
Sam and Grandma
A story about being together,
illness and saying goodbye
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This is Sam.

He loves going to Grandma’s. There are dogs, biscuits and a garden full of hiding places.

Sometimes Sam has lots to say. Sometimes he does not know how.

Can you read a little already? Join in if you like. Are some of the words still tricky? Ask someone to read aloud. Then you can look at the pictures together.

In this story, lovely things happen. Sad things happen too: Grandma becomes ill, and later she dies.

Read this part with someone you love. You can ask anything. You can stop for a while, or carry on another day.



The Day That Wouldn’t Fit

Sam pushed the garden gate open with his knee. His school bag caught on the latch.

‘Just what I needed.’

Moos came plodding over, his black ears almost brushing the ground. Behind him, Octa slipped between the flowerpots. She poked her brown-and-white nose into Sam’s bag.

‘There’s nothing in there. Just an apple. And I don’t want it either.’

Something creaked under the veranda.

‘Is that you, Sam?’ Grandad called.

‘No. The chair.’

Grandad was crouching beside an upside-down garden chair.

‘Thank goodness. I thought it was my knees.’

Sam did not want to laugh. A little bit of him did anyway.

Grandma stood in the doorway. There was flour on her sleeve.

‘I’ve got some cake mixture left,’ she said. ‘And a spoon that’s still clean.’

‘I don’t feel like it.’





‘Then it can stay clean a bit longer.’

She sat down on the bench and moved a flowerpot aside. Sam stayed by the gate.

Something rustled. Octa had found the apple.

‘Hey!’ Sam took it away. Two little tooth marks dented the skin.

‘Now I really don’t want it.’

‘Put it down,’ Grandad said. ‘We’ll see how much is left later.’



Sam sat beside Grandma with his bag on his lap.

‘Would you like to tell me?’

He shook his head.

Grandma nodded. She picked a faded flower from the pot beside her.

A leaf dangled from the net over the pond. Sam watched until the wind blew it free.

‘They acted as if I wasn’t there.’

Grandma turned towards him.

‘At football. They kept choosing someone else. Then the teams were full.’

Grandad put down his tools.

‘That was a rotten afternoon,’ Grandma said.

Sam pulled at a loose thread on his bag.

‘I’m not going tomorrow.’

‘Are you dreading tomorrow?’

Sam nodded.

‘Shall we tell Dad what happened when he comes? Then you can think together about what might help.’

‘Maybe.’





Grandad tried out the mended chair. First with one hand on the armrest. Then, very slowly, with all his weight.

The chair creaked.

Grandad stood up again.

Sam burst out laughing. This time he could not hold it in.

‘Failed the test,’ Grandad said.

Grandma picked up a yellow bottle of bubble mixture from the windowsill.

‘I’d forgotten this was here.’

Sam blew. Nothing happened.



He blew harder. A whole string of bubbles floated across the path. One settled on Grandma’s nose.

‘Don’t move,’ Sam whispered.

The bubble popped.

‘Too late,’ Grandma said.

Sam wiped his eyes on his sleeve. There was still a laugh in his throat. And something else too.

Grandma gave him a tissue.

He slid his bag under the bench.



Flour on the Floor

The next Saturday, Sam stood on a stool at the kitchen counter. His little sister Noor sat further along the counter, with Grandma right beside her. She held a wooden spoon as if it were a microphone.

‘Welcome to the cake!’ she announced.

‘There isn’t a cake yet,’ Sam said.

‘Then we’ll sing it here.’

Grandma tapped a spoon against the mixing bowl. Sam drummed on an upside-down saucepan. Moos left for the hall.

‘Wise dog,’ Grandad said from the doorway.

Grandma laughed. She put the flour on the counter.

‘Sam, would you weigh it out?’

Noor wanted to help too. Her hand reached the bag at the same time as Sam’s.

‘I’m doing it!’ he said.

He pulled.

A white cloud rose into the air. Flour on his jumper. Flour on Grandma’s trousers. A little heap on the floor.

‘Sam! Look what you’ve done!’ Grandma snapped.





Everything went quiet.

Sam stared at the bowl. He put down the bag and stepped off the stool.

