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## We're Not Close Like We Used To Be

My mother has been driving me crazy for as long as I can remember, but I've been in therapy since the beginning of the year and I'm starting to understand that a lot of the things I took for granted as true were actually very distorted by my childhood.

I was never physically abused, and in fact, to anyone looking in, I looked like an incredibly spoiled child doted on by her parents. I was showered with gifts, dressed up like a little doll and my mother was always the "den mother" throwing parties for my classes. But there was a very steep price for all her shows of being the perfect mom. She made it clear to me that I was the most important thing in the world and if I ever showed a negative emotion I was "breaking her heart." I learned that if I had a bad day at school, I had to pretend it was the best day ever or she'd either call the school and kick up a fuss that I was being picked on, or she'd get really depressed herself. She used to pull me out of school *all* the time, so we could have "mother-daughter day" even though I was very stressed about having to keep up my grades with the constant absences. At school, many of my teachers thought I was a liar, because I was always out sick. I couldn't tell them that my mom just wanted my company and wouldn't take me to school.

My mom also couldn't imagine that I'd want to do anything different from her. If I expressed a different opinion than her she would get very depressed and act like I was hurting her by wanting something different. She used to always want to do back rubs and manicures and facials and told me that I was the best masseuse ever. It made me feel icky. Like I was some weird cross between her boyfriend, her daughter, and a paid companion.

Christmases were so weird. She would go into debt buying me things—and it felt like this giant ordeal that would take hours for me to open all my presents. I'd have to stop and dote on each one, and tell her that it was *exactly* what I wanted and she was the "best mom ever." Even when I was that young, I just wanted to open a present or two and go play, not put on this agonizing show for her benefit. If my reaction to the gifts wasn't enough, she'd apologize over and over tearfully that she was a "bad mom" and didn't get exactly what I wanted.

I don't think I cried more than 3-4 times in my childhood. Every time I did it got *such* an overblown reaction out of her that I was afraid she'd do something to herself if she thought I was sad. I would save up my allowance and when she was depressed I would buy her gifts. She would always say, "Don't spend your money on me," but she really did encourage this courting behavior. It was like she wanted me to be her boyfriend and buy her gifts to prove I loved her.

She always wanted me close to her. I slept over at a friend's once and she came and picked me up around 10 o'clock and took me home. She had spent the whole day telling me I probably shouldn't go because I would get scared and want to come home. I was so worked up that I was relieved when she showed up—I knew she was *ok* and I never went to a sleep over again. She always encouraged me to come sleep in the same bed with her, take naps with her, and be very physically close to her. She and my father always walked around nude and although it wasn't overtly sexual, it

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always bothered me. I would ask them to put on clothes, and they sometimes complied. I was encouraged to walk around naked, but it made me uncomfortable so from the time I was 6 or so, I would always at least wrap a towel around me. She would try to touch me all the time—not sexually—and would get annoyed when I would flinch away. I have no idea why I flinched, other than I just didn't want her to touch me. She'd always try to chase me up the stairs, "playfully" slapping my butt and I'd *hate* it. I asked her not to, but she wouldn't listen. She liked to rough house with me, even when I would tell her I hated it. She'd laugh and say I was kidding and go on doing it. I would usually try to fall and hurt myself so she'd leave me alone.

She would go through my room, find my diary, and read it. If I had written anything negative about her she would cry and want to discuss it. I had no privacy. I used to sit with my back against the door to my room, because I wasn't allowed to lock it, and that was the only way I could keep her from just opening the door. She accidentally bumped me with the door more times than I can count.

When I was looking for colleges, she told me she would buy me a horse if I stayed home and went to school locally. I went 8 hours away and she started the pattern of talking to me on the phone many times a day. She had me trained up to call her every time I walked to class or came home, in the morning before I started the day, and before I went to bed. She would also make excuses to call me back 10-20 minutes after I'd hung up at night, for no good reason, just to make sure I wasn't out of my dorm. Even hours away I felt like I had no privacy at all. On a rare occasion I went out with friends and didn't call her till later—about 10pm—she had panicked and already started the eight hour drive to come find me.

She used to come to visit me uninvited all the time and stay a really long time. It wouldn't matter if I was busy with midterms or finals. She made it clear that she would be crushed if I didn't spend every available moment with her. She also used me as an alibi to cheat on my father with a man who tried to molest me when I was 16.

This has kept up my whole life. She expects me to call at least three times a day. If I don't she will call me and if I don't answer, she panics. She constantly asks me for too much information and asks me what I talk to my shrink about. She accuses me of not sounding happy, "always being so dark" and "having changed so much since I was such a happy child." I wasn't a happy child. I was a fake child, trying to make sure she didn't crumble.

Recently, she has started stalking me online. I've never used my real name online, but she finally, through a lot of work, tracked down one of my alias on a board that was on a subject she knew I was interested in. She did not approve of my behavior there and cries all the time, telling me she wished she had died before she had to "see me like this." She keeps telling me that I am so sad and miserable, unlike when I was a child. What she doesn't realize, or won't admit, is that I'm just annoyed because I don't want to spend several hours a day, listening to her on the phone. I feel like she just wants to tell me about her moment to moment life, and wants me to invent all kinds of exciting tales to tell her. It's tiring, and more and more I just

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feel angry. I feel like I never succeed in making her happy, and can't stand the whining on her part when I am already speaking to her too much. The few times I've suggested we talk less so we have more to say to each other she's had a crying fit.

She sends me long, rambling, emotionally manipulative emails where she complains that "we're not close like we used to be" and that this isn't "what she wanted in life." She also almost always puts in a line asking me not to email her back. It's like she wants to dump all her emotions on me and not hear what I have to say.

She hates my significant other, though we have been in a happy, honest, stable relationship for almost a decade. She is nice to his face but denigrates him to me and accuses him of "stealing me from her" and "making me so dark." I'm not dark, I'm just different from her, and I am an adult, who can decide who I want to be with. No one "stole me away" and the very idea of that makes me queasy. Like I was her girlfriend and left her. I was just a kid. I hate feeling guilty for just growing up like a normal person and wanting my own life.

Honestly, I have no idea how to deal with her. When I call her, we talk about nothing and I'm annoyed. When I don't, she panics and tries to come find me. All the time she talks about how I'm "not safe" and as a mother it's her "duty to protect me." But I'm a grown woman, financially independent since I was 18, with no black marks on my record. She doesn't have anything to protect me from except the parts of me she doesn't like.

At this point, I still don't want to make her crumble but I feel like I have the weight of the world on my shoulders. I just want to happily live my own life and not the fake life she wants to dictate for me.

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