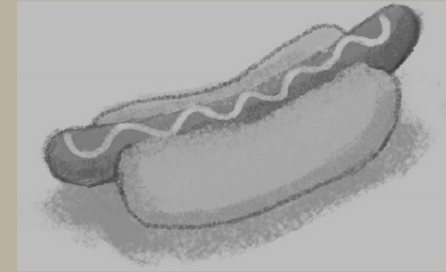




WEEK 2 DAY 4

READ CHAPTER 11 — COMPETITIVE DADLINESS

COMPETITIVE DADLINESS



There was a small, neat woman waiting on the steps of the plane. She had very white teeth and her hair was as smooth and black as Playmobil. She offered Florida her hand and said, 'Florida Digby! So pleased to meet you. How does it feel to have one of the four best dads in the world?'

'Who are you?' said Florida.

'I,' said the woman, 'am Dinah Drax.'

Dr Drax! The woman herself! When it was my turn to shake her hand I got so excited I forgot to let go of it. She must've thought I was trying to get one of her fingers as a souvenir. I tried to think of something clever to say, but all I could manage was, 'I love your phones.'

'A lot of people do, you know. Thank goodness.'

'He's always going on about you,' said Florida.

'All complimentary, I hope.'

'I don't know – I never listen to him. LOVE this plane.'

The plane was impressive, I have to say. It didn't have rows of seats like a normal plane. It had couches and easy chairs and little tables. There were three children down at the front and Galaxy Trader playing on a big video screen. And three dads at the back, on the couches.

'Maybe Florida would like to go and play with the other children, while I introduce you to the other dads.'

'OK.'

'You can let go of my hand now, Mr Digby.'

'Sorry.'

I hadn't known until then that Dinah Drax was Chinese. Drax isn't her real name. Her real name means something like 'Victorious Over Life's Tribulations', but she changed it to Drax because 'Victorious Over Life's Tribulations' didn't fit on the side of a phone.

She took me to the back of the plane, where the dads were sitting around. One of them was a skinny man with a big fat book about prime numbers. Now I thought I knew all about prime numbers, because of being Gifted and Talented, et cetera. But what I know about them comes to about a page. This book was at least a thousand pages long, and he'd nearly finished it. So he was roughly a thousand times cleverer than me. He looked up from the book and smiled.

'I'm Samson Two's father,' he said. He pointed over at Samson Two, who was sitting next to Florida, also reading a big, fat book.

'I'm Liam,' I said, and before I could ask him why Samson Two had such a weird name, he said, **'And my name is Samson One. I am from Waterloo,'** he said.

'I'm from Waterloo too,' I said, **'but not the one with the neighbouring jungle, the one on the bypass.'**

He went back to reading his book.

The next dad had a bald head and a nice blue suit. He gave me a card with his name and phone number on it and pointed to a boy who was hogging the games console. **'That dear, lovable boy,'** he said, **'is my son, Hasan Xanadu. And I'm his father, Edhem. You can call me Eddie.'**

A man with very short hair and a big chest gave me a nod and said, **'Martinet, at your service.'** He took my hand and gripped it so tight that I wasn't sure whether he was greeting me or trying to initiate unarmed combat. **'I'm the father of Max. Max! Greet the gentleman.'**

At the far end of the plane a boy with exactly the same haircut as Mr Martinet jumped up and gave me exactly the same nod. **'Max is short for Maximum,'** said his dad, **'which is what Maximum is. He's the Maximum Martinet.'**

'My name's Liam Digby,' I said. 'Please call me Liam.'

He said, 'Please call me Monsieur Martinet.'

'OK.'

I said, 'I'm Florida's father.' That was the first time I'd ever said it out loud. I could feel everyone looking at me. Any minute now, I thought, one of them is going to say, 'No, you're not. You're twelve.' So I said the most convincingly dadly thing I could think of. I said, 'Anyone watch the game last night?' They all answered at once.

'They need to buy a big defender,' said Eddie Xanadu.

'The back four lack discipline,' said Please-Call-Me-Monsieur Martinet.

'The laws of probability say that you can't win the Champions League just on goals. Preventing opposition goals is equally important,' said Samson One.

So easy. I hadn't even seen the match!

