

When I walked into my fourth period robotics elective in seventh grade, I didn't know that I'd be going home in tears. In hindsight, I should've seen it coming, because all those little digs at me and those backhanded insults were going to have snowballed eventually. Then again, maybe that incident was something that made me stronger at the end of the day.

Like every other day, I left my backpack outside class and walked in to take my seat alone at the back of the class. This was necessary to avoid confrontation because I was the only girl in the entire class, which made me an easy target for their taunting. It was April and I had been going through this for around seven months, and so many people had asked me why I hadn't gotten a schedule change. It was because I loved the whole process of building projects with the complicated machinery, of creating something that could help solve real world problems. Like when we were designing a form of footwear to help people with cerebral palsy walk better. It was a group project and the group that needed an extra person was stuck with me.

Not all the boys were mean to me, there were some that tried to talk to me or would not participate when this group of eighth grade boys would make their typical snarky remarks towards me and feign innocence when I glared at them. My mother always told me to appear tough in front of those boys, saying that if it seemed like their words had no effect on me, they would inevitably stop. It was the one time she was wrong because my indifferent demeanor only seemed to make the boys try harder to provoke me into some sort of dramatic reaction. I went to go collect our half-finished project laying on the back counter of the class and hesitantly approached my group.

"Hey," I said timidly. They looked up from where they were huddled around one guy's phone as he played Fortnite and cleared their belongings off the table so that I could set the project down before turning back towards the game. I sighed exasperatedly, expecting to work alone again while the boys were distracted. Eventually, however, the boys set down the game and paid attention to what I was doing. They got more involved, holding parts in place while I tried to secure them and offering suggestions of their own, and I was thrilled at this abrupt turn of events.

"Should I get some more—" I began, but broke off as the group of boys who frequently bothered me, dropped their project on the desk next to ours even though most of the desks around the room were unoccupied. I tried to focus on our project despite that but the other group kept hollering to each other and bumping into us.

"Maybe we should move to another desk?" someone in my group proposed. We gathered all our materials and moved to the opposite side of the room. Just as we set our project down however, we saw the other boys also ambling toward us casually, clutching their project in their arms as well. They began acting as obnoxious as they were before and we moved to different desks three more times, them trailing behind us each time.

"We can't keep on moving, we'll just waste all of our class time," I said. "Let's just ignore them." After that, we tried our best to ignore them as they continued being annoying, disregarding the glares our teacher gave them. Then, they played deafening rap music on their phones, which the teacher ended up confiscating. I thought that would be it for them, that they

would finally be discouraged and leave us alone. My hopes were proven in vain when they began to poke around at our project that we worked so hard on, popping the bubble wrap we were using for the boot and snapping the rubber bands that we were using to secure the project.

“Hey, stop that!” the teacher yelled, looking positively livid. He directed them across the room and instructed them to stay there. Once again, I thought that would be it for their schemes, but they started calling at me and throwing crumpled papers at me.

“Hey, brownie!”

“Yo, cocoa puffs!”

I was horrified and humiliated. Nobody had ever called me out on my race before, and especially not in a demeaning way. I am Indian and my skin is naturally dark, but I hadn't thought that defined me or could make me a target. I wasn't even the only person of color in the class, they just targeted me because I was the only girl, which also made this about my gender. The whole class stared silently in shock.

“Leave me alone!” I shrieked. “I haven't done anything to you! Why are you doing this?” The bell rang just then and I sprinted from the class to my lunch spot with my friends. I burst into tears on the spot, explaining what had happened through heaving sobs as they comforted me and dealt with the bullies on my behalf, getting the principal involved. Now, that day served as a reminder of two things; that I could be unfairly treated because of my ethnicity *and* gender, and that I had really great friends.