
Darkness Illuminated

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The illuminated red dots on my digital clock alerted me to the fact that it was 5 am. A sea of sweat engulfed me as the interior darkness of my bedroom filled my soul slowly. I was swimming in darkness, drowning into the damned depths of depression. Despondently I gazed at the stars twinkling outside; they twinkled so bright despite the darkness which surrounded them. So why couldn't I do the same? Tilted my head towards the direction of the window, my loneliness became apparent to me. The constellation of stars shone so bright, where was my shining star? My ruminations on astrology were interrupted by the Archer Scorpion and Southern Cross.

Swoosh, swoosh. The palm trees swayed into each other, the wind rushing through them. My eyes blurred as the darkness embraced me and I drifted back to sleep.

The first light of day interrupted my slumber; the snooze had been ringing for intermittently thirty minutes without waking me up. My grief felt so heavy I thought I was comatose. The swoosh of the palm trees and birds chirping reminded me that it is a new day. I've had new days, new days for twenty years, but not one day could compare to the past forty days. Isn't this when grieving is supposed to stop? Where was the supposed magical switch which turns on happiness after grieving for forty days? I sank back, back into bed, the alarm clock still yelling at me in the background. My limbs couldn't...didn't want to move. I wondered if this was part of the period of mourning. The church didn't mention anything of being incapable of moving.

I closed my eyes with hope that I could create for myself a sanction in the silhouette of my late brother's face. Even when I deliberately tried to form an image of his soft

smile in my mind, it seemed like my memory of him was slowly fading away as time elapsed. Still, I managed to form the memory of the birthday present he bought me when I was only four years old. It was a hefty fish tank with only one fish inside. He called it a Snakehead Gudgeon and he named it after me. He told me that unlike humans, fish don't need any emotional attachment or pursuit of happiness. Fish are forced to swim in schools; they don't have the option of choosing an individual life. They are cold blooded and defy definition but share some behaviour patterns humans do. He always managed to link any situation and I found that funny. I guess that's why I loved him.

Several moments passed and I gathered the strength to respond to the screaming alarm in the background. I switched it off and pulled myself out of bed, nature was calling. As I walked down the hall to the bathroom, I looked outside the window. Clouds were gathering, filled with the promise of rain. My tears flowed down my cheeks like the rain dribbling down the window pane. I couldn't help it; a feeling would come over me, my tears involuntarily falling. Outside, the ocean roared as the monster waves crashed onto the beach; a scent redolent of sandalwood filled the atmosphere.

Forty days into staying at this beach house with my auntie and I haven't released any of the negative energy kept up inside me. I needed to get out, get out before the guilt of running away from home overwhelmed me. I'm starting to believe in spontaneous human combustion. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea. I should probably go to a counsellor or something. It all seems like hard work together. Maybe my body might reach a point where the stress exceeds my capacity to expend it. How was I to release this trauma if I was trapped in the house for so long with nothing to do but ruminate all day?

The drapes of the bathroom window seemed to be reaching out to me, trying to get a hold of me. Imploring me to enter the world beyond the house, I couldn't decide whether to draw the curtains and accept fate by sealing my only source of rehabilitation out. I couldn't find the answer. I felt like an abandoned painting needing restoration. Was I letting the deep darkness drain me?

The grey line of the horizon divided heaven and earth. All of the clouds were hiding, the sky was clear. Did the deep darkness engulf them too? I was suffocating in my own thoughts. What happened to the resolve I craved? Sometimes I wondered if this resolution was something tangible, a destination, a hideout or if it was something I had to create for myself within my own mind.

I got out. I felt like running, in commune with nature embracing the moment. The sunlight prickled my skin, forty days without contact with the sun has made me feel like a vampire. I let out a laugh, my first in a while; it seems to be that nature really can be restorative. Please restore me. This has become my new mantra, I prayed for restoration from the depths of my soul.

The smell of the salt in the air overrode my senses. Everything felt magnified; I had been so isolated from nature! The air smelt saltier, felt heavier, made me feel lighter. So many different emotions, feelings and senses. I am in overdrive. I feel light; the darkness which consumed me moments before is fleeting, receding my body. I was yearning for contact with living tangible things.

