

Dear past me,

There's not a lot I can say to you now.
I know not much of it will make a difference.
I remember how deaf I was to everything,
how numb I felt.
The normalcy of autopiloting,
of breaking down and giving up
and smiling the whole time,
lying to yourself
and joking about it to lessen the blow.
I know what happened. I was there, after all,
if only vaguely.

There's not a lot I can say,
but I can tell you that there will be days
when you don't remember fully how it feels to be like that.
At least not entirely.
And I can tell you that
because that's where I am, right now.

I know you wouldn't believe me,
and that hurts too.

But let me talk, and try to listen.

...

Dear past me,

It all won't go away at once.
That's not how these types of problems go.
But little by little, the voices you make for yourself
will be replaced with the voices of your friends.
Things are going to change for you,
and you're going to learn that change is okay.
Change is scary,
but a lot of the time it makes things better.
And sometimes even when you think things will change,
you find that nothing is really different at all.

Did you know I've stopped daydreaming?
Those scenes that used to take you away,

that growing part of your head that was in the clouds,
far away from here, *anywhere* but here—
that's mostly gone.
I don't need it now.
I do daydream from time to time, of course,
but it's nothing like it used to be.
Like it is for you.

We will have a reason to stay present.
We won't have to hide anymore.

Dear past me,

You're going to do things that are important.
Steps toward living in the real world.
And even I'm still not used to it,
and you'll feel like an imposter in your own skin,
just like I did.
But knowing what I know now,
I can believe that I'll get better at dealing with this.
I can really believe it.

Sometimes there will be setbacks.
There always are, sooner or later:
mindless breakdowns that even you don't understand,
panic attacks, mistakes, dissociation.
There will always be setbacks.
But there are fewer and fewer now,
and my support system is growing stronger,
and I can trust the people around me.
I can believe that everything will be okay, too.
I am learning how to believe.

Dear past me,

You're going to learn a lot about yourself.
Not all good things.
You're going to understand more and more
about what is "wrong" with you,
why your mind doesn't work like the rest.
And we're working on it, you and I both,
but you'll understand yourself more, when you grow.

But there will be people to hold onto when it gets difficult.
There may not be answers right away,
or ever,
but there will be fixes,
there will be solutions,
and things will go on.

Dear past me,

Someday, you won't feel so invisible.
You won't feel so alone.
You aren't the only one out here, I know,
and people will help you if you let them in.
People care if you let them care,
and if you show them that you care too.

You are not alone.
You are never alone now.

Dear past me,

You might not even want to get better.
It might feel like a daunting task,
and pointless, and time-consuming.
Why get better if there is nothing ahead,
nothing to be better for?

I'm still working on it.
Just like everything else.
Because getting better is a long process.
But I want this:
for the people I love,
for the people around me,
and maybe even,
finally,
for myself, just a bit.
To hold onto a bit of hope in all of this.
To learn how to be a better person.
To get control of my body, my actions and my world.

I never want to feel lifeless again.

Dear past me,

You're going to meet someone soon,
someone who becomes really important to you.
You'll know when you meet them,
because they will feel stable when you're drifting,
and they will understand you like it's nothing,
and everything will click neatly into place.
I'll trust you to follow your heart.
Because the choice isn't really a choice,
but something that was meant to happen all along.
And so you'll learn what love is,
the terrible intricacies of proper courting,
how good a grilled cheese can taste,
wanting to protect that person when they're hurting,
and the sense of calm when you're near them,
because they're holding your hand
and looking at you in that way you know they do,
and everything is okay.

And even that can still be strange.
Because you've spent your whole life telling yourself
that this could never happen to you.
We're both conditioned that way,
and yes, even now, it's sometimes odd to me.
Because other things,
our troubles, our faults,
our burdens which we try not to share,
those things won't matter as much as you think.

They will still love you, and me, and us.
And yes, it's hard to accept sometimes,
but it's real.
It was the first real thing I held onto, getting better.

I promise you
that they will help you be the most yourself
that you have been in a long, long time.

...

Dear past me,

You're scared, and I'm scared.
And that is still one thing that connects us.
But every step I take brings us closer to peace,
closer to finding what you want,
closer to keeping what I already know I want.
I'm not good. Not by a long shot.
But I can keep going for us.
And I can learn how to really live.
And you can learn how too.

Everything will get better.

- Elle

To past Elle - earlier this year, freshman, eighth grade, and all the way back. You'll get here eventually. I know because I have. I used to believe I couldn't.

But we can. And we will go further.