

# **NEWMAN: By Cole \*\*\*\*\***

## **Chapter 1:**

After only being in New London for two weeks, Lukas already felt like he didn't belong. He didn't have a computer or any way to contact his friends back in Dallas. His entire life – his reputation that he had spent years building up – he had to leave it all behind. He didn't know anyone here. He didn't know ANYTHING here. He hated it. The only thing he knew was how to get to his new high school, Dulaney High.

Now, Lukas certainly wasn't some nobody back in Dallas. He was medium-sized and pale, yet skinny; around 5 foot 10 inches, but only weighed 135 pounds. He had green and brown eyes, a thing people often commented on after meeting him for the first time. He had luscious brown hair that curled at its ends, which made his hair appear a lot shorter than it actually is. He was also pretty well known among his peers in school; not “popular” per say, but most people knew who he was. He had a solid set of close friends whom he would hang out with.

But that's all gone now. Now he's in some middle-of-nowhere town in Connecticut about to go to a school with two thousand people he's never seen once in his life.

He walked into school for the first time ever with one goal in mind: he wanted to make a single friend. Just one. That's all Lukas needed to be satisfied for a few weeks, even if they never ended up talking ever again, he just needed someone to hold him off until he could find some REAL friends.

He walked through the halls in an attempt to find his math classroom, but he got distracted by how ugly the shade of red used to paint the hallways was. Dulaney was completely different from his old school. It was slightly larger in area, but only two floors compared to his old school's three. The school just lacked everything compared to his old school. It was smaller and less crowded, which Lukas couldn't really complain about, but it lacked spirit. The trophy cases were filled with nothing but He didn't really care though. He just wanted to get to class in time.

One by one, as students found their way to their classes, Lukas was one of the few still left in the hallways. The bell eventually rang, which caused Lukas to start to speed up in an attempt to find the room. As he turned the corner of an intersection, he looked to his right to see a girl running. It was already too late for her to slow down. She came barreling into him, knocking

them both onto the ground. Lukas lay there waiting for the girl to get up, but, for whatever reason, the girl didn't budge.

“Can you please get off of me?” Lukas said impatiently.

“Oh- uh... yeah, sorry...” the girl stuttered out nervously. “I'm so sorry for running into you, I've been trying to find my class for forever and I have no idea where it is and I-”

“It's... fine, trust me. I'm in the same situation.” Lukas interrupted. He caught a quick glimpse of one of her books on the ground that had been tossed from her during the collision. As the girl picked up her book, Lukas asked, “Is that *Ender's Game*?”

The girl quickly looked up at Lukas, surprised. “Yes, actually, it is. Have you read the book?”

“I love that book. How do you like it so far?” he asked.

“I'm actually really liking the book so far,” the girl said, trying to hide the smile on her face, “The story has been great.”

“Totally agree,” Lukas replied. “I bet you'll love the ending. By the way, you wouldn't happen to know where room 229 is, would you?”

The girl's eyes widened with a surprised look. “That's the same room I've been looking for.”

Lukas chuckled at the coincidence. “Maybe we could look for the room together?”

“Sure,” the girl said with a smirk. Her smile grew. “I just realized; I don't think I ever got your name.”

“Lukas, with a K,” he replied, “What about you?”

“I'm Payton,” the girl said with a fast-growing smile. “Glad to meet you, Lukas.”

Payton had these dazzling blue eyes that could lose people in their gaze. Clearly Lukas noticed this, as he couldn't stop staring. She had long, light-brown, luscious hair down to her upper back. She was a bit of a nerd, too. Sometimes she could go on rants about the tiny details of video games or the history of different grunge and rock bands for hours on end. Despite her occasional sarcastic and sassy attitude when people act stupid, her peers would consider her one of the nicest people in the whole school.

As Lukas and Payton walked around the winding hallways of the school building in search of their math class, the two got to know each other. They learned they both had many shared interests, such as music and skateboarding. Lukas brought up the topic of the SNES,

which they both owned along with a copy of *Super Mario World*. They both talked about their nerdy interest in the game before finally arriving at room 229.

The pair walked inside as Mr. Westphal glared at them with a look of anger “And what exactly do you two think you’re doing coming into class fifteen minutes late?” the teacher said with a bitter tone. “This is, like, the 5<sup>th</sup> time kids have walked in late today. What’s going on?”

“People are probably getting lost because your classroom is in the back corner of this maze,” Payton backtalked.

“Just sit down, you two,” he sighed with his hand to his forehead.

Lukas and Payton sat down next to each other in the back of the classroom. They were at a table with two other kids who started quietly talking to Payton as soon as they sat down. They seemed to be a few of Payton’s friends.

