



GHOST HOUSE

PAUL KROPP



Ghost HOUSE

a novel

by

PAUL KROPP



H·I·P Books

This One



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New Series Canada

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Tyler and Zach don't believe in ghosts. So when a friend offers them big money to spend a night in the old Blackwood house, they jump at the chance. There's no such thing as ghosts, right?

CHAPTER 1

The Bet

It started with me shooting off my mouth. The four of us were walking down Barton Street on the way to school. I was with my little brother, Zach, like always. A.J. and Hammy were going down the street with us, A.J. riding on his bike and Hammy with his skateboard.

We were goofing around, like always, when we passed the old Blackwood place. It's a big old house that used to belong to this lumber guy, back when

our town was full of lumber mills and the river chock full of logs. I guess the house must have been pretty nice back then. These days it's all boarded up, with half the roof sagging and the paint all peeled away.

"It's haunted, you know," A.J. said. His real name is Alexander, but we've called him A.J. ever since we were little kids.

"Riii-ight," I replied. "And I'm really King Tut come back to life."

"No, I'm not kidding," A.J. went on. "My dad says that a kid got stabbed in there years ago. And I've been by here at night and you can still see funny lights moving around inside." He sounded all pumped up, like he was actually scared.

"Must be some high-school kids having a party," my brother Zach told him, "trying to find some place to crash where the rats won't get 'em."

Hammy zoomed up the sidewalk to the steps on his skateboard, then did a 180 ollie that looked pretty slick. "Hey, ghosts!" he shouted. "How do you like that? You want to see me do a grind?"

"See?" I told A.J. "The ghosts didn't say a thing."



They didn't even give Hammy a round of applause. If that place is haunted, how come the ghosts are so quiet?"

"It's quiet as a tomb," my brother threw in. He made his voice real deep for the "tomb" part, sort of like TOOOM!

"You guys shouldn't joke," A.J. came back. "There's more to this world than you and me understand."

"Like ghosts?" I asked. "How about witches and warlocks and frogs that turn into princes?"

"But only if they're kissed, right?" my brother added. Then the three of us all broke into big laughs.

Laughing is what the four of us do best. We'd been laughing together ever since . . . well, ever since ever. We were together in preschool, friends in grade two and best buddies since grade six. Except my brother, of course. He's not my friend because he's my brother, and because he's a dork sometimes. But still, the four of us are always hanging together. If ever there is a ball game, we become half the team. If there is a movie to see, we

all go together. If there is a problem, then all of us have to fix it. Like the time Hammy's line drive smashed Mrs. Headly's window. We all chipped in on that one. After all, it was my baseball, A.J.'s bat and Zach's pitch that got the ball going. We are that tight.

But that doesn't mean we always agree on stuff. Hammy, for instance, takes school very seriously. He studies all the time, which is funny for a skater. A.J. is really the jock in our group. He follows all the sports there are, even golf, and he plays half of them pretty well. My brother, well, he's just a junior version of yours truly. Except that about a year ago he got the same size as me. People think we're like twins. Teachers at school call us double trouble: "Here come the McCann brothers. Better watch out."

Not that we're bad, really. Just a bit smart mouth, sometimes.

"You guys should listen up," A.J. said. He was getting that serious voice, like we were about to make some big mistake. "Somebody got killed in that house, way back when. My dad told me about

it. People say it's been haunted ever since. That's why no one will buy it. The place has a curse on it."

"Whooooo! Whooooo!" my brother said, then began laughing.

"Heaven protect us!" I shrieked.

"You guys make me so mad," A.J. told us. "Halloween is coming up, and there's no telling what might happen. Stuff isn't as simple as you think."

I shook my head and looked hard at him. "A.J., there are no ghosts, anyplace. There's just no such thing. When you're dead, you're dead," I said. They were the same words my dad used to say.

"Unless you're a mummy!" my brother shouted, and then he began walking with his arms out, mummy style. We'd done that for a play last year for the little kids in grade two. They thought it was great.

A.J. got a funny look on his face, then smiled at the two of us. "OK, if you guys are so brave, I've got a deal for you. Spend one night in the Blackwood house – one full night – and I'll" His voice trailed off.

"You'll what?" I asked, challenging him.

"I'll give you fifty bucks," he concluded.

"Fifty bucks to spend a night with cobwebs and rats?" I replied. "You've got to be kidding! How cheap do you think we are? We could make almost that much babysitting."

"OK, so how much?" he asked.

I turned to my brother, Zach. We both knew that A.J. was the guy with money. He was the one with the big-screen TV at home and the fancy Lexus in the drive. A.J. gets more money for allowance than my sister gets working at Sobeys.

"A hundred . . . each," Zach said. He drives a hard bargain. I think he'll go into business some day and make millions.

The money made A.J. stop and think. Two hundred bucks is a lot of money. For a kid in grade eight, like us, it's a ton of money. We knew that A.J. had the cash. I once saw his savings account passbook, and he had a good five thousand just sitting in the bank. But would he take the bet?

"Deal," A.J. replied. He turned to Hammy so he'd listen up and then laid down the terms. "A hundred, each. You've both got to stay inside for 12



hours, like seven to seven. No leaving. No sending out for pizza. You come out even once, and you lose. And if you lose, then you've got to give me that baseball you've got, the one autographed by Mark McGwire."

"No way," we both shouted.

"That's a World Series ball," I said, though A.J. knew it full well. "Our dad got that for us. I mean, you've got to be dreaming to think we'd ever give that to you."

“OK, so you loan it to me, for a month.”

“Just a month. And no touching it too much,”
I said.

“What, you backing out? You think you might lose the bet? I thought you guys had some guts.”

I looked over at Zach. We were both thinking the same thing.

“We’re not backing out,” I replied. “We’re in – Hammy is the witness. Two hundred bucks versus the Mark McGwire ball.”

“Deal,” A.J. replied.

“Deal!” I said, holding out my hand to shake his. “Kiss the money goodbye, A.J.”