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I Grew up When I Was 74

[A] My mother died last year, aged 107. As I was 74 at that time, this meant I had a “mummy” for much longer than most people do — and as no one is fully grown-up until both their parents are dead (so they say), I probably remained a child well into old age. I was a “bonded” child. A bonding between mother and child was essential for the wellbeing and healthy development of the baby, and she determined that was how it would be between us. I don’t argue with that and no child psychologist today would argue with it either. A strong, long-lasting attachment between a baby and mother, father, carer, or whoever, is the most important factor in infant development. 5

[B] So I was cherished, I was bonded. She had tried very hard to bond with my brother, born three years earlier, but he had demonstrated that he wasn’t having any of it. He was pleased when I arrived, therefore, as it meant that the spotlight of attention moved from him to me. I was the bonding type. My mummy was the best mummy in the world. No one understood me like my mummy, and no one talked to me like my mummy. She used to talk all about her childhood, her mother, her father, her brothers and sisters, and the First World War. I enjoyed hearing about it. 10 15

[C] She was Mummy. We had the war, we had Hitler — but I was always going to be safe because I had Mummy; I was seriously ill but I got better because I had Mummy; we had the 1947 snow and ice for three months but it was fine because, when I got home, I had Mummy and she put my woolen gloves and socks on top of the boiler to dry. In the summer we had a heat wave and she made jugs of lemonade. 20

[D] But we all grew up and our perceptions altered. The adult I became found Mother much less perfect than the child had done. I realized that some of her opinions were racist, some were snobbish — all were ill-thought out. I didn't approve. She was also a nuisance — interfering in my life, worrying about my welfare continually and wanting to know every last detail of my existence so that she could worry about me further. She telephoned me daily, we met for shopping trips involving lengthy, conversational lunches — and every time we chat I let slip personal information I had intended to keep to myself. 25 30

[E] Why was this? I had no idea. I only knew that the habit of “telling Mummy everything” and “always telling Mummy the truth” was one I was unable to break. I regretted it instantly. But too late. I had given her another rope to reel me back in with. Another rope with which she could bond me. How could I lead an independent life if Mother was always part of it? She criticized my choice of friends, my hairstyle, and my clothes — and, of course, any men I associated with were always unsuitable. We argued. She told me she wanted me to be happy. I told her she was possessive. She said she didn't have a daughter any more. I said she was being melodramatic. She cried. I told her to shut up. She told me I had turned into a horrible person. I cried. I said sorry. She said sorry. So it went on. Year after year. 35 40

[F] I married, I became a television producer, and I ran a career. I retired. I got divorced. (“I told you he wasn't suitable ...”) I married for the second time at the age of 68. (“Make sure he looks after you ...”) I was a mature woman. In confidence and experience I had outstripped her. But I remained “bonded”. I joked about it. “It's fine being a bonded child — but when you are over 60 and still bonded to your mother you wonder what's going on.” But I couldn't say, “Listen, Mother, I don't agree with you over so many things; you may think we see eye to eye, but, frankly, we don't. I am not who you think I am. I am me and I don't want to be like you.” 45 50

[G] When she reached 100 she began to worry about me again. “You will be on your own when I die. When you're old, who's going to care for you? You won't have a daughter to look after you.” “Well, good,” I said. “That means no long-suffering female child will have to put up with my deafness, my demands, my irritability and the general strain imposed by the elderly on their young.” 55

[H] But I wondered how I would feel when she did die. She made it clear that it was no fun being a blind, partially deaf centenarian. “I keep hoping that when

I wake up there won't be any me," was how she put it. At her age and with her health problems, she was in the "death zone". When it happened, how would I sort my feelings out? The affection, the disagreements, the anger — all mixed up through the length of time we had been together and stirred into the conversations and the confidences we had shared. How would I be able to grieve? 60

[I] I did know that her brain and her heart were failing. I also knew I could not live with her and look after her. She knew that too. Uncomplainingly, she went into a care home. I made up my mind that it was time my bonds were broken; time for me to distance myself from her. I asked her to repeat some of the stories she had told me about her girlhood. Dementia made it difficult. She said: "My poor mother — she had that terrible thing that came down and chopped her head off and she died. It was difficult for her to manage after that." 65

[J] But the more we talked, the closer I came to understanding. She was a product of her upbringing — as an Edwardian child — and her conditioning, as a suburban mother and housewife in the 1940s and 50s. I saw that the opinions I objected to were skin-deep — born of her background. I saw her as child, wife and mother and realized her identity was rooted in these. 70

[K] At 106 she started having falls. Her balance had gone. They took her to hospital where she lingered horribly because at first they tried to keep her alive. When finally they agreed to simple hydration, I held her hand in her last hours and, just for a moment, I licked the back of it, kitten-like — as I had done as a child for a joke. She half-smiled. The next morning she died. And I wept. But I had come to terms. I had worked it out. I grieved and I forgave, and I finally realized what the confusion of emotions was that we had felt for each other over 74 years. The resentment, the laughter, the anger, the affection, the attachment — the bonding. That's love, that is. 80

