



Hope and Other Luxuries: A Mother's Life with a Daughter's Anorexia

Clare B. Dunkle

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Clare Dunkle seemed to have an ideal life—two beautiful, high-achieving teenage daughters, a loving husband, and a satisfying and successful career as a children's book novelist. But it's when you let down your guard that the ax falls. Just after one daughter successfully conquered her depression, another daughter developed a life-threatening eating disorder. Co-published with *Elena Vanishing*, the memoir of her daughter, this is the story—told in brave, beautifully written, and unflinchingly honest prose—of one family's fight against a deadly disease, from an often ignored but important perspective: the mother of the anorexic.

Hope and Other Luxuries: A Mother's Life with a Daughter's Anorexia Details

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From Reader Review Hope and Other Luxuries: A Mother's Life with a Daughter's Anorexia for online ebook

Morgan Allison says

I really wanted to like this book because it is not often that literature offers the opportunity to read books from both perspectives of a true story but found that the more I read the more I disliked the author. Clare Dunkle is the mother of an anorexic child, Elena, and for most of the novel is in denial that her daughter has a disorder despite MANY attempts by trained professionals to tell her otherwise. Her arrogance only enables Elena's disorder to become worse. Despite this, Clare is an excellent writer and, although I did not agree with many of her decisions, the story was very well told. I am currently reading Elena's version of the story, "Elena Vanishing", and am finding it much more readable.

Jen says

This book was a game changer for me. So powerful. So heart wrenching. But so good.

Jessica says

I would definitely read this and her daughter's memoir, *Elena Vanishing*. The two books tell the same story for different audience, but I think you really need them both to get the full picture. A story is never one-sided. Some bits of this were slow and felt kind of drawn out. At the time that annoyed me, but in hindsight I wonder if that simply parallels the disease itself. Anorexia is a long, drawn out fight, and it is never simple. I respect the honesty with which Claire tells her story.

Machaia says

Wow. What a brave thing to lay out all of your heartache to help your daughter, others, and hopefully yourself. Clare B. Dunkle is one of my favorite authors, and stepping into her head was such an experience. This book was absolutely exhausting to read, and I can't imagine what it would have been like to live it. I am hoping to have more compassion and understanding towards others after reading this memoir and the trials this family had to suffer. What true love this book demonstrates! Wow.

Kier says

I gave this one a 5/5 stars. I found out that this one was published in conjunction with *Elena Vanishing* and was the mother's perspective and my curiosity was instantly piqued. I've read a couple books about eating disorders now and reading these two memoirs were completely different than reading *Wintergirls* by Laurie Halse Anderson. Some of the reviews of Halse Anderson's book said it felt too much like a manual on how to be anorexic, but I never got that feeling from it at all. I didn't get that feeling from the two memoirs either. I think that any sensitive material could end up being a trigger for someone with related issues regardless of

how sensitively it's portrayed. Elena Dunkle's memoir, for example, was very raw and although she does not emphasize weight or numbers, reading about her mindset alone could be enough. That being said I really liked reading Clare Dunkle's memoir. She gave us some background from her life as well as how the family coped with Valerie's troubles before Elena's were revealed to be as bad as they were. It helped give a full picture of what the experience was like and how draining and constant those issues were to deal with. Through it all, she describes feeling emotionally numb, but it's clear that she never gives up on her daughters. Whereas Elena's memoir could pass over significant periods of time, Clare's delved into them. She gives us the insurance headache, the sacrifices, the time, and the sadness. It's quite clear that this was not an easy time for the family. Basically, I'm glad I read this one. I think Clare Dunkle's writing is excellent and that she lays out the emotional trials of being by her daughters' side with honesty and poise. I didn't cry when I read this one as I did reading Elena's, but while Elena's memoir was pure, raw emotion, Clare's is emotion portrayed in another way. Some of the reviews said it was hard to read them back to back given the subject matter, but as Clare does not have the same eating disorder thoughts as Elena, I didn't find it that way. That's not to say that it was an easy, pleasant read though - it certainly wasn't. It was quite real. I also pulled out some quotes that really stood out to me:

"It was a battle, and I wasn't sure who was winning." (p. 235)

"Guilt has a bad reputation. People talk about it as if it's a dirty word...True, honest guilt is a reminder that once we had the power to choose what to do -- and the power to choose is what makes us human." (p. 371)

"She wasn't a thing like the Elena I had known. We felt so far apart now that I didn't know if we would ever manage to bridge the gulf between us." (p. 393)

"But now I felt nothing but cold, hard anger. I was done with all this. I didn't want to understand." (p. 394)

"That's it! I thought. I'm done with this! This person is a closed book to me. She is a riddle I have no more desire to solve." (p. 395)

"I do have a question,' one of them admitted in a small voice. 'Is there ever a point when you can't take it anymore? When you just say, 'That's it!' and you stop loving us?"

