



III

A SPICY FANTASY ROMANCE

ENCHANTRA

KAYLIE SMITH

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SECOND SKY

PRAISE FOR PHANTASMA

“Wickedly delightful and addictively delicious, Kaylie Smith’s *Phantasma* is the decadent feast that every romantasy lover dreams of. Dark magic, fraught danger, exhilarating trials, and a simmering-hot romance abound within its pages. Even long after closing the book, readers will be haunted by the tenacity of headstrong Ophelia and her sinfully gorgeous Phantom. And there’s a cat!”

—Sophie Kim, #1 *Sunday Times* bestselling
author of *The God and the Gumiho*

“Easily one of my favorite reads this year! Make it *Caraval*, but for grown-ups, where everything is darker, bloodier, spicier, and full of twists and turns. Kaylie Smith has created an absolute page-turner with their inventive games, creepy setting, and a swoony love interest that will gladly have you offering up the key to *your* heart.”

—Nisha J. Tuli, international bestselling
author of *Trial of the Sun Queen*

“Spellbinding, suspenseful, and spicy, *Phantasma* is a darkly romantic romp that will take your breath away. Smith has deftly woven the nine levels of hell into a tale that’s as swoon-worthy as it is bloody, and readers will love following Ophelia through a game of wit and nightmares.

Combined with thoughtful neurodivergent rep and twists I didn't see coming, this is a story that kept me reading long into the night!"

—M. K. Lobb, author of the *Seven Faceless Saints* duology

"Sinister, seductive, and delightfully dangerous. Straight off the streets of the Big Easy, readers will be craving more with every brilliantly crafted level in this game of secrets and forbidden desires. *Phantasma* is the perfect concoction of dark opulence, sizzling hot romance, and unforgiving gore."

—Alexis L. Menard, author of *House of Bane and Blood*

BOOKS BY KAYLIE SMITH

WICKED GAMES SERIES

[*Phantasma*](#)

[*Enchantra*](#)

CONTENTS

[Content Guidance](#)

[HIERARCHY OF PARANORMAL BEINGS](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Chapter 41](#)

[Chapter 42](#)

[Chapter 43](#)

[Chapter 44](#)

[Chapter 45](#)

[Chapter 46](#)

[Chapter 47](#)

[Chapter 48](#)

[Chapter 49](#)

[Chapter 50](#)

[Epilogue](#)

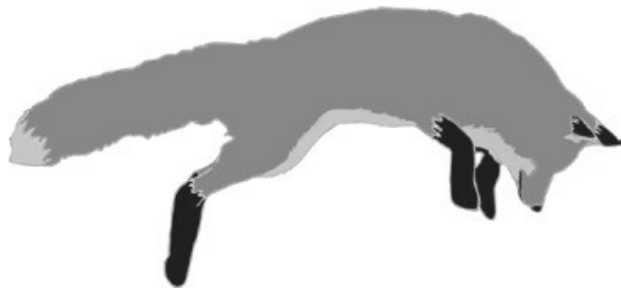
[Hear More from Kaylie](#)

[Books by Kaylie Smith](#)

[A Letter from Kaylie](#)

[Phantasma](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)



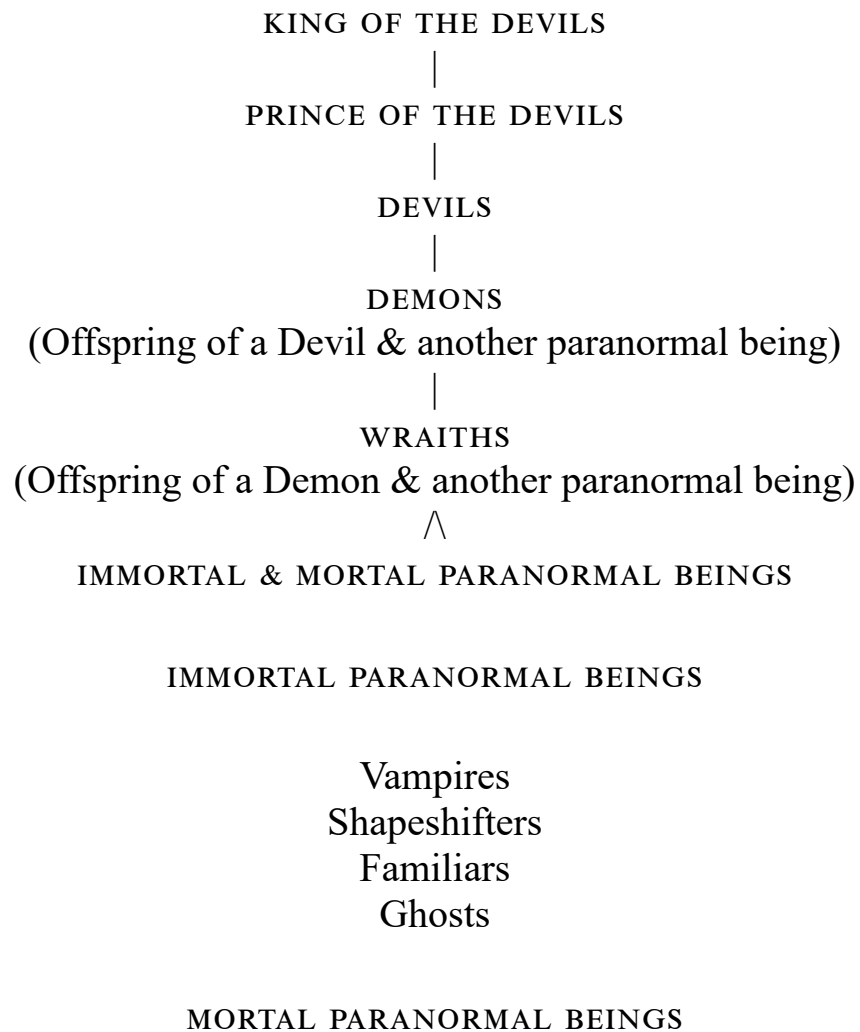
For the brave souls who burned the bridges between themselves and their demons. And for those still trying to light the match—we'll wait for you.

