

What I Know

A PECAN CREEK SHORT STORY

ANNA SCHAEFFER

Also by Anna Schaeffer

All of This

Just One Thing

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To all who love the boy in the baseball cap.

When you wake up in the morning, you have no way of knowing if your life's gonna change with a goodbye, or a hello...or both.

Like all of my friends, I slept in on the first Saturday of summer. Also like all of my friends, when I finally dragged myself out of bed, I trudged into the kitchen to find breakfast. It was almost noon, so I expected a note on the table telling me about a plate of cold pancakes in the microwave or something.

Instead of a note, I found my parents.

"Why're you home?" I asked my dad as I stared into an empty microwave. "Isn't the fishing tournament today?" I closed the microwave and moved to the oven. No pancakes. What were these people trying to do, make their thirteen-year-old son go out and hunt his own food? I didn't think I'd have much luck with my nerf gun. "Where's breakfast?"

Then I noticed Mom. The bags underneath her red-rimmed eyes were big enough to pack for a week at the lake.

"Mom?" I scratched my chin with the back of my hand. "What's wrong?"

"Sit down, T. We need to talk," Dad said in the same kind of voice he used the time he told me our elderly neighbor had died.

I crossed the kitchen and slumped into a wooden chair, crossing my arms across the old Georgia Bulldogs t-shirt I'd grabbed off my floor. Dad bought the shirt for me at my first college football game. It'd just about swallowed me when I got it, but now it was getting tight around my shoulders. It had

paint stains from last fall when we painted the dining room together, and the white letters were dingy from football in the backyard. I tugged at the hole on the hem from the time I climbed a fence to retrieve the football and Dad had to explain to the neighbors that I didn't know trespassing was a thing.

My parents looked at each other. "Go ahead," Dad said in a rough whisper.

"I'm not going first," Mom shot back.

My stomach growled, breaking the silence. "What's goin' on?" I said between my teeth.

Dad looked at Mom one more time, as if to make sure she didn't want to speak first. I could almost see steam coming from her ears. Must've been left over from another one of their fiery arguments. I thought I'd overheard them going at it late last night. It only makes sense for a kid to sleep half the day away when he's up looking for earplugs at one in the morning.

Dad gripped the edge of the table. "I'm leaving, son."

I stared at him, trying to think of why he was telling me this. "Like, for another work trip in Atlanta? Can I go this time?"

Mom snorted. "Your dad does not go on work trips."

"Huh?" Suddenly, the hunger pangs disappeared, replaced by a heavy, twisty feeling in my gut.

"Me and your mom need some time to think through some things. I'll be gone for a while."

"How long is 'a while?'" I asked, grabbing the table to steady myself against the thoughts beginning to swirl in my mind.

Then a meteor hit earth. Crashed right into the Peyton family backyard, sending sod and azalea bushes and paving stones everywhere. That was the only explanation for how my entire world erupted into chaos because, surely, what I was hearing was some freakish hallucination.

Dad glanced at Mom, but Mom stared at the table.

“Can...can I...come?” My voice squeaked like it came from a little kid.

“No, Truitt. You can’t.”

* * *

Dad and Mom went into their room. I heard drawers opening and closing, hangers sliding in the closet, and Mom’s quiet, “When will you be back, Dustin?” She didn’t sound angry anymore. She just sounded...broken.

I couldn’t hear Dad’s answer. I went out to the garage and sat on the brick step, not wanting to overhear their conversation, but not wanting to miss whatever happened next either. I swiped at my runny nose with the back of my hand.

The door opened, and I slid out of the way as Dad stepped out. He carried a suitcase—not our biggest one, but bigger than one you’d pack for a weekend.

“Dad. You can’t.” I sniffed as my eyes clouded.

Dad looked at me, reached out to tousle my curly brown bedhead, but stopped with his hand in the air before stuffing it in his pocket. “Don’t do that, Truitt. Be a man.”

Then Dad climbed into his fancy work car, waited for the garage door to open, and drove away. I stood, watching him leave. Wanting to chase him, but also wanting him to choose me on his own.

The last time I cried, I was seven and took a gnarly spill on my bike. Dad helped me up and carried me on his back all the way home.

Now, years later, I really wanted to cry. But Dad was right. I had no choice but to be a man. Mom needed me until Dad finished thinking and came home to us. Maybe, then, our family would be better than ever.

I eased open the door. “Mama?” No answer.

