



The Devil's Due (Morgan Kingsley, Book 3)

By Jenna Black

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Possession was never this much fun

Trust me or die... That's the choice Morgan Kingsley, exorcist, is given by the gorgeous rogue demon who's gotten inside her. The truth is, Morgan has dozens of reasons not to trust anyone, from the violence that torched her house and killed her father to a love life that's left her questioning her relationship with her erstwhile boyfriend, Brian. But Lugh, a king among demons, won't take no for an answer. He's prying into her body, her mind, even her sex life. And he's just pulled Morgan into a power struggle that could have devastating consequences for both the human and demon worlds.

But Morgan still has a job to do: investigating the highly bizarre possession of the son of a wealthy Philadelphia couple. That hunt leads Morgan into a realm of sexual depravity, then a terrifying kidnapping.... Now a woman who makes her living prying demons from their hosts finds her day job colliding with the night: a darkness that is attracting demons of the damnedest sort, including the one who's about to demand his ultimate due....

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Jenna Black is your typical writer. Which means she's an "experience junkie." She got her BA in physical anthropology and French from Duke University. Once upon a time, she dreamed she would be the next Jane Goodall, camping in the bush making fabulous discoveries about primate behavior. Then, during her senior year at Duke, she did some actual research in the field and made this shocking discovery: primates spend something like 80% of their time doing such exciting things as sleeping and eating. Concluding that this discovery was her life's work in the field of primatology, she then moved on to such varied pastimes as grooming dogs and writing technical documentation.

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Chapter One

It was my first time in the office in more than a week. Somehow, my actual paying job as an exorcist didn't seem so satisfying these days. Finding out that exorcizing demons doesn't actually kill them had robbed me of my *joie de vivre*. Of course, being possessed by the king of the demons myself had something to do with it, too.

Still, harboring the demon king and trying to protect him from his brother, Dougal, the would-be usurper of the demon throne, didn't pay the bills, and I had a lot of them piling up. It had been less than two months since my house had burned to the ground with all my worldly possessions inside, and my insurance company had yet to begin showering me with largesse.

I was seriously behind in my paperwork, and was disappointed to discover that the Paperwork Fairy hadn't taken care of everything during my absence. With something between a sigh and a groan, I dropped into my chair and turned on my computer. While I waited for the dinosaur to muster the energy to boot up, I checked my phone messages. There were a bunch from the U.S. Exorcism Board reminding me that (a) I was late paying my dues, and (b) I was late filing the paperwork on my last three exorcisms. There were also the usual calls from telemarketers who were desperate for me to change long-distance phone companies, but I was much more interested in the three messages—each one more urgent than the last—from a woman who identified herself as Claudia Brewster. She didn't say what she wanted, but I made an educated guess that she had a loved one who'd been possessed by an illegal demon.

I frowned as I took down her number, because it was local. In Philadelphia and the surrounding area, I'm almost always contacted by the court system when there's an illegal or rogue demon in custody, and I hadn't heard anything. It wasn't unusual for me to be hired by distraught family members (not to brag or anything, but I have the best record of any exorcist in the U.S.), but those were usually out-of-state cases.

I called the daytime number Ms. Brewster left and got her secretary. Ms. Brewster was in a meeting, but the secretary took a message and said I should receive a call back within a couple of hours. I hung up, and my shoulders slumped. So much for my reprieve from the dreaded paperwork.

My computer had finally roused itself from its slumber, so I began slogging my way through my backlog. As you might have guessed by now, this wasn't my favorite part of my job, and I had to work hard to resist the lure of a rousing game of Spider Solitaire.

About an hour later, I was feeling conspicuously virtuous about my productivity—and about my willpower—when there came a tentative rap on my office door. I wasn't expecting anyone, and, as far as I knew, no one knew I was here. I pulled my bag from the desk drawer and grabbed my Taser. Hey, better safe than sorry, right?

"Come in," I beckoned, holding the Taser, now armed and ready, in my lap, where my desk would hide it from view.

The door opened, and a lovely forty-something woman walked in. Dressed in a dark blue pinstriped pants suit that looked like it had been made exactly to her measurements, she screamed conservative corporate America. That image was enhanced by the blond hair fastened in a well-sprayed French twist and a makeup job that was supposed to make her look like she wasn't wearing any. She'd have fit right in as the token female in a boardroom full of old fogies.

I took a wild guess as to who my visitor might be. "Ms. Brewster?" I asked, wondering why she hadn't bothered to call first. Paranoia—which was my constant and very reasonable state of mind these days—created any number of unpalatable suggestions, so instead of standing up and offering to shake hands, I remained seated with my Taser at the ready.

"Please, call me Claudia," she said with a brittle-looking smile as she closed the door behind her.

