

LIBRIS

We know
books



ENCHANTRA

KAYLIE SMITH

SECOND SKY

PROLOGUE

Darkness

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

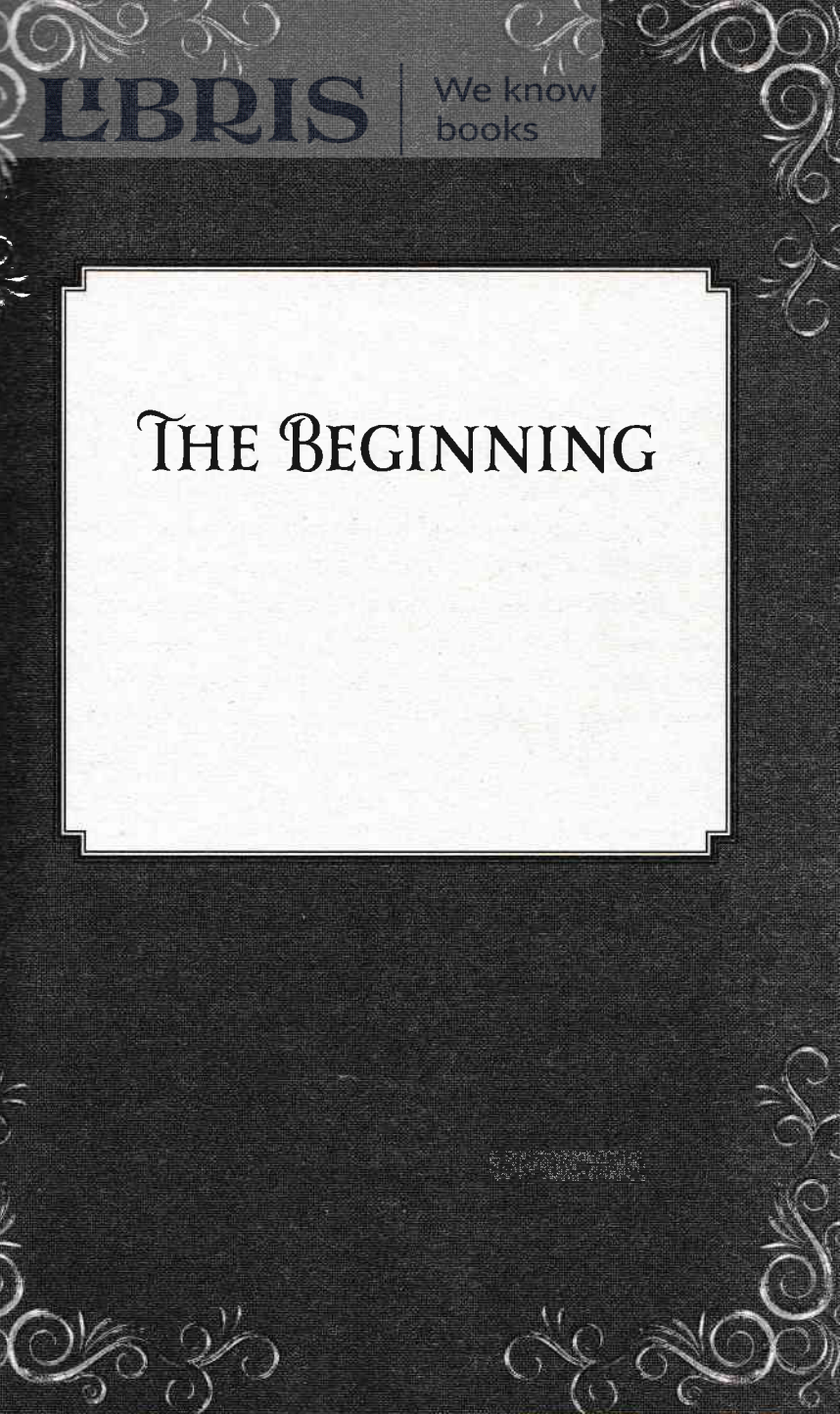
“I loathe you,” she swore as the black tendrils of magic that slithered from his hands wrapped around her wrists and throat, shoving her back into the labyrinth’s wall. The sensual energy that always buzzed over her skin whenever he was this close made her grit her teeth as she resisted the shot of attraction 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.”



EBRIS

We know
books

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.

Neither 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 long 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, even beyond the topics of your letters, and so I must insist the two of us do so in person.

