

A tragic accident leaves Brynna and Travis devastated. Instead of turning to each other for comfort, they drift apart. However, they must complete one more assignment—set on an old ship, The Queen Mary, during Yule, one of the most haunted times in the Celtic calendar. It is believed souls of the dead prevail and *anam cara*—soul friends can visit.

Will Travis and Brynna confront the spirit of love, allowing them a chance to heal and find their way back to each other?

The Spirit of Love

A Paranormal Romance

Karen Michelle Nutt

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A Wee Dram Book

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Chapter One

Brynna's mother had never understood her daughter's obsession with the afterlife. According to her, a person went to heaven or hell; end of subject. However, to Brynna, everyone was a ghost, merely a spiritual being trapped in a body. Sometimes that spirit became stuck in between worlds.

She became obsessed with ghost tours, wandering around buildings known for their haunts, and late night cemetery walks.

This was not an eccentric hobby for her. Investigating the afterlife was her life. People hired her to listen and record their stories, take pictures and try to capture some defining proof on film. As a certified ghost hunter, or more scientifically, a paranormal investigator, she relied on her team of volunteers, Ted Mathis and Kenneth Tanner, and paid employees, Sandra Howard and Travis.

Ah...Travis Smith. She met him in San Diego on the ghost tour of the Whaley House—a historical landmark thought to be haunted. She thought back to that day with a smile, the first meeting all too vivid in her mind.

Brynna watched Travis take pictures with his digital, Polaroid and 35mm, all top of the line essential tools for a serious ghost hunter.

"Impressive equipment," Brynna said, cornering him at the conclusion of the tour. Travis tilted his head and gave her one of those lazy half smiles she would later learn to love.

"I'm assuming this isn't a pick up line and you're referring to my cameras."

She frowned and then chuckled. "Yes, the cameras."

He sighed. "The story of my life."

Brynna couldn't imagine that. He stood tall, trim and fit with coffee brown hair, thick and wavy. A beautiful contrast to hazel eyes flecked with green. His warm and inviting smile stirred the first flutters of attraction. Love at first sight wasn't her thing, but lust at first sight had possibilities.

"I'm Brynna Jones."

He choked back a laugh, and she could tell he was amused by the twinkle in his eyes.

"Okay, spill. What's so funny?" she queried.

He fumbled with his equipment so he could offer his hand. "I'm Travis. Travis Smith."

Brynna took his hand. Oh, she got it. For the second time, he made her laugh.

"Smith and Jones," she exclaimed. "You have to be kidding!"

"Cross my heart. What are the odds?"

“Well, Smith, could I interest you in a cup of coffee or something?”
His beautiful mouth curved into a smile. “I’d love one.”

That had been ten years ago. They became lovers by the fourth date, and six months later married. They honeymooned in New Orleans so they could take pictures of the impressive cemeteries. Soon after, they formed the company, Smith and Jones Paranormal Investigations. Three years later they celebrated the birth of their son. Everything was perfect, then everything fell apart. First the accident, and then the affair.

Chapter Two

Travis couldn't be entirely blamed for straying. She hadn't been there for him. She'd shut him out, never considering he might be hurting, also. As time passed, it became easier not to speak to each other at all, drifting apart until what they'd shared withered away. She had moved out mentally long before she'd packed her bags. Nothing mattered to her, not Travis or their life together. She let him handle the business as well, not showing up to scheduled investigations, but tonight she had to be here.

She swallowed the knot in her throat at the thought of seeing Travis. It would be the first time since she moved out of the house. They hadn't filed for divorce yet, but both knew it was inevitable.

As always, the team would meet at the site. The Queen Mary was once a Cunard Line cruise ship, making her maiden voyage, May 27, 1936. During World War II, she transported over 800,000 troops, passengers and refugees. After the war she was converted back to a cruise ship, but with the new and improved forms of transportation, she'd finally been sold. The Queen Mary was now permanently docked in Long Beach, California as a hotel and museum, was listed on the National Register of Historic places and supposedly had three hundred sixty-five ghosts aboard.

Brynna had planned for this documentary almost a year ago. She originally wanted October 31st, the evening of Samhain since, according to ancient times, the day was the most haunted time of the year. But the Queen Mary held its annual Halloween Terror Fest on the same day. It would be too difficult to set up equipment and obtain accurate readings with bands playing and groups of people screaming and talking as they made their way through the Halloween mazes. With Yule considered the second most haunted time of the year in the Celtic calendar, she convinced the Queen Mary's manager to give them an evening in December. Haunting starts on December 6th and continues through December 20th. Some believe the spirits are more active as they wait for the rebirth of the sun's powers. She prayed one of the spirits aboard the Queen Mary would have the urge to come out and play.

While the Queen Mary was small in comparison with today's cruise ships, walking toward her from the parking lot, Brynna couldn't help but smile. What the ship lacked in size, she made up with her regal charm. Her colors of black and white with the three funnels, painted orange-red, gave the ship a dramatic appeal against the darkened sky, haloed only by the parking lot's lights. The hotel sign stood next to it, a towering monument of concrete announcing where the entrance stood.

Brynna walked up the gangplank, taking the elevator to the main lobby on A deck. The doors opened to reveal antique furnishings with British and Art Deco influences, transforming this deck into a fine hotel.

To the right, the long hall led to the first and second class cabins. The wide carpeted stairs to the other decks faced the front desk. To the left, her gaze landed on couples in the Observation Lounge enjoying a nightcap before retiring for the night. The large porthole stood open in the room, giving the patrons a view of Long Beach across the bay.

She glanced at her watch, which read eight-thirty. No, that wasn't right. She tapped the watch cover hoping to make the second hand move. "Not again. I just replaced the batteries."

Looking at the walls, she hoped to spy a clock, but only original paintings adorned the polished paneled walls. With an exasperated sigh, she walked up to the front desk to ask the receptionist the time. A young woman stood babbling to her co-worker about the holiday party she attended last night. Brynna didn't want to think about the holidays. They were meant to be spent with family. Hers didn't exist anymore.

"Excuse me," she began, only to have the woman turn away from her to answer the phone.

Brynna was about to walk away when she noticed the portable clock beside the computer. "Fifteen after ten. They're late," she mumbled under her breath.

Not wanting to wait any longer for her team, she decided to start setting up.

The manager guaranteed them access to the room documented as being the ship's *vortex of energy*, a place where spirit energy was the most potent, where temperature fluctuations and apparitions had been noted—the first class pool room.

Brynna took the main stairs down to the lower deck, hoping to enter the pool room on C deck.

The pool at one time had been the most ornate of any on a Cunard ship. It had contained salt water, filled only halfway to prevent the water from spilling out onto the deck when the ship rolled from side to side. The pool room stood three decks high, from E deck to C deck with an entrance on both the C and E decks. Modern safety regulations prevented the hotel from using the pool because it was fourteen feet deep and there was no shallow end. Now it remained empty and reminiscent of the past.

The doors on C deck stood partly ajar and Brynna entered. She stood over the pool, looking down at its waterless depths. Yet dampness lingered in the air, producing a musty smell.

