

Title: Chasing Shadows
Centre Number: 120
Candidate Number: 11347444

HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION ENGLISH EXTENSION COURSE 2 MAJOR WORK IDENTIFICATION TAG	
Student No.:	<u>11347444</u>
School No.:	<u>120</u>
Number of Pieces:	<u>3</u>
Category and Description	<u>Street Story (SS)</u>
ATTACH THIS CARD SECURELY TO EACH PART OF THE PROJECT. DO NOT PIN.	

A flame burned brightly in the fireplace as her father paced up and down the length of the room.

"It is a pathetic, simple-minded idea born out of total stupidity. You'll never amount to anything" Her father stared at her, his hand shaped into a tight fist.

Her mother spoke up in her defense. "She is very talented, Antonio."

"God damn it Sofia" He yelled as he punched the wall behind him leaving a shallow indentation in the plaster.

"I will not let my first born child succumb to this nonsense." He slammed his fist against it again in quick succession and with that, all avenues for avail stopped short. Veronica knew there was nothing more her mother could do as she cowered. Sofia held her tongue out of fear and respect but not without regret that her only daughter was forced to modify her hopes and dreams due her overpowering father, and guilt that she did not have enough courage and could do nothing about it.

Her father turned back to her

"You'll forget about this journalism career understand?" He spat at her.

Seventeen-year-old Veronica Valsquez stared fear-stricken into her father's eyes.

"I pay expensive school fees every year for you to be encouraged to follow this utter garbage?" He said indicating towards a pile of manuscript upon the coffee table.

Antonio paced up and down the small living room staring at Veronica as she cowered.

I had been sitting outside upon a garden chair staring out into the distance, my rugged faded jeans, cotton sweatshirt and cardigan ample to withstand the cool winds of the final days of winter. The elevation due to the slope that the house was situated upon allowed me to survey the length of the street over the hedges as my mind wandered.

Remaining rigid and still, my eyes meandered from one end of the street to the other and finally fixed upon the apple tree, lovingly by my mother a few weeks after my birth, in the front yard standing alone upon the dew drenched verdant lawn.

Coming home I was staunch with dread, for many years the mere idea of returning was something of a crude form of punishment. I had been disowned by my family and banished from my childhood home for five years by my father. All contact ceased. From then every phone call to my mother, my father would disconnect. Every letter sent to mother was burned.

I had recalled sitting in the kitchen with my mother the morning after I had returned home.

I glanced at her left hand still ornamented with her simple gold wedding band knowing she will probably never remove it. Feeling the warmth of her callused hand upon mine, I turned back as I met my mother's steady gaze.

"Thank you for coming home, Veronica. Your father would have been so pleased."

Elated at my return, Mother beamed with happiness as I tried to smile at her. But all I could seem to do was nod reassuringly and dart away from her eyes. I wanted to be happy for her, but deep inside I despised being home.

The ringing of a bell on a child's bicycle interrupted my thoughts. Noisy children in excited bundles equipped with their bulky helmets raced one another as a large Dalmatian trailed behind their shinny silver bicycles, their handlebars trimmed with coloured plastic streamers, down the streets.

My father had died a month earlier in his sleep as the cancerous tumours had ravaged his body and drained it of life. Allowing me back into the family home after his death was my mother's first act of defiance against him in all their years of marriage.

With the restless urge to move, the rickety bamboo chair screeched as I rose from it and walked a few steps. I lowered myself slowly onto the second last step of the front stairs. Using one hand to search for my silver lighter and pulling a cigarette from my pocket with the other, I succumbed to the urges of nicotine. I lit it and inhaled deeply letting the smoke escape from my lips in small puffs.

I was five years old when we had first moved into the two story brick dwelling. For twenty years my parents had made this house our residence in the quiet community. With neighbours who turned the television louder to block out the screams that came from next door, who never called the police or knocked on the door to check why so much noise came from the house. A community who never complained and never interfered.

It was midday and the sun disappeared under the overcast of clouds that had appeared. A signal that perhaps a storm was ahead.

I turned around and gazed at the screen door. The notion that it had been permanently locked recurred in my mind. At nights I observed that though he was gone, the place still reeked strongly of him. Uneasiness swelled as I looked away once again, opting to cast my eyes into the garden. I couldn't stand being in the house for long periods of time.

I yawned warily as I tapped the cigarette to rid it of the ash. I lacked sleep and could not fall into a deep slumber since returning, though I wondered why I did not expect this. I had been home for two days. Long after comforting my mother as she cried herself to sleep, I would spend the remainder of the nights and the early hours of the dawn in the kitchen. Hours were spent wondering what the hell exactly I was doing returning home.

"Are you out there Veronica?" Mother called.

Though soft, her voice had the ability to carry a considerable distance. Her short stout figure with a cane basket tucked under one arm appeared from the side of the house, robed in her ochre apron and chalky white day dress. I stood up and brushed my faded blue denim jeans and finished what was left of my source of nicotine. I descended the steps and then retrieved the sizeable pile of laundry from her.

“Thank you.” She said with a grateful smile. She wiped her hands with the apron and her sweat-beaded brow with her forearm. Her thick accent still heard after years residing outside the ‘old country’. Her dark brown eyes sat upon her tired but jubilant face, her once jet-black curls now straightened and greyed, scooped away into a tight bun.

“Ma, you shouldn’t be doing this,” I said referring to the laundry as I felt the strain of the weight slightly.

“I’ll do the washing for the time being and when I get back I’ll send you a dryer.”

“My child,” She beamed. “You and your fanciful ideas...” She said stroking my arm reassuringly.

"I do this to take my mind away from things, I'm fine." Mother placed her hand on my back and gestured me to move towards the stairs.

