Minnie and Winnie slept in a shell. Sleep, little ladies!

And they slept well.

“I’ve diagnosed you,” my roommate, Cassidy, said triumphantly from her desk. I had been scrolling through my Facebook newsfeed idly and looked up at her, grinning. Cassidy, a biology major, constantly “diagnosed” people and often turned out to be right. Once, she’d figured out that I had bronchitis before the doctor did just by listening to my cough.

“What do you mean?” I asked her.

“You know how I said you were screaming in your sleep? Well, it’s night terrors,” she turned to me, her thin brown curls shifting.

“Night terrors?” the words struck me.

“Yeah. Apparently, it means that you scream in your sleep for no clear reason, then fall back asleep. It’s not even from a nightmare. It’s a partial waking, like sleepwalking or sleep talking.”

I furrowed my brow. The idea of screaming at night, and then not remembering doing so, gave me chills. What could possibly make me do such a thing?

“Is there any way to stop it? I feel bad waking you up like that.”

“Not that I found. And it’s okay, you don’t do it every night. You can’t really help it,” she turned back to her computer, satisfied that she had figured it all out, and I thought over her words. Night terrors, huh? I decided to look into it. I thought maybe that would help
soothe the uneasy feeling I got about it. I opened my laptop and started where I almost always did: Google. About ten minutes into that, I wasn’t feeling any better.

There were countless videos of people with night terrors shooting straight up from their beds, screaming and flailing their arms, some jumping out of bed like there were spiders in it. A quick confirmation with Cassidy reassured me that mine weren’t *that* bad, but the reality of them didn’t ease my concern.

Night terrors mainly happen with children. They belong to a category of sleep disorders called parasomnias, along with sleepwalking, teeth grinding and sleep talking. Kidshealth.org explains that, unlike a nightmare, the fear a child experiences from a night terror is inconsolable because there is no monster or villain attached to it:

Night terrors usually occur about 2 or 3 hours after a child falls asleep, when sleep transitions from the deepest stage of non-REM [Rapid Eye Movement] sleep to lighter REM sleep, a stage where dreams occur. Usually this transition is a smooth one. But rarely, a child becomes agitated and frightened — and that fear reaction is a night terror.

Children don’t ever remember having a night terror, and the only way they know it happened is if someone tells them. I also learned that adult night terrors aren’t common. Usually, a child grows out of it. If not, it could mean high levels of stress or, psychologists would say, serious mental trauma. The reason behind it, like many aspects of sleep, is unclear.
Cassidy wasn’t the first to tell me that I scream in my sleep. My Aunt Kristina also mentioned this to me on a cruise I took with her when I was 14. We shared a small cabin, so she could easily hear when I had my night terror. She told me the next morning that she heard me scream, and she thought someone had broken in. When she shook me to wake me up, I opened my eyes and looked right at her. When she asked if I was okay, I mumbled something to reassure her I was, and then went back to sleep.

I have no memory of this.

I’ve noticed that most people confuse nightmares and night terrors. Even the show *House* that, while television, usually gets the symptoms of diseases correct, showed a night terror as a dream when that is in fact impossible. Night terrors happen in a part of the sleep cycle that is devoid of dreams. Before I knew I had them, I thought it was just some nightmare I couldn’t remember that made me yell. I like that explanation better than the reality.

Ancient people must have also experienced night terrors. According to a sleep disorders and mythology website, early Christian and medieval society resolved night terrors to be the work of demon possession. Night terrors expressed the fear that the victim felt following a demonic interaction. In women, an Incubus was blamed for this fear. An Incubus is a male demon that tries to impregnate women in their sleep. The Incubus’ methods were so torturous that the woman reacted with night terrors. In men, they claimed a Succubus, a female demon, caused the night terrors. This answer most likely stemmed from the fact that victims of night terrors scream, lash out and even act as though they are awake, yet they cannot easily be woken. Not knowing what really happened, the people of this time explained it with demons.
Unsure of my exact personal history with night terrors, I decided to call my mother.

“Night terrors? Are you sure?” my mom said, sounding confused.

“Yeah. It fits,” I explained my symptoms and how they matched up to night terrors.

“Well, I have heard you yelling in your sleep before. In fact, you’ve always had trouble sleeping. You used to sleepwalk when you were little. And you talk in your sleep a lot too.”