I stepped into the kitchen and walked down the hall. I

could hear her moving around in their bedroom. A drawer opened. Something slid across the carpet. I knew I needed to be the man of the house, but I was barely thirteen. I couldn't force myself to go to her. Instead, I took a piece of paper from the notepad on the side of the fridge.

Riding my bike. Be back later. -T

I stuck the note on the coffee pot, knowing Mom would see it when she poured a cup. Then I slipped back to the garage.

Like a robot, I stiffly grabbed my oldest tennis shoes from their spot by the back door. Found a ball cap resting on top of the lawn mower. Hopped on my bike and kicked off.

As much as I didn't want to cry, I couldn't help it. At least no one could see because wind was whipping past me too fast to let any tears stain my cheeks as I pedaled for my life. I had no idea where I was going, but at the same time, I knew exactly where I wanted to be.

I pedaled for miles. Focused on the road, channeling all of my frustration into pedaling harder. My parents fought a lot—didn't everyone's? Wasn't that part of being married to someone?

So why was Dad leaving?

Ahead on my left, an old man pulled weeds in his flower bed. He waved as I soared past. Mom always said I had an old soul. Even at thirteen, I sometimes found myself hanging around people twice my age instead of other kids. If that were true, then why did I feel like a little kid? Why did I feel like I had no control over what I was thinking or feeling? Why did I feel like I should just now be learning to ride my bike without training wheels—like Dad should be running beside me, reaching out to steady me?

I wanted to say every cuss word I'd ever heard in the hallways of Pecan Creek Middle School. Wanted to rip off that t-shirt with all our memories in it and throw it as far as I could.

But instead, I pedaled harder.

Sweat trickled down my face, down my back. The late May day was hot and sticky. And I was so thirsty.

By the time I coasted to a stop at the lake, I felt like I might pass out. All my energy and emotions were spent. Every single one left on the asphalt behind me. I propped my bike against a tree and stumbled down the hill. Pine straw and sticks poked at my legs, but the pine trees towering over me made me feel safe.

Eventually, I reached the sand. Kicked off my shoes. Peeled off my socks and that stupid shirt. Then I stepped into the murky lake. Minnows dashed away and Georgia clay squished between my toes. Lakeweed tickled my legs as I waded out until the sun-warmed shallows turned into cool deep. I stretched out on my stomach and began paddling. I swam out several feet, then back in, then out, then back. I knew I shouldn't swim with no one else around, so I didn't go out too far.

My legs ached and my heart pounded, but I just needed to move. I dove beneath the water, my fingers running through the plants at the bottom of the lake. I imagined what it would be like if I could open my eyes and see the depths. Would I even want to? Maybe it was better to not know some things. To be unaware of what really went on in the world.

Because then you wouldn't be scared.

Finally, exhausted and panting like my neighbor's dog, I trudged out of the water and collapsed on a log. I scrubbed my hair with the t-shirt and tried to shake the water out of my right ear. I sat, elbows on my tanned knees, water dripping down my face, watching the lake ripple beneath the angry sun.

"Are you...okay?"

I looked around but saw no one. Was I hallucinating now? Was I that dehydrated?

"Hello?" The voice was quiet and unsure. Was that a

ghost? My friends liked to talk about a girl who drowned in this lake back in the 1990s when a rope swing broke and she landed on a log in the water. She went unconscious and sank down, down, down to where the catfish live. They never found her, but some people say you can still hear her calling for help.

I shook my head. I *was* losing it.

“Can I get you something?”

Finally, I turned all the way around and squinted into the sunlight. A girl stood several yards away, wearing a sundress over a swimsuit. Her hand shielded her eyes.

“Oh, I, uh...” I stammered, rising to my feet and pulling my shirt over my head. “Huh?”

The girl tilted her head, sending her long brown ponytail swinging. “Sorry. I just saw you out here swimming by yourself and wanted to see if you were okay. Wait...” She took several steps toward me. Her eyes widened. “Truitt?”

“Yeah?” I ran a hand under my eyes just in case I was accidentally crying again.

“It’s me, Becca.” She didn’t sound all that sure about it.

I focused on her. She *was* Becca from school. She was just a hair shorter than me. Her tanned knees were scraped, and I noticed a scab on her bent elbow. That wasn’t uncommon around here in the summer—water tubing was rough on the elbows and knees. Loose pieces of flyaway hair surrounded her round face.

I nodded slowly. “Hey, Becca. What’s up?”