With the rectangular shape of the room, she had a clear view of the pool and all the surrounding space. On this deck, she could walk the perimeter of the room and use the tiled railings as a tripod to set up cameras, aiming them down at the pool.

The pool actually stood on E deck with walking space around the entire pool. The dim lighting gave the blue and beige tiled room an eerie glow and cast shadows in corners. When they videotaped, they would have to use the infrared lighting for those areas.

On the other side, facing the pool was the dressing room—a long tiled wall with two entrances on either side, the only indication of what stood behind it.

Below her, stairs led to the pool's deck, tapering down on both sides. Brynna strolled down the right side and stood facing the silver slide that remained attached to the pool as if once more waiting to be used.

"Hello?" Her voice intruded on the still quiet of the room. No one answered. The room was empty, not a soul, person or piece of equipment to be found. Odd. Arrangements were always made for props to be delivered in advance. It helped to lessen the set up time if some

of the equipment was at the site ready to be placed. So where were the boxes? More important—where was her team? Reaching for her back pocket, she pulled out her cell phone. “Crap, no service. Figures.”

She was on her way back to the reception desk to find out where they put the boxes when she spotted Travis coming up the stairs. She didn’t want to care about him, but her heart seemed to have a will of its own, joyfully hammering in her ears the moment she saw him. Even loaded down with equipment, he walked with a nonchalant grace. She had always thought him handsome, with his smooth olive skin which seemed to magnify his hazel eyes, but as he drew near, he looked tired. He also needed a haircut and a shave, though the five o’clock shadow he sported was rather appealing. It added a bit of mystery to him, gave him a dangerous allure.

She started walking over to him, hoping he knew where the equipment had been placed.

* * * *

Travis mulled over all he needed to complete. He had two projects due at the end of the week that still needed final editing. With Sandra and Ted unable to make it tonight, and Kenneth arriving late, how would he manage everything?

This was Brynna’s project, one he’d rather avoid, but the alternative wasn’t much better. While people around him celebrated the holiday season with shopping and parties, he spent most of his evenings with a bottle of Scotch for company.

He shivered—the temperature seeming to drop. “Drafty old ships,” he muttered.

* * * *

Travis walked by Brynna, obviously preoccupied.

“Travis,” she called to him. He turned and for a moment stared at her as though he didn’t recognize her. How annoying. Already forgotten and it had only been a week since she moved out.

“Brynna?” His gaze roamed over her, a slow slide from her head to her toes and back up again, finally settling on her face.

His scrutiny made her uneasy. She tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear. “Yeah. You were expecting someone else?”

“Uh...”

“Well, where is it?”

His eyebrows furrowed as he carefully asked, “Where’s what?”

“The boxes with the props and the equipment. I had them sent ahead, but they weren’t in the pool room.”

“Yeah, they arrived, but because of security reasons, they couldn’t leave the boxes unattended.” He looked down the hall and pointed. “I was told they’re being stored in one of the cabins.”

“It would have been nice if someone had informed me.”

He looked at her intently as if she’d spoken a foreign language and couldn’t decipher meaning of her words. “Uh...well...the manager couldn’t reach you on your cell. So they called me.”

“Hmm. I see.” She couldn’t understand why he’d lie to her about the manager trying to reach her, but his nervous stance and the tensing of his jaw gave him away.

“Do you want to check it out?” He motioned with a quick nod toward the hall.

She didn’t answer, but walked past him, expecting him to follow. Instead, he stood frozen in his spot. She turned to look at him. “Are you coming?”

“Yeah, right behind you.”

* * * *

Travis couldn't believe how she looked—energetic, so alive. She wore her favorite jeans that hugged her in all the right places, and he liked the way the green long-sleeved shirt brought out the color of her eyes. He scrubbed a hand across his face as a dangerous curiosity danced inside him. Why was she here? That hadn't been part of the plan.

She wore her golden-red hair loose and tumbling carelessly down her back, enticing his fingers to slide through the strands. Blood pounded in his temples as he absorbed the idea of working with her again. He had loved her so much. Who was he fooling? He still loved her. It had been so difficult to let her go, and now she was here, speaking civilly to him—a complete contrast to the last time they'd spoken.

He accepted the blame for their marriage ending. He'd screwed up big time. The moment he had opened the hotel room door in London, he should have closed it again. Instead, he allowed his loneliness to rule, and invited Tanya in for a nightcap. They polished off two bottles of wine and in the morning he woke up in bed next to her.

He would be the first to admit his guilt, but for the life of him, he couldn't remember sleeping with her. Making it even worse, he didn't even like Tanya or her crass ways of doing business. So, he not only hurt the woman he adored, but had insulted another, all in one night.

Tanya couldn't wait to tell Brynna about the one-night stand. Her way of getting back at him for rejecting her, he supposed. Brynna packed up her belongings and moved out, though mentally she'd moved out months before that.

“Earth to Travis.” Brynna snapped her fingers. “Quit the daydreaming. We have work to do.”

Travis blinked, coming back to reality, and looked at the woman he would always love. God, she was as beautiful as he remembered. Both delicacy and strength were in her face, and her skin held a smooth color of peach-tinted cream. His eyes lingered on her lips. He wanted to reach for her, pull her into his arms, but he hadn't the right. Not any longer.

“Are you going to help me or not?” She clearly wondered why he was staring at her.

He nodded and set down his camera cases. “I didn't think I would ever see you again.”

Her brow arched. “I know I haven't been reliable lately, but we co-own ‘Smith and Jones’ or have you forgotten?”

“No, I haven't forgotten. I'm just surprised to see you. You haven't joined the team on an assignment in a long time.”

“I wanted to be here for this one. I...” Her gaze met his. “I need this.” One shoulder lifted in a shrug. “Is there going to be a problem?”

“Of course not.” He never wanted anything in his life as much as he wanted to work with her one more time.

“Good, because it's going to be a long night. Who else is showing up?”

His cell vibrated, making him jump. The theme music from the Ghostbusters' movie broke the silence. He didn't move.

“Are you going to answer that?”

That snapped him out of his trance. “Yeah, of course.” He walked away as he flipped his phone open. He spoke to the caller briefly then turned to Brynna. “That was Kenneth. The others already said they couldn't make it, and now Kenneth bailed. He forgot about his nephew's Christmas concert.” He tried to smile, but it felt more like a grimace. “It's just you and me, kid. Like old times.” He held his breath waiting for her to respond.

"I'm okay with that. Working together is the one thing we do well."

"Ouch."

"Sorry, I didn't mean it as a dig." Her chin jutted out with resolve, disproving her statement.

"I guess I deserve it." He gave her a loose-muscled shrug to show her remark hadn't hurt, yet her words stung like needles and his voice betrayed him.

Her features softened and she closed the distance between them. Her light caress on his forearm made him flinch and her hand fell away. "I don't want to fight."

"I don't either." He reached for her, but had second thoughts and shoved his hands in his pockets. "I never meant to hurt you."

"I know. I didn't mean to shut you out."