‘I always get everything wrong.’

Grandma closed her eyes for a moment.

‘Wait.’

She helped Noor down from the counter and crouched beside Sam.

‘The flour gave me a fright. I spoke unkindly to you.’

Sam looked at her sleeve. There had been flour on it yesterday too.



‘But I did pull it.’

‘Yes. And I snapped. I could have said it differently.’

Noor pushed the broom towards them.

‘It’s bigger than me.’

‘That’s the trouble with brooms,’ Grandad said. ‘They grow so fast.’

Sam picked up the dustpan. Noor swept. More flour landed beside it than inside it.

Grandma waited.

Then they both had a turn at stirring. Sam counted to ten, then Noor. She lost count at seven.

The cake went into the oven.

Outside, Grandma sat with a little pot of tea. Grandad brought the biscuits, even though a cake was on the way.

Sam touched a daisy growing between the paving stones.

‘It’s on the path.’

‘Yes,’ Grandma said. ‘It must have found a little gap there.’

Sam left the flower where it was.

Later, Dad came to fetch him.

‘How was school?’ he asked.





Sam looked at Grandma.

She looked back without saying anything.

‘I told my teacher I wanted to join in too,’ Sam said. ‘He’s going to keep an eye on things on Monday.’

Dad sat down beside him.

Sam went on talking. From the kitchen, Noor called out that the cake was wonky.

It was.

They ate it anyway.



Under the Pointed Roof

In summer, the big pool behind the veranda was full of wobbly knees, wet hair and voices.

Sam, his sister and his little brother sailed a plastic boat. Grandma sat in the water with them. Grandad stood ready with towels.

‘My harbour’s here,’ Sam said.

‘So’s my storm,’ said his little brother.

A wave washed over Sam’s boat.

He pushed back. Harder than he meant to.

‘Hey!’

Grandma put a hand on the edge of the pool.

‘Stop for a moment. Both of you.’

Sam climbed out. He did not want to see anyone.

Grandad wrapped a towel around him.

‘The garden’s big enough for a bit of space,’ he said.

The doors of the little summerhouse were open. Sam curled up in a chair beneath its pointed roof. On the saucer in front of him lay a biscuit with a broken corner.





Grandma came a little later.

‘May I join you?’

Sam shrugged.

She sat down.

‘He’s always so rough.’

‘You wanted him to stop.’

‘Yes.’

‘You can say that. Pushing can hurt him.’

Sam rubbed a toe against the chair leg.

‘I’d already told him.’

‘Then call me or Grandad. We’ll help.’



Outside, a butterfly rested on a flower. Its wings opened and closed.

‘It’s not doing anything,’ Sam said.

‘Perhaps it’s just sitting.’

They watched until it flew away.

On the shelf beside the window stood an angel with a broken finger.

‘Can it really fly?’ Sam asked.

‘Not this little statue. It’s made of stone.’

‘I mean a real one.’

Grandma ran a finger along the wing.



‘I like to imagine there are angels who stay close to us. It’s a comforting thought.’

‘Have you ever seen one?’

‘No.’

Sam thought about it.

‘Maybe they’re there. Maybe they aren’t.’

‘You’re allowed to think that,’ Grandma said. ‘You don’t have to believe the same things I do.’

‘So what should I believe?’

‘You don’t have to choose for ever. You can believe what feels right for you. And you can have doubts.’

‘Sometimes I feel something inside,’ Sam said.

‘People call that quiet feeling intuition. You can listen to it.’

‘Is it always right?’

‘No. I can be mistaken too. It helps to ask questions, or ask someone to help you think it through.’

‘But my feelings are allowed?’

‘Always. Even when I feel differently. You matter too.’

A drop from his hair landed on the biscuit.

‘Now it’s a swimming biscuit,’ Grandma said.

Sam’s little brother appeared in the doorway, holding the boat.





‘It’s empty. There was loads of water in it.’

Sam took it.

‘I don’t want another storm.’

‘Then let’s play bridges.’

They went to the pond. Grandad came too and stayed with them. The little gate around the pond stayed shut. A fish darted away beneath the net.

