

## The Good

"I can't see you anymore. Can't hear you, either," I say, squeezing my eyes shut and covering my ears. I am too old to be throwing such a fit, I know. I should act mature going to a new boarding school. I should be thankful for the opportunity. I should be important to someone. But I am not.

Sitting next to me, my mother's face is tight with frustration. "Eleanor, calm down. You will bring me to the grave, I swear, with all this insolence. Sit straight and act like a lady."

"I am not a lady. I'm only ten," I protest, but I sit up straight and let my arms fall to my sides to prevent further scolding. My efforts to please my mother fall short.

"Just look at you, rumpled dress, and messy hair. You are a disappointment, really. Don't worry, dear, you will learn. Listen to me, Eleanor." She put a finger under my chin and tilted my face towards hers.

"You will do well here. Learn carefully and try, for once, please try. Don't fail again. I have no time for failures."

My eyes sting. I gaze out the window of the taxi as we crawl through city traffic. Snow gathers on the few pathetic trees, but it's hard to believe it's Christmas time. I scoot further away from Mother. I won't cry.

Christmas holiday was supposed to be spent with my understanding grandmother in the country, but Mother decided that my teachers' reports were foreboding and decided to force me to move to a new city and a new school and start over being new, awkward and out of place.

I despise her.

We slow to a stop in front of a cold stone building. I shiver.

"Are we there?" I ask, trying to sound brave. The place looks like a prison to me. In answer, she steps onto the gritty curb with a fake smile plastered on her face. I get out of the taxi and follow her up the ornate steps and through the huge wooden doors.

The marble floors are well-polished and the furniture is arranged around the massive room tastefully. Mother looks satisfied. She believes that if the school is expensive enough, I will be well taken care of and out of her sight. I resent her for never looking in to the place I will be living, sending me off on my own.

Two women emerge from a carpeted hallway to greet us. They wear uniforms without a wrinkle in them.

I self-consciously try to smooth my rumpled pink dress.

"Hello, this is Eleanor. We paid the entrance fee online and I believe I simply have to sign some papers." She mouth smiles, but her eyes look at me, warning against any misbehavior. Her brisk voice is a clear sign that she wants to leave quickly and check me off her list of things to do.

“Eleanor will be welcome here. Will you accompany her to her room to help her settle in?” one of the ladies asks.

Mother’s face lies. She appears to be relaxed and caring. I know she is not. I have been in this position before. She will slide out of having to stay with me for any longer than necessary. I am right.

“I believe Eleanor wants to explore by herself. Now, I really don’t mean to be brisk, but I must leave soon. Goodbye, dear.” Another fake smile is given in my direction. She kisses my cheek, leaving a red lipstick stain on my skin.

One lady leads me up another flight of elegant stairs to the dormitories. She is tall and her grey hair is pulled back into a tight bun. I have seen many women who look like her, with plenty of makeup and a false smile. We walk through a long hallway, our feet sinking into the thick red carpet.

“The girls here have study time from four to six, after which, we have dinner. You may call me Mrs. Duflo. I am the English teacher here. Now here is your room. I trust you will get along with your roommate.” Mrs. Duflo spoke quickly. Soon I am alone in another well-decorated room with a girl wearing a navy uniform. She is small and has long dark hair braided down her back. She stands up from the desk and comes forward to shake my hand.

“My name is Porsche.” She says.

I try to remind myself that the girls here do not know me. They don’t know about my mother’s tendency to move me from school to school, city to city.

“I am Eleanor. Nice to meet you,” I reply, shaking her hand and keeping all emotion out of my voice. I do not want to make friends only to have to leave them again.

“You look sad. What’s wrong? Is it that you have to wear a uniform? Don’t worry, they don’t itch. They are ugly, though.”

I try not to smile, but I do anyway. I am grateful that she is trying to be nice to me. I’m not always that lucky.

“I don’t want to be here. I want to be with my Grandmamma in the country. My evil mother made me change schools instead.” I reply, trying to end the conversation.

Still, I find myself trusting Porsche. *Even if she hates me*, I reason with myself, *I will be leaving by spring*. Mother will have another place in line for me.

“You might like it here. At least give it a chance. I’ll show you around the building. Here is the bedroom,” she says, rather unnecessarily. “That is my bed, by the window.” She points toward a large bed covered in a plush white comforter. “And this is your bed.” she sits on a bed identical to her own. “The bathroom is over there, by the desks.” I nod.

She looks at a clock on her mahogany desk. “It’s almost time for dinner. Come wash up. Teachers hate it when you aren’t impeccable at meals.” She looks over my rumpled dress and wild hair. “Don’t worry, I’m sure you’ll get a uniform soon. Traveled a lot?”

