



Just
Let Go

a novel

COURTNEY WALSH

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Praise for Novels by . . .
COURTNEY WALSH



Just Let Go

“A charming story about discovering joy amidst life’s disappointments, *Just Let Go* is a delightful treat for Courtney Walsh’s growing audience.”

RACHEL HAUCK, *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

“*Just Let Go* matches a winsome heroine with an unlikely hero in a romantic tale where opposites attract and we learn that sometimes there’s much more beneath the surface than first appears. This is a page-turning, charming story about learning when to love and when to let go.”

DENISE HUNTER, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
HONEYSUCKLE DREAMS

“Just the kind of story I love! Small town, hunky skier, a woman with a dream, and love that triumphs through hardship. A sweet story of reconciliation and romance by a talented writer.”

SUSAN MAY WARREN, *USA TODAY* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

“Walsh crafts engaging, believable characters who resist falling in love with one another because relationships aren’t easy . . . especially when we struggle to accept our own brokenness.”

BETH K. VOGT, CHRISTY AND CAROL AWARD-WINNING
AUTHOR

“When you want to hug both main characters by the end of the first few chapters, you know it’s going to be a good book! I love Courtney Walsh’s storytelling, and her skills are on full display in *Just Let Go*. I especially appreciate the thread of grace and second chances. Another winsome, poignant read from Walsh!”

MELISSA TAGG, AUTHOR OF THE WALKER FAMILY SERIES

Just Look Up

“[A] sweet, well-paced story. . . . Likable characters and the strong message of discovering what truly matters carry the story to a satisfying conclusion.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“*Just Look Up* by Courtney Walsh is a compelling and consistently entertaining romance novel by a master of the genre.”

MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW

“This novel features a deeply emotional journey, packaged in a sweet romance with a gentle faith thread that adds an organic richness to the story and its characters.”

SERENA CHASE, *USA TODAY* HAPPY EVER AFTER BLOG

“In this beautiful story of disillusionment turned to healing, Walsh brings about a true transformation of restored friendships and love.”

CHRISTIAN MARKET MAGAZINE

Change of Heart

“Walsh has penned another endearing novel set in Loves Park, Colo. The emotions are occasionally raw but always truly real.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

“*Change of Heart* is a beautifully written, enlightening, and tragic story. . . . This novel is a must-read for lovers of contemporary romance.”

RADIANT LIT

Paper Hearts

“Walsh pens a quaint, small-town love story . . . [with] enough plot twists to make this enjoyable to the end.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“Be prepared to be swept away by this delightful romance about healing the heart, forgiveness, [and] following your dreams . . .”

FRESH FICTION

“Walsh writes a small-town setting, a sweet, slow-building romance between two likable characters and a host of eclectic secondary characters.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

“Well written and charming.”

NOVEL REVIEWS

“I discovered Courtney Walsh’s novels a few years ago and quickly added her to my must-buy-immediately list. Her stories have never failed to delight me, with characters who become friends and charming settings that beckon as if you’ve lived there all your life. You won’t want to miss *Paper Hearts!*”

DEBORAH RANEY, AUTHOR OF THE CHICORY INN
NOVELS SERIES

“Delightfully romantic with a lovable cast of quirky characters, *Paper Hearts* will have readers smiling from ear to ear! Courtney Walsh has penned a winner!”

KATIE GANSHERT, AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF
A BROKEN KIND OF BEAUTIFUL

“*Paper Hearts* is as much a treat as the delicious coffee the heroine serves in her bookshop. . . . Like the matchmakers that surrounded the couple in the novel, I couldn’t help cheering them on. A poignant, wry, sweet, and utterly charming read.”

BECKY WADE, AUTHOR OF *MEANT TO BE MINE*

A Sweethaven Summer

“Walsh’s touching debut will have readers longing for a visit to the idyllic vista of Sweethaven. . . . The touch of mystery, significant friendships, and a charming setting create a real treasure.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

“Walsh has created a charming, inviting, homesick-inducing world with Sweethaven. I want to hug the ladies featured in the book and learn from them. . . . To fellow readers, this is a series you don’t want to miss.”

NOVELCROSSING.COM

“A masterful word painting, *A Sweethaven Summer* is a story of loss, regret, forgiveness, and restoration. Novel Rocket and I give it our highest recommendation. It’s a five-star must-read.”

ANE MULLIGAN, PRESIDENT, NOVEL ROCKET

“This book captivated me from the first paragraphs. Bittersweet memories, long-kept secrets, the timeless friendships of women—and a touch of sweet romance. Beautifully written and peopled with characters who became my friends, this debut novel is one for my keeper shelf—and, I hope, the first of many to come from Courtney Walsh’s pen.”

