

The Inquisition

CHERYL AND I were the first at Stonehenge, since we ran all the way. One by one the rest began to trickle in: Darren, Abbie, Jason, and then O.P. Only Randall didn't show, and that made us worry. Generally speaking, Randall was the type of kid who might decide to go play video games instead, but maybe not—maybe he got caught. Maybe he was sitting in Greene's office right now. Maybe he'd talk and tell Greene where Stonehenge was.

"Would Randall give us away?" I asked Cheryl.

"Only if Greene grants him immunity" was her response. That sounded like Randall—he'd give us all away as long as he didn't get in trouble.

There was no fire in Stonehenge today; no fun stories and no good times. There were just six kids, standing, pacing, not sure of their next move.

"What do we do now?" asked Darren. "We're all on Greene's most-wanted list, and we're all in trouble. We all may be suspended from school!"

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"Don't say that!" said Cheryl.

"It's true!" said Abbie. "Darren's right."

"Yeah," said Darren. "So what do we do now, Mr. and Mrs. Club President? Hmm?"

"I'm scared," said Jason. "I can't be suspended—heck, this is the first time I've ever cut class!"

"I can't afford to be suspended either! That kind of thing stays on your record forever," said O.P.

"So what do we do, Jared?"

"Yeah, what do we do?"

"There's only one thing we *can* do," I said. "We have to get Tyson. The only way we can clear ourselves is to make Tyson confess."

"I say we take the little creep and give him a taste of his own medicine!" said Abbie. Most everyone agreed.

"We don't even have to do that. Making him confess is all we have to do."

"Yeah, but we want revenge!" They all agreed on that. I have to admit, I wanted revenge, too—revenge for what he had done to my good friend Austin Pace.

"He'll be home with his aunt and uncle, or whatever they are. Our best chance is to tell them what Tyson's done. Unless they're as bad as Tyson, they'll believe us, and Tyson will be forced to confess."

"What if they don't believe us?" asked O.P.

"What if they're ax murderers like Ralph Sherman says?" asked Jason.

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"Shut up about that, OK?" I said. "They'll believe us—they have to." I looked at my watch. "If we're going to do it, we have to go now. It's almost three o'clock. Greene will be looking for us. Let's go."

I began to lead the way.

"Wait a minute," said Cheryl. "Randall won't be able to find us."

"Where could he have gone?" I asked.

"With Randall, there's no telling."

"You want to wait for him?"

"No," she said, "but I guess I have to. When you see Tyson, give him a good punch for me, OK?"

I turned and led the other four to Tyson's lighthouse.

We didn't talk much as we crossed through the woods and then the grassy field toward the lighthouse. It was getting colder, but it didn't bother me. Dark clouds were looming out over the ocean, but they were nothing compared to the storm clouds within each of our minds as we approached Tyson's front door.

As we got closer, I noticed that there was no car parked beside the house, as there had been the night I had spied on Tyson.

"Wait here," I said, and keeping low, I snuck around the house, looking into every window, leaving Tyson's window for last. Tyson was alone in the house, sitting at his desk, working on those ridiculous marionettes. This was perfect! Perfect! It was even better than I had hoped for.

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I ran around to the living room window, which was open just a crack, carefully took off the screen, quietly worked the window wide open, then got the others.

"Hello, Tyson."

Tyson jumped about a mile when he heard me, sending the scissors and string in his hands flying across the room. His eyes went as wide as his beady little eyes could get. What a shocker that must have been, to see the five of us standing there, right at the threshold of his bedroom!

"Get up," I said calmly. Tyson looked at me, still shocked to see us there.

"I SAID, GET UP!"

"Get out of my house!" he said weakly.

I went up to him and pulled him out of his chair by his shirt, hearing it rip slightly.

"I'll call the police, and then you'll be in trouble!" he yelled. I ignored him.

"I like your room, Tyson," I said. "Nice view of the ocean you got here, isn't it? But what's that I smell, Tyson? What is it?"

"You better shut up!" he growled.

"Hey, Darren," I said. "Why don't you take the sheets off his bed? I think that's where the smell's coming from." Darren did what he was told and pulled back the blanket. The sheet underneath was clean, but when he pulled that away,

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there lay Tyson's rubber sheet for everyone to see. Tyson struggled, and I put him into a full nelson.

"Wow," said Jason. "You mean Tyson pees in his bed?"

"Oh, didn't you know that?" I said. "He does it every night. It's a wonder he doesn't have to wear diapers." Tyson struggled and I made the nelson tighter, pushing down on his head until he could barely move. "Did you know, Tyson, that Austin broke his ankle and he may never run again?" I forced the nelson even tighter. "I just thought you should know."

"I hate you!" he screamed. "I hate you!"

"The feeling's mutual!"

"You stupid Gopher," he said, and then something in my mind snapped. It was as if suddenly I wasn't me anymore—I was someone else—something else. Something evil. It was like I was possessed. I jerked Tyson around and took him out through the front door. He struggled all the way, kicking, knocking down lamps, leaving black footprints on the wall.

When I got him outside, I let him go, only to slug him full force in the face. He reeled and grunted, and I popped him one in the eye, then gave him an upper cut to the chin.

I couldn't stop! I was out of control. Then the rest of the club grabbed him, and held him back so he couldn't move. He couldn't even defend himself, and still I pounded away at him, thinking about Austin, and Vera, and Drew, and the rest.

