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Kasper, Sky and the Green Bear

A story by Marlies Slegers







Kuma

Kuma is an old green bear from Japan, with a very special power.



Who's this book about?



Kasper is nine years old. He's crazy about football, and when he can't go outside, he likes to play a game called Goal. His best friend is his classmate Sky.





Sky

Sky is also nine years old. She loves dancing and music, and she's very nosey!



Kasper's grandfather used to be a captain who sailed across the globe. Everywhere he went, he took beautiful souvenirs home. On one of his journeys, an old Japanese man gave him Kuma.

Bullied

Kasper sat in class, staring at the big clock on the wall. Only a few more minutes until the bell. He yawned. Sky, sitting next to him, tapped him on his arm.

'Been gaming all night, have you?' She smiled at him. When Sky smiles, she has dimples in her cheeks.

Kasper nodded. 'Yeah, not very clever, is it? I'm so tired. Almost got to the end of level ten.'

'Are your parents okay with that? Wow, I'm definitely not allowed to go online after eight. And you are.'

'No, I'm not', Kasper grinned. 'I just do it secretly.'

For a few months now, Kasper had been playing an online game called Goal, a game most of his friends played. If you scored a lot of points, you could buy better players. Kasper had almost finished level ten, at which point he would be able to buy himself a brand new football stadium.

The bell rang and everyone took their bags.

'Hi, Kasper.' Jay stood next to his table. 'So, what level are you at?'

'Ten,' Kasper said, 'but I just can't seem to play it out.'

Mees joined them uninvited and laughed in Kasper's face. 'Loser! Level ten's so easy! We all got to level eleven ages ago. You can't do anything, can you? Just like on the field.' Mees and Kasper were on the same football team. Kasper was the goalkeeper, and whenever he let the ball pass, Mees was angry with him. When they lost the match, Mees always blamed Kasper for it.

Kasper looked up. 'I'm not a loser!' He blushed and clenched his fists. Mees was always picking on him.

Mees grinned. 'Yeah, you are! You can't stop a single ball on the field and you can't even get past level ten on Goal.'

'Leave him alone!' Sky glared at Mees angry. 'You're the loser, for being mean to Kasper all the time.'

Mees shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

Sky looked Kasper in the eye. 'He's the stupid one. Don't let it get to you. I'll wait for you outside.'

Kasper took a deep breath and reached for his backpack. Jay was still standing next to him.

'Ah, well, level ten is tricky, but I did it eventually.' Jay looked at Kasper. 'You want me to help you?'

'That would be nice', Kasper said. 'So how do we do this?'

'Just give me your username and your password, and I'll get to level eleven for you, alright?'

'Yeah, great, thanks!' Kasper smiled at Jay. 'I'll give it to you later this week, okay? I'll have one more go myself, first.'

Minutes later Kasper and Sky strolled towards home side by side. Sky was his best friend and they always walked to and from school together.

'You really shouldn't mind Mees', said Sky. 'He's always mean to everyone.'

'To me in particular, though.' Kasper kicked a pebble away.

'Yeah, he really has it in for you, hasn't he? Why don't you tell the teacher?'

'Nah, that'll make it worse', Kasper said. 'Forget about it. Got any plans today?'

'Yes, I have dance class, really awesome! How 'bout you?'

'I have to tidy up my room first', Kasper grinned. 'And after dinner we're going to visit Gramps and Granny,

that's always fun.'

A dusty old green bear

It was a beautiful summer evening. Kasper and his grandfather were standing in the kitchen, while his grandmother was outside talking with his Dad.

'You're awfully quiet. Are you okay? Gramps cut an apple into pieces and gave some to Kasper.

'I'm okay', Kasper said, shrugging his shoulders. 'Some boy is being mean to me, that's all.'

'That doesn't sound right, does it? What, at school? Football practice?'

'Everywhere, really. Some boy from school.'

'And what does your teacher say?'

'I didn't tell her, I'm afraid he will bully me even more if I do.'

'Yeah, well. So what does this Mees-person do then?'

