

# **"The Night Trevor's Soul Came Loose (A Short Ghost Story)"**

**Written and Copyright by Anna Abner**

## **I**

I shove through the theater exit and chills sweep over me. December is cold and dry in Charlotte. I hug my arms around my middle as I wait for Trevor to catch up from holding the door for the couple behind us.

"Are you cold, Lanie?" he asks, falling into step beside me.

Yes. But if I admit I have goosebumps, he'll offer me his jacket or pull me tight to the warmth of his side.

Something has changed in the last few months. It's not Trevor, either. It's me.

I'm not so sure the life laid out in front of me is even the life I want to live, and the man I promised to marry is a big part of that original plan.

We've been friends since we were six years old and my love has never wavered, not in thirteen years. Until now.

"No. I'm fine."

Even though my legs aren't as long as his, our feet find a rhythm and we move in sync.

We head toward downtown and our off-campus apartment building. Tonight is our date night. Something we've never needed before. But even Trevor must feel things are iffy because this was his idea.

The movie he'd chosen had been a guns-blazing revenge thriller. It had

opened like any other film of its type. Then the tough guy looking for his missing niece had picked up a love interest and toward the end he'd sarcastically asked her, "What is love, anyway?"

The woman had replied, "Love is life. Love is everything."

*Love is everything.*

Except, suddenly, my desire to do something different with my life is obscuring my love for my fiancé.

When I'd dreamed of going away to UNC with him, it had included publishing my superhero graphic novel series *Silver Blade* on the side to boost our income and my career. But publishing contracts are scarce. So, Trevor and I share a cramped one-bedroom apartment overflowing with my assortment of sketchbooks and storyboards.

My parents are sending me through college. I asked them, before I left, to pay for Trevor's education too, but they refused. I'd said nothing in retaliation, but it still annoys me. After all, my parents hadn't technically adopted him, but they've been his legal guardians for two years.

I still can't understand why they won't help Trevor. But they don't, and so he works at Lefty's restaurant, and my parents pay our rent.

It'll be different after we graduate. I'll create heart-wrenching graphic novels, and he'll be an electrical engineer, and we won't have to live the way we do now. If we stick to the plan. But I don't know if I want to finish college, let alone move into the suburbs and get married.

We cross the parking lot with two feet of empty air between us. On any other day, we'd be holding hands. Without even thinking about it, our hands would link, fingers wiggling and twining tight.

But tonight, I keep my arms across my ribs.

"I have a class at eight in the morning," Trevor says, "but if you want to stop at O'Dowd's for a couple beers..."

"No." The concrete beneath me is a hazy, gray cloud. "I don't feel very well."

We stroll past a dog park, its trees blotting out any visible stars.

A pang of fear hits my stomach. It's probably not smart to be in this part of town at night. We both know better. There's no moon, no cabs, and no police.

"Come on," Trevor urges, crossing the deserted street.

A stray dog barks, and I nearly jump out of my skin.

This is insane. Never once has Trevor failed to protect me, and I have absolute faith that he won't break his record tonight. Besides, there's nothing to be frightened of. True, it's the witching hour in the big city, but we're just two people walking home, minding our own business.

At the next corner, I hear a scuffling sound behind us. We turn at the same time. A grizzled man with black eyes flashes a gun concealed under his camouflage jacket.

Immediately, Trevor draws me behind him with one arm. Picturing the most violent comics I've devoured in the last two years, I go willingly into his shadow. I don't want to end up a grieving vigilante out for revenge. I just want to go

home.

"Cell phones," the guy barks. "Quick." His gaze flickers over the surrounding area.

Trevor tosses his phone with the cracked screen at the guy who catches it easily.

The thief turns on me. "You deaf?"

"I didn't bring it." I wasn't carrying a purse, either. Trevor would never let me pay for anything, anyway. It's easier to leave my stuff at home when we go out together.

He curses at me. "Give me your wallet, then."

I hold up my empty palms.

