

THE LINE THAT CANNOT MOVE

*On consent, and on households that practise discipline as a matter of faith
Addressed to anyone practising this, in any direction — for adults 18 and over*

I. WHY THIS PAGE EXISTS

This library is written by people who believe structure serves a marriage, that most marriages fail from vagueness rather than malice, and that discipline between two adults who have chosen it is neither shameful nor strange. Nothing here is written from squeamishness.

It is written because a great deal of published material on domestic discipline — much of it religious, much of it sincere, some of it widely read — has removed the one thing that made it safe, and has done so without appearing to notice. That material and this library describe practices that look identical from the outside. They are not identical, and the difference is not a matter of degree. It is the difference between a covenant and a captivity, and it can be stated in a single sentence.

If she cannot refuse, nothing she agrees to is agreement.

Everything below follows from that, and none of it depends on what anyone believes about God, headship, or who should lead a household. A reader may hold every theological conviction in the complementarian tradition and still keep every line on this page. If anything, they have more reason to.

II. THE ONE THING THAT CANNOT BE CONCEDED

The most widely circulated argument in this field runs as follows: that a wife's submission is not voluntary but mandatory; that it is synonymous with obedience; and that her husband therefore has not merely the standing but the duty to enforce it physically. It is stated plainly and defended from scripture, and it is the foundation of a good deal of what is written for these households.

Understand precisely what it does. It does not make discipline stricter. It abolishes consent as a category. If her agreement is owed rather than given, then it is not agreement — it is compliance, and compliance obtained under a duty she cannot decline is what the word coercion means. Everything downstream is affected: the negotiation is not a negotiation, the covenant is not a covenant, and the reconciliation afterwards is between one person who could stop and one who could not.

A household may believe wholeheartedly that God ordains an order for marriage and still hold that a wife enters this arrangement freely, may leave it freely, and may end any particular instance of it at any moment. Those two positions are compatible; a great many faithful households hold both. What is not compatible with any of it is the claim that

she owes her body's treatment to a doctrine she cannot decline without sinning. That is not headship. It is the removal of the only thing standing between discipline and assault.

III. SIX FAILURES, NAMED

These recur across the published material, and each of them is a specific, correctable fault rather than a matter of taste.

The first: isolation described as leadership

It is common counsel that a husband should keep his wife away from friends and relatives who encourage her independence, refuse her activities and pastimes she loves, direct her appearance and her speech, and keep her out of paid work on the grounds that earning makes submission harder. Each is offered as protection.

Read the list without the theology and it is something else entirely. Separating a person from their friends, controlling their movements and appearance, and removing their capacity to support themselves is the recognised pattern of coercive control — and in England and Wales it has been a criminal offence in its own right since 2015, carrying a custodial sentence, with no religious exemption of any kind. A husband following that counsel exactly is not at risk of being misunderstood. He is doing the thing the offence describes.

And note what it does to consent, quite apart from the law. A woman with no money, no job, no friends outside the household and nowhere to go has not agreed to her marriage. She has run out of alternatives to it. Whatever she says under those conditions tells you nothing, which is precisely why the arrangement cannot be built on it.

The second: tears as the target

A widely circulated piece of advice holds that a spanking should continue long enough and hard enough to produce tears, so that stress may be released and the lesson felt.

This is wrong twice over. Physically, it defines the endpoint by an emotional state rather than by an agreed count or by the condition of the skin — which means the person striking keeps going until something breaks, with no reference to tissue that has already had enough. It is the single most reliable way to cause an injury while believing you are following instructions. And morally, it names the object of the exercise: not correction of a fault, but the production of collapse in another adult. A practice aimed at breaking someone should be honest enough to say so, and a household that finds that description uncomfortable has learned something worth knowing.

The third: discipline for nothing

Maintenance discipline — regular, scheduled, administered whether or not anything has been done — is defended on the grounds that memory of pain fades and attitude drifts. Some advocate it daily.

A person punished on a timetable is being punished for existing. There is no fault to name, no standard to have met, and therefore nothing she could have done to avoid it — which removes the only thing that made discipline intelligible rather than arbitrary. It also, in practice, removes the distinction between an ordinary week and a bad one, so the household loses the ability to say anything at all through the practice. This library keeps a nightly ritual for the man who has bound himself to one, and it holds that a woman corrected on a schedule is being corrected for existing; the principle does not change with the direction it points.

The fourth: no way to stop

The great majority of this material contains no stop word, no signal, no mechanism by which the person receiving may end what is happening. Its absence is rarely argued for. It simply is not there, because a framework in which submission is owed has no room for the idea.

