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.