

Ink Bottle

Trigger warning: contains moderate bullying

The boy was full of ink.

He was an ink bottle containing dark, flowing liquid that filled him to the brim. It flowed against his glass walls, swirling around in luminous circles.

He was young. His walls were strong, sturdy. Nothing could break them. Or so he thought.

High school was very different from primary school. The boy felt it from the moment he stepped into the crowded hall and felt the unfamiliar buzz of the room. But he wasn't scared. He was eager. His glass shone brightly, ink swishing around carefreely.

But the other kids didn't like it.

His self-assurance gnawed at them like little ants.

They threw rocks at him. Small ones at first.

"Why does your voice sound like that?"

Thunk.

"Stop being a pick-me."

Thunk.

"Why are you so dramatic?"

Thunk.

Each rock weakened his glass. He held his resilient form, determined not to break. But more came. Bigger rocks.

"Go away freak."

Crack.

"Shut up already, nobody cares."

Crack.

"What is *wrong* with you?!"

Crack.

Imperceptible hairline fractures permeated silently from the outside in.

Slowly at first.

But, like a crack on a sheet of glassy ice, a small strike in the right place would cause the network of cracks to infect areas far beyond the point of contact.

Nobody else noticed.

But he could feel it.

Ink started to leak.

Not all at once – a small trickle on his uniform sleeve, a drop on his collar. The blemishes unnoticeable unless you looked for them.

But with each casual rock foisted in his direction, the cracks widened – turning the leaky beads of ink into an unrelenting seep.

He stopped raising his hand in class.

Laughed less.

Didn't speak unless spoken to.

Some started to notice the sudden change. Or what they thought was a sudden change.

His parents felt the distance as they tried to coax answers to their questions like, "how's your day?" or "What did you learn today?"

His teachers kept him after class, concerned about his grades. "Is something going on at home?"

His classmates said that he was better now.

That he was finally becoming "normal".

That he was slowly calming down.

He smiled when they said that.

But now all that remained were broken shards of glass. Dismembered fragments of a once proud form. An incomplete jigsaw puzzle lying in a puddle of ink.

The boy was once full of ink. Now he is full of nothing.