

Tyson  
McGaw

**G**ET YOUR HANDS off me, you idiot!" yelled Tyson.  
"Oh my gosh, it's the slimeball!" said Darren.  
"Now we're in for it!"

"What were you doing up there?" I demanded, pinning his shoulders to the ground as hard as I could.

"Get off me, butt head, you're hurting me!"

"I asked you a question!"

"You're hurting me!"

"Good!" said Abbie. "He'll hurt you more if you don't tell!" Tyson didn't say a word.

"I'm warning you, Tyson, we have ways of making you talk—and you won't like any of them."

"I didn't see anything."

"Bull," said Randall.

"Bring him back to Stonehenge!" said O.P.

"To Stonehenge," echoed the rest. "Yes, bring him back to Stonehenge," and that's just what we did. I put him in a full nelson. He struggled, but Darren grabbed his feet,

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and we carried him back through the woods, to Stonehenge.

The fire was still at full blaze when we carried Tyson down into the stone foundation. He had stopped struggling some time ago. We let him go, and he stood, his back against the wall, with all seven of us standing in front of him.

"What is this, a gang?" asked Tyson. I thought about that for a second, but let it fly out the other ear.

"There's seven of us, Tyson," I said, "and only one of you. You had better tell us what you saw."

"I wouldn't tell you if you were the last person on earth!"

"Beat him up!" yelled Jason, standing in the background, pounding his fist into his other hand. "Make him talk!"

"Yeah!" yelled O.P.

"No!" I said. I could see that being rough with Tyson just made him clam up even more. We needed a different approach.

"Listen, Tyson," I said. "We don't want to hurt you, or anything. We're all friends, right?"

"No," said Abbie.

"I said we're all friends . . . right?"

Everyone reluctantly agreed.

"Now, why don't you tell us what you saw?" I backed up a little bit, giving Tyson some room. He looked around at us, and seemed a bit less angry—although that crazy look he had in his eyes never went away. He looked at us for a long time, and then said:

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"All I saw was you guys laughing. That's all. I saw you laughing for a long time. That's all."

"You expect us to believe that?" said Cheryl.

"It's the truth!"

"Then why did you run!" demanded Darren.

"I don't know. Because you started chasing me. That's why."

"We chased you because you were spying on us," I said.

"Well, I just wanted to find out what you were laughing about, OK? That's all." Tyson looked at us all with that mean, dark look in his eyes, then hung his head. "I just wanted to find out . . . because I thought that maybe you were talking about me, and that's why you were laughing."

"Why would we talk about you?" asked Cheryl.

"Because people talk about me. I hear it. They think I don't, but I do. They laugh at me all the time, and call me slimeball. Anyway, that's all I saw. Laughing."

"We don't believe you," said Cheryl.

I sort of half believed him and half didn't. "What are you doing around here anyway?" I asked.

"I live near here . . . down that way," he pointed.

"You're lying," said Randall. "There are no houses around here."

"There's one," said Tyson. "On the cliff, by the ocean."

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"The lighthouse?" said Jason.

"It's not a lighthouse anymore. I live there."

Everyone was quiet for a while. Nobody knew what to say next. If Tyson was lying, there was nothing we could do about it. He'd never tell the truth, no matter what we did to him.

"All right," I said. "I don't care what you saw, or what you heard, but I'll tell you one thing; if you so much as tell another living soul that you saw us all here, you'll be sorry. Do you swear never to tell anyone?"

Tyson looked down. "Maybe."

"No maybes."

"All right—but on one condition."

"What?"

Tyson looked at me, and for a very brief instant, I saw something else besides that stupid-crazy look in Tyson's eyes. I don't know exactly what it was that I saw, but it was kind of like what you see when you look into a baby's eyes, and Tyson said, "I swear I won't tell a soul . . . if you let me in your gang."

"What?"

"Please, I've never been in a gang before. I'll do a good job—a great job—just let me in your gang."

"It's not a gang!" I screamed into his face, and shook him as hard as I could. "You don't know a thing!"

And then Tyson changed again. The craziness was back.

"Well, to [redacted] with you!" he said. "All of you! I don't want to be in a gang of bullies, and you're the biggest bully of them all!"

