



IVY RUCKMAN

NIGHT OF THE TWISTERS

The most dangerous night of their lives . . .

As Told by Dan Hatch

When I was a little kid, I thought a red-letter day was when you got a red letter in the mailbox. Pretty dumb, huh? It finally dawned on me that a red-letter day is when something terrific and wonderful happens to you. Usually something unexpected.

Take that April Saturday when I won five hundred dollars in cash and merchandise. Now *that* was a red-letter day if I ever saw one! But who'd have guessed? A plain, open space on the calendar, that day started out just like any other, with Frosty Flakes for breakfast and Mom posting my jobs on the kitchen corkboard. "Don't forget to change the kitty litter, Dan," she said, just as she had every

Saturday for as long as I could remember.

By noon of April 19, I had entered the Dairy Queen Bike Race because my best friend, Arthur, dared me. By two o'clock I was crossing the finish line seventy-ninth, with only two cyclists behind me. Who'd have guessed a beginner like me would win the racers' raffle afterward?

Besides the one hundred dollars from Grand Island Thrift and Loan, I won a slick new racing bike (Schwinn Voyageur, 26 lbs., with Diacompe 500 G sidepull brakes and a jet-black frame). The prize also included a racing helmet, an aluminum bike pump, and three packages of Fruit-of-the-Loom underwear, which I gave to Arthur because he wears a men's small.

Now that's the kind of day that ought to have a tag on it. It could read:

This Is a Red-Letter Day

- 1. Dress appropriately**
- 2. Practice looking humble**
- 3. Comb your hair, in case of photographers**

Now that I'm older and more experienced, I know there are black-letter days as well as red-letter

ones. Those BIGGEES, the real blockbusters that mess up your life, aren't marked on the calendar, either. You never know ahead of time when you're getting one of those. If I had my way—if I were in charge of the world, as Dad sometimes says—the black-letter days would be announced, for sure.

I've thought about this a lot. What if God or someone actually did send out doomsday letters via the postal service? Wouldn't that be something? Say you wake up to a nice, regular day. Everybody's in a good mood, a perfumy breeze is swinging in from the south. La-de-da! Then you go out to bring in the mail.

"What's this?" you gasp, staring at a black envelope in your hands.

You rip it open, trembling all the way to the elbows.

"Furnace explosion planned," it says, "two o'clock today."

Or maybe "Head-on collision with a Peterbilt truck. Washington and Fourth Street."

Or . . . "Tornado on Tuesday!"

If people got notices like that in advance, it would save a lot of trouble and grief. It's those black surprises that get to you, those things people call acts of God because they have to blame someone.

NIGHT of THE TWISTERS

When a tornado watch is issued one Tuesday evening in June, twelve-year-old Dan Hatch and his best friend, Arthur, don't think much of it. After all, tornado warnings are a way of life during the summer in Grand Island, Nebraska. But soon enough, the wind begins to howl, and the lights and telephone stop working. Then the emergency siren starts to wail. Dan, his baby brother, and Arthur have only seconds to get to the basement before the monstrous twister is on top of them. Little do they know that even if they do survive the storm, their ordeal will have only just begun. . . .

"Exciting and fast paced. Readers will eagerly follow Dan and Arthur from beginning to end."

—*School Library Journal*

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