



The Hazards of Good Breeding

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The "pitch perfect" (*Los Angeles Times*) first novel by the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Women in the Castle*.

This "richly appointed and generously portrayed" (*Kirkus Reviews*) debut novel tells the story of a WASPy, old-Boston family coming face to face with an America much larger than the one it was born in. Told from five perspectives, the novel spans an explosive week in the life of the Dunlaps, culminating in a series of events that will change their way of life forever.

Caroline Dunlap has written off the insular world of the Boston deb parties, golf club luaus, and WASP weddings that she grew up with. But when she reluctantly returns home after her college graduation, she finds that not everything is quite as predictable, or protected, as she had imagined. Her father, the eccentric, puritanical Jack Dunlap, is carrying on stoically after the breakup of his marriage, but he can't stop thinking of Rosita, the family housekeeper he fired almost six months ago. Caroline's little brother, Eliot, is working on a giant papier-mâché diorama of their town—or is he hatching a plan of larger proportions?

As the real reason for Rosita's departure is revealed, the novel culminates in a series of events that assault the fragile, sheltered, and arguably obsolete world of the Dunlaps.

Opening a window into a family's repressed desires and fears, *The Hazards of Good Breeding* is a startlingly perceptive comedy of manners that heralds a new writer of dazzling talent.

A *New York Times* Notable Selection and a *Boston Globe* Book of the Year.

The Hazards of Good Breeding Details

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From Reader Review *The Hazards of Good Breeding* for online ebook

Wendolyn says

I found the characters fascinating. The author's writing insightful. It was not the ending I expected, even though I didn't expect a "happy ending".

The front cover is a bit of a mismatch: the home is on a large lot next to a golf course, not on a residential street. But it does reflect the environment.

Here are the insightful lines I appreciated:

"There has been a house on this spot since 1747, when the first John Forsythe Dunlap turned in his barrister's wig, bought three chickens and two pigs, and moved west from Boston to farm the land." (Page 13)

"Caroline's younger brother, Eliot, the dregs of his parents' conjugal activity, has made it to age ten with a certain degree of grace-virtually unheard of in men of the Dunlap family." (Page 21)

"Storybook air-it actually smells sweet, of strawberries and cut grass." (Page 26)

Editing didn't catch the repeated reference to his parents on pages 49 and 66.

"[Concord] Back then, it was still a simple, small town with no frilly amenities or attractions-'The dullest little next of puritans you've ever laid eyes on,'...Which was exactly what Jack loved about it. The pandering cuteness of its new stores and restaurants makes him want to give up on New England and move out to Idaho or Wyoming, where being American is still a commitment, not just a happenstance." (Pages 49-50)

"'I had a dream last night,' Eliot says-he is looking at the corner of the table rather than anyone in particular-'that you were dead.'

...'Oh, Eliot,' Faith says. There are tears welling up in her eyes. The shadow of the American Legion flag flutters up the side of the building next door like a flame." (Pages 61-2)

It's true; what I recall from life's toughest moments are images of my surroundings and what was going on around me.

"Everywhere she is aware of the scrim of her childhood obscuring the lines and contours of the present-transforming the trees, the street signs, the telephone poles and boxwood bushes, the open vistas and stands of wood into complex forms with double meanings-the overlay of childhood vision onto the here and now." (Page 70)

"What made her sick? Eliot asked his father once, knowing that the word did not really accurately speak to her condition but having no other at his disposal. Too many questions, his father answered. Eliot has never understood whether these were questions that she asked, or that were asked of her. But it was enough to make him stop questioning." (Page 75)

While staying at her friend Lucy's, Faith had slept through breakfast even though Lucy had checked in on her. She is very judgmental of herself.

"Lucy's face peers back around the door...Except this time Faith is dressed, standing at the sink, not lolling

like some teenage slut on her bed.

'You're awake! I saved you some breakfast,' Lucy says, coming through the door like a brisk, reassuring puff of oxygen—a safety line thrown out into the dense, gravityless orbit Faith has been floating in." (Pages 82-3)

"The canoe is rounding the uninhabited part of the island, where low scrub pines and rose-hip bushes grow along the headland and large peach-colored boulders rise out of the water like knees from a bathtub." (Page 145)

What an image!

"Outside the window, the world is gray and abandoned-looking. It has been raining and the sky has a concave weight to it like the underbelly of some giant fish." (Page 149)

Another great image!

