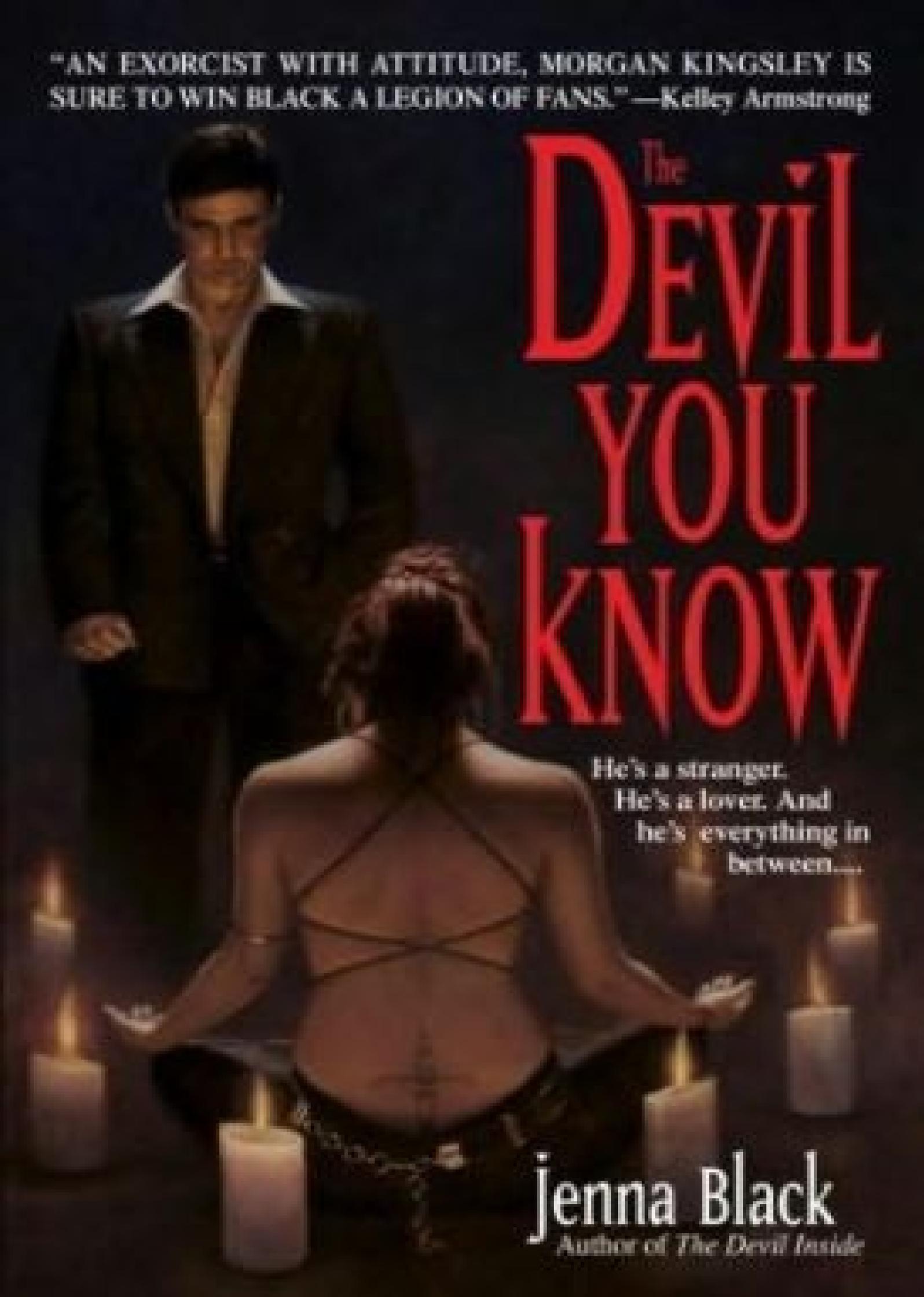


"AN EXORCIST WITH ATTITUDE, MORGAN KINGSLEY IS SURE TO WIN BLACK A LEGION OF FANS." —Kelley Armstrong



# The DEVIL YOU KNOW

He's a stranger.  
He's a lover. And  
he's everything in  
between....

Jenna Black  
*Author of The Devil Inside*

## Annotation

The beautiful. The bad. The possessed.

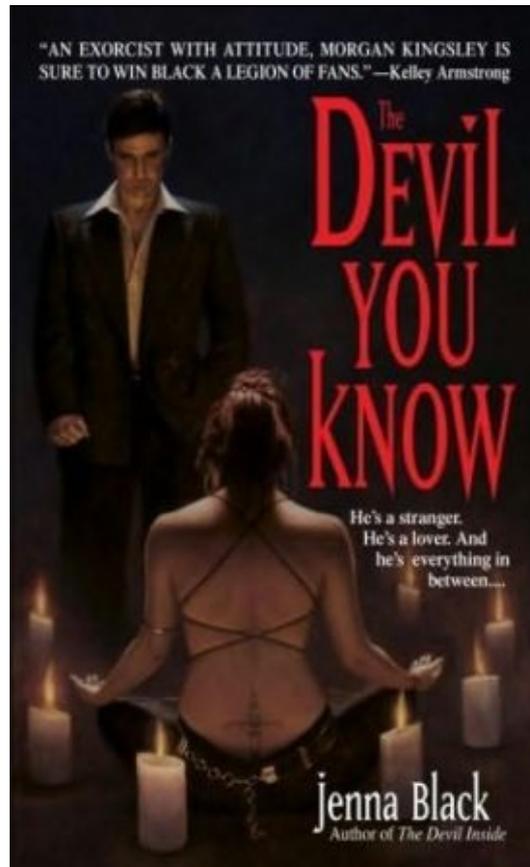
Some people worship them. Some people fear them. And some people — like Morgan Kingsley — go up against them toe-to-toe, flesh to flesh, and power against power. An exorcist by trade, Morgan is one of the few humans with an aura stronger than her possessor, even though her demon can tease her body senseless. She's also a woman who has just discovered a shocking truth: everything she once believed about her past, her identity, may have been a lie.