'He calls me names. Today he called me a loser because I'm not as good as he is at some game.'

'Ah. A board game, or what?'

Kasper laughed out loud. 'No, online.'

Gramps frowned. 'Online, eh? You mean like on the computer? On the Internet?'

'Yeah, I'm playing a game, a football game, where you can win tournaments. You can also chat with each other, you know, like talking through computer messages', he explained, so Gramps would understand it. 'And when we're chatting, Mees calls me all kinds of things.'

Gramps nodded. 'That's tough, buddy. Don't you have a friend or something, who'll help you stand up against boys like Mees?'

'Sky's always there for me', said Kasper, as Gramps handed him the last part of the apple. 'Ah, well, it's not that big a deal. I usually stay out of his way.

Mum and Dad don't know either, cos I'm afraid they won't let me play Goal again, and before you know it, I'm not allowed to go online anymore. You can't tell them either, okay? It'll pass.'

Gramps looked at him for some time. Then he said: 'I have something for you. Come on, follow me.' Curious, Kasper followed his grandfather to the room where he kept all his things from the past. A kind of treasury, Kasper always thought. Gramps had been a captain for a very long time, and he'd been all around the world. On every single journey, he took something home, and all his treasures were exhibited here, in this room. He'd already told Kasper quite a lot of stories about his travels, and Kasper loved the sea almost as much as Gramps did. Gramps moved towards a chair in the corner. He took a gray, dusty blanket off the chair and

smiled. 'Hello old friend', he mumbled.

In the chair was a green stuffed animal, which he grabbed.

Then he turned to Kasper and held the big green bear in front of him.

'He's yours now.' Gramps smiled at the cuddly toy. 'His name is Midori Kuma, but you can call him Kuma. He's a very special bear indeed. I took him home from one of my trips around the globe, long before your father was born. An old Japanese man gave it to me, actually. He told me to take good care of him. Kuma isn't like any other bear, you know.'

Kasper accepted the bear, surprised. He'd never seen him before at Gramps' house. Kuma was so big, he was as high as Kaspers' belly button.

'You never told me you had such a funny bear, Gramps', Kasper said, inspecting it carefully. It was as if Kuma stared right back at him, with his shiny brown beady eyes.

'That's right, I didn't.' Gramps put his hand on Kasper's shoulder. 'I waited until you were old enough for Kuma. And now, my dear boy, that time has come.'

'But I'm nine!', Kasper shouted. He looked at his grandfather, smiling. "Cuddly toys are for four year olds.'

'Oh, but not this one', Gramps said, his voice all low and mysterious. 'Kuma's very special. You have to be able to deal with that in just the right way... And that's why I kept him for you, because I know you'll take care of him. But promise me this: never mention him to anyone. No one will believe you.'

Kasper's eyes went from Gramps to the bear and back, wondering. It was as if the bear was winking at his grandfather. Kasper shook his head. He was seeing things that weren't there, obviously.

'What exactly can't I talk about, Gramps? I don't understand.'

Gramps smiled. 'Can't tell you that mate. Kuma will pick the right moment. But believe me: there's no bear in the whole wide world as special as this one. Take good care of him. And one day, you'll pass him on to your own children.'

Gramps put his old wrinkled hand on the teddy bear's head. 'So long, Kuma, I'm going to miss you. Look after Kasper, alright?' Gramps was acting kind of weird, Kasper thought.

Kasper took the bear downstairs. When they went home, he put Kuma on the back seat next to him. Gramps waved and looked a bit sad.

Kasper looked at Kuma. That's odd. Suddenly, Kuma had a gloomy expression on his face. And Kasper couldn't understand why – after all, it was just a cuddly toy – but he felt sorry for the bear.

'Well, isn't that an ugly thing', Dad said. He looked at Kasper through the mirror. 'Such an old, mouldy teddy bear.'

'He's not ugly,' Kasper said, 'he's cute. No one's got a green bear and now I do and that's very special. He's also very old and rare.' Kasper glared at his dad angry.

