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Dear Dorothy:

When I saw your letter in my mailbox on Wednesday afternoon, I thought its message would be one of two things. One, after not communicating with me for over eleven years, you would be acknowledging the need for a friendly relationship with each other in order to make Mother happy. Two, it would be a letter bawling me out and written in anger.

Unfortunately, the second was correct, and the amount of hatred expressed through your words was devastating. I became immensely upset at the inaccuracies and accusations your letter imparted, and was saddened by the obvious hatred you have for me and my family. I hope that you will not communicate with me again if this in the manner in which you will do it.

Ironically, your letter arrived after I had spent many hours with Mother, taking her food shopping, as I do almost every week, and depositing most of her Social Security check in the bank. Before doing the food shopping, I checked her refrigerator for old, and possibly rancid, food. I did the same the week before. I am not enumerating these chores for praise, as I feel it in poor taste to say what I do for Mother, but since this is what you did in your letter and since you were accusing me of not doing these things and dumping more and more on you, I am merely stating them to set the record straight.

I visit with Mother every week and talk with her by phone every day and/or night. Recently, when she did not go to your house on the weekend, I took both Mother & Honey to the movies. I, too, have bought Mother underwear, towels, cups, robes, etc., etc., but I do not know whatever becomes of them. For some reason, you feel you are the only one purchasing items for Mother.

You also stated that I never eat with Mother. This is not true. We have eaten together many, many times, and recently she had dinner at my house on a Friday night and we had meatball sandwiches because she loves them so much. I feel ridiculous saying these things, but I feel forced to defend myself to you.

Your letter was extremely opinionated and bossy in tone, and I feel intimidated by you. I am not a child, and I am entitled to have my own opinions. Which brings us to the doctor. Yes, I am really upset over your writing the doctor and insinuating that he is negligent. He is one of the hardest working human beings I have ever known. I am mortified that you did what you did and hope to God that I was not included as a participant in the accusations. Yes, I think \$70.00 was appalling, but the business about the X-Rays and negligence I cannot accept. I placed a call to the Doctor's office yesterday and informed his secretary that your letter did not express my feelings. I hope that I am not now without a Doctor for my family.

You complained that you had to take Mother to pay her rent. Dorothy, it would be impossible for me to tell you how many times I have taken Mother to Knorr's to pay the rent over the years.

I will now quote from your letter. "I am sure if one of your children was having a problem swallowing their food for two weeks and you went to a doctor and had all these tests taken, you would not have waited 8 or 9 days for the results -- you would have been on the phone every hour to the Doctor."

Well, I toss that back at you Dorothy. If one of your children was choking, you would not have waited for me to call the Doctor. You have his phone number if you felt it was life threatening.

But, I happen to know my doctor, and if anyone of those tests had revealed something urgent, he would have been on the phone immediately. No news was good news. Viral pneumonia is not usually life threatening, especially when it was not bad enough for the Doctor to detect it with the stethoscope. You can't even take an antibiotic for it, as the Doctor said you could put viruses in a vat of antibiotic and nothing would change. Therefore, Dr. Onifer, did not order medicine, did not restrict her activities, and did not see her condition as even remotely critical. When I talked to you on the phone at Mother's apartment, you said that the haziness in Mother's lung was just a bad X-Ray. I think the radiologist and the doctor are capable of deciphering what is and what isn't a bad X-Ray.

Regarding the payment of the bill. When I took Mother for her "three-patient-visit," which was \$30.00., the nurse said we owed \$70.00 for the emergency visit. Neither Mother or I had that much money with us, so the nurse said she would mail us a bill. I thought Mother was leaving for Alabama that weekend, and, therefore, told Honey to give you the bill should it arrive, since you would have the bank book. I thought I was doing the right thing. I had no idea it would upset you so much. I think if you are fair you will realize that I never asked you to pay the Doctor before or submit any of the Medicare forms.

The Doctor did say that pneumonia is not uncommon among the elderly, and that if in the future Mother exhibits similar symptoms as before, pneumonia should be a strong consideration.