With a family secret exploding around her and a full-scale demon war igniting, Morgan is a key player in an unsettled world. Then a rogue sociopathic demon enters her life with a bang. His name is The Hunter. And since she is the prey, Morgan has only one choice: to hunt The Hunter down — no matter what heartbreaking truths she uncovers along the way...

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**THE DEVIL YOU KNOW**  
**Morgan Kingsley Series, Book 2**  
**Jenna Black**

For Gayle, one of my first critique partners, whose courage and positive attitude have truly been an inspiration

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Many thanks to Anne Groell, my fabulous editor, for helping me make this a better book, and just for being fabulous in general. Thanks to Miriam Kriss, my agent, whose enthusiasm always helps keep me motivated. And my heartfelt thanks to the Heart of Carolina Romance Writers, who are, in my admittedly biased opinion, the most talented and supportive group of writers on the planet.

# CHAPTER 1

There's no denying Dominic Castello is a treat to look at—the classic tall, dark, and handsome. Soulful hazel eyes framed by thick lashes, warm olive skin, muscles in all the right places...But on seeing him standing in my doorway, my first impulse was to slam the door in his face.

He must have read my expression, for he wedged his foot in the door and smiled at me. He has a sweet, disarming smile that would turn most women to jelly, but I'm not most women. Besides, his equally good-looking boyfriend was the sadomasochistic demon host who'd shot my brother. That put Dominic near the bottom of the list of people I wanted to see, with only his boyfriend, Adam, and pretty much my entire family below him.

Unfortunately, with him being over six feet tall and at least two hundred pounds, I wasn't keeping him out of my apartment now that I'd been stupid enough to open the door in the first place.

Giving in to the inevitable, I moved away from the door, letting him enter—though I didn't actually invite him in. I headed to my minuscule kitchen, where a half-full pot of coffee left over from breakfast still sat on the warmer.

"Wanna cup?" I asked without looking at him.

"Sure. Thanks."

I filled two mugs, noticing that the coffee was dark as ink and smelled stale. If it were just me, I'd make a fresh pot, but I didn't want Dominic staying that long.

"Cream and sugar?"

Dominic looked at the tar-scented swill in the cup I handed him and shook his head. "I doubt it would help much."

That almost made me smile. "So, what brings you to this part of town?" I took a sip of the coffee to prove it was drinkable and tried not to gag when I discovered it wasn't.

When Dominic didn't immediately answer, my nerves went on red alert. Apparently, this wasn't a social call, which I suppose I'd known all along.

"Maybe we should sit down for a bit," he suggested.

I really hated the sound of that—and the way he wouldn't quite meet my eyes. My stomach gave an unhappy gurgle, and my fingers clenched on the coffee cup. I put it down before I took a sip by reflex.

For the last few weeks, I'd been trying my best to live under a rock. I'd had enough stress lately to last me a lifetime—or three. Realistically, I knew my problems were far from over, but I'd been determined to hold them at bay for as long as possible—ideally, until I was on my deathbed.

See, here's the thing. I'm an exorcist. My calling in life, my very *raison d'être*, is to kick demon ass. Only the ones who possess unwilling hosts or who commit violent crimes, of course, but in reality I don't like legal demons much better. So as you can imagine, my life became a little complicated when I found out I was possessed by the king of the demons, who was embroiled in a war for the throne of the Demon Realm.

For reasons neither of us understands, the demon king, Lugh, can't take control of

me the way a demon normally dominates a host. Even though I'm possessed, I remain in total control of my body. For the most part, Lugh can only take command when I'm asleep, and can only communicate with me through dreams.

From the moment I'd found out I was possessed, my life had shot straight to hell and stayed there. My best friend had tried to kill me. My house was burned to the ground. I was thrown in jail for murder. My boyfriend, Brian—actually, he's my ex-boyfriend now, though I have yet to convince him of this fact—was kidnapped and tortured in an attempt to get to me. And to win his aid in rescuing Brian, I'd let Dominic's boyfriend whip me bloody for his own amusement.

All in all, I was desperately in need of some R&R. But since I wasn't getting Dominic out of my apartment through brute force, I figured the quickest way to get rid of him was to listen to what he had to say.

I'm sure I looked pretty sulky and mulish as I led him into my living room and gestured him toward my couch. I dropped into the love seat and suffered a momentary pang of yearning for the homey, comfortable furniture that had been destroyed when my house burned down. I'd rented this apartment furnished, and nothing in it reflected my tastes. This love seat, for example, was hard enough to numb my ass. I hoped the sofa would have the same effect on Dominic.

"So we're sitting down," I said, folding my arms across my chest. "Why don't you tell me why you're here?"

