

# *Serendipity*

By Comsewogue High School's Literary Magazine Club

# **SLEEPLESS NIGHTS**



Cover art by Alexander Hunt

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# Poems

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# Fragile Fortress

*By Joseph Tabasko*

Drifting apart,  
Quick as one drifts into sleep,  
Coalesce in a whirlpool  
Pulling us into the ocean deep

Painting new realities,  
Just as water paints a portrait  
Each cell of mine, a brick  
To construct a fragile fortress

The syntax of my desire  
Slowly corrupts the pulse of my rhythm  
Twists the truth into lie,  
And makes logic go awry

The carnage of sequestered love  
Imprints a stain on my pearled eyes  
The lucid image of a constellation  
Sparkling in a blurry night sky

Alone yet connected on this resonance,  
I will wait for dawn to give rise to your exigence

# Needle of Love

*By Joseph Tabasko*

Undercover at night,  
My feet hit the pavement  
Illuminated by the street lights

I'm not too sure where I'm going  
Or if I know who I am  
But I'm still walking

Across the old train tracks,  
The ones that took me to hell and home  
I can't tell which is which exact

I'm not too sure what I need to do  
Or how I need to do it  
All I know is I'm walking

The soles of my feet  
Kissing the bare concrete

I feel the fatigue striking my feet  
Telling me to stop, but I know what I need  
I feel the truth in the beat of my heart  
Telling me to go, fade into the art

Threading the needle of love  
Through sonic motifs and prose,  
The wave crashes against the eardrum,  
Where the spirit meets the bone

# The Artist's Manifesto

*By Joseph Tabasko*

I take a deep breath  
And walk into the room  
Everything is quiet  
Save for the whirl of the creator's loom

Stringing together  
Words and sounds  
The artist evokes  
Emotion profound

Like a warrior's sword  
Sharpened on a stone  
The artist's mind  
Must find its way home

Each step taken,  
A fine stroke of the brush  
On the infinite canvas of life  
Whose fibers turn to dust

And reincarnate themselves  
They, as all things, do  
Through elegant prose  
And heart-strung adieus

A slow-pumping pensive heart  
Stifles the throw of Hypnos' dart  
My mind folded on a crease,  
It shakes in the silk embrace of a breeze

# A Walk In The Dark

*By Sophia Deja*

A Walk In The Dark.  
That's all this is  
I tried to reassure myself that I will be fine  
It's just a walk  
A Walk In The Dark.  
I check behind me  
I can almost hear the silence  
I can almost feel the still air  
But it's only a walk  
A Walk In The Dark.  
Is this what I do now?  
Walk to the park?  
Each restless night, tossing and turning  
Leads me back to my walk  
A Walk In The Dark.  
I was scared I'd get caught  
Sneaking out each night  
But I took the risk  
to continue my walks  
A Walk In The Dark.  
The occasional rustling in the bushes  
and dancing brown leaves,  
were the only things keeping me from turning back,  
Turning back from this walk  
A Walk In The Dark.  
I feel my heart racing  
Am I excited or scared?  
I would see him once again  
And who knows, this could be my last time  
A Walk In The Dark.  
I could see a faint light  
And him on the swings  
I took a deep breath  
And decided to run!  
I Ran In The Dark!  
I smiled as I saw him



# All I can think of is you

*By Ava Kalberer*

On nights like these when the midnight bells have long since chimed  
The hours of sleep I can have are limited, timed  
All I can think of is you

I know I must sleep, and fast  
so that I can live tomorrow to the fullest  
because I know it might be my last  
But all I can think of is you

I can't help but wonder if I will have time  
with all these thoughts racing through my mind  
But all I can think of is you

Enough time to tell you how I feel  
That when I'm with you nothing seems real  
But all I can think of is you

Is this what you wanted?  
Dark circles and shaky hands  
Barely rested  
Can hardly stand

When you said you loved me did you consider the effects?  
That I might become an absolute love sick wreck.

Even on sleepless nights all I can dream of is you

# Anthony

*By Cassandra Paciella*

Late at night I lie awake,  
Conflicting peace and dread.  
Thoughts of tradition, old and new,  
Rushing through my head.

The calling feeling, first time felt,  
That maybe I'll return,  
To tradition I'd abandoned,  
But for its peace I yearn.

Felt shunned by those who practiced,  
I'd never understand.  
But tradition once abandoned,  
Now shows an outstretched hand.

I feel the customs calling me,  
They never had before.  
But I've had time to find myself,  
And now I've come ashore.

This time a new perspective,  
Much different than the past.  
But is this just a brief fixation,  
Or will the belief last?

Raised in thought much different than  
The way that I seek now.  
Hoping to find my peace,  
In a place I feel allowed.

# Losing Time

*By Grace Jos*

The sun does not bestow itself upon me, and I hope, and pray, and beg it never does  
My mattress holds me, and hugs my every crevice  
I internalize the warmth, the comfort  
I don't want to waste a single second, so I will persist in my efforts

I assure you that I'm a sensible woman  
I'm aware time cannot be experienced, only consumed  
So I lay here, every night that I can  
Engulfed in this realm of which I have no control

My mind wanders  
I dread the day where the air turns cold,  
And I can see my breath each morning as if it is my last  
Everyday the world spins on its axis, and mocks the fact I cannot move forever with it

I lay motionless, under the clock of time  
It's frigid, and vulnerable here  
I toss and turn back and forth, in spite of the weight tying down my eyelids  
I fidget and hug my pillow in close, holding on

A breeze brushes my thigh from my window,  
And I'm reminded that soon the leaves are bound to fall  
But I will lay, and wallow  
Until the sun arises, and I am beckoned to awaken from my sleepless night

# Us

*By Sophia Arredondo*

Eyes wide open;  
Heart beating fast;  
Staring at the ceiling;  
The time moving too slow.

A portrait of night brightened by the moon,  
Glistening in through the window shades;  
While stars fill the sky,  
Blinding me with their dance.

I dwell on promises you made,  
But could never seem to keep.  
My heart once so full  
Now broken because of your soul.

Another sleepless night  
To add to the list.  
Where I lay here in want  
Of what once was.

What once was  
you and me  
me and you  
us.

It will be no more.  
You said forever.  
Was it too soon?  
Why can't we try again?

What did I do wrong  
To make us crumble?  
Two birds of a feather  
Now gone forever.

A p a r t  
we are  
You're gone; I'm alone.  
Broken pieces of my shattered heart

Tears cloud my eyes;  
A hand over my mouth;  
To silence the sounds  
Of the hardest form of love:

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G  
o  
I need to say goodbye;  
It's 4 a.m. my love.  
I feel nothing,  
I feel everything.

I can't feel you.

The night sky cries along  
And the nightingales fade in their song.  
The end is near;  
I'll miss you always.

Yet I still think about us;  
Every second that passes,  
Every breath I take,  
I picture you here  
Next to me.  
me and you  
you and me  
us.  
together.

but then you disappear  
and I'm left  
with a mind that  
only causes me pain.

Insomnia takes me,  
encompasses me into her arms  
And I drown into her  
with the thoughts that dive deep into my  
hollow soul.

Forever.

# Drowning In Sleepless Nights

*By Panika Garg*

Sometimes I wish  
I could lie under the stars  
But you steal my time  
Haunt my mind  
Clouding my thoughts  
So I don't know down from up  
You are selfish, greedy, jealous  
You take and you take  
One day there will be nothing left

You whisper in my ear  
Coaxing me to jump  
I think about what would happen if I listened to you  
But I'm not that desperate yet  
I stand on the precipice  
Ready for that wind to blow me over  
But I'm not like you  
It takes more than a breeze to tip me over  
You have to try harder than that

Find my weak place and I'll drown  
Sink to the bottom  
Let the water close over  
Embrace me  
Become one with me  
And I won't swim

Midnight thoughts  
You don't let me sleep  
You keep me to yourself  
Trying to break me  
I'm tired of resisting  
This close to breaking

Leave me alone  
I don't know what you want  
Is this your selfish desire  
Or some other nefarious concoction  
Leave me alone  
I don't have what you want  
Everyone wants something from me  
Soon there will be nothing left to take

I'm drowning

# What is Love?

*By Emma Samghabadi*

As I'm getting ready for bed, I prepare myself for the endless night of thinking; thinking about the inevitable thing that scares me to death.

Love.

It keeps me up at night until my eyes go heavy and the clock strikes 6.

What does it feel like to really be in love?

What does love even mean?

When will I ever experience it?

The moon watches over me as I rethink every answer I have to every question I make.

NIGHT #12

unreciprocated love

I think this might be the love that hurts the most.

The love you give and give,  
but never receive

The love that makes you sad,  
the love that makes you grieve.

You grieve for the love you never feel,  
the love that never warms you up

The love that eventually drains you,  
leaving you like an empty cup

As I look around at all the love in the air that the eye cannot see,

I ask myself why, why is it not towards me?

NIGHT #15

The In-Between

The love that doesn't really feel like love anymore.

Sometimes,  
you might miss how they made you feel

Wishing and wishing that things could go back to the way they were.

But I think when you are used to loving so much,

You don't realize how much it actually consumes you until it is no longer there.

The freeing and empty space left in your heart takes some time getting used to,

But maybe,  
you will eventually learn to like it.

NIGHT #18

Unwanted Love

The love you beg and beg to go away,  
wishing you don't have to feel the way you do.

You wish it could all just fade away, leaving your heart alone  
Leaving your heart to rest.

It is as if you are running around in your own head trying to find an escape to the raw feeling eating you  
alive.

Running and running in a never ending maze of feeling after feeling,  
Seeing blurry glimpses of the laughter and smiles they once made you have.

Maybe eventually you will find a light at the end of the maze,  
A light that will guide you to the feelings you once had, melting away.



