



Elena Vanishing

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Seventeen-year-old Elena is vanishing. Every day means renewed determination, so every day means fewer calories. This is the story of a girl whose armor against anxiety becomes artillery against herself as she battles on both sides of a lose-lose war in a struggle with anorexia. Told entirely from Elena's perspective over a five-year period and co-written with her mother, award-winning author Clare B. Dunkle, Elena's memoir is a fascinating and intimate look at a deadly disease, and a must read for anyone who knows someone suffering from an eating disorder.

Elena Vanishing Details

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From Reader Review Elena Vanishing for online ebook

Jenna says

Really good and realistic portrait of life with an eating disorder. It doesn't sugar coat anything and it paints things in an authentic light.

Susan Bazzett-Griffith says

A good, but not great book about a young woman's struggle with anorexia, what Elena Vanishing does very well is show how trauma and rape can change someone's world to its core, and the course of a life in general. In many ways, Elena's story is extremely textbook- perfectionist, from a dysfunctional and wealthy family, obsessive compulsive, a traumatic rape survivor, a girl who attends a boarding school where she is surrounded by other girls with eating disorders, manipulative, and more than once I found myself thinking as I read, "why wouldn't she develop some sort of neuroses or disorder? Her life is almost a cliché," which is the crux of what makes this book good but not great. As a reader I felt sympathetic towards the writer, but it very much seemed as though this story has been told before. On the upside, her voice is authentic and the writing is solid. 3 stars.

Jen from Quebec :0) says

Awesomely powerful, well-written memoir about the horrors of anorexia, hospitalization, family drama, mental illness and more. I have a LOT to say about this book: (1) I have stayed up all night to finish the Audible version of this novel (2) The narrator was excellent (3) I cannot write anything more until I get some frigging COFFEE. --Jen from Quebec :0)

Sage Looram says

Elena, a seventeen year old girl who has a voice in her head that tells her what to do in order to be perfect. Put on makeup. Have good grades. Work at least two jobs. And never, ever eat. "No one likes you, you are fat, you are obese." This is the voice in her head, and it controls her. Elena has to go from hospital to hospital, trying to fight her conscience. This book was amazing. It teaches a strong lesson, and is very powerful. One of the reasons I loved this book is because it is non fiction, but it reads like a narrative. It doesn't just state facts, it shows Elena's perspective of her story. I would recommend this book to mature readers, because of some of the explicit words and content.

Jessica says

**I originally reviewed this novel for Reading Teen and you can visit their blog as well.

Release Date: May 19, 2015

It seems almost impossible to describe the voice in your head when you have an Eating Disorder. The voice is disembodied, but it seems more tangible than a book in your hands or the food sitting on a plate in front of you. That voice fills up the space in your mind and takes away the silence and peace that you've worked so hard to achieve. It tells you all of the things you hate most about yourself and drills them into your subconscious, and the worst part is that you believe every insult it throws at you.

Elena Dunkle's memoir, *Elena Vanishing*, is the first book that I've ever read that gives a completely honest picture of how hard it is to accept that there is a problem and that help is needed. The authors note at the beginning of the novel that Elena's story is true, but that there are fictional aspects to the story. Does that sound contradictory? Of course, but so is life with an eating disorder. But the main point of that disclaimer is to recognize how impairing an eating disorder can be and how many memories and moments are distorted through the disease. So when venturing into reading this, remember that parts are embellished based on Elena's experience. Instead of taking away from the narrative, I believe that these parts make the story even more powerful.

The writing is superb, and Elena acknowledges that the majority of the writing was actually completed by her mother, Clare, but that the collaborative effort was intense and brought them closer together. Be aware that this story is very painful. There are a lot of family issues explored, self esteem, depression, self harm, obsessive compulsive disorder, and a lot more on top of the eating disorder. By no means is the narrative overwhelming, the Dunkles did a fantastic job of displaying the harrowing details of their experience with Anorexia without being too overwhelming. The pacing is excellent and at no point did the narrative lag.

While I find this memoir to have been comforting due to feeling like someone finally put words on a page to describe my struggle, please be aware that stories like these can also be triggering for some who are struggling with eating disorders. I firmly encourage you to reach out to your primary care physician or therapist if you are having trouble. Elena states in the memoir: getting help saved her life. It saved mine. It can save yours.