"The west lobby of the Fair Oaks Retirement Home is a gallery of time's masterpieces—a room littered with bodies from whom all distinguishing marks of sex, experience, and personality have been exchanged for the uniform gray wash of old age." (Page 162)

Can plastic bags be broken? Page 177

Does this sentence make sense?

"The end glows bright when he inhales and then dims, arcing from his lips through the night." (Page 187)

Page 201; it's mOstaza, not mustaza.

"The Harvard crew is out on the Charles, their boats like delicate centipedes skimming the surface of the water." (Page 204)

?

"Jack's brain grows hard and blank around the name, like flesh around a bullet." (Page 206)

Rock was a great character, a light relief.

- At the dentist, "Where was the cheery small talk and reassuring use of euphemisms like "the easy chair" and "Mr. Slurpee"?" (Page 213)

- "Rock gets up and stretches his stiff back, reaches his arms high above his head like the yoga woman on the late-night show he watches when he can't sleep. There is the buzz of blood in his ears and the crack of his spine, the feeling that something incredible has happened. He has had a baby. No, Jack Dunlap has had a baby. With his Colombian housekeeper. It sends a little skip of a thrill through Rock's body." (Pages 262-3)

- "Upstairs, Rock uses the bathroom, splashes water on his face, and borrows someone's sparkly purple toothbrush. It makes him feel fresher and more presentable. Clean on the inside, as his mother used to say." (Page 263)

- "From outside there is the swish of the clippers, and Brutus thumps into a new position behind the mudroom grate. Rock feels the table spread between them like a vast and shiny ocean, imagines each of them his or her own landmass with its small supply of soup and pancakes and water; with its own language and terrain and natural resources, its own peculiar breed of new and ancient conflicts, folklore and misunderstanding, with its own method of mining iron ore, distilling hops, nurturing hope, and interpreting data, with its own extinct native peoples and thriving breeds of feathered scavengers, weeds, and urbanized wildlife, with its own hampering inefficiencies, corruptions, beachfuls of evolutionary detritus and industrial waste." (Page 267)

Faith:

- "It feels lonely, suddenly, to be in this place that is neither New York or Boston-where no one knows her whereabouts." (Page 238)

- "She lifts her bag and steps onto the escalator. There is the moment of confusion as her bag is on one step, and she on another, and then stability-the hum of unseen machinery, the smooth glide of corrugated metal." (Page 271)

I appreciated the author's note at the end:

"I think of *The Hazards of Good Breeding* as being about individuals and families and love and frustration more than I think of it as being specifically about WASPs. The Dunlaps, like so many people out there, have hemmed themselves in with their own traditions, sense of propriety, and social insularity-and they are each struggling, in their own ways, to realize essential connections between their lives and the lives of others outside the narrow slice of the world they inhabit. Whether they succeed or not is up to each reader to decide for him- or herself."

Carole says

I could not stand to read this book. For seven chapters I read every word and waited to connect with the characters and for them to connect with each other, but neither connection happened. Throughout my reading I experienced anxiety which grew and grew. I found myself longing for a climax of any sort, anything to break the tension, anything to confirm or contradict my sense that something terrible was going to happen to at least one of the characters. But there were no climaxes, no resolutions, no tension breakers, and virtually nothing happened.

So I began reading every other chapter: chapter 9, chapter 11. Chapter 15. Chapter 19. The last two chapters. There were incidents. Characters found out new things. No one appeared to be changed. No one appeared to have a real success or failure. It was terrible all the way to the last paragraph and period.

I gave it one star because it is a book with some beautiful language and phrasing and also because, other than the total uselessness and darkness embodied by this family, there was no tragedy, no death by suicide or murder, no descent to hell or rising up to redemption. I am sorry I started it and more sorry that I finished it.

Jan Chabreck says

I like strange families with issues. All families are somewhat strange and this one doesn't disappoint. The characters are genuine, edgy and there is a mystery that enriches the tension. I found it very engaging.

Kate. says

Like so much in life, this novel's success rests on a single condom. If you make it to the condom (page 170), you're money -- and you'll long remember this book's insight into isolation and social constructs. If you don't make it to the condom, it's over -- because you'll put the book down one day and never pick it up again,

because the characters make you tired and the plot just plain puts you to sleep. What this book does best is to depict Jack and Faith, divorcees who are uncovering their true selves mid-life, after wasting many years in a marriage that was itself a hazard of good breeding.