# The Duality of Life

*By Sarah Seale*

In the dark of night  
She sits patiently  
With her phone in her hand  
It's not turned on  
It's just there  
He should call soon  
She's waiting

Under the same, dark sky  
Halfway across the country  
He sits slumped over  
Surrounded by textbooks  
He's writing intensely  
Taking notes for class tomorrow  
He's busy

It's later now  
She's still waiting  
Her eyes are droopy  
Her mind is cloudy  
Her body is begging her for sleep  
But she can't sleep yet  
She's hopeful

It's been hours  
He's been working non-stop  
He's trying so hard  
To be a good student  
But it's hard  
He knows he's forgetting something  
He's exhausted

The sun starts to rise  
She's beginning to lose hope  
All she wants is to fall asleep  
But he promised  
And he never broke his promises  
He's going to call  
She's faithful

As night turns to day  
His work is finally done  
He has class in an hour  
He still feels like he's forgetting something  
But he doesn't know what  
He can tell it's important though  
He's stressed

The night has passed  
And the day has begun  
He still has the feeling he's forgetting something  
She puts the phone down and gets on with her day  
Two people up all night for different reasons  
He remembered  
She gave up

# Endless Thoughts

*By Madison Villani*

12 a.m: I just finished my work.  
I'm so hungry, I haven't eaten all day  
I don't have time, I'm so tired.  
What do my grades look like?  
Only a 92? That's not good enough.  
How can I make it higher? What extra credit can I do?

It's too late, I have to go to bed.  
1 a.m: My lights finally went off, and I lay down.  
Did I finish everything?  
No, I'm forgetting something

1:30 a.m: I flick my light switch on again and grab my bag  
I just need to make sure I did everything

My eyes are so heavy, but school comes first.  
I forgot about my essay. I have to do it  
Only a paragraph left. I can do it

3 a.m: I just finished my essay.  
I'm so tired.  
Wide awake, but so tired  
Why is my pillow so warm?  
Why can't I fall asleep?

My mind won't calm down  
I can't stop thinking.  
Everything comes rushing to my brain  
It's spinning endlessly, I can't fall asleep  
I'm so tired.

I grab my phone, hoping that will put me to sleep  
I find my self scrolling,  
and scrolling,  
and scrolling some more.

6 a.m: I wake up  
My alarm is blaring in my ear  
Did I even fall asleep?  
I don't want to get up, I'm so tired.

I have to go to school, I can't miss anything  
My eyes are barely open as I get dressed  
I have to do it all over again  
I'm so tired.

# When the Mourning Dove Lies

*By Macy Carter*

Little do I sleep during restless night  
Under inky skies  
When the mourning dove lies

Little do I have closed, unblinking eyes  
Framed by fireflies  
When the mourning dove lies

Little do I feel reason to excite  
In the still lamp light  
When the mourning dove lies

Little do I find pleasant Day's reprise  
When I hear goodbyes  
When the mourning dove lies

Little do I rest when the baby cries  
When the couples fight  
When the mourning dove lies

Little do I think thoughts lacking spite  
When the cold wind bites  
When the mourning dove lies

Much do I despise in the time of plight  
Balance I certify  
With each anxious sigh

For the mourning dove won't mourn, but snore at night  
And I'm awake, upright  
When the mourning dove lies.

# New Years

*By Hayley Villani*

The day is New Years Eve,  
The shiny ball sits on the roof of One Times Square  
Hundreds of people crowd around in anticipation, waiting for the ball to drop  
Signifying the start of the new year

I lay in an empty room  
Attempting to escape the party I was dragged to  
There's glitter on the floor and shoes scattered throughout the house  
Everyone else is excited for the new year

I don't want to stay up waiting for the new year to start-  
I don't want the new year to come at all  
I don't want my life to change  
I'm anxious for the new year

The year that I graduate  
The year that I leave my friends and family for college  
The year that I go out into the world on my own  
I'm not ready for the new year

I think that maybe, if I could just fall asleep,  
The ball won't drop  
Everything can stay the same  
There will be no new year

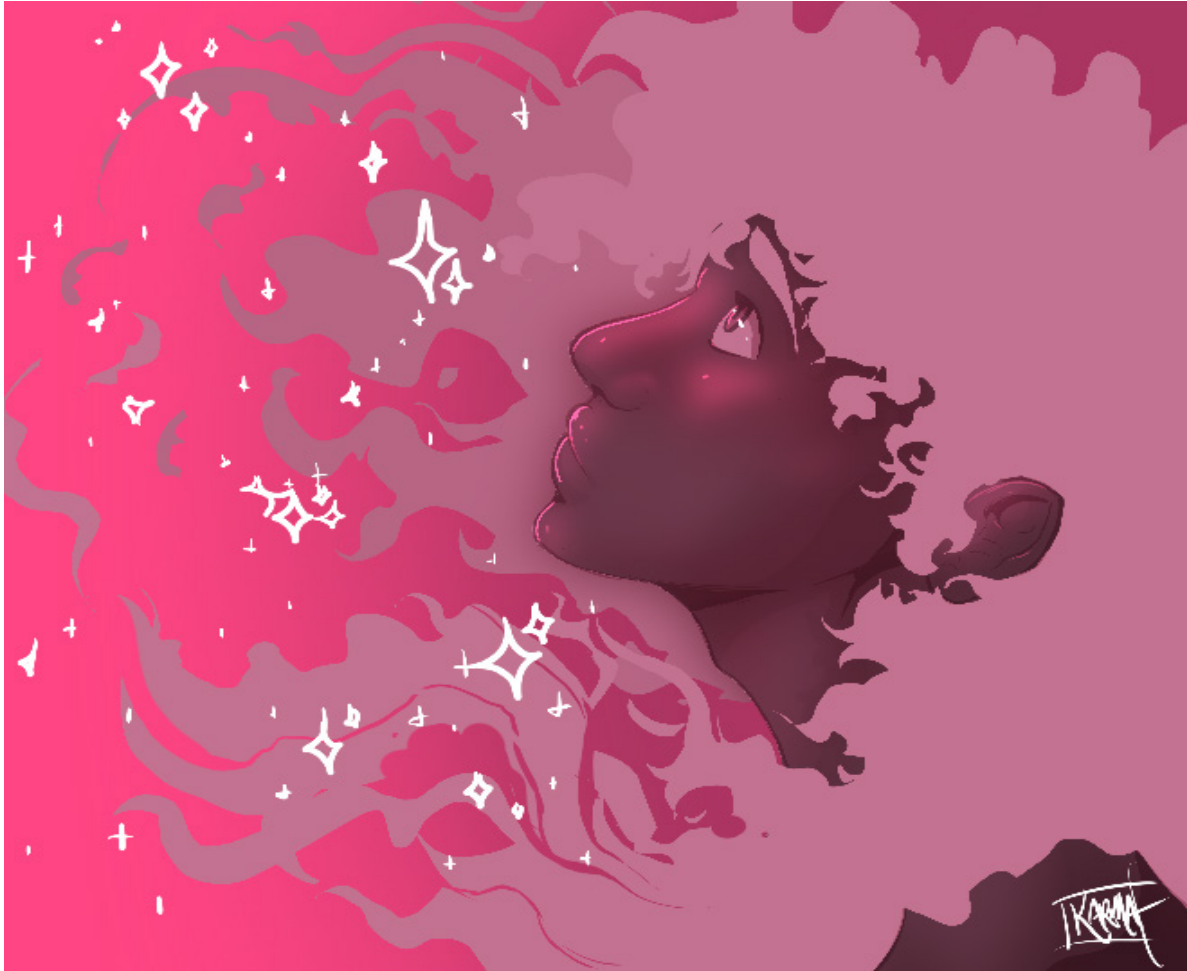
But I can't sleep  
And I can't stop the flow of time  
My anxious state forces me to stay awake  
And watch as this year transitions into the new year

I hear the counting outside come to an end as the shiny ball in Times Square begins its descent  
I couldn't fall asleep in time to prevent the start of the new year

# Art

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Deep Night Haze by Nicholas Mattheus





The Narrator by Lydia McGuigan



Be The Blanket For My Bones by Julia Hamdi



Timeless by Frank Villani

# Short Stories

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# The Fall

By Annmarie Kosak

I stare at the ceiling, blinking sleep from my eyes. I flip to my side, as if twisting would bring on a wave of slumber that I so desperately need. I close my eyes, drawing a breath, and sigh as I open them again.

I see nothing. An endless sea of black. My cozy room fades to a shadow that threatens to swallow me whole. Looking up does nothing to cease the growing darkness. Upon looking down, I find no tender hands, nor feeble body. If I were to peer into my reflection, I would find no face of mine staring back. I barely notice myself blink, as shutting my eyes feels the same as having them open.

I am taken aback when color floods my eyes as they reopen. Green. Everything is green. As I near the verdant view, I see what I should have seen long ago. Treetops dot the field. How foolish of me to not recognize their familiar mapley presence earlier. Bundles of timber crowd together beneath my would-be feet.

*Beneath me? Why am I above the trees? Am I flying? No. I can't be.* I am falling. Panic sweeps over me as I watch the trees growing closer and closer. Their leaves sway violently in a gust of wind, beckoning for me to fall into their embrace, longing for me to tangle among their tattered vines. The trees begin to shift to a bright shade of red, changing with the breeze that blows their tops. What once were rolling hills of green turn into a sea of red.

The trees start to bend inward until there is a gaping hole below me. The chasm is nearing at an alarming pace and I try to shut my eyes, but am not welcomed by the eerie darkness I sought to destroy. Instead, my eyes remain transfixed on the warping world. I try to call for help as I fall through the cavern, yet no sound escapes my lips. I expect my vision to go black again, only it doesn't. Light spills in through the hole I have fallen through. I wait to hit the ground with a force that would shatter my very being, but it never comes. I am still falling, and I can only wonder for how much longer.

Rock piles jut out from the sides of craggy cliffs. They form pointed spikes that meet in the middle to create large pillars of stone. The light taps of rain echo throughout the endless pit. The thick scent of petrichor fills the air and I soak in the pleasant aroma.

Droplets of water begin to fall upon body parts that I cannot see. A light drip on my shoulder. A gentle drop on my arm. It picks up speed. Hundreds of tiny globs of water sprinkle down upon me. I wrinkle my nose as they hit my face, and squint my eyes as it pours down around me. I am drenched to the bone and I fear if this callous cascade continues, I will drown in the downpour.

A collection of the rainwater sits in a small pond below me, but the relentless onslaught of water causes the shallow pond to turn into a grand lake. I watch in terror as the ripples run across the surface that promises to submerge me.

I am flung into the lake with a deafening splash. Water fills my ears and stunts my hearing. I find that I am able to breathe just fine and no pressure constricts my lungs. I am unsure which way I am facing, until I see light filtering in through the moving waves above me. In all the chaos of falling, I had completely flipped over. To my dismay, the layer of light only moves further away from me. I am still descending, though it feels more like sinking now.

