

When she is born you hold her close. You caress her small, soft head as you put her to sleep. You hold her hands as her small pudgy feet pad across the white carpet. She clings to you fiercely as you urge her onto the bus for her first day of school. Your smile is her only reassurance. When she gets onto a bike without training wheels for the first time, you give her shoulder a squeeze, then grip the back of her seat. You give her a thumbs up and she's off. You walk with her, then run, still holding onto the seat. You finally let go. She flies down the street, as if you were still holding on. But then she starts to teeter, and her feet can't keep up with the pedals. She tips over and falls. She gets hurt. It's not the only time. All you can do is put band-aids on her cuts and wipe away her tears. It surprises you when you realize that you're the one crying. Crying as you watch her walk across the stage and accept her diploma. That day, she had to be the one to wipe away your tears. You begin to see her less and less as she pursues her future. She used to never want to let go. But now, your relationship is made up of small gestures. A wave, a hug, a kiss on the cheek, a letter, a card, an email, a text. When you see her again you're lying on a cot, machines beeping and buzzing around you. You thought you might never see her again. You know she didn't mean to, but she left you behind. But you would never say anything. You would never hold her back. So when she walked into that room, tears streaming down her face, but still smiling, you were content. She stayed by your side all night. Fell asleep holding your hand, head resting on your lap. That was all you needed. Just to see her one last time. You could let go now. You knew she'd be okay, and so would you. You didn't need to hold her hand anymore, and she didn't need to hold yours.