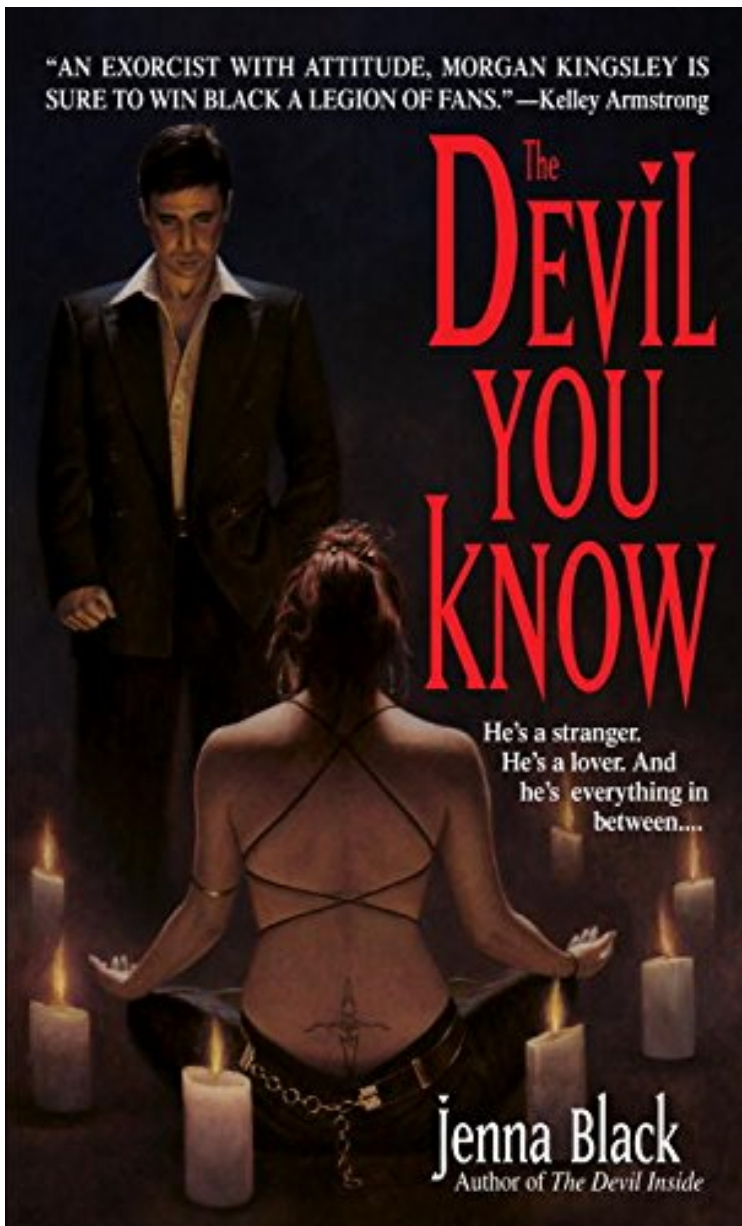


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The Devil You Know



Par Jenna Black
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe beautiful. The bad. The possessed.Some people worship them. Some people fear them. And some peoplelike Morgan Kingsleygo 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. Shes 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.

From the Paperback edition.

Extrait Chapter One

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 RR. 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." Presentation de l'diteur 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. From the Paperback edition.