

The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner

By Alan Sillitoe

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Perhaps one of the most revered works of fiction in the twentieth-century, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* is a modern classic about integrity, courage, and bucking the system. Its title story recounts the story of a reform school cross-country runner who seizes the perfect opportunity to defy the authority that governs his life. It is a pure masterpiece. From there the collection expands even further from the touching “On Saturday Afternoon” to the rollicking “The Decline and Fall and Frankie Buller.” Beloved for its lean prose, unforgettable protagonists, and real-life wisdom, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* captured the voice of a generation, and its poignant and empowering life lessons will continue to captivate and entertain readers for generations to come.

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The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner By Alan Sillitoe Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

“One of the best English writers of the day.”—*The New York Times Book Review*

“Sillitoe offers an authentic and vivacious portrait. . . . A sheer delight.”—*Saturday Review*

“A beautiful piece of work.”—*The Guardian*

“Brilliant.”—*The New Yorker*

“Mr. Sillitoe is a born writer, who knows his milieu and describes it with vivid, loving precision.” —*Daily Telegraph*

“There are few writers around who can rival Sillitoe when it comes to the complicated business of noticing things.” —*Literary Review*

“A master storyteller.” —*The Observer*

“Miles nearer the real thing than D.H. Lawrence's mystic, brooding working-men ever came.” —*Sunday Express*

About the Author

Alan Sillitoe was born in 1928, the son of a tannery worker. He left school at age fourteen to work in a factory. He was one of the working-class novelists who revitalized British fiction in the 1950s. His first novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was followed with the bestselling collection *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. He adapted both works for the screen in the early 1960s. He is the author of more than 40 works of prose, poetry, and drama.

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As soon as I got to Borstal they made me a long-distance cross-country runner. I suppose they thought I was just the build for it because I was long and skinny for my age (and still am) and in any case I didn't mind it much, to tell you the truth, because running had always been made much of in our family, especially running away from the police. I've always been a good runner, quick and with a big stride as well, the only trouble being that no matter how fast I run, and I did a very fair lick even though I do say so myself, it didn't stop me getting caught by the cops after that bakery job.

You might think it a bit rare, having long-distance cross-country runners in Borstal, thinking that the first thing a long-distance cross-country runner would do when they set him loose at them fields and woods would be to run as far away from the place as he could get on a bellyful of Borstal slumgullion-but you're wrong, and I'll tell you why. The first thing is that them bastards over us aren't as daft as they most of the time look, and for another thing I'm not so daft as I would look if I tried to make a break for it on my long-distance running, because to abscond and then get caught is nothing but a mug's game, and I'm not falling for it. Cunning is what counts in this life, and even that you've got to use in the slyest way you can; I'm telling you straight: they're cunning, and I'm cunning. If only 'them' and 'us' had the same ideas we'd get on like a house on fire, but they don't see eye to eye with us and we don't see eye to eye with them, so that's how it stands and how it will always stand. The one fact is that all of us are cunning, and because of this there's no

love lost between us. So the thing is that they know I won't try to get away from them: they sit there like spiders in that crumbly manor house, perched like jumped-up jackdaws on the roof, watching out over the drives and fields like German generals from the tops of tanks. And even when I jog-trot on behind a wood and they can't see me anymore they know my sweeping-brush head will bob along that hedge-top in an hour's time and that I'll report to the bloke on the gate. Because when on a raw and frosty morning I get up at five O'clock and stand shivering my belly off on the stone floor and all the rest still have another hour to snooze before the bells go, I slink downstairs through all the corridors to the big outside door with a permit running-card in my :fist, I feel like the first and last man on the world, both at once, if you can believe what I'm trying to say. I feel like the first man because I've hardly got a stitch on and am sent against the frozen fields in a shimmy and shorts-even the first poor bastard dropped on to the earth in midwinter knew how to make a suit of leaves, or how to skin a pterodactyl for a topcoat. But there I am, frozen stiff, with nothing to get me warm except a couple of hours' long-distance running before breakfast, not even a slice of bread-and-sheepdip. They're training me up fine for the big sports day when all the pig-faced snotty-nosed dukes and ladies-who can't add two and two together and would mess themselves like loonies if they didn't have slavies to beck-and-call--come and make speeches to us about sports being just the thing to get us leading an honest life and keep our itching finger-ends off them shop locks and safe handles and hairgrips to open gas meters. They give us a bit of blue ribbon and a cup for a prize after we've shagged ourselves out running or jumping, like race horses, only we don't get so well looked-after as race horses, that's the only thing.