"I'm not a bully!" I screamed at him, then pushed him back against the wall as hard as I could. If there was one thing in this world that I was not, it was that. I was not a bully! I grabbed him and pushed him against the wall again, to make my point clear.

Then Randall went up to him. Randall was a year younger and four inches shorter than Tyson, but that didn't matter. Randall went right up to him, and grabbed the front of his shirt, and wrinkled it in his fist. He got really close to Tyson, and snarled at him in a way that I'd never heard Randall snarl.

"Your life isn't worth much if you breathe a word of this to anyone, you stupid slimeball." We all waited a moment, and then, out of nowhere, Randall spat in Tyson's face. "That's what you get for spying, sleazebag."

The fight had left Tyson. He looked down, wiping his face, and mumbled, "You didn't have to do that."

Cheryl and I stared at Randall as he backed off. Randall looked at us and shrugged. I tried not to think about what Randall had just done.

"Can I do that, too?" asked Jason. No one answered him.

"Why don't you go home, Tyson?" I said. "And forget you ever saw us. For your own good."

Tyson turned, mumbled something nasty under his breath, and left.

The fire needed more wood, but no one felt like feeding it. It was dark now, and our parents were probably beginning to wonder where we were. No one felt much like talking after Tyson left, and so a few minutes later, the meeting broke up. Cheryl and Randall waited as I poured water on the fire.

"So what's next for the Shadow Club?" asked Cheryl. I stepped up out of Stonehenge, then reached out my hand, and helped Cheryl. I never did let go of her hand after she was out—and strangely enough, I didn't seem to care. I didn't even care if Randall noticed that we were holding hands—which he didn't. Although it was starting to get chilly, Cheryl's hand was soft and warm, and it felt good to hold it.

"What's next?" I said. "I don't know. More tricks maybe?"

"Maybe."

"We used all the good ones," said Randall. "How can we top those?"

"I don't know," I said. "Why don't we think about it, then we'll all talk at our next meeting."

"Are you worried about Tyson telling everyone?" Cheryl asked.

"Aren't you?"

"Yeah."

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"What can we do to him if he tells?" asked Randall.

"I don't know," I said.

As we walked back through the woods, I was certainly glad that Cheryl's hands were warm. Because mine kept getting colder.

Two hours later, at 8:00, I left my house again. I told my parents that I was going over to Cheryl's to work on a science project. Since I never lied to them, and I had always been pretty responsible and trustworthy, they believed me and let me go. Needless to say, there was no science project, and I had no intention of going to Cheryl's house. I would have liked to, but I had some important business to take care of.

I began running at a slow pace. I ran past Cheryl's house, and past all the houses on the street. I ran to the edge of the neighborhood, and then down the road that passed by Stonehenge. I could have taken the shortcut through the woods, but I didn't feel like doing that at night.

I ran for about a mile, which was not hard for me, and then saw what I was looking for. At the edge of the woods, on a wide grassy knoll, stood the old lighthouse. A small wooden home had been built around the old stone tower, and no light had shone in that tower for maybe a hundred years. It only made sense to me that Tyson lived in a lighthouse with no light.

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I was curious about Tyson and the mysterious secrets I had heard so many rumors about, secrets of his past and of his family. I was not there because I was curious, though; I was there for a reason. If I could find a secret—any secret—about Tyson, then I could bargain with him. I wouldn't tell his secret, if he didn't tell about the Shadow Club. It was a simple enough plan, but finding the secret was not going to be easy.

My hair is blond, and easy to see, so as I got closer, I pulled the black hood of my sweat jacket over my head.

As I approached Tyson's house, I began to get a bit frightened, thinking about all the things I had heard in the three years that Tyson had lived in town. Some said that Tyson lived with his aunt and uncle—that's what Tyson said—but we weren't quite sure. Someone heard that they were actually foster parents. But whatever they were, one thing was certain: Tyson didn't live with his real parents, and no one knew why. There were dozens of rumors about that. Some said that they had abandoned Tyson on a street corner, some said that they were dead, and some said they beat Tyson, and were in jail. Ralph Sherman said that they were a family of ax murderers and hid out in the woods somewhere, but then, Ralph Sherman also said that he went skydiving without a parachute on Sundays, so no one put much faith in the ax-murderer story—still, you never know.

