



AWE (A Woman's Experience)

Volume 3

Article 11

4-22-2016

Good Girl

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Recommended Citation

Kaseda, Erin (2016) "Good Girl," *AWE (A Woman's Experience)*: Vol. 3 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/awe/vol3/iss1/11>

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Good Girl

Erin Kaseda

To the girl who is fifteen and feels that abuse fits her
Molded like some spandex-lace hybrid dappling skin
In bruise colors shaped like flowers
This is for you, girl-child, woman,
me-of-ages-past, daughter of twenty-years-down-the-road.

And to the girl who is sixteen and rolls affection on her lips
As delicately as childhood purple lipstick
And the girl of eighteen who wears kisses instead
And the girl of nineteen with your Burt's Bee's chapstick
Because it's more practical and doesn't stick in your hair
Skeleton-and-skin woman cycling language through your lungs
This is for you:

You were never built to be second-class
Second-hand
Handed down through depraved fingers and palms bigger than your own
Own and owed: you are not writing renter's fee checks
Paying the universe back cell for cell
You are not a temporary inhabitant or a migratory bird
Your bones are made of stronger stuff
You are firecrackers lit with sparklers
Firework on firework
Dynamite woman
Your fingertips are powerful.

So when he calls you “good girl” when you apologize for taking up space
Teaching you to hold yourself up by your toes so your thighs spread out less
When he warms his cold suspension-of-belief in your guts
When he takes away your phone so your powerhouse fingertips can’t type SOS
When he says he’ll never do it again
When he says if you’re good he won’t do it again
When he says if not him someone else will do it again
When he says you deserve for it to happen again

I am asking you to remember this:
You are sweat-stained steel and atomic energy and a tangle of roots and ten hundred trees
You are millions of firing neurons and musty book pages and woman in your marrow
You are not a “good girl.”

Dignity-and-thunderstorm woman,
Today is a good day to start saying no.