I didn't even know if there WAS a match!

I just seemed to have a natural talent for being a grown-up.

'Well,' said Dr Drax, smiling, 'I must fly! That's my little joke, by the way. I do fly the plane myself. I find it's the best way to keep our destination top secret. I'm not much of a pilot, but I'm sure I'll pick it up as we go along.'

Everyone stared at her.

'Another of my little jokes!' she laughed. 'Caught you all again! In fact, Daddy gave me my first flying lesson when I was still small enough to sit on his knee. I'm really rather a good pilot.'

And off she went to the cockpit. I'm not sure if it's normal for pilots to be jokey like that, but if it is, it's not a good idea. I grabbed hold of the arms of the seat, closed my eyes and tried to think of the plane as just another ride.

As rides go, the flight to China was a bit lengthy – twelve hours, I think. And once you got used to the idea that you were thirty thousand feet in the air, it wasn't that much of a thrill. But the view was pretty cosmic – miles and miles of clouds, like a country made of squirty cream. I remember watching the plane's shadow moving across the white – like a little dog running over snow.

Eddie Xanadu was sitting next to me. He said, 'It's a nice plane, yes?'

'Best I've ever been in.'

'My Hasan has an ambition to buy a plane like this. And he will do it. He is so good with money – even when he was very small, at his first school. In my country, things are always changing because of wars and so on. One time, the school uniform changed. First you wore a white shirt, now you must wear a blue shirt. Everyone goes to the shops to find the blue shirts. There are none. Next day Hasan comes to school and opens his bag – hundred blue shirts! He bought them all! Everyone bought a shirt from him. Just a little more expensive than the shop. So he makes money. By the time he is twelve, he had enough money to buy a house. He rents it out. Are you good with money, Mr Digby?'

I realized I didn't actually have any money on me. I just said, 'No. Not like that. Not at all.'

'Hasan is a genius with money.'

'Excuse me,' said Samson One, 'I couldn't help overhearing the conversation. Is your boy really a genius?'

'More than a genius. A wizard with money.'

'Oh. With money,' said Samson One, shaking his head with disappointment. 'Samson Two is officially a genius. He did a project on irrigation, and it was so good the government bought it.'

'How much did they pay?' asked Eddie.

'Fifty thousand dollars.'

'My Hasan would've got you twice as much.'

Monsieur Martinet chimed in. 'Money is a terrible distraction. My Max is too focused to care about money.'

'What's he focused on?' I asked, just to be polite.

'Success.'

'Oh. Right.'

'Are you interested in success, Mr Digby? I have written a bestselling book on the subject. I believe everyone can be a winner. It just takes a little discipline.'

My World of Warcraft guild had once taken over an entire territory. We were even going to rename it. But then it was completely destroyed by a flight of dragons. I said, 'Interested but not, you know, bothered.'

'What about Florida? What is her speciality? Is she a financial wizard? A natural leader? A genius?'

'You are joking.' I laughed.

They all looked a bit baffled, and after a while Samson One said, 'Why would that be funny?'

'All she thinks about is shopping and celebrities. All she wants is to be famous.'

'How strange,' said Monsieur Martinet.

'Not really. All her friends are just as bad.'

'I meant, how strange for a man to talk about his own daughter in that way.'

'Oh,' I said. 'Well . . . you know . . .'

It turns out that being a dad is a competitive sport. You're supposed to think your kid is the best kid. You're even supposed to try and convince other people that your kid is the best kid. You're supposed to be PROUD of your child.

I sneaked my dad's copy of *Talk to Your Teen* out of my waterproof backpack, but I thought the other dads might be suspicious if they caught me using the instruction manual so I took it to the loo. (Reading in the loo is definitely dadly.) It's all about listening, apparently. If you don't listen, your child becomes introverted and sulky. The more you listen, the more you'll understand. The more you understand, the more you'll find to be proud of. And if you're proud of them, they'll be proud of themselves. Later I tried listening to Florida – she was down at the other end of the plane going on about Daytona or Paris or Britney or someone:

'You see, her mother had chronic obesity. You know what that is?'

'She was fat for a very long time?'

'And that's why she has got all these eating disorders, because she doesn't want to be like her mother . . .' et cetera.

