

Celebration at Stonehenge

IT WAS THE third Friday after the signing of the charter, and as usual, we met at Stonehenge. From the very beginning, the place seemed to have some mystical meaning for us; those moss-covered stones around the dark pit. Now there was even more meaning. It was our hideout, our special place—the only place where we could swap stories about who did what to whom, and how well the pranks worked. We celebrated our victories down in Stonehenge.

The rains had passed, the wind had brought down new firewood from the trees, and the sun had dried it off for us, so we had a good fire going by the time the sun fell low in the sky. As we talked, a big bag of marshmallows went around the circle until each marshmallow sat roasted in our stomachs.

“Did you see the look on Vera Donaldson’s face as she went around tearing the copies of her diary down from the classroom doors?” asked Abbie.

“Classic,” said Jason.

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"You know, the next day," Cheryl added, "all the eighth graders started asking her out. I don't mean the big eighth graders, I mean the puny ones like Martin, that look like seventh graders! They figured that because she liked Martin, she must like younger guys! She nearly died of humiliation!"

"I love it," said Abbie, as she brushed her hair (which she did a lot).

"Wait, wait, wait!" said Darren. "If you want to talk about the look on someone's face, how about the second Austin realized there was a spider on his head!"

"Or the second it slipped down his shirt!" cried O.P.

"Classic!" said Jason.

"Intense!" said O.P.

"That spider was great, man," said Darren. "It's like the thing knew exactly what we wanted it to do!"

"I wish I could have seen it!" said Jason.

"We should make that spider an honorary member of the club," I said.

"Yeah. Too bad it's dead," said Darren, shoving a marshmallow into his mouth.

"You're all wrong!" said Randall. "The best—the absolute best thing ever, in the history of the whole world—was the look on Drew Landers' face as he took off his socks in the locker room, in front of the whole team—and none of you got to see it!" he said, gloating.

"Tell us about it!" said Abbie.

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"OK," said Randall. Everyone in the club was listening. "The whole team was done changing except for Drew, when the coach passed through the locker room on his way to the pool. I started asking the coach questions to keep him there."

"You mean the coach was there, too?" asked Abbie.

"I'm getting to it!"

"I love it!" said Abbie.

"Anyway, the coach starts telling me that, as usual, I'm in all of Drew's races, and as usual, I knew he'd take first place. Then, just like I predicted, Drew takes off those filthy dirty socks. Jared—you did such a good job of painting his nails, it was incredible! I could have died! Anyway, Drew didn't notice it at first—he put his bathing suit on and didn't even see it—but the coach saw it."

"Oh, no!" I screamed. This was great!

"Classic!" cried Jason. "Classic. Just classic!"

"Shut up, let me finish. OK, so the coach sees him, toenails and all—they were fire-engine red—you couldn't miss them, and the coach just says, 'Drew? Your feet!' and everyone looks down at Drew's toes. Nobody laughs—everyone thought it was for real, you know, like Drew did it all by himself. Everybody's saying, 'Wow' and 'I don't believe it,' and stuff like that.

"Finally Drew looks at his feet, then he turns to the coach, his eyebrows and face all wrinkled up like he's about

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to sneeze, and he begins stuttering like this, 'I . . . I . . . I . . . duh . . . duh . . . duh.' He tries to hide his feet, and that's when the team starts to laugh. I swear those painted toes were the most ridiculous thing in the history of the planet!"

"I love it!"

"Classic!"

"Intense!"

"So anyway," continued Randall, "Drew can't get a word out he's so embarrassed, and then—get this—the coach starts laughing, too!"

At that, any of us who were holding back couldn't hold it any longer. We all began to laugh. Laughing our heads off because we humiliated Drew Landers. Kind of sick, huh?

When Randall regained control of his laughter he finished the story.

"This is the best part," said Randall. "While we all sat there, laughing at those stupid red toes, Drew Landers—Mr. Macho Swimmer himself—began to cry!"

"Yeah!" screamed Darren. "Revenge!"

"We all got our revenge!" said Cheryl. "And the more they humiliate us, the more revenge we're going to get!"

Everybody agreed. Even O.P.—shy O.P.—was all smiles there at the campfire. It seemed that beneath that quiet brainy exterior lurked a kid just like the rest of us, who just loved every minute of our little pranks.

"Hey, everybody," said O.P. "I'd like to read something to

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you." All eyes turned to her as she pulled out a piece of paper. "As you know, David Berger—Jason's mortal enemy—had green slime mysteriously loaded into his trumpet." Everyone chuckled. "Well," she continued, "I would like to read you this small poem that came out in the high school paper this week—not junior high school, but high school!"

"We made the big time!" I said.