The seascape I gazed upon was breathtaking, the colourful hues of blue and green overlapped, as if shimmering with each other as the sunlight danced upon it, like a cut diamond shining. I imagine my life as a wave. Things can tumble over you; however there is always that light that follows you, which illuminates your path

wherever you go. You just need to believe hard enough that this light will eventually grow.

I conjure the image of my brother recounting a story of how the oceanic ecosystem represented our lives. He would have imagined his life as the ocean. Somehow, it all made sense... He would have mentioned scientific terms that didn't even sound like real words. Nevertheless, I always understood him. I understood what it felt like to be a wave, the force gaining momentum, building into a tube filled with light before crashing and starting.

Wandering along the shoreline for three quarters of an hour, I snapped back to reality. Although the beach was deserted, I found solace within my emotions. The refreshing breeze stroked away the hair from my face. I had never seen anything so dreamlike. I was confronted with a sight I had never explored.

Rocks of all different shapes and sizes were scattered over the shoreline. It seemed as if the smaller boulders were leading up to a section of rocks which were greater in size. Some were covered in slimy green algae, others with crustaceans. I was curious and curiosity got the better of me. I scrambled towards the middle of the boulders and stood like a beacon over the sea beyond me.

Deep and long, like a crater in the earth, hidden between the massive boulders was a rock pool. It was a creation of God, an offering of peace and serenity. This was the restoration I longed for. There was no other place where I felt myself drift away. I was unrestricted, yet secure.

As I rested along the edge of the rock pool, I began questioning its significance in the middle of rocks. What could possibly be the reason of a water-engulfed crater? Was

it inhabited? Were there creatures living within its depths? Do they grieve or have lives governed by ethics and morals?

My thoughts were interrupted by a rasping sound. As I tilted my head to the source of this agonising scraping noise, I jumped to my feet. It wasn't hard to spot, still and suddenly silent, like a statue. Its ruby red and blood orange covering caught my eye. As it stood motionless, it looked like a painted canvas. Its razor sharp claws shined bright in comparison to the moist boulder it inhabited. Her beady black eyes gazed into my eyes; I couldn't sense any fear or hesitation. The same expression was always painted on my mothers' face, expressionless and blank. She was the Hermit Crab, soft on the inside but her hard shell and beaded eyes were all that were exposed. Within her suit of armour was a defenceless body that was well guarded.

After those few fearless seconds, it began creeping to the tip of the boulder. I couldn't refrain from taking a few steps closer. I wanted to see what its next move was and how it would react after I got less distant from him.

The hermit crab began shuffling perceptively. Its eyes didn't look ahead of where it was shuffling, however at my face. I then sensed the insecurity.

Plop, plop.

Splashing into the water, there seemed to be no effect. I would have thought that it affected the other creatures populating the rock pool. Did this mean it was an only crab? Where was its family, did it have guardian angels?

As soft ripples began appearing under that boulder, I couldn't resist but move another step towards the ripples in the rock pool. The rippling of water brought back so many memories into my mind. The first time I had ever seen ripples in water

occurred was when I was just a child. At the time, my brother was teaching me how to throw pebbles into the water for that exact effect. Somehow he could relate almost every situation to oceanic fauna, just as I could relate every situation to stars. As a means of cheering me up, he would always tell me stories about the ocean.

He once told me a story about a mermaid who had three close friends. They each had a pearl necklace that they never took off. She lost her necklace one day and realised that the loyalty of her friends was attached to the necklace. This story my brother told me was about how people can cast you out over something so meaningless. It seemed that my parents preferred their pride over our family; they were concerned with the meaningless late night arguments which turned fatal, rather than my brother's and mine safety and security. We felt like outsiders and sought solace in ourselves.

