

# What Visions In The Dark Of Light

By Bob Lock

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Beckett only realised how dark his world had been after the removal of cataracts late in his life. For me it was the realisation of how dark the world really is, now, for each and everyone, and will continue to be so unless I can convince you otherwise. However, it wasn't cataract removal that lifted the veil for me; it was a dead man's eyes. Let me attempt to lift the veil from yours.

For twenty-eight years I've stumbled around in the darkness. My hands have been my eyes; they give me dimensions, distances, compositions, textures, many many things, but they are a poor substitute for vision. I could never tell you what a blue sky, a tomato, a simple thing like a green pea looked like. Oh, I could describe its size, feeling, weight but never its colour, its delicate shades and nuances, the way light would coruscate over the ripe contours of a dew-laden bunch of grapes. These are things which were lost to me, until recently. But I should go back, explain my handicap a little and tell you of its cure, and yes, also tell you of the bigger handicap which that cure brought with it. Whether you believe me or not remains to be seen!

*President O'Connor has stated he will not bow to the demands of the terrorists. USAF jets are already in the air, and should the threat to blow up the cruise ship with all three thousand passengers on board be carried out, then retaliation in the form of a surgical nuclear strike will go ahead. As of yet we have had no reply from the terrorist leader Konrad Naiman, however there are unconfirmed reports that the Navy Seals did manage to disable the vessel before being overcome. Casualties are reported to be high. The Sea Urchin now lies adrift six hundred and fifty miles off the east coast of America, and should the dirty bomb onboard be exploded, fallout is thought to be negligible. However, the ship itself would be completely destroyed.*

The television reporter's voice sounded dispassionate, yet another possible atrocity to add to the long line. I fumbled for the remote control and switched it off. I had enough worries of my own. As if waiting for the newscast to end before ringing, my telephone now burst into life, shocking me from my self pity.

"Hello? Ben Cottle here," I said.

"Seen the news, Ben?" A man's voice said, a light Scottish accent identifying it for me.

"No, not really, Stu. Heard it though."

"In a shitty mood?" he asked.

“Sorry,” I replied with a sigh, “must be nerves, I suppose.”

“No problem, I’m not gonna apologise and you don’t have to either. You know I didn’t mean anything,” Stuart said.

“Yeah, I know. I’m just a bit strung out, you know?” I answered, “and, yeah I heard the news, but tomorrow it’s sort of wafting over me. Perhaps I’d feel different otherwise.”

“It’s understandable, I’d be crapping myself, I can tell you.” Stuart admitted with a half-hearted smile.

“And you think I’m not?” I asked.

“You’re tougher than that, and anyway, in a week or two’s time you’re gonna be able to see my face for the first time. Got to be worth a little inconvenience.” He replied.

“What are you on?” I demanded, “a little inconvenience? They’re going to rip my knackered eyes out and replace them with a pair from some dead guy which they’ve nuked and gene-spliced or some damn thing. And then on top of that if it all *does* work and I’m not holding my breath” one of the first things I’d want to see is your ugly mug. I think I’ll phone up and cancel.”

“I’ve got feelings, you know?” He said with a false note of pain in his voice.

“Oh, yeah?” I retorted, “And just where exactly do you keep them?” I heard him rummaging around and clonking his phone up and down a few times before replying.

“Well they were here a moment ago” he said, “and then, and who the hell told you I was here?”

“Bethan?” I answered with a smile.

“Bethan, I could have guessed. You know she’s a Welsh witch, don’t you?” Stuart asked.

“Why is it when a girl leaves you she suddenly turns into a witch, yet when you first go out with them they’re goddesses, angels, or something?”

“Coincidence?” he replied.

â€œRight!â€™

â€œGlad you agree.â€™ I could almost hear him smirking.

â€œLook, Iâ€™ve got to go,â€™ I felt the time on my Braille watch, â€œI need to still pack a few things, sort of and stop the milk and some other crap.â€™

â€œYou get crap delivered too? Too posh to make your own?â€™

â€œShut it!â€™ I replied with a snort, â€œif I needed anymore crap than Iâ€™ve got Iâ€™d come to you any it.â€™

â€œI donâ€™t have to be insulted like this, and itâ€™s my â€œ phone call too.â€™ Stuart said with a huff.

â€œAhh, so youâ€™re not â€œ phoning from the office then?â€™ I asked.

