

Beams of Light



32592872

There were glints of

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d through the dark.*

Luminous pillars of golden blue held up the quivering surface.

She watched.

When the beams of light struck through the surface and sliced open the water; that was her favourite part.

The world from down here was a hazy wet blur; deep blues and fragile golden speckles collided with the loose streams of aluminium silvers that seemed to ooze and mix with the water. Looking through the water's foggy lens, like smoke in mirrors, she watched the world and turned it round, slowly, in the light.

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G deeper into the darkness, impaled by the golden beams until they faded into nothingness and the water shook itself smooth again. Darkness licked its fingertips and strangled the flame until it fizzled out. She continued her impossibly long descent, like a single grain of sand falling through the hourglass. And the light. It seemed so close, dangling above her head, in front of her eyes, moving around with the swaying of the water. She swam towards it, desperate to feel its warm embrace.

Limbs flailing, legs kicking around in the dark. But all direction had been lost.

Maybe she wasn't moving at all.

Suspended in the water.

Suspended in time.

Morphed into another universe completely. She couldn't see her own hands even when held up close to her face. Bodiless, she was lost. Reduced to a mere a thought; a memory on lonely nights, rolled off the mind's sandy floor, floated through the water.

Air escaped.

Time to come up.

Follow the light.

Break the surface and...

b r e a t h e.



I've started walking the long way home from work. I say it's because I like the fresh air and need to get my steps up, but really, it's the silence I'm avoiding. It's hard to escape; ever present; oppressive; always lurking. I take the streets and laneways of my childhood. It's hard to separate the hissing of the cicadas from the distant high-pitched ringing in my ears and echoing through my mind; the sound of silence.

An ochre sheen spills from the setting sun and mixes in with the blue sky. Each step is another grain of sand falling through the throat of the hourglass. My shoes hit the concrete in dull thumps. The pendulum swings; propelling me forward. A minute was longer some days than others; but now it feels as though it isn't even there at all. Only my mind is free to run its finger down the spines of memories and daydreams; revisiting; re-watching them shift and change. My memories never look the same. Every time they play out a little differently; some moments are stretched out, slowed down, rewinded again and again and again. On repeat.

A car slowly passes me by. Music escapes from the window;

And if you have a minute, why don't we go?

For a moment I smile.

Talk about it somewhere only we know?

I'm taken back; I step through the door that I leave open only some nights; the nights I lie tumbling and wrestling in the deep dark. This moment; like a fractured shard of glass; slipping beyond the mirror frame, the one that's supposed to hold it all together. Fallen apart but not broken, stilling reflecting the world around, still reflecting me. Precious and delicate but sharp enough to leave scars. That's like this moment; buried deeper and deeper in the pit of my memory as time is shovelled on top of it with each passing day. I keep walking, keep moving.

"Perhaps time moves through us and not through it."

I read that somewhere once. I reckon it's spot on. Time has taken the wheel, driving me through life while I watch the world flash past.

I remember the tiny speckles of golden dust that floated around in his eyes when I looked close enough. When the sun shone down on his face through a crack in the

curtains at just the right angle, his eyes, those pots of golden brown looked as if it could ooze out and pour down his cheeks like a slow symphony of sunset tears....

That afternoon, I remember it was raining.

We sat on the worn-out rug in the living room with soft blankets wrapped around our bodies. The muscle on Ben's thin arms was starting to show as we got older. We were still shivering and cold from running through the rain from school to his house. Small glassy droplets slid off Ben's wet hair and onto the side of my face, my head resting on his arm as we watched TV. But we weren't really watching. It was just background noise. Empty syllables. Dull sounds we barely even noticed. Ben made me laugh. And he said he liked my smile. I remember the pellets of rain grew louder on the roof. Like it was trying to break in and disrupt the peace. But being right there and feeling the warmth of his body, it gave me comfort back then. It still does now. It lets me know that we were, in some lifetime, no matter how far away or how deeply buried, we were exactly that. We were part of something; part of each other. I hold on to that moment, no matter how sharp the glass or how deeply my palms are cut.

