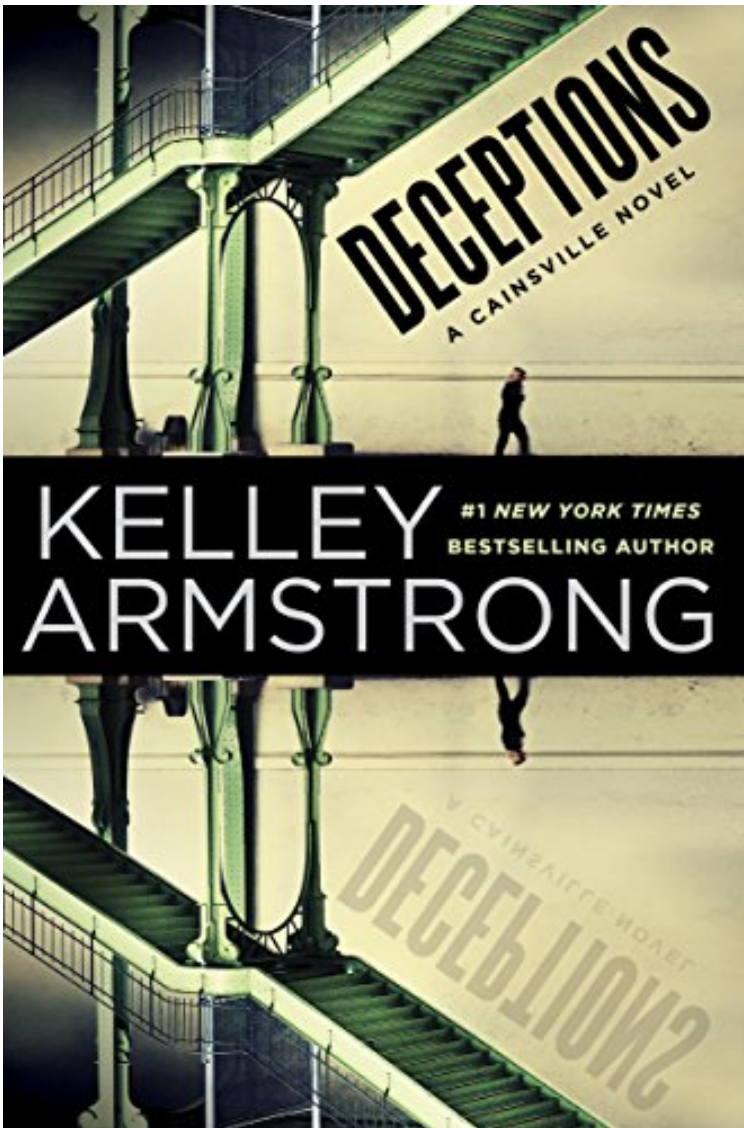


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[PDF] Deceptions: A Cainsville Novel

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe #1 New York Times bestselling author of the Otherworld series delivers her most suspenseful novel yet, where the discovery of Cainsvilles dark past and the true nature of its inhabitants leads to murder, redemption, love, and unspeakable loss.Olivia Taylor Jones life has exploded. Shes discovered she is not only adopted, but her real parents are convicted serial killers. Fleeing the media frenzy, she took refuge in the oddly secluded town of Cainsville. She has since solved the towns mysteries and finds herself not only the target of its secretive elders but also her stalker ex-fianc.Visions continue to haunt her: particularly a little blond girl in a green sundress who insists she has an important message for Olivia, one that may help her balance the light and darkness within herself. Death stalks both Olivia and the two men most important to her, as she desperately searches to understand whether ancient scripts are dictating the

triangle that connects them. Will darkness prevail, or does Olivia have the power to prevent a tragic fate? From the Hardcover edition. Extrait CHAPTER ONE I woke to my ex-fiancé calling. Which was awkward, considering we'd broken up only two months ago and I was in another guy's apartment. Even more awkward when that guy wasn't the one I was currently dating. In my defense, I was on the couch. My first thought was not to answer the damned phone, Olivia. It was of a letter from my father, read right before I went to sleep, which had not been conducive to good dreams and had left me in no mood to talk to James Morgan.

I reached for my phone and hit Ignore. A moment later, a shadow loomed over me. Gabriel picked up my phone. James. He left a message. I should take it. Um, my cell? My ex? Your stalker, too. I looked up. Gabriel is at least six-foot-four and knows how to use his size to his advantage. Hence the looming. When I nodded, he listened to the message as I tried very hard to push aside thoughts of James and the roller-coaster ride that began when I found out my real parents were convicted serial killers. The ride had ultimately landed me here, sleeping in the apartment of one of Chicago's most notorious defense attorneys. My lawyer. My boss.

And, though I'd never dare say it in front of him, my friend Gabriel Walsh doesn't have friends. He has resources: people who can be exploited and used. I'd like to think I'm an exception, but I don't push my luck. James heard about last night, Gabriel said after listening to the message. The car crash? Yes, but I believe he's more concerned about the crazed killer who caused the crash and held you at gunpoint. Oh, that. A minor point, but it seems to bother him. Unreasonably so. Agreed. Coffee? I rose and started for the kitchen. I'll make it. You were in that accident, too, and hurt a lot worse than me. You should be resting. He moved into my path and waved me back. That wasn't him playing congenial host; it was him telling me to stay the hell out of his kitchen. I suspected last night was the first time he'd brought anyone up here. His apartment. His private domain. If you'd rather I didn't stay, I began. I invited you. After sustaining a head injury. Which means you aren't responsible for anything you said last night... except for the part where you forgave me for wrecking your car. You were run off the road. I still feel bad. It was a nice car. I paused. I'm also sorry about almost getting you killed. She says, as an afterthought. It was a really nice car. He shook his head and went into the kitchen. I followed as far as the doorway. You'll need to let James know you're all right, Gabriel said. I would suggest a text message. Tell him I can write my own texts. Yes, but this must be handled with care. While I'd prefer you didn't engage him at all, if you don't tell him you're fine, he has an excuse to keep hounding you. Yet if you give any indication you're opening the door to conversation, he has reason to keep hounding you. I had to agree. Gabriel dictated a message. I did tweak his wording. Gabriel's language choices can be very precise, and James couldn't suspect the text had come from him. He seemed to think Gabriel had a Svengali sway over me. Which showed that my former fiancé didn't know me nearly as well as I'd thought he did. Message sent, we settled in with our coffee, chairs pulled to the living room window, where we could

look out over Gabriel's breathtaking view of the city. I had a call this morning, he said. Edgar Chandler wishes to speak to you. Chandler? Yes. Elderly gentleman. Currently incarcerated. Formerly involved in CIA experiments. Seems to have unlocked the secret of mind control. Which he used in an attempt to kill us. I know who Chandler is. It seemed as if a refresher might be required, given the sheer number of people who have tried to kill us lately. True. So he'll finally speak to us? Chandler has no interest in me. The invitation is for you. May I presume you'll accept? May I presume you'll come with me? His brows shot up. Of course. Whether he wants me there or not. Gabriel arranged to see Chandler that afternoon. A half hour later we were in the elevator, taking the fifty-five-story ride down to the underground parking garage. So what else are we doing today? I asked as we exited the elevator. The only thing on my schedule is working at the diner.

