

The Embellisher

By E. C. Garcia

Copyright 2015 E.C. Garcia. All rights reserved.

Thank you for downloading this ebook. This book remains the copyrighted property of the author, and may not be redistributed to others for commercial or non-commercial purposes. If you enjoyed this book, please encourage your friends to download their own copy from their favorite authorized retailer. Thank you for your support.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner.

Contents

- 1 A Complicated Woman
- 2 The Endless Nightmare
- 3 Meet the Moones
- 4 First Impressions
- 5 Dwindling and Diamonds
- 6 Boys
- 7 The Shindig
- 8 Wishful Thinking
- 9 The Palm
- 10 White Lies
- 11 Prayers and the Professor
- 12 Gain from Pain
- 13 The Vanishing Act
- 14 Changes
- 15 The Lion, the Witch, and the White
- 16 Pop Quiz
- 17 Sacrifice
- 18 The Ugly Truth and a Mission
- 19 The Goldens
- 20 Bang, Bang

A Complicated Woman

It has been two years since Nathan's death. To me it still feels like it happened yesterday. I would be lying if I said I wasn't still haunted by the image of my only sibling taking his own life. After Nathan died it seemed like my life ended too. Ambitions, dreams, everything that I had hoped to accomplish in life didn't seem to matter anymore.

They say that time heals all wounds yet they never say exactly how long it takes for the healing process to finish. The problem with this concept is that time can be never-ending.

I would love to eventually be able to accept his death to the point where I don't think about it every day, but Nathan raised me. He was the only one who really took care of me while I was growing up. That's why when I found out he had gotten a scholarship to some prestigious college across the country I didn't take it lightly. He would be leaving our hometown of Boulder to live out his dreams. To me the more obvious fact was that he was leaving behind his family. Without Nathan there for support and guidance I had no one.

Our father left us when I was five, Nathan was only eight, and he involuntarily became the man of the house. I knew at times he hated this, always having to be there for my mother and I when he was still a kid himself. I could tell by his tired expressions that sometimes he wished he could be carefree but he never complained.

He was an amazing brother and extremely intelligent. I didn't protest when he expressed interest in attending a university in New York City, because I knew he deserved it. I just didn't think it would really happen. For my own selfish reasons I didn't even go to his going away party before he left for school. Now I wish I had.

I've been seeing a therapist for a few weeks now. Her name is Dr. Virginia Bloom. I'm sitting in her office in an overstuffed brown leather chair, staring at a framed picture on the wall of silver fish swimming upstream. The fish all seem to have smirks on their faces. I wonder if the picture is strategically placed there to provoke a certain emotion from her patients. You never know with shrinks. They're judging you at all times which is why I was so hesitant to start these sessions.

It was Sharon, my mother, who made me come here. She's never been there for me but now thinks it's appropriate to start stepping into my life by forcing me to see a therapist even though she may be more damaged than I am. I know she's only paying for this because it saves her the time of talking to me and also makes her look like she is making an effort to be a good parent. *Well played, mother.*

I hear the office door click and turn in my chair to see Dr. Bloom walk in carrying a small, black notebook.

"Hello Zenny, how are you today?" she asks while making her way to her desk to get settled.

"I'm great thanks. How are you Dr. Bloom?"

"Well that's good to hear. I am doing well, and please call me Virginia," she says while smiling. She starts fumbling through the papers on her desk; she's lost her glasses again. This happens every time. But who am I to take a crack at her memory, I always forget to call her by her first name even though she insists repeatedly.

"They're on top of your head," I say patiently.

"Oh yes," Virginia giggles and begins feeling around the top of her head, "this happens every time, does it not?" She chuckles again and this makes me laugh.

Although I haven't known Virginia for very long I feel comfortable with her which is very relieving and surprising. Perhaps it's her kind face that is so welcoming. Her cheeks are plump and she has a long slanted nose that rests closely to her upper lip. Her hair is bright red and full of tendrils. The color reflects off her green eyes, transforming them into a hue of brown that I've never seen before. She reminds me of a cartoon character on a show my mother used to make us watch while she was blending her morning cocktail, maybe that's why I feel like I know her.

"So," starts Virginia as she rests her glasses onto her nose, "last time we met I think we made some progress." Her tone is always so chipper and enthusiastic, the opposite of my intentionally pessimistic demeanor. I still can't understand why she doesn't annoy me.

"Sure," I say. I'm unable to remember what we even talked about during the last session. I've been somewhat detached during the last year.

"Well, we only have a few sessions left. I did want to ask you if things have gotten any better between you and your mother. Have you been able to sit down and talk to her like I suggested?"

"Oh...yeeeah...about that..." I say. Now I remember what we discussed last time.

From day one Virginia has been very insistent about me providing her some insight to my family life, although there is not much to tell which I try to explain to her.