She crossed her arms in front of her and scuffed her flip-flop in the sand. Becca was a grade younger than me. We knew each other from school and summer camps and stuff, but we weren’t close friends or anything. She was the quiet, sometimes a little weird, preacher’s daughter. A reserved sweetheart. She watched more than she jumped in. Obviously, though, she didn’t miss much of anything.

“I think I should ask *you* what’s up.” She had always been

smart for her age.

“Huh?”

“I mean, you’re the one out here by yourself and all. You hungry?” She said it like she was someone’s mama.

My stomach growled as an answer, and she giggled, wrinkling her nose. “Guess so.” She reached out her hand. “C’mon. We’ve got hot dogs.”

Rather than take her hand—just because the day was weird already didn’t mean I needed to hold hands with a *girl*—I scooped up my socks and shoes and followed her a little ways down the shoreline to the nearest swim beach. Some girls wobbled as they gripped each other’s hands and tried to balance on the yellow floating thing that marked off the swim area, but then some boys climbed on and bounced until the girls sailed into the air, shrieking and making way more noise than they needed to.

Four older kids were chicken-fighting, and some others tossed a football back and forth in the water. I followed Becca past a clump of girls sitting in a circle on beach towels, talking about whatever girls always find to talk about. They sounded like a bunch of hens. The talking stopped when we got close, and they watched us while pretending they weren’t.

We climbed up the dirt path to the big picnic shelter, and the smell of the grill made my stomach growl the loudest yet.

“You can put your shoes over there, if you wanna.” Becca pointed off to the side.

“Sure.” I tossed them.

“Here, I’ll introduce you.”

I followed her to the man standing with his back turned by the grill, feeling like a puppy or something. “This is Kurt,” she whispered to me. “It used to be weird calling him his first name and not Mr. Elliot or at least Mr. Kurt, but this is how he wants it. His wife, Melina, is the same. They’re pretty great.”

“Got it,” I said, even though I didn’t really know what I

was supposed to be getting.

“Kurt?” Becca said in her soft voice.

The man with bright red hair and lots of freckles turned, holding a spatula. “What’s up, Becca?”

Becca stepped behind me and put her hand on my shoulders, pushing me forward. “This is Truitt, and I told him we should have plenty of food so he could have some. Is that okay?”

Kurt’s eyes looked confused, but he smiled. “Of course. Nice to meet you, man. I’m Kurt.” He held out the hand that wasn’t holding the spatula. I shook it. “We already ate, but I was just cooking up these extras because I know the guys’ll want leftovers after they go out on the boats later. Pick your poison: Hot dog? Hamburger? One of each?”

Was I drooling? It all smelled awesome. I could only nod. “Thank you, sir.”

Two other girls from my school ran up to Becca, a little girl with hair like Kurt’s between them. Kari—the blonde girl—grabbed Becca by the arm and whispered in her ear while Lena—

the one with the dark red hair—waved at me. “Truitt,” Becca said, “We’re gonna go to the bathroom. I’ll be back.”

She turned, her flip-flop squeaking against her heel, and bounced off with Kari, Lena, and the kid. “I know them from school,” I said to Kurt without really thinking about it. “What is this group?”

Kurt scooped one last burger off the grill and put it on a plate. “We’re a youth group. It’s our School’s Out lake day and we’ve invited everyone going into seventh grade since they’ll be with us in the fall. That includes Becca.” He tilted his head in the direction of an empty picnic table. Only a couple of adults stood around talking—all of the kids were down at the water.

Aw, man. “So this is a...church thing?”

Kurt grinned. "Pecan Creek Baptist. But everyone's welcome. So..." Kurt sat at the table and I sat across from him. "What's your story, Truitt?"

My story? What did that mean? Was that a homework assignment or something? I wasn't sure how to answer, but thankfully, a woman stepped up to us just then.

"Who's this?" She stood next to Kurt, holding a chunky toddler on her hip.

"This is Truitt. He's friends with Becca from school." Kurt looked at her and seemed to tell her something with his eyes. She nodded. I'd never seen my parents do that.

She turned to me and smiled, bouncing the baby. "Hey, Truitt. It's nice to meet you. I'm Melina, Kurt's wife. And this—" She poked the toddler's chubby belly, "—is Jackson. Carrying two kids is no joke."

I stared at her, and she laughed. "Oh, sorry. I feel like a whale, but I guess it's not so obvious to other people yet. We're expecting our third kid later this year. And our oldest daughter, Trissy, is around here somewhere..." She whipped her head around as if she'd just remembered something.