Which I'm not. I wasn't sure if I ever could again. I'd told Larry I was unwell between the accident and the fever that preceded it and needed some time off, and he'd given me two weeks. I require a vehicle, Gabriel said. Since that is your area of expertise, I'm taking you along to select one. After that, we'll pick up a rental car. Then we'll drop your car back here and skip the play-by-play and hit the highlights, please. Today will be devoted primarily to cleaning up the mess from yesterday. We need... An almost imperceptible tightening of his shoulders told me something had caught his attention. Gabriel has an uncanny sense for trouble, which

may be because his gene pool, like mine, contains a sprinkling of fairy dust. What's up? I whispered. He scanned the row of parked cars. Do you have your gun? Always. He put his fingers against my back and propelled me forward. Any warnings? he murmured. Portents of impending doom? I said. Not a one, but honestly? I'm discombobulated enough this morning that I could trip over five dead birds and not notice. We're both out of sorts. Which reminds me that I need to stop by the doctor and pick up a prescription for pain. When he wheeled, I didn't jump. Nor was I surprised to see a man two paces behind us. Gabriel admitting he needed pain meds had conveyed a warning as clearly as if he'd shouted it. The man didn't look

like the sort who'd be stalking us in an empty parking garage: early forties, decent suit, gray-salted beard. A reporter? I'd had to deal with plenty lately. May I help you? Gabriel rumbled, his deep voice dropping another octave. Gabriel Walsh? Yes. The man held out a thick envelope. You've been served. This is Gabriel grabbed the guy by the wrist, wrenching his arm up. The guy yelped, but didn't drop the envelope... or the semi-automatic pistol he'd tried to conceal in his other hand. Give Mr. Walsh your gun, I said. The man stared in confusion at the gun in my own hand. Give it to him now. He opened his fingers and dropped his pistol. Gabriel grabbed for it with his free hand. Then he stopped sharply. Oliv! The gun clattered to the pavement. And cold steel pressed into the back of my neck. You don't want to do that, Gabriel said, his pale blue eyes fixed on my captor. A man's chuckle sounded behind me. I don't believe you're in any position to make that demand, Mr. Walsh. Then you are mistaken. Hurt her, and you will regret it. Regret it? That's all? I expected I'll hunt you down and kill you at the very least. Death is quick. Regret is not. The gun pressed harder into my neck, as if the man was leaning forward. Clever, Mr. Walsh. I'm sure Ms. Jones is very impressed. Her knight in tarnished armor. Impressionable young women must find that very hard to resist. They may, Gabriel said. Unfortunately, we don't have any here at the moment, so you'll have to trust the threat is for your benefit alone. Chivalry and flattery. Are your knees weak yet, Ms. Jones? Oh, and do put away the gun. Please. I hesitated, then lowered it into my bag. Now remove your hand from your purse, Ms. Jones. I did. The man continued, I'd like to believe modern young women wouldn't fall for Mr. Walsh's act, but the very fact you are with him proves otherwise. We'll have to chat about that later. For now, you'll come with me, Ms. Jones, while Mr. Walsh releases my confederate and then stays where he is until we are out of sight. If he follows, you will pay the price. Understood, Mr. Walsh? My assailant dug the gun barrel in hard enough to make me wince. Gabriel punted the other man's gun under the cars and then released him with a shove. My assailant took hold of my arm. When he lowered the gun, I stabbed him in the side, having palmed the switchblade from my purse. He fell back, and I grabbed for his gun arm. I missed. Gabriel didn't. Gabriel wrenched the man's arm up. His partner crawled after his lost weapon, but when I told him to stop, he saw the gun back in my hand and decided to listen. Gabriel threw my attacker to the ground. It was another guy in a suit. Bald. Thirties. He immediately started rising, one hand clutched to the knife wound. Gabriel calmly punched him in the side of the head. The guy dropped, unconscious, to the pavement. There's blood on your shirt, I said. Gabriel glanced down and sighed. You can put it on my bill, I said. He shook his head and walked over to the first man, who had started inching toward his gun again. I'd noticed, but at the rate he was moving, he'd be lucky to make it there by lunch. Gabriel grabbed the guy from under the car, flipped him on his back, and put one Ferragamo loafer on his chest. I've decided to speak to you instead of your partner, Gabriel said. Tell me now if I've made the wrong choice. The man wriggled, as if testing how tightly he was pinned. When Gabriel leaned forward, he gasped and lay still. I'll presume that means I did not, Gabriel said. Prove me wrong, and I'll break every rib in your chest. Is that understood? The guy looked offended. Coming after us with guns was fine, but God forbid we should fight back. Olivia, could you please keep an eye on the elevator and the entrance lane? It's after rush hour so we're unlikely to be interrupted, but it would be inconvenient. Got it. I moved past the unconscious man and the growing pool of blood at his side. I wondered if I should do something about that, but he seemed to be breathing comfortably. I took up position about fifteen feet from Gabriel, where I could see anyone driving into the garage or coming off the elevator. Who hired you? he asked our captive. No answer. Then a gasp, as Gabriel presumably applied pressure literally. We were hired to speak to Ms. Jones, the man said after Gabriel let up a little. By someone who is extremely concerned about her welfare. She's in a very precarious place right now and James, Gabriel said, the name a growl. The man continued, As my associate said, it's obvious you've positioned yourself as her protector. She's vulnerable and alone. You provided a shoulder to lean on and, in doing so, you've influenced her perception of reality to the point where she can no longer see the truth. It's our job to counter that influence. James Morgan hired cult deprogrammers? It's hard to surprise Gabriel, but his voice rose with incredulity. We don't like to use that word. But when undue influence is exerted over the vulnerable, intervention may be required to help the victim see the situation clearly. So I'm exerting undue influence. For what purpose? Money, obviously. That's what you always want, isn't it, Walsh? If you are implying that I'm charging Olivia for my time, her account is closed. She did hire me to help investigate the deaths of two of her parents' alleged victims. But we completed that inquiry successfully. In fact, I'm paying Olivia now, as a research assistant and investigator. My associate said you were clever, Mr. Walsh, and he's correct. Yes, you're paying her... to deflect suspicion and to maintain an excuse for ongoing contact, while you continue to pursue the real prize. Which would be? A five-million-dollar trust fund. Which comes due when she turns twenty-five. A few

