‘Aren’t you hungry?‘ she asks between mouthfuls, pointing an accusing fork towards me.

We’re sitting opposite each other in a small Thai restaurant close to the University and her student digs. Lunchtime, New Year’s Eve, and my daughter has broken my reverie.

‘You’re not eating. If you don’t eat, you don’t shi…’

‘Yes, I am familiar with the aphorism thank you very much’ I reply.

‘What’s an aph…’

‘A pithy saying, and besides, I was just lost in my thoughts and yes, I am hungry – you know I like eating.’

Up to this point the conversation has been measured. Not that there is anything wrong, but there was a time, not too long ago, when it would have been me encouraging her to eat and stop chattering on excitedly about school, about anything and everything in an effort to use up as many of her life’s quota of words.

She has her mother’s striking looks and my - well, truth be known, I’m not sure. I marvel at the fact that I have contributed to creating a new life, but often wonder if my contribution was made up entirely of recessive genes. I know deep down this is not true, I’m just being silly. There are times, for example, when she argues purely for the sake of arguing, taking an alternative stance that she doesn’t really believe in, but will defend to the hilt, and I know that I may as well be looking in a mirror. She has an answer for everything and believes everything she says is right. Just as I did at her age. Was I really that irritating to my own parents all those years ago? With the benefit of hindsight…

I realise, yet again, that she is growing up and I’m just growing old.

I poke my fork at my food - it’s a bit too hot to eat just yet and I’m in one of those moods. One of those reflective moods that seem to come more frequently with age. God I hate that expression - *comes with age* - but it’s true. I don’t want to be an old fuddy duddy - I want to be young again - like my daughter and her friends. I sigh - it’s not going to happen. *Man up,* I say to myself. God I hate that expression - *man up*.

‘So, what are your plans for tonight?’ I ask.

‘Oh, we’ll probably gather at a friend’s place then head into the city to watch the fireworks on the harbour. There’s a dance party on the foreshore - we’ve got tickets. Just the usual crowd. You know…’

I can’t help myself. ‘Don’t get sucked into taking any drugs or such-like’ I caution with as much conviction as I can muster.

‘Dad, seriously. We don’t *do* drugs - unless you count copious amounts of alcohol…’ she replies teasingly, but is probably thinking, *Here comes Dad’s lecture.*

‘Anyway, you’re a fine one to talk’ she comes back at me, smirking, ‘I can remember you telling tales of smoking joints when you were my age’.

She’s got me bang to rights.

‘Yeah well, doesn’t stop me worrying about you does it? That was last century and it was a much different era back then anyway. Our good times came rolled in a cigarette paper, not a potentially lethal tablet - or a dirty syringe for that matter’.

‘Trust me Dad - we don’t do drugs’ she says with a firmness that means the subject is closed.

I finally start tucking into my lunch, reasonably happy in the knowledge that, essentially, she is turning into a well-adjusted young adult.

Just like I was?

I’ve just filled my mouth when she casually clears her throat, not daring to look at me directly, testing the waters as it were, but nevertheless confident in the outcome. I know exactly what’s coming.

‘Can you lend me a 50 Dad? I’m a bit short this week’

I make a show of carefully chewing my food, theatrically deep in thought as I consider her request. I swallow, then dab at my mouth with the paper serviette, but I can’t hide the smile.

‘Of course I can’ I reply, slowly reaching for my wallet.

Yes, she’s just like me.

‘Happy New Year darling’ I say, passing over two 50s, confident in the outcome.

I’ll never see those two puppies again.