"She's with the girls at the bathroom, Mel."

"Oh, good. Honestly, I've never met a little girl with more energy than that wild child. Truitt, you hungry?" Her question reminded me of Becca.

"Yes, ma'am." I hoped my stomach wouldn't growl again.

She spread her hand in the direction of the table. "Help yourself. I'll go get you a Coke."

"Thank you, ma'am." I smiled at her, even though my heart hurt so bad.

"Are your parents around somewhere, son?" Kurt asked.

The way he called me "son" made me feel like I might cry, and I hated myself for it. I couldn't do that. Not here, not now, not ever again. Instead, I reached for a hot dog and pulled a bun from the bag.

“Um, no. No, sir. They’re not.”

Kurt watched me squirt mustard and ketchup on the hotdog. Then he watched me crumble up some potato chips on top for crunch. When I looked at him, he just nodded.

We didn’t talk while I ate, until a little bit later when the little girl with hair as orangey-red as a campfire bounced up to Kurt.

“Hey, Tris! You’re back!” Kurt scooped her up and set her on his lap. She watched me with big, green eyes, and I don’t think she even blinked for like a whole minute.

“Truitt, meet Trissy. Trissy, meet Truitt. Tell him hi, honey.” Trissy grinned and waved, then flipped around and buried her head in her dad’s shoulder.

“She’s real cute,” I said around a mouthful of potato salad.

I heard a muffled giggle coming from the direction of Kurt’s shoulder.

I took one last bite and wiped my mouth with the back of my hand. “Thank you for lunch, sir,” I said, standing. “I should go.” I wasn’t sure where I was going to go, but I needed some time to think about everything.

I stepped over the bench and turned to leave.

“Truitt, wait.” Kurt set Trissy down, and she ran off in the direction of her mama. “Where do you live?”

I knew this was a church guy, but I still didn’t think it was a good idea to give a stranger your address. “Out past Lee Pond.”

Kurt looked shocked. “Seriously? You walked that many miles by yourself to get here?”

My calf muscles ached in response. “I rode my bike.”

“Do your parents know you’re here?”

I looked down at my feet. “Yeah...sort of...maybe not.”

Kurt’s sunburned face turned a little white.

“But I didn’t run away or nothin’. I just...needed to get out for a minute.”

Kurt thought about this. He scratched his red nose and winced. Finally, he said, “How about this? Text your folks and I’ll drive you home. I’ve got my truck, so we can put your bike in the back.”

I didn’t know this man, and he had no reason to help me. But at the same time, the thought of biking home with a gut full of hotdogs and potato salad made me wanna throw up. On instinct, I reached into my pocket to fish out my phone, only to remember I had forgotten to bring it in my hurry to leave the house.

Kurt let me borrow his phone while he told Melina where he was headed. As he was helping me lift my bike into the bed of the truck, Becca jogged over to us, slightly out of breath. “What’s going on?”

“I’m giving Truitt a ride home, and then I’m going to grab another bag of ice while I’m out.”

“May I come?”

I looked at her. “Seriously?”

“Uh-huh. I’m fine taking a break.” She leaned toward me slightly. “Introvert,” she mouthed, pointing to herself.

I wasn’t a hundred percent sure what she meant by that, or how riding in a truck with two other people would help her any, but I opened the truck door and let her scoot into the middle before I climbed in.

I guess Becca started introverting right away, because no one said anything while Kurt pulled out of the pavilion parking lot. By that point, my thoughts were getting really loud and I needed to just talk about anything else.

“I like your truck, Kurt,” I said. I didn’t really have an opinion about his truck, but it was the first thing I could come up with.

“Thanks, man. I grew up in Atlanta and had no idea how to drive one of these manual things until I moved out here to the sticks. But it’s not so bad once you get the hang of it.”

I nodded, already out of things to say.

Pecan Creek was a pretty small town, but I lived clear on the other side of it in a neighborhood where people had pools and these decoration things called pergolas. Had to admit, I was impressed with how far I rode that bike. I'd feel it in the morning, for sure.

"You can go ahead and get the ice first, if you want," I said next, all of a sudden realizing that was a ridiculous idea. It was a thousand degrees outside, and ice would melt so fast in the back of the truck.

"Or we could just get the ice and go back to the lake. I like tubing." I looked down and saw my knee was bobbing up and down like I'd just had an energy drink.

