

Tess pulled up to the side entrance of the school. Ten minutes to spare, as usual.

A *ding* trilled in her handbag. She pulled out her cell phone.

“Mom,” her son said softly from the back seat.

“Yes, Simon,” Tess answered, as she read the message from Laura, co-captain of the Peaceful Palms Neighborhood Watch Team. *Another kidnapping yesterday.*

“I want to go in a bit early today,” Simon said, unbuckling his seat belt.

“Really?” his mother said, as she typed, “*Really?*” then pressed SEND.

An emphatic text popped in almost immediately. *We are going to have to do more!*

“Yeah. The gang and me were talking about kicking the ball before we go in.” Simon explained as he zipped his neon-green rain jacket.

“Sounds good!” Tess answered out loud as she texted the words and sent the message.

Another trilling announced Laura’s text. *We are having an urgent meeting to discuss increased safety measures? Can you come?*

“So, can I?” Simon asked, scooting to the front edge of his seat.

“Yes,” Tess murmured, typing, *Yes.*

*Maybe we can do more to raise awareness for kids?* Laura’s text arrived as Tess’ whooshed away.

“Thanks, Mom,” Simon replied as he opened the door.

“Absolutely. See you later,” Tess dictated out loud as her nails clicked across her phone screen.

Simon opened his car door and stepped out as another *Ding* rang out in the car.

*We must stay vigilant to keep our children safe. I am thinking perhaps a meeting for the kids-hand out flyers and more stickers?*

Simon climbed out of the car. “Maybe we can go to the playground after school? He pulled out his backpack, as the rain began to fall.

Tess smiled at her phone, saying the words she texted: *A great idea. Let’s discuss more later. Great! See you this morning at 10 at Chit Chat Coffee House.*

“Thanks Mom. Bye.” Simon said sweetly as he closed the car door.

“OK! Bye,” Tess said as she typed and started searching for a funny emoticon and a *gif* of people around a table.

*Bye*, the phone dinged back.

Satisfied with the thumbs up and heart emoticons that she received from Laura, Tess looked at the clock on the car’s dashboard. A minute to spare. “Okay, Si. Get ready to go,” Tess said, turning. “Si? Where are you hiding?” Tess laughed as she propped herself up to see the back of the car. Pulling her raincoat hood up, she got out of the car, still smiling as she walked to the back of the car. She opened the hatchback. No Simon. Her chest tightened. Where was he? A hollow feeling filled her belly. When had he left? She looked around her. She put her hands over her mouth, trying to remember the last moments.

The rain fell harder as Tess hurried along the path that was slowly flooding with opening umbrellas and children in colorful rain jackets. “SIMON!” Tess screamed. She spotted something familiar. She ran to the side of the road. He was not there. Tess stood shivering as she clutched his backpack. On the front flap, a bright yellow sticker brandished its message:

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH.