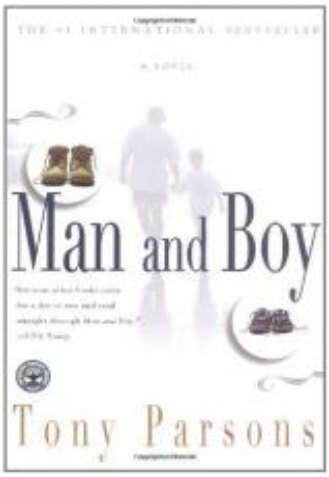
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Man and Boy: A Novel

by Tony Parsons



About the Book

Harry had it all: a beautiful wife, an adorable four-year-old son, and a high-paying media job. But on the eve of his thirtieth birthday, with one irresponsible act, he threw it all away. Suddenly he finds himself an unemployed single father trying to figure out how to wash his son's hair the way Mommy did and whether green spaghetti is proper breakfast food. This brilliantly engaging novel will tug at your heart as Harry learns to become a father to his son and a son to his aging father, takes stabs at finding new love, and makes the hardest decision of his life.

Discussion Guide

1. Did **Man and Boy** change any of your feelings about the kind of love a father feels for his child? How is the love a father has for his son or daughter different from the love a mother feels?

2. The author describes **Man and Boy** as "a generational love story -- the story of how love is passed down from generation to generation." Did **Man and Boy** succeed in showing how the love of a family passes down from generation to generation?

3. Harry Silver, the protagonist in **Man and Boy**, comes from an old-fashioned nuclear family, yet finds himself bringing up his son alone. Is the author nostalgic for the days when marriages lasted forever? Does he feel that a single-parent family is just as valid as a family with both mother and father still present?

4. Harry's wife leaves him after discovering he has had a one-night stand with a colleague from work. Is it convincing that a woman would give up a seemingly happy marriage for a stupid fling that her husband bitterly regrets?

5. Harry's father is an old-school dad -- a war hero, a breadwinner, a husband who plans to be there for a lifetime. Does Harry want to be that kind of man and that kind of father? Or does he realize that he has to be a new kind of father,

husband and man? Is **Man and Boy** a book about how men are changing?

6. Does Harry's relationship to his work change in the course of **Man and Boy?** Does his professional life become less important to him as he cares for his small son alone? Or does he still need his career as the foundation for his self-esteem? Do men and women have different attitudes toward their work? Do men and women have different attitudes toward their children?

7. Is there anything specifically "male" about **Man and Boy?** Would the story work equally well if it were about a woman being left to bring up her daughter alone while attempting to resolve her sometimes difficult relationship with her mother? Is **Man and Boy** gender specific?

8. What do you feel about the honor in **Man and Boy?** Is it there just to balance the book's darker themes of divorce and death? Or is it there to give the book a more realistic quality?

9. How does Harry's attitude toward his four-year-old son change during the course of **Man and Boy?** Does he become a better parent? Is he a good parent at the start of the book? What is a good parent in the context of **Man and Boy?**

10. What does Harry find most difficult about raising his son alone? Is it the practical problems of cooking, cleaning and getting the child to school? Or is it the emotional burden of knowing that he has failed to give his boy the same kind of stable family life that he enjoyed?

11. Is the divorce between Harry and Gina convincing? Do they still like each other at the end of the book? Do they still love each other? If not, where did their love go? And why? How does **Man and Boy** feel about divorce? Does it see divorce as an inevitable part of modern life, or something that is to be avoided at all costs? Does **Man and Boy** believe that the people who suffer most in divorce cases are children?

12. Harry is an incurable romantic. Is it dangerous for a man to be that addicted to romance? Why does it lead him into trouble and grief? Are men really bigger romantics than women?