So there I am, standing in the doorway in shimmy and shorts, not even a dry crust in my guts, looking out at frosty flowers on the ground. I suppose you think this is enough to make me cry? Not likely. Just because I feel like the first bloke in the world wouldn't make me bawl. It makes me feel fifty times better than when I'm cooped up in that dormitory with three hundred others. No, it's sometimes when I stand there feeling like the last man in the world that I don't feel so good. I feel like the last man in the world because I think that all those three hundred sleepers behind me are dead. They sleep so well I think that every scruffy head's kicked the bucket in the night and I'm the only one left, and when I look out into the bushes and frozen ponds I have the feeling that it's going to get colder and colder until everything I can see, meaning my red arms as well, is going to be covered with a thousand miles of ice, all the earth, right up to the sky and over every bit of land and sea. So I try to kick this feeling out and act like I'm the first man on earth. And that makes me feel good, so as soon as I'm steamed up en9ugh to get this feeling in me, I take a flying leap out of the doorway, and off I trot.

I'm in Essex. It's supposed to be a good Borstal, at least that's what the governor said to me when I got here from Nottingham. u We want to trust you while you are in this establishment," he said, smoothing out his newspaper with lily-white workless hands, while I read the big words upside down: Daily Telegraph. "If you play ball with us, we'll play ball with you." (Honest to God, you'd have thought it was going to be one long tennis match.) H We want hard honest work and we want good athletics,," he said as well. " And if you give us both these things you can be sure we'll do right by you and send you back into the world an honest man." Well, I could have died laughing, especially when straight after this I hear the barking sergeant-major's voice calling me and two others to attention and marching us off like we was Grenadier Guards. And when the governor kept saying how 4 we' wanted you to do this, and 4 we ' wanted you to do that, I kept looking round for the other blokes, wondering how many of them there was. Of course, I knew there were thousands of them, but as far as I knew only one was in the room. And there are thousands of them, all over the poxeaten country, in shops, offices, railway stations, cars, houses, pubs -In-law blokes like you and them, all on the watch for Outlaw blokes like me and us-and waiting to 'phone for the coppers as soon as we make a false move. And it'll always be there, I'll tell you that now, because I haven't finished making all my false moves yet, and I dare say I won't until I kick the bucket. If the In-laws are hoping to stop me making false moves they're wasting their time. They might as well stand me up against a wall and let fly with a dozen rifles. That's the only way they'll stop me, and a few million others. Because I've been doing a lot of thinking since

coming here. They can spy on us all day to see if we're pulling our puddings and if we're working good or doing our 4 athletics' but they can't make an X-ray of our guts to find out what we're telling ourselves. I've been asking myself all sorts of questions, and thinking about my life up to now. And I like doing all this. It's a treat. It passes the time away and don't make Borstal seem half so bad as the boys in our street used to say it was. And this long-distance running lark is 'the best of all, because it makes me think so good that I learn things even better than when I'm on my bed at night. And apart from that, what with thinking so much while I'm running I'm getting to be one of the best runners in the Borstal. I can go my five miles round better than anybody else I know.

So as soon as I tell myself I'm the first man ever to be dropped into the world, and as soon as I take that first flying leap out into the frosty grass of an early morning when even birds haven't the heart to whistle, I get to thinking, and that's what I like. I go my rounds in a dream, turning at lane or footpath corners without knowing I'm turning, leaping brooks without knowing they're there, and shouting good morning to the early cow-milker without seeing him. It's a treat, being a long-distance runner. out in the world by yourself with not a soul to make you bad-tempered or tell you what to do or that there's a shop to break and enter a bit back from the next street. Sometimes I think that I've never been so free as during that couple of hours when I'm trotting up the path out of the gates and turning by that bare-faced, big-bellied oak tree at the lane end. Everything's dead, but good, because it's dead before coming alive, not dead after being alive. That's how I look at it. Mind you, I often feel frozen stiff at first. I can't feel my hands or feet or flesh at all, like I'm a ghost who wouldn't know the earth was under him if he didn't see it now and again through the mist. But even though some people would call this frost-pain suffering if they wrote about it to their mams in a letter, I don't, because I know that in half an hour I'm going to be warm, that by the time I get to the main road and am turning on to the wheatfield footpath by the bus stop I'm going to feel as hot as a potbellied stove and as happy as a dog with a tin tail.

