

SCHOOLLED

## Also by Jamie Sumner

*Deep Water*

*Maid for It*

*One Kid's Trash*

*Please Pay Attention*

*Roll with It*

*Rolling On*

*The Summer of June*

*Time to Roll*

*Tune It Out*

# SCHOOLED

**JAMIE SUMNER**



**Atheneum Books for Young Readers**

New York Amsterdam/Antwerp London

Toronto Sydney/Melbourne New Delhi



ATHENEUM BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

An imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division

1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10020

For more than 100 years, Simon & Schuster has championed authors and the stories they create. By respecting the copyright of an author's intellectual property, you enable Simon & Schuster and the author to continue publishing exceptional books for years to come. We thank you for supporting the author's copyright by purchasing an authorized edition of this book.

No amount of this book may be reproduced or stored in any format, nor may it be uploaded to any website, database, language-learning model, or other repository, retrieval, or artificial intelligence system without express permission. All rights reserved. Inquiries may be directed to Simon & Schuster, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020 or [permissions@simonandschuster.com](mailto:permissions@simonandschuster.com).

This book is a work of fiction. Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Other names, characters, places, and events are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual events or places or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Text © 2025 by Jamie Sumner

Jacket illustration © 2025 by Celia Krampien

Jacket design by Karyn Lee

All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.

ATHENEUM BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS is a registered trademark of Simon & Schuster, LLC. Atheneum logo is a trademark of Simon & Schuster, LLC.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Simon & Schuster Special Sales at 1-866-506-1949 or [business@simonandschuster.com](mailto:business@simonandschuster.com). Simon & Schuster strongly believes in freedom of expression and stands against censorship in all its forms. For more information, visit [BooksBelong.com](http://BooksBelong.com).

The Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau can bring authors to your live event. For more information or to book an event, contact the Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau at 1-866-248-3049 or visit our website at [www.simonspeakers.com](http://www.simonspeakers.com).

Interior design by Karyn Lee

The text for this book was set in New Spirit.

Manufactured in the United States of America

0725 BVG

First Edition

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

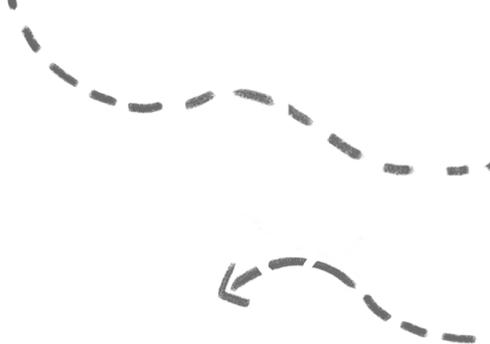
Names: Sumner, Jamie, author.

Title: Schooled / Jamie Sumner.

Description: First edition. | New York : Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2025. | Audience term: Preteens | Audience: Ages 10 and Up. | Summary: Eleven-year-old Lenny navigates grief while grudgingly attending an experimental middle school located on the college campus where his father teaches. • Identifiers: LCCN 2024043828 (print) | LCCN 2024043829 (ebook) | ISBN 9781534486058 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781534486072 (ebook) • Subjects: CYAC: Grief—Fiction. | Fathers and sons—Fiction. | Friendship—Fiction. | Middle schools—Fiction. | Schools—Fiction. | Universities and colleges—Fiction. | LCGFT: Novels. • Classification: LCC PZ71.S8545 Sc 2025 (print) | LCC PZ71.S8545 (ebook) | DDC [Fic]—dc23 • LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024043828> • LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024043829>

For VB,  
the best English professor in the land





1.

## DORM LIFE

**I slouch down as far as I can in my seat. I am practicing invisibility.** There's nothing of me to see above the dash except maybe one fluffed-up bit of yellow hair. So far so good. I hold my phone camera up to watch the happenings outside the van like a spy. Twentysomethings are manhandling couches and floor lamps and . . . is that a fire pit? Wouldn't surprise me. The married-student dorm is a lawless place on move-in day.

I drop the phone in my lap, slink down farther in my seat, and try not to let the ache in my throat sneak out in a sound. I swallow down the sadness like a pill with no water. This is not how sixth grade is supposed to go. For many reasons. Moving onto a university campus is just one of them.

“Where do they keep the babies when everyone's in

school? In the basement next to the dumpsters?” I ask Dad, who is staring up at the street sign to see if he’s allowed to park our beast of a van here.

“I think,” Dad says, forgetting the street sign and following the path of the fire pit with squinched eyes, “the university provides child care somewhere near the student center.”

“Benji,” I say from the subterranean depths of my seat, “you never could take a joke.”

His laugh is the sound of air whooshing out of a tire. Mom was the only one who ever called him Benji. With his cardigans and creased khakis, Professor Benjamin Syms isn’t the Benji type, at least not to anyone but her. Mom would tell me not to poke with my words. I should say I’m sorry. But in a weird way, I’d rather feel bad about this than sad about Mom.

I pick my phone back up and zoom in on a smiley face graffitied next to the stairwell of the tall, bland building. I let my eyes rise up and up to what I *think* is the seventh floor of Lewis Hall, my new home at Arrington University. I’m using the term “home” loosely here.

*It could be worse*, I think as Dad pops open all the sliding doors of the van and a rug flops out onto the curb. It’s the green rag rug that Mom wove for the kitchen in the house in New Jersey I’ll never see again. My stomach plops right down next to it on the curb. No, I decide, *this is as bad as it gets*.

