Bully

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Loser is carved into my desk. It isn’t written in large letters, as that would likely be to hard to do in the short amount of time whoever wrote it had. Instead, it is inscribed in uneven, straight and crossed scratches in the bottom left corner.

At first, I thought nothing of it. It was just a note left on a desk by some other student long ago. I never even thought it was meant for me nor did the idea to tell a teacher cross my mind. It wasn’t until we changed seats and the day after the new desk I had was replaced with the labeled one that I realized it was a message for me.

Well, I have to give them props; after all, an engraving is a lot more permanent than writing in pencil. I guess they decided to skip over the pen stage this year and go straight from pencil to carving such a nice word on my desk. I can even appreciate the thought that went into planning where to place such a word. The bottom left corner, just a smidgen from the edge so that it would always be visible between my paper and my arm as I wrote down notes or doodled. Still, it’s not as bad as they could have done. There were so many other words to choose from… Retarded? I guess that’s too long to carve out… Stupid? Nah. What’s another five letter word that they call me? Oh well, it doesn’t really matter to me. I’ve long since accepted this level. It’s the other stuff, the more extreme stuff, that gets to me anyway.

It’s the shoving on the steps that are always wet due to the moist air that surrounds our school. I’m told its because we live near the ocean, but I still find it hard to believe that the steps can remain wet even on sunny days. It’s the stealing of my assignments when I’m not in the room. This leads the teachers to believe I’m lying about doing it and lying about the abuse. That gets to me.

It’s the way they do stuff that hurts me both mentally and physically that I have to hide at home because my mom will cry all night if I tell her the truth. Although, now I don’t suppose I’ve hidden it too well, because she’s been going to all these school meetings lately. I tried to warn her that they, the school, wouldn’t do anything, but
I guess she'll have to figure it out on her own. I get to re-learn that lesson every year with a new teacher. That's the worst part, and that gets to me too.

This year has been the hardest yet. This year it's become truly physical. This year they actually grabbed me and hurt me. It's not like before. It's not just words, or threatening looks and dangerously timed shoves. This time, three girls trapped me in the bathroom and threw me against a sink so hard I had a bruise for a week.

This time I went to the teacher begging her to help and she brought them up. They denied it, of course, and she just looked at me. Her eyes said she believed me, but her face told me that there was nothing she could do.

"You three can sit down. Lilly, why don't you go to the nurse's office and let Maggie look at you." I don't feel betrayed when the teacher doesn't help me. At least she isn't punishing me. Last year, my teacher made me fill out a pink slip every time someone told her I was lying. The slips, the only sin of lying that I actually committed. It will take years for me to discover that punishing the victim is actually wrong and not just said to be wrong.

I mean, they tell us to be loving, they tell us to turn the other cheek, and they tell us to forgive. They tell us to tell them if something you think is wrong is happening. They say it will all be better if you tell a teacher or adult that someone is hurting you, but those are just words. I still do it, but I know that those are just words. Here, at school, the victim gets punished because the victim is outnumbered.

As I'm walking, I see Ms. Maggie standing outside with a person I vaguely recognize as our principal. When I am about twenty feet from them, Ms. Maggie calls out to me.

"What happened this time, Lilly? Cold, stomach, or did you fall?" I'm not a saint. I do lie sometimes. I say I've caught a cold, or that I've thrown up on days when I just can't take the bullying anymore.

Sometimes it's not a complete lie. I have tripped a number of time on those forsaken steps, and right now, I wish I had because my ability to gloss the bullying over for the day, or pretend it's something
else is too low.

I’ve been here so many times before but right now it’s different. I just don’t have the strength this time. I run up and hug her around the waist, burying my face in her stomach. I begin crying my eyes out.

“Please call my Mom. Please? I just want to go home,” I beg. My voice is cracking and my back hurts so much that lifting my arms to hug her makes my breathing come in short, difficult inhalations, but I don’t care. I just need to feel safe for a little while. I just need my Mom.

“Lilly?” She tries her best to be gentle as she dislodges me, and this time she bends down a little to be at my level. I just shake my head and cry, covering my eyes with my hands. I’m a little ashamed to have lost my composure. I’m a sixth grader crying like a first year. She excuses herself and me and brings me into the office. She asks what’s wrong, but I’ll never tell. I’ll never say it to anyone working at that school again. I just won’t.

She calls my mom, who I hug from her arrival to the car. In the car, I can’t hug her, but as soon as we’re home I go right back to doing it. I hugged her for hours, long after my crying stopped, and only when I let go of her did she get up to make dinner.

That was the last year I went to that school. That was the last year I ever had to deal with those bullies, but I don’t doubt that they’re out there somewhere.

Some of them might even attend my college. If they read this, I hope they know that what they did scarred me. It was years before I was able to move past it. Even now, I still suffer some of the effects. I, at twenty years old, still have nightmares of falling to my death on the stairs of that elementary school. I hope that someday they read this. Not because I want to invoke guilt or shame them by spilling this information, but so they know about it. So they think about it. So they learn from it. I want them to never do it again, but I doubt that will ever happen because something dark has a hold of them.