For more information about eating disorders and treatment options please visit the National Eating Disorder Association.

For more information about Elena, her struggle, and her life now please visit her website.

You can also connect to Elena on Twitter: @ElenaDunkle

Kelsey says

This book was so great and definitely for fans of *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson.

The message of the book will stay with me forever. Unfortunately, it took me months to read because the narrator is so vain it hurts. The last half is so good though that it makes the struggle of reading the first bit worth it.

AND THE LAST LINE OF THE BOOK IS ABSOLUTE. PERFECTION.

Olivia Bailey says

I have mixed feelings about this book. I go back and forth between liking it and disliking it. I mean, don't get me wrong, this is a very good book, it isn't the writing of it, or the vocabulary, nor the characters, it is more just that the topic is a very hard and real situation to put myself into and is a topic that I have heard of but I am very foreign to it and unfamiliar to it. Honestly, Elena makes me think that anorexia is a mental and physical sickness which I'm not sure about because I don't have any perspectives to base her consciousness off of. But overall, I do really enjoy this story and like learning about this sort of thing. All though it is horrible to learn about, it is important to learn about and totally changed my understanding and perspective of anorexia as a whole and in the mental and physical department.

Sally Spratt says

Amazing story. I am always looking for inspiring and insightful biographies and autobiographies. "Elena Vanishing" had me intrigued because of the topic, Elena's eating disorder. I have never understood, how anyone could starve themselves or binge and purge. None of this has ever made sense to me. Elena takes the reader right into the mind of a young seemingly successful woman. We see the world from her viewpoint, and it had me scared. Her level of self hatred and the extreme of perfection was eye opening. I don't know if all people who suffer from eating disorders, also have the amount of self doubt, self hate and depression that Elena had...but - wow. I always doubt myself, sometimes call myself stupid in my own head, but I don't really believe myself. Elena, believed those voices in her head, the voice that told her she was a fat slob, that she was an idiot. Everyone around her told her she was beautiful, smart and they wished they could be more like her. This only gave fuel to her fire of striving more and more into the deep dark world of starvation - the one thing Elena control.

You never know how fragile the person next to you is. They could appear to be this happy, intelligent, with it person, but inside they are screaming at themselves.

Elena, finally managed to get healed after several treatment centers. Some of the centers she describes, I cannot believe are legitimate centers. They seemed like prisons. Elena does end the book with a few thoughtful insights. Her story in no way shape or form is to be used to treat eating disorders - it is plainly her story of vanishing and returning.

I'm looking forward to reading the companion book written by her mother, "Hope and Other Luxuries: A Mother's Life with a Daughter's Anorexia"

Check out Elena's website too: <http://www.elenadunkle.com/>

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Nina says

This is a super-horrifying look at what it's really like to live with Anorexia. Elena's inner-critic is relentless and terrible. The best part about this book is how real it is. There's no sugar-coating and no silver linings - it's just a horrible disorder creating awful situations and experiences. There is hope in the end for Elena, but she meets several people along the way whose eating disorders end up being fatal. As you ride along with Elena, you can see how she would come across if you didn't understand her experiences, and you can see where her anger comes from. It's truly heartbreaking. I'm glad she has learned to push back at that little voice in her

head and start to really live her life, and I hope her story can show others with eating disorders that it's not hopeless even when it seems like it is AND help everyone else understand what they're going through.

Giselle (Book Nerd Canada) says

An Advanced Reader Copy was provided by the publisher for review.

Starting this one, I knew I was going to have trouble getting into the mind-set. Not only is this story real since it's a memoir, what she goes through is what happened in her life. Her thoughts are real. That made a big difference when I was reading it.

Elena feels like she has lost control over her life, and the one thing she believes she can do is to control what she eats. Everything has to be perfect. Being told she's beautiful by others is not enough. She is constantly weighing herself, fighting with her mind and her thoughts on a daily basis. The inner voice saying terrible things all the time..I personally wanted to punch it. In the end, I knew she would get help. She would have hope and pull through. I believe this is a necessary look into people who are suffering this eating disorder.