My sleep disorders seemed to be numerous. Factoring in insomnia, I began to understand the roots of my sleep obsession. I constantly think about sleep, I never seem to get enough sleep, even with 9 or more hours, I take naps whenever I can, I look up dreams that I remember online and the first adjective that comes to mind when someone asks me how I am is “tired.” My brother once told me, “You’ve been tired since 1995. That’s nothing new.”

Ⅱ

Pink was the shell within, silver without; sounds of the great sea wander’d about.

I lie awake in my bed, staring at the ceiling. A slow burn irritates the back of my eyes. The undercurrent of fatigue drags me down slowly and then abandons me. Every sound magnifies and time crawls across my chest, making me anxious. I know that sleep won’t come because it usually doesn’t. I’m beginning to wonder if I should try taking over-the-counter sleep aid. I’d heard that melatonin, a natural sleep hormone, could help with the night terrors and also get me to sleep. For now, I close my eyes and hope. After what
seems like seconds and is actually about an hour, my alarm goes off. Its noise grates my insides, and I just want to rewind time and start over.

This was a typical night for me up until the end of last year when I started getting medication to force me to sleep. It continues to be the kind of night I have whenever I run out of sleep aid, stay up too late to take it and still be able to sleep it off, or when I decide to try to go without it. I used to lie in my bed at home and stare at the digital clock on my nightstand, calculating how much sleep I could get if I fell asleep right then.

Several of my friends suffer from insomnia as well. We often bond over it. I’ve found that insomnia isn't a "one size fits all" kind of disorder. It comes in different forms. One of my best friends, Bee, told me how it affects her.

“I have trouble falling asleep and when I do, I can’t sleep for more than four hours at a time on average. Then I wake up and can’t get back to bed.” According to Sleepdex.org, this is an example of sleep-maintenance insomnia. The sufferer experiences a fragmented sleep pattern in which they wake during the night. I have the other type, sleep-onset insomnia, since it takes me a while to sleep but I then sleep uninterrupted. We both have chronic insomnia because it has lasted more than four weeks. Also like me, Bee has tried every method, from darkening the room to forming a sleep routine to turning off electronics to “proper” sleep positions. None of it reliably fixes the problem.

Insomnia remains such a slippery term even today. It shows itself in so many different forms and severity. Sleepeducation.com claims that millions of Americans struggle to either fall asleep or stay asleep. I once learned in my high school psychology class that insomnia can be as simple as a dissatisfaction with the amount of sleep you’re getting. But it can also be as difficult as another friend of mine, Nick, has it. Nick has struggled with it
for as long as he can remember and none of the over-the-counter sleep aids seem to help him. He has a much more severe type of insomnia than I do.

“Diphenhydramine doesn’t do anything for me. It makes me feel wired. I have to take prescription sleep aid from my doctor. Even then, I barely sleep,” I recall him telling me once. Diphenhydramine Hydrochloride is a common active ingredient in sleep aids like Zzz Quill. I know it by heart because I buy sleep aids often. I suppose I can be glad that they work for me.

I feel as though insomnia is often written off as an easy fix. I have taken into account every piece of medical advice. “You used electronics too close to bedtime,” “You had too much caffeine,” “You ate too much too close to bedtime,” “You don’t have a routine,” “You messed up your sleep cycle. Try not taking any naps,” “You have too much stress,” “You didn’t prepare the best sleep environment,” and, my favorite, “You worried too much about falling asleep.” It’s as if sleep is a skill that some have naturally and others have to work at constantly. Despite my efforts, I cannot seem to sleep unless I take melatonin or Diphenhydramine, have partaken in vigorous exercise or mental strain, or have had myself a good cry about life’s frustrations made worse by, ironically, sleep deprivation. Otherwise, I stay up, eyes burning and stomach knotting, until I see the sky lighten from behind my shades and realize I really haven’t slept the whole night. It ruins my mood for the day, and not to mention I just about fall over in my chair in class. And I know I’m not the only one.

Not only is insomnia understated, it’s an overused term as well. I’ve met people that are convinced they have insomnia. When I ask them about it, they describe one or two nights that they had trouble sleeping. I almost want to laugh because I wish insomnia were
that tame. I wish it crept in only one or two nights every few months. In reality, it’s a merciless demon that taunts me just about every night.

Most days, I feel overly tired if I wake up before noon. Since I have to wake up before then on all class days, I can bet on being sleepy most of the week. Even when I sleep in on the weekends, I struggle to haul myself out of bed. It’s no exaggeration to say that I could sleep all day. The only thing to stop me on the weekends is the desire to shower and have a social life, along with the headaches that I get most mornings.

