

The title is surrounded by elegant, black, swirling lines that resemble calligraphic flourishes or smoke, framing the text and adding a sense of movement and mystery.

# DANGEROUS DECEPTION

BY

KAMI GARCIA &  
MARGARET STOHL



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY  
Boston • New York

*The depth of darkness to which  
you can descend and still live is an exact measure  
of the height to which you can aspire to reach.*

—PLINY THE ELDER

卐 BEFORE 卐

## *Link*

Love is ten kinds a crazy, right?

Especially when you meet the person you want to spend the rest of your life with when you're still in high school? The girl who is gonna elbow her way into more chapters of your autobiography than your folks, your car, and your best friend? The one who's got Satan on her speed dial, at least accordin' to all the parents in the Stonewall Jackson PTA.

Ridley Duchannes is every mother's nightmare—and a whole different kinda nightmare for their sons. Let me put it to you this way: If you can get away, run. Don't walk. Because once you're exposed, you'll never get a Siren outta your head.

If they ever make a vaccine for Ridley Duchannes, I'll be first in line.

But once you've been exposed, things get a lot more complicated. Rid's like those killer viruses they're always talkin'

about on the Discovery Channel. She changes everything—including you.

What I'm tryin' to say is, it's too late for me. I'm headed down a one-way street, with no stoplights and no brakes. The craziest part is that I don't even *wanna* turn back, and you wouldn't, either. You don't need a Caster mood ring to tell you that.

Because there are three kinds of girls in the world.

Good girls.

Bad girls.

And Ridley Duchannes.

Rid's in a category all her own—and trust me, she's earned it. She'll let you peek in the window, right before she slams the door in your face. She does what she wants, says what she wants, and lovesick guys like me still write songs about her.

Sure, she scammed me into comin' to New York with her and joinin' a Dark Caster band. She even pretended we were goin' there to make all my dreams come true, instead a settling her debt with Lennox Gates. Not every girl bets her boyfriend's future in a Caster card game, that's for sure. Like I said, ten kinds a crazy.

And the part that's even crazier? How much your life feels like it's over when she's not around to wreck it anymore.

But I'm gettin' ahead of myself.

It all started with a fire.

⌘ CHAPTER 1: NOX ⌘

*Ring of Fire*

Nox woke up on the floor in the back of the SUV. The last thing he remembered was the car driving away from what was left of his club Sirene...before Silas' thugs started beating on him and he blacked out.

Not that it mattered.

Between all the smoke he'd inhaled inside the burning club and the two Dark Casters kicking the crap out of him, he wasn't sure how much more he could take. Mortals weren't the only ones who had their limits.

The car rolled to a stop, and a moment later, the sunlight blinded Nox as the driver opened the door.

Silas Ravenwood climbed out and stood over him, smoking a cigar. "I'd like to say it's been fun, kid. But mostly, you've been a huge waste of my time." He flicked his cigar at Nox, missing his

face by just inches. “And a waste of a Caster. Not that I’d expect much more from the son of a whore.”

“Good one. Never heard that one before.”

Silas punched him in the face, sending a spray of blood across his cheekbone.

Nox clenched his fists, but he didn’t move. There was no point anymore. Ridley was safely gone, and he was going to take his beating like a man. He had known this would be coming when he set fire to Sirene instead of delivering Ridley and the quarter Incubus to Silas Ravenwood as promised.

*But I’ll kill you one day, Silas. I swear to God. Then you can rot in the Otherworld with Abraham.*

Silas stood in the shadow of the alley. “See you in the next life, kid. It’s sure as hell your last day in this one.” He slammed the door, and the driver pulled away from the curb.

Once Silas was gone, the real beatings started. Enough blows to the head, and Nox barely remembered his own name. Even worse, he had no idea where he was, or where they were taking him.

The river was his best guess. Maybe they’d toss him in like a sack of kittens.

*I’d be lucky to get off that easy.*

Then the SUV stopped at a red light.

