

## Dating 90s Style

His puffed eyes sting, red and raw, but his mind is numbed to mere physical pain. Head bowed, tear-blurred, he stares down at clasped hands that shake with terror.

They should be back soon.

A final re-enactment plays on the silent screen behind his salty eyes. Brief scenes strobe together, the continuum of his thoughts ruptured by the random firings of overloaded synapses.

The party: music deafening and booming, bass beats vibrating the floor underfoot.

The dancing: close and physical, thigh against groin, slippery skin sliding under sweaty palms.

The drink: clandestine and intoxicating, liberating and illicit. Banned on campus.

Her room: room-mate blessedly absent, sent away by God (he thought) on unspecified business. Kissing and cuddling, groping and caressing, fondling and, finally, fucking.

Those memories bereft of pleasure, so cut to: the accusations, the dean's office, the police house, the courtroom trial.

Non-consensual sex, she'd called it. Afterwards. She was pressured; he'd brought his manly strength (all 140 pounds of it) down to bear. She didn't want to do it; she thought he'd hurt her. He'd given her liquor, so she'd let him lick her.

She cried in the dock, pointed her finger.

"There! That's the man who took away my freedom, my self-respect. He's the monster who turned me into a *victim*." That word.

His defense was weak. After all, he'd done all the things she'd said. Young and inexperienced he believed the prosecution: he was a male beast with uncontrollable urges, slaking his filthy depraved lust on this sweet innocent child. Except it hadn't seemed like that at the time.

The jury marches in, their faces set into masks of thinly disguised contempt. They say, these faces, "8 to 10 without parole." They say, these 12 countenances good and true, "We have done our duty in the eyes of God and for the good of our children."

The foreman steps forward and speaks in a voice loud, clear and laden with righteousness:

"Guilty"