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poems  
by  
doctors

## 'In The Spirit of Rivers'

Jo McFarlane

When I was 25,  
a CPN referred me for psychotherapy  
to cure my personality.

I was assessed and found wanting  
but my need was so great, and my resilience weak,  
so how could anybody sensibly take a chance with me?

The litany of traumas I disclosed,  
like an automaton spitting toxic pellets,  
didn't penetrate its target audience.

Did the therapist think I was lying, perhaps?  
Or was she thrown off guard  
by the detachment in my voice?

The conclusion was predictable,  
if, at the time, incomprehensible to me.  
(The more help one needs, the less one gets).

Disproportionate equations abound in psychiatry:  
If you ask for help, you mustn't need it;  
but refuse it and you're certified psychotic

so they'll throw away the key.  
Side effects of medication are interpreted as symptoms;  
blind compliance is a sign you're in recovery.

Oh would that my brain could shut off so easily!  
I was sent away to write a sonnet  
*Thank you Doctor for 'saving the poet!'*

Naively, at the age of 36, I thought I'd earned the right  
to ditch my load, so cap in hand (with money for them)  
I approached the Institute of Humorous Relations.

My life experience seemed alien and threatening  
to the middle class arbiter of my fate.  
On concluding the assessment,

she paused for reflection, then –  
as though weighing up a bag of cherries in her hand –  
had the cheek to say 'Let's not rock the boat'.

Didn't she give a damn  
about the massive hole in the bottom  
sucking all the water in!

Selected by Femi Oyeboode. From *Stigma & Stones: Living with a Diagnosis of BPD*, poems by Sally Fox & Jo McFarlane.  
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Through their collection *Stigma & Stones*, writers/performers/partners Sally Fox and Jo McFarlane seek to promote understanding, improve treatment and reduce the stigma of living with a diagnosis of BPD.