

And true to Calvin, his raunchy and disrespectful side lived side by side with his law-loving, proper-judge side, both sin and grace alive inside him. He embodied a phrase that explains much of this country's history, politics, and culture: American Calvinist. (41-42)

In Calvin's great book *Commentary on Psalms*, he uses one of my favorite theological phrases to describe the range of topics covered in the Psalms, from the good to the downright awful aspects of human nature. As Calvin said, the Psalms give us "an anatomy of all parts of the soul." (42)

. . . I was experiencing the full force of what Calvin called *original sin*, that persistent and all-too-human pull towards our own destruction. At the table that Sunday, it was the sin I'd inherited from Dick Jones that pushed me to ask for another joke. I had some of him in me; I was appalled by the perversity of it—most by my role as a participant. And as a victim. (47)

Silence was as American as Church for us. (47)

As a child, it confused me to no end that one day he could be in the boat with his best fishing buddy, Melvin, and the next day be at home dishing out racist rants like they were Sunday dessert. I knew from an early age that his views of African Americans were not just wrong, but shameful and dangerous. (49-50)

I wondered what wrath God would deliver on my family for all our sins against Arlene and her son, and especially for Dick Jones's rage-filled racism. More practically, I worried that my dad and Dick Jones would soon come to blows over these endless rants. (52)

Though the truth was many African-Americans had arrived as the enslaved human property of the wealthier members of the displaced Native American tribes—they had been brought on the Trail of Tears death march and kept as slaves in Indian Territory. (53)

Click, and then boom: there was a slide showing a postcard picture of a young African-American woman hanging from a bridge, lynched, her long cotton dress covered in dark stains, her leather lace-up boots turned inward. Her head lay unnaturally sideways, the rope tight against her distorted neck. Her eyes were closed. Underneath it, the hand-scrawled tag read: Laura Nelson, Okemah, Okla., 1911. Dick Jones was 6 in 1911. (55)

I couldn't get out of my mind images of her being raped before she was hanged—as I knew was part of the torture meted out on lynched women. . . .

Laura Nelson who had been publically shamed and brutally annihilated by real white people in Okemah. My people? Ys, my Okie people. (57)

The most abhorrent part of it all for me was that my grandma, the woman I had grown up idealizing and adoring, had lived with this man, been in bed with him, cooked thousands of meals for him, consoled him, and surely cursed him. She had also protected him. . . . (58)

I understood why Calvin referred to our collective state of sin as “total depravity.” (59)

Why do I bear responsibility for horrible things that happened before I was born? . . . The notion of inheriting sin makes the bond between past and the present much tighter. (59)

That is for me the most startling revelation about original sin. It finds welcome shelter in churches; it always has. For this version of sin, Calvin meted out especially harsh words: idolatry, heresy, and total depravity. (61)

“The greatest danger, that of losing one’s own self, may pass off as quietly as if it were nothing; every other loss, that of an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, a watch [sic], etc., is sure to be noticed.” Kierkegaard (67)

Each time she found me, I was never the prize she expected. (68)

She still managed to tinge her words with an edge of envy, a woman deeply wronged by the mere fact of her daughter’s choices. (75)

If asked, even as a child, I would have said she was unhappy, easily wronged, and empty, on the inside. Not empty as in full-of-nothing; she had lots inside, especially disappointments. She was empty like a bottomless well that no amount of water could fill. . . . And the deep-down water was always churning with sadness, gnawing frustrations, and rage. Especially at me. (77)

On the one hand, we are *finite*: we are born, we die, have bodies and must grapple with circumstances we don’t control. . . . On the other hand, we are *infinite*, insofar as we are self-aware and can imagine ourselves living other lives, doing other things, being other people. We can also imagine higher realities like God, truth, and goodness. (79)

On pages 80-81, see the four kinds of despairers: flitterers, cravers, ragers, awakened.

“Eternity asks you and every individual in these millions and millions only one thing: whether you have lived in despair or not, whether you have despaired in such a way that 1) you did not realize that you were in despair, or in such a

way that 2) you covertly carried this sickness inside of you as your gnawing secret . . . or 3) in such a way that you, a terror to others, raged in despair.” (81)

Despair consumed her. . . . defined always by the gaze of whoever beheld and adored her. . . . Forever captive to the opinion of others. (83)

Did Kierkegaard ever imagine the despair that generations of mothers could pass along to their daughters? (84)