Kurt stopped the truck at an intersection and glanced at me over Becca's head. "We'd love to have you go out on the boats with us, Truitt. But let's check in with your parents first, okay? To make sure they're good with it."

I nodded and swallowed a lump in my throat. After a car passed across the intersection, Kurt shifted the truck back into gear. "You know..." he said slowly, "I should probably stop for gas soon anyway. Mind if I fill up at the station up ahead before I take you home?"

I exhaled all my air, relieved to have a few extra minutes before I had to face my mom and a house without my dad. "Yeah. That'd be all right."

Kurt pulled into an old gas station with two pumps. He cracked the windows. "Hang tight," he said before slipping out of the truck.

Once Kurt was out of the truck, Becca unhooked her seatbelt so she could turn toward me. She scooted back against the driver's door and pulled her legs up, sitting crisscross. "What don't me and Kurt know?"

I shrugged. "It's not like we're close, Becca, so technically, there's a ton y'all don't know."

She looked at me in silence. I could hear the *chug-chug-chug* of gasoline as Kurt pumped it into the tank. Finally, Becca said, “Okay. Just know that if you ever wanna talk about it, I’ll be here. I mean that.”

“You’re the preacher’s daughter. You’re prob’ly supposed to say that.”

She looked like she might roll her eyes at me but stopped herself. “Nope. I’m being serious.”

I nodded, not looking at her but at a father holding open the gas station door for a little boy. “Thanks.”

* * *

All too soon, Kurt pulled the truck into the driveway. I was halfway out the door before he even shifted into park.

“Hey, wait up! I’ll come introduce myself.”

I froze, my hand on the door. If Kurt came inside, he would know everything wasn’t okay. Dad wasn’t home. His car was still gone. I could tell because the garage door was still open from when I’d left. Was Mom still crying in their room?

Kurt unclicked his seatbelt, snapping me out of my thoughts. “Um, no, that’s okay. I’m kinda spent for the day anyway. From the bike ride and all. I’ll catch y’all later, okay?”

Kurt didn’t answer, just got out of the truck. Becca raised her dark eyebrows. I tried to figure out what she was thinking. She didn’t look scared, though, and that helped me feel a little stronger.

I wanted to complain, but Kurt was already heading toward the front door. I followed. He stopped before he got to the porch steps. He turned to me, put his hand on my shoulder. “What’s going on, Truitt?” He asked softly. I felt like crying again.

I hiccuped. “My dad left us this morning. We dunno when he’ll be back.” The words whooshed out of me. I didn’t

want to say them, but as soon as I did, I felt like I could take my first deep breath all day.

“Man,” Kurt sighed. “I’m so sorry, Truitt.” He ran a hand over his face, quiet for a few seconds. “I’d like to check in with your mom sometime to see if you need anything. Can you ask her if that would be okay? I’ll bring Mel. She’ll be a good friend.”

My throat felt like it had a rock in it, and I tried to swallow it down. “Thanks.”

I turned to open the door, drawing up my shoulders to face whatever was on the inside.

“Hey, Truitt?”

I looked over my shoulder. “Yes, sir?”

“If you need anything—anything at all—let me know.”

* * *

Turns out, I just needed people. I started hanging out at the Elliots’ house a lot. Becca liked to go over there too. She would babysit the kids while Melina did laundry and dishes and stuff. And I helped Kurt mow the grass and trim the bushes. Then we’d all eat a big supper together. Sometimes, when the grass didn’t need cutting or anything, I’d help in the kitchen. I actually kinda liked learning how to follow recipes, and Melina said she liked having help.

We did almost everything together. But the one thing I didn’t do with them was go to church. I didn’t really see why I needed that God stuff. I was keeping myself out of trouble and making sure Mom was okay all at the same time on my own.

“Please come, Truitt,” Becca said one Saturday night while we loaded the Elliots’ dishwasher.

“It’s your job to invite people. Do you get a trophy or something when enough kids come?”

Becca looked like I’d slapped her.

“Sorry,” I mumbled, concentrating on scraping the bottom of a biscuit off the pan.

She sighed. “It’s fine. I just really think you’d like it. You’d get to meet some more friends and everything.”

I shrugged and stuck the pan into the bottom rack of the washer. “I’ve got friends.”

She handed me a plate. “Yeah, it’s just that...” She took a big breath. “I know what it’s like to be missing someone. Not the same kind of missing as you, obviously, but my best friend moved a few years ago, and I still miss him so much sometimes I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to not hurt.”

