

Run On

Susan Holbrook

Dunes and back is 8K, Sleepy Hollow and back is 9K, Black Willow 15. Every route a straight there-and-back, I learn to gauge when I am half-baked. Top of the foot, left hip, right shoulder, these are the spots where, in a Tylenol commercial, the scarlet burrs would flash. Talking about running is as tedious as telling someone your dreams; taking my cue from the Surrealists, I do it anyway. As a girl I heard that runners became addicted to the dolphins. Oxygen in, Carbon Dioxide out. Coal in, Sulphur Dioxide out. Uranium in, radioactivity out. Fukushima's in, Chernobyl's out. The only other time I could have so blithely shed a toenail was in childbirth. My shadow drags me by the ankles along the asphalt road, and in that darker faster body pale pebbles and twigs appear to rain down inexorably, a diagram of digestion, a snowglobe. Today there is a 20K charity run, and although I am neither running 20K nor wearing an orange race bib—orange could mean leukemia, MS, the NDP, motorcycle safety or feral cats—some assume I'm participating and sweatily shout *You're half way there!* *Courage, sister!* and I, too tired to pant out a confession, just raise my fist *Woo!* Point Pelee is biodiversity's tall tale: cattails and lopseed to scalloped sand to swamp bush swallowtails to Northern forest hugger-mugger to beach scree, cactus mats, red cedar savannah, vine-hung Carolinian—you can imagine you've run a long way. Running was supposed to be about my own steam but I begin to suspect I am in thrall to something. Kilometers to the tip: 10. Kilometers to the liquor store: 6.9. Kilometers to the Fermi Nuclear Plant: 61.4. Kilometers to the Davis-Besse Nuclear Plant: 61.5. Thanks to an athletic brother I trained the next lane over from Victor Davis, learned my strokes from an Olympian named 'El Profe', spent hours before and after school in the pool. Never

won a race, not even on Track & Field day, when the kids who ate Lucky Charms and watched Hogan's Heroes after school left me in their dust. One leg slightly shorter than the other, I run iambically. Weaker than a newborn possum, weaker even than the entire Tablespoon of possums lifting en masse. At eight years old I filled out Charles Atlas's comic book ad, □ bulkier arms □ broader chest and back □ tireless legs □ magnetic personality. I was tired of being HALF A MAN! My father, marking calculus exams at the kitchen table and probably needing a laugh, was asked for a stamp. Legs go on without me: a heartbeat, a dog, a 2-stroke engine. Running from, running to. Dogged or dogged. To get the outside inside. To make heat. To the sandpit at the tip, to be the southernmost woman in Canada. You could win this valuable trophy. From grading essays. From Sometimes Joyce uses the colour red to represent blood, such as in the scene where Stephen bleeds and it is described as being "red." From Skype. From an ache without a reason. For all they know I'm a great athlete recovering from an injury. Every day I walk up and hoist my pass for the kiosk attendant, lovely in her sand-coloured warden shirt, and then start running, into the park and back, and after a while she knows me and I don't even have to show my pass, but I do, because I don't just run into the woods without permission, and weeks go by her daily smile and wave, a grin through the glass, a two-handed flap, a curled-finger air-caress, an intimate nod, There goes the runner, she thinks, wowed by my athleticism and high-tech shoes, and after a month she starts checking her watch around the time of my return, develops a little crush on that formidable woman who is old enough to be her mother probably but can run for a solid hour or more and look at those ripped calves! One day as I'm approaching the end, slowing, hot-cheeked and radiating triumph, the attendant is outside of her kiosk, she's fiddling with the green sign, a ruse no doubt, and I turn down my iPod and she turns her handsome head to me and calls out, Have a nice walk? It's