And with a guilty flush, I remembered my anger: *That's it!*

'No,' the veteran mother said firmly. 'We never stop loving. Never.'" (400)

"Finally the Eating Disorder Voice came in. It crouched protectively behind Elena's chair and spoke into her ear.

'Don't worry, I'll get you through this,' it said. 'You're not alone as long as I'm here. I've always been there for you. You don't need anyone else. I'm the one with the answers. We'll handle this ourselves, the way we've always done.'" (p. 403)

"No,' Elena interrupted. 'Everybody thinks that, and it's wrong. Vomiting when you're sick is completely different. It's very uncomfortable, and you can't stop it. You can't *control* it -- it's not anything like purging.' Control. I thought about that. I thought about this hidden skill, this secret sense of control." (p. 408)

"But at the same time, sadness was starting to well up inside me. It was exhausting, this strange new world I was having to see." (p. 409)

"Nothing that I touched in this new world was turning out to be the way I thought it would. A normal person couldn't survive here for five minutes." (p. 410)

"Hey, we all feel them. I'm just the one who's strong enough to do something about them. The rest of you, you don't have the drive. You don't want it badly enough.

You're not willing to die.
I am." (p. 412)

"What do you say when someone you love is standing on a building ledge? What can you do besides scream?" (p. 412)

"Numbers were safe." (p. 430)

"My recovery? My recovery is a joke." (p.435)

PinkAmy loves books, cats and naps says

Grade: C-

If I had to describe HOPE AND OTHER LUXURIES in one word, I'd use: loooooooooong. 2 words: too loooooooooooooooooong.

Published in conjunction with ELENA VANISHING, HOPE AND OTHER LUXURIES is the more well written of these mother/daughter tales of Elena's anorexia and recovery. Perhaps I preferred HOPE because I found Elena to be almost entirely unlikable and unsympathetic, even from her very loving mother's POV. I even had difficulty empathizing with her rape at age thirteen, and I don't think I've ever felt that was about an obvious victim of such a heinous crime. I felt bad that it happened, but didn't care enough about the character/person to feel her pain.

Writer Clare Dunkle pens beautiful, engrossing sentences. The problem I had with HOPE was that rather than showing a concise story, she ventured into tangents and insights about her own childhood. While the asides were interesting, they detracted rather than adding to the pace and telling of the story.

The character I found most likable and sympathetic was older sister Valerie, the oft victim of Elena's wrath and misdirected blame. I wish Valerie had written her own story.

HOPE AND OTHER LUXURIES is a well written, but too drawn out and not entirely insightful story of a mother watching her daughter self destruct into a world of anorexia.

Marie says

After reading the daughter's memoir (Elena Vanishing), which I very much enjoyed, I was eager to read the mom's side of the story. Very quickly I discovered this book wasn't the mom's side of having a daughter with anorexia, but rather an extremely long advertisement for the mom's other books she has written. The excerpts of the author's fantasy stories and how she was constantly daydreaming made it easy to see how this mom missed so many signs of her daughter's struggles. The author came across as so self-absorbed in this painfully long book that I ended up skimming the last third. I'm glad that I read Elena's story first, because I wouldn't have if I had started with this book first.

Beth Blackstock says

This is the first book that's ever made me cry. Her writing was so raw and beautiful, I found myself wiping tears at multiple points throughout this book.

Sally Lotz says

Can't rate this book. I started to read, but only managed to get through 200 pages...and just can't continue. I read Claire's daughter Elena's book first, "Elena Vanishing". Elena's book captured me immediately. I don't think I can't finish right now because of the actual book - I'm just not in a good mental place to read. I'm frustrated with Claire at this point, and I shouldn't be, she's writing as a mother looking back. Perhaps because I read Elena's book first and have a different perspective in the situations happening. For instance Claire is questioning the drs. over and over again even though more than one has used the word Anorexia. I know from reading the other book, that Elena was hiding a lot from everyone. I am keeping on my to read shelf, and will pick it up again when my own personal life settles down.

Kara LeClere says

I enjoyed parts of this book, I preferred the book written by her daughter. This one had too many of the mother's personal stories and history in it for me. Maybe if I had read this before the other book I might have enjoyed it more.