Like a nightmare come to life, he reaches for me with fingers curled. I smell something fetid and ugly all over him.

This can't be happening.

"What a useless bitch."

Out of nowhere, Trevor tackles the guy. "Lanie, run!"

But my legs won't move.

They both knock into me, and I stumble as they crash to the sidewalk. The gun skitters across the concrete. All three of us go for it but the criminal reaches it first.

He doesn't hesitate. Not for so much as a second. He jams the muzzle of the gun into Trevor's ribs and fires.

The sound is softer than I expect. Not a bang. More like a *pop*. And then the back of Trevor's shirt explodes and blood splatters the sidewalk.

I watch in horror, frozen to the spot. Trevor lost a fight? Trevor, the one who never fails to protect me? My champion at all costs?

The guy with the gun is gone before my mind processes what I'm witnessing.

I fall to my knees and roll Trevor onto his back. "Honey? Hang on."

He grabs my hand in a painfully tight grip. My bones and cartilage crunch together. He sees me, though, I can tell he does.

"I'm calling 911." But I don't my cell phone and Trevor's is long gone. The guy must have taken it. Before he pulled the trigger? Or after? I can't remember.

Trevor's breath wheezes out of him, and then nothing.

No. *No*.

This is not how his story ends. Not on the sidewalk outside a dark consignment shop. He has to finish college. Get a job in the city. Start a family.

This isn't right.

With no phone, I scream. There's no one around that I can see, but I raise my face to the inky sky and wail.

And suddenly, in my mind's eye, I'm not bending over Trevor the wounded man, but Trevor the six-year-old boy. My best friend. And he isn't dead, just faking. When he sees that his ploy has worked, he jumps to his feet and laughs hysterically. He tricked me.

#

The plastic payphone receiver in the hospital waiting room is cold and sort of sticky against my ear, but my call goes through.

"Mama?" I say when she picks up.

It's so late at night I must have woken her, but I need to hear her voice. Someone else must know what is going on because I'm not convinced I can handle all this on my own.

"Lanie? Is that you? What's wrong?"

"It's Trevor." I clear my throat to steady my voice. "He was shot." I can't be strong anymore. I cry messily into my free hand, sucking in violent sobbing breaths.

"Where are you?" She sounds awake now. Alert and in charge, like I knew she would be.

But I can't stop crying long enough to answer.

"Lanie?" Mama snaps. "Tell me where you are. I'm getting dressed right now. Daddy and I are coming."

"University Hospital," I squeak. "He died, mama. He died."

"We're coming." Now she's crying, too. "Stay right there. We're on our way."

I hang up the phone and stumble down the hall, but all I can see is the image of Trevor lying motionless on the sidewalk. I watched him die and then watched paramedics revive him.

And now he rests in a white, starched hospital bed connected to every conceivable tube and wire. Alive, but barely.

I careen past the ICU nursing station into Trevor's room and collapse into the chair next to his bed. His eyelids are about the only part of him I can see. And they're more delicate than I remember. Tiny blue veins stand out in contrast to chalky skin.

I wish I could hold his hand, but one has a pulse ox clip on it and the other has an IV. Instead, I count the beeps of his heart monitor and watch the steady rise and fall of his chest as a machine does his breathing for him.

The last time I talked to his doctor, the man hinted at brain damage. No, more than that. He made me wonder whether Trevor will die. For good.

I don't know how to prepare myself for life without Trevor.

A funny sensation prickles the back of my neck. Someone is in the room with us.

I spin, my breath catching in my throat, expecting a doctor, a nurse, or even an orderly here to empty the trashcan.

But it's not any of those people.

It's Trevor.

"What?" I blurt out, unable to think of anything more profound to say. If this is some joke, it's extremely unfunny.

I glance at the man in the bed and then back at the figure in the doorway. I haven't slept all night. And don't people under extreme stress have

hallucinations?

"I'm losing my mind," I whisper to the Trevor in the bed before giving his toes a squeeze. Without making eye contact with the phantom, I step around it and head back for the payphone. There are other people I should call.