(1157 words)

Comprehension Exercises

Directions: *The following ten statements are related to the passage you have just read. Each statement contains information given in one of the paragraphs. Identify the paragraph from which the information is derived and put the corresponding letters of the paragraphs in the brackets at the end of the statements. You may choose a paragraph more than once.*

1. My brother, who was three years older than me, didn't like to be cherished and bonded by mother. ()
2. My mother was worried that nobody would look after me after she died since I didn't have a daughter. ()
3. I wasn't able to break the habit of always telling my mother the truth. ()
4. My mother went into a care home and this was the time when I was determined to break the bonds with her. ()
5. Mother believed that a strong bonding relationship between her and me was critical to my wellbeing and healthy growth. ()
6. I realized that the confusion of emotions that both of us had felt for each other was love. ()
7. I came to understand my mother better after I knew more about her childhood and her situation later as a suburban mother and housewife. ()
8. I remained "bonded" with my mother even though I thought I had more confidence and experience. ()
9. When I grew up, I didn't want to be bonded anymore, but my mother kept interfering in my life. ()
10. My mother suffered from being blind and partially deaf when she was over 100. ()

Notes:

1. bond v. 结合，粘合，团结在一起
e.g. Common interests *bonded* the two countries together.

共同的利益把两个国家联系在一起。

You need a strong adhesive to *bond* wood to metal.

你需要强力胶才能把木料粘在金属上。

2. spotlight *n.* 注意的中心, 聚光灯

e.g. She is tired of being in the *spotlight*.

她对自己老是成为公众注意的中心已感厌倦。

However, dating under the *spotlight* rarely leads to long-lasting love.

但这种聚光灯下的约会难以产生持久的爱情。

3. lemonade *n.* 柠檬水

4. perception *n.* 观念, 看法

e.g. Our *perception* of things is often influenced by subjective factors.

我们对事物的看法常受到主观因素的影响。

He presents his *perception* of imagist poetry.

他提出了他对意象派诗歌的看法。

5. nuisance *n.* 讨厌的人(或事物)

e.g. He was nothing but a *nuisance* and a rascal.

他是一个十足的讨厌鬼和恶棍。

Having to stand in line was a *nuisance*.

不得不排队是件麻烦事。

6. let slip 无意中说出, 错过

e.g. The girl *let slip* that she had been a witness to the accident.

那女孩无意中说出她是该事故的目击者。

He would never *let slip* a good opportunity through his fingers.

他决不会错过任何良机。

7. reel *v.* 卷, 绕

e.g. Help me to *reel* up this powerful fish.

帮我收绕钓线拉起这条大鱼。

When you're sure that you have hooked the fish, *reel* in at once.

当你确信鱼已经上钩时, 赶紧收卷钓线。

8. associate with 和……来往

e.g. My father never allows me to *associate with* those who have their hair dyed and arms tattooed.

老爸从来不许我结交那些又染头发又在手臂上纹身的人。

We'd better not to not to *associate with* immoral people.

我们最好不要跟不道德的人交往。

9. melodramatic *adj.* 耸人听闻的, 夸张的

e.g. It is a *melodramatic* plot full of deceit and murder.

那是一个充满欺骗和凶杀的耸人听闻的情节。

Don't you think you're being slightly *melodramatic*?

你不觉得你有点夸张吗?

10. outstrip *v.* 超过, 胜过

e.g. His newspaper *outstripped* its rivals in circulation.

他的报纸在发行量上超过了他的对手。

Nevertheless, demand will still *outstrip* supply.

但是, 需求仍然超过了供给。

11. irritability *n.* 易怒, 暴躁

e.g. Signs of overwork are nervous tension, *irritability* and indigestion.

过分劳累的征候是神经紧张、烦躁易怒和消化不良。

Men are easier to get *irritability* than women.

男人通常比女人跟容易暴躁。

12. centenarian *n.* 百岁老人

13. sort out 整理

e.g. I went to *sort out* my bedside table.

我去整理我的床头桌。

Please help me to *sort out* these cards.

请帮我把这些卡片整理好。

14. grieve *v.* 悲伤, 哀悼

e.g. They *grieved* at the loss of a family member.

她们为失去的一位家人哀悼。

We *grieve* for him at this very sad time.

在这非常悲伤的时刻我们向他表示哀悼。

15. dementia *n.* 痴呆

16. Edwardian *adj.* 爱德华时代的; 爱德华七世时代的

17. linger *v.* 苟延残喘

e.g. The old man *lingered* several months after the heart attack.

老人心脏病发作之后拖了几个月才去世。

There's no way of knowing how long she'll *linger*.

我们无法知道她还会撑多久。

18. hydration *n.* (医)输水, 输液

19. come to terms 妥协, 让步, 屈服, 达成协议

e.g. But in the end, he wonders if people will never *come to terms* with this.

但他最终不禁怀疑, 人们是否永远都不会对此妥协。

He found the king in no mood to *come to terms*.

他发现国王无意达成协议。