

It was a cherished child, and the gift the father had chosen for the cherished child was much cherished as well. For both were his.

His birthday fell towards the fag end of June. He had bought his present during the summer holidays, on one of the days he returned from office. He had taken care to hide it from his eyes; after all, boys loved surprises, didn't they?

It had not taken much thought for him to choose the gift. After all, the boy was eight this year. It was high time he learned the facts of life, thought Dad. Besides, this way, he looked forward to spending long, cozy hours with his son. While black battled against white, he would battle with his son and make him see a few things he wanted his son to see. While he taught his son to open up his army to attack own father, he would probably be able to open up a bit more to his son.

His own father had been strict, unapproachable and strident. He did not want to be like that to his son, but try as he might, he did not know how to approach his son, how to make him like him, revere him, respect him and cherish him. For he wanted to be he son's hero.

Unfortunately, things had not gone quite like that. He could not hold him without the baby when he cried, nor feed him without spilling food all over. He could not talk three sentences to the boy, for the boy would clam up before the first was out. He had strict notions of discipline, and raised his voice when he had to make his point felt. The father felt it incumbent upon him to teach the son what was what. Unfortunately, he did not know how to go about it.

"My son thinks I am some old guy around the house," he would fume to his wife, though the son was only eight, a mere infant, and his age was not all that venerable.

Her only response would be her usual silence, and an enigmatic smile.

"I think it is because of you that he hates me so much. He loves you so much that I cease to be anything to him."

Well, all that was going to change. He was going to bond with his son through the birthday present. A chess set. What big pieces they were! He remembered his own chess set, the tiny magnetic set purchased after hoarding money for months when he was fifteen. Earlier, he used to play with his best friend. He was the better player of the two, but the chess set was the friend's, and he could not play as and when he wanted. He had felt the richest kid on the block when he got his own set, a fortune in the dire circumstances that he grew up in. He challenged every player he knew to a game, and beat them all. He had been known as some kind of prodigy in that tiny society.

But his own father, the mathematics teacher and headmaster of the local high school, the famed chess player of yesteryears...he was the only player the son could not hope to challenge, though he felt confident of victory. When he was growing up, the little chess set had been the symbol of his reconciliation with the father he did not know. He would fantasize about the day his father and he would sit down at the same table and set up the pieces, and play each other as father and son. He would get to know the man half of whose genes made him what he was. He would be able to let the man know how much he was regarded in the local community, and how proud he was to be the son of such an illustrious man. Over a game of chess, when they discussed moves and tactics, man to man, he would be able to tell his father what plans he had for his future and what strategies he hoped to use to win his own game of life. He hoped to be able to talk, really talk to his dad, live his experiences, share his life.

Sadly, that day was never to come, for his father belonged to the generation which held its children at arm's length. The distance was never bridged, and the armies never met; either to battle it out or over a peace treaty. The *status quo*

continued through the son's marriage and father's death, and the birth of the grandson, the birthday boy, blessed with the name of the grandfather.

Maybe it was the name, but just like his father had never been close to him, he could never be close to his son.

The boy woke up, with messy hair, and rubbed his eyes as he walked to the dining table.

"Presents!" he exclaimed, running over to the table.

"Yes, yes, all in good time. First go to the bathroom, and then brush, and then gargle, then have your milk, and then you can have your presents. They won't run away anywhere. WASH YOURSELF IN THE BATHROOM!! Where's your towel? Oh, and happy birthday, son."

The boy glared up at the father and went to get the towel, rolling his eyes.

"Where do these kids learn these things? Stupid TV..."

The boy finished the stipulated activities, and drank his milk at top speed, blowing on the edge of the glass.

"Careful," said Dad irritably. "You will choke on the milk."

"I won't. Why do you get so worked up for everything?" said the boy through the glass, and proceeding to wipe the milk from his lips, went over to the small pile on the table.

"I did not get worked up. Stop answering back."

The boy rolled his eyes again and picked up the long black package.

"He's picking mine first," thought Dad., not without a sliver of excitement.

"Whoa, this is big!" Dad winced inwardly as the boy ripped the careful packing apart in seconds, sending the paper bits flying all around the room.

The boy looked up. "A chess set?"

Dad smiled. "Like it?"

The boy looked confused for a second. "'Tis ok." He laid the brand new chess set, with its big shiny pieces, on the table, after examining it for about a second.

And as an after thought, so as not to hurt his dad's feelings, "Thanks."

"Do you like it? Do you know to play? Have you been taught at school? Do you want me to teach you?"

"No Dad. Not now. Chess is boring, dad. Hey, what's this?"

The wrapping went off equally quickly, but the reaction was downright different.

"My Playstation! Aunty remembered! Woo-hoo-hoo! Dad, look, I got my Playstation!" With another excited whoop, the boy ran into his room to explore his new toy.

"Well," thought Dad, gathering up the pieces of paper strewn all around, "at least my son got what *he* wanted."