He swallowed the lump of emotion lodged in his throat.

"Come on." Her eyes sparkled with the possibility of adventure. "The ghosts are waiting to be found. We have work to do."

It took three trips to set up the equipment in the pool room. There was a camcorder on the stairs, and one on both balconies overlooking the empty pool. During the day, the Queen Mary hosted theatrical ghost tours with flashing lights, mist-filled rooms, and ghostly laughter. What a different ballgame to be down here when no one else was around. No sounds from the other decks filtered through and there were no portholes to allow sunlight to seep in. It was like stepping into a neutral zone, neither in the present nor the past, but somehow an observer of both.

This project would be his last run. Having lost all heart for it, Travis wanted out of this business. They should have closed up shop when Jake died. Brynna didn't want any other assignments but the ones she set for herself. She didn't sleep half the time, determined to keep the equipment running twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week in hopes of catching a glimpse of their son. Endless arrays of tapes and rolls of film showed nothing. Secretly, he was glad Jake had found peace and wasn't lingering behind, confused and disoriented.

Travis set one of the motion detectors near the dressing room, another at the top of the stairs facing the pool.

"Don't forget the EMF meter around the walls and the thermometers," Brynna reminded him.

"I'll check out the power sources first." He picked up the EMF meter. Whenever there was an electrical charge, natural or artificial, the meter registered the electromagnetic fields. He'd start with the far left wall. To have an accurate interpretation they had to pinpoint all the power sockets to not pick up a false reading of activity. They marked the areas with blue tape. "Are the eyewitness records in the briefcase?" he called over his shoulder. "We should go over them again. I want to set up one of the camcorders where most of the witnesses felt a phenomenon."

"They should be in the file along with the baseline record sheets. Have you read any of the stories?" Brynna asked.

"I skimmed over them last night before I went to sleep." Brynna chuckled, making him turn to look at her. "What's so funny?"

"You used to say you didn't like reading ghost stories before bedtime."

His life of late had been a living nightmare. A few ghost stories weren't going to make it any worse. "Things change, I suppose."

"Yeah."

After checking the power sources, he placed the thermometers around the perimeter. "Where do you think we should set up the Dictaphones?" He leaned down to tape the last thermometer on the small swinging gate that opened to the pool area.

"I'd definitely put one in the dressing room. It's rumored a woman was attacked in there. If I recall correctly, a psychic sensed the presence of a man, a dark image, lots of negative vibes, and all that. Maybe we'll pick up something. The other Dictaphone, I'd put it at the top of the stairs, facing the pool. I've studied the ghost-cam the Queen Mary has set up in here and there's quite a bit of activity in that area. The third..." She paused as she looked around, trying to decide the best location for it. Her gaze landed on the bottom of the pool. The blue tile held a thin layer of dust in spots, but nothing that would harm the equipment. The problem would be finding a way down. The pool's steps ended after a few feet, leaving a twelve-foot drop to the bottom. If they didn't injure themselves from the jump, they would have trouble climbing back out. She dismissed the pool and glanced at the landing on C deck above them. The walkway went all the way around the pool room with only the two tiled columns on both sides to block the view. They could perhaps lean the Dictaphone on the railing next to one of the columns.

Travis piped up. "The storage room behind the stairs would be good. An angry entity was sensed in there. We could request the key."

"Perfect. I'll call the desk and have someone bring it down." Brynna pulled out her cell phone. "Damn, I forgot. I'm not picking up reception down here. I'll go find someone."

"Wait," Travis interrupted, already pulling out his cell. "I'm okay. I'll ring the desk." It only took a minute to make the arrangements. He looked at Brynna. "Someone will bring us the key. While we wait, I'll set up the trigger items."

"Sounds good."

He retrieved the box. One of the entities was of a little girl, so they'd brought a few toys that had been popular in her time.

During World War II the Queen Mary had transported prisoners of war. He pulled out an Italian uniform Brynna had managed to confiscate from a theatrical group, and her great-grandfather's navy uniform. To those he added a few coins from that era onto a tray, then draped the uniforms over the chairs to look as though the two officers were going to have tea. It always amazed him how Brynna could find the props needed for each haunt they investigated.

"I have a bathing suit, cap and a woman's dress in the box, too," Brynna told him. "I wanted to cover all areas."

He grabbed the bathing suit and cap. "I'll put these in the dressing room. One of the eyewitnesses said there were wet footprints that led into there."

While he was in the back, the security guard came in through the side doors near the dressing room. "Hello? I have the key you requested."

"Great." Brynna waved to him from across the room.

"Where do you want me to put it?" he asked.

"I'll take it." Brynna started over to him as Travis came out of the dressing room.

"I thought I heard someone," Travis said.

"I've got the key you needed." The security guard handed it to him. "Kind of spooky down here." He nervously eyed the room.

"I'm used to worse. This isn't so bad."

The security guard chuckled. "You couldn't pay me enough to come down here and spend the night. It's bad enough that we have to patrol it. Some of the guys refuse to come alone."

"You ever see anything?"

The guard shook his head. "Nah, not me, but Joey Parnell said he heard some creepy noises the last few times he was down here."

"What kind of noises?"

"Said it sounded like a woman's high heels. You know how they click on cement? Don't know how they balanced themselves on those contraptions. Anyway, a complete search told him no one was down here. Another time, he thought he heard a woman sobbing. Again, the search came up empty. Spooked the hell out of him, and he isn't one that believes in this shit."

"He's a tough guy?"

"Joey's a few inches taller than me, maybe six-five, two hundred and fifty pounds, and burly as any college defense football player would be. He doesn't scare easily."

Brynna had walked over to them now. "It's generally the non-believers that tend to be approached. It's like the spirits are attracted to them, as if they are a magnet, so to speak."

The security guard shivered. "It's cold in here."

Brynna turned to check the closest thermometer and noticed the temperature had dropped a few degrees since they arrived.

"It's an old ship." Travis smiled. "It tends to get drafty."

"Yeah. Hey, do you want me to bring you some coffee? Or we have hot apple cider and eggnog if you're interested. Non-alcoholic I'm afraid."

"Coffee would be great."

"I'll take a cup, also," Brynna said.

"Is it possible to have a thermos?" Travis asked. "If you don't mind."

The guard nodded. "I guess you need to stay alert if you're going to be up all night. I'll bring you a thermos." He turned to go and then looked back. "Have you ever captured anything on film? Like orbs?"

"Sure, lots of orbs, but they're easily explained as being pollen and dust particles."

"Oh, I thought those were supposed to be ghosts."

"At first some believed so, but we know better now. What we want to record is energy lights and sporadic voices on the EVP."

"EV...what?"

"Sorry," Travis apologized. "EVP stands for electronic voice phenomenon. We hope to pick up sounds on the devices."

"No kidding. Why do you think spirits linger?"

"That's what we're trying to find out."

The guard nodded. "I'll be back with the coffee."

"Thanks." Travis waited until the guard left before he turned toward Brynna. "Want to check out the room?" He tossed the key in the air and caught it.

