

Growing Up  
Story by Jesse McDaniel

It's been two days and they still couldn't find Jaxson. Arleen and Lawrence grew increasingly worried. At this point, Lawrence could care less about the basketball game he missed; he just wanted to find his older brother. Arleen feared that Jaxson was gone forever. She was used to Jaxson coming and going, but this time, it was different. The street life was something that was foreign to Lawrence, but he knew it well enough to understand that Jaxson was in danger.

After another two days of gathering clues, driving around, and contacting anyone who might've known or seen Jaxson, Lawrence and Arleen's hope turned to doubt. There have not been any leads. *When a black person went missing in Harlem, there was little chance that law enforcement would get involved. Most cops were afraid to go to the neighborhood where Jaxson and Lawrence were from, so Arleen was thankful to have the support of Officer Derek.* A lot of people knew the Crenshaw family because Lawrence was a rising basketball star in the community. He was the king of the court anywhere he played at. He even led his high school to a title game. So, when Jaxson went missing, bet the entire city knew about it.

Lawrence and Arleen found themselves sitting next to each other on their worn-down couch. Both sweaty and tired, they both knew they were participating in a waiting game. After several moments of silence, the phone started ringing. Lawrence jumped up from the couch, almosting hitting his head on the ceiling. He ran over to the phone and picked it up like a loose ball.

"Lawrence, this is Scott West, a scout from Georgetown University. How are you today?" The man asked.

Lawrence inhaled deeply, "I am alright. Been going through some things, but I am staying strong."

"Good to hear it", the man continued, "I heard about your brother. I think it's terrible that he hasn't been found yet. I have a brother and I can only imagine losing him. Anyway, it's too bad you weren't there to help your team celebrate the big win the other day. They definitely would not have gotten to the title game without you and that is why I am calling you today. I attended a few of your regular season games and I think you will be a perfect fit for our team. I just need to ask a few questions in person to finalize my offer. What do you think?"

Before Scott could finish, Lawrence cimed in, "Yes... of course. It has been a dream of mine to play college ball and get my degree."

Lawrence turned back to Arleen while holding his hand over the phone, "mama... I am going to make it!"

Arleen jumped up and started clapping, "my baby's playing ball. I can't believe it. My baby's playing ball!" For a small moment, there seemed to be better times ahead. It was nice to see Arleen light up during this dark time.

Lawrence turned back to the phone and focused on Scott's voice, "All I need is your address and we can start the interview process tomorrow. Let's say 7 tomorrow night?"

"Sounds good to me. See you at 7. Thank you, Scott." Lawrence responded. Once Lawrence hung up the phone, he walked over to Arleen and gave her a hug. They sat back

down and the focus shifted quickly back to Jaxson. Arleen's excitement turned to worry within moments. Lawrence looked over at his mother and grabbed her hand, "we will find him, mom. I promise."

The next day came. Time seemed to be going fast. Day quickly turned to night and 7 o'clock was approaching. Lawrence and Arleen barely moved the entire day. They spent a majority of the day watching the news. It was 6:45 p.m as their eyes stayed glued on the television. A news story was running about the recent gang activities happening in the streets of Harlem.

"Harlem has seen a spike in gang activity. There have been 20 homicides in the last month. Over 40 people have been kidnapped. Some say it is due to the influx of drugs entering the neighborhoods. How did it get here? No one knows. All I know is that we should all be working to keep these illegal activities off the streets", a voice came from the screen.

Lawrence turned to Arleen, "Do you think that somebody... you know... hurt Jaxson?"

Before Arleen could answer, she was interrupted by a knock on the door.

She cleared her throat and said, "Hey, Scott must be here".

Lawrence walked to the door and opened it.

*BAM*

The man had cocked his fist back and punched Lawrence in the face, knocking him to the ground. Lawrence looked up and noticed that the man looked just like the one who confronted him at Rucker prior to Jaxson's disappearance. It definitely wasn't Scott, the recruiter. Lawrence confirmed his suspicion when he noticed the man's thinly-trimmed mustache and brown du-rag.

The man looked down at Lawrence and gave him a cheeky smile, "Remember me?" Thinking quickly, Lawrence sprung up and gave the man a push, knocking him out of the doorway. After about 20 seconds of wrestling, Lawrence found himself on his back with the man on top of him.

The husky man had his hands wrapped around Lawrence's neck, "I know you remember me and that's why I must finish what I started!"

The man's hands squeezed tighter and just before Lawrence was about to pass out, he heard a *Smack* that left the man's body limp on his. Lawrence moved the man's body off his and saw Arleen standing there with her prized Jar that she kept next to the door.

"Are you okay, Lawrence? What a fucking dick!". Arleen continued, "Do you know this guy?"

Lawrence nodded his head up and down as he could not speak. Arleen reached her hand in the man's pocket and grabbed his wallet. She noticed that there were two I.D.s in his wallet: one reading, Devon Wright and the other, Jaxson Brown.

