

## *Chapter One*

### COULDN'T HARDLY SPIT

What was taking Frankie so long?

We needed to hurry.

Franklin Cletus Smith has been my best friend since we hunted doodlebugs together in my backyard. Some people call him Frankfurter 'cause he's got hair the color of a hot dog. I call him Frankie. I squinted down the sidewalk, and finally here he came, dragging his towel with his bathing suit hiked way up.

"It's a million degrees out here. I've been waiting forever."

"Well, hey to you, too, Glory," he said.

I stood up and grabbed my swimming bag. "Where've you been?"

"I cut through Mrs. Simpson's backyard." He wiped

the sweat off his glasses with the bottom of his T-shirt. “Then I had to turn around and run down the alley when her mangy old hound dog took off after me.”

“Don’t worry about that dog,” I told him. “He’s half blind. Just barks at what he can’t see.”

“Some dogs run forty miles an hour.” He announced that like it was the gospel truth. Frankie was always saying stuff that sounded like it came straight from his World Book Encyclopedia.

“Let’s go,” I said. “It’s so hot I can’t hardly spit. Jesslyn’s already at the pool. She might up and decide she’s bored, and leave before I put my big toe in the water.”

I scratched at a mosquito bite and tugged at the bathing suit under my shorts. The backs of my legs were burning up from sitting on the concrete bench outside the library. I couldn’t wait to feel the water’s coolness, to dive in and flutter-kick all the way to the shallow end.

Frankie yanked at his towel. “I hope the pool’s even open,” he mumbled.

“Wait a minute,” I said. “It’ll be open. I’m going swimming. Why would they close the Community Pool now, when everybody needs a place to swim?”

“I heard something.” He stared up at a noisy mockingbird perched in the shade tree in front of the library. Anybody watching Frankie would have sworn that mockingbird was the most interesting critter in the universe. “About cracks needing fixing.”

“Nobody’s closing our pool. Where’d you hear that?”

“My daddy. But it’s a secret,” Frankie answered, and headed off like he hadn’t said a thing.

“Your daddy? What does he know?” I raced after him, all the time thinking why in tarnation would our pool be closing on the hottest day of the summer, just twelve days before the Fourth of July, my twelfth birthday? And what was the big secret anyhow?