

Spiders and Snakes

I CAN'T SAY we didn't have fun. We did. We had lots of fun, and the fact that the members of the club were the only ones in on it made it that much more exciting. They were nasty tricks we pulled—we knew that all along—but we felt the victims deserved whatever they got. Our plans were so clever, so ingenious, that it seemed we could never get caught. You see, we pulled tricks for each other: Darren pulled Cheryl's trick on Rebecca, I pulled Randall's trick on Drew, and so on. That way it would be hard to figure out who was responsible; after all, what possible reason would I have for pulling a trick on Drew Landers? I could get away with it because I wasn't even a suspect! Working as a team made it hard for anyone—even us, sometimes—to figure out just who was doing what to whom. I guess every nightmare has to start somewhere. Ours started here.

Lunchtime. Tuesday. It was raining, so everyone was crammed into the cafeteria, which still had the faint smell of

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smoke from the small fire the week before. Cousin Rebecca was getting a present today, but only the members of the Shadow Club knew about it, and we all watched, scattered across the room, so as not to look suspicious, patiently waiting for Rebecca to open that ridiculous lunch box with teddy bears all over it.

Darren had taken care of this particular trick, so the rest of us knew what to expect, but weren't exactly sure when to expect it. Rebecca was all smiles, singing songs from *Annie* to herself and friends because she had gotten the lead role. Then she turned to open her lunch box. Nothing happened. I looked around the room. All eyes of the Shadow Club were focused on her. She talked a little bit more, and reached into her lunch box, pulling out the little plastic container that held her sandwich. I grimaced, preparing myself.

Nothing.

She opened the sandwich box, and pulled out a wedge of a gooey-looking peanut butter sandwich. She opened her bag of chips. Nothing. She laughed and sang, and porked out on her peanut butter sandwich—and then she reached for the thermos.

Oh no! I thought to myself. The thermos! Oh, how terrible! How marvelously, wonderfully terrible. I looked over toward Darren, and knew that this had to be it, for a smile had crept over his face.

Rebecca unscrewed the cap to the thermos and tilted its

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open end toward the cup in her hand. A small green garter snake slithered its way out of the thermos into the cup, and then through sweet-little-Becky's fingers.

It took Rebecca a few moments to scream. I mean, how often do you expect a snake to come out of your thermos? It took about three seconds, then the thermos went flying, the snake went flying, and Rebecca let out a bloodcurdling scream that sounded five times as loud in the tiled cafeteria as it would have outside.

It didn't stop there. The snake landed on another table, and everyone there began to scream. Off it went into the air again, landing on some poor guy's sandwich, and his table began to scream. That poor little snake made it halfway around the cafeteria that day, and before long, people who didn't even know what was going on were screaming as well.

Rebecca continued to wail with a voice that kind of sounded like the way she sang, then, as she tended to do whenever life got the better of her, she began to suck her thumb—but her eyes went wide when she realized that the particular thumb she was sucking on had touched the snake. Out came the thumb and the screaming began once more.

As the chaos grew in the cafeteria, Cheryl came up to me and whispered to me.

"Isn't revenge sweet?" she said, and it certainly was. The Shadow Club was off to a flying start.

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Vera Donaldson, the most popular girl in school, had a diary that she talked about, but never, ever brought to school. She also had a nine-year-old brother, and, as everyone knows, nine-year-old brothers can be bribed.

With Randall as mastermind, we found ourselves sitting in the middle of Stonehenge, with Vera Donaldson's diary sitting there with us.

"This is scary," said Jason. "It's like we got some sort of bible with us."

Randall smiled. "Vera's entire life is in this book."

"Dare we wreck it?" asked Cheryl, and everyone screamed, "Yes! Yes!"

We handed the diary to Abbie, and she read all about Vera's little life (which really did sound like a soap opera), until we came across a juicy bit of information that was just the sort of thing we were looking for.

When the meeting was over, Randall and Cheryl took the diary to the nearest copy shop and brought along their collection of dimes. By dinnertime the diary was back in the hands of Vera's little brother, and she never knew it was missing.

When morning came, everything was ready. All of us arrived super early to put up the papers around school. Nobody suspected.

Vera arrived at school, and was greeted by a piece of

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paper taped to the front entrance that said the following, in her unmistakable handwriting:

Dear Diary,

It's getting worse. I see him every day, and I want to talk to him, but I can't. I don't think he likes me. I'm sure he doesn't. I'll bet he thinks I like all those guys that keep asking me out.

