

Woman

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MARY HAWORTH

Spinster In 30's Treated As Child By Widowed Mom

Dear Mary Haworth: I am a spinster in my 28s, living alone with my mother who was widowed in my childhood.

I am an only child and she never has stopped thinking of me as a child. In fact when I was a child she allowed me more privileges than she does now.

Our financial condition is awful; we have been hungry and cold and we both lack clothes. I can't buy anything without her permission and she discourages me getting a job. I lack even the clothes to look for employment.

She doesn't want me to mingle with or call on people, or invite an occasional friendly neighbor in to see us. She never wants to see a movie or go calling or to any community event. And I can't do anything without her permission, which is almost always denied.

For several summers I swam at a public lake near our home, without getting any infectious, nor did anyone else who goes there, so far as I know. Nor has there been any bad publicity about the place, but now she is opposed to my swimming there.

The fact that I've never been married never worries her. I am to live like a supervised child, without schooling, girl scouting, dancing lessons or all the other activities that take a young person away from home.

Why is my mother so possessive of me? If I'd had a brother or sister, would she have been equally possessive of that person too?

Dear R.V.: Your mother's possessiveness is a form of childishness; a matter of clutching at you for fear of a companionship, somewhat as a backward child might cling to a favorite toy or to a familiar caretaker, rather than branch out into new experiences and associations leading to normal personal growth.

In your earlier years, you were your mother's toy, figuratively. Since you've grown up, she has cast you (unconsciously) in the role of familiar caretaker, the person she leans on for everything. In a sense she is the child and you the nurse who looks after her.

You also keeps you on a shorter tether today than she did in your childhood years, as if she considers you even now as a child now than when you were in fact a child. What this means is that she is projecting her own increasing "childishness" upon you.

All the fears that she feels for herself, if she should be left alone (as she pictures the possibility in her imagination), she "projects" at you, in camouflage form. When she is fretting about "what might happen to you" if you got out of her sight, she is actually worrying about what might happen to her in your absence, and trying to reassure you into sticking close at hand, to give herself a sense of more security.

If she had other children, would she have been equally possessive of them? Well, she would have been equally faulty in her mismanagement of the parent-child relationship. But she might not have found another daughter or son as yielding to her mistaken policies as you have been. They might have fought their way out of her clutches, attaining their adult autonomy after a painful struggle that left them more or less scarred for life.

As for how to free yourself (a question you haven't asked), my advice is: Make your way to the nearest Family Service Agency and ask for counselling help in becoming emotionally reeducated, up to adult levels of self-reliance.

Don't let lack of suitable clothing keep you a prisoner at home. Wear anything at all that covers you in scouting for help. Remember: "The Journey of a thousand miles begins with a simple step." So, least out by seeing the Family Service Agency. M.H.

Mary Haworth counsels through her column, not by mail or personal interview. Write her in care of The Guardian.

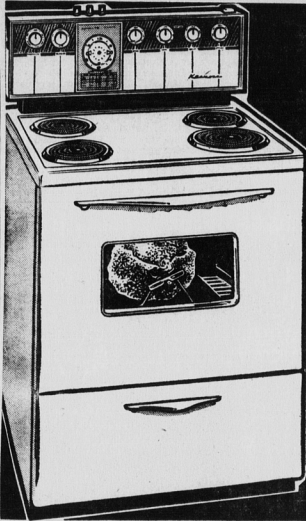
THREATEN AMBASSADOR
 SAIGON, South Viet Nam (Reuters)—Police are holding an unemployed Viet namese accountant on charges of attempting to extort money from United States Ambassador Frederik B. Nolting under threat of assassination. Embassy sources said Nolting who left Saigon Thursday for leave in the U.S., received six letters demanding payment of 1,000,000 Vietnamese piastres (\$12,700) for information leading to the uncovering of a Communist "murder cell."

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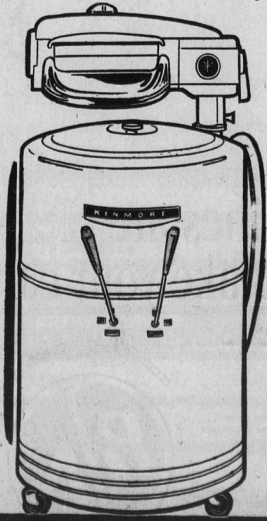
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