

Pedrail

Pedrail is a greasy aluminum barrier
placed between the racers and us,
while these runners fly by at world class pace
in a world championship race, The Marathon.
Two meters each of brittle metal tubes,
unwieldy things we placed by hand,
none of us handled before this day,
and most vowed to never handle again.
We placed hundreds to line the course
especially at the turns,
starting at 3AM on race day,
to present it complete by 6.

Pedrail was not meant to separate us from the racers,
but as a guide to help them focus on the path before them,
upon which they were spending all their energy.
We would have better lined the route with flowers
had we made the time to grow them,
cut them and fill our trucks with stems and petals,
then strew them with an endless crowd before the runners,
a path of garlands wooing each one.
Would they had not run even faster than the records set that day?

Ah, but this race was not a parade,
but meant to stretch the pack into a line of first to last.
Even though Olympians,
their humanity submitted to this inevitable outcome by entering,
they did not need to be wooed,
but surely guided without impediment or disruption.
The racers carried our hopes as they dashed their hopes upon the road.

Their gratitude flows downhill
in an avalanche
pounding enormous boulders,
breaking them down into a mist of atomized frozen crystals in their wake.
It builds a glacier.

It feeds a reservoir
which can feed a nation,
a world with its tributaries.
It fills us as we drag the Pedrail back to its traces.

*Frank D. Ratti, 07/18/22.
for Oregon22 Men's and Women's Marathon World Championships.*

