

Chapter One

I woke to my ex-fiancé calling. Which was awkward, considering we'd only broken up 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 *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-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 car crash, 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 telling me to stay the hell out of his kitchen. I suspect 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 in 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 with 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 came from him. He seemed to think Gabriel had a Svengali sway over me. Which showed that my former fiance didn’t know me nearly as well as I’d thought he did.

Message sent, as 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 held 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.

“I'll presume that means I did,” 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 maybe 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. Yes, she hired 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 aren’t 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 be 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 Satan’s Saints. It’s a biker gang. 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. That confrontation had led to jail and an assault charge when Gabriel had briefly ended up in jail charged with assault. 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 you’re making a mistake.”

“Are you sure?”

“If you’re implying that I’d make up an omen—”

“I’m saying I don’t agree it has anything to do with me visiting James. You’ve 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 wasn’t how it worked. Omens aren’t retroactive. Yet he drove through the intersection and refused to spare me even a sidelong glance. He’d 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. I’d been a delicious story in a slow news week. And I continued to entertain. *Oh, look, she dumped James Morgan. Oh, look, she’s hanging around with Gabriel Walsh. No, wait, she’s dating a biker.* I was the Lindsay Lohan of the debutante set.

In the lobby of James’s office building, I felt the stares and I heard the whispers. His employees had known me even before the media firestorm. To them, I wasn’t just the daughter of two convicted killers—I was the stone bitch who’d 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 Morgan’s 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 isn’t going to help.”

After a moment’s thought, Gabriel nodded. Then the elevator doors opened and we stepped off.

Chapter Three

While the top floor is reserved for his company's executives, James likes to maintain a noncorporate feel, with open areas where people can congregate. That's where we found him, standing at the espresso machine, laughing at something one of his employees said.

When I saw him, I felt as if I'd woken from a nightmare. The encounter with the deprogrammers was so ludicrous it couldn't 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 have been seeing—something twisted and ugly simmering behind James's eyes. No, not “something.” Obsession.

“I take it Palmer didn't 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 don’t 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 you’re his client, James.” I took out my phone.

“Let me forward you the e-mail where you discussed terms with him in case you’ve lost it.”

“E-mail . . .? I’m *completely* lost here, Olivia, but if you have an e-mail that appears to come from me, someone has set up a dummy account.”

“It’s your personal address.”

“Then it’s been hacked or spoofed. Yes, send it to me, and I’ll have my technicians prove that.”

“I’m sure they will,” Gabriel murmured behind me.

“Is anyone talking to you?” James snapped, and when he did, several employees who’d been wandering off looked over. This didn’t sound like their boss; it sounded like a peevish little boy.

“Whatever this is, Walsh,” James said, “it’s none of your business.”

“Anytime you hire someone to put a gun to Olivia’s head and kidnap her, I’ll make that my business.”

James turned to me. “Why the hell would I hire someone to kidnap you?”

“Because, apparently, I’m being brainwashed by . . .” I jerked my thumb toward Gabriel.

“Well, that’s the first sensible thing you’ve said since you got here. I wouldn’t call it brainwashing, but it’s 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.”

“I’m sure you’d 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 we’re civilized enough to avoid threats.”

“But if you’d like one . . .” Gabriel said, his voice a purring rumble. “I’d be happy to oblige.”

James stepped in front of Gabriel. When he realized 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* here—what you plan to do about that.”

“Change your mind.”

Gabriel’s 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 driver’s 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 to 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. He’ll need it by next week.”

“That’s not poss—”

“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. “He’ll 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 into 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 doesn't see the problem because, to him, if you're going to shell out that kind of money, you'd 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, Gabriel's executive assistant, a trim woman in her late sixties who looks as if she has 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 weren't 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 didn't like that word. With others of their kind, they'd founded Cainsville centuries ago and interbred with select humans. That's 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 I'd left Cainsville—and the resident fae—behind.

Lydia rose from her desk. "I was just telling the Clarks here that you weren't expected at the office today, Mr. Walsh. I presume you're just stopping by?"

"I am, but I suspect I'm not the one they came to see."

"Actually, we would like to speak to you as well as Olivia," Ida said. "We won't keep you long."

Gabriel visibly struggled to refuse. It shouldn't 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 didn't get her mocha this morning. Could I impose on you . . .?"

"I'll go grab one." She stood. "When I return, though, there's 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 you’re upset, Olivia.”