"Listen to this." She unfolded the newspaper clipping, and began reading:

*The team was on the field,
And vict'ry was at hand.
Yes, everything seemed wonderful,
Then David slimed the band.
He did it with such style and grace,
You'd think that it was planned.
Not one musician got off clean,
When David slimed the band.
The flutes were sprayed with sticky goo,
Their players filled with scorn.
The bandleader got slimed on, too,
When David blew his horn.
The football players turned their heads,
And heard the band all say,
'There is no doubt, we are grossed out,'
As they all ran away.*

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*Next week they'll all wear raincoats,
And gloves upon their hands.
Blame it all on one trumpet call,
When David slimed the band."*

We were in stitches, laughing so hard our stomachs began to hurt. Ever have one of those laughing fits where one person's laughter keeps feeding the others, until nobody can stop? That's what it was like. Between the sliming, and the tarantula, and the nail polish, and the diary, and the snake, and the green blood, it was just too much for any group of human beings to handle. We just had to laugh and laugh.

Finally, about five minutes later, we came down off of our laughing fit, wheezing, and wiping our eyes dry. The fire had now become full and furious, sending sparks sailing into the dimming sky. We all relaxed, and I found that somehow during the laughing fit, I had ended up leaning back, my head resting comfortably in Cheryl's lap. I looked up at her, and she smiled at me. She was playing with my hair. The strangest thing about it was that I did not feel uncomfortable at all!

"This is classic," said Jason, and although he said that quite a lot, we knew exactly what he meant. Even though most of us had barely known each other three weeks ago, right now, at this one moment in time, we would all agree that we were the best friends in the world.

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I looked up at Cheryl, whose hair was dangling just an inch above my nose, and smiled.

That's when I heard it. We all heard it. I snapped up out of Cheryl's lap, and we all turned our heads to listen.

"What was that?" asked Randall.

"Shhhh!" Cheryl said.

We all listened, and heard it again, the scraping of branches, the crunching of leaves. Something was out there, just above the pit, on the other side of Stonehenge. We were all thinking the same thing. No one ever saw any bears in these woods, but Ralphy Sherman swore that once Bigfoot came up to him and then ran away. Of course, Ralphy Sherman also swore that he was picked up by one-eyed aliens, taken to a distant galaxy, and returned in time for evening television, so no one much trusted Ralphy Sherman—still, you never really know. There were also stories of a mountain lion who was shot by a family hiking only thirty miles away. None of us had any weapons. There were deer in the woods, but what if it wasn't a deer?

We were all silent, and could still hear the faintest movement just a few feet away. I sniffed the air—perhaps if it was some large animal I could smell it—but all I could smell was the smoke from the fire. And then I said the stupidest thing that has ever been uttered by anybody on the face of this earth.

"I'll go check."

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Nobody else volunteered. I slowly stood and walked over to the dirt slope where one corner of Stonehenge had caved in dozens of years ago, and I made my way up.

Now, on the other side of Stonehenge, I was all alone, and for all I knew this could have been the end of my life. Still, I forced myself on, because waiting there in the middle like a sitting duck wouldn't do any of us any good. I walked around Stonehenge, and I heard it again! Moving branches! There was no mistaking it, something was up here, just around the corner of the old stone foundation. My heart began to beat faster. If I could just get a glimpse of it before it saw me, I'd be all right. If it were a deer, then fine, I would go back down, case closed. If it were something worse, I could warn everyone and we could scatter—we'd have better chances that way. Of course, if we scattered, the thing would probably go after me first, since I was right there, but I wasn't about to start thinking things like that.

I neared the stone corner, and slowly peered around. Trees, trees, and more trees came into view, until I saw something at the far end turning a corner. It wasn't a deer. It wasn't Bigfoot. It was a kid. I saw his back and feet as he turned the corner, but did not see his face. Whoever it was had been watching us, and had heard our secrets; knew exactly what we had done, and what was going on! If someone knew, then our whole club could be destroyed! I was not about to allow that!

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"Everybody hurry up here, some kid's been watching us!" Everyone stood, and raced up and out of Stonehenge.

"This way," I yelled. I rounded the next corner, and saw him again, this time disappearing into the woods. He was trying to get away, the little spy!

"Is there only one of them?" asked Cheryl.

"I think so."

"If he tells, we're in lots of trouble!"

"I know."

The Shadow Club raced through the woods, and as our eyes began to adjust to the dim light, we could see him just twenty feet in front of us. I raced at full speed. He was nearing the road!

At last I got close enough, and dove on him, bringing him down. He was about my size, just a bit skinnier. A bit bonier. I rolled him over and looked at the face before me. I instantly knew who it was, and so did the rest of the Shadow Club.