

hello sis,

Carlee Miller, Peabody College

Today was a good day until it wasn't. It's a Saturday night. I went to a concert. I'm alone. I mean, I know I'm never alone, but here we are.

Luckily, I texted one of my friends. I know I'll hear back from her soon.

And I've made so many wonderful friends here, can you believe it?

You can. You have always believed in me the most.

But back to the concert, or before the concert.

With some moments it only feels like there is a before and an after.

I was with my new friends. I watched part of a football game—the team you love.

We walked to shop and get an early dinner. They were going to hang around more. Get some ice cream.

We love ice cream, even though I'm not supposed to eat it anymore. But I had a concert to go to. There would be other times for ice cream.

I was supposed to catch a ride with one of my friends, a boy.

Don't worry, we're not dating. I really am too busy for boys. He texted me that his friends were taking too long and that I should get an Über without them. That was before.

I was still in such a hurry though. I could say I don't know why. But I do. It was my first time walking by that place.

From last year.
I was fine. Totally fine.
Life was great.
All I had to do was walk by the hospital.
A psych ward is a place.
And it had been so long.

The doctors were wrong,

But that created a bigger mess than if they had been right.

So, I mustered my courage. I blasted my new favorite song, Happier.

I clutched my necklace. It's gold, but not real gold. It says, Be Still, even though neither of us ever like to be still for long. I started to walk by. I clutched my necklace even harder.

Planted my feet into my black Birkenstocks. Said some verses in my head. I can hardly remember which ones now. Or maybe I don't want to remember.

And then, it was like time stood still.

The emotions just erupted out of me. All into the grass outside of that place. I felt so alone. But I was wearing a pretty dress. I might have even been wearing makeup.

I had two shopping bags. A bigger one, and a smaller one. And my purse, of course.

I just stood there for what felt like forever. Crying. Wondering why this place could still hold so much power over me. I just thought I was stronger, you know?

Someone had coined us "Psych Ward Warriors" back then.

I still wonder if that's true.

I thought I had conquered everything, but, clearly, I was wrong.

I compose myself, with everything I have. I keep walking. Everything in me wants to crawl in bed, curl up in a ball, and not go to the concert. But I can't. I know I can't. I write a note to another one of my new friends, to go with a small gift I got her.

I know it isn't going to be my favorite concert ever, but I can't just not go.

I love concerts.

We love concerts.

I try to find a ride on my own, but it's going to take forever. And I know the longer I wait, the more time I will have to convince myself that no one would know if I missed the concert.

So, I walk.

Sis, I walk for over an hour. By myself. Blasting music. And just trying to understand where it all went wrong.

But I make it to the concert. My friends are here, even though I don't see them. I buy a shirt. It's blue and tie-dyed.

Almost reminds me of another shirt you have seen me wear time and time again.

And a hat in your favorite color, pink.

Something to commemorate the evening.

There's a lot of music. I take a few videos. Send a picture to my parents. No selfie. I can't bear to look at my face. I'm not sure what I will see staring back at me.

But we love selfies.

And, in an instant, the concert is over.

I actually get a ride. It takes a while. I unexpectedly share the ride with a friend I met recently.

And time starts again.

It feels a little twisted now, long after.

Commemorating that evening. With a hat, or a shirt. Or videos.

The memories are so much more powerful than that. It was one of the hardest nights of my life, and, yet, it gave me so much.

It gave me my people. It gave me back my heart and my faith because of the love, grace, and encouragement everyone shows me.

It made me realize how much I love this school, this town, and this wild life I lead. But most of all, they remind me how much I love you and how much you love me.

Boy, oh boy, do I hope I can bring you here someday. Someday soon.

It's not always easy, my sweet girl. I have learned that a time or twenty.

And unfortunately, so have you. And ever since that night, I have and continue to learn more about myself. About the lives I can touch with a few words. In sharing my story. And you, my sweet girl, are such a huge part of that story.

I haven't walked by that place in a while now, but that's okay. I see my friends from there sometimes, and I texted them the other day.

Baby steps.

You taught me that, among so many other things over the years. You still remind me to be brave, and to be kind.

But before I close, promise me this:

Treasure all the moments, even the hard ones, and know that I love you.

And finally, I owe you a visit. If you still want to. Your call. You'll always be my little sister.

No matter what.