



# **Either the Beginning or the End of the World**

*Terry Farish*

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For sixteen years, it's been just Sofie and her father, living on the New Hampshire coast. Her Cambodian immigrant mother has floated in and out of her life, leaving Sofie with a fierce bitterness toward her and a longing she wishes she could outgrow.

*To me she is as unreliable as the wind.*

Then she meets Luke, an army medic back from Afghanistan, and the pull between them is as strong as the current of the rushing Piscataqua River. But Luke is still plagued by the trauma of war, as if he's lost with the ghosts in his past. Sofie's dad orders her to stay away; it may be the first time she has ever disobeyed him.

*A ghost can't love you.*

When Sofie is forced to stay with her mother and grandmother while her dad's away, she is confronted with their memories of the ruthless Khmer Rouge, a war-torn countryside, and deeds of heartbreaking human devotion.

*I don't want you for ancestors. I don't want that story.*

As Sofie and Luke navigate a forbidden landscape, they discover they both have their secrets, their scars, their wars. Together, they are dangerous. Together, they'll discover what extraordinary acts love can demand.

## **Either the Beginning or the End of the World Details**

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# From Reader Review Either the Beginning or the End of the World for online ebook

## Ann says

This is a story of a young 16 year old girl from New Hampshire who lives with her fisherman father. She is half Cambodian, half Scottish. She meets an soldier with PTSD and they become friends and fall in love. Her Cambodian mother and Grandmother come to live with her when her dad needs to move his boat to Va. This is a story of family, love and friendship. It is a story of a man returning to life after war. It is a story of a young woman dealing with her heritage and real life. Well written, easy to read and holds your interest.

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## Samantha says

I'm sure this book will find its fans somewhere, and I can see that it already has with a few other readers, but as for me – I am not one of those fans and I probably never will be. What could have been a wonderful story about overcoming PTSD and hatred turned out to be a sparsely written, stretched out poem needing a lot more work to make it worth reading. I hate to say it, but I would not recommend this to anyone – not even if it were the last book on earth.

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## Rebecca McNutt says

Why did this remind me so much of the Disney version of *Pocahontas*? O\_o

Don't get me wrong, it wasn't a bad book per-say, and I really liked the author's use of emotion and vivid imagery. Two stars for that. But the characters and story were a little too *Lifetime Movie Network*-ish. They just weren't complex enough to seem worth caring about.

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## Naznin Khan says

It's a good book the chapters are a bit long, and some of the wordings you have to look up. There's a lot of romance in this book, and many secrets as well, which person, in my opinion, keeps the book interesting and it leaves you on a cliffhanger!

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## Crowinator says

Technically this isn't a verse novel, but it might as well be, since it reads more like poetry than prose, with spare language, a lot of symbolic imagery, and a wandering, internal narrative. The language is lovely and evocative, but I also found it distancing, obscuring the characters rather than revealing them, when going deep into a character (or characters) is everything to a story like this. It's a thoughtful book, though, with a strong sense of place and history (New Hampshire, Cambodia, and peripherally Scotland) and a timeless

quality that makes it feel a bit magical.

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### **Meghan Long says**

Not my favorite, at points hard to follow

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### **Krista Stevens says**

I loved that this took place in the Merrimack Valley and in areas I know. Sophie lives with her fisherman father in Portsmouth right by the bridge over the Piscataqua River. It is by the river she meets a mysterious soldier - her father knows him and tells her to stay away, but it is too late. The story is both lyrical and disjointed - it's hard to follow Sophie's thoughts and her interactions, even with her best friend, seem short and untethered. Perhaps that's because she's been separated from her mother for so many years. Her mother (ok - her mother was 16 when Sophie's father got her pregnant - how/why that happened, is never explained - kind of a big elephant in the room) shows up pregnant and with her mother to help take care of Sophie when her father has to leave to fish further south. That actually was pretty interesting. The ending was still vague.