"Absolutely."

He followed her over to a room no bigger than a walk-in closet. "Feel anything?" Brynna asked as she circled the room. There were storage boxes piled in one corner, fold-up chairs, and a table.

"It's like ice in here."

Brynna's eyebrows furrowed. "I feel fine."

He placed the last of the Dictaphones on one of the boxes and turned to her with a shrug. "I've been a little chilled all night."

"Are you catching a cold?"

He shook his head. "It's nothing." He started to head out of the room. "I think we should set up a camera in here, too."

"Okay." She followed him out. "Is your watch working? My battery died. My watch is stuck on eight thirty."

He looked at her for several seconds before he nodded. "Mine's working."

"Good. What time is it? We should record it in the logs."

Her cell wasn't working and her watch was on the fritz. Could be a coincidence, but then again maybe not. One theory stated that spirits drained the batteries' energy, drawing on it to make their presence known. He thought about saying something, then decided he'd wait, see where it went. His cameras were still working; only Brynna's batteries were drained. He loaded the 35mm camera with black and white film. "I'm going to make my first round." He would use the whole roll for each rotation, labeling it accordingly. If anything showed up on the film, they'd go back and look at the video to see if they caught anything there as well.

* * * *

After Travis completed his round, he sat alongside the pool. Brynna had been watching him. Though good looking as ever, something about him didn't seem quite right. Their marriage had pretty much ended, but she still cared about him. She couldn't seem to help it.

"Have you been ill?"

"What?" He looked at her, startled.

"You look like you haven't slept well lately."

"I've been busy."

"Ah, all those holiday parties." They used to love to get together with their friends and share cups of cheer. After Jake was born, they didn't attend as many parties, but would curl up by the fire and drink hot cocoa. Jake loved marshmallows in his. That seemed like a lifetime ago.

"No parties," Travis said quietly. "I couldn't bring myself to..." He stopped mid-sentence, eyes downcast.

* * * *

Travis couldn't help being surprised Brynna asked about his welfare. Jake had died over ten months ago and on that day everything ceased to matter to her. She'd ignored Travis, shut him out so completely it was as though he didn't exist. So why did she seem concerned now? He took a deep breath and let it out in a whoosh. This was all too weird, being here with her, getting along as if the past didn't matter. He glanced at her and sighed. He thought her the most beautiful woman he'd ever known.

Hell, maybe this was all a dream and she wasn't even here. It was the holiday season, a time most people hated to be alone. Maybe this was his subconscious feeling festive, allowing him to be with her one more time. "Closure," he said, not realizing he had spoken the word aloud.

"What did you say?"

He shook his head. "I've missed you, Brynna." The confession surprised them both.

She shifted uncomfortably in her seat, and he'd bet she worried where the conversation was headed or if she even wanted to have one. "I don't know what to say."

"Don't you?"

She shook her head.

He stood. "I'm going to make another sweep around the rooms again. I'll use the digital camera this time. Why don't you check on the video feeds? Make sure they're still running."

* * * *

Brynna watched him walk away. He wanted something from her, but what, she wasn't sure. Maybe he wanted her to confess she loved him above all else and had been miserable without him. Sure, it was true, but she wouldn't tell him. She moistened her lips and turned away.

The camera in the storage room was running smoothly. One number at a time ticked off as the film revolved. Travis had felt cold in here. She didn't feel any different. Strange, usually she was the one sensitive to temperature fluctuations. She left the room and headed up the stairs to check on the next camera. The lighting was poor, but their cameras were equipped with infrared lighting so the filming would be clear. She stood above the pool, leaning against the rail. She spotted Travis at the far end of the room, standing in front of the long wall, near the dressing room entrance. He snapped pictures of the pool at different angles.

He was good at what he did, capturing his fair share of anomalies as though he sensed their presence. Their goal was to capture a full body apparition. At that moment, he turned and looked up at her. Surprise coursed through her when he lifted the camera and pointed it toward her. Her spine tingled and the hair rose on the back of her neck. She turned around half expecting to see a spirit standing next to her. Of course, there wasn't anyone there, or anything else for that matter, but still she couldn't shake the odd sensation. When she looked back, Travis was no longer in sight. He must have gone into the dressing room. She needed to check on the camera in there, so she followed.

Once inside, she wished she'd grabbed a flashlight. Not a slightest glimmer of light shone. She couldn't see Travis, but heard him moving around from the far end of the corridor. There were changing-rooms on both sides. The curtains had been taken down a long time ago, leaving the compartments open for view. It took a moment, but her eyes started to adjust, and she spotted his silhouette. "Travis?"

He cursed. "Don't sneak up on a guy, Brynna."

"Sorry. I wanted to check the video camera in here. Didn't mean to spook you." She rubbed her arms and looked about, feeling a little uneasy. "The hairs on my arms are standing on end. Do you feel anything?"

"I feel something," he said slowly.

"Do you have a flashlight on you? I forgot to grab mine." What was wrong with her? She never investigated a site without toting her own light source. Not only dangerous, it was stupid because she could hurt herself. Travis flipped on his light, but it immediately flickered out. She heard him fumbling around and in the next minute the area was illuminated with a greenish glow of light.

Travis' face looked eerie in the light of the glow stick. His eyes appeared sunken within his skull, shadows hiding most of his features.

"Better?" he asked.

Puffs of his breath indicated the temperature had dropped again. Obviously, they weren't alone. She moved closer to him.

"Snap some pictures," she ordered.

He didn't have to be told twice.

Normally, she would have been excited, for all the signs pointed to a ghostly presence having joined them, but she felt strange, lightheaded. “I think...I think I’m going to pass out.”

Travis swiveled around, a flicker of apprehension lacing his voice. “Brynna?”

Their gazes met. She gasped as a shiver of dread stabbed her chest. “Something’s wrong.” She flew by him, panicked. She needed to escape. Now!

Outside the dressing room, she sagged against the cold tile, bent at the waist. She gripped her knees and drew in a ragged breath.

“Brynna, what happened in there?”

Though she couldn’t speak, the sound of his voice soothed her. The strange sensation seemed to be easing somewhat. She raised her head to look at him. Seeing the anxious look on his face, she murmured, “Give me a moment, okay, Travis?”

“A case of claustrophobia?”

“No. This was something different—a pulling sensation. Almost, as if something was pulling me away.” She shuddered as a flicker of a memory surfaced. She’d read about this kind of phenomenon before, but for the life of her, she couldn’t remember what it meant.

* * * *

Travis didn’t know what had happened to her but, thankfully, she looked like she felt better. The lines of tension smoothed from her brows and her eyes opened. She slowly eased herself up to a standing position, giving him a sheepish smile.

“That was weird.” She let out a breath. “In all the years we’ve been doing this, I’ve never experienced anything like it. I can’t wait to look at your photos and the video we shot in there to see if we picked up anything.” Now that she felt better, excitement laced her words.

“Coffee is served,” the security guard announced as he came through doors to the right of them.

“Good,” Brynna said. “I could use a cup.”

Travis turned toward the security guard with smile. “Thank you. It’s surely appreciated.”

