PERSONAL NARRATIVE EXEMPLAR

*“What Graduation Taught Me”*

I will never forget the end of my senior year in 2014. My graduation was particularly special to my family, because I was the first grandchild to graduate from high school. I was named valedictorian of my senior class and I was graduating summa cum laude! With everything that was good, I never could have predicted the turn of events that occurred and how much these events would affect my relationships with people forever. I never looked at people the same again.

The morning of May 14th, 2014, I awakened with excitement! It was the big day! As I bounced out of bed, my heart fluttered with both excitement and nervousness as I eagerly ran to my bedroom window and snatched back the curtains to reveal a sharp, burst of sunlight that flooded my room, invigorating my sleepy eyes. I squealed with excited as my mother gently tapped my door, opening it. Her eyes were red and wet with tears of joy as she smiled at me ever so gently. Her arms outstretched for a hug, she pounded her foot on the squeaky hardwood floors shouting, “my baby did that!” over and over again. I burst into laughter and we embraced tightly. I buried my head between her neck and her shoulder as I began to fight invading tears as the reality of the situation really hit me.

“We have a big day ahead, Pumpkin”, she said as she kissed my cheek several times in a row, leaving her sticky, cherry lip gloss on my face. I released myself from her embrace and darted towards my bed to search for my phone in a sea of covers.

“Your hair appointment is at 11:00. Be ready!” Her face transformed from a smile to seriousness. She closed the door gently as she walked out. I began to check Instagram, all too eager to see what my friends were saying about the big day. Without thinking, I tapped on some direct messages out of curiosity. As my eyes danced across the screen, I read a series of vicious messages from an unknown sender. “You better not show up to graduation…” and “I hope you die! If you show up…” With my finger trembling, I nervously tapped the last message: “I hope you die, yo momma die, yo sister die…yo whole family die. You’re just a stank, nasty, ghetto…” I finally stopped reading. My entire body trembled with increased nervousness.

Later that day, my best friend, Karen, and I were at the salon being cooked by miserable, hot, dryers and tolerating fried weave that littered the salon floors. I poured out my soul to her about what this moment meant to me. She closed her eyes and sighed, agreeing with me. When I shared with her the nature of the direct messages that I received, she gasped under the dryer, covering her mouth.

“Why would somebody do that!” She said angrily. “Don’t worry about it. It’s probably some idiot that can’t even graduate and wants to ruin your shine. Don’t let it!” She glared at me with her deep, dark eyes seemingly demanding that I be strong. I smiled at my dear friend and the nervousness seemingly fled from my racing heart. I was ready to graduate. My time had come! Our hair couldn’t dry fast enough as we darted out of the salon and raced back to my house to get dressed and leave for the ceremony.

I couldn’t help but smile as the bright lights illuminated me before the audience. I was the school’s valedictorian and I was proud! As I stood dressed in my crisp cap and gown, I spotted my mother’s soft, caramel face, beaming with pride. As my speech concluded, and I turned to leave the podium, I felt a barrage of something mushy and rotten, slam into the top of my cap and dripped onto my gown from the ceiling. As I forced my feet to move in a panic, my body tumbled to the floor and rolled across the stage. My graduation gown and dress flew over my head, revealing my undergarments. The student section roared with vicious laughter. My mother, along with the other adults screamed in horror. As I attempted to crawl off of the stage to get out of sight as quickly as possible, my body slipped all over the stage in what I found out was foul sewage. When I finally made it to the back, I was surrounded by my teachers and family. Tears streamed continuously down my cheeks, meeting at the corners of my mouth. All I could think about was my best friend who tried to encourage me. Where was she? I needed her. As my mother ran from the bathroom with a container filled with soapy water and paper towels to help me clean up, my arch enemy since Kindergarten, Tamika, slowly approached me. Her countenance was filled with fear. I scowled at her. She was the last person on Earth that I wanted to see. I rolled my eyes and tears continued to stream down my cheeks.

“Look, I’m really sorry about what happened. You didn’t deserve this.” I noticed the sincerity in her eyes. I managed to whisper a “thank you” as I dropped my head to the cold, tiled floor. She stood there watching me in awkward silence. I tried my best to ignore the panicked banter from my mother and the other adults backstage.

“Look, I have something to show you. I know you don’t want to see or hear this coming from me, but you really need to know.” She kneeled down to show me her illuminated screen. I slowly lifted my head to view her screen. What I eventually saw, through my salty tears, stunned me. She continued to scroll as I saw my best friend since elementary school’s texts and direct messages to different people around the school. She planned to humiliate me. She sent those direct messages. She has hated me the whole time. She was never my friend. Why?

“I tried to tell you last year, but we had so much beef over nothing. Your friend, Karen, is a jealous bum. She never had your back. I don’t want to see her get away with this, and I’m going to tell everyone that she was responsible.” She slowly lifted her body and walked away. I never thought that the person I felt was my enemy would help me out in such a way, and I never thought that I would be so betrayed by a friend. I never spoke to or saw Karen or anyone else from my high school after that night.

My graduation day was one of the worst days of my life and I was forever changed. I really learned a valuable lesson about people. That night snatched all of my faith and trust in humanity. I would never open my heart to another person as a friend again. I was always told to keep my friends close and my enemies closer, but I learned the hard way that people are not always who they seem to be. That will stick with me forever.