

The High Life

This is a piece I wrote as part of a creative writing course. The task was to try in a different style from your usual one. I opted to write in the second person so that 'you' is the subject. I also wanted to explore feelings but express them in a short, direct way. It ended up being a bit dark which surprised me! Hopefully, there is a touch of humour and irony that cuts through it. It was good fun.

On my tutor's advice, I entered it for a short story writing competition and got some constructive feedback from the judges. I changed a few things. Which one do you think is the original and which one is the edited version? Answer at the end.

The High-life

You were named Boris, a cruel name to give a boy growing up in the 70s at the top of a tower block in the East End of London. 'Boris' might be fashionable now but it wasn't then. You couldn't get away from it, even in your lofty position. The constant teasing you received left scars on you that remained unhealed. That's why you had to do it

Your mother deserved it. 'You'll never amount to anything,' she said. 'Who would want to marry you?' she said. 'Women are too good for you,' she said. She was cruel. Cruel because she should have realised that you were damaged already. Her constant mockery of you – every vitriolic jibe, every disdainful look, every sarcastic reference to failed attempts at relationships, every page she teased you with in the 'Lonely Hearts' section of the local newspaper, every opportunity to belittle you in front of her friends, all of it – would eventually tip you over the edge. Or rather, tip her over the edge. You were sixteen floors up.

A low balcony rail and the story you pedalled that she had fallen off the wagon six months before did the trick. It turned out that she had fallen from something considerably higher than a wagon. When it happened, you were nowhere near the flat. A bit of dirt you had on an office colleague ensured your false alibi was backed up. You got off scot-free. The burning rage you felt was finally quenched and, now, at the top of your tower, you feel safe.

Alone but safe. Safe from hurt. Safe from ridicule. Safe from her. To start with,

anyway. But it's not enough and soon the rage erupts again. You need to dampen the fire that burns inside of you. You need a quest to prove her wrong. A quest for the perfect woman to show her that no woman is too good for you. A quest to heal the hurt. Discrete ads are placed in various places. '*Handsome, middle aged man seeks attractive fun-loving woman. No strings attached. High-rise living a must!*' You leave your tower and visit other towers as you start to date.

But you still feel your mother there, always on your shoulder, criticising, telling you that you're not good enough for them. You see her in them and you can't help yourself. A spate of alcohol induced suicides and accidental deaths ensue in the area. Women perish, crushed after plummeting from their balconies. *No strings attached* – they die wishing there had been. Not so much high-rise living, more high-rise dying. All the while, you keep hoping the next one will be different... and not like your mother.

They always are, unfortunately for them. All of them vitriolic, disdainful, sarcastic, teasing you, belittling you, even when they're not. They're all a disappointment. You treat them well before you make them take the plunge. You woo them with expensive flowers, delicious chocolate, engaging chatter; sweet-eating and sweet-talking. They come and go and you find life has its ups and its downs. Mainly downs. You've gained confidence since you have killed. You are no longer the shy boy who was scoffed at, the spotty teenager who was shunned, the man suppressed by the dominant mother in the tower.

Nearly one year on from the first 'accident' you decide that the next woman that falls for you should fall for you from a special place. The occasion demands something unusual. This will be a date with a difference: a moonlit dinner for two with champagne, on the anniversary, at the top of the Shard. A stock market slump of the most deadly kind. You plan it with your usual thoroughness.

However, there is a surprise waiting for you because she is not at all like your mother. No more crushed hopes. No crushed dreams. No crushed bodies. The rage subsides and

new emotions take hold. You change: you feel coyness as you talk; anticipation as you reach out your fingers and touch; tenderness as you kiss; humbleness that such a gorgeous woman would want you. You feel... love, yes love, as you embrace tightly. Then a toast: 'To us.' You feel dizzy with excitement.

Sick and dizzy. Something in the drink. And suddenly, your emotions change again: you feel pain as your arms are gripped; surprise as you are pushed back towards the balcony railing; shock as you over-balance; fear as you plummet 70 storeys down; curiosity before...