months from now. Gabriel grunted. After at least five seconds of silence, the man said, You arent even going to deny it? To whom? You're hired help. I don't need to convince you of anything. The very thought that anyone however skilled a manipulator could persuade Olivia to part with her fortune is ridiculous. I offered to pay for the shirt, I called. But not the car. The car wasn't my fault, and it's insured. See? Gabriel said. I would also point out that, given how handily she disarmed your colleague, you might be mistaken about her vulnerability. I will forgive you for that, based on your very short acquaintance with her. James Morgan has no such excuse. Beyond the fact that he's an idiot. The man was silent. I have noticed, Gabriel said, that despite your unwillingness to name him as your client, you haven't denied that he is. According to the contract, I cannot identify the man who hired us. There is no provision against acknowledging it, though. He's very concerned about his fiancée. I'm not his fiancée, I called. The engagement ended two months ago, Gabriel said. Which does not keep him from being concerned. Get proof, I called. Of his concern? the man said. Of his involvement, Gabriel said. Prove to me that James Morgan is indeed your client and I will release you. The man warned Gabriel that he was reaching for his phone. He passed it over. Gabriel read the screen and then waved me over to have a look. It was an e-mail exchange with James. A little cloak-and-dagger in the wording, but the intent was clear. These men were to take me, by force, and persuade me that Gabriel Walsh was a very, very bad man. I forwarded it to both of us. Gabriel took his foot off the man's chest. We retrieved the gun from under the car. Or, I should say, I retrieved it. Gabriel wouldn't fit, which I deemed a poor excuse. We left the so-called deprogrammer tending to his partner's wounds. CHAPTER TWO Gabriel didn't say a word on the walk back to the elevator, on the ride up, or even once we got through his door. I shot the bolt. At the click, he turned, as if startled, and then nodded. He changed his shirt, walked to the window and stood there, fingers drumming against his leg. Then he came my way so fast I stepped aside. He unlocked the door and walked out. He was in the elevator by the time I caught up. The doors were about a hand's breadth from shutting before he stopped them and leaned out. You need to come with me, he said. I'm trying to. We returned to the parking garage. Our attackers were gone. Gabriel walked to his space and stood staring at my VW. Um, yeah, I said. Your car was totaled, remember? That's why you need me. Unless you plan to take a cab. He grunted. Letting someone else drive was a relinquishing of control he couldn't abide with anyone except me and his aunt Rose. May I have your keys? he asked. I'm going with you. Of course you are. I'm not leaving you alone after that. But I'd like to drive. I passed them over. We got into my vehicle, an older-model Jetta that I could justify borrowing from my dad's garage, even if it wasn't quite up to my standards for speed and handling. Gabriel peeled out of the garage. Or he attempted to. It's a diesel, and when he hit the gas, he got a whine from the engine instead of a growl. Sorry, I said. If we were closer to the north end, we could swing by my parents' place and pick up the Maserati. If I thought you'd keep the Maserati, I would agree to the detour. You insist on depriving yourself. He clipped off the rant so hard I wouldn't have been surprised if he had nipped his tongue. I checked my phone. I had a good-morning text from my boyfriend, Ricky, who was in Miami on business. That business... well, I didn't know and didn't ask. I'd met Ricky through Gabriel, whose main clients are the Satans Saints. It's a biker gang, sorry, motorcycle club. Ricky's dad runs it, and Ricky is a member. He's also an MBA student at the University of Chicago, not as an escape from the life, but so he'll be better prepared to take over when his father retires. I'd called Ricky last night to give him a heads-up on the accident. I texted him back and when I looked up, we were in the city core. Where are we going? I said. To see James. You're going to confront him at his office? I struggled to keep my tone even. Yes. That is... I lost the battle and twisted to face him. Are you out of your mind? No. I'm serious. So am I. I know you're upset. Upset does not begin to cover it. Each word was razor-edged. He insulted you, I said. I get that. I could not care less about an insult. His ice-blue eyes swung my way. This is about sending men to kidnap you at gunpoint. If you confront him in public. This requires more than a tersely worded e-mail or an angry phone call, Olivia. If I don't confront him publicly, he will skew the story to paint me as the aggressor. I made that mistake once. I won't do it again. Last week, Gabriel had confronted James at his house after James had sent me a private investigator's dossier on every illegal and unethical thing Gabriel had ever been accused of doing. Gabriel had taken that dossier and systematically sorted it into truth, lies, and damn lies. He didn't care; neither did I. What set Gabriel off was the call James made afterward, to inform him that the dossier was only the first strike, and he wouldn't stop harassing me until I came back to him. Gabriel had briefly ended up in jail charged with assault after James's mother had called the cops. We stopped for a red light. When I looked up, I saw a bird sitting on the signal box. Gabriel? Hmm. What kind of bird do you see there? I pointed. A robin. I see a magpie. He didn't say there shouldn't be magpies in Chicago. We both knew that, just as we knew there wasn't really one sitting on that box. One for sorrow, I said. That

means youre making a mistake. Are you sure? If youre implying that Id make up an omen Im saying I dont agree it has anything to do with me visiting James. Youve had a hellish twenty-four hours. First you find out that Cainsville is populated by fae. Then you have visions and a fever. Quickly followed by Macy Shaw trying to kill us. An hour ago, you had a gun put to your head. He waved at the bird. One for sorrow. He knew that wasnt how it worked. Omens arent retroactive. Yet he drove through the intersection and refused to spare me even a sidelong glance. Hed made up his mind, and no mere omen would stop him. Of all the problems that came with the revelation about my notorious birth parents, the most bothersome was the media attention. Id been a delicious story in a slow news week. And I continued to entertain. Oh, look, she dumped James Morgan. Oh, look, shes hanging around with Gabriel Walsh. No, wait, shes dating a biker. I was the Lindsay Lohan of the debutante set. In the lobby of Jamess office building, I felt the stares and I heard the whispers. His employees had known me before the media firestorm. To them, I wasnt just the daughter of two convicted killers I was the stone bitch whod cut the heart from a really nice guy. When we got on the elevator and Gabriel said, Which floor? I hesitated. He turned to the young man beside him and said, James Morgans office? The guy pressed the button. The elevator cleared out before the top floor. As I watched the last numbers pass, I turned to Gabriel. Can I handle this? I asked. Having you speak for me isnt going to help. After a moments thought, Gabriel nodded. Then the elevator doors opened and we stepped off.

CHAPTER THREE While the top floor is reserved for his companys executives, James likes to maintain a non-corporate feel, with open areas where people can congregate. Thats where we found him, standing at the espresso machine, laughing at something one of his employees had said. When I saw him, I felt as if Id woken from a nightmare. The encounter with the deprogrammers was so ludicrous it couldnt be anything but a figment of my overworked imagination. This was the James I knew, making coffee for himself and those gathered around him. Down-to-earth, easygoing, always helpful and considerate. When James noticed me, he smiled, eyes crinkling as he turned toward me, as if thinking, Huh, that deprogramming stuff works fast. Then he spotted Gabriel, and I saw exactly what Gabriel must something twisted and ugly simmering behind Jamess eyes. No, not something. Obsession. I take it Palmer didnt tell you he screwed up, I said. Palmer? James looked from Gabriel to me. I have no idea what this is about, but we should talk in my office. Sorry, I said. But if we do this in private, this time it might be me who ends up in a jail cell on charges of trespassing and assault. You may know Palmer by another name, but that seems to be the one he used in his e-mail exchange with you. I stepped toward him. I really dont appreciate being held at gunpoint. Gunpoint? Is this about last night? If you think I had anything to do with that I mean this morning. Yep, it happened again, and this time you had everything to do with it. Palmer confirmed youre his client, James. I took out my phone. Let me forward you the e-mail where you discussed terms with him in case youve lost it. E-mail...? Im completely lost here, Olivia, but if you have an e-mail that appears to come from me, someone has set up a dummy account. Its your personal address. Then its been hacked or spoofed. Yes, send it to me, and Ill have my technicians prove that. Im sure they will, Gabriel murmured behind me. Is anyone talking to you? James snapped, and when he did, several employees whod been wandering off looked over. This didnt sound like their boss; it sounded like a peevish little boy. Whatever this is, Walsh, James said, its none of your business. Anytime you hire someone to put a gun to Olivias head and kidnap her, Ill make that my business. James turned to me. Why the hell would I hire someone to kidnap you? Because, apparently, Im being brainwashed by... I jerked my thumb toward Gabriel. Well, thats the first sensible thing youve said since you got here. I wouldnt call it brainwashing, but its clearly something, and obviously someone else is as concerned as I am about it. And hacked your e-mail to hire people to deprogram me? Who would do that? James paused, mental wheels turning. Then he looked straight at Gabriel. Only one person. Yes, Gabriel said dryly. I hired men to waylay us in my parking garage. Im sure youd use whatever scenario would allow you to play the white knight. Actually, Olivia extricated herself from the situation. But your choice of wording is interesting, given that the men who attacked us used a similar phrase. We know what you did, James, I said. We have proof. Back off. Now. Or else? James said. I think were civilized enough to avoid threats. But if youd like one... Gabriel said, his voice a purring rumble. Id be happy to oblige. James stepped in front of Gabriel. When he saw he had to look up, he inched back, seemed to realize that looked bad, too, and stood his ground. I have no intention of abandoning Olivia, James said. So tell me tell everyone herewhat you plan to do about that. Change your mind. Gabriels voice was low, almost soft, but the look in his eyes was bone-chilling. James took another step back and caught himself again. You will leave her alone, Gabriel said. One way or another. That sounds like a death threat, Walsh. Then you lack imagination. With that, it was time to walk away. I headed for the elevator. Gabriel followed. I took the drivers seat this time. Gabriel

