

Please Don't Cry

My eyes betrayed me. If they'd just casually glanced right through her, she never would have known. She would have gone her way, and I would have gone mine. But they didn't. Because when you see a person shouting and waving their hands frantically in the air, it is astonishingly hard to *not* see them.

From across the street, our gazes met, and I could see the knowing appear in her eyes, which seemed so familiar to me. A split second later, she was at my side.

"You can see me, can't you?" she asked.

I'd messed up with the eye contact thing, but that didn't mean I had to give up. I continued to walk, keeping my eyes straight ahead. I did my best to pretend that I was like the other people walking on the street. I did my best to pretend that I was ignorant.

I wish.

"Don't you dare do that, dammit!" she shouted. "I know that you saw me—you looked right at me! I know it wasn't a coincidence."

Still, I walked. I was determined to be normal. To blend in. Determined to have her not exist.

But she did. They all did.

For a time, I thought they didn't. I thought that they were all in my head, and I was going crazy. That was what my parents thought, too. And my psychiatrist. I took pills, and they worked at keeping the "hallucinations" away. But there came a time when I couldn't pretend anymore. I had to face the reality: I was an even bigger freak than all those crazies in the loony bin.

Though I'd acknowledged my freak status, I didn't have to embrace it. Just like I pretended I was crazy, I then pretended I was normal. When I'd see a spirit on the street, I looked right through him. When one was in my way, I *walked* right through him.

It took a hell of a lot of practice, of course. It's not easy walking through something that looks very opaque, if maybe a little...illuminated. I got pretty good at it, though. I rarely slip up now.

Occasionally, however, it can't be helped. Especially if the ghost transforms into my own personal stalker.

"You can't just pretend you can't see me! You're the only one—maybe in the entire world—who can help me. Can you really just walk away when someone needs your help?"

She may have been a small little thing, but she had a hell of a lot of strength when it came to yanking a person's strings.

I hesitated for a second, and then turned right instead of going straight and brought out my cell, hitting 5 on my speed dial.

"Hello? Yes, this is Lucy Preston. Um, I'm not feeling so well. I won't be coming in today. All right. Okay. Thank you. Bye."

I still ignored the girl as I walked, but she'd stopped screaming in my ear, thankfully. She was eyeing me carefully, as if she couldn't be sure what I'd do next. I didn't blame her. Even I didn't know what I'd do next.

After a few more minutes, we reached the park. It was deserted, just as I'd hoped it would be. I went straight for the merry-go-round, like I had in elementary, and proceeded to slowly spin around.

"I know what you're thinking. But I'm not dead," the girl insisted, flipping her long blonde hair over her right shoulder.

“First stage of grief: denial.” I muttered.

“No! I know I’m not dead. I just got back from the hospital. My body—I saw my body. I’m still alive, but only just. I’m hooked up to all of these tubes and machines and...but I AM alive.”

I looked up from the ground I’d been intensely studying. This was a new one.

“What’s your name?” I asked, though I wasn’t sure I wanted to know. This girl already looked so much like...*her*.

“Sophie Campbell.”

“Okay, Sophie. So you’re not dead. Great. What do you want from me, then?” I asked gruffly in an effort to place distance between us.

“I don’t know.”

I scoffed disbelievingly. “You mean you practically made me deaf for absolutely no purpose at all? Thanks. Thanks a whole hell of a lot.”

Sophie’s brow furrowed and her nose crumpled in distaste. “Why are you being so mean? I just found out I’m some sort of ghost thingie and all you can do is act like this? I mean, maybe you’d be all cool and stuff if you were in my place, but I can’t be. I’m kinda freaking out here. Just yesterday I was a fully alive person that everybody could see. Now I’m not. The change is a bit much.”

Guilt slashed through my body, and I sighed gustily, toying with a bright red leaf that had fallen into my lap. “Sorry. It’s just...I wish I couldn’t see you just about as much as you wish to be seen.”

“I guess it must suck, being able to see ghosts. They’re probably everywhere, huh?”

“Yeah.” I stared intently at this girl who was sort of dead, but was being sympathetic about *my* problem. And the waves of guilt just kept slapping me in the face. “Okay. How about we make a deal? I promise to do my best to help you if you promise not to tell any ghosts you might run into that I’m *temporarily* open for business. Sound good?”

Her brown eyes brightened as she jumped in the air and clapped her hands. “Sounds awesome!” she exclaimed before sitting down next to me.

Her smile widened as I started to spin a bit faster.

