

## ON THE SIDEWALK BLEEDING

BY Evan Hunter

The boy lay bleeding in the rain. He was sixteen years old. He wore a bright purple silk jacket. Across the back were the words, THE ROYALS. The boy's name was Andy. The name was written with thin black thread in the front of the jacket. It was just over the heart, Andy.

He had been stabbed ten minutes ago. The knife had entered just below his ribs. It had torn a wide gap in his flesh. He lay on the sidewalk. The March rain washed away the blood from his open wound. He had known pain when the knife had torn across his body. Then a little relief came when the blade was pulled away.

He had heard a voice saying, "That's for you Royall!" He heard footsteps hurry away in the rain. Then he had fallen to the sidewalk. Holding his stomach, he had tried to stop the blood.

He tried to yell for help, but he had no voice. It was raining harder. There was an open hole in his body and his life ran red. It was 11:30 PM, but he did not know the time.

There was another thing he did not know. He did not know he was dying. He lay on the sidewalk and he thought only: THAT WAS A FIERCE RUMBLE. THEY GOT ME GOOD THAT TIME. But he did not know he was dying. He would be frightened had he known. He wished he could call for help. But there was only a bubble of blood when he opened his mouth to speak. He lay and waited, waited for someone to find him.

He could hear the sound of car tires far away.

He wondered if Laura would be angry.

He had left to get a pack of cigarettes. He had told her he would be back in a few minutes. He had gone

downstairs and found the drug store closed. He knew that Alfredo's on the next block would be open. He had started through the alley. Then they had jumped him. He could hear the faint sound of music now. He wondered if Laura was dancing, wondering if she missed him. Maybe she thought he wasn't coming back. Maybe she had left and gone home. He thought of her face, the brown eyes, the black hair. Thinking of her he forgot his pain a little. He forgot that the blood was rushing from his body.

Someday he would marry Laura. They would get out of this neighborhood. They would move to a clean place and have kids.

He heard footsteps at the other end of the alley. He lifted his cheek from the sidewalk and tried to call out.

The man came down the alley. He had not seen Andy yet. He walked, leaned against the building, and then walked again. He saw Andy and came toward him. He stood over him, watching him and not speaking.

Then he said, "What's the matter, buddy?"

Andy could not speak. He could barely move. He lifted his face a little. Then he smelled alcohol and knew the man was drunk.

Then man was smiling.

"Did you fall down, Buddy?" he asked. "you mus' be as drunk as I am" He grinned.

It was 11:40.

The man studied Andy. "You gonna catch cold here," he said. "What's the matter? You like layin' in the wet?"

What time of day is it? Could the drunk tell the difference between the blood and rain puddles?

Andy could not answer. The man tried to focus his eyes on Andy's face. The man squatted beside Andy. "You like a drink?"

Andy shook his head.

"Nevermind," the man said. "You're too young to be drinkin' anyway. Should be 'shamed of yourself. Drunk and layin' in a alley, all wet. Shame on you. I gotta good minda calla cop."

Andy nodded. Yes, he tried to say. Yes, call a cop. Please call one.

"Oh, you don't like that, huh?" the drunk said. "You don' wanna cop to find you all drunk an' wet in a alley? Okay, buddy. This time you get off easy." He got to his feet. "This time you lucky," he said. He waved at Andy. "S'long buddy," he said.

Wait, Andy thought. Wait, please. I'm bleeding.

"S'long," the drunk said again. "I see you aroun'." Then he went off down the alley.

Andy lay there and thought, Laura, Laura. Are you dancing?

A couple came into the alley. They were running from the rain. The girl had a newspaper over her head. Andy lay and watched them run into the alley laughing. They stood in a doorway, not far from him.

"Man, what rain!" the boy said. "You could drown out there."

"I have to get home," the girl said. "It's late, Freddie. I have to get home."

There was a long silence. Then the girl said "Oh." Andy knew she had been kissed. He wondered if he would kiss Laura again. It was then he wondered if he was dying.

No, he thought, I can't be dying. Not from a little street rumble. Guys get cut up all the time. I can't be dying. No, that's stupid. That don't make any sense at all.

"I love you, Angela," the boy said.

"I love you, too, Freddie," the girl said. Andy listened and thought: I love you, Laura. Laura, this is stupid, but I think maybe I'm dying.

He tried not to speak. He tried not to move. Finally a grunt came from his lips.

"What was that?" the girl said. "Go look, Freddie."

Freddie stepped into the alley. He walked over to where Andy lay on the ground. He stood over him, watching him.

"You all right?" he asked. He knelt beside Andy. "You cut?"

Andy nodded. The boy saw THE ROYALS on the jacket then. He turned to Angela.

"He's a Royal," he said.

"What should we do, Freddie?"

"I don't know. He's a Royal. We help him, and the Guardians will be after us. I don't want to get mixed up in this Angela."

"Is he - is he hurt bad?"

"Yeah, it looks that way."

"We can't leave him here in the rain." Angela waited. "Can we?"

"If we get a cop, the Guardians will find out who," Freddie said. "I don't know, Angela, I don't know."