Sam put the boat in a shallow bowl beside the pond.

There was no room for a storm in there.



The Head That Wouldn’t Stop

When the evenings began to grow dark earlier, Sam stayed the night at Grandma and Grandad’s.

He knew the house. But it sounded different when he was in bed.

A tapping in the wall. Moos’s claws clicking along the hall. Someone putting down a cup downstairs.

Sam turned over.

What if Dad forgot what time he was coming to fetch him tomorrow?

What if his car broke down?

What if something happened and nobody knew?

Sam got out of bed.

Downstairs, Grandma sat in her pink dressing gown. A candle burned in a glass on the table. Grandad had a book and only one sock on.





‘The other one’s vanished,’ he said when he saw Sam looking.

Sam did not laugh.

‘Will Dad really come tomorrow?’

‘That’s what he’s arranged with us,’ Grandma said.

‘But do you know for absolutely certain?’

Grandma pushed back her chair.

‘I think he’ll come. Is there something you’re frightened of?’



Sam sat beside her. Now all the questions came at once.
Grandma listened. Sometimes she asked a question too.
‘Shall we give him a ring?’
Dad answered with a toothbrush in his mouth.
‘Tomorrow after breakfast, mate.’
‘Not too late?’
‘Just as we agreed.’
After the call, it was better. A little.

‘My head’s still doing it,’ Sam said.

‘Doing what?’

‘Everything.’

Grandma nodded.

‘I know that feeling. I was about to have my tea, but I’d already started thinking about the washing and the shopping.’

Sam looked at the candle.

‘Does that work?’

‘I think it’s lovely. But it doesn’t switch my thoughts off.’





Grandad pulled something from behind his back.

‘Found it.’

The sock was caught in his book, as if it were a bookmark.

Sam began to laugh. So did Grandad.

Then they went upstairs together. Grandma sat on the edge of Sam’s bed for a little while.



Sam listened to Moos flopping down on the landing with a sigh.

‘Will you stay until I’m asleep?’

‘I’ll stay for a while.’

The light in the hall stayed on. Sam thought once more of Dad’s voice with the toothbrush in it.

Then he no longer knew what he was thinking.



The Empty Chair

Winter passed. The daisy came back between the paving stones, though Sam did not know if it was the same one.

That afternoon, Grandma sat indoors. Her tea was cold.

‘Shall we go into the garden?’ Sam asked.

‘Perhaps in a little while.’

But a little while never came.

A few days later, Dad explained why Grandma had to go to hospital so often.

‘Grandma has cancer. It’s an illness. The doctors are going to operate on her.’

‘Cut her?’

Dad nodded.

Sam pushed his sandwich away.

‘Will it hurt?’

‘During the operation, she’ll have medicine so she sleeps and doesn’t feel anything. Afterwards, she may be sore. She’ll have medicine for that too.’

‘Will she get better?’





‘We hope so. We don’t know how things will go yet.’

Sam wanted to see Grandma.

The hospital smelled different. Grandad walked ahead with a bag. He knew where the lift was and which door they needed.

Grandma was in bed.



At first, Sam stayed by the door.

‘I made something.’

It was a drawing of Moos with six legs. He had not been able to rub two of them out.

‘He’ll outrun all of us,’ Grandma said.

She hung the drawing beside her bed.

After the operation, Grandma came home. Later she had radiotherapy: treatment at the hospital to help fight the cancer.

That was how Grandma explained it. Sam asked if you could see the light.

‘No,’ she said. ‘Not like our garden lights.’

Sometimes Sam was only allowed a short visit. He thought that was rubbish.





‘I’m not even being noisy!’

‘I didn’t say you were,’ Grandad said. ‘Grandma gets tired very quickly.’

He took Sam to the shed. They made a little shelf for the summerhouse. The first screw fell between the paving stones.

‘Just what I needed,’ Sam said.

Grandad looked at him.

They both laughed.



That evening, Sam put the little shelf beside Grandma. Noor carried a tiny vase with three daisies. She set it down very carefully.

‘For when the garden’s too far away,’ Sam said.

Noor moved closer to Grandma. ‘This one’s looking at you.’ She turned one of the flowers a little.

