

SURVIVING the Applewhites



Stephanie S. Toland



Chapter One

"My name is not Edie. It's E.D. *E* period, *D* period."

"What kind of a name is that?"

The boy slouching against the porch railing had scarlet spiked hair, a silver ring through one dark brown eyebrow, and too many earrings to count. He was dressed entirely in black—black T-shirt, black jeans, black high-top running shoes—and the look in his eyes was pure mean.

"My kind," E. D. Applewhite said. She had no intention of telling this creep the story of her name. She could tell by looking at him that he'd never heard of Edith Wharton, her mother's favorite writer. Being probably the only almost-thirteen-year-old girl in the whole country named Edith, she had no intention of giving him even that little bit of ammunition to use against her. E.D., she thought, was at least dignified—like a corporate executive, which one day she just might be. "What kind of a name is Jake Semple?"

Two can play at that game, the boy's face said. "Mine."

Not an original bone in his body, E.D. thought. Just a plain ordinary delinquent.

According to her friend Melissa, though, Jake Semple was famous. He had been kicked out of the public schools in the whole state of Rhode Island. Melissa wasn't sure what all he'd done to achieve that particular distinction, but the word around Traybridge was that one thing he did was burn down his old school. He'd come to North Carolina to live with his grandfather Henry Dugan, a neighbor of the Applewhites, and go to Traybridge Middle School.

The plan had not lasted long. No one in living memory had been thrown out of Traybridge Middle School, but Jake Semple had managed to accomplish that feat in three weeks flat. At least the building was still standing. It was only the middle of September, and he had run out of schools that were willing to risk taking him.

Mr. Dugan was inside at that moment discussing with E.D.'s parents, her Aunt Lucille, Uncle Archie, and Grandpa Zedediah the arrangement the two families and Jake's social worker had worked out for continuing Jake's education.

Jake Semple was the first person E.D. had ever met who had a social worker. She thought that was probably

only one step away from having a probation officer, which is what Jake's parents would have when they got out of jail. That was *why* Jake had a social worker—because his parents were in jail for growing marijuana in their basement and offering some to an off-duty sheriff's deputy. E.D. didn't know how long they were going to be in jail, but at least a year. She figured criminal tendencies ran in families. The kid had burned down his school just after his parents were arrested.

E.D.'s Aunt Lucille was a poet and had been conducting a workshop at Traybridge Middle School when Jake was kicked out. This whole terrible idea had been hers. She'd told Mr. Dugan about the Creative Academy, which was what E.D.'s father had named the Applewhite home school. Only Aunt Lucille, whose view of life was almost pathologically sunny, would get the idea that after an entire state had admitted it couldn't cope with the kid and after Traybridge Middle School had been defeated in less than a month, the Applewhites should take him in. The Creative Academy didn't even have any trained teachers, let alone guidance counselors and armed security guards. There were a whole bunch of buildings the kid could burn down at Wit's End—the main house, all eight cottages, the goat shed, a toolshed, and the barn.

But somehow Aunt Lucille had convinced everybody else. E.D. had been the only family member to

Will anyone take on Jake Semple?

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Jake Semple is notorious. Rumor has it he burned down his old school and got kicked out of every school in his home state.

Only one place will take him now, and that's a home school run by the Applewhites, a chaotic and hilarious family of artists. The only one who doesn't fit the Applewhite mold is E.D.—a smart, sensible girl who immediately clashes with the unruly Jake.

Jake thinks surviving this one will be a breeze . . . but is he really as tough or as *bad* as he seems?



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Family Papilionidae
Common name Black Swallowtail



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