

Special Archie

Once upon a time, there was a little boy, who lived in a little village. He belonged to a little family who had just enough money to get by. The boy liked to swim, play games, roam through the forest, and sometimes, in the privacy of a late night, he would sketch. Of course, he was not very good; Arthur was not a talented boy.

Arthur Leed Nockman was born on February 18th, on a brisk windy morning. The year was 1728, I believe. He was the middle child; one sister before him, one sister after. He went to school and enjoyed it enough. Arthur was a quiet child. Stayed out of trouble, behaved well. He despised conflict. Although, he never seemed to mind that conflict when it was amongst his sisters. He rather enjoyed tormenting them.

Let us see, what else is there to say about Arthur? Well, he was great at pulling weeds. He'd go out into the fields for hours and wouldn't miss a single one. His father always fawned over this talent. Their family were farmers, did I fail to mention that?

Boy, I'll tell you, the life of a narrator can be quite monotonous. All day, every day spent watching your boy or girl, waiting for something to happen that is worthy of narration. If you're lucky, your child will become a hero or a king. Some children grow to become prodigies, princesses, or knights in shining armor. Those are the children that become stories. Stories that taunt me as a narrator every night when Mother reads Arthur to sleep. Oh, to be the one who gets to write those stories. However, most often you are assigned to a simple, natural life. The child is born, they grow up, fall in love, make mistakes, fall out of love, give up, succeed in little ways, and eventually die.

Then I am onto the next just as quick.

The moment my human takes their last breath, I hear my next baby's first cry.

I'm an excellent writer, I swear it. I could prove it to you if I had anything to work with. I've been watching Arthur for a long time now. Well, only 12 years, but it sure feels long. Arthur's parents have called their son "Special Archie" from the day he was born. I have spent the last twelve years trying to understand why. I promise this, you have never encountered a more ordinary boy. I'd even venture to say he has had not one riveting dream! There is truly nothing special about Arthur Leed Nockman. And I am the one who is trapped being his narrator till the day he passes on. And with the careful life he leads, that could be a very long time.

So, here I will stay. Watching, waiting, and praying for a story.



Year 12, Day 57, Arthur Nockman.

Arthur caught a fish today. It wasn't very large, nothing he could eat. He was quite proud though.

Year 12, Day 63, Arthur Nockman.

A girl in Arthur's class was looking at him quite often. I don't believe Archie noticed, but I did.

Could a romance be brewing there? Keep reading to see how this story unravels!

Year 12, Day 63, Arthur Nockman.

Never mind, the girl was cheating off his paper.

Year 12, Day 120, Arthur Nockman.

Arthur got a terrible stomachache from some bad lamb. He threw up in the middle of his class!

Now his classmates are calling him "Archie Vomitman." The name is not creative in the slightest, but it has made Arthur thoroughly embarrassed.

Year 12, Day 200, Arthur Nockman.

Arthur stopped going to the local school. It wasn't because of the teases, his father needed him on the farm. He was the only son after all, his future was not in school.

Year 12, Day 269, Arthur Nockman.

Arthur spent the day at the farm.

Year 12, Day 302, Arthur Nockman.

Arthur found a new kind of weed in the garden today. It had white spots on the leaves and...

Oh, forget it, you don't care.

Year 12, Day 328, Arthur Nockman.

Arthur spent the day at the farm.

Year 12, Day 361, Arthur Nockman.

You won't believe what happened today. Oh wait, yes you would.

Arthur spent the day at the farm.

Year 13, Day 001, Arthur Nockman.

Attention, attention all readers, far and wide! Pardon my rashness, but this may be the best day of my life. This is not an exaggeration; how dare you accuse me of something so improper! The most staggering course of events has taken place on this very average day. No, I am not toying with you. When have I ever kidded about something so serious? I finally have a story! I tell you, this is the best day. Well, for me that is. Unfortunately, for poor little Archie, this has to be the worst day of his entire life.



The day was February 18th, 1741. Arthur Leed Nockman's thirteenth birthday. The village where the family resided was a small one. There were only a handful of children and they

all knew each other rather well. Arthur had missed each of them terribly. His days were so consumed with the farm, he hardly played anymore. Arthur's parents decided they would throw a grand celebration for their Special Archie's birthday.

