''I'm not a run-of-the-mill type''

By Jeffrey M Cohen

Endorsements

Individuals with a mental disorder reading your poem, or families of individuals with mental disorder, would I believe find validation, empathy and hope in the piece you have written – and would I believe think, yes that rings true – I have felt that.
Dr Jeremy Beider, Psychiatrist

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I have read the poem closely. I feel it is evocative and powerful in its description of the isolation and terrible fears many mental health illness patients suffer… I think it is a wonderful poem, enabling those who have no understanding of, or contact with, people with mental health illness to have an idea of the torment sufferers live with...I very much like the distribution of the stanza's, the rhythm within each and their variable length as you use the rhythm within each to evoke the feelings and emotions of the ill child at different stages as they describe themselves. Similarly, the scattered use of consonance adds a vivid sense of fracture to the child's life as they struggle through the day within the unpredictability of their illness.

Dr Nigel de Kare-Silver, Medical Practitioner

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I have worked in the field of mental health, for close to 20 years. Your way with words really demonstrated the impact of mental ill health on the person and those involved in their life. It was a powerful read from multiple perspectives.

Ms Rachel Yona

Manager of Mental Health Services and Occupational Therapist.

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'I'm in a mess, mum!

It's doing my head;

Throughout the day—

And when I'm in bed.

I look at my school friends

Larking about,

Carefree and happy,

So much to spout,

While I sneak away,

Afraid they might say:

'What is it with you

That you don't ever play!?'

They don't understand

How different I am;

How, for their world,

I don't give a damn;

The shade,

I embrace;

Shadows,

I chase;

Into the deep,

I'm desperate

To leap.

Sure, I've had friends,

But they drifted away;

Their glances more telling

Than what they might say.

I tried to join in
With a game, one day;
Kicking a football
On a causeway.

‘What’s up with you’—
Screamed one on our side—
‘Standing there,
Mummified?
Get in there and tackle,
Watch the game,
Move your foot—
Or are you lame?’

Maybe I am—
I thought to myself;
My legs are leaden,
I’m not in good health;
I’m feeling confused…
Which way do I kick;
Are they coming to hurt me?—
I’m sweating;
I’m sick!

At supper that night,
I couldn’t eat;
Was the dish a fish,
Or was it mincemeat?
Either way,
I felt replete.

Then it stared at me,
And bared its teeth;
Growing ever larger,
Above and beneath.
I screamed and yelled,
Help me, someone!
Mum and dad soothed,
‘It’s alright, son;
You’ve got a fever,
You need some sleep;
Tonight, you won’t need
To count any sheep!’

The symptoms continued—
Even got worse;
My hallucinations
Became diverse;
I desperately felt
I had to flee;
Everyone looks at me
Frostily;
My view of things
They just don’t see.

Yet, there were days
When I jumped for joy,
Just like I did
As a little boy
When I felt no pain
And was really loved;
When no one bullied
And no one shoved.

Did I ever mention

To you ‘the other’?
That’s the name
I give to my brother
Who doesn’t look me in the eye,
But derives his pleasure
From making me cry;
He tells me
I’m a worthless sucker,
That, if I’m lucky,
Might become a trucker!

He’s twenty,
And can do no wrong;
When he comes in
Mum breaks into song.

‘Why can’t you be
Like your brother?’—
An inner voice calls,
Smother! Smother!
Voices, voices,
In my head;
Voices that I love—
And dread!

‘Your brother’s
A college lad,
You know;
He’s got friends
That come and go;
There’s no sport
He doesn’t play;
He’s off to the gym
Every day.

‘And look at all the exams
He’s passed;
A great future
He’s forecast;
He comes with me
On Sabbath
To pray;
And, unlike you,
He’s not gay!’

Our school is on
A busy road;
Drivers don’t follow
The Highway Code;
The Zebra Crossing’s
Not for me;
The Zebra jumps up—
And I must flee.

My heart races,
I gather pace;
The Zebra’s faster
As it gives chase;
With prams and people
I collide,
Though the pavement is
Quite clear and wide;
I hear them shouting,
‘Stop that lad!
He’s a menace;
He’s quite mad!’

Do you really wonder
That I skip school,

With its grand façade
And vestibule;
Its strutting staff,
And ceaseless noise;
The fervent flirting
Of girls and boys?

What did I gain
When I *did* attend;
Invisibly,
My way,
I'd wend?

Loneliness,
Is my name;
For everything
I'd bear the blame.
When dad walked out,
And never came back,
I was the one
To take the flak.

'Home-breaker,'
Was the name
I earned;
Into my soul
It was burned.

Doctors' visits, medication,
Diets, detoxification,
Stress disorder, phobia—
Or was it, Schizophrenia?—
Stabilisers, palpitation;
A friend's drug-experimentation,
Social workers,
Aggravation,
Trauma,
Desensitisation;
Eating disorder
And depression;
Dragged from one
To another session
Of analysts and therapists,
And specialist psychiatrists—
If they could get
Inside my mind,
It's a black hole
That they would find!

Why is life
So terribly hard;
Why am I
Its wild-card?
I sometimes think
I'll end it all
And turn my face
To the wall;
And then I'll find
The peace I seek—
But voices tell me
I'm too weak!

But, I'm not weak,
I'm strong as steel;
I won't be bent
Over life's wheel;
And if my mind is not at rest,
I'm in the company

Of the best
Of history's hall of fame—
Too numerous
To list by name.

So, I'm certainly not
A run-of-the-mill type;
I've got potential
Of rare stripe;
And, helped by therapies
Prescribed,
Among life's winners,
I'll be inscribed;

If I but affirm
The life I lead,
And seek the love
I know I'll need;
Aware of the talent
At my core,
I'll scale the height's
Of life's credit score.

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