

*A Strangely Thankful Thanksgiving*



*New York Times Best Selling Author*

**Heather  
Graham**

*A Strangely Thankful Thanksgiving*

Copyright © 2021 by Slush Pile

All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, including electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior express written permission of the author. Unauthorized reproduction of this material, electronic or otherwise, will result in legal action.

Please report the unauthorized distribution of this publication by contacting the author at [theoriginalheathergraham.com](http://theoriginalheathergraham.com), via email at [connie@perryco.biz](mailto:connie@perryco.biz), or at Heather Graham 103 Estainville Ave., Lafayette, LA 70508. Please help stop internet piracy by alerting the author with the name and web address of any questionable or unauthorized distributor.

*A Strangely Thankful Thanksgiving* is a work of fiction. The people and events in *A Strangely Thankful Thanksgiving* are entirely fictional. The story is not a reflection of historical or current fact, nor is the story an accurate representation of past or current events. Any resemblance between the characters in this novel and any or all persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.

Sienna Murray and Ryder Stapleton planned on being in New Orleans and welcoming family to his home for Thanksgiving dinner. Relaxing, easy time! The fact that Ryder's kitchen was torn up for renovations might have put a glitch on the idea, but Adam Harrison had just purchased an historic home in the French Quarter, and they were welcome to make use of it.

But while accepting the keys to Adam's new purchase, they hear a strange story regarding the old house. Of course, it's the French Quarter—what self-respecting home doesn't come with a good ghost story?

But this story has to do with the living and the dead and a legacy of fear and lies. And with just hours to spare, Sienna and Ryder will have to solve a mystery from the past—with a 'wee' bit of help from Granny K., friends, and a young man seeking justice and peace.

A Strangely Thankful Thanksgiving

Prologue

Granny K—the Cemetery

“Happy Thanksgiving. Or should I say, happy almost Thanksgiving!” Granny K said.

She sat atop a tomb in St. Louis #1 greeting friends. They had come to know her as a storyteller, and that day she had determined her stories would be good and cheerful.

Even the dead could be thankful. Thankful for those they had left behind who remembered them with love, smiled at the good times they’d had together, and came often to remember those who had gone on before them with respect and care.

She loved being in the city, and these days she came often. Sometimes she really enjoyed haunting her granddaughter in the D.C. area; but when Sienna returned here with Ryder Stapleton, Granny K was always happy to hitchhike, be it by plane, train, or automobile.

Today she was talking about Thanksgiving. American Thanksgiving. Which might seem just a wee bit odd because her Scottish accent would come out. But maybe that was American—they were a mixture of peoples from everywhere.

“So!” She proclaimed, glad to see the spirits of so many—who had lived during so many different eras as well—gathered to listen. “Many claim the first Thanksgiving—though not called Thanksgiving—occurred in Plymouth, Massachusetts, somewhere right around 1621. The Pilgrims were hunting, and some of the Native Americans thought they might be preparing for war. But wise Massasoit, the Native American leader, discovered they were preparing for the harvest celebration, a time to be thankful. So, the Wampanoag joined the settlers and hunted deer and other meats and brought corn and shellfish. The Pilgrims and the Native Americans were thankful for the harvest; and they danced, sang, and feasted together.”

Granny K paused for dramatic effect; and as she did so, she noticed Billy Boyd was leaning against a tomb and watched her with a worried look knotting his brow. Billy was a good lad. Yes, he’d been a pirate with the likes of Lafitte; but with Lafitte, he’d fought at the battle of New Orleans. After the battle he’d accepted a pardon, married a poor young lass straight out of France who was a bit too old for the convent, settled down, raised a family, and died of a fever.

He nodded to her and made a hand motion. *Later. When she was done for the day, they would talk.*

Granny K gave her audience a broad smile and continued.