I remember looking up into his eyes and seeing those glimmers. Those golden rays that mixed in with the brown, shift ever so slightly. And with that, the universe seemed to tilt. It was like the rain and cracks of lightning had finally penetrated the roof and poured over me, blurring my vision. I didn't know it then. The small shard of glass had not yet cracked and fallen through the frame, separating itself for the rest of the mirror.

This could be the end of everything.

The clouds outside became grey, but back then, I hadn't noticed it. I was with Ben. We were part of each other. And I was still smiling.

The cars music surrounds me, drowning out any other distance sound of life. Even the silence was distracted.

And then there was only me.

For a moment I catch a glimpse of my reflection in the passing car's shiny exterior.

At least I think it's me.

I see a woman. Slow. Tired. Weary. Afraid to look back and see everything she's missed; everything she *will* miss. She continues to move toward nothing in particular.

And I keep moving.

The car passes within a matter of seconds. It's fast, that car. But I'm stuck in slow motion. The world turns quickly, and I can't keep up. The pendulum just keeps swinging. Cars pass me by; just like life. And as I track that shiny car moving into the distance, into the ochre sun; I'm blinded by beams of light; by the car and its shiny exterior.



Her silky blonde hair wisped and frolicked with the wind, bouncing in and out all four open windows of the car, leaving soft air kisses all over her small freckled face. Lucy and the wind were friends. Energetic. Pure. Reckless. The wind was just like her.

They drove fast on the straight dirt road. Dad at the wheel while mum rode shotgun holding the Tupperware filled with juicy watermelon and crustless sandwiches. We were only half-aware of the world outside the comforts of the car. And the radio blasted. Its music filled the empty spaces and mixed in with the wind that danced uncontrollably through the open windows. That trusty ol' dusty red Ford Escape that got them everywhere. The car was practically part of the family, or at least, that's what dad would say.

When the car was parked Lucy jumped out, hat in hand, and ran towards the lake. Twigs and dry leaves crunched under her foot. Somewhere along the way she lost her left thong but didn't think to go back and retrieve it. On that day the lake lay without a single ripple. Its smooth surface reflected the world above. A mirror. Creating the illusion of a perfect sky. Famed together only by the clasped fingers of the dry dirt and crunchy leaves that surrounded it.

"When are they getting here mum?"

"Soon. Not long now."

Lucy looked out to the water. Like a wind-up toy she was just itching to jump in. To feel the soft cool embrace completely consume her. To hear the crashing of small quivering waves tumbling over itself again and again in a domino effect from her small body breaking the waters' unmoving, untouched, surface. Everything made sense. The water was a pavement made of perfectly glistening sapphires. And nothing but the beams of sunlight, warm and blinding, could shatter the surfaces hard exterior.



The door to our small unit groans when I open it. It's vibrant yellow colour has faded greatly since the day we moved in. Ben's slumped on the couch watching Fox Sports, stubby in hand. He's been running. His floppy brown hair still falling to one side from the sweat. Ben loves running. He says it relaxes him, the way he watches the world zoom past on fast-forward.

Ben used to ask me if I wanted to run with him.

"We could go together!" he would say.

I think if I did, I might just run right off the edge.

Food waits on the small coffee table in front of us that Ben rests his elbows on. Sitting on the floor, backs leaning against the aged couch behind us, we eat in front of the TV. We're not like our parents. Every Sunday my family goes to Ben's parents house for a barbeque. The first time we went, we were only twelve. And since then, I can't remember ever spending a Sunday night away from his house. Our parents spend hours cooking, mums on desserts and dads on the grill. Ben and I always help out with the cooking, ever since we were little. Ben with the dad's and me with the mum's. There'd be plates and bowls overflowing with custards and creams and jams. The clanging of shiny silver forks and knives and spoons on the white granite bench top is dominated by the orchestra of laughter that filtered through the house. Every so often I would look up to see what Ben was doing, but most times I would catch his eyes already looking at me. And in those small moments, everything around us seemed to freeze.

