

RESPONSIBILITY

By Sam Post

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CHARACTERS: FATHER, DAUGHTER, MOTHER

TIME: Present

SETTING: Home

Notes about Dad:

He wants to get along with his daughter, and he wants her to grow up and assume responsibility — but not right away. Within a logical time frame.

In the opening exchange, he tries to remain calm, using reason and logic. His first mistake is losing his cool when she says, "Money is capitalist filth. Don't want it." He allows this to set him off. His second mistake is his reaction to her reference to the "American Taliban." Perhaps this represents — to a parent — the ultimate in loss and disappointment and pain that an irresponsible child could potentially inflict. At this point, he comes down to her level and begins to argue with a teenager, acting like a teenager himself. She's better at it because the conflict takes place on her level. Thus, the battle is really over and she has won. The rest is mopping up.

Notes about Daughter:

She wants a car, but what she really wants is to become a responsible adult. The problem is, she wants to be an adult, and have what adults have, before — in the eyes of her father — she is doing the things that adults do. Also, she defines responsibility in a different way (perhaps an equally legitimate view as her father's). Although her methods are not necessarily mature — she's disorganized, illogical, and testy — she does deserve a certain amount of credit for taking responsibility. She makes bad grades and embraces them. With her father, she sets a goal and works relentlessly to achieve it.

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If she can get Dad to argue on her level, thereby taking him out of logic and into emotion — she wins. "Money is capitalist filth," gets the ball rolling. The "American Taliban" remark is the turning point.

Notes about Mom:

She wants Dad to be more understanding and let her grow. She wants the daughter to grow up, be nice, and have a car. Mostly, she wants them to get along so that she survives.

(A chair. FATHER sits with a newspaper. Enter DAUGHTER.)

FATHER: What do you want for your birthday?

DAUGHTER: A car.

FATHER: You can't have a car.

DAUGHTER: That's what I want.

FATHER: You can't have it.

DAUGHTER: You asked me.

FATHER: What else do you want?

DAUGHTER: That's all.

FATHER: You know I can't afford that.

DAUGHTER: You asked what I wanted.

FATHER: How about a CD?

DAUGHTER: No thanks.

FATHER: You love CDs. Just tell me what you want.

DAUGHTER: I don't want you to get me a CD.

FATHER: You can pick out your own. I'll get you a gift certificate.

DAUGHTER: Don't want one.

FATHER: A gift card to Blockbuster?

DAUGHTER: No.

FATHER: You love to rent movies.

DAUGHTER: Not any more. Who wants to sit around here and watch a video?

FATHER: I'll get you a gift certificate to Belk's.

DAUGHTER: I despise Belk's.

FATHER: Where would you like a gift certificate to?

DAUGHTER: I hate gift certificates.

FATHER: How about a phone card?

DAUGHTER: No. I hate those. Too much trouble.

FATHER: I've been thinking for a while that you could use a cell phone.

It's an expense I was putting off, but what the heck.

DAUGHTER: I'm not wild about 'em.

FATHER: You always want to borrow mine.

DAUGHTER: I'd probably lose it.

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FATHER: You've never lost mine. Listen, this takes the fun out of it. I'll get you something – maybe a cell phone – and we'll call it a surprise.

DAUGHTER: Don't get a stupid cell phone. I'll throw it in a dumpster.

FATHER: Then money. I'll give you some cash and we'll both be happy.

DAUGHTER: Money is capitalist filth. Don't want it.

(FATHER lowers the newspaper.)

FATHER: You want a car! How do you think people buy those?

(sarcastic)

DAUGHTER: I dunno. How?

FATHER: With money! A lot of it.

DAUGHTER: Cars are useful.

FATHER: Cars are a pain in the butt.

DAUGHTER: I don't think so.

FATHER: You've never had one. They're dangerous. They break. They require constant maintenance. Gas. It's a huge *responsibility* to own a car.

DAUGHTER: Eh.

FATHER: I wish I could give you that.

DAUGHTER: Then give me one.

FATHER: Not a car. Responsibility.

DAUGHTER: I've already got it.

FATHER: That's a crock.

DAUGHTER: I do.

FATHER: You don't know what it is.

DAUGHTER: What is it?

FATHER: Tell you what it is?

DAUGHTER: Yeah. Explain it.

FATHER: Responsibility is... being... responsible. Having... being... able to respond.

DAUGHTER: I respond.

FATHER: Well, it's more. It's being re-spon-sive. It's taking care of your own life. Being accountable. That's it... accountable... for your life. Knowing that... what happens... you know... if it's good... you take the credit. If it doesn't turn out so well, it's... ***(pause)*** ...your own fault!

(pause) Then you respond accordingly.

DAUGHTER: I'm responsible.

FATHER: You are not!

DAUGHTER: I am! ***(pause)*** I should be an A student, right?

FATHER: Right.

DAUGHTER: And I'm not. Right?

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FATHER: Right. Exactly. You don't work up to your potential. You aren't responsible.

DAUGHTER: But I am. I know I'm a bad student. I *choose* to get Bs and Cs and Ds. I embrace them. I know the assignments and I respond accordingly. I'm even responsible for living with you, in this house, in this capitalistic, money-grubbing, time-impoveryished society. If I wanted to, I could choose something different. I could... well... move somewhere – like the American Taliban did.

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