

Honey Bee, Baby

She thought it was a doll. That's what she told the police. And the reporters. And her daughter who called her, distraught having heard the news secondhand. She had looked out her window, she told them all, as her morning coffee brewed, wanting to see how heavy the rain was falling. She saw it laying on the sidewalk. And it looked like a doll. Unmoving. Arms and legs splayed only slightly. She doesn't know what compelled her to go retrieve it, the newspapers would later quote her saying. Perhaps it was seeing the puddles outside becoming full streams of water setting off an instinctive, motherly reaction in her to protect even a doll from the unrelenting elements. It was so cold out, she told the police. When she opened her front door, she had let out a little gasp feeling the iciness of the air, but she stepped out into the rain, nonetheless. How many steps had she had to take, they all asked her. How far away was she when she understood it wasn't a doll, they wanted to know. When was the moment exactly that realization struck her that dolls aren't covered in blood and mucus. Dolls don't have umbilical cords attached.

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When my brother Willy comes in the door I'm already on the sofa with the TV control in my hand choosing my channel and he lets out a sigh 'cause he can never beat me home 'cause my school, the middle school, is closer than his, the elementary school, and he's gotta walk up a hill to get here to our apartment, too, so I always get to pick the shows in the afternoon. 'I'm hungry, Bee', he says and he says it like he's defeated and I don't know if it's 'cause of school or 'cause of the TV so I tell him we got some PopTarts, the box still on the counter where I left it. 'S'mores?' he asks and I tell him nah, it's the strawberry, and he makes a face so I remind him it's got the icing on it at least, not the awful plain kind. 'I don't like 'em cold,' he tells me and he sounds whiny

even though his body is so big, bigger than mind and probably double the size of the other kids in his 5th grade class and even though he's only three years younger than me, he's acting like a little kid and I know he wants me to heat it up for him 'cause he's not really allowed to use the toaster on account of the last time when he sent it all smokin and we had to get a new one even though we don't have money to replace every damn thing you kids carelessly break around here like you pay the bills said my mama at the time but I don't feel like getting up off of the sofa right now, tired lazy today, so I say, 'here, have mine' 'cause my stomach's kinda hurting anyway and so he plops down next to me and takes the PopTart from my hand and asks in his pleading whiny voice if we can watch the Disney channel show with the kids at the camp and I pretend like this is a hardship for me but in secret it's what I was gonna watch anyway. Willy's asleep curled up against me when Mama comes in pulling Miles by his wrist, his three-year-old little legs shuffling as fast as they can to keep up with her looking like he's about to fall over if she lets go and she drops a brown paper bag on the little square table in the kitchen but stops to look at me and at the TV and back and forth again and lets out a laugh that sounds like a puff of air and says, "You're too big for that show, don't ya think?" and I nod and say yeah, tell her it was for Willy but the truth is I'm not too big, I like it. And I'm doing my homework - Math 7 'cause I didn't make it into Pre-Algebra but whatever 'cause I don't want to be some mathematician anyway -- and that's when Ray comes in. He just walks in now no knocking like it's his place and not ours even though he's only been dating Mama for a few months if you can even call it dating when he just comes over to eat the food she makes for him and sleep sometimes and when he stays over Miles has to sleep in my bed instead of Mama's. I don't even look up when he comes in, I just pretend I'm concentrating hard on calculating the area of this damn shape whatever it's called but he calls over to me, 'Hey, Honey Bee' but the hey comes out like a taunting song like heeeeeey all stretched out and I feel my stomach tighten hard when he says it like someone let loose a whole bag of marbles in my stomach and they're all bouncing around and I still don't look up but Mama giggles and when he walks past me to scoop her up into his arms, I get a sniff of his cologne -- cheap ass shit -- and I'm about to vomit.

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It's a small town. Small and liberal with a diverse population of ages, incomes, ethnicities, and sexualities. The town's social media sites are arenas, where arguments are a sport, the majority of residents at least spectating if not geared up and full-on participating. In the previous year an online fight broke out when the town council was floating the idea of hiring professional hunters to cull the deer that were migrating into people's yards with increasing frequency. Moderators came to the unpopular decision of turning off comments – which sparked another bout on censorship. So, on the morning when a residential street was cordoned off by swarms of police as people tried to make their way to work and to school drop offs and TV vans started to arrive, everyone turned to their devices for answers, immersing themselves into the horror as it unfolded in a virtual play-by-play.

Washington Ave closed off. Anyone know why?

Whatever happened is pushing all sorts of traffic onto my street. I can't even get out of my driveway right now.

A fuck-ton of police on the scene.

