



A subtle difference

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A Subtle Difference

by Antonia Pont

A conference is built on words and ideas
And the tenuous fabric we string
Between them.
Let me sew for you
Today
A dress
A lovely garment of homespun semantics.

I read it somewhere, in a book
Perhaps of poetry, or in the letters of a
South American friend, that
There is a difference between pain and suffering.
The distinction made was that
Suffering is passive, and
Pain is active.
Two synonymous units which are
Not the same thing at all.

Suffering as an
Off with the fairies, head in the clouds or
A flying off the handle and no breath in between the insults
Kind of thing;

Pain as a
Not running, a sidling up close to, a face to face with
Nerve to nerve interaction with some
Change
Catastrophe
Transformation
The tearing of the vaginal walls, comes to mind
Or the renting of the beloved's image
Or the gap
The absence
Where something once was.

In Pop-Buddhist parlance
Suffering (the under-belly of pain) is considered the natural consequence of desire
Or attachment.

For attachment I read
EXPECTATION.
Wanting A and not B, and
Getting barely a trickle of A and
Lashings of B
Even though A was immaculate
And B a hideous letdown in every respect.

In
The Not-getting, and the
Imagining-missing-out-on and the
The Not-having, Being-forgotten
Forsaken, abandoned, left to wander in the wilderness
Suffering blooms gorgeous
Like Patterson's Curse in the sunshine.

The world is at fault.
The world is a miserable place.

However
Scratching around with our implements of precision
We may curiously discover THAT
Suffering does not dwell in the dissected cadaver of
Deprivation or coercion,
But in the concoction these create within us
We the casseroles of slow-baked suffering, enamel vessels
Professional generators of it.
Suffering looms
We, the unconscious manufacturers of the most
Banal product.
Product worth nothing
Since the market is flooded with it.

Now
The second limb of our original theorem states that:
Pain is suffering turned active
Turned aerobic.
Turned 'get up and go' or
'Lie down and receive'
Turned something with a bit of zest or stature.
Whatever your definition of that might be.

Three men with a footy each and a child
Amble/run down the street.
They appear to me objectionable
(Because I am sometimes fearful of popular culture)
Little parcels of my suffering, out there in the sunshine.
And I just sit here, with the image of them hunting me through the window.

We need to identify the precise moment when suffering metamorphs to pain.
I will simply *ASSUME* that it does
With no justification...
Because words are arbitrary and
Logic is a scratchy jumper.

Before the haze of suffering
We begin with bliss

Slipping out of the soft, coral canal of
Perfect nutrition and soft-serve peace
With no attrition on the horizon yet
But soon...
Suffering starts to clothe us like a cloistering skin
Like a veil with millions of holes
Cut in.
Breathing holes
In the once-perceived-Perfectness.
We learn to fear the world galloping at us
Arms open, face luminous and loving us maniacally.
We perceive the wrinkles on the face of the world
The irregularities in her trusting eyes.
The swill of sweat from her now craterous pores, and we
Judge. And we
Rattle off one hundred reasons.
And we
Call these deep, firmament breaths, these pretty pauses, these luxurious lacks
Imperfection. And it would seem that all is lost.

We begin to talk at dinner parties
Of protein diets and deadly disease.

We suffer like oil-laden birds, squirming in the weighty black of velvet seas.
Our original hypothesis of suffering intends that we
Pant and wait politely for death.

Our suffering would seem to be wedded
- Often and almost monogamously - to our disappointments.
I am disappointed in you, Susie.
You spilled muesli down your blue velvet smock this morning and then
This afternoon you wiped
Your fingers after eating chippies on your stockings.
I will have to stain remove now. And oh! how that bores me.

Disappoint-ed
Miss-read.
The world I wanted wasn't like this, Mummy.

Mis-placed.
Somewhere... perhaps at the bottom of the kitchen drawer where all the
Takeaway menus are kept.

At the Multinational Calorific Provider
On the corner, we order food
That doesn't taste of anything.
So at least it's not offensive.
Forgetting to look for other options
Under the pile of papers, and the nails
Old matches and rows of half-used blu-tak adhesive.