“So you really don’t know what you need from me?”

“Do I have to need something other than just someone to talk to?”

“I think so. Not every coma person turns into a quasi-ghost. If that were the case, I’d see more spirits than I do already, I’m pretty sure. So you must need something.”

Sophie just shrugged her shoulders, concentrating on the brightly covered leaves that struggled in the chilly wind, straining to break free from their branches.

“Maybe you should start at where you became...like this?” I prodded. “And just tell the story from there. Maybe we’ll find out something you need.”

Sophie shifted on the merry-go-round so that she was facing me. “Sounds like as good a plan as any,” she agreed.

I studied the woman who was going to help me—though very very very reluctantly. Her blue eyes showed me that she wasn’t comfortable with what she was going to do for me, and that she was afraid of what helping me would cause. I decided that I didn’t really blame her. I’d watched *Medium* enough to know that the whole ghost thing sucked, and I could imagine that

having ghosts hound you every day would drive even the sanest person nuts. Maybe Lucy Preston didn't help every ghost that came to her, but she was helping me. That was really all I cared about.

"The first thing I remember," I began, "is waking up in the middle of my room. Everything before that is just darkness—and I don't know how long that darkness lasted. I just know that, when I opened my eyes, I felt like I'd been asleep for a really really long time. But that totally confused me, because I couldn't remember going to bed at all. That's when I realized I didn't remember anything, period," I told Lucy, rising from my seat on the merry-go-round. I started to pace in front of her, concentrating hard on recalling everything that had happened so far.

"There was this fog in my mind that was covering everything and making it really hard to think. I tried to push it away to find out what exactly was going on. That's when I remembered going to Sam's house. It was his 18th birthday, and there'd been a party at his place. But I didn't—don't—remember *leaving* his place. That scared the crap out of me."

I scoffed mentally at my use of past tense. If I were telling the truth, I should have said that it *was scaring* the crap out of me. But for some reason—maybe because Lucy was older than me—I wanted to put on a brave face. Thankfully, I didn't think would be very difficult. I was going to major in drama next year, after all.

"Instead of thinking about what might have happened, I left my room. Which definitely isn't as easy as it sounds. It was hard to move, and it totally felt like I was walking in sludge. In fact, I felt as if I were completely surrounded in the icky crap. Moving any part of my body was hard. It was as if I were fighting some sort of outside force that was trying to keep me immobile. I wished that the force was just Darth Vader, thinking that I could easily kick his ass. I'm still hoping that wish might come true. Even if I have to find out that I'm adopted.

"I called for my mom, dad, and sister, but there wasn't anyone in the house. Which worried me even more, because it was only 8:00 in the morning and it's Saturday and no one in my family is a morning person. That's when I decided to try calling my mom. But then I noticed this weird feeling, like a rope was wrapped around my waist. Or lungs, actually. I'm currently calling it a pulling unless you have a better name for it. Anyways, I put my hand on my chest and stopped ignoring the pulling, which was tugging forcefully." I stopped speaking to look at Lucy, my chin raised. "I'm taking it as a sign that I'm supposed to go back in my body. That this isn't gonna be my end," I told her stubbornly.

I sat back down on the merry-go-round and stared at my hands. "I decided to follow it. I think that was mostly because I thought the whole thing was just a dream—what else could it be—so I figured I'd just wake up if anything bad were at the end of the rope. Opening the door was way difficult, of course, but after a few tries, I finally got it."

Lucy interrupted me here. "Apparently that sort of stuff happens to new ghosts. The longer they exist as a ghost, though, the better they get at walking around, grabbing door knobs, and sitting on merry-go-rounds."

I looked down at the brightly colored play thing. I hadn't even realized I was sitting on it, when just hours before I couldn't even grab onto a freaking door knob. I thought about that for a moment longer, nodded to myself, and then went on with my story. "I left the house and started walking. Everything was good for a while, but once I reached the city, there were people on the sidewalk, and they just... walked right through me. Like I wasn't even there. Not gonna lie, I sort of started to hyperventilate—or whatever the sorta-ghost equivalent is. A lot had happened in practically no time at all, and I didn't know *why* it was happening, either. Of course, by that time

I didn't *want* to know. Especially when I finally made it to the place the pulling was coming from. It was a hospital," I whispered, imagining the building I'd passed many, many times. It had never looked that creepy before.

"I continued to follow the pulling through the halls, my day becoming less and less a dream and more and more becoming reality. I really didn't like it. At all.