I just saw two news vans headed that way. Like, from the major stations. What is going on?

I live on the street. Just up the block. The police are going through the garbage out of the back of a garbage truck!!! WTF are they looking for?!

Oh my God, oh my God. It was a baby! Someone left a baby outside! Oh my God!

Who leaves a baby on the sidewalk in the freezing rain?

Lady who found it said it looked 'just born'. FFS.

Is the baby okay? Does anyone know?! Updates PLEASE!

It was dead.

No! Reports say the baby was still alive when the ambulance took it to the hospital.

What's your source? Do you have a link?

I'm praying for that baby.

Channel 7 is reporting that it died.

Anyone with information regarding the infant that was found this morning is asked to call Detective Nolan.

What kind of MONSTER?

Come on, police! Do your work! Get this asshole! They deserve to FRY.

Holy shit. It was a 14 year old girl. Police have her.

14?!?!?! Dear God. That's an 8th grader, right? That's a CHILD.

(The moderator deleted a post.)

All of the moderators of this page will continue to monitor and delete any post that mentions any suspects' names. Not only is the information hearsay at this point, it is also a minor involved.

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I'm thinking back to that day. Think about that day all the time actually. Months ago. Six months ago. Me and Geneva are in gym class and we're supposed to be running the track but we're just walking it instead 'cause it's the end of the school year in just another week and Mr. Grimes doesn't care 'cause he's busy talking to Mr. Glenn the janitor about baseball anyway and Geneva sees Marcus and he waves to her and that's when she tells me, just comes out in a blurt and says it 'Marcus and me are having sex' I don't say anything and she just keeps talking saying that they've done it now three times and that it stopped hurting now because the first couple of times it hurt and she said she even got blood on the carpet of his living room floor where they were doing it when his mama went out but Marcus was nice about it and didn't make her feel bad or embarrassed saying he'd clean it up and shooed her out before his mama came back but Geneva said she still looks at that spot when she goes over, can't help but look at that spot, 'cause it's not all the way cleaned up but she doesn't know if Marcus's mother has noticed or mentioned it or what Marcus mighta said to explain it. And I'm still quiet 'cause I'm thinking about all of this, not sure how I'm feeling about it just yet and before I can figure it out she keeps talking and says, 'I want you to have sex, too' and she explains to me that we've always done everything together since we were little and always best friends all that time, loosing teeth

together, getting our periods together and all of it like we were two of the same people on the same schedule of everything so she says, 'This, too. This, too, Bea.' She wants us to have this too together 'cause we're Bee and Gee. Always' and she doesn't want that to change and finally, finally the words come to me, the thoughts forming into some sensible shape now so I say, 'Gee. Who'm I gonna have sex with?' 'cause she knows I don't have a boyfriend and the truth is I never had a boyfriend yet. Hmm, she says. Hmm. Like she hadn't considered that might be something worth considering. 'We'll figure it out,' she concludes. Just like that. Just like that, like it's some math problem we just got to calculate. That day, that day when Geneva made me feel like I owed it to her 'cause we're a team, always a team, two peas in a pod, two sides of a coin, and whatnot and it was just before summer, a time I always love 'cause I feel like I have the whole world ahead of me, all those warm sunny days for my choosing not the school's or my mom's or someone else's but those are my summer days ahead and my mind is thinking if it fits in to my days, if having sex is gonna be part of the inbetween of waking up late and icy lemonades and catching fireflies with my brothers and teaching them out to pull the tails off while they're still glowing and make a nightlight out of them. She'd even said Please. Geneva'd said, Please, Bee. And so I just shrugged and said Sure.

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Officer Abby Watson was the first to lift the baby off of the sidewalk. Maybe she shouldn't have, maybe emergency protocol would have advised that she wait for the medics but she just couldn't. How could she?, she'd ask her sergeant later. How could she just leave it on that hard, cold cement, a puddle building up around it, the water lapping at its nose? So she had yelled for towels and she lifted the baby and held it tight to her body. She was four months on the job in this town, having transferred over from a big city where she had seen some shit on her beats. *This fucking little town*, she'd laugh with her family when they asked her about her new location. *This fucking quirky little town*. And she'd tell them stories about calls to help open

a milk jug or a spat between neighbors when one threw a bag of dog shit in the other's recycling bucket.

She held the baby trying to make it warm and as she did her brain was constructing a scene. Her brain was always trying to figure out *what happened?* Was the mom on foot? Trying to make it across the bridge - just a block away! - to the city across where two major hospitals could have helped her? *What happened?*

It wasn't long after, certainly, when the medics arrived and the bundle was taken from her arms, though she doesn't remember it. What she does remember is not wanting to let go.

