

Daniel is a pretty laid back kid. The 14-year-old attends a private academy downtown, right on the border separating the city from the suburbs. He didn't ask to be in private school. In fact, he specifically begged his parents *not* to enroll him there (Mostly because he hated the idea of wearing a uniform). It didn't work, and now he was stuck in this stuffy ass, uptight, homework piling, test-obsessed school. He got by just fine. He did the bare minimum for his assignments and listened sometimes to his teachers and he did alright. But throughout his short tenure at this academy, one thought keeps circling through Daniel's head.

"Man, I wish I had some friends."

Daniel wasn't exactly an unpopular guy, people who happened to cross his path had generally alright experiences with him. But it seems that the other kids in the academy had already formed tight knit cliques, and they didn't need anyone else. Nobody really *clicked* with him. He mostly just spent his time drawing his original characters for some stupid story idea he's had since elementary. At least he did before a teacher caught him doodling and confiscated his notebook. Now he just wallows around at lunch, looking at all the other people who were happy with someone else, be it romantic or platonic. He's an only child too, so he barely gets any connection at home. His parents are usually working late or sleeping, leaving Daniel to his own devices. It's not a terrible life for Daniel, but God, it was a boring one.

Today especially, Daniel has been lounging at his lunch table, drawing on the tables, even though he knows he's not supposed to. He hears the footsteps of the lunch monitor approaching him. Then, the pen gets snatched out of his hands. The stoic yet sassy look of the monitor stares down at him.

"You can expect a one hour detention after school, mister." The monitor drones at him with that same annoying nasally voice she spoke in. She began to walk away.

“Bitch.” Daniel spits under his breath.

“Make that two hours.” She bites back. Daniel slumps on his bench. No friends, nothing to do, his only mindless activity robbed from him. What’s next to do? He could take a nap on the table until class, but he knows he’ll simply be slapped awake and served another detention slip his parents would have to sign for him. There’s no winning with these people.

Daniel continues to stare aimlessly. He could hear the other students chatter on about various things, gossip, games, and movies, stuff Daniel wishes he could talk about. He lifts his head and notices something at another table. It’s a brown haired girl, in the same grade as him judging by how she looks. She’s reading a book while eating a sandwich. Daniel had seen her around campus before, but never actually interacted with her. And every time he saw her, she was always alone. Not a friend in sight. Normally, he doesn’t have the drive to just approach random people. This girl is different. Something... compels him to go over

He stares at her. The girl turns the page in her book. He stares at her some more. She takes a bite out of her sandwich. He continues to stare. She brushes her hair behind her ear. Daniel has an idea. He gets up from his seat and starts to walk towards the girl. As Daniel walks over, he realizes he hasn’t thought this plan through. He has no idea how to approach her, or what to say. He begins to fear that he might come off as socially awkward. But his behind was already sitting on the bench next to hers, just a feet away. No turning back.

Daniel sits in silence, fidgeting his hands. The girl continues to eat and read. After a few seconds, she notices him sitting there. She doesn’t actually say anything to him. She simply stares at him, presumably waiting for him to speak.

Daniel manages to swallow the moist saliva bubble that caught in his throat and begins with, “Hey.”

The girl still does not speak. She must be waiting for him to tell her what he wants from her.

“Whatcha—” He begins to say before the bubble returns again. He clears his throat before continuing with, “What’re you reading?”

The girl looks down at the cover of her book and then back at Daniel. She responds, finally, with a simple, quiet, yet blunt, “A book.”

Daniel forces out a chuckle. On one hand, he got her to speak. On the other, it was a very curt and uninteresting response. He needs to change tactics.

“I can see that,” He chuckles, trying to feign ignorance. “I mean, what are you reading? Like, the name of the book?”

“I’m reading a book, that’s all you need to know.” She retorts, retaining her uncaring tone. Daniel knows at this point she clearly doesn’t want to be bothered, at least right now.

“Well, can you at least tell me a little about the story maybe? Or if you care about spoilers, like, maybe about the genre?”

This time, the girl seems to avert her ice gaze from him. Her eyes are darting at all places as she’s slightly moving her head, almost as if she’s searching for something. They’re not exaggerated movements, meaning what she’s looking for isn’t really that important. She looks back at him.

“No, I’m good.” She says.

At this point, Daniel throws in the towel. This girl is engrossed in her book, clearly isn’t in the mood to talk, and if he keeps pushing, she’ll probably end up hating him. Surrendering, Daniel simply stands up from his seat.

“I’m going back to class to study or something. See you around.” He awkwardly waves at her before turning to walk back to the classroom hallways. Daniel is always going to remember what happened today, but for all the wrong reasons. As he slinks away, the girl looks back in his direction after he is long gone. She stares at him with a mix of longing and confusion. Something about him intrigues her, and she can’t put her finger on it. But she doesn’t pursue him either. She turns her attention back to her book.