I must express my most ardent regret that we left things the way we did and that I 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, for I know how you are, but as rather I have more than I, or my kin, know what to do with, and it's the least I can offer in order to reunite our acquaintance. I know the spring equinox is soon, but I insist you visit us before its eve, 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.

LEBRIS

We know
books

THE EVE OF THE
SPRING EQUINOX



THE INVITATION

Afternoon light filtered in through the window, swathing the first-class sleeping car in an enchanting golden hue. The Tuscan countryside just outside was likely one of the most breathtaking sights she'd ever behold, but she could hardly even look at it as it rushed past, her nerves on fire as the train barreled toward its destination.

The last of the lunch carts rolled down the hall outside her roomette, the sound of glasses and plates rattling against each other slowly fading away as it passed. She tapped her foot on the ground in a steady rhythm of impatience as she waited for the train to make its next stop.

The journey through the Italian countryside had been uncomfortable, exhausting, and, worst of all, *tedious*. At first she'd tried rereading the books in her trunk, but after confirming that the plague of crows following her was likely the result of magic known as a hex, she quickly became bored.

Reaching her right hand over to her left, she attempted to fiddle with a ring that she continued to forget she no longer wore. She dropped both hands back into her lap with a frustrated sigh. Being trapped within the same four walls without a single interesting soul to talk to was Genevieve's personal version of Hell. She felt she'd done enough of that growing up in Grimm Manor.

While her late mother, Tessie Grimm, had trained her sister in the art of Necromancy, Genevieve had been stuck with

nothing but her stuffed animals and dolls to talk to. As the eldest, Ophelia would be the only one to inherit their mother's magic, and it had taken Genevieve years to realize how their mother's focus on Ophelia had made her feel like an only child. And left her with a constant need to be in a crowd. Or someone else's bed.

Genevieve had become accustomed to hiding her own magic, terrified of her mother finding out about her power and sheltering her like Ophie. She told herself she wanted nothing to do with Tessie Grimm's outlandish world. Then her mother had died, just a few months ago, and Ophelia had taken over their family's legacy. Instead of their mother's approach, Ophelia had decided to embrace her Necromancer title by becoming a sort of problem-fixer for every paranormal being who arrived on Grimm Manor's doorstep in recent months—Witches, Ghosts, Vampires, *Devils*—and it made Genevieve realize just how willfully naïve she'd been about the world.

Her experience in Phantasma—the Hellish competition that she and Ophelia had entered this past autumn—had made her want to learn as much as she could about such paranormal things. The competition itself had not worried Genevieve a great deal when she'd entered. She'd known that her particular brand of inherited magic—from her and Ophelia's father—would make it easy to avoid all of the physical horrors and trials within the Devil's Manor. But it had been frustrating to think that if she did not have such magic, she would likely have not gotten past a single day in the competition.

There had been plenty of opportunities for Genevieve to tell Ophelia about her newfound desire to learn. But every time Genevieve had tried, she'd found herself unable to admit how foolish she'd been. How she'd been running from her family, from herself, for so long.

Nor had she been ready to admit the *largest* reason she'd stopped scorning the paranormal. Because she was no longer trying to win the affections of a man who'd never loved her...

A whistle sounded overhead, slicing through her thoughts to announce that the train would soon be approaching its next stop—Florence. The closest city to her final destination.

Genevieve's reflection in the window perked up.

She was so close now. So close to discovering another family like hers.

She dug into the pocket of her cape and pulled out a photograph. She had found it in her mother's room, hidden away with other keepsakes from the life Tessie Grimm had led before settling down in New Orleans. A life that even Ophelia knew nothing about.

The sepia-colored picture showed a man standing next to Tessie Grimm, his arm slung over her shoulders in a way that made their comfort with one another very apparent. But what always drew Genevieve's eye was the fact that they were both wearing matching heart-shaped locket.

From the moment she found the photograph, Genevieve had found herself asking the same questions. She knew that her mother's locket was connected to her family's lineage, that it had always been meant to pass on to Ophelia upon their mother's death. Was the man in the picture a Necromancer, too? Did he have children? Were any of them... like her?

And so her curiosity grew over the years. Until she could no longer resist it.

She flipped the photograph in her hands and read the names on the back, written in her mother's elegant script.

Barrington Silver and Tessie Grimm.

The blast of the steam whistle echoed a second time, and Genevieve shoved the photograph deep into the pocket of her