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I kept delivering punches to his stomach, as he tried to kick me away.

"Do I get a turn?" asked Jason.

"How about me?" asked Abbie. "For Vera!"

Finally I stopped. "Are you going to confess?" I growled at him, and in his pain he looked at me and said, "I don't confess to anything!"

I stepped right up to him, grabbing his shirt again, making sure I tugged it hard enough to rip it, and then, well, I'll never forget what I did next—I'll never believe it either; it will live on in my own nightmares.

I spat at him. Just like Randall had done, I spat at Tyson. I'm not proud of it; I'm pretty ashamed of it—all of it, if you must know—but that's what I did. Then I let go of him, and the club grabbed him, holding him back.

That dark cloud that had been in my mind was now in my blood, filling up my whole body. It was hatred—evil hatred—mixed with power, and together those two things are more dangerous than nitroglycerin. It filled me and took me over. At that moment none of us were the kids we had been before; we were monsters filled with one desire: destroy Tyson McGaw.

I stood there like Darth Vader, breathing the power. The power of club leader. I had Tyson McGaw in the palm of my hand, and all I could think to do with him was crush him—like I would crush a soda can.

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"Take him to Stonehenge," I said.

"Yes, yes, to Stonehenge!" echoed the rest.

While they carried Tyson away, I called Jason over. "Go get all of his puppets," I said. "Tear down that clothesline and bring it along, and don't forget to bring the scissors."

At Stonehenge, while Jason played with the marionettes, the rest of us tied Tyson's arms to two separate trees with two pieces of clothesline. There was enough slack so that it wouldn't hurt, but he could barely move his arms.

Cheryl had vanished, leaving me alone as leader. She had probably gone off to look for Randall and would be back soon.

"You'll go to jail!" screamed Tyson, losing his voice. "All of you will! You'll see. When my uncle and Mr. Greene hear about it, you'll all be expelled from school! You'll see!"

I stood back, leaning against the wall of Stonehenge, letting the dark power flow through me. I watched as, by my command, the members of the Shadow Club yelled nasty things back at Tyson about him and his family, and pelted him with pinecones.

Jason, who had been examining the marionettes, turned to me and said, "Hey, these puppets are of us!" He was right. Now, looking closely at them, what I had first thought to be a coincidence was no coincidence at all. The entire Shadow Club was here, as well as some teachers, and other kids at school.

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"What are these, voodoo dolls?" asked Abbie.

"You leave them alone!" said Tyson, spitting out words that I won't repeat. "They're mine!"

Jason looked at me, and I gave the signal. One by one, Jason cut the strings, and O.P. tore each of the marionettes into shreds, throwing them at Tyson's feet.

"Confess," said Darren, "and we'll stop," but Tyson didn't confess a thing. He was a hard nut to crack. In a few minutes there was a pile of little heads and arms and legs and string in front of Tyson. He tried to break free, but the ropes held.

"You're gonna pay for this," screamed Tyson. "Pay pay pay! All of you!"

"Confess," I said calmly, folding my arms, standing just out of his reach.

"I'll never confess to you!" he said.

The Shadow Club looked at me. Time for a new plan. I pointed to the ropes, snapped my fingers, and they ran to cut Tyson down.

"The beach!" I said, and I led the way as the rest carried him down toward the shore.

We hauled Tyson down the rocks to the small cove closest to Stonehenge, just below where Cheryl and I had our first kiss. The cove was hidden, with no homes anywhere nearby, so no one could catch us. It was close to 4:30

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when we got there, but it seemed even later, because those black clouds over the ocean were closer now, churning up the sea.

We let Tyson go, but formed a semicircle in front of him. With the ocean right behind him, there was nowhere he could run.

"Leave me alone!" he whined. "Let me go home! My aunt and uncle will be home soon, and they'll be looking for me! You're gonna be in so much trouble!"

"We'll let you go home as soon as you confess!" I said. "What's so hard about that?"

"I don't have anything to confess, gopher brain!"

"You're lying," said O.P., "and I'm not going to be suspended from school because of what *you* did!" And with that we began to move closer to him. Tyson backed away until his dirty, torn tennis shoes were being washed over by the icy October sea.

"Stop!" he said. "You're all dead meat! All of you!" We got closer and he backed away farther.

"What are you going to do to me?" he asked, suddenly not as angry as he was frightened.

"Nothing," I said, "if you confess."

By now, the waves were crashing at his knees and at our feet, but we didn't care how wet we got, as long as we forced Tyson to admit the pranks he had pulled.

"It's cold . . ." Tyson backed away a bit more. The water

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was now breaking at his waist and at our knees, then in one last mercy cry he said, "I can't swim . . ."

When I heard that, I smiled a dark, evil smile, and moved closer. If Tyson couldn't swim, then he would *have* to confess. Either that or learn to swim real quick!

That's when I heard Cheryl calling from far away. "Jared!" I looked up; she was on the cliff. "Jared, come here," she called.

"I'm busy! You come down here!"

"It's an emergency!"

"So is this!"

"No," she said, "I mean a *real* emergency."

Figuring that Cheryl had to have the worst timing in the world, I reluctantly left. "You're in charge," I told Darren. "I want a confession from him by the time I get back."

And I left them—four kids, and one rough sea, to do battle against Tyson McGaw.