

Chapter 3

Attention, World!

It was four o'clock in the morning when Bruno and Boots were awakened by a frantic scratching at the window. The two boys rushed over and pulled Elmer in.

He was a sight to behold. His face was shiny with perspiration, and his usually neat crew cut was standing on end. He was twitching nervously and his eyes were wild. He looked like a hunted animal.

“Where have you been?” stormed Bruno. “We’ve been worried sick!”

His shaky knees collapsing under him, Elmer sat down on the floor to tell his tale of woe. “It was horrible!” he croaked. “After those two girls saved me from Miss Scrimmage they wouldn’t let me leave! They made me hide under the bed! When Miss Scrimmage came in and sat down on the bed, I was terrified!”

Bruno and Boots could bear it no longer. They burst into uncontrollable laughter.

Elmer was outraged. “It’s not amusing! And besides, they told Miss Scrimmage the most horrid lies about you. They said

you were terrorizing them until she came along and saved them!”

By this time Bruno and Boots had collapsed to the floor in hysterics.

“Then I had to stay there for three hours before that Cathy person would let me leave,” Elmer continued. “It was the most harrowing experience of my life!”

“No more, Elmer!” gasped Bruno, exhausted. “I can’t stand it!”

Boots caught his breath. “Not bad for a first time out! Elmer, I’m nominating you for Rookie of the Year!”

“It’s all very well for you to laugh,” protested Elmer reproachfully. “You didn’t have to go through what I did.”

“Hah!” said Boots. “Old Scrimmage marched us to The Fish at gunpoint and he almost had a fit! We’ve got to see him in the office at eight o’clock. We’re cooked!”

Elmer turned even paler. “Does — does Mr. Sturgeon know about me?”

“No, he doesn’t,” said Boots. “You’re clean.”

Elmer sighed with relief and turned to Bruno. “You told me you never get caught,” he accused. “Miss Scrimmage caught you.”

Bruno shrugged. “It was a one-in-a-million chance,” he said. “Even a pro like me can have an off night. There’s no way it could ever happen again. She got lucky.”

“Lucky or not,” Boots said mournfully, “we’re the ones who are going to have to face the music.”

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“William, what are you going to do to those poor boys?”

Mr. Sturgeon sipped his breakfast coffee. “I don’t know,

Mildred,” he replied. “I am still Headmaster here, and roaming the countryside in the dead of night is frowned upon by this institution.”

“But they were hungry,” his wife pleaded. “They aren’t getting enough to eat!”

“They *are* getting enough to eat,” he snapped back. “They just aren’t eating it.” He shook his head. “I should be furious with them, but somehow I just feel angry at that awful Scrimmage woman. Every time I think of her being allowed to own that shotgun . . . If she ever hurts one of my boys, I’ll —”

“William, you’re shouting again.”

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At precisely 8 AM, Bruno and Boots marched past the heavy oak door with HEADMASTER lettered in gold, and into the office. They ignored the comfortable chairs intended for visitors and automatically sat down on the hard wooden bench facing Mr. Sturgeon’s desk.

The Headmaster leaned forward, fixing them with the cold, fish-like stare which made his nickname all the more appropriate.

“Lights-out at Macdonald Hall occurs at exactly ten o’clock,” he said icily. “From that moment on all students are expected to be in their beds. Miss Scrimmage’s Finishing School for Young Ladies is off limits at all times, especially in the middle of the night. Are those rules something new to you?”

“No, sir,” Bruno admitted quietly.

“I’m very happy to hear that,” said Mr. Sturgeon. “I never want to catch you over there again. Is that understood?”

“Yes, sir,” chorused Bruno and Boots.

“Excellent,” said Mr. Sturgeon. “At least I’m glad to see you didn’t involve Drimsdale in your nonsense. As for your punishment — except for mealtimes, you are to spend the rest of today in your room.” He stood up. “Dismissed.”

“Thank you, sir.” The boys backed out of the office and scurried down the marble corridor of the Faculty Building.

Once outside, Boots let his breath out in a long sigh of relief. “A day’s punishment?” he said incredulously. “I thought he was going to murder us!”

“I knew he’d go easy,” replied Bruno. “He doesn’t like Miss Scrimmage anyway. He was so mad at her he forgot he was mad at us. It’s all very simple. Anyway, we need a quiet day in our room.”

“You bet!” said Boots enthusiastically. “I could use a nap. I hardly slept at all last night.”

“Who said anything about sleep?” demanded Bruno. “Our suggestion box must be full by now. We have to get to work.”

“Swell,” said Boots without enthusiasm. “We could have started getting publicity for the Hall last night if we’d thought of it. Picture this: *Students Shot By Crazy Headmistress*. Wouldn’t that have enlarged our enrolment?”

“Don’t be an idiot,” scoffed Bruno. “This is an important thing we’re doing. If everyone takes it as lightly as you do and Macdonald Hall closes, then where will we be?”

The two boys headed for Dormitory 2 to serve their punishment and read the suggestions.

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