

Shana (Refuse)

by J. E. Cammon

Papa said he'd be in the stands watching: section H, 5th row, seat 35. During warmups, she had looked, during stretches, she had looked, but she had stopped looking right before the race. "Don't worry about me," he had said. "Focus on the race," so when the man had said on your mark, she was already looking down at her stance, and the vanishing point at the finish line. "You not so fast that you can win looking up into the bleachers. Not yet" With the gunshot came consciousness, and her father's voice again.

"Rita! Rita stay with me!" he yelled, holding her face with his hands, those big, strong hands of his, one he used to hold her while the other kneaded the bread for the morning. "Rita!" with his voice came the memory of the earth moving beneath the water, the bridge, their van. Some kind of way she had ended up soaked. How had she ended up soaked; she looked down. "No, no!" her father yelled, holding her face. But she had already seen the wound coloring the water. Her father's trusty light made the murky water red. Strangely, she wasn't afraid. It was just a dream, after all. She looked at her father, then the underside of the bridge, then blackness. When had the bridge cracked and broken like a breakfast egg?

Her feet pulled at the track like arms on a rope. Arms and fingers and legs flitted into the periphery of her vision. Once, she had tried explaining it to Papa: it was like pushing up from the bottom of the lake towards the sun. The whole body was helping her rise to the surface. She clawed for the finish line like it was air. Nearer and nearer she surged, then the dream came back.

"Help, help please!" Papa was saying. People were coming, sloshing

through the river water. The one in front, she noted, had the look of a sprinter; he was lithe and toned. Maybe he was going to nationals, too. "She's hurt," her father tried to say so she couldn't hear. He had stood up, and half-stepped away, but stayed holding her hand; she smiled. Not wanting her to hear him, but not leaving her, either. He had been such a mess after Mama died; she told him so often. The sprinter man, standing in the water, looking down at her, paused before reaching into a case that was strapped to his shoulders. Again, he hesitated before handing Papa a little black ribbon. "That's to stay with her," he said, his voice going quieter and quieter, "for when the authorities come." He tried to leave, but Papa dropped her hand to grab the man with both of his strong ones. She had never seen anyone ever refuse her Papa. She didn't much like this dream; she drifted off.

She couldn't see, but she could hear him cheering for her, over everything. He was screaming her name. She'd knew he'd make it.

