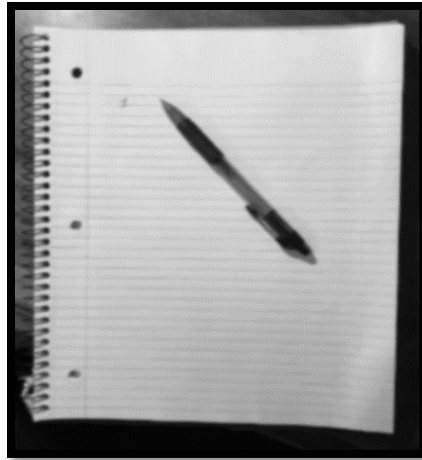


## Trying to get through a sentence.

(Written by Emma Sue Mayberry)



Soon-to-be-fifty-three-year-old Will Akers, Jr. stares motionless in a stagnant state at a blank sheet of lined notebook paper; pen firmly clenched in his right hand, wondering *what the first line of his story should be?* He is clicking the small chrome plated mechanism on top of his assigned ink pen, continuously in and out, with his mind flashing through memories of his youth. Growing up in the core of America's heartland in central Kansas, he could have never imagined a farm boy would become a famous political figure, and now be a well-known criminal behind bars. It was almost as if he had lived two different lives, and now it feels like he was about to start living a third.

In between flashbacks and former conversations running through his head, his pensive gaze is drawn to the pleasant view outside the window to his left. A glorious winter wonderland showcases the beautiful wilderness in upper New York state. Seated a few feet behind him on spacious, solid oak wooden tables are several other inmates seeking inner peace on a free 'open activity,' Sunday. A white haired, African American gentleman and seasoned inmate in his late sixties, intently reads through an excerpt from a rustic hardback copy of *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. The agitated peer looks over his thin-rimmed eyeglasses, showing a sliver of annoyance to the incessant clicking noise coming out the top of the nearby pen. Will Jr. feels the man's icy stare over his right shoulder and looks towards the library attendant, who is skimming through the pages of an *Outdoor Life* magazine from his

desk chair. The male attendant on duty this afternoon points his index finger upwards reminding Will Jr. of the black lettered, vinyl sign hanging down with wire from the strips in the ceiling panels.

**SILENCE PLEASE!**

No Talking! No Noise! No Music!  
***Violators will lose their privileges!***

Trying to avoid a stern reprimand, Will Jr. halts his fidgeting, and figures that he just needs to press the nib of the ink pen to the paper to see if anything comes out of his brain. He takes the first step towards climbing a daunting mountain and presses pen to paper:

*“My life would have gone a completely different direction if I had never met these two women: Amberleigh Gardner and Maureen Donnelson. I loved them both, dearly. In some ironic way though, each one of these women that I chased, served, and adored, took a little piece of faith from my genuinely good heart. These women traded my devotion to them with a handful of cruel, personal disappointment and heartache. Although, my estranged wife did bless me with the true loves of my life and three other special women. My precious daughters; Sarah, Katherine, and Abby. I feel like now it is me that has disappointed them and let them down. I know how it feels to be let down in life...”*

As the words finally begin to flow, Will Jr. is jolted out of his literary focus with the presence of a familiar male prison guard who had just entered through the library doors. Walking over to him, Guard Moses T. Wilson speaks softly and relays a message,

“Mr. Akers, sir. You have a visitor.”

“Who is it?”

The library attendant who is eyeballing the two of them, observes the verbal exchange, as Wilson is bending over to Will Jr’s ear, whispering the rest of the message,

“A lady. —Miss Emma Sue Mayberry. Said she was here before. She’s waiting in the lobby...”

Guard Wilson searches for some kind of confirmation on the face of the prison’s VIP inmate, “Should I send her packing, sir?”

“No! It’s okay. I’ll talk to her. — Just a minute.”

