



Letting Go

Morningstar Ashley

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Years ago, before tragedy struck, Alex made a child's promise to always protect and care for his little sister, Evie. Then piece by piece, all the good in his life was taken away until Alex was left alone as guardian to his much younger sister. Suffering and loss scarred Alex, causing him to withdraw from the world. Struggling with anxiety and trust issues, Alex attempts to help Evie heal from their shared traumatic past, but each day is harder than the last. To make matters worse, Alex's best friend, Ben, is pushing him to get out of his rut, confronting him with the fact that what Alex thinks is contentment is just stagnation and fear. The last thing he needs is for an old acquaintance to reappear in his life, making him feel things he hadn't dealt with in years.

The executive of the marketing department at graphic design firm Vivid, Kelley has his life together. While not perfect, he's happy with his career and his three best friends. A chance encounter with Alex, the guy he was once attracted to, is icing on the cake. Fighting through Alex's defenses to find the breathtaking man underneath will be hard, but Kelley is up to the challenge. Kelley believes that the things most worth fighting for never come easy.

To accept all that Kelley is offering means Alex must drop his barriers. Kelley will need to keep trying and prove that Alex can trust him, even when grief and anxiety try to pull him back.

Letting Go Details

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From Reader Review Letting Go for online ebook

Isabella ~Mikku-chan~ says

*~~*ARC kindly provided by the author to me in exchange for an honest review *~~*

New authors are always a great opportunity to also extend my horizon and when I first heard about the book I was intrigued. I already "knew" who Morningstar Ashley was, saw her as an avid reader and participant in several groups in the gay romance community. When I had the chance to read the book I was really - pleasantly and positive - surprised by the good job she did with writing this book. Not only that it has a capturing story, it has a light writing but dealing with a heavy topic, which isn't easy to read neither to write.

Morningstar did an amazing job and the way she displayed her character was really great. I had an instant sympathy for Alex and my heart bled for Evie, the little sister of Alex. Sometimes, I admit, I wanted to shake Alex because he came along very hesitant and sometimes seemed a bit "cold". It's understandable why he is keeping people at a distance but sometimes an unwanted rage came over me. xD Besides this Alex was a really believable character and his loss is so great, it's astonishing he is keeping his head up so high and is able to "live" on.

We go the way along with him, the book is writing in the third person, it gives also an insight of Kelley.

Kelley is a character who gives Alex the time he need but is also not hesitant to shove Alex out of his comfort zone and confront him. It's a dealbreaker at some moments and the twist and turns are really good. What I really loved about Kelley is his maturity, not only because he is older than Alex which gives the story a bit spice. It's his personality and his natural calmness. But he has a stealthy side behind a friendly, sympathetic and really caring soul. The way that he is dealing also super charming with Evie and isn't parenting her or tries to be a "fatherfigure" when he isn't that asked for shows also his maturity.

The parts of heavy, emotional stuff and the events which not only shake Alex but Evie are great mixed with the funny parts, the scenes are sometimes full of laughter and lightness. It's really touching and the HEA is adorable.

5 out of 5 stars for this marvelous book. :)

Review originally posted on my blog with added content Mikku-chan / A world full of words

Jenn's Book Obsession says

For a debut novel I give the author credit for coming out with such a strong message. The blurb sounded interesting so I had such high hopes for this. Unfortunately, I struggled to get through it.

This story had great potential and I can see where the author was trying to go with it. For me, it just fell a little flat. There was no emotion. Alex went through so much emotionally and was still suffering and grieving but I didn't feel any of that. None of those emotions screamed at me. It didn't jump off the pages and grip my heart. I wanted to cry. I wanted to grieve with Alex. I wanted to feel his loneliness, his struggles but the emotions wasn't there.

Some parts dragged on with maybe too much information as well that I didn't really care for about their work and projects where I felt it should have focused more on them building their relationship. I would've like to hear more about that. Then there were some parts where it was repetitive. Overall, the concept of the story was great.

