

The Confession

WHEN YOU LEFT," began Darren, "we kept walking Tyson deeper and deeper into the water. He kept cursing and yelling like he always does, but then, I don't know, I guess he started getting really scared. A big wave crashed into his back, and he nearly went under. When he got his balance back, he starts begging, 'Please,' he says, 'please, I'll do anything you want, just let me out of the water.'

"We all told him we wouldn't let him out until he confessed—then an even bigger wave breaks right behind him, and knocks him down, washing him toward us. I caught him. He was coughing and sputtering, and he says, 'I'll confess, I'll confess anything. Let me go home!'"

That's where Darren stopped.

"So, what happened?" I asked. They all looked at me. "Well? Tell me!"

"He confessed," said Abbie.

"What?"

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"He confessed, but not to the pranks." Abbie brushed her wet hair out of her face. "He said he didn't do the pranks, so he couldn't confess to that."

"Go on, what did he confess?"

They all looked at me, then looked at each other, then looked down.

"The fires," said Jason. It took a few seconds to sink in. Jason continued. "He told us that he set all the school fires. He burned down the gym last year and set all the smaller fires. He set the cafeteria fire last month, too."

"Why?"

"He's a pyromaniac," said O.P. "That's what I figure. He gets off on setting fires."

"Oh, God!" I buried my head in my hands, remembering how we all watched as the gym burned down last year. Yet somehow I couldn't hate Tyson anymore. I couldn't hate anyone for anything. Instead I felt sorry for him. Those dark, empty eyes weren't empty at all; there was fire buried in them that nobody saw. I wondered if Greene even knew about it.

"There's more," said Darren. "This is the bad part." He leaned his head back. I could tell by his voice that he was crying a little. "When he told us about the fires," continued Darren, "I got real crazy. I . . . I started to dunk his head in the water over and over again . . ."

"Oh, no!" I yelled. "How could you do that?"

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"I don't know! I just started thinking about that fireman they carried out of the gym last year, and about all the people that could have been killed, and if you were there you would have done the same thing, 'cause you were acting just as crazy as me!"

A shiver began in my back, working its way up to my head. Darren was right, I probably would have done it.

"We all helped," said Jason. "We all kept pushing him in the water, and he kept yelling, then gasping, then he didn't make any noises at all."

"We were gonna stop," added O.P., "but a gigantic wave hit all of us. We were all knocked down, and by the time we got our balance and stood up, Tyson wasn't there."

I stared at them in disbelief.

"That's when the craziness sort of just went away," said Darren, "and we all realized what we had done. We searched and searched the water, but we couldn't find Tyson. It seemed like we were searching for ten minutes . . . and then, another wave rolled in, and we saw him tossed over in the crest, facedown. We all swam out to him and dragged him back to shore. It was scary, Jared—he was so limp and so heavy."

"I resuscitated him," said O.P. "I didn't even know if I was doing it right, but I must have been, 'cause it worked. He coughed up water and just kept coughing, so we rolled him onto his side."

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"He was really dazed," continued Darren. "I don't know if he was even completely conscious at first, but then a minute later, he stumbles up, and begins to run away."

"He threw a rock at us," said Abbie. "It nearly hit Darren in the head."

"Do you blame him?" I asked.

"No," said Jason. "Anyway, he ran up the way we came, coughing, cursing, and screaming, 'I'll show you! I'll show you!' That was the last we saw of him."

So that was it. "What a mess," I said, figuring that to be the biggest understatement of my life.

"There's one more thing," said Darren. "We came back here to wait for you on account of we were afraid to go home, since Greene had probably called all our parents. While we sat here waiting we found something out." Darren looked down—nobody could look me in the face.

"Tyson . . . didn't . . . pull . . . the pranks," said Darren. He stopped for a while, then said, "I cut Vera's brakes," and Abbie said, "I poured paint in Eric's locker," and O.P. said, "I put David's trumpet behind the bus," and Jason said, "I put the blockbuster in the fish tank—I didn't mean to blow it up. I also hid the camera in Tommy Nickols' locker."

"We figured Cheryl or Randall put the rocks down for Austin," said Darren.

"Cheryl did," I said.

"Thought so," said Darren.

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"What did you do?" asked O.P.

I thought about it. "I did the worst thing of all," I said. "It was my idea to start pulling pranks to begin with."

We sat there for the longest time, cold and wet, afraid to go anywhere.

"So what do we do now?" asked Abbie. "What happens when we get home? What happens tomorrow? What happens at school on Monday?"

"Whatever happens to us happens. We deserve it. Anyway, let's not think about any of that now." I stood up. "I'm going to Tyson's house," I said, "to start . . . unscrewing things up, and apologize."

"How do you apologize for nearly killing someone?" asked O.P.

"I don't know," I said. "I've never almost killed someone before."

One by one they all stood to follow me, and we walked out of Stonehenge together, but as we did I noticed something and knelt down beside it. It was the pile of marionette heads, arms, legs, and bodies torn to bits. He must have spent hours on each one. Now they were beyond repair.

"Why do you think he made those?" asked Abbie.

"I think I know," said Jason. "He doesn't have any friends. He had to make up friends of his own."

"We were all in his collection," I said. "I guess we should have been flattered." I stood and led the way to Tyson's house.