Alicia says

With Elena Vanishing and this book being delivered to my house to read and obviously picking Vanishing to read first because it's the most direct route into the story of a girl suffering from anoerxia has definitely altered how I viewed my reading of Hope. I would say akin to the dual stories of the Scheff's struggle with meth, this would be another story that their value sometimes relies on the other.

While I think Hope could have been shortened and tightened, I appreciated the injection of Dunkle's own upbringing to help bring into perspective her struggles with her own daughters, specifically Elena, who suffered a terrible rape by which her only control at the time was food that led to her anorexia.

With a stylistically beautiful cover and carefully organized narrative, I can appreciate the mother's story, but it's still just not quite as powerful as Elena's though I appreciated the push forward to a more adult story of what and how Elena is doing.

Kirsten says

I feel like I was robbed of a week and a half of reading time with this book. Like, rarely has a book under-

delivered so hard on a super interesting, promising concept. I know nothing about eating disorders and this book promised to speak about a family's experience with them -- sounds great, let's give it a go.

NO - don't give this a go.

I cannot stress enough how much I do not want you to read this book.

For one thing, like half of it's just about the mom and her career as a writer. Sure, you write weird fantasy books, we get it - what does this have to do with LITERALLY ANYTHING that is happening right now? What does your desire to be an author have to do with your daughter battling anorexia nervosa? From very early on, Dunkle came across as self-absorbed and completely out of it. (Also, her books sound kind of crappy soooo yeah, maybe don't be bragging too much about your writing career.) But honestly - why promote this book as being "A Mother's Life with a Daughter's Anorexia" when really what this is is "How My Writing Career Started and How My Daughter's Anorexia Inconvenienced That."

Now I'm not saying she doesn't care about her daughter - she very clearly does. She puts up with a lot of crap. But she also says ridiculous things like:

"The dark time was over - the dark, imprisoned time. I had rescued my daughter. I had rescued us all."

Rescued us all, huh? Too bad you didn't rescue me from reading you DULL BOOK. Page after page of the same thing: Elena left treatment, Elena's back in treatment. Elena's mad at me, now she's not. I know I started this book off saying it was engaging and interesting but that quickly evaporated when every chapter was the same. Non-fiction written as fiction can only truly be interesting when it's written like a novel aka WITH ACTUAL PLOT POINTS THAT ARE ENGAGING AND INTERESTING. At one point I literally wrote in my notes "We already heard this story, literally in the intro. Book's so long she can't even remember what she's told us." Like, give me STRENGTH.

Another great moment:

"Seats embedded in the walls of an airplane hull don't recline."

I love how she couldn't stop talking about the reclining. Your daughter's like, dying, and the thing you choose to tell me about is how you just want to lie down? I dunno, I'm having a tough time feeling compassion for you about THAT particular "plot point."

Or how about:

"Our normal, reasonable, safe world had blown apart."

This whole book is literally about how you DON'T think your family/daughter in particular are reasonable and safe. You've noticed her not eating and working too hard and you're saying that everything was fine until THIS in particular happened? CLARE PLEASE I HAVE HAD IT WITH YOUR BS.

Don't get it twisted - I have compassion and sympathy for this family and everyone involved, but I don't have time for someone describing her daughter as a sociopathic villain ("...Elena appeared to be immune to the aura of misery rising from the transparent prison cells" -- they're at a pet store looking at fish here, for context, in case you're wondering) or wasting my time with boring, trivial discussions about how much pizza her family ate for a couple of years.

And she loved to repeat the same phrases over and over. Man, I feel like I mention it all the time, but so many authors have "russet skin" #twilight problems. "A *danger* to herself! A danger!" These types of melodramatic exclamations littered this whole book, only like two pages apart, and it was like GIVE ME A

BREAK FROM THIS MONOTONOUS WRITING, PLZ. Just for 2 pages, I beg of you.

And at one point she writes that someone said to her, "Isn't that your brilliant, funny girl, the one who seemed so wise when she was a child?" RIGHT, because other people would describe your kid that way. Absolutely no way you can convince me of that.

Also, the fact that it was broken into chapters quickly removed me from the trauma, which seems counterproductive to what the book was supposed to do. This book would have been way better if she had taken the time to divide it into sections. Either different emotions, or different thought process or something and then told the whole thing out of order to focus on what's REALLY important in here. I would argue what she's really trying to communicate is how it felt as a mother to witness these things, but that can be communicated more effectively than an exhausting, never ending play by play.

