



Tangerine

EDWARD
BLOOR

The house looked strange. It was completely empty now, and the door was flung wide open, like something wild had just escaped from it. Like it was the empty, two-story tomb of some runaway zombie.

Mom called out to me, "Take the bag, Paul. I want to have one last look around."

I said, "I just did. I didn't see anything."

"Well, maybe you didn't look everywhere. I'll just be a minute."

"I looked everywhere."

"Wait for me out by the car, please. We can't have the new owners thinking we left a mess behind."

I picked up the garbage bag and hauled it out to the curb. We'd already packed up our sleeping bags, suitcases, and two folding chairs—all neatly wedged into the back of Mom's Volvo wagon. Now only this ten-gallon, self-tying, lemon-scented garbage bag remained, and we planned to toss it into the Dumpster behind the 7-Eleven. But first Mom had to make sure that I didn't overlook anything. She was worried that the people who bought our house, people who we've never met, would find a McDonald's swizzle stick and think less of us.

Once we dump this garbage bag, that will be it. That will be the last evidence that the Fisher family ever lived in Houston. Dad and my brother, Erik, are already gone. They've been living

in Florida for a week now, with the sleeping bags, suitcases, and chairs that they stuffed into Dad's Range Rover. The rest of our furniture left yesterday, professionally packed by two guys who came to really hate Mom. By now it should be over halfway to our new address—a place called Lake Windsor Downs in Tangerine County, Florida.

I set the garbage bag down and leaned against the station wagon, staring east, directly into the rising sun. I'm not supposed to do that because my glasses are so thick. My brother, Erik, once told me that if I ever look directly into the sun with these glasses, my eyeballs will burst into flame, like dry leaves under a magnifying glass.

I don't believe that. But I turned back around anyway, and I looked west down our street at the receding line of black mailboxes. Something about them fascinated me. I leaned my chin against the top of the station wagon and continued to stare. An old familiar feeling came over me, like I had forgotten something. What was it? What did I need to remember?

Somewhere behind me a car engine started up, and a scene came back to me:

I remembered a black metal mailbox, on a black metal pole.

I was riding my bike home at dinnertime, heading east down this street, with the sun setting behind me. I heard a loud roar like an animal's, like a predator snarling. I swiveled my head around, still pedaling, and looked back. All I could see was the red sun, huge now, setting right over the middle of the street. I couldn't see anything else. But I could hear the roar, even louder now, and I recognized it: the roar of an engine revved up to full throttle.

I tilted up my sports goggles to unfog them. Then I turned back and saw it—a black car—just an outline at first, then clear and detailed. It came right out of the sun. I saw a man hanging

out of the passenger window, hanging way out. He had something pulled over his face, some kind of ski mask, and he was holding a long metal baseball bat in both hands, like a murder weapon.

Then the gears ground, the tires squealed, and the car leaped forward at an impossible speed. I swiveled back, terrified, and pedaled as hard as I could. I heard the roar of the car closing in on me, louder and louder, like it had smelled its prey. I shot a glance into my bike mirror, and there it was—half a block behind, then ten yards, then one yard. The man in the ski mask leaned farther out the window. He pulled the bat back and up. Then he brought it forward in a mighty swing, right at my head. I dove to the right, landing on my face in the grass, just as the baseball bat smashed into the mailbox, exploding it right off its pole. Voices inside the car screamed—animal-fury screams—as the crushed black metal clattered across the street.

I scrambled back up. I left my bike there, its wheels spinning, and ran for home. I ran in absolute terror, listening for the sound of the car squealing back around to come after me again.

I burst through the front door, crying hysterically. My goggles were twisted back around my head. I spun around and around looking for Mom. Then Mom and Dad were both in front of me, holding on to my shoulders, trying to calm me down, trying to understand the word that I was saying over and over.

It was “Erik.” I was saying “Erik.”

Dad finally understood. He looked right into my eyes and asked. “What do you mean by ‘Erik’? Erik what, Paul?”

I stammered out, “Erik. He tried to kill me.”

Mom and Dad let go of my shoulders and stepped back. They looked at each other, puzzled. Then Dad raised his arm up and pointed to the right, into the dining room. There was Erik.

Welcome to Tangerine.

This place is weirder than it looks.

Paul Fisher sees the world from behind glasses so thick he looks like a bug-eyed alien. But he's not so blind that he can't see there are some *very* unusual things about his family's new home in Tangerine County, Florida. Where else does a sinkhole swallow the local school, fire burn underground for years, and lightning strike at the same time every day?

With all this chaos compounded by constant harassment from his football-star brother, adjusting to life in Tangerine isn't easy for Paul—until he joins the soccer team at his middle school. With the help of his new teammates, Paul discovers what lies beneath the surface of his strange new hometown. And he also gains the courage to face up to some secrets his family has been keeping from him for far too long.

In Tangerine, it seems, *anything* is possible.

ABA's Pick of the Lists

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A *Bulletin* Blue Ribbon Book

A *Horn Book* Fanfare Selection

An IRA Young Adults' Choice

A New York Public Library 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing

"A richly imagined read about an underdog coming into his own."

—THE BULLETIN

★"Gripping."—KIRKUS REVIEWS (starred review)

"Breaks the mold."—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

READER CHAT PAGE AND AFTERWORD BY THE AUTHOR INSIDE

Ages 10 and up

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Cover design by Jennifer Jackman

HARCOURT, INC.
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\$6.95/Higher in Canada

ISBN 0-15-205780-3



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