

THE ACCUSER



QUICKREADS

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Donyell Mason had always looked up to his big brother, Ricky. Not that Ricky was some kind of angel. When things didn't go his way, the tough 20-year-old could be mean. But to Donyell, two years younger, Ricky was pretty much a personal hero. Nobody pushed Donyell around if Ricky had anything to say about it. And he always did.

Nobody pushed Ricky around, either—at least not until big Beau Patterson came along. Ricky was bigger than most guys, but Beau outweighed him by 50 pounds or more. And Beau was a dirty fighter.

Last week Ricky said that Beau had been getting in his face and hassling him. Donyell

was startled to hear that. He had never seen such a look of pure hatred on his brother's face.



Now it was late on a Monday night, and Ricky wasn't home yet. Ricky was a good mechanic. He worked long hours at the A-1 Garage, but it was unusual when he wasn't in by 11:00.

Donyell finally went to bed in the room he shared with his brother, but he couldn't get to sleep. Maybe Beau had waylaid his brother and tried to rob him. Maybe Ricky was lying hurt in some alley right now.

Suddenly the door opened and Donyell stiffened. It always irked Ricky when Donyell worried about him, so Donyell pretended to be asleep. But he listened for the familiar sounds Ricky made when he came home. He needed assurance that everything was all right.

When it was late like this, Ricky always took a quick shower and came right to bed.

But tonight was different. Ricky showered for a long time. Then Donyell heard a garbage bag rustling. Finally, Ricky came into the bedroom. Donyell peered at his brother in the darkness and almost cried out.

Ricky's face was badly bruised and bloodied. He looked like he'd been in a terrible fight! Stifling the gasp on his lips, Donyell watched Ricky climb stiffly into bed. The poor guy was hurting all over. He groaned, as if any movement brought pain. After a while, he finally seemed to fall asleep.

When Donyell was sure his brother was asleep, he quietly got out of bed. He went to the bathroom and found Ricky's wet T-shirt hanging over the tub. Then Donyell followed a trail of blood drops to the trash container in the kitchen. He opened the garbage bag wadded up on top and saw that Ricky's jeans and shoes were bloody.

"Oh, man, something *bad* happened," Donyell whispered to himself.

Then the kitchen door slammed open and

Ricky was glaring at his kid brother. “What’re you doing, you little creep? Spying on me?”

“No,” Donyell sputtered. “I was just worried when you came home so late. Then I heard funny sounds and—uh— things just didn’t seem right.”

“Go on back to bed, Don. Forget all this—you hear what I’m saying? You didn’t see anything and you didn’t hear anything. Understand?” Ricky growled. “It was an accident. I stumbled into an old Chevy I was fixing and got messed up. I cut myself, okay?”

“Sure, okay,” Donyell mumbled.

But of course it wasn’t okay at all. It wasn’t anything like okay.



Donyell was taking a graphic arts class at the local community college. He had to get up early even though he hadn’t had much sleep. As usual, he gulped his breakfast and ran out to catch the early bus to school. Another guy from the neighborhood was taking classes at City College, too. Donyell

and Jerry Kelton had been friends since grade school. They usually sat together on the bus. Donyell was a good-looking guy and a pretty fair athlete. Jerry was a short, skinny kid with thick glasses and a bad case of acne.

“What’s going down, buddy?” Jerry called out when Donyell arrived at the bus stop. Jerry looked a little more nervous than usual. He was fidgeting with his baseball cap, turning it around every which way before he settled it on his head with the bill down the back of his neck. He was always trying to look tough—but he was like a fuzzy little kitten trying to look like a wildcat.

“Nothing much,” Donyell said. But he needed information. He wanted to talk to somebody, to fish for news of a possible fight last night. “I heard there was some trouble on the street last night. You hear anything like that, Jerry?”

“Huh? Like gangbangers, you mean?” Jerry asked.

“I don’t know. I just heard something about a fight,” Donyell said. He didn’t want

to say too much. Maybe Ricky and a pal were just playing around and it got out of hand. A good fistfight can bloody noses pretty fast.

Jerry sat down on the bench beside Donyell. “Yeah, I heard something was going on, all right. It was probably some of those guys who only come out when the sun don’t shine. They’re like rats—you hear what I’m saying? Those guys are bad news.”

“What guys are you talking about?” Donyell asked nervously.

Jerry turned his head sharply. “I don’t know. How should I know? I don’t mess with anybody. I learned that lesson a long time ago.”



Donyell knew what his friend was saying. Jerry had always been a scared, little guy. In middle school he often went hungry because it was so easy for bigger, meaner kids to get his lunch money. All it took was a threat to flatten his nose; Jerry always paid. Donyell understood how that went. When he

was in middle school the same thing could easily have happened to him. But Ricky always stood up for him. Jerry never had a protector.

“I wonder what really happened last night,” Donyell went on as they boarded the bus.

“How should I know?” Jerry said again, a flash of anger in his eyes. “What do you think I am—a cop?”

At Fourth and Aspen, Donyell noticed that the street was roped off with yellow crime scene tape. A few seats back on the bus, a girl said to her friend, “Look—that’s where it happened. Right there on the corner is where Beau Patterson died last night.”

Donyell couldn’t breathe. He felt like somebody had hit him in the stomach with a two-by-four.



Donyell and Jerry got off at the next stop. “Jerry, did you hear that girl talking?” Donyell blurted out. “She said

Beau Patterson is *dead!*”

“You want me to cry or something?” Jerry shot back. “That dude was no friend of mine. He bullied everybody. I’m *glad* he won’t be around anymore.”

“You knew about it already, didn’t you?” Donyell asked in surprise.

“Yeah. There was something on the radio this morning,” Jerry said.

“How come you didn’t tell me? How come you acted so stupid when I asked if you knew anything about a fight last night?” Donyell demanded.

“Man,” Jerry said, “I didn’t know about a *fight*. I just heard they found a dead guy on Aspen. Then the man next door told me it was Beau Patterson. Maybe he got hit by a garbage truck. How should I know?”

Donyell’s mind was in turmoil as he walked alone to his art class. He didn’t think Beau was hit by any garbage truck. The odds were that he was killed in a fight. And from the looks of Ricky last night, *he’d* been in a fight, too. Maybe both of them had been in

the same fight.

Class was already in session when Donyell took his seat. He tried to concentrate on the computer. The whole class was working on a series of color graphics for a model advertising campaign. Eventually, Donyell hoped to work for a company that made print and television commercials. But as hard as he tried to concentrate, Ricky's battered face kept coming back to him. And he couldn't stop thinking about the bloody shoes and pants in the garbage bag.



When Donyell got home from school, the apartment was empty. Ricky was probably at work. He made pretty good money at the garage. He could do mechanical work as skillfully as his boss, who was twice his age. The boss, Mr. Kenyon, had told Ricky that he was the best young mechanic that had ever worked for him. He had a great future.

Two years earlier, the boys' mother had