I love Kelley and his approach on Alex. This had great secondary characters as well. Again, it just didn't grasp my attention but may be enjoyable to others. It's a debut novel so I'm sure I'll pick up another book from this author to test the waters again in the future. Great start with so much potential and I wish this author nothing but an abundance of success.

ARC received by author in exchange for an honest review

Alexu says

I loved this story! You wouldn't guess this is a debut novel.

After reading the blurb, I thought I was prepared for facing the emotions reading this book entails, but boy was I wrong! I bawled my eyes out, laughed my ass off, cheered from the sides and have been touched by the way the author managed to create this story. (I also discovered that I couldn't read this book in my breaks at work unless I wanted my boss panicking with my reactions :)))

Morningstar portrayed such an amazing character with Alex! He's scared of letting outsiders in his life, but wraps around your reader heart immediately. My heart broke for him; I wanted to go hug him and hold him tight and tell him it's all going to be OK, just please wait a few more pages!

He and his baby sister Evie went through so much, Alex feels he has to carry the weight of the world by locking his emotions in in order to better take care of his sister. Because of that, Alex struggles with his own anxiety. He chooses to live in a safe bubble, giving up the control he worked so hard to maintain not being an option.

Even though Kelley sees right through him and sets his mind to change Alex's perception, Alex thought love led to loss and pain, a weakness he couldn't afford because it was his job to take care of Evie and nothing more, thus being in denial about many things and always expecting the other shoe to drop.

And Evie! She is such a strong and amazing little girl!

Congratulations Morningstar! You managed to draw me in the Love By Design series! Now I want to know more about Peter!

SyLvIa says

[1.75 stars] the 1st half of the book was okay but i started to feel a little bored out at the 2nd half, was fading in & out of the book. book is slightly lengthy for a book that doesn't have much drama. may or may not continue the series.

Laura Hampton says

Letting Go is Morningstar's debut book and she did a great job with it. I am a sucker for a good M/M read and she definitely delivers in that regard. I was sucked into the story in just the first few chapters. Part of the subject matter deals with mental illness and I thought the author did a great job of addressing it in a

compassionate and educated way. I think we all know of someone who has dealt with a mental illness and the harshness of it.

Alex has spent the past four years raising his younger sister and running his own business. He has no time for hook ups, casual sex or relationships. He has locked that part of his heart away like Fort Knox. Dealing with the ups and downs of raising his sister and helping her deal with the nightmares and panic attacks that she now suffers from keep him busier than most twenty-seven-year-olds. When Alex sees an old acquaintance while out one night, he never imagined that his life might just take a turn for the better. But the walls that he has built up around his heart may be more than Kelley can handle.

I really loved Alex's character, he is very real and believable. He is hard working, caring and compassionate, but there is more to him that lies below the surface. He has stepped up to the plate to raise his younger sister after the tragic loss of their mother. He does everything he can to make Evie's life happy and comfortable. She is the one and only person who can bring a true smile to Alex's face. She is such a bright and outspoken little girl and the love that they have for one another shows. Through it all Alex puts Evie's needs before his own and it is only when he may lose the love of his life that he finally realizes that he to suffers from nightmares and panic attacks as well. Can he finally admit that he needs help to make peace with his past and move forward or will it all be to late?

Kelley's character is Awesome!!! I love how he has this dirty talker side to him. He is thirteen years older than Alex and just as driven and hard working. Seeing Alex again has him wanting to get to know him better and he has this overwhelming need to take care of him. I loved how caring Kelley was. He knew that Alex had his heart locked up tight and he knew not to push him. But he found subtle was to work his way into Alex's life. When he realizes that Alex is not willing to truly open up to him, he has to wonder if he can ever break down the walls that Alex has cemented around his heart.

There were a few times that I had to go back and reread passages in this story. The dialog when there where groups of characters speaking was a little rough. Some of it didn't transition/flow as well as it could of. There were also some tense issues, missing words and grammar issues. This is something that I do not base my rating on as not all ARC's have seen their final round with an editor. Over all Morningstar did a great job with this refreshing read.

4 Learning to Let Go Stars

Cadiva says

This is an impressive debut novel from Morningstar Ashley, solid and well plotted with believable characters acting in a wholly realistic manner.

