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A DARK FANTASY ROMANCE

PHANTASMA

KAYLIE SMITH

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SECOND SKY

BOOKS BY KAYLIE SMITH

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Publishing Team

*To those who've had to claw their way out of the dark and still choose to be
a light in this world—
I'm proud of you.*

CONTENT AND TRIGGER WARNINGS

This work contains explicit sexual content and scenes with elements of horror, as well as in-depth depictions of obsessive-compulsive tendencies, such as intrusive thoughts and compulsive tics. For a more complete list of possible triggers, please see my website:

www.kayliesmithbooks.com

HIERARCHY OF PARANORMAL BEINGS

KING OF THE DEVILS

PRINCE OF THE DEVILS

DEVILS

DEMONS

OFFSPRING OF A DEVIL & ANOTHER
PARANORMAL BEING

WRAITHS

OFFSPRING OF A DEMON & ANOTHER
PARANORMAL BEING

OTHER IMMORTAL
PARANORMAL BEINGS

MORTAL
PARANORMAL BEINGS

VAMPIRES
SHAPESHIFTERS
FAMILIARS
GHOSTS

NECROMANCERS
SEERS
WITCHES
SPECTERS

CLASSIFICATIONS OF GHOSTS

PHANTOMS

MOST CORPOREAL AND POWERFUL TYPE OF GHOST

POLTERGEISTS

TYPE OF GHOST ABLE TO POSSESS THE CORPOREAL VESSEL OF ANOTHER BEING

APPARITIONS

MOST COMMON TYPE OF GHOST, COMPLETELY NON-CORPOREAL AND IF LEFT LINGERING ON ANY
CORPOREAL PLANE FOR TOO LONG WITHOUT CROSSING OVER CAN DETERIORATE INTO A GHOUL

GHOULS

AN APPARITION THAT HAS DETERIORATED
INTO A NUMB, MINDLESS, ENTITY

“What a phantasmagoria the mind is and meeting-place of dissemblables!”
– Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

PROLOGUE

WICKED

The Devil had a wicked mouth and a voice as smooth as bourbon.

“What is your decision?” he pressed as he trailed the tip of his index finger down one side of her throat, his lips mere centimeters from her racing pulse on the other.

“You tricked me,” she whispered.

He laughed in response, his breath caressing her feverish skin.

He was so close that she could barely think.

Any coherent response to his question eluded her as another shot of adrenaline rushed through her veins, but the events leading up to this moment were burned into her mind with vivid clarity.

MIDNIGHT SPELL

THREE NIGHTS UNTIL PHANTASMA

Moonlight glinted off the gilded locket clasped around the corpse's cold neck.

Ophelia Grimm unfastened her mother's heart-shaped necklace with fervor before stepping clear of the spell circle and reaching beneath her loose, umber curls to secure the familiar bauble around her own throat. A shiver ran down her spine when the chilled metal settled against her skin, and her flesh prickled beneath it.

Ophelia sank to her knees on the left of her mother's pale corpse, her sister, Genevieve, watching a few feet away in rapt silence. Tightening her grip around the silver blade in her hand, Ophelia pressed its sharp tip into the soft, ivory flesh of her inner arm. The slice was deep but precise, drawing enough blood that it dripped and pooled onto the ground before her and dyed the delicate white material of her nightgown a macabre shade of vermilion. The scent of iron and salt was pungent.

Ophelia let the blade clatter to the floor, and Genevieve flinched like a spooked hare. Ophelia ignored her sister's cringing as she struck a match, relishing the *hiss* of the igniting fire in the dead quiet of Grimm Manor. She

reached toward the nearest candle and waited for its wick to flare to life, tapping the side of the waxy pillar while she counted each touch silently in her head.

One, two, three.

When the candle finally lit, Ophelia nudged it into place within the spell circle, and the rest of the pillars around Tessie Grimm's lifeless body instantly ignited. The Grimm sisters' shadows stretched all the way up to the ceiling as the velvet curtains billowed violently.

It had been Ophelia that awoke, sweat-soaked in the middle of this balmy New Orleans night, to find their mother lying stiff on the cream chambray rug. There had been no horrified screams or signs of panic or foul play. No signs of any peril at all. Just her mother sprawled out on the ground as if the woman had decided to retire for the night on the floor of the living room instead of a bed. If the foreign, crackling feeling of magic had not alerted her that something was very wrong, she might not have found her mother until the sun rose. And by then, it would have been too late.