Grandma smiled and held her hand for a moment.

‘Now I can see it properly.’

They sat with her a little longer.



One More Summer

One day, Grandma opened the garden gate herself.

Sam almost ran into her.

‘You’re outside!’

‘Well spotted.’

Later, she told him the doctors had found no more cancer at her check-ups. She still had to keep going back.

‘Are you finished being ill now?’

‘For now, I’m mostly finished with this chair.’

She pointed to the bench. Grandad had sanded it, and there were two new cushions on it.

Sam sat down.

‘This one isn’t scratchy.’

‘Then Grandad’s done a good job.’

Grandad came past with the watering can.

‘I wouldn’t mind hearing that again.’

That summer, they went camping with the trailer tent. Sam helped Grandad with the tent poles. His sister and little brother sat on Grandma’s lap. Grandad had one pole left over.

‘Is that right?’ Sam asked.





‘I hope not.’

Grandma read to the little ones while Sam and Grandad started again. That evening, they played cards under a little lamp. Sam won and wanted another game. Then he lost and wanted another game even more.

Next morning, rain pattered on the canvas. In her pink dressing gown, Grandma ate her bread without a plate.



‘An indoor picnic,’ she said. Sam thought it was a good holiday.

There were afternoons with cake. And music that was much too loud.

Noor sat beside Grandma on the bench. Together they tapped the rhythm on their knees. Their little brother shook a rattle. Sam danced in his socks.

‘Again,’ Noor said. Grandma had already started singing.

Sometimes they simply sat quietly together.

Sometimes Sam thought about the hospital. Mostly he did not.

And sometimes the whole family came over.



A Place for Everyone

One afternoon, Dad’s sisters arrived with bags, coats and lots and lots of children. Sam ran to the gate.

Under the veranda, the cousins wound strips of dough around long sticks. Grandad had lit the outdoor fireplace.

‘Keep turning,’ Grandma said. ‘Otherwise your bread will get one very brown cheek.’

Sam shuffled along. There was room for another cousin. His sister and brother sat with Grandma.

Then corn kernels went into the popcorn pan. Grandad held it over the fire. Nothing happened at first. Then: pop. Pop-pop-pop!

‘It’s giving itself a fright!’ one cousin shouted.

The bowl went round. Crumbs fell on the ground. Moos was already there. So was Octa.



In winter, the shed behind the pool smelled of oliebollen, the round Dutch doughnuts Grandad made in enormous piles.

The children were allowed to help. Sam stirred the mixture. A cousin counted the raisins and kept losing his place. His aunts set out dishes.

Grandad looked after the hot pan. Beside Grandma, Noor and her little brother dusted icing sugar over the doughnuts that had cooled down.

‘It’s snowing indoors,’ Noor said.

There was a white spot on Sam’s nose. His brother pointed at it. Then he had sugar on his own cheek too.

There were not enough hands, or chairs. Grandad fetched two more.

Another spring came.

One afternoon, Dad and Grandad sat together at the kitchen table. Sam could see it in their faces before anyone spoke.

The cancer was back.

‘Then they’ll do that treatment again,’ he said.

Dad moved closer.

‘The doctors are looking at what might still help. But this time they can’t make Grandma better.’





Sam looked at the kitchen counter. The mixing bowl was still there.

‘But she was better, wasn’t she?’

‘Yes,’ Dad said. ‘She was well for a while. Now she’s very ill again.’

Sam kicked the table leg.

Nobody told him to stop.

‘I want to go home,’ he said.

Dad picked up his coat. Sam walked out of the garden without looking back.



That evening, he wished he had said goodbye to Grandma.
Dad rang her. Sam held the phone in both hands.
‘I was angry.’
‘I could hear that,’ Grandma said.
‘At everything.’
‘Will you come again tomorrow?’
Sam nodded, even though she could not see him.
Then he said it too.



A Chair Beside the Bed

Grandma’s bed was downstairs now. Sam could see her window from the garden.

He had decided to be extra good. No arguing with Noor. No grumbling when he had to wash his hands. He even ate the apple.

After three days, Grandma was still ill.

‘I’m trying so hard,’ he told Grandad.