My mother spends most of her time working and going out to bars while preying on younger men like a rabid cougar. My father is... indefinitely absent. After she realized that I was telling the truth she seemed worried, but before she made any reports to Child Protection Services I assured her that I was able to take care of myself by now. I'm not in danger and when I turn eighteen in six months I will be free of any stress my mother puts on me.

Virginia began focusing on helping me forgive my mother before I moved on to adulthood.

"Zenny I thought we agreed that you would at least try to talk to her," she says already seeming to know I had not fulfilled her request.

"I know but she's such a ---," I pause. Oh boy. I don't know how to end this sentence without sounding completely insensitive towards the woman that gave me life.

"Difficult person?" Virginia asks quizzically.

"Yeah, let's go with that description."

"It is never going to be simple. Remember I have met your mother and I know she is not the easiest person to communicate with but if you are the one who tries to improve your relationship then at least you can say you tried and you will not have any regrets. Do not forget she is only human and makes mistakes just like the rest of us. Among her responsibilities as a parent she also has worries, insecurities, and problems just like everyone else. There will be a time when she needs you more than you have ever needed her." Her empathetic tone makes me believe she's saying this from experience.

"Fine I'll try again," I say in a promising voice, even though I'm not entirely sure I want to make the effort. She doesn't know how truly frustrating it is dealing with my mother.

"Okay," she continues without pressing. "Is there anything that you would like to talk to me about today?"

I breathe in deeply and adjust myself uncomfortably in the leather chair and it makes noises that sound like passing flatulence every time I move. Virginia is mature enough to not laugh, I struggle to contain myself. I almost wish we could just talk about the gassy chair and avoid any other topic about my life.

I sit in silence with my head down staring at the unpleasantly green shag carpet underneath us that is heavily stained with what looks like the remnants of dark coffee, at least I hope that's all it is.

Virginia starts flipping through her papers again; she seems to be reviewing my file once more. “Well it looks like there is plenty to talk about,” she says. The pages seem to be endless. Am I one of her more troubled patients?

“Would you like to talk about why you were expelled from your last school? We have never discussed this,” she says calmly. “Why did they call you... “The Embellisher” is that even a word?”

“It is today,” I say, “but I wasn’t officially expelled.”

If I really had to give her something today then I guess I would be willing to talk about the unjust ridiculousness of why I was kicked out of high school.

Despite not having influential role models in our lives my brother and I had developed very interesting personalities. Having to fend for yourself at a young age definitely builds character. We were weird, sarcastic, curious, stubborn, cynical, but grateful for the simple things in life. We were also willing to accept the fact that we had imaginations that were wildly out of control, especially me.

This brings me to my next problem. Oh yes, I’m a complicated woman on the brink of becoming a full-fledged disaster.

I learned early in life that I don’t see things the same way as other people do. It’s not like I see dead people or anything, but in my own time I began to think everything was fascinating and magnificently complex to the point where I seemed crazy when I talked about anything.

For instance, I think trees are amazing. I mean c’mon they provide us with oxygen, they’re full of life, and even change colors with every season.

When we were young the city had decided to tear down a one hundred year old oak tree resting near the public library so that a statue of one of the city founders could sit in its place. I had convinced Nathan to stage a protest with me since we both had believed that this tree was also a part of the town’s history. Consider the events that it had lived through, the secrets that it knew.

But when the city officials saw two kids tied around the oak tree with a jump rope holding up hand painted posters, they distracted us by having an ice cream truck pull up a block away. We couldn’t resist. As soon as we ran towards the truck they had the arborists come in and remove the tree. *What a cheap shot.*

Now every time I go to the library I glare at the copper statue of the giant man smiling back at me. The sun gleams off his bald head blinding nearby drivers, it’s very dangerous. And in the winter the snow collects around his pot belly making it appear to stick out even more. I like to tell winter visitors that the statue honors the memory of Boulder’s first pregnant man.

After this incident I was called a tree hugger many times, but it’s not just trees that I’m passionate about. I happen to have an avid appreciation for all things not created by man. While some would say the statue had the right to be there, I say the tree was meant to be there.

Even though I acknowledge fate I don’t consider myself religious. According to my mother she used to take us to Catholic mass when we were still babies. However, she and my father were asked to not return because one day when they took communion they got in line a second time for another sip of wine.

Regardless of our lack of spiritual upbringing I know there has to be a master maker who should be acknowledged for the infinite masterpieces that surround us. Nothing in this world is insignificant so why make something seem less amazing than what it really is? Details create images and images create visions of extraordinary things.

Eventually I started to enhance everything so that overlooked magnificence was no longer a problem. Although, I have learned that applying this to everything and everyone doesn't always work. I do my best to keep my elaborating at mid-level; but there are times when I take it to the extreme. My bad I guess.