Lynne says

I loved this book. I'm happy I've discovered another great author. This is the story of the Dunlap family - one week in the lives of Jack (the dad), Faith (the mom - Jack's fragile ex-wife), Caroline (their daughter - new Harvard grad, home for the summer), Eliot (their 10 year old son), and Rock (long-time family friend - in love with Caroline). We get into each of their heads. The story is about the traditions and rituals of a WASP family in Concord, Massachusetts. Really good.

Erica says

This book was just okay. No surprises and the characters were flat.

Emi Bevacqua says

This story took a while to crescendo, but boy once it got going, it was super well-orchestrated. Dysfunctional Boston Brahmins the Dunlops are headed by introverted father Jack who has alienated the rest of the family - ex-wife Faith is a quivering puddle of recovery in NYC, daughter Caroline is home after college but rather than tending to lost little brother Eliot she is distracted by a dashing cinematographer (who is not what he seems).

I enjoyed how very sordid this puritanical story ended up becoming, and how the culture of "nobility" was found lacking when compared to such noble savages as Colombian nanny Rosita or Parisian one night stand Jean Pierre.

Sarah says

Odd. And really boring.

Pamk says

Another book about a dysfunctional family but this one's saving grace was the beauty of the prose and the great characterizations. It's a story of a marriage that has ended, the mother after suffering a mental breakdown, has left her family and moved to New York, and the rest of the family trying to cope with life. The little boy in this book is so vulnerable and deeply affected by the events that have turned his life upside down, and undertakes a mission to try to locate the son of his Columbian ex-housekeeper/babysitter who vanished when they were in Columbia. A poignant novel and one I enjoyed.

Susan says

I struggled to get through the first half of this book. The characters were not well developed, and the writing jumped around, the transitions were poor. I finished it, mainly because I do not like 'not finishing' a book I have started. There did not seem to be any specific plot with this book, rather, more a documentary of one family's life, and not particularly complete at that. I was disappointed as some of the reviews I had read were quite good. I will admit the ending was not what I had thought, though in retrospect was fitting with the character and her culture.

Arlene Weible says

Sad little Eliot was the best character.

Bloss ? says

This is pretty terrible.

Against my better judgement, I bought this book for \$2. I liked Women in the Castle by the same author so, despite the terrible reviews? I chanced it.

Big mistake.

This is an awful, boring, tedious book with vulgar undertones, violence against animals and terrible, unlikeable characters. There is no story, no character development and zero personality. I regret reading it.

Wendy says

The writing depicted characters that you mocked and sympathized with all at the same time (okay perhaps not all). The storyline around Rosita and the "man of the house" could not have been more evident, and with the crazy midlife mommy in the picture it was not a stretch to open your heart to the idea that people might grow apart and relationships change. The non-forgiving, callous lens of the documentarian made our peeking into this WASPy world seem all the more acceptable.

Rebecca says

God, this book was so boring. So much description about nothing. Rich people are sooo annoying when nothing interesting happens. And nothing interesting happened AT ALL in this book. Daughter comes back to her dad's big house in the country after finishing college at Harvard. She now has no direction. Her father like works all day, but who knows doing what. Her mother lives down in NYC because they are divorced

and she is crazy now. Her younger brother lives at the house and even though he is only 10, somehow he takes care of himself most of the time. The father knocked up the baby-sitter, who comes to live with them again at the end of the book, but she is not in the middle of the story at all. Some filmmaker is in town for the summer, wanting to make a doco on rich people or something, but that part of the story like goes nowhere. And a friend of the older twin brothers, whom we never see on the page, likes the daughter and hangs around a lot, but I have no idea why. This book was so boring but luckily it wasn't too long, so I didn't have to suffer forever or else I probably wouldn't have finished.

Grade: D-

Caroline says

- 4.5, shouldn't have liked it (barely a plot, about rich people) but really did for some reason
 - story about rich/well connected Boston family who's parents just got divorced
 - at first just connected to daughter Caroline who was 22 and just graduated college
 - but in the end wished the story was more about rosita than the dunlaps
 - ending was a little too neat
 - changed star rating at the last minute when I realized title is about rich families and dogs
-