TO BE A FATIGUED WRITER

KAIYA GORDON

IS TO BE UNSTEADY: A BOAT MOVING THROUGH BANKED FOG.

I wake up in the morning, but keep my body curled in bed. It is so, so, so difficult to get up. It is so, so, so difficult to get up every day, at any hour. It is not just sleepiness that clouds my eyes; my entire body aches the moment I awake, straining to escape from the weighted fatigue that presses upon me everywhere, always. It follows me to my desk, where I struggle with my emptied brain; to the grocery store, where I find myself blanking out in the middle of produce aisles; to my service job, where I fumble interactions with customers; and to my classroom, where I stumble through my sentences, often leaving the ends untied.

I am not a writer by choice, but by brain design. The curves and folds of my brain seem to make connections only through my fingers, tapping on a keyboard, piecing together different ideas, tensions, resonances. So what happens when the design of my brain falters? When to simply sit up and at a computer requires an enormous amount of effort?

The narrator in my head is asleep. I do not know how to wake them up.

In February, I try to go to the singer's show, because I am supposed to write about the singer. I look up the bus routes. Eat dinner. Get dressed. I fall asleep—only for a second! I think, too weary to hold my head upright—to light, and wake up to dark. I have missed the singer's show. Just like I missed class last week, and my psychiatric appointment the week before. On the phone, my healthcare provider scolds me, telling me that if I keep missing appointments, I'll get kicked out of behavioral health. I sigh, and promise myself to go next time.

My teacher doesn't scold me, nor does the singer from the show. They are too busy to care. I scold myself anyway.

During my junior and senior years of high school, I spent at least one day a week slouched in my room, or huddled in the bathroom under a pile of dirty laundry. This is the time of my life when the sickness began to pull at me, sometimes gently prodding, and sometimes grabbing so hard it could tear the skin from my flesh. Still, I wrote frantically, in the night, on a laptop that only worked when it was plugged in. I blogged intensively, took photos every day, and kept a notebook filled with poetry drafts. I couldn't turn it off.

What has happened between then and now? Illness has knocked me over, like a sailor in a storm.

As a fatigued writer—a fatigued me—I have an hourglass that haunts me, hanging over my head, reminding me of the limited resources I have each day. The grains of sand fall quickly, too quickly, as I desperately try to get everything done: to maintain my relationships, to complete my service shifts, to prep my lessons for class, to give my peers' feedback, to research, to read, to watch TV, to feed my cat, to shower, to eat, to do laundry, to take my medications, to walk, to be in the light, to be in the dark, to, to. To write. It is always last.

I used to joke about trying, truly, to give up poetry—why, I would say, laughing, would I want this? This life? This time, expended on art? But I could never give it up; it is the way I see the world. When, in the car with my partner, I stare into their eyes and kiss them, my body can only think: poem. When, taking a long walk in San Francisco, my home, my feet can only think: poem. When, lying on a bed at the doctor's office, the doctor takes a stethoscope to me, my heart can only beat: poem.

The problem is not the poems. They come to me. The problem is the way they slip through my fingers, the last grains of sand in the glass.

And here—I am flailing in my fatigue. I am sitting on the beach, watching a tsunami come to pound against me. I am trading grains of sand for glass, cutting myself to write, to essay.

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