

Week 1



Introduction

“Dr. Fairway, I’m so sick of her always interrupting!”

“Well if you weren’t so got-damned long-winded someone else would have an opportunity to speak.”

“Oh shut up you twisted, nympho-maniacal whore!”

“Whore? Chic please, I know you of all people up in here did not just call me a whore!”

“Ladies, ladies...please calm down. Now look, we’ve been making some progress here but we cannot continue to better ourselves if you guys are going to continuously attack one another every couple of minutes. Now this is supposed to be a safe haven...a place to share our deepest thoughts and afflictions. We are family right now, let’s not forget that.”

PSYCHO

Silence covers the room out of respect for my request and for me but I know they're still mentally bickering and slicing into one another's egos without allowing one word to part ways with their lips. I can tell from the icy glares being passed across the room.

My name is Nicollet Madison Fairway – Dr. Nicollet Madison Fairway Ph.D. I began my career in psychiatry but eventually moved on to the field of psychotherapy. After many years of talking rich, bored, and lonely housewives down from a ledge I decided I really needed a change...a greater challenge.

I discovered there was a void in the world of psychoanalysis...an entire group being underserved if they were being served at all. I would fill that void. And so I did it. I referred my wealthy clients to under-worked and desperate colleagues and revitalized my entire business plan. Added more chairs, rented a loft in the Pilsen neighborhood in Chicago, got some plants, healing music, sandalwood incense, a refrigerator stocked with drinks and snacks and got to work reading books.

I studied hard for two months, living comfortably off of my savings, before I was ready to serve. I put the word out there...the word that I was looking for new clients, very specific clients. I hadn't expected to receive such a turn out...though I should have suspected. People everywhere were referring clients my way. I had clients flying in from cities all across the country just to take advantage of my services. It was almost too much.

But I'm not a quitter and I never back down from a challenge – any challenge. And so, I scaled down my private client list to a few women who I thought needed me the

most...trained a few other doctors in my field and charged them a small fee to use my name and what has been dubbed The Fairway Method. Offices boasting my name have been opened all over. There are three in Chicago alone. One in Atlanta, two in Los Angeles, and a suite in Minneapolis, just to name a few.

This has been a very lucrative endeavor for me but more importantly, I have an opportunity to truly help those less fortunate...those without a voice of their own...the most underrepresented of society. The most beloved, most abhorred, most beleaguered. No, I'm not talking about celebrities...I'm talking about fictional characters. That's right, fictional characters. They are the ones that need help the most.

And I've helped so many of them. I hate to drop names but remember Arizona from Eric Jerome Dickey's *Thieves Paradise*, *Sleeping with Strangers*, and *Waking with Enemies*? Former client. And what about Omar Tyree's *Fly Girl*? Yea, she grew up and let me tell you, sister girl had some issues. Oh, and Zola Norwood from E Lynn Harris' *A Love of My Own*, she's walked through these doors a time or two...but I um, I can't help her. Too many problems...too many problems.

You've got to understand, life is hard on a fictional character. I mean seriously people, think about it. What if your entire existence was summed up in a three part discovery – build up, plot, and conclusion. You've done more, seen more, feel more. Hell, you're people too but that's all the world sees you as...momentary entertainment. The sole purpose of your creation is for the enjoyment of man. Your life, peeked into, picked apart, and when it's over, discarded, stuck back on a shelf to be displayed for all to see – if you're lucky. If you're not,

passed down like last year's fashions, sold to the highest bidder at book buybacks, or stuffed in a trunk in the corner of a smelly basement never to be heard from again.

I give them their voice again. Allow them to be free and express themselves. To once more be alive. I only serve female clients; I leave the men to the men. And I don't typically do one-on-ones, not right away anyhow. I find it's better for them once they understand that there are others who have had the same experiences they have. Group therapy, sort of like AA but more pleasant.

Six weeks with me and the group.

Three more weeks. Two sessions. Four in session A, four in session B.

After that three weeks of individual visits to clean up those loose ends.

Twelve full weeks of therapy, that's The Fairway Method.

My track record is nearly flawless (Zola Norwood ruined that perfection for me). I've all but cured Winter Santiago from Sister Souljah's *Coldest Winter Ever*. For all that she's experienced, she is truly a testimony in and of herself. And let me not leave out sex addict Zoe Reynard from Zane's *Addicted*. I hope she hasn't fallen off the Queen-size mattress. Oh and Freda from Terry McMillan's *Mama*. She was my most intimate client. I connected greatly to her story. We still keep in touch to this day.

