

Limitless tales of a Light Sleeper  
Jenna Wilkerson

Stay up late enough and you might hear it. The night is alive. It grows, it groans, arching its back and twisting its tendrils like the branches of the tree outside your window, scratching its boughs on the glass inches from your bed. You blink awake.

Stay up late enough and you can watch the night heal. The black and purple ether blooms like bruises fresh and violent fading with the passing of time into peaks of pink, creamy yellows and the healthy, safe blue of morning. You watch the colors change as they pour through the slats in the blinds.

Stay up late enough, you just might feel it. One o'clock is a sneeze, a snore, a second. It's that cool angel air that your broken air conditioner spares when it's feeling merciful. *Oh! Oh! And it's gone...* Two o'clock is a static touch, a spark. It has the dual effect of awakening your senses and reminding you that you should go to sleep. You don't. It's the perfect time to get that book you started last year finished, to binge on five more episodes of *Criminal Minds*, to draw and erase, draw and erase and draw again. A joke my best friend Maddy and I always make is that inspiration only comes after midnight. So true, but time is a caress you can never keep.

Three o'clock feels dizzy and drunk, a slow spinning that churns in your gut. You lay on your side, your back, on your stomach. No, no, and no. You close your eyes, your brain shuts off but your eyes can't. They switch open. It's too quiet. The lamp overhead is too bright but you fear turning off the light. The darkness whispers and you much rather bare out the silence than strain restlessly to hear intangible words. Four o'clock ticks by bringing the sweaty chill of fear. Your brain itches

involuntarily and diffuses with doubts and wonders—*What if I fail? What if I can never get all my work done? What if my cat runs away? What if I run out of butter? What if they stop loving me? What if the night ever ends?*

The feeling of five o'clock interrupts your inner turmoil, your unraveling. Five feels like a yawn, a sweet confession of your own exhaustion. It's accompanied by the song of birds, quickly awakened and renewed by the dawn. Only then, the promise of a new day, can you rest.

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The backyard was awash in a blue-green pool light that illuminated the round faces of my two best friends and I. Three dirty blonde heads bobbing up and down on the water enjoying the welcome warmth of the summer night like young lily pads. Two are twins, the other, a long-lost triplet. Us, an amputated body, her, a long lost limb. Velociraptor sisterhood— a protective and fierce love—is the fiber that holds us tight together. Youth filling our treading limbs, we were content laughing away the night, flicking June bugs off the fluorescent surface. The summer night was a comfy transition from the daytime heat with a California breeze whisking through the palms. Finally we tired of sinking eight feet deep, sitting at the smooth bottom, and looking up at refracted reality. It was so late the crickets had stopped chirping. Bringing our prune-y toes from the watery depths we snuggled into a jack-o-lantern of a tent. Cheek to cheek we sat with a lone flashlight that radiated across the orange nylon walls of our cave. The battery was a bust. Quicker, quicker it flickered to black. A blink. Toes clench in tension. Then blackness behind our eyelids fades to a gentler denser purple, opaque in its excellence. In our

peripheral vision we were beginning to sense it then. Felt the backyard becoming swathed in darkness, a malevolent silence creeping like the ivy running rampant behind. No need to voice our fears we shared sentience, attempting to talk away our unease, singing the Beatles, breaking the silence in voluminous wakes. *“Let it be let it BE!”* We always yelled the second *be* erupting in giggles before we could finish the song. All the while the silence of the slumbering night curdled the confidence in our stomachs, and our toneless chorus hushed to a hum. *“And in my hour of darkness.”* Lower, now we whisper. *“Whisper words of wisdom.”* When our voices finally fell mute, we were overcome with irrational fear and exhaustion. The deafening silence only yawned in response. Our ears are muffled with tiredness, soft as cotton balls. And we strain with drooping eyes to hear our fluttering heartbeats keep up the rhythm to fight the quiet.