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There's another day I think about a lot, too, of course, of course I think about that day, how can I not and I know that the police are going to want me to talk about that day and maybe they'll even sit me back down in that lady's office, the one with couch that's all blue and soft and sunken in with pillows all across it that don't match the sofa and don't match anything in the room at all actually but they're the kind of pillows that are so big and fluffy that you just want to hold them up against you real tight like and squeeze them and you hope, sitting on that couch and squeezing those pillows tight that you can just sink and squeeze yourself away into oblivion, just disappear from all of this. They'll want to know names and details but how can I tell them that I all see of that day are the shadows of leaves trembling like they're scared and all I feel of that day is a sock stuck on my toe and all I hear of that day is Ray grunting like an animal, a noise that both scared me and made me want to laugh at a grown man making such ridiculous noises. I can tell them some things. I can tell them how I remember Ray pulling off my dress in one swoop up and over my head like he was a magician pulling the cloth off a table of fine glasses without not a one of them breaking or even shaking a little in their places, I can tell them how he called me Honey Bee and said it like it was a song coming out of his mouth but it sounded so sickly sweet that I wasn't sure if I even liked that, and I can even tell them about him

listening in days before to Geneva and me, snooping on us as we were talking in my room. But the rest of it? the rest of it has no detail, it's just blurs of paint on a canvas making a picture that's not clear not even impressionistic, right, Mrs. Collins?, like you taught us in art class, but more like abstract, just swooshed and swirling and splattered about just giving off some feelings and not making anything real that you can see and hold on to. I can only feel those moments of that day. Well, take a breath, take a few breaths, in fact, and then start from the beginning, Beatrice, as best you can recall, no pressure, just what you can, is what they'll say to me. And so I will inhale big and deep and then I'll do it again and when the breath comes out the second time I'll start to tell them, tell them it's a few days after school's out for the summer break and Geneva's at my house and we set the boys up in front of the TV so we could sit and talk in my room by ourselves and Geneva'd brought over two boxes of those chocolate chip cookies because at the Quik Mart they're buy one get one free and so she got one box for me and her and the other box she gave to the boys to keep them still and quiet and out of my room. And she starts talking again about how we are Bee and Gee and we always do things together and I know this means she's thinking about the sex thing, but she's taking a while to get there, building it up instead with all her talk about us being a team. And then she lets out a sigh and says, "Marcus is so sweet. I wonder if I'm in love with him" and she giggles this giggle that sounds faraway like she's somewhere else not here in my little room that I share with my brothers. "You're going to like sex, Bee," she says. She tells me it feels nice and she describes how she gets this feeling like she's a balloon being filled with air that makes her all warm and tickled and it keeps filling up like she's gonna burst and then she does burst and she shakes as she tells me about it, her whole body shakes thinking about it. "I want you to feel that way, too, Bee. I want you to burst." And that's when I see a shadow move near my door and I tell Geneva Shhh and I point towards the door expecting to see one of my little brothers pop out but it's not Willy or Miles, I realize the shadow's too big and he must know we've spotted him, he must know we've gone quiet because of him 'cause Ray steps into the doorway then and says, "Hey girls" but he drags out the words so it's like heeeeeey giiiiirlsssss 'cause he's a snake, and he's got a smirk on his face and he's looking me dead in the eyes and he won't look away, just smirking and staring right at me I know he's heard us but Geneva just says, "Hey Ray" and she asks him

what he's doing here but she says it in a nice way and he says, "Oh, I'm just waiting on Diana. She told me she was on her way home from work but I guess I beat her here." And he makes like he's done talking but he's still looking at me and he adds, "Good thing I did, too. Wouldn't want her to walk into her home and hear things that might upset her." His smile grows bigger when he says this, stretching so big across his face he looks like the Joker and I'm burning hot hot hot with embarrassment and he sees it and enjoys it. Geneva doesn't notice or care and says she best get home for dinner but I don't want her to leave, I don't want to be alone with him so I make up some excuse about some help, could she look at some homework that I didn't understand even though I'm smarter than her, just 'cause I need her to stay until my mom gets home.

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"This is going to look real fucking bad." The mayor was fielding calls from her assistants who were juggling calls with reporters. "How did that girl's teachers not notice she was pregnant? Fuck, how did that girl's family not notice? And fuck, fuck, fuck. When did the schools take sex ed out of the Middle School? The school board will go down for this. Not me. Get me the Chief of Police on the phone."