relinquished the keys without a word. I'm going to get a restraining order, I said as we drove away. Yes, having worked in a women's shelter, I know they aren't worth the paper they're written on, but I need to establish a record of harassment. When he said nothing for two blocks, I asked, You don't think I should? I agree that a record is wise. I'm just not certain I can help you obtain one. No problem. I'll do it myself. I don't mean... He cleared his throat. No matter how you obtain it, your connection with me will... I've used restraining orders in the past to establish a record of harassment against a client. Except in those cases... Your clients weren't actually being harassed. I'll fix this, Olivia. It's not really your problem to fix, I said softly. Actually, it is. I'm the one who... made that deal with him. To protect me and get us back together again. Gabriel had accepted money from James, to look after me and help me reconcile with him. It wasn't Silence. Then, whatever my intentions, it's clear that he interpreted our arrangement to mean reconciliation was a strong possibility. You said it was over, and I muddied the waters. I miscalculated. Two words. Simple enough. I miscalculated. But they weren't simple at all. They were an admission of fallibility, and that didn't come easy for Gabriel. I'll fix this, he said. I promise. As we drove to the dealership, Gabriel got a call. It was Pamela Larsen, my birth mother, phoning from prison. He told me it was her, but he didn't answer. My relationship with Pamela was strained. When I'd discovered I could see omens, I'd remembered her teaching me all those superstitious ditties as a child. So I'd gone to her for answers. She'd brushed it off as nonsense passed along by a young and foolish mother trying to entertain her baby. I'd refused to see her until she agreed to talk. She was trying to reach me through Gabriel because he was her lawyer. She'd hired him a few years ago to win her an appeal. He'd failed to do so. As much as she hated him and hated me having any association with him, she hadn't hesitated to hire him back for her latest appeal. Begging him to be allowed to see me would be difficult for her. I regretted that it had come to that. Yet I didn't regret it enough to visit. If she wasn't going to give me answers, I'd try Todd. Which was turning out to be a lot more complicated logistically and emotionally than I could have imagined. Todd Larsen was a convicted serial killer. A monster. My memories of him should surely be equally monstrous. Except the ones I'd dredged up were bright and warm. By all accounts, I'd adored my father, and he'd adored me. When I'd been unable to get in to see him, we still weren't sure why he'd sent that letter, and it was everything I could have wanted... and everything I didn't want. I'd had a dad. Arthur Jones. An amazing father I lost to a heart attack a year ago. And now I had Todd, who, from that letter, had been just as good a father. I was struggling to reconcile that. I'd have to face him. I would, when I got the chance. I just hoped I could handle it.

CHAPTER FOUR

At the car dealership, Gabriel set me loose and said, Find me something. I tried to get his opinion, but he was having none of that. I don't know if he was too distracted or he honestly didn't give a damn, but he seemed serious, so I had fun. The new Jag I chose wasn't that different from his old one. The style suited him, and I was loath to change that. I started rhyming off options. I usually just pick one from the lot, Gabriel said. That's your first mistake. The salesman cleared his throat. I can offer a discount on the lot models. We'll be starting the new year soon. How much of a discount? I can't say exactly, but if you come inside, we can negotiate. Ballpark it for me, I said. Maybe a thousand dollars. Not worth it. Gabriel's lips twitched in amusement. Whatever she says. I listed the options I wanted and then said, Black, inside and out. Hell, need it by next week. That's not possible. I've picked common options and colors. You'll find one on a lot somewhere. Have it here next week, and in the meantime... I waved at their stock. Hell, borrow one of those. We can arrange a loaner, but first we need to settle financing. It's a cash sale, Gabriel said. Despite the cool June morning, the guy began visibly sweating. I'll blame it on the fact that a big guy in a suit wanted to pay cash for a new Jag, suggesting... well, it suggested he might not really be a lawyer. I know your previous car is a write-off, the salesman said. But it will take time to get the insurance money. It's a cash sale regardless. Gabriel lowered his shades, fixing the man with a cool stare. Is that a problem? N-no. Of course not. Come inside, and we'll do the paperwork. The dealership visit lifted Gabriel's mood immensely. I think my handling of the situation amused him. While I'd been following in the career footsteps of my philanthropist mother, I really was Daddy's girl. My father had turned the family business—the Mills Jones department store—back into the Chicago landmark it'd been in the fifties, and he hadn't done that by letting salespeople tell him he couldn't get stock in until next month. We had an hour before our appointment with Chandler, so Gabriel decided to swing by the office. It's a Garfield Park greystone, a beautiful building but not exactly the prestigious address you'd expect from a guy who pays cash for a six-figure car. It is relatively close to the Cook County jail. Given Gabriel's clientele, that may be the main attraction. We parked my car and his rental Jag in the narrow lane between buildings. I was telling him a story as we walked inside. My poor mother was on the verge of cardiac arrest, I said. Here we are, at this thousand-dollar-a-plate dinner, and Dad's wrangling exclusive rights for a line of designer handbags from