It's a memoir on her life long battle with food. And that battle almost costs her her life. Told in a beautiful yet haunting voice, Elena Vanishing will have you fighting along side Elena as she battles this disorder. Let her tell you her story, and I promise you, you will feel all the feels.

RATING 4/5

QUOTES

"Pain doesn't bother me. I'm not afraid. I'm used to living with pain. "

"Anger is honest. Hatred is a backhanded compliment. Envy is the best gift of all. But let them turn you into a victim, and you're labeled for life."

"She hates you because she's fat. She hates you because you're in control. She'd break down that control if she could."

"You do everything right and one little thing wrong, and the one thing wrong is all she see."

"I'm part of you. I know what you've done. You'll never get rid of me now."

"Recovery is a path, not a destination."

Yari says

I enjoy reading memoirs but this one felt like a quilt sewn from jagged pieces. The writer is Elena's mom who took all her daughter's memories of her struggles with anorexia and pieced them together- except it wasn't a smooth enough story.

But still - this book is a valuable window into the mind of one suffering from anorexia. Elena's daily struggles and inner voice were harsh & terrifying to read. I cried several times at the end. What a messy life we live! "Life is love. Life, in all its suffering, is love. And death is powerless to change that."

Jenni Frencham says

Dunkle, Elena. *Elena Vanishing*. Chronicle Books, 2015.

Elena is a teen who is suffering from anorexia, although she wouldn't tell you she is suffering. She is battling the number on the scale and attaining perfection through control of her food. This is Elena's story, told in Elena's voice as she recalls her ongoing struggle against an eating disorder.

This isn't an easy book to read, but it's a timely one, and the fact that the author is also a teen/new adult will make this book appeal to a teen audience. Elena's mother has also written a book about the same time period, *Hope and Other Luxuries: A Mother's Life with a Daughter's Anorexia*. It would be interesting to read both books back to back and see the same story from two different perspectives.

Recommended for: teens and those who work with them

Red Flags: discussion of eating disorders, rape, drug use, language

Overall Rating: 4/5 stars

Read-Alikes: *Wintergirls*, *Skinny*, *Purge*

Liralen says

In a perfect world, I would have read *Elena Vanishing* back-to-back with *Hope and Other Luxuries*. Because this isn't a perfect world (and my holds at the library were filled a week or two apart), I read this one first and didn't get to compare them directly.

It makes for an interesting comparison, though, reading Elena Dunkle's story and also her mother's version of events. Clare Dunkle had a significant hand in this book as well. Says Elena:

But I couldn't write this book on my own. Saying the words, describing details, remembering snippets, answering questions, even writing paragraphs...okay. But the thought of sitting in front of the keyboard for the entirety of the book from beginning to end, watching the words march onto the computer screen at a painfully slow, steady pace, immortalizing my indiscretions, failures, vulnerabilities, self-hatred, fears, and destruction in a series of cold, neutral Word documents--it would have been impossible. (287)

My mother allowed me to tell my story to her sporadically, skipping to different moments when things got too painful. I jumped around in my paragraphs and interviews, avoiding full descriptions, revealing key information in pieces, sometimes weeks or months apart. I could share a memory, and then, as soon as the words had tumbled from my mouth, I could seal it back into my vault. She had to reread and rewrite the most painful parts of our lives for hours

and hours and hours, down to the italics and exclamation points. (288)

The voice is distinct from that in *Hope and Other Luxuries*, but I admit that I struggled with this definition of co-writing, perhaps unfairly. The skills of an experienced writer make it a tighter, cleaner read, I'm sure, and the 'adult's hand' in other books hasn't bothered me...so I think my reaction is just a knee-jerk (and again, probably unfair) sense of a child asking a parent to do her homework for her.

