

The Gardenia Curse



C. M. SAVAGE

This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

THE GARDENIA CURSE

First edition. April 14, 2016.

Copyright © 2016 C. M. Savage.

ISBN: 978-1533764201

Written by C. M. Savage.

Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[The Gardenia Curse](#)

[Chapter 1 | Darkness](#)

[Chapter 2 | Rival](#)

[Chapter 3 | Nightmare](#)

[Chapter 4 | Shimmers](#)

[Chapter 5 | Trust](#)

[Chapter 6 | Disagreements](#)

[Chapter 7 | Stuck](#)

[Chapter 8 | Realization](#)

[Chapter 9 | Answers](#)

[Chapter 10 | Betrayal](#)

[Chapter 11 | Harassment](#)

[Chapter 12 | Unrest](#)

[Chapter 13 | Friendship](#)

[Chapter 14 | Discovery](#)

[Chapter 15 | Escape](#)

[Chapter 17 | Trapped](#)

[Chapter 18 | Faith](#)

[About the Author](#)

[About the Author](#)

Table of Contents

Chapter 1Darkness

Chapter 2Rival

Chapter 3Nightmare

Chapter 4Shimmers

Chapter 5Trust

Chapter 6Disagreements

Chapter 7Stuck

Chapter 8Realization

Chapter 9Answers

Chapter 10Betrayal

Chapter 11Harassment

Chapter 12Unrest

Chapter 13Friendship

Chapter 14Discovery

Chapter 15Escape

Chapter 16Reality

Chapter 17Trapped

Chapter 18Faith

About the Author

Chapter 1



Darkness

Gasping, Eva felt the coolness of the blade as it sliced through her skin. She clutched her now oozing side and opened her eyes to darkness. She frantically looked around. Her heart pounded against her ribs as if trying to break free. Her face dripped with sweat. Where was she? What was going on?

Feeling a sticky warmth on her hands, Eva looked down. Her hands still clutched her side. In the trickle of moonlight that filtered through the window, she could see blood. Her blood.

Eva scanned her surroundings. The darkness that faced her now was just that, darkness. A lack of light. Nothing more. As her eyes began to adjust, Eva saw a vintage white, wooden dresser along the wall across from her and the outline of a door. She was sitting up in a bed, a bed that wasn't hers. Looking to her side, she saw a matching vintage white nightstand with the red digital numbers, 3:12, staring back at her from an alarm clock. Next to it was a gardenia flower, tinged red from the light of the clock. Eva's hand automatically reached for the gardenia pendant hanging at her chest, a gift from her grandmother. Her parents' divorce, the move, everything came flooding back to her and she knew where she was. She was at her grandma's house. What had happened in her dream was also clear in her mind, as if it was still happening.

She had been running; running from something or someone. Who? She didn't know. It was too dark to see. She just knew she had to get away. Her life depended on it. Looking back had been a mistake. The ground was uneven and she had tripped. She remembered landing on something soft. Soft, yet crunchy, with a slight moldy smell. Then he, if you could call it a he, was there. Wrapped in darkness, a hooded figure stood over her. Before she could scream, he had plunged the knife into her. How he had missed his mark, she didn't know. Instinctively, she knew he had aimed for her heart, yet the blade had gone into and through her side. Now she was here and he was gone.

It must have been a dream—just a dream, a horrible dream. Taking a deep breath to calm herself, Eva felt a stabbing pain in her side. Looking down again, Eva saw the blood was still there. It was seeping through her pajamas onto her sheets and her hands, which were still holding her oozing side. Her hands were covered in blood. How could she still be bleeding if it was only a dream?

Eva stared at her side, trying to make sense of everything. As she did, she saw the blood begin to slow. Her mouth fell open as the blood not only slowed but stopped pulsing from her body. She tore the sheets away and pulled her pajama shirt up. The blood had definitely stopped. As she looked, the deep gash slowly came together. The wound became smaller and smaller until it was a line across her skin. Then it faded into nothing

and her skin was perfect. How could a gash that deep heal so quickly? Eva looked at the alarm clock. The red numbers read 3:17. Only five minutes had passed.