He put his cup on the coffee table—I don't think he'd been stupid enough to take a sip, like I had—then turned so he could face me full-on. I didn't like the intensity of his expression, so instead of looking at him, I idly tugged at a loose thread on the arm of the love seat.

"Adam has found out something he thinks you should know," Dominic said.

I pulled on the thread a little harder, and the fabric started to unravel. With a grunt of disgust, I stopped fidgeting and gave Dom my best steely-eyed glare. "If Adam thinks I should know, why isn't he the one sitting here?"

Dominic grinned. "He thought I was more likely to get through your door."

I couldn't help a rueful chuckle. There have been times when I've said some terrible things to Dominic, but he's never deserved them. When I'd first met him, he'd been a willing demon host, and I had despised him for being the kind of weak-minded, suicidal fool who was willing to give up his entire identity to host a demon. Because the human personality was (in all cases except my own) completely buried beneath the demon's, I'd considered the human hosts as good as dead. Many people—including my entire family—considered those who sacrificed themselves to host "Higher Powers," as they called demons, to be great heroes. Because demons are so much stronger and so much more resilient than humans, the hosts can take on extremely dangerous tasks. But I'd always considered them sheep.

After some of the things he had done for me—and for Brian, a man he didn't even know—I now believed Dominic was a genuine hero, even without his demon. And despite my feelings about Adam, I had to admit that, most of the time, I rather liked Dom.

"Adam could have tried phoning," I said, attempting to maintain my grumpy demeanor.

Dominic just laughed. "And you would have hung up on him and taken the phone

off the hook.”

Probably true. “All right, you win. Tell me what he found out. I assume it’s important or you wouldn’t be here.”

The humor faded from his face. “Yeah.” He cleared his throat, and once again his eyes slid away from mine. “This is going to be kind of awkward.”

“Great.”

“Adam’s been doing some, er, investigation.”

Along with all his other sterling qualities, Adam is also the Director of Special Forces, the branch of the Philly police department responsible for demon-related crime. The fact that he’s hosting a demon himself has never seemed like a conflict of interest to the Powers That Be, though I wasn’t the only citizen who questioned the wisdom of his appointment.

“What kind of investigation?” I prompted when Dominic seemed to be struggling to continue.

He huffed out a breath, and one corner of his mouth tipped up in a wry smile. “I can’t think of a way to tell you this without risking bodily injury, so I’m just going to blurt it out.” And honest to God, the man tensed up as if ready to defend himself. “He’s been investigating you and your family.”

I blinked a couple of times as I let that sink in. A low simmer started in my chest, but either I was getting more serene in my old age, or Dominic had given the statement so much buildup that nothing he said could be as bad as I expected. Knowing me, the latter is more likely.

“Investigating how? And why?”

He was still watching me warily, which meant there was more to this story he didn’t think I would like. “He’s been wondering why Raphael chose you to be Lugh’s host.”

Dougal—Lugh’s oldest brother and second in line for the throne—had hatched an insidious plan to take over as king of the Demon Realm. He’d planned to summon Lugh into a human host, and then burn that host alive, which, counter to popular wisdom, is the only way to kill a demon. Raphael, Lugh’s youngest brother, had ostensibly been Dougal’s accomplice, but instead of arranging for Lugh to take over the chosen host, he’d stuck Lugh in my body.

Turned out Raphael had always been on Lugh’s side, and had summoned him into me to save his life. Somehow, Raphael had known Lugh wouldn’t be able to take me over, and because of that inability, he would remain hidden from his enemies. Even when Raphael had revealed his true loyalties, he’d refused to tell Lugh how he’d known.

“I’m sure we’ve all been wondering that,” I said cautiously. “What does my family have to do with anything?”

“You mean other than the fact that your brother was Raphael’s host?”

I rolled my eyes. “You know what I mean!”

“Yes. Well. Adam figured that Raphael must have found out something interesting when he insinuated himself into your family, so Adam hoped to find out what that interesting something was.”

My heart seemed to be beating louder than it should, but it was probably my imagination. “And? What did he find?”

Dominic looked even more uncomfortable. “I love Adam, but I wish he hadn’t sent me to do this....”

I made a little sound of frustration. “Just tell me, already! Waiting for the other shoe to drop is killing me.”

Dominic clasped his hands in his lap and regarded them with concentration. “He found an old, buried police report from twenty-eight years ago. About a rape.” He squirmed. “The victim was your mother.”

The blood drained from my face. Never had my mother even hinted that she’d been raped. Of course, my mother and I had been at each other’s throats since I was about five, so I guess it isn’t surprising that she hadn’t shared a confidence like that with me.

Still, I didn’t know how to feel. I mean...damn! What a horrible secret to keep for all these years. How much had that rape affected my mother’s life? And her personality? Was it possible that all the things I despised about her were symptoms of that terrible trauma in her past?

Then the other shoe dropped—though I was losing count of how many shoes it had been so far.

“Twenty-eight years ago?” I asked in a hushed whisper, and Dominic met my eyes this time. His chin dipped in a barely perceptible nod, and the sympathy in his expression made my throat ache. “Then there’s a chance...” I couldn’t say it. My pulse was pounding in my ears, my world tipping sideways once again.

Dominic sighed. “Not just a chance, I’m afraid,” he said gently. “Adam also found the record of a paternity test.”

