

ONCE UPON A CRIME

The Residents' River of Crime/Episode #1

CHARACTERS:

Narrator: Middle aged man, pleasant but slightly paranoid

Documentary voice: (Already exists as archive recording; will use that or re-create)

Young Narrator: Boy at age 6 and also at age 8/9

George MacKay: Working class British accent (one line)

Preacher: (Already exists as archive recording; will use that or re-create)

Meemaw: The young narrator's grandmother

Gruff Voice: Older woman (one line)

INTRO

NARRATOR/INTRO

Our lives are constantly surrounded
by unseen streams ...numerous,
invisible rivers composed of love,
power, success, pain ...all that we
detest and desire. Some we navigate
with ease, some we seek forever
...and some are simply whirlpools,
spinning us into oblivion.

While I am not a criminal, crime
has stalked me from an early age.
At this point, I can only see my
life as an unending collision with
evil, leaving me with but one
conclusion: I ride the river of
crime.

(New music - Episode
theme; continues
under...)

INTRODUCTION TO EPISODE #1 - THOMAS ALVA & THE ELEPHANT

A crackling, sizzling electronic sound is quickly accompanied
by a loud, intense, but brief roar, which is immediately
followed by a very loud THUMP!

NARRATOR/ROC#1-N1

That was the sound of Topsy, the elephant, being electrocuted by Thomas Edison ...okay, it was a fake, it wasn't REALLY the sound of an elephant electrocution, but it DID happen, and amazingly enough, Edison actually filmed the sizzling, smoking and undoubtedly disturbing death of Topsy in 1903. As a child, Thomas A. Edison, the elephant killer, was one of my earliest heroes, along with Alexander Graham Bell, Eli Whitney, and other famous American inventors, but it was Edison's involvement with the electric chair that really hooked me. So much so that, by the age of 7, I had read everything I could find concerning this most "humane" of all execution devices.

(musical interlude)

SCENE 1 - ELECTROCUTION 1

NARRATOR/ROC#1-N2

The execution of Julius and Ethyl Rosenberg in the electric chair was a major news event at the end of my first grade year at school. Being an expert on the subject, I volunteered to give a class report on electrocution the day the Rosenbergs were executed.

YOUNG NARRATOR/ROC#1-YN1

On August 6, 1890, the first person to be executed in the electric chair... (fades out)

NARRATOR/ROC#1-N2 (CONT'D)

We were also treated to a live broadcast of the execution on the radio.

A dry, institutional voice is heard; it's an archival tape of an actual electrocution.

DOCUMENTARY/ROC#1-D1

The, uh, wires have been attached and secured to the headset and to the legbands. The perspiration has been wiped again from the condemn's forehead and... (fades out)

YOUNG NARRATOR/ROC#1-YN1

(fades in) ...his common law wife. Unfortunately, the execution did not go well. Due to a mechanical malfunction the first 1300 volt jolt only lasted 17 seconds, leaving Mr. Kimmeler twitching ...and still alive. But the second shock, continuing for approximately 70 seconds, was more successful, filling the room with smoke and the smell of burning flesh.

(musical interlude)

CHORUS/ROC#1-CH1

It would have been better if he
didn't burn
Defecate, vomit or squirm
It would have been better if they
only said
It would be better if he wasn't
dead

SCENE 2 - ELECTROCUTION 2

DOCUMENTARY/ROC#1-D2

The face hood has been secured. The warden and all execution team have departed the chamber. Stand by for the warden's last telephone check.

YOUNG NARRATOR/ROC#1-YN3

I also learned about Willie Francis, the only man to be electrocuted twice. During and immediately after the failed procedure, Willie made three comments:

YOUNG NARRATOR AS WILLIE FRANCIS

I am not dying.

Stop it! Let me breathe.

YOUNG NARRATOR
...and finally...

YOUNG NARRATOR AS WILLIE FRANCIS
My mouth tasted like cold peanut
butter.