Grandad put down the shopping bag.

‘What for?’

Sam told him.

Grandad sat beside him on the bottom stair.

‘Grandma didn’t become ill because you did something wrong. And doing everything right can’t make her better either.’





Sam lowered his head.

‘Then I can’t do anything.’

‘You can ask if she’d like you to read her a story. Or just sit with her for a while. And you can go outside and play too.’

Grandad waited until Sam looked at him.

‘The grown-ups will do the caring. You don’t have to take that on.’



Sam had just turned ten. A book was waiting for him at home: Waarom wij naar de aarde kwamen, by Hans Stolp. Its title means Why We Came to Earth.

Grandma had given this book to all her children. She hoped they would read it to their own children one day, once they were old enough.

Sam studied the blue cover. For children from ten to a hundred, it said.

‘That means I can read it now,’ he said. ‘I want to take it to Grandma.’

That afternoon, he read to her. Noor sat on a little chair beside Grandma to listen. Sam read slowly. Grandma helped with the difficult words.

Halfway through, she fell asleep. Sam kept his finger on the line. After a while, he slipped a piece of paper between the pages.

Another afternoon, Grandma was awake. Her hand lay on the quilt.

‘Are you going to die?’ Sam asked.

Grandma looked at him. Dad sat on the other side of the bed.

‘Yes, Sam. I’m not going to get better. But I don’t know exactly when I’ll die.’

Sam held the edge of the sheet.

‘I don’t want you to.’





‘I’d like to stay too.’

A tear ran down beside her nose. Sam had seen Grandma cry before, but now he did not know where to look.

Dad put a hand on his back.

‘Who’ll bake the cakes, then?’ Sam asked.

Grandma tried to smile.

‘Grandad has the recipe.’



‘He puts too much butter in.’

‘Then he’ll have to practise.’

Sam did not laugh. Grandma did not laugh any more either.

He carefully snuggled against her. Dad helped with the quilt.

Outside, the veranda lights came on. Someone closed the garden door.

‘Do I have to say something?’ Sam whispered.

‘No,’ Grandma said.

Her hand rested on his hair.

Later, they went home with Dad. His little brother sat in the front child seat on Dad’s bike, with Noor in the seat behind Dad. Sam rode his own bike.

On the way, he talked about a new boy in his class.

Just before they reached their front door, he suddenly began to cry.

Dad got off and held his bike steady. He put a hand on Sam’s shoulder. They stood there for a while.





Goodbye, Grandma

Grandma died early one morning.

Dad came and sat on Sam’s bed to tell him. He said Grandma’s body had stopped working. She was not breathing any more, and she was not in pain. She could not come back.

Sam drew up his knees.

‘Never?’

‘No.’

Dad stayed where he was.

Downstairs, the kettle went on. A bin lorry drove past outside. Sam thought it was strange that it still came as usual.

Later that day, they went to Grandad’s. Grandma was still in her bed. Dad had already explained what she would look like and that she might feel cold. Sam could choose whether he wanted to see her.

At first, he did not.

He sat in the kitchen. Grandad put a glass of water in front of him.

Moos lay quietly by the kitchen door. Octa curled up against him and rested her head on Moos’s front paws. They stayed close together.

‘Are you all alone now?’ Sam asked.





Grandad looked at the empty chair.

‘I live here without Grandma now. I’m going to miss having her here.’

He wiped his eyes.

‘But people will come. Today, you’re here.’

After a while, Sam went with Dad to Grandma’s bed. He put his drawing on the little table beside her.

In the days that followed, people came. They brought flowers, a saucepan of soup, a story about Grandma.



Sam did not always know what to do when someone looked at him.

‘You don’t always have to say something,’ Dad said.

There was paper on the table. Sam drew flowers and a big heart.

‘For Grandma,’ he said.

Then he told Dad about the chair Grandad had turned upside down.

‘It creaked,’ Sam said.

Dad nodded. A tear ran down his cheek.

‘You miss her too.’

‘Very much,’ Dad said.

Sam pushed a pencil towards him. Dad took his own sheet of paper and drew Moos. His ears came out much too big.

