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## Long Jog

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# The Long Jog

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*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.