

# OF GREETINGS AND GOODBYES



CULLEN PARKER

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## OF GREETINGS AND GOODBYES

L awrence, Kansas

“So this is the main mausoleum, where we have most of the supernatural activity,” the security guard said. His name was James, or John, or something like that. Ophelia knew it at the start of the job, but by this point, it no longer mattered. She had him right where she needed him. “Hayden Cemetery is the second largest in all of Kansas, and by far the most haunted.”

“Ooh, that’s so interesting,” she cooed, leaning closer to him, clinging to his arm and not-so-subtly pressing her breasts against him. Ophelia was rarely subtle, and this situation didn’t exactly call for it. The guy’s eyeballs had nearly bulged out of his head the moment he saw her. It didn’t take much from there to get him to give her a “private” tour, just the two of them, after visiting hours.

Now she just had to find an out of the way place, convince him to take her there, and give him the best twenty minutes of his sad little life while Sam figured out what the hell was going on in the mausoleum.

“Yeah, we get all kinds of ghosts here. The most famous is called The Gray Lady.”

Ophelia kept herself from rolling her eyes, but only barely. Every town worth putting on a map had a gray lady of some sort, it was

one of the most common types of hauntings. The odds of an actual gray lady being behind the goings on at Hayden were slim- grays were considered “intelligent” haunts, and spirits liked that avoided reminders of death, they weren’t drawn to them. A mausoleum would be the last place a gray lady would go.

Rather than correct him, she directed his attention to a small closet near the back of the room, making her eyes light up with faux-excitement.

“What’s that over there?” she stage-whispered, gripping his arm tighter.

“Uh, it’s a supply closet.”

“We should investigate it.”

He looked at her like she had an arm growing out of her forehead. He wasn’t bad to look at, if you were into burly country boys with the first signs of male-pattern baldness peeking through, which Ophelia wasn’t entirely averse to, but he wasn’t particularly bright. Which Ophelia was grateful for, under the circumstances.

She smiled sweetly at him, letting him work it out on his own. As he did, his eyes widened, and he smiled despite his obvious efforts to keep his composure.

“I, uh...” he let out a nervous laugh. “I can probably arrange that. Let me just...” He scanned the large room one more time with his flashlight to ensure it was empty. “Yeah. That looks good.” He motioned to the closet with an over-the-top bow. “After you, m’lady.”

Ophelia forced herself to giggle, clinging tighter to his arm. He escorted her to the closet and unlocked it, making what she assumed was his version of a grand show of it. She went in first, tugging him in after her with all the enthusiasm she could muster and wrapping her arms around his neck, pulling him into a deep kiss. She arched her

back, pressing her hips against him and swaying back and forth, all subtlety out the window.

The guards's hands moved to her breasts, first squeezing them far harder than was comfortable, before frantically scrambling to pull them free of her black dress. She rarely wore a bra, and tonight wasn't an exception, so his efforts were quickly rewarded. He latched his mouth to her nipple like a hungry newborn, drawing something between a yelp of surprise and a moan. She wiggled her dress down to her hips, pulling it the rest of the way off, leaving her naked before him. He took a step back, surprised, drinking her in with his eyes.

"You, uh, always go commando for cemetery visits?" he asked breathlessly.

"I don't own underwear," she purred, not needing any magical sense to know exactly what he wanted to hear. She gave him her best seductive smile. "Your turn."

His leer turned into a smile as he quickly began undressing. He wasn't bad to look at- he was in good shape, if softening around the edges slightly, she guessed a football player who no longer worked out quite as often now that he had a real life and job, and as he got down to his plaid boxers, she realized she was in for a bit of a treat.

He pulled his boxers off to reveal the thickest cock she had ever seen in person. It wasn't incredibly long, maybe six inches, but was thick enough she was skeptical she could fully close her hand around it. She quickly tested the theory, grabbing his shaft and finding it was just slightly too big to complete her grip. She looked at him and smiled, this one not quite as forced.

"Very nice."

She gave it a pair of long, slow strokes.

"Now, what are you going to do with it?" she asked, sending Sam the go signal.