In reality it was because she couldn't break the cycle father had put in place. He had a strict regime of cleanliness due to his dust and pollen allergies. I often recollect images of Father scrutinising the skirting boards, tables and anything that would lend to gathering dust as he cleared his throat. It seemed he was just looking for fault, waiting for a time to voice his complaint in his demeaning fashion to mother as she toiled washing his clothes and sheets. I wondered how long it took for him to 'break in' mother early in their marriage, or was my mother already conditioned beforehand?

Standing at the base of the steps I noticed that, though I now towered over my mother, the image that I had kept of her since childhood had remained the same, still burdened with tiring domestic duties.

"How is your writing coming along?" She asked

I had explained to her that my writing partner had suggested that I use this occasion as a source for one of my documentaries. Tim was one of the first to whom I had divulged my difficult childhood.

"I haven't really thought about writing anything yet." I said quietly as we ascended the staircase together.

Passing over the threshold and closing the screen door behind us we walked inside down the dark hallway. The house still smelled overpoweringly of a combination of disinfectant and timber lacquer, and strikingly lacked a sense of tone and warmth. Much of the house remained the same since my childhood. Sunlight had difficulty peering through the heavy curtains that blanketed each window.

Moving through the first door on the right of the hallway we entered the lounge room.

“You know, this is your fathers favourite room. He loved it here.”

As my eyes rested on the now bolted up fireplace I tried to ignore the inimical shudder that would crawl down my spine entering that room. I can still picture the back of my father’s balding head in front of the fire, the flames licking at the iron grating placed in front of the fireplace. I hated that room as I stood remembering the countless wishes that the grate would give way and the furious flames would consume his body.

It was in there that as a young child I would be punished for angering my father. I would be made to stand in the closest corner to the flames for one hour as violently deafening arias would flood the room from the dated record player. He would sit there sadistically and watch my back turned to the wall making sure that each time I flinched I would be made to stand ten minutes more. I made the promise not give him the gratification of knowing he won by

moving. I vowed never to topple no matter how exhausted I would become while wishing that the grate would give way and the flames would consume him.

“What are your plans today?” I asked slowly.

“Father Jacob is coming over to visit.” She said as she moved through another door leading to the kitchen.

I tried not to show my disdain for Mother’s heavy dependence on church and the ‘goodness’ of those who worshipped Christ. She had formed some sort of support prayer group, spearheaded by Father Jacob, since my father’s death. I frowned upon the thought of mother joined with a herd of bible bashers surrounded in ‘profound’ worship to an iconic god. I knew their opinions of me from their reprimanding looks when they had come to visit my mother. It was their hushed reproach against me for dishonouring my family. Father’s close comrades savoured on the sight of my ‘eventual’ return, snidely remarking that the only possible reason for coming back was to fight for my already forfeited inheritance.

“You know he came around a lot when your father was ill. I think it cheered him up a lot to see Father Jacob.”

I grimaced. I really didn't want to know, nor did I care for that matter whether my father was happy or not towards the end.

"Father Jacob will be coming over this evening." She replied, boiling water on the counter next to the sink.

The kitchen had remained exactly the same. Organised and stainless, uniquely odiferous with a strong tanginess underneath. It smelt much like the sweet scent of over-ripened cherries or the concentrated incense of fortified wine.

She opened the cupboard reaching above to retrieve a tin canister of peppermint tea. I paced through into the laundry where I put down the cane basket. As I walked out she offered me a cup.

"No, thanks." I said as I left again to go back out onto the porch.

Father Jacob arrived later that evening. I had been introduced to him some few days before when he had dropped my mother off at home after a payer meeting.

I had grown cynical of messengers of 'God'. Religion was no longer about spiritual enlightenment. It was now a player in politics, power and corruption. To me the idea God was just a token.

They both had moved to the kitchen as I left up the stairs to my old room. I sat upright upon my single sized bed, rested my head upon my hands and closed my eyes. My intention was to give them privacy. But every word reverberated back through the walls.

“Antonio was a good husband and a loving father. He was a hard worker and a loving man.” “He loved his family and especially Veronica very much.”

“He would have been overjoyed that she came back home.”

“Veronica couldn’t make it to the funeral because of work commitments. See, it’s difficult for her to get away.”

“She’s quite a obedient child, it’s just Antonio and her didn’t see eye to eye on everything.”

I pitied my mother’s compliance. I couldn’t understand how she could let herself defend him.

When I was younger I would fall into a malaise where I began to doubt my own sense of reality every time I would hear her praises for my father.

Perhaps it was all in my mind, that my father disciplined me strictly for my own good.

As time passed however, the despondency turned into a boiling frustration.

I stayed there and listened to every word with growing contempt and pity. A growing emptiness filled me inside. Overwhelmed and exasperated, I left the

room and escaped outside on to the stairs shutting the front door behind me. I revelled in the silence as I stared into the sky.

After a few hours had passed, the front door opened as Father Jacob walked out on to the porch. His tall slender body dressed in a black suit with the symbolic collar clasped around his neck.

“Good Evening Veronica.” He said. I turned to acknowledge him.

“Do you mind if I sit down for a bit?” He asked as I shook my head wearily as he moved closer, his shoes squeaking on the wooden planks of the porch, stopping as he reached the seat next to me. He then sat down slowly.

“May I?” He asked referring to the cigarettes.

I glanced at him, his hazel eyes reflecting the light that seeped through the blinds from the window behind us.

I nonchalantly nodded as he took the pack with his slender hands and retrieved one, flicking the lighter with the other. He pulled the burning cigarette holding it between his index and middle finger and underneath with his thumb to his thin lips and inhaled. The butt turned from black to a bright orange.

"I haven't done this for a while. I quit when I got into the seminary." He divulged slowly pulling it away and exhaling a steam of smoke.

