

## Chapter 2

“Jack! What are you doing in here!” said Mrs. Walter.

“I—I did not leave,” whispered Jack from under his desk.

“I can see that,” she said, and rolled her eyes. “For your part in the riot, I am going to give you a detention. You must stay after school until five o’clock tonight.”

“But I didn’t do it! It was—” said Jack.

“I refuse to accept your pleading of innocence! Why do you always try to pin your crimes on other people! You are not going to get through life doing that!” screamed Mrs. Walter.

“But the—”

“Stop making excuses, Jack! You’re too old for that! Besides, look at the condition of your ripped clothes! You must have beaten yourself up to hide the fact that *you* led the rebellion! You just wanted to get others in trouble and now you’re lying low. Admit that you did that!”

Although Jack was scared about getting in trouble, he thought this was funny. It didn’t make any sense.

“I a—am innocent!” said Jack.

“Stop lying to me! I have all the evidence! You did not leave the school with the others, hoping to set them up, and you beat yourself up to try to get them in trouble. When a person tries to get others in trouble, HE will get in trouble. Now I will not take any more of your complaints! You are getting two hours of detention! I am taking you to the principal’s office and you will not leave tonight until five o’clock!”

“But my mother yells at me when I’m late!” said Jack, coming out from under his desk and shaking all over. In the past, he would have played frozen, shut down his nervous system to cope with the stress, like those lucky autistic kids down the hall. But Jack’s mother had taken him to therapists who used punishments and cattle prods to train his nervous system NOT to shut down in the face of unbearable terror. Now he couldn’t play frozen even though he wanted to.

“Well, that’s your problem, Mister. Maybe you should have THOUGHT of that before you led the rebellion,” said Mrs. Walter.

Then they went to the principal’s office, where Dr. Drake was filling out an immense stack of forms.

“Mrs. Walter? What are you doing here?” asked Dr. Drake.

“We have found the person responsible for the rebellion,” said Mrs. Walter. “It is Jack Lack.”

“Are you sure? As far as I know, bullies never reveal themselves to adults. Remember the sexual assault last year? It took us two months to find out what really happened,” said Dr. Drake.

“I’m sure. After all, he did not leave the building when everyone else did, and he beat himself up to make it look like the others did it to him. That means he is a coward, as cowards hurt themselves to make others look guilty,” said Mrs. Walter.

“I see,” the principal said. “Well, that’s quite a bit of evidence against him.”

Jack decided to keep a straight face and to hide any laughter as they continued to talk nonsense.

“It’s sad. A boy like you trying to make trouble,” Dr. Drake continued. “But people who try to make trouble will always get punished. So remember that, Jack. Crime does not pay.”

“So I think we should make him sit here for two hours. Is that a good punishment for a riot?” Mrs. Walter said.

“Yes, I believe so. And we will not excuse him from his homework. I believe he has a lot?” asked Dr. Drake.

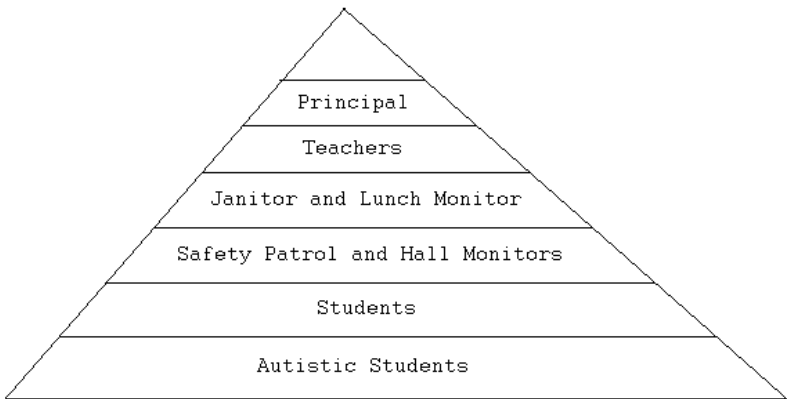
“Oh, yes. A lot,” said Mrs. Walter.

Jack’s heart sank. Two hours! His mother yelled at him when he was a minute late! And he was innocent! It was Moe’s fault! He started the riot!

Jack sat down in the detention chair, and his thoughts raced around in circles, as always. Images appeared like pop-up ads on the computer screen in his head. Whenever he couldn’t pay attention to the outside world, he’d try to explain about the pop-up images—try to tell people to think about how annoying they were on *their* computer—but of course, they never understood.

Why wasn't Moe getting in trouble? In Jack's mind, he saw a pop-up website of menacing fists. Because the universal unwritten code of school states that the truly guilty always get away with their crimes. Therefore, school follows the edicts of the 1500s—guilty until proven innocent, meaning that a person could be charged with a fake crime, but because it was fake, there would be no evidence proving him innocent, and therefore he was guilty. Fortunately, in school, you weren't guillotined or subjected to a swift, cruel death for doing something bad, like the millions who died that way in the 1500s and during the French Revolution. In school, you died slowly, day after day.

Even though it is never acknowledged, in school, the one who is innocent gets blamed. The innocent and the helpless are the ones who suffer. *A school, then, is actually a microscopic version of a feudal society*, Jack thought, with the principal as a king, the students as peasants, and autistic students as slaves. No one is able to do anything without the consent of the party above him. Also, students made up the most population in a school (like the peasants). A pyramid appeared in his mind.



The School Social Pyramid

And each party was in control of the party below it, though no one had control over the party above it.

And to think he lived in America, which was supposed to be a democracy. School is a pre-Revolutionary place, Jack decided.

Like the Catholic Church, which had just decided they were wrong about Galileo four hundred years after he died.

“But aren’t you going to tell my mother about this?” asked Jack as soon as he could clear his mind.

“We’ll call her and notify her you aren’t coming home until five o’clock tonight,” said Mrs. Walter.

Then Mrs. Walter left.

“I hope you understand what you have done and the consequences of it, Jack,” said Dr. Drake. “And I hope you will never do it again.”

Jack understood nothing. Except the stupidity of the adults around him.

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It was finally 5:00 p.m.

“Okay, Jack, you may go,” said Dr. Drake. “I’ll see you in one month.”

“One month?” asked Jack. “Today is Friday, October fifth. Shouldn’t I be seeing you again in three days?”

“I just had a talk with your mother. You’ll find out when you get home.”

So Jack walked home slowly, knowing he was safe only until he stepped into his house. As he got closer, he took smaller and smaller steps. When he finally entered, he found both his mother and father at the house, which was strange because his father usually got home from work one hour later. His job had long hours.

“We just heard on the news a group of kids ran out of your school today. I’m so happy you aren’t one of them, and you are still willing to obey your teacher,” said Jack’s mother, Susan. “I’m proud of you.”

This confused Jack, since he had assumed she would scream and yell at him. But then he could never predict what other people did, since usually their behavior made no sense.

“We’ve been waiting for you. Something has happened in the family,” said Jack’s father, Marvin.