*And for Deanna, Becca, and Night,
who helped me stay sane so this book could exist.
Thanks for always answering my calls.*

CONTENT GUIDANCE

This book contains explicit sexual content, blood, death, light gore, drug references, heavy alcohol use, self-harm, and drink spiking with a magical aphrodisiac. An in-depth list of content is available at the [author's website](#).

HIERARCHY OF PARANORMAL BEINGS



Necromancers

Seers

Witches

Specters

CLASSIFICATION OF GHOSTS

Phantoms

Most corporeal and powerful type of Ghosts.

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.

“I am out with lanterns, looking for myself.”
—Emily Dickinson

PROLOGUE

DARKNESS

Hell was made of swirling darkness and secrets just like the man in front of her.

“I loathe you,” she swore as the black tendrils of magic that slithered from his hands wrapped around her wrists and throat, shoving her back into the labyrinth’s wall. The sensual energy that always buzzed over her skin whenever he was this close made her grit her teeth as she resisted the shot of attraction slowly heating up her veins. The last time his shadows were wrapped around her like this, there was much less clothing between them.

He followed after his shadows, stalking forward until his chest pressed into hers.

“Love. Loathing. Same passion, different names,” he told her. “And how easily and swiftly the line can be blurred, don’t you think?”

“No,” she seethed. “I don’t think it will ever be anything but crystal clear to me that I *hate* you.”

Leaning down slowly, until his lips were right next to her ear, he said, “Prove it.”



THE BEGINNING

OMENS

Genevieve Grimm's first murder was in the heart of Rome.

At the beginning, the crows had shown up one at a time. Squawking in the background of her morning walks to the pasticceria that had become her favorite place to get breakfast. Their jam tarts one of the things she would miss dearly when she left Rome behind to delve into the unknown ahead.

Every morning for the last week she'd packed and repacked her trunks, worried she might be choosing the wrong gowns or forgetting her favorite perfume—or any of the other things she thought might make the best first impression. In the afternoons she explored the city, attempting to visit every significant landmark within a few days, so that her sister, Ophelia, would never suspect she had strayed from their agreed itinerary.

Or that was the excuse she gave herself, anyway.

Really, she was stalling. Thinking that perhaps it was a mistake to pin so many hopes on a stranger who didn't even know she existed. Or that she should wait for a clear-cut sign before uprooting all her sister's carefully laid plans.

It had been at breakfast a few days ago, at the pasticceria, when she'd first recognized that the crows were behaving strangely. One of the little fiends had watched her from a blooming, pink oleander tree while she sipped hot chocolate outside the pastry shop and flipped through a book—a grimoire from Ophelia's collection that she had snuck into her trunk. She'd looked back at the bird, and there was something a bit too shrewd in its gaze. Something unnatural. But the thought that it might be *supernatural* had never crossed her mind.

Nor did the prospect that the feathered beasts would turn into full-blown omens.

The next day, however, the first crow was joined by another, trading shrieks as she walked to the Porta Portese flea market, and again as she walked back to the town house Ophelia had arranged for the duration of the trip. It was that night that the pair had turned into a trio, tapping their beaks against her bedroom window well into the witching hours.

But despite it being clear that there was something off about the birds, Genevieve still wasn't ready to face her suspicion as to why they were pursuing her. Only after her visit to the Colosseum, where she should have been an indistinguishable face amongst a sea of equally clichéd tourists, did the crows become impossible to ignore.

