New Kid

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First chapter of a novel (YA)

I opened my eyes to three flashing, red numbers that filled me with instant panic. *8:46.* Adrenalin rushed through my body as I leaped out of bed into my clothes. I bundled up in my puffy black winter jacket, grabbed a chocolate chip muffin, and raced out the back door, slamming it behind me.

*9:03.* I was standing at the bus stop scrolling through Instagram. School had been in session for three minutes already but being late didn’t faze me anymore. I hadn’t been on time in weeks. My ceramics teacher had pretty much given up on trying to get me to show up on time. Now we had a daily routine where I would walk in late, sit down and start working while he gave me a look of annoyance. It didn’t bother me though, I still liked ceramics, even though I wasn’t particularly good at it. It was a nice break from academic classes.

Just as I really started getting lost in my thoughts about school, the bus pulled up. I slid my compass card out from my phone case and climbed the stairs up into the bus. As the doors shut behind me I tapped my card and sat down in the front. I popped in my earbuds and put on my school playlist, which I would listen to all day today. The only time it would be paused was when my grumpy math teacher made me take them out for the lesson.

I stared at the scenery as the bus bumped along the pothole-filled road. Soon enough we arrived at my stop and I yanked the cord to signal I wanted off.

I strolled into the ceramics room, muffin in hand and sat down at my usual spot. I didn’t notice that someone was sitting across from me until I looked up and saw they were using my paint dish. I don’t like to share.

“Um, hi? Are you new? You can’t use my paint.”

The boy didn’t look up. He obviously heard me though, because he wasn’t wearing any headphones. I decided to ask nicely one more time before getting angry.

“I know you can hear me, dude. Go and get your own paint.”

The boy still didn’t look up. The only way I knew he was aware of my presence was a slight furrowing of his brow every time I put emphasis on a syllable. It was as if my words were a nuisance he didn’t want to address. I turned away from him and stormed over to the paint station. In a heartbeat, I grabbed a tray and paced back to my table. In one swift movement, I brusquely dropped the new tray in front of this annoying stranger and slid mine over to my spot.

Only now did he look up. It seems my aggressive little switcharoo had spilled some paint onto the sleeve of his Champion hoodie. The small “C’ logo on his wrist was now decorated with a small spot of purple. His brow furrowed further at the sight of this before he peered up at me and said, “What the hell is your problem? My grandma bought this for me.”

 Now that I could see his face, I studied him. His eyebrows were a defining feature, as I’d previously noticed. They were thick, dark and expressive. His eyes were green and piercing. His gaze was gripping, and even though he had ignored me earlier, I felt compelled to answer him.

 “It’s not my fault you don’t know the rules here. You’re the one who used my paint and ignored me!”

 I crossed my arms over my chest and cocked one eyebrow at him, waiting for a response. But instead, he just mumbled something under his breathe and got back to work.

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 The next morning on the bus, I pondered the situation with the new kid in ceramics. Who was he? Where was he from? And why did he have to sit at *my* table? This train of thought continued as I got off the bus and entered the school. But when I trudged past the office, my pensiveness was interrupted.

 “Erica! You’re tardy *again*? This is grounds for suspension!”

I looked up from my phone to see that my path to the art wing was blocked by a large mass, otherwise known as the vice-principle. It took all my strength not to visibly shudder at the sight of him. Every detail about this man pieced together to form the most stereotypical middle-aged slob you could imagine. His beige button-up shirt was stained and wrinkled, stuffed into his khakis held in only by an immense brown belt. His face was in a constant state of 5 o’clock shadow, giving him the appearance of somebody’s deadbeat dad.

“Erica! Are you listening to me?”

“Oh, um, yes, vice-principle Johnson.”

“Well, then! What did I just say?”

I opened my mouth to stutter out some jibber jabber about being *deeply* apologetic for my serial tardiness, but before I could say anything I spotted ceramics boy coming in our direction. Mr. Johnson saw me looking down the hall and followed my gaze.

“Oh, my goodness! Another tardy student? This is ridiculous! Young man, come over here.”

Ceramics boy flicked his eyes up from the floor. He scanned the scenario and seemed to quickly decide he didn’t want to be a part of it.

“I’m on my way back from delivering a message for my teacher, as is Erica. If you guys are done arguing I’d like to get back to class.”

With that, he spun on his heel and walked back the way he came. Mr. Johnson was left stupefied, jaw dropped and mouth gaping. You could practically see the gears in his head slowly turning to try and figure out how this teenage boy had outsmarted him so easily.

“Mr. Johnson? Can I get back to class?”

Mr. Johnson muttered a defeated “yes” and trudged towards the office.