“No problem. Where would you like me to put it?” The guard looked at the table that held the props. His gaze lingered on the two uniforms set out on display.

“I’ll take it.” Travis held out his hands and the guard handed over a thermos and Styrofoam cups.

“It looks like you’re expecting some military dudes to come down here to sit and chat awhile.”

Travis chuckled. “Sometimes the props help the spirits to appear.”

The security guard hiked a brow. “Uh, okay.” He shrugged, indicating he didn’t really understand. “Well anyway, if you need anything else, just let the desk know.”

“Thank you.” Travis waited until the man had shut the door behind him before pouring the coffees. He placed a cup in front of Brynna. “Hot and black, just the way you like it.” He regarded her for a moment. “Feeling any better?”

Across her pale and beautiful face, a dim flush raced like a fever. “Embarrassed.” She laughed. “I see your smirk. Are you getting a kick out of the fact I almost swooned, Mr. Smith?”

He had missed her subtle wit. “Why it never occurred to me that you might. If I had, I surely would have come to your rescue.”

Her cute little nose scrunched up when she gave him a snarling expression, but then she chuckled. “Don’t don your armor yet. I think this damsel is far from being in distress.”

He bowed slightly. “As you wish, my lady.”

Her lips curved into a sweet smile, making his body warm under her regard. He had missed their playful banter and would have said as much, but a crash from the storage room had them on their feet.

Chapter Three

They rushed to the room, not sure what to expect. The video camera was no longer on the tripod, but on the floor next to the boxes stacked against the back wall. Travis leaned down to retrieve it. The side panel had a hairline crack, but otherwise seemed intact. He tried the record button but it shut the camera down, ejecting the tape in the process. "The camera might be shot, but the tape looks okay." He waved it like a white flag.

They didn't have an extra video camera to spare. He decided to take a few more pictures in the room. "We'll have to wait until we're at home." He stopped, his gaze finding hers. Home? How easy for him to slip back into their old routines as if nothing had changed. "When *I* go home," he corrected. He tucked the video cassette into his pocket and left the room.

At the table he put down his camera and picked up his coffee cup, his hands trembling. Brynna moved in behind him and before she said a word he closed his eyes and wished away the pain. And helplessness.

* * * *

"Travis?" she called to him, again. He turned to face her. The tensing of his jaw betrayed his deep frustration. She couldn't blame him. Brynna moved to him and placed her hand on his forearm, atop rigid muscles. His gaze traveled over her face, waiting for her to say something. She opened her mouth to say...what, she didn't know, and was struck by a dizzying current of disbelief.

How had she let him go? She still ached for his touch, for what they'd meant to each other. And always would.

He fingered a loose tendril of hair tickling her cheek. She closed her eyes for a second, relishing his feather-like touch. When they fluttered open again, he studied her, a wistfulness in his expression. Her heart swelled with a sensation she thought had died along with their son. She took a shuddering breath. She wanted him. She loved him. But a more terrifying realization washed over her. He might not want her. "Travis, I've missed you." Her voice was an agonizing whisper of longing.

A light smoldered in the gold-green flecks of his eyes. "Oh, Brynna." Emotion drenched his voice. "Why did we allow this to happen to us?"

"Foolishness, stupidity, but we can still fix this, can't we?"

"Brynna, I..." His Adam's apple bobbed up and down and his next words didn't give her hope. "Let's sit down."

She nodded and let him lead her over to a chair. She sat and he set another chair across from her.

She didn't wait for him to speak, but jumped in first. "I know we can't pick up where we left off and pretend nothing happened."

He shook his head. “No, we can’t.”

Her stomach roiled with nerves. *This could be a huge mistake.* Maybe she was just feeling lonely because Christmas was nearing and she didn’t want to be alone. But when she looked at him, really looked at him, it wasn’t that. She wanted what they used to have.

“Is it...too late for us, Travis?”

“I don’t want to believe it is, but...”

His hesitation put her on edge.

“Brynna, what I’m going to ask you will sound strange, so bear with me for a moment. It’s important.”

“Okay,” she answered, slowly.

“Why do you think spirits linger?”

She frowned as she met his gaze. Why was he asking her this when it had nothing to do with what they were discussing? Besides, they’d had this conversation a million times. They debated, theorized, and argued over it. He already knew how she’d respond.

“Please humor me,” he pleaded.

Since it seemed so important to him, she answered. “I believe it’s because they have unfinished business, that they feel they can’t leave until they’ve carried out whatever it is they need to accomplish.”

He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees and folding his hands together, his index fingers forming a tent. He tapped his lips, seemingly giving his response much thought. “If I were to die, right now...”

“Don’t say that! You should never fool with fate like that, Tra—”

“I would tell you how much I love you,” he continued, barging through her words, “and that I wished I could hold you one more time and tell you that.”

She closed her eyes, and swallowed hard, biting back tears. His words should have comforted her. He still loved her, but his talk of dying left her emotions raw and exposed. Life was a precious gift and, without notice, their fragile existence could end at anytime. She hadn’t been able to say goodbye to Jake. Death just claimed him. She took a deep breath and looked at him. “That wouldn’t be enough to hold you here.”

“No? I’ve wanted to tell you that for so long. It haunts me. It haunts me that I wasn’t strong enough for you. Brynna?” His voice sounded thick as he spaced out each word evenly. “How many days has it been since you moved out of the house?”

“It seems like a lifetime, but it’s only been a week.”

“You believe it’s only been a week?”

She frowned, confused by his question. “You know it has. What’s with the weird questions?”

“Nothing. Forget it.” He picked up the thermos, pausing as his hand brushed her cup. “Your coffee’s getting cold.” He moved it aside and took out a fresh cup for himself.

She stared at him for a moment before deciding to let the subject drop. “I’m going to check on the equipment on the stairs. Do you want to snap a few pictures?”

He sighed. “Sure.” He reached for his case and pulled out the digital. He hesitated, then looked at the screen as if focusing on a shot.

Brynna met his gaze at the precise moment the flash went off. “I’m not the subject,” she snapped.

The taut silence was deafening as their eyes clashed. Travis looked away first.

“I’m going over to the dressing room to take a few pictures,” he bit out.

She watched him walk away, already regretting her harsh words. She hadn't meant to yell at him.

A few minutes later, she joined him, glad he had the large Coleman flashlight illuminating the room. When she touched his shoulder, he jumped.

"You're a little jumpy tonight."

"Yeah. Call it a premonition."

She glanced at his arm and saw the goose bumps.

"I don't feel anything."

"Don't you?"

She shook her head, slowly. "I don't..." Strange, she really didn't feel anything: not cold, not hot. "I sense nothingness. Does that make any sense?"

"I have the sensation of cold and electrical current in the air surrounding me." His gaze held hers as if he wanted to say more, but something held him back.

"Okay, perhaps we'll actually pick up an entity tonight on one of the cameras." She turned to leave.

He mumbled something under his breath.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing." He took another picture of the stall in front of him. "Brynna, how much do you remember of that night?"