In any case, the book itself...there's a good sense of what life is like *inside* an eating disorder, and inside Elena Dunkle's head at the time. It's a much tighter, more directed narrative than *Hope*, covering a shorter time period and fewer tangentially related topics. I did have a hard time connecting with the voice here—perhaps because the story is located so firmly in the time period when E was ill, I found it difficult to separate the more nuanced adult perspective from the insecure teenager. There's that sort of 'I can do it all, and *better* than you, so don't you forget it' sense. It's laudable in the sense that memoir writers don't always let the reader see that—the not-always-pretty interior of their younger selves—but also not entirely likable. I couldn't decide how much of it was younger E being a bit full of it (intentionally shown that way) and how much of it was present-day E still trying to impress the reader (working three jobs, getting ready to take care of the poor little homesick first-years, etc.). I wish I'd gotten a better sense of Valerie, considering how much time younger E spent feeling superior for her choices. There's definitely some competition there (though perhaps only felt by one sister!)...both to be 'better' (better grades, better prospects) and 'worse' (sicker, more deserving of attention).

At one point (102–103) there's an essay that E wrote for AP English. I *hated* its inclusion—I think it's supposed to be raw and emotional, but it reads to me more as overdramatic and angsty, more appropriate for a journal than for an academic assignment—but it makes a lot more sense to me in the context of C doing a lot of the writing: the essay would have been source material for C, and it shows E's state of mind.

So it's interesting. I'm not sure *Elena Vanishing* adds a tremendous amount to the genre on its own, but I think there's a more-than-the-sum-of-its-parts argument to be made here—the combination of this plus *Hope and Other Luxuries* is more valuable than the two taken as individual works.

My review for *Hope and Other Luxuries* can be found [here](#).

Willow says

I didn't love this book, but it has successfully built up my confidence with reading nonfiction books. *cheers* I think I'm beginning to understand what's cool about nonfiction books. they're real, true, and honest. as much as I hate to say it, fiction is only as real as our imaginations. though I'm proud that I challenged myself by reading this book, I wish that I would have liked it more. I didn't care for the overall voice of the story, and how so much of it revolved around hospitals. but that's expected. while reading it, I felt dejected. I had so much hope for this book and it let me down. but now that I can say I read it, I feel relieved. I think I struggled with this book because I've read a similar book by Laurie Halse Anderson in the past that I liked better. as horrible as it sounds, I found "Elena Vanishing" to be repetitive and unoriginal in comparison. which is impossible because this is nonfiction, while the other isn't. I think I need a topic change. I'm discovering that there are certain topics I can only read about once, and I think anorexia is one of those things.

Julia Sapphire says

Trigger Warnings: Eating Disorders, Self Harm, and Rape

"Where does thin become fat? Where does success become failure? Where does a great future become a horrible past full of heartache and regret?"

I personally read novels involving mental illness quite often. Though I have never really read books involving eating disorders. In *Identical* by Ellen Hopkins there is an eating disorder element but it was not the main focus. Those who are wondering this is a memory of *Elena Dunkle* who is sharing her experience with anorexia. We see her relationship with food and the voice in her head always telling her she is never enough. We see how this effects her parents and family a bit as well.

"Anger is honest. Hatred is backhanded compliment. Envy is the best git of all. But let them turn you into a victim, and you're labeled for life. Pity is the sea you drown in"

Those who are unaware about anorexia, I will insert a bit of info on it provided from eatingdisorderhope.com:

"Anorexia Nervosa is a psychological and possibly life-threatening eating disorder defined by an extremely low body weight relative to stature (this is called BMI [Body Mass Index] and is a function of an individual's height and weight), extreme and needless weight loss, illogical fear of weight gain, and distorted perception of self-image and body."

This book again is extremely triggering so if you are recovering from an eating disorder make sure you are ready enough to pick up a book like this.

The writing was just average or a bit under. It was a gripping read and I read it very quickly! Some things I feel could have been taken out and some things just didn't connect- I guess. I also found something to be missing for me, there is usually an extra something with books like this but this lacked that for me. I do believe that this really gives others insight to the disorder. Some things did feel jumpy but overall it gets it's message across.

I found the rape aspect in this novel came out of no where. I thought it was just there to give an "explanation" for her eating disorder. I know this is a memoir and by no means am I bashing this girl but I feel like the resolution was sudden and didn't feel fleshed out enough.

I would still recommend this to those interested in novels involving eating disorders. I do want explore more books similar to this. I felt this was powerful and hard hitting but was ultimately missing something.
