

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/3

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Liars Don't Go To Disneyland

My parents dropped me off in front of my fancy Beverly Hills middle school in their faded silver Crown Victoria – another day in 6th grade, the height of my reject years. Seeing the other kids emerge from their parents' Beamers and Mercedes was almost as irritating as the derogatory looks they shot at me like blow darts. They trotted onto campus with an air of superiority as their made-up, perfumed, perfectly-coiffed mothers pulled away from the curb.

My parents rented a one-bedroom apartment in a 50's dingbat building on the outskirts of Beverly Hills so I could go to school with the rich kids instead of the notorious gang kids at LA Unified.

Once my parents enrolled me in school, they expected me to be a star pupil to pay them back for their sacrifice. If I brought home any grade less than an A, I was fucked. My father called me a loser and accused me of causing my parents suffering.

"This is how you repay us?" he yelled, while staring disgustedly at the B on my math test, before yanking off his belt to whip me. When I started lying about my grades, things got even worse. My father accused me of lying even when I wasn't.

School frustrated me as sometimes I could learn the material and do well, and sometimes my brain felt like mush and I failed miserably. I couldn't figure out how to become that perfect student that would please my parents. To add to my situation, the rich kids tormented me because I didn't have Guess jeans and because my hair was always greasy and messy.

"Who styled your hair? A rat?" one girl said, turning to see if she'd won the approval of her fake friends with her well thought out zinger.

"Hi I'm Vassilia and I buy my clothes at Kmart!" they giggled, parading around in their \$50 t-shirts. I hated them and yet I wanted to be them.

Meanwhile, my parents sat home in our dark, barren apartment. Neither of them worked. Instead they sat on their asses all day, at the folding metal table we used as a dining table, smoking cigarettes. My father would come up with get rich quick schemes, all of which he yelled at my mother to write down, none of which he ever attempted.

My mother languished in her depressed state, growing pale and sallow like an urchin locked in our dungeon apartment. She sent me to school with unwashed clothes, sometimes with lunch, sometimes without, and wouldn't buy me deodorant no matter how much I begged. So my odor only made my fate that much worse. The kids curled up and pinched their noses as I walked by. They pretended to pass out from the smell if they had to sit next to me in class, inspiring fits of laughter from their friends.

My only saving grace was Mr. Erin, my science teacher. He had a bright, sunny classroom with a disposition to match. I sat in the front row and everything he taught made sense. I was ever ready with the answers to all his questions and he praised me lavishly for it. As much as the kids

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tormented me, and as much as I envied their Guess jeans and Skechers boots, I relished seeing their faces drop as I became their favorite teacher's favorite student. Mr. Erin called me Dr. V, honoring my good work.

Every day I looked forward to his class until suddenly I was forced out. I brought home a D on a book report in English and my parents stormed over to the school for a conference. During the conference, my father called my English teacher a bitch and a cunt for giving me the D. The teacher ran out in horror and it became clear I could no longer be in her class. I was put into a different cohort with all new teachers and said goodbye to Mr. Erin. Dr. V was dead.

Once Dr. V died, I sat in the back of the class staring into space. I found excitement in nothing until it was announced that Mr. Erin was going to take a select few kids on a trip to Disneyland. I had never been to Disneyland and daydreamed about what wonders awaited me behind those magical gates in Anaheim. All I had to do to qualify for the trip was earn a set number of volunteer service points.

With my soul reignited, I began wiping chalkboards, arranging books, and sorting papers for my teachers. With each task, my teachers initialed my service points sheet and my points slowly accumulated. I got closer and closer to Disneyland.

But soon my motivation began to lapse. I was too tired, too depressed to keep up my efforts in anything. My grades got worse, the teasing got worse, and life at home was abysmal. With the Disneyland deadline approaching, I became desperate. I came up with a seemingly brilliant plan. My math teacher, Mrs. Denver, had been on sick leave and since I had legitimately completed many service points for her before she left, I didn't think it was much of a stretch to add a few more. Quickly, I faked my service points sheet, adding just the right number to reach my goal, and forging her initials.

When I turned in my points sheet, Mr. Erin congratulated me with a smile, but later that day, he personally called me out of math class.

"Did you really earn all these points from Mrs. Denver?" he asked suspiciously.

"Yes," I lied, starting to sweat.

"Are you sure?" he pressed me.

I couldn't stand the heat. I fixed my eyes on the floor and wished I could disappear. Feeling my ears get hot and my eyes water, I admitted I forged the paper. Mr. Erin let out a disappointed sigh. For a brief moment, I thought he would see my desperation, take pity on me, and take me to Disneyland anyway. No such luck. The only place he took me was up to the principal's office.

My official punishment was detention – sitting in a chair outside the principal's office every lunch period for a week. But the real punishment was the stinging shame of Mr. Erin's disappointment in me, contrasted with his joy of taking the real winners, donned in their new Nikes, to Disneyland.

Dr. V was officially as much a lowlife as her parents.