I love the clothes he wears, and I love the way he talks, but he never talks to me. I love his hairstyle, and you know, he really has grown taller over the summer, I'm sure of it.

I can't tell anyone, Diary, because they'll all think I'm nuts, but I think I'm in love with Martin Bricker, and I don't know what to do.

I was there when Vera saw it. She didn't scream, she just sort of moaned in disbelief. Other kids had seen it already—half the school had read it. Vera tore the page down, and ripped it up, but as she went in, she saw the same piece of paper on every single classroom door in the school.

Everybody stared at her.

"Martin?" they sneered. "You like Martin?"

Even Tyson McGaw laughed at her—and if Tyson laughs at you, you know you're in trouble.

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Vera, you see, was a ninth grader. And Martin was an eighth grader—a *short* eighth grader. If ever in history there were two people *not* meant to be together, these were the two.

Vera's face turned red, although it was hard to see it beneath all of that makeup, and she ran into the girls' bathroom, where she stayed till at least third period.

Martin Bricker, on the other hand, was in heaven all day.

Just as Jason Perez had told us, David Berger and his silver trumpet got all the solos in band, and he was always called to play with the high school band. At this weekend's high school football game, he had a solo that neither he, nor anyone sitting in front of him, would ever forget.

It was a simple enough plan that O.P. had thought up, but it would have been easy to get caught there in broad daylight, under the bleachers. O.P. had a lot more guts than anyone ever gave her credit for.

The band had warmed up and gotten ready to play. Jason told us that once their first march started, David wouldn't play a note until his solo came up, and that was perfect.

After warming up, David put his trumpet down next to him. He didn't notice when it was pulled away underneath the bleachers a moment later, and then returned to the exact spot where he had left it.

The song began, David stood up for his solo, blew into

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his mouthpiece, and a whole containerful of green slime poured out of the other end. It was just the kind of green slime you could buy in any toy store, but that didn't matter; it was disgusting, and that's all that anyone cared about. The bandleader and half the football team stared at David in amazement.

David, still unsure of what was going on, blew harder into his trumpet, and the green slime blew out of the end and all over the band. As far as the band was concerned, this was the end of the world. They all began to yell and run out of his way as David blew into the trumpet again, sending slime flying, this time along with a dull tone from the trumpet that sounded pretty rude. In ten seconds the band had cleared out and was running to the locker rooms to get out of their slimed outfits, leaving David alone, his face turning red as he continued to slime the bleachers.

The next trick, by far, was the most dangerous. I was there, because it was my turn to pull a prank. Cheryl and Randall came along to watch.

Midnight. Wednesday. We stood outside Drew Landers' open bedroom window.

"Maybe we ought to think of another trick," said Cheryl. The lights were out in the house, and we were sure Drew was asleep, but still . . .

"No way!" said Randall. "This is perfect! Perfect! We

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have to do it. Trust me, Drew can sleep through anything! Once, he fell asleep in math, and they couldn't wake him up! They had to call in the nurse!"

Cheryl turned to me. "If you still want to do it, then I'm with you."

I smiled, and carefully removed the screen, then climbed in through the open window.

Drew Landers' room was a mess. I mean, I've seen my room get pretty scary, but this was a pigsty. It was hard to walk without stepping on things that crunched.

Drew slept under a mass of covers in his bed. We could hear him snoring more loudly than the roar of the filter on the huge fish aquarium in the corner.

"Look at this," whispered Randall, pointing to a whole row of swimming trophies on a shelf above the aquarium. Cheryl put her finger to her lips to shut him up.

Drew did not hear a thing. He continued snoring as I very carefully rolled the covers away from his feet. He was wearing dirty socks. Moving a fraction of an inch per second, I peeled back the socks until his feet, which smelled a little like chlorine and a little like vinegar, were sticking straight up at me. I reached my hand out to Cheryl, and she handed me the nail polish.

When Drew woke up in the morning, just as we had thought, he didn't change his socks, and fifteen hours after we had left his house, an incredibly embarrassed Drew Lan-

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ders had to explain to the entire swim team why his toenails were painted red.

Eric Kilfoil, the basketball star, was a sweater. Not the kind you wear, but the kind that drips all over the floor during a basketball game. Antiperspirant didn't help his sweating problem very much, but, as Darren told us, Eric would always roll on a sizable helping of antiperspirant under his arms before going out onto the court.

The trick that Abbie planned turned out to be much more complicated than it sounded, because, not only did we have to switch antiperspirant bottles, but we also had to make sure that Eric never saw what he was coating his armpits with. In the end, we had to black out the locker room at the perfect moment, just to keep Eric, and the rest of the basketball team, in the dark as to what was going on.

