

I admit it. There was something free and courageous and very focused about what my younger brother did. He was impetuous, yes. But he was fearless and decisive and I hated him for that. I always felt he was somehow more loved because of it. Me, the steady Eddie. Always dependable. Always there. Him the one who said what he thought, did what he wanted and hang the consequences.

Anyway, there we were, sitting round supper one day when he blurted out his latest decision, a real bolt from the blue this time. "I want my share of what's coming to me when you die, dad. But not when you die. Now."

It was as if he wanted dad to die there and then. That's what asking for his share of the inheritance meant. He wanted out. He wanted to get away and 'find himself', he said. He did not seem to care what anyone thought of him.

I was silent. I watched and waited. I had always hoped he would make a fool of himself, or even better, just disappear. And here was the perfect opportunity. It was always all or nothing with him. He was always like that. And he always seemed to get away with things.

If the washing up needed doing, he'd be off doing something 'urgent' in his bedroom, leaving me with the dishes. I'd dutifully do them. I'd tow the line, he'd line up a new excuse.

Me, I played the percentage game. Looking to my interests by watching which way the wind blew. Looking for the most advantageous position to hold. Sitting on the fence till the last possible moment.

I admit it. I am, of course, deeply insecure. I have spent my life trying to please dad. And yet, and yet, I feel I play second fiddle. My younger brother seems to have more courage in his little finger than I have in the whole of his body. My little brother is able to get away with this act of extraordinary selfishness. All dad does is let him have his way. Of course I knew it would end in his ruination. I knew he wouldn't be able to be controlled. He'd lose it all. But that wouldn't be our problem. He walked out. He cut himself off. It was his funeral.

I believed I would be a huge beneficiary of his leaving. After all, I no longer had a rival. I had dad - and mum - to myself. The way I liked it. But I was in for a huge shock then all dad does is wait for him. My brother's absence seems more significant than his presence. Dad just sat there looking out of the window up the lane. Day after day. Day after day. Day after day he looked out for him. I say it is pointless. I tell him to forget him. I remind how much it has all hurt us, his leaving.

"Yet, he keeps on looking. Somehow knowing he will come back.

"Meanwhile, I worked my socks off. Me and the hired men and the servants and my friends. I slaved in the fields for dad. I made sure there was always food on the table and a bit to spare. I worked from dawn till dusk. Keeping the buildings in good order. Keeping the books balanced. Countless, countless acts of service - all for dad. Yet he did not seem to be noticing.

"He was waiting, but he was not waiting for me, the oldest. I played it by the book. I kept the bargain. I gave 100 percent. But still, dad waited for him.