another guest at our table. He doesnt see the problem because, to him, if youre going to shell out that kind of money, youd damned well better get the chance to schmooze someone who can give you exclusive rights to his handbag line. I would agree, Gabriel said, opening the office door for me. So my dad says... I trailed off as I saw three people in the reception area. One was expected Lydia, Gabriels executive assistant, a trim woman in her late sixties who looked as if she had a yoga mat and green-goo health shake behind her desk and could throw a would-be mugger over her shoulder. In front of her stood an elderly couple. Handsome and well-dressed, but not overly so. They looked like retired professors perfectly pleasant people. Except they werent any of that. Not professors. Not elderly. Not particularly pleasant. Not people, either. Ida and Walter Clark were Tylwyth Teg. Welsh fae. Fairies, though they didnt like that word. With others of their kind, theyd founded Cainsville centuries ago and interbred with select humans. Thats how a population survives when the other outnumber them. Not everyone in Cainsville had fae blood, but enough did for Tylwyth Teg to work their compulsions and charms and keep us from asking questions. Now I knew better, which is why Id left Cainsville and the resident fae behind. Lydia rose from her desk. I was just telling the Clarks here that you werent expected at the office today, Mr. Walsh. I presume youre just stopping by? I am, but I suspect Im not the one they came to see. Actually, we would like to speak to you as well as Olivia, Ida said. We wont keep you long. Gabriel visibly struggled to refuse. It shouldnt have been difficult, all things considered, but we both had fae blood and that inbred compulsion demanded we listen to them. He glanced at me. I nodded, and he turned to Lydia. Olivia didnt get her mocha this morning. Could I impose on you...? Ill go grab one. She stood. When I return, though, theres a case we need to discuss before you leave for your appointment. Which was her way of putting the Clarks on notice that this meeting would indeed be short. As soon as the door closed behind Lydia, Walter said, We understand that youre upset, Olivia. Mmm, Im not sure upset is the right word. I perched on Lydias desk. I mean, I completely understand why you wouldnt tell me what you were. What do you say? Hello, Im a fairy. Sorry, fae, right? Actually, we prefer Tylwyth Teg, Ida said. You are upset. No, upset is what Id get from learning that people I trusted arent what they seem to be. Pissed off is what I get when my life is in danger, on account of said people not telling me what the hell is going on. Cainsville welcomes me with open arms and I think, Huh, thats really nice, only to discover the town is run by supernatural beings. The reason theyre being so nice to me? Well, I havent quite figured that all out yet, but I know I sure as hell cant trust any explanation you give, so Ill keep digging. I know my family is connected to Cainsville, on Pamelas side. I know you two had something to do with getting me adopted by the Taylor-Joneses and making me disappear from the system and from my birth parents. I know thats all somehow connected to my parents alleged crimes. And I know that, apparently, Im very, very special. You are special, Olivia, Ida said. I dont want to be. It is, as Gabriel would say, highly inconvenient. Ive got you trying to woo me, and the Wild Hunt sorry, the Cwn Annwn trying to woo me, and its like Im the top NFL draft pick when I didnt even realize I knew how to play football. Im being waylaid everywhere Thats the Cwn Annwn, not us. No? I looked around Gabriels lobby. Huh. This certainly feels like waylaying. Ida stepped toward me. Olivia, I can assure you that we have your best interests in mind. The Cwn Annwn do not. Stay away from us if you must, but stay away from them, too. And end your association with the Gallagher boy, Walter added. Ricky? Seriously? After everything, you still need to bitch about me dating a biker? Its not Walter began, but Ida shushed him with a look. Gabriel cut in. I believe I know Ricky well enough to vouch for him, but if you have some insight that I dont, anything that would suggest hed harm Olivia... With obvious reluctance, Ida said, Not intentionally. We simply dont think its wise for her to associate with a known criminal. Ricky Gallagher is not a criminal. He has never even been arrested. Hes an MBA student and a member of a motorcycle club. Neither is a crime. Now, if youll excuse us, Olivia and I have work to do. Once Lydia returned, we headed off to Cook County for our visit. Edgar Chandler had been a psychologist working on MKULTRA, the CIAs brainwashing experiments in the sixties. MKULTRA was a flop. Yet Chandler had continued working in the pharmaceutical field. With help of the fantastical kind, hed attained one of MKULTRAS goals: discovering a way to turn innocent people into unwitting assassins. We couldnt tell the authorities that hed killed using mind control because, well, rational people dont believe in mind control. Or omens. Or fae. The state attorneys office had settled on charging him with accessory to murder. So why didnt Chandler get bail? I asked as we walked from the parking lot to the prison. Im certainly not complaining. It just seems odd, given his age and spotless record. Is it set too high? Edgar Chandler could put up a million-dollar bond as easily as I paid for that car. But he hasnt. Which means what? That hes not in any rush to get out. CHAPTER FIVE Chandler looked every month of his eighty-five years. I wouldnt have said I was sorry to see it. Not only had he ordered the deaths of Jan Gunderson

and Peter Evans, but he'd used his mind-control drugs to murder Jans father and a friend of Peters as a test of his new toy. Two innocent people had died and two equally innocent people were now charged with their murders. Chandler tottered into the visitors area on a cane. Not because the weight of his crimes had finally become too much to bear, but because he hadn't recovered from being shot in the leg by Gabriel last month. When a guard strode over to help him, Chandler peered at him. I don't know you, he said to the man. Name's Ransom. I was here last week when you talked to your lawyer. No you weren't. I've never seen you before. Ransom rolled his eyes and took Chandler by the arm to help him into his seat. Chandler shook the man off. I don't know you. Someone's a little paranoid, I whispered to Gabriel. Chandler turned to us. Mr. Walsh. I don't believe you were invited to this tte--tte. If Eden feels threatened, I can assure you both I'm quite harmless here. Gabriel stays, I said. So you've decided to speak to me? I have. That means you want something from me. Let's get that out of the way first. I called you here because I believe we can benefit one another. This was never about hurting you, Eden. I leaned forward, elbows on the table. You forget I heard you give Mrs. Evans the order. Kill the girl. He'd brainwashed Peter Evans's wife after having their housekeeper kill Evans. Then you misinterpreted, which can happen when you eavesdrop, Olivia. Reverting to my preferred name suggested he was anxious to show his sincerity, but... well, I had the feeling it took someone a lot scarier than me or even Gabriel to make Edgar Chandler anxious. I offered to protect you from any fallout after Evans's death and to help you better understand your situation, he said. I tried to work with you. That wasn't quite how I remembered it, but I said only, You also warned me about the hounds. You said they'd come to Cainsville and, when they did, I'd regret turning you in. Well, they've showed up there. Hell, they've showed up in a lot of places. But I'm not quite getting the regret part. Again, you misunderstood me. I never warned you against the hounds. I can promise they're no threat to you. Bingo. I knew who had Chandler scared shitless. The Huntsmen showed you how to perfect your mind control, didn't they? Huntsmen? He tried for an air of bewilderment. Cwn Annwn, I said. I think I'm finally pronouncing that right. Welsh. So many letters. So few vowels. I realize recent events have been confusing, Eden, but I have no idea what you're talking about. No? Huh. I looked at Gabriel. Is it warm in here? Cool, actually. Then why is Edgar breaking into a sweat? It's a fever, Chandler said. I've been unwell. I'm also under a great deal of strain. You've heard about Anderson's death? We have, Gabriel said. Chandler's former bodyguard had apparently O.D. on morphine in the hospital a couple of weeks earlier. I presume he was murdered. While you would be the obvious suspect and mind control the obvious weapon the fact you contacted us says you are not responsible and, moreover, you fear you're next. He motioned toward the guard. Hence your paranoia. Silence dragged on for so long that the guard started walking over, expecting Chandler to declare the visit at an end. I need to make amends, Chandler said finally. To us? I said. Oh, that's sweet. Chandler looked confused. I glanced at Gabriel. Not to us. To the Huntsmen, I take it, Gabriel said. You've outlived your usefulness, and you could be a threat. There's someone I need to... have removed. Gabriel's brows shot up. I provide many services, Mr. Chandler, but that one is outside my area of expertise. No, I don't think it is. Then you think wrong. A chill crept into Gabriel's voice. All right. If not you, then Olivia here. She has the background for it. Um, no. I'll tell you everything. About the hounds. The Huntsmen. My association with them. Your parents' association with them. An anxious smile as I reacted. That one intrigues you, doesn't it? I can answer every question you have, for the small price of removing a man who, as you will discover, richly deserves it. The name? Gabriel said. Chandler turned to him. I will require a name. A genuine smile spread across Chandler's face. How quickly your ethics change, boy. A word of advice: don't feign outrage next time. It really doesn't suit you. The name? Jon Childs. Gabriel nodded as if making a mental note. Chandler eased back in his chair, chortling to himself, and I realized he wasn't a sociopath at all. That would imply an inability to recognize ethical boundaries. This was a man who recognized such lines and delighted in pulling others over them, because it proved they were no better than him. I knew Gabriel didn't have any intention of killing Jon Childs. There were a dozen reasons why, starting with the fact that he's not an assassin and ending with the fact that he'd never play one for a guy like Chandler. But with the target's name, we could track the man down and see why Chandler wanted him dead. I let Chandler enjoy his amoral victory for about ten seconds. Then I leaned across the table. People who do what you're asking expect a down payment. I want an answer up front. Nothing about your parents. I'm not that stupid. What exactly did you do to piss off the Cwn Annwn? I'm in here. They are not impressed. Maybe. But you're not a serious threat. You can't unmask them. That's like Scooby-Doo pulling off Mr. Wikless' face and revealing a monster underneath. No one would believe you. There's more to it. You seriously pissed them off. How? When Chandler didn't answer, Gabriel said, By targeting you, Olivia. The Cwn Annwn are courting you. They certainly don't want you dead. Which explains