Ophelia had been vaguely aware of her sister padding down the creaky stairs after her, but had been too busy scouring her memories to warn Genevieve of the gruesome scene below. Ophelia flipped through her recollection for confirmation that she had knocked on her headboard enough times and tapped her knuckles in the correct pattern on her wall before she went to sleep. But she knew she had. Her compulsions were routine at this point. This was not her fault. It couldn't be. She'd done everything perfectly.

For a moment, she'd considered leaving the corpse as it was and going back to bed, convinced it would disappear in the morning just as all her mind's conjurings did. It wasn't until Genevieve's blistering sob and the pulse of power in the air that she sprang into action. She'd snapped at Genevieve to find a box of matches, and had dashed through Grimm Manor to their mother's study, ransacking the room for the seven black candles she needed to perform the spell before the window of opportunity closed forever.

Ophelia was now the eldest Grimm. A dead mother made her much more than an orphan.

Hurry, your time is running out, the Shadow Voice that haunted her every waking thought whispered inside her mind. ***If you miss your window, there will be consequences.***

Ophelia pushed the voice away as she dipped two fingers into her own blood—careful not to reach past the circle of candles lest she break it and screw up the one thing she had been training for her entire life. This was it. The eleventh hour. Whatever she decided to do next would change her irrevocably. She could refuse to finish the spell and stay as she was, the only version of herself that she'd ever known. Or she could pay the price of continuing her family's legacy.

"You don't have to do it, Ophie," Genevieve whispered in the dark. Almost pleaded.

But Ophelia couldn't be the one who ended her family's magic. As much as this ritual would change the makeup of her very being, not going through with it would change her in a way that would break her spirit. The need to be good, to do well by everyone who had ever expected anything of her, was nestled deep inside her bones. Inextricable from her soul.

Closing her eyes, Ophelia whispered the words of the spell she had recited every night like an unholy prayer since she had learned to speak. The heat of the flames intensified as she finished whispering the incantation, the balmy air making her entire body flush while she concentrated on the power crackling over her skin. A charred, bitter fragrance burned her nose. The scent of magic.

When the last word dripped from her lips, each of the black candles extinguished one by one. Wisps of obsidian smoke rose around the circle as she reached beneath the collar of her unbuttoned nightgown and drew a crimson sigil right over her heart with her blood-dipped fingers.

Then they waited. Ophelia with anticipation. Genevieve with apprehension.

The temperature in the manor dropped ten degrees and the silence became heavy, the darkness too still. Ophelia suddenly felt eyes on her, gazes burning into her skin from every side. Eyes of those she could not see. Yet.

They waited in the dark for what felt like an agonizing amount of time. The midnight bells of the grand clock in the foyer had not yet tolled, but Ophelia thought surely the spell should have worked by now. Maybe she did it wrong, maybe she didn't say the words correctly, or clear enough. Maybe she was a complete and utter failure—

A scream erupted from her throat as fire suddenly seared through her bones and over every inch of her skin. She fell forward, onto her hands, spine cracking and popping into an unnatural arch, mewls of pain breaking free from her lips as her mother's magic flooded her system. She pressed her forehead to the ground, the pool of blood coating her face as her voice grew hoarse from her shrieks. Genevieve strode over to lay a hand on her back in comfort, unable to do anything but watch.

When it was finally over, Ophelia slumped to the floor, where she stayed for another long minute, trying to catch her breath. Eventually, she was able to stand and, taking a deep breath, she whispered a demand to the dark. The one that would seal her fate forever.

Genevieve's mouth fell open in awe as the dark answered Ophelia's request, the candles reigniting with the hushed command. This time, the flames were a silvery blue. Grimm Blue.

