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Radiance

Written by

Alyson Noel

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RADIANCE

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RADIANCE

Alyson Noël

MACMILLAN

To Jean Feiwel, for making this possible—
thank you, thank you, thank you!



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"I may be dead, but I'm still pretty."

—buffy the vampire slayer

I

Most people think that death is the end.

The end of life—of good times—the end of, well, pretty much everything.

But those people are wrong.

Dead wrong.

And I should know. I died almost a year ago.

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The weirdest part about dying is that nothing really changed.

I mean, you'd expect a big change, right? Because dying—well, let's face it, it's pretty dramatic stuff. They write songs about it, books and screenplays too. Heck, it's even a major theme on Saturday morning cartoons. But the thing is, it's nothing like you see on TV.

Nothing at all.

Take me for instance. I'm living, er, make that *dead* proof that it really isn't so different. Or at least not at first. And at least not in a bad way like you probably think.

Because the truth is, the moment I died I actually felt more alive than ever. I could jump higher—run faster—I could even walk through walls if I wanted. And that's pretty much what gave it away.

The walking-through-walls part.

Since it's not like I could do that sort of thing before, so that's how I knew something was up.

Something serious.

But up until then, it all just seemed like a really cool side trip. Like my dad just decided to take a sudden turn none of us were expecting.

One moment he was cruising down a curving highway, while I was singing along to my iPod with my dog Buttercup resting his head on my lap, doing my best to tune out my bossy older sister Ever, who practically lived to torment me. And the next thing I knew, we were somewhere else entirely.

No longer on the highway, no longer in Oregon, we'd somehow landed smack dab in the middle of this beautiful shimmering field full of pulsating trees and flowers that shivered. And when my parents went one way and my sister went another, I just stood there, head swiveling like crazy, unsure who to follow.

Part of me urging, "Cross the bridge with Mom and Dad and Buttercup—they know what's best!"

While the other part insisted, "Don't be such a goody-good—if Ever sees something awesome and you miss out, you'll regret it forever!"

And by the time I finally decided to go after my sister, I'd taken so long she was already gone.

Just—disappeared.

Straight into the shimmering mist.

Right back to the earth plane.

And that's how I ended up stuck. Stuck between worlds.

Until I found my way Here.

That's what they call it, "Here."

And if you're dumb enough to ask what time it is, they'll say, "Now."

Probably because there's no time Here, which means everything happens, well, in the moment it happens, which is always just—*Now*.

So, I guess you could say I live in the Here & Now.

Which, strangely, isn't so different from where I lived before back in Eugene, Oregon.

Aside from there being no time. And of course, that bit about being able to walk through walls and stuff.

But other than that, and the fact that I can manifest anything I want—stuff like houses and cars and clothes, even animals and beaches, simply by imagining it—it's all pretty much the same.

My parents are Here. My grandparents too. Even my sweet yellow Lab Buttercup made it. And even though we can live anywhere we could ever conceivably want, in any kind of house we could ever truly desire, the funny thing is that my new neighborhood is pretty much an exact replica of my old neighborhood back in Oregon.

Everything identical, all the way down to the clothes that hang in my closet, the socks that are stuffed in my drawers, and the posters that are taped to my walls. The only thing that's different, the only thing that kind of bugs me, is all the other houses around us are empty. Mostly due to the fact that all my old neighbors and friends are alive and well and back in the earth plane (well, for now anyway!). But still, other than that, it's exactly like I remember it.

Exactly like I wished it.

I just wish I had some friends to enjoy it with.