â€œWell!â€™

I sighed, â€œthought so. Ok, Iâ€™m off. You going to visit me?â€™

â€œI suppose so, but I do bloody hate hospitals though. Always full of ill people.â€™

â€œPerhaps youâ€™ll bump into a nice nurse. Hopefully a short-sighted one!â€™ I answered with

He hesitated, â€œoh! didnâ€™t think of that,â€™ I could almost hear the wheels turning, â€œbet she turns witch in the end though, they all do!â€™

â€œMy heart bleeds for you.â€™

â€œIt could do, I might sneak in with a scalpel whilst youâ€™re asleep.â€™ He said with a wicked

â€œIâ€™ll just come back and haunt you. Anyway, as I said, got things to do. See you soon, he

Hopefully that will turn out to be true!â€™ I exclaimed and I heard him laugh.

“Not if I see you first, Ben. Take care, man.” And he put down the phone. I replaced the receiver in cradle, picked up my stick and prepared for the last day with my own eyes in my head. It was a strange feeling.

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If there's one thing guaranteed to turn my stomach it's the smell of antiseptic. It probably stems back to the hospital visits I had to go through when I was a child. My parents vainly hoped that some cure or procedure would be available for my retinopathy caused through too much oxygen whilst in an incubator, I was born premature. It's been suggested that the oxygen, which was needed to support my immature lungs, was toxic to the development of the blood vessels in my retinas, it more or less burnt them away. I can't even make out light or dark. Although I'd had operations as a child nothing had improved my vision one iota. The door to my hospital room opened.

“Hi, Ben. It's Mr. Fielding. How're you feeling?” My hand was lifted off the bed and I felt the fingers over the small vein in my wrist. His grip was firm and authoritative.

“Scared, doc! I mean Mr. Fielding.”

“I bet. Not a very nice operation but the benefits are worth the inconvenience.”

I smiled, “strange, you're the second one who's said it's just an inconvenience.”

“Don't worry you're in safe hands. Nurse Olsen is just going to give you a pre-med now and before you know it the operation will be over.” I could smell the shower lotion the nurse had used that morning drift over me as she injected the pre-med into the tubing in my arm. At least it masked out the antiseptic.

“There, all done. It will calm you down until surgery.” She said. She had a pleasant lilt to her voice and I wondered if she was Nordic. Her name, Olsen suggested it and in my mind's eye I imagined her to be tall, buxom and blonde “whatever colour that would be.”

“Thank you,” I said a little stupidly, “I hope we have better luck with this than my previous opera-

I heard Fielding pull up a chair and sit close to the bed, he patted my arm. "A lot has happened in the last few years. When Professor Anders made the stem-cell breakthrough in 2017 it opened the way for a lot of new procedures. Eye transplanting being just one, although be it one of the most difficult. Putting stem-cells next to kidney cells, for example, and getting them to turn *into* kidney cells is simple compared to what *we* shall be doing. The problem with transplanting the whole eye is with the regeneration of the nerve bundle " which means rewiring about a million pathways " the targeting, guiding cues, repelling signals, cell to cell adherence is infinitely more complicated. Add to that the possibility of rejection and you"ll see why so few of these operations have taken place. You are quite a rarity." Fielding s

"Or guinea-pig?" I asked with a slight slur.

He laughed, "yes, of course there is that factor. ~~You~~ experimental. We don't really completely understand how the intracellular signalling will work between the donor eyes and your brain, but we have the utmost confidence."

"Will they glow in the dark?" I asked sleepily.

"Glow in the dark?"

"Yes, aren't they radio-active?" I yawned.

"Oh! No, of course not, they've just been irradiated to help suppress any rejection from your immune system. Don't worry, they won't glow in the dark and you won't have X-ray vision."

"Pity." I said and as I dropped off to sleep with thoughts of seeing through Nurse Olsen's clothing across my mind.

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*It's been two weeks now in the stale-mate between President O'Connor and Konrad Naiman and temp wearing thin. The cruise ship still drifts in international waters away from the American coast, but now fears are that the currents will take it even closer to the west coast of Ireland and the British Government has been called into emergency discussions over the predicament. The Prime Minister has scheduled a broadcast to the nation for seven o'clock this evening. And now back to John in the studio who has an update on Britain's first complete eye transplant patient, Ben Cottle, who is due to have his bandages removed this morning.*

I groaned and switched off the TV in my hospital room. I'd hardly expected to be sharing the same news spot as the terrorist attack on the *Sea Urchin*. My eyes itched intolerably and it had taken a supreme effort of will power not to rub the bandages in the fortnight since the operation. Fielding had warned me that it would be one of the symptoms of the regeneration process and would only aggravate the discomfit if I succumbed to the stimulus and scratched at the coverings. Another strange symptom was the flashes and squiggles of light that danced across my vision in the profound blackness of my bandaged eyes.