Dad grunts as he picks up two large duffel bags.

“Help me with the suitcases, will you?” I eye him in the side mirror, with his belted shorts and Reeboks and VENI VIDI VICI T-shirt. He’s a super-geek Latin professor, but why does he have to *advertise* it?

With a sigh, I open the door and grab one single plastic shopping bag filled with power cords and chargers, because give me internet or give me death. While Dad’s back is turned, I also scoop up the rug and gently roll it up again. Then, with a deep, *deep* breath, I follow him toward the glass front doors.

The elevator takes approximately five hours to ding from five to four to three to two while we wait for it in the lobby. Then the “marrieds” come spilling out. That’s what I’ve decided to call them, the couples in our building with their Crock-Pots and dish towels and Old Navy flip-flops slapping down the sidewalks. They barely break stride to veer around us as they march in and out and in and out with their boxes jam-packed with stuff. Dad and I are two rocks in a river—sunk and stuck—while everyone else sails by. We could have lived off campus, gotten a tiny little house with a busted fence and funky-smelling closets. I wouldn’t have complained. But no, Dad wanted “community” and “inclusivity” and some other “ity” word that was just another excuse for the two of us to be alone together as little as possible. All his students love him. He’s great at small talk, as long as it’s not with me.

Dad looks uncomfortable in the elevator. He's not good in enclosed spaces, and here we are inhaling the same fuggy air as six other humans, two rabbits, and a potted plant. It's entertaining, watching him try to breathe in and out only through his mouth. I keep my eyes on him so I don't have to look at anybody else. I'm an eleven-year-old in a dorm. I don't know who's more out of place—me or the rabbits.

The doors open on floor five and the rabbits and their owner exit. *This will be how it is now*, I think. I will be that kid who never fits in anywhere. I grip Mom's rug. If she were here, she'd know what to say. Actually, if she were here, we wouldn't be in this stuffy elevator in the first place. I close my eyes and picture her toward the end, when her jet-black hair was so short, it looked like she'd buzzed it. Except it was the other way around, just growing back in. She's laughing and waving around a vinyl record at that place on West Fourth where the owner gave her a secret discount because she went so often. "Smile, Lenny, let the music move through you!" she singsongs, and pulls me dancing down the aisle.

The elevator dings, and I open my eyes and blink and blink until the tears shrink back. *Smile, Lenny! This is our floor. Lucky number seven.*

"You first, buddy," Dad says.

"Buddy" is a new word he's trying out, along with "pal" and "kiddo" and, once, "sweetie." It's like we lost

our interpreter now that Mom's gone. We have to invent a whole new language.

I step out into the hallway under a fluorescent light that flickers and makes the skin on my arms look yellow. The carpet is a dirty orange, and the whole place smells like a McDonald's PlayPlace—french fries and feet. Our house in New Jersey had wood floors that creaked and a tiny fireplace that smoked us out at least once every winter. I miss it so much it makes my teeth ache.

“Seven-oh-one,” Dad mutters to himself over and over again, looking from his key to the gold numbers on the doors as we shuffle down the hallway. All the way at the end I spot our door, which someone appears to be . . . setting on fire?

“Um, can we help you?” Dad asks the fire starter, who, when we get up close, turns out to be a girl roughly my age. She's the only other kid I've seen since we got here. I immediately get nervous and then shift the bag of power cords from one hand to the other in case she waves and I need to wave back. But she ignores us. So much for community. We watch for a few more seconds as she continues to wave a smoky stick up and down and across the door. The elevator dings again in the distance.

“Ahem,” Dad says, a bit louder.

After one last up-down swipe, the girl spits on the end of her stick so that it sizzles out, and turns.

“Hi!” she says, holding out a hand, which forces Dad to put down a duffel and shake. “I’m Hen. I live on the second floor. I was just smudging your door. A sage cleansing to start the year. Don’t call me Henrietta,” she says to me, like I had any intention of speaking whatsoever.

“Hen, yes! You must be Don’s girl.” Dad is grinning now, happy to have found the method to this madness. “Lenny, this is Hen. She’ll be one of the other students in your class.”

“Hi,” I mumble, and forget to wave with my freed-up hand.

“Hi back,” she says.

I study Hen from underneath the swoop of hair I spent all of fifth grade perfecting. She is all elbows and knees and impossibly long red hair that seems to move all on its own. If she were a tree, she’d be a weeping willow. She’s wearing rainbow leggings and she’s smiling, but her eyes say *don’t mess with me*.

When Dad finally manages to fumble the key into the lock and creak open the door, Hen follows us in, without waiting to be invited, to complete her “cleansing” or whatever it is inside the apartment. Apparently, she tried to pick the locks with a bobby pin but had no luck.

“Otherwise, I would have been long gone by now,” she adds before stepping back out into the hallway. “The cleansing works better if you have time to let it

spread on its own before you muddy it up with your auras.”

“Uh, right,” I say as Dad squeezes past us toward the elevator to get another round of stuff.

“You’re Lenny,” she states, and because it’s not really a question, I stand there with my hands in my pockets.

She tucks her sage sticks into her messenger bag and looks me up and down. I lean against the door-frame, trying to look both bored and cool, which is really hard to do when someone is staring at you like they can see into your soul.

“Well, Lenny, welcome to the Copernican School,” she says before swishing her long hair over her shoulder. “It should be . . . an interesting experiment.” And then Hen leaves, banging open the metal door next to our apartment and taking the stairs two at a time.