Needless to say at my last school once word got out that I was an "embellisher" as the teachers referred to me as, the faculty became cautious. I could name a few details I've added to stories where my teachers overheard and overreacted but they were all harmless.

Like the time in fifth grade when I yelled at a classmate for smashing a bee with his binder. The jerk was obviously unaware of their importance in our ecosystem. So I told him that in ancient times bees were considered to be a sacred insect with many powers and anyone who caused harm to them would be cursed with facial deformities. Who knew he would take me seriously and run home crying to his mother?

I suppose I could have been a little less daunting, we were only ten years old when it happened. I was only trying to prove a point. It's not like any of it was true even though I found it possible. I still think that patchy mustache he grew on his face when we got to high school was only a coincidence.

The final straw for my last principal came about when one of the school's janitors, named Paulo, got fired when he was caught smoking a joint near my high school's campus during his lunch break. Everyone was appalled and quick to label him a degenerate. I however felt bad for him because he seemed like such a nice old man, always smiling... well I guess I know why now.

I decided to defend his sanitation honor and told everyone that the reason he turned to drugs was because he was a single father who was left by his manly, Puerto Rican wife who used to beat him. She left him by himself to raise two kids Peter and Guadalupe (both who somewhere throughout my story became kids with speech impediments). With his struggle to make ends meet all Paulo could do was persevere. He was endlessly working to support his kids, raising them on his own, hoping that for five minutes out of the week he could take some time for himself and partake in an herbal pick-me-up.

Unexpectedly my plan actually worked as word spread of Paulo's heroic parenting and his evident depression that he was trying to treat with marijuana.

Of course leave it to my friends to take it to the next level. They started wearing t-shirts that said "Praises for Paulo" and then began writing complaint letters to the principal demanding that this struggling father be given a second chance. Only days went by before my principal retaliated and tracked down the sole producer of these Paulo raves, which was me.

I ended up in the principal's office again sitting next to the man of the hour, Paulo. I was fully prepared to stand up for his medicinal rights because I knew there had to be something more to him than what my Principal had made him out to be. But as my Principal revealed the truth it turned out that Paulo had never been married and he didn't have any kids. In fact, he flat out said that he hated kids and the reason he was smoking on his lunch break was so he could tolerate cleaning up after the "Little demons."

Yes, he compared the students to tiny, evil beings. Then right before leaving the office he gave my principal the finger.

This wasn't so great for me because once everyone found out what type of person Paulo really was the Principal made me publicly retract my statements. It came as no surprise that all my classmates and most of my friends shunned me for the rest of the year.

"And so..." I continue explaining to Virginia, "I was given the option of either completing daily detention after school for the remainder of the year plus visits to the school's counselor or

leaving the school completely. The only reason they didn't expel me was because they felt sorry for me. They knew I was dealing with my brother's death and a crazy mother."

She begins to take notes on a piece of bright pink notepad paper. I wish she would wait until I left to start writing about me.

"So technically I didn't get expelled even though all the teachers wanted me gone. I chose to leave," I finish.

I stop talking as she finishes scribbling her notes.

"Do you feel that you have made the right choice?" she asks without lifting her head and adjusts her eyes to peak at me over the brim of her glasses.

"Well yeah," I say, "everyone hated me in the end, it got really awkward. They spent a lot of their Christmas money on those Paulo t-shirts. But either way I felt like I needed a new start. The only bad thing is now my mother is making me go to a Catholic high school for the last four months of my senior year and we're not even religious. Plus now I have to come to these ridiculous therapy sessions," I pause. "No offense."

"You do not believe in God?" she asks ignoring my remark.

"I don't believe in anything these days."

Her expression turns from curious to one of disappointment. "Well you seem to be passionate about the creations in this world," says Virginia. "You believe in the wonders of nature and the world's miracles." She smiles and I can tell she's being genuine.

"I do not see embellishing as being your biggest problem. Do you feel that it is?" she asks.

"No I can control that," I say truthfully. I know my storytelling isn't the reason I can't sleep at night, although it's hard to admit this to a stranger. We both sit quietly for a moment.

"I know you said you were not ready to talk about your brother and that is fine." She sounds nervous whenever she brings up Nathan. "But last time you were here you mentioned a dream that you had about him."

"Yes," I say.

I feel my throat tighten when she says this. I knew I never should've said anything. Why did I tell her about it? And it wasn't a dream; it was more like a nightmare. I remember now that the only reason I had told her was because I was hoping she could prescribe me some heavy sedatives that would help me sleep.

Virginia glances down at the papers on her desk and flips one piece over to see the notes on the other side.

"You said that in your dream you saw Nathan sitting on a rock near a beach somewhere," she starts, "but when you approach him his face begins to change. His eyes become black and his face becomes distorted." She was sugar coating it. Last time I had gone into more detail about what I saw.

