



The Godfather  
(Flash Fiction, 426 Words)  
By Chris W. Vasques

The rock face was cold on Jenny's hand. White and grey stone in the early morning sunlight crumbled away as her fingertips slipped again.

"Try a different grip!" her Uncle Paul shouted from below.

She had the same thought, her eyes dashing from left to right, up and down again.

"I can't see anything much better," she yelled back, strained.

Her legs were holding, but they were beginning to tremble. She slid a foot down to reposition, trying to find a new lateral option.

"Can you see anything to my left?" she shouted again.

Paul squinted, breathing the crisp air in through his nose, and yelled back, "Not really, Jenny. Maybe come back down, and we'll try another route."

Jenny's body tensed at the thought. This was the spot where Dad used to take her. She just wasn't focusing. She had to focus.

"No. I can do it," she said.

She lunged with her left arm and pulled herself up. Her foot locked into a groove that felt familiar. She felt like Dad was there with her. With a few more thrusts, she reached the top.

"I knew you had it," Paul shouted.

Jenny smiled, looking down at him while repositioning her helmet and loosening her harness.

Paul made it up the rock like he had done it a thousand times, because he had. They settled onto two calm logs at the top. Dad loved to sit at these logs after a climb. The logs were the same as they had always been. Jenny and her Uncle Paul sat as they had always sat, only today they were missing their third climber. Paul unpacked a few granola bars and some water. The birds sang in nearby treetops. The forest was still and alive with speckled afternoon sunlight.

"He would be proud of us out here."

Paul felt compelled to resolve the moment. Jenny knew he was trying to help. He couldn't know that nothing would help. Just about anything would make it worse, actually. She appreciated his effort all the same.

She looked at him calmly and said, "I know. This will always be here for us. We can always come back, right?"

Paul's mind flashed to his own childhood, with his brother, camping with their family. When was the first time his brother brought Jenny along? 10 years ago? 12 years? Jenny was a child then. How long had he been gone? A day? A decade? It didn't matter.

They chewed. They did their very best not to look at the empty log.