# Come Home Soon, Kayla

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PUBLICATIONS

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# Chapter 1
# **Kayla Grace**

Samantha slid her penmanship book into her desk and then stood with the other first and third graders.

"Let's sing our theme song before you go home," Sister Janelle said. She started the first verse, and the students joined in.

"There is a song in my heart today,
Something I never had;
Jesus has taken my sins away,
O say, but I'm glad!"[1]

Samantha looked over at her cousin Sonya and smiled. "O say, but I'm glad, I'm glad!" she sang. The words of the song said exactly how she felt—glad. She was glad because another happy school day was over. She was glad because she had gotten 100 percent on

1 "O Say, But I'm Glad" by James P. Sullivan. Public domain.



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her math test. And she was glad because she was going to help Mom make Daddy's birthday cake when she got home from school.

"Jesus has come and my cup's overrun,
O say, but I'm glad!"

After dismissal, the six students in Room One grabbed their lunch boxes off the shelf and hurried outside. "Bye, Sister Janelle!" they chorused.

Samantha and Sonya talked happily as they waited for their moms to come. They were both nine years old and in third grade, and they were best friends. They even liked to call themselves twins, because their names started with the same letter.

Soon Aunt Lisa drove into the school parking lot. "Bye, Sonya," Samantha said. "See you tomorrow." But when Aunt Lisa had parked, she rolled down her window and called, "Emily, Logan, Samantha, and Jordan, you are riding home with us."

"Goody!" Samantha squealed, grabbing Sonya's hand as they skipped to the van.

"Why are they coming home with us?" Sonya asked her mom as they got in.

"Wait until everyone's buckled, and then I'll tell you." Aunt Lisa smiled at the children.



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Samantha turned to Emily, her thirteen-year-old sister, who was getting into the van behind her. "I bet it's the baby," she whispered excitedly.

"Mom said it could come any time," Emily agreed, her voice choking from excitement.

Samantha plopped into the middle seat beside her six-year-old brother Jordan, who was the youngest in their family. She gave an impatient little bounce as she waited for the rest of the children to get into the van.

Finally, Aunt Lisa backed out of her parking space and pulled onto the road. Then she looked right at Samantha in the rearview mirror and said, "You have a baby sister."

Samantha and Emily had guessed right! Samantha felt like she could burst, she was so excited. At first, she didn't know what to say.

"What's her name?" Emily asked, her voice showing excitement too.

"Kayla Grace," Aunt Lisa answered. "I think it's a pretty name."

"Kayla Grace," Samantha said quietly to herself. It *was* a pretty name. She looked over at Jordan, who smiled hugely. "Now you're a big brother," she told him.

Jordan's eyes sparkled as he nodded happily.



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"Is Kayla a preemie?" Sonya asked soberly. A family from church had had a preemie baby, and all the children remembered that she had been in the hospital for a long time.

"No, she's not a preemie," Aunt Lisa answered. "She's a normal, healthy baby except for her lungs. She wasn't breathing as well as she should, so the doctors had to give her oxygen to help her breathe."

"Is she going to be okay?" Emily asked.

"Yes, I think so," Aunt Lisa reassured them. Then she added, "We're taking Logan and Jordan to your grandpa Reinford's, and then the girls will come home with us. When your parents and Kayla come home, you can go home too."

"How soon will they come home?" Logan wondered.

"Well," Aunt Lisa began cheerfully, "once Kayla can breathe on her own without the oxygen, then the doctors need to watch her for twenty-four hours to make sure everything keeps going okay before she comes home."

*Twenty-four hours equal one day.* Samantha remembered learning that in math class. "Are we staying at your house for the night then?" she asked excitedly.

"Yes." Aunt Lisa smiled at Samantha. "We need to stop in at your place to get the clothes and things you need to stay overnight."



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Samantha cheered. She loved staying at Uncle Curtis's for the night!

Suddenly Samantha heard a sniff beside her. Jordan was crying. "What's wrong?" she asked him.

"I want to go home. I want Mom," Jordan cried.

"It'll be okay," Samantha said gently. "Mom will come home tomorrow. Grandma will be your mom today. Won't that be nice?"

Jordan wiped his eyes with his shirt sleeve and tried to stop crying. Samantha hoped that he would be happy at Grandpa's.

Soon they were at Samantha's house. The children went to pack their clothes while Aunt Lisa began washing a small stack of dishes that was on the counter. "We plan to sing with the youth at an old people's home tonight, so pack your Sunday clothes and shoes too," Aunt Lisa directed the girls.

"My dad is the song leader," Sonya explained. "And, oh!—after we're done singing, we're going out for ice cream because it's Michelle's birthday!"

"Yum!" Samantha exclaimed. She stuffed a pair of socks into her backpack. She knew Michelle, one of the youth girls from their church. "Is Michelle's birthday today? The same day as Kayla's?" she asked.

