

## Excerpts from Chapter 1 of *Muchacho* by LouAnne Johnson (Knopf 2009)

### Beecher at the Library

I seen Miss Beecher today at the library checking out a old lady's book. She had her head tipped down so I couldn't see her face real good but I knew it was Beecher on account of her hair is the exact same color as a car I stole once. Bronze metallic. Beecher doesn't look like a regular librarian but she at least she didn't look like she was falling off a cliff the way she did most of the time back when she was trying to be a teacher. ...

First time I saw Beecher, I thought, oh great another one of those Peace Corps people with their organic shoes and their tofu sandwiches and their posters showing how important it is to save the whales and the rain forests and the baby seals and me and all the other semi-literate at-risk underprivileged economically deprived youth at the alt school who don't really give a shit about getting an education because what difference would it make if we did. We'd still be us. We'd still be freaks and losers except we'd be freaks and losers with educations, so we'd understand exactly what we couldn't have.

The day Beecher showed up at our English class, Edgar Martinez asked how long had she been a teacher. We knew Beecher was virgin the second she started to answer the question because the old teachers know better than to leave themselves open like that. Beecher told us she was going through a program for alternative certification because she didn't decide to become a teacher until after she already graduated college. So she said we had something in common because she was an alternative teacher and we were alternative students. For like two seconds, I started to fall for that idea, but I caught myself in time.

I don't miss Beecher or nothing, but at least she was better than the guy we have now who is a total pathetic pussy who wears pink glasses. He thinks if he tells us four hundred times a day that he went to Stanford University then we'll appreciate what a big sacrifice he's making to be a teacher who gets paid crap and works in a place that looks worser than Juarez. He thinks we'll like him for devoting his life to helping disadvantaged kids become successful productive members of society but we mostly think he's a *pinche* dickhead. At least if he was driving around in a cool car with a hot stereo and a shiny rich girl in the jump seat, we could be jealous and hate him and maybe we would jack him up and take his car, but now we hate him worse because he could have had all that stuff and he was too stupid to take it so now nobody has it. If he really wanted to help kids who didn't have his advantages, he could of saved up his giant allowance and got his parents to buy him a real expensive car and then he could of just came here and gave us the money and the car. He could of even sold lottery tickets. I bet a lot of kids would go to school if they might win twenty bucks or a car just for showing up. But he blew it. How can you respect a teacher who wasn't even smart enough to figure that out?

Beecher didn't try to pretend she didn't appreciate her nice easy white girl life. And she wasn't scared of us like most of the lady teachers are even though she's skinny enough that you could probably pick her up and throw her down the stairs real easy. And she didn't try to feed us all that crap about how useful our education was going to be someday, like how we would need

algebra to figure out how many square feet of carpet we need in our living room because everybody knows that we'll be renting some crappy apartment our whole life and even if we could buy a house, measuring the carpet is the carpet guy's job and he probably has a calculator.

...One thing about Beecher I remember the most is that she would look you right in the eye when she was talking to you and you could tell she wasn't thinking bad things about you, even if you just said something real stupid or pronounced a word wrong when you were reading out loud. Like if you were reading something about trains and you said DEE POT instead of DE POE, she wouldn't let anybody laugh at you. She would just wait until you were done reading and then she would say, "Has anybody ever been to a train depot?" and she would pronounce it the right way to let you know how you were supposed to say it. The other teachers would jump right on that wrong word and pronounce it the right way the second you said it wrong because even though they went to college and we didn't, they always have to show how smart they are. But Beecher was too busy trying to show us how smart we were instead of how smart she was, so by the time we wised up to how smart she was, she was already gone.