

## Missy – A Vignette

“Mother?” asked nine-year-old Missy Banks, “What if my new teacher doesn’t like me?”

Helen Banks was getting Missy ready for the first day of fourth grade. “I’m sure she’ll like you, Missy. What’s not to like?” She hugged her daughter and then put the remaining items into Missy’s pretty pink day pack. The pack matched her sturdy athletic shoes.

“Oh, Mother! You’re so funny!” The laughter faded, and Missy asked her mother another question. “When should I give the teacher my note?”

Helen turned Missy around to face her and put her hands on Missy’s shoulders, looking into her soft brown eyes. “Mrs. Wilson will be very busy this morning. You can wait until I come to pick you up and we’ll show her together. How’s that?”

Missy cheered up. “Teachers don’t like your and Daddy’s letters, Mother. I’m glad you’re going to be with me when I give it to her.”

Again Helen hugged Missy. She couldn’t be more proud of Missy. She hadn’t assumed Helen would give her teacher the letter. She was prepared to do it herself, but having her mother there made her feel better.

With a last check of Missy’s new school uniform, Helen got her keys from the rack by the back door and said. “Okay, Sweetie. Time to go.”

Missy followed resolutely out to the Subaru wagon. “First days at school are **hard**.” she told her mother.

Both were silent as Helen headed for the middle school. But Missy saw her friend Julie being dropped off, and hurried to join her, with just a quick good-bye to her mother.

Helen sighed and watched the two girls go into the school, hand in hand. She looked over and saw the two security guards the school had hired and shook her head. Armed guards at school. What was the world coming to?

“Home school, next year, for sure,” Helen said, blinking back tears. They would be in a position to do that by the next school year. Her job the last three years had put them over the top on getting debt free. Jack’s income would keep them going nicely, meeting day-to-day needs, putting money away in life annuities for retirement, and improving their prep stance.

With Missy never completely out of her mind, Helen went about her chores for the day. She got everything done in plenty of time to meet with Missy’s teacher and then take Missy home.

Missy was right about the teacher not liking the note that Missy handed Miss Wilson, with her mother standing behind her after the other children left the classroom.

“These are my instructions if something bad happens at school, Miss Wilson.”

Amy Wilson read the computer printed letter and noted that Both Helen and Joe Banks had signed it.

“This is ridiculous,” Miss Wilson said, upon finishing the note. “School policy...”

“I’ve had the same letter put in Missy’s records in the office. If something happens, and Missy is harmed in any way, because these instructions are disregarded, there will be repercussions.”

“I don’t respond to threats well, Mrs. Banks,” Miss Wilson said. “School policy will be followed. Not the rantings of some hysterical parent.”

Missy had edged around behind her mother slightly as both women’s voices rose slightly.

“It’s not a threat. Just be aware that Missy is very well educated when it comes to possible problems here at school and in the community.”

“She will follow the rules the school board has laid out or she will be suspended. Now, Mrs. Banks, I suggest you take your letter, your child, and leave. Before there are repercussions. I will call on one of the security staff if you don’t leave immediately.”

Helen took the letter in one hand and Missy’s hand in the other and left the classroom and then the building. When they got to the Subaru, Helen looked her precious daughter in the eyes. “Are you all right, Missy?”

There were tears in her eyes, but Missy nodded. “Yes, Mommy,” she said, slipping back to her younger age use of ‘Mommy’ rather than the more grown up Mother she’d been using for the last few months.

“Don’t cry, honey. This isn’t your fault. And now, I’m going to tell you something very important. Okay?”

Missy nodded. “Yes, Mother.” She wiped her eyes and looked at her mother expectantly. “The Principal and Vice-Principle in the office and Miss Wilson all have read the letter. From now on, you don’t have to worry about it. Just follow the rules. If something really bad ever happens, like we’ve talked about, I want you to do whatever your father and I have taught you and ignore the rules.”

“I don’t like not following rules, Mother. It gets me in trouble.”

A slight smile curved Helen’s lips. “Yes, I understand that. So that’s why I want you to follow them. And if Miss Wilson asks you about this in the next few days, you tell her that I told you to follow the rules. You need not mention that you have other instructions if something bad happens. Can you remember to do that?”

“Yes, Mother.” Missy’s voice showed a bit of exasperation at her mother’s doubt that she could remember something that easy.

“Yes, of course you can. And how was Julie?” Helen asked, leaving the subject of following the security rules of the school behind. For now.

Eagerly Missy explained everything that had happened, including renewing acquaintances with her school year best friend, Julie Howards.

That evening, as Helen and her husband got ready for bed, Helen recounted what had happened at school.

“About what we expected,” Joe replied. “Is Missy going to be okay with the double standard?”

