



By

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You'd been staring at a wall in your office for what amount of time you weren't sure. Time slipped that way lately, as if behind a curtain then back out again as something else, here as an internet hole, there as a walk on your street you insisted on calling a hike with your wife and son, here as a book your eyes look at, that you don't comprehend, there as crippling depression, here as observing circling turkey vultures, there as your ever-imminent anxiety, here as a failed Zoom call, there as a home-schooling shift with your son, here as April, May already gone, there as the obsession over the body count, the nameless numbers rising on endless graphics of animated maps. Time was not on your side or anyone's, it was dreaming its waste with you, as

you, hidden and loud as the sun behind a cloud. You were thinking of when you were last in public. This wasn't counting the masked and panicked weekly grocery-store runs, or the post-office-box scramble, you with your precariously stacked boxes of the unessential, keeping as much distance as you could from anyone you saw, especially after hearing a podcast that introduced you to the disgusting idea

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of mouth rain. You don't even make eye contact with anyone anymore, so afraid are you of the spread.

The last mass-gathering public-type thing you'd done was running your first half marathon. There's your medal in your office, hung like a deer head. A half marathon doesn't sound like a whole lot, it just being the half, but it was a big deal to you, to run and run for 13 miles without stopping. When you first started training, you actually paid money to join a running team that gathered together and pumped you up about how grueling it all was. You did chants and listened to your team leaders rant about their race times and the superior foods and energy sources they carried in plastic sacks around their waists. You hated the

team training, so you quit and started to think of your whole body, and health, and routine, and running-songs playlist as the Team. You got up early to run, and you went on more than just one run a day sometimes. You kept to the mileage you planned, and kept to the diet prescribed by the app you downloaded to train — the app then was also part of the Team. The Team kept its promises to itself. The Team was your heart keeping healthy and your lungs keeping clear and your determination remaining determined to do this thing you decided you needed to do for reasons you don't even remember.

Running is surely as old as legs, and you'd been doing it yourself for quite a while, mostly to stave off the ever-encroaching pounds that come with age,

but running to race was new, running for the distance, for a time, to cross the finish line, this was a strange kind of obligation you'd taken on, a mantle, a goal with a finish line. Running before modern times was serious business; it was running away or toward something with urgency, hunting, being hunted, or delivering a critical message. The first official marathon happened at the 1896 Olympics and was won by a Greek mailman. The race length was a nod to the Ancient Greek legend of a runner who'd been running a message about victory just before collapsing and dying right then and there. There could be countless other examples of ancient running — surely Indians were running all over American countrysides before Cortés brought

Iberian horses to Florida in 1519 — and yet you are stuck with the image of the Indian on horseback, and when the image should represent Native people's sheer adaptability, it stands for the static, dead Indian. You've always known this image to reflect an aspect of you that was both true and not true, some kind of centaurian truth, because your dad is Native American, a Cheyenne Indian, and your mom is white, and both of them were runners, which is why you ever even thought to run in the first place, but regardless of ancient running and family heritage, and half-truths, there was no way to really know what kinds of running activities humans were up to since the beginning of legs.

After the race you went back up the mountain to where you moved when Oakland became a cost you

couldn't afford five years ago. You went back up to isolation, and you were mostly safe from what others had to risk being together so closely in cities. But after the race, you were done running. The world came to a screeching halt, and so did your good feelings about it being a worthy endeavor, something worth working for. When the old white monsters at the top threw crumbs and ate heartily from the ridiculous plate that was the stimulus package, you felt the sick need to stop everything and watch it all burn, watch it lose its breath. With all the talking heads talking their talk, saying almost nothing, all you could do was watch, and it's all you did, all you felt you could do, which felt like doing something even though it was doing nothing, to watch, to listen,

to read the news like something new might come of it more than new death, even while you thought the deaths could mean the old white monsters would suffer, but they didn't, and it turned out to be the same people who'd always suffered at the expense of the pigs having more than their fair share of the crop, slop to them because they didn't need it, a level of greed so beyond need you couldn't even conceptualize it. It was all in the name of freedom. You were taught that in school, and it was written in textbooks, the sanctimony of the free market, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, which referred and still refers to Indians as merciless savages.

The new Team was your family, the one you're at home with now. This was your wife, and your son,

your sister-in-law and her two teenage girls. It was isolation itself, what you did with it, against it. The new Team was not running, it was planning meals together and sharing news of the outside world as read about and listened to from the inside of your insular lives, from the inside of your Bluetooth bass-heavy headphones. The new Team was the new future, which was yet to be determined, which seemed to be decided by individual communities and whether they believed in the number of lives lost and how it related to them. Your new Team was made up of front-line workers scanning your groceries and delivering your deliveries. It was made up of your old family, the one that had been broken up for so long it seemed absurd to even think of picking up

the pieces, not to mention putting them back together. You were learning Cheyenne together, from your dad. It was his first language, and your sister had become fluent, and understanding a new language felt like something everyone needed to be thinking about, given that you'd lost the thread of truth, somewhere back when you thought you believed anymore in anything close to hope. Was it before Obama, or during Obama, or after Obama, this all was an important point in time to understand where you stood, what you understood to mean the future of the country, which flag you stood under, and what did it mean that white people were moving toward the minority — never mind hope, never mind prosperity, would you survive? No, you didn't run anymore, and it showed, and you

showered maybe once a week, and forgot about your teeth. You drank too much, and smoked more cigarettes than ever. You would improve once things seemed to improve, once you got a glimmer of hope from the news; you're watching, something will come, a cure, a drop in numbers, a miracle drug, antibodies, something, anything else.

You're back at the wall, staring at it, unable to do anything but watch. It was the Teamwork being done by the whole new world, all those not directly affected, to watch and wait, to stay put, it would be a marathon, all this isolation, but it was the only way the Team could make it, humans, the whole damn race.

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