

Run, Forrest, Run!

"No runnin today," Petey says to me.

"No runnin today," I says back to him, lyin. Same thing ev'ry day after eatin brekf'st. We gets herded back to da cells like sheeps. If we wasn't sheeps, we'da clumb the fence and got shotted up some. Be more fun thin eatin that slop they fed us.

See, Petey doan like my runnin, says it tain't healthy. Prob'ly thinks I shud smoke dubs in my house likes he does. Never did likes smokin much, not even that wacky weed. Yeah, I's tried it some, few times, inhaled too. Reckon I can say that since I tain't never gonna run fer prez'dent er nothin. Gov'ner maybe, to get that fool we's got now otter dare. Sher hopes Petey doan git caught smokin in his house, cuz it's gainst the rules. Then, ev'ry thins gainst the rules roun here. Sheit!

"Petey," I says at breakfast, "you smokes too much." Course, this jest pisses him off and he goes into one of his'n coughin fits, spewin chunks of gray lung into the green powd'ered eggs on our tan plastik plates. Thin I feels bad and a little sick miself. I's doan tell him he smokes too much real oftin. But he does.

Petey got that there emphysemia too, onea them words I cain't spell without'n my diction'ry. Sad thing is, mossa these guys in prison cain't spell for sheit. Me, I gotta work like the dickens fer fun to writes and spells like this, fer verietee, don't yuh knows. Tain't easy neither.

Dumb me says, "Petey, you quit that thar smokin, maybe yer emphysemia'll gets better, no?"

"NO," he says. Doan know ifn he means no, he won't git better, or no, he won't quits smokin. Doan matter, cuz when Petey says NO like that, talkin, she's over.

Stubborn Jackass, I thinks ta miself, meanin Petey. Meanin me too.

That tain't all. Petey, he's racist, says black guys is racist so why cain't he be?

"Cause it's wrong," I says.

Petey, he jest looks at me all crazy like, his titties saggin, and gives me his I's-62-and-your'in-36 smile. Yull be racist too when you's my age, he thinks.

I's kin hear him thinkin. Petey thinks louder'n most men. I's thinkin too. He's runned into some trash bein in prison most of forty years, black trash, white trash, yella trash. Lotsa trash in prison, tain't all of it pris'ners either, not even most of it. He's jest done forgotted about most of the white trash. And now they's plast'r'd a bunch of them Black Histr'y Month posters in the serv'ry. Cain't even eats without Malcolm X or Bubba Wash starin at us. Bet they doan let me put up closet doors and rainbowers on October 11th! Black sheit, she's okay, but not faggot sheit, not Gay Nat'l Comin Outta the Closit Day sheit. See, now I's talkin like Petey!

Me, I tain't gainst Black hist'ry, or Injun hist'ry, or Nazi hist'ry even. Jest doan feed it to me at brekf'st. Have yer Black Pow'r and White Pow'r meetins somewhere I doan hafta watch, see'n, list'n. Petey and I's agrees on that thar. So does my ole room'ate James, and he's'n Black. I still misses him. Ya's tain't slaves no more, so quit doggin my ass bout it all. My famb'ly came from Germ'ny in 1892, after the Civ'l War and before the Doubya Doubyas, so find yerself another excuse to be lazy. Petey and I doan owe yous sheit. Ceptin a fair shake, of course, and I's'll give thats to any man.

See how them damn posters gots me all off track? Sheit!

Yep, I'd say Petey he's jest got the two vices, smokin and bein racist. I kin live with that. Bein a pre-op T-S tain't a vice, not far as I kin see. Doan needs no diction'ry fer that one, though yous might. See, Petey's a pre-opertive tranny-sekshul. That means he's gots titties AND a dick and balls, shriv'led up some, hear tell, thin, he's all shriv'led up some! Years ago, backs when they was fewer dumb asses in pollyticks, a doctor, one of dem flamin lib'rals, he sayd Petey needed that estrogen horse piss stuff sos he'd be more stable motion'ly and all. The judge, he agreed. I does too, even thoughs my pinion doan count fer much. See, the kicker was--still is, I sposes--that the state bein cheap and sanktimonikal, din't want to hafter pay for the estrogen horse piss stuff. Pretty soon ev'rybody would want it, they figgers. Dumb asses! No, not ev'rybody, jest some of the tranny-sekshuls. Not too many of them in prison, you bet. Ole Willy, he doan git hard no more, you take estrogen horse piss stuff. So Petey's got his limp dick, and shriv'led balls and

titties to her, and hips, sort of. If'n he's happy, I's happy for him. Petey still takes that estrogen stuff. Guess it's expensive bein made from horse piss and all, pregn'nt mare pee, to be partic'lar. Pregn'nt mares, not pregn'nt pee. Course, it's still horse pee, you ask me. Golly, that rimes.

Petey, he really doan object to my runnin. He's jest funnin. He jest likes to see me take a day off now'n agin. Runnin's how he got his emphysemia, he says. I doan believe him. Says he froz'd his lungs gitten away from the cops. Damn fool, sprint'n in freezin weather. But'n he did git away, so spose it was worth it.