Christopher. Sonya and Paul. They'll all be so worried...

"Lanie?"

I falter a step.

I've known Trevor since he was six years old. I would recognize his voice anywhere – underwater, in a hurricane, on the moon. It's his.

"You're not real," I say without turning around.

I spot the nursing station. Time to test my sanity. "Excuse me," I say to the nearest female, a young woman with way too much foundation on her face. "Do you see the man standing behind me?" I double-check he's still there. He is.

"Who?"

I look again. "Is there a person right there?" I point. "See him?"

Leaning way over the counter, she squints. "Where?"

It's official. I'm hallucinating. "Never mind."

## II

I need sleep. A good, long nap will blow the cobwebs from my mind. My head will clear, the delusions will fade, and I'll form a plan.

I rush downstairs and out onto the street. Because my purse, keys, and phone are all at home, I head off on foot. It's not that far.

"Lanie?"

*His voice.*

"Go away," I hiss, even though it's an awful idea to engage imaginary beings.

"Let's get away from this place," he says. "I hate it here."

Trevor has never liked hospitals, not since his mom died in one.

I open my mouth to explain that my purse is at home, but then I snap my jaw closed. If I ignore the delusion, it will fade away.

"What is going on?" he asks, his voice strained. "I can't remember last night. Lanie, did something happen?"

I recall the sight of him in his hospital bed. And then, worst of all, him bleeding on the sidewalk. "You're a figment of my overstressed imagination. I'm not talking to you."

He walks in front of me so I have no choice but to look into his big brown eyes. "What happened last night? Something's wrong. I can feel it."

I put my head down and march home.

But at the door of my apartment building, I remember I don't have keys and no one is home. I poke my neighbor Tina's call button.

"Who is it?" her voice crackles over the intercom.

"It's Lanie. I left my keys. Can you buzz me in?"

"Oh, my God," Tina shouts. She sounds pissed, not concerned, so I guess she hasn't heard about the shooting. "Where have you been? You said you'd watch

Cow-Cow last night so I could go out with Marty, but you never came home and I had to leave him in his crate, and now Gus is mad at me 'cause a bunch of people complained about the barking!"

The second she takes a breath, I answer into the little speaker box, "I'm sorry, Tina. Just buzz me in."

"Okay. Jeez. You don't have to be a brat about it."

The box beeps, I slip inside the foyer, and press for the elevator to the fifth floor.

The phantom is right beside me. "Why didn't you come home last night?"

Nope. I will not interact with a fantasy.

The stupid elevator won't arrive, and I feel trapped in the lobby with a replica of Trevor who I miss with a down and dirty aching I can't shake. It's not fair of my brain to play tricks like this because seeing Trevor standing on his own two feet is all I want in the world.

But it's not possible. My fiancé is in the ICU.

Finally, the elevator doors open. I step inside, turn around, and come face to face with my delusion.

He has the same hairline scar on his temple.

We were eight when he received it. My mother had forced me to walk all the way to Trevor's family's farm to give them a tin of cookies she'd made for Christmas. She'd thought it would be cute to doll me up in a fluffy red dress.

Trevor had spotted me prancing up his driveway and run over to laugh at

my outfit. He'd started throwing snowballs. The tin of cookies fell into the snow. I was so upset that I'd returned fire, and we battled until I hit him with a rock unintentionally concealed in one of my snowballs.

It's the same scar.

I stutter a step toward him, and his expression registers concern.

"Lanie!"

But it's too late. The elevator doors close and the car rises without him.

"He's not real," I repeat several times. If I'm the only person who can see and hear him, he's not real.

In the fifth-floor hallway, Tina yells at me some more about her dog, but stops short and takes a long look at me. Blood is still in my clothes and hair and pores.

"Are you okay?" she asks.

"Trevor got shot," I say in a voice so robotic I don't recognize it. "Do you still have my extra key?"