"Finally, I turned a corner and saw that the invisible rope was leading me to my family. Normally, I'd probably be crazy happy to see them. Especially considering the hell I'd just been through. This time, though, seeing them only made me more uneasy. Because there I was, invisible and pretty abstract, and there they were, grouped together and crying."

There was a long pause. The next part was really hard to say, and it took time to get the guts to do it. "I was dead. The realization hit me really hard. I thought of everything I'd wanted to do, but never had. And never would."

I looked up from my hands to see Lucy worrying her lip. I felt my brow furrow as I cocked my head to the side. "Did you know that ghosts can cry?" I asked as I shook my head in disbelief. "They can. I never...I never thought that they could." There was another pause before I sat up straight and finished as nonchalantly as I could.

"When my family started walking away, I followed them into a room. The first thing I saw when I walked inside was my body, lying on a hospital bed. I AM alive, but you wouldn't be able to tell by looking at me. I literally look like death."

Lucy rubbed her hands against her arms in an effort to get warm. The movement made me jealous, because I wasn't hot OR cold. I just...was.

"You still don't remember what happened in between the party and you being in your room?" Lucy asked.

I shook my head. "Nope. That stuff's completely gone. I could have gone to Hollywood for all I know."

"Maybe that's what I'm supposed to do—help you remember what happened last night. There could be something you need to remember before...whatever's going to happen next happens."

I considered what she said for a moment. It made sense, right? I mean, I was in a coma. Obviously, *something* had happened to get me that way. Maybe I was attacked, and I needed to find my attacker before I could get back to my body and be fully alive again!

I couldn't feel hot or cold, but I could apparently still feel excitement. I recognized that feeling coursing through my...ectoplasm. And let me tell you, it felt great!

I clapped my hands excitedly. "Yes! That sounds like a really good idea! How do we do it?" I couldn't wait to get started—the sooner we began, the sooner this whole thing was over!

Lucy held out her hands before saying, "Hold on a second, Sophie. First of all, I've never had to help a ghost remember their past before. I don't really know how, so everything we do is going to be guess work. Second, we're doing this to find out how you got into a coma. My assumption is that what you're going to remember isn't going to be pretty at all. In fact, it's probably pretty traumatizing. So just sit back and think about it for a moment. Do you really want to go through with this? We could be entirely wrong—maybe you're not supposed to remember. Maybe that's not why you're...whatever the hell you are. 'Ignorance is bliss' is a cliché because it's true."

Lucy's words totally stopped me in my tracks. Because she was fully right. What had happened to me was awful, and that awfulness might have been exactly why I couldn't remember anything. Maybe I had blocked it out for my own safety, and maybe remembering

would be horrifying. It was also a possibility that I would go through all that for absolutely no reason at all, because that wasn't what I needed to do before I could get back into my body. But it was the only lead we had. And this not knowing thing was annoying me anyways.

"I want to know even if it doesn't help any."

"Okay, then. If you're sure," Lucy said as she tucked a strand of her chin-length brown hair behind her ear.

"I am. So where do we start?"

"Um...do you remember where Sam lives?"

"Duh. Of course."

"Okay. Then we should go to my house, get my car, and then drive there. We should start by driving on the same road you take when going home, I think. Maybe something there will spark your memory."

Lucy rose from the merry-go-round, and I quickly moved to follow her, taking a deep breath to steady myself. I didn't know what exactly I'd find, but I was pretty confident that I'd be able to handle it. I mean, yeah, what was happening was freaky. But I was 17 and a senior in high school! In no time at all, I'd be graduating and going off on my own to college. It was about time I started to be responsible and stuff. And what could be more responsible than saving my own life?

What was more, I had Lucy with me, so it wasn't like I had to do it all by myself! If I had any questions, I could ask her! If I needed any help, she was right there! My spirits started to lift, and I could have sworn that the sun started to peek out from behind the clouds. Yup, everything was going to work out fine.

I just knew it.

The best thing about being a ghost: you don't get a headache when you head bang.

This was something I learned while on the road to Sam's house. I'd invaded the arm rest in Lucy's car and found that she had really good taste in music. I'd grabbed my current favorite CD and was air-guitaring like nobody's business.

"But it was a trick, and the clock struck twelve!" I sang as loud as I could. "Well, make sure to build your house brick by boring brick or the wolf's gonna blow it doooooown!"

"Better be careful, Sophie. You don't want to break my windshield, do you?" Lucy asked, one eyebrow raised.

