

From **O**ne _____ End >>> to the _____ **O**ther

By Maddie _____ Rae

WHY WE LIKE IT: *We all loved this toked-up telling of growing up under both parents' and God's eyes. The author uses an innovative POV in which passages of scripture drolly illustrate the contrast and irony of their goings on and the dysfunctional dynamics at work in a family that doesn't always pray together and subsequently doesn't always stay together. It is also a paen to the wisdom of 'weed'—something we know a bit about here at Fleas. But it goes deeper than that and voice that takes us there is a fascinating blend of the commonplace, the mercurial, the obstinate and the fresh. From One End to the Other gives 'peace pipe' a whole new meaning.*

QUALITY QUOTABLES (for the love of language...)

One night I came home late from my boyfriend's house. I pulled into the driveway, saw the house was dark, except for the light in my old room. I stepped out of the car and immediately smelled the dank, musky odour of a joint. The light turned off quickly, and the window slammed shut.

I don't know what to do with him. I stood over my mother while she pulled weeds out of the small garden that ran along our driveway. *I think I'll have to kick him out... I just don't understand why he doesn't do better. Why he chooses to make these decisions. Why doesn't he see that he is only hurting himself?* There were a million things I could have said at that moment but what I said was "Yeah, Mom, I think you should kick him out."

From One End to the Other

Every moving thing shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. Genesis 9:3

Watch his fingers. They roll the bud over and over until it crumbles into small, green pieces. I think it looks like moss or like oregano but I won't say it out loud. I am quiet. I know best how to be quiet. He is quiet too, sitting across from me on a lawn chair in his living room,

hunching over the wooden coffee table between us, the one he had built himself, his long brown hair veiling his gaze from meeting mine. The sleeves of the shirt he wears are too long, but he doesn't roll them. The hems brush the crumbs across the table and he huffs, frustrated, perhaps by his sleeves or perhaps his hair or perhaps with the way I say nothing.

Prude, but I won't say that out loud either. Of course, I'll let him fill the blunt with as much weed as he wants. I am silent because I know better. Because I want to impress him but I don't know what words to use. Because I know anything that would come out of my mouth would blow my cover. *Prude*.

Sit still. I am sitting cross-legged on his couch. I chew the inside of my cheek and wonder if he can hear it the way I can. It feels like rubber and tastes like the skin I bite at the base of my nails. I hold my sweating hands tight between my thighs. They slip and slide together but I don't take them out because I'm afraid that if I do, they will reach for the doorknob just to my left and there will be nothing I can do to stop them. The rest of me will follow. I try not to remind myself that I had driven here on my own volition. *Sit still*, I tell myself, *goddammit*. I feel like a child and I am glad he cannot look up at me. If he did, I would never forgive myself.

Grow up. Watch his fingers. Wish they would make you crumble too.

Honor thy father and mother. *Fifth Commandment*

I was about six years old. I remember sitting in the backseat of our old pickup with my older brother. We were parked in the driveway in front of our house, having just come home from somewhere. My father turned around to face us. I don't remember the words that he said, the exact way he phrased it, but I know it was a question of life or death. Something about

accepting God into our hearts, something about Heaven, something about being sinners but it not really being our fault yet it being entirely our fault because we were alive.. Human. He had asked “*Do you accept Jesus Christ into your hearts?*” I couldn’t say no to Jesus Christ. I wouldn’t dare say no to my father. I was six years old.

He marked the date down in his day-timer, laying it flat on the console and scribbling in it with a black mechanical pencil. He kept his day-timer with him wherever he went. And, as the years went by, he made a point to transfer that date into each new calendar, announcing it when he did. When I had finally grown tall enough to meet his eye, he looked into them, with some kind of curious pride and repeated it once more. Each time he did this I recalled the day my brother and I decided we wanted to go to Heaven and not Hell.

Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it. *Proverbs 15:17*

Stranger. He hates the word “pothead”, but I am not sure how else to describe him. *Stranger* makes this apartment seem darker, the night longer, the space between us deeper.

Stranger. I wonder what he thinks of me. I wonder if he knows what he is doing to me. I wonder if he thinks I’m stranger too.

All your children will be taught by the Lord, and great will be their peace. *Isaiah 54:13*

My younger brother had always been the troubled one. We were close growing up, attached at the hip, my mother would say. We spent long hours of our childhood in the woods

together, living imaginary lives, or late nights huddled around our desktop computer playing *Zoo Tycoon*. In middle school, we shared earbuds on long road trips and listened to the non-explicit versions of popular songs. In high school, I drove him to school every day in my manual 2000 Nissan Pathfinder. I taught him how to drive stick. We snuck into our first R-rated movie together and faced the reprimand from our parents while sitting side by side at the dinner table.

I left for college when he was still a junior in high school. My mother used to call me just to tell me how much he missed me. *I wish you would talk to him more*. He visited me once, but only once; I lived in a dorm in Nebraska and I had other friends then and it was obvious that he didn't belong. *He misses you, but he won't say it*.

He had just graduated as a senior the summer of my sophomore year of college and had since moved into my room. He had started smoking pot. It was a "phase" thing at first, a *sorry mom and dad, I was just being dumb and it'll never happen again*. They took it personally, my mother did anyway, and she cried each time she found his stash or the end of a blunt in the driveway.

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Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

Genesis 3:18

Lover. But not really. We kissed, for the first time, in my bed, in the dark. It wasn't a good kiss because we were both anxious and our teeth bumped together though we pretended like it didn't happen. Our tongues couldn't find one another's rhythm. *Maybe you pressured him into it.* Just before our lips met I had said, "Are you nervous about kissing me?"

