

Dear Sugar,

My anxiety rules my life 90% of the time...I tend to be a little overly harsh on myself so in actuality it's probably 70% of the time. I feel like I am a good writer with a lot of potential yet I'm holding myself back. This is comforting in a way since I don't much try to put myself out there because then I can live with this idea of great potential but no failure. "Oh, if only I'd done that then I could've maybe been successful at it enough to make a living." But I'm afraid to fail. Even in special moments where I feel more courageous, it's like my subconscious takes over to find new ways of distracting myself without labeling it as "fear excuses."

*My room is too cold, better turn on my electric blanket and write in bed. Oh no, now my wrists hurt from writing in bed and not at a desk, better get up and stretch or just relax and watch an episode of Community, it's so creative it'll pump me up and inspire me. I haven't had the minimum amount of required caffeine that turns on my creative switch so I better go brew another pot. Maybe I should switch to whiskey? Oh no, I'm out of whiskey, better go buy some just in case I really get going. ...Later, back at home, my apartment is a little messy, I guess it couldn't hurt to just pick up things really quickly...\*3 hours and a clean shower later\*, well now I definitely deserve my bed and tv and I have everything I need to get started tomorrow.*

And so, this vicious cycle continues. Each day the cycle is a little different, but not by much.

Sometimes I'll blame the lack of opportunity around me. Or my circumstances, especially around finances. I'll blame myself for not actively looking for opportunities as much as I should.

But, when an opportunity presents itself, I have no excuse and I'm just left there with a very exposed fear. All the curtains have been pulled back and it's just fear, standing there small with its arms crossed, sweating, self-conscious, hunched, shamed person that looks a lot like me, not wanting to move. And she sees the excitement behind the newest offer. The easiest even. I

didn't have to look at all. It came from a friend introduction at party. The beginning of something possibly huge, and all they need is a writer?! And oh, you're a writer? Let's connect. Do you love self-help, psychology, and personality theory? Do you want to help people? Omg you do, this could be perfect! *Could be...*this echoes as the excitement turns to fear. But how could I possibly let an opportunity too perfect slip through my fingers? I could think about it too long...2 days turning into 16 days. I'm afraid of deadlines. I'm afraid of not being clever enough to stand out. I'm superstitious...because I'm happy right now. Don't truly great writers need to be depressed or depraved in some way? Content in their loneliness? Unable to keep romantic partners or stay in the same place for long, because the new stories they experience help them with their writing so nothing can ever stay the same in their lives? I feel like that's the path I'm on and always have been on, but I don't want to be depressed. I want to be happy but still be observant to the metaphors all around us. I want to appreciate the sad and the past without basking in it. I want love and roots. Is that possible? Does mental health struggle define the great writer? How do I move past my fears?

Sincerely,

Fearful Sads

Dear Fearful Sads,

TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY. They might not like your writing. They might drop you within a week. They might tell you how much you stink and expose your horribly awful time management skills that can't keep up with deadlines. But. At least you'd tried. You live on to write about that disappointment without letting depression claim you from that one experience. It's yet another negative experience that can be transformed by writing. Something ugly turned into something beautiful...like a caterpillar turning into a beautiful butterfly with the power of

flight. Something others can relate to because we all fail and have failed countless times. We've failed in love, in academia, in friendships, in the workplace. Failure will never stop, so you might as well try because there are times you haven't failed. Make a list of your greatest successes and maybe even a list of your greatest regrets and see if the failure to try was more intense than the failure itself. I bet it is. Regret is more powerful than fear. So work past it and dive right in with both feet. Maybe in a week or two you'll be having some whiskey and making way for the next opportunity defeated. Or maybe you'll be thinking back two years from now and admiring how it pushed you to grow as a writer and as a person and how it changed your life. Someone once told me that we all have only a 7% chance for success in anything. 7% chance that things work out with your new love. 7% chance that you are that app's successful writer as they become the top of Apple's Editor's Picks. But 7% is still a better chance than 0%. And wouldn't you like to see what could happen? Some people find love despite the low odds and some people find success. 7% doesn't hold everyone back. Failure itself is a chance to grow. To be even more prepared for the next opportunity. And that's the greatest thing about the essay, it's about trying, and trying is all about failure. When you fail, you revise and sometimes revision takes years.

Repeat this affirmation when you need to rediscover the trust in yourself:

*I trust that everything will be okay in the end. Partly because I simply know it in my gut, but also because it's way more fun to live with trust and confidence than to be a defensive wiener.*

It is important, especially today's fragmented "posts", to use the essay to bring people together, to tell our stories and to connect with others. To learn from failures and revise together as a community, as a partnership, and as an individual. Always write, if not to inspire others or get

published, to simply feel with all your heart and write out the pains of failures and how to keep growing.

Here is another affirmation when you come to the harder chapters:

*Open-Heartedness: I know that life (and the people living in it) can be an absolute bummer sometimes, but I promise not to let unhappy chapters make me jaded. If I let negative experiences turn me sour, then the jerks win. So I'll move on with an open and hopeful heart, if only because I hate losing to jerks.*

Always try. Trust in yourself and trust in others. And just show up. Sometimes that's the hardest part. You can and will do this.

XoXo,

Sugar