It didn't seem to help. In fact, I thought it might be better if she did get a bit introverted and sulky.

Then we landed. And then the doors opened. It was dark outside but the plane soon filled up with the smell of toasted sand.

Florida said, 'Are we on the beach?'

I said, 'No, we're not on the beach.'

'We are in the desert,' said Samson Two. 'And taking into account speed and direction, I would estimate that the desert in question is the Gobi. Sometimes known as Han-Hai, or the Dry Sea.'

Florida said, 'I didn't know we had deserts in England.'

'England?' Samson Two laughed. 'We're not in England. We're in China.'

Florida turned on me. 'CHINA! Ohmygodwhatveyou done? CHINA! How can we be in Chinayouidiot? I knew. I knew. I just knew you'd do something like this. Well, you can just take me home right now!'

'Home?' I said, 'What d'you want me to do? Hire a cab? Give you a piggy-back? Do you know how far away we are?'

'I know we're in Chinayouidiot.'

Chinayouidiot was turning into a country in its own right.

Everyone was staring at her now.

'Oh dear.' Dr Drax sighed. 'We girls are so complicated. Let's leave Dad to sort this out, shall we? I imagine Mr Digby knows how to deal with his own daughter.'

I don't know what made her imagine that. Florida was actually kicking me now and bawling, 'You said we were going to a theme park!'

'We are. This is it.'

'It's in the desert. Not even a normal desert. A Chinese desert. In China. You said it was down south.'

'It is down south.'

'I thought you meant London.'

'But we were on a plane for hours. If you're on a plane for hours and hours, obviously you're going to go further than London.'

'I thought it was a slow plane.'

A slow plane.

Don't be afraid of temper tantrums. Often a child will have something they need to tell you but which they find difficult to say. Anger helps them say it. Think of the anger as emotional FedEx – something you turn to when the normal post just isn't fast enough.

from Talk to Your Teen

Talk to Your Teen does not have a chapter specifically called 'When Daughters Kick You in Public'. In fact, when it came to Florida, *World of Warcraft* was more useful. You just had to think of her as a kind of monster and remember that every monster has a soft zone.

I'd already identified Florida's. So when I noticed that the others were all shuffling around on the steps of the plane, arranging themselves into some kind of group, I pretended to ignore Florida and shouted like I was talking to Dr Drax, 'It's OK, Dr Drax. Florida doesn't want to be in the group photograph.'

As soon as she heard the word 'photograph', Florida sat up and started listening. I said, 'It's just a group photo. For the newspapers or something. I'm not sure. Don't worry about it. You just keep kicking me.'

'Newspapers?'

'Or magazines. I didn't hear which. Oh, maybe it's for telly. Honestly, kick away.'

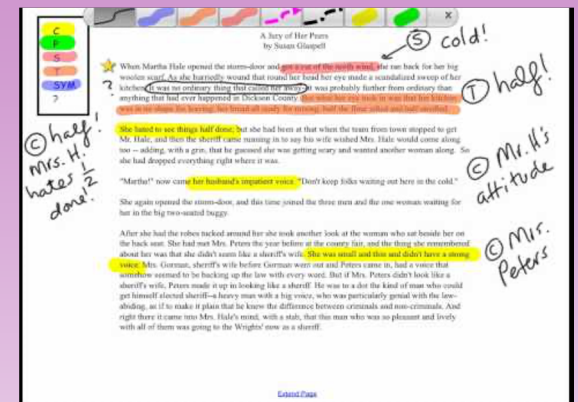
Florida was doing one of her smiles in the front row of that photograph before I had time to stand up. Dr Drax said, 'Well, Mr Digby, you certainly seem to be a very effective parent. Smile for the camera, everyone.'

Look at the title of the chapter
– what might his tell you?

What clues are given to what
the Dads think of each other?

Jot down any phrases in the chapter that give clues about characters
and what the characters might think of each other.

Challenge – what do the Dads
think of each other?



Main Task: Complete the table to show what the Dads think of each other. Use the text to help form an opinion. Include a quote from the text if you can.

	Liam	Samson One	Monsieur Martinet	Eddie Xanadu
Liam				
Samson One				
Monsieur Martinet				
Eddie Xanadu				