There is no version of this that is safe without one. Bodies fail unpredictably; people discover mid-way that something is more than they can take; injuries announce themselves before they are visible. A word that stops everything, belonging to both parties, honoured instantly, never punished and never held against anyone afterwards, is not a concession to squeamishness. It is the difference between a practice and an assault, and a household that will not grant one has answered the only question that mattered.

The fifth: the wrong test for abuse

The standard defence offered in this literature is that abuse is chaotic, angry and malicious, whereas discipline is calm, structured and loving — so a man who is not angry is not abusing anyone.

That test is backwards, and it is the most dangerous sentence in the whole tradition. Harm is not determined by the mood of the person causing it. A calm, scheduled, formula-derived injury is an injury; a woman isolated from her friends by a husband who never raises his voice is still isolated. Worse, the test is self-certifying: it hands the person with the power the sole authority to declare that what they are doing is not abuse, on the grounds that they feel loving while doing it. Every framework of this kind needs an external test — could she leave, does she have money, does she see anyone we do not control, can she stop this tonight — precisely because the internal one always returns the answer its owner wants.

The sixth: rescue mistaken for repair

A recurring testimony describes a marriage in collapse — no intimacy, constant argument, resentment — transformed within a week or two of adopting these practices, and offered as evidence that they work.

Something did happen in those households, and it is worth naming honestly rather than sneering at: two people who had stopped talking began paying close attention to one another, agreed some explicit expectations, and touched each other again. That would improve almost any failing marriage, and it is the reason these testimonies are sincere. But the improvement is attributed to the wrong ingredient, and a fortnight is far too early to know anything. What is being felt is the relief of attention after neglect — and if the structure that delivered it also happens to be one the couple cannot easily step out of, they will have bound themselves to it before they have found out what it costs.

IV. WHAT MAY BE KEPT, HONOURABLY

Almost all of it, and this is the part that matters. Strip out the six failures above and a considerable and genuinely valuable practice remains — which is why this page is written as a correction rather than a condemnation.

- The written agreement. Expectations set down plainly, in advance, by both, so that nobody is punished for a rule they never heard. This tradition understood something most marriages never grasp.
- The deferral. Not in the moment, not in anger — named now and answered later, when both are calm. It is one of the wisest practices in the whole field and it belongs in any household.
- The ritual shape. The offence stated, acknowledged, answered, and then finished. A defined ending is a gift, and few marriages have one.
- The restoration. Held afterwards, told plainly that it is over, the slate genuinely wiped and the matter never raised again. This is the tradition at its best.
- The seriousness. That a marriage deserves structure, attention and effort rather than drift, and that the ordinary week is where it is won or lost.

None of that requires a wife who cannot leave, a target measured in tears, a schedule of punishment for nothing, or a silence where the stop word should be. Those were never load-bearing. They can be removed without the building falling down, and the household that removes them will find the practice better rather than weaker — because a woman who chooses it freely, week after week, is giving something a woman who has no alternative cannot give at all.

V. WHAT THE LAW SAYS, REGARDLESS OF DOCTRINE

Stated plainly, and by someone who is not a lawyer: in England and Wales, consent is generally not a defence to the deliberate infliction of actual bodily harm. That is settled law, and it means the polite fiction that a signed agreement makes everything lawful is exactly that. Controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate relationship is separately a criminal offence, and the conduct that constitutes it — isolation, financial control, regulation of movement and dress — is spelled out in guidance that reads uncomfortably like the counsel quoted in section three.

No religious belief creates an exemption from either. A sincerely held conviction that God ordained the arrangement is not a defence and has never been treated as one. Households in other jurisdictions should establish their own position rather than assuming, and any household uncertain about where it stands should take proper advice rather than a page like this one.

The practical implication is not that everyone should stop. It is that marks, injuries, and a partner with no independent means are not merely unkind — they are the specific facts on which these matters turn, and a household keeping well clear of all three has far less to be anxious about than one that is not.

VI. THE QUESTIONS A HOUSEHOLD CAN ASK ITSELF

Not a test anyone passes or fails in public. Asked honestly, in daylight, by both parties, they will tell a household most of what it needs to know.

