Monday Morning

Lauren Sippy
Concordia University - Portland
The moon looks like someone took a hole-punch to the sky—small and perfectly round, silvery-white against the purpling watercolor sky, spackled with pinprick stars. You can see the cold in the crisp clarity of the houses and the trees. Everything is quiet. Everyone is asleep—even I and Dad.

I am bundled from head to foot: jeans pulled over my pajama pants, two pair of socks, long-sleeve shirt, T-shirt, sweater (a hoodie advertising my year of graduation: 2006), Ryan’s hunting jacket, dollar store gloves, and a wool hat pulled low over my eyebrows making my forehead itch. I am ready for any level of cold but I still shiver as we step outside. Fortunately there is no wind.

Dad is lacing up his army boots. They are impractical but he is proud of them. He says that they symbolize the discipline it takes to get up and walk every morning at 4:30 am. I think the sleep in my eyes is symbol enough. Ever since my younger brother got into hunting, he and Dad have gone from tried and true city-slickers to woods-and-deer-fellows. I don’t know them sometimes. Ryan and I used to make fun of people from the country. Now he just makes fun of me.

Steam from our coffee cups twists and curls almost to the hole in the sky. We walk down the driveway, our shoes slapping against the pavement, making a ringing sound that is exclusive to cold weather.

There are a few lights on in the cul-de-sac. Microsoft and Boeing men and women are starting to wake up. Like us, they move with practiced silence as not to disturb their sleeping families or the sleeping world around them—those that are still blanketed by velvety night dreams. But the silent awake never seem to meet in their morning orbits. Only Dad and I connect before five o’clock.

Dad and I started this to talk, not as a father and daughter but as friends. Dad calls it a “parent free zone”—these walks. He should add that its child free too. We don’t talk about my grades or my messy room. Since he’s not lecturing I don’t have to play the role of sulky teenager.

Lectures aside, we talk about everything else. Some mornings are quieter; we barely have enough conversation to make it to the school and back. There are other mornings when we have to continue walking all the way up to the Golf Course Road before we both realize that we have to get ready for our day.

We have left the cul-de-sac now; the lights are behind us. Dad hugs me to him, sloshing my coffee over my gloves, making my hands reek of coffee, as we walk past the West’s dark hedge. It’s the perfect place for someone to hide and jump out. Newcastle is not a place where such things happen. Still, I shrink into Dad until we get to the street light on the corner.

We are leaving the neighborhood as we cross 135th—passing from the crowd of houses and neighbors to the thick, treey silhouettes—to head down the aptly named Narrow Winding Road.

The Narrow Winding Road is the last nod to Newcastle’s coal mining past. True to its name, it is twisted and dangerous to drive in any sort of inclement weather. Etched into the side of a steep hill, the shoulder drops off dramatically. Cars, whose make heralds back fifty years, litter the ravine. I have always wanted to explore them, but something about ghosts—trapped coal miners, and a murdered girl—keeps me on the road.

They say she was the daughter of a coal miner. They say she was beautiful. But they don’t even know her name. She was murdered by the man she was going to marry. The lovers’ parents would not allow them to marry so the couple ran away. They never say why, but he ran her down. She fell from her horse. She hit her head on a cherry tree. She died.

She died because she didn’t stay on the road. The girl drifted away from the status quo and into the wilderness of human nature. I’m not ready for that yet. As free as these walks are from parenting, even Dad—my friend has standards for me. I have standards for me too. There is a plan we both have for my life—my path. I have to go to college. I have to make the smart
decisions. I don’t have time to dig up corpses. Today is a quiet day. It’s Monday and we both dread this week. Finals are coming up for me and Dad will soon be traveling for work. Neither of us has gotten into the rhythm of the New Year.

Dad is walking quickly. He is only five-nine but his strides are long and I have to skip to keep up with him, spilling more coffee than I drink. It has gotten cold so I throw it out and hand Dad my cup.

“What should we talk about today?” He says as he shakes the drops out of the mug and tucks it into his jacket. The elementary school looms in front of us, our destination.

I shrug at first. It’s barely five o’clock in the morning; the only thing on my mind is sleep. I hop around a hop-scotch court, stalling until I find something worth talking about. Dad and I have agreed that we can talk about anything without judgment, or at least without condemnation, but we both have high standards for ourselves. I stall too long.

Dad smiles and pats my shoulder. “Tired this morning? How late did you stay up?” Dad will keep asking questions until he gets an answer.

“Promise not to tell Mom?” I keep my eyes on the chalk court. Dad nods, at least I think he does. “One.” I glance up at him and he just shakes his head. As much as we stress the parent-free thing, I still need him to be my dad sometimes. He knows and gives me a hug.