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Anyway, those were the thoughts that were toying with my mind as I got closer to Tyson's remodeled lighthouse.

It wasn't much of a house. It was like a small shack, built right up on the edge of the cliff, attached to the lighthouse. It was small but well kept.

Keeping myself low, I made my way to the side of the house, and peered into a window. Two people who seemed on the verge of being elderly sat on a couch watching TV. I stood there for a few minutes. Tyson was not there, and these people—who must have been Tyson's "aunt and uncle," or whatever—did not move from the couch at all.

*They're dead,* said a voice in my brain that sounded a bit like Ralph Sherman. *They're dead, and they've been stuffed!*

Just then, the woman mumbled something about how many commercials were on the tube nowadays. So much for them being stuffed.

I ducked again and made my way around the side, just by the edge of the cliff. Again I looked into a window. This time I had found Tyson's room. It was small, with just enough room for a bed and a desk, and Tyson was sitting at his desk, working on something. For some reason, I sort of expected Tyson's room to be like that. There was a second window, overlooking the ocean, and the far wall was bare except for a single picture, smack in the middle. The framed photo was of a kid who looked an awful lot like Tyson, but younger, standing with a man and a woman—definitely not

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the people who now sat in the living room. This must have been Tyson with his real parents.

What I saw on the other wall seemed completely out of place. Hanging from hooks on the wall were puppets—or not puppets, but marionettes—little dolls with carved hands and feet and drawn faces, hanging by dozens of strings. I knew for a fact that those kinds of things were expensive, but Tyson had lots of them. Then I saw another one, sitting on Tyson's desk next to a mess of wood, plastic, fabric, and knives that Tyson was fiddling with. That's when it hit me that Tyson had made these! I looked back at the ones hanging by the wall. Each had a different face and wore different clothes. There was one with loud clothes, wild hair, and big breasts that kind of looked like Abbie. One with red hair and white shoes that kind of looked like Austin, and one with blond hair that I swear looked kind of like me. I mean, I knew it was all a coincidence, right? Still it was creepy all the same.

So, Tyson made puppets. Could that be a big enough secret, I thought? Naah. I needed something bigger. Something that would shut Tyson's mouth up like a clam. I stood there outside, peeping into Tyson's window, then the living room window, then the kitchen window, waiting for something. I knew spying like that was a low-down thing to do, but I had to do it for the good of the club. I tried to think of myself as 007, instead of as a Peeping Tom.

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After twenty minutes, I began to worry that perhaps this was not going to work. Maybe Tyson's secrets were so well hidden I would never find them.

And then Tyson's "aunt" said something.

"Ty," she said, "did you make your bed this morning?"

"There weren't any clean sheets," said Tyson from the other room.

"There are now. Make your bed."

Now, this might seem strange to you, but I had a feeling about this one, a really good feeling. Quickly I made my way around to Tyson's room. He was gone, but in a moment, he came in with a sheet. He put it on the chair and pulled back his bedspread to make the bed.

In one instant, I knew everything I needed to know about Tyson McGaw.

"How ya doin', Gopher?" said L'Austin. He had just done his morning laps and was ready to do his sprint on the grass, when I crossed the field toward school on Monday. The "Gopher" business was getting way out of hand, and we both knew it. Not only had the entire team decided my new name was Gopher, but half the school was now calling me that, and it was getting worse. Some kids didn't even know my real name; I was just the Gopher. It was enough to make me want to quit the team, but that was just what Austin wanted, and I wasn't about to let him get the better of me.

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"What are you smiling about?" asked Austin. "Get faster over the weekend?"

"Maybe," I said, smiling.

"You better be on time for practice today," he said, "or else I'll make you do extra laps."

"What are you, coach now?" I asked, still smiling.

"Coach, captain, what's the difference? The point is, you gotta listen to what I say, right?"

The smile was leaving my face quickly.

"See you later, Gopher." He blasted off barefoot across the grass, moving faster than any ninth grader in the world except for me should be able to run.

"Watch that you don't run into any friendly spiders, Austin!" I yelled after him. He stumbled for a moment, but kept on running.

