



Source: Anton La Guardia, 'Nuclear chief gives Tehran UN ultimatum', *Telegraph*, London; Reuters; *Washington Post* in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 18/01/06.

Tags: [child/parent](#), [diplomacy](#), [war](#), [home](#)  
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Please do the right thing, you'll feel so much better. If you don't, you will be in big trouble, Dad will send you to your room, you'll be totally grounded—no phone calls, no friends to stay—nothing, and you'll get smacked, beaten even. You know that's where it's going. It's so obvious, even a fool could see that, and you're no fool. Dad's no fool either, he won't want to do it, but he has to, because he's strong and firm and he's not afraid to take a stand. And besides, we have rules you know. His rules. He made 'em and we live 'em. That's just the way it is.

'Okay? So fess up. Go on, come clean. It'll get worse the longer you leave it. It'll fester there, in the dark, growing and growing until the sheer force of it will just blow you away. Right away. And then we'll all be up shit creek without a paddle. You know that don't you? If he finds out, which he probably already has, he's going to say,

"I am at my wit's end with you, this is the last straw, you know you must not touch it, do not take it out at all, ever, am I making myself clear? It is very, very dangerous and it is not your place at all to do such a thing. Once and for all, leave it where it belongs, do not go around, behind my back surreptitiously squirreling it away into your secret stash, deep in the bowers of your filthy bedroom. My confidence in you is growing very thin son, you are revealing yourself to be a very dishonest and manipulative child.'

'Yep, that's what he will say, for sure. And then you'll say,

"Well I just won't talk to you anymore, why should I listen to you, who are you anyway? You don't care about me, you don't even know me, you have no idea who I am, what I think, how I think, why I think and feel as I do? Just no idea, so don't stand there with your god-given rules and tell me what to do 'or else'. I hate you, and I hate this family and I'm never going to come here or live here or eat dinner here again or anything.'

'Then it'll be outright war between you two and I'm here, stuck in the middle. No way, that's not happening, not if I can help it.

'You have to speak to him, address it somehow. If you can't say it, face to face, then write a letter. That's what mum would have done. Letters are good. You can say what you really want to say in a letter. You can get your point across without Dad standing right there, without losing your footing, caving in to his rules. Tell it like it is, from where you are, from here, not there.

'It's not entirely your fault, you know that don't you? It's the weather, it's been so hot, too hot, people have gone up in flames in this heat, it's blinding and bullish. Unrelenting. But it's raining now, it's a good day for

writing, thing's will flow. Just pick up a pen and write whatever comes. I know you can do it.

'Mum wrote me a letter once. We had a fight, about something, I can't remember what. I stormed off. I couldn't find the words. Didn't know what to do, or say. I needed more time, I couldn't face the situation, I didn't know whose fault it was, why it happened. It had just blown up, took us both by surprise. We didn't talk for days.

'Then in the post the letter came. One morning, bit like today, raining. The address ran as I carried it from the post box down the driveway into the front room. Like tears.

'I still have it, I'm not sentimental, as you know, I just never lost it. I know it off by heart now, every word.

"Dear darling, I am so sorry that we have come to this impasse. I have sat at this place for days, carried it with me, pondered the hows and whys and what to do's from here. I am afraid I have no answers or solutions for what we do and how. We have uncovered some very real and great differences between us, things I do not understand, parts of you I do not know. You are my son and I love you, but you are a stranger to me in this. Perhaps we cannot reach a resolution, perhaps no agreements are possible in which each feels the other's truth to be the one that must prevail. I wish only to make contact. I would be happy to come to your table, and sit with you, in silence if need be. Perhaps from there something will emerge, something that leads to comfortable distance and proximity. I am not learned at these things, my eyes do not show me the way. Shall we be lost together in this place, so unfamiliar and yet so rich? Perhaps we can begin, afresh and anew in this place with the discord that brought us here. Feeling our way around the shaky terrain, softly, gently.

Other ways than yours or mine, perhaps the rules we have, have failed us and perhaps in our failures we can find diplomacy. Who knows? This may be old woman's rubbish, a mother's love wanting integration and peace. Who knows? I leave you with a beginning, a place, open. All my love,  
Mum."

For a while he sat there, staring and then he said,

'Well, did you reply? What did you say? Have you kept your response? Do you remember it by heart too? Recite me that? Go on. What did you say and do to get from there to here, from then to now?'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Victoria Spence.*