Book Review: The Correspondent
By Virginia Evans

I decided to read Virginia Evans' inaugural novel "The Correspondent" based on the brief synopsis found online. Let me tell you: as good as the synopsis made the book sound, it wasn't close to the actual reading.

"The Correspondent" is unique in style and format, and one of the most captivating books I have read in a long time.

Sybil Van Antwerp is a 73-year-old mother, grandmother, divorcee, and retired lawyer living in Annapolis, Maryland. She spends her days writing letters to people; anyone and everyone. From family and friends to authors she's read and acquaintances she's made through online help desks, Sybil is a letter writer.

And it's her letters, and the responses she gets, that form the powerful narrative. The story of her life is told through the letters she writes. That includes backstory, conflicts, love and loss, and career choices. The letters capture her estranged relationship with her daughter Fiona; the tough love doled out by her best friend and sister-in-law Rosalie; and threats from an individual impacted by decisions made during a painful period in her life.

Sybil also faces the increasing physical challenge of a debilitating eye condition that will eventually render her blind. Living alone, getting around, tending to her garden, and most of all letter-writing, gradually become increasingly difficult, if not dangerous, as her sight deteriorates over the ten-year period the book encompasses, from 2012 to 2022.

One of the more interesting letters Sybil writes is an on-going flow of pages that never get sent. Who is she writing to? Why are the pages never sent? They pop up periodically and prove to be among the most reflective and revealing of Sybil's character and life.

And speaking of character, Evans does a marvelous job of bringing Sybil and everyone in her world to life through their respective letters. One of the most heart-warming is her relationship with Harry, the teenage son of a judge Sybil has known for many years. Harry is different, and Sybil recognizes that, guiding him through a turbulent period in his life and helping to build his self-esteem.

"The Correspondent" is easily one of the most moving, creative and enjoyable books I have come across in many years. Maybe forever. I give it five stars (I'd make it seven or eight if possible), and cannot recommend it strongly enough.