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## Mary Darling's Mother

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## MARY DARLING'S MOTHER

*JoAnne Brotman-Smith*

Mary Darling's mother found us under Mary's baby sister's crib. We were perfectly fine, I thought. The bare oak floor was warm, even in the middle of winter. Well, it should have been; Mary's place was the top apartment of a three-flat — right across the hall from mine.

Her mother glared at us, her face puffed and red from bending so far over to see us under the crib. She particularly glared at me. I suppose she thought I was doing something bad to her daughter. We both had our panties down. Well gee, we were playing "doctor," and it was my turn to be doctor.

I don't really remember a sense of fault. Eight-year-olds often have a keen interest in each other's crotches, and we were nearly eight. Looking at each other's crotches was a discovery adventure, and playing "doctor" was the way the adventure went. Well of *course* it was a taboo adventure, otherwise we would not have hidden ourselves under Mary's baby sister's crib. Mary's mother's face seemed enormous to me, peering at us with her angry bulging eyes.

Of *course* it was my fault. Little Mary Darling was her mother's perfect Swiss-dotted angel. Mary *always* wore dresses. I didn't like dresses. I rather thought of myself as a cow-girl. I even fibbed at school that I was Roy Roger's 10th cousin. But I liked looking at dresses. I was particularly fascinated with the white puffed sleeves of one of Mary's dresses that had tiny eyelets all over them. These were teeny little holes that were stitched all around, like button holes. I imagined that some old grandma had sat up all night, stitching the eyelets in Mary's puffed sleeves.

Of *course* Mrs. Darling ran down the hall of her apartment to her front door and across the top landing to the apartment where I lived. She had every angry intention of ratting on me. She was going to tell my mother what a nasty little girl I was, playing "dirty" with her Swiss-dotted angel daughter. She expected my mother to give me a royal spanking — hard enough so that I would cry plenty loud. Then Mrs. Darling would have her satisfaction.



But ha, my mother never did spank me. She told me never to do “that naughty thing” again, and that was the end of it. Only it wasn’t the end of it. Mrs. Darling thought I was a pervert and never allowed me into her apartment again. I didn’t care; I never liked her apartment anyway. It seemed so sparse. We had *rugs* throughout all the seven rooms of my apartment, except for the kitchen.

But Mrs. Darling had been really mean when she said I could never play with her daughter again. In my mind though, that wasn’t so bad as Mary knuckling under. She *never* stuck up for me. *That* was the real eye-opener. Since Mary wouldn’t share the blame, I saw instantly that she wasn’t my Loyal Friend.

Mary wouldn’t walk to school with me anymore, and she avoided me at recess. Boy, *she* and not her mother, was the one who made me feel as if I had really done something terrible. Boy, did *I* feel betrayed.

We said “boy” a lot, back then in the 40’s. Even the girls said “boy” a lot. Well of course that made sense. *Boys* had the edge over girls (except in our reading and vocabulary classes). Boys, it seemed to me, had all sorts of privileges that girls couldn’t have. They could be *rough* and fight and say bad words and altogether express that fierceness in them that girls couldn’t. I hated that. So I pretended to be a cow-girl a lot and my parents put up with it, saying it was pretty normal for me to be a Tom-boy. They never knew I hated being a girl. They never knew how *unfair* it was out there . . . how boys could act up and misbehave and then say “boys will be boys,” while girls had to wear dresses and clean white socks and patent-leather shoes.

My parents never knew my deep down hurt when Mary betrayed me. I chalked it off to her being her mother’s little Swiss-dotted angel who never had the guts to be more than the sweet starched dresses she wore every day to school. Mary was a stink-pot and so was her mother. They moved away within the year. I thought that was good riddance of bad rubbish, as they used to say back then in the 40’s.