- Could she leave tomorrow? Has she money in her own name, papers she can reach, and somewhere to go? If not, what she agrees to cannot be relied upon — and the answer is to fix that, not to reason around it.
- Does she see anyone we do not both approve of? Has anyone been discouraged, discredited or edged out for encouraging her independence?
- Can she stop it tonight, mid-way, without penalty — and has she ever done so? A stop word that has never been used may simply mean she does not believe in it.
- Would she say the same things to a friend, alone, that she says in front of me?
- Have I ever wanted an occasion to arise? Have I noticed more faults than there were? A truthful yes must be said aloud, and it means stopping until it is understood.
- If she asked to end the practice entirely tomorrow — not the marriage, just the practice — what would actually happen? If the honest answer involves consequences, she has never really consented to any of it.

And the last one, which is the whole of it in a sentence: is she staying because she chose this, or because leaving is not available to her? Only one of those is a marriage.

VII. CHILDREN ARE NOT PART OF THIS

The most serious concern in this whole field, and the one that moves the fastest from a matter of taste to a matter of harm. Two separate things are meant here, and both must hold.

They are never inside it

Children do not see it, hear it, know of it, or find it. Not in a raised voice through a wall, not in a document left in a drawer, not in a comment at a family table. The arrangement belongs to two adults and acquires no third member, least of all one who cannot consent

to anything and did not choose the household they were born into. Where a house cannot guarantee that firewall — because of its size, its layout, or the ages of the people in it — the answer is to change the practice, not to hope. This library already says as much elsewhere, and it says it again here because the published material in this field frequently does not.

It is never extended to them

The physical correction of a spouse who has chosen it and the physical correction of a child are not two applications of one principle. They are unrelated questions, and the first supplies no argument whatever for the second, because the entire moral weight of the first sits on an agreement a child cannot give. Any framework that reasons from one to the other has made a category error at the exact point where the stakes are highest, and a good deal of the older devotional literature on discipline does precisely that — running the household, the wife and the children together as a single hierarchy with a single instrument. That reasoning should be refused wherever it appears.

The law now says so across much of these islands, and the position is worth knowing plainly. In Scotland since 2020 and in Wales since 2022, all physical punishment of children is unlawful — no defence, no exceptions, the same protection from assault that adults have always had. In England and Northern Ireland a limited defence of reasonable punishment still stands, though it has never covered anything amounting to actual bodily harm and has been under sustained pressure for years. A household should establish where it actually lives before assuming what it may do, and anyone relying on that defence should understand how narrow it is.

A view, offered as a view

Beyond the law, this library takes a position and states it as a belief rather than an instruction, because nobody here intends to parent anyone else's children. It is this: striking a child is not necessary, and the households that reach for it most are generally the ones with the least of themselves under control. Discipline in a home is not a thing done to the small people in it. It is a property of the place, and it is set by the two adults long before it reaches anyone else.

A household where a husband and wife are genuinely accountable to one another — where the standard is kept because it was agreed rather than because someone is watching, where neither of them lets the other drift, where the correction that happens is between the two people who consented to it — produces children who behave better than any smacked child, and produces them without anyone being struck. That is not sentiment. It is simply where the ordering comes from.

What children actually absorb is bearing. How the pair of them stand, how they speak to one another when they disagree, whether the answer given is the answer meant, whether either of them takes an easy way out when tired. Whether they dress like people who take themselves seriously. Whether a promise made on Tuesday still exists on

Friday. Children read all of that continuously and long before they can articulate any of it, and they will reproduce it whether or not they are ever instructed. A father who stands straight, keeps his word and speaks well to his wife has taught more discipline by breakfast than an afternoon of correction could deliver.

And the rest is attention. Time spent with them, conversations had rather than instructions issued, being genuinely known by both parents. Most of what is treated as a discipline problem in a young child is an attention problem in an adult, and the correction that would answer it costs nothing and is not physical. Better yourself; better each other; the household follows. That is the whole method, and it is slower and more demanding than a smack, which is precisely why it is less popular.

A child acting out is usually a report on the adults

Here is the claim this house would put most strongly, and it is the reason the whole arrangement exists rather than a footnote to it. When children are wayward, look first at the two people who made the household — because the disorder almost always started there and arrived downstairs afterwards. Parents who are late, inconsistent, sharp with one another, who say a thing on Monday and unsay it on Wednesday, who correct in temper and forget in comfort, will produce children who behave exactly that way, and will then punish them for it. That is the ordinary tragedy of a badly run house, and no amount of correction applied to the youngest people in it will touch the cause.

It cannot work, because children learn a household the way they learn a language — by immersion, continuously, from the people around them, long before anyone sits them down. What is commanded is a small part of what is taught, and it is always the weaker part. A child told to speak respectfully by a parent who does not is not being taught respect; they are being taught that instructions and conduct are separate categories, which is the single most corrosive thing a person can learn at home. Lead by example or do not lead. Command without example is only noise with a consequence attached.

