

A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a person's face. The person's eyes are completely blacked out, and their mouth is wide open, showing their teeth. The skin is a warm, reddish-orange color, and the overall image has a grainy, textured appearance. The word "BLACKOUT" is superimposed in large, bold, black capital letters across the middle of the face.

BLACKOUT

QREADS

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Brevin McCoy was on a roll. He was earning great sales commissions at a fine men's clothing store and taking college classes at night. Just recently, he'd moved into his own apartment. His life couldn't have been better—until the night of Nealy Hamm's party.

Anything and everything was happening there. As the action got wilder, Brevin felt like going home. It really wasn't his kind of scene at all. But he had stayed. Then someone slipped a dangerous designer drug into his soda, and he'd ended up in the emergency room. The aftereffects had been serious—*very* serious. In fact, they ended

Brevin's life as he had known it. He had spent two months in a convalescent hospital, going through terrifying flashbacks almost every day.

Now he was back living in his parents' house—his job gone, his car about to be repossessed. He was 20 years old and starting over again. He might as well be 18 and fresh out of high school.

Worst of all, a lot of people in the neighborhood were calling him 'Wacko McCoy' behind his back. That night at the party, he'd gone ballistic. It had taken three paramedics to restrain him. So now he was the butt of snide jokes. And since he got home, he hadn't heard a word from his girlfriend, Alyssa.

Brevin went to the phone to call her. He figured he'd probably get the answering machine again. It seemed to be Alyssa's way of avoiding him.

But this time Alyssa answered. Brevin couldn't believe how nervous he felt. Before the drug episode, he had always been so self-confident. Now his voice came out an

octave higher than normal. “Hi, Alyssa,” he stammered. “This is Brevin. Would you—uh—like to catch a movie tonight? If you’ve got other plans, that’s all right—but, hey, if you aren’t doing anything, you know—” Brevin got ready for the rebuff that he was sure was coming.

But Alyssa sounded friendly. “Hi, Brev. I’m just doing a crossword puzzle,” she said. “I’d love to get out to a movie.”

Brevin broke out in a big smile. This was the first good thing that had happened to him since he got home from the convalescent home.



Alyssa was ready and waiting when Brevin got there. She looked beautiful in her white slacks and red pullover. He’d half-forgotten how great-looking she was. “Hey, it’s really good to see you, girl,” Brevin said, giving her an awkward little hug.

“I missed you, too, Brevin,” Alyssa said sweetly. “It’s been a long time.”

“I called you a couple of times,” Brevin began, but then he was sorry for even bringing that up. He didn’t want to fault Alyssa for being cautious. He knew there was a lot of talk about him being crazy.

“My schedule has been just frantic,” Alyssa said. “Grandma got sick and was in the hospital, and then I had to have a wisdom tooth pulled. But everything has settled down now. What about you, Brevin? Got a job yet?”

“I have some good leads,” Brevin said. But that wasn’t quite true. He was angling for a couple of going-nowhere jobs he wouldn’t have even considered before all this happened.

“That’s good,” Alyssa said cheerfully. “You’re looking fine, Brevin.”

“Thanks,” Brevin said. “You look terrific.”

“I’m so glad you’re better,” Alyssa said. “Whoever put that drug in your drink ought to be in jail. What a creepy, evil thing to do! I never did trust that Nealy Hamm and his crowd of losers.”

“Yeah. That drug really messed with my mind,” Brevin said.

Alyssa nodded sympathetically. “Boy, after what happened to you, I’m not drinking *anything* at a party that doesn’t come out of a sealed bottle!”

“Good idea,” Brevin said, slowing for a pedestrian who was darting across the street. Then he spotted some of his old high school acquaintances on a street corner. They were the kind of guys who liked to bring other people down. To really get going, all they needed was a poor freshman who’d broken out in zits. They’d make his life *miserable!*

“Hey,” Donnie Baker shouted when Brevin stopped his car for the light. “Alyssa—ain’t you scared riding with Wacko McCoy? From what I hear, ol’ Brev could freak out anytime.”

Brevin looked straight ahead and pretended he didn’t hear Donnie’s insult.

“Don’t mind fools like that,” Alyssa said. “Mama always says that empty wagons make the most noise.” She flipped on the radio just

as the 6:00 P.M. news came on.

“Here’s an update on Janice Revere, the popular Bethune High teacher who was attacked yesterday evening,” the news reporter said.

Alyssa and Brevin stared at each other. *“Our Ms. Revere?”* Brevin gasped.



Janice Revere was the best-loved teacher at Bethune High. No matter what the situation was, she was always on the kids’ side.

The news report described what had happened. Ms. Revere was alone in her classroom, correcting papers late yesterday afternoon. Then a masked intruder appeared out of nowhere. He had quickly overpowered her, bound her mouth, hands, and feet with duct tape, and terrorized her for almost an hour.

“Thank God she wasn’t hurt,” Brevin said. “She’s the coolest teacher I ever met.”

“I bet she’s hurt psychologically real bad,”

Alyssa said. “Sometimes people never get over something like that!”

Brevin broke into a cold sweat. Since the drug overdose, he’d been having some terrifying nightmares. Yesterday afternoon, while he was taking a nap, he’d dreamed about Ms. Revere. She was in some kind of terrible trouble and Brevin was desperately trying to help her—but he couldn’t.

How strange! Just when he was having that awful dream, something bad really *was* happening to the teacher!

The doctors had told Brevin that his scary dreams were side effects of the drug he took. But they assured him that the dreams would gradually taper off.

As Brevin pulled into the parking lot of the movie theater, a horrible thought occurred to him. Was there even a remote possibility that he had awakened during yesterday’s nightmare? Maybe, like a sleep walker, he had made his way down the street toward Bethune High School. While still in the grip of the hallucination, could *he* have

been the person who harmed Ms. Revere?

Could that drug have indeed turned Brevin McCoy into a madman? Surely, he reasoned desperately, the doctors would have warned him if such a thing were possible!

Wouldn't they?

Brevin was glad the movie they had chosen was a comedy. For a couple of hours, it helped him forget about what had happened to Ms. Revere. Brevin had an especially warm spot in his heart for the dedicated teacher. Her patient tutoring had gotten him through science class and enabled him to graduate.

After the movie, Brevin and Alyssa stopped at a taco stand. Two girls who were a year behind them at Bethune High worked there. Brevin remembered that they had both played soccer on Bethune's championship team.

"Did you hear what happened to Ms. Revere?" Alyssa asked red-headed Judy Carson.

"Yeah," Judy said. "We just heard about it on the radio."

Judy looked at Brevin then. “Oh, hi, Brevin. Are you—uh—okay now?”



Sure, I’m okay,” Brevin said. Lucy Arthur, the other girl, looked at him suspiciously. She stared at Brevin as if he might freak out at any moment.

As Brevin and Alyssa walked away, Brevin heard Judy say, “I heard they had to keep him in a straitjacket!”

“Wow!” Lucy giggled.

Brevin and Alyssa carried their tacos and sodas to a booth. “Brevin,” Alyssa said, patting his hand, “Don’t let kids like that bother you. They’re horrible gossips. Remember when we were at Bethune? Poor Ms. Revere tried so hard to bring their grades up—but all they wanted to do was gossip and pass notes. Those two are real losers. That’s why they got kicked off the soccer team.”

“Yeah, but they’re only saying what most of the other people around here are thinking. I really lost it that night at the party, Alyssa.