

Lessons in Insomnia

by Christian Bell

Three o'clock on a Tuesday morning, wide awake, I decided to teach a class. There's this site online where you can spontaneously teach non-credit courses, and there are thousands of students lurking, ready to pounce on a new class. Your syllabus can be no more than 300 words, and the class no longer than one two-hour session. The course I decided to teach was Lessons in Insomnia. The class filled within seconds. 115 people were on standby. I speak and faceless people listen. In this sleepless, dead hour, I ramble and stumble but I let the words from my inner mind fly. Most of all, I have purpose.

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Here are the lords of Ambien, the gods of Xanax. The doctor says, no caffeine, no alcohol, no good reason for being alive. Just pull the trigger, man.

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I didn't want to wake you. Here's a Corvette instead of a Prius. My dreams are bent in the invisible stardust. Here are the gods of fate over the lords of chance. It'll all make sense when you're sitting on an éclair chaise longue by the morning pool of coffee. Here's hot digital flame instead of cold paper ice. I have to write it down and make it up since I can't participate. Here are the world's paintings you'll never see become the reconfigured scrap of a serial killer's mind. I shut my eyes and for you I pretend.

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These stops and starts, brief naps accumulating into fractured nights of sleep. How long can a body withstand it? How long before the brain stops beating, the heart stops thinking? I'm looking at life through a shattered pane of glass that's been glued back together. I think, the world's passed me by. I think, I can't walk across the street, it's just too much. I think, if I could only sleep.

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I look over at you and you're sound asleep. Your perfect face, mouth closed in slightest pout, head straight in a funereal pose. I

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don't know what it's like. I move around just to make sure you're still breathing. You sigh and turn to your side. I'm forever the sentinel. Carry on, world, carry on.

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Count the people I knew who didn't live long enough. Wonder how it could just as easily have been me. Figure out what I was doing 30 years ago. Realize how quickly 30 years goes by. Figure out all the places where I used to hold court and drink all night. Realize how many of these places no longer exist. Think about the people with whom I used to hold court. Wonder where they are now, if they still drink, if they're still alive.

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Seriously, I didn't want to wake you.

