

‘You’re a good child, aren’t you?’

a short story by Rex Rowan

Eva hugged her legs to her chest, listening closely from her room. Downstairs, she could hear faint voices, making out some words from her frantic mother and her ‘greatly respected guests,’ as she had put it.

‘No...Of course...but...’

‘No buts woman...value...your life...your wretch’

The voice talking to her had started out as a drawl, formal and cold. Now it had taken on a sharper tone, going from cold to bone-chilling. As it did, Eva felt herself shiver. A cold, assertive feeling swept throughout the building. She could make out her mother’s voice again; it had gone from frantic to straight up terrified. The voices moved closer to the bottom of the stairs. She felt like a sinkhole was opening up in her stomach and that she was about to be sucked into it. She could make out the voices more clearly now.

‘Get her, or he will...’ a new voice came, low and brooding. Each spoken syllable made her want to faint and vomit at the same time as the cold closed around her.

‘N-no’ she heard her mother stammer ‘I will get her, it may take some-’

The drawling voice snapped back. Eva felt the air crack as the second man spoke.

‘Ten minutes, or you risk my anger, woman.’

The fact that he apparently *wasn’t* angry made Eva clutch her legs tighter to her chest, the fear threatening to overtake her. Her mother opened the door, seemingly having gone up the stairs four at a time. The 14 year old looked at her, catching her mother covering up the fear, as the more dignified, sniffy look she always wore came over her face.

‘Evaline darling..’

‘What?’

‘O-our greatly respected guests are in need of...assistance.’

‘What kind?’

‘It’s none of my business,’ her mother snapped back, her opulent hat she constantly wore nearly falling off her head.

‘Well why do they need me?’

‘They need someone small, someone who can crawl through small spaces,’ her mother responded coldly. ‘Why are you asking so many questions? You never ask questions. You always do as you’re told like the good child you are.’

‘It’s just that-’

‘Do you not *want* to help our greatly respected guests?’ her mother asked, a bit of the fear she had covered up coming into her voice.

‘No, but-’

‘I cannot believe you, Evaline! Our greatly respected guests have asked for our help, *your* help, and you are being a rude urchin and refusing to help them!’

The word cut through her. Her mother was right; she did not want to help these people. She hadn’t even met them and just their words made her feel like she would not be safe, like she would be killed, but she didn’t like being called an urchin, she wanted to be a good child, to get *some* affection from her mother, whose face scrunched up at her silence.

‘Oh, my Evaline won’t listen to me, won’t talk to me! Oh, what have I done!? She has made me seem like a bad mother in front of our greatly respected guests and is being a little urchin!’

she wailed, pounding the bedroom wall with her fist while her other hand covered her face, seemingly soaking up the tears.

Eva found herself fighting her gut as she watched, the word cutting deeper and deeper as her mother pounded the bedroom wall, making some of the flaking and fading green paint crack and fall, much like her daughter's will.

'Urchin, urchin, urchin! She is being a wicked and cruel little urchin and she will make our greatly respected guests think very low of me indeed! Oh she is bold and ungrateful to me and is a cruel little urchin! Urchin! Urrchhiinn!'

The last word she screamed shrilly, and Eva broke, unable to take it anymore.

'Alright, Alright! I'll help, I'll help! Please stop calling me an urchin! I want to be a good child!'

Her mother turned, her face showing no signs that she had been crying at all.

'You are a good child,' she said coldly. 'Now come along, our greatly respected guests are in a rush.'

Eva shuffled out of her room, feeling her mother's hand fix itself to her shoulder. She moved towards the stairs, feeling it push her along, as if guiding her. She almost stopped at the top of the stairs, the gut feeling meekly calling out, but her mother silenced it with a cruel, calculated whisper.

'You are a good child, aren't you?'

She moved down the stairs, feeling it would be the last time she did so.