The subject of mental illness is dealt with compassionately but without blunting the edge of how difficult it can be to live with debilitating panic attacks. Alex is a frustrating character but never an unsympathetic one. He has had to deal with a lot and it shows in his every action.

Kelley, by contrast, is solid as a rock, steady in his convictions and in his love and support for Alex, his maturity bringing a lot of stability to Alex's life, even if the younger man doesn't appreciate it and fights against it.

The world is well fleshed out too, with a healthy cast of secondary characters including Alex's younger sister Evie, who read of her age rather than being some uber developed eight-year-old.

There are some odd grammar tense changes and the occasional typo but, as I was reading an ARC, this is to be expected and I am sure they'll be cleaned up before release.

#ARC received from the author in return for an honest and unbiased review

A GandyGirl says

4.5 Stars

He didn't do anything inappropriate but his touch, whether it was the hand on his thigh or when he draped his arm across the couch and drew circles on the exposed skin of his neck with his fingertips, spread chill bumps across Alex's skin making his skin feel alive and sensitive. It was all innocent, except to Alex's body, because it felt like Kelley was playing him like an instrument. Tweaking and strumming and fine tuning it to hit every note in a song only Kelley knew.

I have to say I was not sure what to expect from this at all. I rarely read reviews and even find myself avoiding blurbs. But I had met Morningstar Ashley at GRL and have since interacted with her on Facebook. So picking up her book seemed like a logical step. But what if I hated her book? It is a difficult position to be in as a reader when you become acquaintances with authors on FB. But in the end, I had to dive in and I am so thankful that I did, because this was better than I ever could have expected.

First off, as a debut novel, I can say that I was thoroughly impressed overall by not only the story itself but the writing style. Yes, for me there were some inconsistencies in some timing of a few things, the lack of understanding about this intern program (which frankly was unnecessary) or paragraphs that did not seem to flow as smoothly as others, but regardless, these moments were few and far between. In the end it was the emotional connection made, not only between these characters but the connection made between these characters and me as the reader. I fell in love with Kelley, Alex and Evie.

Kids in books can be a challenge, but sweet Evie never felt anything but real for me. And as a parent with a child with high anxiety I could relate to this sweet child. And the fact that she doesn't miss anything is absolutely true. Kids are perceptive on a level some adults never give them credit for.

Alex's internal struggles were beautifully captured and told. Morningstar dealt with these mental challenges amazingly well and I felt every barrier that was built up over the years and understood quite well the reasons. I loved how Kelley had glimpsed years ago the smile and life that was Alex and could see that he was buried under years of grief and internal abuse as he denied himself true emotion.

I do wish we could have had less of Kelley's work and more about him. I know nothing about his personal story other than his friends. Had he even dated anyone in the past at all? Are his parents living? If these things were said, they were definitely in passing. But regardless, his caring and "mother hen" persona was just so well matched to Evie and Alex.

And the sex...good gawd. I absolutely loved the sexual connection between these two. These scenes were so hot but at the same time so emotionally driven that I loved every moment. I do wish we could have avoided the time jump at the very end and had a few more steamy scenes...but hey...I will take what I can get.

So what is next? I have to say if Morningstar is not already writing Peter's story I will begin hounding her now for this book. I am fascinated and intrigued by this man for sure!!

Oh and for what it is worth...the paper plate scene will be one I remember for years to come. Sweet Kelley. LOL

Candice says

A couple of things:

1. Evie did NOT act or talk like an 8 year old. I have an 8 year old and I kept rolling my eyes at Evie.
2. Ben was a dick.
3. Kelley sure did push a lot, after saying he wasn't going to.

I really liked Alex. I thought his actions were pretty spot on and I'm glad he blew up a few times. I'm glad he was short and moody. It made it feel real. Is it bad that the only time I got teary eyed was when Alex and Ryan were in the rain?

Overall, I felt like this was too long. If this was shorter I think my rating would be higher.

(view spoiler) I want to know more about Peter! I LOVED River, too.

