

**A HUNDRED-TWENTY, LESS ONE
(GRADUATION)**

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I arrive late and alone
This evening in June
And the band strikes up
The time-honored tune
Pomp and Circumstance
Resounds through the room
But the uplifting notes
Displace none of my gloom.

I slip into a seat
Far removed from the crowd
As the grads file in
Deservedly proud
I pause for a moment
My head is bowed
But to honor these students
Was something I'd vowed.

They had comforted me
In my hours of need
Since the death of my daughter
At the age of sixteen
Halfway through
Their junior year
They had lost a friend
Whom they held dear.

They take their seats
A hundred-twenty, less one
I regain control
Though my heart weighs a ton.
Speeches begin
They mention her name
Because they're less one
They won't be the same.

The school is presented
A gift from the class
Beautiful trees in her honor
Along with a plaque
Proclaiming affections
For a friends who is gone
That they, too, are sad
They're a hundred-twenty, less one.

My vision's an ocean
Of blurred red and white
As I try to focus
To see their delight
As they leave the stage
Diplomas in hand
Their parents rejoicing
Beginning to stand.

I cannot move
'Til it's over and done
Mortarboards flying
A hundred -twenty, less one.
I quickly slip out
The way that I came
Not wanting to dampen
Their dazzling flames.

My tears run unchecked
I can't stop them now
I've gotten through it
Though I'll never know how.
My one consolation
This moment in time –
She, too, has graduated
But to heights sublime.