'No need to get mad,' Dad grinned. 'I just don't like the look of him, that's all. It's very sweet of your grandfather to give you this bear.' Dad turned up the radio as they drove on.

Back home, Kasper took the bear straight to his room. He put him in a chair in the corner. Kasper looked around the room. It was still the prettiest room in the entire house. He slept in the attic and it had a high, pointy roof with four small, round windows. It felt like a cabin on a ship just like Gramps, back in the day. Mum had decorated the room from top to bottom with things that had to do with boats and ships. There was a bright red life buoy hanging on the wall. Another wall had wallpaper with little anchors on it. The lamp on his desk was a globe. The woodwork was painted in white and his bed was shaped like a rowboat. His father had put Gramps' old ship's wheel on the wall. You could even spin it around. The bookshelves

where filled with shells, wooden model vessels and a tiny bottle with an even smaller sailboat in it.

With his hands in his side, he looked at Kuma.

'Welcome to my house, Kuma', Kasper said. 'Don't mind Dad. You're not ugly. Not really. You're just... well, you're green, aren't you? That must be what Gramps meant. That's what makes you special.'

Mum entered his room. 'Time for bed, Kas', she said, closing the curtains.

'Can I do one more game of Goal, please? I'm not tired yet.'

'No. It's getting late. You can read a book, though. And you know... '

'Yeah yeah, no computer at night, I know. But it's not fair. You and Dad are on your phones all the time!'

'I get that it doesn't seem fair, Kas, but we're reading e-mails from work and checking news sites, and we go to bed later than you.'

'Also stupid', Kasper sulked. Mum laughed, kissed him and turned around.

'I don't think your bear's ugly', she said, standing in the doorway. 'It's nice. I don't know anyone who has a green bear and it's very special that it's so old and that it used to belong to your grandfather. It wouldn't be a bad idea to put it in the washing machine, though, to fresh it up a little. Well, good night, Sweety.'

Kasper undressed, brushed his teeth and got into bed. He picked up his book. It was an exciting story about pirates and robots. Kasper was crazy about reading and the story swallowed him up completely.

Suddenly, there was an unknown voice.

'Any good?'



Kuma

Kasper looked up in awe. Where did that voice come from? He sat straight up and gazed around. He got off his bed and took a glance under it. Nothing but a lost sock, a few toys and some comic books. He didn't get it. Clearly, he heard a voice, or did he imagine it?

He climbed back into bed and looked around again, a little scared. The bear in the chair looked at him kindly. Could it be... No! Don't be silly. Stuffed animals don't speak. Kasper laughed at the thought of a talking bear. He just had to go to sleep. He must have been mistaken. He put out the light and lay down.

'Sleep tight.'

Kasper bounced up and turned the light back on. This voice again! His heart went wild as he looked around.

'Over here.'

Kasper instantly turned his head to the corner of the room, where the bear sat in the chair.

'Yes, that's right, here I am.' The green bear moved and looked at Kasper kindly. 'This can't be happening...', Kasper mumbled in shock.

The bear slid gently from the chair and shook his body up and down. 'Yes, wonderful, shake up that fur!' Kuma walked towards Kasper's wardrobe and rubbed his back against it.

'Ooh, that's nice!' He looked around. 'Yes, this place seems to be okay. But that chair... not so nice. You have a soft pillow for me or something?' Kuma wandered around the room, every now and then picking something up with his paws, then putting it back again. Then he looked at Kasper and nodded in content.

'Nice room!'

'Thanks', Kasper whispered. 'Surely, I'm dreaming...', he said, rubbing his eyes. But when he opened them again, Kuma was still there, looking at him with that friendly face, his paws neatly behind his back. 'How is this even possible? A talking bear?'

'What, where?' Kuma asked, looking surprised . Then he turned back to Kasper and winked. 'Just kidding. You wonder what I'm doing here, right?'

'I wonder how you can talk.' Kasper shook his head with disbelief.

'My point exactly. How do people talk? Why don't they just grunt or bark, like normal beings?'