There was an awkward silence between the both of us as we sat there staring into the night sky, the clouds shadowing the sparkle of the stars.

"Antonio was no saint." I uttered finally, compelled to convince Jacob that my father wasn't the perfect man everyone thought him to be.

"He was a difficult man no matter what my mother says."

"I'm helping your mother deal with the trauma." He said calmly, then he paused.

"She told me about you and why you were disowned."

I snickered.

"Was it the truth? Did she tell you that they turned their backs on us? Why the mighty church would tell my mother to go back and make things up with my father like a good wife."

"'Keep the family together'. 'The vows of marriage are sacred'. 'God has a way'. That's what I kept hearing throughout my childhood." I muttered

contemptuously as the deep frustration mounted. I despised the church and my mother's naive beliefs that told her marriage vows were sacred. For better or for worse, even though every second night he's got you pinned to the wall threatening to hit you with a closed fist.

"My father kicked me out because I wouldn't comply. I didn't keep it in the family." I turned to him. Slowly the anger smouldered.

"My father has a hell of a lot to answer for." I said spitefully. I reached for my lighter and lit up again, breathing in heavily.

At first he said nothing.

"Did you see him in the end?" He asked.

I shook my head.

"The cancer spread rapidly. He was in a lot of pain. Your mother was extremely upset."

I thought of him on his deathbed and savoured in a sadistic sense of satisfaction of images of my father lying in a bed racked with intense agony.

"I hope he was in a fucking lot of pain" escaped from my lips as my hand quivered as I took in another breath of smoke.

I felt his eyes turn to me, I wondered what he was thinking. Did he think that I was the monster for wanting him dead like everyone else? Part of me didn't give a shit at all and thought to hell with the lot of them. He didn't understand what it was like.

But I was painfully aware that another portion deep inside cared what they thought, dissolving what little satisfaction I gained.

"Why are you here?" He asked turning to look at me.

"What do you mean?" I asked oddly, surprised by his line of questioning. "My mother. She's the reason that I came here. Nothing more. I'm not here for his money or any bullshit like that if that's what you've heard from them."

"Have you talked to her about your father?"

I shook my head slowly.

"Have you talked to anyone about it?"

I did not go into any great detail but when it came down to it, I never talked to anyone really about the circumstances at home.

"You have so much animosity. I think that perhaps you need time to grieve.

Time to face the past..."

I immediately interrupted his sentence.

"I don't need to grieve. In fact I should be celebrating that my father is dead.

He can't touch me or my mother any more." Something within flinched as I completed that sentence.

"You can't move on if you don't let go." He said delicately

"I have let go. I don't care about my father. He doesn't control me any more." I replied sternly. I was becoming increasingly agitated and restless.

"Now if you don't mind I want to be alone." I said halting the conversation uneasily.

"Alright then." He agreed, almost too passively.

He extinguished the cigarette on the ashtray on the table between us and got up slowly dusting his pants, then placed his hands in his pockets. The priest glided slowly back to the front door to pick up his case and then descended the stairs. He stopped for a moment at the base of the steps and turned to me for the last time.

“Veronica.”

I turned to look at him as I pulled my cardigan over myself tighter, shielding myself from the cold of the night air. But it would not end the sharp icy pain that had been released inside.

“When we’re children we get scared of the shadows that appear on the floor. As we grow older, we either go on to chase those shadows on the ground to find who formed them, or continue to let the fear cultivate for the rest of our lives.”

Quietly looking away, I focused my attention upon the silhouettes of the houses directly opposite. There was genuine warmth that radiated from his eyes that I could not ignore no matter how much I tried.

“Perhaps you should consider that on your stay here.” He said gently.

“Thanks for the advice, father. I’ll remember that.” I said apathetically.

He paused for a moment. He then turned around and travelled the length of the driveway out onto the street then finally disappeared from view behind the hedges.

It was not until long after I had heard the sound of his car fade away down the street that I felt the pain of his remarks. I could feel the pangs of anger at myself for revealing such personal feelings. I clenched my teeth together as I told myself repeatedly that it was going to be 'okay'.

Placing my hand upon my forehead, the image of my mother breaking down under immense grief for the man who put her through thirty years of abuse besieged me. I quickly closed my eyes trying to force the pain inside my stomach to contract.

Slowly the images started to fade little by little. But the feeling of emptiness still remained, so too did the anger and frustration.

"You will stop this nonsense" He bellowed.

"No,"

"What did you say?"

"I'm good at this. I'm not going to." She said compelled by what little determination within that he had not yet demolished.

Hearing her father's demeaning laughter, she wanted to crawl back into a hole for her outburst.

"Good? Did I hear you say Good?" He said. His gaze was terrifyingly psychotic as he picked up the manuscripts and diaries, her only solace collated since she was a child, and threw them into the fire.

"No, oh God, don't!" She screamed from the top of her lungs and she tried to reach into the fire and retrieve it, her mother pulling her back furiously. Tears of pain and agony streamed down her face. Suddenly something within her snapped. She turned around to face her father.

"I hate you! Go to hell!" She screeched breathing in deep breaths, fuelled by pure hate.

"What did you say, you little whore?" He bellowed as he pulled her by the hair from her mother's vice.

"Antonio, no!" Her mother screamed hysterically.

"I hate you!" She screamed again with more vehemence.

Antonio grabbed her hair tighter with his left hand as his right hand formed a fist.

"This will teach you, you stupid little bitch."

That night I couldn't sleep. I was plagued with visions in my mind of being bound to this house and my mother, having to go through life denying what has happened and saving face.

The majority of the day I had spent sitting in the sun, smoking cigarettes incessantly and once again staring into the yard and the street.

Mother had spent the majority of the day sifting through photographs. Tattered remains of the past, black and white photographs of my mother when she was young, their home in the Philippines and my half-Spanish Filipino family. And of course pictures of my father.