I think so,” Helen replied. “She’s a smart cookie. And with the emergency training we involve her in, I think she can differentiate between the normal goings on, and something that requires her to make her own judgments.”

“Let’s just hope she doesn’t ever have to,” Joe replied.

Keeping one more secret wasn’t hard for Missy. She was used to it. Ever since she was little, she’d been instructed not to tell people certain things. Such as the shelter in the basement, and all the food they have in it. And never to tell anyone about the guns her mother and father had. Or about some of the things in her backpack in the special bag. Or the fact that the pack had a Kevlar bullet resistant back panel.

Missy had her very own Get-Home-Bag that she carried in her back-pack. And knew how to use everything it contained.

First there was the laminated ID with her picture, name, home address and telephone number, alternate address and telephone number of her Aunt Jackie and Uncle Jim, with their pictures and names.

Another laminated card, again with her home address and telephone number and parents’ cell phone numbers. There was a list of safe houses if her parents weren’t available, with names, addresses and telephone numbers. It also included the telephone number of a taxi service that Joe and Helen trusted.

A city map with home and relatives’ addresses marked, along with the list of safe houses.

A small coin purse contained a ten dollar bill, a five dollar bill, and five ones, plus coins. The bills were primarily for paying for a taxi. Included was a signed note that offered a reward to get Missy safely to one of the addresses on the laminated cards if she asked for a cab. The change was primarily for vending machines or a pay telephone.

The school didn't allow children to bring cell phones or she would have a prepaid one. In addition to the money, the packet contained a telephone card so Missy could make calls on any payphone, or regular telephone. She used it at least once a month under supervision so she could remember how. Usually she called her grandmother to say hello.

Two juice boxes, packet of trail mix, one of jerky, and some hard candies provided a little nutrition and much comfort. Two one-liter bottles of water covered hydration needs. A windup flashlight provided light if needed. A space blanket and disposable poncho provided shelter and warmth. A change of underwear, knit cap, and pair of warm gloves in a vacuum sealed bag for cleanliness and compactness was included. A camper's pack of toilet tissue, individual moist towelettes, a one-ounce bottle of Purell for sanitation if regular bathroom facilities weren't available.

A couple of band-aids and two larger patch bandages were the only first aid items. Over the counter medicines weren't permitted by the school. A packet of tissues was included in case of runny noses.

There was a shrill whistle and a small mirror for signaling, and a dust mask and swimming goggles for her to wear if there were dust, smoke, or fumes involved in the emergency.

Like cell phones, lighters and pocket knives were banned from the school, so Missy had to do without those, even though she knew how to use them safely.

Missy had memorized three code words and their uses with help from her mother. One word was used to indicate it was her parents' instructions, by them or trusted family and friends to give or receive information or pick Missy up, and a second word that meant for her to keep doing what she was doing, primarily meaning stay where she was. A third word that meant Missy was supposed to follow her Get Home Now plan.

Miss Wilson kept a close eye on Missy for a while, but the intelligent, vivacious little girl did nothing out of the ordinary and the letter was soon out of Miss Wilson's mind. Missy was just another of her students.

That was until three days before Christmas break. Everyone was excited about the upcoming break. The Banks family had plans to spend the time at Helen's mother's place in the country.

Helen dropped Missy off, as usual. Missy ran to join the waiting Julie. Helen's eyes were drawn to one of the security guards. He was at the fence near the swing set, talking to a man in blue jeans and a leather jacket.

Her sense of danger tingled, just slightly, at the sight. There was no tangible reason to be concerned. Especially as the man in the leather jacket turned and walked away. Helen put it out

of her mind, thinking about the grocery run she was making next. But that little tingle was still there.

Definitely her mother's daughter, and well educated by both her parents to be observant of her surroundings at all times, noticed the same thing Helen had. The security guard talking to a stranger. If that had been a student, they would be on their way to detention. But the stranger left, and the guard, George, headed back to where he usually stood during the morning arrival of the students.

The security man George wasn't one of the students' favorite people. He was surly and unpleasant. Mike, on the other hand, while maintaining a certain professional distance, would speak pleasantly, nod, and smile. He was an okay guy in the eyes of most of the students and teachers, too.

Missy also noted her teacher when Miss Wilson greeted Missy and Julie as they entered the classroom. She looked drawn, and not very happy. "Are you sick, Miss Wilson?" Missy asked, stopping as Julie continued to her desk.

A wan smile curved Amy Wilson's lips. She'd become fond of Missy. She was an excellent student. All that trouble over the letter had been a tempest in a tea cup. "No, Missy. I'm not sick, though I do not feel very well. Nothing to concern you."