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### **Nina says**

Utterly pointless. Nothing happened in this book really, except Sofie falling in insta-love with Luke and forgiving his PTSD from Afghanistan while hypocritically being judgmental about her grandmother's and mother's trauma from the Khmer Rouge. My curiosity was piqued by the depictions of being a fisherman in today's economy, but otherwise I was underwhelmed by the plot, characters, and writing.

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### **American Mensa says**

Either *The Beginning or The End of The World* by Terry Farish is a fairly short, fictional novel about the changing life of a teenaged girl. Seventeen-year-old Sophie Gear is the daughter of a traditional, American fisherman and a cultural, Cambodian woman. However, Sophie has lived the bulk of her life on the Northeast Coast with only her beloved father. But one icy morning, Sophie meets a young, disturbed veteran named Luke, and they fall into an abnormal sort of love. However, Sophie's father absolutely forbids the relationship. To make matters worse, Sophie learns that her dad will be traveling south to fish for the winter, leaving her in the care of her mother and grandmother. In possibly the strangest winter of her life, Sophie Gear is yanked out of her comfort zone and into a world of unfamiliar emotions—anger at her father, love for Luke, nostalgia for the past. How will Sophie reestablish herself in this new world? What truths will she learn about life along the way?

*Either The Beginning or The End of The World* is wonderful in many ways. In the book, there are numerous well-developed, unique characters. Throughout the novel, the reader learns about these characters' unusual, interesting lifestyles. Similarly, the novel is rich in themes. It is built on the principles that love is not a choice and that change can be beneficial. These characterizations and themes create a novel that is both educational and entertaining.

Farish's novel is extremely unique. It is written in an almost poetic style, with hardly any structure, such as

complete sentences and full paragraphs, and much figurative language. Although this makes the book a more difficult read, it also gives the narrative a more philosophical tone. The novel deeply examines the life of a seventeen-year-old; therefore, it will mostly interest teenagers with a penchant for philosophy, but I would encourage any teen to explore its pages; you may be surprised at what you find.

review by Isabella T., age 14, Memphis Mensa

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### **Angie says**

Sophie lives with her dad, a fisherman in New Hampshire. She is perfectly happy with just her dad and her dog. But fishing is bad and her dad is going to have to go south to better waters for a few months. Sophie's pregnant mom and grandmother are moving in with her. Sophie hasn't had much to do with her Cambodian side of the family and resents the fact that they are moving in. She has also just met Lucas, a soldier returning from war. Sophie has to navigate the troubled waters of both her new boyfriend and her mother and grandmother's PTSD. She has to come to terms with the fact that her mom is here to stay and back in her life. She also has to figure out new love with someone with a dark side.

The language is sparse and lyrical, told in an almost verse style. I found the story interesting, but couldn't seem to connect to any of the characters. The style of the book, while beautiful, was a bit too sparse for my tastes. I gave up on the book a couple of times before finally plowing through the final pages. I am sure this book will find its fans, but I was not one of them.

I received a copy of the book from Netgalley.

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### **AlishaReadsAllDay says**

180 pages of confusion and pointlessness. I didn't get it.

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### **Samantha says**

I hope this book finds its readers. This story is told in lyrical prose, close to poetry but not quite, and meanders a bit through a brief time in the life of Sophea, called Sofie, who lives in Portsmouth NH with her father, Johnny. I could feel Portsmouth come alive around me in Farish's story, and I can picture Johnny going on fishing trips and coming back. Sofie desperately wants to keep him home in NH, but the fishing industry is dying and he needs to go away. This prompts her mother and grandmother to move in, people Sofie wants nothing to do with, as they have been long absent from her life. He also doesn't want her to see Luke, a deckhand of his who is suffering from PTSD after being a medic in Afghanistan.

I was initially troubled by the idea of a romance between a almost 17 year old and a 22 year old, but it does work in the story. You can feel the draw between the two of them. I'm glad the story ends the way it does, which feels realistic. It's not happily, everything-tied-in-a-bow, but there is a sense of acceptance that feels right.