The TV casts off a luminescent hazy blue light that surrounds us. It's as though the world inside the TV has somehow escaped the boundaries of the screen. And here, sitting amongst the blue feels like sitting at the bottom of the ocean, my thoughts crash and collide like waves. These thoughts, these words; things you say to your own burning reflection.

We leave the TV on for most hours of the day. Without it, the silence would become louder than it already is, like a heavy cloud hanging over our heads with bursts of lighting. Those eruptions of light scare me now more than it did then. Every night the man on TV dresses in a grey suit, his mask, and never fails to smile and point and laugh. Never failing to pretend. Every so often he'll say something, and Ben will laugh.

When Ben laughs his whole-body shakes. It's an infectious disease. Some nights we'd end up rolling over each other in fits of laughter; breathless, completely lost in the moment. It's then that he'd cup my face in his calloused palms and gently press his forehead against mine. If I could put my life on pause and be suspended in time, this is the exact moment I'd choose. But now when he laughs, I smile sadly; because I realise that then isn't now.

I wait for him to say something, to say anything, and mean nothing. Or better yet, leave the silence.

Say nothing and mean everything.

"Fuck yes! Slotted it!"

He was up off the couch. The faceless crowd on the TV seemed to share his enthusiasm. Cheering. Jumping. Screaming. Euphoric. He downs what's left of his beer and slams the stubby down on the coffee table.

"We should go out there one time. Watch the game live. Really get in there. Be a part of something! That'd be good aye?"

We must have different somethings.

A sweaty ocean of bodies swaying excited playful motions. Rocking back and forth. That's his something. Footy. Chugging beers. Throwing an arm around his 'missus' in victory. I can see it. We're at the top of the hill. I'm there but I'm not really there.

My body, masked in the hill's cold shadow, already aches from pushing my something, this boulder, to the top. Ben wants to be part of the crowd on TV. He wants to jump together. Scream together. Maybe even laugh.

He has his sights set on the fridge. Another stubby. Standing up he kisses my forehead and lightly caresses the bottom on my chin with his forefinger, tilting my face to look up at his.

"I love you, Luce. You're my other half. Never forget that."

My other half. We would say that to each other all the time. I revisit those memories, reshaping them, slowing them down, replaying in my mind. Now I don't know if it's just the slight breeze of the fresh night air filtering through the open window, but I still feel cold.

His face is so close to mine. Too close. I see myself in his eyes like looking into a fishbowl. They're hopeful. Always hopeful. And I can see the soft glimmers; those golden rays still mixing in with the brown. His eyes; the things that are talking to you without talking to you.

I open my mouth



"Love you too, mum."

Mum smiled. She did that a lot.

"That's my girl."

And laughed. She did that a lot too.

"Come here. Can't forget sunscreen. It's stinkin' hot today."

The sun; that dazzling dot in the sky that radiated golden beams like an open hand amidst the blue. Wide-eyed, Lucy reached her palms up as if she could grab hold of the sun's rays and be pulled into its warm and blinding embrace.

She sat on the ground, half dirt half dry grass, and let mum smudge dollops of sunscreen all over her small fragile face. Chin raised. Eyes squinted. Mums face leant over Lucy, replacing the sun with glimmers of powdery light. And for a moment; the seconds seemed to pass by in slow motion; they felt more like minutes; hours; days. A whole lifetime. And Lucy saw herself reflected in mums purple sunglasses mum always loved so much. The one with the small gems glued to the sides of the specks; plastic gems but they shined all the same. Looking into her own eyes, Lucy was unaware that the heat of the sun was but a mere illusion that died with the day. That the joy and the laughter would somehow get lost; memories; visions of what was that touched forgotten souls, then left.

A silver car parked next to ours. His dad got out first. Then his mum. And then there was Ben. His whole face was smiling; eyes crinkled at the sides, nose slightly scrunched, dimples created indents on his cheeks. But more than anything, his eyes seemed to sparkle; glimmers of golden rays mixed in with the brown.

The parents laughed together. They often joked about Lucy and Ben getting married, going into detail about what kind of flowers Lucy should hold walking down the aisle, or if Ben would wear a proper tie or bowtie. Saying everything and meaning nothing. Creating ripples. They were part of each other right from the very beginning.