“How about a story this morning?”
I smile. A story for the walk home. “What is the story about?”

Dad has lots of stories about his younger years: some true, some not. There are stories about His childhood: the forts he made, the friends and enemies he made as a youngster, playing Robin Hood or Lewis and Clark. There are stories about college, about how he met Mom. Then there are stories about Alaska.

“When I was in Alaska one summer, we were on a fishing boat called The Purpose. Now when these boats would make anchor at high tide, they would be level with the dock. But at low tide, the boats would be sitting some twenty feet down in the mud. You’d have to climb up these wet, grimy ladders to get up to the dock to go into town.”

The sky on the left blushed from the bluish grey to a delicate peach. The trees change from black silhouettes to detailed green. I breathe in slowly and exhale. My breath swirls in the air and floats off to mix with the clouds. I can see smoke rising from our chimney. Ryan must have laid a fire for us. We pass the house but keep walking.

“So we dock at high tide and most of my shipmates go into town. I was sick though so I decided to stay on board. I’m sitting there in my hammock, reading a book, when I hear this loud thud on deck. Well, needless to say, I’m scared. I put down my book and tiptoe onto the deck.

“I see this shape grunt and stand up by the ladder to the dock. He is a little shaky on his feet, hunched over and leaned forward. He looks around, not moving his head but shifting his entire torso, like a novice skier.

In Alaska during the summer, it never gets truly dark. We were a bit too far south to see the sun for more than twenty-four hours—that eternal daylight—but the sun barely dipped beneath the horizon before it grayed the sky again.”

Our horizon has blossomed. It always amazes me how quickly it gets light. Oranges, yellows and pinks bleed across the pale sky. I search for the moon, but it is gone. The hole in the sky is shut until tomorrow and I am still on Earth.

Sometimes I wish I could run away for a day. I wish I could, instead of following the trail, marred with my footsteps, from the bus stop to my door, walk the other way. I wish I could explore those haunted mine shafts and look into the windows of the abandoned cars. But only in the daylight. And only for one day. Then I would want to go home, sit by the fire, and treasure my one day.

I couldn’t run away forever. Maybe that’s why I haven’t even gone a day. What is the point of running away for a day if there is not the possibility of never coming back?

“The sky was just lightening though it was barely after midnight. I could see him clearly, even from where I stood by the door. He blinked his beady eyes several times—dazed. He was clearly drunk, probably why he didn’t kill himself falling off the dock.
Finally over my fear, he was just a harmless drunk fisherman; I asked if he was alright. He jumped, startled at my voice and tried to find me in the haze. I walked closer so he could see me. He stared at me for a while, blinking, as if he couldn’t quite make out my face. Then he grabbed onto my shoulders and looked me in the eye. ‘I am trying to find my way,’ he wheezed. ‘I am trying to find my way.’

We are at the door now. Dad is looking at me intently, analyzing what I have gleaned from the story. I see the path in his hazel eyes, the path we walk every day. Yes, we often improvise it—turning here instead of there, walking it backwards—but we still end up right back on the doorstep.

I am still improvising. Looking out the window at the campus’ lawn, at the other dorms, I think of home, that green door with the brass handle that I always come to at the end of an adventure.

Maybe before the end of school, I’ll run away. I will walk my usual path but then just keep walking, I will leave my cell phone behind. And my keys too. I won’t even take my journal. I won’t need to write, just walk. I will disappear. I will become the rhythm of my walk; I will become the path so that no matter which turn I take, I will have traveled both.

But not today. It’s raining outside. And tomorrow I have a paper due. And then it’s the weekend. Maybe we’ll go clubbing or to the mall. I wouldn’t want to miss that. Maybe next year.

Someday, I’ll walk across the country. That’s it. I will just leave one day. I won’t tell a soul. I won’t take anything with me. I’ll just start walking, alone but for the ephemeral friendships of the road. I’ll treasure it when I get back. When I get back.

PATIENCE

Michael Tucker

Abandoning Specter!
A desert’s mirage!
You promise us victory,
With a lofty visage.
A puffed up ideal
That is stolen day to day
By all the items on our list,
and worst promise of play.
Leisure steals you, Patience.
Our tasks completed to obtain
A little bit more fun
To ignore and avoid our pain.
Patience you are a phantom virtue,
A whimsical little Sprite,
Offering assurance of relief
But never applicable to our plight.
For those who know of pleasure
Are relegated to dine:
A mind of tumult as the meal
And anxiety our wine.