

QUITTER

Coach calls me a quitter.

He mutters it under his breath
loud enough for me to hear,
but quiet enough
so no one knows
when I prove him wrong.

Junior year of high school, we had a tough gym teacher. He made us run on the hottest days till we dropped—or vomited, or cried, or bled. I often had nose bleeds, bad ones. Nothing would make the blood stop for ten or fifteen minutes. I'd plug my nostrils with tissue and tip my head back, pressing hard at the bridge of my nose and swallowing clots of blood. This was when I lived in Walnut, where Stage 1 Smog Alerts are common. We'd be struggling, wheezing in the thick, brown, soupy air, but our P.E. teacher didn't care. Worse yet, maybe, he did care; I think he wanted us to struggle because he thought it would make us stronger.

In a weird way, it did make me stronger. I decided to start running at night, when it was easier to breathe, so I could build up my stamina and then run during P.E. without embarrassing myself. I started with a mile, then two, and worked my way up to five miles a night. Then I made my mistake. I told my parents I wanted to try out for the cross country team.

I'll remind you: I was a little plump. My mother would say "chubby" or "roly-poly"; my father just used the word "fat," very often in the phrase, "Move your fat ***" (even though it was my belly that was fat, not my rear). I had lost weight from the nightly running, but they didn't notice. In fact, they seemed to have forgotten that I had been doing nightly running at all when they said, *Track team? You gotta be kidding. You're so slow. You can't run.* So I quit thinking about it. Just like that, I quit before I even got started.

*Is there something you would like to try to do?
Where can you find support
to help you make it happen?*