Mr. Chandlers eagerness to insist he was, in fact, not targeting you at all. Chandlers hand flexed against the table. But theres more, I said. The whole scheme to keep me from uncovering the truth about Petes and Jans deaths. Killing Will Evans and Josh Gray. That was personal, wasnt it? Unsanctioned by the Cwn Annwn. An unsanctioned use of their tool, Gabriel said. The mind control. You were using it for your own purposes, which is not permitted. Chandler glowered at us. Why ask a question if youre going to answer it yourselves? Because its more fun that way, I said. All we need is for you to confirm it. Im not going to Your reaction already did. Not only did you use their drug without authorization, but you attempted to use it against me. No wonder theyre pissed. We are indeed. The guard Ransom had appeared at Chandlers back. When Chandler tried to scramble up, Ransom put a hand on his shoulder. It seemed a gentle touch, but Chandlers face convulsed in pain. I started to rise. Gabriel gripped my arm, and his touch may have been as light as the guards seemed, but the look in his eyes was rock hard. I followed his gaze to see the other guard and the video cameras trained around the room. Gabriels meaning was clear. We are in a jail. With armed security. Who will not hesitate to act if we seem to be interfering with a guard. Ransom bent to Chandlers ear. Do you hear the hounds, Edgar? Chandler gave a jerky nod. Im sorry. It was a mistake. Ill make amends. Im doing that right now. He is, I cut in. Let him make amends. Please. The guard didnt appear to be more than thirty, but when he turned his gaze on me, I saw someone much older. Id be concerned about your sentimentality if I didnt know you were only pleading for his life because it benefits you. Edgar here is a genius. But that does not mean we consider him an ally or that we dont feel the need to bathe in bleach after dealing with him. Chandler made a noise that might have been a protest but came out as a terrified bleat. Ransom continued. He is a self-absorbed, egotistic maniac, Olivia. That means he lies. Consistently and pathologically. He will not tell you the truth. He will tell you whatever version of it best suits his needs. If you want answers, come to us. Only us. As for Chandler... He leaned down to the mans ear again. You hear them coming, dont you? Chandlers head bobbed. Good. Then I need say no more. He patted Chandlers shoulder and looked at us. Visiting time is over. On the way out, I hit the restroom. I couldnt have been more than five minutes, but from the look Gabriel gave his watch when I exited, youd think it had been hours. Waiting was one thing. Waiting without doing anything productive was quite another. You could have gone out to the car, I said. Im not leaving you alone. Im in a prison. The only danger I face is that they might decide I should stay. As we passed through security, I recognized the man ahead of us. It was Ransom. When we reached the parking lot, he continued to the streets beyond. Id like to follow, I said. See where he goes. CHAPTER SIX The neighborhoods surrounding the jail were... well, pretty much what youd expect for neighborhoods surrounding a jail. There were good areas in East Garfield Park, but they didnt extend to the doorstep of the nations biggest prison. Still, it wasnt such a bad neighborhood that we looked out of place. Ransom stuck to the sidewalk, moving at a purposeful stride down one street after another. Where the hell is he going? I muttered. Ive seen them vanish, so why not just walk into the guards change room and never come out? Do you think he knows were tailing him? Possibly. Ransom turned down another street, this one industrial, with a building in the throes of demolition on the left. They cant actually disappear, right? I said. It must be some kind of Jedi mind trick. I believe you are conflating your fantasy worlds. You know what I mean. He alters our perception so we no longer see him. Rather than actually vanishing. Does it matter? Yes. I want limits, damn it. Ill accept omens and portents and second sight. Ill accept giant black hounds and creepy ravens and magpies. Im still working out the fae and Wild Hunt thing. But I draw the line at people disappearing into thin air. Dont give me that look, either. Look? Youre laughing at me. Im quite certain I didnt even smile. I can feel the laughing. His lips twitched. Thats when Ransom did disappear, if only around the side of a coin laundry. I picked up my pace. Gabriel laid his fingers against my back. Careful, Olivia. He was right. Id left my purse in the car, to avoid checking it at security, which meant I was unarmed. We caught another glimpse of Ransom as he turned into the gap between two buildings. Gabriel stopped me before I could follow. He surveyed the area and then swung his gaze back to that gap, his eyes narrowed. If he were a cat, his fur would have been standing on end. Trouble? I said. Weve been led up and down these streets. Now our target has vanished into a dark alley. I dont believe it takes an omen to signal were being led into a trap. So we retreat? No, we proceed with extreme caution. The dark alley was actually a narrow road between buildings. It wasnt all that dark, either, only dim from the shadow of one building stretching across to the other. It was still midday, and we could hear the shouts of men at a construction site a block over. The last dangerous place Id ventured had been an abandoned psychiatric hospital at 2 A.M. This was nothing. There was no sign of Ransom. When we got halfway down the lane, Gabriel pointed to the mouth of an adjoining alley. Which meant that Ransom could have gone that way... or be lying in wait there to pounce on us. Im

