

Equal Parts Light and Dark

By Kyle Herselman
Al Ain English Speaking School
2016 Division D 1st Place Writing Award

Inside each and every one of us there exist equal parts light and dark. We all have those parts of our personality that we would rather keep to ourselves. Those parts of us that we cannot change, yet wish that we could. For the most part, many of us are successful in suppressing these parts of ourselves, however once they are revealed, once you see the worst side of a person, you won't be able to see them in the same way again.

Have you ever looked at a person, someone close to you, and felt that they could do no wrong? That surely there resided within their soul nothing but the brightest of light? Did you believe this to be true, only to have the harsh reality laid bare before your eyes, as you watch the source of all your earthly joys be transformed and transfigured into the root of all your pain? I did.

As a child there was no living thing on this planet which I cared for more than my mother. When I looked at her I saw nothing but gentle kindness radiating from every aspect of her being. It was in her beautiful brown eyes, her golden smile, the way she walked, the way she talked, every action she took was for the sake of bringing joy to others. This woman was my entire world. Everything felt right with her around, her very presence would drive all my worries away. My happiest days were those when we would read stories, go to the park, or visit the pool, the movies. Every moment I spent

with her was bliss. I believed, in my heart of hearts, that this person could never do anything to hurt me, in any way.

Over the years, however, I would see this illusion deteriorate, bit by bit, piece by piece, until the most horrible side of my mother became clear for me to see. Looking back now I can say that my mother was an incredibly anxious woman, always fussing or stressing over something or other; on top of this, she struggled with strong feelings of depression, and as any person would, sought relief from her demons. She found her solace at the bottom of the bottle. She would drink away her troubles and she would change; the pristine image of my mother would be shattered, casting light on the monster that dwelled within.

I can remember how it would always start. I would go to talk to her about how my school day was or what we were doing for dinner, or the weekend, or something or such; and I would smell it. First it was always the smell. I would enter the room and my senses would be assailed with the stench of alcohol. Then it was the slurred speech. Words which once gracefully danced from her lips on the wings of angels now lazily, uncaringly, stumbled from her mouth as they unceremoniously found their way to my ears. It was at this point that I would know what was coming, and I would find a way out. I would retreat to my room, seeking shelter from the coming storm. But there would be no refuge. I what felt like no time at all I would feel the thunderous cacophony of my parents' feuding resonate throughout the walls of the house, as if the beaches of Normandy were being stormed within my own home. Eventually my curiosity would get the better of me and I would venture out of my bunker to survey the damage done, inevitably being swept up into the maelstrom of verbal haymakers, unable to

comprehend the sight before my eyes, the sight of my guardian angel reduced to a snarling, unfeeling beast. This would become a near nightly routine, until my parents split and I was finally free from the worst of my troubles.

It is difficult to express in words, how unsettling it is to bear witness to this change. The sinking feeling you feel in your stomach as you look upon the person that you care most about in this world, that person that would never harm you, and feel fear. A cruel, unnatural, predatory fear that shakes you to the very core. A fear bites deep, with icy fangs that numb every fiber of your being, leaving you paralyzed as the source of all your happiness is ripped away, to be replaced by the vilest creature you have ever laid eyes upon.

As I sit here and ruminate over the changes which befell my mother come night, I am lead to ponder how I have changed because of them, and how my perception of her has been changed. I can say for certain that I do not care for her the same way that I once did. No longer does picturing her face conjure visions of the purest joy. No longer do I see her as the unwavering light of my life. Tragedy has tainted these visions beyond repair. Do I then resent her? Do I curse her for blessing me with such a turbulent upbringing? Do I damn her to the depths for the pain she caused me? No. I bear no ill will towards her, for I can see now that she gave to me equal parts light and dark. One balances out the other and thus I feel nothing. I am indifferent. I neither love her nor hate her. All I can do now is set the past to rest, and turn my eyes towards the future.