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generic upbringing

There is a version of the story in which the child also lives in a happy home and everything is delightfully simply terrible. She lives in a big house right outside of the city. They have a dog, and his name is Guddy. The child is soft in the right places. She runs around with Guddy and steals soda from the refrigerator on nice summer days. They have a pool, and she almost drowns but it's funny. Some days her older cousin comes up to her room and touches her. She lies down on the bed while he touches her hair and works through the knots. When her hair is untangled he stretches out on top of her, hot and fast breaths against her little child neck. Later, he graduates from college and moves sixteen hours away. Guddy gets older, slower, and he dies. The child steals more soda from the refrigerator, but it goes down bitter and sharp. The child grows tall and soft. When she is nineteen, her mother tries to send her to different places but no one takes up the offer. Her mother teaches her how to braid hair and bake bread and sew a ripped pocket together, but still no one takes up the offer. Too quiet, they say, too folded in. Sometimes her mother forces her to go to the public pool in their new town, strip to a two-piece that shows a good amount of body, squirt the right amount of sunscreen on her palm so she doesn't burn. Her father likes to come home late at night. He opens the refrigerator door and asks his house where his whiskey is, and she doesn't tell him how she steals them and brings them to the poolside. There, in the late afternoon, after her mother has given up, she shares the bottles with older men who know her father. Sometimes the girl goes home with the older men, is introduced to their wives who are just leaving to go grocery shopping. In the mornings she forgets how to bake the morning bread. It burns. Her mother screams, sends her to the poolside early. There, she floats on her back until the sun is high up in the sky and her mother comes in for an hour to look for the young men her daughter needs. Her mother, upset by the lack of success at the pool, keeps her home. In the darkness of early morning, she strips herself clean and touches herself. Later, she washes her hands five times before baking the morning bread. Sometimes, she stays wide awake, goes to the pool late at night. She lies face down in the water until she chokes.

In this version of the story, the child lives in a happy home and everything is delightfully simple, terrible. She lives in a big house right outside of the city, painted a pale eggshell yellow, which is all the rage now. Her family has a golden retriever named Max. She runs around a large front yard. Her mother pretends to like gardening but takes pleasure in watching the gardener come in every other day to take care of the lawn. The child wears delicate clothing, and her aunts all panic in a flurry of white faces and fast hot breaths whenever she turns red after a warm summer day. The child grows up and the clothes hang on her properly from her perfectly bony shoulders. The mother teaches her how to curl her hair every morning. Her sisters teach her how to draw on winged eyeliner. She grows tall and her legs are just long enough to look good in the mom jeans advertised in fashion magazines. Her face is narrow and pale, but in the fragile way that the world likes it. Her eyes hollow out, deep-set and beautiful, which is also the way they like it. "Good," they say, "Good, good, good." They tick off the check boxes in smooth green ink on the papers clipped to their fancy clipboards. The world smiles and promises her a great deal of money. Her own eggshell house. Everyone can see it now. They take pictures of her without the flash on and post them for the world to see. "Good," people shout. Later, "More!" She gets her eggshell house, her own attractive gardener, who she sleeps with when she drinks too much. She sleeps with him even though her body is tired. He learns to come into her house through the side door, because people have started waiting outside for her to come back. Languidly, they watch as people forget about her. And then the gardener posts more pictures of her for the world to see, and he is paid a lot of money. She hires a different gardener but forgets who he is and sleeps with him. They all take more pictures, and they all get paid a great deal of money. This time she can no longer afford a gardener. She scoops out her eyes. The girl has to sell her house.

Sometimes they tell the story like this: the child lives in a happy home and everything is delightfully simple/terrible.

