

Madman

“Quick, Arthur. Break the window!” I smashed the back-end of my father’s shovel through the automobile’s window. The other boys looked behind them before leaping into the backseat. I jumped into the passenger’s seat and unlocked the driver’s side door. Billy Cunningham slid in, starting the old flivver and winding down his window. We sped off into town, hooting and hollering at people passing by. We pulled into the town square, still bustling as it was late afternoon. Bill began backing all the way around the square, still laughing obnoxiously. Old Mr Conner, the town constable saw us and began approaching. The car slowed and we waited. Mr Conner began yelling and threatened to arrest us. The other boys grabbed him and dragged him towards the courthouse. He screamed and shouted that how he would see us thrown into the town jail, before he relented and went quiet. We, with no irony lost, threw *him* into the court house’s outhouse and locked the door. The other boys howled with laughter as he hammered on the door, but I was starting to get an awful feeling about this.

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“Arthur Radley, you are charged with disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, battery and using abusive and profane language in the presence and hearing of a female.”

I closed my eyes for a moment. That final one didn’t sound like a real charge anyway, but I’d best keep my mouth shut. I was going to be imprisoned for sure. Then came the judge’s ruling which I did not expect.

“I rule that these boys be sent to the Meridian state industrial school”.

The other boys murmured to each other. My father gaped in horror.

“Excuse me, your Honour”. My father said meekly.

“I ask that my son may be released to me, with my word as bond that no further misbehaviour be exhibited.

Grudgingly, the judge agreed. And while the other boys went off to claim, most likely the best secondary education in the state, I was sent home. While the other boys may have to endure a harsh boarding school for years, regardless of the education quality, I still knew that what awaited me at home would be far worse.

My father slammed the door with a fearful force.

“You will *never* see the light of day again. Is that understood, Arthur?”

I put my head in my hands and nodded slightly.

“You have brought dishonour to our family. You are a disgrace, both in my eyes, and the eyes of God. Go to your room and stay there. You’d best not have the nerve to ask for a meal tonight.” As always, my mother simply looked on from the dining room, slowly knitting as my father harshly chastised me once again.

I darted off to my room and closed the door quietly. What had I done? I leapt onto my rock-hard bed and sank my head into the thin pillow permitted by my strict, Baptist father. I decided to pray. if there was a God as my father believed, perhaps he would help me. So, I prayed. There was no response. And there never would be.

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How many years now? Who could say? Fifteen, perhaps? I was never getting out. Only once did I try to escape, hiding in the hollowed-out tree near my house. My father found me within an hour. There was no hope, no way out. How old am I now? Thirty-two? Thirty-Three? I think it was my birthday last week but I’m not certain. My family didn’t celebrate birthdays. Today my brother received some scissors from my father. My brother gifted me some twine. I was overjoyed. I could attach it to my blunt pencil and make it dance! There was never anything to do here. Always bored. Always left thinking. No hope, no way out. I drew on my wall with my blunt lead pencil. It was then I concocted a plan. Perhaps there was a way out. I lay on the floor, with my father’s Tribune newspapers. Cutting out articles of interest. I could read, just not particularly well. I still had to sound out words as I did not get to exercise my mind very often and had lost my skill. My father opened the door, placing his hat upon the stand near the doorway. The scissors made a low scratching sound. His footsteps echoed slightly through the near empty hall. Sweat gathered on my forehead. My father came closer. “Arthur? What’re you- “

I plunged the scissors into my father’s calf. My heart stopped for a moment. I drew the scissors out. So much blood. He let out a horrific scream and ran out. My mother walked in, seeing the blood pooling on the ground she screeched, grabbing my brother and darting outside. Without even wiping the blood off the scissors, I enjoyed the peace and continued cutting articles out of my father’s bloodstained copy of The Tribune.

Suddenly, people were rushing in the door. They grabbed me. They picked me up and carried me out to an old black flivver. Even in my confused state, the car reminded me of the one I had stolen what must have been a thousand years ago. I was free. They took me to the courthouse and locked me in the basement. This was awful. The mould made me cough and splutter and it was cold and damp down here. But father wasn't here, so it may as well have been heaven. What began as a low chuckle spiralled into a maniacal fit of giggles.

Alas, it did not last.

When I had been there for a few days, and they thought I may die of the damp and the rats they brought me back. The sheriff came into the basement before telling me,

“Radley, you're being released without charge”

My father walked me back home, silently. Not saying a word. Not even looking at me. Now, back to the place I had done everything to escape from. There was no escape, and there never would be. I stared out through the shutters, the cool evening light causing the vertical lines of shadow to play across my face. I pulled out the pack of gum I had stolen from my brother. He bought it often, but it was unusual I was able to steal a piece. I turned the packet over in my hands, ignoring the splatter of blood near my bed where I had cut up the newspaper. Children played outside, but what could a madman do but watch?