Diverse says

Letting Go is the debut novel from Morningstar Ashley and I can say she's knocked it out of the park! This book deals with so much but the author doesn't layer it on so you feel suffocated. It's plotted perfectly and your emotions will be lit on fire. It's not often I read a debut novel that takes my breath away but Letting Go did just that.

Mental health is something we don't talk about a lot. It's a vast area and there are so many suffering. Alex lives with so much on his shoulders and a heaping amount of denial that he needs help. All his energy and extra energy goes into his kid sister Evie. Oh and she needs all the extras! She's a firecracker and will burrow into your heart quickly.

Kelley has his work cut out for him in this. He's not perfect no matter how much he thinks he is and it isn't until he jumps into the deep end of Alex's world does he truly see that. My heart went out to him and I cheered for him and hoped. Only after this book took a plunge into the angsty pool made of my own tears did we finally breathe.

I suffer from anxiety so relating to Alex wasn't hard but at the same time I couldn't relate completely because his life isn't one I've lived. I sympathized and empathized. I wanted to hug him and Evie countless times and tell them that everything will be okay.

Morningstar Ashley has written a story that touches on many things. Mental health, the world we live in,

second chances, acceptance, bravery, and true and everlasting love. After reading this book I have no doubt that this author will be one that will hug our hearts for many books to come.

Nese says

Having had no preconceptions and knowing it's a debut novel
I jumped at the chance to discover a new M/M author,
all I can say is, what I read totally blew me away.

Expecting a light read with scope for development, I did not expect to find;
such a strong sense of sibling love, protection, and devotion,
such description of the fragility of the human heart and mind,
and such in depth, insightful writing into each complex character.

Alex and his sister Evie have had to face so much trauma and heartache in their lives,
as promised to his parents Alex spends all his time devoted to looking after and protecting Evie.
This in turn has made Alex very self-reliant, socially awkward, and totally closed off to any other love.
Alex and Evie are an island and Alex is determined that they don't need anyone else, no matter the cost.

Kelley is an executive of a company Alex had worked at previously,
he is well liked by all his friends and workers, as he is very caring and approachable.
Kelley remembers Alex as a very happy and beautiful man, he also remembers his strong attraction to him.

A chance encounter brings both characters together, Kelley finds the opening he needs
to try and become friends with Alex,
however, all Alex wants to do is run away and hide behind his walls.
Kelley is determined to find his way into Alex and Evie's lives.

What follows is so much push and pull and so much sexual tension.
Sometimes the heart and the head move at different speed, but Kelley keeps hoping.
The times they were together was like an explosion of fireworks, but is it enough?

This story is so well written, you feel committed to the characters instantly.
It flows beautifully and pulls you right in.
I enjoyed it so much and cannot wait to read more from this author.

MillsyLovesBooks says

Letting Go is the debut novel for Morningstar Ashley and I've got to say for a debut this read really packs an emotional punch. I love the M/M genre and thoroughly enjoyed this book.

Letting Go pulled me in right from the start and kept me invested in their lives. It's a slow burn read but never felt like it was dragging. The story wasn't about the angst it was more about emotions, feelings and coping with life after loss. The author's writing with regards to the subject of mental illness was well written. Showing great care to show both sides of the illness. Parts of this story were truly heartbreakingly and Evie,

the little girl, will utterly capture your heart.

Alex and Kelley's relationship really captivated me. I loved the compassion, strength and lets not forget the dirty talking of Kelley. He new how vulnerable Alex was but never pushed for more than Alex was able to give. Alex truly was a beautiful soul taking on the responsibility of his sister at such a young age. He was very closed off and i could understand why after all the heartbreak he'd been through. So seeing him although it was a struggle to open up to Kelley really left my heart aching.

I look forward to seeing what comes next from this author.