“Now, this was not called Thanksgiving. And some say the first Thanksgiving really happened a good fifty or so years before the Pilgrims landed! That would be when Don Pedro Menendez de Aviles landed on the northern coast of Florida in September of 1565. This Spanish seafaring leader stepped ashore and quickly created a makeshift altar, claimed the land, and had Father Lopez perform a mass of thanksgiving for their safe arrival and for the land. In Florida, Timucua natives watched curiously what was going on, and they were invited to feast with the eight hundred settlers who had arrived. So, well, feasts, my lovelies, might be claimed by many places as the ‘first’ Thanksgiving. President George Washington declared November 26, 1789, as a day of prayer—and thanksgiving! Then, well, another

war rolled around after the Revolution. And during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln declared November 28, 1863, to be a day of thanksgiving, and he closed government offices for that day of thanks! The Battle of Gettysburg had taken place, and while the toll of lost life had been far beyond tragic, the battle had been won by the North. This is now seen as the forerunner of the holiday we celebrate today. Wait! American Thanksgiving, because other countries have a day of Thanksgiving, too! My dears, I shall leave you with such bits of history and thank you for having me!”

Her ghostly friends bid her thanks as well and called out to ‘Granny K,’ though a few had passed away at ages far greater than she had been at her demise. That was okay. She liked being Granny K.

She waved, smiled, chatted and quickly made her way over to the tomb where Billy Boyd waited to talk to her.

“I hear your granddaughter has just bought a house in the Quarter,” Billy said.

“No, Ryder’s boss bought the house,” Granny K corrected. “He knew Sienna and Ryder wanted to come here for Thanksgiving, and while Ryder owns a home here, he’s having extensive repairs done to the kitchen and it’s kind of a mess. So, his boss arranged for them to get the keys and accept ownership from the realtor. It’s a lovely place; I’ve seen the pictures.”

“You’ve seen the pictures. You haven’t seen the past,” he said. “Come on; we need to get there quickly. Tomorrow is Thanksgiving, and it will be the anniversary.”

“The anniversary of what?”

“Murder.”

\*

“What a wonderful way to spend the Thanksgiving holiday! This is seriously one of the most significant homes in one of the most significant areas of one of the most significant cities in the country!” the realtor Darcy Anderson said, as she smiled broadly at Sienna Murray and Ryder Stapleton.

“Adam Harrison made a brilliant buy!”

She handed the keys to the house to Sienna and added. "I understand it's to be a corporate location for your special unit of the FBI; but you were coming here for business, and it's home to you both, and so you'll be the first to stay here!"

"Yes, we were coming home for the holiday. Well, I'm actually from an area west of here, but it's the home we've both known lately, and I still work for the new museum in Treme, so . . . anyway, thank you!" Sienna paused, looking at the house. Ryder grinned at her. They were both fascinated.

The old house was in the French Quarter just a block or so in from Esplanade Avenue and Rampart Street. According to records, it had been built in 1786; and while sustaining damage, it had withstood the fires that had swept through the city in 1788 and 1794.

Like all old houses, it was filled with history. It had served as a hospital during the Civil War. It had stood empty. It had been a school. For the last years, it had been vacant. However it was on all the ghost tours, because of course the ghosts of Civil War soldiers surely walked the grounds.

But so far, neither she nor Ryder had contacted any new spirits. It would hardly be a shock for them since Sienna's Granny K, departed many years now, was with them more often than she was not.

The realtor, an attractive woman in her early fifties with silver gray hair and a slim, fit body, suddenly lost her smile.

"You know the story, right?" she whispered.

"The Civil War—" Ryder said.

"No, this is . . . Fitzgerald House." The realtor suddenly looked a little ill. And guilty.

Sienna saw Ryder frown. He'd been a cop in New Orleans before entering the academy to become part of the FBI's Krewe of Hunters. He glanced at her. She worked media for a museum that specialized in the city's history.

"Fitzgerald House?" Sienna asked.

“This house . . . right before Katrina, the owner rented out rooms. There was a young couple living on the ground floor. Don Mayberry and Sally King. They were beautiful, wonderful. They got married. They had a child. He was a musician, and she was a dancer. But Katrina came. They didn’t flee the city. They were determined to ride it out. Katrina was horrible. Areas of the city looked as if they were nothing but a box of match sticks thrown down, and the flooding took so many lives--” she said nervously.

“We’re from Louisiana,” Sienna reminded her quietly.