13. Harry's new girlfriend, Cyd, has a daughter who is the same age as Harry's son. Why does Harry find it so difficult to accept that he will never be a father to Peggy, the little girl? Is it convincing that he is jealous of the child's relationship with her biological father? What kind of relationship does he develop with Peggy? Is it truly paternal, or just a cheap imitation of a father-daughter relationship? Can a stepfather ever matter the way a biological father does?

14. Why does it matter so much to Harry that his father is a decorated war hero? Does he wish that he was his father? In what way does Harry yearn to be more like his dad?

15. Why does Harry seem to have a much more easy and relaxed relationship with his mother than his father? What is the source of conflict between father and son? How does the mother try to mediate between them? Is the author more interested in Harry's relationship with his father than his relationship with the mother?

16. How does the relationship between Harry and his father differ from the relationship between Harry and his son? Is Harry the same kind of father as his own dad? In what way is he different? Is it only the divorce that makes Harry different from his father? Does **Man and Boy** believe that we give up on our relationships too easily?

17. The book contains graphic descriptions of watching a parent die of cancer. Are they convincing? How does Harry's relationship with his father change when he learns that his dad is terminally ill? How does Harry's father deal with his illness? By keeping the disease secret from his family for as long as he can, is Harry's father really protecting them? Does **Man and Boy** capture the raw grief of watching someone you love die of cancer?

18. After the disintegration of his marriage, Harry finds love again with Cyd. Has divorce changed his attitude toward love and marriage? How does his new love's daughter complicate their relationship?

19. Many readers have remarked on the emotion and tenderness in **Man and Boy**. Is it surprising that the author is a man?

20. Does the book have a happy ending? Do you feel that the relationship between Cyd and Harry will last? What has Harry's divorce taught him?

21. How does Harry cope with suddenly finding himself bringing up his four-year-old son alone? Is he suddenly aware of how much he relied on his wife? How does he learn to become a real parent?

22. How has Harry changed by the end of **Man and Boy?** How has he changed as a father? A lover? A man? Does Harry finally learn to put his son's interests above his own? Did you feel that Harry loves his son more than anything in the world? Is he a good father at the start of the book? Is he a good father at the end of the book? If he is a good father, then how could he have done something as destructive as having a one-night stand?

23. Two of the book's most important characters are the children, Pat and Peggy. How are they different? Are they different because they are a boy and a girl? Or because they have very different parents?

24. Does setting the book in the world of television have any effect on the text? Could it be just as easily set in any office or factory? Is Harry good at his job? Does dealing with highly demanding TV presenters teach him anything about dealing with his child?

25. Harry's son is obsessed with Star Wars. What is the significance of this obsession? Does the author use Star Wars as a metaphor for what he wants to say about fathers and sons? What is the symbolic importance of Star Wars in **Man and Boy?**

26. Harry clearly loves his father. Does Harry's father deserve to be loved so deeply by his son?

27. Harry learns that bringing a child into the world does not make you a man. Does he learn that simply staying with your family -- as his own father does -- does not necessarily make you a good husband, father or man?

28. Why does Harry's wife leave him -- because of his sexual betrayal, or because he has broken some greater trust? If Gina had not discovered his infidelity, would they have still had a "good" marriage? What is a "good" marriage?

29. What does the book tell us about single parents? Does the book believe that single mothers and single fathers are different? Does the book suggest that a man bringing up a child alone has more in common with a woman bringing up a child alone than he has with other men?

30. Does **Man and Boy** have any heroes? Is Harry a heroic figure? Is Harry's father? Is Gina?

31. Is **Man and Boy** a book about the rights of children?

32. Did the book change your opinion about single fathers?

Author Bio

Tony Parsons is an award-winning journalist and the international bestselling author of more than 10 novels, including MAN AND BOY, winner of the Book of the Year prize; ONE FOR MY BABY; and MAN AND WIFE, among others. He lives in London.

Critical Praise

Utterly irresistible.

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Publication Date: May 7, 2001
Paperback: 361 pages
Publisher: Touchstone
ISBN-10: 0743225082
ISBN-13: 9780743225083