"Yup!" I shouted before continuing to sing. I was crazy happy at the moment. I knew that this was the key. We'd find out why I was comatose and, though remembering would be pretty horrible, I would soon be normal again! I'd be able to hang out with my friends and family, go to school, graduate, and then go to college! After all this, I was more determined than ever to do everything I had on my list.

"You don't really think I'm a bad singer, do you?"

Lucy quickly glanced at me before looking back at the road. "No. But I don't think you really needed me to tell you that, right?"

I shrugged in response.

"Hey. Are you okay, Sophie?" Lucy asked, her tone sounding kind of worried.

I turned my head to look at her like she was crazy (something she was probably used to, of course). "What are you talking about?"

"You tell me. You're the one rubbing your chest."

I blinked and saw that she was right: I was. "Huh. I don't know. I didn't realize."

I cocked my head to the side. I hadn't noticed, consciously, but I was feeling a little different...freer, kinda like. Almost as if I could suddenly breathe easier. Except that ghosts don't actually need to breathe.

"Lucy, why do you hate this whole ghost busting thing so much?" I asked to change the topic of my thoughts. "Is it just because it ruins your social life? Because I think that's what I would hate most."

Lucy looked at me strangely for a moment, and said nothing. I didn't think she was going to answer, and I guessed I'd just had one of my nosey moments where I ask something that's too personal. But then she spoke.

"My sister was the first ghost I ever saw."

I gasped and winced—yes, I'd asked something way too personal. Dammit.

"Seeing her again...I think maybe it could have been better, but Phoebe was only six. She had a tough time understanding what had happened to her and...she acted like she was alive. She followed me everywhere. I was 13, so I knew she was dead and...Having her around just seemed to make everything worse. And there were times I'd forget she was dead and talk to her and my parents or friends would be there and it exacerbated everything. I was scaring my friends and my parents and my teachers and having Phoebe with me for almost every second of every day...I couldn't move on. I can't accurately describe, even now, what that time was like.

"Anyways, I eventually couldn't take it anymore. After a few months, I blew up at her. Told her I didn't want to see her anymore, and that I wished she would get the hell away and leave me alone. Forever. And she did. But the rest didn't."

I absentmindedly rubbed my chest as sympathy coursed through me. "So...you felt guilty for what you said to your sister. For making her go away like that, and maybe having her think you hated her. And you just wanted to forget about what you'd done, but the other ghosts wouldn't let you."

Lucy nodded sharply.

I hadn't blamed Lucy much for her feelings about ghosts before, but after her story, I blamed her not even a little bit.

"That's why I'm helping you," Lucy said.

I cocked my head to the side. "What?"

"Phoebe. You look...I think she'd look like you. If she'd lived. I didn't help my sister. So maybe, if I help you, she won't be upset with me anymore."

I quickly wiped away the tears that started to fall. "I don't know for sure, obviously, but I think Phoebe stopped being mad at you long ago. If she ever was, even. I don't see how she could—Stop!" I yelled, sitting up in the passenger seat.

"What is it?" Lucy asked as she pulled over to the side of the road.

I didn't answer her question. I was too busy remembering.

Sophie's shout scared the shit out of me. I slammed on the brake, thankful that nobody was behind me. "What is it?" I asked her worriedly as I pulled over.

But she didn't answer me. Instead, she stared off into the distance. I followed her frozen gaze and saw that there was one tree in the copse by the road that didn't look like all the other trees.

I unbuckled my seatbelt, opened the car door, and slowly walked towards that tree. When I got there, I saw that it had been damaged, and pretty seriously. The reason wasn't hard to figure out, considering the fact that it was surrounded by candles, pictures, CDs, books, notes...

"Me and my friend Carrie left the party early," Sophie said.

I jumped, startled, because she had used her ghost powers to come to me instead of walking.

"Carrie was going somewhere with her parents early in the morning, and I had a headache, so I didn't mind leaving. It'd been raining for a while—since before the party started. I don't know why it happened exactly. Maybe it was those leaves on the road. But all of a sudden I lost control of the car. I was going too fast. I always go too fast. Like magic, the tree was suddenly in front of me, and then, like magic, I was standing in the middle of my room." Sophie sighed heavily. "All of it, too fast."

The air surrounding us had been lethargic and depressed, but that changed in an instant.

Sophie's hand had been rubbing her chest once again, but it suddenly froze in place as she gasped, a bewildered look upon her face.

"Sophie—" I started, but the girl disappeared before I could say anything more.