“I took a plane from my old school then took a train then my mother picked me up for a two hour taxi ride to this city and now here I am.” I almost snap. I feel filthy and tired and alone. Even if Porsche is kind to me, things can get much worse. I have been in this situation before. Things seem always the same.

I wash my face in a large, elegant bathroom and trudge downstairs after Porsche. I am in a long line of girls all wearing dark blue dresses with braids down their backs. I

feel awkward and repulsive. Pulling myself up straight, I am determined to make a good impression on the teachers and staff here. Mother will hear of any of my disobedience.

I sit next to Porsche as we ate a gourmet meal, dreading the activity that always ensued when I changed schools. Soon that moment had arrived.

“Eleanor Peterson, please come to the front.”

I walk slowly to the front of the cafeteria. I go to stand near Mrs. Duflo, the English teacher I have previously met.

“Girls, this is Eleanor, your new classmate,” said plump middle-aged women.

“We all need to remember to come to class and meals clean, honey.” She spoke daggers into my back. I try to stand straighter than I already am, ignoring the titters of some of the girls. I see Porsche is straight-faced. I draw some comfort from that.

“May I have a uniform now?” I ask shortly. Soon I am granted a navy dress and a matching ribbon to braid my hair with. I stare glum faced at the floor as I walk back to my seat.

That night, I sit on my bed, freshly washed with lavender soap, in my silk pajamas. I am biting back tears. My mother doesn’t care about me. My dad is always off somewhere on business, and everyone here thinks I am a dirty mutt.

Porsche comes out of the bathroom with her toothbrush in hand.

“What’s wrong, Eleanor? Are you crying?”

I feel anger boiling up inside of me. I have had a long hard day and want to be alone. I have every right to that wish. Why won’t Porsche leave me alone? I want to cry myself to sleep, but I won’t let her hear my sobs.

“I’m fine!” I shout, letting my voice rise to a bedraggled shriek. “My mother doesn’t care about me, I haven’t stayed in one school for over three months and I don’t have any friends!” I continue to yell. I stare at her breathlessly. “Yes, I’m fine. Goodnight.”

“Please, Eleanor, I don’t want to upset you, but-“

“But what? I don’t care! Leave me alone! Go away!” I feel my fists clench. I hit Porsche with all my might and she cries out. Her eye swells. She sits on the floor cradling her face. I stand, unsure of what to do.

“Girls! What are you doing? What a racket you two are making! What has happened?” says the plump lady who humiliated me earlier at dinner.

We stare at each other, Porsche squinting through her good eye and me furious and guilty. To my great surprise, Porsche stands up, dusts herself off and says, “Ma’am, I’m awfully sorry. I blamed Eleanor for stealing my engraved sliver pencil. I didn’t think about the fact that Eleanor would never do that. I just was so mad...” she trailed off.

“And what about that bruise on your eye? You must see the nurse soon, dear,” says the plump woman.

“I tripped on the rug and hit my eye against the desk. I’ll go see the nurse right away, ma’am.” She leaves the room with the teacher.

Feeling devastated, I huddle among the many stylish pillows that clutter the surface of my bed. I am confused and amazed that anyone would stand up for me after I have been so terrible. I am still lying there when Porsche returns with her eye freshly bandaged.

“Why did you do that?” I ask tentatively.

She sits beside me on the soft bed and says quietly,

“I see hurt in you. I know what that’s like. I have hurt too. My mother ran away when I was a baby. My daddy forgot about me and made up the loss of my mom by working all the time. He got rich and didn’t want me under foot, so he sent me here. I’ve been alone without a roommate for two years. I am glad you are here. Look for the good in everyone. The bad things are easier to see, but keep looking. I see you are kind.”

Now I am even more confused. Why would anyone be glad I am here and call me *kind*? Nobody is ever glad to see me. I am simply a burden. But Porsche, someone I have just met, stood for me. I slowly smile.

The next morning, I braid her long black glossy hair and she braids my brown shoulder-length tresses. We dress in our uniforms and walk the corridors to the cafeteria. I am still feeling new and alien, but now I am dressed like the others.

All throughout the day, I see Porsche “looking for the good” as she calls it. I want to be like that. I will try.

Now I am at another school in another city. I am always thinking of Porsche, my friend. I smile as I think *Friend*. Things haven’t changed, not really. I am always shifting, out of the way of Mother. Now, however, I can see things differently. My mother, my schools, my life, everything seems better. I decide to always look for the good.