"Yes, Miss Wilson. I hope you feel better."

"I will, I'm sure. Now go ahead and take your seat and get your English book out."

"Yes, Ma'am." Missy hurried over to her desk and did as Miss Wilson said, tucking the back pack into the tray under the seat of the combined seat/desk unit. She chatted with Julie for a moment, but the bell rang and everyone in the class went quiet and waited for Miss Wilson to start the class.

Things progressed normally that morning. Missy had forgotten about the man George had been talking to until she saw him outside the schoolyard gate. Mike was nowhere in sight. George started over to the gate and Missy expected George to make him leave. Instead, the two men talked for a moment and Missy saw George point toward where Miss Wilson was standing, talking to Missy's former third grade teacher, Angela Montague.

It just didn't seem right, and Missy, taking Julie's hand to bring her along, ran over to the two teachers monitoring the afternoon recess. "Miss Wilson! Someone is at the gate and George isn't making them leave."

"That's Officer George, Missy," Angela said, her attention on Missy rather than the gate. But Amy Wilson looked over at the gate. Missy saw her give a little start.

"I'll go handle this," Miss Wilson said, striding firmly away, toward the gate.

“You children go play,” Angela said, intending to follow Amy. With the way things were now, the instructions were to always have two people when someone not with the school was on the premises.

Amy drew up short when the man in the leather jacket slapped Amy as soon as she stepped up to him and George. George made no move to stop it, as the man grabbed Amy.

“Everyone! Into the building! Now!” Angela began urging the students inside, with the help of the other teacher on recess duty.

“Where is Mike?” yelled the other teacher, looking around even as he urged the children inside.

Having shot her personal .22 pistol and rifle many times when at the range with her parents, Missy knew what a gunshot sounded like. The sound was much louder without her hearing protection. That just added a bit of impetus to her moves as she ran for the building.

Angela was screaming at the principle, who had come out of the school offices at all the commotion of children running into the building. “Lock down! Lock down! There’s a man with a gun!”

Mr. Chambers hurried back to the office and the lock down siren began to sound. The students were entering their respective classrooms and Julie was about to enter Miss Wilson’s. Missy made a quick decision. Her parents had stressed to her not to be caught with no way out in case of trouble. They were adamantly against the lock down policy of the school.

Missy grabbed Julie’s hand and tugged her away from the door to the classroom. She led Julie to the girls’ bathroom at the end of the hall.

It suddenly got quiet, other than the sound of the siren, as Missy held the door of the bathroom open just slightly and watched the hallway. She jerked back, but then quickly put her eye to the narrow slot of the door opening when George and the man in the leather jacket dragged Miss Wilson into the building and took her into her classroom.

“Come on, Julie! We need to get away!”

“No! We’re in lockdown! We’re supposed to be in our classroom! I’m scared, Missy!”

“So am I, Julie. But we have to be calm. Not panic. My mom and dad tell that to me all the time.”

There were tears in Julie’s eyes. “And I wet my underpants!”

“That’s okay, Julie,” Missy said. Julie was as upset about her accident as she was the rest of the situation.

“Look,” Missy added, letting the bathroom door close. “I have an extra pair. You can wear them.”

“Really?” Julie asked through her sniffles.

Missy nodded and took off her back pack. It took only a moment to get the zip-lock bag out and open. Julie changed in a stall and came back out a bit calmer. “We should go to the room, Missy,” Julie said. “We’ll get in trouble if we don’t.”

The building siren suddenly cut off. But through the crack left when Missy eased open the bathroom door slightly again, the two girls could hear police and fire sirens approaching from the distance.

George came out of Miss Wilson’s classroom. Missy saw that he had his gun out. She eased the door a bit more closed and continued to watch with one eye. She shivered when George opened the front door of the school just slightly and yelled out, we’ll start killing kids in an hour if you don’t bring us a million dollars and a helicopter! You try to rush us and we’ll kill as many kids as we can before you can stop us!”

George quickly backed away from the doors and leaned against a wall, watching the outside activity as not only police and fire vehicles started showing up at the gate, but several personal vehicles, too. The word had already made the rounds.

Suddenly, the man in the leather jacket dragged Miss Wilson out of the classroom. She was whimpering and crying. “There’s two missing, you idiot!” the man half screamed at George.

“Two! But who? Everyone is supposed to go to their classroom when the siren sounds!”

“I don’t care about what they are supposed to do. Two didn’t, in just this classroom. There could be more. Find them. And kill them.”

“Who are they?” George asked Miss Wilson.

She didn’t answer and George slapped her. Missy drew a sharp breath.

Crying, Miss Wilson whispered, “Missy Banks and Julie Howard.”