The Endless Nightmare

As I approach Nathan on the beach he starts to change. His eyes shift from a sparkling green to a glooming, possessed black. Then his skin begins to boil and blister. I scream and run closer hoping to save him but then he starts to laugh evilly and I stop in my tracks. The rest of his skin begins to ooze pus and crack open; revealing bloody flesh, nerves, and veins. His skin starts to melt right off his bones until only his skeleton is left.

What he says after this is what haunts me the most, although I didn't mention it to Virginia. Nathan's skeletal remains turn to face me, and although his eyes are replaced with only hollow sockets I know he's looking straight at me.

"They're coming for you!" he shouts as if he's trying to warn me.

For a moment I can still sense my brother is with me and I make one last attempt to try to run to his rescue. Before I can reach him he starts to scream. His skeleton begins to shake and almost instantly completely shatters and all that is left of my brother is a pile of broken bones.

Now I have goose bumps on my arms just thinking about it. Something so nonchalantly mentioned by my shrink is something that has been terrifying me night after night.

"You never told me what this could mean, how do you interpret this dream?" Virginia asks.

"I don't know what it means," I say abruptly. I want to talk about something else, anything else. She continues to stare at me blankly as the minutes of our session waste away.

"Is there any reason your brother might appear to you this way, as if he was possessed or demonic?" she asks.

I'm surprised by her question. Demonic? Where does she get this idea from?

"No. My brother wasn't evil if that's what you're asking," I say.

Her expression remains. "Do you think by seeing Nathan like that it was a reflection of where you think he might be now?" she asks.

"Excuse me?" I ask defensively. Her attitude is becoming more intense and inquisitive. She shifts forward in her chair and rests her elbows on her desk to look closely at me.

"Why do you think he turned into a possessed figure in your dream? Is there anything you are not telling me about your brother?" she asks.

Her sudden shift in approach scares me. She's usually never so pushy. I'm wondering where she's going with this. Does she really think there's a possibility my brother was evil while he was alive? She sits staring at me with wide eyes waiting for an answer. It's now obvious she's very interested in this dream and there's a sudden curiosity about my brother.

"No. No! You didn't know Nathan," I yell, "he was a better person than all of us. Why would you think that he's demonic? I don't believe in that stuff and I don't know why I saw him that way! And what do you mean "where he is *now*" he's dead remember? My brother is no longer alive. So if you're going to pass your judgments on anyone just let me have it!"

Tears are forming in my eyes. I don't know why I'm being so sensitive, but now I'm upset that Virginia was able to affect me like this.

"I have to go now." I quickly stand up from my chair and turn to head for the door.

"Zenny, I am sorry but we are running out of time," says Virginia just before I reach for the door handle. I can't help but turn to face her, the sound of her voice is cooing at this moment. I know I only signed up for a few more sessions with her but I'm not sure I'd be able to withstand any more of this.

“I really did not mean to imply that your brother was a bad person. I was just wondering how this dream can be interpreted,” she says while slowly standing up from her chair. She grabs the small black notebook on her desk that I saw her walk in with.

“I would like you to try something for me.” She begins to walk over to me holding out the notebook. “Keep a journal. Not for me to read. It will be for your eyes only so I do not want you to hold back any of your thoughts or feelings. Try to write in its pages daily about everything you experience. Will you try this?” She smiles kindly at me.

“Okay,” I say now calming down. I take the notebook from her hand and begin to walk out.

“Zenny one last thing,” says Virginia, she looks hesitant. “I think you need to try to find out why Nathan killed himself.”

Meet the Moones

The drive home from Virginia's office is a blur. I'm so angry after our session my mind goes into auto-pilot; focusing on not hitting any pedestrians and driving slowly on the snow splattered roads while reality spins out of control around me.

How could Virginia think it was okay to speak to me like that? She spoke of Nathan as if she knew him. How could she suggest my brother was a bad person?

I briefly consider how perhaps her intentions were to help me find closure, but I still think it's too soon for me to revisit Nathan's death. I had spent months obsessing over the investigation. I so desperately wanted the police to find incriminating evidence of a killer, but after several months of no leads, clues, or witnesses; Nathan's death was officially declared a suicide. He had hung himself from his dorm room ceiling. His roommate had found him long after it was too late. I didn't accept the suicide claim as easily as everyone else. There was no note left behind or any form of a "goodbye world" statement. To this day it still doesn't make any sense to me.

As far as I knew Nathan was happy and enjoying his new job as an assistant to one of the most powerful stock brokers in New York City. The last time I spoke with him he was ecstatic about learning to become a success in the finance industry. He went on and on about how he was constantly commended by his professors and colleagues for being such a genius when it came to learning about financial strategy and stock market predictions.

