

**BIG ON LITTLE: MEHER MARFATIA**

# An open letter

Dear Son,

YOU weren't quite four when you became an excited elder brother. I drove home from hospital happy that the second baby was a girl and that you loved showing her off. Among the first visitors to see us was an old friend, the mother of two boys. Who unforgettably said: "When people tell me I must miss having a daughter, I think, maybe. But it's a double chance, twice the opportunity to raise two fine young men."

Well, I'm thankful for the shot I got to groom even the one. You.

Because God knows the world desperately needs a few more good men. Mere months before you turn 21 you stand on the brink. About to come of age yet already arrived into an age that could and should make you rage.

Rage at the living hell we've hurtled into as a city. Rage against its slide from grace to disgrace. Rage especially on seeing where it hits the women in your life: sister, girlfriend, other women friends.

There's no tougher task any parent faces today than raising a daughter to stay safe and a son to stay sensitive. You know our endless try-to-keep-alert-at-all-times dining table discussions after each fresh atrocity reported.

And I don't only mean the ultimate horrors of rape, mutilation and murder. Other wars are waged — less violent, as venal. Seeing her as an appendage, accessory or arm candy, let's count the ways to snuff someone out while she is still alive.

What does it take to kill a woman without being confirmed a criminal? Subtly but surely savage and ravage her. Mock and manipulate. Maim without touching, cut without slashing. Commit ugly small everyday acts of aggression. Sneer and snarl, bludgeon and browbeat, hurt and humiliate.

How else can you finish her off? By dominating and destroying her. By being a boor and a bully. By being acidic without tossing a drop of acid on her face. You could disfigure her by just not figuring her out. Lord over her with impunity. Claim her with entitlement. Play deaf to the word 'No', pretend to hear 'Yes' instead. Force and reduce her to a wraith of her former self, bring her to breaking point. Be monstrous, manic. 'Be



Human' is simply cold print on a T-shirt. Respect? Restraint? What's that?

Abuse assumes unlikely forms... emotional pain, mind games, might-is-right tyranny. It's hardly all testosterone-tipping swagger and bluster. Anger hides veiled under supreme suaveness. Manners mutate, quiet erupts. The sweet talker tricks, the smooth operator reneges, the mild man thunders privately.

Prescriptive or plain deceptive, male ego is vile. It actually emasculates, leaving you wimpy and weak. Losing it is the manliest thing you can do. If conceit and control get the better of a relationship, she's never really yours. But walking freely beside you, treated always an equal, she binds fast forever. Understood and encouraged, she flows fully into her own, sans fear or fetter. Hold on to that. Cherish it. Celebrate it. Because gentleness is power, softness is strength.

At a quiz staged in junior school, you once won the team its final 'media round' with a true clincher. Asked to supply the tagline for popular product ranges, your cue was 'Raymond'. A bare beat from the brand name being announced, you offered: 'The complete man'.

From the audience I cheered. Then, I'd put my hands together for the correct answer you gave. Today, I will if it's the conscious choice you make — to live embracing your feminine side. Evolved. Infinite. The complete man.

Love,  
Mum.

Meher Marfatia is the author of 10 books for children and two for parents. She has mothered her own kids well past the terrible twos and almost past the troubled teens. Reach her at: [mehermarfatia@gmail.com](mailto:mehermarfatia@gmail.com)