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The computer shines white light on my face, the clock reads 2:30 am. The incandescent void of the screen attracts my eyes, draws it closer. Moths to flame. My feet are getting clammy under my down comforter, twisting in my unkempt sheets, squealing like pigs in the blanket. I scroll and scroll and scroll. Click. Click. Click. Reading manga—Japanese comics—by moonlight might not be everyone’s cup of tea. For me I’d call it a guilty pleasure. Monochrome school-girls and boys flick fast before my eyes, their voices and culture bring a whirlwind of attitude and an exotic life to each page. And it is then no longer night, oh there are people to see and talk to. There is much to be done. I can’t get enough. Something in the buzz and beat of my veins, something in the eager crackle of my awakened synapses tells me that I

am meant for night activity. A giddiness glints in my eyes as another night goes by spent reading, spent knowing. More. My smile wavers in a flare of longing is lit, fast as a match it burns. My eyes make out the form of my sister under her pile of perfectly layered blankets, oozing snoring contentment. Confident even in her sleep, was she not curious? She, always the one to fall asleep first in a blink, no second thoughts. She, always leaving me to my thoughts, my fears, and thus, to my own devices. But I know more because of it. But she won't wake up with eye-bags. A second passes and I stare into the blind blackness of my room. A wicked thought taints the wonder. *Maybe ignorance really is bliss.*

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Tokyo air is an ecstatic exhale that I gulp down fervently. As I inhale, the feel of a foreign fever ignites in my lungs. It's been two days into my tour of Japan and there's nothing I find more awesome than the citric streetlights casting orange spells of light against the star-studded indigo sky. That's a lie. I know immediately that everything I see I take in with the same awe-struck appreciation. I gape at the shrine standing proud, emblazoned red, in the middle of the city's skyscrapers. It smells of incense and baking sweets. At the random flower shop in the middle of Shibuya train station. At the old man selling momos—peaches— for 200 yen on the corner of Akihabara. At the people reading brown paper-wrapped books on the train in the stagnant golden afternoon light. At the compact car parks three stories high. At the food. Don't get me started on the food. I will myself not to blink, knowing all too well a blink's power to waste time.

The heat is slick. It's sweat. It's an insulated blanket that rests on all of our foolish tourist shoulders. Even under the raven's wing of night, this city is still

feeling the dragon's scorch of the daytime sunlight. Our little group of high school graduates on our overseas adventure meander down the shadowy street, neon storefronts and lantern lit alleyways. We are young, not tired enough to go to bed. No one tells us to. For now we keep our eyes open, walk one more mile, and stop in a convenience store for refreshments. I grab a bottle of barley tea and a soda flavored popsicle, fumbling for change so I can pay and eat. Wandering outside I ask, "Where next?" and give my best friend Maddy the first blue icy bite. This country will soon be memory melting away, ice on our tongues.

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Something woke me. It was one of those *some things* that, in your sleep, feels as abrupt as a jackhammer to the head, an anvil to the chest, an icy cold kiss. It was none of these things. Yet what remained after my eyes flicked open and I sat up was the imperceptible traces of *something*. A stirring of stagnant air. The absence of sound. It was that certain time of night when only malevolent intent is awake imbuing the air with anxiety. The rev of my heartbeat exalted in another notion, *What if I'm early?* Everything happened slowly in the silence between the murderous tick tock of the wretched hallway clock. Kendall in her bed next to me sat up slowly and I turn my head too fast for my eyes to keep up. Whiplash. Her eyes were closed when I said her name first tentatively, then with wavering authority. Her eyelids opened, I saw no recognition in those green eyes, we screamed.