A few days later, they went to say goodbye.

Dad explained beforehand what would happen that day. Grandma was in a wooden coffin now. Sam had been able to see her once more. Now the lid was on.

‘And after that?’ Sam asked.





‘Then we’ll take her to the cemetery. The coffin will be lowered into the grave. Later, it will be covered with earth.’

Sam looked at his shoes.

‘But then she can’t get out.’

Dad sat beside him.

‘Grandma is dead, Sam. Her body can’t move any more. She doesn’t feel pain, and she isn’t frightened. She doesn’t need to breathe any more either.’



Sam straightened his shoelaces.

‘Do I have to look?’

‘You can look if you want to. You can also stand beside me without looking. And if you want to step away, we’ll go for a little walk together.’

The room where the coffin stood smelled of flowers. A woman straightened a row of chairs.

Grandad stood by the window with a tissue in his hand.

Sam showed him his drawing.

‘Can this go with Grandma?’

Grandad nodded.

They laid it on the coffin. Sam moved the paper a little so the flowers did not hide the Moos he had drawn.

He chose a daisy from a little vase and laid it beside the drawing.

‘Goodbye, Grandma,’ he said very quietly.

Then he went to sit beside Dad.





Music played. Someone spoke about Grandma being a teacher. Grandad said she sometimes started the next song before the first one was finished.

People laughed.

Sam looked up. Grandad was laughing too, with wet eyes.

After a while, Sam’s legs began to wriggle. There were so many voices and faces.

He tapped Dad’s hand.

It was cooler outside. They walked as far as a tree and back again. Dad did not ask if he was all right now.



‘I want to go back inside,’ Sam said when he was ready.

At the cemetery, he walked beside Grandad. Dad carried Noor and Sam’s little brother, one on each side. Leaves lay on the path.

His cousins were there too, with his aunts. Some children held a flower. Others held a hand.

They stood still by the grave. The coffin was slowly lowered.

Sam took Grandad’s hand. He looked for a moment, then down at the ground by his feet. Grandad gave him some loose flower petals.

Sam let them fall from his hand. At first, one stuck to his thumb. He had to give it a little shake before it came free.

‘Are we leaving her here now?’ he asked.

‘Her body will stay here,’ Dad said. ‘We can come back and spend time by her grave.’

Sam stood looking a little longer.

Dad carefully put the little ones down. Then Sam wrapped his arms around him.





Afterwards, they sat at tables with everyone else. There was tea, and there were bread rolls. His sister asked where the biscuits were.

Sam did not know. A cousin came to help look. His little brother followed them.

Back at Grandad’s, he took off his shoes by the door. A little lump of earth fell onto the mat.

Grandad put the old teapot on the table.

‘Can I come again tomorrow?’ Sam asked.

‘Yes,’ Grandad said.

Sam moved along the sofa so Grandad could sit beside him.



There Is Still a Place

A few days later, Sam had PE at school.

He ran so fast that he forgot to think. In the changing room, he remembered again.

At home, he asked if that was bad.

‘That you had some fun for a while?’ Dad asked.

Sam nodded.

‘No. You’re allowed to.’

Missing Grandma came at all sorts of moments. At the sight of a pink coat in a shop. At the smell of cake. Once, when someone in the street laughed just like her.

One Saturday, Sam went with Grandad to Grandma’s grave. Leaves lay among the flowers. Grandad lit a candle.

Sam wanted to say something, but he could not.

So he helped clear the leaves away.

Weeks later, they sat together on the bench. Moos lay on Grandad’s feet. Octa was asleep inside.

‘I can’t remember how she said my name,’ Sam whispered.





Grandad looked up.

‘Wait.’

He searched on his phone. It took a long time. Sam heard a little wind, a door closing, and then Grandma.

‘Sam! Not all the biscuits. Leave one for Grandad.’

There was laughter in the video.

Grandad played it again.

Sam cried and laughed at the same time. His nose ran. He wiped it on his sleeve.



‘Those tissues are still in the kitchen,’ Grandad said.

They found the mixing bowl there too.

They got everything ready. Sam read the recipe. Grandad cracked an egg into the bowl, with a bit of shell.

