

Stuff Happens: Ned

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Extract

Chapter One

I was lost already. I had no idea where to go or what to do or who was in my class or anything.

When she dropped me off this morning, Mum said I should go to the office. But that was next door to Mr Murray the Maggot Vice-Principal's office, and a ticket to trouble if he saw me. Mum also said everything would be fine after a deep breath and a good look around. 'Besides,' she said. 'No one ever gets in trouble on the first day of school, especially not you.'

We'll see, I thought.

Mum was late for work and I was late for school because my older sister couldn't decide what to wear for her first day of high school. She's late for everything. If every day started with her trying on four hundred different outfits and staring at herself in the mirror for hours, I was going to be late for school a lot.

When Misty bolted out of the car at Monvale High she didn't even say goodbye. She ran straight to her friends and screamed, 'OMG! OMG!' She sounded like a cockatoo. Then they all flapped about and ran inside.

When we were halfway to my school, Monvale Primary, Mum's phone rang and it was Misty. I answered it because Mum was driving. Misty was spewing. She'd left her bag in the car, with her lunch and phone and everything. 'I'll die if I don't get it, like, right, like, now!'

'How can you call Mum if you don't have your phone?' I asked.

'It's someone else's, Ned,' she said. 'Just bring me my stuff. It's like, an emergency.'

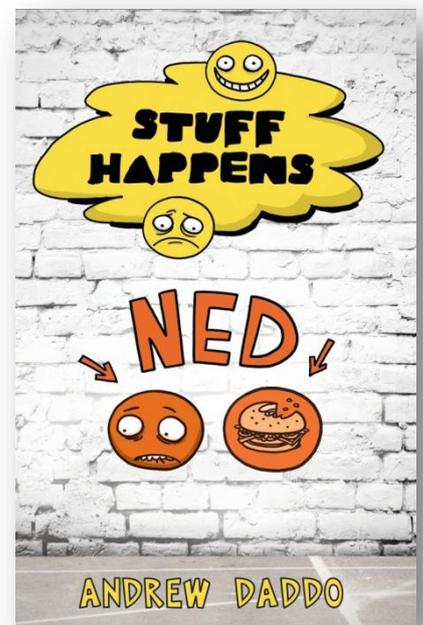
Something had happened to my sister over the summer. She was very different from the year six Misty Jenson, captain of Monvale Primary. She was nice enough inside the house, but once she got near our front gate she was just plain weird.

I told Mum, who said something she probably shouldn't have and turned the car around to take Misty her stuff.

'But, Muuuuuuum,' I started. 'It's already after nine. I'm late. It's her fault. Can't you take me to school, then take Misty her junk? It's the first day and I'm really, really late.' I tried putting on the croaky voice, like I was about to die or cry. That didn't help.

'We're all late, Neddy. You're late, I'm late, your sister's late. Your brother's probably late as well. What do you want me to do about it? What can I do about it? It's the first day of school – it really doesn't matter. Trust me, no one cares what happens on day one.'

No one cares about me, I thought. I only kind of meant it. But it's hard being the youngest of three kids. Most of the time the world revolves around the older ones. It's like they've already done the stuff I'm doing, and compared to them, it's not as if I'm an excitement machine, you know?



Mum and I didn't talk much after that.

When she dropped me off, she said sorry and gave me a kiss. She said she wanted to come in and make sure I was okay, but knew I'd be fine because I always was. I got out at the school crossing and Mum yelled, 'Make good choices!' as I walked in front of her car.

It wasn't the start to year five I'd been hoping for.

Deep breath and have a good look around. No one thinks clearly when they're panicking.

One of the really exciting, but scary things about the first day of school is finding out which teacher you get. If you get a good one, it's all good, unless none of your friends are in your class. If you get a bad teacher it's definitely all bad, even if your friends are with you. If you've got no friends and a bad teacher, it's like a tsunami of badness washing you in and out of the school every day.

I didn't know which teacher I wanted, only the one I definitely didn't. I wasn't alone. As bad as it sounds, no one wanted Ms Lucas as their teacher. Pretty much everyone says she's the worst teacher ever. As in of all time. She's mean. She's short and loud and angry. Even when she's happy she's short and loud and angry.

Mr Johnson had been my sister's year five teacher. He was supposed to be okay, except he always smelt of coffee and garlic and something we only guessed about.

Best of all was Miss Hobbie. She was young and fun and nice to everybody. She was a bit of a greenie, too, so she liked to have lots of classes outside. In nature. Or as nature-y as you can get in a school without much real grass. Dad said if she was my teacher he'd definitely come to parent-teacher nights. 'Miss Hottie's hot!' he said. Mum gave him the look for that.

I could see all the old year five classrooms were full before I got there, but it was hard to tell who was in which class. All I could see were the tops of the kids' heads, with the teachers up the front talking.

Ms Mucus was calling the roll. I could hear her from outside her room as if I was in the front row. 'Davidson? Doral? Fenton? Oh my, what's this name? Is it Grain? Is that how you say it? G-R-A-I-N-N-E? That's Grain, right? What's that first name? Geez. Murayah Grain? What's that? It doesn't sound like a name I've heard before and I've heard a lot of names.' When she said Murayah's name, she made it sound like a boy's name with a big farty 'ahhhh' at the end: 'Murray-ahhhh.' She was trying to get the name right, but she got it so, so wrong.

I hid under the open window of the classroom listening with all my fingers and toes crossed – when she got to the J's I hoped she'd blow right past Jenson. So far she hadn't said any of the names I really wanted in my class, which was fine if she didn't call my name.

Murayah Grainne must have put her hand up. 'It's Murayah Grainne,' she said. But when she said her own name, it sounded nice. Like 'Myou-ray-ah Grown-yah'. 'It's Irish.'

'It's beautiful, I suppose,' said Ms Lucas. 'Especially if you're Irish. Is it a bit like an Irish Maria? You know? Murayah? Ma-ria? Same, same, but different? Shall we call you 'Muzza' for short? That'd be funny, and the Irish are funny, right?'

It was hard to tell without seeing, but it sounded as if Murayah tried to protest. 'It's an Irish name, it's . . .'

'I know, I know,' said Ms Lucas. 'And congratulations, you got the first nickname in the class. Good one, Muzz. Hepman? Hertz? Jenson? Nedrick Jenson?'

Suddenly, it sucks to be me.