Angela waited a long time before she spoke. Then she said, "I have to get home, Freddie. My folks will begin to worry."

"Yeah," Freddie said. He looked at Andy again. "You all right?" he asked. Andy lifted his face from the sidewalk. His eyes said, Please, please help me. Maybe Freddie read what his eyes were saying. Maybe he didn't.

Behind him, Angela said, "Freddie, let's get out of here! Please!" Her voice was near panic. Freddie stood up. He looked at Andy once more. "I'm sorry," he said. Then he took Angela's arm. Together they ran toward the far end of the alley.

Why, there're afraid of the Guardians, Andy thought with surprise. But why should they be afraid? I wasn't afraid of the Guardians. I went to every rumble

with the Guardians. I got hurt, and I'm bleeding.

The rain felt good somehow. It was cold rain. But his body was hot all over. The rain helped to cool him. He had always liked rain. He could remember sitting in Laura's house one time. He looked out the window and watched people run from the rain. That was when he first joined the Royals. He could remember how happy he was that the Royals had taken him. The Royals and the Guardians were two of the biggest. He was a Royal. There had been meaning in the title.

Now in the alley, with the cold rain, he wondered about the meaning. If he died, he was Andy. He was not a Royal. He was simply Andy, and he was dead. Had the Guardian who knifed him ever once known that he was Andy? Had they stabbed him, Andy, or stabbed only the jacket and the title? What good was the title if you were dying?

I'm Andy, he screamed without a sound. I'm Andy.

An old lady stopped at the other end of the alley. The garbage cans were there. The rain made noise as it beat on the cans. The old lady had a shopping bag over one arm. She lifted the lids off the garbage cans like a queen. She did not hear Andy grunt because she was a little deaf. She had been searching most of the night. She collected newspapers and string. Sometimes she found an old hat. Then she put the lids back. She carried an old broken umbrella. She worked quickly without a sound. Then she lifted her umbrella high and was gone.

The alley looked very long now. He could see people passing at the other end of it. He wondered who it was on the Guardians who had plunged the knife into his body.

"That's for you Royal!" the voice had said. Even in his pain there had been pride

in knowing he was a Royal. Now there was no pride at all. The rain was beginning to chill him. The blood was still pouring between his fingers. He knew only that he was dizzy. He could only think: I WANT TO BE ANDY.

It was not very much to ask of the world.

He watched people passing. The world didn't know he was alive. He wanted to say, "Hey, look at me! I'm alive! Don't you know I'm alive?"

He felt weak and tired. He felt alone and wet. He knew he was going to die now. It made him sad, but not afraid. He felt sad that his life was over at 16. He had never done anything, seen anything, been anywhere. Now the rumbles and purple jackets were not important. They seemed like such small things in a world he was missing. I don't want to die, he thought, I haven't lived yet.

It seemed important to him that he take off the jacket. He was close to dying. When they did find him, he didn't want them to say "Oh, he's a Royal."

With great effort he rolled over on his back. He felt the pain tear at him when he moved. It was a pain that he did not think possible. But he wanted to take off the jacket. If he never did another thing, he wanted to take off the jacket. The jacket had only one meaning now. That was a very simple meaning.

If he had not been wearing the jacket, he would not have been stabbed. The knife had not hated Andy. The knife hated only the purple jacket. The jacket was a stupid thing that was robbing him of his life. He wanted the jacket off his back. With great hate for it, he wanted the jacket off his back.

He lay and pulled at the shiny wet cloth. His arms were heavy. The pain ripped fire across his body when he moved. He

turned and fought until one arm was free, and then the other. Then he rolled away from the jacket and lay still. He listened to the sound of his own breathing. He thought rain was sweet. I'm Andy.

She found him in the alley a minute past midnight. She left the dance to look for him. When she found him she knelt beside him and said, "Andy, it's me Laura."

He did not answer her. She backed away. Tears came to her eyes. Then she ran from the alley crying and calling. She did not stop running until she found a cop.

Now standing with the cop, she looked at the dead boy on the sidewalk. The cop rose and said, "He's dead." All the crying was out of her now. She stood in the rain

and said nothing. She looked at him. She looked at the purple jacket that rested a foot away from his body.

The cop picked up the jacket and turned it over in his hands. "A Royal, hun?" he said.

The rain seemed to beat down even harder now.

She looked at the cop and very quietly, she said, "His name is Andy."

The cop put the jacket over his arm. He took out his black pad. He opened it to a blank page.

"A Royal," he said. Then he began writing.

## "On the Sidewalk Bleeding" reading check

1. Where has Andy been?
2. Why does he leave?
3. Who is Laura? Why is she important to Andy?
4. Why do you think Andy joined the Royals?
5. Why do you think anyone joins a gang?
6. How does Andy's attitude toward the Royals change and why?
7. What does the jacket symbolize?
8. Why is Andy's last living strength spent taking the jacket off?
9. What is important about the rain?
10. Who are the people who walk through the alley?
11. How does the cop react to Andy's death? Why does he react this way?
12. How does Laura feel?
13. How does the cop treat Laura?