But now I face a brand new set of challenges in my latest experiment with healing my clients. I've taken on the challenge of creating a group of characters, all of the same mind. The questions I pondered were what sort of issues would they have

in common? Will they connect better because they are born of the same creative mind? Is it easier...faster to recovery that way?

So far we've been in session for all of 15-min and well, (gulp) I'm beginning to think that maybe I made a mistake. I mean, who knew that putting a group of characters all developed from the same place, would bring such drama? Which begs a new question, is it the characters or is it the author that has the issues?

I suppose I should introduce you to my present group of women, all from the mind of a brilliant author named Miki Starr Martin:

To my right is Zella Dora Frazier from the self-titled *Zella Dora*. She may be the sanest of them all except, she suffers from bouts of...umm...fantasizing about her parents having...sex. Yes, you read correctly. Her parents...having sex.

Beside Zella is Erika Curtis of *Well Runs Dry*. She's the one that's been accused of being a "twisted nympho-maniacal whore". That may be a little exaggerated though she does tend to have various sex partners to serve very specific and varied purposes. Okay, maybe slightly nympho-ish.

Across from her, locking gazes and clenching fists, is Adé [Ah-Day] Wyett of *Broken Promises*. Self professed diva that does not get along with Erika because they are so much alike. I'm working to get her to invite her teen daughter who she basically abandoned when she was two, Kenya, to a private session but she doesn't seem to get along with her either. But

PSYCHO

Adé doesn't get along with most including the woman to her immediate left, Graciela DiLaura also of *Broken Promises*.

Gracie and Adé have a very stressed relationship with bad blood shared between them ever since Adé slept with Gracie's man and baby's daddy – ahem, I mean, child's father Kenny, when they were fresh out of high school. Prior to that they were best friends, like sisters.

Next to her is Ayinde Domonique Phelan of *Zella Dora*. Troubled girl battling to stay clear of an addiction to drugs and alcohol, a dependence on her friend Zella and a seemingly impenetrable need to have a man in her life – namely a man named Marcus who I've never met but haven't heard very flattering things about.

And to my left is Anesia Marie Hawkins...I mean Jackson...I mean...well, I don't know who the hell she is anymore. She was about to marry her husband JT and he walked out on her, leaving her at the altar which left her twisted and confused and giving her virginity to a guy she met in New York when she ran away from Minneapolis, except she wasn't actually a virgin because she'd had one partner prior, but then she came back and eloped with JT and they moved in together but then...sigh. Oh if you want to know the rest read the book. It's much too complicated for me to try to explain.

Who we're missing today is Lydia Washington (thank goodness!) of *Well Runs Dry*. Anesia's cousin and though I believe she really needs therapy, I think she only agreed to come to put Anesia on the spot. If she doesn't take this seriously and misses one more session I'm going to drop her.

And lastly Umifemilola Sahlemariam Brown of *Zella Dora*. Her couple's therapy conflicts with our group therapy. Today should be the only time. I am hoping to be able to convince Zella and Lola to look one another in the eye again before our time ends.

So that's the group and those are the women and some of the issues that I have to deal with this session. Feel free to sit in on future sessions, offer up advice for me to share with the client of your choosing, or whatever you like. May I suggest however, that you research a little bit of the background before judging too harshly.

Reference material can be found at:

<http://www.mikistarr.com/books2.html> and on **Amazon.com**

See you in session!

Dr. Nicollet Madison Fairway



Week 2

The alarm sounds on my clock radio, old fashioned and very annoying. One of those bulky pieces of history from the dark ages of the ninety-eighties. I know part of the beauty of modern technology is the convergence of the cellular telephone device with internal alarm clocks but that semi-pleasant lulling to consciousness does nothing for a night owl such as myself.

My sister makes fun of me for it. She awakens by internal clock and when that fails my niece, her latest family addition Simone, never does. I have no children tugging at my nipples in the morning and well...no husband doing it either for that matter so I've got to make do with what's available to me.

"Grrr..." I reach over and slap the dang thing three times before I finally connect to the correct button and it silences.

One eye open, the other crusted shut, I gaze around my room trying to recall something important. The morning sun is

forcing its way through, threatening to destroy my retinas if I fully expose them too quickly. I turn my face away and my cheek falls back into the pool of drool on my pillow.

“Ugh, gross,” I whisper to myself as I immediately separate my face from the nighttime wetness. May as well get up anyway. The whole point in setting the alarm for 7 am is so that I can hit the gym and get a good workout before it’s time to deal with my patients.