Fer sher, I woan git there cirrhosis of the liver. No boose here. Used my diction'ry agin, but I hads it right. Petey woan neither. He'll git that nasty-assed cancer, lunged cancer. Hear tell, they's more'n one. That bad one, from smokin, you git it, yer ded, D-E-D, ded. Course, I knows it's spelt D-E-A-D! But, spells it right, you still tain't no more alive.

Petey, he plays getar. It's an ugly, sparkly thang, but he's can make it dance. I's play too, got a prettier one, but cain't make it dance. Petey, he'n doan git it. My runnin, it's his'n getar.

Runnin. Runnin. Ev'ry day. That's when I's free. The fence, I knows she's thar, razery-wire too, but I cain't sees it, you knows? I cain't sees at all, jest feels. I feels my strong heart pump'n red blood to my legs; I feels my thigh muskles c'ntrack; I feels the ground slide past and the breese in my soggy hair. Free. I's free. Petey needs titties and his getar to bees free; I needs to run.

One day, she's witch-tit cold out. Sarg'nt Kirk, she sees me signin out, drest to run, cover'd up good, but not too good. Doan wanna swet in minus-fifty wind-chilly. "Grindemann,"--thas me--she says in her boss voice, "I'm givin you a dir'ct order not to run today."

"Yes, maam," I says, smilin, lyin. But I runs jest the same. Doan hafta. Jest wantsta. I runs out and busts them old froz'n tits right off'n that old witch. Spit ice in her face, jest cuz I kin. Tips of my ears they gits fros-bit, but not much. They din't rot off or nothin. Head of my dick gits cold, swells up a little. Nex time I'll member to wear'n an extra pair of tight undies under my swets, sure nuff. Petey can freeze his'n dick off, save him an op'ration maybe. Not me! I likes my Willy jest fine. Wash him clean most ev'ry day. Fast. Fast as I wants. The faster the better, likes runnin. Always feels good whens I git done too.

That day, I comes inside lookin like that snow baboon in LIFE mag'zine. Eyebrows they's froze to my hat, mousetash frozed to my scarf, and frozed fether breath all over my back and head. Cap'n Kirk sees me. She's really a sarg'nt, but we calls her Cap'n Kirk fer fun, but nots to her face. She'd gets mad maybe, but nots too much I think. Tain't sure tho. I knows she sees me, she laughs, fergits all about the direct order she done gave me. She shooked her head, smiled. She cares bout me is all. Most doan. She a good sarg'nt, for a woman. Or a man. Doan matter. She a good person, so course she a good sarg'nt. Good momma too, maybe.

WAS warm last week, twenty-deegrees maybe, so I's dug out my shorts and a therm'l top, cotton glubs. Tain't sposed to have the glubs. Dumb ass gov'ner says we doan need none. Bet he wears glubs when the witch's titties are cold. Me, I's stole a pair from the lawndry where I works. Tain't no sin. Tain't no shame. Fuck the gov'ner, him and his glubs. Tain't gonna freeze Willy, fingers neither. Gov'ner's momma, she says, "Shames on you, Tommy!" [Thompson, former gov'ner]. I's bet she does.

Shorts is red. Red, RED. I's wears them cuz I tain't afraid of wearins them. Red shorts is sissy color. Pink too. Other guys afraid of wearin red, they turn sissy. Dumb asses. I's already a sissy so tain't afraid of em. Somebody throwed em out. Thanks. Fits me jest fine. I wears the shorts, tease the bulls, the ignor'nt inmates. Sometimes they calls me Forrest. Sometimes Fool. Sometimes Faq, but not too often, that. "There goes SissyPansyFag," the dumb bulls says. Tain't never lerned no better I spose.

"Yeah," I says, not stoppin runnin, not fer God or nobody, "and this SissyPansyFag can run your ignor'nt ass in the ground," I taunts back. Theys sure cain't catch Forrest!

"I should kick your ass," one sometimes says, stupid-like. He cain't catch my ass unless I let's him, so how's he gonna kick it? Likes I says, ignor'nt.

"No," I says, all seryus like, "I don't thinks that would be a good idear. See, if'n this SissyPansyFag by chance kicks yer ass, well, you'd hafta commit susieside or your pals would tease you to death." Then his pals, they teases his anyways fer bein so dam stupid that a SissyPansyFag in RED shorts could make him looks so stupid.

Which weren't diff'cult atall.

I runned tiday too, thought up this here essay. It went and got cold agin sos I din't wear my red shorts. Maybes next month. It's only Feb'rary. Maybes I'll have put on my grabes stone: No Runnin Tiday. But nots fer a long, long time, I hopes. Gotta haves hopes. Tain't got much else, you knows? I done already told you about brekf'st.

A National Treasure

They call me a career criminal; I guess I am. But you know, the cops're really the problem. Kickin people in the ass--like they done me and my folks--don't make people better. It makes them worse; it makes them angry. It's like fuckin for chastity. I'm sixty-two years old ... sixty-two, so I been angry a long time. I been locked up most of them years, an I'm still locked up, the bastards.