YOUNG NARRATOR
After hearing the argument that a
second electrocution amounted to
"cruel and unusual punishment," the
Supreme Court ruled against Willie
and he was successfully executed on
May 9, 1947 ...which just happens
to be my birthday.
(musical interlude)

SCENE 3 - ELECTROCUTION 3

DOCUMENTARY/ROC#1-D3
Ralph this is the commissioner.
There are no stays. You can proceed
to carry out the official order of
the court.

Very well. On my count of three,
I'll press the button ...one ...two
...three
(electrical sound effect
is heard and continues
under...)

YOUNG NARRATOR/ROC#1-YN4
The average execution takes two
minutes and ten seconds. The first
shock lasts up to one minute and
usually destroys the brain and the
central nervous system.

DOCUMENTARY/ROC#1-D4
The execution is now in progress.
When the surge first entered his
body, he stiffened and I heard a
pop, as if one of the, uh, straps
had broke, but I can't tell from
this vantage point. He is still, at
this time, sitting there with
clenched fists and no other
movements.

YOUNG NARRATOR/ROC#1-YN5

To make certain that the heartbeat of the condemned does not resume, a second shock is then administered. Physical reactions to the process include the release of urine and feces, vomiting of blood and the burning of hair and skin.

DOCUMENTARY/ROC#1-D5

From my vantage point, it seems that the inmate has relaxed somewhat. His fists are still clenched, but there's no movement from the condemned.

(musical interlude)

SCENE 4 - HAVING A GOOD CRIME

NARRATOR/ROC#1-N3

Sure, it's dark, but kids love dark scary stuff and this was way better than "I Was A Teenaged Frankenstein." But soon this compulsive interest in the electric chair led to an even more obsessive attraction to criminality in any form. For me crime became the artform of the sociopath, a curious combination of creativity and antisocial behavior that often led to wildly unpredictable acts ...like Sadimacha Hirasawa, a Japanese artist, who, in 1948, posing as a doctor, poisoned 15 bank employees with cyanide, then picked up all the money he could find and calmly left the bank ...or George Mackay, a cop killer, who was the first man to be convicted by ballistic evidence. On the way to the London gallows in 1913, Mackay was allowed to kiss his new born baby and used this last act of affection to slip a piece of poisoned bread in the child's mouth, saying...

GEORGE MACKAY (BRITISH ACCENT)/ROC#1-GM1

Now no one can say your father never gave you anything.

NARRATOR/ROC#1-N4

And so, obsessed, my childhood was
 consumed with crime. While other
 kids were watching the Mickey Mouse
 Club, I saturated myself with
 murder, rape and arson, reading
 countless books, watching crime
 movies and television series; I
 even collected thousands of crime
 themed records ...but then
 everything changed
 (musical interlude)

CHORUS/ROC#1-CH3

Nothing never doesn't changes
 Nothing never rearranges
 Nothing never stays the same
 Occasionally it's entertaining

SCENE 5 - MEMAW'S HOUSE

NARRATOR/ROC#1-N5

A few years later, my parents went
 away for a few days, leaving me
 with my grandmother, Meemaw. Meemaw
 was a little fussy, but we always
 ate popcorn and watched lots of
 wrestling on TV, so staying with
 her was okay. The worst thing was
 that she always wanted me to go to
 church with her on Sunday mornings,
 but I usually got out of it. The
 problem with that, though, was the
 first thing Meemaw would talk about
 when she got home would always be
 the goddam sermon. It was her way
 of spreading a little of the Lord's
 light on me ...but this time it was
 different. The subject of this
 week's sermon was Tony Jo Henry,
 the only woman executed in the
 electric chair in Louisiana.

(church music fades in
 under the end; the
 following voice, a
 documentary recording of
 the Rev R G Lee, is heard
 over the sounds of a
 congregation, reacting to
 the sermon)

PREACHER/ROC#1-P1

... the devil had gotten ready for her! They buckled her beautiful young body in with a heavy leather belt. A man pushed a lever and that sudden charge of electricity hit her young body and it jerked and it pulled and convulsively twisted and her eyes almost popped out of her head. And the smell of burnt flesh and wistful smoke came out from between her toes and between her fingers and from under the edges of the electrodes on her head and circled toward the ceiling like little imps of hell -- laughing at the girl, who laughed at the Bible and cursed preachers and laughed at churches and heard the sermon that you're listening to tonight -- PAYDAY SOMEDAY had come to Toni Jo..