I use all my limited morning strength to push my body up to a seated position. I look to the other side of my bed to the rapidly cooling pillow...and then my breathing stops and my ears perk up. I stay perfectly still...listening...listening...and then I hear it – music!

I fling the covers from my legs and jump from the bed, forgetting how tired I really am until I become slightly woozy and a fainting spell threatens me on the horizon. I fight through it and keep forward from my bedroom, my bare feet slapping the hardwood in my townhome. I stop short in the hall, looking over the railing to the large living room below. And there I discover him, my boyfriend of the past nine months, fingering what doesn’t belong to him and what he has no business touching.

“Joseph!”

He looks up to me then nervously glances at the clock, and then back to me except now he looks cool...real calm, like he wasn’t just busted molesting my record collection. Like he had every right to be there.

“Oh, good morning, babe.”

PSYCHO

I turn to head down the stairs, holding extra tight to the banister to steady myself. "Don't you *'good morning, babe'* me. What are you doing messing with my albums behind my back?"

"What? This? Oh, I couldn't sleep so I thought I'd listen to a little music to calm my nerves."

"Lie."

"You calling me a liar?"

I tilt my head, raise an eyebrow and fold my arms across my breasts. "Why couldn't you sleep, Joseph?"

"Y'know...a lot on my mind. Lot of stress, too much stress."

"Such as?"

"Life...just ummm...life."

"You don't stress. You never stress about anything."

"First time for everything."

"Why couldn't you sleep, Joseph?"

"Fine, you were snoring."

"Ah!" My arms drop to my sides and I feel my cheeks warm. "I don't...I don't snore."

Joseph stands and walks to me, placing his large hands on my cheeks and planting one right on my lips. "Yes you do honey, you snore."

My eyes widen and I fix my mouth to retaliate but nothing comes out. Joseph laughs and walks past me and to the stairs.

"I'm going to shower, you coming?"

I turn to face him and take note of the devilish smirk on his face. I fold my arms and purse my lips again. He just laughs loudly and continues on course to the bathroom.

“Your loss,” he calls back to me. “Would have been a great opportunity to get those little crusty boogers out your eye!”

My eyes widen in embarrassment and I quickly use my nails to try and pick them clean. Once the door shuts and the sound of running water fills my ears, I take up the seat abandoned by him...my guy music connoisseur, Joseph Aberdeen. Somehow he managed to stumble into a career doing nothing all day but listening to music, collecting music, and talking about music. I'm constantly amazed that he actually gets a pretty sweet paycheck for it. It's a rather awesome career path for him and I support him fully except when he starts stealing music – namely mine.

That's how we met...music was the cupid that shot the arrow which connected us. Dusty Groove America is our special place. We were reaching for the same album at the same time – Stephanie McKay's *Tell It Like It Is*. It was the last one and I was not going to miss out and have to search for it again. He told me he'd gotten there first. I told him he could go get her CD but the LP was mine. He was offended by the suggestion yet intrigued that I was seemingly willing to come to blows over a record. He then questioned how I even intended to listen to this music embedded in such a lost piece of technological history. I told him on my Audio Technica AT-LP2D.

His jaw dropped and he quietly and respectfully placed the record in my hands. Then – he asked me out.

Nine months and twelve mysteriously missing LP's later and we're still hanging in there. It helps greatly, our mutual respect for the others decision to avoid sex again 'til marriage. Amazingly we both agree that sex incredibly complicates things and we've each made vows of abstinence that admittedly we began challenging the moment we started the occasional practice of sharing a bed.

I glance at the time.

Oh crud, gotta go. My trainer will kill me (literally) if I'm late again!

Group Therapy Week 2

I watch from the window in my office as the women file in. I watch who speaks to whom and who and how who shuns the other. Ayinde and Zella Dora arrive together. Ayinde clings to her friend ensuring they get a seat beside one another this week. She'll probably be angry when I force her to separate. She needs to learn to stand on her own, and now is as good a time as any.

Erika sits tall, legs crossed, fashionable glasses on her nose, ticking away at a Blackberry, probably "tweeting" about how she really doesn't want to be here. Gracie slips in quietly and takes a seat, not looking around at anyone...just picking at her fingernails. I notice that her body tenses the moment Adé enters the room. Bad blood...bad blood.

Adé and Erika glare at one another, and then look away. The others file in slowly. Anesia offers up a hearty '*good morning*' to

the room. Some grumble out a response, others pretend she isn't there. She walks over and speaks to Zella as Ayinde looks on, shooting daggers at the side of her head before taking a seat. With all the women present I grab my legal pad and Pilot pen and scoot my chair back from my desk.