Apparently one of his classmates had a father that was a CEO at one of the most powerful banks in the city and he told Nathan he could get him a job there once he graduated. Nathan was thrilled. He said he would be making more money than he knew what to do with and could even buy us a new house.

I remember one of our conversations when he told me his colleagues wanted to initiate him into their member society that was so exclusive people were unaware of its existence. Most of the members included descendants of some of the richest men in the country. I knew Nathan had to be nervous about joining such an elite group, considering our less than ideal upbringing that included a drunken mother and reliance on Welfare checks rather than a trust fund. But still, there would be no reason for him to resort to suicide even if he felt mediocre. Nathan was a fighter; he wouldn't give up that easily.

So why did everything suddenly change? Even though the unanswered questions of his death bother me, I'm not sure I have the energy or the strength to take on the role of a private investigator; especially when it involves delving deeper into my brother's death. The thought of what I could find out interests me but it also frightens me.

When I arrive home from my appointment I walk into the house to find my mother passed out belly down on the couch. She's got one arm and one leg dangling off the side of the cushion and still has her work clothes on. Her face is smashed up against the decorative pillow and smudges of mascara now stain the tan fabric. A smoldering cigarette is in the ash tray which sits next to her glass half filled with straight vodka. This is a typical evening at the Moone residence.

"Hi mom, how was your day?" I ask.

I walk over to the couch and pull her hanging leg up onto the cushion. I pause for a moment, knowing she will not respond from the depths of her blackout.

“Well that’s good to hear,” I continue. “My day was pretty good too. I had a great appointment with Dr. Bloom today. She thinks I’m making a lot of progress.”

I grab a plush blanket hanging over our lounge chair and shake it out before covering her with it.

“She wants me to start keeping a journal. She thinks it will help me get in touch with my feelings and other stupid stuff like that. What do you think?” I ask.

My mother shifts from her belly to her back with her eyes still closed. Her brown hair falls over her mouth and then she begins snoring.

“Really? You think it’s stupid too?” I ask. “Good. I’m glad you agree because I really don’t want to do it. I’ll be sure to tell Virginia your thoughts.” She still doesn’t respond and her snoring becomes even louder.

“Oh Sharon, how I do love our heartfelt talks,” I say.

I push her hair away from her face and in this moment of her drunken slumber I can still see how beautiful she is; with a very feminine face, soft skin, and long eyelashes. People tell me I look just like her but I don’t see it. My eyelashes are scarce, my lips are thin, and I’m always teased about my thick eyebrows on the verge of becoming one.

I remember when I was little I used to watch her do her make-up. She would pile on pounds of powder, eye shadow, and blush. I always wondered why. I thought she was prettier without it. She seemed to like hiding her true self from the world.

There are times when I can understand her lack of parenting skills. After all she was only a teenager when she became pregnant with Nathan. She reminds us constantly that she and my father sacrificed their youth to be parents and I’m pretty sure she blames us for my Dad leaving. I wish I could say things were better when my father was around, but with the small amount of memories I have from when I was little I can only remember them screaming at each other. It’s hard to say if things might have been worse if he was still here, because with or without him my mother was trapped in her own self-built world of toxicity.

After all these years I was hoping she would mature and develop maternal instincts, but again that whole perpetual time thing kind of rains on that parade. I’ve seen other single moms manage to survive on their own and they all seem pretty normal. I’ve tried my best to understand why she acts the way she does, although now I’m not sure I’ll ever be able to accept the reasoning, whatever it may be.

“I’m going to bed,” I say to her, “goodnight.”

I start to walk down the hall to my room as my mother continues to snore like an angered beast. She won’t wake up until tomorrow. I stop about halfway down the hall and turn around to look at her.

“Oh, one other thing,” I say from a distance, “she also wants me to find out why Nathan killed himself.”

My mother jumps in her sleep and for a second her snoring becomes muffled. At least something had an effect on her.

Dear Diary,

Well, it’s official. My life sucks.

My shrink wants me to start keeping a journal like a friggin’ ten year old. This is such a waste of time. I don’t want to write about my feelings, it’s so lame!

And it’s not like the good ol’ days where I can write about fun stuff like the cute boy I have a crush on.

My life is no longer sunshine and rainbows. Not that it was ever perfect, but those times of carefree peace are over. I can easily see this becoming “The Diary of a Debbie Downer.”

I never was into writing about my day to remind myself of memories because I knew any day worth remembering, well, I would never forget it. I’m still trying to figure out how reflecting my sorrows onto a piece of paper will help, but at this point I have nothing to lose.

