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Valerie - Bernadette's mother
Brenda - my mother

Dear Brenda,

Thank you so much for your long letter; it is gratifying to have a different view of the situation. I tried to ring you yesterday, but was told by a Spanish voice that the number did not exist. I rang Ben to check, but he has the original number as well.

I am sorry you have caught the rough edge, and certainly understand your feelings, but from 2,000 miles away I would not make any value judgements about Bernadette and Stephen. In general terms I think she is reacting full-tilt against years of trying to be a perfect wife and mother, and a great deal of this pressure seems to have come from those pillars of perfection, the Church and the Welfare services. Her behaviour now is inconvenient for all concerned, and the girls' reaction is understandable. Naomi escapes into everything-turns-out-all-right-in-the-end stories, but she will grow out of this when the storm has passed.

I had hoped that the cats would give Bernadette a job of her own in the form of responsibility and a personal income. At the moment, she is a kept woman; I have been one for years, but I am essentially a dreamer and this existence has allowed me to write. But Bernadette is a highly intelligent and integrated girl; her Primary school teachers often commented to me that she was a happy and co-operative child, and a pleasure to teach.

But now after many years of conformity, she is finally rebelling. She does not want to be organised any longer, and reacts by behaving like a slut. She would be very hurt if I told her this, and as far as I can tell, the Church and Welfare service are treating her as a sick woman. Our ethos and mores today have no other kind of cure. In times past she would have been given a good spanking and told to pull herself together.

This does not mean that she must be subservient all her life. Indeed, what she is trying to be is herself - not a very attractive person at the moment. She needs to be more than a housewife and mother, but one can be so dependent for so long that one's drive and ambition become atrophied. If she took over the cats again, she would have to do all the work herself to justify a sole income, and pay for help when needed. Because we live in a capitalistic world, the main drive is independence. Money is the means to that end, and work is usually the best way to get it - other ways being dodgy!

In conclusion, Bernadette is fighting Stephen because he is the organiser in her life, but Auntie Church and Auntie Welfare are also organising her - with the very best of intentions of course. Until she realises that she can be a responsible earner, she will remain in this twilight existence. She has a natural sunny disposition, and her brain is capable of a great deal more than slopping around at home. How about a re-training course in Chemistry?

That, from this distance, seems to be the ultimate solution. Do keep in touch.

Love Valerie