My heart clenched in my chest, and it was all I could do to hold myself together. “I guess that means my father isn’t really my father, huh?” I tried for something like nonchalance and was sure I failed.

Dominic shook his head. “I wish there were some good way to tell you this.”

He looked so miserable that I was able to pull myself up by my bootstraps, at least temporarily. “You did fine,” I assured him. I could only imagine how Adam would have delivered the news. He doesn’t like me any more than I like him. In my more generous moments, I admit that I’ve given him good cause to dislike me. But my generous moments are few and far between.

Still, I guess this unpleasant truth about my origins explained a bit about my less-than-stellar relationship with my parents. I’d always assumed they favored my brother for his willingness to host a demon. My parents are members of the Spirit Society, a group that practically worships these demons. To them, there can be no greater glory than to sacrifice oneself to host a demon. The fact that they hadn’t been able to brainwash me into hosting had inspired boundless animosity, but now I had an insight into what else they held against me. And it wasn’t pretty.

“Not to be shitty or anything,” I said, “but is there some burning reason you and Adam felt it necessary to tell me this? I mean, I’ve gone twenty-eight years without knowing, and I’d have been happy to go twenty-eight more.”

Dominic shrugged. “Lugh can’t gain control of you. There’s got to be a reason, since Raphael had no trouble taking over your brother. Don’t you think the fact that you and your brother have different fathers might have something to do with it?”

I leaned back into the stiff, uncomfortable cushions of my rent-a-couch and

brooded a bit. I wasn't sure how I felt about this revelation. There was definitely an element of shock. I mean, how could I not be shocked? But I think I would have been more devastated if I were actually close to my dad.

Christ! Why had they done it? Why had my mother decided to keep her baby under the circumstances? Yeah, she was the pro-life type, but even if she wasn't willing to have an abortion, that didn't mean she had to keep me after I was born! Had my father known all along that I wasn't his?

The questions circled like sharks, and I didn't want to deal with them.

"Okay," I said, "let's say you're right and my biological father"—man, did that sound weird—"has something to do with why Lugh can't get a foothold. What does that gain us? We don't know who he was, do we?"

Dominic shook his head. "No. Your mother didn't even give much of a description in the police report. But the strange thing is that, after she made the initial report, nothing happened."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, no one made any effort to investigate the case. It just kind of sank out of sight, and your mother never made an inquiry. I can't help wondering why."

I had to admit, that was pretty strange. But I also had a sneaking suspicion where this was going, and I intended to nip it in the bud. "If you think I'm going to question my mom about it, you can forget it."

"Now, Morgan—"

"No!" I snapped. "I do everything I can to avoid her, even in supposedly pleasant situations. No way in hell am I asking her about a rape she never bothered to tell me about."

I was too agitated to sit still, so I stood up and paced. I wanted to pull the blanket of denial up over my head again. After all the shit I'd been through, I needed more time, damn it! Bad enough to have to deal with royal intrigue and assassins and the fate of the human race—which, according to Lugh, could turn seriously ugly if Dougal managed to grab the throne—but to have to deal with my family issues on top of all that...

Nope, not ready for it.

Dominic's a pretty smart guy, and his instincts are good. He took one look at my face, then swallowed whatever argument he'd been about to make.

"All right," he said, standing. "I can certainly understand your position. Adam will keep poking around the old files. He'll let you know if he finds anything important."

I'm not the most polite person under the best of circumstances, which these weren't, so I couldn't manage much better than a curt nod of acceptance. Still, I did walk him to the door, which I felt was rather decent of me.

"If you ever need someone to talk to," he said before he left, "give me a call. I'm a good listener."

I couldn't help a little snort of laughter. Dom looked hurt.

"Nothing personal," I hastened to assure him. "I'm sure you're a great listener. But I'm a lousy talker." Which I bet he knew already. He hadn't known me all that long, but he was far too sensitive not to have picked that up.

Dominic smiled faintly. "All right. But the offer stays open."

“Thanks,” I said, and then there was nothing else to say.

After Dominic left, the apartment seemed ominously empty and quiet. Just the kind of atmosphere to encourage a round of brooding melancholy and self-pity. I decided hanging around would be a bad idea, so I stuffed my Taser in my purse and headed out.

Tasers are one of the few weapons that actually work against demons. The electricity fucks up their ability to control the host body and leaves them essentially helpless. Normal weapons, like guns, might be able to kill the host, but the demon would just return to the Demon Realm. And if it ever managed to get back to the Mortal Plain, you’d be high on its shit list.

It used to be that I rarely carried my Taser when I went out. By the time I’m called in to do an exorcism, the demon has been well and truly contained and is no threat to me. Now, with Dougal’s unknown minions wanting to kill me, I wouldn’t go to the lobby to pick up my mail without the Taser on my person.

I didn’t actually have a plan for where I wanted to go, but as I walked the streets of Philadelphia, trying not to brood or even think, I found myself heading toward The Healing Circle. That’s the hospital-cum-nursing home where my brother currently resides. The demon Raphael abandoned my brother’s body after Adam shot him. My brother managed to survive the gunshot wound, but as is usually the case when a host loses his demon, his mind didn’t survive. He’s in a state of catatonia, probably permanently.

