

The Family Council

Editor's Note: The Family Council consists of a judge, a psychiatrist, three clergymen, three editors and a women's editor. Each article is a summary of an actual case history. The Council reports on problems that have been dealt with by responsible agencies and counselors.

Chester B.—If she'd only grow up, we could be married.
Regina S.—He can't understand how wonderful my parents are.

Chester B.—I'm 30, a government worker, and in love with a charming divorcee of 25 who has two young children. We have wonderful times together, both with and without the children along. I would marry her tomorrow except for one problem—her parents.

I never met her former husband but I can bet, whatever the stated reasons for the di-

vorce, the real reason was Regina's mother and father. She's an only child and they just never let go. Her mother is a busybody who knows more about housekeeping and babies than anyone in the world. And her father has retired and has all the time in the world to hang around, play with the children, do Regina's errands, and fill in his day just being her "Popsy-Wopsy."

Right now Regina lives a few doors away from her parents. When I asked whether she'd consider moving to another state, she said she couldn't do that to her folks. "I'm all they have!" was her answer.
The parents don't think

much of me. They'd rather not have Regina marry at all, I guess, so they could be sure of having her at their beck and call the rest of their lives. But if she insists on marrying, they'd prefer a rich guy, because she'd lose part of the big alimony she's getting.

How can I help Regina see what they're doing to her?

Regina S.—Chester has made the past year the happiest of life, except when he starts picking on my parents. My happiness is all they want, and through all my suffering they suffered along with me. My previous marriage was in my first year at college when I was 17. My husband

was a campus idol, studying medicine, and both our fathers chipped in to set us up and support us. When my baby came, they moved us into the house I'm in now, which happens to be near my parents' home. I was divorced when the second baby was only a year old. My husband had quit his studies and was working for his father. Between them they are coughing up a good alimony and support check for me and the children each month.

But I don't know what I would have done without my parents. My husband was stingy, abusive and unfaithful. He struck me and frightened the children. We are all

better off this way. He has remarried and has visitation rights to see the children. So far this is working out, although the children don't seem to enjoy seeing him and he runs in and out faster each time.

My parents would be only too glad to see me settled, with a father for my children. But how can I think of marrying Chester who wants me to turn my back on them?

The Council: While it's hard to say who is responsible for Regina's jellyfish response to strong personalities, it's easy to suggest where to start in firming things up for her—with herself! Regina is the

key to a more wholesome life for all the people mentioned above — except, perhaps, her former husband who found his own key.

It's doubtful whether Chester can set in motion the belated weaning of child from parents and parents from child that is so necessary. Such deep-rooted immaturity as we see here may need psychiatric attention before Regina sees her true relationship with her parents. And until she does, she cannot move ahead to an adult relationship with anyone and hope that it thrives.

Here is a girl who has never seen herself as a person, only as a daughter. What

ever is all right for her parents is all right for her. And what's been super-all right for them has been to intensify and prolong their parent-role so that they'll never have to fill their days, as do normally loving parents when their children grow up. Regina, to their subconscious delight, has never grown up.

What Regina says in praise of them is really an indictment. "I'm all they have!" She shouldn't be. It's about time they came up with a few other interests. "Selfless!" That's not always a compliment. Maybe they're running from self, neglecting self, when if they took a good

square look at self they'd see a few faults and correct them. In pulling up stakes and making an independent life for herself, with Chester or another man, Regina is not turning her back on her parents. She is turning her back on childhood and helplessness. No man can be happily married to a puppet.
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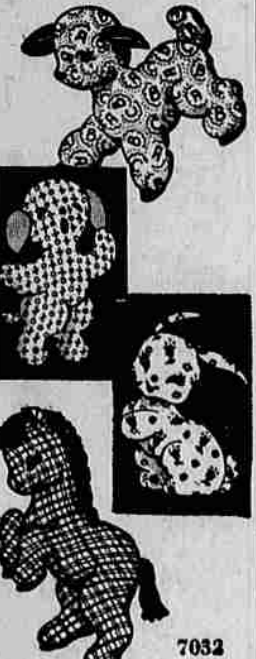
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