

Uncertainty within the system

Sunday, 3rd October 1999

Shards of light sent to inquire outwards from their point source, a lighthouse tasked to unmask the unlikeliest of combinations; metal boxes bobbed up and down on an ocean not given to forgiveness, rock an ever-present threat to puncture that thinnest of steel skins. Light directed to play against the mix of organic and inorganic matter; fragments of powder, dust forever caught up in the mix of white and yellow, a tumble and glisten seen here and there. Convection currents proved to be an obstacle with the mission unwittingly accepted, dust layered upon dust, liberally sprinkled here and there, patterns matched sand carefully combed, imposed order at odds to the emptiness of a beach set to span against the horizon. A smile kissed his lips, the purity of light less of an irony here present in church, crystals embedded within the ancient granite responded in kind to the play of rays, energy set upon them.

His eyes narrowed, pink feldspar picked out, a glitter ball from an 80's disco; a ruddy spark dressed to glow, tossed within the minerals interspersed throughout the igneous rock; photons, chunks of light one brick at a time, superimposed before sent on their way outwards to dance upon the observer's retina.

A sense of raw, true beauty tunnelled from deep within; quartz off stage left to act out her part, a filter to any and all colours. Egress offered to only a purest of white shown through a clinical sparkle, at first glance a series of South African diamonds woven into the material cooled at pace from liquid magma drawn forth many millennia ago.

The longest of breaths taken, tongue held between his teeth, top and bottom jaw clamped tight; an easy win, soft flesh only too eager to yield under the unflinching grip of enamel set to hold firm.

A sense of joy felt through the stark white and pink light show placed on centre stage, absorbed by the matte black biotite minerals woven throughout the ancient granite; no longer designed to illuminate and raise spirits of the congregation held transfixed by the interplay of light against the coarse fabric, the blocky white cassock a mask over the animated human figure, gestures half hidden, absorbed within.

The matte black crystal a Hoover over the rays of light playfully emitted, an insistent, stark tracer designed to scour a clinically revealed audience, colour sucked dry and emotion taken

along for the ride, a searchlight glanced with urgency across a prison yard, hope and opportunity prised away with the play of surgical white.

A nervous shudder resonated through the young man's frame, the priest stood tall, words projected as longitudinal waves, lost on the attentive figure sat within the congregation, attempts made to absorb the words of wisdom spelt forth, paper towel dropped onto the spill of red wine; his attention caught by the war of beauty versus sterility, light refracted and reflected through that absorbed, coded and finally re-emitted, little warmth to be found. A story told by the ancient rock interspersed by splintered, weathered wood found within the altar, pews, a common factor throughout the inside of the space they found themselves within, itself taken from trees hundreds of years ago, oh so junior in comparison to the igneous rock that had once resided many miles below where they now sat.

Eyes blinked once, twice, dry yet sticky, closed for a moment then pinned wide open, the realization that his vision had been fixed in a thousand yard stare, the sermon of light a soundtrack to his study of the very old.

‘Ralph, Ralph? Are you okay son?’ A confused voice found to his right, deep and possessed of a deep, resonant boom.

The young man caught himself one last time, nose flared, eyes scrunched; a gasp taken for air, the surface breached.

‘Mr Stratton?’ A quick appraisal made to take stock of the situation, service now complete, congregation engaged in small talk, little other than the leather of the pews and flesh of people to absorb the sound waves reflected back and forth, thin and tinny to the ear.

‘Heck of a sermon Father Keith offers, always makes me think.’

His voice alien to his own ears, such a primitive method of communication, limited bandwidth compared to the breadth and quality his eyes had feasted upon for the last hour or so.

‘That he does.’ Uncertainty clearly present in the tone of the large black man stood to his right, bear like mitts dwarfed the wood smoothed over time, worn varnish allowed ebony black to shine through the prayer rails, a glance sent back to his wife and daughter who looked on with a shared sense of bemusement.

‘I wonder sometimes, the words you offer on rote during, at the end of each service.’ A shrug offered, the wrinkles set deep lessened, momentarily misplaced, the grip of crest and trough evident, linear ripples across a high forehead, laughter lines firm spilled out and around his eyes.

‘You have a good rest day Ralph.’ A sincere nod of the head, briefest of moments shared, and then a glance sent back to the two ladies, words exchanged quietly between themselves.

A purse of lips, eyes closed for a moment, tension worked away by the backs of hands ground insistently into his eye sockets.

Ralph’s lips pursed tight together, a glance sent around the interior of the church, a low resolution sketch of the image built up across time in his mind; flicker and play of the light as embers were half seen to fall piece by piece, gracefully, particulates one at a time. Candle wicks frustrated, a diminutive offer in the way of illumination, smoke tendrils tossed and swept in a clue offered to the draughts that were manipulated through an invisible current of convection swept up within the great volume of open air.

His hands slowly sent to reach back, waves of floppy hair pinned against his scalp, an impatient wait to be released, to creep back one tendril at a time from right to left, a hair style pre-ordained, little choice offered by the clump of fine brown hair with one definite direction solely in mind.

His focal length shortened, focus shifted from the interior of the church to the back and side of the large man now elongated with a stretch, a wince observed at knees that spoke of a welcome to the reality middle age brought; attention moved on to his well-dressed wife, silk blouse and similarly expensive skirt designed to flow, creases lost, smoothed out with an affluent ease even though seated for the hour.

A slow glance of eye line continued, fell onto their younger daughter; what must Adeline be, two years, three years his junior? Smooth, creamy coffee coloured skin, angular almost feline features very much at odds to the thick-set bone structure of her parents who possessed a much darker pigmentation of skin.

A twitch of his nose, a reaction to the ever-present dust signed up for a lazy paced cruise out and around the church, along with the last of the pungent incense, a cocktail designed to clog up his nasal membranes, invoking sneeze after sneeze.

Adeline Florence Stratton, quiet girl yet with a smile that could light up a room, clear intelligence burnt bright within those large, watchful, chestnut brown eyes; quite the maths brain people said, last year of secondary school, she would do well for herself, her family.

His eyes drifted across to an expectant figure dressed in white, Father Keith stood under the stone arch, dual heavy wooden doors opened outwards a signpost to the eye, relaxed body language offered to the last of his congregation with a handshake and gentle smile; quiet, personalized words offered for each and everyone entrusted into his spiritual care.

Ralph caught himself, a measured nod to the figure set above the altar, eyes flicked to either side, the mix of granite rock slowly released his attention, an open archway glanced once more in his peripheral vision, time to leave.

The ever-present question framed in his mind as he moved towards the exit, mouth on remote control, a series of inane nods to the priest; with the large stained glass windows a ready welcome to any and all light, why was it so dark in the church compared to the illumination beckoned from outside?

A glance sent back inside, iris wide and lens focused on the stone infrastructure of the church, embers of effervescent quartz and feldspar receded, biotite set to dominate within a matte black magnetic presence as it drew and hung onto the light rays impacted upon the surface of the rock; a shake of his head offered, the tricks of light, surfaces and distance, words picked up on, sound energy encoded as communication sent his way.

‘Yes Father.’ Eyes flickered in rapid succession. ‘Wednesday, midweek mass, I will of course be here.’ Ralph turned away, unaware of the slow oscillation of puzzlement and concern present, evident in the priest’s eyes.