

Name _____

Date _____

The Winner

I ran across the finish line and everybody cheered. The race was finally finished, and it was still drizzling outside. The rain was coming down very slowly, making it look as though we were trapped inside a giant cloud. I looked around at the other runners. They were all cold and tired and happy to be finished. Some people were giving out hot chocolate and it looked good so I decided to get myself a cup. The hot cup felt like fire in my frozen hands. After a while it cooled down, and slowly I drank. It tasted good.

Just then, someone touched my shoulder and I turned around to see that it was Genevieve.

"Good job!" she said enthusiastically.

"Thanks," I said, feeling so cold and tired I could hardly talk.

"I bet that tastes good," she said, pointing to the hot chocolate. "Yes, it does," I said. "How did you do?"

"What," she said, "In the race?" "Yeah."

"Oh," she said, "I did all right." We stood there for a few minutes, long enough for me to realize I was shivering. I felt like I was getting sick. "So," Genevieve said, "want to get out of this rain?"

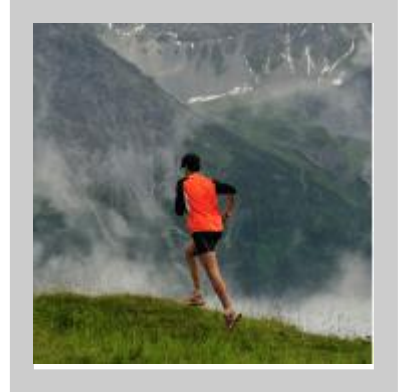
"Sure," I said immediately, sounding perhaps a bit too eager.

We walked down the hill to my car, which sat slumped under the branch of a big oak tree. A mud puddle had formed around it and we had to tiptoe or our shoes would get all muddy. Arriving at the driver's side door, I unlocked the car and sat—fell—onto the hard leather seat, rubbing my hands together, trying to get warm. I turned the key and the engine started. After a while, sweet, warm air began pouring out of the vents. I felt sleepy sitting back in the seat, nearly nodding off, until I noticed something from the corner of my eye. A man was running down the hill, waving his arms. "Wait!" he was saying. It looked like he was talking to us.

I cracked the window, just enough to talk without letting the rain in. "What?" I said, looking at him, perplexed, unable to figure out what he was doing. Without answering, he glanced inside the car and walked over to the passenger side. He knocked on the window and held something up in his hand and courteously Genevieve opened the door to address him.

"You forgot this," he said, handing her a shiny gold medallion. It took a moment for me to comprehend what it was: a medal, first place. He smiled, waved goodbye, and tiptoed back up the hill. I still didn't understand what had just happened. Genevieve closed the door and sat back in her seat. She tucked the medal away inside a pocket just as I turned to face her.

"You won?" I asked her, incredulously.



"Oh. Yeah," she said, nearly rolling her eyes.

"Oh," I said, surprised. "Wow."

She didn't elaborate. She didn't need to. And it was in that moment that I realized Genevieve was different. Not different, but she just wasn't really who I thought she was.

The car interior went quiet and all I could hear was the sound of the rain falling gently upon the windshield. We sat there watching it form little rivers as it raced down the glass. The warm air coming out of the vents felt so good, I don't think either of us wanted to move. We just sat there. After while, I started to feel a little embarrassed, and I think Genevieve knew what I was thinking. Then she looked at me.

"Want to get some lunch?" she said. Her voice, breaking the silence, sounded like a hammer coming down upon a sheet of glass.

"What?" I said. It took me a second to register her

suggestion. "Like a sandwich or something."

"Oh," I said. The sound of food made my stomach rumble. "Sure." I put the car in reverse and we slogged our way out of the muddy parking lot.