“Oh, I’m going to have fun with those two before I kill them,” George said. It was barely loud enough for Missy to hear, but she did. Julie didn’t and Missy didn’t tell her what George had said. Missy was old enough to understand what George meant and she was determined that neither she nor Julie would suffer that fate, much less die.

The leather jacket man took Miss Wilson back into the classroom, and George went into the school offices. Suddenly the PA system squealed and George’s voice came over it. “I’m gonna get you two. You know who you are. Come on out and everything will be fine.”

Julie looked at Missy, but Missy just grabbed Julie's hand in one of hers and pushed open the bathroom door with the other. "Come on! Run!" Missy hissed. She was leading the way toward the outside entrance nearest the bathroom. They were through it and outside.

Missy had a destination in mind. She quickly led Julie to a spot behind the big compost bin the school maintenance people used to compost the grass clippings. Missy looked up with a frown. It had been threatening snow all day. It started coming down hard and the wind picked up.

"I'm cold, Missy!" Julie said after a few moments. "We have to go back inside! We'll freeze."

Missy wasn't feeling the cold. She still had on her jacket from being out for recess. Julie had taken hers off when she changed and hadn't put it back on. Her training coming back to her, Missy took off her back pack and took out the watch cap, gloves, emergency poncho and the space blanket.

"Here, Julie. Put these on," Missy said, giving Julie the poncho first. When she had the items on, Missy hugged her close and wrapped the space blanket around them both. Missy kept her head clear so she could hear and watch.

They were in a cul-de-sac, hidden from sight from the school, but also from the police that Missy assumed were out there trying to help. The way out of the cul-de-sac would take them past Miss Wilson's room's windows. They couldn't even crouch down and go under the level of the windows. The windows were almost full height as part of the solar heating system.

Again the PA system sounded. George was not a happy camper. Missy hugged Julie close when he began to explain what he was going to do to them when he found them. Julie started crying again.

Missy dug out juice and the trail mix from her backpack and urged Julie to eat and drink something to calm her down. Missy kept taking peeks around the corner of the compost bin. She saw George at the doors once and jerked her head back. She was ready to explode outward and run if George came out. But when she looked a few moments later, George was gone.

To Julie it seemed like they were there forever, but Missy had a good sense of time and knew they'd only been outside for perhaps twenty minutes. She relaxed just slightly.

When George came around the opposite corner of the compost bin, he caught Missy off guard, though he was actually the most startled. He wasn't expecting them to be there. He thought they might be in the utility shed where the mowers were.

Missy had thought about that, but didn't want to be trapped inside another place. She wanted space to run.

When she saw him, Julie screamed and George started. Missy lunged up and shoved George. He went down hard. Missy wasted no time. Grabbing Julie's hand again, she jerked her

up and began running toward the opening of the cul-de-sac. "Run, Julie! Run!" Missy yelled, releasing her hand so they could both pump their arms and run faster.

Missy was the faster of the two girls, but slowed down to let Julie take the lead. She didn't realize what she heard first, but the sound of the gunshot came immediately after the whistle of the bullet that sailed past Missy's right ear. She knew that George was shooting at them.

A bullet chipped the brick at the corner of the building as Missy turned the corner. Missy's heart leaped when she saw the police and firemen and there was her mother right there by the gate, behind the police warning tape.

She saw several policemen raise their weapons, but didn't hear the shots as she felt a great pain in her back and went tumbling. The last thought she had was, "George shot me!"

It was several minutes before she came to. She immediately recognized the fact that she was in her mother's arms. "It hurts, Mommy!" Missy cried.

"I know, Sweetie, I know. But you're okay. The paramedic said the Kevlar panel stopped the bullet. But you have severe blunt trauma. We have to take you to the hospital, just in case there are complications."

"Is Julie okay? George was shooting at us."

"She's fine. Her father has her over by their car. Come on. Let me help you onto the ambulance stretcher. The police shot him. And Miss Wilson's boyfriend gave up. He'll be going away for a long time. He really hurt her and some of the kids. They found Mike tied up in the furnace room."

"Owie, owie, owie!" Missy couldn't help it. Even as gentle as the paramedics and her mother were, it hurt being picked up and put on the stretcher.

Just as they started to put the stretcher into the ambulance, Missy saw her father. He had tears in his eyes. "Baby, are you all right?" he asked as the paramedics paused.

"I'm okay, Daddy. It hurts. It really hurts. But Momma says I'll be okay. I'm glad you gave me the back pack, Daddy. It came in really handy."

They couldn't help it. Helen and Jack Banks both had to laugh. Through their tears, but they laughed. Their baby was going to be okay.

End \*\*\*\*\*

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