Sonya nodded. "I guess so."



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Emily came into Samantha's bedroom just then. "Do you have everything?" she asked.

"I think so," Samantha answered. "I have clothes for tonight and a nightie and clothes for tomorrow."

"What about your toothbrush? And your hairbrush and comb?" Emily reminded her.

"Oh, I forgot." Samantha ran to get them from the bathroom.

Soon they were all ready to go again. Ginger, their puppy, frisked over to meet them when they came out the door.

"Who's going to feed Ginger?" Jordan asked.

"Who normally does?" Aunt Lisa wondered.

"Me," Logan replied. "After breakfast. Maybe we could stop in on our way to school tomorrow."

"Yes," Aunt Lisa agreed. "Remember to tell Grandma that."

Half an hour later, Samantha and Sonya sat down with paper and crayons at the table in Uncle Curtis's dining room. Both girls liked to draw.

Samantha picked up a pink crayon and drew a big heart on her paper. Then, with a purple crayon, she carefully wrote, "KAYLA GRACE—BORN APRIL 4" in the middle of the heart.

As Samantha thought of her little sister, her hand



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slowed and then stopped. She had been praying for a sister for as long as she could remember. Then one day last winter, Mom had told her that God was going to give them a tiny baby in the spring. Samantha had been so excited—how she had hoped it would be a baby girl!

Then, only a couple weeks ago, Mom had brought two totes down from the attic. Inside were stacks of baby girl onesies, sleepers, dresses, and blankets. Samantha had helped wash them, fold them, and put them into the changing table drawers. Her favorite was a tiny white dress and a matching white headband. Mom said that Samantha and Emily had both worn that dress for their birth announcement pictures. The little white dress was hanging on a small hanger on the nursery wall, waiting for Kayla to wear it.



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Samantha felt a little sad that her baby sister was in the hospital where she couldn't see her. *Does Kayla have dark brown hair like I do?* she wondered. *What does her face look like? What color are her eyes?*

It had been six years since they had had a baby in their house. Samantha could hardly remember when Jordan was a baby—she had been only three years old then.

"Aren't you going to draw?" Sonya asked.

Samantha looked up, startled. She had forgotten that she had been drawing with Sonya. She picked up a yellow crayon and drew a tiny onesie on one side of the heart. She added a pink pacifier on the other side. Then, with a black crayon, she carefully wrote, "I love Kayla," in her neatest handwriting.

Soon it was time to get ready to go to the old people's home. After everyone was showered and combed, they ate a quick supper and left.

While the youth sang, Samantha and the other children sat and listened. Samantha could hardly sit still when she thought of going out for ice cream afterward. And the sooner they got done singing, the sooner they could get back to Uncle Curtis's and go to bed. And the sooner they went to bed, the sooner tomorrow would come—the day that Daddy and Mom and Baby Kayla could come home!



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Finally, they were done singing. But Samantha knew that they must first shake hands with the old people before they left.

"I have a new baby sister," Samantha told one old lady.

"Oh, how nice!" the lady exclaimed. "What is her name?"

"Kayla Grace Reinford," Samantha said clearly.

"What a pretty name!" The lady held Samantha's hand and patted it.

While they ate their ice cream, some of the youth girls stood around Samantha and Emily's table.

"So you have a new baby in your family," one girl said.

Samantha smiled and nodded.

"Are you excited?" Michelle, the girl who shared Kayla's birthday, asked.

Samantha nodded again. Of course she was!

Just as they were leaving the ice cream shop, Aunt Lisa's phone rang. She talked awhile. Then she handed her phone to Emily and asked, "Do you want to talk to your mom?"

While Samantha waited for her turn to talk to Mom, Aunt Lisa explained, "Kayla is on her way to Rochester. The hospital where she was born cannot



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take the best care of tiny babies, so she needs to go to the children's hospital in Rochester."

"Why does she need to go there?" Samantha asked. She knew Rochester was a big city far away.

"Kayla's lungs were damaged before she was born," Aunt Lisa explained, "so she cannot breathe well enough until her lungs heal. She needs to stay in the NICU, where they can help her lungs heal."

"What is the NICU?" Samantha asked. Everything sounded scary!

"NICU is a section of the hospital especially for tiny babies," Aunt Lisa explained. "It's spelled N-I-C-U—the first letters of the words *Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Neonatal* means the same as newborn. So NICU is the word for the place where they take care of newborns that are very sick."

*Very sick? Is Kayla very sick?* Samantha wondered. All kinds of scary thoughts began to spin around in her head. *Is she going to die? How long will it take for her lungs to heal? Can she still come home tomorrow?*

A few minutes later, Emily handed the phone to Samantha. "Hi, Mom," Samantha said.

"Hi, Samantha." It was good to hear Mom's voice again, but she sounded tired. "How was your day?" Mom asked.



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