

THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING at Macdonald Hall!

GORDON KORMAN



SCHOLASTIC INC.

New York Toronto London Auckland
Sydney Mexico City New Delhi Hong Kong

If you purchased this book without a cover, you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as “unsold and destroyed” to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this “stripped book.”

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

ISBN 978-0-545-28924-5

Copyright © 1978 by Gordon Korman.
All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Inc.
Scholastic and associated logos are trademarks
and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

11 12 13 14 15 16/0

Printed in the U.S.A.

40

This edition first printing, May 2011

“It’s Always Us!”

East of Toronto, just off Highway 48, you will find a beautiful tree-lined campus right across the road from the famous Miss Scrimmage’s Finishing School for Young Ladies. It is Macdonald Hall, where generations of boys have been educated and prepared for manhood. Named for Sir John A. Macdonald, the Hall, with its ivy-covered stone buildings and beautiful rolling lawns, is the most respected boarding school for boys in all of Canada.

In Canada? you say. Why, then, is the flagpole in front of the Faculty Building proudly flying the flag of Malbonia?

The answer lies in Dormitory 3, room 306.

* * *

The window blinds were drawn, but that did not prevent two sets of attentive eyes from peering through

the small cracks. They were fixed on the area in front of the Faculty Building.

"Nobody's even noticed it yet. You'd think this *was* Malbonia," grumbled Bruno Walton.

"Let's give it a little time," came the soothing voice of his roommate, Boots O'Neal.

Just then the Headmaster's blue Plymouth turned into the driveway. Instead of driving on into the parking lot, it screeched to a halt in front of the flagpole. The window rolled down and a familiar head emerged.

"This is it!" Bruno exclaimed.

The two boys watched as Mr. Sturgeon got out of his car and stared at the flag as if hoping it would vanish if he looked at it long enough.

"He sure doesn't look very happy," Boots observed.

"The Fish *never* looks happy," countered Bruno.

"No, not unless he's expelling somebody," Boots agreed. Among the boys at Macdonald Hall Mr. Sturgeon was notorious for his sternness, although to their parents he seemed a kind and understanding administrator who was fond of his students — he just never let them know it.

The two boys strained for a better view. A crowd was beginning to gather around the Headmaster, who was still staring at the flag as though willing it to be the red Maple Leaf of Canada.

Bruno jumped up from his spot at the window.

“Okay, everything’s in motion. Let’s go out and join the crowd.”

“Not me,” said Boots, beginning to perspire. “The Fish will know it’s us.”

“Don’t be silly! How on earth could he know?”

“It’s *always* us!” Boots exclaimed.

“Come on,” Bruno said, pulling his friend up and half-dragging him down the freshly painted hallway. “We did all the work and they’re having all the fun. Maybe it’ll turn into a riot. I love riots.”

The boys emerged into the yard and melted into the crowd. They could see the entire population of Miss Scrimmage’s Finishing School watching from across the road. There was a lot of whistling, shouting and waving from the boys, until Mr. Sturgeon began surveying the students with his steely gray eyes. A hush fell. Boots pinched Bruno; the steely eyes had stopped on them.

At that moment the flag of Malbonia was unceremoniously lowered and the Maple Leaf run up in its place — but not before a number of spectators arriving for the big game had noticed it.

* * *

The annual hockey game between the Macdonald Hall Macs and the York Academy Cougars was to take place that afternoon. It had been a tradition since 1952, and the feeling of rivalry was intense. Spectators from

both sides were pouring in, not just the families of the teams, but everyone who wanted to witness the yearly battle. The Macs were determined to win this one — having been thoroughly trounced in each of their five previous meetings. Then there was that wretched cat! The Cougars had a mascot, a thirty-pound alley cat sporting the team colors. At every game she would sit smugly on the players' bench looking fat and contented. It was too much! Macdonald Hall had no mascot at all — except for a loud cheering section from Miss Scrimmage's.

Two of the Macs' best players, Bruno Walton and Captain Boots O'Neal, were not yet in the dressing room. They were sneaking down the hall of Dormitory 3, trying to subdue a strangely active laundry bag. They stumbled into their room and locked the door behind them.

"All right, let 'er loose," gasped Bruno.

"Let her loose?" Boots screeched. "She'll rip the room up!"

"No, she won't. I'll give her a saucer of milk."

"A bucket would be more like it! All right, here goes!"

The cat erupted from the bag, swiping at Boots' face and scratching him from ear to chin.

"Yeow! Stupid cat!" Boots howled, backing away.

The animal stretched, then leapt up onto the bed where it began making strange groaning noises.

"Do you think we hurt her?" Boots asked, rubbing his face.

"Nah, she's probably just overfed. I'm sure they stuff her before games so she can look extra fat on their bench."

"She'd better be all right," said Boots doubtfully.

"She's fine. C'mon, let's get going. We're late!"

As they entered the dressing room, Bruno and Boots gave their teammates the high sign — the first phase of 'Operation Fat Cat' had been successfully completed.

"You two are late!" Coach Flynn roared. "What's that scratch on your face, O'Neal?"

"I cut myself shaving," Boots mumbled, leaning over to tighten his shin pads.

Before the coach could respond, the dressing room was filled with laughter. Then the team was called out onto the ice.

Bruno and Boots skated their warm-up close together. From the corner of his mouth Boots hissed, "That scratch on my face is like wearing a sign saying I took the cat."

"Relax," Bruno said. "I won't let you take all the blame."

"Thanks, that's very comforting!"

Suddenly the loudspeaker burst into life: *Attention, please. We regret to announce the disappearance of the York Academy mascot. She is a large gray tabby wearing an orange and black ribbon and a tag bearing*

the name Myrtle. We would remind the gentlemen of Macdonald Hall that the York Academy team are our guests. We ask that Myrtle be returned immediately to the Cougars' bench.

