

THE RUN  
COLLECTION  

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HAYDEN COX

I. *Recovery*

busted toenails  
water dripping  
sweat

twinge of  
pain, frustration, regret  
muddled  
ignored from the plantar fascia  
on the white background of the bathtub

this IT band, screaming from knee to hip,  
lectures again that actions have consequences  
real  
and imagined

soreness in the glutes and hips offers a feeble plea to the mind to get up  
move on with life  
but a deep exhale only roots the body in place

world, slipping  
agony, fading  
to nothingness

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## II: *Affliction*

suicide

Age 15

a neighbor

a friend

a brother

that's where the stopwatch began

on the run

away

from himself

somewhere between perpetually puking on the side of the road and racing a state championship on five broken bones, life started to make sense again

emotional pain replaced

by the physical

the stopwatch kept ticking

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## III: *Relapse*

January 3rd, 2017.

You'd think he'd have quit by now, but the same drudgery and pain again wraps him up.

It's nearly midnight. The world is home, at its resting place. Sit-coms dance as the world lays thee down to sleep. But his rest must wait for a forlorn track, whipping with a frigid wind that foreshadows the coming storm. Security asked him to "vacate the premises" two hours ago, but he has miles to run before he sleeps. Rest must wait until his Sisyphean task is complete. Now security has gone home, joining the

masses, leaving him alone with an empty water bottle, lying prone where his time begins and ends.

A deep breath coincides with the increasing rapidity of his footsteps, coming back for more. The meaninglessness was realized long ago, but he insists, like the widower who refuses to let go of his lover, as if just one more kiss could bring back life. He whips around the corners, body mechanic, snapping at the hips, trapped in lane 1 while his mind roams free. Almost.

Shared laughter with a teammate, a stolen kiss before the start, the feeling of invincibility when the world floats under his feet. All were once connected through the voluntary struggle, the same that he indulges in now. He suppresses the hope that he can bring them back. It's too late. He knows. All who once felt with him have gone, finding all this and more anywhere else.

He accelerates from the thought, focusing on his task, circling endlessly like a vulture, as if the laughter and kiss will grow again from the dead grass embraced by the borders of cold, broken rubber. The spikes in his shoes dig in again, pushing off to be yanked back a second later. Tease. He takes the first turn for the last time, hurling himself away from the emptiness of his bottle. 40 seconds later, he does it again.

After a while, the track begins to push him away, a heavy presence that has long overstayed its welcome. His lungs burn, stomach churns, legs begin to fail. Despite the consequences of his past, he ignores it, yearning blindly for what? He does not know, seeking in the next step, the next lap, the next mile a fulfillment that still outruns him. But the track—it has had enough. It rips at his insides until his footsteps cease. He collapses outside the walls, returning his borrowed calories to the earth. He didn't deserve them anyway.

Reaching for his water bottle, he recalls that it was never full in the first place. He returns to his exile as his lungs and stomach begin to heal, leaving the dull throbbing of his legs and the blood blister on his foot as a reminder never to return. He'll give it a week. Meanwhile the stench of his clothes offer advertisement of his misdeeds in case some other lost soul mistakes him for someone of worth.

There will be no mistake.