supposed to be two steps each for inhale and exhale, like *Hey Hey, Ho Ho!* (you can choose what's got to go!) but swimmers' lungs swallow up six beats, as in *Hey Hey Hey* and *Ho Ho Ho*, as in *Fat Albert* and *Santa Claus*, both of whom would beat me in a race. The trunk rises to bronchi, to bronchioles, to clusters of alveoli, which drop to the road with a sigh. Huff and puff. Puff n' Stuff. Hufflepuff. For all they know I am a slow-mo Englishman on the beach in *Chariots of Fire*. In 1790 the Caldwell First Nation ceded Point Pelee to the government in a treaty they didn't sign. FirstEnergy Corp. fell to \$43.76 at the close in New York after a report that engineers discovered a 30-foot hairline crack in the concrete shell of its Davis-Besse nuclear plant. The green sign says The Stable Flies Are Biting. Buffeting sounds too soft for what the lake wind is doing. The run on sentence takes no breaks. In the 1950s thousands of people sardined onto the beaches in polka dot bikinis and jolly clouds of DDT. With the hot dog and beer stands gone, the beach is bare now, on the horizon twin plumes from the Fermi dragon's Northward snout. Heffalump. Hasselhoff. Puffin fluff. Whiffenpoof. Among the Canada geese, a white swan. We really love Swarovski's luminous and modern statement piece that celebrates the wonder of nature, that it's 1-ply and breaks down easily in today's low-flow toilet systems. We love that it's soft and solid. In thrall to oxygen. The green sign says Actually You Are *Older Than My Mother*. The sky is becoming less Sky blue. It's Cobalt blue but I say who would pay six dollars and forty cents admission to a National park just to rape a jogger. There's one road, same in and out, no getaways, who would pay, thank the kiosk attendant for the owling map, park the car Jazz blue by the side of the road which you're not supposed to do anyway and there French Navy blue are wardens patrolling for that, drag a jogger Denim blue into the woods, risk being seen leaving Ultramarine by the same attendant, and if he can see Ink my reflective piping surely he'll know Midnight I can take him Black blue at the

bottom of a well. Running for President. Running for Dummies. Running out of oil. Are we running out of oil and gas? Are we running out of IP addresses? Time is running out for Greece. Popeye's ran out of chicken yesterday in Rochester, NY following a special on chicken. Running for the cure. Exactly what happens if we run out of water? It's running in the background of your iPhone. The passing cars wag their windshield wipers at me but I laugh at the sleet in my moisture wick technology. A late-starter and life-long weakling, I have no varsity records to haunt me. A rush from behind and then the great yellow claws before my eyes, only just curling up from an octave-wide span the raptor prepared before, finding the weird neon rabbit too large to pluck, she thought better of it. In the morning and evening, tree trunk shadows cut across the road, hair standing on end, tamed only briefly at noon by the licked palm of the sun. Scan the hoof-pocked shoulder for things I've lost: park pass, glove, 1-2% of muscle mass every year after 40. Running on solar energy. Just leave the car running. Other locations ran out of chicken too, the 4.99 special too good to pass up. Running on fumes. Running on JavaScript. California at Risk of Running Out of Money by March. Windsor-Detroit Running Out of People. Running out of breath. Running out of bandwidth. Are we running out of stuff? You left the water running. We just kinda ran out of gas. Squirrels rush around, carbo loading. I consider walking and the turkey vultures on the bare silver branch turn, adjust their footing, one lifts her dusty wing like a sail. Dummies for President. You left the money running. Oil and gas running out of grease. Before I lace up my Just Do Its I pull on my Designed for Sport, Crafted for Life and if it's cold my Refuse to Compromise with Because We Take Your Running as Seriously as Our Own and, to keep my head warm, Let's Make Excellent Happen and Don't Just Go With It, Run with It and under all that, if you must know, I'm Bringing the Legacy into the Present and America's First Name in Comfort Since 1901. Winter-bleached marsh reeds

still 2 metres high all around, we traverse the boardwalk, fleas on a golden dog. Popeye running out of breath. Olive Oyl running out of gas. The North wind sculpts the Davis-Besse plume into a rearing caterpillar. If I kept going I could circle the Earth in 208.7 days. Let me just charge my iPod. Laid end to end, you could circle the Earth with: the nerves in your body; a day's worth of oil consumption, in 55-gallon steel drums; a year's worth of discarded ink cartridges; a day's worth of plastic water bottles dropped in U.S. landfills; ¼ of all Barbie dolls manufactured; 1/5 of the eggs produced in North Carolina in 1980; 2.2 million human small intestines. It's amazing there's anywhere to step. Breath too good to pass up. Fumes for breath. Breath for bandwidth. It's breathing in the background of your iPhone. Davis-Besse was shuttered for more than three months in 2010 after workers discovered cooling water leaking through cracks in some reactor-head nozzles. A scrap of mink coat scuttles across the boardwalk. No choice but to run South, I can't reassure the doe—who glances back over her shoulder, trots ahead, glances back—that I'm not tracking her, can't avoid staring at the sun, the scene before me perforated with afterimages, an evershifting spray of blue-green bullet holes. Would you rather be an elite marathoner, vomit and pee in the street, never breaking pace, or the slower participant who can relax, wave to the fans, step in it. 4.99 for the cure. 4.99 for spinach. We just kinda ran out of IP addresses. IP for Popeye. Leaks and reactor corrosion prompted FirstEnergy to close the plant from 2002 to 2004, while the company retrained or replaced workers who ignored signs of damage. I know the lake froze overnight because legs hoisted the floating ducks. I am a cheetah and a bullet-train and I kick sand in faces! Once the leaves fall, all the nests are revealed, spots on a lung. Two steps forward, one sore back. I'll trade that raccoon my breathable mesh and responsive midsole for the ability to see with my hands. Litter depresses except for the mint Aero foil, evergreen. Flying squirrels don't, really, but naming goes a long long

