

Be warned

THOSE who are parents will understand and might even agree. Those who are not yet parents should read on and be warned: fathers, don't challenge your sons, mothers, make peace with your girls. Realise, your time has gone. And if you proclaim 'That's not true, and if it's true, it's unfair', understand: if it was or is not true, it was not true when you were squeezed out of your mother's belly. And if it's unfair now, it was unfair then.

This occurred to me, sitting in the garden with a low evening sun, a gentle breeze, now no longer hot, but not yet cold and my drink, a bottle of lager, allowing me and my fancy to wander without plan. There came a second thought: don't generalise, never generalise. Yet how can we not?

That's the trouble with difference: at one level we are all the same. All fathers are fathers, all mothers are mothers, blond or dark, black or white, young or old. All fathers and mothers will tell you the same tales, and few vary. 'oh, he or she was a lovely, lovely boy or girl, and then, well, I don't know, then he or she changed. Yes, I was expecting it, of course I was, that's what happens, all birds fledge and fly away. But I was still surprised. If I'm honest, I thought I might be different. But I wasn't.'

Fathers don't challenge your sons, Mothers make peace with your girls. For that's how you will show your love.

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Years ago, far too many now, and in the future far too many more, my son was young, not yet at school, and his delight was to watch Fireman Sam. His greater delight was to watch Fireman Sam with me, and he came, often, to ask: 'Daddy, will you watch Fireman Sam with me?' I was reluctant, always, there were other things to do. So I watched again the episodes I'd seen before, a repetition which bored me but delighted the lad by my side who knew every scene and spoke the lines. Soon, on some pretext or another, off I slunk, not yet wise enough to value every second my young son chose to spend with me. Shame is not regret for lies told or friends betrayed, shame is wasting time you can never reclaim.

One day, I and my daughter, she then twelve and strong-willed, went shopping. I parked the car, we both got out, and I took her hand. She pulled it away. I said nothing, for there was nothing to say, but I knew my 'little girl' was no longer my 'little girl'.

Some years later, another twelve, now the mother of her own strong-willed 'little girl', carrying a second child and suffering from eternal, nine-month

morning sickness, she told me the truth: 'I was always scared off you, growing up. I heard you shouting at people on the phone, shouting at Mum, saying you would leave when we had grown up. How do you think a young girl feels to hear that?' The shocking part? This was news to me, blind-sided me, I had no idea. The sad part? There's now nothing I can do. Nothing.

Fathers don't challenge your sons because the time will come when they, stronger, more intent, will take up the challenge, happily, and beat you at the game they will soon play again but then will lose. Mothers, make peace with your girls. Don't deny them the passions which course through them, the red-hot will to find a man, any man, a man to certify their womanhood. Yes, warn them and keep them well-informed, educate your 'little girl' to beware the token love of a hard cock and a ruthless will, but remember, her life is hers not yours. As yours was yours and not your mother's.

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We talk of oil and water, of diamonds and minerals, of rare earths and knowledge, but there is just one treasure in this world, one so often, too often, unwelcome, so often unexpected, too often neglected and resented by a selfish race. But forget self. Fathers, don't challenge your sons, mothers make peace with your daughters.