“Come back inside Veronica, it is chilly out there. Come help me with these photographs.”

The cool wind had little effect on the heat of the basking sun. I didn't move an inch besides taking another sip out of my bottle of water and putting out a butt, then lighting up again.

It wasn't until it was late in the evening that I would return back inside. The frustration had not disappeared. Getting off the porch, I turned around and entered the front door.

I moved towards the kitchen where Mother had been sitting on the wooden kitchen table. In her ochre fabric apron, like a worker bee, she had laboured meticulously to place the photos within the burgundy album.

Motionless, Mother was still there now staring at the photos, clothed in her simple black knee length dress and charcoal woollen coat draping over her as I entered the room. She was dressed for mourning.

I stopped at the doorframe and my eyes moved towards Sofia Velasquez. Her sunken eyes dulled by years of obedience, her pale translucent skin etched with faint lines across her face, seeming to represent “a scar from battle”, a constant memory of the tumultuous struggle which was her life. Her high forehead was exposed as her hair was secured tightly in a knot at the nape of her neck, a trait that she thankfully found I had not inherited. Her neck was adorned with her exquisite cultured pearls; I remembered the countless photos of my mother in her youth, radiating in near regality, wearing those same beautiful pearls. She was still beautiful, but her overwhelming tiredness blanketed her splendour, which angered me. Staring at her I was enraged that living all those years with my father had drained her zest for life, her youth. She was faithful to him to the very end. She looked at me with her tired dull brown eyes; she was not startled to see me watching.

A silence followed.

“Where are you going, Ma?” I asked, shattering the stillness.

“To Mass. It’s Sunday, Veronica. I would like you to come with me. I want you to come pray for papa.” She said.

“Ma...” I trailed as I moved towards the kitchen sink to empty my bottle. “You know I don’t go to church.”

“Mass is not at church, it’s at Tita Josie’s tonight. We’re staying overnight for a vigil, for your papa”

I shuddered at the thought of Josie Benedicto’s reprimanding face.

“Ma, if you don’t mind, I want to stay at home. I want to save you the embarrassment. Go without me.” I said dryly, placing the bottle on the bench. With the intent of moving out of the kitchen doorway into the hall to walk up the stairs, I sighed at the thought of my mother still relentlessly praying for him.

“Embarrassment?” She paused flustered. “Veronica, please *anak*. Just go upstairs and change, come with me.” She countered almost pleading.

“If you don’t mind, I’m going upstairs to take a shower and an early night.” I said in a tone emphasising that I was through. I had become irritated with my mother’s persistence.

“Why won’t you go? If not for me, then please go for Papa. He would want you there. I’m praying for heaven for your Papa...”

I suddenly felt cold. Something within me snapped.

"He deserves nothing, mother. Absolutely nothing. I will not pray for him, no God will save him." I replied softly but sternly, exhaling deeply.

Momentarily I heard nothing. Turning around to look at her she had grown quiet and displeased. Her eyes narrowed, disbelieving but conscious. I saw a flicker of disappointment sweep through those dark weary oracles. I had a protective need to spare my mother my animosity. However her persistence to believe my father was a saint had taken its toll. She loved him and wanted me to forgive, she wanted my blessing so he would rest in peace. I wasn't ready to accept it.

"When did you start to be so cold Veronica?" She questioned soberly, her voice an audible whisper.

I stared at her, unbelieving that she had asked me to justify my hatred. I shuddered with pure disbelief.

"Mother, He means nothing to me." I said through gritted teeth, turning my back on the kitchen and Mother. I moved out of the room and towards the staircase. Reaching the base of the staircase I heard my mother call:

"He may deserve nothing, but he is and always will be your father, even in death Veronica."

A pain burned inside my stomach as I walked up the stairs and sat against the wall of the hall. Mother, accepting defeat, had been angered by my coarse remarks. She left that night, still clinging to hope, something that I also wanted desperately to retain.

I curled into a ball, head between my legs, listening for the sound of the engine and her car driving away.

Inundated with numbness, the anger and disappointment had disappeared and left me deflated and insensate.

I had felt the degree of agitation and emptiness I had not felt since I was a young child.

Placing my head within my hands, my arms rested on my knees, I rubbed my face over and over.

"Its alright, you can get it together," I said closing my eyes and concentrating, trying to dispel the pain. I swiftly decided to retire to my room to rest. I was no closer to closure than I was fifteen years ago.

Tick. Silence.

My childhood room.

I lay in bed for many hours, regulating the position of my neck from time to time, listening to my mother's words repeated: he will *always* be *your father*, even in *death*.

My head propped upon pillows as I stared at the opposite wall, watching the occasional flicker of light cast by a headlight of a car driving down the road through the slats of the wooden blinds. Recalling the events of the past few days I realised that my life was in a mess and I felt helpless.

A dull throbbing ached from my head.

Walking through the front door two days ago I knew that I would never feel the contentment of a sense of ease in the house that he built. Never.

Darkness inhabited every corner of the room. So did the anxious sombre silence.

My mother's words continued to antagonise me. Specifically it was the idea of He being my father. I am awed how she was able to forget the spiteful criticisms and the threats. His perpetual need to thrust his 'authority' upon mother and make a humiliating example out of my 'stupidity'.

I couldn't understand him or why he had systematically abused me as a child.

Not many knew of the abuse. I could remember certain incidents but many were blocked from my memory.

I closed my eyes trying to dispel the agitation infusing into a deep boiling anger. All this time I was angry and upset that I had not had the courage to confront my demons and was frustrated that my mother refused to believe that any existed.

The whispers filled my head.