Once again, the piercing sound of scratching interrupted my thoughts and pondering. As startled as I was, I was unable to find the crab. I considered where it would go. As I restlessly searched for it, I noticed a sapphire blue shade at the bottom of the boulder. Bending towards the rock for a clearer look at the blue hue, I realised that the blue had moved. In those few sudden seconds, I recognised what it was. My brother taught me everything he knew about it. He studied every marine animal that ever existed and this was one of them.

Black, brown, blue and yellow, colours I could never forget. From memory he called it the Southern Blue-Ringed Octopus. I could tell it was that particular type of octopus because of the distinct patterns and blue rings, as well as the size of its head in proportion to its body.

The blue rings on its legs lit up. The thought of venom alarmed me to move as far away as I could. The glow rose to the top of the water. His tentacles ascended from within the water, calling for attention and admiration. The venom was harmful, like my father when he would push my mother into the wall. His eyes were piercing with violence and his skin was a suffocating blue.

I guess that my brother and I had one thing in common. This was curiosity. Just as he would have acted in a situation as such, I couldn't move too far from the octopus. I remained where I was, studying its colours and its substantial size. I recalled my brother telling me that southern blue-ringed octopus usually hide underneath rocks and prefer to stay there at all times as a means of camouflaging for prey. Why is this octopus so diverse? If it has been scientifically studied to conceal itself, why has it revealed itself to me?

I noticed the wrinkles on the octopus. They covered his entire body; I wondered why these wrinkles had appeared. I have heard that wrinkles were caused as of stress and trauma. Has this octopus been put under stress and trauma, like a human would?

The last time I recall meeting my father, he had stretch marks and wrinkles across his face. His forehead and cheeks were sagging, his eyelids were drooping. I contemplated whether this was evidence that marine animals face problems which caused emotional strains.

Losing track in my thoughts, the hermit crab appeared back from its den. She seemed like a gladiator no longer safe in her fortress; her body was stiff. Her eyes were rigidly fixed on the octopus. For a moment, I detected fear. Hesitantly, she shuffled further away from us.

Within the blink of an eye, the octopus drove himself towards her. He had an entirely opposite design. He seemed soft on the outside, but what people didn't realise was that he had his armour worn on the inside. As he eased his way towards her, his agitated colours shone neon blue. The hermit crab shuffled as fast as she could, yet her formidable claws were not as fast as the octopus's masculine tentacles.

As her body retracted within the safety of her shell, a sense of sympathy overtook me. Was the octopus out to get her for territorial reasons or was he preying on her? Was her fortress enough to save her?

Splash.

Salt water was flicking in the air and onto my face, my vision was blurred momentarily. Yet, I could still see his electric blue colour become as intense as it had ever been. As he slithered over her body, his mantle seemed to act as a net, trapping her. It appeared as if his tentacles searched her body for a weak spot where he could pack her body with venom.

Crack.

I could hear his crushing power; her shell was crackling ever so slowly. Then, I knew that the venom was seeping through her. Was she drowning in venom? Is this like drowning? A feeling of struggle, then accepting fate? A lifeless form. A dead weight.

Retreating back off of what was left of her, I realised that the octopus had lost one of its tentacles. Did he do that to himself or did the hermit crab fight back? As he recoiled into the rock pool, I noted that his wrinkles appeared longer after the attack, and that a range of fresh ones were forming. What was the reasoning of these

wrinkles? How had this happened and why? Wasn't this a feeling which humans could only experience?

I searched all over for his missing tentacle; it was nowhere to be found. However, I noticed an animal, in the form of a cucumber. As far away as I was from it, it still managed to continuously come closer to me. Why had I attracted it? Why didn't it camouflage with the rock for the remainder of the time that I lingered at the rock pool. It managed to keep itself hidden and isolated, why did it too, expose itself to me? Was this sea cucumber the reason as to why the hermit crab and octopus fought? If so, why had the octopus deserted it, abandoned it? Just as I was abandoned? I looked at this creature and felt guilty for some strange reason. Could I have helped the Hermit Crab? Why didn't I?

