

Truth And Dare

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The June sun beat steadily down upon the gravel school yard as the children ran out to play for the last time before vacation. The little girls with their hair flying dashed helter-skelter over the playground, and the boys brought out their baseballs. On one side of the yard in the shade of the library building stood a row of ten-year-old girls. They were members of "The Gang," an elite club composed of Republicans only and those who could stand to have their thumb bent backwards without flinching. In front of this rank stood the leader with her hands on her hips. She adopted this position in an effort to compensate for her short stature. "Tenshen!" she snapped, and the wash dress army stiffened.

"Truth or dare?" she asked of the first little girl in the row.

At the far end of the line Martha quivered and wondered whether she should risk it. All term she had taken "truth," but today she couldn't. Over and over the leader had drawn her deepest secrets out into the daylight. She trembled and rubbed her hands together.

"Martha," called the leader. "Stand still, or I'll expell you from the gang."

Again Martha came to attention. Down the row she could hear the girls deciding either for "truth" or "dare." Soon it would be her turn. What if she took a dare? What would she have to do? She could hear the "truth" question over and over in her mind. "What did Harry say on your birthday card?" She

could say that he only wrote his name, but that wouldn't be the truth.

The little girl next to Martha had just said, "truth," and the leader pointed her finger at Martha.

With faltering voice Martha said, "Dare," and then uttered a long sigh.

"No, Martha, you want 'truth,'" the leader yelled.

"Dare," repeated Martha.

"You can't."

"Dare," Martha cried as she tightened her hands into fists.

"All right. You'll be sorry 'fore we get done with you, Martha."

The leader walked to the far end of the line and began to ask questions or issue dares. With each dare Martha blinked her eyes and wiped her damp hands on the skirt of her print dress. The eyes of the leader grew blacker and more threatening each time she looked at Martha.

With stiff legs the leader marched over to Martha and glared into her eyes. "Martha Benson, I dare you to tell what Harry said on your birthday card." The leader stepped back, put her hands on her hips, and a smirk spread over her face. Martha looked straight ahead, and with her fists clenched at her side she scowled at the leader.

The clang of the bell broke the deadlock. With all the energy of her ten-year-old legs, Martha ran toward the school building and breathlessly stumbled up the steps ahead of the rest of her playmates.