



THE **RITUAL**

QREADS

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A story about the football team?" Terrell snorted with disgust. "They haven't even started playing yet! That's a crummy idea—zero interest. Print that in the paper and I guarantee you that people are gonna be yawning after the first sentence. Nobody's going to read *The Eagle* with stories like that. They're going to use our school newspaper to wipe up after their dog!"

"Would you hush for two seconds?" said the boy named Booth. "There's this freshman coming in who's supposed to be really good. You get to interview him."

"Oh, goody!" Terrell said in a sarcastic, high voice. "I'm really honored. And what do

you get to cover, Boo?”

“I don’t know yet,” Booth answered.

“If this freshman was such a hot story—like you say—you’d cover it yourself. You’re passing me the scut-work, Boo-Boo,” Terrell complained.

“Don’t call me that!” Boo said. “The reason I’m not covering it is because I’m on the team. It’s a conflict thing.”

“A conflict *of interest*, genius,” said Terrell. “How come you get to be editor this year when you’ve got zip for brains?”

Just then the bell rang, and students began streaming out of the room.

Boo leaned close to Terrell. “You have got to watch your mouth around me, man. I mean it. I’m not someone you want to mess with,” he said.

“I’m scared to death,” said Terrell.

Suddenly, each boy felt a hand on his shoulder. Ms. Baird, the journalism teacher, had a way of getting right next to you before you even saw her coming. “Terrell, stop provoking Booth—*now*,” she said. “Booth,

you keep your hands off Terrell. Is that clear, you two?"

"Yes, ma'am," they answered.

"Good," said Ms. Baird. "Now go on to lunch, boys."

Terrell was still simmering when he and his friend Shanelle had lunch on the stadium bleachers.

"Why is Boo the head honcho of everything?" said Terrell. "Okay, he's captain of the football team. This actually makes sense because he's big—and nothing's going to injure his brain. Know why? Because it's missing in the first place! But how come he gets to be editor of the school paper?"

Shanelle smiled. "You just can't stand taking orders from him," she said, peeling an orange.

"That's not it. Booth Bellamy cannot *write!*" said Terrell. "Did you see that dumb article he wrote about the student council last year? It stunk! Oh, man, I can do so much better!"

"Look," said Shanelle. "As long as Mr.

Bellamy's the principal, Junior's gonna be telling you what to do. So why don't you just go along with it? Do your interview and make it ten times better than whatever Boo writes!"

"Right," said Terrell. "You're right."

"Of course I'm right," said Shanelle. "You just keep telling yourself you're gonna be a professional journalist. And Boo's gonna end up doing something boring, like selling used auto parts."

"Auto parts!" said Terrell. "That's a good one. I like that."



After school, Terrell hurried to the locker room. He wanted a quick interview with the freshman before practice got started. The room was crowded with piles of shoulder pads and jerseys, boxes of shoes, and boys. Coach Nesbitt was tearing open a brand new carton of shiny, white kneepads.

"Where's Dylan Frye?" Terrell asked a player who was trying on a helmet.

The player glanced over at Boo. “Uh—I think he’s out sick today.”

Terrell marched over to Boo. “What happened to Frye?” he asked.

“Frye’s off the team,” Boo said. “You need to pick someone else.”

“Why?” said Terrell.

“’Cause he’s a wuss, that’s why,” Boo snapped. His face looked hard and mean. “Interview one of the other guys.”

“You can’t just order me around like that, Boo-Boo. Not without giving me a good reason,” Terrell said.

Boo grabbed Terrell’s shoulder and squeezed. “What did you just say to me?”

“Bellamy!” Coach Nesbitt yelled. “Knock it off. And you—” he jerked his head at Terrell “—*out!*”

Terrell took off. As soon as he was out of the locker room, he rubbed his shoulder. It really hurt.

In a few minutes Terrell got Frye’s number from the registrar’s office. Dylan’s mother answered the phone.

“Hello, ma’am. This is Terrell Mathis, from school. Is Dylan there?” he said.

“I’m sorry, he’s asleep now,” she said.

“Oh, is he doing okay?” he said.

“Well, he’s in a lot of pain,” she said.

“Wow, that’s terrible,” said Terrell. “How’d it happen?”

“Well, he says he fell off his bike coming home from school last night,” she said. “A freak accident, I guess. But I can’t imagine how he managed to crack a rib falling off a bike,” she added.

Terrell heard doubt in her voice. After telling her he’d call back, he went back to the registrar’s office and got a list of all the new players. That night, he sat down by the phone and started calling them, one by one. The first was Henry Lewis.

“Hi, Henry?” said Terrell, when Henry picked up the phone.

“Yeah,” Henry answered.

“This is Terrell Mathis. I’m a reporter from *The Eagle*. First of all I want to welcome you to McClemonds High and congratulate

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