For many years, I’d despised Andrew as much as I’d despised the rest of my family. But in the horrible moment when Adam shot him, I’d realized that, despite all our troubles, I still loved him. And so, even when I was otherwise trying to keep my head firmly buried in the sand, I made sure to visit Andrew on a regular basis. Usually, I tried to time my visits to miss my other family members. Visiting spur of the moment like this was dangerous, but I guess after the disturbing news I felt the need to connect to the one family member I felt comfortable with.

The fact that I could talk to Andrew without him talking back might also have been a plus.

The gods decided to have mercy on me—for once! — and Andrew had no visitors when I arrived. My parents were well-off enough to afford a private room—only the best for their favored son—so I closed the door behind me and pulled up a chair.

Naturally, Andrew had lost a lot of weight since he’d gone catatonic. He was too tall and big-boned to look frail, but he certainly didn’t look like the strong and powerful big brother I’d once known.

“Hi, Andy,” I said, reaching out to clasp his limp hand. My voice came out a bit raspy, and the stinging in my eyes said I was on the verge of tears. I blinked until they went away.

Andy didn’t move or blink. His eyes were open, but they stared fixedly ahead. I swallowed hard. Those few demon hosts who’d recovered after being in this state said they were conscious and aware during their catatonia, even though they couldn’t move or speak. Knowing that, I always tried to talk to him, keep him up-to-date on the news, maybe even read to him. Anything to keep his mind from atrophying inside his useless husk of a body.

But tonight, my own mind was in too much turmoil to manage banter, and I didn't want to tell him what I'd learned from Dominic. There was always the possibility he knew, but I kind of doubted it. He would have been only three years old when the rape happened—too young to understand what was going on around him, even if he had heard whatever discussions my parents must have had as they decided to keep me.

Instead, I just sat there holding his hand. It felt strangely peaceful, and I let my eyes slide shut.

I guess I hadn't been getting all that much sleep lately. Either that, or the stress of Dominic's revelation had sapped the last vestiges of my energy.

Whatever the reason, I must have drifted off, because when I next opened my eyes, I wasn't in my brother's room anymore.

When I'd first met Lugh in my dreams, his control of even my unconscious mind had been tenuous at best. I'd met him in a barren white room with no doors or windows. As his control had gotten better, the room had gotten homier.

He'd embellished it since the last time I'd been here, adding a simple geometric rug under the coffee table and a frothy potted fern on a plant stand between the sofa and love seat. I gave these details about a half-second's attention before I gave in to the inevitable and let my gaze rest on Lugh.

Dominic is nice to look at. Lugh is every woman's sexual fantasy come to life. His skin is a beautiful burnished bronze, his hair is a silky, shiny jet black and reaches to his shoulder blades when unbound, and his eyes...They're an intense shade of dark amber, and there always seems to be a hint of light glowing behind them. And let's not even talk about his incredible body!

Of course, demons are actually incorporeal, so that body was nothing but an illusion—and since Lugh has access to all my deepest thoughts and feelings, he knows exactly what buttons to push to make my mouth water. But knowing that doesn't ever seem to stop me from drooling when I see him.

He was sitting on the middle seat of the sofa, his long arms stretched out along the back, his ankle resting on his knee as he watched me ogle him. His sensuous lips curved into a hint of a smile. I made an unladylike grunting sound and plopped into the love seat. I didn't particularly want to talk to my own personal demon right this moment, but it would take me a while to close my mental doors to him. So...

"Long time no see," I said, fighting the urge to cross my arms over my chest in my trademark defensive gesture.

"I've been trying to give you some space," he answered.

His low, rumbling voice always seemed to vibrate through my nerves. Goose bumps rose on my arms at the sound of it, and I had to fight a shiver.

"Very considerate of you." My voice sounded too breathy for the attempt at sarcasm.

"But in light of this evening's news," he continued, "I think it's time for us to do some investigation."

I suppressed a groan. "Let Adam do all the investigating he wants! That's not my area of expertise, and I'd rather spend time with my gynecologist than my mom." I tried a little harder to close my mental doors.

"There's only so long you can go on pretending none of this is happening. You

know Dougal's people have been up to no good while they've walked the Mortal Plain, and you know the fate of your entire race may lie in the balance."

"Thanks for reminding me!" I snapped, allowing another wave of self-pity to break over me. "I might have forgotten all about it otherwise."

He sighed quietly. "I can apologize again for dragging you into this against your will, but my apologies don't seem to do either one of us any good. The only chance you have of returning to your 'normal' life is to help me defeat Dougal. Until then, you'll never know when one of his supporters might find out you're hosting me and try to kill you."

His words stung. "Do you really think the only reason I might help you is to save my own ass?"

"Of course not," he answered with reassuring promptness. "I just thought the reminder might hurry you up a bit."

I was working my way up to a smart-ass reply when I finally managed to shove those mental doors closed and wake up. I entertained a few less-than-complimentary thoughts about Lugh for a moment before I remembered where I was.

My hand was still clasped in Andy's. With a start, I realized that his fingers were actually curled around mine instead of lying limply in my grip. A shot of adrenaline burst through me, and I sat up abruptly and opened my eyes.

Andy's head was turned toward me, and when our eyes met, I could see the recognition and intelligence in his gaze. Without a moment's warning, I burst into tears and bowed my head over our clasped hands.

## CHAPTER 2

Eventually, I stopped bawling. Andy held my hand the whole time, neither speaking nor moving. I could have used that hand to wipe away the tears, but I wasn't any more eager to let go than he was.

