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The Finish Line

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The Finish Line

Providence has dogged you, Monsieur Vincent,
 and your body—how it stoops with four score.
 Here are the poor—your masters really?
 They hulk about you still. Do you see them?
 Your eyes blink, struggle to focus. Yes, they still
 hover, so near, crowding into your slower-beating heart.
 Will they ever have their fill? Will you?
 You flinch. Terror lurches in to ice-grip your heart.
 Paralysis—almost. Then . . . then . . . is that a smile?
 Why?
 Has the Dogged One finally won the day?
 Oh, you have resisted, been cautious, tip-toeing
 on hesitant feet, checking over and behind,
 stopping sometimes, then launching out into deeper and deeper,
 but always wondering warily . . . “is this the path?”
 But now, now you see, don’t you?
 The poor are not yours. You have seen whose they are.
 And yes, it is a smile. Now, to let go the dropping flesh,
 that cache of sweating brow and rippled arm,
 that wide-open heart slowing to a still,
 those eyes brought to a ghostly sparkle—
 all is falling off, transfigured like crushed coal into diamond lustre.
 You are ready now, Monsieur. You do smile. It is finished.

John S. Sledziona, C.M.