I looked over at her from beneath hair that really needed a cut. “You hurt too?”

“Yeah, I do.”

“Huh. Okay.”

* * *

Kurt picked me up the next morning.

“I like your truck, Kurt.”

Kurt laughed. “You said that last time you didn’t know what to say.”

I smiled back at him. “I think I’m starting to mean it. It’s, like, vintage of something. The stick shift is cool.”

Kurt flipped on a blinker and glanced at me. “Tell you what. Stick around and I’ll teach you how to drive it in a few years.”

“Deal,” I said, because it felt like what I was supposed to say. On the inside, I had that wanting-to-cry feeling again. Dad was supposed to be the one to teach me to drive. Just like Dad was supposed to teach me how to mow grass. Not a man I met at the lake.

But at the same time, Kurt was so nice to me. He even helped me mow the grass at my house and said he’d help until

Dad came home.

Dad had been gone for a few weeks, and I still didn't know why he left. Whenever I asked Mom, she looked like she couldn't decide if she was angry or sad. I didn't like seeing that. I'd have to ask Dad when he came back. Even if he wasn't coming home to stay, he still had a lot of stuff to pack up.

So surely he'd be back.

Right?

Anyway, that's the Sunday I stepped into church, not expecting anything except the Sunday lunch after church I'd been promised.

Becca's dad preached the sermon, and he talked about having courage. For a second I wondered if Becca had told her dad to talk about that topic.

"After Moses died, it was Joshua's turn to lead the people." The preacher's voice pulled me out of my thoughts. "Joshua was going to be the guy to finally take the people into the land God promised them years ago. It's what he'd been preparing for all his life. In Joshua 1:9 God said, 'Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.'"

Pastor Shepherd looked around the big room with the tall ceilings and colorful stained-glass windows. "Have you ever felt like God was asking you to do something too big or too frightening or too difficult? Have you felt like it was impossible? Joshua knew he was about to lead an army to take over Canaan. I imagine that was a daunting task, don't you?"

A few rows in front of me, Becca nodded. Somebody behind me said, "Amen!" and some other people chuckled.

"But," the preacher continued, "God told Joshua to not be scared or overwhelmed. Why? Because God Himself—the Creator of the universe and the Commander of creation—said He would be with Joshua. And the same God will be with you too, no matter what He's calling you to do. He sent Jesus, His

Son, to save us so we could have a relationship with God. You don't have to be afraid because you are never, ever alone."

Then Pastor Shepherd prayed for everyone, and the church sang a song. After it was over and I'd waited for Kurt to talk to some people, we rode back to the Elliots' house.

"What did you think of church, Truitt? Glad you went?" Kurt wrestled with his seatbelt.

"Yeah, it was all right. I liked what he was talking about."

"Yeah? Which part?"

I shifted in my seat, suddenly embarrassed to be talking about feelings stuff. "The part about how God's people don't have to be scared when He tells them to do something major because He is always with them."

"Do you believe him?"

"Huh?"

"Do you think what the preacher said is true?"

I shrugged. "Maybe."

We were quiet for a couple of minutes. Then Kurt turned into the gravel driveway. I listened to the sound of crunching rocks under the truck's tires. Kurt put the truck in park and turned to me. "Are you scared, Truitt?"

I almost laughed, that's how random Kurt's question was. "Scared of what?"

"Scared," Kurt said, his voice quieter, "of what will happen with your family. About if your dad will come back."

I felt a tickle in my nose, but I refused to cry. Instead, I shrugged and looked down at my lap. "Guess I kinda fail at the preacher's whole message then, huh?"

Kurt cupped my shoulder with a steady hand. I looked over at him. "Nope," he said. "Fear reminds you that you can't do hard things on your own. You need Someone to fight your battles for you. God wants to be that for you."

Another shrug. "I dunno. I've gotta think about some stuff."

Kurt took his hand from my shoulder and pulled the keys from the ignition. “Just promise me something, okay?”

“Yessir?”

“Promise me you *will* think about stuff...and you’ll come to me if there’s ever anything you want to talk about. I don’t know all the answers, but what I do know is you’re not in this by yourself. You’ve got my family and Becca’s family. And you’ve got God, if you’ll trust Him. All right?”

“Sure. Yeah.”

None of it made much sense, but that promise to Kurt seemed like the least I could do after all he was doing for me.

