

Among the many creatures that walk this earth, there are some that go unseen, but yet still felt. Creatures we choose to not face out of fear, but still know when their presence is near. Not all creatures like this are bad. Some are simply misunderstood. However, there exists a creature who isn't completely understood, yet we do know is bad. A creature who has plagued humanity from the shadows since the dawn of time.

Yet, as strange as this creature may be, it is one many, if not all, of us are familiar with. It lurks in the shadows and the corners of all populous areas. It goes by unnoticed, day by day, lurking just out of our sight to find its next victim.

This creature lives all around the world. In places we would traditionally think to be safe. Among its most favorite places are schools, specifically high schools. Here teenagers of all ages are the perfect prey for this creature to stalk. It speaks all languages and knows your deepest darkest secrets. It can infect your mind like a virus, preparing to consume your thoughts in an attempt to sate its endless appetite.

This creature, despite how often we unknowingly see it, is still somewhat of a mystery. Some say it has no shape, constantly shifting and evolving to lure in its prey. Others say it looks ugly, like a dirty cloud of smoke ready to suffocate anyone who dares get too close to it. As much we all try to avoid it, one way or another it always finds a way to capture its prey.

“Did you see what Sarah posted on Snapchat?”

Unknowingly captured, the creature possesses its victim, its host. Much like a parasite, the creature now has limits to what it can do. However, this creature is adaptable. It comes in many shapes and sizes and spreads best through word of mouth or through written word. One becomes two, two becomes four, in no time the creature has spread throughout the entire school.

“Hey, did you hear what Kim said about Sarah? I heard she...”

Leaping from mouth to mouth, the creature oozes and leaks, its influence knows no bounds. Unknowingly, the students of the high school have allowed for the creature to nest inside their walls. Most prefer not to look at the creature directly, many never get the chance. Those who come in contact with what they believe to be the creature is simply just the byproduct of its infestation of the minds of other people.

“Who did you hear that from? Why did they say that about me?”

This is a creature that is most powerful in silence. It knows how easily humans can be deceived by their own thoughts and it uses this to its advantage. Once in your mind, it knows who you like, who you dislike, your secrets, and the secrets you were told by other people. Suddenly, your mind is buzzing with sounds. Thoughts that weren't originally yours but you're no longer able to tell the difference. You quiet your conscious and lean in to hear what these voices have to tell you. It appeals to your pride, your ego, your vulnerabilities. It tells you to strike before you can be hurt. Be a part of the bigger picture. If you're too late, keep the story going, *you* get to choose what the truth really is. *You* know all about it.

“Well that's not true! You know what is though? Last Tuesday I saw Kim and Ryan under the bleachers!”

And just like that, the creature continues to weave its web throughout the school. Entangled in its greasy strings of lies, the creature prepares to feast like a spider with a fly stuck in their web. The students are too concerned with their own pride to look around them and see how trapped they really are. The more the students talk, the more they get caught up in their own lies. Soon, no one can really tell the truth between what is fact and what is fiction. No one remembers what was originally said, that's no longer important.

“I heard from Amanda that Susan said that Sarah said...”

“John wouldn’t know that? He’s not even friends with Ryan.”

“You don’t even like Kim. Why do you care?”

But just as quickly as the creature emerged in the school, it disappears. It is satisfied with its feasting. It may return one day if its hunger grows unbearable, but for the time being it has infected all the minds there are to infect. Slowly slinking down the hallways, pulling its greasy web back with it, the students sound find themselves free. Untangled from the string of lies they’ve been so consumed in, they no longer remember what they were arguing about in the first place. The aftermath is fractured friendships and hurt egos. But at the end of the day, all of the students agree to move on. This effect the creature leaves on its prey’s minds is the most peculiar of all its traits. As it crawls off in the distance, all the students are left with foggy memories of their fights. Simply put, they all agree that it was “just a rumor”, for which the creature gets its name.