

Finish Line

by RachelW

Reaching the finish line: There are many to reach, to cross, but the one I see and the one you see might be different.

Finish Line: One-Shot

Chapter 1 of 1

Reaching the finish line: There are many to reach, to cross, but the one I see and the one you see might be different.

I can't really feel my body anymore.

I'm trying to remember exactly when it was that I could last feel anything but the continual rhythm of running, the rush of incoming breath and then the exhalation. The crowds on either side – it's nearing the finish line, I see – are moving, cheering, but I don't see them anymore – they're like something outside my vision, outside my hearing, like they're in a TV on 'mute' and my world is nothing but the pounding of my feet on the pavement, the salt-sting of sweat in my eyes, and occasionally a hand in front of me with a cup of Gatorade.

They're not why I'm here, anyway.

My downstairs neighbour is in this race, too. Odd, that I should think of him now. He runs 'just for fun'. I don't begrudge anyone that, of course, but it's not me.

We all have our passions, goals – well, I hope we all do. It takes a different form in different people. Though the finish line lies several hundred yards ahead, I've already reached mine. The inhalation, exhalation, the sound of the rubber of the soles of my shoes leaving the pavement. It makes a sort of sucking-squeaking sound each time a foot leaves the ground, and more of a thump and slide upon impact. I don't want to see *them* anymore. I close my eyes. The way is straight, and my body will carry me there.

It's not every day I do this: finish a twenty-K. I don't do this every day, but every day it is – has been – my focus. I can't really feel my body anymore. Like the wind, its effects are apparent. The sound of my feet, the sting in my eyes... I'm still moving forward. It's there.

At one time, I thought this was the answer for everyone... this... this... what I've achieved here, now, this feeling will be with me always. Years ago, I was a runner's missionary, spreading the good word of how everyone could do this, everyone can know the bliss, the wonder... of what happens when you run... and run... and run....

"Dude, I'm just doing this for fun," my downstairs neighbour had told me.

"I only do this because it keeps me in shape; I really don't like it all that much. I'm so relieved when I finish my three miles," a lady in the park with whom I'd shared a mile had told me.

"My friend is a runner and she likes it a lot," another had told me. We ran together for a time, meeting in the park, even going out together a few times. Her name was Sharon. She ran, but the longer we ran together the more I realised she didn't really *want* to do it. No, she only did it because other people enjoyed it, and she thought she could find the same rewards in running as we did. She ended up with knee surgery, and after that, never really returned to running. We're still friends, but we don't run together anymore.

The finish line is closer now, and I close my eyes again. The flashes of the camera are taking me away from myself (or is it back into myself?) , and I don't want to leave. I have another moment, another moment to enjoy this, to be here, wherever this here is. The pound of my feet, and the intake of breath, and the sting in my eyes is all a part of it.

Sharon will probably call to congratulate me later, I think. That is pushed back down, back into the background. A picture of my wall at home comes up. It's in living room, where I never really spend time, anyway. Trophies, ribbons, and other memorabilia adorn the wall. I'll trade a few of my old medals for the one they'll give me today, put them in a drawer and put the new one up for a time. It doesn't matter, though.

Light bursts in my face, but it's not the cameras flashing. My body, which I've not felt for some time, comes crashing painfully back to reality. My legs burn, my knees hurt, my back, which has plagued me this training season, throbs sharply. I suck in air, which hurts for some reason. I don't know if I can take another step. But I'm already there, at least, 'there' being the finish line, the one set up by the race officials.

There are more flashes now, all around me, and the hum of the crowd explodes into a roar. My body would collapse, but there are many bodies around me, holding me up, guiding and pushing me. There, I see the race officials. Someone else gives me a cup of Gatorade and I gulp it.

Someone asks me how I feel having won. Another person asks if I'm proud to have another win under my belt. I mutter answers, smiling genially to them. They don't realise I met my goal well before the end of the race, that I reached Nirvana, at least for a short while, and that all this really doesn't matter. I'm not doing it for them.