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A Note About This Story

Kimmie Pooh & Suga Bugga: The Empathy Machine of Yamtasticville explores themes of love, loss, and grief, including the death of a grandparent. It is written for children ages 7–12 and the adults who care for them.

This story may bring up strong feelings. Every child grieves differently. Please read together when possible and offer comfort and support as needed.

Disclaimer

This book is a work of fiction created for storytelling and educational purposes. It is not intended to provide medical, psychological, or therapeutic advice. If you or someone you love is struggling with grief or emotional challenges, please seek support from a qualified mental health professional. The author is a writer, not a medical provider or counselor.

CHAPTER 1: I LOVE YOU THREE

The night of June 22nd, 2013, started like any other Saturday night. I was lying on my bed, staring up at the glow-in-the-dark stars stuck to my ceiling, when my phone buzzed.

GRANDMA flashed across the screen.

I grinned and hit answer before the second ring.

"Hey, Suga Bugga!"

Her laugh crackled through the phone, warm and bright, like sunshine breaking through clouds.

"Kimmie Pooh! There's Grandma's baby! What are you doing up so late?"

"It's only nine-thirty," I said, rolling onto my stomach and kicking my feet in the air. "Besides, it's Saturday. And I just turned seven, remember? I'm practically a grown-up now!"

"Seven?" Grandma's voice danced with amusement. "Oh yes, that's right. I forgot you're ancient now. Probably need a cane."

"Grandma!" I giggled so hard I had to press my face into my pillow.

We talked about everything and nothing, the way we always did. She told me about Mrs. Hiner's cat getting stuck in a tree again.

"That fool cat climbs up every week like she's forgotten she can't get down."

I told her about the new video game system Mom had gotten me for my birthday and how I'd spent all afternoon playing it.

"Well, that sounds like a perfect birthday weekend," Grandma said, and I could hear the smile in her voice. "I'm sorry I couldn't be there, baby."

"It's okay. You sent me that big card with the butterflies! I put it on my dresser."

"Did you now? Well, good. That way you can see it every morning and remember your Suga Bugga loves you."

"I know you do," I said softly.

She told me about a party she was heading to later that night, where she would be celebrating with some friends from church.

"They're picking me up in fifteen minutes," she said. "I'd better not keep them waiting. You know how Miss Joyce gets when people are late."

"Don't let her bully you, Grandma."

"Oh, I'll handle Joyce just fine, baby." I could practically see her waving her hand. "Now, before I go, let me ask you something."

I knew what was coming. She asked the same question every time we talked.

"Do you love me one or two?"

Usually, I'd say two, just to be silly, like picking the biggest number in a game. But tonight felt different. Grandma was humming in the background, off-key and cozy, the same tune she always hummed when the world felt safe. But underneath, something wobbled. Maybe it was all the laughing. Maybe my birthday had been too perfect. Or maybe I just wanted to hold on extra tight.

Whatever it was, I didn't want to just say two.



[ILLUSTRATION: "I love you three" close-up moment]

"Grandma," I said, suddenly serious, "I love you three."

There was a pause on the other end of the line. Then, softly, almost like a whisper:

"Three?"

"Yeah. Three is more than two, right? So that means I love you even bigger. Like... the biggest hug I could ever give you. So big you'd feel it all the way in Gilmer."

I heard her breath catch. Just a little.

When she spoke again, her voice was heavy with feeling.

"Oh, Kimmie Pooh. My sweet, sweet girl. I love you three, too. Always and forever."

"Always and forever," I repeated.

"Now you get some sleep, baby. I'll call you tomorrow, okay?"

"Okay, Grandma. Have fun at your party!"

"I will. Goodnight, my love."

"Goodnight, Suga Bugga."

I hung up and stared at my phone, grinning. My heart felt stuffed with warm, happy light.

But as I placed the phone on my nightstand, I felt that little tug in my chest.

The one that whispered, *Call her back. Tell her one more time.*

I picked up my phone again. My thumb hovered over her name.

She's getting picked up for the party, I thought. I'll just bother her. I can tell her tomorrow.

I set the phone down.

Tomorrow.

I woke up to sunlight streaming through my window. Sunday morning. I stretched, grabbed my phone, and called Grandma.

The phone rang once.

Twice.

Three times.

Voicemail.

That was strange. Grandma always answered. Even if she were busy, she'd pick up and say, "Hold on, baby. Let me finish this real quick."

I tried again.

Voicemail.

A cold feeling settled in my stomach.

She's probably still sleeping, I told myself. She stayed out late.

I got dressed and poured a bowl of cereal. Mom had already left early that morning. Mrs. Rosa, our babysitter, was in the kitchen making coffee, moving quietly like she didn't want to wake the house.

I checked my phone again.

Then again.

I tried calling two more times.

Voicemail.

Voicemail.

Around noon, there was a knock at the door.



[ILLUSTRATION: Aunt Brenda at door delivering news]

I opened it to find Aunt Brenda standing on the porch. She was one of Mom's close friends, the kind who showed up for birthdays and holidays and brought casseroles when someone was sick.

But she didn't have a casserole today.

And she didn't have her usual smile.

"Hi, baby," she said softly. "Can I come in?"

Something in her voice made my throat tighten.

"Um... yeah. Okay."

We sat on the couch. Aunt Brenda took my hands in hers. They were warm and soft, but they were shaking just a little.

"Kimmie, honey," she said, "your mama asked me to come talk to you. She didn't want you to be alone when..." She paused, swallowing hard. "When you heard the news."

My heart started pounding.

"What news? Is Mom okay?"

"Your mama's fine, baby." Aunt Brenda's eyes filled with tears. "But it's about your grandma. She had a heart attack this morning. The doctors tried everything they could, but... she didn't make it."

The words floated in the air, but they didn't make sense. They were just sounds. Just syllables.

"What do you mean?" I heard myself ask.

Aunt Brenda squeezed my hands tighter.

"I'm so sorry, baby. Your grandma is gone."



[ILLUSTRATION: "Gone" - world stops (abstract grief moment)]

Gone.

Such a small word. Four little letters.

But it swallowed everything.

The world didn't explode. It didn't shatter like in the movies.

It just... stopped.

It was like someone pressed pause on the sound, the light, even the air in my lungs.

No illness.

No warning.

No chance to say goodbye.

Just... gone.

I wanted to rewind time. I wanted to pick up my phone the night before, when I'd felt that tug in my chest. I wanted to call her back and say, "I love you three" one more time.

But I couldn't.

Tomorrow had never come.