The yellow picnic mat was scattered with fallen leaves and wandering ants. Heavy glass jars overflowing with rich jams and salty pastes. The clinks of our mums plastic wine glasses complimented the cracks of our dads icy beer cans.

Lucy and Ben waited long enough to slip quietly away from the parents in their daze of cheap wine and good company. Dry leaves shrivelled up from lying helpless to the sun created a path that trickled to the shallows of the lake. Each step kicked up dirt behind them, letting it sift and flutter in the wind. The soft water swirled around their ankles as they stood there together.

They were cut from the same mould, but hers was cracked. And she always knew this. She was a

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Lucy took a step further, leaving Ben behind. She knew he wouldn't follow her. Not out here. Not where the dirt floor started to melt and crumble away under her feet. Without looking back behind her, she smiled. But the smile was for only her to know and the water to see. It was theirs.



Ben and I walk together. In front of us the sun melts away beyond the horizon.

“Just one drink” he said.

“Everyone will be there”.

Everyone and no one.

In the darkening skies above, the symphony of stars are beginning to sparkle; if I close my eyes, I can hear them singing. I can imagine I'm somewhere else, someone else, just for one moment. Somewhere else where I'm a part of something. Something meaningful.

"You right Luce? What are you looking at?"

"The stars. They're bright tonight."

He looks toward the vast canvas above. He sees a different sparkle; a different lustre.

We see different stars.

He swings his right arm around me and rests it on my shoulder.

Mum used to tell me that women hold up half the sky. With Ben it feels like holding up the whole universe.

"Vodka, Lime and Soda thanks".

They don't use real lime and there's not enough ice. I heard once that the vodka comes in a barrel and they just decanter it into bottles for the sake of appearance. It doesn't matter. It does the same job. The keen burn on my tongue and throat, you know the one, makes me feel alive. Tonight, I'm stepping out of myself. A stranger. Some silhouette of a woman whose stumbled into this lifetime without finishing her last.

We meet up with our mates. They're all Bens. My friends disappeared years ago; to the city, across the world; it didn't matter where. Somewhere out there they might even be together sipping expensive chardonnay from delicate wine goblets. I'm drinking vodka that might be from a barrel.

Down the hatch.

"Another please."

Did they disappear or was it actually me? Buried under the weight of the universe.

"Luce. You might want to slow down."

"Same again please."

The lights seem to dim and the music is turned up. There's a cheap looking disco ball that lifelessly hangs in front of the bar that finds and reflects every spark of light. With each thump of the music's beat I feel myself leaving my body. Detaching.

Something; a sweaty ocean of bodies. Rocking back and forth. Slurred and senseless. Ben said he wanted to be part of something. Was this enough?

Down the hatch again and again.

Drown out the weight of world. The universe on my shoulders. My fingers penetrating the solid rock. It's hard edges worth smooth.

Drown.

The darkness. It's overwhelming.

No, it's calming.

Breathe it in.

Let it consume me.

Drown...

At some point the music stops and I stumble outside. The silence finds me again just like it always does and for a moment I'm blinded by the lights of a passing car; its headlights beaming off the concave traffic mirror. You can see the world in that traffic mirror. But I can't really see me. And all I see is chaos. Maybe if I looked close enough or stood at the right angle, I'd see a woman staring back at me on the mirrors smoothed out surface. She'd be stretched out or scrunched together, pulled this way and that. Even without cracks in the mirrors glass or without missing fragments, one of us would still be distorted. Would it be her or would it be me?

"Luce! You right? What are you doing?"

There's no mistaking the silhouette in the door of the pub, blocking the light that spills out behind him.

"Fine. Just need a time out."

The world is spinning. All I see is an array of colours and shapes but I can't make sense of any of it. Everything is distorted; like looking into the mirrors at a theme

park. But I don't remember visiting any place like this as a kid. My words are slurred. Even the stars in the sky above are blurred.

I know I should sit and grab a water from the servo.

My body turns away. The earth's core pulls.

"Lucy! Seriously. Do I have to chase you?"

I choose to run.