Will Jr. realizes his precious writing time may have to be placed on hold for the day and whispers back to the stooped guard,

“Let me turn my things in and check out. Tell her to wait for me, would you? —Thank you, Guard Wilson.”

Sliding out of his sturdy wooden chair from his favorite table, Will Jr. grabs his scratch notes and strolls towards the front desk. He turns in his papers and pen as the attendant bundles up his belongings with a large rubber band, stuffing them into a yellow manilla envelope designated, ‘AKERS,’ scribbled with a black magic marker. Will Jr. apologizes about the unexpected disturbance with the attendant acknowledging that it wasn’t Will Jr’s intention and lets his inmate know he will read through his latest composition at a later time.

Will Jr. leaves the room, quietly closing the library glass doors behind him and heads down the hallway through the empty cafeteria to the family lounge, taking a seat at the end of a long table. He watches as Emma Sue is now being escorted into the family room by a male and female correctional officer. She sits down across from him looking considerably frazzled and anxious. The male guard stays behind, settling into a comfortable space about ten feet away from Will Jr. and Emma Sue. His female work partner heads back to the front lobby.

Emma Sue is dressed very professionally in a dark navy-blue business suit and opens the conversation,

“Mr. Akers. How are you?” Excusing herself, “Sorry! I am running real late today.”

Will Jr. eyes his new visitor, as she begins to explain the circumstances of her hectic day.

“All kinds of problems with my rental car this morning. And then a traffic detour. Crazy!” She pauses, “So, are you doing, okay?”

“I’m alright. Welcome!” salutes Will Jr. asking, “What’cha got for me today?”

Emma Sue collects herself,

“Mr. Akers, sir. Thank you for agreeing to see me again. I know you were pretty adamant about not needing my help before, but I have a plan to make this a win-win. Do we have ample time to talk?”

“All the time in the world, honey! —Well, probably forty-five minutes, or so today. You said you’d be back. What’s up?”

The sophisticated thirty-something journalist jumps right in and begins to relay her bent up thoughts at a rapid pace. She goes on to explain that the whole world wants to hear his story and a book like his biography could give her some longed-for notoriety. She reminds Will Jr. that he is already extremely famous and there is nothing more than she wants in her career to be the one that can bring this future novel to life. She expresses that she can help him pass the time behind the confined walls and they can collaborate on the project together. Trying to fight for little integrity and acceptance, she informs Will Jr. of her journalistic aptitude and tenured career, mentioning that she used to be a senior editor and copywriter for a large publishing company in Chicago. Continuing to sell him on all her honors and accolades, she brags about earning her Master’s degree from the University of Missouri when she was in her early twenties. She conveys that in this stage of her life, she has stepped away from the stressful corporate world to pursue an opportunity to become a freelance journalist and business consultant.

Will Jr. listens enthusiastically, as the information is being pinballed at him. As the gung-ho journalist takes a breather, he offers his initial reaction to her words.

“That’s quite a pitch, young lady. I can see you’re a smart gal. Very impressive.”

Emma Sue calms down a little, thinking that *all her traveling might not be a waste of time after all* with some encouraging words from her prospective client, and gives Will Jr. an opportunity to talk. He begins to share with her what has been on his mind since the last time they met.

“As a matter of fact, I may have changed my mind a bit from the last time you were here.” He fills her in, “Sorry for the way I came across before. I’ve been trying to write.”

Emma Sue utters, “No problem,” as Will Jr. continues with his thoughts.

“I’ve got so much stuff I’m trying to pull out of my head. —This writing stuff is overwhelming. My mind is all jumbled up.”

Recalling all the endless late-night hours working on corporate deadlines, Emma Sue scrunches her nose with a smile,

“Not so easy, is it?”

Will Jr. scoffs, showing his discovered frustration so far,

“Didn’t think it would be. I think I may have some memory loss. I get bad headaches at night.” He switches gears, “Do you have anything published yourself?”