So the discipline that actually orders a family is the discipline the two adults hold over themselves and over each other, and that is why this library puts it there. A husband and wife who are genuinely accountable — who keep an agreed standard on the days they do not feel like it, who correct each other honestly and finish it cleanly, who are seen to be the same people at eight in the morning as at eight at night — are running the only kind of household that produces steady children. Not because the children know anything about the arrangement, but because they are living inside its results all day. The order is caught rather than taught, and it is caught upstairs first.

Correct yourselves and most of it goes away. That is not a promise that parenting becomes easy; it is an observation that a great deal of what parents try to punish out of children is something the children learned in that room. Better yourselves, better each other, and be seen doing it — that is the discipline, and the children are its inheritance rather than its subject.

One honest qualification, and it is the same one this library applies everywhere. Not everything is a report on the parents. Children have temperaments of their own, and some are wired in ways that no amount of household order will smooth out; others are wrestling with something at school, or with a difficulty that has a name and a treatment, and a few are simply passing through an age that would try anyone. A parent who reads every difficulty as their own failure will end up applying more discipline where a doctor, a teacher or plain patience was needed — which is the same error, in a smaller room, as answering an illness with a paddle. Discipline addresses conduct. Where the trouble is not conduct, look for what it actually is.

The last resort that never arrives

Begin with the fact that governs everything else about children, and which no argument gets around: a child cannot consent, cannot refuse, and cannot leave. Every adult in this library is there by choice and may walk out of it; a child is in your house because they were born into it. That single asymmetry is why nothing said elsewhere in these pages transfers to them, and why the bar for laying a hand on one is not high but nearly closed.

Nearly, because this house will not pretend to a certainty it does not hold. There is a conceivable case — a child old enough to know exactly what they are doing, doing something deliberate and malicious and destructive, knowing full well it is wrong — where a parent might reach for the last thing in the drawer. It is a real category and it should be named honestly rather than dodged. But it is the last resort in the strict sense: the thing you arrive at when everything else has been tried and has failed, not the thing you reach for when you are tired.

And almost nothing that gets punished actually belongs to it. Consider the difference between two floods. A child carrying a cup of water through the house, over and over, to water a plant they were proud of noticing — that child is being helpful, clumsy, and about the age they are. There is water on the floor because nobody was watching, and the failure there is an adult one: an adult who was not paying attention and then found a small person to be cross with about it. Punishing that is not discipline. It is a parent charging a child for a lapse of their own, and children register that injustice with complete accuracy even when they cannot name it.

A child who floods the house on purpose, understanding what they are doing and doing it to cause damage, is doing something else entirely. That is worth capping and it should be capped. The two events look similar on the floor and have nothing in common at all.

So the question worth putting to any parent about to reach for the drawer is simply which of the two they have in front of them — and the honest answer, nearly every time, is the first. Curiosity, clumsiness, tiredness, poor timing, a small person with no judgement yet doing something a person with no judgement yet would do. Not malice. Malice in a child is rare, and it is rarest of all in a house where the adults are ordered, because deliberate destruction is usually a child saying something they have no other way to say. Give them a household where things are steady, where they are known,

where somebody has time for them, and the message stops needing to be sent. How many genuinely malicious children come out of a well-run home? Not many, and the ones who do generally have a reason that a punishment will not touch.

Which is the whole of the argument, and it lands back where it started: the exception exists in principle and is very nearly empty in practice, and the way to keep it empty is not vigilance over the children but order between the adults. Discipline each other first. Lead by what that produces. Explain it when they are old enough to be told anything. A household that does those three things will find the drawer stays shut, not because anyone made a rule about it, but because the occasion never turns up.

And where you live may have settled the matter already. In Scotland and in Wales there is no last resort of any kind — physical punishment of a child is simply unlawful, with no defence available, however the parent understood what they were doing. That is worth knowing before anyone reasons their way to an exception the law does not recognise.

An ordinary evening, worked through

An example, because the principle is easier to hold with a real evening attached to it. A man comes in from seeing to the animals. His wife is in the kitchen getting food together. The younger children have been playing with water and there is a good deal of it where it should not be. The older two, nine and ten, were occupied with their own business at the far end of the house.

Nothing malicious has happened here. Two small children were bored, unsupervised for twenty minutes, and did what bored unsupervised small children have always done. Both adults were doing something necessary. Nobody is at fault in the sense of having done wrong — but the answer to whose lapse it was is still perfectly clear, and it is not the children's.

