

PAIN(T)

A year.

I look back and I think
it's been only a year
since I spiralled into crisis
 since my only reason
 for still standing upright
 was that collapsing
 meant failing.

 It's been only a year
 since I sought a teacher
 in every person I saw
 since I looked for release
 in every book
 in every gym
 in every mindless activity
 I could find.

 And while people failed me
 as I failed me
 while institutions failed me
 breathlessness to the point of exhaustion
 failed me

 one of those days
 I picked up a paintbrush
 and painting taught me.

Painting taught me
to be alone with my thoughts.

 It's been only a year
 since I clung to social interactions
 public spaces
 denial, avoidance
 to cope with my own existence.

 I had poisoned my inner dialogue
 to the extent that I no longer understood it.

 I had crushed my sense of self-worth
 to the extent that it existed
 only on paper.

 I had reduced myself
 to a paperweight
 if even that.

 And while words failed me
 avoidance failed me
 I failed me –
 painting taught me.

 Painting forced me
 to *be alone with my thoughts.*

Painting taught me
how to deal with failure.

It's been only a year
since I wallowed in self-doubt
over leaving a job
that made me miserable.

This is giving up
a voice said
this is you, once again, failing
the voice said.

This is you
not being enough of a person
to handle it
the voice said.

It never occurred to me
that abandonment
for the sake of sanity
can be an act of self-preservation –
painting taught me.

Painting taught me
that it's okay to lay down the brush
if the mood no longer strikes me.

Painting taught me
that it's okay to jump ship
when the ship itself
makes me seasick.

Painting taught me
how to trust myself to make decisions.

It's been only a year
since I was flustered
about whether I was passing up opportunities
for the sake of resting
while I still could.

However
when all paint has dried
and no cracks can be seen
and all hues are perfect
you can leave it be
and enjoy the sight
or you can trust yourself
that anything you add to it
will only make it better.

You can celebrate the accomplished
or decide to further accomplish –
painting taught me.

Painting taught me
how to trust myself
to make decisions.

Painting taught me
that I was capable
of doing things that matter.

It's been only a year
since I became aware
that I had no employable skills
only a debt statement
and a piece of paper to show for it.

A golden seal and cursive scribble
to certify that I was useless to society.

On top of that pile
A black-and-yellow letterhead
Congratulations!

to certify that I would soon be rewarded for my suffering
by suffering more.

The letter failed me
anticipation failed me

investing in my future failed me –
painting taught me.

Painting gave me visible proof
that what I do has worth.

It gave me tangible evidence
that I was capable
of *doing things that matter*.

Painting taught me
positive affirmation
and to guiltlessly surround myself with it.

It's been only a year since I opened that letter
that email

since I smiled into that camera for that award
that presentation, that accomplishment
only to feel like a failure.

It's been only a year
since I've heard the words

I told you so
No one doubted you

only to feel
like they didn't get it
like they didn't know

how much more suffering was necessary
to succeed in a manner
that was acceptable.

Acceptance is just what –
painting taught me.

When I now deem my efforts
unsatisfactory

and I scream it into the void
a wall of colourful successes
screams back.

Most importantly
painting gives me
an existence.

It's been only a year
since my only way of release
from the matter-of-fact
from the hard and the logical
from the methodological
was stripped from me
in a matter of minutes.

A year
I've been ridden
with waves of nostalgia
and incompleteness
while reciting rules
and algorithms
and numerical truths
without room for gray.

But now
painting teaches me.

Painting gives me
an existence
a space to be fragile
and fallible

outside the rigid confines
of the perfect
the professional
the expert.

I am blood-red
and neon green
and pastel pink
cracked, faded white
and deep indigo blue
on top of what
black-and-yellow letterheads
paint me to be.