Promiscuous. Is it promiscuous simply to desire the feeling of skin on skin? To feel the rising and falling chest of someone sleeping next to me, to wake up before him just to glimpse his quiet face in the morning light, then shut my eyes tight and pretend to doze until he wakes and stretches on his own? Is it immoral to practice sleeping as if someone is taking space on the other side of the bed, alone, in hopes that we will come back? I lie in bed with my arms close to my chest and count my breath just to practice falling asleep. Sometimes I practice so hard I *can't* sleep.

Promiscuous. But I was on my period that night and nothing happened. We just kissed. We just touched, skin on skin.

Watch him lick the tobacco paper and note that his tongue does not hesitate.

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. *Ephesians 5:22-24*

My boyfriend broke up with me in September of my senior year of college. He did it just a week before our two-year anniversary. Up until that moment, I was certain that he would be my husband. It seemed like fate, after all. We were both from the same hometown in Colorado, had decided to attend the same small college in Nebraska. He was a grade below me, and we met because we lived in the same dorm. I was his RA. It felt like a Nicholas Sparks novel, the way it unfolded, but the fine details of our relationship, the ones that were somewhat less romantic, were hidden in the fine print, the parts that no one actually reads. The parts I certainly didn't read.

He broke up with me abruptly. On a Sunday morning just after he'd gone to church. When I asked why, he said, "*Just because it's better that way.*" I reminded him how we had sex the night before, how he left me to sleep alone in the twin-sized mattress I had bought for us. He told me he'd decided to break up with me days before, but had only now just found the courage. He said, "*You're intimidating, you know that?*" I reminded him that we had had sex the night before.

I cried when I told my parents. I initially called my mother but she handed the phone to my father. I wailed. He told me not to fret. "*It's her job, the wife, to wait for her husband. And if it's meant to be, it'll be, but you have to be patient and wait.*"

"*Maybe he'll change his mind*", my mother said. "*Don't show him that you're upset. That will frighten him away.*"

But every time I cried in front of him, he would kiss me. In the weeks, the months that followed, I cried and he kissed me. There came a point when I wouldn't cry *until* he kissed me. There came a point when I stopped crying and frightened him away.

And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. *Isaiah 6:4*

Here? How did I get here? *Here*, meaning this dingy apartment with this practical stranger, with this imperfect lover, with this pothead of all people. *Here*, meaning approximately 1,416 miles from the front door of my childhood home. My parents are asleep under the impression that their daughter is doing the same. They have Bibles on their nightstands.

End. I wonder about that word. I wonder if “beginning” just means “pre-end” and if “end” is all there is. After all, “end” is all that matters. That’s all they say that matters. “End” as in Heaven or Hell. “End” in this sense isn’t an end at all. It’s an eternity.

That day, when I was six years old, sitting in my father’s truck and letting Jesus into my heart, that’s the day that I chose eternity. And it is this eternity that scares me more than “end” ever will.

I wonder how the night will end. I wonder if it will end with the sun rising on our sleeping faces. I wonder if it will end with my arms curled against my chest. Then again, I wonder that if I reach for the doorknob with my sweaty palms and pull the door open the night will grab me and steal me away somewhere safe, swaddle me in a blanket, and tell me just to sit still and wait for the end to come. And I wonder, if I ask politely, if “end” could just be night, could just be dark...

I think I could grow fond of nothing.

He bakes the blunt with the flame of his lighter.

Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things. *Proverbs 23:33*

He asks, "Are you okay?"

How can I say "*No, I am headed to eternity faster than I want to be?*"

How can I say "*Will you meet me in the middle?*"

How can I say "*Please, God, save me, but not in that way?*"

"I'm good."

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. *Peter 5:8*

He says we should go outside to take it, that the smoke will stain the walls. It's raining as we walk, so he shows me how to cover the blunt with my palm when I bring it up to my lips to keep the rain from the delicate paper.

Eventually we find ourselves sheltered in the garage of an apartment complex a block over. We pass the blunt back and forth, our fingers grazing one another's for a split second and adjacent lips touching lips.

I am not sure if I am high, but I am definitely high, and I can see time melting around me. Silver raindrops against the black distance where the garage lights don't reach. I reach out and

cup my hands under the trickle and watch time puddle in my palms. I want to show him what I've collected. How do I say "Look what I found?" But he won't see it.

You have to understand that he will never see it.

AUTHOR NOTE: *Of course, my story of growing up in a strict, religious household isn't an uncommon one. But those who grew up in that same way know what it's like to live a normal life with the notion of eternity always hanging over their heads, especially if they've moved on from the belief that they were raised in. For me, that life is just made up of fine lines; like the fine line between getting high and religious reverence and being unsure if it's okay that the two blend. It's difficult to not believe in religion but to believe in God, but to not follow any holy doctrine, but to also fear Hell above all else. This story is inspired by my parents who love their children very, very much but who made mistakes, as all parents do and by getting high with my crush (who is now my boyfriend) for the first time. It's inspired by growing up and inevitably growing old and really being unsure what happens at the end of it all (but smoking the weed anyway).*

AUTHOR BIO: Madeline Downie is currently a MFA candidate at Western Washington University, specializing in both fiction and nonfiction craft. She finds most of her story inspirations by spending time outside rock climbing, mountaineering, or hiking in the Cascade wilderness. Her most recent adventure was suffering her way up Mt. Baker. She lived in Bellingham, Washington with her rabbit, Fab.