“Disgrace”

“It was her fault, she had aggravated her father’s condition”

“Deceitful girl”

Clenching my jaw, my head throbbed as I tried to end the condescending voices. I closed my eyes and concentrated, wanting to be far away where nothing could hurt me. A juvenile fantasy I had come to grasp wholeheartedly for the majority of my adolescence and adult life. I would be there where I would find silence, happiness, peace.

And I was ashamed. Disgraced that I, a grown woman, had to retreat to a magical world to escape from pressures of life. Opening my eyes and staring into the darkness and obscure future, that night I made a conscious decision to face the demons, to finally chase the shadows that appeared on the ground.

The voices slowly faded into obscurity, they’d be back I assured myself, if I did not confront them first. My head ached.

Then there was only silence.

But not peace. Never peace. Only a thunderous, shrieking silence.

The stillness had started to deafen, its amplified buzzing filling my eardrums.

A pulsating static that I couldn't shut out. I started to panic as waves of nausea washed over me. My fists tightened as I plastered my eyes shut.

The aching returned.

That dull aching pain from a place that felt as if it resonated from the very core of my body. It was as if I was taken to a place that I could not control, no matter how hard I closed my eyes and concentrated my energy to repress the hurt, I could no longer make it disappear. Blinking furiously I knew this time I could not ignore the pain.

Memories of a young girl painfully terrified seeking solace in the corner of this room appeared in flashes before my eyes.

“You can't move on if you don't let go.”

I knew that, I always had. Unconsciously the protecting urges of a will, which had shielded me for so long, had started to retreat. Control had left my grasp, as the wounds of the past were ripped open.

My jaw pulsating from the pressure, throbbing from the cold sweat, the mortification pierced and pulsed through all my nerve endings. Here, I started to recall the number of times I would be locked in my room, left hungry and ashamed for wetting my bed at the age of six. Here I would remember my father's torrents of abuse for hours on end, his demented claims that I was not his child, that my existence was worthless.

It was here as a young child I would hide in the corner, adjacent to the window and opposite to the door. Skinny and vulnerable, my dark raven loose curls hung apathetically upon hunched shoulders. A painfully absent gaze had overtaken a youthful buoyant expression. As a child I had been taught to comply with orders. Just submit and keep silent, "In the end everything will be alright". I had been disciplined to keep it within the family since the day I uttered my first words. I was isolated and scared, I stepped on eggshells fearful that another sound may trigger a wrath of abuse and threats on my mother.

"Are you stupid?"

"Worthless little bitch"

"How could I have such an idiot for a daughter?"

I cowered. Closing my eyes I remembered those words, still repeating in my mind like a sadistic mantra. I could still remember the trembling at the voice of my father. Crawling off my bed into the corner of the room, a sick feeling seeped down into the depths of my stomach. I lurched as my eyes darted to the crack between the doorway and the floor where the hall light poured in. I could picture the shadows forming on the floor of my father's feet pacing down the hallway blaming my mother of being a lousy ungrateful housewife. Remembering the time he had pinned my mother against the wall of their bedroom, threatened to hit her, and then punched a hole into the plaster inches away from her head.

Panic filled the body as my fingers of my crossed arms curled onto my cardigan. I started to remember images that I thought I had forgotten but as hard as I tried my mind could not block them out.

I can still remember the panic that filled me when I felt vibrations from his car when he had returned back home. After the vibrations would stop, I would hear the car door slam, the turn of the key into the front door and his heavy footsteps climbing the staircase. Then came the screaming, agonising silence from the moment my father walked through the front door room carefully scrutinising every detail inch by inch. The clenching fear deep down inside the pit of my stomach every time father and his prying, critical, gut-rendering eyes entered the room. Holding my breath, praying painstakingly that a wheeze from my athsma-ridden lungs would not escape, pacing my twelve-year-old

mind to counter and deflect his criticisms and commands. I remembered unconsciously chanting to myself "He can't hurt me, he can't hurt me", a coping mechanism that couldn't be further from the truth.

Suddenly I could feel the vibrations on the wall and beneath me. My stomach lurched as I began to drip into cold sweat. Terror gripped as short intervals of dizziness began to overcome me. The room had begun to spin. Rocking to and fro and the dizziness returned stronger for lengthy periods each time.

"Oh Jesus" I moaned as cramps stabbed at my stomach.

Disorientated and unbalanced I almost tripped over the red hall rug as I ran to the bathroom and placed my head into the toilet bowl. I vomited, purging myself violently.

Through bleary eyes I concentrated on the white bathroom tiles as I tried to stop the room from rotating, the spinning ceasing after heaving a third time. I grabbed a nearby hand towel and pressed it against my mouth. Managing to manoeuvre the silver knob to flush the bowl, I then sat on the cold tiles leaning motionless against the wall, weak and exhausted.

I wanted to die, but I wouldn't let him have the satisfaction of beating me.

After sitting there to recompose myself and make sure that the nausea would not return, I hobbled to the sink to rinse the remnants of the acrid bile from my

mouth. I struggled to get back on two feet and regain balance. Turning on the cold water, I rinsed my face and mouth thoroughly, feeling the cold bite of the cool water upon my skin. I opened my eyes and faced my reflection in the mirror. Tired and wearily I stared into my eyes.

A haunting pain flashed through me as I looked at the almond oracles staring back at me for they resembled Antonio's eyes: cold, unemotional and hardened.

Overwhelmed and bitter, the painful realisation hit me with great force, not matter how far I ran, my mother was right. He will always be my father and it disgusted me.

I started to quiver. It still hurt me as much now as it did back then, the torment of trying to please father as a young child. The humiliation that as a full grown adult inside I had remained the sad and afraid nine-year-old petrified of "Daddy's" disapproval.

The quivering turned into convulsions of deep sobs as I slid on the ground and squeezed the hand towel in my arms. Laden with shame, the torrent of hot tears stung my cold cheeks as I cried myself into a slumber on the bathroom floor.