"What night are we speaking of?" she asked, although she had a good idea.

"The night you found out about..."

"Tanya," she finished, her voice sounding harsh to her own ears.

Before he could reply, a loud popping sound filled the room, then an exploding blast of glass.

Chapter Four

Brynna and Travis hurried out of the dressing room to discover the light fixture mounted on the tile wall was broken. Glass littered the floor like tiny teardrops.

"The spirit is rather excitable," Travis murmured.

Brynna raised her eyebrows. "You've become cynical."

"No, just stating the truth. Now, what were we talking about?" He wasn't going to let it go.

"You want to talk," she huffed. "Fine, we'll talk. It's about time we aired everything. You had an affair. You broke my heart. End of story."

"I know."

She hadn't expected him to say that. She thought he would deny it, make excuses. "Then why? Why did you do it?"

"You shut me out."

Okay, here we go again. "So it's my fault."

"No."

She looked at him, her eyes narrowing. "Yeah, right."

“No, I take full responsibility for my stupidity. That night I drank myself into oblivion thinking it would ease my pain, but in the light of day, it had only escalated the problem. It doesn’t change anything, I know, but I don’t remember being with Tanya. I didn’t want her. I never wanted her.” He shifted the camera to his other arm, sliding the strap high on his shoulder. “I wanted you, Brynna. I love you.”

The sincerity of his words broke her heart. He spoke the truth. She might as well have sent an invitation to Tanya to let her know he was vulnerable and in need of a good lay—crude, but true. Knowing the facts didn’t make the reality of his betrayal hurt any less. “I was so angry,” she began, “mostly at me, for not fighting for you. You were slipping away, but I didn’t stop it. Not because I didn’t care. Because I didn’t have the energy to change the destructive path I had put us on. I missed Jake so much and the weight of the grief dragged me down so deep I was drowning in self-pity.”

God, it hurt to talk, relive the horror of their loss. Pain washed over her in waves as it always did when she remembered. Could airing the truth allow them to heal—to move on?

They returned to their chairs and sat down. Travis changed out the camera batteries and loaded a new roll of film.

“Did you blame me for Jake’s death?” He spoke so softly she almost didn’t hear him.

“Blame you? Why would I blame you? It was an accident.”

“I bought him the bike.”

“And I told him he could ride it that day. Did you blame me?”

He looked at her now. “Never. It was a horrific tragedy. I wanted to hold you and tell you everything would be all right, but in my heart I knew nothing would ever be all right again. I couldn’t fix this. I couldn’t bring our little boy back.”

Brynna blinked back tears. “What happened to us, Travis? When Jake was hit by the car, what we had as a family died with him.”

Travis had no time to answer. The alarms on the machine went off and Brynna leapt to her feet. “We’re registering some activity.”

* * * *

Brynna wiped the tears away and glanced around the pool room as if expecting to see a spectral image. Travis knew she wouldn’t. He reached for her hair, letting it slide through his fingers like air. Uncertainty made him cautious, but he had to tell her.

“Brynna, the night you found out about Tanya, you were angry, angrier than I had ever seen you. I tried to stop you, but you wouldn’t listen. It was raining, a downpour.”

Even though the equipment was going haywire, she seemed to concentrate on what he was saying.

“You were so upset, crying. You most likely didn’t see—”

“Stop!” Her eyes widened in fear as she realized where the story was going. She didn’t want to hear it, but there was no other choice. He had to finish.

“You didn’t see the construction sign until it was too late, baby.”

“Shut—”

“Your car went off the embankment.”

She backed away, her eyes round—scared. “No.” Her anguished cry of denial tore at his heart.

“You said it yourself that you thought ghosts were people that returned for a reason, to complete what they hadn’t in life.”

He recognized the moment the truth hit her. Her body stilled and her hand flew to her mouth to stifle a sob. “I can’t be...” Her eyes lit with realization as the truth of her own words sunk in. He had gotten through to her. All the signs had been there. She had just ignored them, had dismissed every one of them.

“The receptionist wouldn’t acknowledge me.” Her gaze riveted to her wrist. “My watch doesn’t work.” Her eyes filled with tears and her hands shook. “You didn’t see me until I called to you and...and the security guard never looked at me. He only spoke to you.”

“He couldn’t see you.”

“But you can,” she insisted. “You’ve been talking to me all evening. How is that possible?”

“You’ve read up on this. The spirits of Yule are connected with the mystical and the psychic logic of the Solstice season. We can be visited by ancestors, relatives, spirit guides or our soul friends. You once believed I was your *anam cara*. Your soul friend.” He dragged his hand through his hair. “You’re the Ghost Hunter; I’m the photographer. What do you think?”

“Oh, God.” She sat down with her hand over her mouth not wanting to believe it was true, but there it was.

The memories of that rainy night came back to her all at once. She had left the house, angry and upset. She’d been driving too fast for the slick roads. Her windshield wipers could barely keep up as the rain pelted down on the car. She remembered trying to blink away the tears blurring her vision, but it had been too late. She tried to stop. Had slammed on the brakes, but nothing gripped. She screamed as the car spun out of control, then hit something hard. She didn’t want to die, but everything hurt—her damaged body, her heart, and her soul. Then she saw him. “I remember seeing Jake, but I didn’t go with him,” she whispered.

“Why not?”

“Because...because I had to tell you.”

“Tell me what, baby?”

“That I was sorry. That I love you.” She sensed that he wanted so badly to hold her. “You can’t touch me.” She shook her head. “But you did, not more than ten minutes ago.”

“Brynna, you aren’t really here. Yes, I feel you, but it’s not like touching flesh.”

“Like an electric shock?” she asked.

“Not strong, but enough to make me take notice.”

“That’s why you flinched each time I touched you. I thought you didn’t want me to.”

“Believe me. I want nothing more than to feel you. I want to wrap you in my arms and hold you.”

“It hurts so much. If I’m dead, how can I hurt so much?” She beseeched him to answer.

“I don’t know.”

“I’m dead and buried,” she said, testing the truth of it. She looked at him. He hesitated as if he needed to tell her more. What more could he say to her? She was dead; her life had ended. “Travis?”

“You’re not buried.”

At her gasp, he hurried to explain. “You’ve been in a coma for almost two months. When I saw you here, I realized something had happened. That you were—”

“Dead,” she finished for him. This was too incredible. “Where?”

“What do you mean?”

She began to pace. “What hospital? Where’s my body?” She almost laughed at how hysterical she sounded. What difference did it make where her body was? She wouldn’t need it.

“Hoag Hospital,” he told her.

She nodded, feeling relieved that she wasn’t misplaced, that her body was in a reputable place. “They have the best equipment and the doctors...” She stopped in mid-sentence realizing she was babbling as if talking about someone else. She stopped pacing and turned to him. His eyes mirrored her emotions. Even dead, her corporeal state reacted to his galvanizing gaze. The pulsing knot formed in her stomach. She didn’t want to tear her attention away from him for fear that whatever was keeping her grounded would end.