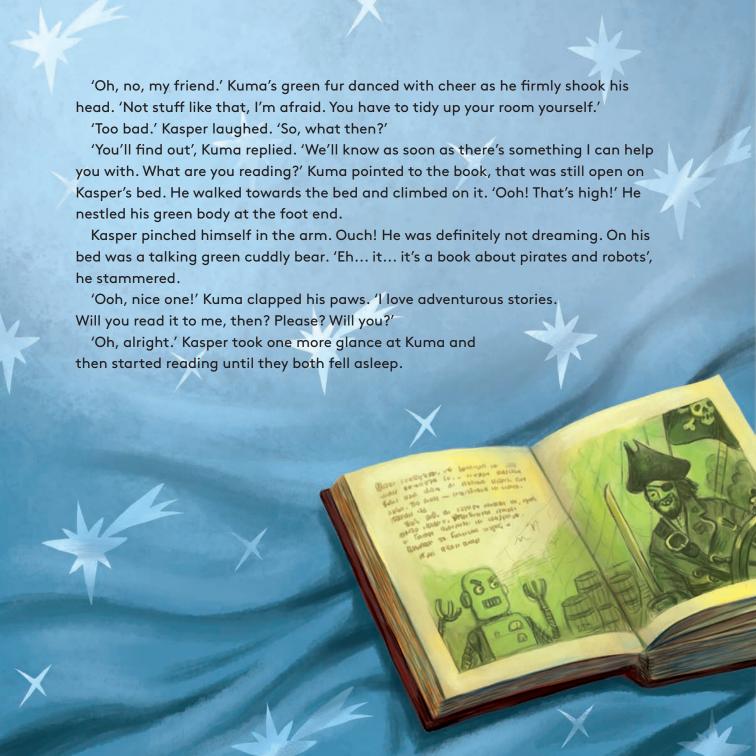
Kuma scratched his throat. 'No, seriously. I'm a helping bear. If anything's wrong, I'm here to help you.'

'Help me? With what?'

'Well, things you need help with.'

Kasper smiled. 'You mean tidying up my room and stuff like that? You're going to do my homework? Cool!'





You must have been dreaming!

'A bear that talks?' Sky stared at him with her mouth wide open. 'Clearly, you must have been dreaming!'

'No, really! When Mum woke me up this morning, he was still at the foot end of my bed. Mum laughed because I fell asleep with my book in my hands. And she teased me for reading to my teddy bear.'

'See? You dreamt it.' Sky laughed out loud. Kasper looked at her for a moment. Her black hair was braided today.

'I'm telling you, it's real. When I collected my school stuff this morning, he said: Have fun today! Mum put him back on the chair and he didn't move, but he said it alright. And Gramps told me it was a very special bear.'

Then, suddenly, Kasper gasped in shock. Gramps told him not to talk to anyone about it. And now Kasper had told Sky. What was it Gramps said again? That he'd waited until Kasper was old enough to handle Kuma in the right manner.

'I... I shouldn't have told you', Kasper stammered. 'I promised Gramps not to tell anyone. And now I told you.'

Sky took his hand. 'Don't worry about it. I'll never tell anyone, you know that, right? Remember that time you ate a box of cookies and blamed the dog? Did I tell on you then?'

'No, you didn't', Kasper laughed. 'You didn't need to either, because we don't have a dog. Mum knew all along it was me!' He looked at her. 'It would be cool if you wouldn't mention this to anyone.'

'What, the cookies?' Sky looked at him in a teasing manner and Kasper blushed.

'The bear, silly', he said, just when they arrived at school.

Sky put her hands in her side and looked at Kasper. 'I don't believe you anyway. You don't have a talking bear. There's no such thing.'

'Yeah, there is!' Kasper looked at her, annoyed. 'You know what? Come home with me after school. I'll show you.'



Lost

After school, they strolled to Kasper's house together. Kasper wondered if Gramps would be mad at him for taking Sky to see Kuma.