"Claudia," I agreed, taking an instant dislike to her for no good reason. "I usually meet with clients by appointment only, and I'm very busy at the moment." I idly tapped a couple keys on my keyboard, turning my face to the screen while keeping a watch on her out of the corner of my eye. "I can fit you in tomorrow at . . ." I pretended to scrutinize a calendar. "Three o'clock. Will that work for you?" I turned to face her once more, putting on my blandest smile.

Claudia licked her lips and shifted her grip on the designer pocketbook that hung from her shoulder. It was only then that I noticed how she clutched the strap of that bag as if it were a lifeline.

"Please, Ms. Kingsley," she said, and she sounded like she might be on the verge of tears. "I've been trying to reach you for a week, and I'm . . . Well, I'm desperate."

My opinion of her softened, and I realized my initial dislike had been a result of her looking like she had her shit together—in deep contrast to myself. But no power suit and fancy makeup could camouflage her misery for long, and I felt a surge of kinship.

"You can call me Morgan," I said, and I let my curiosity get the better of me. "Please, have a seat." I indicated the pair of chairs in front of my desk, and, with a sigh of relief, she sat in the one on the right and put her bag on the one on the left. I folded my hands on the desk in front of me, leaving the Taser on my lap, where I could easily reach it if necessary.

"What can I do for you, Claudia?"

She took a deep breath as if steeling herself for a mighty effort. Strain showed in the tightness in the corners of her eyes, and she wet her lips again. "I don't know where else to turn," she said, giving me a pleading look.

"Okay," I said slowly, then gestured for her to continue when she seemed to stall out.

"I'm in desperate need of your . . . services."

People were often reluctant and uncomfortable when they hired me. For reasons that escaped me, they often found having a loved one possessed to be a source of embarrassment. However, Claudia was taking it to the extreme with this strange hesitancy. I'd been sympathetic for about sixty seconds, which I think is a personal record. I decided it was high time to revert to my usual bluntness.

"Just spit it out already," I said, with more than a touch of impatience. "You want me to exorcize a demon."

A hint of fire flared in her eyes, and it seemed like my prickly bedside manner had steadied her some. "Yes. But of course it's not quite that simple or I'd have gone through more traditional channels."

She crossed her legs, her foot jiggling restlessly. "It's about my son, Tommy." She grimaced. "Tom," she corrected herself, and I had to suppress a smile.

"You think your son is possessed."

She shook her head. "I know he's possessed." She seemed to notice her jiggling foot and stopped herself with what looked like a concerted effort. "He was possessed while his father and I were on vacation."

I still didn't get why she was here. "It's a police matter at this point," I told her. "Once they take him into custody, I can come to the containment center and make an official diagnosis." I held up a hand to forestall her attempt to interrupt. "I'm not saying I don't believe you—it's just that we have to follow standard procedures. After I diagnose him."

"Ms. Kingsley," she cut in, "let me get right to the crux of the matter. All the evidence except for common sense says that my son is a willing host."

"A willing host," I repeated stupidly. I'd pictured Tommy Brewster as a petulant teenager, but he had to be at least twenty-one to be a legal host. I nudged my estimation of Claudia's age up a few years.

She nodded. "They've got the signed forms and everything. But there is no way in hell my son volunteered to host a demon."

And to think I'd believed she had her shit together! I thought I was the queen of denial, but it looked like there was a new contender to the throne. "You do understand the process of registering to be a legal demon host, don't you?" I asked.

She made an impatient tsking sound. "Of course I do, but—"

I counted off the points on my fingers. "He had to sign the documents before witnesses. In a courtroom. On videotape. And after he'd been interviewed by a shrink to establish competency. Are you seriously trying to tell me he did all that against his will? And that no one noticed?"

She pressed her lips tightly together. "I know how it looks. And I know you think I'm just the distraught mother who can't accept that her baby has grown up." She managed a rictus of a smile. "That last part's even true." The forced smile faded. "But volunteering to host is the last thing in the world Tommy would do. He hates demons. Hates them with a passion."

I wasn't so fond of them myself—hence my career choice—but I had to admit getting to know Lugh, the demon king, had lessened my hate by approximately one hair. "People change their minds."

"Not like this they don't. You see, when my husband and I left for the Bahamas, we'd finally given up hope that we could extricate Tommy—Tom—from God's Wrath."

I couldn't suppress a gasp. God's Wrath is the most militant of the anti-demon hate groups. They specialize in roasting people alive to destroy the Spawn of Satan, as they consider demons. They're so radical, they even hate exorcists, because when we kick a demon out of its host, its host gets to live. Of course, about eighty percent of them live the rest of their lives as vegetables, but God's Wrath didn't think that was a severe enough punishment for those sinners who'd invited demons into our world. So I had to admit, the idea of a God's Wrath member volunteering to host a demon was a bit . . . out there.

"We were gone ten days," Claudia continued. "Do you really believe someone could be a card-carrying member of God's Wrath one day, and then ten days later be a willing demon host?"