Finally, after the long walk home and all of Tina's bitching, I close my door to the world and collapse onto my bed, not even bothering to clean up the sketchbooks spread across the comforter, just sprawling on top of them.

I need sleep.

As my eyes drift closed, I see Trevor standing over me like a haunted, but noble crime fighter. My hero.

I dream a scary, black-and-white nightmare straight out of Trevor's past. His

mother died of breast cancer when he was twelve. Four years later, he identified his father's body after the elder Robertson took his own life in a single car accident.

Trevor had been left with a family farm he didn't know how to run. The foreman who'd worked for the Robertsons for years had called sixteen-year-old Trevor incompetent and immature and a disgrace to the profession.

Trevor lost the farm to the bank.

Even after my parents brought him home to live with us and filed guardianship papers, he still couldn't relax. At night, he'd crouch in the corner of the guest bedroom and cry.

I wake from my nap feeling worse than I had when I lay down.

Groaning, I stumble into the bathroom, swallow pain medication for my all-over ache, and shower nice and slow. I don't know how long I've been asleep, but my stomach is growling like it's been hours and hours. I need to check on Trevor and talk to his doctor. Maybe he has better news.

I'm on the edge of the bed tying my shoes when Trevor strolls through the door as if he's made himself at home.

No, not Trevor. My delusion.

Except I'm not sleep-deprived anymore.

"You're still here," I say before thinking better of talking to a phantom.

Apparently, my nap hasn't calmed him any more than it has me. "Lanie, why can't I remember last night?"

I pretend he's not there. Because he isn't. The real Trevor is in the hospital.

"I know something's wrong." His voice wobbles. "You haven't frozen me out like this since the first grade."

He sounds so much like Trevor that it pulls me up short. "I can't talk to you," I say. "You're not real. And I'm not crazy."

*"What the hell is going on?"* He swipes his fist over the foyer table where we keep our key rings in a giant clamshell.

"Don't." I flinch away. "You'll break it."

His hand passes right through the solid items. "What. Happened. To. Me."

It's Trevor. I can see it now. Invisible to everyone else, or not, it's him.

"You were shot." The words are sour on my lips, but they tumble out. "They got your heart beating again. Except it's bad. It's really bad. You're not waking up or breathing on your own. You might not make it, Trevor." My breath hitches. "You might die."

His eyes go all shiny like he'll cry, except I haven't seen him cry since those late-night breakdowns two years ago. And then I'd only heard him crying at night. I never actually saw it.

"Are you alright?" he asks, his brown eyes dark with worry. "Did he hurt you?"

"You remember the mugger?"

"It's starting to come back."

"I'm fine," I assure. "But I don't get why you're standing here talking to me

while your body is lying in a hospital bed. Are you...?" I look him up and down. Not a detail out of place. "A ghost?"

"No. A ghost is just, um, an echo of someone who died." Silently, he pleads with me to believe. "I'm not a ghost. I'm not dead."

"Then what are you?" My imagination is not this good. Something else is going on.

"I don't understand any of this. All I know is, you are all I can think about. Wherever you are, I want to be. Period."

Guilt settles heavy in my belly. For the past few weeks all I've thought about is starting fresh somewhere new. On my own.

My phone buzzes with an incoming call and I see that I've missed eight others and four texts. Most from my mother's cell.

"Mama?" I answer. "Where are you?"

"Thanks for finally picking up." She sighs into the receiver. "We're at the hospital. We just finished speaking to the doctor. It's not looking good. Trevor's brain was deprived of oxygen for —"

"I understand." I talk right over her, unable to deal with this and the apparition in my living room, too. "I'm going to grab dinner. I'll be there to see him soon." I hang up.

But I don't collect my keys or purse. My mind is a jumble. It hurts to think at all. So, I open my laptop intending to search the term *ghost*. Or *out-of-body experiences*. Or even *spirit familiars*.

But my phone buzzes again and I turn away to read a new text from Mama:  
“Meet us for dinner at JoJo’s across from hospital. Thirty minutes. We need to talk.”