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Meanwhile

Sam paced outside of the mausoleum, waiting for Ophelia's signal and trying not to think about Cassandra. About how it should be the two of them on the run, instead of her and Ophelia. But it wasn't the two of them. Cas had begged off, saying she wasn't feeling well, but there was something more going on, Sam could tell. Thoughts of what it could be had been driving her up a wall all day.

Stay focused, she told herself. This should be a milk run, but things could go sideways in a hurry, as Elizabeth loved to remind the girls.

Thoughts of Elizabeth filled her with a different feeling of anxiety. She was dying, and there was nothing any of the women of Wayward House could do about it. Cancer, slow and painful, had her in its final grip. She was at peace with it, she said, but Sam wasn't ready to deal with losing one of her two mother-figures.

The thoughts chased themselves in circles, each rotation making Sam more antsy and annoyed. By the time Ophelia's signal- a wave of magical energy any witch within five hundred yards would have picked up on, came through, Sam was ready to hit something, hard.

She hurried into the mausoleum. She knew Ophelia would keep the guard occupied for as long as she could, using whatever tricks, magical or otherwise, that she had to in order to prolong their dalliance as long as possible, but she didn't trust the guy not to come before she could find, and banish, whatever was kicking up trouble. She had to hurry.

Sam passed through the small entrance room into the main chamber of the Mausoleum, feeling a slight disturbance somewhere above her. At first she thought it might have been residual magic from Ophelia getting it on in the small closet across the way from where she was standing, but then she felt a subtle pulse from the closet itself, and realized it was, in fact, her quarry.

“Alright, let’s get this over with,” she muttered to no one before beginning an incantation in the bastardized Latin favored by ghost hunters in the Society. This sort of spell-work wasn’t her strong suit. She preferred battle magic, spells that didn’t require subtlety and finesse, just strength.

She finished the incantation and scanned the room, looking for any sign of the spirit she was seeking. There was nothing. The spell had failed. She tried it again, more urgently, emphasizing each syllable. It should have illuminated the spirit, if only for a few moments, but she saw no flash of light, despite the obvious magical residue she was feeling from the haunt.

“Shit,” she swore under her breath, looking around in vain. Normally, in this situation, she would shout at the spirit to draw it out, insult it, or challenge it. But no matter how distracted he was, the guard would hear her, and that him getting involved would complicate things, defeating the entire purpose of Ophelia running interference at all.

She started the incantation again, one last roll of the dice, but was cut off by a vase flying past her, narrowly missing her head, crashing into the wall behind her.

“Shit,” she swore again, realizing the situation was worse than they thought.

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She was on her knees, struggling to wrap her lips around the entirety of John or Jack or whatever his name was’s cock, when they heard the crash. He turned towards the door, popping himself out of her mouth.

“What the fuck?” he gasped.

“It was probably just your ghost, baby,” she purred, putting just enough magic in her words to dull his suspicion and nerves, cursing



Sam silently. He didn't look entirely convinced, which was a worry, so she gripped him firmly, standing up and kissing him, swapping their positions so she was between him and the door as she did.

"I just..." he tried to say, breaking the kiss, but the words died on his lips as he locked eyes with her, her magic overwhelming his senses.

"You just need to give me that cock, I know, baby. I know."

She turned around and presented herself to him, arching her back and wiggling her ass enticingly. Even without magic, he never could have resisted.

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Sam had not been expecting a fight. She should have been, of course, she should always expect a fight on a run, but all the intelligence that had been provided to them spoke to a residual haunt, not something intelligent. She thought about dialing Centro, but decided against it, wishing they had an operator of their own at Wayward. For something small and local like this haunt, a mere few hours from the House, another region's operator wouldn't be much help, no matter how good they were.

She knew she had to think fast, determine what, exactly, was anchoring the now obviously malevolent spirit to the world, find it, and get rid of it. It would have been no problem, if Cas had been there. But she wasn't. She was alone.

She took a deep breath. It was go time.

Exhaling, she reached out with her magic, trying to feel any nearby magical energy. She felt Ophelia, rutting away in the closet, and did her best to block it out. She felt the spirit, faintly, in and out of her perception. She felt something else, though, a small but steady pulse of magical energy, not in the room, but nearby, that she couldn't account for. It was the best lead she was going to get.

