

Me and Leonard

Richard Hill

Some years ago:-

It hits you all of a sudden. It's the middle of the day, you're all alone and the sun is out. But something isn't right. There is this feeling, a very nasty feeling in your mind. You are being consumed. Consumed by your own thoughts. So dark and so horrid, you are afraid. But afraid of what? Everything? Something? Someone? Anyone?

I lose my point of view. I care little nor nothing about the world around me. Why should I care? No-one cares about me. I struggle with my thoughts. I think of my past.

I was an awkward kid. I was anxious, struggled to make friends and would feel a sense of isolation watching others in their own friendship groups. I had to fight hard to cope. It was a constant battle and it made me frustrated. Essentially being angry at myself for who I was.

So. What's different now? I've lived for over forty years with depression and anxiety, but this is very different. My mental state has transformed me into a new beast. It's slowly wrecking me from the inside out. It's all or nothing now. In my mind I'm stepping on eggshells.

I come indoors and retreat to my room, my womb. This has, until now, been my 'safe' space. There's no intrusions or interruptions, just me and Leonard Cohen. "*But you don't even care for music, do ya?*".

But now it doesn't feel right. As I said before, this has been my 'safe' space. So why don't I feel safe? I lower myself onto my cushioned floor. I light a candle and turn off all the lights save for a string of fairy lights on the mantelpiece. I light a few incense sticks from the flickering flame of the candle. The aroma fills the room. The flavour hits my tongue and taste buds and the smell is alluring.

But even this doesn't work. I try to think good thoughts like the time as kids we went to Brighton. The wave washed pebble beach. The smell of the sea, the sound of the gulls and excited children paddling and splashing in the shallows. But the ocean panicked me. It stretched out to infinity, its immensity knowing no bounds.

But that was then. This is now. A feeling of dying without dignity. Here I am, all alone in the world. Just me and Leonard. The peace is disturbed by the ringing telephone on the sideboard. I get up to answer it. "Hello?". Nothing but a dialling tone but, in my mind, it's still ringing, resonating, getting louder. I replace the handset. Leonard soothes me slightly. His lamenting lyrics and guitar chords compete with the ringing sound of the telephone. It stops. Leonard sings to me alone. *"And leaning on your window sill, He'll say one day you caused his will, To weaken with your love and warmth and shelter."*

But it's still early afternoon. Have I eaten? Am I hungry? No to both - I think. I can hear a voice coming from somewhere. *"Is there anybody out there?"* I ask. Silence and stillness. The television comes alive on its own. Nothing but interference. I begin to see images on the screen, wild staring eyes. *"Does anyone else here see what I can see?"* I think Leonard can: *"Now I've heard there was a secret chord that David played, and it pleased the Lord."*

That's it! The key to release me from this hellhole. Please the Lord! *"...but deliver us from evil."* I wish I knew it all. Do I have to genuflect? But I don't believe in God. If God is loving, why is there so much evil in the world? Why would a good God send people to hell? So many questions. Is God here, now? Leonard has the answer, I think. *"Your letters, they all say that you're beside me now, then why do I feel alone?"*

He's not here. I am all alone.

Some years later:-

I let the world know that I had depression and anxiety and explained the way it made me feel and act. It wasn't until I opened up that I was actually able to become well. Now, I'm proud to have depression and anxiety. I'm even more proud that I have things under control. Experiencing mental illness and learning about it has made me a much more compassionate, empathetic, tolerant, patient person.

I still have negative thoughts but I know it's natural. Now, I'm able to visualise all my thoughts, good and bad, as clouds in the sky just pass by. They can be light and fluffy, or dark and horrible, and that's OK. It just puts everything into perspective and reminds me that I'm more than my thoughts. And I still love Leonard!

-ENDS-

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