

Adrin Bentley

Instructor's Name

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Date

### Asylum

The trip to the asylum was a spur-of-the-moment plan. Seth, Chris, Ray, Johnny, and I never expected to end up anywhere near that old, condemned complex, but we were a handful of adventure-hungry juveniles, desperate one night for something different than the usual routine. A challenge among friends led us to a race through the gaudy asylum in Morrilton, Arkansas. The feelings of excitement and fear I experienced in that old building will always be with me.

After we had a long evening of driving through the county, a boyish argument over bravery emerged in Seth's white Jeep Cherokee. As we argued, Ray brought up the abandoned mental hospital since we were driving through Morrilton. Jokingly, I told Chris that he'd never go inside. I should have known that Johnny would take advantage of this statement. He challenged all of us to go inside; we accepted the challenge and made our way to the asylum.

Seth decided to park the Jeep about a block away so it wouldn't look suspicious parked outside the mental hospital. Evading the exposure of the illuminating street lights, we ran down the street to the front of the asylum. It was completely misplaced sitting on top of a dreary hill in the middle of a neighborhood. As we walked to the foot of the hill where the old complex had scarred the earth for years, I noticed the high grass, dead trees, and garbage decorating the unwelcoming property.

The challenge escalated as we stood gaping at the haunting landscape, from simply entering the dank hospital to racing through the morbid structure to the rooftop. This was

Johnny's idea because he saw two balconies, one on the second floor and another on the third, near the top of the asylum. I'm sure he thought he could still prove himself to be better than all of us by climbing to the roof from one of the concrete protrusions. We agreed to the new additions to our challenge and began the game.

The five of us ran around to the back of the building, trying to find a means of entrance. I saw a broken window on the second floor and decided I'd take advantage of my small, yet athletic, body. I ran at the brick wall and jumped; continuing the movement of my legs, I managed to push myself about four steps up the wall before I had to slam my fingers between the bricks to retain my height. I pulled myself up to the window after a few minutes of struggling with gravity and a severe lack of grip. I was now in and on the second floor.

Johnny also took advantage of his build; after all, he was terribly strong and bulky. In a few moments of silence and searching, he found a boarded-up window on the first floor. Confident in his strength and aiming to impress the other guys, Johnny pulled back his burly fist and hammered the wooden planks with a firm blow. Breaking the boards with only a few splinters as the price, he moved the sharp remains out of the panel and climbed through the window. Seth, Chris, and Ray followed right after him through the now-inviting entrance. Meanwhile, I was already racing through the second floor.

I raced through the dark halls covered in graffiti, dodging in and out of chambers and rooms filled with a variety of clutter and debris from over the years. I could barely see what was in front of me due to the dramatic lack of light, so I had to constantly push my hand against the walls to keep myself standing as I ran, tripping over broken doors, toilets, and chairs. Occasionally, the cold concrete walls would escape my hands as I passed by the doorways, and I would find myself falling sideways to the filthy floors covered with dirt and other substances I

could have gone without identifying.

Minutes turned into what seemed like hours in those dark halls. I found myself lost in this maze of darkness and stale air. All I could hear were the sounds of the bats chattering and flying overhead and the echoes of footsteps bouncing off the walls surrounding me. It seemed as though I wouldn't be able to find my way through the asylum; my adrenaline began to rush as I came to this realization. I felt an essence of fear come upon me, an excited state making me almost frantic, but I enjoyed every bit of it. The thought of finding a way to the roof first singled itself out from all the other things filling my head. I had to top at least Johnny for leading me into this dark, cold labyrinth.

Finally I found the stairs resting in the center of the mess of hallways. I stumbled up the stone spiral steps. Suddenly my progression ceased and was reversed. I fell back and down a few steps because I had run into something in my uncontrollable rush. I gathered myself and moved back up the steps to find what had blocked my path. I groped the air until I found the coarse blockage in front of me; I had run into a giant thick wooden door. I threw my panicking hands all around it, looking for a way to open it, but all I discovered was a latch and bolt. In my frustration, I kicked the door several times before running back down the staircase to the second floor.

At this point, I had forgotten that anyone else was in the building, and in my hectic state I hoped that there wasn't anyone present. Fear began to find me as I again ran up and down the wretched halls of the second floor. I stopped to catch my breath; my lungs screamed for fresh air as the dust choked me and blinded my already-inhibited eyesight. As I leaned against a wall, I heard noises coming from around the corner. I quickly backed away, unsure of the source. My imagination conjured many different eerie subjects to explain the lumbering noises, but it took

only a moment for me to realize that it was Johnny climbing from the second-story balcony to the balcony above.

Coming back to reality, I realized that once Johnny was on the third floor, he only needed to climb from there to the roof to win our little game. I went back to the stairs and looked around for another way up. I felt the wall beside the stairs and found a cold metal door; it was an old broken elevator door. I looked inside the empty shaft and saw that the door on the third floor was open. Deciding to take a risk for the sake of this childish ordeal, I climbed into the elevator's hollowed vertical chamber. The pungent smell within made me wary as I scaled the pipes running up the walls of the elevator shaft. I cautiously clung to each of the hollow iron rods as the flakes of rust crumbled at the touch of my fingers.

After clumsily making my way to the top of the elevator shaft, I managed to pull myself through the half-opened metal doors; I was finally on the third floor. I looked to the open doorway of the balcony. I could see Johnny's arms pulling his burly figure up to the surface of the rugged balcony. I was ahead, but not by much.

Suddenly, the wooden door that had blocked my way up the stairs shook violently. I was startled at first by the screams from behind the door, but I shortly recognized the screams as the frantic voices of Chris and Ray. Turning back to the elevator, I noticed the figure of Seth climbing up with much more difficulty than I.

The race was coming to an end. I needed to find a fast way to get to the roof. Johnny was already standing on the railing of the balcony to my right, preparing to ascend to the top, and Seth was almost halfway through the elevator door. In that instant, as my heart raced and adrenaline intoxicated my body, I noticed a huge hole between the concrete wall and the elevator's steel doorway. It was some sort of access to the elevator's pulleys and machinery. I

ran into the small chamber and discovered a small set of stairs that led to a tiny doorway. I staggered up the steps and out the little door.

I fell onto the gravel-covered roof, panting for air. I made it to the roof before anyone else. I had beaten Johnny; I had beaten everyone. As I lay out in the cold, refreshing night air on that asylum roof, it struck me that I wasn't enjoying the victory as much as I had enjoyed running fearfully through the dark.

I know that night at the asylum could never be mimicked. It was the adventure that we had desired, and I vividly remember it as if I were still lost in the dark corridors. I will never forget the intensity of the excitement I felt inside the asylum in Morrilton. I know that I will never again so greatly enjoy fear the way I did that night.