It wasn't right. The purpose of coming here was so that Sophie could go back into her body, so that she could live again. But I didn't feel as if that had happened. Sophie was gone, yes, but not in the right way. There was this part of me—the part that I'd tried to ignore, that I'd tried to get rid of, the part that made me abnormal—that could still sense her when I tried. So she was still a quasi-ghost, I knew. But there was still something different about how she felt to me, about how *I* felt.

I stood at the dilapidated tree, staring at the pictures of Sophie for few moments. I began to rub my chest just as Sophie had. The feeling inside was getting weirder and weirder. It was a sensation akin to how I would imagine a person might feel if a black hole were to open inside them.

I stood immobile, trying to figure out just what was happening.

Eventually it hit me. I knew why Sophie left, why she felt different, and why I felt different.

Sophie was dying.

Panic had seized my body, and so I stood motionless in the middle of the walkway, seemingly oblivious to all the people who passed by and shot me weird looks.

But I had a reason for my strange behavior: Hospitals freaked me out like no scary movie ever could. The cause for this isn't hard to understand—people often go to hospitals when they're sick, and people who are sick sometimes die. I've been trying to *not* see the dead for a good part of my life, and it's really hard to do that when you're being swarmed by them.

The selfish part of me wanted to just turn back. It said to forget the girl. She would die soon and she would move on and that would be that. It wasn't like I could keep her alive or anything. I wasn't a doctor.

But then there was the other part of me, the part that got me into this mess in the first place, that told the first part to shut up and go to hell. It said that this girl needed my help, no matter how little I could give. It said I was the only friend she had.

I closed my eyes, took a deep and cleansing breath, and slowly entered the haunted house.

It was slow going (mostly because I had to differentiate between the living and the dead so I would know who to walk through), but eventually I made it to the hallway outside of Sophie's room. And to Sophie.

She was standing in front of a doorway, nervously twiddling her thumbs. She caught sight of my movement in her periphery, and glanced my way. I turned to my left and headed toward a restroom, knowing that she would follow.

"The pulling's gone," she said.

"Yes."

Silence.

"Why?"

"You know why."

Sophie shook her head emphatically. "No. I'm alive. Those machines will keep me alive."

"Do you really want to be alive that way?"

Sophie didn't answer.

"Sophie, I know that this isn't fair, but—"

"It's not. I don't understand. Why am I like this if I'm not going to survive? You said that not all comatose people get like this, that I was special! If I'm so special, why can't I stay alive? I know that I made a mistake, but I don't want to...I still have to..." Sophie trailed off, and I saw her shoulders start to shake.

She'd asked me a couple hours ago if I'd known that ghosts could cry. I had. But none of their tears affected me the way hers did.

"Hey! You! You can see ghosts! You need to tell my son that he needs to take better care of Miss Fluffy!"

I looked away from Sophie to see an old woman in her hospital gown shaking her finger at me.

"I'm sorry, Ma'am, but I can't do that right now."

"What do you mean you can't do that right now? You're supposed to help me with what I need! You're a psycho median!"

Well, she was half right, anyways.

"I'm sure Miss Fluffy really needs my help, but Sophie does, too. If you'd be willing to wait, I promise I'll deliver your message as soon as I can."

"Well I never! You young people today—"

I sighed with gusto as I reached into my purse and pulled out a small salt packet. With one quick movement, I ripped off the top of it, and then poured it over the woman. She instantly disappeared.

Sophie stared at me wide-eyed. "What did you *do*?"

"Ghosts don't like salt. I would watch where I step if I were you. The disappearing act is only temporary, but I can't imagine that it's very pleasant."

"Oh. Well, ick. I can see even more why you're so bitter about this gig, if you have to deal with people like her all the time."

"Sophie..."

I hadn't known Sophie very long, but she was always so vibrant and full of energy (though that sounds cliché), and it made her seem very tall. When she looked up at me then, though, she looked so small, and so young and alone.

"I can't fight it, can I?"

“Honestly, I don’t know. Maybe you could. But you wouldn’t ever be able to live, and fighting would only make you and your friends and family more miserable.”

“Like Phoebe did to you,” Sophie whispered.

“Yes. And also, something I’ve hypothesized is that maleficent spirits are the ones who fight death not to help or send a message to the living, but because they don’t want to leave this world. Do you really want that to happen to you?”

“...No,” Sophie whispered. “I don’t.”

Time passed, and Sophie and I stayed in the restroom. Sometimes we would talk—about Phoebe, or me, or her, or ghosts...whatever—but other times we just sat in silence, each in our own thoughts. Eventually though, Sophie turned to me and just stared.