She lives in a big house right outside of the city. This child has a cat, and her name is Mel. In her free time, the child dresses Mel in frilly animal clothes and creates artificial tea parties for them to enjoy. In the next room, her parents like to yell. The child is not allowed outside, and there is no dog. Her mother yells about an affair, and after many events like this, the family splits. Later on, her father meets a new woman, and suddenly she has an additional mother. Her first mother spends a lot of time being red after that, and comes home dizzy and sour-smelling. The additional mother spends a lot of time being red, out of embarrassment, twenty years younger than the girl's father. The girl is six and everyone is old to her, so it doesn't matter yet. She is thin, but in a bad way, and her teachers try to phone her parents often, all three of them. Her parents make up the existence of false doctors' statements about various deficiencies over the phone, but never show. The school gives her pills to swallow but they don't help. Her limbs feel loose and she faints, often in class. Her teachers write it off as extreme tiredness, extreme irresponsibility. "Get some more sleep at night," they say. They phone her parents but none of them pick up. Mel becomes frail and shriveled, dies. Her father works late hours and sleeps with the secretary, and in turn the young additional mother sleeps with a different secretary and gives birth to an angry baby, red and mushy and wrinkly. They all call it Baby. Her first mother sleeps on the street most nights, but when she is home she turns up the TV volume so high the soap opera voices crack. The first mother likes to order pizza when her credit card works, and sometimes she offers a slice to the child. The child is brought before doctors, arms dangling from substanceless sockets. The doctor prescribes medicine but no one complies. The child's body is passed from mother to mother. The additional mother forgets about Baby, and one day the child finds Baby stretched out on the living room coffee table, still. She positions herself alongside Baby and stares at the ceiling, waiting.

At times the story is different from all the other versions. The child lives in a happy home and everything is delightfully simple. Terrible. She lives in a high-rise apartment in the big city, where businessmen and CEOs live in their offices across the street. Growing up, the child watches them bend over their desks, until the offices have spine specialists come in to evaluate their employees. The child watches people paste green, yellow, orange, red stickers on themselves, with numbers for how crooked they are. She tells herself she will not be like them. There are no animals allowed in her building, but she keeps a goldfish. She calls him Orangefish because she thinks it sounds better, but when she tells her friends this they all laugh at her and pull her hair until her scalp bleeds. Her teacher asks her to stay after class and touches her chest for a moment, laughs before letting her go. A few months later he invites all the children to his home for a playdate. Her mother forgets to pick her up, because she is getting her spine straightened. Her mother asks her to ask him to drive her home. In the car, he pats her head and touches her chest. Orangefish dies. A little bit later, the child does not do well in school. She cries through multiplication tables and her parents hire tutors to come to her house after school. The tutors slap her wrists with rulers. Her parents are at a high-class dinner function, and children are not permitted to come. On her first time taking the school bus, her friends dig their greasy fingernails into her back. She cries and her teachers write it off as *lack of emotional awareness*. The child grows tall. She inhales so much cigarette smoke and an emergency is called when she becomes sickly. Her parents send her away, to a distant uncle further north. In the mornings, he lets her drink coffee or tea. Later, he goes out to drink with his friends and play bridge. One day her uncle dies, and she is sent back to the city. School boards demand that she become caught up on the required knowledge. In high school, the other kids are only mean in secret. There are more tutors and they wait until she learns to cry again. Her parents are both promoted and they celebrate in the house. Her father's business partners are fascinated by her. "Exotic," they say, "but why so sad?" They all want to fix her, but instead an affair her father had at a business meeting in Miami seventeen years ago is brought to light. Her parents separate, and no one wants to figure anything out. They send her to her dead uncle's house, and occasionally they send her postcards. She buys a new goldfish and doesn't name it anything.

There is a child who lives a delightful life. It is terrible in all the right ways. She lives with her aunt and has a hamster named Dotty. The hamster is stupid and escapes. The aunt loses her mind. But she doesn't live with her aunt. She lives with her grandmother, who is named Dotty. *Dotty takes too many shits*, her aunt says over the phone. Dotty likes to crawl into her bed at night. Her grandmother died thirty years ago. The girl lies in her bed every night as Dotty climbs in next to her. *A service animal?* the aunt says. *Really?* Dotty is the name of her favorite stuffed animal. The child singles her out and puts her on the windowsill. The child pushes her over. The child screams. The aunt climbs into bed with the child at night. The child goes to school and says, "I live in a big house with my grandmother Dotty. We have no animals because she does not like them." *The aunt says, this is confusing. What's going on?* but no one answers her because now she is dead. The child grows up, keeps three hamsters in her bedroom. The child births a baby and names her Dotty. Dotty is pretty and people tell her this all the time. There is no baby. The grandmother says, *what's going on? Where are you?* and the child does not respond. They catch her in the attic with a dead hamster in her lap. They send her someplace else, where she lies in a room painted only in white and screams at all the nurses.