When Jake died, she had wanted to die, too. Now, all she could think about was that she wasn’t ready to go, but the day of reckoning couldn’t be postponed forever.

For a long moment, she admired him. Unhurriedly, she studied his face, feature by feature. The memories were like a film rolling, and she remembered every moment of how it had been with him. How he always made her feel cherished and beautiful.

An exultant sensation wafted through her in heated waves as she recalled his touch, the way his hand would move up and down the deep furrow of her spine, and how his touch sent passion rising like the hottest fire, until sighs of satisfaction shook through her. She wanted to go to him, feel his arms around her, smell the clean scent of him as he leaned down to kiss her. She touched her mouth as if she could still feel his tender caresses. He had a way of brushing his lips over hers, a tantalizing invitation that would lead to more. She wanted that now. She wanted that wildly masculine sensation of his kiss, but the reality of her shifting world left it impossible.

“Brynna, your face is showing the roller-coaster of your emotions. Tell me what you’re thinking.”

“About the breathless wonder of our first kiss and the many more that followed.”

He gave her a whisper of a smile. “Our first kiss,” he said with reverence. “I meant to take things slow with you. Didn’t want to rush, because I knew you were the one for me, but one taste and I lost all my sense of reason.” He spoke the truth. He recalled that night. He recalled that night in vivid detail. After dinner, wine, and a fascinating conversation where they talked about everything under the sun, he had walked her to her door. She stood on the top step and he was one below so they were eye to eye. That first kiss, that achingly sweet exploration of her mouth had sent him spiraling out of control. He couldn’t get enough of her and she clung to him demanding that he give her more. He loved everything about her from her sweet laugh to her gregarious charm, everything that made her who she was. That first indelible kiss had sparked an ache inside of him, making it a staggering challenge not to ravish her there on the spot.

“I’ll have to admit,” she said, “that I was disappointed you didn’t ask to come in. Thoughts of sleeping with you pranced through my head.”

He quirked his right eyebrow. “I wish I’d known. It would have saved me the uncomfortable ride home—and the cold shower.”

She grinned. “If I recall, I didn’t make you wait too much longer after that night.”

“No, you didn’t, and for that I am forever grateful.” He placed his palm over his heart and made a low bow of gratitude. He straightened and met her smile with his own. God, she was so beautiful. The impulse to reach out and touch her was such a tangible urge that he made a

move toward her. He looked into her eyes as if he saw something new in her that he hadn't realized before. "I need the illusion that I can still hold you."

Surprise crossed her face. Did his words echo her thoughts? She stepped toward him as he opened his arms to her. The electricity of her touch shocked him, but he didn't shy away.

"Ah, Travis. To feel like I'm gathered against a warm pulsing body is divine. I can feel your heat down to the tips of my toes," she murmured, "and your heart hammering against my chest."

He cleared his throat, determined not be affected by her words, for he could only sense the projection of her, and he wanted so much more. Unbidden memories of their lovemaking teased him, and the involuntary tremors of arousal began. She'd left a burning imprint on him that would forever haunt him. He held tighter, trying to feel more of her, yet knowing he couldn't. Against his resolve to stay strong, tears filled his eyes. She would leave him again, but this time it would be forever. The inexplicable feeling of emptiness choked his heart. Never again would he be able to talk to her, see her, or touch her.

He lifted his hands up to cup her face. When he bent his head, she met his lips halfway. A blaze of liquid fire seared through him, a golden wave of passion and love. He let it flow between them, this wondrous sensation so like a tangible bond.

He moved his mouth to the side, taking a breath, then he kissed her a final time before he stepped back. "You have to let go, Brynna." He didn't want her to be a spirit that lingered between life and death. "You have to go on, sweetheart. Jake is waiting for his mommy." His voice broke miserably, his sorrow of losing her a painful knot inside, but he had to let her go.

* * * *

"Jake." A flash of grief weighed down on her. She loved him, her little boy who had so little time to live. Life was so precious, so fleeting, and she had let hers slip away without a fight.

"Brynna."

She looked at Travis and saw the tears shamelessly lining his cheeks. She loved this man, too. With her entire being. How could she let him go? Say goodbye? No, she wasn't strong enough. She wanted—needed—him forever. How to make him understand in what little time she had left. "I don't want to leave you."

"I know." His attempt to smile failed miserably.

"Be happy and live a long life." Then she realized something that tickled her to no end and chuckled. "All my life I've wanted to capture a ghost on film and I have. Isn't it ironic that *I* am the spirit?" The humor of her situation suddenly vanished, to be replaced by the feeling of something pulling at her. The same sensation she'd had in the dressing room, only this time she wasn't afraid. She had no urge to resist. Death. Although not wanting to leave Travis, she would be with Jake. Their son was a part of them both, so in a way she'd still have a part of Travis with her. Forever.

Her eyes locked with his, wanting his loving gaze to be the last thing she saw before she faded away.

Travis watched her closely. "Do you notice a change in me?" She looked down at her hand. "I'm flickering like a light about to go out?"

Travis stood there, strong for her, but the slight pulsing at the side of his jaw betrayed him. He'd hold onto her if he could.

"I have to go," she whispered.

"I know."

“And I’ll miss you forever, Travis.”
“As I will miss you.” His voice choked in his throat.
She extended her arm, as though to touch him.
And disappeared.

* * * *

Travis barely made it to his seat before his legs gave away. He hid his face behind his hands, unable to suppress his grief. The doctors had explained to him that there was nothing physically wrong with Brynna, but the longer she remained in the self-induced coma the more likely it would be that she wouldn’t recover. His mind accepted all this, he’d been warned of the inevitable, but his heart wasn’t prepared to let her go. With every breath she took, there had been a chance. A chance she would wake up, that they would have an opportunity to find their way back to each other.

He clenched his fists painfully, until his knuckles turned white. “Why?” He shouted his anguish of the injustice at losing his wife, too. The deafening silence greeted him as he gazed at the eerily lit pool, void of water. He leaned back in his chair, not caring to check the equipment, not caring about anything.

Brynna and Jake were both gone forever and nothing else mattered.

Chapter Five

“Hey, wake up, dude.”

Travis almost fell off his seat as someone shook him as delicately as a bulldozer. He glared up at the tall burly man with hair that looked like it had been set on fire, spiked and dyed unnaturally red. “Jesus, Kenneth.” Damn, he’d fallen asleep. He glanced at his watch, relieved it was still early. The manager had told him he had to have the equipment out of the pool room before the first Haunted Tours started for the day.

“Sorry, boss.” Kenneth chuckled. “I called to you. And you know my voice can wake the dead, but it didn’t disturb you. I didn’t think you would appreciate me throwing a cup of water in your face. Shaking you awake seemed the next best thing.”

Travis rubbed his eyes, the realization that he had been dreaming snapped him awake. What a wonderful dream. Brynna had been... “Where is she?” He bolted out of his chair and scoured the room.

“Who, man?” Kenneth asked.

“Brynna. She was...” He stopped when he saw how Kenneth was looking at him as if he thought he’d busted out of a mental institution. In the light of day, it did seem ludicrous to believe she appeared to him. “She was never here, was she?”