going to check, Gabriel said. Wait here and stand watch, please. When he reached the intersection, he peered around it. At a noise behind me, I glanced around to see a plastic bag tumbling my way. I turned back and...No Gabriel. I was almost ashamed of the sudden impulse to run and see where he'd gone. Um, down the side alley obviously. I waited a minute. Then I walked to the intersection and looked around the corner to see...A dead end. The alley was only about ten feet long and stopped at a chain-link fence. I couldn't imagine Gabriel hopping that fence. He's too big to be agile, and his dignity stops him from doing anything that could look, well, undignified. I walked to the fence and peered through. No sign of Gabriel. That's when my heart started pounding in earnest. And when I started cursing us both out for not retrieving our cell phones from the car before we set off to follow a Huntsman. I returned to the lane and walked along it. When a dark shadow loomed over me, I turned with a greeting on my lips. No one was there. The shadow stayed, though, and I craned my neck to see an owl perched on the roof above. Owl in daytime. Always a bad sign. I rubbed the back of my neck. Across the road at the end of the lane was a block of housing. An old woman stood in a rear yard scrubbing clothing in a basin with a washboard. I crossed the road, pulled by the archaic sight. She had her head down, scrubbing diligently while crooning to herself. I walked right up to the fence and peered over. I could see her long, snarled hair and her reed-thin, wizened arms. When she raised her head, I knew what I'd see. Those blackened, jagged teeth. That long nose and sunken eyes one black and one gray. Y mae mor salw Gwrach y Rhibyn, I whispered. Her mouth opened. Fy mhlentyn, fy mhlentyn bach, she shrieked. Fy mhlentyn, fy mhlentyn bach. My child. My little child. The bean nighe warns of death. As she wailed, I stared at the white shirt in her hand. Gabriel's shirt. I turned, tripping and stumbling down the road. Then there was no road. I was in a field. I took two staggering steps and felt the soft earth beneath my feet and the long grass whispering against my legs. The field flickered, like a broken recording, and I was on the street again, feeling the pavement and hearing the whine of distant machinery. Two more steps and I was back in the field, a butterfly tickling past, the smell of wildflowers on the breeze. I stopped and pressed my palms to my eyes. I have to stay in the real world. Gabriel's there. I heard the shouts of construction workers and smelled the stink of fresh asphalt, and when I opened my eyes, I was on the street. I searched for a sign. Nothing. Even the owl was gone. I spun back to Gwrach y Rhibyn, but in her place was an ordinary woman hanging out her laundry. I raced across the road, ignoring the honk of a passing truck driver. I was almost back to the lane when I heard a psst, like a child trying to get my attention. It was indeed a child. A little blond girl, one I'd seen before and one who was as out of place in this world as Gwrach y Rhibyn. Unlike the crone, she looked as if she belonged a girl in a pale green sundress and neon-green jelly sandals. In one hand she carried a stuffed animal, so old I couldn't even tell what it was. Her other fist was clenched, but I knew what it held: black and white stones. I'd seen her before, in my dreams. I'd been her in an earlier vision of Gwrach y Rhibyn. Seeing her here, though, made the ground seem to shift under my feet. I have a story, she said. Do you want to hear it? I want to find Gabriel. She wrinkled her nose. Gwynn is fine. No, Gabriel. I said he's fine. You need to hear my story. It's important. My heart pounded faster. It's a trap. She's stalling. Where is he? As soon as I thought that, the distant baying of hounds sounded and my breath caught. Do you hear that? I asked. She smiled. The hounds. The Hunt. Isn't it wonderful? No, it's. The world flickered and suddenly I was in the night forest, and I heard the hounds and felt the ground vibrating under the horses' hooves, and it was wonderful. Like the night in the forest with Ricky, when we'd heard them. Then the scene evaporated, and I was back in the city, dread coursing through me, my face heating now as I started to sweat. Back and forth, the girl said as she fingered her stones. Black and white. This and that. Night and day. Hunt and fae. So it will always be. What will always be? Us, she said. She put out her hand, with just two stones, one black and one white. Then she made a fist. When she opened her hand, there was only one stone, black and white swirling through it. There's no escape, she said. Only balance. The hounds bayed again, closer, and I stiffened, my heart hammering now. They won't hurt you, she said. It's Gabriel. I'm worried about. They won't hurt you, she repeated. I started down the lane. You really should hear my story, she called after me. I need to find him. She sighed, like a gust of wind, and I swear I felt it rush past. Then she was beside me. This way, she said. She headed to the side alley. Wait, she said. A horse neighed. Its scent wafted past on the breeze and sweat dribbled down my cheek as I strained to catch some sign of Gabriel. Wait, she said. He will... She trailed off, and when I looked, she was gone. Olivia? Gabriel called. See? the little girl's voice whispered in my ear. I said they wouldn't hurt you. Gabriel stepped into the intersection of the alley. Relief flickered over his face, quickly swallowed by annoyance. I asked you to stay where you were. My mouth was dry and my heart seemed to short out, as if unable to find a proper rhythm after pounding for so long. I did, I said. You... you took off. Took off? The annoyance crackled as he came toward me. I found a

dead end, turned around, and you were gone and He stopped short and stared at me. I took a step toward him. My knees wobbled. He grabbed me just as I regained my balance. Im okay, I said. No, youre burning up. His hand shot to my forehead, smacking it hard enough to make me wince. The fever is back. I pushed his hand away. Im fine, just... I took a step and my knees wobbled again. A little weak. He tried to put his arm around me, hand braced under my armpit. That was awkward, and not just because of the height difference. Gabriel isnt accustomed to supporting others, physically or otherwise. I took his elbow instead. So what happened when you went around the corner? I asked. I didnt go around it. I merely glanced around it. When I turned back, you were gone. Then I went looking for you. Huh. Well, my experience was a little stranger, I said, and then explained. I dont keep anything from Gabriel, no matter how weird it gets. And no matter how weird it gets, he never so much as quirks an eyebrow. This time wed both experienced some perception or reality shift, and I dont know if it merely separated us long enough for us to wander our separate ways or if I hadnt been here at all. Not in this world or this plane. Last week Id been inside the empty Cainsville house that originally belonged to my great-great-grandmother. Id stepped into an inlaid triskelion of an owl that had triggered a vision of the girl and the bean nighe. To have that same thing happen on a city street was disconcerting to say the least. I blame the Cwn Annwn, Gabriel said. They were close enough to cause it. He steered me into a dodgy corner store and bought me a Dr Pepper and a bag of ice. Ill take the pop, I said. But I dont really need the Humor me. We returned to the car, and I put the ice bag against my forehead, which seemed to be what he expected. We sat in the parking lot for a while, so I could rest. Gabriel checked his messages and so did I. The curse of modern communication spend a couple of hours separated from your cell and youll spend another twenty minutes catching up. I went to my texts first. Gabriel said, Ricky? My smile must have given it away. Hes coming home early. Which means you wont have to babysit me tonight. Gabriel gave a grunt that I interpreted as Good. Ill surprise him at the airport, I said. He can drop me at the office in the morning. Another grunt. I looked up to see him engrossed in his e-mail. I stopped talking and texted with Ricky. When I finished, Gabriel was sitting with his phone on his leg, his hand engulfing it. Everything okay? I asked. Edgar Chandler is dead. What? He killed himself shortly after returning to his cell. Cyanide, it seems. Ransom must have slipped it to him. He warned Chandler that the hounds were coming and gave him a way out. Thats why I heard them. They were coming for Chandler. I exhaled. Shit. There will be an investigation, Gabriel said. As his final visitors, well be questioned. We may also be suspected. Of giving him the pill? But we never touched him and the guard can confirm... Except the guard wasnt a guard at all. There were security cameras. As well as the second guard. I doubt wed be seriously considered as suspects. Okay, so what about Jon Childs? The guy Chandler wanted you to kill. I had no intention of actually I cut him off with a look. I know that. You just wanted to get his name and find out why Chandler wants him dead. He nodded, pleased that Id figured it out and relieved that Id known he wouldnt kill a man at least, not one who didnt present an immediate lethal threat. So lets find Jon Childs, I said. CHAPTER SEVEN While neither Jon nor Childs is a particularly uncommon name, when you put the two together you get fewer than twenty adult males in the country. And exactly one in the Greater Chicago area. The Chicago Jon Childs was a thirty-six-year-old self-employed equities trader. Successful, according to his tax records. Yes, we had access to his tax records. Or Lydia did. Not necessarily legally. Shed spent most of her working life as the executive assistant to Chicagos Field Office Special Agent in Charge. That would be the CIA field office. Before I met Lydia, Id presumed that husky voice on the phone belonged to some hot young thing. When we did meet, I realized my unforgivable lapse in reasoning. There was no way in hell Gabriel would hire eye candy to manage his office when he could get someone like Lydia for the same salary, given she was past retirement age and just looking for an interesting way to spend her time. Working for Gabriel was nothing if not interesting. According to Lydias research, Childs was a graduate of Portland State whod moved to Chicago ten years ago, immediately opening his own business and attracting a decent clientele. Never married. No kids. No affiliation with any known political party or other group. In other words, a guy without ties. Not unlike the man I worked for. A lack of ties meant a lack of accountability and, well, lets face it, a lack of witnesses. Childs worked from home, which made it difficult to stake him out. Problem number two? We could find absolutely no photographic record of him. No passport. No drivers license. The only alternative was to call him up, express interest in his services, and persuade him to meet with me. Except Childs wasnt home, and he didnt seem to have an admin assistant. I left a message with my cell number. Lydia was on the phone as we were walking past her desk. She flagged me down and covered the receiver. I can finally get you in to see Todd, she said. I froze mid-step. Gabriel turned to me. Youd rather not? No, I let me rephrase that. I know youd rather not. Im going to leave this ball in your court,

