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Unfriendly Boy

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Introduction

Some stories are told because they echo the experiences of many, shedding light on the quiet struggles seen and unseen. "Unfriendly Boy" is a novel born from observations of those who walk the halls of school feeling invisible, misunderstood, or simply out of step with the world around them. While this book is ultimately a work of fiction, it is built upon the authentic emotions that make up adolescence: uncertainty, longing, defensiveness, and the fragile hope for something better.

At the heart of this story stands Noah, a boy who is often branded as 'unfriendly' by his classmates and teachers. Yet, as the pages unfold, the reader will come to understand that what is unseen by most is often the most important. There are countless reasons a child might withdraw from the world; sometimes these reasons are noticed, more often they are not. Each chapter is a window into Noah's life—a chance to see past the labels and into the complexities that shape his world.

The journey through this novel is an invitation: to look closer, to judge less quickly, and to recognize that the surface rarely tells the whole story. Through Noah's encounters—with his peers, his family, his teachers, and himself—the novel seeks to challenge the easy narratives we tell about others. In schools, neighborhoods, and communities everywhere, stories like this one either go unnoticed or are only whispered about. "Unfriendly Boy" aims to speak them aloud.

This fictional tale does not offer easy answers or tidy resolutions. Instead, it strives to honor the difficulty of growing up when you feel you don't quite fit in. It is about small, sometimes invisible turning points: the almos, the if-onlys, and the moments we wish we could have seen differently in hindsight. The hope is that readers—young and old—might recognize a piece of themselves or someone they know within these pages.

As you read, remember that every story is more than what is seen at first glance. Each chapter builds upon small truths and quiet moments that, together, reveal the depth and dignity of a character who refuses to be defined by others' expectations. Thank you for beginning this journey. May it inspire empathy, understanding, and the courage to see past the obvious.

CHAPTER ONE: The New Kid

The first day of school at Northwood Middle School was always a kaleidoscope of noise and nervous energy. Lockers slammed shut with a clang, sneakers squeaked across the linoleum floors, and a cacophony of greetings and whispered anxieties filled the air. For most kids, it was a chance to reconnect, to share summer stories, to re-establish the familiar social order. For Noah, it was just another Tuesday.

He stood slightly apart from the eddying currents of students, his backpack clutched a little too tightly, his gaze fixed somewhere above the milling crowds. He wasn't exactly *trying* to be invisible, but he wasn't actively seeking connection either. He had mastered the art of blending into the background, a skill honed over years of moving from town to town.

Northwood was the fifth school he'd attended in seven years. His dad's job was like a capricious gust of wind, picking them up and setting them down in new, unfamiliar places. Each relocation meant a fresh start, but for Noah, it felt more like a constant reboot, wiping the slate clean just as he was starting to figure things out.

This time, the move had been from a small town in the Midwest to the bustling suburbs of a major city. The change was palpable. Everything felt bigger, faster, and louder. Even the school building seemed to hum with a different kind of energy, a high-frequency buzz that grated on his nerves.

He'd arrived the week before school started, just enough time to unpack boxes that still smelled vaguely of the last house, and to walk through the quiet, empty halls of Northwood. The principal, a portly woman with a kind smile, had given them a quick tour. Mrs. Gable had pointed out the library, the cafeteria, and his locker.

"Don't hesitate to ask anyone for help, Noah," she'd said, her voice warm and encouraging. "Everyone's finding their way on the first day." He'd just nodded, a tight little movement that didn't quite reach his eyes. Asking for help felt like admitting a weakness he wasn't prepared to reveal.

Now, surrounded by hundreds of strangers, Mrs. Gable's words felt hollow. Everyone seemed to already *have* their way. They moved in packs, laughing and shoving good-naturedly. He saw clusters of girls with brightly colored backpacks, boys in basketball jerseys comparing shoes, and even a small group huddled over a shared phone, their faces lit by the screen.

He checked his schedule again, even though he'd memorized it the moment it was

handed to him. Room 212. History. He knew exactly where it was, having traced his steps multiple times on the quiet tour. The trick was getting there without making eye contact, without bumping into anyone, without drawing attention to himself.

The bell for first period was due to ring any minute. The noise level intensified as students scrambled to find their classes. Noah took a deep breath and started to walk, hugging the lockers lining the wall. He kept his head down, focusing on the scuff marks on the floor.

