

CHAPTER 1

“AAAAAHHHHHHCHOOOOOOOOO!”

It was the sneeze heard around the world. Or if not the world, at least the neighborhood. And it didn't stop at one, either. It was followed by two more, each blast more powerful than the last. Billy Broccoli had never heard Hoover Porterhouse III sneeze before. In fact, he never even knew a ghost could sneeze, but apparently they can, and with the force of a hurricane.

“Holy moly,” Billy said to the Hoove. “At least cover your mouth.”

“I did,” the Hoove answered. “But I blew my hand right off. That's the kind of power I possess. Besides, I can't help myself. My delicate system is allergic to paint fumes.”

“Well, we're redoing my room this weekend, so you better get used to it.”

Billy reached down and stirred the can of

paint his stepfather, Bennett Fielding, had just brought in. It was a medium shade of blue, dark enough to cover the pink-and-lavender nightmare walls Billy had been living with for the past eight weeks since his blended family had moved into the new house.

“And why wasn’t I informed about this particular painting situation?” the Hoove asked. “It happens to be more my room than yours. Don’t make me remind you that I was the one who lived here ninety-nine years ago when this was nothing but an orange grove and a ranch house. I think I deserve to know when my room is being painted and when it isn’t.”

“How could I tell you? You haven’t been around, as usual,” Billy snapped. “I looked for you everywhere — behind every door, inside every drawer. I even checked the laundry hamper.”

“And what gives you the impression that a young ghost with my dapper personal style would choose to hang out with soiled garments? Or worse yet, fold myself up in your underwear drawer?”