Eva thought she must still be dreaming. That made sense. Sure she could make sense of everything in the morning, she placed her head back on the pillow and fell into a fitful sleep. Not really sleeping at all, she remained on the verge of sleep and wakefulness.

When her alarm clock went off for 7:00 o'clock in the morning, Eva woke feeling as if she hadn't slept at all. She rolled over and tried to go back to sleep. She was so tired. She pulled at the sheets as she rolled away from the window to block out the morning light and froze. Her hands were closed around a stiff section of the sheets. Eva opened her eyes as she slowly opened her hand. She stared down at some rather large crusted, dark brown splotches on her sheet.

"Eva, time to get up," her mom called, knocking on her door.

As the doorknob began to turn, Eva sat bolt upright and said a little louder than she meant to, "OK, OK. I'm up. I'll be right down." She was rigid, staring at the door.

"Everything OK?" her mom asked.

Eva took a quick breath trying to calm her voice. "Yeah, just first day jitters at a new school is all. Be right down."

"If you say so, I'll go and get breakfast ready," her mom said.

Eva let out a breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding when her mom's footsteps retreated downstairs.

Then she looked down at her pajamas and saw more dried blood. Could that really be what it was? *A slash right in the middle of the stain, in the side of my shirt, right where I'd been stabbed in my dream. My skin is fine though. No mark. Nothing. What happened? It's not that time of the month. There's no logical explanation for all the blood. It couldn't have been a dream though if my shirt was ripped and dried blood is everywhere. Unless I'm still dreaming. That has to be it. I'm still dreaming. Aren't I?* Eva pinched herself. *Nope. Not dreaming right now.*

Eva did know one thing. Unless she wanted to tell her mom or grandma what had happened and have them look at her as if she were crazy, she needed to get the sheets to the laundry without them knowing. She didn't have time now though so bunched them up and threw her blanket over them in case her grandma decided to come in and replace the gardenia with a fresh one, and got ready for school. As she walked downstairs, Eva hoped whatever had happened was a weird fluke, a one-time thing. Deep down though, she knew it was more than that. A tiny shiver crept up her spine as she realized she was about to face another nightmare, eighth grade at a new school, part way through the year.

Chapter 2



Rival

Eva looked out the car window as they drove through the one main street in town. She sighed as she pulled her phone from her bag and looked down at the blank screen.

“Still haven’t heard from Grace or Kelly?” her mom said.

“No.”

“Give it time. They’ll come around.”

“They’ll come around? They’ll come around? How can they come around?” Eva said, suppressing the urge to yell. “I live on the other side of the country now. I’ve texted. I’ve emailed. I’ve called. Still nothing. Even if they wanted to come around, as you say, they’d have to take a six hour plane trip first.”

“Very funny. You know what I mean. They know the move wasn’t your idea. They can’t stay mad at you forever.”

“Yeah, it was your idea,” Eva said in a whisper. Then louder, “Even if they don’t stay mad at me, it won’t do much good. It won’t be the same. I can’t even call them when I want to chat. I have to think about the time change. What’s the point in even trying anymore?”

“Eva,” her mom said, as she pulled the car into the school parking lot.

Eva ignored her mom and quickly got out of the car when it stopped. She wanted to walk away from her mom, to find some comfort somewhere else. When she looked up, she was surrounded by the unknown. She didn’t know where the office was so she couldn’t even walk off toward it. Instead, she put her backpack on and pushed her phone into her back pocket, despite it not fitting all the way. Eva waited, standing there, for her mom to get out and lead her toward the office.