“Lanie?” Trevor says in a voice that makes my skin break out in goose bumps. “What is this?”

Oh, crap. I already know what he’s looking at. I’d forgotten the last project I’d opened on my laptop. “Hold on, listen —”

“You’re leaving me?”

Oh, God, his tone brings to mind heartsick, teenaged Trevor.

“I was just...” I slam the laptop closed.

I’d written a stream-of-consciousness essay in 3D bubble font to organize my evolving feelings, which probably looked a lot like a Dear John letter. In fuchsia.

It was something Trevor was never supposed to see.

“Lanie?” He visibly struggles. If he gets upset enough, will he disappear?

“Since we started college...” Ugh, this is so awful. I’m not ready for this conversation. I haven’t sorted my feelings well enough to explain them. “Things are changing. *I’m changing.*”

“You stopped loving me?”

“Of course not.” Damn, I’m crying, too. I rub at my face.

“Then why did you write those things?”

I’d been so confused and anxious about my life’s trajectory, it had seemed like my relationship with Trevor was holding me back.

Now, with the threat of losing him forever looming over my head, I'm not sure what to think.

"I have to meet my parents," I mumble and escape out the front door.

### III

Mama and Daddy are already at JoJo's diner when I walk through the door. Trevor's spirit, or whatever it is, isn't anywhere in sight. And I'm a little freaked out that he's not following me anymore.

After hugs and hellos, we all sit at a booth. Mama and Daddy on one side. Me on the other.

"Do you want to share something?" Mama asks.

I can't even stomach the idea of food. "No. What did you want to talk about?"

She sets the menu aside and holds my dad's hand on the tabletop. "They're still doing tests, but Trevor isn't showing any brain activity," she begins.

I shrink in on myself. Where is he? If I could just see Trevor's image again, I wouldn't feel like my ribcage is crumbling.

"We have to accept that Trevor's gone." Mama tears up and Daddy pats her back gently. "The doctors brought his body back, but not his soul. That part of him is gone."

*His soul.*

"He just needs time," I pledge. His brain will heal. He'll come back to me.

"It won't do any good, pumpkin," Daddy says. "We're going to let him pass

peacefully."

"What?" I search both their faces. "What are you talking about?"

"We'll be with him," Mama says. "The doctors will turn off the machines, and he'll pass away."

"That's crazy." I push out of the booth because I can't breathe all locked up within it. "Trevor will wake up."

"No. He won't." Daddy heaves an enormous sigh, sinking low into the booth.

Mama gives me a pitying look. "It's for the best."

"Well," I stutter, "I'm his fiancée. And I say no."

"Your Dad and I have the final say on this one," Mama assures.

"He will wake up." I collect my purse in shaky hands and leave.

I don't stroll across the street to the hospital. I *run*.

But as I swing into Trevor's room, his bed is missing. My breath dries up in my chest and I have to force myself to inhale.

"He's having an MRI downstairs."

I spin at the voice behind me. It's the nurse with the heavy make-up.

"He's okay, though?"

"The same." She touches my shoulder sympathetically. "Would you like some water while you wait? Or something to read?"

"No." I just want to see Trevor.

She gives my arm a squeeze and leaves me in the shadowy, windowless

room. All alone, I take a seat in the chair in the corner and stare at the empty rectangle where Trevor should be.

Reading my brainstorm letter had hurt him, which was the last thing I wanted to do. He shouldn't have seen it. I'm not ready to talk about my changing feelings, let alone for him to learn about them by accident.

I love him. I've loved him so long I can't remember a time I didn't love him. He was my buddy in grade school and my protector in high school. There wasn't a part of my life he wasn't involved in. Heck, he was the one who encouraged me to create graphic novels.

But I'm not fifteen anymore. I can think for myself. And I'm not happy with the way things are going with my career and my future.

My parents pay for my tuition at UNC so I can study what I really love. Modern art. They pay for our apartment, too, but only as long as I attend college.

