

## Author's Note

I have always believed in ghosts. This may be due to the fact that I grew up near one of the most haunted cities in America. Or perhaps it's because of the time in the sixth grade that my friends and I performed an ill-advised séance that resulted in a power outage. Which definitely scarred us all for life. Either way, I've always believed.

As an only child, I spent a lot of time, alone, between the pages of books at odd hours of the night, wishing I could conjure someone who *understood* me. There's a good chance I was just being a moody teenager, but when Ophelia and her story came to me, that's exactly what I found—someone that understood me. Ophelia doesn't just believe in ghosts, she sees them. In her home, around the city of New Orleans, in her past. And, like me, she starts her story desperately wishing there was someone, anyone, who could understand that part of her. So, when Blackwell splashed onto the page in all his charming, phantom glory, it made complete and utter sense to me that the two of them would understand each other. The girl who saw ghosts and the ghost who had never felt seen.

Blackwell was as much of a surprise to me as he was to Ophelia. At first, I thought Ophelia's love interest might be someone much darker, more sinister, someone that could directly relate with the demons lurking in the shadows of her mind. But Blackwell's hope, humor, and passion, despite his despairing circumstances, was exactly the sort of balance Ophelia needed. It's something I learned from my own partner over the years—struggling with your mental health does not make you undeserving of their love. It took me many years, and a lot of work, to let go of the fear that I might somehow corrupt someone I consider to be sunshine with my dark, bleeding thoughts, and it was important to me to show that while Blackwell might

not understand the Shadow Voice, he certainly did not think Ophelia needed to be fixed in order for him to love her.

Despite the hellish games Ophelia and Blackwell must play within *Phantasma*, I hope that the little piece of heaven they find with each other makes you remember there is always light to be found in darkness. I hope that when you're out at a café getting coffee or browsing in a bookstore and feel a slight chill, that maybe it makes you wonder what benevolent, charming spirits might be curiously hanging about. And I hope that these characters haunt you as much as they have me, in the best possible way.

- Kaylie Smith

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## Discussion Questions

1. The book begins with Ophelia performing the ritual to transform into a full Necromancer. She seems both afraid the spell will work and prideful when it does. Do you think it's her position as the eldest that influences these contradicting feelings within her? Or do you think she would have completed the ritual even if Genevieve had been the eldest daughter and decided to pass on the opportunity?
2. Ophelia survives the first level of Phantasma without Blackwell's help—and holds her own without him during later trials as well. Do you think she would have been able to win the game entirely without him? If not, which level do you think she would have stopped on? Would she have forfeited before or made a deal with a Devil to leave during?
3. When asked his favorite book, Blackwell describes the book *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. Do you see any overlapping themes between *Frankenstein* and *Phantasma*?
4. Before entering Phantasma, Ophelia watches Genevieve run to hug a friend and reflects there's not a single person that she would greet like that. However, when Ophelia finds herself trapped inside the walls of the library, she calls out for Blackwell and runs to hug him when he appears. What do you think elicited this change in her?
5. After reading the revelation at the end of the book, who do you think Ophelia's secret in the magic pool in level six was truly about? Do you think the house itself knew what she, and all the others within Phantasma, didn't?
6. The Shadow Voice is a personified manifestation of Ophelia's Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and it influences not only her actions but the way she exists despite her drawing clear boundaries between its thoughts and her own, as well as its desired actions and her

free will. Do you think without the Shadow Voice, the events of Phantasma would have ended in the same way?

7. Early in the book, Blackwell claimed he didn't kill Cade because he was afraid of what Ophelia might have thought about him. Do you think if Blackwell had killed Cade at that point, it would have changed Ophelia's opinion of him? Conversely, do you think Blackwell's perspective of Ophelia changed after her battle with Cade in level seven? In what ways?
8. At the end of the book, we see a certain promise that Blackwell made to Ophelia being made verbatim between two different people. Do you think this is simply a coincidence? Or fate at work?
9. In the epilogue, Ophelia shares that she plans to make Grimm Manor into a safe haven for other paranormal beings rather than carry on her mother's practice of assisting only mortals. Do you think she would have come to this conclusion without the events of Phantasma? Do you think her mother would have approved?
10. In the end, we see that Blackwell and Ophelia still do not know the locket's origins or its connection to their shared histories. Do you think it is better that they don't have all the missing pieces and are starting from a clean slate? How do you think their relationship would change if they did know the full story?

Bonus: Do you think there's a Ghost Cat distribution system?