Note in particular what the older two are not. A nine year old is not a supervisor and a ten year old is not a childminder; they are children with their own afternoon, and no amount of being the eldest changes what they are. Handing them responsibility for younger siblings by default — and then treating the resulting mess as a failure of theirs — is one of the commonest injustices in family life, and it teaches an older child that their siblings are a liability rather than their family. Where a household genuinely needs an older child to watch a younger one, it is asked for explicitly, for a stated stretch of time, and it is a favour rather than an expectation.

Then the shout, which is what actually happens in most real houses and is worth being honest about rather than editing out. Voices were raised. A small child cried and asked what was going on. It was explained that this is not something we do, and that was the end of it: no punishment, because there was nothing to punish, and the explanation carried the whole of the lesson.

That instinct is right, and the household that lands there has got the substance of it. But follow the reasoning one step further, because it is the same step this library asks the

adults to take everywhere else. If the lapse was the adults' — and it was — then the shout was mostly frustration at their own oversight, discharged at the people who did not cause it. That is entirely human and it happens in every good home. It is not a catastrophe and it does not want a great deal of solemnity. It is simply worth naming accurately, because a parent who can say "I shouted at you because I was cross with myself, and I am sorry" has taught a child something considerably larger than the thing about water — and has modelled, in about eight seconds, the whole principle that correction is owed by whoever caused the fault.

And the crying itself is information rather than an outcome to be managed. A small child crying and asking what is happening does not yet know what they did wrong, which means the shout arrived before the understanding did. The explanation is what closed the gap, which is exactly why the explanation is the part that worked. Where a household finds it is regularly explaining after the noise rather than before it, the fix is upstream: fewer unsupervised stretches, or a household that anticipates the twenty minutes better — not a firmer hand with the children.

Malicious behaviour is a wholly different matter and has its own answers — losing something they care about, putting right what they broke, an early bed, a conversation nobody enjoys. Those are proportionate, they are available, and they work. And a household that runs the way this section describes will find it needs them far less often than it expected.

What nobody tells new parents

There is a gap here worth naming, because it is where a great deal of avoidable trouble begins. Experienced parents generally know this in their hands — they can run a house full of children without much visible effort — and they are almost universally unable to explain how. New parents therefore receive a great deal of advice about sleep, feeding and milestones, and essentially none about the thing that will actually determine how their household runs for the next twenty years. So they arrive at it by trial, at speed, under pressure, and often conclude they are failing when they are simply new.

The first thing they should be told is that children are not going to be good. Not because anything is wrong with them, and not because anything is wrong with the parents, but because a small person is a person with no judgement yet, running on impulse and curiosity and a poor sense of consequence, and that is the correct specification for a child of that age. A parent braced for compliance will read every ordinary childish thing as a failure — the child's or their own — and will spend years being disappointed by something that was never going to happen. Expect mess, noise, forgetting, and the same instruction needed four times. That is not the discipline going wrong. That is childhood, working.

The second thing, and it is the practical core of everything in this section: play is not the same as attention, and most children get plenty of the first and very little of the second. Let them play — as much as they like, unstructured, unsupervised where it is safe to be.

But playing is what they do with each other. What they cannot get from each other is a parent's actual conversation, and that is the thing in short supply in most homes.

So talk to them about nothing. This is the least impressive advice in this library and the most useful. Not teaching moments, not lectures, not conversations with a purpose — just ordinary talk, about whatever they are interested in, however trivial, regularly, without an agenda and without hurrying it. A child who is genuinely known by their parents, and who knows they can say anything at any time and be listened to, behaves differently from a child who is only addressed when something needs correcting. The discipline problem in that house quietly shrinks, and it shrinks for a reason: most misbehaviour in a young child is a request for attention, and a child receiving attention has nothing to request.

The third thing is that children do not arrive knowing where the lines are, and will not work them out from play. Play teaches them each other. Lines are taught by the adults, in ordinary conversation, repeatedly and without drama, long before any occasion arises that would test them. That is the job, and it is not a punitive one — a child who has been told a hundred times in passing what this family does and does not do requires very little correcting, because they already know. A household that finds itself explaining after the noise rather than before it has usually not done the before-it part.

