

To End Is to Begin

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My name is Alice Enda, and about two years ago, just like you, I was reading. Sitting on the ledge beneath a window in our relatively new ranch house, I sat reading a book. I can't remember what it was called, but I know it was about horses. Back then my name was Angela Ropehouse.

"What are you reading?" A short, balloon-faced man had walked into the room and was interrupting the train of thought that comes with reading a book.

"I'm reading *blablabla*," whatever it was. Being the round man that he was, my father waddled over to the couch and flopped onto it, causing its wooden frame to creak, and turned on the television to some sports game.

I was attempting to get sucked back into the book but found myself reading the same paragraph perpetually, distracted by the din of the television, accompanied by my father's grunts and sighs.

"Oh c'mon!" he shouted, tossing a nearby newspaper at the television.

"Could you please try to be a little bit quieter? I'm trying to read," I said, trying to stress the politeness of the request.

He paused, turning his head to look at me with narrowed eyes. "What did you say to me?"

"Sorry," I said, timidly turning back to my book in the childish hopes to be ignored.

"Don't you take that tone with me."

"Okay," I had most certainly not taken any tone with him.

"I have had it with you disrespecting me," he said, raising his voice.

"I wasn't disrespecting you. I just asked if you could maybe turn the TV down so I could read."

He got up off the couch and moved in my direction. "You little brat, don't you talk back to me."

"I did *not* talk back to you!" I said, letting my feelings flow from my mouth.

He raised his fat arm, and as if time slowed down just for me, I saw it begin its plunge. I felt his open palm contact my left cheek, followed by his fingers against my jaw. I felt it with my whole face, as my head turned to the right.

For a wonderful second I felt nothing but shock and loathing, as if God had granted me a moment of clarity before I was hit with an aftershock of pain.

He pushed me over and began paddling me with something flat and almost flimsy. *Thank God my horse-book was paperbacked.* Harder and harder the object contacted my backside, and harder and harder I cried. After a while the blows softened, and I heard the deep, ragged breathing of lungs struggling to expand. *Thank God for my father's obesity.*

He sat back on the couch, turning up the volume to drown out my sobs.

The following Monday, as always, I sat with my best friend, Marissa, in the front of the bus, "Hey Angela, how was your weekend?"

"It was uneventful; how was yours?"

"Well, I went to the movies with my parents, and we camped out in the back yard, and we..."

How lucky to have parents that want to be around her. I wonder how good it feels.

"...and last night we had a pizza. I had a cool weekend, I guess. So, how's that book you're reading? The um... one about the horses?"

I burned it. "I don't know. I just really couldn't get into it."

School is pretty boring. I don't listen to the teachers or do my homework or study or any of that, but I still manage to get As in all my classes. I guess some would call me lucky, but without any of that stuff, I had nothing to occupy my time at home.

That Monday we had a test over the presidents in history class. History was my favorite class, but I was distracted by the fact that when I sat on the cold, hard, unforgiving desk-chair, my butt still hurt.

Mr. Duffy, my teacher, pulled me aside the next day. "Angela," he said, "are you having trouble with this unit?" *Nope.* "If you need help you can ask me. I've been noticing that you don't turn in homework..." *I don't need homework, Mr. Duffy.* "...and I was a bit surprised when I graded your test last night." *I always get A's on your tests; you*

should have a little faith in me, Mr. Duffy. “You didn’t do as well as usual...” He let his sentence trail off and looked down at his desk. Following his gaze, I saw the off-white coloring of a history test; my eyes began to move up the page. *Wow, there’s a lot of red ink on that paper; somebody really sucks at knowing things.* When I saw the three pen-strokes of a taunting F, I felt almost bad for whoever earned it. Then my gaze fell on the beautifully scribbled *Angela Ropehouse* on the name line.

Mind-numbing panic.

My brain exploded with a rush of anxiety and everything was blotted out to a distant din.

Mind-searing fury.

My inner voice let loose a scream, *how did this happen? How am I going to explain this? What am I going to do? Stupid, stupid Angela!* That litany was the only thing I could hear.

As I took the paper from his desk, I said something about being sorry and about studying more. The test was difficult to carry, as though weighted by the impending hell that awaited me that night. I didn’t hear a thing anybody told me that day; my mind was stuck, as if by glue to that officious F in my backpack.

