

Chapter 1

I realized I was a hypocritical liar the day I wore a bright pink-colored dress on a day that was not meant to wear a bright pink-colored dress.

Overcast weather were always like this: you could never tell what time it was because the outside stayed one color. It was an infinite stretch of shades of grey, with the same kind of light filtering into this paradise we supposedly live in. It was as if the whole world was a poster, a picture and a postcard of what was and what will be. I must have looked like a clown in the middle of black-tie event of hors d'oeuvre and fancy cocktails because everyone stared, wondering *what* and most importantly, *why*.

Well, the weather promised sunny skies, a breeze that made you want to sway round and round, and flowers at every corner of the field. Plus, we were going to this “gourmet” restaurant called Marco’s and our lovely manager was going to pay for meal, so I figured a nice spring dress would add an extra touch to the restaurant, my confidence, and the benefactor.

But I knew I was spinning this day out of proportion the moment I left my apartment because the wind physically took my breath away. I wanted to choke up and run back in to change my life into something else. But if I went back in, it would take me an extra ten minutes to come back out again,

and then I would miss the bus that came at 8:30, and then I would be late for work, and then I would feel worse because I never stayed the full eight hours, so I told myself to suck it up because there was nothing I could do.

I also knew I was spinning this lunch thing out of proportion because I ended up carpooling to Marco's with Ross. Well, Lillian was driving, David, Ross, and I were in the backseat.

I never liked Ross. It wasn't because his voice sounded so nasally you thought he was holding his breath on purpose, or he wore sunglasses under clouds of rain, or he thought he had a chance to stay in our elite club of volunteers, but because I couldn't talk to him. You had to be careful with your words to Ross or else you would see him quiver underneath his pants and almost start crying. And once he starts quivering, he would spit out all these nasty things to you because that was the only way he knew how to defend himself. Ross was sitting too close to me in the backseat, and every time the car bumped around/turned/twisted/stopped, his leg would brush up on my naked thigh and I knew I should have just taken shotgun.

At the table, he just so happened to sit across from me.

I wondered if he knew I hated his guts.

Marco's was not nearly as packed as I thought it would be. The waitresses were too beautiful to be randomly

hired, and our table for 15 filled up the entire middle of the restaurant. I felt important. The menu looked exquisite too, and I felt even more powerful that I could order anything and everything I want because money didn't mean anything to me in the moment.

I wondered if this was what all rich corporate people do: eat hundreds of dollars for lunch, and then go back to the office to make thousands of dollars more. And then I imagined myself like that for a moment. First, as the wealthy boss, treating all friends and coworkers to lunch at a new 5-star restaurant everyday, and then second, as the new girl at work treated to lunch by all her handsome managers and colleagues. They would all be subtly trying to figure out who this mysterious person was and try to make her laugh to see who was the wittiest of them all.

I was trying to stop drinking sugary beverages, so I just asked for water. By the time I got my water, Ross already finished his diet coke.

I never understood the point of diet coke. In fact, diet coke seemed to be even more insulting than regular coke. If you made a point to drink coke, then you're either a badass who knows coke is bad for you, or an exercise freak who knows coke is bad for you.

One could never be both.

He finished his second refill before we even ordered lunch.

By the time his lunch came, he already finished his third cup.

When he expressed his interest in a fourth refill of diet coke, the managers all complained about it.

“That’s so *bad!*” Our manager cried, her hands on her face. “Stop drinking it.” Her nails were always changing colors.

“Yeah, Ross, you’re done,” I heard Lillian say.

I wasn’t too sure what Lillian ever did. It never seemed like she knew what was going on.

I was glad and so relieved that they were expressing what I had been thinking this entire lunch that I couldn’t hide my feelings and thoughts anymore. I told him, “You know you’d probably need to run two miles to work off all that sugar off, right?”

His joking face faded into something grim. Ross’s face scrunched up like the back of my dirty sponge, and it looked like he was about to leap onto my face and claw my eyes out. For a moment, I thought he’d do it and I’d end up in the hospital, winning a lawsuit over millions of dollars. But he didn’t. He stayed in his seat. I didn’t know if I was disappointed or relieved.

Ross sneered, “I got diet coke, not regular coke.”

I couldn't find the right words to say back to him, but he continued to defend himself, as always, "It's fine. I'm healthy."

I wanted to point out that diet coke was worse than regular coke, but I was unclear of the scientific details, so I just shut up and stopped paying attention to him. But I found himself *still* speaking on how he was healthy because it was diet coke, and not regular coke. I didn't even know who he was talking to and I almost lost my cool until I realized some people couldn't be saved.

Afterwards, when I got back to the office, I felt sort of bad for what I said earlier because he could do whatever he wanted with his own stinking life. He could lock himself up in his basement and play video games all day and smoke up Mary all night, and it shouldn't matter to me. He should be able to drink all the diet coke he wants and pretend he's healthy.

No one has the right to judge him for his actions.

No one has the right to judge him for anything.

And although I cling to that ideal with all my life, deep down inside me, there was an entity that disagreed. It was a gross thing, a disgusting slime that only sees the world in its rawest and most sinful form. It mocks me, laughs at my silly daydreams and unrealistic expectations. It hides in the

depth of my own hell and comes out when the shadows fades.
It knows I am wrong about so many things on so many levels.

And not more than once now, I give in to its sly and
charismatic smile.

We can definitely judge people for their actions.

We can judge people for anything.