Closer to sunset, I returned to my aunt's beach house after an invigorating and strong connection with nature. It was so difficult to let go. Was I really going to leave the safe haven which I so desperately craved? I was deserting my newfound heavenly respite area, to return to a house I had no connection or affinity with. It was not my home; I don't recall ever having a home. Home is where the heart is. At least that's what they say. My heart is attached to myself only. I don't ever experience that warmth that people talk about. The warmth that boils in their chest as they reach home to their loved ones, with the sound of their parents talking and where the aroma of fresh food and baking overpowers the senses into delight. I needed that, I yearned for that.

I was returning to a rock. A fortress. A lighthouse that didn't offer peace, not even a guiding light but rose within me as I returned was an overwhelming sense of sadness. I quivered as I walked into the living room. My body did not belong to me,

or so it seemed. My limbs felt weak, my legs were struggling to hold up my mere body weight. I looked for respite; respite that could not be found anywhere. My heart yearned for respite. I found myself succumbing to my inner turmoil. I sank, sank onto the couch. Traces of what occurred during the day were replaying vividly in my mind. I couldn't rid myself of the memory of contentment. I experienced this was an emotion which I hadn't felt for quite some time.

Soundlessly, my auntie paced through the hallway and stood by the door. As per usual, her soft and loose brown curls were put back in a knot. Nothing ever changed.

Yet, she watched me with a face painted with concern. She usually watched me with an expression of compassion. It was different now; her face was pale, lifeless and gazing at me as if she has been on the receiving end of a confrontation with a ghost!

I gazed back at her for a few moments more in anticipation of why she looked so despondent, my heart beat slowed down and I could begin to hear the pulse of the blood being pumped around my body through my ears. I waited. Waited for a change in her facial expression. But it didn't.

'Hey, Aunt Candice, how are you?' I asked worriedly.

'Well, Rosemary. What about you?' After a short pause, she added 'I haven't ever seen you so pale.'

I smiled. 'Aunt Candice, I'm fine. I did exactly what you've been asking me to do. I'm probably just tired.'

Her facial expression finally changed. She smiled with joy, blushing she said, 'Thank goodness! I didn't think that you would ever take my advice. How did it feel, Rosemary?'

‘It was amazing Auntie. I had, until that moment never felt so alive and well.’

‘That’s great, Rosemary! I’m going to make a snack, would you like anything?’ she said as I saw the colour rise back into the contour of her cheeks. She looked like a wave of relief had just washed over her. Had I not noticed that this woman did indeed care for me? An overwhelming sense of guilt started to rise in my throat; I shook my head and got past it. I couldn’t feel any more negative emotions, I wanted to change. The respite of the marine world served to be quite excellent food for my soul. I needed to hang onto that feeling. It should only get better from here, I was going to change my life and the only way to change my life was to change my *modus operandi*. The way I viewed the world and the way the world in return treated me. I realised that I am a by-product of my thoughts – my aunt interrupted my thoughts as she reassured whether I wanted any dinner whilst she was walking out of the room towards the kitchen.

‘No thanks, Auntie. I need an early rest tonight,’ I replied as I, too, exited the room.

Heading up the stairs, I realised that the window along the wall of the stairs held blinds hiding nature’s beauty and restorative power. I predicted that Aunt Candice had closed it for my sake. So, I opened it to enable nature to do its work and replenish the household.

As I opened the shutters, I saw the ocean and beyond. I took note of the rock pool and the various rocks surrounding one another. The re-enactment of my journey during the day was still replaying in the back of my mind. I was expecting it to protect me, yet it had the complete opposite effect. Can humans be as cold-hearted as aquatic animals? Could my parents be considered proof of this revelation?

Whoosh, whoosh.

The sound of the palm trees by the window dancing in the wind reminded me that it was time I rested.

As I entered my room, the first thing that caught my eye was the streak of moonlight which beamed from the window. Looking out of the window, I was confronted with the constellation of stars once more. My mind began to wander as I stood fixated at the stars. Did the stars ever stop shining so brightly because they were surrounded by darkness? No, they shone brighter as they twinkled, lighting up the dark sky, almost kissing the earth with their beams of twinkles. I liked that thought, it reassured me. Life is good, sometimes even though you are surrounded by darkness, it is that which allows you to illuminate and stand out. My eyes started to burn slightly, I was exhausted. I resisted the temptation of sealing the source of light from the room. As mentally exhausted as I was, I took a nap.