Mum looked up when they entered. 'Hello Sky, welcome, how nice to see you again!', she said. 'You guys want juice and some fruit?' She poured two glasses and put a bowl of fruit on the table. Then she took her keys.

'Kasper, I have to go to school for a project. Can you two manage for an hour or so?' 'Mum, I'm nine, not five!' Kasper rolled his eyes.

'I know that, smarty-pants.' Mum laughed. 'If something's up, just go next door. I'll let Mrs. Smith know I'm out. And you can always call me. I've written the number down, it's next to the phone.'

Kasper looked up. 'What do you need to go to school for anyway?'

'Oh, they need help from parents with something, I'm going to talk about that. Bye, Sky, see you next time.'

When Mum was gone, Sky looked at Kasper. 'So where's this green magic bear of yours, then?'

Kasper felt more and more miserable. What if Kuma would never speak again because he'd told Sky?

'I'm not sure if...', Kasper stumbled.

'I bet he's upstairs, in your room!' Sky sprinted up the stairs.

'Wait for me!' Kasper followed her up.

Sky was already in his room.

'Where's he at then?'

Kasper stood next to Sky and looked around. He glanced at the chair in the corner where he'd put Kuma yesterday.

It was empty.

There was no trace of Kuma.

'See?', Sky said. 'It's just a dream. Or a lie. There's no talking bear.'

Kasper inspected the entire room. He looked under his bed, opened his closet and gazed under his desk. But Kuma had vanished.

'I... I don't understand...', Kasper stammered.

'Well, I do', Sky said, with disappointment in her voice. 'You fooled me. Is this some kind of joke? You think you're funny?'

'No, honest! I...' Kasper looked around, bewildered. He just knew it wasn't a dream. Sky turned around and left the room.

Kasper followed her. 'Wait up! I swear, I didn't make it up. I don't know where he is. But he's real.'

And as he walked behind her, his eyes passed over the washing machine in the bathroom. There, behind the glass, he saw something green...

'Kuma!' He stopped in shock, staring at the bear in the washing machine. He remembered Mum saying he needed freshening up!

Sky stopped. 'What, where?'

'Over there!' Kasper rushed into the bathroom and opened the washing machine. Please, let Kuma be okay. He grabbed the soaking wet teddy. He laid him down on the floor with great care. Kasper held his breath and looked at the bear, which seemed a lot smaller because of his drenched fur.

'He doesn't say much, does he?', said Sky.

'No, you wouldn't say much either if someone'd put you in a washing machine, would you?', Kasper replied, annoyed.

Suddenly, Kuma moved. Sky jumped backwards in terror.

'It's alive!'

'Kuma! Everything okay?' Kasper looked at the old bear on the floor.

Slowly, the bear stood up. He muttered and shook his body up and down. Splashes

of water flew around and made Kasper and Sky wet. But that didn't bother Kasper one bit. He smiled happily. Kuma survived the wash.

'Brrr!' The bear shook up his fur once again. 'That was far too cold and wet!'

'lt... it speaks...', Sky stammered, taking a few steps back. Her face was almost as pale as the sink.

'Told you so, didn't I?' Kasper grabbed Kuma's paw. 'Come on then, let's dry you up in my room.'

'Who's this then?' Kuma nodded in Sky's direction while holding Kasper's hand firmly.

'Kuma, this is my friend Sky.'

'Oh, nice to meet you, Sky', Kuma said, reaching his free paw towards her.

Sky just stared at him, her mouth wide open.

'She's not very polite, is she?', Kuma whispered to Kasper, who started laughing out loud. 'Never seen a washed bear before, has she?'

'Never seen a talking bear!'
With a smile on his face, Kasper
pulled Kuma along.

Minutes later, Kuma was wrapped in a towel on Kasper's bed. He observed Sky curiously.

Sky stared back. 'I've never met a green bear before.'



'Well, now you have', Kuma said. 'Pooh, I have to warm up a bit.'

'You want to play Goal in the meantime?', Kasper asked Sky. She nodded, still staring at Kuma.