Sniffling like a baby, I pulled myself together as best I could and met his gaze once more.

"How ya doin', bro?" I asked.

He managed a faint smile. "Better than about thirty minutes ago," he said, his voice little more than a whisper. His eyes closed for a moment, and worry stabbed through me.

"Andy?"

He opened his eyes again, and I noticed for the first time the haunted expression in them. He didn't speak, and I couldn't think of anything to say.

I hadn't spoken to Andy, the real Andy, for ten years. The last time I'd spoken to him, I'd let him know in no uncertain terms that I hated his guts for volunteering to host a demon. For years, I'd believed that. Not until Adam shot him had I realized how untrue those words had been.

Thinking about that awful moment reminded me of some problems I'd rather have ignored. Like the explanation we'd given the police for what had happened to Andy, which had been a complete work of fiction. God, I hoped he was willing to go along with the story, even though it painted his demon, Raphael, in the worst possible light.

How much did he know? I'd gotten the impression Raphael had made a habit of blocking Andy out to keep him from overhearing state secrets. Did Andy remember anything about the confrontation that led to his temporary death? Perhaps not. Perhaps all he knew was the official story, which he had surely overheard multiple times during his stay here.

But I wasn't about to bring that up now. Maybe I couldn't think of anything to say to my brother after his ten-year absence from my life, but I wasn't going to dump problems on him to break the awkwardness. At least, not yet.

"Thanks for coming to visit," Andy said, his voice weak and sickly. "I always knew you were here, even if I couldn't talk."

I gave his hand a squeeze. "Hey, in spite of our differences, you're still my big brother."

He smiled, though the expression didn't reach his eyes. "You told Raphael I was dead as far as you were concerned."

I winced and looked away. "I know." Remembering some of the other things I'd said to Raphael, I squirmed with guilt. I'd been very, very hard on Andy.

"It's okay," he assured me. "Raphael was a real son of a bitch, and I'm the one who brought him into your life."

I raised my head, surprised at the bitterness in his voice. The only other demon host I knew who'd lost his demon and was still functional—Dominic—had been so attached to his demon that I'd expected Andy to be the same way. Although I had to

admit, I had a hard time imagining anyone being attached to Raphael.

“So you’re not sorry he’s gone?” I asked.

He shuddered. “No. Adam did me a real favor by helping me get rid of him.” Well, that answered the question of whether he knew what had really happened.

His jaw clenched, and he let go of my hand. He shifted position in the bed, then winced. “God, I feel weak as a newborn. And I’m more than ready to lose the diaper. Could you go let the nurses know I’m back?”

I didn’t want to leave his side, especially with all the questions and regrets that swarmed me, but I knew if I’d been in his position, I’d be in a hurry to regain my dignity, too. I wanted to hug him, or kiss him, or even ruffle his hair, but his body language didn’t invite affection.

“I’ll be right back,” I told him around the lump in my throat. He merely nodded, not looking at me. I didn’t know if he was angry at me, or at Raphael, or at Lugh, or just at the situation in general. But there’d be time to talk about that later.

Knees feeling a bit wobbly, I went to the nurses’ station and gave them the good news. Looking genuinely delighted, a nurse and an orderly hurried to his room, telling me to stay put while they helped Andy get cleaned up and dressed.

“Here,” the remaining nurse at the station said, pushing a phone toward me. “I’ll let you be the one to give your parents the good news.”

I made a face. I didn’t want to talk to my parents under ordinary circumstances. After what I’d learned this afternoon, I wanted to even less. However, it would probably take more energy than I had to talk the nurse into taking the phone back, so I gritted my teeth and made the call.

Naturally, my mother was beside herself with glee, and I knew she and my dad would be at the hospital as soon as humanly possible. I’d have given everything I owned to get the hell out of there before they made their grand entrance, but I couldn’t walk out on Andy like that. Not after he’d been gone for so long.

I took a seat in the depressing waiting area and tried not to chew my lip raw. Eventually, the nurse came to get me, beaming. “You can go back into the room now,” she informed me, and I tried to smile at her.

Don’t get me wrong—I was thrilled that Andy had awakened. But I was such an emotional mess myself that I couldn’t manage the giddy excitement I thought I should be feeling. Andy and I had been estranged, at best, when he’d gone to the ceremony that drew Raphael into the Mortal Plain, and now he’d been dormant inside his own body for ten long years. The man who awaited me in that room was a stranger.

I stood in the doorway a moment, struggling against my cowardly impulse to flee. Then, with a deep breath, I pushed the door all the way open and stepped inside.

Dressed in blue jeans and a black T-shirt that hung loosely on his gaunt frame, he sat in a wheelchair, eyes fixed on his hands, which were clenched in his lap. He didn’t seem to notice me entering the room.

“Andy?” I asked hesitantly. “You okay?”

He blinked and looked up at me. “Yeah. Fine.” He tried a smile, but it was a sorry effort. “Apparently, it’s going to take me some time to regain my strength,” he said. His voice still sounded weak and raspy, but then his vocal cords were out of practice. “It was all I could do to stand up long enough for them to get the pants on.”

I bit my lip. “I’m sorry.”

He raised his eyebrows. “What for?”

I sighed. “Everything?”

He laughed briefly. “That certainly covers all the bases.”

The awkward silence threatened to return, and I rushed to fill it. “Mom and Dad are on their way.”