The light begins to dim and I beg for it to stay, even just a moment longer. It does not. I am thrown back into a growing darkness that isolates me from the rest of the world. I remember the fear I felt as I was falling, and decide it might be better to stay in the dark.

A white speck appears. It's only a dot, but it shines with a kind of warmth I have never known before. It doesn't hurt to look at, but I fear it might make me realize I am falling again. Another speck of light appears, a little ways away from the first one. Then another, and another. Soon the area above me is filled with little orbs of warmth.

They are stars. The same stars I look at every night when I cannot fall asleep. Only there are more of them. So many that I cannot count them or make out constellations in the night sky. They illuminate the sky with a bluish glow. I reach my hand out to touch the stars, my palm outstretched to the sky. I can actually see my hand. I open and close it to make sure it's real. For the first time, I feel like I am really there, in control. I slowly twist my body to face downward again. I am still falling, but I am not afraid this time. Below me is my room. Everything laid out exactly where I left it. No overgrown trees, no jagged rocks, and no pounding rain. Just my room. I close my eyes and let myself fall into the comfort of my sheets.

My body jolts itself awake. I sit upright in my bed, breathing fast and hard. My pulse is rushing and my head is pounding. My heart batters, a deafening roar that I'm sure will wake my parents. My hands tremble as sweat drips down my fingertips.

A smile creeps onto my face. A laugh escapes me. Then I pull my sheets over my head and ease into a placid slumber.

# What Keeps Me Up At Night?

By Jillian Queller

## 9:22 - lavender haze

i say goodnight to my parents and sisters who are going to sleep soon. i light a lavender honey candle. *maybe the scent will be calming and it will help me sleep*, i think as the fragrance begins to fill my room with a lavender haze.

## 10:12 - maroon

from my bed, i am looking out the window at the beautiful stars and moon. suddenly, i look down to see drops of blood. i reach up to touch my nose and recognize it as the source of this mess. i get nosebleeds a lot. i plug my nose with a bunch of toilet paper and start cleaning up the maroon mess.

## 10:21 - antihero

as i attempt to scrub the blood off of my comforter, i begin to think about people no longer in my life, especially the ones who i thought of as heroes, the ones that have saved me from bad decisions and helped me through tough times. now the absence of those people brings me sadness rather than their presence bringing me joy. they are the root of my sorrow rather than the people to guide me through it. it's strange how people can transform from your savior to your antihero.

## 11:02 - snow on the beach

something feels ever so slightly off tonight. i cannot put my finger on exactly what it is, but something seems wrong, as if there was snow on the beach.

## 11:54 - you're on your own kid

my cat, who has been keeping me company through the night, begins to meow. he stands next to the closed door to my bedroom. "let me free!" he begs me, i open the door. before he leaves, he looks at me for a moment as if to say, "i'm sorry, but you're on your own kid."

## 12:01 - midnight rain

i see a flash of light outside my window and begin to hear the rumble of thunder. the wind begins to blow and i see the slight shadow of the trees swaying. i can hear a faint pitter patter of rain on the roof. the storm is quite calming. i have a new appreciation for midnight rain.

## 12:35 - question

i begin to reflect on my life. who am i really? do i deserve the good things i have? do i deserve the bad things that happen to me? why do i overthink so much? why can't i fall asleep? what if i'm a really unlikeable person? am i unknowingly a bad person? how do i make these questions stop?

## 12:44 - vigilante

i wonder if people are really good. can a good person do bad things and still be a good person? no human actions no matter how good or bad will really make a difference. so, why am i putting all this work in trying to be good? is it worse to be unaware of your flaws or to acknowledge them without having any solutions? do you become a better person by being a vigilante?

**1:12 - bejeweled**

i'm washed over with sadness. I try to push it away. i don't know what its source is. sparkling tears run down my face. i try to get it to stop, but of course this only makes it worse. soon enough, my face has been bejeweled by drops of water.

**1:48 - labyrinth**

my mind feels twisted and confused. i'm trying to find an end to my awful thoughts. the more i think, the more lost i get. i can't find a way to escape. my head feels like a labyrinth.

**2:11 - karma**

this night feels like hell. all i want to do is sleep. what did i do to deserve this sleepless night? i feel like this night will never end. it feels torturous, almost like a punishment. if this is karma, then what they say about it is true.

**2:36 - sweet nothing**

i'm trying to think of the positive things in life, something to keep me from spiraling. i think and think about some things i love about life, anything that is sweet; nothing comes to mind.

**3:10 - mastermind**

i start listening to taylor swift. her lyrics make me feel understood. finally, i feel my eyes get heavy, and i close them and listen to the music. as i finally drift into my world of dreams, i think to myself, *this music was written by a mastermind.*



# A Letter to the Enemy

By Jillian Bollbach

Dear Sleepless Nights,

You first visited me exactly one week ago today on Friday, September 30th. You woke me up at precisely 12:00 a.m. I was very angry because all I wanted to do was sleep and you decided to interrupt that. I lay there wide awake, wondering why you were keeping me up at this weird hour. My stomach made a thunderous growl so I decided it was time to get food. While walking down the stairs into the kitchen, I stepped on my little brother's lego pieces. I have extremely low pain tolerance, so I screamed so loud that it woke up my dad. He came downstairs, and he was in a very cranky mood— I wonder why? I got my snack but little did I know, I was allergic to the pizza topping I ate. I was throwing up for three hours. By the time I went back to lay in my bed, it was around 4:00 a.m. After that, I slept through the night for two nights straight, and I thought you would finally leave me alone. I was in fact, completely wrong.

Monday, October 3rd, you decided to give me another visit. You woke me up at the "haunted hour" of 3:00 a.m. Of course I was scared out of my mind because that day I watched the new Halloween movie with Michael Myers. Were you playing tricks on me? I heard a lot of weird noises and I got extremely panicky. You thought trying to give me a heart attack at 3 a.m. was a good idea!? I got out of my bed because I thought maybe going to the bathroom would help me go back to sleep by relieving myself. *wrong*. I walked into the bathroom and turned on the light, and the biggest spider I have ever seen was staring right at me. I screeched at the top of my lungs, waking up my baby sister who started crying louder than she ever has before. This made the entire family wake up, and everyone was not too happy with that. Everyone went and sat in the living room, and I got a lecture on how I should be sleeping—not waking everybody up in the middle of the night. I tried to explain to them that it was you who was keeping me up, and you were the one deliberately doing all these bad things to me. They thought I was going absolutely insane. They sent me up to my room to go back to sleep and told me that if any of these shenanigans were to happen again I would be in serious trouble. *ugh!*

Thursday, October 6th— the reason I am writing this letter to you. You woke me up yet again. This time you decided to visit at 1:00 a.m. I just stayed there, laying in my bed, wondering what your reason was for waking me up again tonight. I thought I had finally gotten rid of you. I got a craving that I wanted to binge watch *Spongebob Squarepants*. It was so weird, it was like a pregnancy craving, but only this one was not an eating situation. Since I don't have a TV in my room, I had to sneak downstairs to the living room TV. I knew that would be hard, but somehow you got me to do it anyway. I was walking towards the stairs when all of a sudden, I tripped completely over our little tiny pug puppy. I went rolling down the stairs, waking up everybody in the whole neighborhood; it was that loud. My mom and dad made sure that our precious dog was okay before checking on their own daughter. They were not too thrilled with the stunt I pulled, or shall I say, the stunt *you* pulled.

Now here I am, Friday, October 7th, writing this letter to you from the hospital. Oh yeah, I forgot to mention that I broke my leg, pulled a back muscle, fractured my arm, and have a very bad concussion. In case you have any sympathy flowers you want to send me, I'm in the Stony Brook Hospital located near Stony Brook college. I also like peanut M&Ms, Taylor Swift, Cheez-Its, Starbucks, and you could even throw in a Target gift card because it's right down the road... Praying that you won't return and hoping you stay as far away from me as possible.

Sincerely,  
Jillian

# Sleepless Sunrise

By Macy Carter

Jeremy lay awake, staring at the light of the streetlamp through the window, projected on the ceiling, wishing he was staring at the stars. He hated the city. “Busy town, not city,” his mother would say. Not that it would change anything. There were no stars here, no chirping crickets outside, no gentle breeze through the window. It was loud and busy and bright and crowded. Jeremy often felt claustrophobic in the city. He missed the wide open space, running through the field. “You’ll get used to it,” his mother would say. It had been almost a month now. He wasn’t used to it.

- - -

Christine lay awake, staring into the pitch black ceiling whose inky darkness seemed to swallow her whole, wishing a streetlamp would lighten up the dark. She hated the country. “It’s just a small town,” her father would say. Not that it would matter. There was no light here, no noise from the cars and the people, nothing to distract you or keep your mind busy. It was quiet and empty and dark and lonely. Christine often felt alone in the country. She missed the busy street, walking on the sidewalk and looking at all the colorful people and stores. “You’ll get used to it,” her father would say. It had been almost a month now. She wasn’t used to it.

- - -

Jeremy couldn’t wait for Friday. He could already smell the fresh air like it would be when he went back home to visit his family for his grandma’s birthday. She was turning eighty and the whole family was gathering to celebrate. Jeremy missed being just a mile away from them. He used to see his cousins every day and now it felt like he hadn’t seen them in forever. But Friday, everything would be better. It had to be.

- - -

Saturday morning, Christine woke to the neighbor’s rooster. She groaned and threw the blanket over her head. She hated waking up at the crack of dawn. Her dad and grandma always slept through the loud rooster call. They had both grown up here. One thing Christine could not complain about, though, was the view from the front porch. Her grandma had two rocking chairs there, and Christine would sit and drink coffee each morning, watching the radiant sunrise beaming over the corn fields.

This particular morning, though, Christine found something unexpected at the end of the sunrise: a boy, jogging on the road. It had been a little over a month and Christine knew everyone in town, but not him. She watched as he stopped and bent down to catch his breath before looking at the sunrise across the street. He sat on the grass and stared, the light shining gold onto his brown hair.

“You lost?” Christine called out. She watched as he jumped and swung his head around to find her. She waved.

“Who are *you*?” he said.

“Excuse me?”

“Sorry, it’s just that I used to live here, but I’ve never seen you before,” he stepped closer to the porch.

“Yeah, I’m new. I’m living here with my grandma because my dad lost his job— and I don’t know why I’m telling you this.”