“Yes, right, well, some say the spirits—many think we’re the most haunted city in the country, even more haunted than Salem, Massachusetts—grew bitter and vengeful; and some people were possessed by them and went insane during and after the storm. Some say those who remained will never be right. Anyway—”

“I’ve heard this,” Ryder interrupted quietly. “Sally was found in the Mississippi River in 2006. Don disappeared. The police were never able to find him. But there was a letter sent to the police stating he would return. She had died on Thanksgiving, and he’d be back, because she’d never be free if others didn’t join her. For years the police took it as a real threat, and I’m sorry to say that, yes, other crazy murders took place in the city. A fellow—who probably had PTSD from his days in Iraq—went crazy after the storm, strangled his girlfriend, and dismembered her, cooking her head. Awful things happened. But they didn’t happen *in* the house. And Don Mayberry is remembered as one of our most heinous murderers.”

“There were no other suspects?” Sienna asked. “And Don Mayberry just disappeared.”

Ryder looked at her and said, “If I remember what I heard correctly, there was a man who attacked and killed a barmaid who was walking home on Rampart. He was later caught after killing a woman in Biloxi. He never admitted to anything and hanged himself in his cell soon after his capture. He would have been a suspect if not for the letters.”

“Could he have written the letters?” Sienna asked.

“We’ll never know,” Ryder said.

“No! We don’t know!” the realtor said. “Well anyway, Special Agent Stapleton, you’re FBI, so you’ll be fine, right? Though I hear that . . .”

“That what?” Sienna asked.

“I’m not sure all the training in the world can protect you from a vengeful ghost—or a murderer intent on others joining his dead loved one! Anyway, I must go. Enjoy the house! It’s all just fantasy and rumor, of course. Good for the ghost tours!”

Sienna and Ryder watched her hurry down the street then turn off on Esplanade.

Sienna looked at Ryder. “You didn’t know any of this?”

“I knew about the murder. It happened before I was with the police force; and by the time I came into it, it was a cold case. The storm was bad, horrendous—as you know. It cost many lives and I don’t doubt it brought many—especially anyone who had been traumatized before—into a state of PTSD. We both know vengeful spirits didn’t—”

He broke off. Granny K—with a friend dressed in a frockcoat and breeches worn in a different era—were rushing down the street.

“Aw, heck. There goes Thanksgiving,” Ryder murmured and shook his head. “Let’s get in before we look . . . crazy,” he added.

She smiled. They had both learned to be careful when trying to converse with the dead. They usually pretended they were talking on their cell phones.

“Right. Oh, I’ve got the keys!” Sienna said. She hurried up the few steps to the door and opened it quickly. Ryder had nodded toward Granny K and her friend. They stepped into the house’s entry followed by the spirits. Ryder firmly closed the door behind them.

“Granny K—” Sienna began. In life she had adored her grandmother. And in death she had learned from her grandmother she did have the talent to speak with the spirits of those who remained. And because of her grandmother’s ghost, Sienna had saved lives. That was how she had met Ryder, because knowing to get someone out of a building before it became an inferno suggested she might just have been guilty of setting that inferno herself.

Of course, they had been so uncertain at first. And now he was her world. Once a cop, he was going to prove to be a stellar agent. He was striking and confident without being rudely aggressive, and he could also make her laugh.

He shared her world. He loved those she loved including the ghost of Granny K.

“Good! We’ve caught you before you’ve gotten yourselves moved in!” Granny K said. “Ah, lass, I’ve been a wee bit worried. Nay, much more than a wee bit! Oh! This is my friend Billy. And he’s watched everything that has gone on in the city for years and years and—”

“Before the storm there were several apartments in the house, and one of the men living here murdered his wife,” Sienna said.

Granny K. frowned. “Wait, you know the awful history and—”

“Hi, Billy,” Ryder said politely.

“They really do see us!” Billy said.

“And there are more like us,” Sienna told him, smiling.

“You can’t stay here. Adam Harrison should have investigated this property before buying it. He should have—”

“Granny K., I work for a history museum, remember? Ryder was a cop here. Nothing has happened here—”

“Because no one has actually lived here since the poor lass was found in the river!” Granny K. said. “The owners sold it to a corporation; they sent one man and he left, and it went up for sale. But

there was so much up for sale . . . they took it off the market. They used it for meetings then, but no one stayed here. Ryder, Sienna, you just can't stay here! Okay, so, there's no record of anything horrible happening in the house itself, but there is history—"

"Granny K., mom and dad are coming tomorrow. Ryder has family coming. We have an order arriving from the grocery store any minute—" Sienna began.

