

The Graduation

You were very sweet when I saw you,
With breasts heavy and full.
You had the hips of a woman.
But we did not have to say anything,
We both knew.
Our need was in our eyes, and you wanted to give.
It wasn't love, just two young mammals learning to play.
Next time it will be for real.

His parents had insisted. They would come to his graduation ceremony. He would wear a proper suit and one of those gowns with a coloured hood, like you saw in the films. They had paid a lot of money for his education. He was the first of his family to go to Uni. It was a reason to celebrate. His dad said they would make a weekend of it together, staying at a hotel in the city where he had studied. They would get photographs and go out to eat in a posh restaurant.

Mikey knew there was no point arguing. He would go along. After all he was leaving home and this was one way to say good-bye. He knew it was a farce, staged for the mums and dads. He could get his certificate by post if he wanted. Mikey had long moved on. The degree had been the easy part. Dealing with those little public school kids in their middle class bubble had been the pits. They had no idea what life was about. This would be the last time he would have to sit with them. They would go off to their jobs in the City, helped out by friends of the family. "His father is a sound man, we should give young Tarquin a chance..."

Mikey thought bitterly about his first term. His parents had booked him into the single sex hall of residence. It had been modelled on an Oxbridge college and attracted all the immature private school kids. He had had to share a room with an idiot doing physics who had kept coming back drunk and violent. The cleaners had complained of the vomit left in the room and he had nearly been thrown out as a result of his room-mate. One night the boy had suddenly started hitting him in the face for no apparent reason. At exam time the residents had spent the nights playing loud rock and holding parties which disrupted his studies. Worst of all the girls were all in mixed halls and paired off with boys in their flats. He learned not to admit where he lived, until he moved out in his second year. Thank God for the climbing club where he met like-minded people. The posh crowd went for team sports. He found a better mix in outward bound.

Mikey had expected to find a girl friend at Uni but they all seemed either monastic or paired off long ago to older students. The girls in the climbing club were all fixed up and the girls in the faculty seemed unapproachable, uninterested and demure. Many seemed to go home to boyfriends at the weekend. Whatever happened to the sixties he had heard so much about? Sometimes Mikey

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imagined that he had a big sign round his neck which said, "I'm a virgin". The truth was more that he was young, shy and introverted, which kept him away from girls and student groups.

It was late July and the schools were about to break for the summer. Mikey's mum had pressed his suit and shirt, just to be sure, she said. He felt a prat. His father had booked a hotel in the middle of Bristol, near the new docks development. They could walk up the hill to the ceremony. They talked about the tour of the faculty and the cream tea, and how expensive the gown hire was. All that money just for two hours' hire!

Mikey sat in the back as the car shot down the motorway, thinking of his interview next week. He would research the company for new material on its website. He really wanted the job. It would give him the chance to leave home and be independent at last, to do what he wanted in life. Maybe he could find himself a real girl who wasn't some stuck up toff with fancy notions.

The car pulled in to the hotel and they got out with the luggage. Mikey noticed a promotion for a new drink going on in the foyer: "Black Velvet" coffee cream liqueur from Ireland. There was a team of girls in skin tight black lycra and high heels, wearing black fluffy cats' ears, offering free product from merchandisers. One of them caught his eye. She was tall and well-built with glossy brown hair in ringlets down below her shoulders, and big brown eyes. She must have been thirty but she seemed to be looking at him. Mikey wandered over trying to feign interest in the product. His parents were checking in at the desk. "How much?" he asked. "It's free" she said, and handed him a bottle. He hesitated and took one, looking at her close up. He thought she must be an agency model, hired for the promotion. She winked at him slyly as he walked away to join his parents.

The old judge droned on as he moralised about the entitlement of young people and their duties to society. Mikey sweated in his suit and gown in the front row. Well, he hoped his parents were enjoying it. This was what they had wanted. At last the tirade ended and they filed up in an endless queue for their scrolls. Then off to a cream tea in the sun at Royal Fort Gardens up the hill. This was more his mum's idea. She had worn her wedding outfit with a large hat, from his sister's do. The gaudy orange and white fabric billowed round her large pink form in the sunshine. His dad looked small in his electric blue suit next to her. Mikey's tutor moved over and flattered them about their talented boy, hoping they hadn't had to come too far on such a hot day. Mikey could see he hated the pantomime as much as Mikey. The day wore on. Other parents circulated and made light chat about the weather and what their child had achieved. Finally they went back to the hotel by the dock and to their rooms before dinner.

Mikey lay awake in the small hours. It was very hot and there was no air-con. He could see a light reflected on his ceiling. He had that powerless feeling of being in between stages in his life. He was stalled, waiting to move on. It was frustrating having to go home after Uni, like a little boy again in his old room, surrounded by childhood long forgotten, harassed by his fussy mother.

He moved to the window. It looked out on a well in the middle of the hotel, which gave light to windows for inside rooms. Suddenly he realised that the light came from the floor below on the other side of the well. The curtains and window were open. The girl from the Black Velvet promotion was lying on the bed reading a book. She wore a black negligee lying open around her on the bed. Mikey gaped. She was amazing. Gorgeous and voluptuous. Had she seen him spying on her? He hadn't meant to, he had only glanced out. She didn't seem to care, lying naked with the curtains

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wide... her eyes were on her book. He could hear her radio playing rock quietly in the bedroom. He went back to his bed and sat down. He couldn't just sit there watching her. He wasn't a pervert. But he knew he wanted her, very badly. What could he do? Mikey counted the windows and slipped on a pair of jeans. He went down the fire stairs and walked round the block, counting the doors. He noticed her light coming over the sill. He caught his breath in the dark corridor and knocked softly on the door.

The music stopped and a stronger light came on. Her voice came through the door, it was soft and Irish. "Who is it", she said, a tension in her voice. "It's the guy you met in the foyer", he said lamely, "I couldn't sleep and saw your light on...". She recognised the young man's voice and let him in. "Do you want to just talk?" she said. "I wouldn't normally do this, but youse can come in". He noticed she had slipped on a robe. She had a cigarette, and the room was filled with a haze of smoke. "Cat got your tongue is it?" she smiled at him. "You sit on the bed and I'll make you a milky coffee." "I just wanted..." he started to say. She turned sharply and caught his eye, "I know what you wanted young man!" she said gently in her Dublin brogue. "I could see what you were wanting in the foyer, and it wasn't Black Velvet, to be sure." Mikey sensed she was making fun of him now. He felt young and inexperienced, powerless in the thrall of this woman.

Suddenly she dropped her robe and pushed him back on the bed. "We'd best get these jeans off you then," she said, pulling them off and lying beside him. She reached across and switched off the lights.

"What time do you call this?" his dad said as Mikey arrived late at breakfast. "We've got to drive back you know." "It's all right, take no notice" his mum said. "You look tired. Anyway, I hope you feel properly "graduated"" she said. Mikey smiled sheepishly. "Yes thanks mum, I feel properly graduated!" he said.