way from canopy to forest floor. One nail would puncture a lung but you rest on a thousand points unharmed, because of the word ‘bed.’ Think up, think the roaring sun, think the inch taller, think sunlight swelling fog, think a dew-balloon glissading down a pine needle, hitting the gold back of a frog who jumpcuts into light in lycra shorts, think bed, think that sitting up in the dark and feeling for your socks and glasses is another kind of going to bed. Over the last decade, one resident ran out of Detroit every 22 minutes. Oil for president. Just leave Windsor-Detroit running. What happens if we run out of background? I never squandered the lucid dreams of my childhood, placing myself on my mark for the Running Long Jump and in mid leap flying just a touch, enough to win but not enough to arouse suspicion. The only monster on the predawn road is me, unable to avoid the snails popping underfoot. I am the worst nuisance on the beach! January’s paraffin lake, grey in the guttering sun. In the marsh a Great Northern Loon or Red-Breasted Merganser or jagged log or Doc Marten boot or boot with foot severed at the ankle cracking open into a squawk and flight at the skipped stones of collateral earbud music. Oil left the water running. Are we running out of solar? We just kinda chickened out. Do I stop at organ donation, or give them all of me so they can tort me into inch-thick slabs, organize me into drawers, invite medical students to gaze and gently prod and the ones who got into it for the money will be the worst lovers. Do not judge a person’s politics by their running iPod and anyway when Pit Bull said “I like that Dale Mama” (i.e. I like that skank) I thought he was saying “I like that Dalai Lama.” Kick the black ribbon of road behind me, then turn around and pull it all back into place before the warden comes by. The Composition teachers did warn us about the 1% inspiration 99% perspiration. Do I give a shit if the hot peppers drop off my ratemyprofessors page. Running time: 1 hr 26 min. Rated PG for scenes of peril and fantasy violence, brief crude humour, intense themes, mild language, depiction of a

smoking caterpillar. In thrall to the dolphins. But why did he ask the Dalai Lama to “bend it on over”? At 20 I wore roomy hippie smocks to protect myself from the panopticonic cultural surveillance of female bodies. Now I don’t care, deflecting the gaze with my skin-tight polypropylene leggings. It helps that nobody’s looking now.

Leaf pile: recto yellow, verso buff. Recto scarlet, verso plain brown wrapper. My feet strike the road and later the road strikes back, but in the delirious middle they high five for a while. I expend enough energy to power a head-mounted 100-watt lightbox sign that says Coke. Drawing a tree, we always forget the half living underground, the woman who runs upside-down below me, ploughing through packed earth, ambitious root. In 1922 the RCMP destroyed the root cellars of remaining Caldwell First Nation families to ensure they wouldn’t return. Rooted in, rooted out. The damaged structure poses no safety hazard to Davis-Besse, located 21 miles southeast of Toledo, said Jennifer Young, a FirstEnergy spokeswoman. Low on water the return trip is an Escher staircase. Poems either go too far or not far enough. Further warmer than farther. Farther further than father. Feathers fatter than either. The lake thaws, yanks their legs back under. Energy corporations always hire female spokespersons. I feel all apple pie about the tar sands. The ATV riders think I am crazy and I think they are crazy, each of us considering ourselves the one actually doing something. You move to the country for the stillness and peace or you move to the country so you can raise hell. You are neighbours. We believe the crack issues could be resolved relatively quickly, said Michael Worms, an analyst at BMO Capital Markets in New York. In thrall to it all. We hope to wake up manic enough.

Susan Holbrook

Susan Holbrook's poetry books are the Trillium-nominated *Joy Is So Exhausting* (Coach House 2009), the chapbook, *Good Egg Bad Seed* (Nomados 2004), and *misled* (Red Deer 1999), which was shortlisted for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award and the Stephan G. Stephansson Award. She lives in Leamington, Ontario and teaches North American literatures and Creative Writing at the University of Windsor. She recently co-edited *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson: Composition as Conversation* (Oxford U P, 2010).