

Your main commentary should be focused on IT. Other topics may also be addressed.

When I fell into disgrace many years ago — when I left the force and Rachel left me — it was Helen who came to my side. I don't mean she thought I was blameless, but she came to my side. The strangest thing, when we'd been such enemies. When you might have thought she'd have relished it, gloated over it. At least have taken her mother's side.

But she took my side.

The strangest thing. She's almost thirty now, and I'm turned fifty. The years between us haven't changed, but when we see each other now it feels like we're just two contemporaries, two grown-ups. So different from when, say, I was thirty-something and she was just fifteen. She used to make my life a misery — as if police work couldn't be tough enough — she used to give me hell.

I think she hated me. She might have hated both of us, but I know she hated me, and it was my being a cop that put the seal on it. 'My dad's a policeman': it simply wasn't a cool or easy thing for any teenager to say in those days. Even if I wore plain clothes, even if it didn't show that much. My dad's a policeman and therefore one of the ones on the other side. My dad's a policeman and therefore one of the pigs.

I'd sometimes wonder — small comfort — if it wouldn't have been worse if I'd had a son. On the other hand, sometimes I wished I'd had a son — as well — to take away some of Helen's heat.

The sulks, the tempers, the silences that burned. Where does it all get brewed? And Rachel, a primary-school teacher, used to the tantrums of little brats. But Rachel and Helen, I thought, had some kind of bond that was beyond me. How does it work — a policeman's daughter, a policeman's wife? I always thought they were friends.

Maybe it wasn't that I was a cop. Maybe that wasn't the main thing at all.

And it wasn't that she just took it out on me, she took it out on herself too, or so it seemed. She took it out on herself to take it out on me. She'd wear those awful clothes and dye her hair a different colour every month and make it go spiky like the bristles on an old

brush. God knows how she got away with it at school — but we got the letters, the cautions, about the code for dress and personal appearance. And me a policeman. And Rachel up for Deputy Head.

But the strange thing was her schoolwork was always pretty good.

Not like me, in my day. Poor marks all round.

(I've told Helen most things now, of course, most of the story).

Then she had a stud stuck in the side of her nose. Then another on the other side. In those days that sort of thing hadn't yet become a kind of uniform.

Her business, her nose. But at weekends she'd go out with some gang, some gaggle — we never knew who they were — and sometimes disappear all night. Being a policeman doesn't stop you worrying, the opposite if anything. And sometimes I'd think that sooner or later I'd have to go and fetch her from some nick. Drugs, whatever. And that would be it, that would make her day. The perfect piece of retaliation.

So when real scandal came my way, when I got drummed out of the Force and proved to be, after all, a dodgy cop, a bad cop (but a good one too — I'd made DI), shouldn't that have been her moment of triumph?

But which way did it work? If being a policeman was bad in the first place, then being a bad one ... Do two bads make a good?

We both knew which way it worked for Rachel. Rachel decided— almost overnight— that I wasn't just a bad cop, I was a bad husband, a bad deal altogether. Rachel decided I was no longer for her and went her own way. That's how it worked, in a word, for her. And Helen, I would have thought, would have jumped the same way too.