

[PDF] Shadows Before The Sun (Charlie Madigan, Book 4)

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Description:

About the Author Kelly Gay is a multiple award-winning writer who lives in North Carolina. She is the author of *The Better Part of Darkness* and *The Darkest Edge of Dawn*. Visit her online at KellyGay.net.

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"I'm serious, Charlie. I think I'm becoming telepathic."

"Telepathetic is more like it," I muttered.

Rex's tone went flat. "Funny."

I slowed my vehicle to a stop at the light, and then took a sip of coffee, meeting Rex's dark, sleep-deprived scowl over the rim of the cup. He was unshaven and needed a haircut. And, yeah, he might be the biggest goofball I'd ever met, but now that he knew who he was and where he came from, he'd become edgier and fiercer than before when he was simply a Revenant occupying the body of my ex-husband, Will.

"What?" He stared at me with one eyebrow cocked.

"Nothing." I looked out my side window for a second and then back at him. "Your eyes are different."

"Noticed that, did you?"

"Hard not to," I admitted.

Will Garrity's gorgeous gray-blue eyes that had always put me in mind of stormy skies were now changed—once I'd pulled his soul from his body, releasing him to find peace as he'd asked, it had allowed Rex's jinn spirit to lay claim, to knit itself into Will's physical form in a way that was beyond possession, in a way that was permanent and complete.

As a result, small jinn signatures began to manifest, changing things on the inside and the outside. The gray-blue color of Will's eyes was still there, but now it was shaded in the violet indicative of the jinn race, turning them into a strange but beautiful lavender shade.

"I look like a fucking girl," Rex grumbled as I accelerated through the intersection.

Somebody shoot me.

From the time Rex had gotten into the passenger seat, I'd had to listen to him detail every ache and pain, his every claim and suspicion about what he thought was taking place inside of him. "You don't look like a girl," I said. "Your eyes are . . . pretty." Which I knew would set him off, but I had a certain payback quota to fill when it came to Rex.

His finger punched the air. "Exactly! Pretty. Not masculine. Not dark and mysterious. Fucking pretty."

"Oh please. Women love guys with beautiful eyes. Trust me. I think you're good."

He thought about it for a moment, calculating. "How good, exactly?"

I laughed and saw he was grinning. Will had a smile so warm it could melt snow and in Rex's possession . . . well, the female population of Atlanta was in for a treat if Rex decided to start prowling.

"You shouldn't fish for compliments, you know," I said, parking along the curb and then cutting the engine. "It kind of breaks the whole thing you got going on with the scruff and the leather jacket."

Rex might look good on the outside, but inside he was a contradiction convention. Arrogant, yet unsure. Extremely intelligent, yet would veg out in front of Nick Jr. like a four year old. A warrior at heart who walked around the kitchen in a cherry print apron reciting Shakespeare sonnets.

He had a devil-may-care attitude that came from thousands of years as a spirit, one who couldn't be killed, one who had seen it all and done it all within host after host of willing bodies. Until he fell in with the Madigan clan. Until he met my daughter and felt the stirrings of the one thing he hadn't done in life: be a father. Part of a family.

We got out and proceeded down the sidewalk, which ran alongside the tall fence surrounding the Grove. I ducked my shoulders against the light mist of rain and silently cursed the weather. The off-world darkness I'd summoned months ago still churned above Atlanta like a living shroud, but the rain was even worse. It carried some of the darkness to the ground, creating a thin off-world fog and causing my Charbydon genes to go haywire from all the raw arcane energy in the air.

Ahead, ITF cruisers blocked the 10th Street entrance to the Grove and two officers stood nearby talking. I'd been one of them once, proudly wearing the Integration Task Force uniform and dealing with the influx of beings from the dimensions of Elysia and Charbydon. Eventually, I'd moved on to detective, where I dealt with crime in the off-world communities in and around Atlanta, usually in Underground, the biggest off-world neighborhood in the city.

But those days, like everything else, seemed like a lifetime away, when I'd been human, when I had an identity I was sure of. I supposed in a way, Rex and I were both having our own identity crisis. We were just approaching it differently.