Kasper turned on his computer and started the game. Sky sat next to him, but she kept staring at Kuma, rubbing his paws through his fur and then climbing off the bed.

'Can I play?' Kuma looked at Kasper, wondering.

'It's a bit tricky. You can watch, though.' Kasper put Kuma on the desk so he had a good view of the computer screen. The bear was almost completely dry and he smelled like flowers.

Kasper typed in his name and password while explaining to Sky and Kuma how the game was played.

After playing for a while, Kasper suddenly pointed to the screen.

'Look, Jay's online and he promised to help me out.

Wait, we can chat with him.'

Hi jay!

Hi Kasper!

You promised to help me with level ten.

Right! Give me your username and password and I'll beat it for you.

Cool!

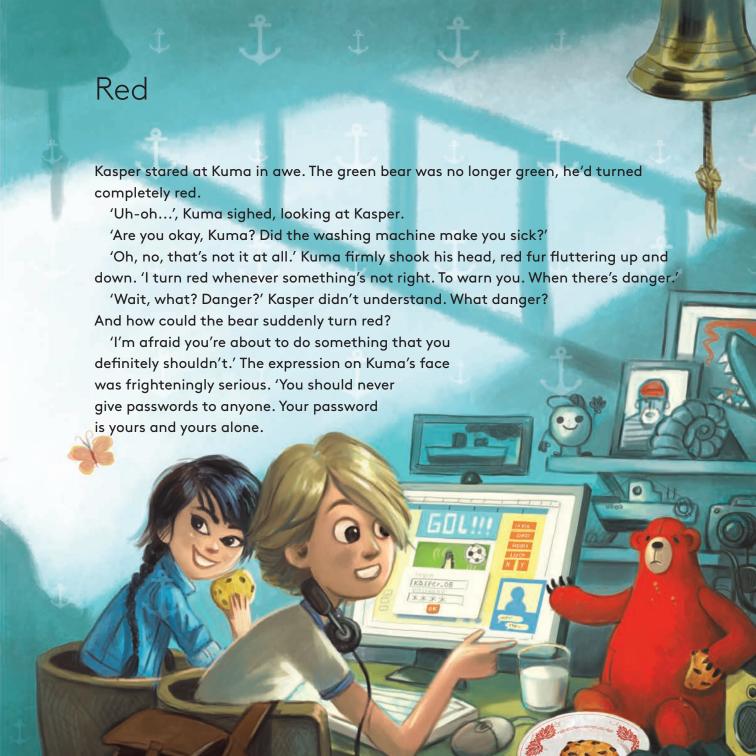


Kasper started typing his name and password in a message to Jay.

'Kasper...' Sky poked his arm. 'Look!'

'What?', Kasper replied, a bit annoyed. Then he saw Sky, staring at Kuma, her eyes all big, and he almost stopped breathing.

'How's that possible?', he whispered.



Never ever share it, not even with your best mate!' Kuma sighed. 'Ugh. I always get a bit sick when I'm red.'

'That's all very well, but how can I get Jay to play that level for me then?' Kasper looked at Kuma hesitantly.

'You could always invite him to come over, couldn't you?', the bear said, shaking the last drops of water out of his red ears. 'That way, you can enter your name and password without him seeing it, and you can play the level together. How 'bout that?'

Kasper thought about it for a second. 'Yeah, that's a much better plan,' he replied, 'I'll do that right away.'

Yo Jay, I'd rather not give you my password. You wanna come over next Saturday? We'll play it together, that should be more fun anyway!

Yeah, cool! See you then!

Kasper watched Kuma slowly turning back to his old green self again.

'Does this always work?'

'What do you mean?' Kuma looked at him with friendly eyes.

'Whenever I'm about to do something not too smart, you'll turn red?'

'Yeah, that's right', Kuma replied. 'I told you I was here to help you, didn't I?' Kasper grinned at Kuma knowingly.

He went to a website strictly forbidden by his parents because of the violent pictures. You had to be sixteen to go there. In an instant, Kuma's fur was like a fire truck.

