We Grow Accustomed to the Dark

~ Emily Dickinson

Adapted from Kaitlyn Quigley’s Prezi Page: http://prezi.com/oze19cq6inua/we-grow-accustomed-to-the-dark/
We Grow Accustomed to the Dark

We grow accustomed to the Dark --
When light is put away --
As when the Neighbor holds the Lamp
To witness her Goodbye --

A Moment -- We uncertain step
For newness of the night --
Then -- fit our Vision to the Dark --
And meet the Road -- erect --

And so of larger -- Darkness --
Those Evenings of the Brain --
When not a Moon disclose a sign --
Or Star -- come out -- within --

The Bravest -- grope a little --
And sometimes hit a Tree
Directly in the Forehead --
But as they learn to see --

Either the Darkness alters --
Or something in the sight
Adjusts itself to Midnight --
And Life steps almost straight.
It must be noted that the title is simply the first line of the poem as Dickinson did not name her poems. The poems were not named simply because she had never intended for them to be published.
Growing accustomed to the Dark means to not only accept the struggles that life brings but to familiarize yourself to the degree that you overcome the obstacles that are sent your way. You are made stronger by your experiences.
Stanza 1

We grow accustomed to the Dark --
When light is put away --
As when the Neighbor holds the Lamp
To witness her Goodbye --

We are forced to get used
to hardships when we are
left alone and there are no
distractions.
Stanza 2

A Moment -- We uncertain step
For newness of the night --
Then -- fit our Vision to the Dark --
And meet the Road -- erect --

We adapt our life to focus
on the obstacles and
hardships.
And so of larger -- Darkness --
Those Evenings of the Brain --
When not a Moon disclose a sign --
Or Star -- come out -- within --

There are nights when the sorrows are
plaguing your thoughts. When not even
lustrous hopes or distant goals can save you
from yourself.
Stanza 4

The Bravest -- grope a little --
And sometimes hit a Tree
Directly in the Forehead --
But as they learn to see --

The bravest face their inner demons head on,
sometimes being struck by the uglier, sicker
side of life. Yet, if they persist, they see
beyond the ugly to all the beauty life offers.
Either the Darkness alters --  
Or something in the sight  
Adjusts itself to Midnight --  
And Life steps almost straight again

Either you learn from the obstacles in life  
(learn to rise above them to continue on  
with your life) or your struggles will  
shape you.
Figurative Language

Dark/Light

Vision

Midnight

Moon & Stars

Tree

Back
We grow accustomed to the Dark --
When light is put away --
As when the Neighbor holds the Lamp
To witness her Goodbye --

Darkness is a symbol for the hopelessness and desolate nature of loss or hardships.

Light is a symbol for hope and positivity in life.

The neighbor leaving is a simile used to represent the physical deprivation of light. The light leaves as the neighbor parts from you, leaving you encompassed by the shadows.
A Moment -- We uncertain step  
For newness of the night --  
Then -- fit our Vision to the Dark --  
And meet the Road -- erect --

“Newness of the night” is an alliteration that creates a sense of peace that contrasts the current sense of disorientation the poet is obviously feeling during this time of her life.

Vision is a symbol for mindset (outlook). So the “Vision fit to the dark” suggests a grim outlook, rigid and negative in nature.

The “Road” is a symbol of life or the path that life takes you. Roads can twist and turn which makes it a suitable comparison for life. It was a universal symbol during this time period, and was used by many.
Either the Darkness alters --
Or something in the sight
Adjusts itself to Midnight --
And Life steps almost straight

It is the darkest hour of the night, blanketing everything. Only you are left to pull yourself out of the darkness—marking the true point of solitude in the poem.

Life occurs and things happen that you can’t control. You do, however, have control over which direction your life takes. But your outlook sometimes distorts your view.
The Bravest -- grope a little --
And sometimes hit a Tree
Directly in the Forehead --
But as they learn to see --

The tree is a symbol for life. Trees can be used to display sickness, as one branch can poison the whole tree if it is not cut away. The bravest people take a step forward in the darkness and are smacked with the branches or the hard labors of life. Yet if they keep moving closer, they learn the shape of the tree and can touch the trunk, which makes up its core, representing stability. Light can begin to shine through the tree branches.
And so of larger -- Darkness -- Those Evenings of the Brain -- When not a Moon disclose a sign -- Or Star -- come out -- within --

As day is overwhelmed by night, the evening is when you unpack and think. Just as hopes are overcome by despair, and hopes and goals are eclipsed by the darkness, the “Evenings of the Brain” can be a blessing or a handicap.

Moon and Stars are both symbols of hope or out of reach goals that make all obstacles worthwhile. And, the fact that they cannot help you, suggests that this is a journey undertaken alone.
The mood of the poem is gloomy and desolate, but after the shift (stanza 4), it changes to create a more optimistic mood.
The Bravest -- grope a little --
And sometimes hit a Tree
Directly in the Forehead --
But as they learn to see --

Either the Darkness alters --
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The second shift occurs in stanza 4 when there is a change in the tone and mood of the poem. It shifts from a feeling of hopelessness and pessimism to an optimistic outlook, full of hope. The symbol of the tree creates a shift showing that there is always a way out, creating hope for knowledge and enlightenment.
Dark vs. Light: Dark is symbolized throughout the poem as ignorance, obstacles and struggles. Light is knowledge. The poem explores the constant battle between light and darkness—most people choose to accept and live in the dark while others fight to escape its clutches and find the light.
Dickinson connects this poem to an instinctual level with iambic tetrameter—mimicking the heartbeat. Yet the heartbeat is left hanging in the third stanza: "...and SO of LARGer—DARKness—".

This draws attention to the poet's motivation for writing the poem. She realized that in order to truly overcome the darker side of life, you must embrace it and learn to surmount it ON YOUR OWN. And from within. Not from outside influences.

After this realization is achieved, the tone and mood of the poem shifts as the speaker now recognizes what she can do to overcome fear and despair and set her life straight.
The use of dashes creates a sense of stumbling through the dark. The poem is not read through smoothly and fluently, it is choppy and broken up. It reflects the nature of self discovery, how it will not be a journey that is effortless, and there will be snags in the plan.

It is only at the end of the poem where a flow emerges, as the journey is continuing beyond the obstacles of darkness. The traveler has found a path, accepting the pitfalls as a part of the road.

The sole period at the close marks the end of this stage of life's journey.

The former lack of punctuation shows that, while one journey ends, another is just beginning.
Dickinson uses plural first person to make the poem a universal journey that any reader can connect to at some point of their life. The switch to the use of “they” in the fourth stanza shows that among us there are those that will conquer this darkness through sheer bravery and stubbornness. These people are special and not everyone will try (or is able) to accustom themselves to their struggles.
Rhyme scheme usually gives a sing-song style to Dickinson’s poetry. But in this poem, Dickinson uses it sparingly to stress the disjointed feelings felt in the dark. And yet, she rhymes in two situations: Stanzas 4 and 5. There is a distinct shift in tone, where the narrator tries to overcome obstacles, in stanza four. The use of rhyme scheme lightens the mood; giving the poem an, almost, happy ending.