The brilliant Dr. Virginia Bloom also suggested I find out why Nathan committed suicide. The more I think about it what good would this bring? I would find no resolution or comfort in discovering why my brother ended his life. It actually makes me feel worse knowing I couldn’t be there for him at a time when he may have needed me the most. Even though none of the facts add up maybe it’s best not knowing the truth. It’s not like knowing will bring Nathan back.

I received a postcard from him four months before his death, but it didn’t give insight to anything about his life at the time. This is all it said:

Zenny,

I miss you guys. Hope you can visit soon. Love you.

-Nathan

That was it. Short, sweet, and straight to the point; nothing revealing or unordinary that would expose any sign of trouble. He didn’t share a lot of information about his life in New York. He had been so busy with school and his new job that all of our conversations had turned brief and his weekly calls slowly turned into once a month encounters.

On the front side of the postcard is a picture of a portly palm tree that seems to be resting on a hilltop. It is oddly misplaced in a forest of tall pine trees. The photo manages to capture the palm’s leaves glistening in the unseen streaming sunlight. The palm stands out of course and the only thing it has in common with its background surroundings is the deep green moss that is slowly creeping up the trunk of every tree in the picture.

The strangeness of the image actually leaves me with a comforting feeling of Nathan’s uniqueness, only he would choose such a weird card. This is the last memory I have of him.

It saddens me to think that if Nathan really was going through something, why couldn’t he tell me that he needed help?

First Impressions

Have you ever stared into a mirror long enough that your own reflection becomes an unrecognizable silhouette of flesh. It's as if for a moment you're out of your body and you see yourself the way strangers do. It makes you wonder who you are without all that skin.

After Nathan's death I started thinking more about who I really am and what I'm doing here. I mean, why are any of us here? Of course there are the obvious theories to consider like the religious and scientific possibilities. But the truth is I really don't know what to believe. I'm still trying to find out if I'm capable of believing anything anymore.

So at the prime age of seventeen, approaching a sophisticated eighteen, I feel like I'm ready to find out what life is all about. I want to get out and see the world and all it has to offer. Unfortunately I'm still tied to adolescent responsibilities like graduating high school and proving to society that I can become a useful human being.

Today is my first day at Saint Esther's Catholic School. Since I was given an ultimatum at my old school for embellishing I now have to suffer the consequences of my choices.

I'm dressed and ready in my new Catholic school girl uniform with a white, short sleeved top and a blue, black, and gold plaid skirt that falls just below my knees. I don't think I could be more uncomfortable right now if I tried. My mother used to watch a music video with a pop star suggestively dressed in one of these outfits. No matter how modest this outfit may appear, now I feel like it ironically screams "harlot."

When I arrive at the campus the assistant headmaster, Mr. White, greets me inside the front office. He is a short, hairy little man with an interesting hair piece that seems to rest on the side of his head instead of the middle.

"You must be Zenny Moone?" he asks.

"Yeah, that's me," I say timidly.

"Welcome to Saint Esther's," Mr. White says while smiling. "I'd be happy to give you a quick tour of the campus. We have about fifteen minutes before I have to run to a meeting."

"Great," I say unexcitedly.

Mr. White proceeds to walk me around the campus that is adorned with steel crosses and granite statues of saints I have never seen before. The school grounds are very well-kept and the buildings share similar architecture of a Roman cathedral. I wonder how my mother could afford to send me here.

As we walk around the courtyard Mr. White continues to tell me more about the school, its history, and all the extracurricular activities. I try to focus on what he's saying, but his excessive arm hair is distracting me. Before I can outline a story in my head about him becoming a werewolf at night and having supernatural strength, the tour is over and I still have no idea where I'm going. Luckily Mr. White leads me down a hall to my first class, and as I walk in every head turns to stare at the fresh meat (me).

My new English teacher is at the front of the classroom and introduces herself as, Ms. Aldridge. She is an older lady. The grey in her hair is slowly taking over her head and she has smile wrinkles; which actually makes me feel less uneasy. She guides me to the center of the room where I stand awkwardly in front of all my new classmates.

"Class, I'd like to introduce our new student," says Ms. Aldridge, "her name is Zenny Moone." Laughter spreads throughout the classroom when she says my name. "Quiet down everyone. That is an interesting name Zenny."

“That’s a dress code violation!” I hear someone shout out from the crowd. I search for the face of the speaker and see one girl in the crowd with her hand raised and a smile across her face. She is a thin girl with blonde hair and a seemingly orange body tan.

“Sorry to interrupt Ms. Aldridge. I was just saying her shoes are violating our dress code, but I do have a question for Zenny,” says the girl.

Ms. Aldridge looks down at my feet and her face became stern. Her smile wrinkles practically disappear and now I feel even more nervous.

“Go ahead and ask Lindsay,” says Ms. Aldridge with her gaze fixed on my sneakers. I look down and completely forget that I had decorated my new school tennis shoes with different colored sparkling jewels and on the sole I wrote the chorus of my favorite song.