She made her way to the exit of the mausoleum, on-guard for any further resistance from the spirit. The cemetery grounds were large, stretching for acres in multiple directions, so she concentrated on the bubble of energy she felt, trying to follow it like a compass.

It wasn't her strong suit. Ophelia would have had a far easier time of it, but Sam would much rather struggle to track some relic than distract the beefy country boy. She headed north at a sprint, hoping she was right, only to be felled after mere yards by a large tree branch falling directly in her path, sending her to the ground with a thud.

She rolled with her momentum, taking the brunt of the fall on her right shoulder, and bounced back to her feet quickly, looking around and seeing nothing. It was dark, not quite pitch black, but dark enough that she was at a severe disadvantage in any sort of fight. Thinking quickly, she concentrated, tapping into her magical core before sending out a wave of raw, unfocused magical energy in all directions.

It was brute force, but she hoped it would be enough to keep her target off her back long enough for her to find its anchor. She didn't wait for to see or feel the response to her handiwork, sprinting again in the direction she hoped was right.

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What the guard lacked in prowess he made up for in sheer enthusiasm, Ophelia thought. She hadn't expected the man to care much for her pleasure, beyond the obviously rhetorical "You like that?" he muttered every so often, but she was slightly disappointed in his lack of technique. With the weapon he was packing it could have been a highly enjoyable assignment for her. Still, even with his overly-aggressive slaps to her ass, which she typically enjoyed in small doses, it was better than what Sam was having to do, she reminded herself.

She slipped her hand between her legs, rubbing small circles on her clit. If her would-be partner noticed, he didn't mention it, thrusting away with the same speed and aggressiveness, his muscular hands gripping her hips hard enough that they'd likely be bruised after. She moved quickly, trying to get herself off as quickly as possible before time inevitably ran out.

Her fears were well founded, the guard's moaning and grunting increasing both in volume and frequency.

"Ungh, baby," he grunted, almost intelligibly. "I'm getting close."

Surprised at the fact he said anything at all, she muttered a quick spell in archaic Gaelic to try to hold off his conclusion, to give both her and Sam more time. She climbed as quickly as she could, knowing her spell would only hold off the man's nature for so long. She sent tiny pulses of magic through her fingers as she rubbed, and soon she was approaching her own peak.

"You want my tits or my ass, baby?" she gasped, pushing him back, turning to face him, and stroking him furiously with one hand and herself with the other. He stared at her, dumbfounded, for the span of three heartbeats. His knees gave a slight wobble.

"Tits," he groaned. She dropped to her knees in front of him, riding the edge of her orgasm. She didn't need her magical senses to tell he was desperately close to his own. She stroked him furiously, increasing the intensity of the magic she sent through her fingertips on her clit.

It happened simultaneously, her orgasm rocked her from within just as the guard erupted, covering her breasts with rope after rope of semen. He let out a guttural sound, something between a moan and growl, before collapsing backward, barely getting his hands down to break his fall.

She would have laughed, if this had been a recreational jaunt and not part of a job. Instead, she reached out with her magic, trying to

get a sense of how Sam was faring. She was further away than Ophelia expected, sprinting towards something Ophelia couldn't quite place, the spirit close behind her. She had no time to waste.

She retrieved her dress and stood, putting it on as quickly as possible, enjoying the small pleasure she always felt when a garment stuck to her freshly covered body. She looked down at the guard, who was staring, half cross-eyed, at nothing in particular. Making a split second decision, she leaned down and kissed him, casting a silent, low-power sleeping spell as she did.

"Thanks for the tour," she whispered as he nodded off immediately. She waited a moment to make sure he was out before breaking into a run out of the mausoleum. She had to help her sister.

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The source of the magic Sam had been searching for was inside another, much smaller mausoleum, a family vault for the Palmer family, who had all passed away in the mid-1800s. As she approached the rectangular stone building, she was sent sprawling for cover as its heavy wooden door exploded into splinters in front of her. She saw the faint outline of a figure glide into the room. The spirit was growing stronger.

She pulled herself to her feet and got ready to fight.

She charged into the crypt and saw a small shrine to the departed, with pictures and a few trinkets of jewelry and books, on a far wall. She knew whatever was anchoring the spirit to the world was in that shrine. She also saw that the spirit had achieved a nearly full apparition, likely thanks to being reunited with its anchor.