"No! It's too dangerous," Billy said. "Seriously—"

"I'm so sorry. I don't believe vengeful spirits are going to come and get us," Ryder said. "Billy, we're talking to you, right? I'm about to be part of the Krewe of Hunters—whose members have encountered dozens of spirits. Not evil, but out to help others."

"Aye, we're out to help others! I stay because of this headstrong granddaughter of mine!"  
Granny K. said.

"Please, investigate," Billy said. "One of the men here for a corporate meeting was last seen in this house. He was supposedly heading to the airport to fly back to New York. Except he never made his plane. This was the last place he was seen."

"He was an adult and not married, and a missing person's report didn't go up for weeks. By that time, anything might have happened, so . . ."

"He wasn't attacked by vengeful spirits!" Sienna said, looking around the old house. Construction workers had been in as well as a cleaning crew. A beautiful, sweeping staircase led to a second floor while double French doors closed off either side of the house. She assumed that at one time, they had been apartments. Adam had told her one side had been restored to a parlor, dining room, and kitchen while the other side housed a bedroom and an office. There were four more bedrooms upstairs.

The house had been beautifully built then was enhanced in the Victorian era, and—prior to sale, Sienna imagined—it had been freshly painted and cleaned. It was big with an enormous fireplace and handsome mantle there in the parlor.

“Granny K., sometimes, a house is just a house. And evil—”

“Exists!” Granny K. said.

“We’ve seen it in the living,” Ryder added softly. “We are not going to run away from someone’s idea the place is dangerous because of vengeful spirits.”

“But!” Granny K. began.

“Let me,” Billy said, interrupting her. “It’s not vengeful spirits you need worry about. It’s the living person who created the notes to the police and who really killed Sally.”

\*

It was easy enough to research police records. True, Ryder was no longer with the police, but he had a great relationship with Captain Troy. Troy had served the city for a good thirty years; he’d been there when Katrina slammed ashore, and when other storms and a pandemic had descended upon the city as well. He’d been a great boss; he’d never been a micromanager, but he’d had his finger on every case his detectives were working.

Ryder had just wanted a great—and peaceful—Thanksgiving. Time off, time to be with family, time to be with Sienna.

Troy stood with pleasure when Ryder entered his office, shaking his hand and then drawing him into an embrace. He was in his sixties now with snowy white hair, but his form was still straight and strong. “I was afraid you wouldn’t get by! Wasn’t expecting to see you until after turkey-day, I must admit. So, you wrote you were coming. Where did you wind up staying?”

“Well, that’s why I’m here before turkey day,” Ryder said, taking the chair in front of Troy’s desk. “We’ve recently learned there are all kinds of rumors about the place. I remember hearing about the murders after Katrina, but—”

“The Fitzgerald place?” Troy asked. “Adam Harrison bought it?”

“Don’t tell me you believe it’s haunted,” Ryder said.

“Hey. There are haunted houses all over the French Quarter. Saying a place is haunted seems to be part of the sales pitches. No, I don’t think the place is haunted. It just has a sad history. A couple living there—with a little boy—came to a tragic end. Some folks in the city like to say the ghosts of New Orleans all went crazy after Katrina and possessed people and made them do horrible things. You talk to a dozen doctors, and they’ll tell you that you don’t have to go to war to witness something like New Orleans after Katrina and have PTSD. I still feel ill, seeing footage and pictures days after the storm went through and the levees broke.”

“So, Don Mayberry killed his wife Sally, sent in letters about her murder, and then disappeared. He was never apprehended?”

“It was 2006. The city was still crippled. We were fighting all kinds of problems. We searched for him; but no, we never apprehended Don Mayberry.”

“What happened to their son?”

“Her parents came down from the north of the state and took the boy; they left Louisiana all together, I believe. I think they moved to Hawaii.”

“Did anyone ever doubt Don Mayberry was the one who killed his wife?” Ryder asked.

“Well—there were letters sent to the police. Confessional—and threatening—letters. Supposedly, he’s coming back one day to make sure Sally doesn’t have to haunt the river alone. Although the Mississippi? The Mighty Mississippi. And New Orleans? I doubt poor Sally is alone.” Troy

frowned suddenly. “Are you worried? Sure, the ghost tours go by there; but they go a dozen other places, too.”

