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## His Final 10k

After his final race, we five runners  
stood in a circle, arms wrapped around  
one another's shoulders- five men  
shaped by eight years of running together.  
Cory's maroon and white jersey  
dripped down, as wet as the tears he held back  
when he choked out, "I love you guys,"  
in a voice that struggled more in that moment  
than Cory five minutes ago  
when he unleashed the final kick  
of his final 10k, and moved on  
from competitive running.

Tight in that circle, I watched a tear  
leak down his face, one that  
escaped his masculine impulse to hold it back  
by any means necessary. As that tear rolled  
down his cheek, I remembered we five  
running in the rain, hopping rusty guard rails,  
just a few hot summers ago  
in what we would later call  
"The three bridges in a rainstorm run."

The trees were a little more orange that day  
as rain pooled in their cupping leaves  
and then dumped them down  
to the hard pavement below.

That day we talked about aspirations,  
dreams, and our lives yet to come. Who

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to have kids? Who would be the one living in  
a trailer park, their dog tied to a pole,  
running in a circle so many times the grass  
faded away and left a perfect circle of dust?

The five crossed three wooden bridges that day-  
felt them knock under our feet,  
as the rain poured down and we knew  
we could outlast anything that God  
would throw at us. But, today Cory crossed  
a fourth bridge. His running career  
has come to the end. No longer will he feel  
the intensity before the starter's gun. He won't  
throw elbows, or talk shit, or  
feel the glory in seeing the finish line  
and fire in his stomach, burn down  
the last quarter mile. His running career  
has all too suddenly come to a close.

Soon, Cory will wear a wedding  
band on his finger and his children  
will call me Uncle Brian as they ask me  
to play tag in the living room. Soon,  
he will take on other names-  
names like "honey" and "dad."  
"Who the fuck is Cory?" they'll say,  
those snot nosed brats that took him away.

We all have chain link fence scars,  
dog bitten calves, and big toes  
that press inward from five thousand miles  
of running down roads like the one

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we ran down that day. But, no matter how far apart,  
or how many little Corys we have, nothing  
will change the way that those five,  
each supporting one another,  
ran into a cross country brotherhood

together.

- Brian Dunn