and drank it. He sank a little deeper into the big, over-stuffed chair and closed his eyes. The old serpent squeezed tighter, sensation diminished even further, and sometime later, the woman helped the old man to his bed, where he would sleep...and dream.*

*The office, small and utilitarian, barely houses the man whose name is on the door. Col. Sampson Ashford is a huge man with thick black hair on his head, weeding out from the front of his shirt and covering the backs of his hands.*

"You wanted to see me sir?"

"Sit down, Sergeant Franklin."

"Yes sir."

"I'm gonna get right to the point. Your test scores indicate exceptionally high aptitude. Your physical conditioning is way above average. You have been selected, along with about a dozen other men from all over the country, to be trained for intelligence work."

"Intelligence work, Sir?"

"Don't interrupt me, Sergeant. Yes, intelligence work. If you accept this assignment, you'll leave in two weeks for Yale. You'll learn Russian and Chinese. When you're finished at Yale, you'll be a Lieutenant. You're a fortunate man, Sergeant. This could be the start of a great career. No telling where it could lead. Give me an answer by tomorrow morning 0800."

"Thank you sir."

I already know the answer. At 0800, I give the colonel a formal letter accepting the assignment. I'm relieved of all duties for the remaining two weeks and the colonel tells me to read up on Yale and keep up my physical training. I study all morning and then head for the obstacle course. I know I can break that record in two weeks. A good run first, though, a couple of miles and then...

"John, can you help the boys get ready for school?"

The woman was leaving for work. The old man sat up on the bed, held his head in his hands until the room slowed down enough to step into and then carefully stood up. He mumbled some answer to the woman and she, satisfied that he was up, went out the door and headed for the bus stop. It was 5:30. The man went into the small, dimly lit kitchen and cooked some bacon and eggs. He went into the small room that served as a bedroom for the two boys and woke them up and somehow got them fed and dressed for school. David was in the fourth grade and the "baby" was really six years old and in the first grade. He walked them to the end of the driveway and watched them walk down the block to

the elementary school. He went back to the house and sat down. After a few moments, he got up and looked behind the sofa for the bottle he knew the woman had left there. After preparing the ice water, he returned to his post in the battered old chair and started on the day's assignment: to get good and drunk and try not to think about what a waste his life had become. He turned on the TV and Lucy was telling Ricky that she wanted to be in the show. He tried to keep up with the story, but soon the old serpent had retained its grip around his senses and his eyes closed and the projector of his memory played a familiar scene across the inside of his eyelids.

"47.3, Franklin, a half a second more and you'll have the record."

"I thought I had it that time." I didn't tell anyone about my new assignment. In another week and a half I would get on a train and disappear. Anyone who knew me would be told that I had simply been reassigned.

"Give it one more run and we'll call it a day."

I wait for his signal and begin the course. The tires, the bars, the hurdle, the tunnel, the wall. I know I'm making good time and the wall is the easiest part. I take the rope and start up. Something doesn't feel right, but I keep going. Just as I throw my leg on top of the...

"Daddy, we're home," David called from the front door.

"David pushed me down!"

"I did not!"

The old man, quite drunk, hardly noticed the boys. He looked at the television and didn't recognize the show that was on. He barely recognized his children.

"Daddy, can we have some cereal?"

"I don't care." The boys knew he didn't care—as long as he didn't have to get up, he would say yes to anything.

David fixed two bowls of cereal, knowing that Momma would have said no. The old man wondered where his "great career" had gone. A few minutes of silence—except for the television—and then he was back in 1947.

*The rope doesn't feel right. I'm almost to the top anyway. Just as I put my leg on the top of the wall, the rope breaks away from the top of the wall and I reach out and grab the air. I'm falling. It's only ten feet, but I'm falling backwards. My foot hangs on the top of the wall for a second and a second later my back hits the ground. Next thing I know, I'm in the base hospital. I can't move. A week passes. I still can't move. I can't feel my legs. I can barely move my arms. The doctor tells me I will probably be able to walk in about a month and a half. The date of my intended departure to Yale comes and goes. Col. Ashford never calls. The doctor tells me that I will never have full use of my back again and recommends a medical discharge. When I get out of the hospital, Col. Ashford has been transferred. I never hear from him again. I leave the army with a full pension and an empty future. I was heading for greatness, and now I'm heading for a bar. I'm a civilian for the first time in nine years. Intelligence work. Exceptional aptitude.*

*Now I'm an exceptional nothing, an above-average loser. I order a whiskey and then before he can pour it, I tell the bartender to give me the bottle. I ask the bartender for a glass of ice water and pour some of the warm brown liquid into a small glass. I gulp it down and take a long drink from the glass of ice water...*

"Daddy, can we go outside?"

"Yeah, I don't care." The old man poured the last of the warm brown liquid into the small glass, gulped it down and took a long drink from the glass of ice water. The serpent squeezed gently until the last trace of sensation succumbed to its embrace and the story started over again. □

Tommy N. Thomason

## Curtain Call

Stillness covered our home  
near the time of your arrival.  
A cold eerie setting became the scenery.  
Sound effects of jovial laughter  
ceased into the background.  
Your presence becomes the foreground.

The curtain rises.  
Everyone takes their places.  
The performances tonight predict  
the closing act.

The show begins with an abundance  
of cordiality.  
Lacking the genuine performance  
yearning to flee.

The cast always take their lead  
from you, the director.  
Hoping our performances would not send you  
raging into a violent scene.  
When the curtain falls,  
the audience leaves,

Our show begins.

Christine King

## Race's End

A man completing a long race knows he is very tired.

Nearing the finish, he anticipates—relief from pain, fatigue, boredom. Soon he will rest and accept the praise and aid others will offer. Later, alone, he will reflect on the meaning of what he has done.

These are his thoughts as he crosses the finish line, when he finds, amazingly, that his legs question this ending. Leaden and knotted with pain, they resist the order to walk, feel instead suddenly, miraculously, light, agile, young.

Has he discovered unknown strength? Could he continue running another mile, two, another race?

Surely not. He senses that the strength he feels is false, and forces himself to walk. Slowly, he falters, nearly falls, struggles to find balance. When he finally walks, he finds it excruciating.

For hours he has run, in the company of others yet alone, his strength and his pain his own. He has cultivated the isolation of his task, nurtured it, protected it.

Now, at race's end, his strength is gone, his pain complete. It leaves no room for reflection.

It is, in fact, too great to tell. You must read it in the lines of his face, and in his silence.

If you wish, you may touch him and feel the beating of his heart. Despite the blankness of his eyes, it is racing in his chest. □

*Dan Jones*