*Light!* I thought, *whenever had I been capable of identifying that? Was the procedure working or had the trauma merely caused my brain to imagine that there was some stimulus coming from my donor eyes?* I wondered what colour they were. I wondered what colour was in itself. Today I would hopefully find out. The door opened and the citrus fresh smell of Nurse Olsen permeated the room.

"Good morning, Nurse Olsen," I said and raised a hand to wave at where I thought she stood.

"Right again!" she said, "are you just a lucky guesser or do you have some sort of synaesthesia?"

"Neither, I just sense your wonderful Florence Nightingale aura of nursing excellence. I'm surprised you even ask," I replied and hoped she would turn out to be as beautiful as I imagined. She laughed throatily and I suppressed a need to quiver excitedly. *I'm like a little kid getting ready to go to the theme park for the first time, I thought.*

"You've been such fun Mr. Cottle, we'll all miss you when you leave, and such a celebratory too."

I sighed, "that was one thing I didn't factor in. Are the reporters still outside?"

"Yes, but no-one is allowed in until Mr. Fielding has removed the bandages and is certain you are all right. Then it's up to you if you want to speak to them or not. One at a time of course, the hospital can't have them running around like a troop of monkeys, can it?"

"Sounds like a fair description, even though I don't know what the hell a monkey looks like."

“Well, hopefully today you’ll find out,” she laughed again, “oh and by the way, your friend Mr. Rang to ask about you. He’ll be in just before lunch he said. By then the bandages will be off.”

“Stuart. I wonder if I’ll recognise him.” I said.

“Not long to find out, here’s Mr. Fielding.”

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They left me alone after the first hour of bitter disappointment. I’d told them to send away the reporters and I didn’t even want to see ~~Stuart~~. *See, one word, three little letters, such an easy thing to say, quite another to do*, I thought as I stared sightlessly at the ceiling. Vague shadows swam across an opaque film that was my vision. From complete blackness I’d now progressed to a vagueness of sight that teased and cajoled, promised so much and yet denied it all. I felt cheated. Fielding had said not to get my hopes up, there were myriad things which could go wrong. I suppose one of them had. I closed my eyes and dropped into a fitful sleep. The noise of the door awoke me and I opened my eyes, the terrible itch had returned and this time I thought, *what the hell? Do I give a damn now if I do some damage?* I rubbed them with the fleshy heel of my palms and opened them again.

I could see! I gasped as I saw a short, stocky man look furtively back out through my door and gently close it as he stepped back into my room. I couldn’t speak; I was flabbergasted, not just by the shock of seeing for the first time in my life but by what I *actually* saw. I had no idea we were like this. No-one had ever mentioned the fact that we looked like this. I couldn’t even contemplate how I would have imagined this vision to be like. I was awestruck and also revolted.

“I had no idea!” I gasped as the man looked across at me and frowned.

“Don’t worry Mr. Cottle, I’m just a junior doctor, Mr. Fielding thought it a good idea for me to make notes on your condition. Nothing to worry about.” He glanced over the partially frosted glass panel set in the wall to see if anyone was outside and then pulled a chair up to my bedside. I realised the man thought I was still unable to see. I stared at the thing above his head and my lack of focusing on his face seemed to relieve him. He sat down, the thing wallowed above him and then flowed down closer to his scalp, the tentacles gently probing the upper surface of his skull and then as if finding the optimum spot melded into his head.

I couldn't help myself. "What the fuck is that!" I cried in a half strangled voice and pointed to the cloud above his head. He sprang out of the chair sending it crashing back onto the floor and spun around as if expecting someone to be behind him, the thing above him twisted lazily too but the tentacles stayed attached. I watched dumbfounded as it uncoiled itself and turned towards my bed as if appraising or scrutinizing me and I wondered if it had understood my outburst.

"What?" the man said looking around with utter confusion upon his face. I closed my mouth, my eyes fixed on the pulsating mass above his head.

