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When to Let Go // Taylyn Hulse

There was a little mouse that lived in a tiny crevasse in the kitchen wall. He was an innocent looking mouse, but as with most mice, he liked to steal. He stole what he could find. Baby Charlotte loved pointing him out from her high chair. Bib tied around her neck, cheerios knocked to the floor, she would point her finger out front and babble Mah! The little mouse would scramble around as if baby Charlotte could catch him. He didn't know she was attached to her throne.

He usually preferred the fallen cheerios or trinkets like beaded bracelets, but one day he tried to steal a scarf. It was a Turkish scarf with a bright blue pattern that was lined with shining gold. As the mouse took the scarf by his tiny teeth and scooted it across the floor, the dog's ears perked. He barked and ran after the scarf. The little mouse hurried his fast feet. With its mouth holding tight, a blue and gold tail trailed behind him. The scarf was much too heavy for the mouse and much too big for the crevasse. Though the little mouse made it, the scarf stuck and left the dog sniffing.

The dog started to chew on the scarf when Father walked in. He gnawed and slobbered and made the edges fringe. Father shouted *No* in a low tone. His hand settled on a warm, damp spot when he picked it up. His other hand was wrapped around an old travel duffle and car keys. The keys tapped into each other as he walked, making the softest ting. Father walked into the living room and stopped at the door frame. His face was stern and his eyes sank back into the dark.

Mother looked up from her reading. She sat on the big, red lounge chair in the corner. It had a velvety cover that, when brushed aside, changed to a deep red like blood. The light from the lamp yellowed her skin and made her look old. She looked at the suitcase and her head sank. Their long line of lovely moments had gradually taken a plunge.

Father's empty eyes told her he was done. The air in the room hung heavy. Mother waited for anything. He took a step forward and laid down the scarf so gently. It rested alone on the dark oak table by the lamp. A slight turn and he went without a word.

Mother waited in the chair until her shocked fogginess faded away. She picked up the scarf and circled it around and around her neck and shoulders until it sat just right. It had been her favorite. The scarf had been given as a gift by her grandmother who has long since passed. She wore it to school every day that first week. She wore it to the best ballet she ever saw. She wore it on the train when she moved to the city. She wore it to the Vietnamese restaurant when they had first dinner together.

Baby Charlotte cried in the front room. Mother noticed the scarf's frayed edges from the dog. When mother held Baby Charlotte, she bounced a few times and then smoothed out her swings. Baby Charlotte calmed and took the bright blue and gold scarf in her small hands. She laughed as Mother continued to bounce and swing, bounce and swing. They walked into the hall together and Mother caught their reflection in the mirror. The way the scarf draped down was unfamiliar. Charlotte giggled and tugged on it, twisting it around her wrists. Her eyes shined. Mother took a moment. She then slid it from her neck, freshly warmed, and wrapped it around Baby Charlotte.