

Dead Last

written by

Rob Herzog

Chicago, Illinois
robherzog@hotmail.com

FADE IN:

EXT. PARK RUNNING PATH/5K RACE COURSE - DAY

Four hard-core 5K RACERS dash toward the finish line.

The fourth place runner, long-limbed ADRIAN SHAW, 30, makes a surge: striding, pumping his arms, fighting through the pain.

Just as he closes in, the trio ahead of him throttles into a higher gear.

Adrian loses ground, fights to keep up, falls short.

The first two runners cross the finish line, arms raised.

The third-place runner glances over his shoulder at Adrian and glides unchallenged across the line.

Devastated, Adrian breaks stride and slows to a walk.

Sucking air, hands on his hips, he comes to a dead stop--only about ten feet away from the finish.

Spectators yell encouragement to him, but he doesn't budge. He keeps his head low, sweat dripping off his dark hair.

Two more RUNNERS zoom by.

A male SPECTATOR steps onto the course to check on Adrian.

SPECTATOR

Hey, are you okay, man? You're almost there.

Adrian keeps his eyes down.

SPECTATOR

Are you hurt?

Adrian struggles for words. He shakes his head: No.

SPECTATOR

Need water?

ADRIAN

I beat all those guys last year. I was faster than all of them.

Confusion from the spectator. Three more runners pass Adrian.

ADRIAN

What's wrong with me?

Adrian's eyes contain frustration, fatigue, and bewilderment.

ADRIAN

I'm getting worse. I'm sliding.

SPECTATOR

You're top ten, man. You can just walk across the finish if you want.

ADRIAN

I'm going backwards.

Adrian turns his back to the finish line.

A half dozen more runners blow by him.

Adrian takes a few tentative steps--not toward the finish line, but away from it.

He picks up his pace, running in the wrong direction.

The runners who pass Adrian look at him strangely: Where is this guy going?

EXT. 5K COURSE: RESIDENTIAL (A MILE FROM FINISH LINE) - DAY

Like a salmon swimming upstream, Adrian continues his wrong way race.

So many runners in the middle of the pack. Weekend warriors.

Adrian zig-zags through the clusters, drawing confused looks.

AMUSED RUNNER

Wrong way, dummy.

Adrian doesn't answer. He picks up his pace.

EXT. 5K COURSE: RESIDENTIAL (FARTHER FROM FINISH LINE) - DAY

Adrian jogs against a sea of walkers. This group is full of smiles, just happy to be getting some air on a nice day.

They, too, shoot Adrian strange looks as he passes.

Adrian spots a church.

He jogs to a clothing donation box in the parking lot.

Sweating, tired, he removes his running shoes and flings one into the donation box.

When Adrian throws his second shoe, it hits the side of the box and bounces back into his face. With a humiliated grunt, he continues the wrong way.

His socks plop softly against the pavement as he runs.

After a dozen strides, Adrian sees an active water sprinkler on somebody's front lawn.

He rushes onto it, letting the water arc onto him.

He lies flat on the lawn and gets drenched. A sad, defeated, wet, muddy, last-place failure.

Someone approaches from the race course: SUMMER SLOAN, 20s. She wears jean shorts and a pink T-shirt with a race number pinned on it. A lovely, kind face.

SUMMER

(to Adrian)

That's a good way to cool off. Why didn't I think of it?

A pleasant, genuine smile.

SUMMER

You need any help?

Rivulets of sprinkler water run down Adrian's face. He thinks.

ADRIAN

You can't help me. Everyone should stop asking.

SUMMER

I'm sorry. You're having a personal moment. That's cool.

Her legs get sprayed with water and she laughs.

SUMMER

Well, if you get tired of the sprinkler, you're welcome to join me and my neighbor on the rest of the walk.

She points to silver-haired DOROTHY BOTTOMS, 60s, standing on the course, holding a walking stick.

SUMMER

Her name is Dorothy and she lives in the apartment next to mine. She asked if I'd join her on the 5K walk, and I agreed, even though I don't usually do this sort of thing. We're taking it slow. My name is Summer, by the way.

ADRIAN

You go on without me. I'd be crappy company.

SUMMER

What's your name?

Adrian frowns. Summer scans the race bib pinned to his shirt.

SUMMER

You're bib number 114.

Adrian nods.

SUMMER

Okay. I'll let you soak up the rays.

Summer waves and strolls back to Dorothy. They continue their slow walk on the 5K course.

Sopping wet, Adrian watches them go.

After a moment, Summer and Dorothy hear wet athletic socks slapping against the pavement. It's Adrian.

ADRIAN

Hey. I'm going to take you up on your offer.

SUMMER

Ah, look. We've got company, Dorothy. It's number 114.

DOROTHY

He's a wet tuna.

LATER

The trio walks slowly on a different section of the course.

SUMMER

They should give you an award for doing this course twice.

ADRIAN
I'd never accept it.

He licks his lips and admits the truth:

ADRIAN
I've got a problem with living up
to my own expectations.

SUMMER
Jeez, obviously.

ADRIAN
I melt down when things don't go
perfectly.

Grimaces.

ADRIAN
What if I can't keep up anymore?

SUMMER
You should ask some questions.

ADRIAN
Yeah. Am I not training the right
way? Should I switch shoes? Am I
having a midlife crisis?

SUMMER
No. Don't ask yourself questions.
Ask me some questions.

Confusion spreads on Adrian's face.

SUMMER
We're walking together. Don't you
want to know anything about me?

ADRIAN
Uh.

Dorothy pokes Adrian.

DOROTHY
World don't revolve around you, wet
tuna.

Adrian nods.

DOROTHY

'Cause it revolves around me:
Dorothy Bottoms--sixty six years
old. I'm number one around here,
not you.

ADRIAN

Okay. I got it.

DOROTHY

Now ask Summer a question. We ain't
got all day.

ADRIAN

All right. Summer, do you like
movies?

She smiles.

SUMMER

Pretty in Pink. Breakfast Club.
Poltergeist. Footloose...

DOROTHY

You opened the damn floodgates.

LATER

The trio get to the finish line. A few spectators are still
there, but most have gone off for water or post-race snack.

Adrian holds his hand out, letting Summer and Dorothy finish
ahead of him.

He follows them: dead last.

Summer gives Dorothy a high five. The whirls and gives one to
Adrian.

A tired smile flashes across his face.

EXT. SNACK AREA - DAY

Dorothy, Summer, and Adrian sip water and eat and eat bagels
and bananas with the other runners.

Adrian shuffles a bit.

ADRIAN

I should get going.

SUMMER

Okay. Cool.

He shuffles some more.

ADRIAN

Maybe I could get your phone number
and, uh, we could walk around some
more.

Summer scrunches her nose like she's sniffed something awful.

SUMMER

Are you serious?

Uh. Adrian stumbles for words.

SUMMER

You took last place. Why would I
hang out with a guy who took last?

He sags.

SUMMER

(smiling)

Hey, I'm just kidding, Adrian. I'd
love to walk with you.

He laughs.

SUMMER

But first we've got to find you
some shoes.

He looks down at his wet socks.

ADRIAN

Yep.

The sun shines brightly on both of them.

FADE OUT: