

Words

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but *words* will never hurt me,” I told Ally sarcastically.

“Oh, just shake it off. She's just a big jerk and is probably jealous of you because you're smarter than her,” she said.

“But words *do* hurt, Ally!”

“Well, they don't hurt you physically.”

“No, they don't. They sink in.”

Ally pulled aside the branch covering the entrance to our shortcut. I bend over and began to squeeze myself through the small passageway. Wet leaves brushed against my arms, leaving trails of water. Flower buds dotted the passage all the way to the end. When I got out, I turned around and watched Ally reposition the branch covering the entrance.

As soon as Ally was out, we started to walking through the courtyard. Ally and I have been friends for as long as I can remember and we discovered this courtyard a long time ago while we were playing hide-and-seek. I was hiding in the passage and when Ally got too close, I squealed and ran all the way through and discovered this courtyard. Ally saw me enter the passage and followed. We found that it leads to the back of our school. We've used it as a shortcut ever since.

The courtyard is covered with dead grass and has a single, broken-down chair in the center. I can think of a thousand adjectives to describe the chair, but there are a few I can relate to: abandoned, worthless, useless. It must had been used heavily in the past but is now left behind. Why? Why is the chair the only piece of furniture left here? Sometimes I wonder what it

might have been used for when people used to live here. Perhaps kids used to play with it and used it as part of a make-shift fort. Perhaps it was used to pick apples from a nearby apple tree. Perhaps kids played musical chairs with it.

I was lost in my imagination and by the time I knew it, we were at the back of the school.

“Sara? Sara? Were you listening to me at all?” Ally asked.

“Uhhh...”

I thought back to our walk. Ally said something about our science project and what we should do for it. “Yeah, I was.”

My iPhone buzzed and I read the notification.

uAsk.com: Anonymous commented on your photo: OMG UR SO FAT!!

I locked my phone and continued to walk. Ever since I made an account on uAsk, people have been commenting really nasty stuff on there. I mostly get “you're fat” and “you look stupid.” I normally ignore it, but sometimes it feels so personal I begin to think that I really am fat and stupid.

“What was that?” Ally asked me.

“Oh, uh, my lives are restored for *Soda Pop*,” I told her.

“Oh. Ok.” I could tell that Ally was skeptical but I didn't care.

The bell rang just as we reached the front of the school. Kids flooded into the locker bays and halls. I saw Kate typing on her iPhone. She paused, looked at me, gave me a smirk, and continued typing. When she put it away, my phone buzzed again. I couldn't risk being late for class so I decided to check it later.

I was the first to arrive to my first period class. I took a seat and pulled out my phone.

uAsk.com: Anonymous commented on your photo: wow ur so stupid!

I put it away and tried to forget about it. My phone buzzed again in the middle of class just about the time our teacher was talking about ratios and rates. I asked to go to the washroom and ran down the hall. When I got into the washroom, I pulled out my phone and read the notification.

uAsk.com: Anonymous commented on your photo: Hehe, that's dumb!

Oh, my God. I'm getting so fed up with these. I jammed my phone into my pocket and made my way back to class.

I kept getting nasty comments throughout the day. "Look at your eyes, theyre sooo ugly!" and "y r u so flabby?" were just a few of the twenty comments I got today.

During recess, I sat in the corner of the blacktop and pulled out my phone. *uAsk. uAsk. uAsk.* All my notifications were about uAsk. I pulled out my headset and played my music mix. I nodded my head to the beat.

"Sara!" The voice was muffled but I could tell that it was Ally calling me. I pulled out my headset.

"Sara! Wanna play soccer?" Ally gestured to the soccer team behind her.

"Nah. I'm fine. You go ahead and play." I shouted. Before she left, Ally gave me this look that I couldn't quite place. Worry? Unease? Concern? All of the above?

Ally had soccer practice after school so I had to walk home by myself. I wasn't in any hurry to get home and decided to stop by the courtyard. I put my bag on the chair and looked around. The walls went up really high: *my shield, my protector*. They provided me with comfort, knowing that everything has been blocked out and I can have some peace. The shadow of the

walls covered the entire courtyard. My phone buzzed again. I didn't look at it; I already know what to expect. Instead, I took it out and threw it at the wall. I stormed around the courtyard kicking at the doors. Suddenly, one of the doors flew open and I walked inside, looking for the stairs. It took me a few minutes, but I eventually found them. I ran up to the rooftop and walked towards the edge.

“Sticks and stones, sticks and stones...” I turned my head up and looked up to the sky.

“Sticks and stones will break my bones,” I said. I thought back to this morning.

“Do you remember what you have to say for our science project?” Ally asked me.

“Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.”

I thought about Ally.

First grade: I sat crying in the corner of the blacktop. *“Hey!”* Ally yelled. *“What's wrong?”* *“Th-they p-p-pulled my pigtails again. R-really h-hard.”* I sobbed.

Third grade: Gym class. We were playing dodgeball. Class vs. class. A bunch of kids on the other team whipped the balls so hard, they bounced off the wall on our side and flew back to their side. One of the balls hit me straight on the face, knocking me off my feet and sent my glasses flying. Ally was by my side almost immediately and she took me to the office.

Sixth grade: I accidentally left my locker open and somebody slipped four huge spiders inside and locked it before I found out. After class, when I opened my locker, I got so scared I screamed for Ally. She knows that I'm afraid of spiders and she knows what to do if I see one. She came running to my locker and quickly swept away the spiders.

“I won't forget you, Ally.”

I stood at the very edge, my toes hanging off.

I heard something fluttering in the wind. It was a piece of paper hooked onto my pocket. I pulled it out, looked at it, and read what was written on it.

“I find hope in the darkest of days, and focus on the brightest. I do not judge the universe.”-Dalai Lama.

Did you really think I didn't know?-Ally

I tucked the paper away and looked beyond the horizon.