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

By Jeffrey M Cohen

''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
(Comment on the poem, ''I'm not a run-of-the-mill type'')

'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;

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.

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 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 to sleep;
Tonight, you won't need
To count any sheep!'

The symptoms continued—
Even got worse;
My hallucinations
Became diverse;
I felt that I
Had to flee;
Everyone regarding me
Frostily;
My view of things
They wouldn'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 my brother
Who doesn't look me in the eye;
Deriving pleasure
From making me cry;
He tells me
I'm a worthless sucker,
Who, 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
To shul,
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's
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 flirting, there,
Of girls and boys?

And, what's the point,
If I *did* attend;
Invisibly,
My way,
I'd wend?

Loneliness,
Is my name;
For everything
I 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 arm
I had it burned.

Doctor's visits, medication,
Even 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 my 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 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 need;

Displaying the goodness

At my core;
My confidence will grow
More and more.

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