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## Nicole says

I received an ARC from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. This started out feeling like the saddest and most depressing book I've ever read, and it took a long time for that feeling to go away. I think that was a reflection of the characters because they are isolated and missing essential pieces of themselves. The spare and haunting prose style added to that oppressive sadness. This wasn't my favorite narrative style - it is more a series of moments and conversations over the course of a formative winter in Sofie's life instead of a more traditional plot line. However, I have to say that once I got a few chapters in, it became compelling, and when Sofie's mother and grandmother became a more integral part of the story, I couldn't put it down. I thought it was haunted at first, but when the stories from Sophie's grandmother's life under the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia started winding around Luke's experiences in Afghanistan, I learned what haunted meant. All of the characters, no matter how small their part, felt distinct and really visible in my mind's eye. I liked them all, and the resolution really played fairly with all of them in a way I couldn't have possibly anticipated. I won't go so far as to say it was heartwarming by the end, but it certainly felt right. In the end, I really liked this book - it felt like I was looking in a series of windows that resulted in one amazing picture of how important family and love is to everyone, even those who think they don't need it. If you are considering reading this, I say go for it. I also say that you need to stick it out because you have to get to the end to really see the significance of it all. Language and situations are appropriate for high school readers, but adults will appreciate it just as much.

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## Sharon Dean says

I've been a fan of Terry Farish's writing ever since I read *Flower Shadows* way back in 1992. Whether she's writing about a young woman volunteering with the Red Cross in Vietnam (*Flower Shadows*), a Cambodian refugee in Lowell, Massachusetts (*If the Tiger*), or a Sudanese teenager trying to find her way in Portland, Maine (*The Good Braider*), Farish captures the innocence, the struggle, and the hope of the young. In *Either the Beginning or the End of the World*, her voice for Sofie, who is half Cambodian and half American, is pitch-perfect. Sofie's relationship with Luke, a medic returned from Afghanistan and fighting PTSD, is tender, not overly sexualized. Farish shows how they care for one another and grow through that caring. She connects the traumas of Cambodia and of Afghanistan and to move Luke and Sofie to understanding and healing.

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## Danielle says

*This review is based on a digital ARC. Thank you to Lerner Publishing Group and NetGalley for providing me the opportunity to review this book!*

Sofie and her fisherman father live in a small New Hampshire town and they are just fine. Then, the shrimping season is closed down early and her father heads towards monkfish waters in Virginia. Sofie's left in the care of her newly-returned, newly-pregnant Cambodian mother and has to untangle their relationship and figure out how to start fresh. She also struggles with her feelings for Luke, a young Army medic back from Afghanistan.

I didn't know how important this story was until I read it.

*Either the Beginning or the End of the World* is a lyrical drama, unfolding in vignettes over the course of a dark New Hampshire winter. This isn't just Sofie's story as she fights to continue to hate her estranged mother, but Luke's story as he battles PTSD and Yiey's story as she tries to draw her family back together with memories of Cambodia.

***How can my grandmother have this terrible memory and yet still have the peace of the sea in her bearing?***

I loved Sofie as a protagonist and a narrator. I felt her longing for her mother – so raw on the page – as well as the latent anger at her mother for having abandoned her. We get to watch the slow emergence of the truth of their relationship and the character growth of both women as they try to prove themselves to each other. This is the story that took center stage for me, and moved me to tears at least twice.

I also loved the development of Sofie's relationship with Luke. Sofie describes the attraction as magnetic – as her chance to be a different girl with him – and it seems to be. She wants to touch him and tell him her stories because she knows that only he will understand some of her family's tragedy. It seems that it is only through sharing this tragedy with Luke that Sofie begins to understand it herself.

Lastly, I loved each and every secondary character and the depth with which they are portrayed. Each character is vivid and strong, even if they only spend a few minutes on the page. From Vincent, the crosswords-in-ink, messages-on-the-seawall manager of Dunkin' Donuts to Rosa, the encouraging best friend, the secondary characters are as full of life as Sofie herself.

In the end, we learn that all of our pain and all of our joy connects us to each other, and that we can learn from the stories and shape our future.

***Maybe now the picture has hope.***

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