Eva was silent in the office and smiled at the lady behind the counter, who seemed to know her mom from when they were in school. Eva could tell they hadn’t been friends. The lady was civil to Ellia, just barely. Why would her mom want to move back to this? When her mom finished refilling out a form she had apparently done wrong, Eva was handed her schedule and given a brief description of the school’s lay out.

As they walked out of the office into the empty hall, Eva turned to her mom and said, “I don’t understand why you wanted to move back here. It’s not like people are nice to you or anything. Aren’t people supposed to be nice and friendly in a small town? We were better off in San Francisco...with Dad.”

“No, we weren’t, sweetheart,” her mom said in an exasperated tone, as she opened the door and stepped outside.

“Yes, we were. I know I was,” Eva said, her voice slowly getting louder. “You were too, even if you won’t admit it. Dad took care of you. He took care of everything you couldn’t do. He never filled out a form wrong. Why can’t you even fill out a stupid form?”

“Eva, please, you don’t need to yell,” Ellia said.

Eva hadn’t realized she’d been yelling. She looked around and saw everyone staring at her. She turned back to her mom, waiting.

“Look. I know this isn’t easy on you but we’ve been over this. Now is not the time, nor is it the place to go over it again.”

“Nothing’s changed, though. We’re still here,” Eva said, through gritted teeth.

“And we’re going to be staying here,” Ellia said. “All I ask is for you to do the best you can with the situation in front of you. That’s what I’m trying to do. Can you at least do that?”

Eva didn’t answer, scowling at her mom, oblivious to the stares from all the nearby students. Ellia let out a sigh and turned to head back to the car.

“Oh look,” Ellia said, gesturing toward the entrance gate, “There’s Courtney.”

Eva looked up to see Courtney in a sea of blond hair and fair skin staring back at her, along with everyone else. Eva realized how much her dark hair and olive skin seemed to scream to everyone that she was different.

“Maybe she can show you around today and introduce you to her friends,” Ellia said, as she started walking toward Courtney.

“I doubt it,” Eva said. Her mom wasn’t paying attention. *Great, Eva thought, like I need something else to add to the fantastic day I’m having. It isn’t even 8:00 o’clock yet. If things kept up at this rate, I won’t be alive by the end of the day.*

“Courtney,” Ellia called as she walked toward her. “Hi, I’m so glad I saw you. You remember Eva, don’t you? Would you mind showing her around today? I would feel so much better.”

Eva cringed. Thinking back to her first day in town and meeting Courtney with her dad, Brad, had not gone as well as Ellia thought it had. Ellia and Brad seemed to be transported to their own little world as Eva was forced to stand by and watch Courtney glare at her mom and her. There was no question that Ellia and Brad had chemistry and, although Eva wasn’t thrilled about thinking of her mom with someone other than her dad, it seemed to make Courtney mental. It didn’t help that when Courtney had gone to the bathroom, Eva overheard Brad tell Ellia that Courtney’s mom had filed for divorce. Unfortunately, Courtney didn’t know yet.

Courtney stared at Ellia, apparently too shocked to respond.

“Thank you,” Ellia said to Courtney before turning to Eva. “Have a good day sweetheart. I’ll see you at Grandma’s, I mean home.”

“Yep, it’s not like I could get lost here, even if I wanted to,” Eva said, the last part under her breath.

With that, Ellia left Eva with Courtney and her friends.

“Let’s get one thing straight,” Courtney said, apparently regaining her senses. “I don’t like your mom and I don’t like you. As long as you and your mom stay out of my way and my dad’s, we’ll be fine. If not, you’re in for trouble.”

Eva’s eyes widened slightly at the blatant threat that included her mom. As soon as Courtney had said this, she turned and walked off, followed by her friends. Angry and frustrated, Eva pulled on her backpack straps and let go. When the backpack fell back against her, it knocked the phone out of her pocket. The phone landed on its side and bounced, landing face down on the cement.