The word “insomnia” comes from the Roman god of Sleep, Somnus, by adding the “in” prefix to negate it. Somnus’ Greek equivalent is Hypnos. Somnus was seen as the cause of insomnia. Perhaps the mortal was unable to be affected by Somnus’ influence or Somnus desired to punish that mortal.

With how technologically connected we are today, it’s no surprise that there would be sleep problems associated with it. If a person is up texting, scrolling through social media or even writing a paper, he or she obviously isn’t getting quality sleep. The light that most electronics give off interferes with your brain’s ability to produce melatonin and thus keeps you up longer. For this reason, doctors recommend not using any technology at least an hour before bed. But in college, that’s a pretty ridiculous idea. How can we sleep with Facebook and Twitter and Instagram and YouTube and Yik Yak? Just sticking to the no electronics rule was hard for me, and it turned out not to be worth it anyway. Regardless of electronic influence today, it seems that insomnia, along with other sleep disorders, has plagued people for a long time.
Sometimes, just before I am fully conscious, I hear myself talk in my sleep. It’s strange because I am aware of what’s going on around me. I can hear my roommate rustling papers and opening drawers, or my mother working in her office down the hall. Whether I’m at home or at school doesn’t matter, I’ll lie awake in a light sleep and hear myself say something suddenly. I don’t remember having any dreams while this happens, but I’ll say something like, “No, you can’t just do that,” or “Get out of my face.” If I’m at school, I’ll hear my roommate pause, confused probably, and then maybe laugh a little. After I hear myself say that, I always think, was that me? Did I say that? I recognize it was me, but I can’t stop it. It happens without my control, even though I’m not fully asleep.

From the National Sleep Foundation, I learned that sleep talking (somniloquy) often occurs with other sleep disorders. Sleep disorders seem to come in twos or threes. As is well-known, sleep talking doesn’t really hurt the person or anyone else, it’s just an embarrassment or annoyance. What I found is that the kind of things that are said coincide with the stage of sleep the person is in. In stages of deeper sleep, 3 and 4, the person mumbles or might speak gibberish. However, the lighter stages of 1 and 2 yield more understandable sleep talking. This could be why I can never catch myself saying gibberish, but I can hear myself say words or phrases. Also, when someone sleep talks, it may not even sound like his or her normal voice. It can be a completely different voice. I haven’t had any personal experience with this, but I bet it’s freaky for anyone that is nearby when it happens.
Common myths about sleep talking include association with dreaming. While a person can certainly talk while they dream, it’s in fact less likely than the other stages of the sleep cycle. While in the dreaming portion of the sleep cycle, the body normally undergoes a paralysis to keep the person from acting out everything in his or her dreams. This paralysis includes the jaw and vocal cords. Personally, I have been told I say things in my sleep, mostly “no,” that have nothing to do with what I remember dreaming. That makes sense given this information, since I was likely not even dreaming when it happened.

Roman mythology often blamed Somnus for odd sleeping patterns in mortals. Any sleeping disorder with the "somn" prefix represents a disorder that they attributed to Somnus. This includes somniloquy and also somnambulism--more commonly known as sleepwalking.

IV

*Two bright stars peep'd into the shell.*

"What are you dreaming of? Who can tell?"

Recently, I asked my mother about when I used to sleepwalk as a child.

“Luckily we had a ranch-style house, so there were no stairs for you to fall down. You would just walk down the hall to the kitchen. Then I'd always just put you back to bed.” My mom doesn’t recall that I ever said anything when it would happen, and she was never sure why I walked to the kitchen. This would happen about one or two times a month when I was about 3 or 4 years old. She isn't sure when I stopped and I can't remember that far back.

I also learned about somnambulism in my psychology class. It’s considered a partial waking and so sleepwalkers can navigate the environment they are in, manipulate objects
and even have conversations. However, they are in a state of deep sleep, and are moving because the paralysis that usually occurs in that stage malfunctioned. Another difference lies in the fact that they are in an extremely suggestible state, similar to hypnosis. My psychology teacher, Mr. Nimmer, told of a time he once made his sleepwalking sister slather her face in peanut butter just because she would do anything he said.

People often say that it is dangerous to wake a sleepwalker because the shock of coming out of deep sleep so suddenly could be fatal. This is a myth and it can actually be worse not to wake a sleepwalker. They can not only walk around their own homes, but they can also get in their cars and drive long distances. It's rare that they would do that, but it is possible. While waking them may result in confusion and some mild shock, it has not been proven to kill them.

