

Greene's Eye

TELL ME ABOUT the Shadow Club, Jared.”

Mr. Greene sat in his tiny office, with the venetian blinds open. I could barely see his face, because the sky behind him was so bright. All I could see was his silhouette. My heart seemed to stop for at least five seconds when he asked me the question.

“The Shadow Club? What’s that?” I said. It was a stupid thing to say, but he had caught me off guard.

“Something you know about,” said Mr. Greene. I had gotten a note during third period that said he wanted to see me during lunch. It didn’t take me long to figure out that Tyson had told him about the club.

“Oh, oh that,” I said. This wasn’t going to be easy. “It’s just a group of kids. We get together, go to the movies, play board games, you know.”

“Why do you call it the Shadow Club?” he asked, twiddling his thumbs and sitting in his big chair, behind his big desk, in that small room.

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"Because we meet late in the afternoon," I said. "When there's lots of shadows. Can I go now?"

"Not yet. I'd like to know a little more about the club first."

"Like what?"

"Like who's in it."

"Is it all right if I eat my lunch in here?" I asked. He nodded. I began to chow down my sandwich, and shut up real quick. I ate my sandwich, my chips, and Greene waited until I was down to the core of my apple before he spoke again.

"You never answered my question."

"Which one?"

"Who's in the Shadow Club?"

"Me!" I said, smiling.

"Who else?" asked Greene.

"Hard to remember. Like I said, there's lots of shadows. I don't see their faces. Can I go now?"

"No, not yet."

I sighed and looked at my wrist, pretending I had a watch. Be calm, I thought to myself. Don't sweat. If I sweat, he'll know I'm scared. I couldn't let him know that. I looked up at him, but all I could see was the dark blob of his big head.

"Could you close the blinds?" I asked. "The sun's in my eyes."

"Certainly." He turned around, and shut the blinds. Now I could see his face; his eyes watched me from behind those

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thick glasses. I decided that I liked it better when I couldn't see him.

"Why won't you tell me who's in the club, Jared?" he asked.

I sighed. "Because it's a secret club," I said. "I'm sworn to secrecy."

Greene didn't seem to react at all. He just sat there, staring out at me from behind his bug-eyed glasses. "Secret club?"

"Yeah, weren't you ever in a secret club when you were a kid? Is there something wrong with that?"

"I don't know," he said. "That's what I want to find out."

I stood up. It was very intimidating, the way Greene sat there staring at me, and it was so hard not to tell him everything he wanted to know. But if I did, I knew he would put two and two together. He would figure out about all the tricks we did—and worse, we would end up getting the blame for David's trumpet, and the other nasty tricks that we had nothing to do with. I couldn't tell him a thing. I began to pace around the room, looking at things: the books on his shelf, a diploma on the wall, a filing cabinet with a lock on it. This office made me nervous. I felt like I was in jail, getting the third degree.

"Who told you about the club, anyway?" I asked, knowing full well who did.

"It doesn't matter," he said.

"It was Tyson McGaw, wasn't it?"

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Then Greene leaned forward and took off his glasses. Without his glasses, his eyes seemed a lot smaller. "Leave Tyson out of this."

"I'll bet it was him!"

"Give Tyson a break," said Greene. "He's got enough problems without you making things worse, believe me."

"What kind of problems?" I asked, sitting down again.

Greene waited for a while, as if he was going to tell me something, but instead he said, "It doesn't matter." He thought for a moment, then said, "You know, Tyson thinks an awful lot of you."

I looked away from Greene's small eyes. He looked funny without glasses. He looked more like a person, and less like a vice principal.

"Why?" I asked.

"I don't know. I guess because you're a good kid." He smiled. That made me feel a little uncomfortable. I don't know why. That cold feeling in my hands came back, along with that sick feeling I had at our last meeting at Stonehenge.

"I barely even know him," I said.

"Why don't you get to know him?"

I shrugged. "I have my own friends. I have the track team. I don't have time for that."

"I see." Mr. Greene nodded, and looked at me for a long time, as vice principals like to do, and then he asked, "Is the Shadow Club a gang, Jared?"