Olivia. If you wish to visit Todd at some juncture, let Lydia know and Tuesday. He hesitated. Ill go Tuesday, I said. Thats tomorrow. Oh, right. Maybe... I took a deep breath and turned to Lydia. Id like to go tomorrow if you can make the arrangements, please. She nodded, and Gabriel led me out the door. I showered and changed at Gabriels, and I planned to grab a taxi, presuming Ricky would have his bike at the airport. Gabriel was having none of that. He would deliver me to the doors of the appropriate terminal, where he would watch until I was safely inside. I could say he was overreacting, but given the events of the last few days, he really wasnt. I stood with the usual crowd of friends and family at the bottom of the baggage claim escalators and tried not to bounce on my toes like an excited kid. As I spotted Ricky at the top, a young woman beside me whispered to her friend, Whos that? They began speculating musician, actor, model... When I first met Ricky, I thought he looked like Hollywoods version of a biker. Six feet, well-built, tousled blond hair to his collar, hazel eyes, and a cleft chin when he shaved. What bolstered the whispering, though, were the two Satans Saints who stood on the escalator step behind him. To his left was CJ, who looked pretty much exactly like youd expect from an aging biker. Big guy, late forties, slight paunch, graying beard, stringy ponytail, and shit-kicker boots. The other was Wallace, sergeant-at-arms Don Gallaghers right-hand man and main enforcer. Wallace is clean-cut and almost as tall as Gabriel, with an extra twenty pounds of muscle. Both men could pass for roadies or bodyguards, and thats what the girls obviously mistook them for. Ricky was staring straight ahead, lost in his thoughts. Wallace said something and as Ricky looked over, he noticed me and gave a blast of a grin that had the girls beside me twittering. He jogged down the rest of the steps, strode over, and scooped me up in a soldier-on-furlough kiss. Whispers snaked around us. Id caught a few earlier, but that kiss made people take a closer look. They recognized me and Ricky from a Chicago Post photo a few weeks ago. I heard my name and biker, and Im sure Ricky did, too, but he just kept grinning down at me. I didnt expect this, he said. Thank you. Wallace and CJ walked over. Hey, Miz Jones, CJ said. Hey, guys. I asked how their flight was as we headed to the baggage carousel. Then I said to Ricky, I know you thought youd be clear tonight. Does that still stand? Or does your dad need you? Ricky would have texted me if our plans had changed. I was saying this for Wallace and CJs benefit. My relationship with Ricky didnt thrill Don Gallagher. He seemed to like me well enough. What he didnt like is the Gabriel me Ricky dynamic. While Gabriel has made it clear he has no romantic interest in me, Don would rather Ricky kept his distance, just to be safe. Don values Gabriels legal expertise too much to rock that boat. Nope, its all good, Ricky said. I checked in with him before I invited you over. Ah. Well, in that case... I glanced meaningfully at a sign for the airport Hilton. Its a long drive back to the city, and Im sure you had a tiring flight. His eyes glinted, sending a familiar lick of heat through me. Go on, CJ said. Well grab your bag. Thanks. Ricky put his arm around my shoulders and we walked away. Was that okay? I said when we were out of earshot. My girlfriend surprises me at the airport and drags me off to a hotel? I dont think my rep will ever recover. I definitely owe you. Im looking forward to repayment. It was a very long three days. Damn straight. He tugged me around as he backed up. Next thing I knew, we were in a short service hall, partially blocked by a massive cardboard standee. He propelled me to the end and then pulled me into a kiss. If the one at the escalator had started reminding me how much Id missed him, this one cemented it. Five seconds later, I had my back to the wall, arms around his neck, hands in his hair, his hands under my ass. By the time I broke the kiss, I wasnt even sure where we were anymore, and I looked around, blinking, before saying, Hotel, five minutes, that way. He dropped his lips to my neck as he pressed against me. So near and yet so far. I chuckled. Well, if you dont want to wait... Tempting, he said as his lips moved up my throat. I am wearing a skirt. I noticed. His hands slid under it, cupping my ass again. Did you notice what Im not wearing? His fingers checked, making sure I didnt just have on a thong. Then he groaned, pushing against me. Now, that is a tease. Between that sign blocking the hall, and the fact that no one has come this way since we arrived, Id put our odds of not getting caught at about eighty percent. He kissed me so hard it left me gasping. Tell me youre serious. I am always serious, I said. Even if someone looks in, itll seem as if were just making out, very enthusiastically. Hell, yeah. He kissed me again, boosting me up to straddle him, which lowered our odds for discretion, but I wasnt arguing. Thats when his phone rang, the tone playing Big Boss Man. His father. He let out a curse and fumbled to hit Ignore. Sorry. I texted him when I got off the plane. Hes just saying hello. Lousy timing. I caught his shirtfront and pulled him back into a kiss. He turned off the ringer and stuffed the phone into his pocket, and within seconds we were where wed been, my back against the wall, skirt hiked up around my hips. I felt his phone vibrate and let out a snorting laugh. Revue de presse Kelley Armstrong has paranormal elements in her classic mysteries but there are no ghouls, ghosts, werewolves or fairies and thats why readers who loathe crossovers will love this series. Its smart, cleverly

plotted and really well-written and you dont have to ignore the vampires to get to the good stuff. Read it, but get the previous two. Youll want the whole story to date. Margaret Cannon, The Globe and Mail Sometimes big, bad things really do come in small packages and no one is more adept at unwrapping them than she, making Deceptions a paranormal tale beautifully written and told. Providence Journal Deceptions is a must read for fans of the Cainsville series. . . . Armstrong maintains that edgy atmosphere I loved in the first two books, and the interaction between characters, main and secondary, continues to keep that sense of mystery alive. Impressions of a Reader Deceptions is a high-quality page-turner. . . . The characterization is thorough, the psychiatric care facility is fascinating, and the piece-by-piece reveals are handled well. Tez Says Once again, Kelley uses Celtic lore, myths, magic, fabled legends and supernatural beings to reveal a storyline filled with mystery, suspense and the fear of the unknown.. . . Deceptions is a wonderfully detailed and amazing storyline that reveals many secrets and stories. . . . The premise is intoxicating and addicting; the characters are intense, enthralling and magical; the happily ever after is still to come. The Reading Caf I cant wait to find out what happens next. Inside of a Dog I FREAKING LOVE THIS SERIES!!!! I think Ive read more books by this author than any other author. I am just impressed and in love with her writing style, the way she weaves the threads of each story. I am just amazed and I cant seem to put her books down!

Awesome Book Nuts