

All Her Ribbons

by Kim Chinquee

He said he needed her, and she wiped her face a little, stepping to the in-lane, closer to the tundra.

She'd told him she was quitting, tired of being laughed at. She was always last. She said the distance was too long, and she couldn't even finish without stopping, couldn't do the workouts without walking.

He wore those running shorts that rose too high, flapping up when you went faster and the wind blew. His hair made him look like Elvis. He should have been a wrestler.

He said, Do you want to be a quitter?

Everyone was gone now and she told him she felt foolish. It was just running. It wasn't hard.

You're not always last, he said. She beat someone in the last meet. He said, That was really something.

He said, "Someone has to be last."

He said, "You don't always have to win."

He said, "You really want to be a quitter?"

She figured no one really cared and it was her decision. At home, her father ran around with knives falling from his pockets, and her mother couldn't live without Chianti. At mealtimes, she sat on her hands, looking out at the gate that kept in all the cattle.

The coach said, "And who cares if someone's laughing? That's a silly reason to quit."

She watched him fly away then. He went fast. He tripped on a hurdle.