“Lucy?”

“Yeah?”

“I think...I think maybe I can go now. But before—before...Can you help me talk to my parents?”

This was always the part of the “job” that was the hardest—when the living got involved. They want to believe so badly that someone can help them talk to their loved one, so when someone offers just that, it’s obviously too good to be true. The only logical explanation is that this someone is trying to take advantage of them or likes to see people suffer. This is one of the main reasons why I refuse to help the dead.

When Sophie asked me, though, I said yes without hesitation.

Mr. and Mrs. Campbell sat close to each other, hands held together so tightly, it was if they thought they’d shatter if they let go. I watched them for a moment, knowing how badly I was going to hurt them.

“Are you sure you’re ready, Sophie?” I asked.

“I am, but...Can I say something?”

“I guess.”

“I want you to think about opening for business, but only part time. Maybe. I mean, I totally think you should refuse to help ghosts who want your help only to say goodbye to their cat. Because even if the cat knows exactly what you’re saying, that’s just...way too weird. But you really helped me, Lucy. Without you, I might have hung around my house forever. I’m pretty sure no one in my family can see ghosts, but I still think that wouldn’t be very healthy for them. And I can’t imagine I’m the only one. I think there are probably a lot of Phobes out there who need your help. Will you just think about it?”

“I’ll think about it,” I replied grudgingly.

“Then let’s do this.”

Suddenly, I begrudged her no more. It was quite amazing how quickly my mood changed. Seconds before I felt belligerent and stubborn, but now I felt sad and unsure. Very, very unsure.

I steadied myself and then calmly walked forward, Sophie at my side. We’d rehearsed what she wanted to say to her parents, what she wanted them to know, and different ways to get them to believe I wasn’t a fraud.

I think we could have rehearsed for a year, and I still wouldn’t have been prepared enough.

Finally, I reached their chairs. “Mr. and Mrs. Campbell? Hi. My name is Lucy Preston. I know you don’t know me but...”

I walked slowly, taking the time to feel the lush grass beneath my feet. The scent of the blossoms I held in my arms was gentle and comforting. The sunlight that shone down from above warmed everything it touched. My pace was slow but steady, and my thoughts were everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

“Um? Excuse me?”

I stopped where I was to see a girl of 10 standing shyly in front of a headstone. She wore a cute white dress, and had her dark hair in a braid. Her green eyes looked up at me, and I could clearly see a very strong hope in them.

“Yes?”

“Oh! You can see me! This man said you could, but...Um. Can you help me?”

I smiled at the girl as I moved to crouch beside her. “I think so. What’s your name?”

“Emily.”

“Well, Emily, what do you need?”

“I stole my brother’s iPod because he wouldn’t share. I didn’t get to give it back to him,” Emily looked guiltily at her feet.

“Where is it?”

“It’s in my room in Kanga’s pouch.”

I then proceeded to get some more information about Emily’s brother and where he lived.

“Is that all?” I asked when she stopped talking.

Emily looked up at me nervously and didn’t reply.

“I can’t imagine how scary this is for you, Emily. And I hate that I can’t tell you exactly what to expect when you leave here. But I know one thing for sure.”

“What?” she asked quietly.

“There’s going to be someone waiting for you there. Her name’s Sophie, and she’s a good friend of mine. She’ll be waiting for you there to help you out with anything you might need.” I had no proof that what I told Emily was true, of course. But it didn’t feel like a lie. It felt like the truth.

“Is she nice?”

“Very. She can be a little strange, though. She likes to jump around a clap a lot, I think.”

Emily smiled. “I do too!”

“Well, then. I think you guys will make excellent friends. What do you say?”

Emily looked at me, and then she looked at something behind her. “Okay. I’ll go. You promise you’ll tell Marc about his iPod?”

“I promise.”

“And...can you also tell him that I love him and I’m sorry?”

“Of course,” I replied softly.

“Goodbye, Lucy. Thank you.”

And then she was gone.

I stood still for a few seconds before walking forward once more until I reached my destination.

I knelt by the headstone and replaced the dull, brown flowers with brightly colored ones I’d brought with me. I then gazed at the headstone that marked the grave, which was one of the many things Sophie had wanted me to talk to her parents about. The text on the simple white marble read:

Sophie Leigh Campbell

October 1, 1992

November 16, 2009

Beloved daughter, sister, and friend

"If I'm gone when you wake up, please don't cry, for I'll be with you in your dreams."