She scrolled through the social media comments while she waited and though she thought of herself – prided herself, in fact – on being hardened to the grittiness of the world, she startled to see how many people were calling for harsh punishment for the girl. Jail. Tried as an adult. Death penalty! This is murder, after all! She scoffed and was fighting the urge to remind the idiot that their state did not have the death penalty when a phone was handed to her. "The Chief of Police, Mayor."

"Tell me. What's the latest?"

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What the fuck, Bee? What the fuck? What the FUCK, Bee? Whatthefuckwhatthefuckwhatthefuck? What the fuck, Bee?? It's about 5 in the morning and all my mama can say from the doorway of her bedroom, her eyes no longer sleepy but wide and wider like they're growing and gonna explode when she hears me calling for her and sees me standing in the middle of the living room clutching my middle and a stream of water snaking down my leg making a big wet spot on the carpet below me, my knees feeling like they're gonna drop 'cause the pain was too much to keep quiet, I tried, I tried so hard to be quiet and was even in the living room so I wouldn't wake the boys with tossing and turning and moaning, I tried but I needed her so "Mama!" I called "Mama PLEASE!" And she came and saw me and whatthefuckwhatthefuckwhatthefuck Bee and then Ray stumbles outta the room next looking pissed that he was woke so early on his day off no less but he sees for the first time, they both see for the first time, my belly and Ray pulls up his pajama pants that were hanging loose and falling and he says, "Oh shit" and I look at him. Even though there's pain, so much pain, I look at him hard so he knows and he looks away and can't look me in my eyes and he can't look at Mama neither, so he's staring at his feet instead. But the pain hits hard again and I can't keep my eyes on Ray and I yell "Mama it hurts" and she's not frozen in place anymore and says, "Get in the car!" and she tells Ray "Stay with the kids" and she's got this voice like nobody'd better talk back and I'm struggling to walk to the car, it's old and gray and the door gets stuck sometimes and I'm trying the handle again and again but Mama's behind me and says "Get in the back" and opens the door for me but she tosses in some towels first that she musta picked up from the closet on her way out and she says, "And put these down!" She's angry. I hear her so very very angry and usually when she gets like that something in me boils up and makes me want to sass her back real bad but not this time. This time I'm quiet and I do what she says, I don't even think to sass her. And then she's driving. She's driving so fast and I want to tell her to be careful because the rain is coming down real hard now but the pain is too much and I can only yell instead. "Who, Bee? Who, Bee?" Mama starts saying this over and over and over again

and my brain is struggling with two things at once. It's struggling to handle the pain that makes it feel like my body is going to rip in half and it's struggling with the thought do I tell her the truth? Do I tell her it was Ray or do I blame a boy at school? Maybe just pick a name, any name. An answer shoots out of my mouth but I can't remember which I chose because at the same moment something big and wet slides out from between my legs and onto the back seat of the car with me and mama's stopped the car short and she's turned to look at me. She doesn't look at the baby that's started to wiggle a bit now and make some noises, she just stares straight into my eyes and if there were words in that stare at all it'd be that she hates me. Her eyes tell me they hate me right now. And then she does talk but her words are worse than the hate me stare 'cause she says "Get that thing out of my car." And I kinda don't understand and I kinda don't know if she's serious and I'm still hurting so so much so I don't move and she says it again but she says it as she gets out of the car and opens the back door. She reaches in and takes it and holding it far away from her like it's the most disgusting thing she's ever seen she runs it over to the curb and puts it down on the sidewalk in front of this house that is a pretty, pretty blue color and has got these two rocking chairs set up on the porch like the people that live there come and sit outside together enjoying their pretty blue house and each other. I want to ask her what she's doing, I want to ask her to stop, but it's like everything's been drained out of my body, not just a baby. She gets back into the car and starts to drive so fast away that the tires spin a bit on the wet ground making a noise like, well, like a baby crying. She stops again a little ways up the block and gets out again. I wonder if she's gonna go back to get the baby but she reaches for the towels next to me, all gooey and bloody and gross and she runs them to a garbage can somebody's put out for trash day today. I don't want to say anything, not even ask where we are going as she starts to drive again because I'm afraid that she'll toss me out of the car next and I don't know where I'd go.

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They all wanted to know. It was the same question from reporters and neighbors and even friends, though her friends would whisper it like they respected her trauma, like they understood she would wake from bad dreams about finding that baby outside of her home for the rest of her life. Though the question baffled her. Why does it matter? Does it make it any more or less tragic one way or the other? She's even started to answer it now with the crease of her forehead, a gentle shake of her head, hoping the questioner will take note as to how awful they sound. But she'd answer anyway.

Was it a boy or a girl?

It was a boy.