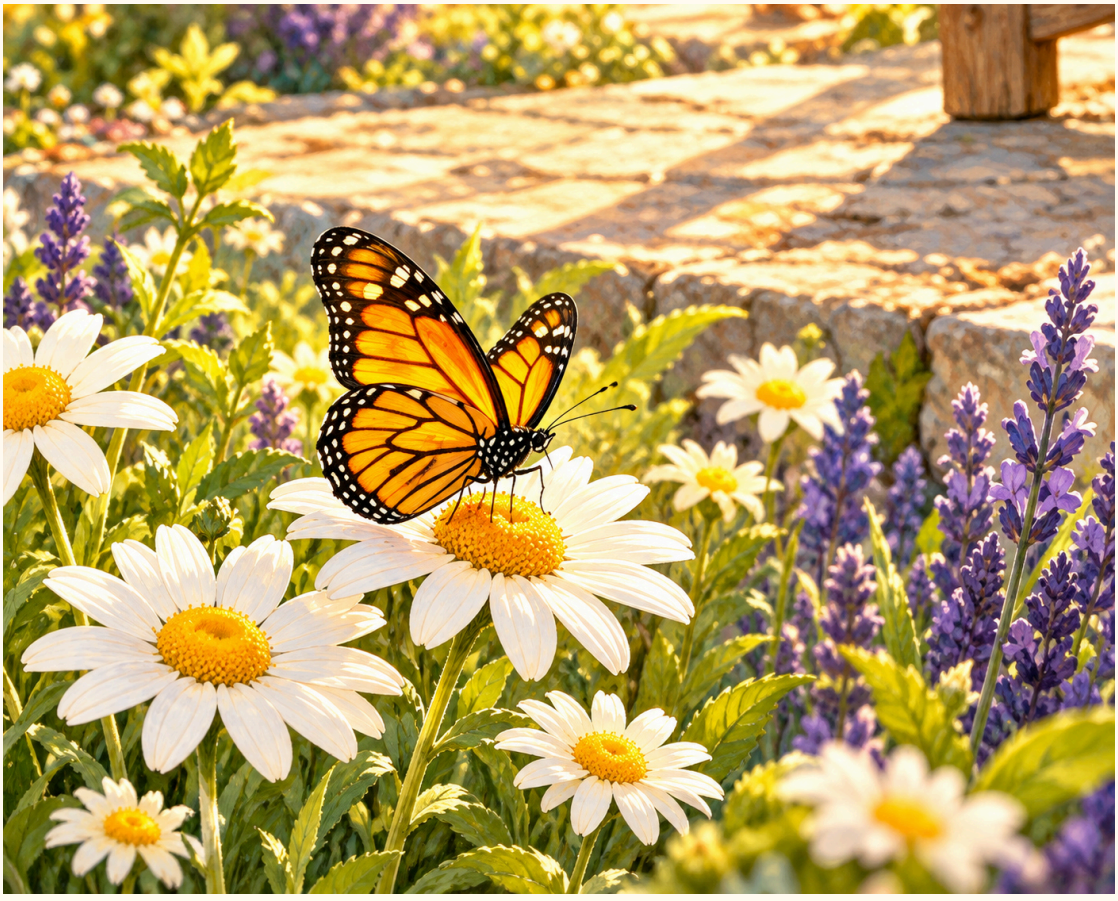
‘Extra crunchy,’ he said.

‘Grandad!’

Sam fished it out.

While the cake was in the oven, they went into the garden. A daisy grew between the paving stones. Sam stepped over it.

By the summerhouse, a butterfly settled on a flower for a moment.
‘When I see one, I sometimes think of Grandma,’ Sam said.
Grandad looked too.
‘For me, it’s the first sip of tea. I want to ask if she’d like some.’
They stood there a little longer.
Then the kitchen timer rang.





The cake stuck to the tin. A piece broke off on one side.

Sam tasted a crumb.

‘It’s good.’

Grandad put out two little plates. Sam fetched the old teapot from the cupboard.

Outside, it was getting dark. The little lights on the veranda came on.

Sam pulled a chair up to the table.

‘Are you coming, Grandad?’

