

THE BIG DANCE

By James Brady

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CHARACTERS

DONALD GARRISON	17
MRS. GARRISON	30s, his mother
COACH MONTGOMERY	a college basketball coach

TIME & PLACE

The room is the cheapest of government housing. The present in the Garrison's living room in Memphis.

At Rise: MRS. GARRISON and COACH MONTGOMERY are sitting on the sofa. DONALD is sitting in a chair.

COACH: ***(takes a letter of intent out of his briefcase)*** My last one. I saved it for you. A full four-year scholarship to Southwest Tennessee State College. ***(hands the letter and a pen to DONALD)*** All it needs is your signature. ***(points to the bottom of the letter)*** Right here. On the bottom line.

DONALD: I'll think about it.

COACH: Since tomorrow is national signing day, this is the last night to recruit. I would love to have you, but if you're going somewhere else, I've got to take the letter with me and go sign Lester Taylor over at Overton High. He's ready to sign.

(DONALD sets the letter and pen down. MRS. GARRISON picks up the letter and looks at it.)

MRS. GARRISON: If Donald gets hurt, would he still get an education?

COACH: Absolutely. Free room, board, books, tuition, and fees for four years. That piece of paper is worth a hundred thousand dollars... Is there something wrong, Mrs. Garrison?

MRS. GARRISON: Is this legal?

COACH: What's that?

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MRS. GARRISON: Signin' the letter tonight with tomorrow's date.

COACH: **(looks at the letter)** By golly, you're right. Thank you for pointing that out, Mrs. Garrison. **(looks at his watch)** We'll just have to wait ten minutes.

(The phone rings. DONALD jumps up.)

DONALD: I'll get it. **(HE gets a pen and pad out of his book bag.)**

MRS. GARRISON: Take that phone off the hook.

DONALD: It might be Coach Bilecki. **(exits)**

COACH: Kentucky A & M.

MRS. GARRISON: He really likes this Coach Bilecki.

COACH: It's a good school but it's got forty thousand students. Donald could get way off at a big school like that and get his mind on playing ball. They won't even know if he's going to class. At Southwest, we only have four thousand students. Everybody knows each other. Donald will get to know all of his classmates and professors. Remember what you told me at the cafe about having to stay on him all the time to get him to do his schoolwork? If he comes to Southwest, he'll have ten hours a week of monitored study. And he'll have his own personal tutor.

MRS. GARRISON: His high school coach told me that a lot of these kids quit school after a couple of years to play professional.

COACH: Over 90% of my players have graduated. And not only have they gone on to play professional ball, but graduated and gone on to become lawyers, businessmen, teachers, coaches. Mrs. Garrison, I will take full responsibility for making sure Donald gets a four-year education and gets his degree.

MRS. GARRISON: **(looks around)** It's gonna be awfully quiet 'round here when he leaves.

COACH: We're only 80 miles from Memphis. An hour and a half away. He can come home on weekends and you can come to our home games.

MRS. GARRISON: I don't go to the games.

COACH: Mrs. Garrison, you don't know what you're missing. The band playing and the fans cheering. And to be able to watch a player with a God-given talent like Donald. All the excitement.

MRS. GARRISON: I don't need no more excitement. My nerves are already shot. All these coaches are 'bout to drive me crazy. Talkin' out of both sides of their mouths, offerin' this, promisin' that, tellin' you what you want to hear. This one long-winded coach was here one Friday night. Thousand-dollar suit, gold watch **(COACH covers his watch with his jacket sleeve.)** and he wouldn't stop talkin'. I could see right through him but Donald was eatin' it up. I couldn't

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make up my bed with him out here, so I went into Donald's room and went to sleep. I woke up in the middle of the night and heard somethin'. I thought I was having a dream... This coach was still out here, talkin'. It was two in the mornin'. Donald was asleep. This coach was talkin' on a cellular phone. I said, this man is crazy.

COACH: This profession will make you that way.

MRS. GARRISON: Grown men fightin' over a seventeen year old kid.

COACH: If you want to be a coach, which is all I've ever wanted to be, you've got to win. And to win, you've got to have the best players. Because if you don't win, you lose your job. And it's not so easy to find another one.

MRS. GARRISON: I know that.

COACH: That's why I've got to make it to the Big Dance.

MRS. GARRISON: What you talkin' 'bout, Big Dance?

COACH: The National Tournament at the end of the season.

MRS. GARRISON: Big Dance. **(They laugh. Silence.)** What you thinkin' 'bout, coach? ...The Big Dance?

COACH: No, I was thinking about some of these other coaches. They offer kids money and cars. I don't believe in that.

MRS. GARRISON: I told Donald that we ain't acceptin' nothin' for free.

COACH: I hear you.

MRS. GARRISON: Whatever I got, and it ain't much, I've worked for.

COACH: I admire you for that, Mrs. Garrison. At Southwest, we don't make promises we can't keep and we don't offer—

MRS. GARRISON: All I want is for Donald to get a good education and come home on weekends when he can.

COACH: I promise you, if he comes to Southwest, he will get a good four-year education and graduate. And I'll make sure he comes home on weekends, if I have to drive him myself... I will look after Donald like he is my own son. **(picks up the letter)** Is there anything else I can tell you? ...Have I answered all your questions? ...How do you feel about Southwest? ...Talk to me, Mrs. Garrison.

MRS. GARRISON: I like you Coach Montgomery and Southwest sounds good. But I want Donald to be happy. I want him to like the school.

COACH: Absolutely.

MRS. GARRISON: He's got his mind set on Kentucky A & M and once he gets his mind set...he's just like his daddy was. **(stands)** Let me get him off the phone. **(walks toward the exit)** Big Dance. **(exits)**

COACH: **(takes out a cellular phone, dials, and talks into the phone)** Mrs. Taylor, may I speak to Lester? ...Lester...Coach Montgomery...You ready to sign? ...You signed with the University of Memphis? ...Lester, we had a verbal agreement...Has your mama signed it? ...Yeah, yeah, yeah. **(disconnects the phone)** Aw, shoot.

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MRS. GARRISON: *(offstage)* You're not signin' anything with this Coach Bilecki until I've talked to him.

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