

'Hello, love, did you sleep well?'

On the point of confessing that she had had the worst night of her life, something ' stopped her and she smiled back. 'Yes, Mum, fine.'

Watching her mother quietly for a moment she remembered the photographs of her in the family albums. Her mother, now faded and anxious, had once been pretty and lively and had glowed with happiness as her married life began. And yet, looking at her kneeling there in her dressing gown, Britt felt herself to be a cuckoo in this poky¹ suburban nest. And she realized, with an unfamiliar twist of regret, that hers was a classic story.

Her parents, always believing that education was power and that it was a gift to which girls should be as equally entitled as boys, had scrimped and saved to give her the best opportunities they could. With their encouragement she had gone to grammar school and on to Oxford. And steadily, with each new achievement, she had moved further and further away from them, until she had, now, almost nothing in common with them at all.

And as she sat sipping her tea another memory, deep and repressed, sprang up bringing with it a sick feeling of shame which even twelve years hadn't managed to blot out.

It had been Degree Day at Oxford, for parents the one moment where the saving and the sacrifice seemed to have all been worth it. The day when their sons or daughters, dressed in gown and mortar board or cap, trooped into the rococo splendour of the Sheldonian Theatre and collected their degree from the Vice-Chancellor before submitting themselves to the most sacred ritual of all: the taking of the graduation photo for the place of honour on mantelpiece² and in family album.

And she had deprived them of it, their one moment of reflected glory, because she was ashamed of them. To Britt, groomed and sophisticated now and in with the university's smart set, the idea of her father in an ill-fitting suit and her mother wearing Crimplene and a borrowed wedding hat, wandering uncomfortably among the rich businessmen and titled parents of her new friends, was too much to face. So she had put them off, telling them she would be on holiday for Degree Day and would collect hers by post.

But she had gone all the same. And as she stood amongst a group of laughing friends she had turned to see the only other student from Rothwell Grammar standing watching her with her parents, and she had gone cold and sweaty, and her day had been ruined by the fear that her parents might, after all, discover the truth. That she had been too embarrassed to invite them.

If they did hear, nothing was ever said. But as she looked at the empty mantelpiece this morning, where their only child's Graduation photo should have proudly stood, she felt so ashamed that she had to look away.

Her mother smiled her faded smile at Britt perching on the arm of the uncomfortable sofa, in a raw silk kimono which had probably cost more than the entire three-piece suite³.

'Warm enough, love? The fire'll be ready in a minute.'

And Britt watched fascinated as her mother finished plaiting old copies of the Daily Mirror into neat fire-lighters and laid them carefully in the grate, covering them with twigs⁴ and coal, then sat back and put a match to the paper and stared at the fire, listening to the hiss and crackle of the kindling as it began to catch. And it struck her for the first time that no matter what she thought her mother and father were happy with their lives, that they felt secure in their daily rituals and their strong beliefs, pulling together in a tightly knit community. And that it was she, who believed so passionately in the individual, whose credo decreed that you could have anything you wanted if only you tried hard enough, and that the only person who could really help you was yourself, it was she who found herself pregnant and alone.

Having it all, Maeve Haran (Signet,1992)

1. poky: uncomfortably small

2. mantelpiece: shelf above the fireplace

3. three-piece suite : a sofa and two armchairs

4. twig : a little piece of wood

I - COMPREHENSION

1. Who are the main characters? What are they doing? Where and when does the scene take place?
(40 words)

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2. What can you say about the girl's results at school and university?

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3. l. 14 - l. 37.

a) Mention four rituals of a typical Graduation Day at Oxford.

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b) To what extent was Britt's Graduation Day different from her friends'? Explain why.

Differences	Why? (Quote the text)
-	- (l. ...)
-	- (l. ...)
-	- (l. ...)

c) How long ago did it take place?

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4. Today how does she feel when she remembers that day? Quote elements from the text in your answer. (30 words)

5. (l. 13) "... *She had now almost nothing in common with them.*"

Fill in the grid with elements from the text to illustrate this quotation.

	The parents	The daughter
1 - marital status	-	-
2 - clothes	- -	-
3 - ideals in life	-	-

- 10 6. As far as human values are concerned, what does the main character become aware of at the end of the text? (40 words)

II - COMPETENCE LINGUISTIQUE

1. Say who or what the underlined words refer to:

- a) I. 4 "photographs of her"
- b) I.8 "hers was a classic story"
- 5 c) I.18 "with their sons or daughters"
- d) I.28 "collect hers by post"
- e) I.32 "with her parents"
- f) I.33 "that her parents might ..."

2. Put the verbs in the appropriate forms and tenses.

- 10 a) If her parents (come) to the ceremony when she was a student,
she (feel) ashamed of them.
- b) She (change) since she (go) to Oxford.
- c) She was afraid her friend (tell) her parents the truth.
- d) They were proud that she (obtain) her degree.
- 15 e) She wishes she (behave) differently with her parents when she
was younger.
- f) If she told them the truth now, she (be) relieved.

3. Rephrase the following sentences using the prompts given.

- a) She regrets not having asked her parents to come.
20 She thinks she should
- b) She felt so ashamed that she had to look away.
Feeling ashamed, she couldn't help
- c) For the first time in her life she realized she was wrong.
It was the first time
- 25 d) The parents certainly felt very disappointed.
They must
- e) She thought her parents were too conventional.
She blamed

4. Use the following linkwords in the sentences, rephrasing them when necessary. Each word must be used once only

thanks to - unlike - so ... that - in order to – although

a) Life was very difficult for the parents. The mother had become faded and anxious.

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b) Her parents would have loved to go. They were not invited to the ceremony.

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c) They had sacrificed themselves. They wanted to help their daughter to get a good education.

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d) She had been successful at school. Her parents' encouragements had helped her.

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.....

e) Her fellow students had asked their parents to come. She hadn't.

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5. Translate

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I. 12 - "with each new achievement, she had moved further and further away from them"

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I. 35 - "If they did hear, nothing was ever said. " ,

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III- EXPRESSION

Choose one of the following subjects. (250 words)

1. A few days Britt' s belief that " later, Britt confesses her lie to her mother. Write their conversation.

30 2. Do you agree with You could have anything you wanted if only you tried hard enough" ? Justify your answer, giving examples.