“I heard you got kicked out of your last school. Is that true?” asks Lindsay. I look up to observe Lindsay once again; she is apparently my new nemesis. She has short blonde hair, big gray eyes, a blindingly white smile, and the face of a movie star. Of course she had to be stunning; she looks like a Disney princess.

“Really? You heard about that?” I ask purposely sounding bothered. “I didn’t know they made such private information public to the students.”

“They don’t. My father is the headmaster here. I’m sorry if my sharing this information with the class seems rude, but we all have a right to know if you did something dangerous to have yourself kicked out.”

“Yes, I shanked a girl with an overly sharpened number 2 pencil,” I joke. Shocked gasps spread among my peers. I start to laugh but no one else does. “I was joking,” I say aloud and look over at Ms. Aldridge whose dubious expression reveals her shared unfamiliarity with sarcasm.

“Zenny, that isn’t something to joke about. We take violence very seriously at this school. That comment was as inappropriate as your ostentatious shoe décor,” says Ms. Aldridge.

And it looks like we’re back to the shoes.

“I’m sorry about that,” I say. “I just thought I would let my personality shine through somehow since we’re forced to wear uniforms.”

“Those shoes are unacceptable. We only allow plain white tennis shoes with our student uniform. If you fail to adhere to our standards you will be placed in detention or possibly suspended. Understood?” says Ms. Aldridge dismissing my defense while she glares back at me.

“Gotcha,” I say and I look up at Lindsay who is smirking.

“Good. Then why don’t you tell the class a little bit about yourself,” says Ms. Aldridge.

This is an opportune moment to accentuate every aspect of my life, emphasizing the good (the small amount of it) so that my existence doesn’t seem so pathetic. But for some reason I can’t bring myself to exaggerate the truth this time.

“I’m just like everyone else,” is all I manage to say, and a sad feeling sweeps over me as I start to believe that this is true.

“Obviously you’re rebellious, which would make you different from the rest of us,” Lindsay speaks out again.

I’m starting to find her as a threat. I’ve barely been in this classroom for five minutes when she started with the attacks. I’ll have to stand my ground.

“Thank you for another observant, yet completely unnecessary comment, Lindsay,” I start. “Maybe I don’t want to be like everyone else, but I don’t think I have a choice now.

Unfortunately I’ve landed myself in a classroom with Nazi-like tendencies so to make my life easier I’ll just, “adhere to the standards.”

Lindsay looks pleased as if she knows what is coming next.

"Please make your way to Mr. White's office Ms. Moone," says Ms. Aldridge. "I think you should have a talk with him before you start class today."

"Zenny, did you compare Ms. Aldridge to a Nazi?" asks Mr. White as I sit in his office trying not to stare at the hair protruding from his arms.

"Of course not," I respond, "I simply hinted that the way she runs her classroom was Hitler-esque. You should really have a talk with her sir; she obviously has an issue with relating to her students."

"Well, I don't think suggesting she may be a part of the Third Reich is the best way to introduce yourself, Ms. Moone," he says.

"Now wait a second it all started with the shoes and went downhill from there. If she can easily decide to hate me because of one mistake, then she should not be a teacher."

Mr. White shakes his head and lowers it and I swear I see a hint of a smile. Perhaps this is not the first complaint he's had about Ms. Aldridge.

"Zenny, I know transitioning from a public school to a private school may be a big change for you, but nonetheless our rules have been put into practice for a reason. I would appreciate if you at least try to make this easy for the both of us. You're lucky the headmaster Mr. Bowen is not here today to handle this. You would most definitely be assigned to afterschool detention for a week for a dress code violation. Since it is your first day I'm only giving you a warning."

"Mr. Bowen. That must be Lindsay's father?" I ask.

"Yes, Lindsay Bowen, have you become friends with her?"

"Not exactly."

"Well she is a very prominent student. You could learn some things from her. Zenny, you should also know that I'm aware of the details of why you left your last school," says Mr. White. "None of your teachers know about this. I prefer to let you have a fresh start without there being any preconceived judgments, but do me a favor and hold back from enhancing the truth. Focus only on what is true and virtuous. And it wouldn't hurt to explore your spirituality before your senior year is over."

I have to admit I'm caught by surprise from his admission. I figured he would most likely be aware of my student record and wouldn't hold back from sharing his findings with the rest of the school staff. The fact that he didn't has lead me to a newfound respect for him.

"I'm honestly not sure if I can commit to a spiritual quest, but I will do my best to find the goodness," I say.

Mr. White smiles humbly. "That's all I hope for."

Before I can thank him I glance upwards and notice a picture hanging above his desk. It is the one with the smiling fish swimming upstream.

