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Like Mother, Unlike Daughter

Joan Harris

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Saturday March 2, 2024

By Joan Harris

Everyone tells me I'll inevitably do or say something that makes me realize I have become my mother, but I'm not so sure. You see, my mother and I have next to nothing in common.

Our physical similarities end at blue eyes and root canals. Mom is a tall, elegant blonde with two green thumbs and feet like a fashion model. I am a short, slapdash brunette with thumbs the color of dry-rot and wide dogs more at home in Birkenstocks than heels. My lactose-intolerant insides churn just looking at the stockpile of ice cream in her freezer.

My mother worships at Our Lady of the Dust-Free Ceiling Fans where the Holy Trinity is Pledge, Windex, and Easy-Off. I'm a disciple of dirt swirl carpeting and self-cleaning appliances. I ditched my iron when I left the Air Force in '98. My bathroom mirror is perpetually speckled with toothpaste. I consider a nine-pack of vacuum cleaner bags a lifetime supply.

I'm soft-hearted where animals are concerned. I adopt stray cats and pound hounds and give them free run of my home. When a mouse became entrapped in the recycling bin under my kitchen sink, I carried the bin to the back yard and set him free. "What on earth were you thinking?" Mom scolded. "It knows how to get in now! It will come right back!" She sets traps for the neighborhood varmints that treat her garden like an all-you-can-eat buffet. If the snap of the trap only maims the poor creature, she finishes the job with a hammer blow to the head.

Add to all this the fact that I have reached the autumn of life un-besotted by pantyhose, Buicks, or Amish romance novels, and you will arrive at the same conclusion I did: I was accidentally switched at birth.

Sending in cheek swabs for DNA analysis would yield conclusive proof of the stork's error. This would, I assume, be of comfort to my mom, who could finally stop wondering how she ended up with a daughter who owns a closetful of Bernie Sanders campaign t-shirts, drives a seventeen-year-old Honda Element named Remington, and believes babies are delivered by a stork. Not to mention the relief it might provide to some bewildered hippie mom whose daughter never begged for a puppy, irons her underwear, and wants a Roomba for Christmas. And yet, I hesitate. Despite our myriad differences, I have grown rather fond of the woman I've called Mom all my life. And who knows? Maybe 2024 will be the year I'll have an inexplicable urge to spray Windex on the bathroom mirror.

—Joan Harris

Joan Harris is a retired nurse and prior Erma winner who lives in Huron, Ohio with her husband and pampered pets. She was badgered throughout childhood to tuck in her shirt and pull up her socks, and it turned her into the offbeat humorist she is today. Her essay "Like Mother, Unlike Daughter" was a finalist in the 2024 Erma Bombeck Writing Competition in the local humor category. She hasn't yet submitted a sample to 23&Me and probably never will.