To my surprise, he grimaced. He and my folks had always gotten along famously, what with him being the golden boy and all.

He saw my surprise and shook his head. “They’re going to expect me to exonerate Raphael, and obviously I can’t do that.”

As far as everyone except myself, Adam, and Dominic knew, Raphael had gone rogue, kidnapping and torturing my boyfriend to punish me for the bad blood between us. My parents had always refused to believe that. They loved Raphael as if he were their true son, not Andy.

“How much do you remember?” I asked.

He closed his eyes. “Exactly as much as Raphael wanted me to. He made sure I knew the party line before he left me. Just in case I’d ever be a functional human being again.” He sighed. “How much do you want to bet Mom and Dad are going to try to convince me that there must be some kind of misunderstanding?”

I frowned. “I know they won’t be happy, but surely once you confirm the story, they’ll have to believe it.”

He snorted. “You’re underestimating the power of their denial. They might not argue with me, but I doubt they’ll really believe me.”

Of course, since the story wasn’t true, it was hard to blame my parents too much for not believing it. But no worries—there were plenty of other things I could blame them for.

I longed to ask Andy if he knew anything about my real father and the circumstances of my birth, but I knew it was too early for that. I needed to give him time to recuperate, to readjust to life as an independent human being. So I’d wait until tomorrow to ask.

I was once again struggling against my urge to run away when I heard the excited babble of my parents’ voices and realized it was too late.

“You want to hide out in the bathroom until they’re gone?” Andy asked me, and for the first time since he’d awakened I saw a spark of life and humor in his eyes.

Sad to say, that offer actually tempted me. But I scraped up what maturity I could and stayed right where I was.

My mom came through the door first. She’s the kind of woman who won’t set foot outside her house until her face is meticulously painted to hide any hint of blemishes or wrinkles and her hair has been sprayed until it didn’t dare move even in a gale-force wind. She wields her iron with fanatical zeal, and even when she wears linen, you’ll rarely see a crease anywhere.

Tonight was no exception, though how she managed to look so perfect when she’d obviously rushed out of the house, I had no clue. Maybe she was really a demon-possessed mannequin. But I’m being uncharitable. So what else is new?

She put her hands over her mouth when she caught sight of Andy, stifling a sob as her eyes shimmered with tears. Then she walked past me without even a sidelong glance and reached out her hand toward my brother. Andy took the offered hand and

forced a smile. My mother couldn't speak through her silent tears, and for that I was grateful.

My dad wouldn't know a tender emotion if it bit him in the ass. He stepped through the doorway and gave me a brief nod, then moved to stand by Andy's wheelchair, looking like being reunited with formerly catatonic sons was an everyday occurrence for him. I wondered if anyone would notice if I just slipped out the door.

"How are you feeling, son?" my dad asked.

"Much better," Andy said. He tried to withdraw his hand from my mother's grasp, but she didn't let go.

"We're so grateful to have you back," my mom said, her voice quavering. "And now you can tell us what really happened on the night you were shot."

Andy and I shared a look. Now as you might have gathered, there's no love lost between me and my mom, but even I had a hard time believing she could be this callous. My mouth went on autopilot.

"You haven't talked to the real Andy in ten years, he's been catatonic for weeks, and the first thing you say to him is how grateful you are that he can tell you R—" I stopped myself before Raphael's name left my lips. Demons adopt their hosts' names when they walk the Mortal Plain, and they rarely divulged their own names. In all likelihood, my parents didn't know the name of the demon who had possessed Andy, and we were all better off if it stayed that way. "Raphael" might not be his True Name, but there were probably others who knew that was the king's brother's name.

I cleared my throat, trying to disguise the slip as a cough. "Hoping he can tell you his demon isn't the bastard everyone else has said?"

My mother's back stiffened, and my dad glared at me.

"Morgan," he said, "if you don't have anything nice to say, then I'd suggest you not say anything at all."

What was I, five? My hackles rose even higher. "I might say the same of the two of you! Are you even marginally happy to see Andy restored, or is that goddamn demon the only thing you care about?"

My dad's glare became even more icy. "Watch your language."

Unbelievable! I'd always thought of Andy as their favored son. I'd known it was because he'd agreed to host a demon, but I didn't realize until this moment how little regard they actually had for him as a real person.

"Let's not argue, okay?" Andy said weakly. "I don't have the strength for it."

I immediately felt like shit. Yeah, I thought my mom was a callous bitch, but surely I had enough self-control to keep my opinion to myself for a few minutes while he and my parents got reacquainted.

"Sorry," I mumbled. I was apologizing to Andy, but my parents seemed to think the apology encompassed them as well, and I saw no reason to disillusion them. My dad turned away without a word, and my mom had never looked my way in the first place.

"Of course we're very glad to see you recovered," my mom assured Andy. "I can't imagine what these last few weeks must have been like for you." She sniffled daintily, and Andy forced another smile.

"It's been rough," he admitted, "but that's over."

My mom finally let go of his hand and pulled up a chair, my dad standing behind

her like some kind of bodyguard. Surely he was feeling something—other than his distaste for me, that is—but you wouldn't know it by looking at him. He's one of those super-uptight men who thinks showing emotion is girly. I doubt a tear had dared leak from his eye since well before puberty.

Leaning forward slightly in her chair with her earnestness, my mom asked, "So tell us what happened."