The dusty road melts and crumbles away under my feet. I smile. I know where I'm going before I've even decided. Everything behind me gets smaller and smaller with each step I take until I'm sure if I reached out my hand, fingers outstretched like those in the sky, I could grab hold of it all and toss it into the ocean, letting it plunge like a single grain of sand falling through the throat of the hourglass.

I watch the world zoom past on fast-forward. Was I always this fast?

Another car. Squinting, I lift my hand to my face to shield my eyes, but the lights are too bright. I can't see my own hand and blinding orbs become embedded in my vision. And when I close them, I see only sparks and fizzles of reds and oranges and yellows. But more than anything, I see white. It's dazzling. My very own firework display. My eyes begin to water; my vision glazed; the world becomes a smudged wet blur. But even now, I can still see the beams of light.

I choose to run.

I don't turn back. The thought never crosses my mind. The smooth concrete paths are replaced with the dusty naked land. Still cluttered with fallen dry leaves and broken twigs, the wind has yet to whisk them away. It's different to the way the flecks of dust and dirt would kick up behind my feet, shifting and fluttering in the wind as I ran. But now, everything sits still. The leaves and the dirt create a frame around the vast mirror that reflects the world above.

I push through the overgrown weeds, that energy always pulls. Its kinetic. It's the promise of a new adventure; new depths to discover. Bravely I used to swim to the lake's darkest point. How powerful I'd feel; what a risk it was. Stepping out of the shallows; away from Ben; away from it all. Alone. Completely free.

The deep, dark, water.



The twilight bestows shimmering rays of golden-white, creating a glittering path from the shore to the horizon. It must go on forever; dripping down the side of the world and smudging over the blurry stars that lay beyond. The stars have started to fade behind the pomegranate sky as beams of the sun's rays poke out from the beyond the silky mist, like a sea of milky clouds.

Everything looks like I remember. It's as if the world inside my memories has somehow escaped the bounds of my mind and spilled out into the real world; my world. And it seems like time has crept away from me; slipped so far through the cracks that all these years feel like mere moments. I feel older than the lake now.

There was sausage grease left on the paper plates after they'd eaten everything off the barbeque. Ben still had a tomato sauce stain smudged on the right side of his mouth. Lucy laughed.

They held each other's gaze. "Last one in's rotten egg!"

Ben stood up abruptly.

Excited.

All that mattered was that moment.

Running on the thin pathway my legs are scratched and poked by the overgrown reeds of grass. I barely skim the ground, gliding, floating, soaring. The sun peaks up from behind the treetops like an orange egg yolk. It's white light is unavoidable and I'm blind; running into nothing; running towards everything. The dirt path before me seems to stretch longer and longer until I feel as if I'll never reach the top of the cliff.

For a moment I think of Ben. "We could go together!".

What if I run right off the edge?

*Lucy rushed up off the picnic mat. Flailing limbs toward the lake's edge.
Her feet barely grazed the fresh green grass as she soared through the air.*

In my memories, it felt like I had to run for miles to reach the top, but already, I start to slow down as I get closer and closer. The cliff stands out over the deepest part of the lake. I don't know exactly how deep, but I do know that I wouldn't be able to touch the bottom, and the thought of that frightens me.

It excites me.

I remember that feeling.

*She ran to the top of the high cliff, this mountain, that loomed over the lake and
casted an endless shadow.*

Lucy thought this part was infinite, with no sandy floor to stand upon.

This excited her.

There was no fear, there was no cold, there was no darkness.

They didn't exist. Lucy only saw the light that pulsated in the sky.

She imagined there was no water to jump into; instead there was just the sun.

*And she was heading straight towards it, letting the world pass her by on fast-
forward,*

pending for its warm embrace.

I lean over the edge and stare into the black hole. The moon escapes behind the shadows while the sun further exposes itself to the world, making the distance between itself and the horizon that much more.

I gaze down at the water reflecting back a girl.

A girl so unaware of the fear and the darkness.

A girl who will one day fall out of the sky and embrace the cold.

But for now, she still smiles and laughs and plays with the wind.