... disappointment as you, too, are crushed. Disappointment because you are wrong.

You are wrong and your mother was right: women are far too good for you.

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You had to do it. Your mother deserved it. 'You'll never amount to anything,' she said. 'Who would want to marry you?' she said 'Women are too good for you,' she said. She was cruel.

Cruel because she should have realised that you were damaged already. Her constant mockery of you – every vitriolic jibe, every disdainful look, every sarcastic reference to failed attempts at relationships, every page she teased you with in the 'Lonely Hearts' section of the local newspaper, every opportunity to belittle you in front of her friends, all of it – would eventually tip you over the edge. Or rather, tip her over the edge. You were sixteen floors up.

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fallen off the wagon six months before did the trick. It turned out that she had fallen from something considerably higher than a wagon. When it happened, you were nowhere near the flat.

You were nowhere near the flat. A bit of dirt you had on an office colleague ensured your false alibi was backed up. You got off scot-free. The burning rage you felt was finally quenched and, now, at the top of your tower, you feel safe.

You feel safe. Alone but safe. Safe from hurt. Safe from ridicule. Safe from her. To start with, anyway. But it's not enough, you soon realise, and the rage rages again. You need to dampen the fire that burns inside of you. You need a quest.

You need a quest to prove her wrong. A quest for the perfect woman to show her that no woman is too good for you. A quest to heal the hurt. Discrete ads are placed in various places. *'Handsome, middle aged man seeks attractive fun-loving woman. No strings attached. High-rise living a must!'* You leave your tower and visit other towers as you start to date.

You start to date but you still feel your mother there, always on your shoulder, criticising, telling you that you're not good enough for them. You see your mother in them and you can't help yourself. A spate of alcohol induced suicides and accidental deaths ensue in the area. Women perish, crushed after falling from their balconies – *No strings attached* – they die wishing there had been. Not so much high-rise living, more high-rise dying. All the while, you keep hoping the next one will be different... and not like your mother.

Not like your mother but they always are, even when they're not. All of them vitriolic, disdainful, sarcastic, teasing you, belittling you, even when they're not. They're all a disappointment. You treat them well before you let them down. You woo them.

You woo them with expensive flowers, delicious chocolate, engaging chatter; sweet-eating and sweet-talking. They come and go and you find life has its ups and its downs.

Mainly downs. You've gained confidence since you have killed. You are no longer the shy boy.

You are no longer the shy boy who was scoffed at, the spotty teenager who was shunned, the man suppressed by the dominant mother in the tower. But, nearly one year on from the 'accident', you decide the next woman that falls for you, should fall for you from a special place. The occasion demands something different. This will be a special place and a special date, a moonlit dinner for two, on the anniversary, at the top of the Shard. A stock market slump of the most deadly kind. You plan it before you get there.

You get there but you are surprised. She is not like your mother. There will be no crushed hopes this time. No crushed dreams. No crushed bodies. You're falling for her as you realise not all women are like your mother after all. The rage is subsiding.

The rage is subsiding and new emotions take hold. You feel coyness as you talk, anticipation as you reach out your fingers and touch, tenderness as you kiss, humbleness that such a gorgeous woman would want you. You feel... love, yes love, as you embrace tightly. You feel great...

You feel great! But then... everything changes. Starry-eyed love is replaced by starry-eyed confusion as she raises a malevolent eye-brow. There is pain as she grips your arms, surprise as you are pushed back towards the balcony railing, shock as you are tipped over the edge, fear as you plummet 70 storeys down and finally... disappointment before you are crushed. Disappointment because you are wrong.

Disappointment because you are wrong and your mother was right: women are far too good for you.

Which is the edited version?

Answer: the first one. The judge's main criticism was that he was not keen on the use of repetition at the end and start of paragraphs. I changed a few other things and made it a bit tighter.

Which one do you think is better?