Really? Eva thought. She reached down to pick up the phone and let out a groan. There was a huge crack in the middle of the screen radiating out. Eva tried sliding her finger over where the bar should be. Nothing happened. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath to keep from screaming then stomped off toward her first class or at least where she thought it was.

Eva found her first class without trouble. The campus was small and uncomplicated compared to her previous school in San Francisco. Just like town, there wasn’t much to it and it would be nearly impossible for her to get lost. Eva let out a big sigh before walking into her English class. Other than the teacher, who was sitting at her desk, the classroom was empty. Eva looked at the clock on the wall above the teacher and saw that class wouldn’t start for another ten minutes.

The teacher noticed her then. “Ah, yes. I did hear we would be having a new student today. You must be Esmerelda’s granddaughter. You look like her, you know.”

“Yeah. I’m Eva. Eva Thomas.”

“Well, I’m Mrs. Roberts. We’re reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* right now,” she said as she handed Eva a copy. “Have you read it already?”

“No,” Eva said.

“Well, you have some catching up to do then. We’re on chapter four. Take a seat anywhere. I don’t assign seats in my class.”

“OK,” Eva said as she turned to face the seats. The room was divided in two, with two rows of seats on either side of a center aisle, of which she was currently standing at the head. The seats all faced this aisle. Not wanting to sit near the front of the room and draw attention to herself, Eva chose a seat on the side away from the door in the back row, close to Mrs. Roberts. In case Courtney was in the class, Eva didn’t want to give her another opportunity to pose a threat. She figured avoidance was the best policy when it came to Courtney.

Eva sat quietly, trying to read the first chapter of *To Kill a Mockingbird* so she wouldn’t have to look at everyone as they walked in. She knew they would be looking at her. She couldn’t concentrate though so she just pretended to read.

When the bell rang and Mrs. Roberts began talking, Eva let out a sigh. She didn’t have to stand up and introduce herself. Thank you, Mrs. Roberts. Eva decided it would be safe to look around and see who else was in her class. She found a few of the other kids

looking directly at her but didn't see Courtney. She let out another sigh of relief. Eva noticed the girl next to her look over at the sound and smile. The girl's eyes were warm and friendly and seemed at home on her freckled face. Her brown hair was loosely pulled into pigtails that hung over her shoulders. Eva gave a small smile back. Maybe today wouldn't be so bad.

After English ended, the girl leaned toward Eva, "I'm Alice. You must be Eva. What class do you have next?"

Momentarily, Eva was taken aback by her forwardness. She stared back blankly then managed to say, "Uh, yeah."

"Next class?" Alice prompted, eyes staring at Eva.

"Uh, science," Eva said as she looked down at her schedule.

"Oh, too bad, I have math. Oh, look," Alice said as she grabbed Eva's schedule from her hands, "we have history together and then health. Yay, come on, I'll show you where science is."

"You don't need to go out of your way. I can find it. This school isn't very big," Eva said as she headed out of the class, not sure what to make of Alice. Her smile and bubbly demeanor were very inviting. However, her 70's inspired electric blue dress was clearly a fashion statement not shared by anyone else at the school and made Eva think she was a loner.

"It's not out of my way," Alice said, "I walk right by it on my way to algebra. So, you and your mom moved in with your grandma, Esmerelda, right? How cool is that?"

Eva wondered what Alice meant by 'cool'. She didn't have a chance to ask. Alice kept on talking.

"So, tell me about yourself. What's your story? Why did you and your mom move in with your grandma?"

"Uh, there's not much to tell," Eva said, not sure how much she wanted to tell this friendly but forward girl. "My parents got divorced. My dad's still in San Francisco and Mom dragged me out here."

"Oh, that sucks," Alice said, looking a bit sympathetic, "You must miss him. I don't know what I would do if I had to live without one of my parents."

"Yeah," Eva said, deciding Alice was OK after all. "I don't even know when I'll get to see him again."