Someone jostled him from behind, a whirlwind of backpack and flailing arms. He stumbled slightly but regained his balance, muttering a low "Sorry" that went unheard in the din. He didn't look up. He just kept moving.

He reached Room 212 a few minutes before the bell. The door was open, and he could see the back of a teacher setting up materials at the front of the room. A few students were already seated, some talking quietly, others staring blankly ahead.

He chose a seat in the back corner, the kind of seat that offered maximum visibility with minimum exposure. It was near a window, which was a small bonus. He could look out at the patchy schoolyard grass and pretend he was somewhere else entirely.

He slid into the chair, his movements stiff and deliberate. He unzipped his backpack and took out a worn notebook and a pen. He didn't look at the other students. He just sat there, hands folded on the desk, waiting.

The teacher, a tall man with thinning hair and a slightly rumpled shirt, turned from the front board as the bell rang. His eyes scanned the room, a quick, efficient sweep. They paused on Noah for a fraction of a second before moving on.

"Good morning, everyone," the teacher said, his voice clear and surprisingly loud. "Welcome to eighth-grade history. I'm Mr. Davison." He gestured towards the board where his name was written in neat letters.

Mr. Davison launched into the usual first-day routine: introductions, syllabus overview, classroom expectations. Noah listened passively, his mind drifting in and out of focus. He was used to this. He could tune out the droning of authority figures with practiced ease.

He noticed a girl two rows ahead of him turn to whisper something to the person next to her. They both glanced back towards him, their eyes lingering for a moment too long before they turned away, giggling. Noah felt a familiar prickle of unease. He knew what they were whispering about. The new kid. The quiet one. The one who didn't smile.

He forced himself to look out the window. A single pigeon strutted across the grass outside, pecking at something on the ground. It seemed oblivious to the chaos inside the building. Noah envied the pigeon's uncomplicated existence.

The class droned on. Mr. Davison was talking about Mesopotamia, about rivers and civilizations and fertile crescents. Noah wrote down a few notes, his handwriting small and cramped. It was just busy work, a way to occupy his hands and make it look like he was paying attention.

He could feel the weight of unspoken observations on him. He didn't look up, but he knew that every so often, a pair of eyes would drift towards his back corner seat. He was a puzzle piece that didn't quite fit, a foreign object dropped into a carefully constructed system.

When the bell finally rang, signaling the end of the period, Noah was one of the last to move. He packed up his notebook and pen slowly, methodically. The rush of students leaving the room felt like a physical current pushing against him.

He stood up and slung his backpack over his shoulder. He didn't say goodbye to Mr. Davison, didn't exchange any pleasantries with the students around him. He just walked out the door and into the noisy hallway.

His next class was English, in room 107. He consulted his schedule again, a purely performative act. He knew exactly where he was going. It was down the main hall, past the library, and around the corner.

The hallway was even more crowded now, a swirling sea of bodies. He navigated through the throng, trying to avoid making contact. He kept his eyes fixed ahead, his expression carefully neutral.

As he walked, he overheard snippets of conversations. "Did you see Maya's new hair?" "Physics is going to be the death of me." "What'd you do this summer?" Normal school stuff. Stuff he wasn't a part of.

He passed a group of boys leaning against the lockers. They stopped talking as he approached, their eyes following him. He felt his shoulders tense. He didn't look at them. He just kept walking.

He reached room 107 and slipped inside. It was another classroom filled with unfamiliar faces. He found an empty seat near the back, away from the main clusters of students. He settled in, his backpack beside him, and waited for the next period to begin.

The pattern of the day was already establishing itself. Move from class to class. Find an empty seat. Tune out. Observe. Avoid interaction. It was a familiar routine, one he had perfected over the years.

The English teacher, a young woman with bright pink hair, introduced herself as Ms. Evans. She was energetic and smiled a lot. She talked about books and stories and the power of words. Noah watched her, a detached observer. Her enthusiasm felt foreign, something he couldn't relate to.

Lunch. That was the next hurdle. The cafeteria was a notorious social battleground, a place where alliances were formed and broken, where reputations were solidified or shattered. Noah dreaded the thought of it.

He usually found a quiet corner to eat by himself. Sometimes the library if it was open. Other times, he'd just sit outside on a bench, if the weather was decent. Anything to avoid the cacophony and forced interactions of the cafeteria.

He looked at the clock on the wall. Still an hour until lunch. He sighed internally. The minutes stretched out, long and slow.

