

The other students were sprawled out on the grassy hill beside the bleachers. They were grouped in clusters according to their affiliation. Gus did not have an affiliation. One of the clusters was out of view behind the bleachers passing around an aluminum, hockey puck shaped can and packing little snus pouches into their lower lips. Gus eventually rounds the bend and hits the first long stretch of track.

“Last one, come on now.”

Everything the instructor yells out sounds hallucinatory and far away. The sun glimmers in the sweat of Gus’s forehead. He can hear the clusters of other students chattering next to the bleachers, but they too sound far away, and as his respirations get sharper and closer together he can feel a mounting pressure inside his head — his sinuses it feels like, and the noise of his environment is compressed into a high-pitched ringing. The students who had been packing snus were now belly up in the grass, the white sun hanging over them. One of them had become dizzy and had his head and neck lowered, heaving into a metal drum at the bottom of the bleachers.

Gus reaches the end of the long stretch and begins to round the curve of track at the far end of the field, opposite the instructor and the other students. The instructor’s posture is dedicated to him. Presidential fitness, that’s what he is dedicated to: a stately, objective measure that every student is entitled to. Even heavysset Gus, he thought, could attain it. He thought about how he had begun referring to Gus privately, to people that were not Gus, as *heavysset* Gus, and couldn’t pin down when he’d started doing it.

Twenty-three minutes is how long it had been since Gus started. He felt himself running through sand. The other students had finished in, at most, twelve minutes, and the fastest, in about seven.

Gus feels the prickly feeling in his left hand, the one he gets when he sleeps with his arm under his pillow. One of the snus-lipped students gets up off the hill, buzzing, and starts running back and forth across fifteen feet of track, his left arm down straight and his right arm crossed over holding his left bicep. The disparate clusters on the hill all slowly begin to notice and make the connection, their heads turning toward Gus for comparison, who is making his way around the near-side of the bend. The running student at the bottom of the hill feels the other affiliations gradually tuning in and begins to increasingly ham it up. He tilts his chin higher, mouth open, exaggerated breathing.

Gus feels the pressure that made his head feel like stretched plastic move into his neck, and then into the left side of his breast. The instructor turns, for the first time, away from Gus and toward the growing ruckus behind him. Another boy from the snus-lipped affiliation peels off the hill and begins running back and forth, right arm to left bicep, just like the first. The instructor wanted right then to tell them to knock it off, he wanted to call them block heads and threaten that if they don't knock it off he'll, so on and so forth. He thought about making them run some more. There was time. And he thought about how heavysset Gus would be finished soon and he'd be able to sit and watch the nicotine buzzed punks do four more laps around the track, and that within this, somewhere, there might be some sort of redemptive quality to his actions. When did he start referring to him mentally as *heavysset* Gus?

“Hey cut—” he began, but each syllable became syphoned into the noise of the dumb spectacle, and the instructor stood motionless and stammering. Students from every affiliation were now at their feet, clamoring, wrapped in total mutiny. Two more students, lanky, ribbed blond boys, had joined at the bottom of the hill, and the four boys, all holding tightly their left

arm in their right, were now running around and around in a tight circle, their heads cocked, breathing mercilessly toward the sky.

Gus felt his heels slipping out of his untied shoes with every movement forward. No one was looking in his direction anymore. He could have been totally alone. For the first time since he'd started, he felt divorced from himself, weightless, hovering above his own panting, struggling body. He looked immediately ahead at the mutiny, surrounded in his vision by a dark vignette. The instructor, having surrendered to the affiliations, turned again toward Gus, now only thirty or so feet away. "That's it Gus atta boy, that's it."

One of the blond boys met Gus's eyes and stopped running, his arm falling limply back to his side. The three others, becoming aware once again of their existence outside of the spectacle, also stopped to watch, shifting the entire collective focus of the hill away from themselves and onto Gus. The only noise, now, was Gus's narrow breathing as he closed in. He kept his gaze straight ahead, which now no longer included the instructor or the snus-lipped punks or anyone on the hill as he slowly moved past them, but instead was set absently on the hazy and distant horizon, the peaks of houses against a dull white.

"Gus you're all done buddy, that's it, that's four." But Gus, still divorced from bodily decision, kept moving. Not toward the horizon, not toward anything at all. The pressure was not gone but no longer felt. All they could see was his back, the grey shirt darkened by sweat in between his shoulder blades and down to the waistband of his shorts, some nebulous form. They watched it move away from them, gradually getting smaller, the form, and the instructor feared that by speaking he would interrupt some delicate process, objects becoming indistinct shapes. And so he didn't tell Gus to stop — he didn't say anything at all. And collectively the clusters on

the hill, the members of frail affiliations, watched as the nebulous form, the dampened grey, completely assimilated.