There was no denying it sounded hinky. Hell, I didn't even see how a former God's Wrath member could get accepted into the Spirit Society in such a short time, much less get accepted, get an appointment with a judge, get all the paperwork approved, and have a summoning ceremony.

"I presume you voiced your concerns to the police?" I asked.

She nodded. "Naturally. Everyone agrees it sounds like an unusual case, but there's no evidence of a crime having been committed." Her voice turned bitter. "Everyone tells me with great sympathy that there's nothing they can do to help me."

"What do you think happened?"

Claudia blinked away what might have been the start of tears. "I think he had to have been possessed already when he signed the papers."

I shook my head. "That con hasn't worked for at least thirty or forty years." There was a famous case back in the sixties of a young man who'd turned out to be possessed when he signed the consent forms. Ever since then, the applicant had to be examined by an exorcist first.

"I know the exorcist who was on duty claimed Tommy wasn't possessed, but he could have been paid off."

It sounded plausible, if hard to prove. "Who was the exorcist?"

"His name was Sammy Cho."

I think I managed to avoid making a face. Sammy was a second-rate exorcist—which explained why he was doing shit work like examining host wannabes. However, even the worst exorcist in existence can read auras well enough to spot a demon, and Sammy had such a big stick up his ass I half-expected leaves to sprout from his ears in the spring.

"There's no way Sammy would take a bribe," I said.

"No one is incorruptible."

"Sammy's about as close as you can get. Believe me, I know him well." Only in a professional capacity, mind you, and being an inveterate rule-breaker myself, I tried to spend as little time in his presence as possible. But I'd stake my reputation on the fact that he'd rather die than take a bribe.

Claudia dismissed my assertion with a wave of her hand. "It doesn't really matter in the long run how it happened. The fact remains that my son has been possessed against his will." She swallowed hard. "I know it may already be too late, that he may never recover, but I have to get that demon out of him."

And I realized now exactly what she wanted me to do. "You want me to perform an illegal exorcism."

She held her chin up defiantly. "We—my husband and I—have money. We're willing to pay whatever it would take."

I wasn't sure whether to be offended that she thought I could be bought, or sympathetic to her terrible situation. What I did know was that there was no way I was performing an illegal exorcism.

"You could pay me a king's ransom, and it wouldn't matter to me one bit as I rotted in prison. Illegal exorcism is considered murder." Only because the authorities didn't know that the demons didn't die but were merely sent back to the Demon Realm, but no one was going to believe me if I declared that in my own defense. Besides, I'd been arrested for illegal exorcism once before, and I hadn't enjoyed the experience.

"I understand you'd be taking a great risk," she said, her voice soothing despite the desperation in her eyes. "But once we get Tommy back, he can confirm that he wasn't willing, and—"

"You said yourself it might be too late." If Tommy Brewster really was hosting an illegal demon, then there was considerably more than an eighty percent chance of him being a vegetable if he and that demon parted ways. Just a little more of my hard-earned knowledge of the deep, dark secrets the demons keep from the human race the brain damage is brought on by abuse, and sometimes even legal demons don't treat their hosts all that well.

With a pang, I thought of my own brother, Andrew. He'd hosted Lugh's brother, Raphael, for ten years, and spent weeks in a state of catatonia when Raphael was gone. The good news was that he'd recovered. The really shitty news was that Raphael had recently possessed him once again.

I forcibly dragged my mind back to the problem at hand. What had I been saying? Oh yeah. "If he's a—" I stopped myself, thinking that using the word "vegetable" right now might not be very sensitive. "If he's catatonic when the demon's gone, he can't corroborate a thing. It's not just my own ass I'm protecting, it's yours, too. You and your husband would be accessories. I'm sorry, but I just can't do it. And if you find another exorcist who agrees, you can be ninety-nine percent certain you're about to get scammed. No one's going to risk a murder charge—not when the pool of suspects would be so small."

There are only a couple hundred exorcists in the U.S., and many of them would have alibis. I imagine if someone were stupid enough to take the Brewsters' money, they'd find themselves behind bars in no time.

"So what do you suggest I do?" Claudia asked bitterly. "Just write my son off as dead? Watch that . . . that thing live out my son's life?" She shuddered. "I can't do that. I won't." A tear snaked down her cheek, and she swiped it angrily away. She didn't strike me as the kind of woman who cried easily, but it's amazing how much pain family can cause.

She stood up, snatching her purse from the seat beside her. My heart ached with sympathy, the situation with my brother making me feel her pain all the more keenly. Now some might argue that the world was better off without one more God's Wrath wacko tromping around burning people alive, and I might even agree with them. But I'd rather see that wacko in a brick-and-mortar prison than imprisoned helplessly within his own body.

"Look, don't do anything drastic," I advised as Claudia strode to the door.

She stopped and looked over her shoulder at me. "I'll do whatever I have to do to free my son. He's had a hard enough life already. I won't abandon him."

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