DEBORAH RANEY, AUTHOR OF THE CHICORY INN NOVELS SERIES

“*A Sweethaven Summer* is a sweet debut, filled with characters whose hopes, dreams, and regrets are relevant and relatable. A great book club read!”

SUSAN MEISSNER, AUTHOR OF *A FALL OF MARIGOLDS*

“*A Sweethaven Summer* is a stunning debut. . . . With a voice that sparkles, Courtney Walsh captured my heart in this tender story of forgiveness and new beginnings. It’s certainly a great beginning for this talented author.”

CARLA STEWART, AUTHOR OF *THE HATMAKER’S HEART*

“Courtney Walsh weaves a captivating tale that taps into the universal desire for belonging and happiness. This delightful debut has a bit of mystery, a bit of romance, a beautiful setting, and an intriguing cast of characters.”

MEGAN DIMARIA, AUTHOR OF *SEARCHING FOR SPICE*

“*A Sweethaven Summer* shines with moments of hope and tenderness. With interesting characters, a delightful setting, and a compelling plot, this is one of those stories that stays with you.”

TINA ANN FORKNER, AUTHOR OF *RUBY AMONG US*

A Sweethaven Homecoming

“Courtney Walsh puts the sweet in Sweethaven. If you’re looking for an uplifting, hope-filled story filled with characters you’ll feel like you know, *A Sweethaven Homecoming* has it!”

MARYBETH WHALEN, AUTHOR OF *THE BRIDGE TENDER*

“*A Sweethaven Homecoming* is a triumph! With the foundations of family, love, and faith, The Circle grows through heartbreak, loss, and betrayal and emerges renewed in their love for one another and, most of all, their love of themselves.”

SUSAN OPEL, CREATIVE EDITOR, *PAPER CRAFTS*
MAGAZINE

A Sweethaven Christmas

“Readers will smell the pine of Christmas trees and the aromas of holiday food and will hold close the friendships they develop with the characters.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

“Walsh’s compelling writing style creates unforgettable characters readers come to know and love, while her story lines contend with issues common to us all. . . . Even though the ending is emotional (keep [a] box of Kleenex handy), it’s a story of hope, goodwill, and good friends that is perfect for the Christmas season.”

EXAMINER.COM

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CHAPTER

1

HE SHOULDN'T BE HERE.

A diner in some little tourist town in Michigan was no place for Grady Benson, but here he was. From the second he walked in the door, it was clear he'd made a mistake. Eyes found and followed him all the way to this table, conspicuously located at the center of the space.

A girl with glasses and wild, curly hair rushed over and set a glass of water in front of him.

If he had to guess, he'd say tourist season was over and this place was filled with locals. He didn't even catch the name of the diner when he walked in, but when Wild Hair handed him the menu, he read *Hazel's Kitchen: Harbor Pointe, Michigan* on the cover and figured that's where he was.

Where he definitely should not be.

So much for staying under the radar.

"Did you see the sign on your way in? It had all the specials written on it." Wild Hair wore a nametag that read *Betsy*. Now that

he looked at her, she was cute, in a small-town, innocent sort of way. Not like the girls he was used to dating. They were anything but innocent.

“I didn’t.” He opened the menu and kept his head down, but the whispers started despite his best efforts to disappear. Apparently Harbor Pointe had noticed him.

“Can I just get a cheeseburger with everything, fries, and a chocolate milk shake?”

Betsy’s eyes went wide. “Are you sure that’s a good idea?”

He glanced up at her, and she quickly swiped the menu out of his hand.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said that.”

“What do you think I should eat?” he asked.

She looked away, visibly ruffled. “Grilled chicken with a big plate of roasted vegetables and a glass of water?” There was a question in her voice.

He pretended to think it over for a few seconds but shook his head. “I’ll stick with the cheeseburger.”

She scribbled something on her notepad, then scurried away like a mouse. Grady sat for a few long minutes, feeling too big for the chair she’d put him in. He pulled his phone out of his pocket and opened Twitter.

Grady Benson needs to learn the art of knowing when to quit.

Benson chokes again. Time to hang up the skis, buddy.

Kiss the Olympics good-bye, GB. You’ll be lucky to land a job training little kids with a run like that. #crashandburn

He clicked the screen off and flicked it on the table with a clunk.

The race in Vermont would follow him all the way to Colorado with Twitter comments echoing in his head. He should’ve just gotten on a plane like everyone else. A solo road trip to clear his head suddenly seemed like a ridiculous idea.

Betsy returned with his milk shake, half of it in a tall glass with whipped cream and a cherry on top, the other half still in the metal mixing container. He ate healthy most of the time—it was one of

the few rules he actually followed—but he didn't feel like making wise choices right now.

He wanted to do whatever he wanted to do.