“I’m just curious. I have a friend who suggested the letters sent to the police were fakes. That someone else killed Sally,” Ryder told him.

“I was a sergeant back then—I wasn’t on the case,” Troy said. “But I believe they had every reason to accept what they had. Sally was dead. The letters described her death. And Don Mayberry was gone.”

“But what if someone else killed her, planning to frame her husband all along? Wouldn’t that be a possibility?” Ryder asked.

“And you think coming back to murder again is just a line to add to that hoax?” Troy asked. “Is it possible? Sure. The department was in chaos back then. Weird stuff—including a murder/suicide set of strange deaths—also occurred right about the same time. I wish I could tell you more. I don’t know more. And now . . . fifteen years have passed. More storms. Covid. We’ve been battered time and again. And still we stand. So, you keep thinking this is home, huh, no matter what’s going on up in D.C.? And remember—a house is a house.”

“Gotcha. If you have time, bring the missus and whatever family, and come by tomorrow. We’ll have a massive turkey out around five or so Sienna tells me.”

“May just take you up on that!” Troy told him.

Ryder smiled, thanked him again, greeted a few other old friends, and left the precinct. It was when he was finally walking out that a distracted young man almost body slammed him, not seeing that Ryder stood in his path.

“Sorry, sorry!” the man said. He wasn’t even twenty, Ryder thought, tall and lean, with sandy hair and light eyes. “Really sorry!”

“No problem,” Ryder said.

He watched the young man walk into the station as he walked on ahead; he hadn't taken his car. Easier to walk.

Night was falling.

Many people were out on the streets. New Orleans had been careful, needing to get tourism back. Masks were worn, and bars and restaurants asked for vaccine certificates before letting clientele in. There would always be those who didn't want to comply; but for the most part, people were out, musicians were playing, and the city was moving on. He smiled. He loved the city. It had a personality all its own—and that personality was a fierce one, that of a survivor.

\*

The groceries had arrived. Sienna had only been able to see a little of the house before the groceries were delivered. Granny K. and Billy were following her, making her nervous every step of the way.

"You shouldn't be alone here!" Granny K. said.

"I'm not alone; you're here," Sienna said.

"I'm not a living person and neither is Billy!" Granny K. remonstrated.

"But you'd know if I was in any danger, right? Hey! I locked the door. We're fine. And I need to get the turkey all set for tomorrow. It's Thanksgiving. And you know what, Granny K.? We're going to have a great dinner with family and be thankful!"

Granny K. looked at Billy and shook her head. Sienna ignored her, setting the turkey out to prep.

"Your recipe. No stuffing in the bird, stuffing made separate. Breadcrumbs, logically, would soak up the moisture."

"I just don't think he did it," Billy said, finding a seat at the kitchen table. He obviously hadn't heard them talking about food, or he just didn't care. "I don't believe Don Mayberry killed his wife. I just don't."

“A stick of butter wrapped in lettuce and stuffed into the bird,” Sienna said. “Come on, Billy, please! Thanksgiving. My folks are coming, Granny K. Your son and daughter-in-law. And a few of Ryder’s family members are going to make it. Let’s . . . oh, look! I’m going to go and put the wreath on the front door. Fall! After tomorrow, we’ll start on Christmas!” Sienna said.

Smiling at them, she left her turkey and walked out to the entry. She took the fall wreath from one of the boxes they’d dragged in and then opened the front door and walked out to the porch.

She hadn’t been afraid in the least. Granny K. was better than having five guard dogs, and she knew Ryder was on his way back. He had called.

But as she stood on the porch, she had the eerie feeling she was being watched.

A feeling someone was close. An eerie sensation slipped over her. In the distance, she could hear the sounds of music and laughter. Noise spilling into the night from Bourbon Street, a place filled with life . . . and yet, far enough away so from where she stood, the darkness was quiet, alleviated only by streetlights, and a bit of an opaque glow from the moon.

She sensed movement! Movement coming from the bush by the side of the house. It seemed as if someone lurked between the courtyard gate and the side of the house. Movement . . .