Another myth is that sleepwalkers can move around their environment without falling or injuring themselves. This is also not true. Falls or injuries happen often during an episode of somnambulism. That could be another way that you can tell the person is not actually awake. It is often advised that people who are aware they sleepwalk remove dangerous objects and clutter from the space. That way, they are less likely to trip or hurt themselves.

A final myth is that actions taken by sleepwalkers have no deeper meaning and are random. Surprisingly, logic exists behind things that a sleepwalker does. Although the rationale may not be clear, the behavior is not simply meaningless. Counselheal.com uses the example of a man who brought his dog from the end of his bed to the tub so he could spray it with water. This was not a random action since the man, in his sleeping state, thought the dog was on fire.
Sleepwalking normally goes away as a person grows older. Personally, I no longer sleepwalk and do not remember any time when I did. This is because as a child, a sleepwalker is less likely to remember why the somnambulism occurred or what happened during the episode. However, adults may sleepwalk due to genetic factors or environmental ones such as stress or sleep deprivation. If they do, some adults can recall their actions while sleepwalking or even why they did things in the first place. There’s not much information as to why this might be. It could be the fact that adults have further developed brains than children. Perhaps they are more able to remember the dreams they had and explain their behavior.

V

*Started a green linnet out of the croft; wake, little ladies,

the sun is aloft!*

I’ve had my fair share of strange or nonsensical dreams. I think that everyone has. I once had a dream that I still remember years afterward. I don’t remember details, but there’s one aspect that sticks out. I saw a lynx. It slinked out of a door and passed me like the Cheshire Cat, grinning the whole way. Maybe seeing a lynx wouldn’t be weird for someone else, but I had never seen one. Not once. No pictures or videos of a lynx had ever crossed my path before that dream. The stranger thing was that, in my dream, I thought to myself as soon as I saw it, *That’s a lynx.* Upon waking up, I searched Google images for a lynx. What came up was exactly the creature in my dream. Thoroughly disturbed, I searched a dream dictionary for "Lynx." I found a few different meanings:
To dream of seeing a lynx, enemies are undermining your business and disrupting your home affairs. For a woman, this dream indicates that she has a wary woman rivaling her in the affections of her lover. If she kills the lynx, she will overcome her rival.

To see a lynx in your dream symbolizes secrecy. You need to expose and examine the secrets around you and learn from them.

I never found out what the lynx actually meant for me—as is true with most of the odd symbols I see in dreams. However, the "enemies" that the first source refers to could very well be my sleep disorders and the secrecy part could come from how little I knew of them at that time.

Seeing a lynx in my dream when I didn't know of them beforehand reminded me once again about that psychology class. Mr. Nimmer discussed Freud's various dream theories and how the subconscious mind spoke to us through them. It tried to tell us things by encoding the message in a symbol. One of Freud's students, Carl Jung, had theories of his own. There was one in particular of which Freud wasn't too fond. Jung proposed that, on top of personal subconscious minds, all humans throughout time shared a collective subconscious. It was filled with experiences and knowledge that was passed down through generations of mankind. He supported this theory with the story of a young girl who saw the Ouroboros in a dream. The Ouroboros is the symbol of a snake swallowing its own tail:
It’s a symbol that can be traced back to ancient Egypt and the girl hadn’t encountered it any time before then. Not in a book nor in a painting or photograph. Jung found this very interesting that she would see it in a dream when she hadn’t seen it in her waking life. My lynx experience reminded me a lot of this theory. I don’t believe in it, but it was certainly unsettling.

Regarding Greek mythology on dreams, the god with the most influence was undoubtedly Morpheus. He could appear in a mortal’s dream as anything—object or person. The Greek word "morphe" actually means form. He formed and controlled dreams:

Morpheus was the God responsible for the dreams of people. When in the arms of Morpheus people would enjoy a sound sleep, but would also see dream about their future or even coming events. Morpheus was the dream messenger of Gods, communicating the divine messages through images and stories, created as dreams.

Morpheus was the son of Hypnos, the Greek god of Sleep, and Pasithea, goddess of Relaxation and Rest. His home was a cave full of poppy seeds, which are known to induce drowsiness.