“Lots of articles, blogs and such, but no published books, yet.” Her passion begins to ooze out of her pink lipstick-lined mouth,

“I just want to see my name on the front cover. All the future royalties can go to your children Mr. Akers, or charity. Whatever you want. The publishing firm backing me on this is going to give me a \$30,000 advance. Once, I get your blessing for the exclusive rights, of course. That’s it! —That’s all I want for now.”

Will Jr. verbalizes his idea for a compromise,

“Look! I’ve been thinking. I still want to see if I can do this.”

He leans forward towards Emma Sue,

“Let me write the beginning chapter and the part about that fateful night by the fishing hole. It might be the therapy I need. You can write the rest of it—Fair deal?”

Emma Sue mulls over the new proposition, as Will Jr. interjects,

“Hey! You want a bottled water? I’m thirsty. How about you?”

“We’re allowed?”

“Yes!” Will Jr. twists in his chair,

“Guard, would you mind if we grabbed a couple of waters from the fridge?”

“I’ll get them for you, —Two?”

“Yes, please. Thank you, guard!”

As they quench their thirst, Will Jr. is curious about her gameplan, and asks the journalist a pointed question.

“What are you going to do? Come back here every Sunday to talk in person? You know, I can’t tie up the phone lines for more than fifteen minutes.”

“I will try to come up every other Sunday.” She pauses, “I have to pay for all my own expenses. Airfare, and all that,” and looks directly into Will Jr.’s alert eyes, holding out her hand,

“Do we have a deal?”

His hand starts to leave his side towards Emma Sue's open palm, as she pours on some more charm,

“What do you say? It will at least give you something to look forward to, right?”

Will Jr. is silently thinking over her offer, but the veteran people-person in Emma Sue already knows his answer is going to be a ‘yes.’ She offers a little more assurance,

“Make the weeks go by quicker for you.”

Emma Sue reaches into her designer purse for a surprise,

“Do you like chocolate chip?”

“Hold on. Let me check?”

The nearby guard who was tuned into their conversation nods with an, “Okay.” Will Jr. shows his appreciation back to the guard with a respectful, “Thank you.” He looks over the small kitchen freezer bag Emma Sue is pulling out of her purse,

“Yes, of course. —Who *doesn't* like chocolate chip?”

She hands him a bag of four homemade baked cookies and Will Jr. grabs a couple, taking his first few bites with a crunch. With his mouth half-full of goodness, he gives Emma Sue an update about the rules and procedures.

“We would have about two hours for the Sunday designated family time, but I need to find us a room, away from all these other people.”

“You got that kinda pull in here already?”

“Yeah. Don’t worry. I’ll make it happen.”

Emma Sue begins to articulate her plan that she had been orchestrating for weeks.

“It will take us months to put a working manuscript together. I can just ask you questions and record it. Go back and work on it. Piece it all together. —You don’t mind if I record our little chats, do you?”

“No. It should be alright.”

“I can re-listen to the sessions in my free time. With the tapes.”

“Knock yourself out! What are you going to do with the info and valuable insight? —Put me behind bars? Too late for that!”

Emma lets out a light chuckle,

“I will make sure your three lovely daughters get every dime of the royalties Mr. Akers, if that’s what you think is best?”

Will Jr. expresses some of his personal concerns,

“I don’t want any news organization getting the tapes. Recordings are for you and your firm. No one else. They get released; I’ll sue. I’ve still got access to my team of attorneys.” He threatens, “And my counsel, they don’t play around. Nothing without my permission, you understand?”

“Yes. I respect that. I won’t even show them to my publisher. This is my freelance project anyway. They will only see the rough manuscripts. The cassette tapes will be off limits.”

“Great. Seems like we understand each other.”

“And the only thing that the public will see is what eventually makes it into the book. —Our book.”

Will Jr. relaxes,

“Okay. Good.” Probing with curiosity, he asks,

“What are we going to call it? Our book? —Your book? Any initial ideas?”

