

Jamie's fingers hover over the tablet screen, the light from the device casting a faint glow on his face. He's not playing games or watching videos like he used to. Instead, he scrolls through the group chat, rereading the same messages over and over.

Kyle:

"You're such a loser."

Kyle:

"Bet you won't even show your face tomorrow. Scared?"

Kyle:

"Everyone knows you're weird. Just stop trying."

Jamie's chest tightens. He doesn't reply—he hasn't for days. Each time he types something, he deletes it before hitting send. No matter what he says, cyberbullying has made sure Kyle will twist it into something worse.

The emojis mock him.

The laughing faces, the clowns, the thumbs-down. They seem harmless, but they sting more than words ever could.

Online harassment isn't just about words—it's the silent pressure, the fear, the anxiety that follows you everywhere.

He wishes he could just leave the group, but he knows the bullying won't stop—it'll only get louder at school.

Downstairs, Mum and Dad sit at the kitchen table, their voices low but urgent.

Mum:

"He's barely spoken all week. And have you seen him? He's not eating properly, and he doesn't even touch his football anymore."

Dad:

"I know. I tried talking to him yesterday, but he just shrugged me off. I think something's going on at school—or online. You've seen how glued he is to that tablet, but now it's different. He's not laughing at videos or showing us memes anymore."

Mum:

"What if someone's bullying him? You know how kids are these days—it's not just in the playground anymore. It's everywhere. And the worst part? You can't even see it happening."

Dad exhales sharply, leaning back in his chair. "We need to tread carefully. If we push too hard, he'll shut us out completely. But we can't just stand by, either. Tomorrow, I'll try to sit with him while he's on his tablet. Maybe he'll let something slip."

The next morning, Jamie sits at the dining table, his tablet propped up against a cereal box. His parents watch him closely as he scrolls. The usual chatter of breakfast is replaced by an uneasy quiet.

Mum:

"Jamie, love, what are you looking at?"

He shrugs, not looking up. "Just stuff," he mutters.

Dad leans over slightly. "Can I see?"

Jamie pulls the tablet closer to his chest, his movements sharp and defensive. "It's nothing, okay?"

Mum and Dad exchange a glance. Mum places a gentle hand on Jamie's arm.

Mum:

"You know, if something's bothering you, you can tell us. We're here for you."

Jamie's eyes flicker with something—fear? Shame? Anxiety?—but he doesn't say a word. He pushes his chair back abruptly and leaves the table, his cereal untouched.

That evening, Jamie locks his bedroom door and sinks onto the bed. The tablet sits beside him, its screen lighting up every few seconds with new messages.

Kyle:

"What's wrong? Cat got your tongue?"

Kyle:

"Go on, cry about it. Everyone knows you're too scared to do anything."

Jamie swipes the notifications away, but the impact of cyberbullying lingers, the words echoing like a taunt.

He opens the group chat, hesitates, and then types: "Leave me alone."

His thumb hovers over the send button, but he deletes the message before it can go through.

In the quiet of his room, Jamie feels the weight of the shadows creeping in. He hugs his knees to his chest, wondering if tomorrow will be any different—or if it will only get worse.

Downstairs, Mum and Dad sit together, their worry growing heavier with each passing day.

Mum:

"We need to do something. He's shutting us out more and more."

Dad:

"We will. But we have to do it carefully. Tomorrow, let's sit him down together and make sure he knows he doesn't have to face this alone."

The clock ticked towards midnight — and with it came the message that would change everything.