

The Pain Without A Name

By Michelle Taverner

Photo - Numbers

First Place - Short Story

Cornwall

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Mrs. Amberley Plainwell

Journal Entry #1 Sunday:

Apparently, it's some kind of "rest cure". I'm not sure what that's supposed to mean but resting sounds good and cure sounds even better. I feel as if I'd heard the term before— somewhere in the imaginary realm— like maybe a short story I'd read at the library, back when I had time to go. Why do I feel the story had a tragic ending? I wish I could remember.

My husband told me part of the therapy requires me to track down the location of the treatment site on my own. He said to think of it like a scavenger hunt from childhood—that it would make me feel accomplished when I succeeded in locating it.

I personally don't see how that's got anything to do with getting help. I quite find it a bit sadistic to make a "patient" responsible for finding some obscure destination—like dangling a carrot above a starving rabbit. But that's me, and what do I know anymore? Certainly not what I used to, when others valued my opinion—eye's widened after they'd asked my impressions, or answers to difficult questions.

Since I've given life to a child, it seems the impression is that my intellect and purpose were extracted in the birthing process. Honesty, should that not, if anything, make me wiser? More in touch with eternal things? Stretched wide with God's silent knowledge?

Instead, it seems my identity—my individuality—has been removed. The desire to remain a separate person is now selfish. My husband would say this all sounds deluded — on my part, that is. It would be deemed "overly-dramatic" and "born of female rhetoric". It's all so mottled in my head. I just know that sad music or stories now pull me under to a bleak place, where it becomes almost impossible to climb up once I've reached bottom.

Journal Entry #2 Monday:

I so terribly miss the art, especially. He's advised me to totally remove any potentially upsetting things, like reading novels, creative writing, walks in the woods, and viewing films. It's not as if I've time for these anyway, with my precious little one needling me so. My husband doesn't know I'm writing this journal. But I feel an unmistakable urgency to document this.

My husband is a physician specializing in childhood illnesses. Who wouldn't trust his knowledge? Some point out that emotions are emotions, and how different can things really be for a woman than a child? So, that's how I got myself here, and now I must find this place of treatment on my own to discover

how I can be helped. I'm told that I'm one of only a handful of women who can participate in this new, "cutting-edge" approach. I should be grateful.

The treatment brochure said the very first step was to choose a door. There were images of four different door entries to select from. There was a red arched door with a sparrow-shaped knocker and the numbers 4321 for an address. A second door, #1010, was black with a vintage- looking brass handle and a keyhole probably big enough to peek through in real life. The third, number 3535 was a pristine white, and narrow to the point of claustrophobic. The fourth and final was canary yellow with the welcome symmetry of 1111 across the front. I'd once read that yellow symbolizes things like enlightenment, intellect, creativity and clarity. These are all pleasing qualities, so without allowing myself to overthink it, I chose the yellow door.

I must go. The child is crying, and it feels like a clamp on my heart until I stop it.

Journal Entry #3 Tuesday:

The next step is to open the envelope that just arrived in the mail. My hands tremble but don't move to open it. I try to focus on how much better everyone would feel if I were better. No more crying jags in public places, no more wells of anger and resentment to make me toss disruptively in bed, no more staring in the mirror trying to identify the woman looking back.

Just open it. My hands tore at the seal leaving a small blur of red that took me a moment to realize came from a paper cut I'd given myself. More proof that I'm self-destructive. It's subconscious at this point, they say.

The letter inside tells me the yellow door is several towns from Truro, where we live, in a smaller town on the South Coast called Eden. There's a map enclosed. It's an hour and thirty- minute bus trip. Well, at least it's bound to be a lovely, serene location. But it's up to me to find the street, the building, the door. (I can't imagine how it will feel to have empty arms?)

The only clue they've given me reads: Follow the flowers to river's edge. The password given is Baby's Breath. Again, it seems a little like making a blind person feel around for her house keys when you can see them right within her grasp. But it's all supposedly therapeutic, so who am I to be questioning?

On the map of the Eden area, I see a spot called Glendurgan Gardens. Follow the flowers. It's described as a thriving sub-tropical valley winding through exotic gardens to meet the river.

I know this is bound to be a meandering goose chase, but the idea of getting lost in a valley of color is not unappealing. In fact, disappearing into nature feels like an invitation I've longed for without yet being conscious of the desire.

The child cries. This must wait until tomorrow. I'm so weary.