

Jenny Amber Petch

# Dialogue Over a Bath

Alison: Jenny, are you home?

Jenny: I'm in the tub. Will you come in and talk to me?

A: What are you doing in the bath this early?

J: I'm thinking about an assignment. I have to write a Platonic dialogue.

A: Is it due tomorrow?

J: No, it's not due for a few days.

A: What are you stressing about then? You have plenty of time. You shouldn't be worrying.

J: I know, I just don't feel like doing it. Every time I start to work I feel so overwhelmed.

A: Obviously you need to take the night off. What do you think about that? We could make a nice dinner, smoke a joint, and listen to some Miles Davis.

J: I can't! I really need to work...

A: But you don't want to work! If you're not going to enjoy working on it, then it's not worth doing.

J: Well, I'm not going to enjoy the process, but that doesn't mean that there's no worth in doing the work.

A: Ever since you started studying philosophy you've become highly adept at splitting hairs. (muttering) I think I liked you better when you were a poli-sci student. You're telling me that writing the dialogue is going to be unpleasant, but despite this, the work is somehow worth it in the end?

J: Well of course it's worth it! If I didn't feel it was worth it, then I wouldn't be doing it. If it's not worth it, then what the hell am I doing at University?

A: Exactly! What the hell are you doing at University? I really believe that if it doesn't feel good to do something, then it is not a good thing to do. The fact that writing this assignment isn't enjoyable should tell you that it's not the right thing to do.

J: So, the "right thing to do" should always be accompanied by pleasure?

A: Sure. Right now you're in the bath and it feels good. You're not doing your schoolwork because it feels bad. So, having a bath is the right thing to do, and congratulations, you're doing the right thing!

J: Alison, just because having a bath feels good doesn't mean that it is good.

A: Oh, excuse me, I forgot that I was speaking to the Oracle of Higher Purpose! I suppose you're gonna start rapping about "the Good" and "the Way" right about now.

J: No, not yet. All I'm saying is that there are things that feel good that are not inherently good.

A: That doesn't make sense to me. The most important thing in life is to live it to its fullest and all that rot. I mean, we only have one chance in this life, so we should make it a good life.

J: You may be right but I don't see how this changes the point that things that feel good are not always good things. Maybe the bath example is too benign. Consider your penchant for the Backstreet Boys' music. Listening to their CD makes you feel good, but the music itself is not good.

A: I only like their music when I'm drunk; I think it's kind of catchy...

J: Speaking of drunk, I thought of a new example. Imagine a man who likes to get drunk and beat up random strangers on the street. Imagine that this is his favourite activity, and that nothing else gives him the same pleasure. Just because beating up people feels good to him, is it a good thing to do?

A: Of course it's not a good thing. Why?

J: Well, the people he beats up are caused a lot of pain, and that's no good. But the guy really loves to kick the shit out of people. It may be that this is the only thing that gives him pleasure. So, he enjoys hurting people and I enjoy taking baths.

A: Come on, I fail to see the connection between you deciding to take a harmless bath and a guy deciding to inflict pain on another person.

J: The common denominator is pleasure...

A: Yeah, but what you feel in the bath is pleasure and what the guy feels is some sort of twisted pleasure.

J: What's "twisted" about it? Pleasure is pleasure.

A: His pleasure is the result of some other person's pain, that's what makes it twisted. The pleasure you experience in the bath is the result of filling a metal basin with hot water. They're apples and oranges.

J: So, are you saying that the pleasure I experience is real pleasure?

A: I'm not sure that it's a matter of one pleasure being more real than another. I guess I see it more as a difference in quality of pleasure.

J: What do you mean by "quality"?

A: I mean that some pleasures are better than others. You're having a bath because you're stressed. You have a good reason for seeking out a little pleasure right now.

J: What if this guy is beating up people because he's stressed?

A: Argh! All right, some things that we do for pleasure are good and some are bad. I still think you should give up working for the night.

J: Wait a second! I thought that if something feels good then it must be good.

A: Well, if there are people out there that feel good by making other people feel bad, then I suppose

all pleasures are not necessarily good.

J: Then you believe it is possible to feel good about something that is itself not good?

A: That's what I'm sayin'...

J: If that's the case, then how can we tell if a pleasure is good or bad?

A: We can definitely say that a pleasure that is the result of pain is not a good thing, and, therefore not the right thing to do. So even if you are going to claim that writing your dialogue is working toward some sort of higher good or pleasure, it still does not make sense to write it if it's causing you pain.

J: The very point that I might be doing something for a higher good makes it a worthwhile endeavour! You're tossing the baby out with the bath water! If the purpose of the action is good but the process is unpleasant, shouldn't I still aim for the good?

A: But you don't know what the good is! What if the good isn't good? Maybe pleasure does lead us to the higher good.

J: What I do know about the good is that it isn't bad...

A: Stop speaking in circles!

J: I know what things are good because I also know what things are bad. And, I might add that pleasure couldn't lead us to the good because pleasure can be both good and bad.

A: Pleasure by its very nature is...

J: Pleasure by its nature is both good and bad. Remember the drunk guy scenario?

A: Yeah, yeah.

J: Seriously, I believe the fact that there are bad things implies that there are good things, and that we should do things that we think of as good even if we can't see them as good in the moment. Pleasure is not just pleasure, but good is definitely good.

A: Have it your way then, but on a more pressing note, should I get the rolling papers or are you going to work tonight?

J: No, I think I'm done.