

**“The Gilded Daughter” by Terri A. Schleuder – Awarded Honorable Mention**

*Photo - Walk*

I'm done! No more!  
Like a bird in a gilded cage, on display-  
Plumage vibrant and flowing, hiding within the trappings of glitz and glamour.  
Always expected to say the right words, be the right person,  
Live within tightly confined rules and roles.  
Never stray, never be free, God Help Me!

I'm done! No more!  
I'm leaving this place -- tonight--  
Leaving these people, I've lived with my whole life-  
Who only see the trappings and never me-  
I want to tear off this gown of chintz and silk -  
Run naked in the grass among the wild flowers and cool breezes-  
Dip my toe into the cool, cleansing waters of the brook as it cascades passed rocks and willows.

What is my favorite color? Do they know?  
What book fills my heart with joy? Do they care?  
Always rules, expectations, fit in, don't say or do anything to make someone notice.  
Be invisible in a designer gown with sparkling jewels  
A golden pattern on the palace wall.

I'm done! No more!  
For once I will live for me - Do what I want - Be what I want.  
If they are embarrassed, so be it!  
I'll Step out of this gilded cage.  
Leave behind the cold, glittering world that judges an extra ounce of fat, a new wrinkle, or broken nail.

Be me, be free!  
Leave, and step into the shimmering sunrise of a new day-  
The warmth and glow of an authentic life-  
Accepted for what is on the inside not the outside — with all my glorious imperfections.

Today I Leave it all!  
The lights, the fancy cars, the mansions, the money, and the endless frivolous parties—  
Where people come to preen, and gloat about how wonderful their world is.  
It is not wonderful, it is empty, a jaded persona.

And so... I'm done! No more!  
I'll start fresh—begin anew-  
Like a tiny babe discovering everything for the first time-  
A giggle, a laugh, the wonder and beauty in the ordinary.  
I'm free!