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I found this to be an exceptional poem. It is beautifully written, emotionally powerful, and at the same time raises questions about existence, connection and hope. I recommend that it be published as is. I had two small concerns, but I would leave it to this author's expertise and craft to decide whether they would actually strengthen the poem.

The first line of the poem is challenging, partly because it starts with an answer to a question, rather than the question itself. Even more confusing, the answer given is "existential" which is a rather abstract philosophical term. I read the poem 3 times and finally think I understand what the poet is saying: 1) the catatonic patient is speaking, she is engaging and connecting 2) By choosing this answer, she is conveying that she is struggling with being, but also perhaps is affirming her existence. This is an awesome way to start us off, but it demands a lot of thought. In my view, well worth it; but if there were any way to find a word a little less philosophical while still preserving her intention, that might give a hand up to the struggling reader.

As the poem develops, we see the patient (a teen) slowly come to life. Her eyes fill with light, she connects with mundane objects in the room in a purposive way. Then there is this marvelous perspective shift, so that suddenly the patient is gazing at the psychiatrist/med student/nurse - whoever is the narrator. What she sees is decidedly "weird," a label which likely has been applied to her more than once. Also skillfully, the author acknowledges that the treatment and hoped-for recovery of this patient concern not only the patient herself and her doctor, but many other people, including family members (the completely adorable little nieces).

The author's compassion and literary sensibilities are very much in evidence by the fact that they choose to start at an "outer ring" of this family before moving to the anguished, patient mother. Her interaction with the narrator is perhaps the most affecting moment in the work. The mother's gratitude and rekindled hope shine worth in the understated but deeply perceptive final lines.

It is here that I had my second small stumbled. The reference to music caught me a bit off-guard. Again, this reference does suggest a parallel between the heartrending, uplifting emotions that music evokes. But it took me a beat to think how does music figure into this final image. If there were any way of inserting a subtle foreshadowing of this metaphor might allow the conclusion of the poem to flow more smoothly.

These may be just personal reactions, and I would not require ANY rewriting of this already poignant and artistically confident piece.

Comments to Author:

I absolutely loved this poem. It is intellectually deep, grappling with fundamental questions of existence, while also evoking strong feelings (happiness, hope, even humor) in the reader. As you will see in the comments in the text, overall I am just admiring, both of your craft and your skill in turning to examine really important issues about human connection and relationship.. There were two small points in the poem that caused me a bit of a stumble, but I offer them only for your consideration because, on balance, the poem may be best left as is.

The first line of the poem is challenging, partly because it starts with an answer to a question, rather than the question itself. This creates a sense of groundlessness (which may have been your intent). Even more confusing, the answer given is "existential" which is a rather abstract philosophical/logic term. I read the poem 3 times and finally think I understand something of what you might be saying: 1) the catatonic patient is speaking, so she is engaging and connecting 2) By choosing this answer, she is conveying that she is struggling with being, but also perhaps is affirming her existence. This is an awesome way to start us off, but it demands a lot of thought. In my view, well worth it; but if there were a way to find an alternative word that is a little less philosophical while still preserving her intention, that might give a hand up to the struggling reader.

As the poem develops, we see the patient (a teen) slowly come to life. Her eyes fill with light, she connects with mundane objects in the room in a purposive way. Then there is this marvelous perspective shift, so that suddenly the patient is gazing at the psychiatrist/med student/nurse - whoever is the narrator. What she sees is decidedly "strange," a label which likely has been applied to her more than once. Also skillfully, the narrator acknowledges that the treatment and hoped-for recovery of this patient concern not only herself and her doctor (a limited dyadic view), but also many other people, including family members (the completely adorable little nieces).

Your compassion and literary sensibilities are very much in evidence by the fact that you choose to start at an "outer ring" of this family before moving in toward the "center" - i.e., toward the anguished, patient mother. Her interaction with the narrator is perhaps the most affecting moment in the work. The mother's gratitude and rekindled hope shine forth strongly in the understated but deeply perceptive final lines.

It is here that I had my second small stumble. The reference to music caught me a bit off-guard. Again, this reference does suggest a very credible parallel between the heartrending, uplifting emotions that music evokes. But it took me a beat (!) to think how does music figure into this final image in the first place? Where did music come from? Inserting a subtle

foreshadowing of this metaphor earlier in the poem might allow the conclusion to flow more smoothly.

These are very small quibbles about a poem that I admire for its wordsmithing and fell in love with for its combination of clear seeing and hopefulness.