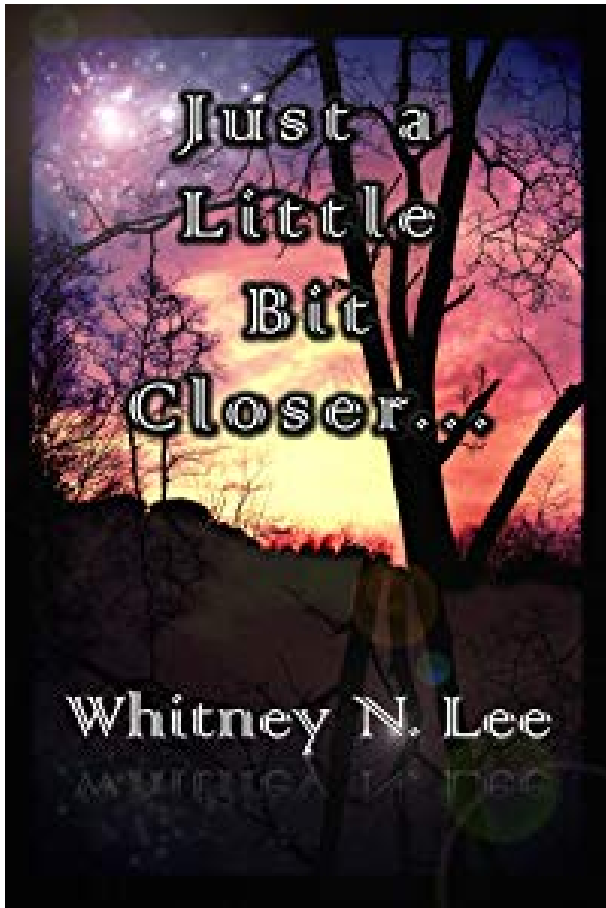


Just a Little Bit Closer



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It was a beautiful autumn day. The sun was bright and clear, and the air around was crisp and light.

Fallen leaves coated the ground and occasionally were swept into the air by the gentle breeze. By all definitions, it was a perfect day. But here Aubrey stood, surrounded by flowers, as the occasional sniff and strangled cry rang out into the haunting silence. An inconsolable mother was barely able to stand as her eldest son and husband supported her on both sides. Aubrey's eyes and nostrils burned as the priest began his last words. Her chest felt as if it were bearing bearing the weight of a thousand men. She didn't want to be here. The priest's words, or anyone else's for that matter, meant nothing.

They did not ease her pain or sorrow. They were not a final farewell, and they certainly could not bring Melanie back. Melanie was dead, and the dead were no longer among the living.