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I couldn't believe he actually thought that! I just sat there, dumbfounded.

"You know, we've never had trouble with gangs here."

"The Shadow Club isn't a gang!" I said.

"How can I believe that?"

"You have to believe it! It's just a bunch of good kids having a good time, that's all."

"All by yourselves, without any adult supervision?"

"Exactly."

"I don't like the sound of that."

By now that little room he called his office felt like a cage. I sunk deeper into the hard wood chair, figuring Greene would just keep picking on the club. He didn't. Instead he started talking about something else I didn't want to think about.

"Aren't the District Olympics coming up, Jared?" he asked.

"Yeah, in about a month." I squirmed in my seat, trying to get comfortable. There was no way to get comfortable in that chair.

"I hear you could be running for our school," he said.

"Me or Austin Pace. It depends on who has a faster time," I said through clenched teeth, because I knew Austin's time was still better than mine.

Mr. Greene nodded. "You know, Jared, I'd hate to see you disqualified because you've done something stupid."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

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"I mean that if this 'club' of yours gets you into trouble, you could be suspended from the team."

"Mr. Greene," I said, "our club has nothing to do with school—we don't even meet at school. Can't you just leave us alone?"

"It's my job to make sure our kids don't get into trouble!"

"C'mon, Mr. Greene, what kind of trouble could kids like us get into?"

"Kids like who?"

"Like me, and Cheryl, and Jason Perez, and O.P. Han, and . . ." I stopped as soon as I realized what I was doing. He'd tricked me! He'd tricked me into leaking out information about the club! If I said one word too many, I could have been signing the Shadow Club's death warrant.

"Jason and O.P. are in this club?"

I didn't say a word.

Greene leaned back in his chair, and rocked a bit, like he had the whole world in the palms of his hands. Until that day, I sort of liked Mr. Greene; of course he never talked to me much, but he seemed like a nice guy. Now, sitting there at that desk, he seemed mean. He seemed nasty. He seemed like the one person who could destroy the Shadow Club just because we were having a good time. I suddenly realized that I hated Mr. Greene. I wished he had never been born.

"I'll tell you what, Jared," he said, "you don't have to tell me anything else about your club. You've never gotten into

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trouble before, and your teachers always have good things to say about you, so I'll trust you . . . but there's one condition."

"What?"

Mr. Greene leaned a bit closer. "I want you to let Tyson join your club."

I backed away as if I had been slapped in the face. "No!" I said straight out. "No way! He can't!"

"Jared, I'm asking you a favor. It would mean a lot to him."

"You don't understand," I said. "He can't because . . ."

"Because what?"

"Because he can't!" I said. "It's a special club, and only certain kids are allowed in it!"

"I can't accept that. If your club is just a social club, like you say it is, then you can let Tyson in. Or is there something about your club you'd rather I didn't know?"

"No!"

"Then let Tyson join."

"No!"

"But, Jared . . ."

"No! No! No!" I said. "No!" Period. The end. "No!"

I stood up, and nearly smashed my fist on the desk, I was so angry. Mr. Greene, on the other hand, couldn't have been calmer. He just leaned back in his chair, twiddling his thumbs again. He stared at me for a long time, like vice principals do. This time, I didn't look back at him.

"Can I go now?" I asked.

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"Close the door on your way out, Jared" was all he said.

I stood there for a moment longer, but he didn't say anything else, so I turned and went to the door. Just as my hand touched the doorknob I heard him speak.

"Answer me one question, Jared," he said. I didn't look at him; I kept my eyes fixed on the doorknob. "Has the Shadow Club done anything wrong?"

I still looked down at the doorknob. "No," I said.

"OK, fine . . . but I want you to know, Jared, that I'm keeping my eye on you. I don't like this club of yours; there's something about it that smells. I'm going to be watching you like a hawk, and if you're lying to me, Jared, you'll be in a lot of trouble."

I left, closing the door behind me as quickly as I could, and ran down the hall to get far, far away from that horrible little man in his horrible little office.

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