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At 10 pm on a weeknight, *Thundercats* is the name of the game. And I know how to make any babysitter fold, let me stay up and watch. Just open my mouth and start

talking. I hate bedtime. But then again I hate a lot of things. I've been told I am picky. I can count my age on my fingers, my teachers say not to, but I do it anyway. I could list them if you asked me to, the things I hate of course. I will list them if you don't ask me too. Bees, strawberry and grape jam, when mom dresses me (Ewk!), barbies, swimming, when I cant have dessert, dinnertime (unless it's butter pasta), sharing, fractions, and bedtime. I love my sister, gogurt, tv, when my grandma peels my apples, my blanket, eating pasta upside down, libraries, my moms pajama bottoms, hammocks, my best friend Maddy and staying up late. Once I couldn't sleep, especially with the vampires in the closet, so I walked down the hall to find mom and dad. They were eating tapioca! I don't know what tapioca was but I liked it. They laughed when they saw me and let me watch TV snuggled between them on our corduroy couch. They don't do that anymore though. They say I have to go to bed, they yell at me. So please let me stay up?

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My eyes squint, sting, and snarl when they meet the over-enthusiastic white florescent light above the sink. It hasn't been this bright since one this afternoon where the yellow-blue-green noonlight carelessly reflected its way off of cars outside and through my window announcing the world was awake. All I did at the time is roll over and cover my face with a pillow, a raspberry turnover not fully baked. Maybe in a couple hours. The fear of impending cavities is the only force that coaxes me now from my dimly lit dorm room, my igloo of comforters and pillows, the soft, warm glow of my computer screen, the silky scritch-scratched pages of my sketchbook. The child of a dental assistant, any more sugary sins would result in

penance under a teasingly scornful maternal eye. At 3 o'clock no one is awake in my suite, that's for sure, and I act surprised seeing my spit-flecked reflection. *Did I even brush them this morning?* I can't remember. The sink is leaking one single drop at a time, I twitch unnerved, and shut it off before anything happens. There is spaghetti meat sauce dry and rusting on the counter and I wince at a colorless chunk of ground beef. Bowls filled with milky water in differing shades of brown sit near it. I prefer the *ignore-it-until-it-disappears* method of washing dishes. On to the real business now. The minty fresh smell of toothpaste bubbles up and bursts in my nose as pasty foam spews from the corners of my mouth, dribbling down my chin. The mirror-me makes a zombie face at me, eyes rolled up, left ear dropped to a shoulder, charming fish-lipped grimace, the toothbrush hanging out of my mouth like a severed blue appendage. I giggle back but those dark undead circles don't disappear. *Don't make that face or it'll get stuck like that.* When I spit, the bubbly drool drips slow and viscous like the grossest kind of honey. I look up at my mirror-me and she's sniggering at my plight. *Ha-ha.* I say to her. *Look yourself in the mirror.*

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When the violet umbrella of night finally breaks the summer day's fever, it's finally safe to move. For a sweet second my blood stops boiling, the sweat dries tight on my skin, and I breathe in a shady breath still tinged with the sun's salt. I emerge from my seat in front of the fan and kick energetic kangaroo legs and spread my monkey toes gleefully. They've been waiting, hunched and curled in a constant state of strain. My stomach gurgles and the cravings start, drop by drop then quickly inundate my thoughts. I know. I have the munchies. Bad. Hot Cheetos. Salty, spicy, more addicting

than I thought, leaving red hot tire tracks on my tongue. I have no self-control. My fingers twitch. Ice cream. Cold, creamy, it caresses my tongue, filling my veins with opalescent sweetness. I sigh, letting out a jagged breath. Pizza Rolls. Meaty, saucy, they burn my tongue mercilessly. It's my fault for eating them right from the oven. I laugh, giddy. Cookie dough. There are no words to describe perfection. I groan and drop my head onto my best friend's lap and groan again for emphasis. She looks up from her computer where she is busy drawing and gives a suspicious squint; I have my hand on her precious drawing arm. But she smiles, lips closed like a secret. My echoing smile is toothier, crooked. She reads my mind and says "cookie dough?" The hunt is on. "You are a saint," I say. "We need wheels," I say. There is just one more person I must convince before enjoying a post-midnight pigout and he's in the other room. He is reckless with nervous energy. His knee bounces like a spring, his right hand taps out his heartbeat on the mouse, and he brings his left absentmindedly to his mouth to bite his nail. All this he does while deftly decimating an online opponent in a video game, his other reality. The screen is hypnotic and his eyes two brown refrigerator magnets, weak to resist the forces of nature. But night has a tidal pull stronger than any computer screen, washing everyone in the same azure shade of hunger. Convincing will be easy. I drop my head on my boyfriend's shoulder in the same way, with a substantial thud, and whisper the sexiest two words I know: pizza rolls.