Emma Sue tentatively discloses her preliminary working titles,

“‘First Gentleman,’ sir. Something like that, or, ‘America’s First Gentleman.’”

Will Jr. begins to laugh,

“I like it! —Perfect.”

Realizing the intellect of the young lady, he interlocks both hands together, resting his stubbled chin on the inside of his thumbs and bellows,

“*God Bless America!* Could have used you in our cabinet.”

The two of them chat for another twenty minutes, discussing the necessary legal paperwork and consensual agreements, until a supervising guard with a baritone voice yells across the entire room,

“That’s time folks! Times up. —Thank you for everyone coming today. Please make your way out to the check-out table.”

Emma Sue picks up her brown leather Kate Spade purse and thanks Will Jr. for his time, handing him her glossy freelance business card. As she walks over to the check-out table, Will Jr. can hear the sound of her high heels tapping on the hard concrete floor over the stir of mayhem from other family member voices. She is frisked by a husky female guard, turning over her purse for inspection at the exit station. As she gets ready to head back out the main doors, she turns back to her new client and sends a cute wave back with all of her fingers.

Will Jr. nods back at her with a smile as he stands in single file, getting ready to head back to his cell. One of the other inmates close to him asks,

“Is that your new woman?”

“No! I wish! It’s my new business partner and journalist. We’re writing a book together.”



***(Partial transcript of interview from third visit recorded on Sunday, April 9th, 2017)***

Emma Sue: How are you? I am excited to find out more about your life. You are, by far, the most interesting person that I have ever had the chance to speak with. To interview, I mean.

Will Jr: Well, thank you!

Emma Sue: With your permission, sir, I'm going to start the recording now, okay? Think we get about thirty minutes each side of these little cassettes.

Will Jr: Yes! I see. Thanks for coming back!

Emma Sue: My honor, sir.

Will Jr: So, do you drive all the way here from Chicago?

Emma Sue: I flew into Buffalo last night and drove up here this morning. Through Syracuse and Watertown. Pleasant ride. Spring is coming.

Will Jr: Quite a commitment. You must really want this story?

Emma Sue: I do.

Will Jr: How's this conference room? Better than the family room with all eyes and ears on us, right?

Emma Sue: Yes. Thank you. No noisy kids. Much better. We can chat, alone.

Will Jr: Except for our watchful friend over there.

Will Jr: How are you doing today, Guard Mathews? Are you ready to hear my life story?

Guard Mathews: Just here to do my job, sir. I'm really not paying no attention.

Will Jr: Very good.

Guard Mathews: I'm watching you, though. You know the rules.

Emma Sue: So, where do we start? Who is Mr. Will Akers, Jr? Besides what we all know?

Will Jr: Well, I am, or once was, America's First Gentleman. The husband to our nation's president. These days, I am inmate number 25377. Can't forget. See, it says so right here.

Emma Sue: Hmm. How is it in this place?

Will Jr: It's okay. Not quite 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue!

Emma Sue: I should think not. How have you been coping? Is it safe? Some of these inmates look a little scary to me. I feel them staring me down when I walk in.

Will Jr: There's a couple of ring leaders. A few New Jersey mafia types. Some shady characters, what would you expect? It is prison, but no gang riots, yet. You never know. They keep my pod pretty well sanctioned off. I can only walk in the courtyard with my friend on Wednesdays and Thursdays. The Secret Service sends a few guys in for protection. Got a cell to myself. I try to keep my hands clean. It's just boring. Not too thrilling. Enough to send anyone batty. But safe, for now.

Emma Sue: When we met, you mentioned you spend some time in the library?

Will Jr: Yes! Actually, I have something for you to read.

Emma Sue: Oh?