It's a good life, I'm saying to myself, if you don't give in to coppers and Borstal-bosses and the rest of them bastard-faced In-laws. Trot-trot-trot. Puff-puff-puff. Slap-slap-slap go my feet on the hard soil. Swish-swish-swish as my arms and side catch the bare branches of a bush. For I'm seventeen now, and when they let me out of this-if I don't make a break and see that things turn out otherwise-they'll try to get me in the army, and what's the difference between the army and this place I'm in now? They can't kid me, the bastards. I've seen the barracks near where I live, and if there weren't swaddies on guard outside with rifles you wouldn't know the difference between their high walls and the place I'm in now. Even though the swaddies come out at odd times a week for a pint of ale, so what? Don't I come out three mornings a week on my long-distance running, which is fifty times better than boozing. When they first said that I was to do my long-distance running without a guard pedalling beside me on a bike I couldn't believe it; but they called it a progressive and modern place, though they can't kid me because I know it's just like any other Borstal, going by the stories I've heard, except that they let me trot about like this. Borstal's Borstal no matter what they do; but anyway I moaned about it being a bit thick sending me out so early to run five miles on an empty stomach, until they talked me round to thinking it wasn't so bad-which I knew all the time-until they called me a good sport and patted me on the back when I said I'd do it and that I'd try to win them the Borstal Blue Ribbon Prize Cup For Long Distance Cross Country Running (All England). And now the governor talks to me when he comes on his rounds, almost as he'd talk to his prize race horse, if he had one.

All right, Smith? he asks.

" Yes, sir," I answer.

He flicks his grey moustache: How's the running coming along? "

I've set myself to trot round the grounds after dinner just to keep my hand in, sir," I tell him.

The pot-bellied pop-eyed bastard gets pleased at this: Good show. I know you'll get us that cup," he says.

And I swear under my breath: Like boggery, I will." No, I won't get them that cup, even though the stupid tash-twitching bastard has all his hopes in me. Because what does his barmy hope mean? I ask myself. Trot-trot-trot, slap-slap-slap, over the stream and into the wood where it's almost dark and frosty-dew twigs sting my legs. It don't mean a bloody thing to me, only to him, and it means as much to him as it would mean to me if I picked up the racing paper and put my bet on a hoss I didn't know, had never seen, and didn't care a sod if I ever did see. That's what it means to him. And I'll lose that race, because I'm not a race horse at all, and I'll let him know it when I'm about to get out~if I don't sling my hook even before the race. By Christ I will. I'm a human being and I've got thoughts and secrets and bloody life inside me that he doesn't know is there, and he'll never know what's there because he's stupid. I suppose you'll laugh at this, me saying the governor's a stupid bastard when I know hardly how to write and he can read and write and add-up like a professor. But what I say is true right enough. He's stupid, and I'm not, because I can see further into the likes of him than he can see into the likes of me. Admitted, we're both cunning, but I'm more cunning and I'll win in the end even if I die in gaol at eighty-two, because I'll have more fun and fire out of my life than he'll ever get out of his. He's read a thousand books I suppose, and for all I know he might even have written a few, but I know for a dead cert, as sure as I'm sitting here, that what I'm scribbling down is worth a million to what he could ever scribble down. I don't care what anybody says, but that's the truth and can't be denied. I know when he talks to me and I look into his army mug that I'm alive and he's dead.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Raymond Roth:

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to ready your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite e-book and reading a e-book. Beside you can solve your condition; you can add your knowledge by the guide entitled The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner. Try to stumble through book The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner as your close friend. It means that it can being your friend when you really feel alone and beside associated with course make you smarter than in the past. Yeah, it is very fortunated to suit your needs. The book makes you a lot more confidence because you can know every thing by the book. So , let us make new experience and also knowledge with this book.

Nathan Marker:

Spent a free time to be fun activity to accomplish! A lot of people spent their free time with their family, or their own friends. Usually they accomplishing activity like watching television, likely to beach, or picnic within the park. They actually doing same every week. Do you feel it? Would you like to something different to fill your current free time/ holiday? Could possibly be reading a book might be option to fill your free of charge time/ holiday. The first thing that you'll ask may be what kinds of guide that you should read. If you want to consider look for book, may be the guide untitled The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner can be excellent book to read. May be it is usually best activity to you.

Allen Ellis:

You can spend your free time to study this book this publication. This The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner is simple to bring you can read it in the park, in the beach, train along with soon. If you did not have got much space to bring the particular printed book, you can buy the e-book. It is make you much easier to read it. You can save typically the book in your smart phone. And so there are a lot of benefits that you will get when you buy this book.

David Furtado:

That guide can make you to feel relax. This particular book The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner was colourful and of course has pictures on there. As we know that book The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner has many kinds or genre. Start from kids until young adults. For example Naruto or Investigator Conan you can read and believe you are the character on there. Therefore not at all of book are make you bored, any it can make you feel happy, fun and relax. Try to choose the best book for you personally and try to like reading in which.

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