

Annex 3: Excerpt from the Book “The Bully” by Paul Langan (pp. 22-27)

Darrell caught his reflection in a store window as he walked. He reminded himself of a rat scurrying down an alley, hoping no cats could see him. He figured that to the rest of the world he looked like a little kid afraid of his own shadow.

Ahead there were five boys in front of a small sandwich shop. They looked to be around fifteen or sixteen years old, and each of them was bigger than Darrell. They did not look like the tough kids he knew of back home. Instead they seemed like ordinary guys just hanging out, the way he and his friends did. Two had soda cans and were shoving each other and laughing. Darrell wondered if any of the boys were freshmen at Bluford.

He thought about what to do. *Wouldn't it be something if I smiled and introduced myself, and they turned out to be friendly guys*, he said to himself. *Maybe they're just like Malik, Reggie, and Mark. If I get to know them, the first day at Bluford won't be so bad.*

Darrell moved closer and tried his mother's advice. He smiled at the group of guys, trying to hide the fact that his bony knees were almost knocking together.

"What are you laughin' at, fool?" the biggest boy called out. He was almost as tall and muscular as Malik. "You think we're funny or somethin'?"

"No, no," Darrell said quickly, his mind spinning, searching for the right words. *It was easy to talk to Malik and the guys back home, but these guys are different*, Darrell thought. He had no idea what to say to them. I'm ... new around here," he mumbled nervously, "and I'm going to Buford."

"Buford? What's that? You stupid or something?" the big one demanded as his friends laughed almost on cue.

"I ... I mean *Bluford*," Darrell stammered, "yeah . . . Bluford."

"Why didn't you say that in the first place? You got some kinda speech problem?" the big one asked. "Anyhow, you ain't foolin' nobody. You some sixth grader tryin' to pretend you're in high school." He stepped so close that Darrell could smell his breath, a sickening mixture of onions and cigarette smoke. "What's your name, kid?" he asked.

"I'm Darrell . . . Mercer."

"Darrell . . . Mercer." the boy repeated with a chuckle.

Darrell's name struck them all as funny. They kept saying it over and over in a mocking way. Darrell looked for a way to get away from them, but he was surrounded. Finally, the big kid asked, "You got any money on you, Darrell Mercer?"

"For what?" Darrell asked.

"We thought you'd make us a loan, so we don't put your scrawny butt in that trash dumpster over there," the big one said. His friends started laughing out loud. One kid in an oversized Lakers shirt doubled over, unable to control his laughter.

"He looks like he's going to wet his pants," the kid in the Lakers shirt said, struggling to catch his breath amidst his laughter.

Darrell gave them \$3.25, all he had. His hands were trembling when he turned over the money.

"Three bucks? That all you got?" the muscular kid demanded. Darrell stared at him in open-mouthed terror. Then, without a word, Darrell tried to walk down the sidewalk past them, but they all moved into his path, blocking him. The large kid raised his finger and poked Darrell's chest. "I'm Tyray Hobbs. I'm a freshman at Bluford, and I run things around here. Hear what I'm sayin?"

"Yeah," Darrell said, nodding his head. He wanted to go home, not to Uncle Jason's, but back to Philadelphia. Once again, he tried to move down the sidewalk. This time, the boys stepped aside. But as he hurried to get past them, Tyray stuck his foot out. Unable to step over Tyray's Nikes, Darrell tripped and fell into the gutter. His teeth jammed into his lip when he hit the ground. He could taste the salty blood oozing into his mouth.

"You clumsy or what?" Tyray asked.

"You some kind fool or something?" another boy asked.

Darrell got slowly to his feet. The cut in his mouth was small. He hid it by sucking in his bottom lip. He did not want anyone to see he was bleeding.

So this is how it's gonna be, Darrell thought.

"Look at him shakin'," Tyray bragged, and they all laughed again, the sound like car horns in a rush-hour traffic jam.

Darrell turned around and started walking slowly back towards his new apartment.

A young couple pushing a baby stroller were coming towards him. The man was burly. Darrell figured Tyray and his friends would not mess with them. When he got about ten feet from the baby stroller, he looked back. The boys were gone.

Tyray and his friends had slipped back into the shadows, but Darrell knew he would see them again. When he arrived at Bluford High, they would be there, walking the halls, sitting in the locker room, hanging out in the gym.

They would be waiting for him.