Will Jr: Yes, this is my first attempt at my chapter. It's about when I was sixteen, and my car. My first love. Well, both of my first loves. The '74 Hurst-Olds and the girl. You can take it with you. The envelope is sealed because it's been screened. Guard Mathews, I'm handing the lady my envelope, okay?

Guard: All clear, Akers. You're good.

Will Jr: Don't open it yet. Put it in your purse. And this black handbook is my journal. You can read this now, but I have to give it back to the library attendant, so you have to read it here.

Emma Sue: Do you mind?

Will Jr: No! Please. Might tell you a few things for your story.

Emma Sue: Okay, let me pause the recording for a bit.

EMMA SUE READING THROUGH DAILY PASSAGES

Emma Sue: Well, the good news is. I can read your handwriting. Well done! Your daughters? Where are they now?

Will Jr: The two eldest, Sarah and Katherine, are in Topeka. Kansas. Katherine is a mom. She has my grandchild, Anna. My youngest, Abby, is in Washington DC with her mother.

Emma Sue: You must miss them?

Will Jr. Immensely. I would say that's the hardest part of this whole thing. I practically raised them. I was 'Mr. Mom' for all those years. They visited once so far. Not sure how much I'll see of my grandbaby in the future. But we talk on the phone. My girls and I.

Emma Sue: So sad.

Will Jr: I do have a scheduled call every week with my eldest daughter, Sarah. She accepts all my calls. Do you have any children?

Emma Sue: No. No children for me. Not ever. Unless, we would entertain a surrogate mother, or artificial insemination.

Will Jr: *We?*

Emma Sue: My partner, Elizabeth, Liz. I am actually a gay woman.

Will Jr: Oh. you were waiting for an opportunity to slip that in, weren't you?

Emma Sue: Figured I'd get it out of the way. Liz and I have a condo in the Aurora suburbs. Upper west side of The Windy City. Thanks for asking.

Will Jr: Yeah sure. Doesn't affect anything with me. All the power to ya. Everybody needs someone, right?

Emma Sue: Yes. So, tell me your thoughts on our project. I have been thinking. Do you want to spill the beans on everything, or should we keep some details taboo? I mean, off the record? To ourselves? I think your story is compelling enough, from what I know, and I probably don't know the half of it.

Will Jr: That you don't. No one does.

Will Jr: I guess I should use my discretion if there is anything regarding National Security, but I think I'm willing to disclose most of everything. I would like to give the people what they want, you know?

Emma Sue: Yes. The first tidbit that I'm definitely curious about, myself is. - What made you tell the whole nation what you did? In

that press conference? That was quite a day in history. It was the lead story on all the news channels for a while.

Will Jr: Yeah. A day of infamy for sure. I guess I couldn't live with myself anymore. The guilt had been eating my insides away for too long. So long, plus the scandal, the affair with Governor Greschen, now Senator Greschen sent me over the edge.

Emma Sue: You were mad? Angry?

Will Jr: I was ...hurt, depressed. Anyone would be, but I just felt betrayed. I gave up everything for the family, for her political career, and then, this is what I get. I was never unfaithful to my wife. *Never!* Had many tempting opportunities. The kids were confused. It affected them too. My wife was just another person in my life that let me down.

Emma Sue: I understand.

Will Jr: People always let you down.

Emma Sue: Well, not everyone.

Will Jr: Yes, everyone does. My guess is that you will too. I am expecting it. Think about it, I even did it to myself.

Emma Sue: I'm sorry you feel that way, Mr. Akers, sir. I will work hard to earn your trust.

Will Jr: Sorry. We're all the same. Flawed humans. We are all going to eat the apple eventually.

Emma Sue: You have to see the good in people, sir.

Will Jr: I lost faith in that years ago. Look around at the bad apples. We are in a room full of them. You can't say, you never let anyone down. It's what we do. Pretty much made up my mind.

Emma Sue: This is a little disheartening to hear, sir. But, then again, I am not here in Brixton.

Will Jr: Yes, it's definitely not helping my attitude.