From up here, she could see her small town sitting beyond the tall trees while the wind wisped and laughed around her. And she felt closer to the sky than ever. And the stars. And the sun. This would be the closest she would ever get to the other side of the universe.

Refracted light from the fresh sun danced on the lakes sheen surface, blinding me. But for the first time I could see myself. Our eyes meet. Mine like empty windows.

The water reflected powdery light over her skin that left her sparkling.
Don't speak.

Then, like stars falling out of the sky, I fall out of mine to join the girl in hers.

Falling. Falling into nothing.
Don't think.

The missing spark in an endless constellation of glistening stars.

Don't even breathe.

It wasn't the water that scared me, but my own burning reflection.

And it was dazzling.

JUST JUMP!



A single grain of sand fell through the neck of the hourglass.

Lucy felt everything in slow motion.

And for a moment, it was only them; the sun and her.

All the rest was white light.

And then there was the water.

*And the mirror it makes. Rays of light poured out from the newly birthed sun and
slanted across the lake. She was flying.*

Suspended in the air.

Suspended in time.

It felt so real there was nothing that could convince her it wasn't.



The blues unmoving, untouched surface is shattered, creating small waves and white foam bubbles to rise up, breaking the illusion that I could fly. I feel the cold rapture, but even more, I hear it. The screaming of the water rings in my ears, its voice echoing through my mind until it settles, becoming only a soft mumbling of sloshing and slurring. The water tumbles over itself, letting in beams of sunlight, creating luminous pillars that looked as if they were holding up the quivering surface. My body drops further, but I seem to be moving in slow motion. All I know is the cold. The way it consumes every part of me, wrapping around my body and pulling me into a tight embrace. I don't feel afraid, there's a comfort in the coldness; a familiarity. And after running for so long, the world underneath the surface seems to stop. Time has always crept away from me, but now, so far away from everything, it seems to not even exist at all.

Striking through the surface and slicing open the water.

I slip further and further into the blue. Maybe when I come up, mum will be standing over me wearing those purple sunglasses she loved, and I'll get to see it all, starring back at me in the reflection of the lens.

Like strings tied around my ankles and wrists, my body effortlessly sways and floats. I become a mere thought rolled off the mind's sandy floor.

Looking up, she could see glints of powdery light scattered through the dark.

And dad'll be back behind the wheel of that ol' red Ford Escape, blasting music and letting it wisp around with the playful wind.

Facing up, smoothly rocking back and forth, I see the pink sky slowly merge with the orange of the rising sun. The water glazes over the sky and for a moment, I feel like a faded star floating with the clouds.

*She was falling. Impaled by golden beams that slipped through ripples before
the water shook itself smooth again.*

The pooling rays of sunshine was part of her.

They were part of each other.

Ben will be up there too. He always has been. But down here, it's different. It's just me. And I move with the soft motions of the water, dancing around the pillars of light that brighten up the dark, letting it completely consume me. If only for a moment.

Stepping out of this universe I tumble into my own. A place that breathes in my memories.

Overwhelmed by the feeling I always got; floating above the deepest part of the lake. Yet, it's not the same. It's a different sensation standing on the edge.

It reminded me of everything.

Follow the light.

My face parallel to the waters glazed surface, getting closer to the burning fire, I wouldn't want to imagine I'm anywhere else.

And through the light, it's like I can see her, stepping further into the deep water; without hesitation; without the weight of the world threatening to pull her back.

It's like I can see her. And she looks just like me.

The last embrace of the cold water somehow feels warm.

Break the surface and

Creating my own blinding light, I burst in to the sun and the stars, reflecting the world around. And I can see myself; dazzling, laughing. Just like the world orbiting around the sun, a rippling crest of foam create perfect halos that orbit around me. I am a constellation of stars.

And the water starts to settle.

breathe.



Inhaling that first breath of life, she knew it then, deep in her lungs.

That was it.

That was her new favourite part.