Grady glanced up as the door opened and a pretty blonde woman walked in. She wore ripped jeans rolled at the ankles, slouchy and a little too big for her, along with a gray T-shirt underneath an army-green jacket that cinched in at the waist. Like him, she looked out of place, like she didn't belong here, but judging by the welcome she received when she walked in the door, she absolutely did.

He couldn't tell, but it seemed the crowd at the front of the diner was congratulating her about something. Not his business. He went back to his milk shake, and a few seconds later his food arrived.

Betsy stood beside the table for an awkward beat. "Need anything else?" she finally asked.

"I'm good, I think," he said. "Thanks."

She nodded, then skittered away, leaving him to eat in peace. He took a bite of his burger and washed it down with a swig of the shake. While so many of the people around him still seemed on high alert that he was sitting there, several had gone back to their own meals, their own food, their own company.

"Hey, aren't you Grady Benson?"

Grady turned in the direction of the voice and found a booth of three guys, early twenties, off to his left. He swallowed his bite and gave them a nod.

"I remember watching you at the last Olympics, man," one of the guys said. "Tough loss."

"He didn't lose, you idiot; he came in fourth," another guy said.

He didn't need the reminder. The first guy was right. He'd lost. Fourth place had never been good enough, not when he was favored to win the gold. Not when he only had himself to blame.

"Don't beat yourself up, man. Hard to come back after something like that."

"I'm fine." Grady set his burger down.

The guy laughed. "Dude, you're done."

“Jimmy,” one of the other guys warned.

Grady gritted his teeth.

Jimmy laughed again. “What? You saw what happened in Vermont. He didn’t even finish. Washed-up at thirty, that’s gotta suck.”

He should stand up and walk away. He should pay the waitress, get in his SUV, and keep driving to Colorado, where he could get ready for the next race. He should . . . but he didn’t.

He’d been listening to commentators talk about his skiing, his messy technique, his disregard for the rules for years—but now they’d started using terms like *washed-up* and *retirement*, and whenever he heard them, something inside him snapped.

Grady turned toward the table. “You got a problem with me?”

Jimmy’s expression turned smug. “I’m just not a fan, is all. You’re not as great as you think you are.”

Grady reminded himself he didn’t know this guy, didn’t care what he thought. And yet something about Jimmy was really getting under his skin. He looked around for Betsy so he could get his check and leave.

But Jimmy didn’t let up. “We all watched the races the other day. Guy choked. He choked, man.”

“Dude, shut up,” his friend said.

“Supposed to be the fastest guy on the slopes, but my Aunt Frieda could’ve skied better than him. In her sleep.”

“You don’t even have an Aunt Frieda.” The other guy sounded as irritated with his friend as Grady was. Grady’s knuckles had gone white around the edge of the table.

“Heard he got his girlfriend pregnant and then tried to pay her to keep quiet. Not like he’s got a squeaky-clean image to protect or anything.”

That was it. How that lie had ever picked up steam, Grady didn’t know, but he was sick of hearing it. Grady spun out of his chair and lunged at Jimmy, pulling him out of the booth by his jacket. A plate crashed to the floor, but Grady barely noticed.

Jimmy tried to fight him off, but he was several inches shorter and not half as strong as Grady. Still, he managed to squirm from Grady's grasp, falling into a table and knocking over more dishes.

The guy didn't know when to quit. He smirked at Grady. "I forgot you've got a temper, too. Is that why nobody wants you on the team?"

Who did this punk kid think he was? Grady didn't hold back as he hauled off and punched Jimmy square in the jaw. Jimmy's body shot backward into a wall of framed photos, which shattered when they hit the floor.

Grady stepped back to catch his breath when out of nowhere, Jimmy lunged toward him, catching him off guard and ramming Grady's body into the long counter on the other side of the diner. He was scrappy, Grady would give him that, but this kid didn't have nearly the fighting experience Grady did. He'd grown up fighting. He practically enjoyed it. He knew how to handle himself.

Grady wrestled him to the ground, his only focus to keep him there. Jimmy yanked himself from Grady's grasp and landed a punch across his left eye. Anger welled up inside him as the sting of pain zipped through his body. Grady's mind spun; long-buried grief demanded to be felt. He had Jimmy's comments to thank for that.

Washed-up at thirty.

Injuries beyond repair.

Sloppy technique.

Embarrassed. Frustrated. Ashamed.

Someone grabbed him from behind and pulled him off Jimmy. Only then did Grady realize he'd unleashed the full force of his rage on the man, who now lay beneath him, bloody and moaning.

He shrugged from the grasp of the person who'd pulled him away and wiped his face on his sleeve. He scanned the diner and found pairs of eyes darting away from him. All but one. The blonde's. She stood off to the side, unmoving, watching him.

