

Disneyland

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I have my own room now so I don't have to sleep on the sofa anymore. We used the money from my real daddy's life insurance to buy a bigger house in Reseda. My Mother tells me my new address and makes me repeat it over and over again in case I get kidnapped. Our new house has a pool and an extra room for an office. She tells me that my new daddy is going to use the insurance money to start a business that'll make us rich. She says that rich people have mirrors on their ceilings. My new daddy laughs when she says this so I smile and say, "Yeah," like I know what they're talking about.

Since his father was a dog and pony man, he knows all about the carnival business. He says there's big money to be made there. Our new house is a whole half acre right on Tampa Boulevard and he's going to make it into an amusement park with pony rides, a petting zoo and a playground. Then all the city kids will want to come over and we'll charge their parents money, like Disneyland. My mother tells me that my new daddy loves children and we are so lucky that we found him. And aren't I excited to have my very own amusement park?

Before we can move in, my mother makes him put a fence around the pool. She's afraid I'll drown, but she's making a big deal out of nothing since I already know how to swim. I'm a natural. My new daddy pats me on the back and says, "Well, I know *you* know how to swim," in his sweet voice and smiles because he knows I'm more advanced than other kids. He tells me that he doesn't want the other kids who come to our amusement park to get near the pool because of liability. He's always talking about liability. It's an adult word, but he tells me about it because I'm really smart for my age.

My new daddy lets me do things that my mother doesn't, so we have to keep some things a secret from her. When I ask to take a drink of beer, my mother says, "No, you're too young to drink

beer,” but my new daddy tells her to let me taste it because I won’t like it anyway. He’s right. Yuk. Then later, when she’s not looking, he lets me taste my mother’s port wine which is sweet, then sharp on my tongue. The sharpness startles me at first. It cuts my throat as it goes down, but then the sweetness flows over the cut part and sends tingles all the way out to my fingertips. I like how it scares me a little at first, then makes me feel warm and smiley.

Liability means that parents can take our home from us if their child drowns in our pool, even if it’s their own damned fault because they can’t even swim. We have to be careful because everyone’s looking for a quick buck.

He lets me watch as he builds the fence around the pool. He digs round holes with a tool that takes bites out of the ground with a metal mouth. My new daddy is real strong. He brings the swing set from my old house in pieces and cusses up a storm as he tries to put it back together in the playground. Words like, “Goddamned son of a bitch,” creep out of the corner of his mouth. He puts two picnic benches together and builds a cover over them out of redwood posts with turquoise colored fiberglass on top. He paints blue and white stripes over the rust on the swing set. He lets me help him paint the picnic benches bright orange. Everything looks fresh and new when we’re done.

Buddy is our first pony. Tisket and Tasket are next. They’re twins but I can tell them apart because their spots are different. He says I’m just the right size for a pony and he lifts me up in the saddle and gives Buddy a little pat on the butt so he trots forward. Buddy can only run in circles for now because he’s tied to a pole. My new daddy says when I learn better, I can take him out on a real trail. He teaches me how to give him a kick to keep him going and pull back on the reins to slow him down. Even though Buddy is a lot bigger than me, it’s important that I don’t let him know I’m afraid. I learn to cinch up his saddle and my new daddy says I’m an expert before I know it.

When he’s working, he wears a cowboy hat and a plaid shirt with swirly piping at the chest. The pockets snap shut at a point. He walks fast with his head thrust forward. His beard hangs over his chin

and cheeks, bobbing up and down like an oil drill. I have to run to keep up with him. He likes showing me how things work. I follow him everywhere, even into the bathroom. He doesn't mind.

While we're outside fixing up the amusement park, my mother is inside watching soap operas and drinking port wine with ice cubes in it. She closes all the curtains so our eyes have to adjust when we come inside. She still cries sometimes about my real daddy and that makes my new daddy mad. He says, "What is this, a goddamned loony bin?" When he's mad, it's best to stay away from him, but my mother just sits there and cries. I can hear her from my bedroom. That's where I go as soon as he starts in on her. She's stupid for sitting there like a baby.

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