He opened his notebook again and started to doodle in the margins. Abstract shapes, jagged lines, a solitary tree on a barren hill. Things that required no words, no explanations. Just lines on a page.

He could hear the low murmur of voices around him. Kids talking about their friends, their weekend plans, their favorite video games. The sounds were like a foreign language, a conversation he couldn't participate in, even if he wanted to. Which he didn't. Not really.

He felt a sense of detachment, a floating sensation. Like he was watching everything from a distance, through a pane of glass. He was in the room, but he wasn't *of* the room.

Ms. Evans called on a student to read a passage from a poem. The student's voice was hesitant at first, then grew stronger as they read. Noah listened, his gaze fixed on his notebook. The words themselves were okay, but the performance felt forced, like they were trying too hard.

When the reading finished, Ms. Evans smiled and offered encouragement. "Very nice, Kevin. You captured the mood well." Kevin beamed, clearly pleased. Noah felt a faint, distant ache. It had been a long time since anyone had offered him that kind of genuine praise.

The hour crawled by. Ms. Evans assigned a short writing exercise. "Write about

something that inspires you," she said. Noah stared at the blank page in his notebook. Nothing came to mind. Inspiration felt like a luxury he couldn't afford.

He wrote a single sentence. "The sky is vast." It felt true, if not particularly inspired. He left it at that. He didn't feel the need to elaborate.

When the bell for lunch finally rang, it was a relief and a new wave of anxiety all at once. He packed up his things quickly, avoiding eye contact with anyone. He was one of the first ones out the door.

He didn't head towards the cafeteria. Instead, he walked towards the exit near the gymnasium. He knew there were some picnic tables outside, tucked away behind the building. Maybe he could find a quiet spot there.

The hallways were packed again, a churning sea of students heading for food and freedom. He kept his head down, his pace steady. He could feel the subtle shifts in the crowd as they parted around him, like water flowing around a rock.

He reached the double doors leading outside. The fresh air was a welcome change from the recycled air of the school. He stepped out and scanned the area.

He spotted the picnic tables. There were a few students already there, scattered in small groups. He chose a table at the very edge, furthest away from the others.

He sat down and pulled out the sandwich his mom had made him. Turkey and cheese on whole wheat. The usual. He unwrapped it slowly, his movements deliberate.

He ate in silence, watching the students around him. They were talking and laughing, sharing snacks, looking at things on their phones. They seemed so comfortable with each other, so connected.

He felt a pang of something he couldn't quite name. Loneliness? Envy? Maybe just a deep-seated weariness.

He finished his sandwich and took out a small bag of chips. He ate them one by one, savoring the salty crunch. He wasn't hungry anymore, but it gave him something to do.

He noticed a group of boys at another table pointing and talking in hushed tones. He didn't look at them directly, but he could feel their eyes on him. He knew what they were talking about. The new kid. Eating alone. Again.

He didn't react. He just continued to eat his chips, his gaze fixed on the ground. He had built up a thick skin over the years. Most of the time, it worked.

When the bell rang for the end of lunch, he was ready. He crumpled up his sandwich wrapper and chip bag and put them back in his backpack. He stood up and walked towards the doors leading back inside.

The afternoon classes were a blur. Science, Math, Art. More new teachers, more new faces. He repeated his routine: back corner seat, minimal interaction, detached observation.

He answered a question in Math once, when the teacher called on him directly. His voice felt rusty, unused. The teacher nodded approvingly, but Noah felt no sense of accomplishment. It was just an interruption to his carefully constructed silence.

By the time the final bell rang, Noah felt drained. The sheer volume of unfamiliar stimuli, the constant undercurrent of being watched and judged, it all took its toll. He just wanted to go home.

He waited for the main rush of students to clear out before heading to his locker. He retrieved his coat and his library book, a fantasy novel that offered an escape into a world far removed from this one.

He walked out of the school building and into the late afternoon light. The sky was a pale blue, streaked with wispy clouds. He started walking towards his house, his backpack bouncing against his back.

He passed groups of students walking together, talking loudly. He saw a couple of kids kicking a soccer ball in a nearby park. The world outside the school walls seemed just as full of connection and activity as the world inside.

He kept walking, his pace steady. He didn't look back. He didn't wave to anyone. He was just a solitary figure moving through a world that felt both overwhelmingly present and utterly distant. The first day was over. Twenty-four more chapters stretched out before him, a long and uncertain road.

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