I grieved not for the memory of my father, but because I would never hear my father begging for my forgiveness or for my love.

Ashamed because of my perpetual need for my father to love me and fill me with self worth.

Veronica felt a sharp slap across her face the stinging pain radiating from her left cheek right up to her temple and across her jaw. She tasted blood in her mouth. Veronica fell against the wall as Antonio released his grip letting her fall. It was the first time that he had hit her.

Bewildered, Veronica stood up slowly as she saw her father's face turn white. He glared at her swollen tear stained eyes and the trickle of blood and mucus ran from her nose. He looked then to his fist stained with the same blood. He relaxed his hand at once.

"Jesus Christ..." He whispered breathlessly.

Veronica placed her hand on her cheek. Her eyes were now filled with anger instead of fear, Antonio noted this well.

"You'll pay for this you son of a bitch. I'm getting out of here. I'm never coming back," She hissed vengefully.

"Please Veronica, No!" Trembling with fear and overwrought with grief, Sofia tried to hold her daughter. But Veronica escaped from her grasp and bolted

out of the room and through the front door. Antonio chased after her but had stopped at the porch.

“Veronica! Veronica! Come back here!” He shouted. He knew was going to lose her as she ran down the driveway disappearing from his view.

“By god Veronica if you leave you’ll never be allowed back in this house, you understand me Veronica? Never! Never!”

I awoke to find myself where I had collapsed that night still in a hypnotic daze. Opening my eyes the sunlight had peered through the blinds. I slowly stood up and stared at the opposite wall.

I still felt empty and exhausted, but now a sense of freedom filled my body as the emotions I had blocked out were released.

Pulling myself up I brought my knees to my chest and rubbed my eyes.

I was no longer afraid. Just alone.

The animosity I had for him now had a beginning, but I needed it to end, I was tired for too long.

I stood up to wash my face, the cool water against it bringing me back to reality. Staring back into the mirror brought back haunting images of the

previous night. I forced myself to look back into my eyes. Staring at the mirror I knew I was the daughter of Antonio Velasquez, his child.

But I am not Antonio Velasquez and I need not have to repeat his mistakes.

I thought after so many years I'd be able to come back home and finally find some sort of solace. It was conclusive; my father was dead.

But the fact remained that he was as alive today as he ever was.

In my mind, from his grave he was still able to lull me into submission, degrade me, and fill me full of insecurity. He still had that presence to make me believe that I was nothing without him, no thanks to my own cowardice and a need to suspend reality indefinitely.

I realised I would never be able to force him into admission of his sins. He would never apologise for making me believe until this day that I was worth nothing to him or to anyone.

I retrieved my lighter and cigarettes from my bedside table before I went downstairs, outside on the porch. Smoking cigarettes one after the other, I was deep in thought trying to decide what I would do with my life. The exhaustion of last night was completely overwhelming.

I sat there listening to the sounds and basking in the stillness of the early morning.

I knew that up until last night he still controlled me, even after I left the house at 17. Everything I did was either blatantly or indirectly caused by his actions. This repulsed me because even in death he could haunt and control me; influence me to an even greater degree than when I was still living in this house. I had to leave again, not because I wanted to escape from the shadows, I had already faced them. I needed to be alone so that I could put them behind me; I wanted to move on. But I couldn't while I was in that house.

It was then I made the decision to leave.

Mother returned from the prayer meeting. From the moment she parked the car into the driveway and walked briskly back into the house, she immediately immersed herself with the cleaning dishes and maintaining the house once again.

"You should have gone to the meeting, Father Jacob was there. All your *Tita's* and *Tito's* were wondering where you were." She said.

"I'm sure my aunts and uncles were waiting anxiously for my arrival," I replied sarcastically.

I watched her as I sat on a chair at the kitchen table

"Father Jacob really is a good priest. He stayed back and helped straighten up the house afterwards. They all have been very supportive, Veronica."

Mother paused for a moment and then turned to look at me.

"They've been very good to us, the Parish."

Resembling an unappreciated servant buried with domestic duties, mother stood there with a tea towel mopping up the suds on her hands and wrists, nodding slowly.

"Ma, take off your apron and sit down," I motioned towards the empty seat.

"Oh no, I have so many things to do." She said shaking her head, awkwardly shifting her weight from one foot to the other. Finally after careful deliberation she sat down for a moment. Impulsively I chose that time to tell her.

"Mum, I'm going to be leaving soon. I need to go back to work," I said. Almost immediately I could feel my mother's shock and disappointment.

"How soon?" She asked a frown had started to appear upon her face.

"Probably tomorrow." I said quickly, managing to refrain from eye contact. It was obvious she was upset and had unexpected my leaving so soon.

"Well..." She said breathlessly. "That is soon."

She initiated eye contact. Those weary glassy brown oracles stared with pleading as she tried to smile.

"If you must go then so be it..." She said as her voice trailed as she proceeded to go back to the sink and continued with the dishes pretending nothing had happened.

I felt mixed emotions as I battled with wanting to explain and comfort my mother however at the same time infuriated that she could just ignore everything and go 'back to work'. That is what she had done for the majority of her life, pretending nothing had happened when deep down she was dying inside. It made me want to scream.

"Stop it!"

"Stop what? Veronica what are you talking about?" She turned to look at me, a twisted smile appeared across her face.

“Just stop it Goddamn it. Can you say how you feel for once mother instead of pretending.”

“Pretending? What ever do you mean?”

“About me. About father. Can you just admit for once to somebody... anybody... that my father wasn't the perfect husband.” The volume of my voice increased drastically.

