

INSTANT MENACE

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RED ROCK MYSTERIES

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JERRY B. JENKINS · CHRIS FABRY

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Instant Menace

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**“In the end, we will
REMEMBER not the words of our
enemies, but the SILENCE of our friends.”**

Martin Luther King Jr.

**“EDUCATION is the
movement from darkness to LIGHT.”**

Allen Bloom

**“You cannot get AHEAD
while you are getting EVEN.”**

Dick Arney



CHAPTER 1

☘ Ashley ☘

The first day of school is a mixture of Christmas and a trip to the dentist. You want everyone to see your new clothes and you want to see your old friends and catch up on what's gone on over the summer, but there's also dread for what your teachers have in store.

The air is filled with the smell of fresh denim, sharpened pencils, and newly cleaned hallways. Immaculate backpacks swing behind pixies (our term for sixth graders), and you can almost feel their fear as they face their next three years.

Will the year be exciting? Will you get into the subjects and lose yourself, or will it be an educational root canal? I've had both experiences.

At least I had my twin brother to walk through the whole thing with me. His name is Bryce. We moved from Chicago a few years ago with our mom. Our dad died in a plane crash and she got remarried to Sam, a man whose wife and daughter died on the same plane. Wasn't my first choice, but I guess that's life. We have a little brother, Dylan, and a big stepsister, Leigh.

That Thursday morning, Leigh walked toward the bus stop with a face longer than a horse's. She'd been saving all summer to buy a car, and the long face was because she had to climb onto the yellow monster. She says there's nothing more humiliating than being a senior and riding the bus. Watching Bryce and me zoom away on our ATVs probably didn't help.

We motored to Mrs. Watson's barn, just across from the school. Eighth grade makes us kings and queens. No one older to bully us, and everyone younger looks up to us—or should. Other than our senior year in high school, this is the last time we'll have this feeling.

It felt like a long time since we had walked these halls. Summer is always too short, and ours had been full of adventure and mystery. Part of me looked forward to a nice, uneventful school year.

I saw my friend Hayley near my locker and we hugged. Bryce rolled his eyes and moved to first period. Marion Quidley waved and smiled. I'd come to know her a little better the past few weeks.

Duncan Swift tossed a football to Chuck Burly, and it bounced off Chuck's chin. Duncan is probably the best athlete and cutest guy in the school, but he doesn't pay much attention to me.

One of the best things about the first day is that teachers don't expect to accomplish much. You get your books, find out a little about your teachers and classmates, and go home. No big whoop.

I had great hopes for the year. I didn't see how anything could possibly go wrong, especially the first day.

But as soon as I stepped into Mrs. Sanchez's Spanish class, I thought I was going to throw up. Standing at the back window was none other than the school bully from last year, Boo Heckler.



CHAPTER 2

☺ Bryce ☺

First period I'm teacher's aide for Mr. Gminski, an English teacher who's also the forensics coach. Forensics is speech competition where people read dramatic stories or do duet or solo acting. I looked forward to the season, which starts in January.

I'd never been a teacher's aide, but it seemed fun. Mr. Gminski said I'd grade papers and be a gofer (go for this and go for that), or when there was nothing to do I could sack out behind his desk in the reading room.

The sixth graders filed in like lemmings jumping off a cliff. The guys all tried to look cool, strutting but laughing nervously. They

looked so little that they reminded me of my brother, Dylan. It was his first day in kindergarten, and I couldn't wait to hear about that.

The bell rang and Mr. Gminski sauntered in. Short and stocky, he looks like a football linebacker with broad shoulders and a head too small for his neck. Reminds me of one of the comedians my Mom watched when she was young—the guy with the sunglasses and black suit.

Mr. Gminski told the class about where he'd taught before and what they'd do this year. Then he introduced me and asked me to call the roll and guess how to say all the names. But the intercom squawked, and the school secretary asked me to report to the front office.

“Uh-oh,” one of the kids said.