I did not know that you were not going to pay the Doctor, and I submitted the bill to Medicare that week. I think the \$48.00 check might be for that, but it could be for outpatient tests. I'll try to find out.

I also do admit that over the years you have done far more for Mother than I, but I have done far more than either of the two boys, and yet you don't hate them for it. However, I do know that Jim would be a great help if he lived nearby.

You mentioned that you have problems in your life and seem to think that I don't. Well, I do. I just don't talk about them. My problems may not be as apparent as yours, but, nevertheless, they do exist.

Honey told me that Jim is coming this weekend for Mother. I don't exactly feel comfortable about moving her from place to place the way we are planning. I spoke with two people at the university yesterday, (one works in geriatrics), and they both agree that elderly people should not be moved from their own small environment; it can add to a rapid deterioration. I know this is debatable, and I hope we are doing the right thing. I wonder if it would be better to keep her in her own place and hire someone to be with her for a few hours each day. I don't know; I just don't know. I wish that she had a front apartment so that she could look out and see things. I also wish that it were a two-bedroom apartment, so that if our present plans don't work out, there would be another room for someone who might be taking care of her from time to time.

I certainly will do my share in the arrangements, I only ask that I do not take my turn during the summer months. As a public school teacher, Fred is home morning, noon, and night during the summer. Such steady contact between Mother and Fred would not be to either of their benefit, and ultimately, it would be horrible for me. However, if summer is a bad time for you also, then perhaps it would be a good time to try out the apartment again, but with a hired companion. Mother does enjoy sitting out in the warm evenings with Honey and the ladies. Also, since your busy time is Christmas and the preceding months, then I would be willing to ease your burden and keep Mother during that time.

Many people suggest that we should consider one of the new type of complexes that are for the elderly (not a nursing home,) so that she has a permanent place and doesn't feel like an intruder. Once again, I just don't know the answer. I am only mentioning these things as alternate solutions if our present plans don't work out.

I really don't think Mother is going to be happy living in with us and our families, since she said to me very recently that she tries not to stay too long at your house even though everyone is nice to her. She says that you and Ed need time to be alone and it isn't fair to have an old lady sitting around. Even though she doesn't have good common sense anymore, she still doesn't want to be in the way.

Well, getting back to your letter. You mention lack of conscience. Once again Dorothy this made me feel badly, because I spend many a sleepless night worrying about what to do for Mother. It's on my mind all the time. I am not the cold and uncaring person you make me out to be. I just don't know the right thing to do in this situation. I guess I know what I would tell someone else to do if a similar problem existed with his/her mother, but because Mother is not cooperative ~~by~~ any changes in her life, I can't recommend a logical solution that would not be upsetting to her.

I still don't know why you dislike me so much. I wish you didn't feel that way. It would have been nice to have had each others' friendship over the years, to share in holidays, and to have our families share the many joys and sadnesses together. Our children have missed the fun of knowing their cousins and aunts and uncles.

I think you blame me for a situation in your life that I did not create. You've mentioned enough times that Ed said he has had Mother all his married life. But, Dorothy, I didn't bring Mother into your marriage all these years. You did.

I'm not talking about recent years. I'm talking of your early marriage years, when I was just a teenager living at home. You made Mother dependent on you after Daddy died. Jim and I did too. I seldom had a Saturday night date, for that was Jim's night. My nights were Thursday and Friday; Jim's were Wednesday and Saturday. None of us felt Mother should be alone. We made sure someone was with her. As a result, we didn't help Mother, but instead made her more reclusive. She never had to go out and meet new people or do new things; we took over.

After my marriage, I did the same thing as you. She was always at either my house overnight or yours. It was a difficult pattern to break. It was only when the big fight took place 11 yrs. ago when Diane was born that Mother stopped living at my house.

Mother has said to me over and over again, "The one thing that would really make me happy is if you and Dorothy would be friends." I tell her that I am not mad at you or feel the way you do. I hate to end this letter using the word "conscience," but is your conscience prepared to willingly not grant Mother her one request?

Helene