The boy stared intently at her, she could see him listening. He was smiling, but only slightly. He looked peaceful here.

- - -

When Jeremy stopped to gaze at the sunrise, he didn’t expect to see what stood before him now. She was tall with thick curls that framed her face. Her dark eyes reflected the sunrise and her brow was

furrowed. She was focused, trying to figure him out.

“Well, I should probably go.”

“No, yeah, sure.”

“I’ll see you around...?”

“Christine.”

“Christine.”

Jeremy felt like he was running on air as he jogged home. He laughed as the wind hit his flushed cheeks. He wished he could just run here forever, but before he knew it, he was home. The sun rose now, reflecting off of his mother’s car, which stood before him like a death sentence. Tomorrow he had to go back home. Christine. He might not ever see her again, or the sunrise over the cornfield. It would feel like eternity before he once again felt the cold air burn the inside of his lungs and heard the sound of his feet flying through the dirt and the gravel. But he still had today, and he intended to make the most of it.

- - -

“Christine.” his voice echoed in Christine’s mind. He hadn’t told her his name. She would probably never see him again, or the skyscraper windows reflecting the 9 a.m. sun. It would be forever before she smelled the Halal food trucks or felt the brush of a dozen winter coats against hers as people rushed to their destinations. But at least it was Saturday, and for the moment, she was free.

At night, though, Christine was trapped. She had been up since 6 a.m. and her eyes were heavy, but her mind was awake. Still as a frozen pond, but awake, and she knew it wouldn’t be sleeping anytime soon. So, she decided to escape.

- - -

Jeremy’s mind was running. It felt like every thought he ever had was stuck in his mind at that exact moment, jumbled around and screaming at him. He didn’t want to leave tomorrow and he didn’t want to spoil his time here by thinking about leaving, so he left.

- - -

The crisp night air felt like a cure for any ailment. You could find clarity or purpose in it, or just a break from the stresses of life. Christine liked the sounds it carried. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, listening to the wind rush through the trees, the crickets chirping loudly, and a familiar voice calling her name. She opened her eyes.

Jeremy had been staring at the stars. He always used to stare up at them in awe as they glittered through the depths of space. He was seeing a shine that had started lightyears ago, but was only just reaching him. He broke from his fascination for a moment to look where he was going when he saw her. Christine. She was walking towards him with her eyes closed.

“Christine?”

She opened her eyes, “You! Oh my God, I don’t know your name.”

“Jeremy,” he laughed.

“What are you doing out here?”

“Couldn’t sleep.”

“Me neither. Hey, do you want to go back to my grandma’s house?”

“Sure.”

They weren’t far from Christine’s house. Jeremy sat on the steps when they arrived.

“You can sit in a chair, if you want.”

“No, this’ll do.”

“Can I get you anything?”

“Well I could really go for a cup of Mabel’s-”

“Hot chocolate,” Christine finished his thought, “I don’t think she’ll be open. How about water?”

Eventually, Jeremy found his way to a rocking chair, and the two sat, rocking, looking out into the night.

“Where do you live now? You said you used to live here so...”

“We moved to the city for my mom’s work. I hate it there. It’s loud and bustling and uncomfortable.”

Christine laughed, “That’s what I love about it. Where I come from, it’s a lot busier, and better than this middle of nowhere town.”

“Oof.”

“No, it’s great here, it’s just...it’s not home, you know? I miss the little things. Like, not having to drive an hour to get to a chain store. Or this old guy I would see outside my apartment window power walking every morning with a ridiculous orange t-shirt and-”

“And highlighter yellow sweatpants.”

“How did you...?!”

“I think I might live in your old building.”

“Looks like we’ve got a Freaky Friday situation on our hands, Jeremy. How does it feel to live my life?” she laughed.

“Terrible,” he smiled, “but right now, it’s not too bad.”

After hours of talking, they realized the sun was rising again.

“I should probably get back home,” Jeremy said reluctantly, looking at his shoes.

Christine hugged him. “What if I never see you again,” she said, her chin resting on his shoulder.

Jeremy moved to look into her eyes. “Fate has brought us this far. I’m sure it can handle the rest of the way,” he said with a sincerity that Christine had come to admire. She watched as Jeremy walked to the road.

“Jeremy!” He turned.

“Call me.”

“I will, Christine.”

In most happy endings, the contented couple rides off together into the sunset. But as Jeremy ran from Christine, the sun rising behind him, both knew that this was only the beginning of their story.

# 3 Benadryl

*By Riley Grimes*

11:27 p.m.- Thursday

After hours of working, stressing, struggling with studying— I am finished. Though I am not nearly as confident in my knowledge as I'd like to be, I can finally reward myself with the sweet release of sleep. I shut my notebooks, my folders, and my computer.

11:41 p.m.

I wash my face and brush my teeth. I change into pajamas and fall into bed. My legs ache, my mind aches. I pull up my sheet and flick off my lamp. The test is tomorrow. I need to sleep.

11:53 p.m.

I have rotated a few too many times. The comfortable position is yet to reveal itself to me. My pillow is too warm. I flip the pillow to the cooler side and roll to my back. I find myself staring at the ceiling.

12:00 a.m.- Friday

The cool side of the pillow is now the warm side, but the warm side is still warm. I still stare at the ceiling. I've stayed in this coffin position long enough that I have tricked my body into a feeling of comfort. I am exhausted.

12:08 a.m.

My blinks are appearing in decreasing intervals. Sleep is slowly pulling me under.

12:13 a.m.

My alarm. I sit up, now wide awake. If I had fallen asleep, I wouldn't have woken up in time for school. I reach for my phone to set the alarms: 5:40, 5:50, 6:00, 6:05, 6:10, and 6:12 just to be safe. I dread the moment I hear each of them.

12:20 a.m.

I feel like I've been sitting here for hours. My legs are sweaty, So I take my sheet off. The cold breeze from the fan strikes my bare feet. It feels nice.

12:22 a.m.

Nevermind, I'm now freezing. My toes feel numb. Goosebumps line my neck and trickle down my arms. I pull the sheet back over my legs. Warmth.

12:28 a.m.

I wonder if I studied all the material for the test tomorrow.

I'm certain I did.

I do not know.

I pull myself out of bed, turn on a light, and grab for my backpack. I look over the review sheet one last time. I need to sleep.

12:48 a.m.

I know most of what will be on the test, but to do well I will need to sleep. If I sleep now, and wake

up on time, I will have gotten five hours and twelve minutes of sleep (give or take). With that knowledge, I get back into bed and attempt to go back to sleep.

1:38 a.m.

I have no idea how long I have been laying here. I continue to rotate my body to find comfort, but to no avail.

2:01 a.m.

I have to go to the bathroom. Do I dare gamble on waiting until morning? I should be fine, I wake up in only a few more hours and I am not a toddler.

2:34 a.m.

Hunger. I need food. My stomach rumbles while I continue to find a comfortable position.

3:15 a.m.

Annoyance is starting to get the better of me. I wrestle with the sheets in frustration and in an attempt to expel any remaining energy from my body.

3:49 a.m.

I have found a comfortable position. Flat on my stomach with my bent arm under the pillow supporting my head. My legs stretched out across the width of the bed. I feel my muscles finally relax.

3:53 a.m.

An itch forms on my ankle. It was stupid of me to think I would finally be able to sleep. At first I stayed still, hoping it would pass with time. It does not. I try to scratch the itch with my foot, trying to keep the rest of my body in the exact same position. I can't reach it. I forfeit my comfort and reach down and dig into my ankle with my nail. Relief.

4:43 a.m.

I can't tell if I have gotten any sleep at all. The past few hours have been a blur. I know that I am going to be exhausted during my test. I know that I will struggle to keep my head from dropping onto my desk, and to keep the drool from escaping my mouth. Just over an hour remains until my first alarm.

???

I am comfortable. My mind is empty. I finally feel myself drifting off. Just as I slip into sleep, I am jolted awake by the sound of my alarm. It's 5:40, and I have officially gotten no sleep.

# Sleepless Decades

By Ebubechukwu Maduekwe

The wind brings in squalls and whispers through the window. Echoes of the wind bounce around the secluded room. There are voices roaming throughout the space, voices that will not rest. The bed of mine, is no longer rest worthy. It feels as if pins are crushing the bones of my spine. I lay up right at a full ninety degrees. It is only October but my body feels like a disgusting December. The shattering voices squeeze into my mental space. My hands are dragging on my face in frustration. The bellows are getting more and more antagonizing.

The screams are piercing my ears. The pain will not end, my sanity is decreasing. I have been awake for an ungodly amount of time. The night has felt less of a time of rest and more of a time of horror. But, the voices jump around my walls and begin to strangle me. Around and around the voices spin in my thoughts. The atmosphere of my room does not help comfort my fears and worries. Only a candle lit by my side table, a ticking hand watch, and the rest of the room in pitch dark with decaying pumpkins in the corner of my bed. Oh, how the atmosphere remains congruent to my mind. It's been centuries since I've been in contact with my beloved family. They do not remember me, for I know that. It feels even worse to know that a family of mine cannot remember my presence. All the wrongs I have committed have led up to what? I have no heart. I wish that the generations in my family can find it in them to forgive a soul like mine.

*Tick.* I cannot bare anymore! The screams are getting worse. I cannot sleep, if I sleep it'll be worse. When I rest I see the faces of those I've wronged. I remember a time, a time of no screams and despair. A life like mine, isn't life. I lived for long, too long. It is worse than death to be immortal and watch people breathe their last breath. The screams! They are breaking my windows. The decaying pumpkins are burnt to ashes. I rush to the door but the door is stagnant.

*Tick* The voices say they cannot leave so I cannot as well. I strike the door, I beat the door, I abuse the handle. I slide down the door with my back facing it. The screams bring me to my knees on the floor, blood runs from my ears. "What is my life!?" I scream. I kick my head back and look up at the ceiling covered in webs and holes.

*Tick.* The ticks from the clock made it worse. *Tick.* With pure anger I crush the clock into my left eye. I didn't dare to think about it, it was better in my eye than the night table. Black vines grew all over the room.