If I quit school, Trevor will be homeless. He's having a hard enough time paying his own way through school. If we lose our apartment, he'll have to move in with roommates. Or live in the dorms. I'd never see him. Not like now.

I hear quiet voices outside and then two men bring Trevor back on a gurney and settle him among all the machines, reattaching leads and clips.

My gaze follows them out. They pass Trevor standing in the doorway.

"Hi," I whisper, sitting forward. "I was afraid you'd left for good."

"I was following him around." He jerks his chin in the bed's direction.

I stare at the image of my fiancé. The one that shouldn't exist. "I'm glad

you're still here."

"I can't believe you want to leave me, Lanie." He drops his head as if he's overcome with exhaustion. "I know you're having issues, but I never thought you'd leave."

"What do you mean issues?" I believed I was doing an outstanding job of keeping my feelings disguised.

"You want to quit school," he says wearily. "But you're scared of disappointing your parents. And me too, I guess."

"How did you know?" Was he incorporeal now *and* psychic?

"I can read between the lines. Plus, I've known you since the first grade. I can tell what you're thinking."

"I want to quit school." It's a relief to say it out loud.

"What's holding you back?"

"Hurting you." It's the first thing that pops into my mind. "If I drop out, my parents will stop supporting me. You'll be on your own."

"And you'll be on your own, too. So what?"

"I don't want to cause you any pain."

"You're breaking up with me to save me?" A frustrated groan rumbles through his chest. "You're a coward."

"No, I'm not." But he has a point. Maybe I am afraid.

"I want to marry you, Lanie," he says with absolute conviction. "I don't care how tough the first few years will be while we're finding our footing. I love you."

And I will never stop fighting for you."

"Even if I drop out of college and move to New York and work minimum wage jobs until I sell my superhero series?" I blurt out. "Because that's what I want to do. I want to stop living off my parents. I hate Charlotte. I hate going to classes that don't help me find a publisher. I hate waiting around for my life to start!"

He jabs a finger in my direction. "You think I care where I live or where I go to college? I care about you. You're my entire life, Lanie."

*Love is life. Love is everything.*

"Oh." A doctor walks into the room looking confused over my one-sided shouting match. "Hello. How are you feeling this evening?"

"Fine," I say. Just dandy.

He checks the clipboard at the foot of Trevor's bed. "Do you understand what will happen?"

"What?" I look up as a different nurse joins us.

"I just talked to your parents," the doctor continues. "They're on their way. And then you'll all have time to say goodbye."

"What?" I glance from the doctor to the phantom in the doorway.

The doctor never loses his friendly, but slightly bored, demeanor. "Your parents spoke to you about the young man's condition, didn't they?"

I nod because I can't vocalize what they told me. It's too awful.

"After all of our tests, he has no significant brain function. I'm afraid there's

no chance his condition will improve.”

“No chance,” I repeat because I can’t believe it. Trevor has to come back. He’s standing right there.

#### IV

“Lanie, I’m glad you’re here.” Mama enters the hospital room, followed by Daddy, and the space is suddenly crowded.

The doctor nods at me. “I’ll be back in a few minutes. Take your time.”

“Oh, my darling boy.” My mom bends at the waist and kisses Trevor’s forehead. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall—”

“What are you doing?” I say, horrified.

My mom’s expression crumbles into grief. “Lanie, say goodbye. He’s suffered long enough.”

I stand and approach the bed, but I don’t touch him. The figure between the sheets is looking less and less like the man I know.

“I don’t want to die,” Trevor says from behind me. “This sucks. I didn’t have enough time with you.”

“There will never be enough time,” I say sadly.

“I know.” Mama reaches to hug me, and I let her give me a squeeze, though it makes my skin shrink two sizes.

“You can’t do this,” I tell her.

“He’s already gone,” my dad chimes in. “We have to let his body be at peace.”

"No."

They both ignore me.

I have not stood up to my parents very often in my life. Maybe never.