“Mmm, I’m not sure *upset* is the right word.” I perched on Lydia’s desk. “I mean, I completely understand why you wouldn’t tell me what you were. What do you say? ‘Hello, I’m a fairy.’ Sorry, fae, right?”

“Actually, we prefer Tylwyth Teg,” Ida said. “You *are* upset.”

“No, *upset* is what I’d get from learning that people I trusted aren’t 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, that’s really nice,’ only to discover the town is run by supernatural beings. The reason they’re being so nice to me? Well, I haven’t quite figured that all out yet, but I know I sure as hell can’t trust any explanation you give, so I’ll keep digging. I know my family is connected to Cainsville, on Pamela’s side. I know you two had something to do with getting me adopted by the Taylor Jones and making me disappear from the system—and from my birth parents. I know that’s all somehow connected to my parents’ alleged crimes. And I know that, apparently, I’m very, very special.”

“You *are* special, Olivia,” Ida said.

“I don’t want to be. It is, as Gabriel would say, highly inconvenient. I’ve got you trying to woo me, and the Wild Hunt—sorry, the Cŵn Annwn—trying to woo me, and it’s like I’m the top NFL draft pick when I didn’t even realize I knew how to play football. I’m being waylaid everywhere—”

“That’s the Cŵn Annwn, not us.”

“No?” I looked around Gabriel’s 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 Cŵn 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?”

“It’s 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 don’t, anything that would suggest he’d harm Olivia . . .”

With obvious reluctance, Ida said, “Not intentionally. We simply don’t think it’s wise for her to associate with a known criminal—”

“Ricky Gallagher is not a criminal. He has never even been arrested. He’s an

MBA student and a member of a motorcycle club. Neither is a crime. Now, if you'll 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 CIA's brainwashing experiments in the sixties. MKULTRA was a flop. Yet Chandler had continued working in the pharmaceutical field. With help of the fantastical kind, he'd attained one of MKULTRA's goals: discovering a way to turn innocent people into unwitting assassins.

We couldn't tell the authorities that he'd killed using mind control because, well, rational people don't believe in mind control. Or omens. Or fae. The state attorney's office had settled on charging him with accessory to murder.

“So why didn't Chandler get bail?” I asked as we walked from the parking lot to the prison. “I'm 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 hasn't.”

“Which means what?”

“That he's not in any rush to get out.”

Chapter Five

Chandler looked every month of his eighty-five years. I won't say 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 Jan's father and a friend of Peter's 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 tête-à-tête. 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 only said, “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.

“Cŵn 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 OD’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—”

“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 had no 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 Cŵn 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 Old Man Wilkes's 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 Cŵn Annwn are courting you. They certainly don't want you dead. Which explains Mr. Chandler's eagerness to insist he was, in fact, not targeting you at all."

Chandler's hand flexed against the table.

"But there's more," I said. "The whole scheme to keep me from uncovering the truth about Pete and Jan's deaths. Killing Will Evans and Josh Gray. That was personal, wasn't it? Unsanctioned by the Cŵn 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 you're going to answer it yourselves?"

"Because it's more fun that way," I said. "All we need is for you to confirm it."

"I'm 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 they're pissed."

"We are indeed." The guard—Ransom—had appeared at Chandler's back.

When Chandler tried to scramble up, Ransom put a hand on his shoulder. It seemed a gentle touch, but Chandler's face convulsed in pain.

I started to rise. Gabriel gripped my arm, and his touch may have been as light as the guard's 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. Gabriel's 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 Chandler's ear. "Do you hear the hounds, Edgar?"

Chandler gave a jerky nod. "I-I'm sorry. It was a mistake. I'll make amends. I'm doing that right now."

"He is," I cut in. "Let him make amends. Please."

The guard didn't appear more than thirty, but when he turned his gaze on me, I saw someone much older. "I'd be concerned about your sentimentality if I didn't 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 don't 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 man's ear again. "You

hear them coming, don't you?"

Chandler's head bobbed.

"Good. Then I need say no more." He patted Chandler's shoulder and looked at us. "Visiting time is over."

On the way out, I hit the restroom. I couldn't have been more than five minutes, but from the look Gabriel gave his watch when I exited, you'd think it'd been hours. Waiting was one thing. Waiting without doing anything productive was quite another.

"You could have gone out to the car," I said.

"I'm not leaving you alone."

"I'm 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.

"I'd like to follow," I said. "See where he goes."

Gabriel nodded.