As morning sunlight crept into the room slowly I awoke and switched off the alarm before it could have even rung. The sounds of the trees by the window grew slower and more silent; I could hear life across the ocean from my bedroom. The crashing of the waves against the rocks alerted me that the ocean had awoken and so must I. Leaping out of bed, I could feel the adrenaline running through my veins. Then, I longed for nothing more than the rock pool and the promise of tranquillity.

Leaving the house, a thought struck my mind; I began to grow worried whether the octopus had preyed on yet another victim. Perhaps, he was waiting for me.

The echo of the ocean and the infrequent calls of birds were the only sounds that interacted with the salty air as I made my way to the rock pool. I passed a tree where

a mother bird was feeding her baby. She regurgitated the food from her throat into her baby's throat. That's an indication of true love.

The water glistened a dazzling blue in reflection of the sky. The bright sunlight shimmered on the ocean's surface. Walking along the shoreline, the ocean licked the soles of my feet, a remarkably soothing feeling. I stopped and stared, not moving.

The sand gave way to a pool filled with blennies. My attention was focused on the school of bright yellow and earthy green fish. Each fish was half the size of my index finger, yet swam in parallel lines, darting this way, then that at a rapid speed.

My attention hit the depths of the ocean. I was not expecting to see so much light in such a hidden environment. I witnessed a lone snakehead gudgeon.

Memories of my brother then began sweeping through my mind. The thought of him giving me a birthday gift again, lingered in my head. This fish was me. I was like the Snakehead Gudgeon. I didn't long for people controlling my perception of life and contentment. I needed to be an individual with my own perspective and emotional stance.

Splish, splash.

The waves began washing over me, it cleansed me. I felt refreshed. I continued walking along the path following the sand, which then gave way to the rock filled domain. With that thought, I wasn't too far away from the rock pool; I was near my shelter.

As I reached the rocks, I could see multiple other rock pools. However, I could tell which rock pool I had visited yesterday from a mile away. As the adrenaline pumped

faster through my veins, my senses navigated me towards the sacred refuge. I felt comforted.

Yet, this time, the rock pool seemed bare. There was no longer a hermit crab and the southern blue-ringed octopus had gone missing.

Taking a few steps closer, I could see that the sea cucumber had dramatically shrunk in size. It seemed to have slowly broken down from the inside. It was disintegrating! What a slow and painful death, I thought. It was, too, a dead weight. The lifeless form of the sea cucumber now took a similar shape to that of the hermit crab. What was happening to my safe haven?

Forcing myself to take a closer step to inspect the sea cucumber, I stopped motionless. Almost stepping on something soft and slimy, I grew immobile. In the shape of a cucumber, it laid itself amongst the rocks, harbouring the rock pool. It was a sea star. Camouflaging itself to the stone of the rock pool, I considered whether it had been there for days. Had I not noticed it?

Did I have a protector or guardian angel similar to the rock pool? In the distance was Aunt Candice coming toward me. I watched her slow, languorous walk as a contented walk and realised she was at peace with herself and her surroundings. She had accepted the death of her sister and nephew. She was a strong woman...

And with that...

My smile broke into laughter; tears of bliss came streaming down my face. Finally, I was content.

Reflection Statement

The intention of 'Darkness Illuminated' was to produce a piece which expresses the beauty of both life and nature. Through metaphoric imagery and descriptive language, 'Darkness Illuminated' articulates the various perceptions of certain ideas, hence exploring how a person's state-of-mind and perception of issues can alter through the purity of nature. The paradox present in the title contains a preview of what the narrative plot will entail. It foreshadows a story about a young person trying to overcome inner demons, struggles and someone trying to find a sense of affinity to anything or anyone.

