

My Career Journey: Treadmill Meditations

I. College Recreational Center

I can't watch the clock while running so I watch other people work out below me— the football team squatting in the glow of the weight room, our calm librarian climbing the Stairmaster. From the top floor my future thrums with possibility, falls in step with each of my strides. Why count the minutes when life feels like it will go on forever? Until my iPod dies, I become tangled in headphone wires and realize one of my shoes has been untied this whole time.

II. First Apartment Amenity

This city never sleeps so I work out at night to show my solidarity. *Your network is your net worth* a podcaster tells me, his strong, steady voice firing my hyperconnected fantasies. Running underground, I like to imagine the city's lights are powered by me and these other lonely Nighthawks gym attendees. God saw fit to give our fearless leader—the rat in the corner—a tail, so he must know all about balancing work-life properly.

III. Yet Another Conference Hotel Gym

Unfamiliar— every time I swipe left this treadmill beeps in protest. It's not that there are too many choices. Autumn-lined roads, city streets drenched in sun, light rain on hilly trails. It's that there are no dead ends. I like to move without sound following, to jog through these virtual scenes as a reminder that a real career path is never quite this linear.

IV. Graduate School Athletic Complex

Sometimes to get where you want to be you must go back. Or as the poster I'm staring at promises, "When one door closes, another door opens." I know my professor would reject this cliché. She'd say: *build your own door*. A wise remark, and even though she's right, I grow tired of metaphors. My quads are on fire. Maybe I should cross-train, since it feels like the only organ I've been using lately is my brain.

V. Now

in the dark window I watch my reflection
jog between handrails. A fan hangs over
my head like a jester's crown, bobbing
ceremoniously while I run. But the joke's
on the universe this time around.

I didn't have to ask for a sign to know
I'm exactly where I need to be: at the cusp
of sunrise, coffee steaming in my company's
mug nearby. What I have learned: we
should always run toward ourselves.