“I don't know what you are talking about.” There was a vacant, scared look in her eyes

“He hit me mother. He hit me in the goddamn face. I had that bruise for weeks. Don't say you don't know what I'm talking about. You were there. I didn't 'move out' either mother. I fled. I escaped from him.”

“Oh no Veronica, don't say that about your father. I loved your father, he loved us...”

I was tired of her constant denial and her excuses. The chair scraped. I got up, paced the tiles, came back and stared at my mother.

“Loved us? He degraded us and maintained control. My arguments would be demolished with a single sentence. He was a monster.

“He instilled fear and self-loathing into us, so much so that I began to question my thoughts and actions with one side-glance. I hated him because of that; I hated how he could make me feel insecure with one swift movement. He threatened to hit you constantly and he hit me. That’s not love mother.”

All the pain of a lost childhood had hit me at once. The years of built resentment that I had for my mother overflowed in a single moment.

She had been taken back at first as she stared at the ground. I looked away as her eyes downcast, she put down her tea towel. As I turned to look at her she suddenly rose her head with an air of confidence and came closer to me.

“Veronica.” She said slowly as I looked at her face.

“I’m sorry that he hurt you...” She continued hesitantly with a constant flow of eye contact.

“But he did love you. He is your father.” She held my hands. I tried to look away but something inside would not let me move.

“Hindi ka pwedeng manataling mabuhay na may dalang sama ng loob sa iyong puso. ‘You cannot go through life with animosity for him in your heart’.”

There was a silence that felt it had lasted for eternity. She then finally spoke.

"I'm sorry I did not defend you like I should have." She said echoing the words I had been waiting to hear since I was young.

Bitter tears welled in my eyes as I looked down and stared at the tiles in the kitchen.

"I hated you Mother, I was so angry because you would not defend me, and you just stood by him regardless of all that he did. You were never there.

"I hated my culture, I hated my father, but most of all I hated myself for not having enough confidence to defend my own beliefs and opinions." I let go of her hands and clenched my fists determined not to cry in front of her.

I looked back up and stared coldly at my mother, there was so much in her eyes: fear, anguish, shock, grief. But a peculiar sense of calm radiated from her. Immediately my anger turned to anguish and shame.

"Most of all I hated myself because it was my fault." I could no longer stop the hot tears coursing down my cheeks as I placed my hands over my face.

Mother stood in front of me and placed my face in her hands.

"I thought I was saving our family by staying. But as much as I fought to keep us together, we fell apart regardless."

"It wasn't your fault Veronica. Never your fault." Her calm soothing voice so different to the cries that I had heard outside of my bedroom door for so long. Emotions over flowed as I looked at her full of strength. I was racked with pain and stripped of my defenses.

Why didn't she tell me this before? Why didn't she come into my room all those nights after his rages and comfort me? Why was she saying this only now?

I pushed my mother away as she tried to embrace me. I rose to my feet to leave only to have her arms grasp around me. I struggled to break free but her arms kept holding tighter and tighter. Finally my head collapsed on her shoulder as I broke down and cried like a terrified child, my mother comforting me in her arms.

"I'm sorry Mom, I'm sorry. I wanted to be strong." My voice trailed as I wept unashamedly. She held on tightly, tears also flowing freely from her eyes.

"Let it go, Veronica. Let it go. It's not your fault."

My mother stroked my hair as she filled me with her warmth during that moment when life seemed devoid of all hope. My loneliness was dispelled.

For the first time I had felt safe in that house, alone with her.

Surrounded in my mother's solace, it was then I finally found my own peaceful serenity.

Extension English 2

Major Work Reflection Statement

Title: Chasing Shadows

Medium: Short Story

Area of Study: Changing Perspectives

HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION ENGLISH EXTENSION COURSE 2 MAJOR WORK IDENTIFICATION TAG	
Student No.:	11347444
School No.:	180
Number of Pieces:	3
Category and Description:	Short Story (SS)
ATTACH THIS CARD SECURELY TO EACH PART OF THE INDIVIDUAL PROJECT. DO NOT TEAR.	

Summary of Intent:

Complying with the specifications of the English Extension 2 Major Work Module, I have completed work on a Short Story composition to be submitted upon completion to the Board of Studies on the 3rd of September 2001. The title of this composition is 'Chasing Shadows' [herein referred to as 'the composition'].

Accompanied is my Major Work Journal verifying that the composition is of my own work from its developmental stages through to the finished result.

Purpose and Intended Audience:

The composition, Chasing Shadows, is aimed at the mainstream educated audience through its use of colloquial language. The all spectrums of society

will be able to grasp the universality of the issue of Domestic Violence. Due to the reflective nature of the story, the audience is aimed at those preferably eighteen years and older age bracket.

The purpose of the composition was to highlight the quite sensitive societal problem of domestic violence and the psychological repercussions that are felt during the childhood in adulthood.

Through the short but profound stay at her childhood home, the principal character, Veronica Velasquez, is forced to take hold of her own life choices and change her attitude towards her father abuse, and thus change her perspective on life.

Ultimately, the composition questions the breakdown of the family unit in today's society, the reasoning behind a parent's choice to stay in a violent situation and eventual consequences for a child of that relationship in the future. The intent is not to degrade those who 'choose' to stay in an abusive situation, but address the wide spread problem of the hidden victims of domestic violence.

Relationship of Concept, Structure, Technical and Language features:

The concept of the Major Work was to produce a sustained composition focusing on the issues of Domestic Violence and the impact of cultural barriers, Self-growth through the realisation of responsibility and forgiveness.

This was achieved through the theme of a dysfunctional family and mainly the strained relationship between a 'father and a daughter', the perpetrator and the victim.

Subsequently the result is the interrelation of the themes and issues presented through the final story line: a daughter facing her abuse soon after her father's death during a stay at her childhood home as she and her mother struggle as survivors of that abuse.