Amanda at WickedGoodReads says

The character's in this book, Alex and Kelley, used to work together years ago. However, after Alex's mother and sister were in a car accident, and Alex was left as the sole caretaker for his much younger sister, he slowly sank into a world of anxiety, and while he did go out and about on occasion, his undiagnosed anxiety steadily rules his life, as well as his younger sister who also suffers from panic/anxiety attacks. While I do understand the pain and trauma Alex and his sister have suffered is hard, at times I found his stand offish attitude to make him seem kind of...dick-ish. I realize this was entirely a defense mechanism for him, to avoid any future pain and suffering, but at times I just wanted to smack the kid.

Kelley is a man who knows what he wants and goes after it. And, IDK if it was just me, but I felt at times that Kelley was kind of weakfish? It's hard to explain what I mean here, but, honestly, I felt for as little as he knew about Alex, he sure put all his cards on the table and just laughed off the dick-ish attitude Alex gave off.

But, eventually, these two come together and settle into a relationship the, of course, Alex tries his hardest to sabotage. He eventually realizes that he does, in fact, have some issues that do require him to seek out professional help if he expects to have any kind of a life with Kelley and be any kind of a father figure to his sister.

Overall, I gave this book 3.5 stars. This is her debut novel, and for that, it is a decent debut. It is somewhat long with parts of the book seeming to drag on a bit, and the character's take some getting used to. I do give the author credit for attempting to tackle mental illness as it is often a touchy subject to approach.

Natalie says

3.5 Stars. This is a very good debut novel from Morningstar Ashley. She's tackled some mental health issues with her characters and portrayed them realistically. Following the developing relationship of 27 year old Alex and 40 year old Kelley, the impact of trauma on survivors is a primary focus. Taking on his sisters care has made Alex keep himself isolated and more lonely than he cares to admit. The path to a friendship and eventual relationship with Kelley is a slow process for a patient, understanding Kelley. Alex can't see his own troubles and is utterly intransigent when others urge him to attend to his own needs. Kelley's character was a good foil for Alex. He is settled in his life and career, and has a nurturing streak that he extends to friends and coworkers, and he wants to do the same for Alex. I enjoyed the depictions of the two together. I'm also not always a fan of kids in my books but Evie's character wasn't too precocious and didn't

dominate the storyline.

I do feel that the book was too slowly paced, particularly the first half. The alternating POV's were very good for developing the characterizations and the dynamics with secondary characters. But I think there could have been a tighter narrative, with less reiteration of daily activities, and Alex's denial of his symptoms and rejecting any help, were a touch repetitive. It was an excellent resolution, albeit a somewhat abrupt conclusion. Having Evie's POV for the epilogue was a cute touch. It's a promising start for a new author and I will keep an eye out for new offerings from Morningstar.

An ARC was provided to me by the author via Jessie G Books Reviews, for an unbiased review*

Mari Cardenas ~ Bayou Book Junkie says

4 Stars!!!

At 18-years-old, Alex made a promise to his father on his deathbed to take care of his mother and sister, and then later, when he lost his mother to a drunk driver, he took over complete responsibility for his little sister, who suffers from panic attacks and anxiety.

Kelley is happy with his life but there's still something missing. Finding Alex again after so many years might be just what he needs. Kelley relentlessly pursues Alex, finally getting the chance to prove that they could work great together, especially with as well as Kelley fits in Alex and Evie's lives.

Alex is determined to do everything for his sister like he promised, even if he's suffering from panic attacks that he keeps denying and even if Kelley wants to help him, Alex refuses to just let go.

I loved Evie, she was such a mature 9-year-old, which considering all she's lived and lost at her tender age is not that surprising, and yet, she was obviously still a little girl in some senses.

I liked Kelley a lot, even if it took me a while to warm up to him. He was a bit overbearing and pushy at first and I wasn't too sure about him, but he proved himself. He was patient and confident and was there for Alex and Evie when they needed him.

I liked Alex, but boy, if he wasn't stubborn as all hell. I get that he felt responsible for Evie, but there's a fine line between just being headstrong and trying to become a martyr, putting his life on hold to do things his way and refusing to accept help from others. He was the second kind and really, it was a bit tiring and frustrating after a while.

Alex and Kelley had a lot of chemistry and even with the age gap between them, or maybe because of it, they worked out well when Alex allowed it. The bed scenes were undeniably hot and I just loved seeing them both with Evie.

