



Cracked

By K. M. Walton

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A teen takes a bottle of pills and lands in the psych ward with the bully who drove him to attempt suicide in this gripping novel.

Victor hates his life. He has no friends, gets beaten up at school, and his parents are always criticizing him. Tired of feeling miserable, Victor takes a bottle of his mother's sleeping pills—only to wake up in the hospital.

Bull is angry, and takes all of his rage out on Victor. That makes him feel better, at least a little. But it doesn't stop Bull's grandfather from getting drunk and hitting him. So Bull tries to defend himself with a loaded gun.

When Victor and Bull end up as roommates in the same psych ward, there's no way to escape each other or their problems. Which means things are going to get worse—much worse—before they get better.

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Editorial Review

Review

"In this powerful debut novel, K.M. Walton takes an unrelenting look at the corrosive effects of bullying, sometimes coming from where one would least expect it. CRACKED crackles with emotional intensity from beginning to end."

--James Howe, bestselling author of THE MISFITS

"Readers who enjoy stories of dysfunction, personal growth, and redemption will love this book."

-- "VOYA", February 2012

"[Bull's and Victor's] stories offer a strong message of hope to the bullied and abused."

-- "The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books", April 2012

About the Author

K. M. Walton is the author of *Cracked* and *Empty*. A former middle school language arts teacher and teaching coach, she is passionate about education and ending peer bullying. She lives in Pennsylvania with her family. Visit her online at KMWalton.com and follow her on Twitter at @KMWalton1.

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Cracked

Victor

I HAVE WISHED THAT BULL MASTRICK WOULD DIE almost every single day. Not that I would ever have anything to do with his death. I'm not a psychopath or some wacko with collaged pictures of him hanging in my room and a gun collection. I'm the victim.

Bull Mastrick has tortured me since kindergarten. I'm sixteen now, and I understand that he's an asshole and will always be an asshole. But I wish a rare sickness would suck the life out of him or he'd crash on his stupid BMX bike and just die.

Lately, as in the past two years of high school, he's been absent a lot. Each day that he's not in school I secretly wait for the news that he's died. A sudden tragic death. As in, not-ever-coming-back-to-school-again dead. Then I'd have some peace. I could stop looking over my shoulder every five seconds and possibly even digest my lunch. Bull has a pretty solid track record of being a dick, so death is my only option.

Last year Bull pantsed me in gym. Twice. The first time was—and I can't believe I'm even allowing myself to think this, but—the first time wasn't that bad. It was in the locker room and only two other guys saw me in my underwear. And they're even more untouchable than I am. They're what everyone calls "bottom rungers."

Fortunately, the bottom rungers just dropped their eyes and turned away.

But a few weeks later Bull put a little more thought and planning into it. He waited until we were all in the gym, all forty-five of us, and when Coach Schuster ran back to his office to grab his whistle, Bull grabbed my shorts and underwear and shouted, “Yo, look! Is it a boy or a girl?”

I’m not what anyone would categorize as dramatic, but it seriously felt like he grabbed a little of my soul. I remember standing there like a half-naked statue—not breathing or blinking—as wisps of me leaked out of my exposed man parts. I heard a snort, which unfroze me. I slowly bent down, pulled up my underwear and shorts, and walked back into the locker room.

And puked in the corner like a scolded animal.

He got suspended for it, which earned me two guaranteed Bull-free days in a row. You think that would’ve made me feel better. But each time I walked down that hallway in school or thought of the forty-five fellow ninth graders—eighteen of them girls—seeing my balls, I would gag. Then I’d run to the closest bathroom and regurgitate perfectly formed chunks of shame and disgrace.

Bull has a habit of triggering my body functions. In second grade, he made me pee my pants on the playground. He sucker punched me, and I landed face-first in a pile of tiny rocks. Bull squatted down just so he could use my head to push himself back up, squishing the rocks further into my face. He had just enough time to tell everyone I’d peed my pants before the playground monitor wandered over to see what the commotion was.

“Victor pissed his pants! Victor pissed his pants!” Bull shouted over and over again.

I laid facedown for as long as I could. I knew I’d peed my pants. I felt the warm humiliation spread through my tan shorts. And I knew that as soon as I stood up, the difference in color would be a blinking arrow, alerting the entire playground that yes, Victor Konig had just pissed his pants.

I got up on my elbows and felt my cheeks. It was as if my face sucked up those rocks like they were nutrients or something. Many were embedded and had to be popped out by the school nurse. I looked like I had zits—twenty-three red, oozing zits.

My father wanted to know what I had done to provoke “that boy”—like Bull was actually human. My mother only cared about what the adults at the school thought of her eight-year-old son pissing his pants. She said it made her look bad and that grown-ups would think she wasn’t raising me correctly.

“Only weird boys pee their pants on the playground,” she said. And then she asked me if I was weird.

She actually asked me, “Victor, are you one of those weird boys? Are you? You can’t do that to Mommy. I’ve worked very hard to get where I am in this community, to live in this lovely neighborhood and in this beautiful home. I can’t have my only child embarrassing me. Do you understand, Victor? I can’t have you be one of those weird boys.”

I remember apologizing for embarrassing her.

Bull cut in front of me in the lunch line the next day. He shoved me and said, “Out of my way, pee boy.”

I remember apologizing to him, too.

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