When my mother got home, I made my way down to where she was unloading the groceries. Compared to my father, she usually took bad news relatively well. I started helping unload the food, getting them out of the car and handing them to her. She put them in the refrigerator or cabinet.

“Mom,” I said as I handed her a gallon of milk, “I had a test yesterday...I didn’t study for it, and I...I got an...an F.” I stood rooted to the garage floor holding two grocery bags, crying.

She started yelling, and it felt like the room had become cold, like I was empty, hollow.

“Go to your room until your father gets home!” Forgetting grace and dignity in my shock, I ran up the shag-carpeted stairs, made my bed and began cleaning. I had gotten into trouble before for being disorganized, so I made sure every paper my father might want to see was where I could find it without looking through worksheets, notes, doodles, letters, and whatever else happened to be in my backpack at the time. After I could find nothing more to tidy up, I sat on my bed and stared at the pages of my history textbook.

Around five thirty I heard my father pull into the garage. I sat stock-still, not moving, not breathing, not thinking, straining my ears to hear muffled voices from the kitchen, but through the thick floor I could only hear the bass of my father’s voice getting deeper. I heard some cabinet door bang shut as he helped put away groceries. Everything he did was louder and more abrupt, signs I had learned.

I did not have to wait long for the sounds of heavy muffled footsteps on carpeted stairs. The door to my room slammed open, and I jumped off my bed to stand, ready. My face contorted with my best attempt to look sorry, and honestly, I was. Even before he spoke, I felt a prickling sensation neighboring my nose. I willed my tear ducts to stay firmly shut and dry.

“What did you do?” he shouted, gripping the front of my shirt, bunching the fabric and shaking me. I didn’t say anything; he wouldn’t be in my room right now if he didn’t already know what I’d done. He continued, his voice changing from barks to low threatening grumbles, but I stood there, locked in eye contact. His breath smelled rotten; his hands, sweaty. Oh, how I loathed that face with its sunken in pores and greasy complexion. “Why didn’t you study!” It was more a statement than a question, but I answered anyway.

“I don’t know,” I said, disgusted at the plea in my voice. He pivoted and slammed me into the wall, holding my feet off the floor.

“Don’t you lie to me!” he threatened with a thrust of his chin. He lifted me a little farther off the floor, pushing me harder against the wall, asking snidely if it hurt.

I answered with a glare.

Rage.

I flexed my tongue in a wave pushing all the saliva to the front of my mouth. I pursed my lips and sent spittle spraying through the air, covering his face. Why not add a little more moisture to that greasy face? I smirked.

His lips thinned, nostrils flaring as he backhanded me, let go of my shirt, and dropped me to the ground. “Don’t you dare leave this room,” he said. “No reading, no music, and no dinner. Just sit there and think about how stupid you are for not studying.” He stepped out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

About half an hour later, my mom opened the door. “Your father wants to see you in our room,” she said before walking away. I made my way out of my room and down the hall to my parents’ bedroom.

He finished putting on some black socks, sitting on the corner of his bed, and began to talk. Although he was talking in normal tones, his body language was stiff and jerky. “...and if you thought that was bad, there is much worse coming, and I swear...” he said with ringing words, “...if you ever do something like this again, I will not hesitate to beat you to within an inch of your life.” At this he held up his hand, his thumb and forefinger pinching a small

amount of air in front of his left eye.

I imagined myself lying on the edge of a dark cliff, the hint of a rocky shoreline beneath it, having been kicked there by my father. I launched myself at him, my fist smashing his nose.

Immobilized, he was shocked, weak.

Taking advantage of this golden moment, I planted myself on top of him, grating his face with my fingernails. My spine began to tingle as I felt his skin building up under my nails. I scratched harder and harder. I was dimly aware that my lips had curled away from my teeth, revealing my gums, allowing wolf-like snarls to escape my throat.

He regained control of his body and struggled to push me off, but my legs were secured around his gluttonous midsection. He screamed as I continued to rip and tear at his face. I clutched his entire head in my hands, pushing my thumbnails against his screwed up eyelids, hungry for what awaited them just past those thin flaps of skin. My fingernails dug into the unscathed skin at the back of his head with the counterforce of my thumbs.