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July nights are blue-green cough syrup kisses that leave everyone drowsy and blissful. The air hangs thick and tired spreading the illusion that each star is stuck in

quicksand. The heat from the height of the day leaves a salty aftertaste. I lick my well-sweated shoulder to test the fact. The car hums a pleasant tune from where I sit on its roof next to my mom. I giggle for no reason other than to hear her giggle back. The car still ticks metallicly, cooling down from the exhausting 2-minute car ride. Dad is helping Kendall paw her way up through the sunroof. When our seats are settled there is a feast of red licorice and bon-bons. Popcorn is still warm from the microwave; I brush my finger on the buttery paper bag affectionately. We are blocks from our house, perched atop a steep hill the shape of a dragon's back. Fire works are spreading like wildfire in the sky. Radiant light rains down with every burst until only our eyelids can see the memory of it. Here I am happy.

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It's getting so late you begin to wonder if you should be calling it early. Your eyelids sink lower as the sun slowly rises causing the caustic void of blue-black sky to disperse into a rich comforting blanket of purples. Sleep at first feels like an unfamiliar hand, cold to the touch. You shake and let go. Shake and let go. Shake and hold on. You turn the hand over, trace the lines on its palm. You know sleep well now, it warms your cold fingers and intertwines with them. You feel your own pulse echoing at your wrist. Your vision fades to grey.

Then it all comes to soon. Before unconsciousness can do its job, everything in this pink and yellow painted world is determined to drag you up the rabbit hole.

Consciousness calls. You let the phone ring.

Your mom does it irritably. She tells it how it is, usually ten minutes earlier than it is. Her words are ice water on the back of your neck. Her tone is all pepper. No salt. It leaves you off balance. *Get up. It's 7:00. Do you want to be late?* You sit up so fast your

neck strains and your equilibrium falls off. You are ready for school before your sleep-numb limbs have realized they are awake.

Your dad does it unintentionally. Urgently banging drawers in the dark of his room, ironing clothes with a fwoosh, letting out a stream of *crapfuckshitgoddamitsonofabitch* every time he stubs his toe. You're awake before he says a word to you, trying to nurse the killer headache that rings in you ears and pulls the shutters on your eyes.

Your alarm clock does it with gusto. Like someone who's been holding his breath way too long. It's exhale is a tidal wave of cringe-worthy cacophony. It's repetitive buzzing finally enables you to put a sound to true evil. You heave three pillows on Kendall before she turns it off. Five more minutes is your mantra. Snooze obliges, inhaling once more.

Your grandma does it mercilessly. Unhesitant she will turn on the light, an artificial sun, to announce the morning. Blasphemy! Sacrilege! Betrayal! Torture! You scream, but it is only in your head, amplifying with every breath. Your eyelids burn and peel, this must be real. Never are you more convinced of your vampirism. You take refuge in the blankets to nurse your wounds where only her words of "*breakfast's ready*" will retrieve you.

Your boyfriend does it horribly. Your eyes flick awake on their own, adjusting like the lens of a camera to the dimness. He is warmth beside you, his arm probably numb under your head. The rays of morning infiltrate boldly through the cracks in the blinds and illuminate off the mirror at the foot of the bed. As your reach for the

mattress' edge to get up, he pulls you back to him by the waist. There is no escape except succumb to warmth.