"We're in for it now!" groaned Boots. "The Fish is looking straight at us!"

"Just wait until they play the anthem," Bruno replied. Boots' heart sank; he had forgotten about that.

The loudspeaker broke in again: *Would everyone please rise for our national anthem.* There was the usual scuffling of feet and the crackling of a record. Then a hush fell over the arena. But instead of the solemn opening bars of *O Canada* the air exploded with the throbbing beat of *The Strip*. Miss Scrimmage's cheering section went wild. The girls started to bump and grind while their Headmistress swooned back into her seat. Even when the record was finally switched off the hubbub continued.

Boots could almost feel Mr. Sturgeon's glare burning into his back. He did the only thing he could think of: standing at attention, he started to sing *O Canada*. Bruno got the message and quickly joined in; soon both teams were singing. The spectators followed suit and order was finally restored.

The game began in typical fashion: Boots got a goal and Bruno got a penalty. The Cougars struck back to even the score. It was still 1 - 1 when the first period ended.

In the dressing room Coach Flynn started into his pep

talk. "We've got them, boys!" he bawled. "They're playing like a bunch of rejects today!"

Bruno raised innocent eyes to the coach. "That's because they don't have that stupid elephant cat."

Flynn glared at the players. "I hope none of *you* had anything to do with that cat's disappearance."

"No, sir!" said Pete Anderson, the goalie. "We have better things to do than play with kittens." As Coach Flynn continued his harangue, Pete nudged Boots and his voice sank to a whisper. "What'd you do with it?"

"It's in our room," Boots muttered. "The last I saw of it, it looked as if it was dying!"

"Better not! What would we do with a hot dead cat?"

Before Boots could reply, the buzzer sounded and the teams took the ice for the second period. Boots and the Cougars' captain met at center ice for the face-off. The Cougar boy stared at Boots' face, then suddenly dropped his stick and gloves and wrestled Boots to the ice.

"Where'd you get that scratch?" he screamed. "Where's Myrtle?"

When the referee finally stopped the fight, the Cougars' captain was thrown out of the game for unsportsmanlike conduct. But from then on all the Cougars were after Boots. Only his speed and Bruno's weight saved him. At the end of the second period, the Macs were ahead by two goals.

In the dressing room Coach Flynn gave the team

another rousing pep talk. At the end of it he turned to Boots and said, "As for you, O'Neal, I know darn well you're too young to be shaving. So if that scratch comes from a cat, I don't want to know about it." Boots remained silent.

As the teams poured onto the ice for the third period, Boots skated over to Bruno. "Do you think the coach will mention this to The Fish?"

"Who cares?" Bruno crowed. "We're going to win for the first time in six years!"

Boots was about to protest when the buzzer sounded. No sooner was play under way than he took a viciously hard cross-check from a revenge-seeking Cougar. Seconds later an egg came sailing out of the crowd and splattered all over the Cougar's sweater. It wasn't hard to locate the source of the egg: Miss Scrimmage looked as if she wanted to crawl into a hole. Cries of "Attaboy, girls!" and "That's showing 'em!" erupted from the Macs' bench. The offender headed for the penalty box with yolk dripping down onto his skates.

When the final buzzer ended the game, the arena rang with cheers. The Macs had won, 4 - 1. As Mr. Sturgeon pushed through the crowd, his expression alternated between a victory smirk and a grim mask.

Bruno and Boots showered and dressed hurriedly, mumbling something about having to study. It was time to plant Myrtle on the Cougars' bus. They raced to their room, let themselves in, and stopped dead. There, still

on Boots' bed, was Myrtle — with five kittens!

"Look!" Bruno gasped. "We're a father!"

"And I thought she was *sick*! I wish she had been! How are we going to get all of them back on the bus?"

"Same way," Bruno decided. "In the laundry bag."

Recalling Boots' scratch, he put on his hockey gloves and began to pack mother and kittens into the bag. Then the two boys stole out of the building and over to the Cougars' bus.

"I'll unload them. You stand guard," Bruno ordered.

A few seconds later, while Bruno was arranging the cats comfortably under a seat, he heard an ominously loud voice say, "Good evening, Mr. Sturgeon. Did you enjoy the game, sir?"

"Very much indeed," the Headmaster replied cordially. "And may I ask what you are doing at the Cougars' bus?"

Before Boots could reply, Bruno emerged. "I knew it, sir! I just knew it! Those York guys didn't even look for their precious mascot. The nerve of them, accusing us of kidnapping! Look, there she is, right over there. She just hid under a seat to have her kittens."

Mr. Sturgeon smiled crookedly. "Well, I'm extremely relieved to learn that none of the Macdonald boys stooped so low as to kidnap a mascot."

"We don't need *that* kind of help to beat them," Bruno replied.

"Just the same, I think you two had better run

along,” said Mr. Sturgeon. “I wouldn’t want to see you accused of any hanky-panky just because you happen to be on the scene.” Again his face adjusted itself into a very strange smile.

“Yes, sir!” the two chorused, and ran off to their room.

“Boy!” exclaimed Boots. “Were we lucky to get through this day alive!”

Bruno was rolling on his bed, hysterical with laughter. “Did you see Miss Scrimmage during the anthem? I thought she’d disintegrate!”

“I don’t know,” Boots said in a worried tone. “I still think The Fish knows about the flag . . . *and* the record . . . *and* the cat.”

“How could he?” Bruno scoffed. “We were brilliant!”

His jubilation was interrupted by a knock at the door. Boots opened it and took a note from the office messenger. It read: *Bruno Walton and Melvin O’Neal are to present themselves at Mr. Sturgeon’s office immediately following the dinner hour.*