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Long Jog

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The Long Jog

Josh Matthews

Wearing tights in the night for the sake of observers,
I used to make the long jog around the familiar circular course enclosing our town’s only body of water, a run that sought to achieve the hormonal surge of euphoria on display in the movie Rocky II, in which Rocky races through the mean streets of Philadelphia so awesomely that he inspires a whole troop of children—a la the Pied Piper of Hamelin—to bound with him over wood benches, race through tunnels, and charge up the stairs of city hall, declaring to all the victory of the Jog as if the world should flood itself with the sweat of happy runners and the sound of cheering children.

My jog never featured sycophantic kids or horn-happy montage music. Instead I sucked wind hard and felt like collapsing after the first lap. Those who run know the call to quit incessantly trumpets from every cell in the body, as if we were not made to pound pavement or hack up and gulp down our own phlegm. Worse than that were the Rockys who passed me every night. I did not follow them with glee, as those movie kids did, but groaned and spat, then dashed after them fast to pass them up and demonstrate to those bastards how sloth and cowardice felt. I would not slow for them ever—no dream of a run together up the stairs of any stone symbol of government—rather, they deserved to consume the crud kicked up by my shoes.
The hope of a long jog is a vain one, the all-consumptive race to nowhere but the surgeon’s table for artificial joints and knees, and the extra calories that will find their way to hips and guts, no matter what. I run no longer. I have given that up. I have heeded the urge of the voice in the heart of my cells and the wood and the stone. I return to the natural call of the wild and reject the everyday circles and nineteen seventies fantasies of endless running. Yes, around that old course surely Rocky still jogs, vainly calling fools like me and children to hear his montage music and follow along. As he and his own run around the water, they may want to show up each other. But I will lean and loaf and play and eat. By them I will be passed up no more.