I have always been an agreeable child. I turn in my assignments on time. I attend the college they chose. I didn't even make a fuss when they refused to chip in for Trevor's tuition, even though they can easily afford it.

But this is the line I cannot toe.

The doctor returns with a nurse, and they push buttons on the machines around Trevor's bed.

"We'll disconnect him from the respirator," the doctor narrates calmly, "and he'll stop breathing. It'll be like going to sleep."

"No," I say with more force.

My dad grabs me in a bear hug, probably meant to be comforting, but it feels as if he's restraining me. "He's gone."

"No, he's not." I break free and put myself between the bedbound Trevor and the doctor. "He's just lost. Temporarily."

Bodies can't survive without their souls. Trevor is dying because his soul has abandoned him. If I can convince two halves of the same man to reconnect, Trevor will wake up.

I look straight into his beautiful, tear-filled eyes. "Get back into your body. If you don't, they'll kill you."

"I don't know about this," he answers. "I'm afraid of dying."

"Trevor," I breathe. "You already have."

Mama holds up her hands. "You're upset. We all are."

I ignore her. "Trevor, I don't care what I wrote on my laptop. I was an idiot. I can't lose you."

"If I get into that body," he points to the figure on the bed, "he'll drag me down into death with him."

"They're going to kill you!"

"Lanie!" My mom shakes me by the shoulders. "You're scaring me. Who are you talking to?"

The doctor scans my face like I'm a science experiment. "Do you want something to help you relax?"

"Trevor!" I try to wiggle loose, but Mama's steering me into a chair and she's using her full strength.

And the nurse is fiddling with Trevor's IV as if she's itching to turn him off.

"No!" With a well-placed elbow and a burst of speed, I get free and shove the nurse away. "I need more time!"

The nurse looks like she'll say something mean, but the doctor steps in. "Let's give them a few more minutes to say goodbye." He sends a pointed look at my mother and then they leave.

"What has gotten into you?" Mama hisses in my face. "You think your theatrics will make any difference? He's brain dead, Lanie! He can't hear you. Nothing you do will change that."

"Please," I say to Trevor. "I need you. I can't breathe without you." A raw laugh scrapes up my throat. "And I don't want to."

"I'm scared." He steps closer, revealing wet tracks down his cheeks. "What if this doesn't work?"

Fear flushes through my system, bitter and electric.

"But I'll do it," he says. "I'd do anything for you."

"I love you," I say as the apparition climbs onto the bed. "I love you so much." I haven't said the words nearly enough since we moved to Charlotte. If I receive a miracle today, I'm saying it a lot more. "I love you, Trevor. I always have. I always will."

He lies down upon the bed and I can no longer tell the difference between the physical Trevor and the ghostly one.

My mom prattles in my ear. Has she been talking the whole time?

"We'll get through this," she says, stroking my hair down my back. "You'll skip a semester and come home. We'll find you a therapist to talk to. Okay? Okay, Lanie?"

The machines around the bed continue beeping in the same rhythm. Trevor doesn't move. Nothing happens, and I make a strangled cry.

This can't be. His soul is back in his body. He has to wake up. Or at the very least, breathe for himself.

"Lanie?" Mam asks. "Okay?"

But I can't tear my eyes from Trevor.

I have been a fool in so many ways. I can't believe, as I take his limp but warm hand in mine, that I ever thought I could live without him. I haven't been away from him for more than a day since we were in grade school, and that's exactly the way I like it.

"I'm sorry," I say. "I took you for granted. If you come back, I swear I won't ever make that mistake again."

The respirator machine beeps erratically. Trevor's fingers curl around mine, gently at first, and then tight like metal bands.

"Trevor?" I call, standing on tiptoe to see into his still closed eyes. "Can you hear me?"

He wiggles his toes and then turns his face in my direction. He hasn't opened his eyes yet, but it's a vast improvement.

"Grab the doctor," my mom exclaims. "Something's happening."

Yeah, something is happening. Trevor is waking up.

### **The End**

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