Ophelia caught a glimpse of her reflection flickering in the window. Her dark hair and wispy nightgown were caked in blood. Crimson was smeared across her razor-sharp cheekbones and dripping over the bridge of her delicately pointed nose—a startling contrast against her porcelain skin. That wasn't what caught her attention, however. Not when the gaze staring back at her was no longer her own. Her irises no longer the bright, warm cerulean of her childhood. The color Genevieve's still were. Instead, they had changed to a haunting, icy hue, almost bleached of their pigment entirely. It was the same chilling color that their mother's had been, the same as their grandmother's in the oil portrait that hung in the foyer. The same as every Grimm woman who had accepted her magic before them.

The same color as the hazy, glowing outlines of the Apparitions she could now see lurking in the shadows of the room.

Grimm Blue.

A venomous pride shot through her, but the wave of grief and fear that chased it almost buckled her knees. Part of her had hoped the magic wouldn't transfer, that their mother wasn't truly gone from this corporeal plane even though the cold corpse at her feet clearly told a different story. The other part of her, the one that successfully completed the spell and unleashed the magic now flowing through her veins, was satisfied.

A flickering reflection in the glass caught her eye. A curious Apparition with a wispy smile gazed back at her, knowingly, before blinking out of sight.

"Fucking Hell, Ophie," Genevieve whispered, shaking Ophelia out of her trance. "Are you alright?"

Ophelia said nothing as she reached up to smooth her finger over the locket at her throat, tapping it as she felt the first prick of tears in her eyes.

One, two, three.

Ophelia let out a strangled curse on the last tap and stumbled back a step, looking down at the necklace in disbelief. She held her breath as she waited for confirmation that she hadn't imagined it.

A moment later, the locket pulsed again, syncopating to the thrum within her own chest.

A heartbeat.

FAREWELLS

TWO NIGHTS UNTIL PHANTASMA

Very few things were considered unusual when you came from a family of prolific Necromancers. Every day of Ophelia's childhood had consisted of corpses being dragged in and out of Grimm Manor, trips to the cemetery, listening to her mother complain about yet another possible Demon-inflicted virus sweeping through New Orleans, or spending hours reciting lessons on each type of paranormal being she might one day encounter. Shapeshifters, Vampires, Witches.

But waking up to Ghosts lurking in her bedroom and hallways the morning after she had found her mother's lifeless body was strange even by her standards. She wasn't sure if she would ever get used to the pale blue beings popping in and out of sight around her. For their part, the Ghosts mostly ignored her, passing through Grimm Manor and around the streets of New Orleans like aimless will-o'-the-wisps as she and Genevieve attended to the practicalities of their mother's death. If she paid them no attention, most gave her the same courtesy. Some, however, seemed to enjoy making her squirm. When she accidentally caught the gazes of those, they refused to look away. Watching her every move. Beckoning for her to talk to them.

The two of them had been up since dawn. Or rather, they had been out of bed since dawn. Ophelia had spent the morning preparing her mother to be taken by the city coroner while Genevieve collected everything they'd need to get a death certificate and release an obituary in the *New Orleans Post*. Now, it was only an hour before dusk, and she and Genevieve were about a block from the coroner's office to say one last goodbye. Unlike other mortals, Necromancers didn't bother with traditions such as funerals or wakes. They said their goodbyes to the corporeal forms of their loved ones and then waited until the opportunity to reach them in the afterlife presented itself. Having any sort of grand ceremony felt too final when they had such a connection to the dead.

Ophelia wondered if the solemn tension that clung to the humidity in the air was only in her mind, or if the city somehow felt the grave loss of one of its own. If it knew that she would never be able to fill Tessie Grimm's shoes and it was grieving.

The new weight of magic sitting in her core churned her stomach. It would only be a matter of time until she felt the urge to expel it in some way. Too much energy left to build up without release would corrode her internally.

"Are you alright?" Genevieve murmured at her side.

"I'm fine," Ophelia lied.

Instead of calling her bluff, Genevieve graciously moved on. "Have I ever told you how much I hate living in a city so humid?"

"Almost constantly."

"It always destroys my curls," Genevieve griped as if Ophelia hadn't spoken. "Hell must be less humid than this."

Ophelia snorted. "You know what they say. Come to Hell—we may have Devils and Demons, but at least your hair won't get frizzy."

Genevieve wrinkled her nose. "Ugh, don't mention *them*. That's just asking for one to show up."

That wasn't how it worked, of course. Unless you actually stumbled upon a Devil, or they stumbled upon you, individual Devils could only be