

The joy of a mad

night out

[REFLECTION] Have you ever wondered what happened to the party girl you once were? Eleanor Tucker recalls hers – and decides it's OK to for her to reappear and greet the dawn chorus from the wrong end now and again >>>



>>> **G**radually, I am coming to, and before I notice that I'm lying on a floor, or that the living room I'm in is littered with similarly crashed-out bodies, my eyes are drawn to a single, piercing beam of sunlight that's found a gap in the grubby curtains. I lie, watching the smoke that still lingers dance with dust inside the beam. It's mesmerising. I'm probably still a little drunk.

I get up, ignoring five or six other people on the floor. I'm not even sure who they are. Checking that I'm fully clothed and I've got my fags, purse and keys, I head out the door of the flat into the street – it's only then that I realise I don't know where I am. But it doesn't matter. Last night was amazing, I do remember that much. I'm filled with memories of laughter, dancing, of... wait, was I kissing that guy with the ponytail? Who cares! It won't be on Facebook – it doesn't exist yet. It's 1994. I am a party girl. And I love it.

Twenty years on, I can still taste the Marlboro Lights, the Red Stripe lager, and remember that song we used to listen to, you know, the one by The Crash Test Dummies, what was it called? But this wasn't a particular night; it was any night, every night. Because back then, I wasn't driven by career ambition, or a hobby, or sport,

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or anything like that. I was driven by one thing: hedonism.

Recently, I needed to find a particular photo in my huge trunk of keepsakes, and was taken aback when I realised that practically every picture of me from the ages of about 16 to 30 is taken after dark. And not just at night, but at parties. Photo after photo of me, in various sparkly frocks, with my arm around friends, boyfriends, and people I couldn't name. Who *was* that guy in the deerstalker hat with the cigar? And what about that girl, the one I'm dancing with, *very* closely? Her name escapes me. I think she was Spanish...

This was the woman my husband fell in love with. Jack Daniel's-swigging, spliff-puffing, table-dancing, chaotic, but generally laughing, never crying. I was a pretty good drunk, I think. Always one of the last to leave, but never the one slumped in the corner, sobbing. Where is that woman now? Has she gone forever? I peer into the photos, scrutinising my hippie market clothes and pre-children figure. Analysing my face, checking to see if I had crow's feet back then. You know what? I look fun. I wonder if I still am...

With age comes responsibility

It got me thinking. What's changed? Well, my age, for one thing. Falling out of a taxi because you overdid the mojitos is funny when you're 20. It's still funny-ish when you're 30. But as time marches on, it starts to look a bit undignified. Less 'party girl' and more 'old soak'. A bit like Patsy from *Ab Fab* (remember her?), only without the endless legs and comedy timing.

Then there's good old responsibility, which can come in several guises. Work is one of them. In my early twenties, I was either a (not very diligent)



student, or in and out of various jobs on my way to finding a career path. I worked as a waitress, which I loved. I worked evenings in a bookshop, which was perfect, as I could sleep till lunchtime. I even signed on the dole for a summer after I graduated, just so that I could focus properly on the serious job of clubbing.

Now, I work and I love my career, so I want to be clear-headed when I sit down at my laptop, not hazy from the night before. I also have a home to run, meals to cook and children to mother. None of these would work particularly well if I woke up one Thursday morning on a living room floor on the other side of town. And my other responsibility, my husband, would probably be calling his lawyer if I did.

Last but not least, there's The Fear. I

got tired of it. The horrible, 'What did I say?' 'Do all my friends hate me?' 'What on earth was I doing with that guy?' feeling that you get the next day. Thankfully, in my partying days, there wasn't the immediacy of social media. Photos would be taken, but they would appear at someone's house in a glossy black folder a week or so later, after they'd come back from being developed at Boots. And if, when sorting through them, you saw an unflattering one, well, you'd just slip it into your bag and rip it up later. These days, it would be going viral by 1am on the same night as the party. But I still had The Fear, and I certainly don't miss it.

So I'm older, more responsible and less keen to wake up feeling like everyone loathes me. But do I still have the desire to forget the day-to-day now

and again, to step outside of life, just for one evening – and feel a night full of promise and the unknown stretching out ahead of me like I used to? Depending on how long I've got a babysitter booked for, I would say yes.

Keen on reality

As an adult, I'm now able to draw a line more carefully between escaping life, and avoiding it. And I think that is what saves me from being the (OK, I admit it) slightly dysfunctional young woman I was. Back then, I was dodging responsibility, putting off a career, avoiding life, reality even. But these days, I'm rather keen on my reality. So what I'm after is the feeling of that release, that abandon – but without the feeling of coming crashing back down to earth the next day.

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After all, it's on nights when wine flows and nobody looks at the clock that the laughter rings the loudest and we all open up a bit more. Have you ever said, 'I wasn't sure about her, but we really bonded on that night out'. Or 'I didn't think I liked her until the party'? Maybe we all need that release; that distance from the office or the supermarket or the school run, to have exchanges that mean a bit more, that reveal a little more of our emotions than we're willing to give away in the lunchtime queue at the sandwich shop.

Last week, I went out with some women I didn't know that well – I moved house in the last year and made some new friends. It was exciting: I had a late pass (a wonderful feeling when you have small children), and no plans the next day. Did I wake up on a living room floor? No. Did I feel terrible? No. (The Fear, it seems, doesn't get you every time.) Did I have an amazing time? Yes. I laughed, I sang (badly), I danced, and had the kind of conversations you can never have in daylight hours.

That party girl in the photos, she's still around. She doesn't come out that often, but I love it when she does.

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