

The Girl From the Attic

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Maddy Rose lives in two worlds. A hundred years apart. In the same strange house built in the shape of an octagon. In this excerpt, Maddy has stepped through a portal into the past and found herself in an unknown attic where she peers through a grate in its floor to the kitchen below.

Maddy leaned away from the grate, afraid she had been seen by the strangers below her. What were they doing in her kitchen? And why did it look so different? When she peered again through the opening, she saw the old woman wave her hand towards the back door where a rusty squeaking of metal against metal could be heard outside.

“I hear them washing up at the pump, Helen.”

“Then sit yourself down, Aunt Ella, and I’ll finish the serving.” The young woman adjusted a white apron over her long gray and white striped skirt. Why were they wearing those clothes in the summer? They looked awfully hot.

As Aunt Ella plumped a pillow in a chair by the table, boots stomped across the wooden floor. Maddy’s nose touched the grate as she bent closer to see the new arrivals. A long-legged boy and a heavy-set man with dark cropped hair entered the kitchen, scraped their chairs over the wooden floor, and settled down at the table below her.

“Where’s Eva?” asked Aunt Ella, a note of concern in her voice.

“In the hen house,” the boy said. “One of the new chicks is looking sickly. She’s fixing a box for it.”

“Oh, Clare, shouldn’t you be giving her a hand?”

Clare rose in his chair, but before he could stand, a tall, thin girl with brown curls framing a flushed face burst through the door. She held a wooden box. Straw poked over its edges. From inside came a weak *peep-peep*.

“This chick needs a warm place!” Eva pushed the box next to the cook stove’s metal legs. She straightened and wiped her hands on her skirt.

A dark shape slunk from under the table and disappeared behind the stove.

“The cat’ll get it!” said Aunt Ella.

With a serene smile, Eva shook her head and sat down next to Clare.

“Shadow’s just curious.” On cue, the black cat with the white tip on its tail sniffed the box and retreated back under Aunt Ella’s chair. Eva laughed and picked up her fork.

“To be safe, Clare says he’ll put a lid on the box. And he’ll feed the chick for me and change its water after I leave. I named it Speckles. After the marks on its feathers.”

“Best not get a liking for it,” said the older man. “You won’t be wanting to eat a chicken that you’ve named.”

“Oh, Uncle Ray, we’re not going to eat it! It’s a laying hen.”

Clare shifted in his chair. “That little peeper may be a rooster, Eva.”

Eva took a bite of carrot and chewed it slowly. “Perhaps,” she said softly. “But still, it deserves to live.” Aunt Ella regarded Eva with sad eyes but said nothing.

Clare stared at his plate. For a few minutes no one spoke. Then Eva covered her mouth and coughed into her hand, a short, tight cough. She put down her fork.

“I’m not hungry,” she said. “I think I’ll rest till it’s time for the train.”

Clare jumped up and pulled the rocking chair away from the wall. When Eva sat down, she began to cough again. Reaching into her skirt pocket, she pulled out a large handkerchief and buried her face in it. A long spasm racked her body. When it stopped, a large red stain spread across the white cloth she held in her hands.

Who are these people in Maddy’s house? Who is that strange old woman, Aunt Ella? What’s wrong with Eva? Can her brother Clare help her? So begins Maddy’s adventure into the lives of the people who lived in her house a hundred years ago.