The door opens again and all eyes move in that direction. I recognize the woman entering. Tall, dark skinned...dreds. Same description as Erika and Adé but leaner...elegant. She's a dancer, she shared that in the Future Patient Bio that I sent to her. My eyes move from her to Zella Dora and Ayinde. Ayinde shifts restlessly in her seat and her face contorts. Zella says something to her and she settles back into her chair. I look back to my new client, Lola Brown, and I swear I see steam come from her ears.

I graze a finger across the cover of *Zella Dora*, the events that occurred birthing the hostility that I am witnessing come flooding back to me and I say a quick prayer for courage before jumping from my chair and rushing into the room and the center of the women.

I glance nervously from Zella and Ayinde to Lola and take a deep breath. *Nicci, you can do this.* I turn to face Lola, my most welcoming smile on my face.

"You must be Lola," I say, walking in her direction with an extended hand.

"Yes I am. It's a pleasure to meet you, Dr. Fairway."

"Well, come on in. Take a seat wherever you like."

"That bitch better not sit near me," Ayinde blurts out. "I'm giving you fair warning, Doctor."

“Day, cut it out,” Zella warns.

I immediately re-think my strategy of separating Ayinde and Zella Dora. Clearly that plan will have to wait until we’ve had some progress in our sessions. I also make a mental note to put 9-1-1 on multiple speed dials.

I address Ayinde, “Language please. Rule number two.”

The circle is set for eight with an available seat beside Ayinde and one next to Gracie. Lola naturally takes that one. Crisis averted (at least for the moment) I take a seat and call the meeting to order.

“Ladies, thanks so much for coming back. Last week was about getting to know each other. Although some of you, ahem, clearly already know each other, last week was about introducing you to other characters created by your author. Lola, as we know, wasn’t here. As I told you, a previous engagement conflicted with the start of our sessions. So what we’re going to do today is open with our mantra and then allow Lola to introduce herself, okay?”

I’m smiling and nodding. With the exception of Anesia, no one else responds. I catch the look passed from Erika to Anesia and the roll of the eyes.

“Erika,” I begin, “would you mind putting your Blackberry away so we can start?”

Her eyes shift from Anesia and to me. “Sure Doc.”

“Thank you. Okay, ladies let’s hold hands...or not...and say our mantra before we get started.”

Reluctantly, the women hold hands and we recite a poem I'd read once by my favorite poet, Nikki Giovanni, that totally resonated with me:

*"If I can't do
what I want to do
then my job is to not
do what I don't want
to do*

*It's not the same thing
but it's the best I can
do*

*If I can't have
what I want . . . then
my job is to want
what I've got
and be satisfied
that at least there
is something more to want*

*Since I can't go
where I need
to go . . . then I must . . . go
where the signs point
through always understanding
parallel movement
isn't lateral*

*When I can't express
what I really feel
I practice feeling*

PSYCHO

*what I can express
and none of it is equal I know
but that's why mankind
alone among the animals
learns to cry."*

"Thank you, ladies. Lola, please tell us a little something about you."

"I can tell you a little something about that skank," Ayinde blurts out.

"Day," Zella scolds.

"L-Lola, continue."

"Well...hello everyone. My name is Olufemilola Sahlemariam Brown but you can call me Lola. I'm originally from Africa...Nigeria but I was mostly raised in the UK which...explains the accent. I was apparently created to be the antagonist to Zella Dora in Mrs. Martin's novel titled after her-

"Oh come off it," Zella Dora responds.

"Well that's how you two are treating me. I don't even know what in bloody hell she has to do with this anyway," says Lola.

"You're not going to make everyone feel sorry for you."

"You know what you did!"

"And you know why I did it!" Zella yells in response, jumping to her feet.

"Ladies, calm down. Please," I request as Lola stands.

"What did she do?" Adé asks.

“Oh, you’re nothing but a whore,” Lola accuses.

“Well, at least I’m not the only one,” Erika chimes in.

“Ladies, please. Lola, have a seat. Zella Dora, sit down.” I try to regain some order.

“And you’re an adulterous tramp,” Zella concludes before taking her seat.

Anesia gently takes Lola’s hand and guides her down.

“I want to know what she did?” Adé repeats.

“It isn’t important,” I answer.

“I still wanna know.”