"Okay," I chuckle, "I have to ask. What is with that painting? My psych— I mean my doctor has the same one in her office. Is there like an underground world of creepy fish art circulating the globe?"

"Oh my fish painting?" Mr. White laughs seeming excited that it has been noticed. "It was actually a gift from an old friend. I thought it was odd at first as well, but did you know that fish are actually quite intelligent? They have the ability to learn from their mistakes and even have more than five senses. Among many of God's creations they're capable of sensing things that other living species cannot," he says.

"Interesting," I say honestly amused.

After my meeting with Mr. White I stroll into the girl's bathroom before heading back to class. As I walk in I discover two girls snorting lines of cocaine off the sink.

Sadly this doesn't surprise me. They both turn to look at me and appear mortified as I discover them, but they suddenly become very hostile.

One of the girls was very big, in both height and girth. "If you tell anybody about this you'll be sorry," she threatens.

I smile peacefully and slowly back up towards the exit door. In situations like this I really have to pick my battles, and if the person who is threatening can snap me like a twig I will always choose a graceful flee.

"It's not like we're the only ones doing this either," says the other small blonde girl who is wiping traces of the white powder off her nose, "so you could get a lot of people in trouble and we can have the whole school turn against you."

"I won't say anything, calm down. Have fun girls," I say. Before I turn to make my way out I can't help but notice the chains around their necks adorned with a gleaming cross. "Praise Jesus!" I shout before flashing them a smile and walking out of the restroom.

This is when I realize the last few months of my senior year of high school might be the most torturous days of my life.

Dear Diary,

A couple weeks have gone by of a draining repetitive lifestyle that I've been unwillingly pursuing. The only good thing time has done at this point is allow me to blend in more with the people at my school. And I don't mean blend as in fitting in or relating to my peers in any way whatsoever. I mean more in a sense that I have become just another face in a sea of people. I like being able to swim by unnoticed.

I'm finding it hard to relate to any of my classmates. After my run-in with the snow queens snorting lines in the bathroom (so unsanitary), I started to wonder if people can ever be truly genuine. It's depressing to know that a school where one could assume they would be able to find spiritual relief is filled with hypocrites. I saw one girl praying diligently during mass service. Then the next day I caught a glimpse of her and another girl sneaking pills during study hall. The boys are no better. Not a day has gone by where I don't hear one of them talking about which girls are easy and who their latest conquests were.

Then there's Lindsay, my arch-rival, who never stops trying to make me miserable. Every day I walk by her it seems she comes up with a new nickname for me. So far this week she's declared that I am a freak, a loser, a piss stain, an idiot, and a whore.

At first I was annoyed but now I'm just getting bored with her inability to come up with an original insult.

I thought these people were Godly and lived happy lifestyles. If this is the type of person I would become in my walk towards spiritual maturity then I want no part of it.

If I can't find out what I'm living for and I don't even have anyone here for love and support then what's the point? I doubt anyone would even miss me if I was gone; maybe the wrong Moore child was buried. I'm starting to wonder if anything can save me.

Dwindling and Diamonds

Why is it that school days seem to drag on as if there's no end? I swear the clock slows down once it realizes that millions of teenagers are entrapped inside a brick building full of authority.

Ms. Aldridge is rambling on about our submitted rough drafts for our senior papers and how they are less than extraordinary. Moments before this she made it a point to announce how the use of diction would never impress her if we didn't know how to write a proper thesis. Then she proceeded to glare at me for a full twenty seconds so that everyone was sure that I was the cause of her complaint.

I swear she hates me. Every time she passes back our assignments she always has to comment out loud about my work.

"Average at best," or "Effort would have been nice," and then she goes on to silently distribute everyone else's paper.

Apparently I have become her bipolar symptom relieving target for reasons that remain unknown. What I do know is that she supports my misery.

Every day seems grey. Even if the sun is shining it's like I'm oblivious to its rays.

I gaze out the classroom window to escape for a moment. Luckily the view is full of lush green trees and mountains in the distance with no man-made obstructions to block their glory. The most beautiful things in this world are those of nature.

Suddenly, as if Mother Nature knew I was admiring, it begins to sprinkle rain drops outside while the sun is still shining brightly. Odd. There isn't even a hint of rain clouds today. The rain starts falling harder and the sun gleams through each raindrop. It looks like diamonds are falling from the sky as the drops twinkle and make their way to hit the ground. I can't take my eyes away from the window.

For a moment I feel like I'm going crazy, because now it seems that time has been altered. The rain drops begin to pause in mid-air and then continue to the ground in slow motion.

Am I about to faint? Has one of my classmates slipped something in my lunch from their infinite drug stash as a joke?

I close my eyes for a second and open them again to see that everything is still moving slowly, but now as I look through the window I can see the reflection of a face sitting right behind me. It's the face of my brother Nathan.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

