

Letting Go

By Chloe Kleidon

My body is running high with emotion. I feel like I'm going to vomit and the tears are falling freely down my face. It's as if I'm going through all the stages of grieving at once: shock, denial, anger. Everything. I can hear my mum repeating my name over and over, but I don't answer- I can't. All I can think about is what I said to him- the last thing I ever said to him...

"Daaaad, please. I feel sick."

"Chloe, eat your food." I stare down at the plate of spaghetti and almost vomit just thinking of taking another bite.

"Da-"

"No, Chloe. You're not leaving the table until you've finished every last mouthful."

"Aargh! I hate you." I push myself away from the table and storm out of the room to my grandmother's backyard. Why does he have to be such an arse?

My parents were gone when I came back inside. Off to celebrate their wedding anniversary- the first of what should have been many. At the time I felt guilty and now it's ten times worse. I just wish I could take it back. I know what he'd say if he were here- that all the good times outweigh the bad and I shouldn't be too hard on myself...

He's gesturing for me to jump and I'm shaking my head. The smell of the ocean fills the air and I can hear the screams of children smaller than myself. We're on the beach in Queensland and I'm standing on a ledge that seems ten feet high but is probably only two.

"I can't." My arms are wrapped tightly around the stone pillar to my right.

"Yes, you can." Dad smiles and outstretches his arms. I slowly release my grip and ease towards the edge. His grin widens and for a split second, I can see the sun's reflection in his eyes. At that moment, I jump.

I chuckle at the memory of my father falling to the ground as I land in his arms and the whole room turns to face me. Apart from my constant sobbing, it's the first sound I've made since my mother delivered the news. Everyone is silent and I feel like a deer in headlights; frozen for a minute until I finally sprint out of harm's way. Locking the door shut behind me, I collapse in a heap on the bathroom floor.

I can't shake the feeling that somehow this is my fault-that his heart stopped beating because of me, because what I said hurt him that much. After all, it wasn't the first time something like that had happened...

"No!" I'm standing in front of the T.V., blocking mum's view.

"Chloe, move. Now."

"Why shou-" I'm cut off mid-sentence when the front door swings open.

"What's going on?" Dad says, sounding suspicious.

"Nothing." He gives me a look that I can tell means 'yeah right'.

"She won't move. I've been yelling at her, but she won't listen." Mum only gives her side of the story-typical.

"Chloe, listen to your mother."

"But-"

"No buts. I'm gonna count to three and if you haven't moved..." I cross my arms and plant my feet firmly on the ground.

"One...two...three." He takes a step closer and I can tell he's not going to hear me out. "Room. Now."

"No." With that, he picks me up, throws me over his shoulder, carries me to my room and locks me inside. I furiously bang on the door screaming, "I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!"

"Chloe?" I hear a whisper along with a soft tap on the door. "Chloe, it's mum." I don't answer. "Look, I know you're upset, we all are, but you need to come out at some point."

"Mum, it's my fault. I did this."

"Aw, Sweetie, it's not your fault, it isn't anybody's fault."

"All those times I said I hated him. It broke his heart."

"I know you had some bad times and I know you said some things you regret, but what about all the times you didn't?" When Mum leaves, I realise she's right. Dad and I, we were best friends, he took me to the beach, gave me ice-cream for breakfast, we played twister and he got me ready for school every day. It doesn't matter how many times I said I hated him. I stand up, ready to open the door and whisper, "I love you."