“Okay, God,” I mumbled as I followed Kurt into the house for Sunday lunch. “If you’re out there, I’d really like some courage. Can you help me know it’s all somehow gonna be okay?”

My phone buzzed in my back pocket. I felt some of the breath leave my body as I read the text: “Hey, T. I’ll be at the house at 3:00 today. Let’s talk.”

It was the first I’d heard from my dad since the morning he left. I quickly texted back a “See you soon.”

I didn’t know what was next. I didn’t know what Dad wanted to talk about or what it would mean. I didn’t know what my family would be like if he left for good or even if he stayed. But here’s what I did know: I would be strong and courageous. Because maybe I wouldn’t be fighting this battle alone after all.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I've gotta thank all of you readers. When you read *All of This* and *Just One Thing*, you fell in love with Truitt Peyton and wanted to know more about him. Your enthusiasm inspired me to go back in time and think about Truitt's life before Sadie showed up. This story is a result of that. Y'all are the best ever.

To Mom and Dad: Being your daughter is a gift. Thank you for always cheering me on and spreading the word about my books.

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And to the Author of my life and salvation: I can be strong and courageous because I know you are with me wherever I go. You keep giving me stories, and I'll never get over how cool that is. Thank you, God, for all of this.

Group Discussion Guide

1. The opening line of the story says, “When you wake up in the morning, you have no way of knowing if your life’s gonna change with a goodbye, or a hello...or both.” How have you experienced your life changing with a hello or a goodbye?
2. Truitt wears an old t-shirt that reminds him of adventures he’s had with his dad. What is something you have that brings back lots of memories? What are those memories?
3. Truitt is determined not to cry when his dad tells him he’s leaving. Why might crying actually be a good thing for Truitt?
4. The lake is Truitt’s favorite place to be. That’s where he’s able to think clearly and breathe deeply. Do you have a place like this? What makes it so special?
5. At first, Truitt doesn’t want to share what’s going on with Becca and Kurt. Do you agree with him keeping it to himself? Why or why not?
6. The Elliots quickly become like family to Truitt. In what ways do they show him that they love him? Who in your life feels like family, even though you aren’t related? How do they show you that they love you?
7. At the end of the story, Truitt still has a lot of questions. But now, he isn’t as afraid of the unknown. Why?

8. What would you say is the main theme of “What I Know?” How can you apply this theme to your own life?
9. How might Truitt’s story have gone if he hadn’t met Becca and the Elliots that day at the lake?
10. What do you think will happen next in Truitt’s life?
11. Bonus: Joshua 1:9 becomes an important part of Truitt’s life. Read the book of Joshua in the Bible to discover Joshua’s response to God. Then, keep reading to find out what happened when Joshua chose to accept his mission!

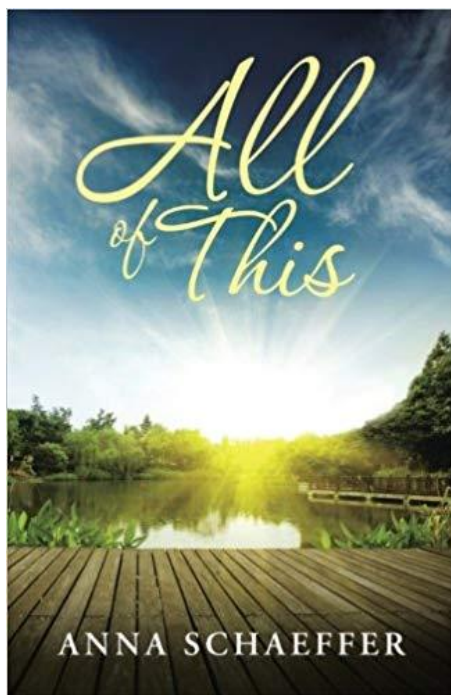
A note from Anna:

Feel free to reach out to me on social media (@aschaeffwrites) or through my website (annaschaefferwrites.com) to share what you’re learning! And if you have any questions about what it looks like to give your life to Jesus and be strong and courageous, let me know. I’d love to chat with you!

About the Author



Anna Schaeffer writes about girls navigating their teen years and discovering their purpose along the way. Anna lives in Georgia, where she teaches sixth grade ELA. When she's not lost in a book or helping tweens discover a love of stories, Anna loves hosting movie nights, making playlists, and taking road trips with her family. Hang out with Anna at annaschaefferwrites.com and on social media @aschaeuwrites.



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