Little did they know it would be their last day with their child.

The party was planned to be in the town square, under the grand oak tree Arthur loved to climb. As they were making their preparations the morning of, a peculiar fleet of men on great dark stallions rode into the village. Woodham Village never got many visitors, much less officials of the King. These men came dressed in their offensively decorated uniforms and wore pride on their faces like powder. The lively village fell silent as a grave when the fleet strolled down the main road. Bitter looks were cast upon them, but they were too high and mighty to notice. Archie didn't think much of them, he was far more interested in the preparations for his party. A party he would never make it to.

There was a hint of fear in his mother's crystal eyes as she studied the men herself. "Archie, let's go inside." Her warm hand pressed against his back as she pushed him and his little sister through the back door of their home. Papa arrived soon after and the family locked all their doors. He pulled off his hat and kissed his bride before whispering into her ear. Archie didn't hear what Papa mumbled to Mother, but I did.

"There is only one reason the King's officials are here."

"We don't know that, George."

Arthur couldn't help but peer through the windows as he heard them passing. He was dazzled by their red vests. He had always loved the color red, though he had never seen it in clothing before. Only in the wildflowers that sprinkle through the fields in the winter seasons. Arthur's boyish smile melted as one of the men dismounted and marched up to his neighbor's

house. Their thick fist pounded against the door. The moment Ol' William opened his home, the man stepped inside as if the house were his own.

The rest of the officers lingered out in the street, mounted on their magnificent stallions. Their eyes wandered from home to home until one man's gaze landed on Arthur.

He began to think peering through the window wasn't a good idea.

Only moments later did a deadly knock strike their own door. Papa was the one who opened it. Mother quickly gathered the children in the kitchen, till they were just out of the line of sight. The officer that stepped inside was so large, he filled the entire entranceway. Papa's neck cranked back as he said, "Good morning, sir."

"We are here in order of the King, on a critical and confidential matter. I order you to answer in complete candor to the following questions."

Papa hesitated but at last said, "Of course."

Papa had always been courageous.

You could hear it in his steady voice and see it in the way he held his dagger behind his back.

"Do you have any children?" The man asked plainly.

"Yes," Papa replied, a fresh fear in his voice.

He hadn't expected the question. He had thought the King sent for him regarding his multiple delayed tax submissions.

An attack on his household and business, he could handle.

An attack on his family, he could not.

Papa gripped his weapon tighter. "Why do you ask this?"

"Were any of them born on this day: February 18, 1728?"

Arthur's heart became a broken clock right then; ticking faster and faster, loosening the gears till his lungs nearly collapsed inside his chest. February 18, 1728, was Arthur Leed Nockman's birthday.

Papa kept his voice low, "Why do you ask this?"

Arthur felt the officer's boots rattle the floorboards as he stepped further inside their small home. Mother stopped breathing, in fear she may lead the man into the kitchen, where she lay, clutching her children to her chest.

Papa at last pulled his knife from behind his back and pointed it at the Kingsman's throat. "Leave my home, you are not welcome here."

As I said, he was courageous.

But it turns out, our little Arthur was braver. When the Kingsman swiftly raised his pistol at Papa, it was Arthur who wrestled from his mother's arms and cried, "Stop!" till the barrel was pointed at him. "Don't hurt my Papa. Please." He wasn't beneath begging. Arthur fell to his knees and tears ran down his cheeks. "Please."

The man looked down at him with not a hint of mercy.

He asked, "What is your birthdate, child?"

"Today." Arthur cried out till his vision blurred. "Today is my thirteenth birthday."

The fiendish look in the man's eyes is an image that stuck with Arthur till the day he died.

It all happened so quickly after that.

A shot rang out.

Arthur didn't see anyone drop, for he was the one who did.

Everything was darkness, blurred voices, and hot tears. He felt his mother's hands shaking him alive, but he couldn't speak to her. He couldn't tell her it was all going to be okay.

He felt his father's fury as he screamed out. And he heard his sister's small voices as he floated away from them.

“No! You can't take Archie! You can't take him!”

“Oh, my Special Archie. If only you knew...”



I am not sure how long we were in the darkness.