Kenneth pinched his lips together and shook his head. “I knew you shouldn’t have taken this gig.”

“Brynna wanted to do it. It was important to her.”

“Yeah, but you should have had the sense to cancel it.”

Kenneth turned away and started gathering the paperwork. He mumbled under his breath about what a fool Travis had been to allow himself to be haunted by some code of ethics. "Last request, bullshit," he growled.

"I know you don't understand, but I had to do this for her."

Kenneth shrugged. "I don't get it, but I've never been in love." He went over to the video camera, taking it off the tripod. "Do you think you picked up any activity?"

"I thought..." Travis didn't know how much of last night had been a dream. Hell, maybe it was all a dream. Last night he'd been so tired. He missed Brynna. He missed them together. Missed what they had.

This project had been hers. Obsessed with the Queen Mary, she claimed there was a vortex, a safe place where spirits could venture forth with ease. And added to that, it was the current Winter Solstice, the time of year when spirits and souls were most active. Well, it was no wonder he imagined she'd been with him.

"Are you going to the hospital today?" Kenneth asked.

"Yeah. They'll want me to make the final arrangements."

Kenneth set down the camera. "Hey, man, I'm sorry. I didn't realize Brynna...God..." He leaned on the table for support. "She was so strong. I thought... Well, I thought she'd pull through."

For a moment, Travis was confused. If he'd only dreamt about Brynna, then that could mean . . .

"I have to make a call." He moved away, not wanting Kenneth to overhear his conversation. On the third ring, the operator picked up. "Hello, I'd like to speak to Dr. Robinson. It's concerning Brynna Smith's condition."

"Hold, please."

It took a minute, but Brynna's doctor soon picked up on the other end. "Mr. Smith?"

"Yes."

"I was just about to give you a call."

Travis's heart pounded and his knees shook. He didn't want to hear that Brynna was gone. His head buzzed and he barely heard what Dr. Robinson was telling him, but something the doctor said caught his attention. "Wait. Could you repeat that?" Travis asked.

"We almost lost your wife last night, twice to be exact, but I assure you that she is fine. Better than fine, Mr. Smith. Your wife is up, alert, and demanding that you call her immediately." The doctor paused to clear his throat. "I'm aware this is going to sound strange, but are you at the—"

"Queen Mary," Travis finished.

"Yes...that's exactly what she said. How would she know?"

"May I speak to her?" A powerful relief filled him. He couldn't explain it even if he wanted to. Something mystical had happened last night. All his prayers had been answered and he was being granted a second chance with Brynna. She was alive, awake, and asking for him.

"Yes, yes, of course. Hold on and I'll transfer you."

Travis glanced over at Kenneth who watched him with a worried expression "Everything okay, Boss?" he yelled to him.

"Okay?" Travis strode over to him at a fast pace, and surprised the man by throwing his arms around his waist, giving him a huge bear hug. "No. I'm not *okay*."

"Hey, man, are you having a nervous breakdown or something?"

Travis released him and let out a whoop as he thrust a fist above his head. “She’s alive! Brynna is alive.”

“But you said...”

“I was wrong. Brynna must have been...I don’t know...an out of body experience.” Travis was talking more to himself than to Kenneth.

His attention was drawn to his phone again, when he heard someone say hello. He’d forgotten he was still on the line. He brought it to his ear. “Brynna? Brynna, is that you?”

“Travis?”

He squeezed his eyes shut. It was her voice, her beautiful voice. “I’m here.”

She fell silent, then said, “I dreamt about you last night.”

“I know, baby.”

“You know?”

“Yes, I know.”

“Oh, God, Travis. I was so lost. I saw Jake. He told me it wasn’t my time, that I had to go back, but I didn’t know how.” The sound of her crying came over the phone and he wished he could cross the chasm separating them and hold her. “It was you,” she told him. “You helped me. Somehow, you helped me.”

“I thought you were gone, Brynna. I thought you were a spirit and you were passing through to say goodbye.” His grip on his phone tightened. He wondered how much she remembered. “You said things.”

“You said some things, too.” She paused. “Travis?”

“Yes?”

“Hey, Boss,” Kenneth called to him. “You have to see what’s on this film. You aren’t going to believe it.”

Somehow, Travis knew he would.

“Travis, are you still there?” Brynna asked.

“I’m here.”

“Was it a dream?”

“No, Brynna, it wasn’t.”

A newly awakened sense of life comforted him. They had another chance.

“Will you come and get me and take me home?”

“As soon as the doctor releases you, you bet I will.”

Chapter Six

Travis carried Brynna over the threshold of the cabin, her laughter a sweet sound to his ears.

They’d been granted a miracle. Their souls were cleansed, allowing them to finally heal.

They renewed their wedding vows the morning of December twenty-second, the dawning of the new sun for the year back in medieval times. For them, it would signify a new beginning. For a second honeymoon, it seemed only appropriate that they book a room aboard the Queen Mary.

Travis cupped Brynna's face and leaned down to kiss her. It was like coming home to a place of love and warmth. "You smell good," he told her.

"I taste good, too," she said mischievously as she began undoing his tie.

"Oh, yeah."

She took his hand, leading him over to the bed. They fell onto it, laughing. His lips met hers in a searing, demanding kiss.

He made love to her fast with an urgent need to be closer, but later he loved her slowly, savoring every moment, every touch.

"I love you." Travis drew her against him.

"I love you, too." She turned to him, her gaze touching his. "How would you feel about trying to have another baby?"

"Really?"

She nodded, chewing on her lower lip as she waited for his answer.

He kissed her softly. "I think it's the best idea you've had all day...besides marrying me again, that is. And I'll be happy to give you as many babies as you want."

Jake could never be replaced, but they had enough love for each other to share with another child, maybe even a few. She closed her eyes, a smile touching her lips.

"Three would be fine by me."

"Three." Surprise sounded in his voice, but then a smile spread across his face. "We'll be mighty busy, Mrs. Smith."

"Only if you stop talking, Mr. Smith, and put that equipment of yours to proper use."

"Are you talking about my cameras or is this a pick up line?" he teased.

"A proposition, Mr. Smith. Most definitely a proposition."

"Well, how can I refuse such a beautiful woman's offer?" He kissed her forehead, her cheeks, and trailed caresses down her neck. "Have I told you how much I love you?"

"Not in the last few seconds."

"I love you, Mrs. Smith" he exclaimed. "Always and forever."

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Karen Michelle Nutt lives in California with her husband and three fascinating children. They have a houseful of pets, Brownie the guinea pig, three cats that have everyone well trained, and a hound named Shakespeare, who keeps three chihuahua pups in line.

In her spare time, she reviews books for PNR- Paranormal Romance Reviews. An avid reader of history, romance, and the paranormal, she tends to combine the three in her writings. She enjoys travel, old movies, books, and the chance to weave a tale.

Karen would love to hear from her readers and invites them to enter her world of Time Travel, Magic and Otherworldly Romances at: <http://www.kmnbooks.com>