Grandad came and sat down.

The story has ended.

But you do not have to hurry on.

Would you like to tell someone something?

Or sit together for a little longer?

Either is all right.

For the Grown-up Reading Aloud

You do not have to read this story in one sitting. A child can ask questions, skip a page, turn back or stop. Follow what the child wants to share; they do not have to explain which feeling belongs with a picture.

In this story, Grandma dies. This is also mentioned on the back cover. If possible, read those parts yourself first, so you can respond to what the child already knows and has experienced. Answer questions in simple, honest words. It is all right to say you do not know.

Sam misses Grandma, and he can still play or laugh at times. One feeling does not have to replace another. Grandad is grieving too; Sam is not responsible for the adults' wellbeing.

Grandma's thoughts about angels are her personal beliefs. Sam's memories of her can exist alongside other beliefs and questions. Candles, water and music are part of their everyday lives, not treatments for illness.

If a child's worries or grief keep getting in the way of everyday life, you can speak to a doctor or a child health professional. A story can help begin a conversation, but it does not replace appropriate support.

Sources

These sources provided background for writing about reading aloud, feelings and grief.

Nederlands Jeugdinstituut (Netherlands Youth Institute) — Loss and grief in the family [in Dutch]

https://www.nji.nl/kennis/opvoeden-ouderschap/verlies-rouw-gezin

UNICEF — How to talk to your children about the death of a loved one

https://www.unicef.org/parenting/child-care/how-talk-your-children-about-death-loved-one

American Academy of Pediatrics — Supporting the Grieving Child and Family: Clinical Report (2024)

https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/154/1/e2024067212/197497/Supporting-the-Grieving-Child-and-Family-Clinical

Stichting Lezen — Reading aloud: repetition, illustrations and asking questions [in Dutch]

https://www.lezen.nl/onderzoek/voorlezen-het-nut-van-herhaling-illustraties-en-vragen-stellen/

The book Sam reads to Grandma

Hans Stolp · Waarom wij naar de aarde kwamen [Why We Came to Earth]

A book to read, or read aloud, for children aged 10–100.

Ten Have, 2000. The book appears in the story as part of a personal family memory. The English rendering of its title here is explanatory; it does not refer to a published English edition.

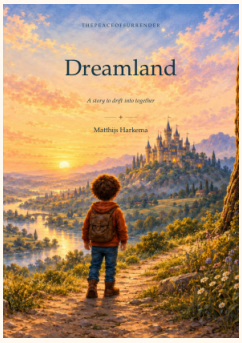
About the Author

I create texts, audio stories and images for The Peace of Surrender, a personal, free, non-commercial initiative. In my work, I make room for difficult feelings, connection and questions that do not always have an answer.

This book carries something of my dear mother Diny. As a mother, grandmother and teacher, she gave children love, stories and a place to belong. Their wellbeing, their open-hearted wonder and their own ways of feeling and believing mattered deeply to her. Through Sam and Grandma, I hope to pass on some of that love - to her grandchildren and to every child who finds a place in this story.

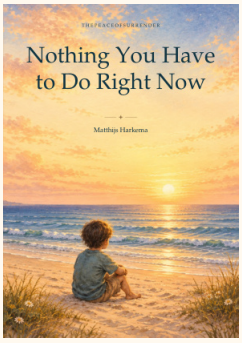
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More to Read Together



Dreamland

A read-aloud story about Sam and a journey through a world of imagination.



Nothing You Have to Do Right Now

Short texts and pictures about a busy mind and having nothing to do for a while.



Come On In

An illustrated reflection on restlessness, thoughts and room alongside what is here.

Text: Matthijs Harkema. Images, English translation and production with the help of AI.
The Peace of Surrender · English digital edition 2026



There is always something to find at Grandma's. Cake crumbs. A dog under the table. A place beside her.

Sam brings his stories, his questions and, sometimes, a head full of noise. Grandma does not have all the answers either. But she knows how to listen.

Then Grandma becomes ill, and later she dies. Together with Grandad, Sam discovers that missing someone and enjoying happy moments can exist side by side.

To read together, from around age 7.

Matthijs Harkema
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