"Well, at least you get to live with your grandma. That must be cool. She can DO things, can't she? What's she like?"

"I don't know. I don't really know her. I didn't see her much growing up. I've only really talked with her on the phone." Eva wasn't sure what Alice meant by 'do things' and wasn't sure she wanted to know. Alice seemed nice but, as far as she was concerned, her grandma was a grandma. Apparently a bit odd though, from what she gathered being in town a few days.

“What about your mom? I bet she’s like your grandma. What can she do? You know, like not normal things.”

“Not fill out a form,” Eva mumbled.

“Huh?”

“Nothing,” Eva said. “She’s a mom. I don’t know. She’s definitely not normal. Still, she’s just my mom. She sticks needles in people. Some say that’s not normal. It’s acupuncture, you know. She went to school for it. My dad is totally normal. I miss him. I miss San Francisco.”

“Forget San Francisco. You have me now and I’m soooo glad you’re here. This town can be so boring.”

Eva wasn’t sure how to take Alice’s comment. She decided it was a good thing. “Thanks,” she said.

“So come on, what is the story with your family? Your grandma’s side of the family, that is. Your family isn’t from here originally, is it? Where did they move from and why did they pick here, of all places? Where did your grandma learn everything? Do you know stuff too, like she does?”

Eva had no idea why Alice was so interested in her family or what she was trying to find out with all of the odd questions. She began thinking maybe her idea that Alice was OK was a bit premature. Eva wondered why she was befriended by a crazy person.

“Uh, do you ask everyone questions like these?”

“Of course not, silly,” Alice said, waiting expectantly.

“I told you, I don’t really know my grandma or anything about her family and to be honest, I don’t really want to. Uh, here’s my class. I guess I’ll see you later.”

For the rest of the day, everyone either avoided Eva or gave her odd looks. No one really spoke to her, at least not more than was necessary, except for Alice. It seemed Alice was the only one at school who was glad Eva was there. At least, no one else was hostile, outwardly, toward her, as was Courtney.

Even though Eva thought Alice was a bit odd, she was relieved to see Alice in her history and health classes. At least the half of her classes with Alice would be bearable, she thought, as long as Alice stopped asking about her grandmother. What was her deal, anyway?

By the end of the day, Eva was more than ready to head home. Going all day with only one friendly face was wearing on her. Hopefully, tonight she would get some rest. She was so drained. Already, the nightmare from last night had faded and she couldn’t wait to go to bed.

Chapter 3



Nightmare

When Eva got home, she headed straight for her room to get started on her homework. Although her classes were the same as her old school, the material was a little different and Eva found herself behind in a few classes. Math, her best subject, was the only one she had previously covered what they were working on so was able to finish that homework rather quickly. After two hours, Eva headed down to the kitchen, sure dinner would be ready.

“There you are,” her mom said as she walked in. “How was school?”

“Awful and I broke my phone.”

“Oh, Eva. I’m sorry, honey. Maybe we can fix it. Let me see.”

“Thanks, Mom, but you don’t know how to fix phones and it’s beyond fixing. The whole screen shattered. Do you think I can get another one?”

“I wish we could. Money is tight right now, though, and we just can’t.”

“Can I use Grandma’s phone to call Dad?”

“I wish you could. Grandma doesn’t have long distance service, remember? I didn’t think it would be an issue with free long distance on your cell phone.”

Eva looked down at the floor and started to turn away when her mom asked, “Didn’t Courtney introduce you to her friends? I thought you girls were going to hit it off right away. They looked so nice.”

“Um, no. Courtney and I didn’t really hit it off.”

“Didn’t hit it off? What do you mean? Maybe you need to warm up to each other.”

“If you say so, Mom.” Eva didn’t want to dwell on Courtney. “What’s for dinner? I still have some reading to do for English.”

“I made spaghetti. It’s on the stove. Your grandma went to bingo so it’s only the two of us tonight.”

