

AVALANCHE



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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.”

Chapter 3

No Sweat

Basketball is not my game. I don't score once. Even Cole and Alexandria are good at it. They don't seem to sweat. But they also don't play the whole time. Mr. Lee has to keep yelling at them.

Me? I'm soaked in sweat. My finger jams when I catch a pass wrong. *Ow!* Being the worst player sucks.

The whistle blows. Relief! There's a race to the locker room. I'm thinking about my next class. Where is math from here? This school is a maze.

"Hold up," Mr. Lee calls to me.

Great. He's going to make me late. I'll pretend not to hear him. But something makes me stop and turn around.

"Have you thought about wrestling? I coach the team. We need players."

Is he kidding? Sweating is one thing. But being that

close to someone else's sweat? The thought makes me cringe. There's only one sport for me. That's skiing. "Is there a ski team?"

"No."

He might as well have kicked me. What will I do for fun?

"But there is a ski trip coming up," he adds.

This is good news.

"Stop by the office. They'll give you a form. Your parents have to sign it. Be sure to bring it back tomorrow."

"Thanks!" Mr. Lee is pretty cool. I hurry to the locker room and change.



It's a surprise that I'm not behind in math. But I might as well be. It's my worst subject. The next class is my favorite. Science. At my old school, we were studying plants. Here, they're finishing a unit on energy. Just what I need, more math.

By lunchtime I'm grumpy. Making friends is the last thing on my mind. Most kids go to the cafeteria. That's when I head outside.

It seems strange eating outdoors in October. That wouldn't happen in Montana. It's snowing right now. But this is Seattle. Freezing here is warm. It just rains a

lot. Now I notice my shoes and socks. They're soaked through. I'm so ready for this day to end.

After lunch is English. Of course I'm behind. We're talking about books I haven't even read. History is last. Boring.

Finally the bell rings. Cole and Alexandria are nowhere around. They should be headed for the bus. Oh, wait. That's right. They have detention. I've never had friends like that. *Friends* might be a strong word.



"How was it?" Mom asks when I get home.

The look on her face says it all. She has a big smile. Her eyes are open wide. She's hoping it was a good day. That would make her feel better. It's because of her we moved here. She just had to leave Montana. That was after Dad left. Her goal was to get as far away as possible. Now she's feeling guilty. Good. She should.

"Awful," I say. "I'm behind in everything. And I didn't make any friends."

The smile leaves her face.

"But there's this."

She takes the form from me and reads it. "A ski trip? That'll be fun. But it's on Saturday. That's in three days. Not much notice."

"No. But that's okay." It's skiing. What else matters?

Mom signs the form and hands it to me. Wait till my friends hear about it. But we won't be able to talk until later. They have ski practice on Wednesday.

After a couple of hours, I check online. Still, nobody's around. It makes sense. They're tired. Practice is like that. All you want to do after is eat and go to bed.

I lay back and look around the room. Reminders of my old home are everywhere. There are pictures of me and my friends. Many are ski team photos. Awards we've won are displayed on a shelf. Posters cover one wall. One shows the Montana State ski team. The Bobcats are the best. It was my dream to be on the team.

Now that I'm really looking, it hits me. The whole room is blue and gold. These are the school's colors. And the state of Montana's colors. No wonder I'm so homesick.

It's awful being stuck here alone. Seeing my best friend smiling in a photo doesn't help. Does Jamie even miss me? Maybe nobody misses me.

There's only one thing left to do. And that's go to bed.

AVALANCHE

"Shhh. You'll set off an avalanche."

"That's a myth. Noise doesn't cause them."

Then the mountain echoes back.

Day one at her new school stinks. Andrea wears the wrong outfit. Every subject seems challenging. Only a ski trip sparks joy. There is nothing like cutting through fresh powder. As the new kid, Andrea wants to impress her classmates. The resort's loose snow is tempting. Desperate to fit in, she skis out-of-bounds with two other girls.



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