One quote I did like: "I miss so many things that were beautiful."

If you want that to be the main takeaway, that's cool with me. If you want to heed my warning, don't waste your time with this. You will undoubtedly regret it #moneybackguarantee

Sarah says

Before reading this memoir, I had said I would never pick up another ED book. Well, heavens, I am thankful that this one found me. While I did find bits indulgent and I thought it ran a bit long, I actually enjoyed reading the fragments from Clare Dunkle's fiction. I was pleasantly surprised to relate to her, while also admiring her capacity to love and her determination. This book brought me tremendous comfort. Each family has their own story, but the Dunkle's have given me hope when I didn't think it was possible.

Liralen says

Hope and Other Luxuries, published in conjunction with *Elena Vanishing*, is rather broader in scope than *Elena Vanishing*—*Vanishing*, while it covers various relevant experiences and influences (e.g., boarding school, Valerie's problems), is really only about Elena and Elena's eating disorder; *Hope* is also about C. Dunkle's childhood and being a parent and becoming a writer.

They're books best read together, as each fills in blanks left by the other and gives the other more context and balance. At times this one felt like *too much*, though. It's a beast of a memoir at more than 500 pages—C takes her time setting up scenes, rarely skims over things, and devotes large chunks to her fiction writing (including short excerpts). While the fiction is usually relevant, reflective of her state of mind...it's quite a lot of book. (Way, way too many references to 'my imagination', e.g., 'my imagination showed me...')

I'm still struggling with the question of C ghostwriting *Elena Vanishing*. C talks a fair bit about it here—in particular, about trying to figure out what E's voice is/should be. Again, I know it's probably a better book for having an experienced writer do a lot of the actual writing, but it feels weird to me to have person A determine the voice of person B for person B's memoir. I don't mean to suggest that E had no hand in *Vanishing*—the voices are actually really distinct, so *something* worked. But it's striking to me, also, that some of the voices C plays around with in this book are so different from the voice in *Vanishing*. C describes E as having a 'cocky attitude' (428), which feels true to *Vanishing*, but we also get things like this:

For every woman who sighs to her girlfriends, "If I could just drop fifteen pounds"—check this, bitches, I'm proof that you could. For every girl who cracks on Day Three of the diet and wolfs that chocolate shake—tough for you, babe, here's what you could have had. I'm all your insecurities, the ones you try to pretend don't matter—but the minute you see me, they do.

Hey, we all feel them. I'm just the one who's strong enough to do something about them. The rest of you, you don't have the drive. You don't want it badly enough.

You're not willing to die.

I am. (428-429)

That's one of C's early attempts at characterising E for E's memoir (I think—it's possible that it came from E's journals, but it's not clear), and maybe the smugness is why I had such a hard time with E's voice in *Vanishing*. Makes me think that C doesn't necessarily have a great sense of eating disorders in general, or E's more specifically...though I suppose that's largely speculation.

But, well. Other things to consider: I loved that the prologue made it clear that eating disorders aren't one-time things, that E's *better* but not *cured*, but I couldn't place the prologue within the context of the epilogue. The latter ends with (view spoiler), while the prologue starts with *My daughter Elena called me up last week, crying. She's twenty-four now, and she just broke up with a boyfriend she needed to break up with* (2).

If you read one of these books I'd highly recommend reading the other along with it. C's a good writer with a strong sense of tying multiple storylines together, and the one informs the other. And...I learned the word *Kettenraucher*, which means that my German vocabulary has increased ever so slightly without getting even remotely more practical.

My review for *Elena Vanishing* can be found [here](#).

Rachel says

I could not put this book down, and I can't entirely say why. I wasn't necessarily riveted by the writing, but the story had a hold on me, perhaps because I kept putting myself in Clare Dunkle's shoes. Though my daughter's are very very young, I could not help but imagine what I would do if I were in the same situation, and I know that I would do anything for my children, much like Clare, but I would likely have hit my breaking point a lot sooner. I was constantly amazed by her ability to keep going in the face of nearly insurmountable odds.

One aspect of the book I greatly appreciated was how honest it was. When I read a book about characters with mental illness, I hope to come away with a greater understanding of the illness and its effects on, not only the person suffering, but also all the people around him/her. That is exactly what this book did. In nearly 550 pages, Dunkle spared no expense in detailing her daughter, Elena's, struggles with anorexia, as well as her own struggles in trying to help Elena. I am very interested in reading *Elena Vanishing* in order to experience these same events from Elena's point of view.
