

Hellementary School

My dry, scorching fingers touch the cold metal. A wave of comfort passes over me. I grin and slouch in my chair, my attention drifting from my fellow students. I focus less on the book being read to the class and more on the cooling sensation. “Thomas, stop messing with the keys!” My third-grade teacher shouts at me.

My finger jolts away from the metallic keyboard as if I got shocked. I turn towards my teacher, who has already scolded me twice today.

“I wasn’t,” I say, knowing the keys are plastic and not metal.

“Don’t lie to me,” she says. “Go sign the clipboard.”

I get out of my chair in dismay and trudge towards the teacher’s desk, each step like a hundred. I reach the desk with the clipboard and half-heartedly sketch my name down with a dissatisfied sigh. I will miss yet another Friday break.

My hand races across the paper, leaving behind a sleek, gray trail. The gray sketches form letters and words, neatly stringed together in a sentence. As I finish the worksheet, I feel a hard tap on my shoulder. I turn my head and see my teacher’s face, full of disapproval.

“We need to talk about your behavior,” she says. “These last weeks, you’ve been rude to me and your fellow classmates. When asked to sign the clipboard, you don’t.”

I think back to the keyboard incident, how I was doing nothing but was still asked to sign the clipboard. “But I told the truth,” I say. “I was actually doing nothing.” Somewhat confused, I look away from her and see Alex. Alex, who teases and mocks me. Alex, who loathed me from the moment I first stepped in the classroom. I glare at him as he walks towards my desk.

The teacher's response does not obstruct my eye contact with him. "Do not talk back to me like that." She says. "Apologize right now."

"Yeah, Thomas," Alex says. "Don't talk back to people."

My fists clench. I stand up in my chair, staring Alex right in the eye, and shout, "Shut up!"

My teacher, thinking that I shouted at her, calls my parents.

"Did you trip him or shove him?" My teacher asks.

The entire class stops what they are doing and stares in my direction. Small droplets of water form at my forehead. My face starts to catch on fire. Standing alone amidst eager classmates, I recall the event.

I smiled when I saw him ahead of me, the only friend that had not moved away this year. While greeting him, I heard the bell ring. Ten minutes of school left. Both in a hurry, we rushed past each other. I felt pressure on my foot and heard a thunk. Turning around, I saw him get up from the floor and turn around the corner. I never had time to apologize.

"Neither," I said. "It was an accident."

"Let's see what the principal has to say," she says with a smile.