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Man and Boy



TONY PARSONS
Man and Boy
The million-copy bestseller

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Par Tony Parsons : Man and Boy
before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Man and Boy:

'I cried five times
and laughed out loud four'
James Brown, *Observer*

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA fabulously engaging and exciting novel about a man who has to learn about life and love the hard way.Harry Silver has it all. A successful job in TV, a gorgeous wife, a lovely child. And in one moment of madness, he chucks it all away.Man and Boy is the story of how he comes to terms with his life and achieves a degree of self-respect, bringing up his son alone and, gradually, learning what words like love and family really mean.Very well written, pacy, funny, and heart-breakingly moving.ExtraitChapter OneSome situations to avoid when preparing for your all-important, finally-I-am-fully-grown thirtieth birthday.Having a one-night stand with a colleague from work. The rash purchase of luxury items you can't afford. Being left by your wife. Losing your job. Suddenly becoming a single parent. If you are coming up to thirty, whatever you do, don't do any of that. It will fuck up your whole day. Thirty should be when you

think -- these are my golden years, these are my salad days, the best is yet to come and all that old crap. You are still young enough to stay up all night, but you are old enough to have a credit card. All the uncertainties and poverty of your teens and twenties are finally over -- and good riddance to the lot of them -- but the sap is still rising. Thirty should be a good birthday. One of the best. But how to celebrate reaching the big three-oh? With a collection of laughing single friends in some intimate bar or restaurant? Or surrounded by a loving wife and adoring small children in the bosom of the family home? There has to be a good way of turning thirty. Perhaps they are all good ways. All my images of this particular birthday seemed derived from some glossy American sitcom. When I thought of turning thirty, I thought of attractive thirty-nothing marrieds fooling around like teens in heat while in the background a gurgling baby crawls across some polished parquet floor, or I saw a circle of good-looking, wisecracking friends drinking latte and showing off their impressive knitwear while wryly bemoaning the dating game. That was my problem. When I thought of turning thirty, I thought of somebody else's life. But that's what thirty should be -- grown-up without being disappointed, settled without being complacent, worldly wise but not so worldly wise that you feel like chucking yourself under a train. The time of your life. By thirty you have finally realized that you are not going to live forever, of course. But surely that should only make the laughing, latte-drinking present taste even sweeter? You shouldn't let your inevitable death put a damper on things. Don't let the long, slow slide to the grave get in the way of a good time. Whether you are enjoying the last few years of unmarried freedom or you have recently moved on to a more adult, more committed way of life with someone you love, it's difficult to imagine a truly awful way of turning thirty. But I managed to find one somehow. The car smelled like somebody else's life. Like freedom. It was parked right in the window of the showroom, a wedge-shaped sports car that, even with its top off, looked as sleek and compact as a muscle. Naturally it was red -- a corny, testosterone-stuffed red. When I was a little bit younger, such blatant macho corn would have made me sneer, or snigger, or puke, or all of the above. But now I found that it didn't bother me at all. A bit of testosterone-stuffed corn seemed to be just what I was looking for at this stage of my life. I'm not really the kind of man who knows what cars are called, but I had made it my business -- furtively lingering over the ads in glossy magazines -- to find out the handle of this particular hot little number. Yes, it's true. Our eyes had met before. But its name didn't really matter. I just loved the way it looked. And that smell. Above all, that smell. That anything-can-happen smell. What was it about that smell? Among the perfume of leather, rubber and all those yards of freshly sprayed steel, you could smell a heartbreaking newness, a newness so shocking that it almost overwhelmed me. This newness intimated another world that was limitless and free, an open road leading to all the unruined days of the future. Somewhere they had never heard of traffic cones or physical decay or my thirtieth birthday. I knew that smell from somewhere and I recognized the way it made me feel. Funny enough, it reminded me of that feeling you get when you hold a newborn baby. The analogy was far from perfect -- the car couldn't squint up at me with eyes that had just started to see or grasp one of my fingers in a tiny, tiny fist or give me a gummy little smile. But for a moment there it felt like it just might. "You only live once," the car salesman said, his heels clicking across the showroom floor. I smiled politely, indicating that I would have to think that one over. "Are you in the market for some serious fun?" he said. "Because if the MGF is about one thing, it's about fun." While he gave me his standard sales pitch, he was sizing me up, trying to decide if I was worth a test drive. He was pushy, but not so pushy that it made your flesh crawl. He was just doing his job. And despite my weekend clothes -- which because of the nature of my work were not really so different from my week clothes -- he must have seen a man of substance. A fast-track career looking for some matching wheels. Young, free and single. A life as carefree as a lager commercial. How wrong can you be? "This model has the Variable Valve Control system," he said with what seemed like genuine enthusiasm. "The opening period of the inlet valves can be varied by altering the rotational speed of each cam lobe." What the fuck was he going on about? Was it something to do with the engine? "A total babe magnet," he said, noting my dumbfounded expression. "Plenty of poke. A young single guy couldn't do any better than the MGF." This was my kind of sales pitch. Forget the technical guff, just tell me that you can lose yourself in a car like this. Let me know you can lose yourself. That's what I wanted to hear. The salesman was distracted by something on the street, and I followed his gaze out of the showroom's plate-glass wall. He was looking at a tall blond woman holding the hand of a small boy wearing a Star Wars T-shirt. They were surrounded by bags of supermarket shopping. And they were watching us. Even framed by all those plastic carrier bags and chaperoning a little kid, the woman was the kind that you look at more than once. What you noticed about her child -- and he was certainly her child -- is that he was carrying a long, plastic tube with a dull light glowing faintly inside. If