“Then buy her book,” I yell in frustration. All eyes land on me. I curse myself quietly for losing control then look about the room. “Listen, this isn’t why we’re here. We’re here because all of your dirty laundry has already been aired. Your most private moments exposed. We don’t need to pick them apart and discuss them amongst each other. We’re trying to help each other move on and lead healthy, functional lives as the complex fictitious characters that you are. Now let’s try this again-”

The door swings open, interrupting me. All eyes move to my rear. I have flashbacks immediately to Lydia Washington’s role in *Broken Promises* and question why and what I was thinking when I extended the invitation for her to be part of the group. Eight has been my special number and I needed an eighth body in a chair. It was to be Lydia...or Noreen. It’s enough having Lola and Zella Dora in the same room, there’s no way I could have handled Anesia and Noreen together. Cousins or not, there’d be

no session I'm sure with those two locked in a room together for forty-five minutes.

"Uh huh...uh huh...yea girl, I'm phenna be in this counseling mess for like a half hour or something like that....girl, I don't need counseling but you know Nesh does. I'm just here to support her."

I stand and turn slowly to face her for the first time. Lydia Washington. Her auburn hair is in a ponytail hanging over her right shoulder. Dark sunglasses conceal her green eyes. She chews gum and talks into the cell phone plastered to her ear.

"Ms. Washington, I presume," I say but she continues to speak to the person on the other end of her line, completely ignoring me. "Ms. Washington, please. We're in session. I'm going to have to ask that you end your call now."

Anesia jumps to her feet and moves in Lydia's direction. "Lydia, hang up that phone. We're in the middle of session."

Lydia rolls her eyes to the top of her head but respects her cousin's wish. "Girl, let me call you when I'm out of here. These broads is trippin'."

"You're late," Anesia scolds.

"I know," Lydia answers with sarcasm.

"Ms. Washington, welcome to our group. There is a free seat beside Ayinde there-" I begin.

"I don't wanna sit next to her. I don't know her. I need to be by my cousin. I'm here to support her."

"Someone is already sitting there, as you can see."

“She can move, can’t she?”

Ayinde speaks up quickly, “No, she cannot.”

Lola sits back comfortably in her seat, folding her arms in defiance.

Adé stands. “Look, I have more important things to do than sit around here playing musical freaking chairs, so please take a seat and let’s move on.”

Lydia looks as though someone has spilled Kool-Aid all over her newest Prada bag. “Who...the hell...”

“Lydia,” Anesia interrupts, “just sit. You can support me from across the room.”

Lydia’s eyes shoot razor sharp daggers across to Adé who doesn’t flinch beneath her intense gaze.

“I’m beginning to enjoy this therapy thing more and more after all,” Erika states.

My temples begin to throb as I force out the words, “Let’s try this again.”

“You’re late.”

“How do you know I’m not pulling up in the driveway right now?”

“Are you?”

“No.”

“Then you’re late.”

PSYCHO

“Okay, I’m running late.” I bite my tongue, avoiding saying the things I really want to say to my sister.

“Have you left your office?”

“No, Giada, I haven’t.”

“Then you’re not running anyplace, you are late.”

“I’m leaving right now.”

“Are you rising from your chair?”

I bang my fist quietly against the desk. Busted again. “Okay, okay. Five minutes Gigi, five minutes.”

“Momma’s gonna be upset,” she sings. She’s taking too much pleasure in this.

“I know, Gigi. Five minutes and I’m out the door.”

“Bye, Dr. Fairway.”

She disconnects before I can say anything more.

I need to leave quickly or else I will never hear the end of it from my mom...or Giada. I grab my journal from the top drawer and a fresh ink pen and begin to chronicle my thoughts on the day.

Journal Entry

Today was very difficult. The women refuse to put their differences aside and get along. Of the forty-five minutes that we schedule to spend together only about twenty of them were productive, and I am being quite generous. I hope I know what I’m

doing. I knew there was bad blood between many of these women but I'd hoped we could look at the bigger picture and make greater progress. But Gracie won't speak, Adé and Erika and now Adé and Lydia spend the sessions eyeballing one another. Zella and Lola and Ayinde and Lola send endless streams of negative energy back and forth between each other. Anesia, I feel, is overcompensating and trying to avoid the fact that Erika is here and Erika had been involved with her husband. There may be no hostility but surely there are questions.

Next Wednesday is a new day, a new opportunity and I am going to take it. I'm confident that I can do it. I will get through to these women if it's the last thing that I do!

I'm feeling confident and refreshed. I can do this. I can do anything I set my mind to. I close the journal and place it back inside the drawer. I reach for the lamp but pause before turning it off. I look over the stack of books on my desk...*Well Runs Dry...Zella Dora...Broken Promises...* I can do this, I know I can!

I pull the string on the light shutting it off and head out the door...'til next time.