

You're Welcome by Amy McAllister

Sometimes I like pretending I'm not mental.

I'll do a hard day's temp work in an office, and a supermarket shop on my way home,
Eat full-fat cheddar and not even think about it, dry my hair and put on tinted moisturiser,
Grab a drink.

Sometimes I think I might just pull this 'I'm not mental' off.

I go to bed before the drunks start singing, read a chapter of a book that's won some prize.
Then close my eyes and dream of flying, or of losing teeth, or of being chased while mutely
screaming.

When in female company, I share made up opinions on Kurt Geiger handbags
And I kiss my teeth when I'm informed that one of the Kardashians has cheated on her long
term partner
Just as if I give a shit.

I engage in chit chat about rain, or Tories, or the environmental reasons to go vegan
And I almost pass for normal.

But if I bump into someone unexpectedly, I'll dive behind the nearest food waste dumpster,
And if anyone so much as thinks about high-fiving me at Zumba, there's a chance I'll punch
them in the fanny.

I spend hours in the little Tesco crippled by cross-referencing, with taste and price and ethics
in the boxing ring

And frequently walk out with nothing.

I have lengthy conversations with my absent ex while washing up,

And although the postman comes six days a week, my heart beats faster when I hear his
footsteps on the stairs

For reasons I will not go into.

I google suicide.

And house prices in Middlesbrough.

And cry when I see someone singing really well on Youtube.

I get *very fucking angry* over nothing and I know I'm wrong but don't know how to change.

I scroll all night, then pass my mornings begging no-one in particular to take this pain away
and yet, the other day,

On one of those rare weeks when I was well enough to make it into work,

A lady I had never met before asked me about my living situation

And when I told her all about my flat in Hillview, in the heart of London,

She implied that I did not deserve to be here, being young and strong and childless.

What a world we live in, where a stranger can survey my outsides and declare me
undeserving,

Where I'm tempted to relay my darkest moments just to justify the roof above my head.

I should have stayed in bed.

There, I could listen to my next door neighbour's blaring radio- he uses it to drown out his own
thoughts of dying,

I could hear the family two floors down scream bloody murder then make up,

Or the harmonica some other someone I have yet to meet breathes all his loss into.

I could look out my window in the afternoon and see that others haven't made it out
of *their* pyjamas either.

We are trying.
But we, many of us, carry baggage that that stupid lady couldn't even fathom.
And I'm happy for her.
Likely, she has loving parents, top notch English, a postgraduate degree,
Connections, war-free roots, a passport, and her health.
Her wealth of privilege a blindfold.
But it's getting old to read about ourselves in newspapers - **The Rats of Central London**
Hogging what could be Prime Real Estate with our disgusting, pointless little lives,
Concealing knives beneath our hoodies, putting off the tourists
And affecting the Hawaiian Poke place's business with our tears, unsightly dental problems,
And our mental, mental selves.

So I want that woman and her sort to ask themselves- what sort of London do they want?
A sanitary Truman Show with facial recognition cameras
Watching over landscaped seating areas outside chain tofu-chicken joints?
An edgeless, H&M-infested monoculture with God-awful taste in music?
Polite civilians saying please and thank you on the buses
And apartment buildings sponsored by BP on every corner, populated by computer
scientists?

COME ON!!!!!!!

We nutters, orphans, sickos, bloody foreigners, we make this city great.
We're where the heart is.
We mental cases, *we* are where the *art* is.
We wrote that song you can't quite shake.
Spray-painted colour in the drudgery to brighten up your trudge to work.
We looked you in the shiny eye and handed you a tissue
When the commuters in expensive suits could only look at laptops, or away.
We never judged the woman turning tricks behind the Burger King
Because we've seen a thing or two ourselves and know that
Sometimes you look down to find that, suddenly, the other foot is in the shoe.
We may seem scary, with our unironic Adidas, our facial scars, the odd embarrassing tattoo,
But we take good care of each other.
And if you lot can accept us as your neighbours, and respect our right to be here in this city of
so many,
We'll take good care of you too.