



**JULIE**  
**AND THE**  
**PHANTOMS**  
*Whatever Happens*

*An Original Novel by*  
*Candace Buford*

Scholastic Inc.



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Julie

Luke, Reggie, and Alex were always real to me, even when I was the only one who could see them. And when I discovered they were visible to other living people when we played music together, that felt real, too—better than real. When Reggie plucked his bass strings, Alex wailed on the drums, and Luke strummed his guitar as he sang along with me and my piano—it felt like a dream come true to play with my phantoms, to bring our music to life.

But *come on*, they're ghosts—or *musician spirits*, to use Alex's preferred term. Even though they felt real, they were still just made of air. They always faded away at the end of a song, and I expected nothing less tonight.

But tonight was *different*.

My eyes snapped open as I pulled away from my

hug with Luke. I gripped his hands, feeling his skin push back. “How can I feel you?”

“I—I don’t know.” He scrunched up his face, shaking his head.

I grabbed his face between both hands, my eyes growing wider when my hands didn’t slide right through his ghostly form. Luke was very much *solid*. He felt real to me—literally.

*This can’t be happening.*

Playing our show at the famous Orpheum Theater in Hollywood was supposed to be Luke, Reggie, and Alex’s unfinished business—their second chance at the show they never got to play before they died. And it was their best bet at crossing over before Caleb Covington’s curse zapped them into nothing—or into an eternity of being forced to play in the Hollywood Ghost Club’s house band. So why were the guys still here instead of over on the other side, wherever that was?

I rubbed my forehead, wondering if I was still riding the high of our performance tonight. We’d *killed* it at the Orpheum. Our chemistry was electric, and it had radiated toward the crowd like the rays of the sun. Everywhere our music touched, it brightened the crowd’s faces. And right now Luke’s face was glowing, with the pulse of *life*. Had

our beats been so powerful that they resurrected him from the dead?

*Don't be ridiculous, Jules. You can't just bring someone back from the dead!*

But stranger things had happened lately.

"I feel stronger." Luke gripped my hands tighter, and a tear slipped down his cheek.

"Alex, Reggie, come," I said over his shoulder, where our bandmates looked on in disbelief. I waved them over to where we were standing. I wanted to see if they were solid, too. If whatever was happening to Luke—whatever *I* was doing?—would happen to them.

They rushed across the garage studio with their arms open, smashing into us in a giant group hug. When we pulled away from each other, the purple stamps on their wrists detached and floated above our heads, disappearing into thin air.

"What do you think that means?" I asked, my eyebrows knitting together. I hoped it was the last we'd see of Caleb and his Hollywood Ghost Club.

"I think *the band's back*." Luke's eyes glowed with hope.

"Can we try that hug thing again?" Alex asked, pulling us into another group hug with his long, gangly arms.

I pawed Reggie's tuxedo, feeling the silkiness beneath my fingers. Then I pinched Alex's arm to confirm he was solid, too.

"Ouch!" He frowned for a second, but his scowl quickly perked into a smile. He laughed, like he welcomed the pain. "I felt that. *Ow!*"

"Just double-checking." I chuckled into our group hug. I was about to do the same thing to Reggie, but he wriggled free.

"Well, I think this means it's time to *eat*." He patted his stomach, his eyes bright. "Do you think that burger place on Sunset Boulevard is still open?"

I stared at him, unable to blink. I could *not* believe Reggie's first thought was about fast food. How could he think about burgers at a time like this?

"What? I haven't eaten real, non-ghost food in twenty-five years. I'm *starving*." He slicked his dark hair away from his forehead. "Who's with me?" Then he balled his hands into fists and squeezed his eyes shut.

"Wait," Alex said, holding a hand up.

Reggie pried one eye open, clearly annoyed with the delay.

"Aren't we going to talk about this crazy awesome thing that's happening to us?" Alex reached out and poked my arm, feeling solid flesh. "I mean, is Julie the

only one we can touch, or are we solid to everyone? And if we're solid right now, does that mean other people can *see* us, too?"