I liked the secondary characters, especially Kelley's best friends. I liked Ben, Alex's friend, but there was a scene that left me with a bad taste in the mouth after, because I felt it was blown out of proportion.

Overall, this was a very solid debut novel for Morningstar Ashley. Very entertaining and well-written, even

if there were a few things that didn't quite work for me (like how Alex dealt with the aftermath of his panic attacks' denial), Alex, Kelley and above all, Evie, made it more than worthwhile. Very recommendable!

*** Copy provided to Bayou Book Junkie for my reading pleasure, a review wasn't a requirement. ***

Jenny Wood says

Cute cover!

I was drawn to this book because I'm such a sucker for hot guys with kids. Single dad's or in this case, single brother raising his eight-year-old sister. After losing his father to cancer a month before his sister was born and losing his mother in a car accident when his sister was just four, he's dealing with a lot. Evie (his sister) has panic attacks and night terror's and other residual problems from the accident, making it hard for Alex to do much else besides work and worry about her. He seems like kind of a jerk in the beginning, he's impatient and short with people, his best friend especially, even though his best friend Ben is there for him and Evie and honestly just wanting him to move on and live again. It doesn't help that the guy Alex was seeing at the time of the accident that left Alex a single guardian, had left him because it was too much to stick around with a guy who had a kid with psychological problems. Now, don't blame the ex though, he had his reasons and they were completely understandable. I didn't blame him a bit. Still, Alex didn't trust people after that and didn't get close to anyone. So, when Ben (the best friend) asked him to meet a girl he'd been seeing and was getting serious with, Alex puts on his grown-up pants and agrees, even though he was grumpy about it. That's where he runs into Kelley.

Kelley is the head of a marketing thing where Alex worked before he lost his mother. Kelley had seen him around and thought he was gorgeous.... Over time, he saw him get sadder and sadder before he up and quit. Knowing at least a little bit of the reason why, he was happily surprised to bump into Alex at restaurant and tried to talk to him to catch up. It didn't last long, but Kelley didn't give up....

I thought the way Kelley and Alex talked to each other for the first half of the book was borderline professional and not in any way like "friends". I understand that Alex was trying to keep him at a distance and Kelley was trying to not be pushy, but especially when Kelley tried an innuendo or a silly jab, it seemed awkward... like trying to tease your lawyer or something. I didn't get the chemistry between the two at all. Not for a while.

And don't get me wrong, I understood, TO A POINT, where Alex was coming from, but I couldn't stand him the majority of the book. I understand panic attacks, I understand pushing people away, I understand doing everything on your own and feeling like if you let your people down, it makes you feel like crap.... But Alex was selfish. Period, he was selfish and his woe is me, nobody understands me, nobody knows what it's like because nobody else has ever faced tragedy in their lives before, crap was annoying. His whole thing with Ben... although Ben was a jerk and pushy at dinner the ONE TIME, I didn't see him as being pushy at all any other time. He was concerned for his friend... Man, my best friend after a lifetime together is used to tough love because if you can't trust your best friends, your family to tell you the truth then who can you trust? Even when it hurts... and that's all Ben was trying to do... Like I said, he did go overboard, but it came from a good place. Alex flew off the handle and into a fit of rage any time anyone said anything he didn't like. True or not.

Kelley was patient and understanding and wonderful. He put up with so much from Alex and I honestly

thought he deserved so much better. I wanted to be sympathetic towards Alex, I really did and I guess at some points I was... but the majority of the time I just wanted to throat punch him and his attitude.

I loved Evie and I loved all the friends, although I wasn't so sure about Peter, still not, but I haven't given him another thought after I closed the book. The story ended on a good note, which I was happy about... I love good endings, especially when they took so long to get there, like I felt this one did. The story itself wasn't a bad one, it was actually a great storyline. I just don't feel like I ever got over my annoyance of Alex to enjoy it like I wanted to. I hate when that happens.

3 stars from me on this one :(

I received this story from the publisher in exchange for an honest and unbiased review