As I savored the feeling of my wide thumbs squishing around in jelly-like eyes, he went limp in my hands. I then noticed a set of arms wrapped around my middle. I dislodged my legs from beneath his folds of fat, whipped around, and with a great push, extricated myself from my mother's grip. Unbalanced she fell backward, and with the loud crack of something breaking, her head connected with the thick corner of a heavy wooden dresser.

The limp, pale look on my mother's face mimicked those I have seen looking out at me from unnecessarily handsome caskets. I looked at my father; he was dead as well. *I guess he had a heart attack or something because I definitely didn't push my thumbs far enough into his head to kill him.*

It hit me: *I just committed murder. I just killed my parents. What am I going to do? I'm a murderer now; they're going to put me away for life. I'm going to jail. I'm going to jail. My life is over at the age of twelve. What am I going to do? I can't go to jail.*

Wait.

People get away with murder all the time. If they can do it, so can I. Think of movies; think of books. How can I get away with this?

"I've got it," I said. Looking around, I shook my head and walked out of the room.

After making sure all the windows were closed, I turned on the gas to our two fireplaces. I rushed into the kitchen and lit the stove, blowing out the fire.

I went up to my parent's room to re-position their bodies in their bed. The covers were made of cotton and nylon, so they would burn and melt at the same time, hiding all evidence of what I'd done. I crumpled all the old newspaper I could find and stuffed it under the bed. Slightly light-headed, I ran to the basement, breathing as little as possible. I pulled out all the deer meat from the freezer and hauled it up to my room. I never thought I'd have to do *this*. I quickly unwrapped the meat and positioned it between the sheets in the shape of a person, stuffing the wrappings under my bed. I flung all my school papers around the room, ripped all my books, and stuffed them into my bed. I dumped my backpack before stuffing it with two pairs of pants, three shirts, two sets of underwear, a pair of stockings, a pair of socks, a tennis ball, a penknife, and my wallet.

Hurrying to my parents' room, senses dulled from the gas, I took their wallets and a lighter from their dresser. My last stop was the basement where I stumbled down the stairs, turned the corner into my dad's workshop, and fell to the cement floor. *Get up!* The room began to spin, but I dutifully pulled myself up with the doorknob. *I have to hurry!*

I grabbed some electrical tape and a rag, stashing them in my backpack. *Difficult to breathe. Terrible headache. I wish everything would stop moving. I wish...stop moving...hurry!*

I stumbled from the room and up the stairs, leaning against the wooden railing for support. In the kitchen, I slung my bursting backpack over my shoulder. I felt the floor move as I stole a bottle of something alcoholic from the liquor cabinet. I found the door, turned the handle slowly, and was out of the house. I carefully closed the door behind me, stumbling for the woods.

Relief.

I took deep breaths of clean, cool night air and relaxed. It was midnight; three hours had passed since I murdered my parents. As soon as I blew the house up, I needed to be ready to run. I needed to be ready to start my new life.

Beyond the woods lay a golf course; on the other side of it a road marked the edge of a forest. That's where I would go. I would make a temporary shelter and stay for a few days. After that, I'd thumb a lift to wherever and check myself into an orphanage or something. That'd be good. I'd just cry a lot and wail something about how my parents abandoned me on the side of the highway, and they wouldn't ask any questions. I'd be set.

I'd become thirteen-year-old Alice Enda. My parents were abusive addicts who traveled the country in a mobile home. We had stopped for the night at a truck stop nearby, and I woke up on the side of the parking lot with them

gone. I waited for two days before setting out on my own.

At twelve fifty-eight, I pulled the stockings, a sock, the tennis ball, and the penknife from my backpack. I looked at the alcohol. *Crap! It's wine. I hope it has enough alcohol to burn.*

I uncorked the bottle and sliced the tennis ball, squeezing it open to fill it with wine. Then I soaked the sock in wine and stuffed the tennis ball into it before stuffing the sock into the stocking.

It's time.

I'm ready. I flicked the lighter and put flame to sock, lighting it. *Yes!* Winding up, I flung it toward a window.

In the silence of the night I could hear the sock roar as it sailed through the air. With a ground shaking "bang," fire lit the night, highlighting the debris showering the neighborhood.

Jesus Christ! That sucks for whoever's house that was. At least their parents didn't abandon them.