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Reflection Statement

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Maslow's Hierarchy of needs places self-actualisation at the top of the pyramid; above love; above belonging; above esteem. It is the goal toward which we must run with open arms. It's getting there that is the challenge. It's a long road to the top of the pyramid. A road that is fraught with obstacles; the passing of time; the bonds of history; the blind pursuit of the platonic ideal; the realisation that maybe, just maybe, you're a better version of self without it all.

Beams of Light is a short-story that fits within the bildungsroman genre and aims to explore the tensions between the past and the present in the perception of self-actualisation. My composition challenges the platonic 'Myth of Aristophanes' as explored by Plato in the philosophical text, 'The Symposium'. According to the myth "humans were originally created with four arms, four legs and a head with two faces. Fearing their power Zeus split them into two separate parts, condemning them to spend their lives in search of their other halves"¹, thus popularising the idea of a perfect 'other half'. My composition suggests that fulfilment is not dependent on platonic ideals, but rather the discovery and cultivation of one's best version of self.

Ideally, my composition would be published in 'The Atlantic' given their recent commitment to publish more short fiction in valuing storytelling "as a defining characteristic that makes us human". The publication provides a thought-provoking platform for literary ideas that explore human truth. Therefore, The Atlantic provides a space where my composition may be consumed by those who are interested in authentic personal truth and texts that challenge societal preconceptions.

¹ Plato, *The Symposium*, c.385 – 370 BC

Initially, my concept centred on the notion of fear as a barrier to fulfilment. I had hoped to explore this 'truth' in relation to Aristotle's Mimetic Theory of Art (the notion that all art imitates life) and as such, preliminary research led me to Picasso's stylistic cubism which visually depicts a sense of multi-perspectivity. After considering Picasso's visual body of work, the experimental modernist form of *Mrs Dalloway*² and the novel *Five Bells*³ by Gail Jones, I experimented with multi-perspectivity and decided this was an approach worth pursuing.

Structurally, the events depicted throughout my composition cover one day of the protagonist's life; a day when she finally faces the need to break free of her relationship to achieve self-actualisation. This is interspersed with memories of her vibrant youth. *Mrs Dalloway* inspired my 'day in the life' approach and my decision to include the intrusion of childhood memories thus allowing Lucy to make comments on herself, others and the world around, whilst also encapsulating Irving Singer's suggestion that "fiction...often exposes more truth than non-fiction"⁴.

Lucy's relationship with Ben is reflective of her broad sense of discontentment. Ben embodies the town which she is unable to separate herself from, despite feelings of disillusionment and unfulfillment.

"Ben loves running. He says it relaxes him...I think if I did, I might just run right off the edge."⁵

Lucy's inner thoughts foreshadow the ending in which she literally jumps off a cliffs' edge in a moment of 'rebirth', whilst exposing the underlying desperation to escape the routine ties of her connection to the people and places she's known her entire life.

The setting itself is relatively ambiguous but reminiscent of many small Australian towns. This augments the significance of my characters feelings of detachment: languishing in a 'dead-end' town cut off from the world around her and from the 'best version' of herself. This suggests that our surroundings shape who we will become,

² Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 1925 (As studied in Advanced English Module A: Textual Conversations)

³ Gail Jones, *Five Bells*, 2011 (A multi-perspective narrative that offers a nuanced portrait of modern Sydney)

⁴ Irving Singer, *Literary Truth*, 1956, critical essay

⁵ In my Major Work, *Beams of Light*, page 6

exemplifying Bridgman's suggestion that "curiosity arises from the gap between what we have been told of the past and what else we image might have happened."⁶

This is represented through the ambiguous ending of the story with Lucy experiencing a moment of 're-birth' having been reunited with the 'best' version of self; the Lucy of her childhood. This sense of openness is reminiscent of *Mrs Dalloway* in which the reunion of the central characters take place off the page: "It is Clarissa, he said, for there she was." This prompts readers to imagine what happens beyond the page thus making them an integral part of the narrative experience.

As previously mentioned, my composition was heavily influenced by the multi-perspective approach utilised by Gail Jones in *Five Bells*. I was also inspired by Tim Winton's stylistic sense of 'fabulism' and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's use of magic realism. To be clear, I do not intend for my composition to be categorised as magic realism, but was committed to making stylistic choices that would make the reader feel as if they were floating 'above' the narrative in some type of dream.

