

The Last Promise – Frankie, Year 5, NSW

Old hands come together. Soft and weathered skin intertwines, two fingers fitting perfectly together, just like they do every time.

I love this feeling, this unbreakable lock that brings people together. A permanent reminder that someone out there cares about you. The feeling I get when a promise is made is exhilarating, a zap of energy bringing me to life.

You see, it's my job to look over the promises. Hundreds are made every minute, but some have stories and some of those stories stick with you until the very end. Maybe it's wrong to have favourites, but it's these two fingers I adore.

The couple met in their early twenties and got married soon before the war started. Late night dancing, movies and bicycle rides filled those early carefree days, but as the war progressed and air raids became ever more insistent, the time for the young man to leave arrived. The heartbroken couple clung to one another as their pinky fingers linked together.

"Jenny," he said.

"Jack," she said.

"Do you promise you will be okay without me?"

The woman's voice quivered, "I promise", she whispered.

And with that he left.

As time passed, the hope that came with the promise they'd made started to fade. I think I did too. I felt weaker and weaker. Days turned into months and those months turned into years. Jenny's tear stained, pale face telling a story of despair. It was like a permanent storm cloud had come over the house.

I felt the weight of responsibility, like I was holding the world's largest boulder. What if some promises can be broken? Perhaps she can't be okay without him? Perhaps a promise is more fragile than I thought? No. I wouldn't let that happen to her. She believed in me and I wouldn't let her down.

It was early morning, the sun having only just peeked over the horizon when the loud knock on the door broke the silence of the house. Jenny cracked the door to see a man in uniform holding a light yellow telegram. Memories of her soulmate and herself flashed before her eyes. She could almost hear his laugh, smell his scent and touch his hand. All the promises they ever made together came to mind. *I promise I will go to the movies with you this Sunday, one laughs. I promise I will always be the first to say sorry after a fight, one says. I promise I will be okay without you, one whispers.* With trembling hands she started to read.

It was my job to help her keep the promise, was it my job to help her be okay without him?

Weeks later, another knock at the door. Jenny sprinted down the halls, flung open the door and leapt at the person standing on the porch.

“ Jack!” She cried.

Jack had been sent home from the war after a large bomb had caused him to lose his hearing. The couple now communicate with sign language, but the house is louder and more joyful than ever. Time and time again their fingers lock together, bringing me to life with promises of love and commitment. Summers by the river pass to crunchy red leaves and meals shared by the winter fire. With each season, each year, a connection deepens, like no other.

Old hands come together. Soft and weathered skin intertwines, two fingers fitting perfectly together, just like they do every time. Through gentle tears their fingers lock one last time.

“Jenny”, he says.

“Jack”, she says.

“Do you promise you will be okay without me?”

The woman’s voice quivered, “I promise”, she whispered.

And with that he drifts off to the other side.

I, the Pinky Promise, know it is wrong to have favourites, but it’s these two fingers I adore.