Rex bumped me with his shoulder then lifted his chin a notch so I could get a good, clean look at him. "So besides the eyes, do I seem different to you? Like on a sensory level?"

Yeah, *totally* different approaches.

It wasn't even nine o'clock and Rex was already getting under my skin. "For the hundredth time, no."

"Well, I feel different."

"No shit, Rex," I finally said, exasperated. "You've been floating around for thousands of years as a Revenant, occupying one body after another. Always a bridesmaid, never a bride. Now you have a body all your own and it's bound to feel different for a while. Look, you'll get used to it." I took another sip from my paper cup. "You kind of have to, since you're stuck with it."

He rolled his eyes. "Gee, thanks. Promise me you won't accept any speaking engagements, or start counseling, or writing self-help books. Really. Stick to killing things because your motivational skills suck ass."

I shrugged. "We each have our talents." And I was perfectly fine at giving pep talks when the situation called for them, and this one didn't. I wasn't about to feed Rex's imagination. "But I've always thought about writing a book one day . . . maybe something like *How to Deal with Overemotional, Highly Delusional Revenants* or maybe I'll just shorten it to *Revenants for Dummies*."

Rex gave a humorless laugh. "No, yours would be *Don't Let Life Get You Down, Let Charlie Do It Instead*."

I shot him an eye roll, unclipped the badge from my belt, and flashed my credentials at one of the

two uniformed officers standing before the open gate. Somewhere beyond that gate in the home of the Kinfolk, the city's largest population of nymphs, was a dead body.

As we stepped around the officers and into the Grove, unease slid down my back. Gone were the concrete paths, the benches, the water fountains, and the public restrooms that existed here years ago when this was Piedmont Park. In their place was an ancient forest, thick and dark—spurred into old growth by the nymphs' magic. The forest of the Grove was dark even on the sunniest day, but now, beneath a cover of living darkness, it took on a sinister feel. And when the nymphs said *stay on the path, don't stray from the path*, one tended to listen.

Torches lined the path that cut through the forest from the gate all the way to the shores of Clara Meer Lake and the nymphs' colossal wooden temple. The only things that kept me from feeling like I'd just stepped back in time by a few thousand years were the skyscrapers and city lights surrounding the park.

"This is . . . rural," Rex said as we kept to the path.

"The nymphs' private playground." The only beings born with the power to shift into an animal form—without the use of spells and crafting—the park gave the nymphs ample room to run and play and hunt. "They built their own Stonehenge on the hill there," I said, gesturing to Oak Hill.

Rex stared at it for a few steps. "Looks creepy as hell."

"It's even creepier when it's being used."

The stones sat silent for now, ghostly monoliths that could pulse with power so strong and deep it had once made me momentarily deaf and extremely nauseous.

"You know I'm changing, Charlie, or I wouldn't be here to help with the investigation," Rex said at length.

"I know, Rex. But you're just regaining some of your old jinn traits. You're not developing powers beyond what a jinn is naturally capable of. And telepathy is not a jinn trait. I brought you with me because of what a jinn can naturally do."

"I can only tell you if I sense a jinn presence at the crime scene, so I'm not sure how much that's going to help."

"It'll help a lot. It'll rule them out. The only eyewitness says he saw a large gray-skinned being near the lake." And since the jinn had skin that ran the spectrum of medium gray to dark gray, and were built like linebackers, they were the first to come to mind, unfortunately. There was also the darkling fae, but they were thin, sinewy beings and definitely didn't fit into the "large" category.

But a jinn? That spelled all sorts of trouble. Nymphs were from Elysia. Jinn were from Charbydon. They weren't known for being friendly since the beings of "heaven" and "hell" had continually warred for eons. Here in Atlanta, the ITF and local representatives from all the races made sure peace was maintained and treaty laws adhered to—a sort of neutral ground for all beings. But none of that stopped years of bias and hate. And when it came to the boss of the local jinn tribe, Grigori Tennin, and the nymphs' Druid King . . . well, those two made fire and water look like friends.

So, yeah, a jinn here in nymph territory? Not good. A jinn murdering a nymph within said territory? Monumentally *bad*. Not to mention the highly disturbing suspicion that if a jinn was really here, he or she might've been in the Grove for a very specific purpose. And the subject of that &...

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