(church music fades)

MEEMAW/ROC#1-M1

Poor Toni Jo, comin' to such a evil end ...and she was such a sweet girl when she was little.

NARRATOR/ROC#1-N6

Perhaps as never before, my grandmother had my complete and total attention.

YOUNG NARRATOR/ROC#1-YN6

...did ...did you actually know Toni Jo Henry, Meemaw?

MEEMAW/ROC#1-M2

Know her? Land sakes, boy, I made cookies for Toni Jo right there in that oven ...she was a sweet child.

YOUNG NARRATOR/ROC#1-YN7

...how ...how did you know her? Did ...did she go to your church?

MEEMAW/ROC#1-M3

Why, ...she lived right next door. Her aunt, Florine Farmer, she still lives there ...the poor thing, Toni Jo's mother was killed in a accident when she was only six, so they sent her to live with her aunt. She was visiting over at Florine's house when the police came and arrested her. They ran over two of my rose bushes ...an' I haven't said a word to Florine since it happened. Proper people don't have police cars driving up in their front yards.

SCENE 6 - ILLEGAL ENTRY

NARRATOR/ROC#1-N7

I couldn't stop thinking about it. After absorbing morsel after morsel of criminal activity through third hand experiences, I was practically NEXT DOOR TO A MURDERER!!! ...well, at least a murderer's aunt. I had to go over there ...nothing could stop me ...I had to feel the presence of a killer.

(brief musical interlude)

NARRATOR/ROC#1-N8

So the next day, seeing that the back door was open, I snuck into the house. Lit only by shafts of sunlight streaming around the curtains, the dark interior was a maze of brightness and shade ...every sound, seemingly amplified ...every shadow, vaguely sinister. I had no idea where Florine Farmer, Toni Jo's aunt, might be. Maybe she was at work, like my grandma ...but she could be waiting around the next dark corner ...with a knife, or maybe a hatchet ...okay, I know, if she was there she'd probably be cleaning the toilet, but I was a kid ...and I was scared. Creeping along, I slowly worked my way to a small room in the back of the house.

(MORE)

NARRATOR/ROC#1-N8 (cont'd)

Piled in a corner and reeking of mold were half a dozen boxes full of old clothes, photos and yellowed newspapers ...the worldly remains of Toni Jo Henry. It was heaven. I picked up a dress and smelled the faint scent of cheap perfume, barely blending into the stronger odors of mildew and must. Picking up a newspaper, my hands shook as I read an article about Toni Jo's trial ...but then (a door slams) suddenly I heard someone at the front door ...terrified, I grabbed a photo and jumped out a nearby window ...a gruff voice shouted into the room

GRUFF VOICE/ROC#1-G1

Who's there! I know someone's there. You better get outta here 'for I call the cops!

NARRATOR/ROC#1-N9

...petrified, I sat motionless on the ground beneath the window. Hiding behind a bush, I stared at my prize - a wedding photo of Toni Jo and Claude "Cowboy" Henry. It was the best day of my life.
(musical interlude)

CHORUS/ROC#1-CH5

We need to know there is a best
Because we fear there's nothing
left
But emptiness as we grow old
Hoping our memories are gold

EPILOGUE

NARRATOR/ROC#1-N10

Yes, after years of collecting crime, one had actually come to me. I was ecstatic ...then another came ...and another ...and another ...faster and faster they came ...and closer ...and closer. Before long my friends were all criminals ...and my family? ...I didn't want to know.

(MORE)

NARRATOR/ROC#1-N10 (cont'd)

So now I sit here ...alone ...in a
world that gets a little darker
every day ...reaching out to
someone, anyone ...I'm not a
criminal, but crime is sucking me
down ...down into a pit, where
darkness waits, where cruelty
pervades ...and evil knows my name.

CHORUS/ROC#1-CH6

Evil knows his aunts and uncles and
It knows his name
Evil is an endless tunnel
With a bad migraine