As I left the field I passed his stupid white Aeropedes resting in the grass. A month into school, and they were still as white as snow. Stupid shoes. Well, who cared about Austin? I had a mission that morning, and I was not about to let old Tarantula-head spoil it.

Off I marched into the building and waited by my locker for a sign of Tyson McGaw.

"Get out of my face!" said Tyson. I was standing right next to him as he opened his locker. The second the door opened I pushed it shut.

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"That's no way to talk, Tyson."

"All right," said Tyson. "Get out of my face, moron."

"I'm not in your face, I'm standing next to you. Do you have problems judging distance? Is that it?"

"Just leave me alone." Tyson opened his locker and put his books in.

"I just wanted to tell you something, Tyson."

"Yeah, like what?"

"I just wanted to say that I like the puppets on your wall." Tyson snapped his head to me. That crazy look in his eyes became fuller.

"What do you know about it?"

"I saw them. I looked through your window one night, and I saw them."

"You're lying!"

"Why would I lie, Tyson? Besides, how else would I know about them?"

Tyson said nothing. He just stared at me.

"Is that what you do all the time, make puppets?" I asked.

"Is that all you do, look in people's windows?" he said.

"Anyway, it's none of your business, and you'd better not look in my window anymore!"

"Why not? Got something to hide, Tyson?"

"You just better not, that's all."

"You spied on us, so I just spied back on you. There's also something else I know about you, Tyson."

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"What?"

And staring straight at him I said, "I know that you're a bed wetter."

Suddenly that crazy look in his eyes became even more frightening than I thought it could. It was as if Tyson's eyes were a window to some dark, horrible place that only he knew about. It was like his eyes could have turned me to stone.

"That's a lie," he snarled, like a caged animal would snarl.

"I saw, Tyson. I watched you change your sheets. I saw the stains on them. I saw the rubber sheet. I know all about you, Tyson."

"It's not true!" he growled.

I didn't say anything.

"I hate you!" he yelled. Then, softer: "You better not tell anyone, because if you do . . ."

"Quiet!" I said. "All right, I'll make a deal with you. If you don't tell anyone about the Shadow Club, I won't tell anyone about your rubber sheets. Is it a deal? C'mon, is it?"

Tyson stared at me, unable to speak. His frightening, empty eyes got deeper, then suddenly it was like the bottom dropped out of his mind. He bared his teeth, snarled, and lunged at me, grabbing my hair and my throat, fighting like no normal kid fights. In a second, dozens of kids were all

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around watching—most laughing at Tyson, like they always laughed.

"I'll kill you if you tell," he screamed. "Killyou-killyou-killyou-killyou!" I pushed him away, but he came right back at me. Maybe I should have been punching him back, I don't know. I guess I felt it was unfair to hit him, so I just kept pushing him off me, and he kept lunging, with tears in those wolf eyes.

Finally, Vice Principal Greene came running down the hall and grabbed Tyson, shaking him and talking to him as if he were trying to shake someone out of a bad nightmare. Eventually Tyson snapped back into sanity.

"What is this all about?" Mr. Greene asked me. I shrugged. "Nothing," I said. "He just came at me. I think I must have bumped into his locker."

And Mr. Greene believed me, because I was always such a good kid who never caused anyone any problems. It scared me to think what I could get away with if I really wanted to. It scared me and bothered me to think of how I was toying with poor Tyson's head, so I tried not to think about it.

"All right, Tyson, why don't you tell me why you went after him?"

Tyson just looked at him, then at me, with his jaw open, as if he would spill out the whole story. Then finally he looked down.

"He bumped into my locker," said Tyson.

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"Fine. Let's have a talk in my office, Tyson," said Mr. Greene. He looked at the crowd in the hallway. "Didn't I just hear the homeroom bell? Don't you all have somewhere to go?"

The crowd began to break up, and Greene walked with Tyson down the hall. Tyson turned back to look at me, both of us realizing that I had him over a barrel, and there was nothing he could do about it. I winked at him, and he threw back at me that stone-turning gaze of his.

I guess in some ways I *had* turned to stone, but it wasn't by Tyson. It was by the Shadow Club.