Our Daughter
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It is time we turned our eyes to the future. Time we gave some thought to life without our daughter. For we hope she'll soon be leaving home.

It couldn't be harder without her than with her. Oh, we've learnt to accept her domination of the house; and we know her little ways. We know her voice, her smile, her teeth, we know her will. We know it very well, we've felt it long enough. We've watched her, over the years, organising the pocket money, playing with stinks, reading her one book a year, our philistine daughter, the same book, the same, of course; we've seen her making, without being a dirty person herself, a mess, making our house the dirty house. We've heard her berate us for its unpersuading look, and we cry, we cry because there may be beneath the surface worse.

We aren't ever sure of anything, with our daughter in the house. There may be worse.

People ask us, with disapproval, moral disapproval, how it is that I, for example, can bring myself to visit those particular other houses, where they beat their children, or deal out colossal punishments to children who throw stones, houses where there may be unseen oppression, or very obvious discrimination, houses in which improper activities, dark doings, eaves-dropping and forced labour in the garden are the norm; and we answer, with moral pain, we answer then, how can we live in our own house. How can we live in our own house without shame?

It is we who have made our daughter, she is our father and her mother, she wasn't really brought by the stock. We've told for her, some of us, and provided for her, loved her and worshipped her, we fell for her, perhaps, and for her nursery ideology, we've felt stirred and proud, at the least lifting of her finger we've taken our medicine, swallowed purge after purge, black drinks. Think! It is we, not she, who are to blame for her, we who truly should not feel pride again until we can say, we are ashamed. We should be ashamed.

It is time for a review of the nursery. On the floor she has our train set, its stations painted a garish new red, all the cars in all the stations, all the doors and all the ironwork, and through the stations whistles the crude comfort of its carriages, the designs and colours of her re-vamped choco-choo. Poor train set. On the floor, our dolls' house. Our farm, with its polluted pond. Our toy hospital. Plastic policemen with bent arms. Only our model soldiers seem rather good. She tends to set the contents of our nursery at odds with itself and sulking, the dolls at odds with each other, the teddy, we know, injured in a remote cranny. The meritocracy of the nursery table and the nursery carpet functions with merciless imprecision, and there are many more figures lying tossed aside. The nursery atmosphere is uglier. The stinks abandoned, toy till with a broken bell, the ships and oil rigs listing in the bath, we find a catalogue of ills, whilst she points to the bullshit van, propelling itself bullishly round the nursery and every so often going bumpety bump over its own security guardrail along with her head in the gutter. Bumpety bump.

For all this, for this incoherence, we are ourselves to blame. Didn't our supposition that she sprang from nowhere render her somehow attractive! Does our daughter deserve our hostility, after being so encouraged in her little starts! Didn't we bring her up! We did. We did. Dobbin's bridle was complete with blinkers long before she stood on a chair to mount him, mounted him and insisted on hugging his mane. Poor old Dobbin.

We groan. We beat our breasts and blink at one another and we, like children ourselves, in trying to recall the moment, for there must have been one, of our baby's conception, gaze into quite vacant minds; children who can't begin to picture thingie in thingie and bingo. Does it matter, when or how...? It doesn't matter, it's ancient history, and history, even if a lesson lies in it, has a habit of passing. It is hardly the time to reward the dreamy.

The cuckoo clock has wound down so we might think of taking away its key altogether, its mockery may be an invitation to linger; so long as she can hear its mechanism whirring, it occurs to us, so long as the little door keeps opening and the bird popping out, so long as it delivers its song and darts back, she flourishes. She is a big girl now. Our nest, we sense, is full of broken twigs.

We all look forward to her leaving home.

Dobbin, rocked slily. Dolls. Torn, smashed dolls, and smart dolls. Trains, dented. Toy town. The bricks and blocks. The whole nursery, shaken and mortified. The very stinks themselves suspect she mismanaged the chemistry.

It is time we forgot. The tale of how we were set at each other's throats needn't be repeated ad nauseam. Are we not perfectly capable of organising ourselves and our money affairs, of laying the fruit in its dish and the bread in its basket? Yes, we say, yes. Capable of seeing that there is, after all, ripper fruit, fruits tenderer and sweeter than others, better yeast and better dough, fish and fowl, pork and... cow; why suck the lemon when the orange can be plucked from a tree that drinks no more water, eats no more fertiliser, grows no higher and yields no lesser crop than its sour cousin; for it is only nature and in the lap of gods, that one banana shall be shapelier than the last, one sausage, one buttered sesame seed roll.

Naturally, there is forgetting and forgetting. Her havoc shall never be, in a sense, forgotten. In order to feel proud we must first feel ashamed, deeply, horribly ashamed, and to that end we cannot forget it. That's very plain. Yet other ends there are always.

Without our daughter enlightenment will come, will come back.

Let's quietly drop her vision of the future, vision is often suspect; let's say, there is room again for all; room for, shall we be honest, her mother books, cello lessons and chess; room for the brightest and...room for the dimmer; room, no, rewards, rewards for the bright, the ingenious, the bold, and as a consequence frequent emptying of Piggy at the bank. So long as Piggy goes to the bank ninpence can be paid for weeding the garden, however be...however badly the weeding is done, and if someone has the gumption to spray it with selective hormone killer that someone will earn ninpence and a bonus, because children should always be encouraged, what is a child without gumption, where is the nursery without enterprising children, what would be the point of keeping Dobbin idle, without enterprise there would be stultification, flattening its nose on the nursery linoleum, new eyes are constantly needed, a turn-over in eyes, not vision, is healthy, nobody wants to be so misguided as to deny such sentiments, deny that vision is a dangerous tool, sound vision and unsound vision, they arrive both at a sticky end. Now, with bucket and spade, with Dobbin and Apple and Piggy, rosy cheecks, a sensitive glow.

Our daughter will leave us a precious, a most invaluable legacy, a mess is far better than a feast, why should beggars be gluttons. The clobbering has gone down in history and history has its uses. She did do some clobbering, a nursery is a jungle and even with our elevated moral sense we can see that clobbering has its uses, works for the good of all, out of the mess new ashes, wonderful, alive and soft.