Once again, Andy and I shared a look, but this time I managed to bite my tongue and let him talk. He shook his head and met my mother's gaze.

"I'm really sorry, Mom, but I'm afraid you already know the truth. My demon went rogue, and there was nothing I could do to stop him." He shuddered visibly, and my mom sat back in her chair looking dumbstruck.

"How can that be?" she whispered, eyes wide and incredulous.

Andy shrugged. "Not all demons are the same. I just happened to draw one of the bad ones."

My mom didn't say anything, but anyone with half a brain could see she wasn't convinced. I really don't get her. She has to know that there are bad demons out there. Even with the thickest, rosiest-colored glasses imaginable, she had to have seen reports of rogues (demons who commit violent crimes) and illegals (demons who possess unwilling hosts). Why was it so impossible for her to imagine Andy getting saddled with one?

"Well," my dad said with false cheer, "even if that's the case, I'm sure things will go better next time."

My jaw dropped open, and I felt like I'd been punched in the gut.

I should have known my parents would want him to host again. Hell, they'd probably wished they could summon another demon to take him over while he was catatonic. However, even though he'd signed the consent forms the first time around, he'd have to do it all over again if he wanted to host another demon.

I'd just gotten my brother back after a ten-year absence. I didn't want to lose him again!

Then an insidious thought wormed its way into my mind. If Andy was going to host another demon, why shouldn't that demon be Lugh? My heart tripped over itself. Andy had always wanted to be a hero, and I never had. It would be perfect! I'd get rid of Lugh and go back to as normal a life as I'd ever had. And Andy would get to be the hero who saved the world.

But before I got too excited about the idea, I saw the ghastly white color of my brother's skin, saw the horror in his eyes, and knew that my faint hope was already dead.

Still pale, his hands gripping the arms of the wheelchair, Andy shook his head. "There won't be a next time," he declared, his voice slightly wobbly. "Once was enough for me."

My mother put a hand to her breastbone in shock, and my dad was momentarily rendered speechless. He recovered quickly.

"That was insensitive of me," my dad said, and I swallowed a laugh. "I'm sorry, son. I didn't mean to rush you. The first thing you have to do is get your strength back. We can talk about your future later."

Once again, my brother shook his head. "We can talk about my future, but I'm

telling you now, that future won't involve becoming a host again. I know you think I'm traumatized and will change my mind when I get better, but don't get your hopes up."

My dad looked like he had something else to say to that, but my mom beat him to it, leaning forward and putting her hand on Andy's shoulder.

"Of course not, dear," she said. "You know we'll support you one hundred percent, no matter what you choose to do."

I had to swallow bitter laughter. And ugly though it might be, I couldn't suppress the surge of jealousy. Of course they'd support him no matter what. It was only me that they left hanging out to dry if I didn't do exactly what they wanted me to.

But given what I now knew about my origins, could I really blame them?

I smiled grimly to myself. You bet your ass I could. I'd been doing it all my life. Why should I stop now?

## CHAPTER 3

The doctor on call wanted Andy to stay at the hospital at least one more night for observation. My parents were disappointed, but far be it from them to argue with the doctor. Not when he was another Spirit Society member whom they obviously respected.

I left them to get reacquainted with their real son. I would call Andy when he was out of the hospital and my parents were nowhere to be found. Then he and I could talk some more.

It was nearing dinnertime when I stepped out of the elevator into the hospital's lobby. My stomach was growling at me for skipping lunch, but when I considered my various options for dinner, none of them seemed terribly appealing.

All thoughts of food fled my mind when I saw Adam standing at the information desk.

Being gorgeous was something of a job requirement for a demon host, and Adam was no exception. He was a little shorter than Dominic, though his swagger always made him look like the biggest guy in the room. If Dominic was tall, dark, and handsome, Adam was tall, dark, and dangerous. No matter how much I didn't like him, I couldn't say I minded the view. Now if I could only put up a wall of bars between us and duct-tape his mouth shut, I might almost be happy to see him.

As it was, the sight of him made a hard day even worse. I scowled at him as he grinned and met me halfway to the exit. I had managed to avoid him ever since the night he shot my brother, but apparently my lucky streak was at its end.

"What are you doing here?" I growled, my hand itching for the Taser I didn't dare draw. "You sure as hell better not be following me!"

He gave me a look of mock innocence. "Who, moi?"

At my savage expression, Adam dropped the phony innocence and shook his head. "Actually, the fact that you're here, too, is merely a happy coincidence."

I snorted and headed for the door, not at all surprised when he fell into step beside me.

"I heard the news about your brother," he said. "I'm glad he's doing better."

"No thanks to you," I muttered, then wished I'd kept the thought to myself. This wasn't a conversation I was anxious to have with Adam. I glanced at my watch. "It's been less than an hour. You must have a damn good informant."

It figured Adam would have someone keeping an eye on Andy. If my brother had blown our cover story, Adam would have been in the worst trouble of us all.

He shrugged benignly. "It was in all our best interests to know if and when he snapped out of it, and I couldn't count on you conveniently being by his side when he did." He held the door for me like a gentleman, and protesting would have been more trouble than it was worth. I stepped out onto the sidewalk just as a bus was pulling away from the stop in a cloud of exhaust fumes, reminding me why I'd always preferred living in the suburbs.

Before I had a chance to start walking toward my apartment, Adam took hold of my arm and steered me in the opposite direction. Naturally, I tried to jerk my arm out