



**⚠ WARNING:**  
MATURE CONTENT

# BLACKOUT

**Q**READS

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**B**revin 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 something 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 target 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 her voicemail 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 everything happened, 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 what had happened with him.

"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 good, Brevin."

"Thanks," Brevin said. "You look terrific."

"I'm so glad you're better," Alyssa said. "Whoever put something in your drink ought to be in jail. What an awful thing to do! I never did trust that Nealy Hamm and his crowd of friends."

“Yeah. Whatever was in that drink 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 turned 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.



**J**anice 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, grading 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.”

# QREADS

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 **SADDLEBACK**  
EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING  
[www.sdlback.com](http://www.sdlback.com)

ISBN: 978-1-61651-190-6

