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We didn't mean to send the town of Great Bear Heart into complete panic, but that's just what happened when the big footprints were discovered in the park on the shores of Puckett Lake one summer day.

Of course, we were partially to blame, if not mostly, since we were the ones who put the huge tracks there in the first place.

It was just supposed to be a prank. We were just trying to get back at Norm Beeblemeyer, the reporter for the Great Bear Heart Times. Not a single one of us thought that it would turn into the chaotic situation it became.

The idea began with the president of the Adventure Club, Shane Mitchell. He had just called the meeting to order in our clubhouse, which sits high in an old maple tree on the other side of McArdle's farm. We used to get together in Shane's dad's garage, but after we had the fire, his father wouldn't allow us to meet there anymore. Not that we could have, anyway: the fire took out most of the garage, and almost burned down Shane's house. In the end, everything turned out for the better, anyway. The six of us in the club—Shane Mitchell, Holly O'Mara, Tony Gritter, Lyle Haywood, Dylan Bunker, and myself, Parker Smith—spent a whole week building the new clubhouse high in the branches of an enormous old tree. Even old Ralph McArdle couldn't see it, and it was on his property. The fort is almost completely hidden within the thick leaves, and from the other side of the field, you can't see it at all.

Which is a good thing, because we needed someplace that was secret. We couldn't let just anybody know what we were up to.

We had formed the Adventure Club out of pure desperation. Great Bear Heart, the small town where we all live, really doesn't have a lot to do. It's a great little town in Michigan on the shores of Puckett Lake, and while there's a lot of outdoorsy- type things to do like fishing, hunting, hiking and biking, that's about it. No skateboard parks, no bowling alley, and the closest movie theater is fifteen miles away in another town. The six of us had started the Adventure Club in an effort to have a little fun, and make things a bit more exciting.

And I must say this: I think we almost always succeed—because whenever we get mixed up into something, you can bet that normal everyday boredom goes right out the window.

"All right," Shane Mitchell said, holding up one hand and calling the meeting to order. He was sitting on an old blue plastic milk crate, one hand on his knees. Shane is thirteen, and the oldest member of the Adventure Club. "Wednesday's meeting of the Adventure Club is now in session. Do we have any business from last week's

meeting that we need to discuss?" He looked around the room for volunteers.

Dylan Bunker hesitantly raised his chubby hand, cocking his head from side to side to see if anyone else had anything to say. Dylan is ten, and is the youngest in our group. He's got a mop of thick, fire-engine red hair that hangs over his forehead and nearly covers his eyes. Dozens of freckles dot his cheeks.

"I do," he squeaked. "I still haven't been paid back that four dollars and thirty-four cents that I loaned the club last month."

Tony Gritter let out a tired groan. Tony is twelve, and has short, wiry, blonde hair. "For crying out loud," he grumbled, shaking his head as he glared at Dylan. "The club owes all of us money. You bring this up every week. You'll get your money when we have it."

After the fire, it had taken all of the club's money to build the new clubhouse. We even had to dip into our own savings and contribute a few extra

bucks to buy lumber and other materials.

"Give it a rest, Dylan," Holly O'Mara said, pulling a lock of her brown hair away from her eyes. "We'll all get our money back soon enough."

The matter was dropped. It had been agreed last month that as soon as the club came into some money, it would pay each of us back, plus a little bit of interest, if it could be afforded. Dylan Bunker looked a little disappointed. He didn't have a lot of money—but then again, none of us did. Dylan had been hoping to get paid back by now. I guess I couldn't blame him.

On this particular day, we were all still a bit miffed at Norm Beeblemeyer, the local reporter for the town's small newspaper, the Great Bear Heart Times. It's a weekly paper, and Norm is the only full-time reporter. He's kind of a dufus, and no one in the club likes him much, ever since he accused Tony Gritter of waxing the windows at the community library a few weeks ago. Sure, Tony is a prankster, but he'd never do anything

that would cause any damage. Norm Beeblemeyer was proven wrong, of course, but not until Tony had already been blamed and even questioned by the police. To this day, Norm still believes that all of us in the Adventure Club had something to do with the vandalism at the library—and to this day, he is wrong about it.

There are a few more reasons why we don't like Norm Beeblemeyer, too. Since there's not much excitement in or around Great Bear Heart, there isn't a lot of news to report. To dig up a story, Norm Beeblemeyer sticks his nose into everybody's business, and most of what he reports in the paper just isn't true. There are more than a few people in Great Bear Heart, including all six of us in the Adventure Club, that would like to see Norm Beeblemeyer get what's coming to him.

So, when the window-waxing incident blew over, our club voted 6-0 to somehow, some way, get back at Norm.

Which is how this whole Bigfoot thing came

about.

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The topic of discussion at our meeting had shifted from money matters to Norm Beeblemeyer, and what a creep he was. We all

had devised plans to get even with him, but most of our ideas were either too far-fetched or just not practical.

"I know!" Dylan Bunker said excitedly. "Let's gather up a bunch of dog mess and wrap it up in newspapers! We'll light it on fire, set it on his front porch, and then we'll—"

"Ring the doorbell and run," Tony Gritter finished snidely, taking the wind out of Dylan's sails. He continued, tiredly explaining Dylan's idea. "Norm opens the door, stomps on the fire to put it out, and gets dog mess all over his shoes." He shook his head. "That's the oldest trick in the book. Problem is, it doesn't work, and it'll probably catch his house on fire."

Dylan Bunker pursed his lips tightly, then, just as he was about to say something, Holly O'Mara spoke up, her eyes narrowed and her jaw tense. Like Lyle and Tony, Holly is twelve, but she looks older.

"We need to do something that proves to

everyone that Norm Beeblemeyer is the creep he really is," she boiled.

We went around the room, bouncing ideas around. Finally, Shane Mitchell smiled, and one side of his lip curled up, then the other. Real slow-like, like he had an idea that was growing by the second. When he grinned like that, we knew he had a winner. And usually, when Shane Mitchell had an idea, you could bet it was a pretty good one.

Shane explained that he'd been reading a lot about 'Bigfoot' sightings out west . . . mostly in Montana, Idaho and Oregon. Bigfoot was supposed to be this huge, hairy creature that roamed the forests and mountains. He said the library has a couple of books that even have pictures of the beast.

"Awww, come on Shane," Lyle Haywood sneered. "Do you really believe all of that bunk?" He adjusted his glasses, then scratched his chin. Lyle is tall . . . tall and lanky. Skinny as a rail. He's the same age as Holly O'Mara, but man . . .

Lyle Haywood should be in college, not in grade school. He's brilliant. He's also the skeptical one of the group. Lyle Haywood isn't likely to believe anything unless you can show it to him.

Shane Mitchell skewered his face into a sarcastic frown. "Of course I don't believe it," he insisted sharply, furrowing his brow. A wide, toothy smile returned to his face. "But what if, all of a sudden, there was a Bigfoot creature that roamed Puckett Lake?" His smile grew. "I bet we can make people believe it—especially a particular reporter from the local paper."

Hot diggity-dogs. I knew exactly what Shane was thinking.

Lyle Haywood grinned broadly, and so did I, then Holly O'Mara. Dylan Bunker hadn't yet figured out what Shane was talking about, and he had a questioning look on his face. Tony Gritter knew what Shane was thinking, because a smile began to form on his lips, too, and soon it was an all-out smug grin.

And that's how the whole mess got started.