

THE
Mother-Daughter
CONNECTION

not to please others, but to meet your own needs.

I never wanted to emulate her. I never wanted to care about how I looked or how my couch did. But now I hope that if I do grow truly old, I will do it with her style. For the sake of my daughter. So my daughter can take comfort.

"Mother's all right," she'll be able to say, as I do. "God bless her."

Growing Up

BY BETTE-JANE RAPHAEL

As far back as I can remember, I was my Daddy's girl. When I was five and six and seven, my father took me on Sunday outings to the zoo, took me to see revivals of his favorite movies and took me up on his lap every evening after dinner for another installment of the bedtime story I adored. It was easy to love my gentle, affectionate father.

Loving my mother, on the other hand, took more effort. Unlike my father—who left for work before I sat down to breakfast and didn't come home until dinner was being put on the table—my mother was a fixture in the house. She was there when I left in the morning and when I returned in the afternoon. She was also a host of practical people: a weather reporter who brought out the rubber boots and made me wear them; a timekeeper who decreed how long I could stay at a friend's house after school; a dietitian who insisted on putting an unwanted piece of fresh fruit in my lunch bag every day; a wardrobe mistress who let down my old skirts instead of buying me new ones and who chose practical blue coats instead of longed-for red ones with rabbit-collars and cuffs.

If my father filled me with fantasy, my mother was inescapably real life—something for which she received little thanks from me. I resented her for intruding the commonplace into the imaginary world I preferred. I loved her, of course, but we came into conflict a lot. Her practicality fostered grudges that persisted even as I grew up, went away to school and began to live on my own.

And then one night when I was nearly 30 I went to my parents' house for dinner, something I'd done dozens of times

in the years since I'd moved out of the tiny bedroom. On this evening I met my father at his small factory, a dreary barn of a place located in an even drearier section of the city. The winter evening was chilly and damp, and we had to drive through depressing business districts, run-down residential neighborhoods and a barren stretch of highway to reach my parents' suburban home. By the time we arrived, forty-five minutes later, we were hungry and cold. We hurried up the path to the house, where my father put his key in the lock and pushed open the door.

And there was my mother coming toward us against a backdrop of light and warmth and kitchen aromas. She was smiling and cheerful. In fact, the whole house had a welcoming quality of which she was both source and center. It was a quality I had never noticed all those years when I arrived home from school in the afternoon light. But now, as I stood next to my father and shared his perspective, I felt a growing illumination that had nothing to do with the fluorescent light of the kitchen.

My mother put her warm face up to my father's chilly one and placed her arms around his neck to rub a spot at the top of his spine. Behind her, the table was set for a dinner that would be put upon it as soon as we'd washed up—a meal that would be as delicious as it was well-balanced, and that would be cleared away while my father sat in the living room with the paper on his lap. It was the same lap that had held me on innumerable nights when I had listened wide-eyed to the adventures of his heroine, Garbage Can Mary.

Watching my parents caress each other, I was suddenly overcome with emotion. "This is what he has always come back home to," I thought. "This is what has made his life sweet and my bedtime stories possible. This is why he has often told me,

'Your mother is a wonderful woman.'"

I had finally realized what he'd meant: that my mother was the heart of our home and always had been—for my father and for me too. It was a heart made up of everyday objects like sewing thread and galoshes—not fantasy. Fantasy needs a solid place from which to grow, and my mother had provided that place. Our home could not have existed on bedtime stories alone. It needed the commonplace and the fantastical. As I moved forward to embrace my parents, I finally understood how very lucky I had been to get both.

So Beautiful, So Rare

BY ROBERTA ISRAELOFF

My mother's not much of a talker, but she is a saver. Knowing this, I asked her one day a few weeks before I was expecting to give birth why there were no pictures of her pregnant with me. (continued on page 121)

