

## Chapter 1

# A First for Everything

The bell rang a minute ago. I'm standing on the steps of the school. My body is frozen. It's not because of the cold. Though it is late October, and it would be freezing in Montana. That's where I used to live. No. I'm frozen in fear.

Does anyone like the first day of school? No matter how much you plan, something always goes wrong.

It starts with a forgotten locker combination. This means carrying all your books to each class. But the schedule is messed up. So you're never in the right place. Teachers just keep glaring at you all day.

Then there's the whole social thing. Fitting in and making friends. Wearing the right clothes. It's never fun. But this time it's even worse. This is the first day at a new

school. Classes started months ago. That means I'm seriously behind in everything.

The building in front of me is so big. It's scary to think of what's waiting inside. There are 200 kids in tenth grade. My old school had 200 students. I'm talking total.

"You're late."

The voice startles me. A teacher? But it turns out to be two girls. One has on leggings and a tight top. The other is wearing jeans and a hoodie. My sweater dress is not even close to being cool.

"You're late too," I say.

"Yeah," the girl with leggings says. "But on purpose."

"Maybe I'm late on purpose too."

Jeans shakes her head. It seems she's not buying it. "You look like you're about to puke."

*She can tell?*

"What's your name?" she asks.

"Andrea." I put extra stress on *dray*. It's out of habit. I'm used to correcting teachers. They always read it wrong.

"Dray," Jeans says.

"Really? You too?" I say. "Hi, Dray."

"Uh, no. You're Dray," she informs me. "I'm Cole."

"Oh! Right. Sorry."

Cole just stares.

*Rule 1. No full names.* It's going to take months to figure this out.

"What's your name?" I ask the other girl.

"Alexandria."

Dray and Dree. That's funny. Hold on. Why is she allowed to use her full name? Is there a test you have to pass?

That's it. Before even trying, I've given up. I'm going home and letting Mom know. We have to move back to Montana. There will be no going to school until then.

"Are you going to the office?" Cole asks. "It's on the way to our first class. You can follow us."

*Don't think, I tell myself. Just do what you're told.*

## Chapter 2

# No Joke

*Where are we going anyway?* We've been walking forever. Maybe this is all a big joke. These girls are really leading me to a supply closet. But we do end up at the office.

"Thanks," I say.

Cole sticks out her tongue. Alexandria says nothing. They head for their class.

The woman behind the counter has questions. "Why are you late? What were you doing with those girls?"

What does she mean by *those girls*? "Nothing. I'm new here. This is my first day."

Then she asks to see my schedule.

"You're supposed to be in PE."

This isn't helping.

“Right. Can you tell me where the gym is?”

“All the way across campus. You’d better hurry. You’re already late.”

“Thanks.”

It takes forever to get to the gym. Now I’m super late. The kids have already changed. They’re playing basketball.

“Hello?” I call out. Nobody hears me. This is my chance. I’ll hide out in the bathroom. Then the teacher looks over at me. It’s too late.

“Can I help you?” he asks.

“I’m supposed to be here.”

The kids in the room are all wearing black shorts and T-shirts. An image of my gym clothes comes to mind. They’re pink. So much for not standing out.

“You must be the new student,” the teacher says.

He blows a whistle. The noise comes to a stop. Everyone looks at me.

“You’re behind,” he adds.

*Like I don’t know that.*

“We already warmed up,” he says. “Go get changed. Then give me 25.”

“Twenty-five?” I say.

“Dollars,” a voice calls out.

It’s Cole.

“Yeah,” she says. “Mr. Lee is broke. It’s embarrassing, really. Asking students to lend him money. Happens all the time.”

Who speaks to a teacher like that? It wouldn’t happen at my old school.

“Detention, Cole,” Mr. Lee says. He doesn’t seem mad, just tired. Now he’s looking at me. “You still owe me 25.”

Alexandria steps up to explain. “Push-ups,” she says.

“Really?” I say.

Mr. Lee nods his head. His arms are crossed. This is not a joke. I’ve never gotten detention in my life. I’m not about to start now. So it’s off to the locker room.

When I get back, the kids are playing ball again. Mr. Lee is waiting for me. This is my cue to drop into proper push-up form. I’m on my toes, not my knees. My body is in a straight line.

*Twenty-three. Twenty-four. Twenty-five.*

Off to one side, I see Alexandria. She’s nodding approval.

“You actually did it,” she says. “All 25.”

“Yeah.” It’s not a big deal. I was on a ski team. Push-ups were part of practice. We did double that amount. It must not be normal at this school.

Mr. Lee gives a sigh. “Get back to the game, Alexandria.”

*Yeah, Alexandria. Mind your own business, I think.*  
Who runs this class?

“Grab a basketball,” he says to me. “Let’s see what you can do.”