When Arthur was shot, I had respectfully drafted his conclusion, then patiently awaited my next baby's cry. You can imagine my confusion when it never came.

Arthur was alive, somehow. You see, even when a child goes into a state so close to death, we will not leave them until they reach the very end. And though I could not see Arthur, I could hear his unsteady heartbeat ringing through the abyss. My boy was alive.

My eyes opened before Arthur's did.

When I looked down on him, I could've convinced myself he was simply sleeping. But *that* was not rest. His little body twitched and jolted as he laid on that table. A thousand horrors raced behind his closed eyelids. He was fighting to survive. The bullet wound wasn't yet treated; it was red and angry.

You needn't see a doctor to know, he had mere minutes left.

I almost wish he hadn't survived, for the rest of his story was not one you could ever read to a child at night.



When he finally woke, I imagined he would be sluggish, lightheaded, dizzy maybe.

That was if he even woke at all.

But oh, how wrong was I.

Arthur came shooting up from the table like a broken spring. “Wh- where am I?” was the first thing he said before his mind began grasping for the memories.

He couldn’t remember much. Except for the red. The awful, awful red. It was the last thing his eyes saw before his world turned dark, silent, and oh so very cold.

“Where am I?” He asked again, his stutter morphing into tears. Panic, pain, and pure confusion mixed in his mind like a bad cocktail.

As he cried out, sharp pain snaked through his chest.

That’s when he remembered the rest.

The Kingsman, the bullet. His sister's cries dripping down his ears.

Each horrific memory was now overcome by the burning pain that festered in his chest.

He gathered the courage to look down.

I must have not paid mind in class when they taught us where the heart was. He had thought to himself. From what he could see, that was precisely where the bullet tore through him.

The wound looked awful. I rather not describe it to you though. It isn’t pleasant to read or to write. All you must know is that, against all odds, he was alive. And if it wasn’t for his heart beating so furiously inside his chest, Arthur wouldn’t have believed it either.

It wasn’t until the pain subsided that Arthur had a moment to take in his surroundings.

The rough stone walls,

the floor that was slick with blood,

and tables and tables and tables of children.

The image still horrifies me to this day.

Terror took the place of Arthurs' confusion. Anger stole away his pain. All that burned in his eyes now was pure hatred for the person responsible for this.

So many of them, lying motionless on tables.

So many of them, bleeding as horribly as Arthur.

So many of them, and yet, I hadn't sensed one other narrator.

My heart ached.

A cold draft blew through just then, bringing the metallic fragrance of fresh blood into Arthur's nose. Sliding off the table, he landed clumsily onto his feet. The room was unbearably quiet as he weaved through the tables, carefully pressing his hand onto the neck of each of them. I will never forget the desperate hope in his eyes as he searched for just one pulse.

Poor Arthur, I wish he hadn't. He didn't need to live with the memories of how it felt to touch their cold skin. To have to realize, one by one, that he was the only child alive in this awful, awful place.

Arthur loved to cry. He did so every time a flower wilted before he was able to present it to Mother. Every time he soiled a new shirt or fell asleep during a story that he wanted to hear the end of. I thought I had past the point of sympathy for him. I had seen him waste his tears too many times before. But never had I seen him like this. His tears were raw, tender, yet furious as he destroyed the silence.

His tears poured out for children he never knew.

Children as innocent as him.

Children born on February 18th, 1728.

I wish I could have talked to him just then. Let him know that he wasn't alone. Held him as he crumbled.

What? I may think the boy is ordinary, but I do have a heart. And although I wanted a story, I never wanted this. Arthur didn't deserve this. No one deserved this.

And as he shattered on that red floor, I set down my quill, and I wept too.



Some time passed. Arthur remained on the floor. His eyes still shedding tears. His face was still red and soggy. His heart was still the only one beating.



The door creaked open.

For a moment, Arthur's heart stopped beating too.

He didn't dare move from his place on the floor.

Smart boy.

A pair of square-toe shoes began clicking against the stone slab. *Click. Click. Click.*

Arthur's breathing went shallow as a dew pond. The man whom the shoes belonged to, bore a long white coat and a stern eye. His glasses slid up the bridge of his nose as he moved from child to child. The vile man had been purely calloused to the sight of death. He didn't as much as flinch when he knocked into one of the tables. "Excuse me." He whispered to the still child and continued on.

