

Lexi Waterman

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Zoned Out

School is draining; work is draining. After going to school, and then working for 6 hours, I finally have the ability to go home. It's only 10 p.m. but I've never been more exhausted. Worst of all, it's only Wednesday, and there are still two more days of this irritating schedule until the weekend hits and I'll be able to have more than an ounce of free time. Leaving work, the only thing on my mind is what homework I have to do before I can achieve the best sleep of my life: a Spanish project, reading for English, book problems for AP Statistics, and a worksheet for AP Psychology. *Do I have enough time to finish everything? There will be no time to finish any of my homework tomorrow because there's a soccer game. I need to get everything done tonight.* With the ever-increasing amount of stress and panic overtaking my body, I speed out of my work parking lot in an attempt to make it home as fast as possible.

I'm tired, that's no secret. Noticing that I'm having some difficulty keeping my eyes open, that fact becomes more obvious. Turning on the air conditioner and moving my seat into a more upright position, I try to find bursts of energy to keep myself awake. However, as I travel further and further away from my job in the bustling city of South Portland, and deeper into the wooded areas surrounding the town of Gorham, the scenery around me becomes blurry. The oncoming headlights of passing cars obstruct my vision and soon after, stop signs begin to look like construction signs, mailboxes morph into people, and I begin to read speed limit signs as being faster than they actually are. Zoning out for longer periods of time, it becomes more difficult to focus on the road. Passing objects catch my attention, and as I start to swerve, I pull the wheel to the right and merge back onto my side of the road.

My mind is racing. I focus less on the road and more on my thoughts and constant stress. *I need to stay up late to finish my assignments, but making food is also a prime concern because I haven't eaten since before school. Preparing an outfit for school, packing my soccer bag, and making sure that I know my full schedule for tomorrow are also priorities. I should probably get gas, but I don't have enough money to fill up my tank. Showering is a necessity, but should I do it before or after my homework? Do I need to do anything else?* I've become accustomed to overthinking my thoughts and emotions, but this only pulls my focus more away from the road than before. Feeling as though I'm dissociating from the world around me, I continue to only get more tired.

There are bright lights flashing, sirens becoming louder and louder. There's been a car accident. A black Volvo S60 went speeding off of the road and landed upside down in a nearby ditch, feet away from the crumbling gravel of a narrow driveway. But wait, that's my car. That's my car, completely totaled, and I'm inside of it. I'm bleeding, but I can't find the source. My left leg goes numb and the pain in my head is excruciating. "What happened? I'm a good driver," I say to myself. "There's no way this is real right now." Feeling dizzy, the pressure in my head continues to increase. Before I can find a way to escape my car, everything goes completely dark.

The newspaper reads, "Heartbreaking accident leaves Maine teenager dead." My family's life has been shattered; never did they think this would happen. My brother was left without his sister and my parents were left without their daughter. The dreams and plans I had for my future were now impossible to attain. The pain and sadness that I wished my family and community would never have to feel becomes horrifyingly real.

There's a knock on my car window. Rolling down the recently cleaned glass, I meet the eyes of a police officer. He asks, concerned, "What are you doing in this parking lot so late at night?" At that moment, I realized it was all a dream. I never started driving, never crashed my car, didn't die, and I never caused my family any pain. While overthinking about all my homework and stressing about everything that had to be done before tomorrow, I ended up falling asleep in my work parking lot due to how immensely tired I was.

Although it was only a dream, this could very easily happen to someone in real life. Like all forms of distracted driving, tired driving can impair a person's vision, focus, and cognitive functions and it can be very dangerous. If this hadn't been a dream, I would no longer be alive all because I felt the need to rush home, while filled with complete exhaustion and stress, just to finish a few simple assignments for school. There is no excuse for a person to take the risk of injuring themselves or the drivers around them. One wrong decision, and getting behind the wheel when one is unfit to do so, can lead to unfulfilled future goals and mountains of pain and grief for the families, friends, and communities of a victim of distracted driving.