Human movement. No vengeful ghost. But someone was out there . . .

“Hey!”

She nearly jumped sky-high at the sound of Ryder’s voice. He was heading straight for the porch—but his eyes were on the bush by the side of the house and the courtyard. “Who are you and what the hell are you doing?”

He kept walking. She saw him head straight to the side of the house and grab a young man by the arm.

“You!” the young man gasped.

“Yes, I’ve been following you since you turned away from the police station. Who are you?”

Ryder demanded. “And what the hell are you doing?”

The young man was silent, wincing as he stared back at Ryder.

“I asked you a question!” Ryder said roughly. “Who are you?”

“Daniel!” the kid gasped out at last.

Ryder looked angry, and Sienna smiled inwardly despite the circumstances. He was angry—because he’d been afraid for her.

Because Billy had warned evil came in those who were very much alive.

She stepped from the porch and asked softly, “Daniel. Daniel . . . who? No, never mind. I think I know who you are. Ryder, I believe this is Daniel Mayberry. He is the almost-grown-up son of Sally and Don Mayberry.

The young man winced and nodded.

Ryder instantly released his hold on Daniel’s arm.

“All right,” Ryder said evenly. “What are you doing here?”

By then, Granny K. and Billy were out on the porch as well.

“He knows!” Billy said. “He knows his father didn’t kill his mother.”

“I—I don’t know. I’m trying to find a way to prove . . . that my dad didn’t kill my mom.” There were tears in his eyes. “I’ve read everything and whoever wrote those letters threatened to come back on a Thanksgiving and . . . I don’t know. I just don’t know. I thought if I watched the house, I could catch them . . . him. Her. Whoever did it. Because they were wrong. My father loved my mother so much. Yeah, I was a kid. I was five when it all happened, but I know, I just know! My father didn’t kill my mother.”

“May we go inside?” Sienna murmured, looking at Ryder.

He frowned, bit his lip, and nodded slowly. “Sure. Let’s go inside.”

Sienna went on in, followed by the ghosts of her grandmother and Billy. Glancing back, she saw Ryder indicated Daniel should follow Sienna with Ryder right behind him.

Sienna headed for the kitchen. She paused and turned.

Daniel had stopped.

She looked at him and he said, "This—this was our apartment."

"I'm sorry. Come in. Sit down. Would you like a cup of tea, or water or a soda or something? We're pretty well stocked," she said.

"Water?" he asked. "And thank you. Thank you. I'm not a stalker; and I've never committed a criminal act in my life, I swear. I just . . . I can't live with everyone thinking my father was a monster."

Sienna indicated he should take a chair at the table. He did so. Ryder sat at the end of the table, and continued to study him suspiciously. Sienna collected a couple of bottles of water, placing one in front of Daniel and another in front of Ryder.

She was startled to feel her grandmother at her back whispering, "Something is happening!"

And it was. Billy leaned against the refrigerator and Granny K. was right by her.

Something was appearing at the end of the table.

*Vengeful spirit? She didn't believe it!*

"What's wrong?" Daniel asked. "I mean, besides me?" He shivered suddenly. "There's something . . . here," he whispered.

And there was. But it wasn't a something. It was a someone. A pale, barely-there spirit, just vaguely forming the shape of a man.

"My son!" he whispered. "My beautiful boy."

Granny K. came and stood next to the apparition. "Laddie! Speak up, now. So, this young rascal is your boy, come back to clear your name! You're dead, but you're here. So, don't be a lyin' to me, man, did you kill your wife?"

He didn't reply. Slowly, slowly, he lifted a finger, pointing toward the pantry.

Ryder jumped to his feet, reflex causing him to draw his gun as he hurried to the pantry, pushing the door open wide.

There was nothing there.

"The wall," the apparition whispered.

Ryder looked back, frowning.

"What's going on?" Daniel asked. He shivered fiercely. "He's—he's here. My dad is here, isn't he?"

Sienna didn't reply. She hurried back to the pantry as well. She had so recently been in there, stocking the groceries that had arrived. And now . . .

"Ryder. This shelving, let's pull it out."

"It's built into the—"

"So, we break a few shelves!"

"Yeah, you got it," Ryder said, his voice hard. And she knew why. For once, it seemed, a ghost might be leading them straight to his murderer.

