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I had two classes that I disliked the most, gym and band. Gym class was a nightmare. I was never a fan of sports but it was a required course. The locker room was a place of anxiety, and I dreaded every moment of it. Changing clothes in front of others was embarrassing, and I felt exposed. The activities in gym class didn’t help either. I wasn’t good at sports, and my lack of coordination made me an easy target for teasing. The competitive nature of the class only highlighted my inadequacies.

Band class was a nightmare for other reasons. I struggled with the snare drum, but I kept going, hoping to get better. It was just something I did not want to give up. The thing that made band so difficult was partly because the band room was always loud before class started, the sound of instruments being tuned and casual chatter filling the space. This constant noise wreaked havoc on my hearing aids. The worst part of band, however, was the constant bullying.

Back in the 1980s, bullying was something we were expected to handle on our own. For me, it was mostly verbal—insults, teasing, being left out of groups. The hallways, the classrooms, and even the playground weren’t safe spaces. Gossip spread like wildfire, and name-calling was constant. Teachers would overhear it but usually didn’t step in. They just saw it as part of growing up. I can’t count how many times I was told to “toughen up” or that it was just “kids being

kids.” Honestly, there weren’t any real tools or support systems to help us deal with it. You either ignored it, fought back, or just endured it.

I do think awareness has improved a lot since I was a kid. Back then, no one really talked about how bullying could leave lasting scars— anxiety, depression, trauma. It was just something we were supposed to “get over.” Now, there’s so much more recognition of how serious it is. Schools have anti-bullying programs, and there’s a real effort to address it. But even with all that, it feels like bullying has become more complicated and more invasive.

When I think about the kids who deal with this today, I feel for them. It’s hard enough to deal with bullying face-to-face, but when it follows you home and invades your personal space? That’s a whole different kind of pain. It’s like bullying has evolved into a monster that’s even harder to fight.

So, back to my bullying in band class. I would sit quietly behind my snare drum, trying not to draw attention to myself, but it never worked.

Amanda, a red-headed girl with freckles on her face whose favorite game was to embarrass me in front of whoever would listen, spotted me almost immediately, and I could feel the tension rise before she even said a word.

“Hey, look who it is,” Amanda said loudly, her voice carrying across the room. She strutted over to where I sat, a mischievous grin plastered on her face. “My favorite drummer boy,” she added, batting her eyelashes in an exaggerated way.

A few of the other drummers, mostly guys who hung around Amanda, snickered, already picking up on her cue. "Aww, Amanda's got a crush," one of them teased, nudging another kid in the ribs. I felt my face grow hot, and I hunched over my drum, wishing I could disappear. My hands tightened around my drumsticks, and I kept my eyes down, not wanting to meet anyone's gaze.

Amanda leaned in closer, her voice dripping with fake sweetness. "You're just so cute when you get all shy like that," she teased, her fingers lightly tapping the top of my drum as she winked. "Maybe we should hang out after class, what do you say?"

The room seemed to burst with laughter, the drummers teaming up with her as they all piled on. One of the guys started imitating me, slouching over his drum like I did, pretending to be uncomfortable. It sent another wave of laughter through the group.

I felt the familiar mix of embarrassment and dread crawling up my spine. My throat tightened, and I shrank back even further, gripping my drumsticks so hard my knuckles turned white. All I could think about was getting through the class and going home. Just survive the next hour.

"Aww, don't be shy," Amanda cooed again, this time tilting her head like she was talking to a puppy. "I don't bite. Well, not too hard." She gave a fake giggle, and the boys around her howled with laughter.

I glanced at the band teacher, who was standing at the front of the room, flipping through his sheet music. He glanced in our direction but said nothing. He never did. It was like he didn't want to get involved, so he just ignored it. I was on my own, as usual.

The class hadn't even started yet, and it already felt like the longest period of the day. But it was the last class, and I clung to that small bit of hope—just make it through this, and I could go home, away from all of this, at least for a few hours.

As the bell rang and the band teacher finally called us to attention, Amanda gave me one last exaggerated wink before taking her seat. I let out a breath I didn't realize I was holding, but the relief was short-lived. Tomorrow it would start again, like it always did. This had become my routine, my daily torment.

But for now, I kept my head down, focused on my drum, and waited for the end of the day. The ride home was my only real escape.

Despite the bullying, I tried to focus on improving my skills, hoping that maybe one day I would be good enough to be accepted.

One day, the band teacher stopped the class and had me play certain notes until I got them right. My peers giggled and stared, making me feel like the dumb kid. I never expressed my concerns to anyone, just wanting to get through each day. I focused more on academics, hoping to get better grades like my sister.

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