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Mother!!

by Sue Hitchcock

Every day is Mother's day, at least when you are a child. I loved my mother, I hated my mother. She was the kindest of mothers, only wanting the best for her children. The only trouble was that ultimately she wanted me to go to heaven when I died. Up to puberty the worst that meant was three obligatory trips to church every Sunday and naturally I was sometimes reluctant. I liked singing hymns and even sermons were argued with a certain logic. Of course I hadn't started to indulge in Philosophical debate at that stage. So the sun shone – I had music lessons (it would be useful at Sunday school) but with my father's encouragement, I was taken to ballet, opera, and even Ivor Novello musicals. My hobby was making miniature theatres from cereal boxes and writing plays. When I got 100% in a scripture exam, my mother's aspirations for me were based on St. Paul and missionary work in Africa.

My ambitions changed with puberty and the discovery of Colette, Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Juliette Greco and Brigitte Bardot. If I could have formulated it, I wanted to be a dominant, sexual female. Full immersion baptism at fourteen seemed to wash away any religious aspirations and I started to count the months till I would be sixteen and legally old enough for sex. That is when the antagonism with my mother started. Any comment critical of a sermon was cause for argument. Actual sexual intercourse did not take place amongst my school friends, but my church friend, a buxom redhead, lost her virginity and wanted me to come out on a double date. I'd reached the grand old age of sixteen and three quarters. I became the most sophisticated girl in the sixth form, though it wasn't of any other importance to me. My mother didn't know, but our arguments increased.

Until I married, I was considered the black sheep, but tolerated and coaxed to conform. My father wouldn't even come to my wedding.

The birth of my children was considered a normalization, but why didn't I take them to Sunday school? Visits to my parents involved some indoctrination of the little girls, but the last argument we had was so silly! A chimpanzee which had been taught sign language in the United States was headline news when it started painting. To me the painting was a symbol of its hand gesture, hence not painting, but writing. I was excited and wrote to the newspaper. My mother, however, was on her knees, praying. The issue, she said, was that Darwin was wrong, you just had to read the Bible. God created us, we didn't come from monkeys.