It was a woman, tall and thin, flickering in and out of reality, growing sharper and more defined each time. And stronger, Sam reminded herself. It stared at her, motionless, waiting for Sam to make a move.

Sam took a deep breath and, doing her best Cassandra impression, held up her hands and spoke.

“We don’t have to fight,” she said to the spirit, doing her best to keep her voice as calm and even as possible. “I want to help you...” she tried to think of what Cas would say. “I want to help you cross over. Find what comes next.”

Everything that wasn’t bolted down rattled around her. There was a feeling of malice in the air that made her stomach hurt. She braced herself.

The spirit’s attack came quickly. It charged at her, sending her diving to the ground again to avoid it, not wanting to find out what, exactly, would have happened if a not-quite-corporeal entity ran into her. She did a shoulder roll and popped up to her feet, sending a Ugartic banishing spell in the direction she assumed the spirit would be.

To her dismay, the spell missed entirely. The spirit momentarily faded out again before reappearing to Sam’s left, screeching an unearthly howl. Sam grit her teeth and flung another spell at the spirit, this one

a medieval Japanese curse designed to cast out harmful spirits. It caught the spirit, but instead of ejecting it from the room, it just made the apparition howl again, leaving Sam to curse her crappy pronunciation. She needed to figure out which item in the shrine was the anchor and destroy it. All while keeping the spirit from thrashing her.

Sam readied herself for another attack, but it failed to come. Instead, the apparition howled again, staring at the doorway, much to Sam’s confusion. A moment later Ophelia appeared, looking spent in more ways than one. The redhead glanced at Sam, then at the shrine, her eyes narrowing as she reached out with her magic.

“Small leather book. A journal,” she said breathlessly.

“Take the book, I’ll keep this thing busy,” Sam growled with determination. She half-expected Ophelia to argue with her, demanding to take the lead, but no complaint came, only a small nod of acknowledgment.

Sam bent down and pulled a small leather satchel out of her sock, emptying the contents into her hand as subtly as she could while the spirit’s attention was still on Ophelia. She stood back up and stepped towards it.

“Over here, bitch!” she shouted, flinging the handful of rock salt directly at the spirit. It let out another horrific cry as the salt made contact. Salt was often used to keep spirits at bay, so the witches of the Society often carried it just in case.

The spirit flickered in what passed for pain for the incorporeal, giving Ophelia the window she needed. Moving as quickly as she could, she crossed the small crypt to the far wall, opening the shrine as carefully as she could. She had to destroy the anchor, but there was no need to harm the other artifacts, and in fact, doing so could cause more problems for them.

The spirit reappeared, still howling, and tried to dive at Ophelia, but was met with another, stronger banishing spell from Sam, stopping it in its tracks, its more corporeal form more prone to the effects of the spell.

“Ardeat,” Ophelia muttered, the spell lighting the book on fire. The spirit twisted and contorted, howling in pain as the book went up in Ophelia’s magic flame, leather and all. Within seconds it was all over, all traces of the book, and spirit, gone. Ophelia turned to her sister. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah,” Sam replied, dusting herself off and checking for damage. “Just some scratches and bruises. How was guard duty?”

Ophelia smiled and moved closer to Sam so she could see the remnants of her dalliance with the guard on her chest for herself.

“Quite well, thank you.”

“You are disgusting.”

Ophelia only smirked, turning to leave the crypt and return to their waiting car.

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Meanwhile

Wayward House, Lebanon, Kansas

In her dream Callidora was in the Library. Her body was asleep in her room, some unquantifiable distance away through the twisting and ever-changing corridors of Wayward House. She knew she was dreaming as she moved through the stacks. She could feel it.

The Library was darker than usual, shadows obscuring the tops of the shelves, towering over her. She was looking for something, she realized. She wasn't sure what, exactly, but she knew she was searching, the way one knows things, in dreams.

She turned left at the end of one of the long rows of shelves, down another, near identical row. To her left was a series of tomes on blood magic, to her right a set of biographies of past Society leaders. This struck her as strange, the two topics should not have been near each other. But, she reminded herself, Wayward House often had its own ideas of where things should be, the Library most of all.