It all started when I was a kid. The cops, they had a hard-on for my dad, wouldn't leave us alone. They come out to talk to dad once--prob'ly somethin I did--and he ran their asses off the place. It was icy and one of the cops fell and hit his head. I mean hard, the stupid fucker. He wasn't quite right in the noggin after that. Yeah, they really dogged us then, so I never had no respect for the law.

They sent me to goddamn Boy's School for truancy when I was thirteen. What kinda sense did that make? Ma and Pa needed me at home on the farm. Besides, there wasn't no school at the Boy's School. They had me shovelin horse and cow shit. I coulda done that at home, so I ran away.

Been on my own since I was fourteen. Visited my sister out East and seen them big corporate stores ruinin her neighborhood. That pissed me off, it sure enough did. My Ma and Pa worked all day long when I was a kid and they was still broke. Now I saw them stores squeezin out the corner grocery. The little guy was gettin fucked again. That's when I decided I'd become a thief, do stick-ups.

So I started hittin them fuckin supermarkets. Was good at it too. I was gettin even an thinkin, "screw workin, it ain't worth it, nohow." Them big stores was always fuckin it up for the little guy. I'd hit em, and then in two or three months, I'd hit em again. Yes, sir, I put some of them bad-ass stores out of business. I guess they didn't feel safe with me out there. Well, they wasn't--safe, that is.

Finally got busted down in Illinois. The headline read, "Fugitive Captured in Illinois Shootout." What the fuck? The pigs was doin all the shootin. All I was doin was runnin. That was the second time the cops shot a car out from under me. The first time I was in a '48 Chevy. I was only fourteen then. Imagine that. Fourteen, and them cops was shootin at me, a kid. But the fuckers caught me cuz they had Buicks! Every time I went around a corner in town, they was a poppin at my tires. The sheriff was all pissed off cuz I smashed up his new station wagon in a roadblock. "Why didn't you stop?" he says. Well, why'd he park it there?! The fool, that's when you GO, when they're chasin ya! If I'da had my bad Ford back then, their dumb asses would be chasin me yet.

Got shot in Indiana doin a stick-up. Was my own damn fault. I walked into the store--into the manager's cage--and showed him my .45. You had to pull the trigger four or five times before it'd go off, but he didn't know that. I told him to open the safe but forgot to look for the silent alarm. I had the money in my hand when I heard car tires squeal out front. Shit! I headed out the back but it was deadbolted. I finally got the lock shot off, but it was chained and padlocked on the outside too. They was ready for my dumb ass that time.

They was shootin at me by then and somethin hit my left wrist and my stomach; I felt a strange ripplin down there, but I held onto the money bag. I was just up to speed, runnin down an aisle, headin for the front door, when everything just quit and I collapsed on the floor. I was a bit dismayed that I'd got shot. I wanted some more of it, the good years. You always want more of it. I thought, this was it; so did the pigs. Two magnum slugs in the guts is generally curtains.

Well, the doctor, he told me later, "We gave up on you a couple of times, but you had such a strong life force. Your heart was still beating but you had no blood left." They gave me nine pints. I never told him I was on speed.

I got shot in December. I was just startin to get around walkin in May when I went to trial. I was in John Dillinger's old cell, they told me. Imagine that! I got ten years.

I escaped five years later. It was foggy out and the streets were deserted, just the way I'd planned it. It was about 3 a.m. I came around a corner and this car was just sittin there, runnin, honest to God. It just fell from heaven. It had a three-quarter tank of gas and there was even a pliers and screwdriver in the glove box so I could switch plates. When God sends a gift, he sends a good one. I thought to myself, "Here I come again, you motherfuckers!"

It's really exhilaratin, escapin is. When you're out on an escape, you're totally free, man. You have only your wits and your own limitations. You know, no one else understands that. Every day, every moment, belongs to you. It's so fuckin good, bein free, you get mad when you get tired. When you get away from them fuckers, against all odds, you're like ... you're like ... you're superhuman! You can do anything.

But people, they ain't free no more. The cops and the corporations, they run everything, and the people just let em. Yeah, they say I'm a career criminal, but someone has to have the courage to stick to his convictions. If I live long enough to get out and the cops start hasslin me again, I might just take them for another ride, the fuckers.

One guy here in prison calls me a national treasure. I don't know what's the matter with his dumb ass; I was just tryin to set things right. Like this one cop, you know, he told me he kept shootin at my head but missin. The silly motherfucker was tryin to kill me, and he was proud of it! Now tell me that's right. All I ever done was rob businesses. Had buck fever is what he had; that's why he kept missin me. Yes, sir, them motherfuckers is the problem.

A national treasure? ... Huh!

Author's note: "Run, Forrest, Run!" and "A National Treasure" both feature "Petey." Copyright 2011 by Michael A. Grindemann. Stories used by permission of the author for Between the Bars.