We were all there in the stands when the basketball team came out of the dark locker room and into the gym. Darren looked up from the floor and gave us the "OK" sign.

The team wore their warm-ups through the layup drills. Finally, when the game was about to start, the warm-ups came off, revealing the team uniforms. Eric's was already beginning to look sweaty.

It was jump ball, and, of course, Eric jumped. His arm went up, and in the excitement, nobody noticed Eric's un-

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derarms but the referee. The whistle dropped out of his mouth.

The other team had possession of the ball, and Eric ran down the court, taking his position as center of the 2-1-2 zone. His arms went up, and that's when everyone else saw it: fluorescent green sweat under his arms, soaking the sides of his shirt!

Well, the captain of the other team dribbled the ball through the defense, then stopped dead when he saw Eric's little problem.

"Hey, what's with the armpits, dude?" said the kid with the ball.

Now, when somebody says something about your armpits, you have to look; you can't help it, even if you're in the middle of a basketball game. Eric reached under his left arm and came out with a fluorescent green hand. The kid shot a basket over Eric's head to score.

Had the joke ended there, we would have been more than satisfied—but it didn't.

We didn't count on Eric being color-blind.

"I'm bleeding!" cried Eric, stumbling around the court, showing everybody his very green hands. "I'm bleeding! I'm bleeding!" The game sort of stopped as everyone tried to figure out if this could be possible. If it was, Eric must have been an alien. "Help, I'm bleeding, I'm bleeding!" he cried. "Call the nurse!"

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And everyone was so confused and dumbfounded by this weird turn of events that the nurse was called immediately.

The most obnoxious of our tricks was a doubleheader. It involved two kids, and one of them was L'Austin Space.

You see, Mr. Milburn, the science teacher, had a collection of animals in his classroom. Animals that ranged from gerbils to lizards. Tommy Nickols, the ninth grade's foremost brain, kept his pride and joy in Mr. Milburn's room: Octavia, his beloved pet tarantula. Sometime after lunch, Tommy noticed that Octavia was missing, but try as he might, he could not seem to find her. She was not in her cage, she was not hiding in the bookshelf. It seemed she was nowhere in the room, and nobody could find her.

L'Austin Space found her. Or should I say that *she* found *him*?

I was particularly mad at Austin that day, so I couldn't wait to see the trick pulled off. You see, Austin had called me Gopher so much that everyone had started to call me that. I couldn't wait to get back at him.

Anyway, it was a rainy day, and so Austin, as well as everyone else, came to school in a hooded jacket. In homeroom, at the end of the day, everyone put on their coats and waited for the bell to ring. Ralph Sherman saw it first.

"Hey, Austin," he said, "there's something in your hood!"

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"Yeah, sure," said Austin, because nobody ever believed a word Ralph said.

"If there was something in my hood, would I do this?" And Austin, thinking himself pretty clever, put his hood on. When he pulled his hood off again, a tarantula was sitting on his head.

"AHHH!" he screamed, running around the room. "Get it off me! Get it off me!"

He wouldn't touch it. The thing was sitting smack on the middle of his head, but he was too grossed out to actually touch it. Well, just like with the snake, everybody in the room, including Mrs. Marlow, our homeroom teacher, began to scream. Meanwhile, Austin ran around the room with Tommy Nickols running behind him, crying, "Don't hurt her! Don't hurt Octavia! She doesn't bite, she's a *good* tarantula."

However, when a tarantula is doing push-ups on your scalp, you don't care how good it is; you just want it off. Watching Austin turn white as a ghost was the high point of my day—and then, as if it wasn't bad enough, Octavia got freaked out and tried to climb off. Unfortunately, the easiest way off of Austin's head was down the back of his shirt.

Austin fell to the ground, shaking his shirt, but Octavia wouldn't come out. She'd had enough for one day.

Austin tore off his shirt, ripping out all the buttons, and Octavia went sailing across the room. When she landed she

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wasted no time in racing across the floor for a place to hide.

"Don't hurt her!" yelled Tommy Nickols. "She's tame, really, she's a *domesticated* spider!" But no one much cared. While most everyone stood on the tables, Octavia scampered around the room between the table legs, until she finally met an untimely end under the heel of Richard Fergusson's shoe.

L'Austin Space sat on the floor in a daze, for once actually lost in space. Tommy Nickols had collapsed to his knees in tears, mourning his dearly departed spider, and Richard Fergusson threw his shoe into the wastepaper basket, choosing to walk home barefoot.