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CHAPTER 1

FADE-IN

“Get to class!” EJ’s voice boomed.

EJ was the security guard at Cube Middle School. He was tall and strong. Some kids were afraid of him. Usually, EJ was nice. But sometimes he had to lay down the law.

Seventh grader Shawn Miller heard EJ’s warning. Anyone outside when class began could hear it. It didn’t matter where they were on campus. His voice echoed off the walls.

Once again, Shawn was running late. That morning, he'd had a math test. Shawn had felt ready. But his pencil was missing. He had to dump his whole backpack on the floor. Finally, he found one. By the time Shawn had started the test, some kids were already done. Now he was rushing to third period.

Advanced Video Production was his best class. Most kids called it AVP. The class was small. There were only ten students. Shawn and his best friend John Gomez took AVP. They had known each other since second grade. Both boys loved making movies. Sci-fi films were Shawn's favorite. John enjoyed comedies. Someday, they would start a production company together. That was their dream.

Mr. Murphy taught AVP. In his spare time, he directed music videos. Some were for big stars. Students watched them on YouTube. This made him the coolest teacher at Cube. He rarely got mad.

But even Mr. Murphy would get tired of Shawn being late.

Shawn dashed across campus. Sweat soaked his red T-shirt. This wasn't the first time he'd had to rush. Nor would it be the last. His morning classes were at opposite ends of the school. It wasn't fair.

Mr. Murphy won't care about that, Shawn reminded himself.

He got to class only four minutes after the bell.

Not too bad, he thought.

Shawn barely heard anything Mr. Murphy said in class. He was working on his science homework. It was due next period. The assignment had been given three days ago. But Shawn always waited until the last minute.

The subject was black holes. At least that was interesting. Shawn loved outer space. One day, he hoped to make a movie about it. Maybe he could even film it in space.

Shawn looked up at the clock. *Five more minutes*, he thought. Class was almost over. He only had six more questions to complete.

“Don’t forget,” Mr. Murphy said. “Your big projects are due tomorrow.”

This news normally made students groan. But this wasn’t a history class. Nobody in AVP complained about projects. They all loved being in this class.

“You can upload them tonight. Or you can turn them in tomorrow. Please use a DVD, flash drive, or SD card.”

“Big projects?” Shawn blurted out.

“Yeah,” Amanda Nguyen said. She pushed up her glasses. They were big and black. Without them, she could barely see. “We’ve been talking about them for weeks. Duh!”

Shawn ignored her. Amanda had never liked him. He had called her “four eyes” for all of first grade. But that wasn’t why she hated him. It was

because he barely ever got in trouble. No matter what he did, Shawn always came out okay.

Sure, Shawn had to stay after class now and then. Sometimes he had to do extra homework. But his grades never suffered. Teachers didn't seem to care that he was constantly late.

Amanda found this very unfair. She was always organized and on time. Turning in her homework late never happened. In her eyes, Shawn was a total slacker.

The bell rang. Class was over.

Shawn folded his science homework in half. He turned to John.

“Have you started editing your project?”

“Yeah. I'm almost done.” John slid his iPad into his backpack. “Haven't you?”

“Ha! What do you think?” Amanda snapped. “Shawn Miller never does anything on time. Or without a million reminders.”

She pushed past them in a huff.

Shawn didn't respond. He was used to her insults. There wasn't anything to say anyway. Amanda never listened to him. Doing that wasn't worth her time.

"We shot all that footage over the summer," John said. "You haven't even started cutting it?"

"It was assigned too early." Shawn shrugged. "I forgot about it."

"Well, it's due tomorrow. What's your plan?"

Shawn grinned. "I'll get it done," he said. "I always do."