In order to realise this in my composition structure plays an important part. Selection of the right structure is needed to best represent the intended themes and issues.

I have selected a short story/reflective narrative written in first person narrative style as the story is relayed in the eyes of the main character, Veronica [the daughter] and thus the story is written in largely in past tense. The language style adopted is largely colloquial combined with some slang and formal language included. The intention was to warm the tone to suit the situation and purpose, to portray the emotions of the principal character as her mood altered. The language of everyday conversation was utilised in order to transport the responder into the mind of the principal character and place emphasis upon the personal struggle of domestic violence. Slang was used at times to express the immediacy and emotional force of some sections of the plot, specifically during Veronica's traumatic realisation of the extent of her abuse and the consequences that she still bears until the present.

Investigation and Research:

Essentially independent investigation undertaken has been critical in order to create the composition from the preliminary beginnings to its completed result.

The Initial source of research was the novel by Jamie Manrique entitled 'Twilight at the Equator' where I had gained my first inspiration for the Composition combined with the personal experiences of my mother and father's childhood in their native country of the Philippines.

Previously the composition, then entitled 'The summer of our Discontent', was to be written as a script/screenplay. However after careful consideration and research of different format of presentation including David Williamson's Brilliant Lies and Arthur Miller's 'Death of a Salesman', I had made the decision to change the format into prose. I had done this believing that the issues and themes of the Composition would be best suited in the short story medium.

After renegotiating and salvaging what was left of the script to be used later, I had made study into the a particular narrative style that would suit the plot and aid in emphasising the issues and themes that I had chosen to be presented.

Some of the texts that I had studied include:

- 'The Godfather', Mario Puzo [Arrow Books, 1998]
- 'The Thorn Birds', Colleen McCullough [Harper and Row Publishers, 1977]
- 'The Valkyries' and 'the Alchemist', Paulo Coelho [HarperCollins Publishers 1992 and 1993]

These had been written in third person narrative and had an omniscient atmosphere that I had been drawn to initially.

- 'Twilight at the Equator', Jamie Manrique [HarperCollins 1996]
- 'Falling Leaves', Adeline Yen Mah [Penguin Books 1997]

Written in first person narrative, both these texts have a reflective structure. Problems have occurred in other texts where reflection can lead to disjointed flow of ideas. However the texts maintain unity when dealing with personal emotions.

I had adopted third person narrative to begin with however later I had abandoned this in opting for first person narrative instead. I found that I was more comfortable in expressing my ideas in first person narrative and as time had progressed a much more delicate and personal 'first hand' approach to the sensitive story line appeared.

After formulating preliminary characterisations of the principal identities within the plot, the daughter Veronica, the mother Sofia, a priest Jacob and the

father Antonio, I had sought out to comprehensively research the main issue of Domestic Violence, particularly psychological violence. I had already some knowledge of the Violence in the family, however it was this research of Violence issues that lay the critical foundations for the formation of the characters personality, mannerisms and traits.

Many sources of information include

- the leaflets from the Domestic Violence Resource Centre [Understanding Domestic Violence, Theories to explain Domestic Violence, Why do women stay?]
- Articles by the Sydney Morning Herald [When Daddy Hits Mummy, April 17 2001] Sun Herald [Pain Junkies, April 29 2001]
- Observable and Behaviour Indicators of Emotional Abuse [www.divorceinkentucky.com/emotionalabuse.html]
- as well as a plethora of personal stories by abused women [www.safechild.org]

After collating information, I then incorporated the different pieces of material into the composition. All of these were important in formulating the psychology behind the characters. Some examples of how this was adopted include:

- From the Behavioural Indicators of Emotional abuse using several mannerisms that were present in Veronica indicating that she was raised

within an abusive household. As a child her rocking in the corner of her room.

As an adult she shows characteristics of victims of emotional abuse including post-traumatic stress in particular nightmares and recurrent headaches, low self esteem, fear and distrust of others and emotional difficulties.

- Sofia's perpetual need to stay in a violent domestic situation had its source from the leaflet '*Why do Women Stay?*'. Her religious beliefs, belief that it is important to 'keep the family together' and her emotional attachment to the perpetrator bind Sofia.

There had been several instances of redrafting during the duration of composition where certain characters had been erased completely or had given a smaller role.

Class time was particularly important for interaction with different students and the teacher in order to exchange ideas, which indirectly gave shape to the composition.

Areas of Concern:

Time management- I had specifically targeted time frames in which I would complete the Major Work. In my opinion at the time I had thought as reasonable however as I had progressed, I had found increasingly that this

was not the case. I had not adequately planned time to complete the composition as well as assessment tasks for other subjects. As a consequence I was not meet my set targets before the due date for completion.

Complacency- the problem of lack of motivation and writers block had set in. This was very difficult to overcome. The remedy for this was to constantly redraft and reconfigure the original storyline have had time in between to 'digest' pieces of writing and replenish creativity.

Conclusion:

In creating, Chasing Shadows, through its developmental stage to the finished product I have found that not only I had composed a substantial piece of work. I have extended my knowledge substantially in regards to my writing style and organisation skills, and moreover my capabilities and weaknesses as an individual. Through the composing the Major Work, I have highlighted many of my strengths as person, such as a forte for descriptive prose and detail. I have still found that I have many difficulties with time management, thought this has improved substantially in regards to some of my previous efforts. The developmental stage of the Major Work which extensive research was carried out had greatly expanded my thoughts on the victims of Domestic Violence.

Personally, developing the major work had emphasised some weaknesses that I had not been made aware of including, my lack confidence in public

speaking during the Viva Voce, and at times I had been overcome with complacency.

Overall I believe that I had conveyed my intentions and have fulfilled my goals in developing the themes and issues in the Composition that I had produced.