Between them, they ripped the shelving away. He looked at her one more time and found a shovel along with some other tools in the corner. He began to slam at the wall where the shelving had been.

It broke away. And there, tightly wedged between wooden support beams, were the skeleton remains of a human being.

Daniel stood, calling to them. "What is it?"

"Don't be letting that lad in!" Granny K warned.

"Stay where you are, Daniel. We're going to have to call some people in," Sienna told him.

She knew Ryder was already on the phone. She walked over to Daniel. His face was strained; his eyes were wet with tears.

“My father?” he whispered.

She set her hands on his shoulders in a comforting gesture, looking at the apparition at the end of the table. He seemed to be growing stronger.

“Tell him!” he whispered. “Tell my boy I love him, and his mother with everything in me!”

“He loved you, Daniel. Loved you so much. And you’re right. He loved your mother, too.”

They could hear sirens. Police and forensic crews were on the way; they had been called out by a man who had been one of their own.

Ryder came back out from the pantry. He looked at Sienna.

“Um, I don’t think we’ll be having dinner here tomorrow.”

\*

“Thanks a lot, Adam,” Ryder said, grinning as he spoke to the Krewe’s founder on the phone. “I had Thanksgiving off! And now . . .”

“I have you set up with a nice big private room, and you’re all staying at my favorite hotel,” Adam said. “You’re there now, right?”

“We are. Love the room, love the balcony. Sienna’s family will be here soon, and catering has us all set up.”

“So, all is okay. “The house was a great deal. And if it was haunted, so what? You guys are always haunted. I didn’t think you’d go finding a man in the wall, but . . . you found him. And it will take time, but I’m willing to bet the body found is that of Don Mayberry—”

“It is.”

“And,” Adam added. “He was a victim, just like his beloved wife. If the boy hadn’t been at school . . . kindergarten, I’m guessing, he might have met the same fate. Anyway, it is Thanksgiving and you’re

all set up. You've got great rooms for the night, too, and thank you! Do you realize you'll clear a man's name? That young man will now hold his head high. He spent his childhood believing, and he was right. But the world didn't believe him. You gave him a dream of justice."

Ryder smiled and said, "Happy Thanksgiving, Adam."

"Happy Thanksgiving!"

He ended the call and looked across the room. Adam was a wizard. The city had been just about sold out of hotel rooms, but Adam could produce miracles—because he gave them. A brilliant man, he'd made a fortune—and spent his life 'paying it back,' giving to charity time and time again, even while finding the right people to create the Krewe of Hunters. He'd lost his only son, hadn't had a talent himself, but had seen it in others. Eventually, he had been able to see his Josh.

Sienna had been on the balcony with Daniel—Adam had also gotten him a room at the hotel. She walked in and smiled curiously.

"What is that look for?"

"I'm thinking it's Thanksgiving. And I'm thankful for Adam Harrison. And the Krewe."

Sienna slipped her arms around him. She looked up at him. "Okay, so this Thanksgiving got a little weird. But you know what? I'm so thankful we can do what we do. I'm thankful, so grateful, we are lucky enough to help others."

He smiled down at her, thinking how grateful he felt. She was in his life.

But he didn't get a chance to speak.

"You'd best be thankful for me!" Granny K. announced, grinning at them.

Sienna rolled her eyes. "Of course, so thankful for you."

"I'm going to see about the boy," Granny K. said, leaving them alone in the parlor area of their suite along with the whole set-up for their Thanksgiving dinner.

“I just wanted you to know,” Ryder murmured and pulled her close, “I am so, so, so, so very thankful for you.”

She kissed his lips quickly.

“And I am thankful for you!”

The doorbell to the suite rang. Sienna grinned.

“That will be my parents.”

“Right. Mom and Dad.”

She started to walk to the door. He caught her hand and pulled her back.

“And later tonight, I promise, I’m going to show you just how thankful I can be.”

Sienna laughed. “I’ll hold you to it!”

She turned and walked to the door.

Ryder smiled. It was going to be a great Thanksgiving after all. They were grateful for all they had. And it was better than that. They were grateful because they could give to others as well.

Yep. He hadn’t realized until now just what a great Thanksgiving it was going to be.