

Destined to Be Fatigued

Category: Sleep

written by Karen Gardner | May 6, 2019

Crashing the car should have been the wake-up call.

The driver had fallen asleep at the wheel while driving a familiar road at midday. If angels exist, they were surrounding the driver's car that afternoon. Because the car crossed two lanes of traffic when no cars were coming from the opposite direction. Because the vehicle headed toward a fenced-in spread of uninhabited land. Because the accident did not occur where homes line the road. Because the driver escaped with mostly minor injuries and did not harm another soul. And because the metal fence post that came through the windshield missed the driver's head by just inches.

When the driver and a dear friend cleaned all belongings from the totaled car, the special device a loved one had bought the driver—to wear behind an ear, to issue a warning if one's head drops to a sleep-deprived angle—was in the glove compartment. The driver acknowledged it had been there for months and was no longer being worn, though no explanation was offered as to why. It had reportedly worked on the occasions when it had been worn, preventing drowsiness at the wheel and keeping the driver alert.

The driver's doctor had already recommended more sleep. And when the driver did fall asleep (in bed), sleep came deeply, almost as soon as head hit pillow. Yet despite a desire to drive again, during the three years since the accident the driver has almost never gotten to bed by 10 p.m., the time the doctor recommended.

Instead, the driver seems to fight sleep, allowing the slightest distractions to delay bedtime—whether a dish that should go in the sink, a stray thread on the carpet, or a word that must be looked up right now. On the way back to bed after a trip to the bathroom, the driver's spouse will find the driver in the guest room at 1 a.m., sitting in a chair making lists, or looking up some arbitrary bit of information. Or asleep in the armchair in the living room, book in lap, mouth agape, body swaying in an awkward position. Not even sleep medication seems to help.

One wonders whether only death will bring the rest apparently so dearly needed.

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