

# **She Was My Favourite Teacher**

By

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Here's how it went down.

The family decided to go for a walk first thing. I say the family – it was Grandpa's decision. He couldn't stand another moment indoors, so even though it was the middle of winter and probably about three degrees with the wind chill factor, Grandpa, the two aunts, cousin Denny and the three grandkids went outside, all rugged-up, and braved the cold. Anything to get out of the house.

They went to the park around the corner first. The little one, Kristie I think, wanted to swing on the swings. Connor, a little older, had a go on the pirate ship but his heart wasn't really in it. The eldest, Brit, pushed Kristie and tried to smile but never did.

Grandpa found it much colder than he expected, though he was warned. He tried to convince somebody to walk around the park with him but they instead huddled for warmth, "keeping an eye on the kids". He did a lap himself. Anything to keep active, moving, busy.

The adults, in their huddle, laughed too hard at each other's jokes and checked on the kids. It was a cold day. Grey.

When Grandpa returned he announced it was time to go. But they had just got there. What about breakfast? Coffee at least, hot chocolates for the kids. There's a place not far, only new, why not?

Kristie was dragged from the swings by Brit. Cousin Denny gave Connor a piggyback to convince him to come with them. They trudged to the café.

It was immediately warmer inside and smelt inviting just like cafés are supposed to. Some people were finishing long breakfasts, others were picking up coffee to brace themselves for work. Some sat and watched as the family drifted in.

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Grandpa marched to the bathroom straightaway. Brit took the little ones to a table. The two aunties deliberated over the sweets in the display cabinet while Cousin Denny interrogated the barista about the origin of the coffee beans.

When it was their turn to order, the two aunties still hadn't decided. The guy behind the counter, who it turns out, owned the place, told them to take their time. As the owner paused for the first time all morning, a shadow of sadness fell over his face. It was so sudden and dramatic that the aunties stopped looking at the food and asked if he was okay.

The owner tried to brush it off, it was nothing. Then he nodded and pushed a copy of the local paper across the counter. The headline declared that a beloved local teacher had suddenly and shockingly died. Car accident. She was my favourite teacher, he said.

The aunties did not react at first. Then they began crying. Sobbing. Cousin Denny rushed over to check on them. Most of the café had stopped to watch at this point. Brit tried to distract Connor and Kristen.

Denny looked at the paper and his eyes bulged. He explained, as the aunties were still bawling, that the beloved teacher was actually his cousin, the sister to the aunties, mother to the kids over there.

The owner chuckled at the small world, the small town. He came out from behind the counter and embraced the aunties who roared their approval. Denny called over the kids and explained that this man knew their mum. He didn't just know her, he corrected, he loved her. She had believed in him. The kids didn't know what to say or if this made them happy or sad.

Grandpa emerged from the bathroom to a frankly bizarre scene. His family, half of them in tears, were crowded around the owner of the café, who was also an emotional wreck. Grandpa stormed over and demanded to know what was going on.

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One of the aunties took his arm and told him that his man was one of Alex's students. Without any further explanation, Grandpa pulled the man into a bear hug. They never knew she was so loved, you know, not really. The owner promised he wouldn't be the only one in town so upset.

By then everything that could be said had been. The barista quickly made their drinks and the owner assembled together their order. The family waited. They were drained and they hadn't even had breakfast yet.

Finally it was time to go. They shook hands with the owner and wished him good luck. The owner refused any payment. He couldn't do anymore.

I doubt they'd ever see each other again.