One could say that I don’t get a whole lot of attention from Morpheus. I rarely sleep well or peacefully. I also don’t often remember my dreams and when I do, I forget them quicker than I can even write them down. I know I have had more odd dreams besides my lynx dream, but I simply cannot find where I, if I did at all, wrote them down. I’ve been
meaning to start a dream journal for a long time now. What I can do is grasp onto one specific object that stuck out to me as a possible symbol. I'll then look that up online in a dream dictionary. While I don't completely believe in what it tells me, I find it interesting. Much like horoscopes, I can pick out a few aspects of the entries that strike a chord in my personal life. But it's hard to tell if they're coincidences, or if there's some actual validity behind them. Regardless, I enjoy exploring dream dictionaries. It helps me give meaning to a strange object or animal I see, and I think much of that desire for meaning is simply human nature. I only wish that I remembered my dreams more often. Since I started taking sleep aid, I remember dreams even less.

It's not only dreams that my sleep disorders have taken from me. There aren't many baby pictures of me in which I'm not crying or unhappy. I've had dark circles under my eyes for as long as I can remember. Along with sleepwalking and sleep talking, it's likely I had insomnia back then as well. My mom mentioned once that I hated being woken up and would have a fit when I had to get up early. There is one picture of me in my mother's arms at one of our old houses, clutching my baby blanket and burying my face in her shoulder. I was visibly upset, and I suspect now that this could be because I never properly fell asleep in the first place.

As well as general unhappiness, there were developmental delays. I used to suck on middle and ring finger for much longer than most other kids would suck on their thumbs. I still have a bump near the top of my right middle finger from it because I did this until probably around eight years old. I remember that my mother threatened to duct tape my fingers to the wall if I didn't stop. On top of that, I slept with a night light well into childhood, and I was often a slower learner than my peers, especially with math. My father
would sit on my bed with me for hours with math flash cards for adding and subtracting. He would get so frustrated when I would get a problem wrong for the second, third and fourth time it came up when after each time, he would keep telling me the right answer. Then again, he never had much patience.

I also believe that much of my personality is shaped by my sleeping issues. I'm a little slower to figure things out, like riddles and jokes, than my friends and I often space out to the point where I become deaf and blind to the world around me. I don't even think about anything. I'll simply get absorbed staring at something random like a tree or a wall. My friends might find it cute or endearing, but I think it's because I don't sleep enough. Bee, my friend, once mentioned around tenth grade that my personality had changed. I used to be more free-spirited, easygoing and less irritable. She attributed it to a strict English teacher we had that had gained my respect. She thought I began acting in a way that would please him. Reflecting on it now, I think that the teacher had nothing to do with it. I think that's just when the effects of my sleeping problems seriously began to catch up with me.

I became more caught up in details and little things. I had always obsessed over my handwriting, but I think it got worse just around tenth grade. It got to the point where I stopped writing in the notebooks I kept for my fiction. I had one notebook for each main character's story and, by tenth grade, I had six or seven notebooks going. My friends would always ask to read them when I wrote more, and they would make comments in the margins. I loved this, but somewhere along the way I began to hate writing in notebooks. My hand would hurt after just a few pages because I would go back over letters that I didn't think came out right. I still do this. So, I started typing up my stories instead. This worked
for a while, but lately I have been noticing that I feel less creative when I type. I want to switch back, but I don’t want penmanship to get in the way again.

It’s only recently that I’ve started to realize that my bad writing habit and personality changes could actually stem from my various sleep disorders over the years finally showing themselves in the daylight. It’s getting harder and harder to remember a time in my life that sleep came easy to me.

On one of the nights I had taken Diphenhydramine (I try to alternate that and melatonin so I don’t use one of them too often) and was waiting for it to kick in, a familiar tune came into my head. I got a strong sense of nostalgia as I recalled the lyrics through my mother’s singing voice. It was a lullaby, the only one she ever sang to me because it was the only one I really loved. "Minnie and Winnie" by Alfred Lord Tennyson, a poem that my mother had put to music. I remembered the cadence of my mom’s voice as she sung it. I saw flashes of many nights lying in my bed, begging her to sing it over and over again so that maybe I could get some sleep.

“Oh, all right," she would say. She’d clear her throat and sing once more:

*Minnie and Winnie*

*Sleep in a shell.*

*Sleep, little ladies!*

*And they slept well.*

*Pink was the shell within,*

*Silver without;*

*Sounds of the great sea*
Wander’d about.

Sleep, little ladies!
Wake not soon!
Echo on echo
Dies to the moon.

Two bright stars
Peep’d into the shell.
“What are you dreaming of?
Who can tell?”

Started a green linnet
Out of the croft;
Wake, little ladies,
The sun is aloft!

I can hear her voice even today, rising up on “Wake not soon!” and falling low on “Dies to the moon.” No matter what havoc my disorders might cause, I still have the comfort from the echoes of this song.