

look into my eyes

*a poetic narrative of mental illness experienced by four
students at Duke University*

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a poetic narrative of mental illness experienced by four students at Duke University

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*this project is dedicated to anyone who feels
like they are their own worst enemy.*

*you are not your conscience,
you are not your thoughts,
you are not your illness.*

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upbringing

certain situations

a conversation
a conversation
In my home everybody gets sad
signs interpreted
signs dismissed
My home
just dismissed
those things.
Certain situations
not underlying,
but
Debilitating
and obsessive, certain situations
surround me.
In my home
a kid could have been interpreted
Grow out of it
Grow out
of
My home
just dismissed
those things.
Certain situations
not underlying,
but
Debilitating
and obsessive,
and obsessive,
and obsessive,

grow out of it

a conversation
gets sad
and difficult
as a kid that could
grow out of it
obviously grow out of
anxiety,
depression,

every stage of life
get better
happier
get better
better at choosing
better at being able to get out of bed
better at being able to be yourself
better at being able to function
get better

a conversation
gets sad
and difficult
tendencies to
hopes in every stage of life
to
get better
happier
better at choosing
yourself

seven

i've constantly conceived
since i was young
the terms
i've identified
the language
i've dealt with
the journey
since i was young
i was seven

the language to talk about it
(not identified as health)
the journey to open up
(not dealt with in my family)
i've identified
the journey
i've dealt with
the language
my whole life
since i was young

i've constantly conceived
since i was young
i was seven
i was seven

anxiety

let go
let things go
i would keep little knick-knacks
i would keep everything i acquired and i wouldn't let
anything go

(you don't realize how impermanent things
in life are until they leave)

taken away
it was taken away
everything, everything i acquired
anything was taken away and i had an illogical breakdown
with

(a friendship ends a relationship ends a
chapter of your life ends)

everything
i didn't want to give it up
i was given a camera at age eight
a little digital camera so i would just take pictures of

(you don't realize how much you lack
control)

everything
in my mind it was everything
i didn't want to it give up
i didn't want to
let go

*“over time,
you get less [open]
because the world beats you up a little bit,
and you realize that it’s better to keep things in,
to a certain extent
you’re just more
cautious”*

diagnosis

i.

diagnosed
half thankful
half useless
the feelings are the same either way.

ii.

anxiety
told
depression
told
OCD
that
i'm thankful
they're useless
feelings
either way.

iii.

generalized anxiety
situational depression
minor OCD
the same
the same
the same
the feelings are the same either way.

the hill

i finally had something
i had a way to articulate
a way that made sense to other people

but there's no cure
when you have something physical you can pop meds and
you're fine
with this
with this
with this i wake up and i'd rather just be in bed
it feels like so much work
to choose to be happy

with this i have to shift my mentality
it feels like so much work
i have to shift the way my brain thinks

with this i wake up and i'd rather not be happy
it feels like there's a hill you have to climb
and at first it was blurred and you didn't even know where
you were and now you see
it's just a hill that you're climbing
and climbing
and climbing
with this it's just a hill that you're climbing

i'm trying not to say this about myself but sometimes i just
don't feel resilient
it lays it out for you
it lays out *exactly what you have to do to get over it*
but sometimes i wake up and i'd rather not
with this i wake up and i'd rather not

depression

sophomore slump
so heavy
my physician was concerned
i didn't have space
to even
start to deal with it
my physician was concerned
"almost every day?"
she was trying to be sure
"i don't know why i'm here"

everything feels so big in your head
ill wake up – i feel good today
the next day,
not
manageable
not
motivated
constant
constant
"almost every day?"
she was trying to be sure
"i don't know why i'm here"

sophomore slump
people started feeling
a little smaller
"almost every day"
i can't do this
and everything
gets
smaller

anorexia

I was nonexistent to the rest of the world
I didn't feel thought of
And I don't think I was thought of.

Freshman year
I was home that night, I didn't have plans
I wanted to get it
But I didn't really

And then
I got it
A hard time and certain behaviors
And a certain amount of weight
And a certain period of time
And then
I got it

I was nonexistent to the rest of the world
History repeated itself
Summer fighting for my life
During that time I would take a step forward and then take
a step backward and actually I wasn't moving
A bunch of accidents
And a handful of people
A bunch of accidents
And by accidents I mean I took a day off from running or I
ate too many nachos at a brewery in Portland
I was nonexistent
I wasn't moving
Winter I died every other week
I went from 104.6 to 109.2 pounds and for a person whose
biggest fear was gaining weight I sunk

I wanted to get it
But I didn't really
A hard time and certain behaviors
And a certain amount of weight
And a certain period of time
And then
I got it

therapy

getting help

i don't want people to treat me differently
i always feel like a downer
i feel pressure to feel better
so there is no point in talking

i need to release some of it
empty out
all the muck in my head
(you're disappointing them)

constant sadness
people don't know what to do with
one conversation is not enough
so there is no point in talking

*"so then therapy was what helped me process that.
and my parents.
and i probably would have died if not for those things."*

they're going to help me
i need to feel good
or a little better
(you're perpetuating sadness)

it's in my head,
the pressure
i'm a downer
i'm a downer
so there is no point in talking

forward, backward, forward, i.

*started seeing the transition
i just remember crying a lot.
on new years
i wanted to start seeing
the transition.*

two weeks
happier
a few months
fighting for my life
nine months
a step forward
and then
a step backward
break
every
process
two weeks
happier
a few months
fighting for my life
nine months
a step forward
and then
a step backward
break
every
process
to navigate
healing
to navigate
forward

growth

opening

to give someone your deepest thoughts
they have every power
it's the power to ruin you
it's the power to take advantage of you
but the power to see you
it's the most powerful power of all

how hard it is to accept being okay

grow and compensate
afraid of moving forward
we can want something with our whole heart and just keep
steps backward
so scary
we can want something with our whole heart
we can want something with our whole heart

letting things happen
responding breaks
a habit or a pattern or a way of thinking
i was forced to

letting things happen
responding breaks
a habit or a pattern or a way of thinking
(so scary)
i was forced to

grow and compensate
afraid of moving forward
we can want something with our whole heart and just keep
steps backward
(so scary)

we can want something with our whole heart
we can want something with our whole heart

responding breaks
a habit or
i was forced to
(so scary)

accept
a pattern or

a way of thinking
i was forced to accept
being okay

forward, backward, forward, ii.

it's always a few steps forward and then a few steps back
i am the most unsure of myself that i've ever been but in
some ways i'm the most mentally healthy
i'm ready
to figure things out in a way that i wasn't able to before
i'm open
not having a plan,
having no idea what i'm doing,
i'm open.
feeling sort of like i'm floating,
as chaotic as that is,
i'm open.

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