After Arleen helps Lawrence drag the man's unconscious body into their apartment, they place him on the couch. Both of them were shaking their heads back and forth in disbelief.

Lawrence looked at Arleen, "this guy knows where Jaxson is. I mean, why would he have his I.D.?"

A single tear fell from Arleen's eye, "I don't know, Lawrence. We need to call the police and tell them what happened."

Lawrence ran over to the phone and dialled 911. After a few rings, a man answered,

“Hello! Hi! A man just tried to kill me. He knows where my brother, Jaxson, is. Please send help.”

The voice responded, “and how do you know that?”

“We went through his wallet and found his I.D. He also had Jaxson’s I.D. as well. The man’s name is Devon Wright”.

“Devon Wright?!” the voice sounded surprised. “We have been looking for him for a while now. He has been a prominent figure in the gang community and on Harlem’s most-wanted. He is responsible for many crimes. We just haven’t been able to catch him.”

“Well, we have him here. Come before he wakes up.”

“Wait... you knocked him out?”

“Not me, but my mom. Just come!”

“On our way,” the voice trailed off.

Lawrence hung up the phone and looked over at the man on the couch. At this point, he has been out for 10 minutes now. Arleen whacked him pretty good, but the man started moving over and groaning. The man started to come to and become aware. He tried to get up. Knowing how dangerous the man was, Lawrence didn’t think twice to pick up his basketball and throw it at his head. The basketball bounced off his head and the man retreated back to his unconscious state.

After about 15 minutes, two officers arrived at the apartment. They opened the door and to their surprise, they found the suspect squirming on the couch. Arleen and Lawrence tied the man’s hands and feet. Lawrence walked over to the two officers and noticed that one of the officers was the officer who initially helped with Jaxson’s disappearance, Officer Derek.

“How are you doing, buddy?”

“Better now,” Lawrence responded.

“Good. Now let’s shake this guy down and find out where Jaxson is at,” the two officers look over at the struggling man.

“Hey. Devon, we have a few questions for you,” officer Derek started. “We heard that you know where Jaxson is.”

The other officer chimed in, “Actually, we know you know exactly where he is. Why would you have his I.D.?”

“And why would I tell you, Mr. Cop?,” Devon ended his question with a groan.

“Because if you don’t, you will never see the light of day again,” the officer answered.

“Up yours, ho”

“Alright, if you want to dance, then we will dance,” Officer Derek looked over at Lawrence and gave him a wink.

Before Devon knew it, he had another basketball flying at his head.

*BAM*

Not before long, Devon talked. After he confessed, he was now sitting in the back of a cop car heading to the jail. His make-shift constraints were now steel handcuffs. As the one officer took Devon to be booked, the other, Officer Derek, drove Lawrence and Arleen to Brownsville, where Devon said Jaxson was. Brownsville was one of the more dangerous neighborhoods, where it was rare to see a police officer. Because Lawrence and Arleen have been challenged in life, this scenario did not phase them.

“Devon said he would be here,” Officer Derek pointed at a run-down house with half a fence around a concrete slab.

Sweat was rolling from Arleen and Lawrence’s forehead. They were nervous, but excited: an emotion they seldom felt.

“What are we waiting for?,” Lawrence blurted out.

“He will come out in three...two...one,” Officer Derek called it.

As he said “one,” the door swung open and two people ran out the door: one with a bag over his head and the other, without.

“And... now!,” Officer Derek opened his door and hit a sprint. Within 10 seconds, he tackled the runners.

He was grabbing both of them, trying to cuff them. He looked back at Lawrence and waved him over.

“Hey! Grab me some cuffs”.

Lawrence sprinted over to the men and handed Officer Derek the cuffs. Officer Derek thought he needed two pairs of cuffs, but it turns out he only needed one. After he cuffed up the exposed man, he pulled the bag off the other man’s head. It was Jaxson. It is almost like they knew the Officer Derek was coming, so they tried to relocate Jaxson. Lawrence, Arleen, and the officer came just in time, mid transferring.

Lawrence looked down at Jaxson, “Brother, we came for you. We love you and miss you. I am so glad you’re safe”.

Jaxson looked up, “I’m so sorry, Lawrence. I was trying my best to be better, to be something. I should have been better”.

With tears in his eyes, Lawrence stuck out his hand and offered to help Jaxson up, “It’s over, Jaxson. Come home”.

As Jaxson stood up, he was now in the view of Arleen. She let out a huge cry and ran to Jaxson. At this moment, Lawrence, Arleen, and Jaxson were together again. They were hugging each other like they never had before. Arleen was so relieved that she couldn’t talk.

Jaxson knew what she was going to ask him, so without him hearing the question, he answered, “Yes, I will come home. You saved me. You saved me from myself, from this dangerous life, from this cruel world.”

Arleen didn’t say a word and just kept hugging her boys.

After another minute, Arleen looked at Jaxson, “Jaxson, don’t put me through that ever again.”

With tears in his eyes, Jaxson looked at both Arleen and Lawrence, “I won’t. I promise. Now, let’s go home.”