The vines darken the room so much I cannot see my own hands. I beg the voices to stop. The sleepless nights are not worth it. They say the wicked do not rest. But, I am beyond wicked. Blood on my hands from wiping my ears. I beg to end this madness. I thrash and contort myself to ease the pains. I beg, I beg. I realize all the insomnia and pain is related to all the lives I've taken prematurely. I broke apart families and ruined lives. I hold on to my scythe, for support. I stab the floor with my scythe so much it has become embedded into the ground beneath me. The last soul I will reap, is my own. For centuries people have feared my scythe and cloak. I now fear myself as well. The wind sweeps in and gracefully carries the remains of my own out the window. There is no rest for the wicked they say, but now I rest.

*Tick.*



Wicked Hour by Ebubechukwu Maduekwe



# Opposites

*By Mahreen Anwar*

I hadn't realized, until recently, that I never really had control over my life. And now that the depression, the paranoia, the delusion, have crescendoed to a point where there is no bow left to play, I feel that now is the perfect time to finally seize authority, and share what the dark and twisted abyss of my mind has been compressing for my entire life with this journal. I have nothing to lose since I don't plan on living very long after this entry is written.

It's a bit funny that this is both my first and last entry. I was meant to write down my thoughts every time I stayed awake, but it was never really my priority. Instead, I let this piece of garbage reside in my back pocket to take the space that was meant for a wallet. My time is limited so I suppose I should start before it ends.

He's never acted like this while growing up. In fact, he was the exact opposite. He was my only friend, and the only person who really knew me. He was always there in my darkest times, getting bullied, my first heart-break, and of course my mother's death. Shortly after this time when he started to unravel. In the hospital especially.

He urged me to do unspeakable things to the other patients. He told me that the only way to get him to stop was to act upon it. So, unwilling to start a fight with my old friend, I obliged. During the time we were allowed outside, I had called another resident towards me. It was an older man, he had to be around sixty. I believe he had bipolar disorder. The conversation we had was now a blur, but I do remember squeezing his neck to the point of him turning blue. The poor man was too weak to fight back, and even as a feeble, sleep deprived twenty year old I was able to take his conscious.

After that incident I was put into solitary confinement. He got louder. To drown him out I spoke to myself. The speaking turned into yelling, yelling into crying, crying into silence. I had spent a month in the cell, and in those four weeks he had gotten to be the loudest in my entire life.

It was on the last day of my sentence that he had done something I've never seen before. I was in a fetal position against the wall of the padded room. His voice became something like TV static, or white noise playing in the back of my mind. Until it suddenly stopped. The silence was so loud, and so alien-like. For a second I thought I had died. It was like the world around me had stopped.

I picked my head up and looked around the room, and to my surprise, I saw something. On the opposite side of the cell, where the toilet and sink were, a man stood, looking directly at me. I stared at his face, and let out a small gasp. He looked like a thirty year old man. He wasn't too tall, quite thin, with very dull skin and a tired, worn out expression. He looked like... me.

I was in disbelief. I opened my mouth but nothing came out. He mimicked me. But when he did, a singular phrase left his mouth. It was so quiet that a single blink could have drowned out his voice. He muttered in a well-rehearsed manner, "Your fault." Then, just as quickly as he appeared, he vanished without a trace. The rest of the night was silent. The rest of the week was silent. The rest of my time at the hospital was silent. I wish I could say the same about my life.

Today marks the one year anniversary of my discharge from the hospital. In that time I have gotten a total of 120 hours of sleep. If it wasn't for the ungodly amount of alcohol I've drunk it'd be a lot less. Each day I decide which street corner to reside, and each night I walk along the road with a brown paper bag in my hand, taking sips from it as he talks, and whispers, and yells. I've become completely numb to it. I've become numb to almost everything at this point. All of my emotions had shut down and no amount of pain could bring them back. Tonight, I had gotten particularly drunk. I had downed an entire bottle of cheap liquor before blacking out in front of an old laundromat. Usually when this happened, my mind would be

My mother was sitting in the corner, crying. She looked like she was avoiding eye contact with me. I watched in third person as my teenage self approached her. My eyes were wide, and fixated directly on the old woman who was sitting curled up, fearing for her life. My heart stopped as I found out why she was scared. In my hand was a kitchen knife, almost invisible in the dim light. My mother's sweet voice emanated through the room corrupted by desperation,

"Please, please get away from me! This isn't you. What happened? You aren't my son! My sweet, sweet boy please! Remember the playground, and the cakes I made you for your birthday, and when we would play with your imaginary friend, oh please son! I just want my baby boy back please! Please! Please!" Her begs were trivial. I tried to avert my eyes as the steel blade made contact with her small stomach. I tried to cover my ears to block out her horrid screams. I tried to tell myself that it was just a dream.

Another, much too familiar voice interrupted my thoughts. It began as a mumble, so barely audible over my mother's pain. Hot tears streamed down my face, for each one the speech got louder. "Your fault, your fault, your fault," it gradually got louder. "Your fault, your fault, your fault, your fault, your fault, your fault!" it screamed.

I was shaken awake by a man who asked if I was all right. I ignored him and stumbled toward the nearest subway station. It was completely barren at this time of night. The last train came, and I rushed to get on. There were three other people in the car. A man wearing a fitted suit and a woman wearing a fast food uniform got off at the same stop.

He's the only one left. He sits directly opposite of me and has not blinked, moved, or looked away from me as I write this. I see his mouth moving, muttering what I can only assume are those vile two words. I have in my jacket pocket the small orange bottle of white pills given to me when I was released from the asylum, along with this journal. In the other is a flask. The bottle was primarily opened about fifteen minutes ago, while the flask was already a quarter empty. I feel the drugs colliding with each other. It's getting harder to think and my vision is becoming increasingly blurry.

At the beginning of this entry I said that I had never really been in control of my life. I thought that he was the one that took the reins, but I now believe that it has in fact been the exact opposite. I believe that he and I are not opposites, but rather the exact same. I am him. He is me. His thoughts are really mine. His actions, they're mine. And I believe that this world will be a better place when that happens. I am not a good person, I never was. So with my time on this earth I'd like to do one good thing. And I believe that this is it.

# Why Me?

By Madelyn Serxner

The streets are lonely, with only a few street lamps keeping it company. Crickets are singing and my night light is humming. The room is dark. I catch my eyes wandering, skipping from object to object.

My thoughts— so complex, so fast, never-ending. Unable to clear my head. Unable to stop my racing mind.

The power they have over me— so great, so heavy, barely imaginable. I desperately try to stop them and erase them from my head. For, I only want to do one thing, nothing.

I want to stop these puzzling questions that keep running, wandering, and to my disbelief, eventually start fading. My body starts to fall asleep, a tingling sensation jolts down my spine. I desperately try to reach for my water on the nights' and next to me. Heat rushes to my face and I can feel my body immediately getting hotter. I am trapped, stuck, unable to move. I try and try until I'm unable to breathe. *It's just a dream*, I would tell myself. *This isn't real*. My heart, so loud in my chest, I can hear it pounding through my ears. My eyes, wide, sacred, afraid, restricted from me eagerly trying to close them. Such power this mysterious thing has over someone. Such, invisible and ethereal power.

Why me?

# Midnight Hours

By Lucia Simonetti

I sit up in my bed and hit my pillow a few times in hopes that it will suddenly make my frustration disappear. Newsflash- it's not that easy.

I shouldn't be surprised since the frustration has been bubbling up for the past three months. I started noticing that my restlessness was not going away. I thought it was due to stress; it's more than that.

I sigh as I fully get up from my bed and click on the lamp beside it. I open the blackout curtains I got as one of the "solutions" for my issue, but they obviously didn't work. I brush out the knots in my tousled hair and put on leggings and a hoodie. *No need to get dressed up at three in the morning.* I lace up my shoes before heading out the door carrying my essentials; pepper spray, a notebook, and a pen.

I make sure to lock my apartment door before taking off into the town.

At this time of night the town is almost dead. Almost.

I take my normal spot on a bench that is concealed by the darkness. This is the only spot that is not illuminated by the street lights and is *conveniently* located in front of the one place that somewhat makes my inability to sleep seem useful.

My quaint town may seem like the perfect weekend getaway since it's seemingly quiet and safe, but safe is the last word I would use to describe this place. Most residents would even consider this place to be the most relaxing place on earth because there is nothing to worry about.

But oh there is.

I keep looking at the door of the old speakeasy turned regular bar across the street from me, willing it to open. I need something. I need it to unlock the secrets this town is hiding because it's my one way ticket out of here. Now why wouldn't I just go in there? Because the door automatically locks when it closes and you need to have "the secret password" to be let in.

Three months ago, I was an intern at a big newspaper. When I thought I was getting the job, my boss turned around and said that my stories aren't interesting enough for them. Now of course I could always try to work at another newspaper, even a lesser one, but I knew my articles weren't the issue. I wrote an article about one of the biggest crime organizations in the world and I had the resources to get the information I needed. The other intern wrote about how people don't like rush hour traffic. Now why would a top newspaper take a basic article about traffic when they could've taken articles upon articles of research or answers to questions the police have been asking for decades.

So after I was released from my internship, I reviewed all my research and it brought me here. I will prove that my story is enough for every single newspaper and news station out there.

I spend a half hour watching before I finally see some movement but roll my eyes when I see a drunk guy stumbling out of the bar. *Definitely not newsworthy.* I look up at the night sky contemplating my life choices before I hear the door open again. Three guys in suits walk out of the bar, grab the almost unconscious drunk man, and drag him back into the bar. When the door is about to close, a huge gust of wind blows it open; I decide to take my opportunity.

I sprint across the street before the door shuts again. I must look like a lunatic, but nobody is awake to judge me.

I creep in and I stand in the little lobby. I walk up to the second door that leads into the actual bar and peer into the circle window. The place is still designed as a speakeasy and the people in there still dress like it is one. They all seem serious and are engaged in important conversations. I look down at my outfit; I definitely didn't expect my opportunity to come today. I look to my left and spot a coat rack. *This will just have to do.*

After I've put on a fairly large coat and a hat that covers my face, I take a deep breath and enter the

bar. The people seem too involved in their own worlds to even notice my presence, so I lean against the bar and look around. As I'm scoping out the room, I see a door open out of the corner of my eye. I quickly turn my head and see the two men I saw carrying the drunk.