you had been to the cinema at any time over the last twenty years, you would recognize it as a light saber, traditional weapon of the Jedi Knights. This one needed new batteries. The beautiful woman was smiling at me and the salesman. The little kid pointed his light saber, as if about to strike us down. "Daddy," he mouthed from the other side of the plate-glass wall that divided us. You couldn't hear him but that's what he was saying. "My wife and son," I said, turning away, but not before I caught the disappointment in the salesman's eyes. "Got to go." Daddy. That's me. Daddy. "You don't even like cars," my wife reminded me, edging our old VW station wagon through the thick early evening traffic. "Just looking." "And you're too young for a midlife crisis," she said. "Thirty is much too young, Harry. The way it works, you wait for fifteen years and then run off with a secretary who's young enough to be your second wife. And I cut off the sleeves of all your suits. Not to mention your bollocks." "I'm not thirty, Gina," I chuckled, although it wasn't really all that funny. She was always exaggerating. "I'm twenty-nine." "For one more month!" she laughed. "It's your birthday soon," our boy said, laughing along with his mother, although he didn't have a clue why, and tapping me on the back of the head with his bloody light saber. "Please don't do that, Pat," I said. He was back there with the week's shopping, strapped into his little car seat and muttering under his breath, pretending to be in the cockpit of the Millennium Falcon with Harrison Ford. "I've lost my starboard engine," he jabbered away to himself. "Fire when ready." I turned to look at him. He was four years old with dirty blond hair that hung down over eyes that were the same shade of blue as his mother's. Tiffany blue.

Catching my eye, he grinned at me with pure childish delight. "Happy birthday, dear Daddy," he sang. "Happy birthday, birth-day." To Pat, my birthday was a chance to finally give me the homemade card he had hidden under his bed (Luke Skywalker decapitating a space monster with his trusty light saber). To me, it meant that the best might already be over. It really did. When would I feel the way I felt the night that my wife said that she would marry me? When would I feel the way I felt the morning that my son was born?

When would life be that -- I don't know -- real again? When? "When did you become interested in cars?" Gina said. She wouldn't let this car thing rest. "I bet you don't even know what kind of petrol this one uses, do you?" "Oh, come on, Gina." "What is it, then?" "Fucking hell." "The green kind," I said, taking a wild guess.

"You know -- nonleaded. The one that saves a rain forest every time you fill her up." "It's diesel, you doughnut," she laughed. "I never knew a man less interested in cars than you. What happened?" "What could I tell her? You don't tell a wife that some inanimate object somehow represents all those things you know you are never going to have. The places you are never going to see, the women you are never going to love, the things you are never going to do. You can't tell a wife all that stuff. Not even a wife you love very much.

Especially not a wife like that. "It only carries one passenger," she said. "What does?" I said, playing dumb. "You know very well what I'm talking about," she said. "It only carries one passenger -- one thin, female passenger." "You're still pretty thin and female," I said. "Or you were the last time I looked." "What's brought all this on, Harry? Come on. Tell me." "Maybe I'm compensating for becoming an old fart," I said. "I'm joining the old fart's club so, pathetically, I want to recapture my glorious youth. Even though I know it's ultimately futile and even though my youth wasn't particularly glorious. Isn't that what men do?" "You're turning thirty," she said. "We're going to open a couple of bottles and have a nice cake with candles." "And balloons," Pat said. "And balloons," Gina said. She shook her lovely head. "We're not having you put down,

Harry." Gina was a couple of months older than me. She had breezed through her thirtieth birthday surrounded by friends and family, dancing with her son to Wham's greatest hits, a glass of champagne in her hand. She looked great that night, she really did. But clearly my own birthday was going to be a bit more traumatic. "You don't regret anything, do you?" she said. "Like what?" "You know," she said, suddenly dead serious. "Like us." We had married young. Gina was three months' pregnant with Pat on our wedding day and it was, by some distance, the happiest day of my life. But nothing was ever really the same again after that day. Because after that there was no disguising the fact that we were grown-ups. The radio station where I was working gave me the week off and we spent our honeymoon back at our little flat watching daytime television in bed, eating Marks Spencer sandwiches and talking about the beautiful baby we were going to have. We talked about eventually taking a proper, grown-up honeymoon -- one where we didn't just stay home watching television and eating sandwiches in bed. But by the time there was a bit of money and a bit of time, we had Pat and the course of our lives seemed set. Gina and I found ourselves separated from the rest of the world by our wedding rings. The other married couples we knew were at least ten years older than us and friends our own age were still in that brief period between living with their mother and living with their mortgage. Our little family was on its own. While our friends were dancing the night away in clubs, we were up all hours with our baby's teething problems. While they were worrying about meeting the right

person, we were worrying about meeting the payments on our first real home. Yet I didn't regret any of it. Yes, we had given up our freedom. But we had given it up for something better. I loved my wife and I loved our son. Together, the two of them made my world make sense. My life without them was unimaginable. I knew I was a lucky man. But I couldn't help it -- lately I found myself wondering when I had stopped being young. "I just really hate the way that life starts to contract as you get older," I said. "The way your options narrow. I mean, when did owning a car like that become ridiculous for me? Why is it such a joke? I would love to know. That's all." "The Force is strong in this one," Pat said. "A red sports car," Gina said to herself. "And you don't even like driving." "Listen, I was just looking, okay?" I said. "Happy birthday to you," Pat sang, smacking me across the ear with his light saber. "Squashed tomatoes and glue. You -- look -- like -- a -- monkey -- and -- you -- act -- like -- one -- too." "That's not nice," I told him, as the traffic ground to a halt and my ear began to throb. Gina put the hand brake on and looked at me, as if trying to remember what she had liked about me in the first place. She seemed a bit stumped. I remembered what I had liked about her. She had the longest legs that I had ever seen on a woman. But I still didn't know if that was the best basis for the love of your life. Or the worst. Copyright 1999, 2001 by Tony Parsons

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