There was the option of proper food
Despite fatigue and a gaping fridge.

But sometimes
Someone
Manages to clean out the kitchen drawers and turn
Suffering into possibility

Voila
Abracadabra
There is a birth and it is bloody and
Beautiful
And banal, so banal
Having happened trillions of times before
Our little foray into housework.

Suffering wakes to itself
All lain out on its back in the hessian sun
It sits up.
Bony on the paving bricks
With the weeds growing up symmetrical in the
Cracks, making
Green hexagonal stars in the shape of soft wheels.
Suffering grabs itself, stands up.
Shakes off gritty blooms of dust
And strides forth
To put out the washing
And to stare straight up, fierce, into the
Mouth of the sun
Which is not so unpleasant when it sucks on
Willing skin.
Suffering becomes a new thing: PAIN
Erect. Upright. Or fluidly still.

Pain is suffering engaged with.
To engage with
To play with
To look at
See
Acknowledge
Pain is suffering respected.
Suffering loved.
Mother Mary's Letting Be.

To love your suffering - we are not talking co-dependently -
But real, grown-up, look-you-in-the-face and
See the other.
When you look at suffering and examine its
Limbs and flaws and funny posture, pitted skin and
Fickle whims - you

Make it into something new:

1 + 1 = 2

You find yourself in the act of loving.

The simple act of permitting.

Allowing it to be there.

To rise like a gigantic bird

All grey and black with underfeathers the colour of fruits.

Glorious with a wingspan to shelter everything.

Pain is your treasure

And your loss of the treasure lived.

Your bedfellow, your friend.

It is the plough creating the topography of your life.

Marking the turnings.

Making lines for you to colour in

With texta, even though the blue has gone streaky now

You've used it so much.

Sometimes, caught unawares your gut reacts with

The usual whining, grey oblivion

Some hazy, cowardly, little suffer-scurryings in the brain.

But later... You engage with it

You artists out there.

You thinkers.

You with memory as an option, flecked with mercy.

And the capacity for slowing down that is:

To document. (Infinitive).

You the magician, the alchemist

Make some silver, mercuric, more precious

Than Prada

100% proof Pain.

The good stuff. Not of dictionary definition.

It is a lofty achievement.

All cheer and shout hooray!

Today there was a metamorphosis.

In my word-processor.

In my limbs looping intricate text

Across the expanse of a wooden floor

Or

In my pots of colour smeared.

But this is

Not the age old (or New Age) advocating of pain.

It is not the same. IS NOT

Like the church

Like the ascetics, like alcoholism glorified or the fetishists of damage.

Living in garrets.

Rotting life and concreting veins

Such dramatic questings are mediocre and **far too large**.
Exaggerated unnecessarily.

If **All existence is suffering** (as the Buddhists like to tease)

Then

We might conclude

All existence has the potential to become pain.

Dark, exquisite, strange, or

Light like meringue on lemon curd

Or the fickle trackings of a purple migraine.

Take it on your tongue and gaze deep into its

Unpleasantness.

Or whateverness.

Find the smallest pain.

That which we call pleasure.

The towelling off of shower water in a cold bathroom.

Find the smallest pain:

This is the art.

The nice gleam of the skin stretched tight over the

Smiling cheekbone of a lover, who has to leave the bed

Or the fascination woken by watching blind, toothy mole-rats,

Who resemble walking testicles

Scrambling underground on the telly last week.

So you do not need addiction by definition.

But it is an option.

Naturally.

Like everything is.

Farm your pain from the quotidian.

The whole range.

The vast spectrum, stretched tight like a jelly snake

Pulled to its full potential.

For it is our loving and seeing and re-seeing

That is our art.

It is our taking up of little suffering bundles,

Holding them close, talking to them into the night,

Like teething children: and they become

Luminous, gurgling pain.

Our ways of getting close.

Our silent brushings of the surfaces of breathing.

I can't tell you anything about pain and art.

For they may be the exact, same thing, and

The ability to have pain, to practice it rather than just to suffer -

The hidden nature of art.

That love we bring to the average and the startling.

