

Chapter 3

The Voodoo Curse

Phil, the assistant kitchen chief, exchanged high fives with Bruno and Boots as they reported for dishwashing duty.

“My buddies! How was your summer? I knew you’d be here soon, but the first day? What was the rap — the scuba suit on Sir John A.?”

“Scrimmage’s,” shrugged Boots.

“Yeah?” laughed Phil. “You got caught? Boy, you guys must be getting old or something.”

Bruno winced. “Don’t say that, okay?”

“I love it when you get put on dishwashing duty,” Phil went on. “You’ve both got so much experience. I mean, you know exactly how to scrape the plates and load the machine. You’re a couple of pros.”

“Thanks, I think,” said Bruno, accepting the hairnet that all kitchen workers had to wear. “Hey, Phil, just for old times’ sake, how about you let us work without these things?”

“No can do, buddy. School rules. Okay, here come some trays. It’s show time.”

Bruno and Boots set to work, scraping and stacking. In min-

utes, they were bathed in sweat from the heat of the kitchen.

“Hello, suckers. Nice hair.”

Both boys looked up. There, his head sticking through the tray window above the conveyor belt, was Edward O’Neal.

“Suckers?” repeated Boots. “You were at Scrimmage’s, too. We could have ratted you out to The Fish, but we didn’t. You’re welcome.”

Edward placed his tray on the belt. “My plate is especially dirty tonight,” he informed them. “So you’re going to have to put a little extra muscle into scraping off the hardened gravy and the fossilized mashed potatoes.”

“Get him out of here,” said Bruno without looking up, “or he’s going through the pot-scrubber cycle.”

Suddenly, Phil’s voice rang out in the kitchen. “What the — ?”

Bruno and Boots wheeled. The assistant kitchen chief was crouched in front of the big industrial dishwasher, trying to stop a wall of suds. The white soapy froth was pouring through the steam vents, from the bottom and out of the gasket around the door. Phil backed up as it advanced.

Bruno and Boots waded into the bubbles.

“I’ll turn it off!” called Bruno.

“No!” shrieked Phil. “You don’t stand in water and touch an electrical switch!”

“Then what do we do?” called Boots. The suds were waist-deep and still coming.

“Get some help!” cried Phil, his voice muffled as he tried to clear a path through the suds.

“*Fi-i-i-i-re!*” howled Bruno.

Instantly, the chef and his crew stampeded onto the scene.

“What fire?” the chef demanded. “There’s no fire!”

“Yeah!” cried Bruno. “But you wouldn’t have come if I yelled ‘bubbles!’”

The chef marched to the dry end of the kitchen, opened a fuse box and flipped a circuit breaker. All at once, the lights went out, and the dishwasher fell silent. The mountain of suds began to settle slowly with the whispering sound made by popping bubbles.

The chef looked around the room with blazing eyes. “This doesn’t just happen by accident! There must have been a box of detergent in that dishwasher! Now, who put it there?”

There was dead silence as suspicious glances darted like laser beams around the kitchen. Finally, all eyes came to rest on Bruno and Boots.

“What’s everyone looking at us for?” Bruno demanded, outraged.

Phil frowned thoughtfully. “It’s kind of a coincidence that this happens right when the two biggest practical jokers in the school are washing dishes.”

“But we didn’t do it!” squeaked Boots.

It took an extra hour to clean up the kitchen after dinner that evening. Bruno and Boots were there for every mop stroke and squeegee. The dirty looks from the kitchen staff didn’t make things any more pleasant. No one seemed to believe that the caper had not been their doing.

“This year is really starting to get on my nerves,” said Bruno, wringing his rag into a plastic pail. “First I meet your lousy brother, then The Fish shows up on a cane and now this. What idiot pulls a stupid stunt like this?”

Boots laughed mirthlessly. “Us, if we’d thought of it first. It was pretty funny.”

“It’s only funny when you don’t have to clean it up,” muttered Bruno. “If I ever get my hands on the kid who did this, he’s a goner!”

Boots picked up a sponge to wipe off the counter. He paused. There, in a small puddle on the Formica, was a single brown feather. “Yeccch! What do they do — pluck the chickens right in here?”

“Either that or we drowned a pheasant,” commented Bruno.

“It’s not fair,” said Boots feelingly. “They treat us like criminals over something that’s not even our fault, while they run this kitchen like a pigsty.”

“Life isn’t fair,” agreed Bruno. “Not this year, anyway.”