Lukas listened in to the conversation. He could hear them speaking about things that he liked and had talked about with Payton. Lukas thought about chiming in, before he heard the boy across from him whisper “Is the other kid with you?”

What the hell does that mean? Lukas didn’t know. His mind started racing as he thought about all of the different possibilities. What if they didn’t like him? What if they made Payton stop liking him? What if they started making fun of him and he’d have to live like that for the rest of the year?

Lukas’ thoughts were cut off when the boy across from him paused his conversation with Payton. He looked over at Lukas and questioned him, asking, “Are you new here? I don’t think I’ve ever seen you before.”

“Yeah, I’m new here,” Lukas shakily replied, still nervous about making a first impression. “I used to live in a town around Forth Worth until I got here during the summer.”

The boy across from him leaned back in his chair, stuck out his hand, and replied “Cool. I’m Savior, by the way.”

Savior’s answer filled Lukas with relief. They didn’t hate him. He was just being irrational. Lukas reached across the table to give him a fist bump. When he did, the boy next to Savior chimed in. “I have a bunch of family from Dallas. My family used to live in Plano, a little northeast of Dallas. My name’s Alex.” He didn’t stick out his hand like Savior or Payton, but Lukas just assumed it was a personal preference.

Savior was only around four inches taller than Lukas, but he looked to be a good 75 pounds heavier than him. He seemed laid-back to Lukas, both figuratively and literally, leaning back in his chair and chewing a piece of bubble gum. Savior had light brown skin with long, thick dreadlocks that hung shoulder height, and a rather monotone voice. He wore a dark purple hoodie with “High Velocity” written on it, with navy ripped jeans. Lukas didn’t want to seem annoying by asking Savior about the hoodie, so it remained a mystery to him. He thought Savior seemed nice, but he couldn’t be so sure yet.

Alex, however, differed. He had pale skin and blond hair that looked akin to Kurt Cobain, just slightly shorter. His quiet, raspy voice made him appear shy to others, but in reality, he was completely the opposite. He and Savior both played basketball together, which made them extremely close to each other. Around his waist he wore a dark green hoodie with a Smashing Pumpkins graphic. He wore a black t-shirt with a *Simpsons* graphic in the center and a pair of light gray shorts.

Savior interjected and asked Lukas, “How did you and Payton even meet?”

Lukas replied to his question, “Yeah, we met earlier when she ran into me at full speed and knocked me onto my ass.” He said while glaring jokingly at Payton.

“Shut the hell up,” she said, red with embarrassment. The rest of the group chuckled before she softly punched Lukas in the arm, making Lukas laugh even harder.

The group continued to talk for the remaining 30 minutes of class, much to the anger of Mr. Westphal, who nearly gave the whole group detention, but Payton managed to argue their way out of it. The bell rang, and together, they all left to figure out where their next classes were. Checking their schedules, they realized they shared most classes with other members of the group. Lukas in particular had each one of his classes with at least one other member of the group. This was perfect for Lukas. Even if his friendships didn’t work out in the end, they would keep him company for at least a couple of weeks before he made real friends. They seemed like good friends, however, so he hoped he wouldn’t have to do that.

After a long day of school and work, Lukas finally finished his classes for the day. He, Savior, Payton, and Alex met up right outside of school to walk home together before being parted by the roads. The group walked for half a mile before ending up on Murdock Road.

As it turns out, Lukas lived on the same street as all three of them. He lived across from Payton, diagonally from Savior, and right next to Alex, their backyards connected by just a single fence.

Lukas and his friends laughed about the coincidence. They said their goodbyes to each other before all entering their own houses. As Lukas entered his house, his mood went from excited to

He entered through the side door of the house into the kitchen. He looked to his right and saw a mountain of dirty dishes in the sink so large they were nearly overflowing onto the counter. He looked into the dining room through the cutout to his left and saw the mountain of papers and folders surrounding his mom on her side of the table. In front of him was a short hallway that led into the living room. Inside he could see just the head of his dad lying on the couch, passed out drunk, with multiple beer cans lying next to him. He ignored it and walked through the dining room up the stairs to get to his room. He entered his room, which consisted only of a bed, a desk, and a dresser, and lay down on his bed.

He just wished he could go back home.

He stopped worrying about his old life and got to work. He finished his chores and homework, then got into bed and thought about his day.

It went perfectly. His goal was to make just one friend. He had made three friends who all lived within a 100-foot radius of him. If he made three friends in one day, who knows how many friends he could make in a few weeks. His thoughts were sporadic and scattered. The thought of so many people knowing his name excited him to his core.

Lukas fell asleep that night, excited about what was to come in the following weeks.