

## We're Gonna Be Okay

The house faded behind them as it was engulfed with the red dust trailing from the back of the Ute. Madi watched it disappear and felt a lump form in her throat and tears pool in her eyes. No! She shook her head firmly to get rid of the tears as if that would also get rid of the burning ache in her heart and the emptiness that consumed her whenever she let her mind go *there*. At last, they rounded a corner and the old farmhouse disappeared from sight. Madi gasped as though she had been punched in the gut and swung her head around to try and keep it in view. It was no use. The tears she had been trying so hard to contain sprung free and cascaded down her face as she watched the dusty landscape race past the window.

...

Sam swallowed hard as he watched his niece sob silently in the back seat, struggling to keep up the calm composure he had maintained since the accident. No! He couldn't think about that. All his efforts of seeming he was okay, telling himself he was okay, making himself "okay" He couldn't let it all go to waste now. He wracked his brain trying to think of anything that he could possibly say to her. She was just a kid. He could only imagine what must be going through her head right now. Yet he still couldn't bring himself to say anything in case he might fall apart in front of her. He fought back against the tears clouding his vision and watched the dusty road race towards him.

...

By the time they made it into town, the sun was setting and Madi's tears had run out. She fiddled with her cast and stared out the window without seeing anything, thinking about what she would have been doing right then if *it* had never happened. Sunset was the time for rounding up the chooks for bed and making sure the horses had their dinner and the potty calves had been fed. Then she would head on home to do some homework while *he* cooked dinner.

Finally, the old Hilux pulled up in front of a house that Madi had been to countless times before, but this time was different. The driver turned around and smiled at her from the front seat.

"Here we are." Her uncle Sam said. He must have noticed her red eyes then because he looked away quickly and cleared his throat. "Um, I'm sure you're hungry so how about you go settle into your room and I'll make us some dinner."

...

Sam stared into the depths of his bowl of spaghetti as if it held the solutions to all his problems. Swirling his fork round and round, he thought of what he would have been doing right now had it been even a week earlier. Friday evenings were the time for drinks at the pub with mates and a couple of rounds of pool. Then he would drive home a bit unsteadily and fall into bed, tired from a long week of work. Suddenly, he was startled by Madi's chair scraping back as she pushed her bowl away and stood up. Sam glanced first at her untouched dinner then his own spaghetti mush.

"Ah, I guess we weren't really that hungry. How about you go get ready for bed and I'll drop by and say goodnight after I've dealt with this."

...

As Sam cleared the bowls away, he cursed himself for getting so stuck in his own mind. It was like a maze in there at the moment and he couldn't afford to get lost now that he had Madi. He thought about the fact that he hadn't heard her speak once since picking her up from the hospital that

morning. Even at the farm, she just silently got all her stuff and sat waiting in the car. He wondered yet again what was going through her head. It just wasn't fair. What had any of them done to deserve this? Suddenly it was just all too much. All the emotions he had been pushing down since that day bubbled over like a cup of soft drink poured just a little too quickly. He slid down the cabinets until he was sitting on the floor, buried his head in his arms and sobbed. He sobbed for himself. He sobbed for his niece. And he sobbed for his poor, poor brother.

...

Madi lay under the covers in her new bed, staring at the stars out her new window. She traced the different constellations with her good hand remembering the countless nights she had spent under the stars with *him* while out mustering. His soothing voice encouraging her to keep looking for the shapes above them sounded so real in her head that she shot up and looked around expecting to see her dad standing in the doorway. No. She slumped back down, burying her face in her pillow. The soft fabric absorbed the tears streaming from behind her closed eyelids. It wasn't long until she realized the sobbing she could hear wasn't just her own. She pushed back the covers and crept out into the kitchen. Her breath caught in her throat as she recognized the slumped, shaking figure as her uncle. Silently, she made her way over and slid down next to him, reaching out a trembling hand to rest on his shoulder. He startled at her touch and raised his bloodshot eyes to make contact with her own. Almost immediately, it was as if a weight had lifted off her shoulders, for now she knew that she wasn't alone in her grieving. And in that split moment, Sam realized that there was nothing he could say. He just needed to show her that he was there for her. He threw his arms around his darling niece.

"It's gonna be okay." He whispered, "We're gonna be okay."