Endnote

Like most creative writing classes, I had no idea or objective I aimed for in starting this project. Before the workshop drafts I had consolidated a few stray ideas, all not cohesive to be a singular essay. I was a quite at odds with myself realizing I was having a more difficult time than usual deciding what I thought was important to talk about. In my meeting with the professor I was able to get a better grasp of the experience, or in this case, the set of experiences I wanted to deal with in my January writing project — writing about nighttime. I was surprised to find that I was truly curious and excited about writing about and studying nighttime thoughts, experiences, and scenes because of the romantic nature of night. I was especially energetic about describing the dark imagery in my scenes. Nighttime feels so much more intimate in my mind, and to uncover the little moments that at least I have experienced under cover of night was something I had never thought about and seems very vulnerable to me. I did not truly have a straightforward idea of where my essay would go as I began writing. I felt that if I desired I could write infinitely on the subject, and that writing in vignettes gave me the ability to make this possible. After further thought, that is probably why I decided to title the essay *Limitless Tales of a Light Sleeper*, because of its infinite possibilities.

In my revision of my first draft I took under consideration the critiques and opinion from one-on-one meetings from both the professor and the teaching assistant as well as the opinions of the class. There are a couple viewpoints that stood out to me from observing and reflecting on the workshop we had in class about my piece. Many of them spoke on the poetic quality of my work, but the opinions that were most helpful pointed out where I needed more clarity or thought

lacking. In my revision I tried to make some moments such as the end of the tent scene and the screaming nightmare scene clearer by rewriting the final sentences of each vignette. The idea from James saying that he'd like to see more of myself (the narrator) in the piece definitely stood out to me. Knowing very well how I usually tend to not over-emphasize myself in my pieces I write, I could see where he felt like I wasn't being very straightforward. Still, I decided that my piece already focused enough on myself. In my revision, I decided not to fully bring myself into the foreground of the segments but increased a little more of my own action in some of the added vignettes to show off the narrator more through her gestures and small words than through any major reflection. I thought about changing up the order of each segment but found that I liked the order I had written them in even after the addition of a few more moments. Also I took under consideration the advice of Marilyn, Andrea, and one of my classmates who desired some kind of closure to my piece. As I found myself capable of writing more and more about the subject I found it difficult to wrap up the piece with a sense of finality. I noted Marilyn's comment on wanting to see an expository riff about nighttime and what I thought about it and attempted to accomplish this. But in my writing (often something with a mind of its own) I found it hard to write an expository section. What became of my pursuits was a section on the in between of sleep and the transition into a new day in which I demonstrated how each of my loved ones wakes me up. I thought that this would book end the piece well in a way because I wrote my opening section on night and contrasted it with the "morning after".

The readings for the course were more various than any other readings I've done in prior creative writing classes. I enjoyed seeing different writings techniques used in each piece and the variety in subjects in nonfictional work. Some essays that stood out were *Working at Wendy's* by Joey Franklin, *The Knife* by Richard Seltzer, and *California* by Jess Lacher. Each of these pieces lit up for me because of differing reasons. Joey Franklin's talent to make his story cinematic in its telling was what really made it an outstanding read. I could see myself there, with his coworkers, in his shoes, and loved the honesty of the piece. What I learned from this reading is how little you need to tell the reader what is what in a piece, and sometimes showing them through dialogue, description, and actions is easier. In Richard Seltzer's case I loved how he worked with the littleness of a mere knife, a tool of his craft, to demonstrate his understanding that in his profession there is always a life hanging in the balance, lying before him on his table. His focus on the knife is obsessive and I admired this obsession. I wanted to show this fervor for one particular topic in my piece and hopefully emulate in a way his adoration of the knife through my obsession with nighttime. *California* was just an essay I fell in love with through her descriptions of California, perhaps because of the romantic way that Jess Lacher described L.A. (which isn't always a beautiful place). Despite realizing that perhaps she didn't round out the character of California completely, I learned to write in brushstrokes, how to characterize a place or the passing of time briefly. Through our class discussions on the readings, workshops, and free writes I began to realize in this class that writing nonfiction is a way to be vulnerable with your readers. Writers who show honesty in their writings, level with their readers,

tell things how they are more likeable, garner the most trust. I hope my narrator in future projects can come to be admired for her honesty even though my writing has not achieved this goal.