She'd dressed for the day as drably as she was capable of, hoping it might help mitigate any unwanted attention from the birds. Her gown was made of blush chiffon, the hem and sleeves adorably ruffled, and her loose golden-brown curls were swept up in a simple chignon atop her head. She didn't bother with gloves or any sort of jewelry—like herself, corvids enjoyed shiny things a bit too much.

Her effort was rewarded when her walk to the ancient amphitheater was uneventful. Her stroll staying even-paced as she made her way further and further from the town house without spotting a single one of the feathered fiends. Nor was she bothered while she followed a guide around the magnificent attraction.

No, it wasn't until the sun finally dropped below the horizon, turning everything from warm gold to cold silver, and she stepped back outside with the rest of her tour group, that the caws of the murder came with it. A crow was perched on every single rooftop and streetlamp, and the scene of a hundred beady gazes locking onto her face in the middle of the bustling crowd would likely never fade from her memories. Nor would the echo of the burning sensation in her lungs as she ran through the cobblestone streets of Rome while the birds chased after her in a frenzy of shrieks and wings.

The crows never harmed her, never left her with a single scratch on her skin as they swooped too low for comfort and sent the crowds around her screaming in terror. Nor did they pull a hair out of place on her head. They only offered the inescapable feeling of being rushed.

She'd hoped for a sign and she'd certainly gotten one.

"I'll go!" she shouted at the birds. "I just need a little longer!"

Then they *did* get a little too close to her—their wings brushing against her hair, her back, her skirts—as they pushed her toward the town house faster and faster.

She pounded up the path to her front door, her fingers fumbling for the gilded key in her cape's pocket as the birds swooped through the air and began to land on the window ledges and the balcony above. She shoved the key into the lock and listened for the click before pushing herself inside and spinning for the stairs.

I just had to ask for a sign, she admonished herself in her mind. *Now I can't put it off any longer.*

Throwing open the double doors to the primary suite, she hauled a trunk up onto the bed. She cringed as frantic pecking reverberated against the windows of the far wall. Talons scraped over the glass and sent a hair-raising screech through the air as inky feathers fluttered over the panes.

Tossing dresses, skirts, and undergarments onto the bed, she muttered, "It's in here somewhere."

When she finally reached the bottom of the case and plucked out the item she was searching for, the pecking hushed.

It was a black envelope embossed with an intricate filigree design, the swirling patterns foiled in glittering silver. Its matching wax seal featured an image of a thorned branch adorned with wild roses and berries, a large letter "S" embedded in the center. Inside was a piece of velvety parchment more luxurious than any paper she'd ever felt, and the words elegantly scrawled across it were in rich sapphire ink.

Genevieve pulled the letter from its already torn sleeve, unfolding it as a heavy sensation settled over her shoulders. Her blood began to heat as she read it once again.

From the desk of the Enchantra Estate

Dearest Tessie,

My deepest apologies that it has taken me so much time to get back to you. The situation with my family has grown increasingly complicated over the years and I'm afraid that time got away from me. I won't bore you too much with the details.

I know there is much we have to discuss after all this time, even beyond the topics of your letters, and so I must insist the two of us do so in person.

I must express that it is with the most ardent regret that we left things the way we did and that I have neglected to reach out before now, but I would very much like to rectify my mistakes.

Enclosed is a small gift for your travel expenses. Please do not take it as charity, I know how you are, but rather I have more than I, or my kin, know what to do with and it's the least I could offer in order to reunite our acquaintance. I know the spring equinox is soon, but I insist you visit us before then as I will have a brief sabbatical from my duties to Knox. I demand you visit, actually. Plus, the demonberries will be perfectly ripe.

See you very soon.

Your old friend,

Barrington Silver

When she'd opened the letter for the first time back home, she had noticed that the ink of some of the letters had bled ever so slightly, making parts of certain words appear thicker than the others. Revealing an all-too-familiar shape amongst the lines.

A crow.

"Damned fucking birds," she muttered.

The omen was blatant now—as was the sensation emanating from the parchment. The slight buzz of warmth was one that she'd been training herself to recognize in recent months. Magic.

I know the spring equinox is soon, but I insist you visit us before its eve.

Genevieve had always intended to leave Rome with plenty of time before the equinox, but between her nerves and all the city's attractions...

Better late than never, right?

She shoved the invitation back inside the pages of her diary and clasped her trunks closed. It was time.

Behind her the murder reached a crescendo, their beaks hitting the glass panes so hard she wasn't sure how they hadn't yet shattered. Their caws were thunderous as their frantic wings continued to beat in sync with her heart.

"I'm going," she grunted as she hauled her luggage off the bed, the weight of the trunks nearly too heavy.

But when she finally turned around, ready to go, the birds had disappeared.