I could leave right now and forget this ever happened- that would be easy. Or, I could go inside the creepy room. Since my feet are already guiding me towards the door, I know I've made my decision. I swiftly open the door. I'm on high alert because, for a notorious crime hotspot, it sure is easy to break in here. The room is dark when I walk in, so I flick on the lights. I gasp at the sight. On the wall is a collection of every article I've ever written, dating back all the way to my early college days. Along this wall are pictures of me throughout the past few months I've been here. When I'm walking around town, when I'm buying groceries, even me being camped out in front of the bar. It all makes sense. The entrance door being left open, no security, everyone paying attention to their own conversations. It was all a *trap*.

I have no time to process all of this before I feel a sharp pain on the back of my head.

Everything goes dark...

*My eyes feel heavy as my body wills them to open. This is the first time I have gotten a rest in a long time, just let me sleep. My mind is screaming to let me rest while my body is jolting me awake.*

I try to jump up from my seat, but I'm restrained by rope. I look around the dimly lit office and see I'm surrounded. One man from the crowd of people surrounding me walks towards me.

"Finally, you're awake."

# Sleepless Nights Are My Closest Friend

By Dulcebella Hernandez

This all circles back to when I was in middle school. I used to have a good sleep schedule, falling asleep around 9 p.m, maybe 9:30p.m at the latest. Everything was going great. No horrible eye bags, no falling asleep during class, I was an amazing student with pretty nice grades. I have no clue how this all started, one day my mind went, "Oh wow, you seem like a person who doesn't need eight hours of sleep, let's reduce that to half." From then on I've had sleepless nights.

Some days I'd fall asleep at midnight, or maybe five in the morning. Even so it was impossible to get a good night's rest. Even if I went to bed early I'd be staring up at my ceiling waiting for something, anything to happen. A yawn, droopy eyes. I would be relieved if I closed my eyes for more than five seconds 'cause that would mean I'd fall asleep soon. I then found out this sleepless habit was called insomnia.

It became my best friend really fast. maybe my phone was the problem, I had to get rid of it. I'd shut off my phone and put it somewhere it wouldn't distract me. Nothing. I'd still stare at the ceiling. What if I did something exhausting for hours before bed? Maybe that would get me tired. Trying three hours of volleyball without stopping certainly is exhausting, but trying to fall asleep was still a hard task. Surrounded by darkness, no noise, just crickets. I couldn't fall asleep, it's like my body wouldn't allow me to. It really is bad for your health, I should know 'cause now I'm seeing blurs and my eyes are more irritated when faced with light. There's nothing I can do now, but I hope I'll fall asleep early tonight.

# Anxiety

*By Jordana Schweitzer*

I can't move. I can't breathe. I can't look around me for fear that the world won't revolve the way I intend it to be. Mind you, this is all transpiring while I'm laying in bed. The only problem is when you're laying in bed, the only thing you can do is fight off the drowsiness long enough to regret getting in bed in the first place. This is because you know what trying to shut your eyes will do. Which is something that makes me want to tear myself apart from the inside out. If only things were different... If only I wasn't wallowing in the deep dark pit I call a brain! It only takes so long before I sink back into old familiar habits.

My thoughts come swirling back down from the foreboding spirals I call my ceiling. Black spots encapsulate and enrapture my thoughts as that of a mouse tantalizing their cat's titillations. Oh how I wanted to reach my hand out and capture a thought! It was excruciatingly eluding my range of motion, causing just enough turmoil to make me want to cry outside of the minute dreamworld I found myself oh so deliciously pinned in. Finally, but with the gingeriness that a fisherman might pull on a nudging line, I was able to adjust my lens so that the resolution was just barely visible on a singular thought.

I stepped one foot out, then another into the scene that was spread out before me.

It was me, but older. A lot older. My cheeks were wrinkled with age, knobby knees that I thought only existed in movies were now mine. The apartment I was inhabiting was quite small; suffocating compared to the space I had occupied as a youth. From my murky perspective, it consisted of a main room, with a bed and nightstand and a minimalistic looking alarm clock. Good to know I still wake up at a reasonable hour, I thought semi-hysterically as I took in the rest of my shoddy condition. Did I really live alone? And live was the bare bones terminology here. There seemed to be no leisurely articles around the entire space, save for a moth-eaten curtain that seemed to be housing some once pleasant looking greenery.

I stepped closer to the hazy apparition of my future self, as if she could tell me what the heck happened in sixty years. I began to notice the finer features of her. Yes, I was separating myself from the person in front of me because it was too painful to think of her... no whatever this was, as myself. Her eyes were sunken and empty, back slouched against a Big Joe recliner that needed to be refurbished and burned quite some time ago. Also at this point the scene around her had solidified, and I was starting to notice some common themes in how she maintained things. Firstly the color scheme was quite monochrome, the exception being the aforementioned curtain. The bathroom hit me first with the stench. Then the mold surrounding the walls materialized, and I very nearly retched.

She pointed a gnarled finger at me and uttered a single bone chilling phrase, "What you see is a culmination of all of the choices that you made, or rather what you didn't make. You stood off to the side and wallowed in self pity when you could've had it all." I noticed that even in her final years, she was still selfish and pitifully pitiless. I swallowed and answered back as levelly as I could,

"No, it's you who's suffered in your own mistakes, I will make a path and thrive where you have failed, you aren't me, I accept that and feel nothing for you." She let out a wicked screech at that, and her mouth elongated to the size of my body, and she swallowed me whole. Waking up was the worst part.

# Under The Bed and In The Closet

*By Jenna Levine*

It's a nightly occurrence now, waiting.

I keep my eyes wide open to keep it from dragging me under. Its long, scraggly, fleshy arms itch to grab me and choke me out. Its interminable legs allow it to tower high above me, a feature that's made to intimidate me even more; it waits to kick and hurt me. Hit me until I can no longer breathe. I know it's coming to get me. It lurks under the bed waiting to pounce. It'll catch me, drag me under the bed when I least expect it.

It scares me half to death. I know when it finally comes out to get me I have no chance of survival. It's far more powerful than I am. I'm weak, small, and scrawny; It's large and assertive.

Mom tells me all the time that there's nothing to worry about, but I don't believe her. I can hear it breathing. Its harsh, rough, gurgly breath wrecks from under the bed. I listen to the creaking of the floorboards as the monster makes the slightest movements. Every time the floorboards groan, I fear it's going to strike.

It's behind me, I feel its presence. It shifts closer... and closer. My eyes blur with tears. I can feel the warm, salty liquid streaming down my face; pooling into the warm pillow I'm laying on. My breath grows quicker, and suddenly I can't breathe.

It's got me! I panic, waving my arms around me, trying to swat away the monster. "Please don't hurt me!" I shriek, still flailing my arms wildly. I quickly fumble for the bed sheets and I cower under them. My breath makes hiding under the covers too hot to withstand, and a wave of anxiety brushes over me. It's not safe outside. The monster is waiting for me; he's waiting to feast on my flesh, tear me apart limb from limb, and torture me until I can no longer take it.

Moments pass, and I realize it's gone quiet. I can't hear the monster's raspy breath anymore. The crickets from outside my room chirp loudly. Making their presence known. I focus on the insects trilling, attempting to calm myself. It has to be gone by now, back to the monster world, far, far away from me.

Cautiously, I take the covers off from over my head. The cold of my room hits me like winter's breath, it feels soothing on my warm face. It's empty. The only things around are the clothes I threw carelessly on the floor this morning.

I look around once more and I meticulously plan my escape to safety. Then I hear it, scratching, scraping at the closet door. The other monster. Short, stubby, ovular, like an egg. Its fluffy body only deceives you, for it is not a cute, cuddly buddy you want to have around. No, like the other flesh-eating monster, it too likes to feed on children. It grows stronger with every ounce of fear it induces into the children it torments.

I'm paralyzed with horror. There's no escape. My vision blurs with the tears building in my eyes once more. It's all over. I drop my face into the pillow, hoping that maybe this was all a dream, and I've been sound asleep this whole time. I'm perfectly safe and not in a constant state of fear. The monsters aren't real.

But alas, I don't wake up, this isn't a dream. The fear comes swarming in again. Spiraling through my mind, chasing each and every peaceful thought away to only leave the foreboding thoughts behind. The scratching continues and I decide the only way to make everything better is to make a run for it.

I draw in a deep breath, summoning all the strength and courage I can muster.

I pull the covers off from over my legs, and I dash to the door and fumble with the doorknob. Once I successfully open the door I run down the hall to my parents' room. I open their door and crawl into the bed.



“There are monsters in my room,” I reply between sniffles.

“There’s no such thing as monsters,” My dad chimes in. My mom sits up and wraps her arms around me, comforting me for a while, occasionally wiping away my tears. Every once in a while she strokes her hand through my hair.

“You’re OK sweetie,” she says, and for the first time tonight, I feel safe.

# State of Grace

*By Lydia McGuigan*

A comfortable silence blanketed the small bedroom. The only sound that could be heard was the occasional horn honking from passing cars and the quiet exhales of the sleeping figure that lay still in front of David.

He gazed over her shoulder. The digital alarm clock resting on the nightstand read two-forty three in the morning in its light-up green numbers. His eyes fixed upon the sleeping woman in front of him. Maria, his wife, was out cold after a day of chasing their toddler around and constantly poking herself with a sewing needle while trying to fix the numerous tears and holes in David's clothes.

He took in the peaceful sight of her finally being able to rest. Her eyelashes rested on her soft cheeks. The dark brown curls of her messy hair lay atop her forehead and sprawled out over the pillow. Under her eyes laid heavy bags that began to form over the years. The usual crease between her eyebrows seemed to have vanished in her relaxed state.

It was relieving to see his wife calmly sleeping. She had been up for the past few nights making sure their child was actually out cold for the night and not just pretending. The gentle rise and fall of her chest as she breathed contributed to the sense of pure tranquility that filled the room. One of the straps of her nightgown fell off her shoulder a bit revealing one of the many freckles that littered her skin.

David smiled. He could lay here for hours on end admiring every feature and little detail about his wife. The man truly loved everything about her. Her long curly hair that bounced slightly when she walked, her deep brown eyes that he could get lost in, and the mole that sat on her cheek just below her left eye. She had an ear-to-ear grin that gave anyone who witnessed it a warm feeling. The mere sight of it could take an awful day to an amazing one. It was David's driving factor: he knew that no matter how brutal his day was, Maria would be waiting for him on the other side of their apartment door with that brilliant smile and her arms open for a loving embrace. She would always be there, ready to hold him in her arms and run her fingers through the thick locks of his hair. The feeling was euphoric.