“Oh. Is it OK if I eat in my room then?”

Eva’s mom looked at her daughter’s face for a moment, sighed and said, “OK, just make sure to bring the dirty dishes back down before you go to bed.”

“OK, Mom, thanks.”

Eva grabbed a plate of spaghetti and some bread and headed back upstairs. Once there, she sat at her desk and pulled out *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Eva made it to the end of chapter 2 while she ate. Then she took her dishes back downstairs and said goodnight. Even

though it was only 8:00 o'clock in the evening, she was exhausted. She went to grab her pajamas and saw the blood again. She threw them in her dirty clothes hamper and grabbed some clean ones. She quietly crept into the hallway and took some clean sheets out of the linen closet so she could change the sheets. She threw the dirty ones in her hamper, making sure none of the blood showed and told herself she would have to do the laundry the next day.

When she got into bed and put her head on the pillow, she was asleep. Although Eva didn't wake up bleeding again, she did toss and turn all night. In her dream, she found herself in the same darkness as she was in the night before. She knew she had to hide and kept frantically looking around. Then the dread washed over her again and Eva knew HE was close. She had to get away. Eva started to run. This time she didn't look back. She just ran and ran. She ran through the darkness. She ran until her legs felt like they wouldn't carry her any farther. Just when she felt her legs would give out, she was jolted from sleep by her alarm clock.

Eva groggily opened her eyes. She looked around and sighed with relief when she recognized her room.

Eva literally stumbled through the morning, she was so exhausted. She couldn't figure out why, though. She had gone to bed so early the night before. The dream kept coming to the forefront of her mind. *To dream, I have to be sleeping. If I'm sleeping, I shouldn't be so tired. It doesn't make sense.*

By third period, history, Eva couldn't take it anymore. It didn't help that Mr. Lauren turned the lights off to show some slides. Eva had put her head down on her arms and drifted off to sleep. She was back in her dream and she wasn't alone. The next thing she knew, she was screaming and the lights were on. Everyone in class was staring at her. Courtney was laughing. Only Alice and Mr. Lauren had concern in their eyes.

"Are you all right?" Mr. Lauren asked. "Do you need to go to the nurse?"

Eva felt clammy and thought she must be pale. Her heart was racing. Although she wanted nothing more than to leave the class, she knew the nurse would call her mom and she didn't want to deal with that. Then she would have to explain the dream...and the blood.

"No, I'm fine," Eva said. "Sorry, I must have fallen asleep and had a nightmare or something." Perfect, she said she had had a nightmare. It was true. She was thirteen, though and to admit to having a nightmare in class was embarrassing. *Why couldn't I have thought of something else to say? Anything else.* She never was very good at coming up with things to say on the spot, especially not with everyone in class staring at her. Now everyone would really have a reason to look at her funny. *Great, just great,* Eva thought.

Mr. Lauren gave Eva a doubtful look, apparently deciding not to make any more of a fuss. Eva was thankful when he turned the lights off again and went back to the slides. Eva sat in the dark, mortified, for the rest of class. When the bell rang, Eva bolted for the door. She wasn't fast enough and heard Courtney's voice, "As weird as her grandma," and the laughter that followed.

"Hey, Eva. Wait up."

Eva turned to find Alice, running to catch up.

“Hey, you OK?”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m fine, just tired.”

“That looked like a bit more than just tired. I’m not one to pry but you really looked freaked out.”

Eva thought Alice was just the type to pry.

“I don’t know what’s going on,” Alice continued. “Can’t your grandma do something?”

Why would my grandma be able to do anything? Eva thought. “I haven’t been sleeping well the past few nights. It was nothing more than a weird dream. Then waking up to find everyone staring at me. Really, I’m fine,” she lied.

When she was in her math class, Eva let her mind drift back to the dream she had in history. *He found me again. I saw him pull the knife from his robe and I screamed. Would I have bled again? That would be hard to explain. They’d really think I was a weirdo—just bleeding out of nowhere.* Eva decided she couldn’t fall asleep in class again. She just couldn’t.