"I'm sorry; I was half asleep, dreaming." I stuttered wondering if we all had the same monstrosity to our heads. I involuntarily ran my right hand over the top of my head as if smoothing down my hair. The creature wafted closer as if extremely interested in my movement. I put my hand back down on the blanket.

"That's ok," he replied and fished a small recorder out of his pocket, coughed loudly to mask the click switch as he turned it on and held it in the air between us. "I imagine you are quite devastated to find that the operation was unsuccessful."

"I'd rather not talk about it." I replied.

"But sometimes it's better to get things off your chest. Release the pressure, you understand? Tell me Mr. Cottle, did you pay for the operation yourself? I believe you received a large amount of compensation for the original accident which led to your blindness." He continued.

"What the hell has that to do with anything?" I said a slow anger building in me.

He frowned, "oh, nothing, just making conversation. So before the operation could you see anything at all? Has there been any improvement in the slightest or do you think it was all just a waste of hospital time and resources?"

"I think you'd better go," I said and reached for the little remote which would call the nurse, it was at the end of a long lead and as my hand almost closed over it he pulled the lead and the remote moved across the bed out of my reach. He smiled wickedly and I noticed the creature above him darken as the tentacles pulsed rapidly almost as if siphoning some sort of energy from his brain.

"All in good time." He replied, "just a few more questions."

"No, no more questions. I don't think you're even a doctor. Now either get the hell out of here or I'll..."

call for help. I won't need a remote for that. My eyes fixed on the cloudy form above him as it darkened even more. He looked at my face and then glanced at the tray next to my bedside in which lay the computerized system which monitored my immune suppressing drugs.

Very perceptive he snarled as his symbiotic friend pulsated even more grotesquely, for a blind man was a medical student, at one time. But now I'm a freelance reporter. Your story would do me a lot of good.

My story is my own business. Now I won't tell you again, get out.

He shrugged, suit yourself. If you won't help me, I won't help you. And he reached over to inject an infusion of drugs into my system; I caught his hand tightly around the wrist before he could do so. You can see!

Well enough to do this. I said and threw a left hook which connected with his jaw. His head snapped backwards and he stumbled, knocking over my bedside table with a bottle of squash and the remains of my breakfast on it. Then he crashed against my door, slid down it and came to rest on the floor. The tentacle creature had been torn away through the speed of his departure and now floated halfway between us. It seemed unsure of whether to re-attach itself to the unconscious reporter or to approach me. I pulled the cord attached to the remote angrily towards me and the thing spun around and wavered. I was sure it was my emotion that had triggered the response and forced myself to take a few deep breaths and calm down. It floated motionless between us. I pressed the button on the remote. A minute or two went by and no-one appeared. I pressed the button again and a white shape flitted by the frosted glass, a nurse, and floating serenely in the air above her head was another creature albeit a much smaller version of the one in my room. The nurse reached the door and tried to open it, the reporter's unconscious body made for a good door stop and she had to call for assistance. A male porter arrived; he too had a creature which lay somewhere in-between the two others regarding size. With the two people pushing in unison the door opened and they entered, the two nebulous things above their head buffeted each other as if jockeying for prime position in the room.

What's happened here! The nurse, a large woman with shoulders like a rugby prop said and for a reason I felt glad her accent didn't have a Nordic element to it and her odour was pure sweat and not citrus.

Someone tried to attack me. I think I must have hit him when I lashed out. I said. If they could see the monstrosities above their heads then they didn't appear to mind them for they just looked at me. The nurse shrugged and pointed to her eyes, demonstrating to the porter that they were dealing with a blind man.

Well you certainly caught him a blinder, she said and immediately put a hand over her mouth when the

faux par registered, he's out cold.

Bloody mess he's made too. The porter said, hands on hips as he surveyed the broken glass intern with orange squash, the remains of my porridge, tea and toast. He looked at his watch, "great! I'm supposed to be clocking off in five minutes too." His face was a mask of sullen anger. I noticed the reporter's symbiont twirl languorously around towards him and float closer. The one attached to him, smaller than the reporter's yet larger than the nurse's seemed to cower.

He said he was a doctor, but I think he might be a reporter. I said as I watched in fascination as the porter's creature finally gave precedence to the largest and disconnected itself. The porter's anger appeared to increase as he pulled the unconscious man to one side and unceremoniously let him drop back to the floor.