Of course, David always tried to return the favor. He always aided in the housework when he returned home from work and made sure his wife wasn't overdoing it. Despite her many protests, the man insisted.

Maria was a blessing. She was an angel. She was the sun that peaked out from behind the clouds after a harsh thunderstorm. The woman was kind and pure-hearted but also abrasive and fair when it was required. She was respected by everyone and greatly appreciated by those close to her.

David inched towards her. He pulled his sleeping wife closer so that the woman was wrapped in his arms. He couldn't ask for a more perfect moment. All he needed to be happy was this beautiful woman in his arms. Although she never thought the same, he believed that not even a goddess could match the heavenly beauty of his wife. To him, every feature she considered a flaw was just another reason to love her. Her soft body that she had been insecure about since the birth of their child was immensely beautiful and reminded him of how incredibly strong she was. He never thought of the dusty pink stretch marks on her belly and hips as something to be ashamed of or the newfound wrinkles that began to form on her face.

David planted a kiss on her forehead. He caressed her arm gently as his eyelids started to feel heavy. He was now ready to fall asleep in his dark bedroom blanketed in silence beside the occasional horn honking from late-night drivers. He was ready to fall asleep with his dear wife who he would give the world. Nothing would ever be able to beat the feeling of dozing off with his beloved enveloped in his arms.

# What Has Stress Done to Me?

*By Madison Maida*

I lay on my bed, restless, uncomfortable, and exhausted. The same thing playing continuously in my head, “stress is life’s killer and savior”. It’s something my mother always used to tell me. I’ve always questioned it. What does that mean? I understand the killer part. I believe everyone has experienced burn-out when it comes to school, work, family, etc. Even right now, I feel so burnt out. Yet I’m so confused. It’s been two weeks and I still haven’t had a single night of sleep where I slept more than three hours. My Isonomia is killing me.

Trick or treat street, honor societies, clubs, work, etc. Everything is like a fat blanket suffocating me. Even thinking about everything gives me a consistent headache. How is one supposed to do this all, while maintaining a social life, family life, and sleep schedule. Yet what people say is very true, once your mental health starts to deplete so does your physical. I know school is no joke, but this is just high school, I wonder what college will be like.

Again laying on my comfy bed. So soft, my beautiful white pillow under me. Which I can sink my aching head into. With a nice comfy beautiful blanket; a warm blanket, that just snuggles and cuddles with me. But even with that, I cannot fall asleep. I just lay there endlessly as the clock ticks. Thinking about everything, the stress is killing.

Yet, while laying on my comfy bed. Still unable to sleep, an idea ponders within my head. as my mother has stated. Has stress ever helped me? I know it can cause me great grief but how has it helped me? It’s a great motivator, always helps when it comes to completing my assignments. It’s also my biggest supporter when it comes to college cheering me on to get into my dream college. Not only that it really helps to ensure I do all my assignments correctly or also studying for an exam. Although outside of my education there is stress to impress loved ones, or the stress to ensure you have a clean home. Honestly despite the fact I hate it so much, it really has saved me throughout my lifetime.

Honestly although I lay awake unable to sleep, I feel a sense of accomplishment and relief. Although I may hate stress, it really has a severe effect on myself and so many others. I have to agree with my mother, stress is life’s killer and savior.

# The Wreck

*By Maddie Dobias*

The same thing happens every night. I sit in my cold room, the shadows on the wall taunting me as my eyes begin to flutter shut. I attempt to force them to stay open. My lack of sleep is unhealthy, and it's beginning to show. The bags under my eyes have grown larger, and my cheeks are gaunt. Yet, I can't relinquish myself and give into the siren song of sleep.

I can't watch it happen again. Each time I let myself fall asleep, I am plagued with the memories. The final flash of the lights, the honk of the horn, and the horrified gasp of the passenger next to me. People around me tell me I need to forgive myself, and that it's not my fault. Yet, my mind won't seem to let me forget. The moments replay like a reel of the worst film ever shown.

The only thing that seems to keep me awake is all the possibilities. All the thoughts of what else could have happened that night, and how things could have gone differently. What if we pulled out of the driveway five minutes later? What if we stopped at the gas station on the way? It's not like I'll ever get the opportunity to go back and test these theories.

It all happened so quickly- one fell swoop of the steering wheel, and my whole life shattered. I didn't mean to swerve that far. I thought I saw something we were going to hit, maybe a deer or even a pedestrian. I've told the story so many times it's starting to get blurry, like when a story gets passed down through your family. Other people had to repeat the story back to me at first, because I had no real recollection. Maybe I repressed it. I can't repress it anymore. The smoke coming out of the car, and the mangled wreck of metal bent around the tree. Not to mention the body, crimson and shiny, yet still beautiful even in pain.

I can still hear the sirens as the large vans pulled up, carrying all of my hope and love on a stretcher in the back. The rushing smell of the hospital antiseptic still stings my nose, and I still remember the feeling of the hospital chair on my back. Hospital chairs have a strange form of comfort- while your body can feel comfortable, they do nothing to calm down the thoughts flying back and forth.

The last image that haunts my brain. The doctor, in his bloody and stained scrubs, approaches with his clipboard in hand. The messy scrawls are unlegible, presumably written in a hurry. I don't want to read the rushed writing anyway- I'm afraid of what it might say. As soon as he opens his mouth, it all stops. My brain won't give me the peace of letting it end, and I must wait in agony for one night more.

So for now, I'll continue to pace my apartment, and let the thoughts rush in, as my energy drains out.

# Door Dream

By Fazal Naqvi

*“Door! Door! DOOR!”*

The voice was echoing in my head. I could not escape it. Sweat was flowing down my face. My knees were shivering, my feet trembling, my fingers unable to contract. The hair on my arms stood up; I felt a shockwave down my body. I was standing in a hallway, the lights were flashing, I couldn't get a glimpse of what was ahead of me.

*“Door! Door! DOOR!”*

The voice wasn't going away. Finally, the flashing stopped. I saw the door. My mind was telling me to run away, to get as far away from the hallway as possible. I tried to run away, but my body refused to listen to me.

*“Door! Door! Door!”*

The voice was inviting me. I tried to run, but there was an unexplainable temptation that drew me to the door. I did not command my body to move, yet, without instruction, it slowly began walking to the door. I tried to stop; I went faster. Again, I tried to stop; I started to run. Before I could process my next thought, I was at the door.

Everything around me became stagnant. With hesitation, I opened the door. A light, as bright as the stars, hit me.

I awoke. My shirt was full of sweat, my pillow drenched. I felt something strange in my lower abdomen. My mind was telling me to go to the door again. This time, I ran to the door and entered a room. I let my body go to ease. All of my muscles relaxed. I sighed in relief. Before I exited, I washed my hands, wiped away my sweat, and returned to bed. As it turned out, I only had to use the bathroom.

# Restless Nightmares

By *Adastra Cuiffo*

Days and nights went by with no thoughts in her mind. All along she thought it was just one big nightmare. What she did was sinful and unforgivable. She sat in this room with a blank expression across her face. Was she even aware of why she was sitting here? Does she even know what she has done? Well it turns out she they were referring to was actually me! They were talking about what I had done. Here I was, a 35-year old single mom with 3 daughters to take care of. Yet instead of being at home with them, I was sitting in some courtroom wearing a smelly orange outfit with handcuffs on my wrists. My head was pounding, my mind was spinning, and my eyes were drooping. I needed to take my morning solriamfetol. Maybe if I had, I would have been able to know where I was. At that moment I just wanted someone to tell me what was going on. All I could think about was what had I done to get here?

“Mrs. Ravenswood we are here today by the court of law to discuss your sentencing. You are being charged with three counts of first degree murder. Are there any witnesses you would like to call up to the stand before the final decision?” The room was silent and some lady next to me who was wearing way too much perfume tapped my shoulder.

“You have to cooperate”, she said. “You need to answer his questions if you want a reduced sentence.” I was too tired to think and too confused to comply with the judges questions. Safe to say I didn’t make a good enough case for myself in that room. Sadly, that was my one and only chance to explain to him and to the jury what I had done. Or at least what I thought I had done. Instead I stayed quiet because of how tired I was.

A few days after, I arrived in what the judge said my new home was. A security guard opened the back door to the van and told me to get out of the vehicle. I was still wearing this orange outfit, which was even smellier now, and the handcuffs were still around my wrist. I got out of the van and was escorted inside the building. Here they gave me one off-white towel, a pair of weird looking shoes, and another smelly orange jumpsuit. I then realized that I was in prison. Prison? Me? Why? What happened? All of these were questions that couldn’t be answered. Though I should have known.

After receiving these items, I was taken to my cell. Everything looked so depressing. Inside the cell were two rock solid beds and a toilet. The guard told me that for the rest of my life I would be in this hell-hole. All I could remember doing was letting out a big sigh. Still unsure of what made me get arrested and sent to jail for life, I tried to stay out of trouble and stay on the down low.

My cellmate’s name was Cassandra, but she told me people called her Candy. Candy was unlike anyone I had ever met before. She was crazy and had crooked teeth but seemed like a nice lady. At least to me. Later I would discover that she wasn’t all that nice.

Candy helped me get situated to my new life and taught me all the “jail tricks.” She helped me get used to a new schedule and made me feel a bit better about this whole thing. I mean, how good could I really feel? I was sitting in jail.

Even though Candy helped a lot, the first couple months were still rough. I stayed up pretty much every night thinking about what I did to end up in prison. I still had no answer to this question. One night I was lying awake in my bed when I had a vision. A vision of my three girls laying in their beds while I read them a bedtime story. I was reading them their favorite princess stories. I screamed. Two months had gone by and for some reason I had just remembered that I was a mother. How could I forget them all this time? After this vision, I stayed restless for the time being while I was in prison. I wished and prayed that they were okay every night.

The next morning the guards came around with our breakfast. If you would call it that. I took my tray from the guard and turned around to try and eat it. I looked up and Candy wasn’t there. The guard was furious and asked me all kinds of questions. Questions that I once again had no answers to. I haven’t

had a good night's sleep in months and it was too early for me to be getting interrogated.