'That's definitely not a good site for you', Kuma said. 'Ouch, I'm not feeling well at all.' Bubbles were bubbling out of his mouth. 'Oh, don't worry about thát, it's just detergent', Kuma said, and he burped loudly. 'Oops, sorry.'

Quickly, Kasper left the site and Kuma went back to green.

Sky started laughing. 'This is really great!, she said. 'That bear will warn you whenever you're doing something dangerous.'

'You bet!', Kuma nodded. 'If you do something you're not supposed to, I'll be turning red like a tomato. Speaking of food: have you got any honey, maybe? I'm feeling a bit peckish. Or a sandwich? A banana?'

'You must be the sweetest and funniest bear I've ever met!', Sky exclaimed, grabbing Kuma and giving him a firm hug. When she let go, Kuma had turned red again.

'Oh boy!' Sky looked at Kuma in shock. 'What did I do now?'

'No, no... nothing', Kuma stuttered. 'Just blushing...'

Sky laughed. 'You silly bear, you! I promise I won't tell anyone.' She kissed him on his fluffy head and Kuma turned even redder. But he grinned from ear to ear.



Mission accomplished

It was getting late. That evening, Mum entered the room.

'Time for bed, Kasper.'

'Yes!', Kasper shouted with joy.

'Well, well. I'm not used to this cheerfulness when I tell you to turn in...'

Kasper grinned. 'I'm cheering because I just finished level ten, all by myself.'
He pointed at his computer as he switched it off. He didn't even need Jay's help.
And when he was playing, Mees started to chat with him and he was really kind.
He even told Kasper he did a good job, getting this far in the game. Kasper had no idea why Mees was being this nice, but it made him feel good.

'Well done, good for you. And you let your bear watch.' Mum laughed and pointed to Kuma, sitting on the desk. Then she moved towards his bed and turned back the duvet. Kuma and Kasper winked at each other behind her back.

'Yeah, something like that', Kasper replied, as he climbed into bed.

Mum sat down on the duvet. 'So, Gramps told me something on the phone this morning', she began. 'Being bullied by a boy from school, eh? And you don't want me to discuss it at school because you're afraid it might get worse. But you know, Kas, there are things you don't have to deal with by yourself. Sometimes you need a little help and that's why Gramps told me. He was afraid you'd be angry with him for telling me, but you really need to share this kind of thing.'

'So I had a chat with your teacher today', Mum continued. 'She was a bit disappointed you didn't come to her. Mees, that's the name of this boy, right? She told me he acts like this all the time, with other kids too. She phoned his parents right away, and they told her Mees has been very angry ever since the day his

grandmother died, and that's why he's behaving this way. That doesn't make it right, of course, but at least we can understand where it's coming from. They were going to talk to him right away. Your teacher promised me she'd keep an eye on him. You should always come to me or Dad with stuff like this, Kas, because sometimes you need all the help you can get. Mees will not bother you anymore, and if he does, you immediately go to your teacher. She'll help you, okay?'

Kasper felt all warm and fuzzy inside. 'Thanks Mum', he said. 'That's a relief.'
Mum gave him a kiss and turned out the light.

Kasper stared in the dark. So that's why Mees was so unkind. He missed his grandmother. Kasper could relate to that, he'd

miss his Granny dearly if she passed away. Maybe he should take Mees to Gramps and Granny one day, and they'd have a look in the treasury. Gramps would like that.

He yawned. Then he heard a soft poof, paws shuffling on the floor.
He felt a soft pulling at his duvet as something climbed onto the bed. Kuma laid himself down at his feet.

'Night night, Kasper', the bear whispered.

'Sleep tight, Kuma', Kasper replied and then they both fell asleep.



About the author

Marlies Slegers (1965), Dutch author of children's and young adult books, has published 35 titles so far, including successful series like *I Love Liv*, Gezocht: Normale Ouders and Hockeyteam De Sterren. In addition, she writes about media literacy – Vertrouw Me Maar, Soci@I Kids – and has published the YA books Onder Mijn Huid and Vijftien.

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