

Chiaroscuro (or Beckett on his Death Bed)

At the left hand side of the wrought iron bed sits a small table. It is made of varnished mahogany. Above it is a small mirror. Its thin wooden frame is cracked in the bottom right hand corner. The wallpaper's ripped and patchy, yet the walls remain smooth. The stripped floorboards are worn. Nothing appears out of place in the almost square room. There is no natural light — the shutters are closed over the small window. The only source of light is from a dim table lamp.

It was a place I could not describe. I knew where it was, I knew what the place should have felt like. I knew the place, but I could barely see it anymore. My vision was blurred. No detail was evident. Rusty browns mixed with dank greens. Patches of damp yellow and wet oil obscured my vision. Damp water I couldn't wash off — a smudged liquid warm stagnant pool of decay owned my body. Hot salt bit my face, dried my lips, and burned my eyes. Everything was moving as if in slow motion — all was heavy and my body, a dead weight, would not move. I lay on the hard ground, frozen. Sound remained. Sound cut my head. Sound came from within and from outside, and it was impossible to separate the two. Everything was shouting then. The shouting had overtaken my body. Shouting from inside and from outside. The words made no sense. I distinguished just one thing. My name was called repeatedly. I could hear it but did not know what it was. I knew it was mine but I did not know what it was! I did not know my own name. The shouting sounded like the skin and texture of crusting oil, slipping between grains of hot sand and covering my body. The shouting turned to squabbling. I was buried in what must have been boiling sand and oil, but I couldn't feel anything except liquid warmth. My oil eyes developed dark brown crusts, sizzling and scraping. Then the squabbling turned to screaming, like a boiling kettle, the whistling cutting and piercing my tightening chest.

My chest was tight and my eyes were unable to close. A change began to take place. All feeling was lost. No sensation. No emotion. The screaming gradually became fainter, slowly disappearing. My body calmed. My senses picked up lush wet green. I could taste rain. In no more than two seconds, I saw all that is pure and natural, all that is living and beautiful, wet and growing, harmonious and peaceful.

My heart began to pound. Blood rushed to my head. From my chest an explosion came, Fast. Rush. Bang. Close. Stop.

Blackness. All is black. I cannot see a thing. I cannot stand. I cannot feel my body. I cannot see where I am. I cannot touch my skin. I cannot scream. I cannot taste. I cannot smell. I cannot hear. I'm in blackness, nothingness. There's nothing to reach for. I think over and over about the way things were, but cannot remember. I remember two seconds of green. There were leaves and there was rain. There were blue skies and piercing blue eyes penetrating me deep down. I cannot remember the taste. I cannot remember the touch. The feel. The sensation. What is pleasure, what was pleasure? It's murder to know

each word but not what it means or how to grasp it. How to experience it. What is sex? What does sex feel like? Who is sex? Where is sex? Where do these words belong? How long have I been here? How many times have I endured the same thoughts? What is this blackness? When will this end?

Upon the bed side table sit four place mats, neatly piled. To their side sits a masculine gold ring. Opposite the bed sits a lone chair, made of the same wood as the table. What was once a plump velvet cushion is now tattered and thread-bare. The chair sits in line with the wall, perfectly straight. Large black shadows cover the floor. A patch of the floor is stained. Upon the stain is an upturned glass. Facing the bed is an easel, on it sits a small oil painting. The painting is clearly not displayed this way permanently — it may be that the artist has delivered it for the buyer's perusal. The painting is a portrait in oils, and appears to show a face, peering out of a black background.

A face, peering out of the darkness — where did that come from? Krapp wasn't it? All those images! All that filth! All that decay! Never-ending nothingness and the same thoughts repeated over and over. Now much time has passed since those two seconds of green. How many times have I repeated the same thoughts? I can see now. I can see a small white in the unreachable distance. I do not recall when it appeared, but it has reached my thoughts. I do not know whether my eyes are open or closed. Nor, in fact, do I know whether I have eyes. I focus on the white and it focuses on me. It slowly moves towards me. The closer it comes, the less ability I have to compose thoughts. Thinking becomes non-existent. White approaches. Closer and closer until, as if all in one flash, the black becomes white. The brightness fills everywhere — pure brilliant white light.

Infinity of whiteness. All is white, but for a mouth. Just a mouth. Alone. Where it is unknown; for where exactly is the centre of infinity. Infinity is white; it has no texture or structure, but a sort of buzzing. Buzzing... until the lips begin to move and sound is created. Nonsensical, dislocated sounds echoing for infinity. Noise. Clapped lips of throats pushing for words, trying for what? What words can be said when there are no words? Fear is the only emotion present in this new place. The mouth screams, not knowing what it is, or what its purpose could be. The white begins to shatter and crumble. White worlds are created. The mouth is sad. Sad because it has grown eyes, but cannot use them. Tears fill a universe of oceans. Sprouting, growing, nature begins to take shape. Form, texture, shape, body, a house, a room, a room of blackness but for a white light shone on a face. The face of an ageing man; his white, unshaven face; a contour map of wrinkles and frowns. Completely white pupil-less eyes, bulging, with nothing to look at. Nothing to see. The face turns, enveloping itself in darkness. Now all is black once more. The face is mine. I can touch, I can feel, I can feel my ears and nose, my eyes and eyelids. I can feel my body, I can move. I can sniff and I can listen, but there is nothing to hear or smell. My eyes are open but still, all is black.

I move. I can walk, almost weightlessly. The ground is flat and smooth. The ground is enclosed by four walls, each of which is just as smooth. I can understand meanings and logic. My mind is clear. It takes me to that white place and cleanses me. Smells emerge from the walls and floor. Stagnant, empty, damp smells. My skin smells of burning sand.

Liquid begins to drop from above, like oil. The oil is rubbed into my skin by sand paper. I burn and dry. I sting and shrivel. Mild colours begin to appear, light greens and blues, gradually getting brighter. I see leaves and water, I taste rain. I'm there again, I'm in that green place of beauty, I reach out for it to grab it, but the light is still increasing. Burning flowers are stuffed into my mouth. The stench reaches my brain as the colours scorch me. My eyes fill with colour and an immense brightness. My head splits as the colours get brighter and brighter very quickly. I scream, I roar. I hear myself roaring. I shake violently. I run from wall to wall, holding my head and kicking violently. I ache, I hurt, my head splits. My voice breaks and the screaming stops. A climax is reached. Every sensation and feeling comes at once — exploding, the colours become so bright that they are now white. White again.