



# Grandpapa

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The pantry door stands one and a half feet open. The sound of crinkling plastic and munching comes through the opening. An almond drops and rolls out onto the cold kitchen tile. "God dammit!" a raspy voice mutters from behind the door. The owner of the voice peeks his wispy white-haired head through the crack, looking for the almond. As he bends, his stiff, skinny legs in beige khaki pants, he catches me standing there. His eyes rise from my filthy and bare little feet, to my stained floral dress, to my missing front tooth. A smile instantly erupts across his wrinkled face, and a twinkle flickers in his cloudy eyes. "Ah! My favorite grandson!" he booms and chuckles at his own joke.

He eases his body back upright and walks unsteadily toward me. I stand still, smiling in anticipation with my chipmunk cheeks, until he reaches out and swoops me in with his long, strong arms. He nestles my ear against his chest where I can hear his wavering heartbeat, his five o'clock shadow scratching against my head. I wrap my thick arms all the way around his waist and let myself sink into his embrace, soaking up his unconditional love.

I was too young to wonder how he felt about having a black grandchild. What went through his mind when I would sit on his lap with my ashy legs and out-of-control nappy fro? I looked at him like he was my sunshine. What did he see when he looked back at me? What did he think when he held me in a bundled blanket the day I was born and gazed down at his own granddaughter whose skin color he had been taught to hate?

It took me years after he died to identify why I somehow felt more loved by him than by anyone else. It was because he didn't notice my dark skin and ashy legs, and he loved my nappy fro. I was different and that made me important to him. I looked at him like he was my sunshine; the twinkle in his eyes told me I was his.

Standing there in that hug, I let myself relax into his love. I closed my eyes, letting the edges of my mouth turn up into a smile, and a childish giggle flowed out of my strawberry popsicle-stained lips.