More guards came over to us because they had heard the commotion. The prison went into lockdown. No one was allowed to leave or enter the building. I was clueless as to how she escaped the cell. Everynight I stay awake and she snores like an old man. I wasn't sure how I didn't hear her break out. I was taken out of the cell and questioned more. The officers told me that Candy was just like me. A vicious murderer. Now, I've been told that I had killed three people and that's why I'm in jail but no one had ever elaborated on that. And, I certainly don't remember killing anyone. But, they had just told me that Candy was in jail for only a few months before I had arrived. She was wanted for a long time before that though. She has seven murders under her belt. They told me she was caught in a drug store stealing prescription pills. All I could think was: *Wow! You kill seven people without getting caught but you can't even steal something from the pharmacy.*

Candy was gone for several weeks. It was kind of annoying that she had left. She was good company and now with her being gone, they took away outdoor time to increase safety. Everyday the guards scoffed at me while bringing meals. Everyone thought I had helped her escape. If I had helped her escape, why wouldn't I go with her? I had three daughters at home who needed their mom.

One day, there was fluster throughout the prison. Candy had killed again and they had suspicions she was going to be on a spree. "She'll make a mistake," "We will catch her soon," "She will be stopped." All throughout the building we heard things like this. I stayed up at night thinking about where she could be or what she was doing.

The officers still had no luck finding her and would routinely question me. They still thought I had something to do with her escaping. They pulled me from my cell to talk about her once again. But, this time was different. They tried to guilt trip me into telling them where she was planning on going. I couldn't tell them because I didn't know. They showed me three pictures of my beautiful girls. Then they showed me three more pictures. Three more pictures of my girls. This time, my girls were dead in the pictures. At this point it all clicked. I had killed them.

I started crying. The tall officer said, "Candy is going to do this to more children. Just as you already did to yours." I cried and cried. Hearing the words that I had killed my own children had shattered me. How could I do such a thing?

When they brought me back to my cell it was already dark outside. There weren't many lights on inside. Each cell had a small barely lit bulb but it must've been late because for the most part everyone's was off. Mine was off too since the last five hours I was being questioned about Candy. I also just discovered what I had done and my head wasn't straight.

I got into my bed all teary eyed and wept. A few hours had passed and I had just sat there crying. Not like I would've been able to fall asleep anyways. I heard a noise aside from my sniffles so I turned my dimly lit light on. After doing so, I saw a faint shadow. "Candy is that you," I say. I turned my head and there she was. Sitting on her bed staring at me. "What are you doing Candy? Everyone's been looking for you for so long! I have to tell the guards you were here so they stop questioning me." She didn't say a word to me. I think what set her off is the fact that I mentioned to tell the guards about her being back. She looked possessed and evil like a murderer. Funny because she actually was one and now she was sitting in the same room as me after being gone for several weeks.

I tried to calm her down but she didn't care. She was getting even more angry and before I could scream she had her hands over my mouth. She started trying to strangle me and I couldn't fight back. Her hands are around my neck and I start giving up. All of a sudden my eyes opened and I gasped for air. When I looked around the room I was in my bed. Not my cell bed, but my real bed. I get up and go out into the hallway. I was in my own house. There were sounds coming from downstairs. My three daughters were playing dress up together. One of them asked me what was for breakfast. just a dream?

All along I had a nightmare, a scary one at that. I hadn't been sleeping well due to my insomnia. I must've finally fallen asleep and had a nightmare. I looked for my pills to help me get through the day. I couldn't find them but I was just so relieved that the nightmare was over, but was it really just a dream?



# Crushed

*By Joseph Finn*

I can't stop thinking about her. She owns me. She owns my thoughts and dreams, every day, every hour, every minute, every second. All I can think about is her.

It started in October. I don't exactly know how it started. All I know is that it started building up from the beginning of October, and by the middle of the month, the crush was too large to ignore.

I don't know anything about her. Her likes and dislikes, her hobbies; and yet, that still hasn't stopped my attraction to her. If anything, the mystery makes me want her more. I'm pretty sure that's a horrible thing to admit, but my love for her is way too strong.

I don't want to name any names here, because I am 99.9% sure that the feeling is not mutual. Yes, we have talked before, but never in a one-on-one conversation.

I don't know if this is a normal human experience. I don't think I'm in the right here, but it's how I feel. I can't go a day without thinking about the way she looks with her beautiful voice and her great hair. I tried discussing it with one of my friends. She told me to stalk her on social media, which I don't have. The act of talking to someone just made me think about how idiotic this whole ordeal is. It's a stupid crush, and it is my first, so it feels larger than life. And yet, I'm not over it. I still feel all of the strong feelings of attraction to this girl.

I'm not sure how to approach this situation. I know that I'd be turned down if I asked her out on a date. She is in a lot of my classes, but I don't sit by her in any of them.

I just can't stop thinking about her.

# Reviews

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# Review of Maurice by E.M. Foster

By Samantha Rodriguez

*Maurice*, written by EM Forster in 1914, is a novel revolving around Maurice Hall as he comes of age in England. Maurice rejects the ideals of society in favor of creating his own ideals, finding salvation in a man who is of a significantly lower class than him. Clive, Hall's initial romantic interest throughout his years at university and a little while after, is a particularly interesting character; in contrast to Maurice, he goes on a trip to Greece and finds himself rejecting Hall afterwards, having chosen tradition over rebellion. He marries a woman by the name of Anne and becomes a government official. Forster weaves a narrative in which we find ourselves asking, "Is it worth it to be successful and adhere to the standards of society if one is ultimately miserable as a result?" Ultimately, *Maurice* is a story that questions the validity of England's societal conventions in the twentieth century, and though it has been over a hundred years since it was first written, its themes are as poignant as ever in the modern day.

# Blonde; Necrophiliac Entertainment

By Lydia McGuigan

Andrew Dominik's *Blonde*, a film about Marilyn Monroe, was one of the most anticipated films this year. The movie, a fictional take on Monroe's life based on a novel of the same name by Joyce Carol Oates, got an astounding eleven-minute standing ovation at the Venice Film Festival back in September. When the film was released to general audiences, this long-standing ovation would mean nothing. It was received incredibly poorly and turned out to be one of the most disappointing movies to come out this year. As someone who sat through the full two hours and forty-six-minute runtime, I can't help but agree with these harsh critics.

*Blonde* has very few positives. The film has a stellar cast with stars like Ana de Armas and Adrien Brody. De Armas' performance was nothing short of amazing and could be considered for an award if the rest of the film wasn't a complete mess. The outfit recreations were also done well besides a few missing details like the black outline of the bow on Monroe's iconic *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* dress or the lack of shape in the breast area of a majority of the costumes. Seriously, it wouldn't hurt to use a cone bra. The cinematography was alright. It was one of the few things that the film was praised for but it was nothing special. That's just about it when it comes to the good things I have to say about this film.

*Blonde*, a movie about exploitation, partakes in the exploitation of Monroe the way that many did to her during her life. Although some supporters of this film argue that this is the point of the film, the film seems to revel in her pain rather than condemning the cruel treatment she received during her life. The writers don't respect Marilyn. The scenes are created to make it feel like all of her problems are her faults. This is evident in the talking fetus scene. Yes, that was a really creative choice that someone decided to make. A talking CGI fetus.

Films about famous people don't always have to adhere to conventional biopic standards. Movies like *Spencer*, a film about princess Diana, do not and are raved about. It made things up to illustrate a deeper meaning of how Diana Spencer must've felt during her time with the royal family, while still showing the well rounded kind-hearted princess Diana was. But, *Blonde* is directionless misery entertainment.

The film tried to explore the idea of Marilyn Monroe being a mask and a character for Norma Jeane. She's presented as an avatar of suffering, brought low by the misery of a rough childhood, lack of a father, and an industry of men who abused and exploited her until she died in 1962, at the age of thirty-six. Of course, there is truth to that story, but it's hardly the only truth to be drawn from Monroe's tough life and extraordinary career. The long runtime doesn't help this either and it's tedious to keep hitting this note for nearly three hours. Another problem with the film is that it skips forward from her difficult childhood straight to the peak of her stardom. There is no trajectory or introduction to her created persona.

*Blonde* goes to extreme lengths of faithfully recreating iconic scenes from Marilyn Monroe's movies and even real events from her life while tormenting her in the process. It tries to get us to feel for Norma Jeane but dwells on her pain so much that it makes her agonizingly boring and flat. This film's sense of "empathy" is another form of exploitation brought on by Hollywood to make money off of this woman's legacy. *Blonde* is a repetitive, uninteresting, disrespectful film trying to pass itself off as deep with no real substance and it's one of the absolute worst movies I've ever seen.

# Paddington 2; Better Than Citizen Kane

By Lydia McGuigan

I'm not ashamed to admit that *Paddington 2* is one of the greatest films I've ever seen. *Paddington*, which was released in 2015, was an unexpected breath of fresh air when it came to movies adapted from children's books. The movie was a delightful combination of slapstick comedy, punny wordplay, and heartfelt emotional moments. It charmed viewers of all ages by teaching simple lessons like the importance of kindness and family love.

Three years after the release of the first movie, *Paddington 2* proves once again that Paddington bear has a bigger cultural impact than the bible. The movie, just like in the first one, depicts a London that is colorfully picturesque but also filled with adventure and possible danger. Paddington, voiced by Ben Whishaw, has now settled comfortably into his new life with the Brown family. He is also a vital member of the community. He helps forgetful neighbors and runs errands for friends all the while making everyone's day brighter with his unconditional generosity.

Back in Peru, Paddington's home country, his dear Aunt Lucy is about to turn one hundred and Paddington wants nothing more than to buy her the perfect present. He knows he's found the ideal gift to express his love with when he discovers a vintage pop-up book of London in an antique store. The pop-up book sequence is one of the highlights of this film. It's colorful, and creative, and leaves the audience with a warm feeling.

Paddington resorts to taking on several obscure jobs to pay for his ideal gift for Aunt Lucy. The movie's director, Paul King, meticulously crafts the set-ups for the inevitable meltdowns that occur with each new gig.

Our beloved protagonist is not the only one with an eye on this special pop-up book. Phoenix Buchanan, played by the charming Hugh Grant, wants the book to exploit its hidden secrets for profit. I won't get into any spoilers because I think that everyone and their mother should watch this movie but it takes an unexpected turn that worked surprisingly well. No matter the obstacle Paddington faces, he finds a way through it by sticking to his simple philosophy: When you're kind to others, everything will turn out alright in the end. Don't be rude, be like Paddington.

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