

# Catch Me When I Fall

A few months ago, virtually overnight, aliens came and took my little girl and left a teenager in her place. This new being is someone I'd not known before: a social media-obsessed, fiercely independent, Brandy Melville-wearing, *Pretty Little Liars*-watching near-13-year-old who takes SoulCycle classes, swigs Starbucks and wants to get her legs waxed.

Before this abduction, my daughter and I were quite a team. We held hands crossing the street, baked cupcakes and snuggled in my bed, watching old movie musicals. Some kids can't wait for the fourth-grade overnight trip. Not mine. She hugged me tightly and cried, "I don't want to go! Mommy, I'll miss you."

Well, I miss you, now. I miss making you Easy Mac for dinner (a lot easier than pesto gnocchi). I miss your asking me to help you with your homework (believe it or not, I have read *Lord of the Flies* and I do remember the Pythagorean theorem). I miss being your confidante, the one you turn to when you've had a bad day or some boy smiles at you and your heart does a backflip. I miss picking out your clothes (the more pink and bedazzled, the better). I miss your kisses, the big sloppy ones I used to get that covered my entire face, not the quick peck on my cheek as you dash off.

I miss being the person you are excited to see at after-school pickup. Lately, I wait for you on the corner, lurking in the shadows, ever careful not to be spotted by your classmates. At this age, parents are the enemy, the intruders. They cramp your style and weigh you down.

Yet just when I decide all is lost (especially childhood), something magical happens: You need me. You're stumped on a science fair project or a Spanish verb conjugation and you ask for help. Or your BFF has decided to ice you out for no reason, and you feel adrift and alone. That's when you find me, buried in work in my home office, and you crawl into my lap for a hug. Not for skinned knees or spills off the monkey bars but for bigger, more painful slips and trips and boo-boos of the heart and soul.

Although you might seem like a stranger these days, I truly understand the person you are inside: sweet, compassionate, loving, smart, kind. And just as I know you, you know me. No matter how many times you tell me to "go away" or leave you alone, I won't. Not really. I'll be waiting in the wings wherever and whenever you need me. To catch you when you fall or, at the very least, to hold my arms out, a safety net so you can leap as high and as far as you want without a care in the world. That's where I'll be...just in case.

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