

Month 2, Day 1, Iraq

2230 Hours, My Room

Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.

I'm tired. I don't want to get up. I want a day off. It's now the beginning of month two and I feel as though I can no longer hide the insanity. The constant change of sleeping patterns is really starting to take its toll. I can visibly see how the shift changes are affecting all of us in the unit. Denti chain-smokes with heavy, dark bags under his eyes. Crade has gained weight and spends his day drinking coffee and snapping at everyone. I can't remember seeing Reto and Torres for days or weeks. During surgery I spend my time chewing gum to try and keep from falling asleep as my head bobs up and down. The doctors all think I'm a slacker because I keep dozing off. I see the first shift doctors every third day. They all assume I only work every third day and have two days off, and that when I do work I am still tired. The doctors and nurses don't know we change shifts every day so they say nothing. This is the Army; we can't complain.

I have a different sleeping pattern every day. On the days that I do fall sleep, mortars constantly interrupt me. Yesterday or I think it was yesterday—I worked eleven hours and fifteen minutes. I know it was eleven hours and fifteen minutes because everyone else only worked eight hours and I keep track. I came home after work and fell asleep. Three hours later we were under a mortar attack. I grabbed my weapon and ran to a bunker. An hour later the base was all clear and we were told there was a mass casualty. After sitting around, we are told there really was no mass casualty—go back to our rooms. Two and a half hours later I wake up and lie in bed thinking about everything that just happened. My sleep is no longer natural. When I lay my head down

to sleep every night I am exhausted but I can't fall asleep. I can't get any sleep. My body isn't getting used to the changing shifts. It doesn't know when I'm supposed to be awake, so I take pills to make it sleep.

When I first started taking the pills I had to wait two days for the store to get more in—they're always sold out of sleeping pills. I'm not the only one with this problem. I only took half a pill the first time. Now I have to take two and a half. I know that I shouldn't be taking that much, but I can't sleep. The pills make my body sleep, but because of my constant fear of the mortar attacks and shift changes, my mind doesn't. My mind continues to race and I think about home. I think about why I'm fighting this war and my eyes tear up. I think of all the people we've killed. I think of all the people's families, mothers, fathers, siblings, and how they'll never see them again. I think of my parents, brothers, and sisters worrying about me. I think about my friends, all of them living their lives as if I've never existed—these are all the mediocre nights.

Sometimes I go into the hospital and have to do surgery just as the sleeping pills begin to kick in. I spend the rest of the night pinching myself and throwing cold water on my face. At night I tell myself it's not worth it. I tell myself I hate the Army and wish I'd never joined. I curse the war on both sides, American and Iraqi. I wish everyone would just . . . die so that I could go home.