“Calli?” she heard a voice call her name. The sound was faint, distant, coming from some faraway part of the Library, carried through means unknown to her. She didn't recognize the voice, but it felt familiar. She opened her mouth to answer, but no words escaped, her voice gone.

She moved to follow the voice, to find it, sure that the person speaking is who she was searching for. She made her way up the long

aisle, then down another, wandering the labyrinth of books. She was drawing closer to the voice, to whoever it was she was looking for. Every so often they called again, louder, but still unclear.

She stood at the end of a row and had to decide which way to turn.

“Calli,” the voice said. Louder. More direct. She felt her magic react, lighting up like a neon sign. It was not a feeling she could remember having before. Who was calling her?

She turned left, then right, then one last left, before coming to a small, circular clearing in the stacks she didn’t recognize. As far as she knew, the Library didn’t have a center. Yet there it was, in front of her, with someone hunched over a set of four computers.

Nothing about the sight made any sense, but rather than alarm or confusion, she felt comfort, there in her dream. She moved toward the figure. She heard her footsteps echo, a strange sound to hear in a dream, she thought.

She was just a few feet away from the figure when she felt herself stop, unable to go further. The figure rose, taller than she expected, and turned to face her.

It was a man, thin and pale, with piercing eyes that took her in warmly. She didn’t recognize him, but her magic reacted to him immediately, even stronger than before.

“Are you okay?” the man asked her, closing the distance between them and gently pushing her hair behind her ear.

“Yeah, I’m good,” she heard herself say. “Just getting ready for the run.”

The man smiled, sending a storm of butterflies scattering through Calli’s stomach.

“Sounds like a fun one. Water nymph? I wish I was going, myself.”

“It could still be dangerous,” she replied unconvincingly. Somewhere, in what remained of her waking mind, her thoughts were



racing. Why was there a man in the Wayward Library? Who was he? Who was he to her?

"I'm sure you and Sam can handle it. Plus, I'll be here, if you need anything."

To her great surprise she felt herself close what little distance that remained and kiss him deeply. It felt comfortable, familiar, a decidedly strange thing to experience while kissing a stranger. After a few moments, the kiss broke and the man, whoever he was, gazed longingly into Calli's eyes.

"Go on, get out of here," he said, smiling. "I'll see you soon, Callidora."

Calli snapped awake in her bed, completely and utterly sure of two things. One, she had just had a vision, not a dream. Two, something was very, very wrong.

She rolled out of bed and sprinted from her room in just her underwear, not bothering to redress. She ran through the halls of Wayward, not looking where she was going, certain the House would lead her to her mother. She barreled through the empty kitchen, past Cassandra's locked room, and came to a halt when she saw her mother, Tia, sitting outside the Library, looking close to tears.

"Mom," she gasped, throwing herself into her arms. "I had a vision."

"Tell me," Tia whispered.

"There was... a man. Here. I think he was... I think he was the Keeper."

"What did he look like?" Tia asked. Calli took a deep breath, confused by the question but knowing better than to second guess her mother.

"He was taller than any of us, but not tall-tall. Dark hair. Thin. Pale. Intense eyes."

“And in your vision, you felt safe with him?”

Calli looked away involuntarily, fighting down a blush she knew she shouldn't be feeling.

“Yes.”

Tia suppressed a smile.

“Elizabeth described him the same way,” Tia said, blinking back tears. Calli turned to her, first looking puzzled, then heartbroken as she realized.

“She's...?”

“I was with her. I held her. She saw him, described him to me. Then she told me how much she loved us. All of us. And then she went.”

The tears overtook them both. They cried together for a few minutes before Tia took a deep breath and rose.

“I should tell your sisters.”

Calli followed suit, wiping her eyes.

“I'll tell Cass. You can call Sam and Ophelia. Hopefully, they're done with their haunt.”

Calli summoned a thin robe to cover herself and set off for Cassandra's room, leaving Tia alone with her thoughts. Thoughts of Elizabeth, the decades they'd spent together, guiding Wayward House, raising the girls, saving people from evil, and her thoughts of what was to come.

A man in Wayward House?

It was going to be interesting...