"Any theories?" I crossed my arms, searching Luke's face. I knew he probably didn't have all the answers, but a girl could hope.

"I don't know." He shook his head.

"May I suggest we find out at the burger place?" Reggie raised his eyebrows.

Alex dismissed him with a grumble. "You *still* might not be able to eat."

Then he paused. "Wait—Willie. Can he still see me? Is he even okay after everything that happened with Caleb tonight?" Alex's face grew worried as he thought about his crush. From what he'd told me, Willie was a seriously cute skateboarder ghost who could skate wherever he wanted now that he was dead. He and Alex had their own unfinished business to take care of, but it was unclear if that could be resolved right now. If Alex was solid to *me*, maybe he wouldn't be to other ghosts like Willie. The guys were definitely in a weird gray area at the moment.

But my phantoms had never really played by the rules. They were special.

"Dude, we can go look for him if you want." Reggie

said, softening his stance. He may have been eager to test the limits of their current solidness, but that didn't take precedence over Alex's more pressing concerns.

"Uh, thanks, Reggie." Alex looked touched as he nudged Reggie's arm. He couldn't hide the blush pooling under his cheeks, and Alex divined *exactly* what was still on his mind. "Yes, fine. And then we can go try to eat burgers."

"If you insist," he said, his eyes bright. Reggie turned to me and Luke. "You guys want to come out with us?"

"I think—" Luke looked at me, raising his eyebrow. It was a question, asking if I wanted to stay or go.

Part of me wanted to stay with my bandmates and celebrate all night. We'd played the Orpheum, ditched Caleb, and the guys and I could *hug*—at least for now. I was torn between hanging with the group and spending some alone time with Luke. But one look at Luke's intense gaze was all it took. I *definitely* wanted to stay.

"I think we're good here," I said, feeling a blush creep across my face.

"*Uh-huh.*" Reggie smirked at me before elbowing Alex in the side. "You ready to go?"

Alex hesitated and exhaled in a rush, and Reggie rolled his eyes. "Oh, come on, Alex. You're not scared, are you? Poofing is like second nature."



“Well, yeah, but that was before Julie could touch us.” He reached his arm out and poked my elbow with his pinkie, then shook his head. “See? What if we *can’t* poof anymore?”

“Let’s find out,” Reggie said with a grin. Then he instantly poofed out of the room.

“Okay.” Alex held his chest, relief relaxing his facial features. He gave us a little wave and wiggled his eyebrows. “See you two later.”

And with a *poof*, he was gone.

I blinked rapidly, my breath hitching as Alex and Reggie disappeared before my eyes. It was nothing new to me—I’d seen them poof away dozens of times before. But it also *was* new, because now they were solid. Or, at least, I could touch them.

What did this mean for the rest of their ghostly abilities?

I had so many questions about the guys’ current solid state, but one look at Luke and my mind went blank. *Poof*—my questions vanished, just like Alex and Reggie had.

A weird stillness fell over the studio, and I could only hear Luke’s shuffling feet mixed with my own nervous heartbeat. We’d been alone together countless times, staying up late writing songs and talking. But

for some reason, right now, I was nervous to be so close to him.

“So.” I tucked a bundle of curls behind my ear and stepped toward my mom’s old piano, putting space between me and the crackling energy buzzing around Luke.

“So,” he said with a cautious grin.

I’d had crushes before, but none as strong as the one I had on Luke. And right now, as my heart hammered against my chest, my feelings for him had reached new depths. I’d never felt like this before. *Never.*

Flynn liked to tease me that I had it bad for a *ghost*, and she was one hundred percent right. The whole “being dead” thing aside, Luke was kinda my dream guy, and right now he was staring at me with a mix of wonder and awe. By some stroke of luck, I think Luke liked me, too.

His gaze locked with mine, and for a second I thought he might say something more, but his eyelashes fluttered and he looked away.

*Omigod, I can’t!*

My stomach churned, a swarm of gazillion butterflies. When I looked up, Luke had stepped closer. He laid a hand on the piano, close to mine.

“You were *incredible* tonight,” I said, my voice a little shaky.