Arthur was sharp enough to creep underneath the nearest table. He hoped the man was a tall one so that the surface might conceal him.

He was not.

“From initial inspection, no survivors. Darcy, do check and make sure of it. Then send report at once—” That was when he saw the shadow of Arthur, spilling out from underneath the surface.

“Darcy, I seem to be mistaken.” The doctor bent down to scan Arthur with awe-filled eyes.

“Hello there.” His lips curled into a heinous smile.

Fury slammed in Arthur’s chest.

For once in his life, I truly didn't know what he would do next.

And that’s when our sweet, quiet, no-conflict Archie did the most outrageous thing. He drove his fist quick and hard into the only place he could reach. The place no man wanted to be punched.

And the very moment the doctor stumbled back, groaning out his pains, Arthur ran. Faster than I had ever seen him move.

Run, Archie, Run!

I like to imagine he heard me cheering him on as he disappeared out the wooden door.

After a stint of aimless running, Arthur ended up in the most extravagant, lavish hall one could dream of. But there was no time to marvel. His feet were bloody and bare, but sure-footed as he raced past the magnificent tapestries and gilded crown molding.

Arthur’s plan became simple in his mind.

Run. Run forever. Run until you are safe again. Run until you land back into Mother’s arms.

Run until you see the little white house on the top of the hill, glowing brightly as the sun sets behind it.

He never did make it back to that hill.

The problem with trying to escape the castle of the King was the guards that were stationed at every step you took. And although they didn't know who Arthur was, anyone with a brain and two eyes could see that he was not where he was supposed to be.

Arthur put up as much of a fight as he could.

The guards brought Archie all the way back to the awful doctor. He was about thirty yards behind, breathing heavily from his own failed attempt to chase Archie himself.

“That devil child!” The doctor hissed.

By Dr. Goede’s instruction, the guards chained Archie by the wrists and ankles, to keep him from running again, and dragged him into another room.

But this room was nothing like the last.

Arthur had never imagined what the King's throne room may of looked like. To him, nothing could be grandeur than his golden hill. But I must disagree. This room was laced with every form of art and luxury imaginable. Lavish paintings, stringed music, dazzling dancers who lined the walls, tapestries with sparkling thread, massive sculptures, and gold.

A great deal of gold.

King Benjamin sat high above us, sparkling like a god on a throne that glowed brighter than any chandelier. The guards brought Arthur forth. The King looked expectantly as the guards threw him to the ground. Arthur didn’t move or speak. He didn’t do anything at all.

He focused on balancing on his knee and remembering to breathe.

One by one, more children began appearing beside him. Arthur’s eyes counted one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Each of them with ghastly wounds that bled down their chests.

All of them, chained.

All of them, angry.

And all of them, very much *alive*.

“What's going on?” One of them screamed out. A girl with fire-red hair. Her question was ignored by every listening ear. The dancers kept dancing, the quartet played on, and the children kept bleeding. Their rage-filled eyes latched on the King.

Then, like a nightmare that keeps returning, Dr. Goede appeared.

“Your Majesty,” He announced before sinking into an embellished bow. “I have brought you Annabelle Wilson, Hugo Knight, Aalto Turner, Jasper Smith, Arthur Nockman, Leilani Hutt, Rufus Bancroft, and of course, your son William Frederick.”

The prince’s name made Archie take another look at the children who knelt beside him.

He had thought all of them bleeding, but in that moment, he noticed one had no wound at all. Not an ounce of blood or grim on his costly clothes. Yet, chained and thrown down just like the rest of them.

Arthur recognized his face.

It matched the one painted in oil that hung behind the King's throne.

He had known Prince William was close to his age. He hadn’t realized he was precisely his age. What could be so bad about a birthdate to make a father turn on his own son?

Arthur swallowed his fear down, hard.

But the others had different ideas. “Let us go, you coward!”

“We have done nothing wrong!”

“Who do you think you are? Chaining us up like animals!”

“Let us go home!”

Arthur and William were the only ones with the sense to stay quiet.

“Why do you even want us?” The red-haired girl screamed out. Her desperate voice was as strong as ever. Her eyes were wide and alert as if she was fully awake, though the dark circles

under her eyes betrayed her. And although she bore a wound that had destroyed her chest, she still had the strength to scream.