Therefore, this influenced my two-strand approach; one depicting the world-weary 'Adult Lucy' and the other, a more whimsical, gold gilded strand that captured the memories and vibrant existence of 'Young Lucy'. These strands are then framed by an abstract, lyrical chunk of prose depicting the climax of Lucy's journey: her plunge into the lake and her assumed 'rebirth'. This stylistic experimentation and manipulation of form provokes consideration of shifting perceptions as impacted by the passing of time.

My work purposefully engages with Bridgeman's assertion that literature "of the fantastic" offers "portals between different worlds, such as mirrors [that] take on particular significance as privilege sits of powerful"⁷. To reflect this, I incorporated mirrors and refracted light as recurring motifs and extended metaphors for Lucy's journey and realisation, as symbolically exemplified through my title, *Beams of Light*. For example:

"This moment; like a fractured shard of glass; slipped out of the mirrors frame..."

This is then extended:

⁶ Teresa Bridgeman's, *'Time and Space'*, taken from *'Narratives'* - edited by David Herman, 2009

⁷ Teresa Bridgeman's, *'Time and Space'*, taken from *'Narratives'* - edited by David Herman, 2009

“I hold on to that moment, no matter how sharp the glass or how deeply my palms are cut.”

This is reminiscent of the ocean in *Brooklyn*⁸ by Colm Toibin (as studied in the English Extension 1 Elective: Literary Homelands) acting as an extended metaphor for Eilis’s journey and symbolically represents the portal from one ‘homeland’ to another. As such, light-based imagery is utilised throughout the story to illuminate Lucy both literally and symbolically ‘blinded’ by expectation, unfulfilled dreams, the sun itself and the memories of childhood; a time when she was the ‘best version’ of herself.

Beams of Light also offers insights into the interplay between past and present through direct intertextual reference to Tim Winton’s *Aquifer*⁹:

*“Perhaps time moves through us and not through it.”*¹⁰

This emphasises the inevitable passing of time, which is then reinforced through a car symbolically embodying time; “cars pass me by; just like life.” This imagery is then extended throughout childhood flashbacks, with Lucy riding in a car while her hair “frolicked in the wind.” The shifting of tenses and the differing descriptions of the similar moment not only better distinguish the two strands, but also speaks to the departure of childhood, whilst directly alluding to Winton’s idea that “the past is in us, not behind us.”¹¹ Moreover, the structure of my work, through the imagery of Lucy in childhood and adulthood depicted in water, creates a metaphorical framing device and an alignment of the strands. The adulthood narrative in first person juxtaposed to the third person omniscient narration of her childhood, enables this shift to act as stylistic manifestation of the emotions felt throughout the story and throughout life.

The decisions made during the crafting process enabled me to focus on refining the parallels of the narrative strands. *Beams of Light* evolved with awareness of textual integrity in sustaining a ‘golden thread’ and the need to produce a tightly constructed narrative in which all strands seamlessly interweave, creating a cohesive whole, which proved challenging and required constant drafting. However, it also allowed

⁸ Colm Toibin, *Brooklyn*, 2009

⁹ Tim Winton, ‘*Aquifer*’, from his collection of short-stories, ‘*The Turning*’, 2004

¹⁰ In my Major Work, ‘*Beams of Light*’, page 3

¹¹ Tim Winton, ‘*Aquifer*’, from his collection of short-stories, ‘*The Turning*’, 2004

me to elevate my writing through truncating sentences and the proper incorporation of punctuation, focusing on the idea that 'less is more'.

Ultimately, the aim of my composition at its core, reveals that with the inevitable passing of time, the desperation to "be part of something"¹² can lead to a lost sense of self; beyond the point of recognition. The subsequent dynamism of circumstances and individuals being an accumulation of insignificant instances is portrayed through the lens of two separate, yet unified, narrative perspectives. *Beams of Light* hopes to engage readers in the personal pondering of the dreams we have as a child against the reality in which we exist.

¹² In my Major Work, '*Beams of Light*', page 10

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