

Chapter 3

Booby-Trapping the Star

At a secluded table in the dining hall, Bruno Walton was holding court.

“All right, guys, what are we going to do about Cutesy Newbar?”

Larry Wilson looked at him. “Do? The guy’s here making a movie. When he’s done, he’ll leave. What’s there to do?”

“We’ve got to put him in his place. Get him off his high horse. He thinks he can run around like the king of the world, throwing orange juice on everybody — ”

“Not everybody,” interrupted Boots. “Just you.”

“I mean symbolically,” amended Bruno. “Besides, he’s poisoning their minds at Scrimmage’s. We’ve got the spring dance coming up. How’d you like to spend the evening with a bunch of love-struck Cutesy Newbar zombies? We’ve got to show this guy who’s boss!”

“We already know who’s boss,” put in Boots. “The Fish is. And we’re not allowed out after classes, remember?”

“I’ve already thought of that. If we go out tonight, that’s not after classes. That’s before tomorrow’s classes.”

Pete Anderson looked shocked. “You’re right! And to think of all the times I sat in my room, doing confinement on the wrong day!”

Boots ignored him. “Bruno, The Fish is going to kill us if we feed him a line like that.”

“The Fish appreciates good logic,” said Bruno smugly. “If he’s going to punish us, he’s going to have to be more specific.”

“‘You’re expelled’ is pretty specific.”

“If it’ll make you feel better,” said Bruno kindly, “we can do it after lights-out. That way we won’t be violating our confinement, since we aren’t allowed out that late, punishment or not.”

Wilbur Hackenschleimer peered out from behind an enormous stack of chicken cutlets. “Now that we know *when* we’re going to do it, why don’t you tell us *what* it is we’re going to do?”

Bruno grinned diabolically. “We’re going to rig up his trailer with fireworks and scare him the rest of the way out of his saggy diapers!”

A babble of protest rose up.

“It’s perfect,” insisted Bruno. “Everyone at Scrimmage’s gets to see what a little baby their hero really is, Golden and Dinkman freak out, which takes the heat off me sneaking into the movie, and we knock the Rear Admiral down a couple of notches.”

“Those fireworks aren’t ours,” Boots pointed out. “They belong to the girls.”

“Cathy and Diane want them to be used on Cutesy Newbar. *We’re* going to use them on Cutesy Newbar.”

Larry shook his head. “It’s a great idea, Bruno, but we just can’t. Rockets and Roman candles and stuff — that’s dangerous. We could really hurt the guy, or even ourselves. Fireworks are tricky.”

“I know,” agreed Sidney. “My dad gave me a sparkler once, and I wound up in the hospital.”

“What happened?” asked Mark.

“I swallowed it.”

The chorus of laughter that followed was interrupted by Bruno’s serious voice. “Come on, guys. I know fireworks can be dangerous. That’s why we’re going to have an actual scientific genius on the scene telling us *exactly* what to do.”

All eyes turned to a lone figure eating quietly at the end of the table. Studious Elmer Drimsdale continued to take slow bites of his salad, oblivious to the fact that he was the centre of attention.

At last, he looked up and regarded his tablemates through thick glasses that gave him an owl-like appearance. “Yes?”

Bruno slapped himself in the forehead. “Sheesh! How can such a smart guy be so out of it? Pay attention, Elm. Now, could you hook up a bunch of fireworks to scare someone without hurting him?”

“I suppose I could if I wanted to.” He regarded Bruno intently. “Do I want to?”

Bruno laughed. “You can hardly wait!”