



**WHO
LET THE
GODS
OUT?**

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LYING LOW

It began on a Friday, as strange things often do. This particular Friday turned out to be stranger than most, although it had started normally enough. Elliot Hooper got up at 7:30 a.m. as normal, made his mom breakfast at 8:15 a.m. as normal, went to school at 8:55 a.m. as normal, and was in the headmaster's office by 9:30 a.m., which was, in fact, slightly later than normal.

"Oh, Elliot," sighed Graham Sopweed, headmaster of Brysmore Grammar School. "What are we going to do with you?"

Elliot scratched his shaggy blond head. He figured that "excuse me from school forever and make me Lord High Emperor of the Universe" wouldn't be deemed an acceptable answer, so he said nothing.

"You seem rather . . . distracted lately," said Mr. Sopweed to fill the silence. "Is everything okay? Is anything wrong at school? Or at home?"

Elliot avoided his headmaster's concerned stare. School was . . . well, it was school. Annoying, boring, pointless. Nothing new there. But home? That was a different story . . .

"I'm fine," he said after a lengthy pause. "Thank you, sir."

"Oh, Elliot." Mr. Sopweed sighed again, nervously flicking his floppy gray fringe. "You know you can call me Graham. Let's all use the names our mothers gave us."

There were many more creative names for Brysmore's headmaster than the one his mother gave him, but the politest by far was Call Me Graham.

A shout outside nearly made the jumpy headmaster fall off his chair. Elliot couldn't help but feel sorry for Call Me Graham. There were many theories at school as to why he was such a bag of nerves, not all of them started by Elliot. Some said it was because his wife had left him. Others said it was because she hadn't. Elliot's favorite was that Call Me Graham was actually a serial killer on the run. He could imagine the appeals on the news: *So be on your guard against Graham Sopweed, the Cardigan-Clad Killer, and be sure to call this number if he's bored someone you know to death . . .*

"The . . . the . . . the thing is, Elliot, everyone at Brysmore wants to help you to achieve your fullest potential," Call Me Graham went on.

"Mmm. Not everyone, sir," muttered Elliot.

"Whatever do you mean?" squealed Call Me Graham, nearly pulling a button off his cardigan. "Everyone at Brysmore is committed to encouraging, nurturing, and inspiring every pupil in our care. We're always here for a friendly word, helpful advice, or to make sure we know—"

“WHERE IS THAT SNIVELING RUNT OF A PATHETIC EXCUSE FOR A BOY?!”

The office door blasted open with a furious roar, making Call Me Graham scream like a kitten on a roller coaster.

Elliot was all too familiar with that loathsome voice.

“Ah—hello,” whimpered Call Me Graham. “As you can see, I am just having a little chat with Elliot . . .”

“Hooper,” sneered the new arrival, lurching up behind Elliot’s chair and polluting his airspace with weapons-grade body odor.

There was only one person who could make Elliot’s surname sound like a dirty word. It was Mr. Boil, head of history, Brysmore’s deputy headmaster and, unless there was a schoolmaster somewhere on the planet who minced his students into sausages, the world’s worst teacher.

Boil was a stumpy, piggy little man who was the only person Elliot knew with fat eyes. He squashed them behind a pair of thick, bottle-lensed glasses and glared at his pupils like most people look at used cat litter, as if he had a permanently nasty smell under his nose. (In fairness, he did—his own.)

His few remaining strands of dark, greasy hair were pasted over the top of his head, held in place by hope alone. To the naked eye, Mr. Boil had three chins, but who knew how many more were lurking beneath his shirt, which always smelled like three-week-old vegetable soup? He truly hated

everyone, but reserved a special revulsion for Elliot, who had been getting up his pudgy nose for the past year.

“Sir?” asked Elliot, innocently.

“Don’t you ‘sir’ me, Hooper,” growled Boil, bringing his sweaty face inches from Elliot’s own. “What you did in my assembly was disgraceful, disrespectful, and downright disgusting!”

“Yes, we were just getting on to that . . .” stammered Graham.

“He disgraced the Brysmore name!” roared Boil. “He shamed himself! He shamed the school! He ruined my brilliant PowerPoint presentation on Napoleon’s favorite socks! He—”

“He fell asleep,” said Call Me Graham quietly, looking at Elliot’s pale face and dark-rimmed eyes. “Let’s try to keep a little perspective, Mr. Boil. This isn’t the first time this has happened lately, Elliot. Why are you so tired?”

“Pah!” spat Boil. “Out all hours terrorizing old ladies, I expect! Or playing violent computer games until dawn! Or putting my underpants up the school flagpole! Again!”

Elliot tried not to smirk at the memory of his all-time favorite prank—which Boil knew but could never prove—that Elliot was responsible for last year. But pranks were long gone. These days Elliot couldn’t afford any more trouble.

“Hooper!” shouted Boil. “The headmaster asked you a question! Don’t be so disrespectful . . .!”

“It’s quite all right,” whispered Call Me Graham, “Elliot can take all the time he—”