He looked away.

He didn't need to be judged by Little Miss Goody Two-Shoes.

Jimmy's friends pulled him to his feet as two officers in uniform yanked the front door open. Grady glanced at Betsy, who wouldn't meet his eyes. He should apologize. He'd made a huge mess of the place. Tables were overturned, at least one of them broken. The glass from the shattered picture frames crunched underneath his feet, and there was at least one place where they'd put a hole in the wall. Oh no, make it two.

He didn't even remember doing that.

Before he could say anything to the wild-haired waitress (or anyone else), one of the cops—an older man with a wrinkled face—grabbed him by the arm. “You'll have to come with me, son.”

The other officer did the same to Jimmy, who immediately launched into his side of the story, spouting about how Grady “freaked out for no reason” and “I'm the victim here, man.”

Grady let the older cop lead him through the small crowd, avoiding the stares of the people who'd just witnessed yet another of his colossal mistakes. The blonde stood near the door, arms crossed over her chest. She said nothing, but her eyes never left his as the officer pushed him through the door and into the street.

“Do I need to cuff you, or have you calmed down?” the cop asked.

“You don't need to cuff me,” Grady said, wishing he'd never stopped in this ridiculous town in the first place. What was it that made him pull off at the Harbor Pointe exit? He wasn't particularly hungry—he was just tired of driving. He should've kept going. If only he could rewind the last hour.

Who was he kidding? He'd have to rewind a lot further back than that to undo the mess he'd made.

The second officer was shoving Jimmy into the back of a squad car parked at the curb.

“Look, Officer—” Grady turned toward the older man—“I'm sorry I lost my temper back there. I'll pay for the damages to the diner.”

“I'm sure you will.” He opened the other back door of the car and motioned for Grady to get in.

“There’s really no need for this,” Grady said. “I screwed up. I get it. But I’m fine now, and I’ll make it right.”

“Well, your version of ‘making it right’ might not be the judge’s version of ‘making it right.’” He eyed Grady. “There’s still time for the cuffs.”

Grady let out a stream of hot air, anger prickling the back of his neck as he leaned down and got into the car. Jimmy sat on the opposite side, sulking. At least he’d shut up. For now, anyway.

Through the windows of Hazel’s Kitchen, Grady saw the people who’d witnessed the fight picking up overturned tables and chairs and sweeping broken plates into a dustpan. What a mess he’d made.

The main stretch of Harbor Pointe was made up of cotton candy-colored buildings neatly stacked together on either side of the street. As they drove, he saw a bakery, a flower shop, a couple more diners, antique stores. Old-fashioned lampposts shone on alternating sides of the street, casting a warm yellow hue over the brick road in front of them.

They drove in silence for several seconds until finally the older officer turned around and looked at Grady.

“I know you’re not from here. What kind of beef could you possibly have with Jimmy?”

“He’s crazy,” Jimmy said.

“I’m not talking to you,” the cop said.

“No beef. Just don’t like people with smart mouths.”

The cop laughed. “That I understand.”

“It’s not funny, Sheriff,” Jimmy protested. “I’m pressing charges. Assault and battery. And I want a lawyer because I didn’t do anything here.” Jimmy was still riled up, and normally Grady would be too, but he’d been here before. He knew exactly what would happen next. He’d be arrested. Booked. Pay a fine and be on his way.

Though, sadly, this time, he wasn’t even sure where he was on his way to.

A Note from the Author



Every story I write seems to be a snapshot of the journey I'm on, the lessons I've learned, and the pieces of life I've grown to love. *Just Let Go* is no different. It was a pure joy to return to Harbor Pointe, this time with new characters, and to explore life through Quinn and Grady's eyes.

In so many ways, I relate to Quinn—the risk-averse rule follower who is still holding on to past hurts, so much so that she doesn't even realize how they've kept her from moving forward. I've been there. I've been frozen in the past, unable to break free of the way I thought things were supposed to go.

Maybe you can relate?

Writing this story helped me realize that letting go and moving on are essential if we ever have a hope of living a full, happy, and prosperous life. I'm grateful for the opportunity to explore the things God is doing in my heart through the stories he places there, and I'm especially grateful that you've taken the time to read this one.

I know you have a million choices when it comes to what you can do with your time, so the fact that you spent it reading my words truly means the world to me.

I sincerely hope you enjoyed Quinn and Grady's story, and I would *love* to know what you thought of it. I truly love to hear

Just Let Go

from my readers, especially when I get to know you a little better! I invite you to stay in touch by signing up for my newsletter on my website, www.courtneywalshwrites.com, or by dropping me a line via e-mail: courtney@courtneywalshwrites.com.

With love and gratitude to you,
Courtney