That's when it all fell into place in Arthur's mind.

He didn't understand much. Even to say he understood some was generous. But he understood enough for all his anger to melt back into fear. He spoke his realization out into the throne room.

"Because we can't die."

At his words, the children stopped their squalling, the dancers fumbled their steps, and the musicians lost their rhythm. Everything fell quiet, dreadfully quiet.

King Benjamin rose from his throne. "What is your name, child." His voice was as grand and imperious as the room around him.

Arthur attempted to mimic the depth and strength of Papa's voice, but his name came out more like a squeak. "Arthur."

The King descended the stairs that stood between them. "You are right, Arthur." The guards stiffened at their posts as the King approached the chained children. "However, there is much more you can do than not die." The words were spoken with venom in his throat. "Power is a delicate thing. It is easy to attain but hard to preserve. I have worked tirelessly in the span of my reign to preserve the balance of power in this kingdom." The King's heated glare burned into Archie's skin. "It's *creatures* like you who desecrate that balance."

Arthur kept his eyes on the marble floor. The metal cuffs ripped at his wrists. New blood ran down his fingers. He didn't know what he did to deserve this.

“I’ve never dared believe in the supernatural.” The King went on. “I never thought God would be so lenient to allow such abominations like yourselves roam his great green earth. But here you are.”

He drew a long breath before kneeling before his son. “Even my own son, soiled by the supernatural.” The King stoked his brown hair, his fingers covered in lavish gold rings. “I wish it could have been different, William. But it is not safe to have you in this kingdom. It isn’t safe to house any of you.”

The hatred written on the prince’s face was viscous. “You’re afraid.” William said through gritted teeth. “You are afraid of the fact that, crown or not, we are and will always be, more powerful than you.”

A crack of lightning. That was the sound that echoed through the throne room as the King slapped his boy across the cheek.

“You all are too young, foolish, to be trusted with such power.” The King hissed, standing back on his feet so he could look further down upon them.

“Well, you can’t kill us, Father.” His face stayed composed as he met the King’s gaze, but Arthur could feel the hate that boiled inside of him. “So, what is your grand plan?”

It was the kind of statement that wasn’t a statement at all.

Rather, a test. A threat. A warning.

The king scowl turned into a smile. “We are calling it the Isle of Creatures.”

A chill struck through Arthur’s veins.

“Fitting name, don’t you think? I came up with it myself.”

The King’s words were condemning and final as he explained their fate.

But Arthur was distant, hardly registering a single word.

“It's a permanent solution...”

Bits and pieces of sentences were all that made it into Arthur's ears.

“...You will never pollute this kingdom or this world with your curse.”

His mind was fogged with realities that were much harsher than the ones the King spoke.

He would never hear Father's voice again.

“...each of you will remain on this island until your very final breath.”

He would never feel Mother's warm hands again.

He would never laugh with his sisters again.

The cries of the children became all he could hear. They mauled his ears and broke my heart.

Oh, how Arthur wished he had never spoken. Never looked out that window. Never rushed out of Mother's arms. He wished he had never been born.

No, he ordered his own thoughts back into line. He refused to wish that he was never born. He had so many people he loved. So many people who loved him. And had loved his life. All the little things about it that made it so beautiful.

Over the symphony of sorrow, his mother's voice rang through his ears like a promise.

“Oh, my Special Archie. If only you knew...”

Her last words to him.

The world had turned dark before he could hear the rest of what she had said.

But I heard her.

Her tear-filled voice cried out as the Kingsman carried him far, far away.

“Oh, my special Archie. If only you knew all the power that's inside of you.”



I hate to leave you on such a low note, but do not fret. Arthur's story is far, far, *far* from over. In fact, it may never end.

As always, Arthur has been able to find joy in the littlest of places. He has found family in the ragtag group of children who are just as unlucky as him. And every time the darkness tries to close in, he continues to choose hope, even though he has every reason not to.

Arthur has taught me there is nothing wrong with being ordinary. And even if it I will never get to write a different story again, it's an honor to be his narrator. It's an honor to walk by his side through life. It's an honor to write his never-ending story.