In striving to elucidate and achieve my intentions through my writing, I immersed myself in studying the short story form. Each resource stressed the need for seamless construction. The intricate study of the short story genre has aided in the development and use of literary devices, features and structure of my piece. Therefore, I was able to develop my skills of writing, and defined my works style in its language, form and structure. Via extensive and independent reading, deconstruction and evaluation of various texts, I have been able to closely study various portrayals of psychological adaptations from multiple insights. The extensive study of these interpretations has enabled me to create my own ideas for my Major Work. The result of this is an authentic and complex composition in both content and style. The studying of previous English extension 2 major works, such as Kristina Hollestelle's 'There's Something In The Water' has also assisted me in providing concepts concerning the development of textual structuring, the juxtaposition of imagery within text, and conceptual integrity.

Hence, the extensive independent investigation which has been undertaken throughout the formulation 'Darkness Illuminated' has influenced my Major Work.

In order for the didactic message to be fully understood, the intended audience of my Major Work include well-educated adolescents and adults. The audience must be emotionally developed to deal with the confronting issues and concepts. The audience also requires perceptive thought to find value in the persona's descriptions, metaphorical observations and reflections. The audience will be able to pick up on themes which may be similar to what they go through as adolescents are constantly going through physical, mental and social changes in their lives. This story is a backdrop on all of these issues. If you were to look into any home, these themes would be ever present with the adolescents and adults as the events displayed in the novel convey emotional growth, which can grow through overcoming obstacles and emotional barriers in their lives.

The medium of short story enables a sense of flexibility in order to employ narrative treatment as a means of portraying powerful images to the responder. It provides the details of the setting and characterisation prior to being thrown into Rosemary's abstract life. Whilst conveying her personal issues and the conceptual basis of the story, the denoting tones of 'Darkness Illuminated' endorse an emotional response. Attempting to subtly convey hints based on metaphoric characters, I have employed an oceanic motif throughout my Major Work. This narrative feature suggested symbolic qualities interweaved with the substance. Notions of survival are suggested through the universal presence and necessity of water. Water is also symbolic of cleansing, and in 'Darkness Illuminated', this is the cleansing of pessimism. The concept of the rock pool is metaphoric of Rosemary's family and the issues which occur from within the rock pool are also symbolic of the reality in her life. Imagery is

utilised in order to endorse an image into the readers mind, just as personification. This supports the element of pragmatism. Nonetheless, the title also suggests that you need to grow through darkness in order to find yourself. Sometimes people are placed into difficult positions which they perceive to be as negative, but instead it is these negative positions that they are place in which allow them to grow. It is forceful and done without their will; however the end result will be a positive. The notion that diamonds are made only through putting them under pressure and crushing them helped me come up with this title.

'Darkness Illuminated' displays the relationship of which the Advanced English and Extension English courses have aided in delivering my Major Work. I have gained the knowledge and skill of formulating independent choices in regards to composition and planning skills, word choice and structure. My Major Work portrays the influences of from the Advanced English Syllabus, the Area of Study: Discovery. Within my Major Work, this Area of Study has allowed me to excel and mould the composition of the literary scenery of 'Darkness Illuminated', as well as character development. Hence, the elements of both syllabuses are extended in my Major Work.

I began my Major Work and stopped for a long time period as a result of the various concepts I wished to manipulate into my short story. After obtaining feedback from my teacher, it became evident that it was essential to embark on an in depth, extensive research process. This would remove irrelevant information and concepts. It would also assist to deliver the notions of the short story in a precise and clear method.

Inspired by works of Rob Bresky, I purposed to manipulate the serenity of nature and life through narration and language as a means of annotating the positive aspects of Mother Nature. As Bresky has said, "You're pushed to a brink that challenges you to either rise to the occasion or else surrender to demoralizing chaos... Seeded inside each of these personal turning points is the crux of the evolving global apocalypse: You get to choose whether you'll adjust by taking a path that keeps you aligned with the values of the dying world or else a path that helps you resonate with what's being born."ⁱ

ⁱ Brenzsy, R. [2006]. Free Will Astrology [Internet]. Available from: www.freewillastrology.com [Accessed 24 March 2006].