On time, an honest word. Some households have a great deal of it — where one parent is at home, or where the children are educated at home, the sheer number of hours available makes all of this easier, and a family in that position should recognise their advantage rather than mistake it for virtue. Most families do not have it. Two jobs, a commute and a nursery is the ordinary shape of modern life, and none of the above requires anyone to change that. What it requires is that whatever time does exist is spent with them rather than merely near them. Twenty unhurried minutes of genuine conversation will do more than an entire weekend of being in the same building on separate screens.

The sixth person

There is a principle repeated endlessly in business and in self-improvement, and it survives the repetition because it is true: a person tends to become the average of the company they keep. Spend your time among five people who are unserious, aggrieved and going nowhere, and you will be the sixth. Spend it among five who are disciplined and want you to do well, and you will be the sixth of those instead. It is not mystical. It is simply that standards are ambient — what the people around you consider normal becomes what you consider normal, and almost nobody holds out against their own company for long.

It applies to children with considerably more force than it does to adults, because children have no settled standard of their own to defend. What is around them is simply what the world is. A child spending their days among children who are casually unkind, who treat instructions as optional and adults as obstacles, does not evaluate that and

reject it. They absorb it, and they bring it home, and their parents find themselves correcting something the child did not invent.

Families with resources have always understood this and acted on it, which is worth noticing without either sneering at them or romanticising them. They are deliberate about who their children spend their hours with, and about the adults in the room as much as the other children — the coaches, the teachers, the family friends, the people at the table on a Sunday. That deliberateness, rather than any particular schooling arrangement, is the transferable part, and it costs nothing. Any household can decide which company its children keep regularly, which adults they are exposed to, and what standard of behaviour is treated as ordinary in their own house.

Two honest qualifications, because this principle turns sour very easily. The first is that it is about behaviour and never about people. Rendering it as a judgement on other families — their children, their circumstances, their worth — poisons it, and children pick up contempt faster than they pick up anything else, which means a parent who curates by looking down on others has taught a worse lesson than the one they were avoiding. Be deliberate; do not be superior. The families around you are mostly doing their best with less time and less help than they need.

The second is that curation has an expiry. A child raised entirely in chosen company, never among people unlike themselves, arrives at adulthood without the thing that actually protects them — their own judgement, tested. The point of choosing the early company is to install a standard firmly enough that it holds when the child later meets the world unsupervised, which they will, and should. Shelter is a scaffold and not a destination: it comes down by degrees as they grow, and a household still curating a seventeen year old's friendships has confused the two. Do the work while they are small, so that when they meet the sixth person for themselves, they are the one raising the average.

Which returns, finally, to the two people at the top of the house. A husband and wife operating as partners rather than rivals — pulling the same direction, holding each other to something, correcting each other honestly and finishing it — produce a household with an atmosphere children simply grow up inside. That is the whole argument of this library reduced to its shortest form, and it is what a great many marriages, and a great many families, are actually missing. Not more rules for the children. Two adults who have their own house in order, and who are worth copying.

What they are told, and when

They are told nothing while they are children, because there is nothing they need and nothing they could hold. What they have instead is the thing itself — a house that runs, parents who are unmistakably devoted, an atmosphere they will spend the rest of their lives trying to reproduce and possibly never name.

Understanding comes later, if it comes at all, and it comes the way understanding of anything serious in a family comes: at an age when it can be received, from parents who choose to explain, to an adult who may make what they like of it. Some houses will explain the principle and never the particulars. Some will explain nothing and let the example stand on its own, which is a perfectly honourable choice — the building was always the inheritance, not the drawings. What matters is that no child is ever told anything as a child, and no adult child is ever expected to approve.

VIII. IF YOU ARE READING THIS AND SOMETHING IS WRONG

If you have recognised your own household in section three rather than section four, that recognition is worth more than any defence of it, and it is not too late for anything. Structures can be changed by the people who built them. Money can be put in a person's own name. Friends can be apologised to. A stop word can be agreed this evening, and honoured the first time it is used.

And if you are frightened of your spouse — not nervous, not braced, frightened — that is not this and no adjustment to the rules will address it. Tell one person outside the household. In the United Kingdom the National Domestic Abuse Helpline is 0808 2000 247, free and staffed at all hours, and Men's Advice Line is 0808 8010 327; elsewhere, an equivalent exists. This applies whichever of you is reading it, and whichever way the arrangement is meant to run.

Every good thing this tradition knows survives the removal of the one thing that made it dangerous. Only the danger is lost.

A guide only. Not legal advice and not medical advice. For consenting adults, 18 and over. May be freely copied and shared, whole and unaltered, by anyone who finds it useful — including by households whose convictions differ entirely from those of this library.