“Eva, please put your books away. This isn’t an open book quiz,” Miss Lily said.

“What? Oh. Yeah, sorry,” Eva managed to get out.

Everyone was staring at her, once again. When she looked at the board, she saw the words ‘pop quiz’.

Wonderful. Can this day get any worse? At least it’s math. How hard can it be? Eva loved math and, generally, didn’t have to work too hard at it to get good grades. It was strange that she left class feeling less than confident. Her brain simply couldn’t make any sense of the problems. She knew she knew how to do them. She was just so tired. *So much for thinking I could do math in my sleep.*

Somehow, Eva made it through the rest of the day and found herself at home. She was relieved to open the front door until she heard her mom talking with a man. When she entered, her mom was beaming at her.

“Eva, good, you’re home. You remember Brad?” Ellia said.

“Uh, yeah,” Eva said. “Courtney’s dad.”

“Yes,” Brad said. “It’s good to see you again, Eva. How’s school going? I hope Courtney is showing you around.”

“It’s school,” Eva said smiling, weakly. “I’m going to start my homework.”

“OK, sweetheart,” Ellia said. “Dinner should be ready in about an hour.”

“OK,” Eva said, as she started toward the stairs, wondering if Brad was staying for dinner.

When Eva got to her room, she grabbed her stained pajamas and sheets and rushed to the laundry room. She grabbed a stain stick and opened the sheets to the blood. As she

rubbed the stains with the pretreatment, a shiver crept through her body and the fear and pain returned. Eva's breath quickened and became shallow. The room dimmed and the Shadow's form was clear in Eva's mind. Her body convulsed. The stain stick clattered to the floor, breaking Eva free from the memory. She shoved the sheets and PJs in the washing machine as they were. She added twice as much bleach as she normally would, thankful the sheets were white and her PJs were a light pink, setting the washer to a soak cycle. She took a deep breath.

Closing the laundry room door behind her, Eva could still hear her mom talking with Brad. She tiptoed back up to her room. Half an hour later, Eva snuck back down to check on the sheets and PJs. Although the bloodstains weren't completely gone, she could no longer tell what type of stains they were. Eva started a wash cycle and added more bleach.

"Laundry already?" Esmerelda said.

Eva jumped.

"Sorry, dear. I didn't mean to scare you."

"I, uh, didn't have time to, uh, wash a few things before Mom and I left so, uh, I packed them dirty. Figured I might as well wash them now," Eva said, amazed she was able to come up with something to say.

"Well, I can stick them in the dryer for you when they're done, if you'd like."

"Uh, no, Grandma. Thanks, but I, uh, can do that," Eva said, smiling half-heartedly.

"OK, if you insist. Next time, though, you should use a little less bleach. It smells like you used the whole bottle. It can break down your clothes if you use too much."

"Oh. OK, Grandma. Thanks," Eva said, with a nervous smile and walked back to her room.

After an hour of homework, Eva headed back downstairs. When she entered the kitchen, she was relieved to see Brad wasn't there. It was just her mom and grandma sitting at the table.

"There you are," Esmerelda said. "I was about to come up and get you. Your laundry is ready for the dryer and dinner is ready. Hungry?"

"Starving. What's for dinner? It smells great."

"Lasagna," her mom said.

Eva loved lasagna.

"Be right back."

She ran to the laundry room and pulled the sheets out of the washing machine. The stain was gone. Like nothing ever happened. But it had. Eva shoved them into the dryer and was glad to see the stain was gone from her PJs as well. At least that was one less thing to worry about. When the dryer was going, she went back to the kitchen.

"Laundry?" her mom said.

"Mmm Hm," Eva said.

Her mom gave her a quizzical look, then let the subject drop.

