



Context of If Only

By Marcus Lander (2007)

This poem was written when I was going through a very painful episode of my life—the breakup of my first marriage. It had not been an easy relationship, but divorce was not something that at the time I considered an acceptable option. However as it turned out, I did not really have much choice in the matter. It was made worse by the fact that I had a young daughter who I think the world of, and unfortunately, as has been the experience of many other fathers estranged from their partners, my ex-wife saw fit to exclude me from her life as far as possible.

I found myself the victim of malicious accusations, and I came to realise how little value the family lawcourts place on fathers in domestic cases where there is a child-custody dispute, and how one-sided the legal system often is when false allegations are made. I felt that as a man I suffered a great deal of unfair discrimination at the hands of the family courts and social services, that would not have been the case had I been the opposite gender.

There is a famous poem by Rudyard Kipling, in which he lays out the great qualities entailed in being a man, and in living up to the ideal of manhood as he saw it. It is an inspiring set of attributes to be sure, but in my own personal experience I found being a man a considerably less glorious experience, an experience that made me feel rather bitter at the time. So I wrote this poem which is like a negative version of 'If' with its inspiringly optimistic outlook. In adding the word 'only' to the title I wished to convey that the condition of manhood comes with some quite crippling limitations, especially in domestic matters in modern western societies.

I, of course, recognise that when viewed historically and globally, the situation often is and has been far worse for women in a great many respects, and some of the injustices I experienced may be the result of a backlash against such. However this is my own personal experience, and I know I am not the only one, so for all the victims of similar miscarriages of justice I feel it needs to be expressed.