Don't give a shit who he is, all I know is I'm going to miss the fucking kick-off now. He said as expected, the thing began to feed off his emotions. The creature that had vacated the porter now threatened the one above the nurse and soon *their* positions too were changed. The smallest of the creatures looked forlornly around the room, for a moment appeared to consider me and then floated out of the open door. I breathed a sigh of relief. The nurse came to my bedside, checked the equipment and tutted.

This seems to have taken a knock. We'd better get you into the next room and set you up there Mr.Cott

I nodded, "Ok, thanks. You've been very patient and helpful; I appreciate it." I smiled. She fussed with her hair and blushed, "all part of the N.H.S. service." I was astounded to see the thing over her head actually quiver as if in disgust. *Could it be that they fed on anger and hatred but didn't thrive, in fact were poisoned by love, peace, feelings of goodwill?* I wondered.

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Safely ensconced in the new room, and once again connected up properly to the computerised machines which dripped the necessary drugs into my system, until my body would be able to cope on its own, I switched on the TV and marvelled at the sights. For the moment I'd decided not to inform anyone of my new found vision. I needed to get my bearings first and more importantly discover what those creatures were and if anyone else knew about them. I didn't have to wait long to see more of their kind. The

television soon showed me them in abundance, they were everywhere.

A tap on my door and I looked up. Someone was entering and for a moment I thought it was another reporter. This one was dressed a little better, had a bright-eyed happy-go-lucky expression and I immediately felt a kinship with him, as if we were already friends. He opened his mouth to speak but I pre-empted him.

“Jesus, ~~you~~ as ugly as she said!”

Stuart froze and stood there open-mouthed in the doorway.

“Close your bloody mouth, its draughty enough in here as it is.” I said and noticed a watery glitter in his eyes, but more importantly the lack of anything sinister floating above his head. He strode over to the bed and clapped a hand on my shoulder.

“They told me you could only make out vague colours and shapes.”

“True, that’s why I can see you so well.” I replied and gripped his arm, “nice to see you.” He shook his head, “but how? Why? What?”

I held up a hand, “I’m not sure myself, but I didn’t want to say anything until I’d checked some things out first.”

He raised an eyebrow, “Oh? What?”

I took a deep breath, “Do you ~~skem~~? Have they always been there, why didn’t anyone mention them to me?”

There was a moment’s pause and then he shook his head, “I don’t know what the hell you’re on about.”

I nodded, “I didn’t think so.”

“Want to explain?” he asked, and so I did.

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“Another dimension. Extra-terrestrials. A life-form that’s always been with us, living off our fears, our anger, our hatred. You name it, I’ll entertain the idea, but one thing’s for sure, it exists.” I told him after giving him a detailed explanation of all that had happened and what I could exactly see.

“But why should you see them and no-one else?” Stuart asked.

“No idea,” I shrugged, “perhaps it’s the way my pathways have been connected. Could be the radiation mutated the donor eyes; your guess is as good as mine. I’m no science fiction buff, haven’t got a clue, but they’re sure as hell there.”

We’d spoken all afternoon and early into the evening and now as we sat contemplating what to do the seven o’clock news appeared on the TV and we both sat up and watched as our Prime Minister delivered his own ultimatum. The *Sea Urchin* was going to be sacrificed. It was too dangerous to allow the vessel to drift closer to British waters. As the man gave his reasons and his conclusions I described the vast thing that pulsed over his head, almost filling the screen, to Stuart. The scene changed to the White House and at that point words failed me. My tears and opened-mouthed despair at what I saw was enough to convey the terrible vision to my Scottish friend.

Is there an answer? A rhyme or reason to this? You may well ask and I still grope like a blind man to try and give a coherent response, but I have none. All I can do is seed this information, nurture it and hope to propagate it worldwide. Information is power, that is the well-worn adage, but I wonder, now that you are informed about what is potentially above *your* own head will the knowing give you the power to free yourself?

The next time you see your reflection in the mirror, in the window of a passing bus, or a glimpse of your face reflected in the eyes of a young child, ask yourself if *your* creature, your tentacle nemesis floats patiently over your shoulders sipping hungrily at the anger and hatred. Or if you are one of the lucky ones who offer it nothing but starvation?

A small but ever growing band of us now knows the truth. Some you have heard about, a happy-go-lucky Scotsman, you’ll forgive him if he sometimes stares off into the distance at times. A Welsh beauty, who not be offended if you think her a witch, for she is. A patient and lovely Nordic nurse who married a blind man who could see “but in the light, only saw the visions of dark”

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