“Now sit and tell me about school while I get you a plate,” Esmerelda said. “It’s nice being in a small town, isn’t it? You have Mrs. Roberts for English, of course. I like her.”

“I like her too,” Eva said. “Your small town though, not so much. Everyone stares at me. Well, everyone except Alice. Back home, I just blended in.”

“Of course, everyone stares at you. This is a small town and you’re new,” Esmerelda said.

“And you did yell a bit and create a little scene when we arrived at school yesterday morning,” Ellia added.

Eva glared at her mom and then turned back to her grandma. “It’s more than that though, Grandma. They look at me like...like...I don’t know. It’s more than me being new or causing a scene,” she said, while glaring back at her mom for the last part.

Ellia sighed. “Yes, well, I was afraid of that.”

Eva looked at her mom, surprised. “What?”

“They used to look at me like that too, back in the day. I was hoping things would have changed by now. I guess I was wrong.”

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of,” Esmerelda said. “I told that to your mother when she was in school and I’ll tell it to you now. Be proud that they look at you funny. It’s because of our family and our heritage, because of which, you should be proud. Hold your head up high, my Eva.”

“What do you mean because of our family? What did we ever do?” Eva thought back to what Alice had said about her grandmother. “What do you do, Grandma?”

“I help people, like my family taught me and like I taught your mom. That’s what we do,” Esmerelda said, defensively.

Eva looked at her grandma, waiting for more. When it became apparent that was all she was going to say, Eva turned to her mother.

“People in this town are very conservative, at least on the outside. They would even look at my job as an acupuncturist as voodoo, I guess you could say. Grandma does similar things—not the needle aspect but in terms of alternative healing. All of my herbal knowledge is from Grandma. She knows and can do so much more, too.”

When Ellia finished, she looked at Esmerelda; they locked eyes for a moment. Eva wasn’t sure what it meant. She knew it meant something. Neither had noticed that Eva observed their moment. Eva wondered what they were hiding.

Dinner was silent after that, except for Ellia commenting that the lasagna was good. When dinner was over, Eva grabbed the now clean and dry sheets and pajamas and returned to her room. When she finished folding and putting them away, she attempted to catch up a bit more on her English reading. Eva was just too tired. After ten minutes of reading the same sentence over several times, Eva put the book down. Even though she knew she needed to get some sleep, she was afraid to. She headed back downstairs.

As she neared the kitchen, she could hear her mom and grandma arguing in hushed tones. It sounded like two snakes hissing at each other. The third step from the bottom gave her away, though; as it creaked, the hissing stopped abruptly.

Eva entered the kitchen with both her grandma and mom looking at her.

“Can I make some coffee?” Eva asked.

“Coffee? Why on earth would you make coffee at this hour? You don’t even drink coffee, do you?” Ellia said. “Dad didn’t give you coffee behind my back, did he?”

“Uh, no. You and Dad always drink it when you need to stay up and I...I...need to stay up.”

“Go to sleep, Eva, dear,” Esmerelda said. “You look so tired.”

“Uh, well, I’m already behind in some classes, Grandma. If I don’t catch up now, I’ll get even further behind and I’ll never catch up.” *It’s the truth*, Eva thought.

Ellia looked at Eva and sighed. “I’ll make you some weak coffee. I don’t want you staying up all night.”

Internally, Eva groaned. Staying up all night was exactly the idea. She couldn’t go to sleep. Not after being stabbed in her sleep, having almost the same dream the next night and then waking up screaming in class the other day.

Something is going on with my dreams. They’re more than just dreams and until I figure it out, I don’t want to sleep. I can’t sleep. What if something worse happens? What if I don’t wake up? It isn’t safe to sleep until I figure it out. Coffee always helps my parents stay awake and work on things. Coffee will help me stay awake and figure out what is going on. It has to.

But, it didn’t.

You've Just Finished your Free Sample

Enjoyed the preview?

Buy: <http://www.ebooks2go.com>