

*This excerpt is from a young adult manuscript. It has a very familiar style and pace for this genre. The characters are introduced quickly, it's a first-person narrative, the protagonist's conflicts are brought forward in a fast and interesting manner, and the setting is familiar – an American High School.*

My shirt gets some looks, but I'm not sure how many of the students even know who The Ramones are. I didn't think it was a dumb shirt when I walked out of the house, but now I'm having second thoughts. Whatever I can deal with it. At least my fly isn't open and my face is fairly clear today.

As I stroll into art class, I do a quick scan around the room. I pick out a workstation near the back. I only know George Newman, a fellow sophomore, so I sit next to him.

"Hi, George."

"Johnny, welcome back to the salt mine," he replies with a noticeable change in his voice. It must have dropped nearly an octave over the summer break. I can't help but laugh.

It's a typical elective class. You have your freshmen, with their bad hairdos, mismatched clothes, and deer-caught-in-the-headlights expressions. Followed by the sophomores, now a little more comfortable in their skin this year. And finally, the juniors and seniors, the self-proclaimed 'leaders' of the school. The seniors make up most of the class. They are always congregating together, lost in their superior world, having long forgotten what it was like to be an underclassman.

Then I notice her – Jenny Smith. It doesn't get any better than Jenny. She has long dark hair and big brown eyes. She's one of those girls that can get along with

almost anyone. She happens to be a cheerleader, but she's down to earth and has this hippy-vibe going.

Mr. Gallagher stands in the center of the room while he takes roll. The desks are arranged in a circle so we can all face each other. My eyes keep wandering to Jenny. I have to be careful she doesn't catch me staring. My sister is always telling me that it's creepy when guys stare. Jenny seems very consumed by whatever she is working on. I'm going to ask my sister about Jenny; a little reconnaissance work never hurts.

Jenny is Mr. Gallagher's assistant this year and will be helping his student throughout the semester. Mr. Gallagher introduces her to the class. As she addresses us, I close my eyes and focus on her voice – it's a perfect match to the rest of her.

So far, even though it's only the first day, school is starting better than last year. Since Jenny is the teacher's assistant I will have to improve my art skills. Abstract shapes or simple yellow sunsets aren't going to impress her. Time to take this crap seriously.

Class ends and we all scurry out. As I enter the hallways, I hear a voice from behind me – "I like your shirt."

I whip around, it's a freshmen girl named Sherry, or Cheryl, or something like that.

"Uh, thanks."

I want to kick myself – what a weak-ass reply. But to be fair, I was rather taken back by her mouthful of braces and uneven bob cut. You don't see many teenagers with metal braces anymore. I could have said something to extend the conversation, but I came up empty. Jenny was still on my mind. 0-for-1.

Second period is American History with Mr. Bowers. My sister told me he smells like booze at times. I guess even teachers have to do their thing to get by. Alcohol can't be as bad as Mr. Gallagher's stinky Patchouli oil – or can it? When I get a whiff of that stuff I want to barf while I sneeze.

I walk in and grab a seat in the second row, which isn't normal for me. I am more of a back-row kind of guy, but all the seats are taken. Just as I sit down, in walks Jennifer McFadden. I knew her in elementary school, but she moved away when I started junior high. I never got a chance to tell her about the huge crush I had on her. She was interested in Sean, my good friend at the time. But he didn't give her the time of day, which only made her more interested in him. She sits down right in front of me. She turns around and smiles.

"Hi," Jennifer says in a friendly voice.

I retort with the same word. But did she recognize me? I know it's been four years, but I look the same – I think. She's definitely gotten prettier over the years.

Mr. Bowers gets things rolling. He doesn't look drunk. Maybe he's an afternoon drunk, which would make more sense. Getting drunk in the morning is only for a dedicated pro, someone who can hide it really well. Jennifer isn't turning around again, she seems to actually be paying attention. The class ends and we walk out.

Jennifer strolls down the halls by herself. This is the perfect chance for me to strike up a conversation. But I chicken out. 0-for-2 – I got no game.

Third period is PE. So far my schedule looks pretty tolerable. I make the long trek across campus to the gym, where Mr. Stewart will give us the long scoop on the class; because there's so much to explain about PE. We should be getting a free pass on the

first day: some minor workouts, maybe a brief overview of the syllabus – but definitely no homework. There should never be homework in PE.