Nox could see the cloud of smoke above the club in the distance. He was still staring at the smoke, dazed, when the side window next to him shattered.

A hand the size of a dinner plate plunged through the glass.

Sampson dragged one of Silas’ men out through the window and unlocked the door before the driver even realized what was happening. Instead of hitting the gas, the idiot came out and tried to take on close to seven feet of angry Darkborn.

*Bad move, big guy.*

Silas' other lackey was still in the back with Nox, and he jumped out to help. Sampson hurled him headfirst into a sign, leaving the guy's face almost as cut up as Sampson's hand. Nox crawled out of the car and stumbled to his feet, but the fight was already over. The driver and one of Silas' thugs were knocked out cold, and Sampson finished off the second guy, who was bleeding under the sign, with one hard stomp from his size fifteen Red Wings.

The Darkborn grabbed Nox by the arm and shoved him into the passenger seat of the SUV. "You're welcome. Now get your ass in the car."

"Sam, look at your hand." Nox could barely get the words out, but he pointed at the gashes slicing through his friend's skin and the blood running down his arm.

Sampson yanked his sleeveless T-shirt over his head and tugged down the ripped Sex Pistols one he was wearing underneath. "Wrap it around my fingers, but not too tight. I'll take care of it. After we get out of here."



"I owe you one," Nox said as he picked the slivers of glass out of Sampson's hand with a pair of tweezers. He had so much gauze stuffed up his bloody nose that he wasn't sure if Sampson could understand what he was saying.

After they'd ditched Silas' men, Nox had bought a first-aid kit from the nearest Duane Reade drugstore. Now they were parked in a seedy long-term lot near Penn Station, and it was the best Nox had felt all day. He could almost see out of one eye, and Silas' thugs hadn't knocked out any of his teeth.

*It's the little things.*

"One?" Sampson winced as Nox pulled out a big piece of glass. "You owe me three or four by now, boss," the huge Darkborn said.

"You don't have to call me that anymore. The club is gone, and opening another one would be like sending Silas an invitation to kill me."

"You mean *another* invitation?" Sampson didn't smile.

Nox ignored him, tossing a piece of glass on the dashboard. "So I hope you didn't risk your life for a job."

Sampson's jaw tightened. "There are other cities. And if you think I saved your ass and stole one of Silas Ravenwood's cars because of some crappy job, you don't know me very well."

Nox felt like a jerk. "Sorry, Sam."

"Forget it. You're just lucky those guys didn't kill you before I got there."

Nox knew Sampson was right, but he didn't feel lucky. Alive was different from lucky. A guy had to be pretty unlucky to lose the only girl he'd ever cared about.

Nox tipped the bottle of peroxide over Sampson's gnarled hand. "I think it's all out."

"Just wrap it up," Sampson said. "Darkborns heal pretty fast."

Nox wound a whole roll of gauze around his friend's hand until it looked like a prizefighter's.

Sampson pointed at his face. "You better clean out that cut on your cheek, stitch it up. Pretty boys don't look so pretty with scars."

"Yeah?" Nox flipped open the mirror on the visor and cringed. He looked like crap. Silas' punch had left a gash



across his cheek. “I don’t know, I think I look good. All things considered.”

“Good for a hamburger, maybe. A rare one. Now sew that thing shut.” Sampson screwed the top off a bottle of rubbing alcohol. “You’re out of peroxide. Time to man up.”

Nox found a needle in the first-aid kit and poured alcohol all over it. He was looking forward to the pain.

But the moment Sampson flicked on a lighter and Nox saw the flame, he felt something else. The alcohol stung Nox’s skin, and the world faded away...



The sight of a flame triggered Nox’s Sight, and the vision hit him all at once.

The fire...

Ridley’s screams...

The fear.

This time he heard the impact.

*Metal crushing.*

*Brakes squealing.*

It was the last sound that hit him like a kick in the gut. A song—“Stairway to Heaven.”

Nox had seen hints of this before in his visions, but the details had never been clear enough. It had always been a vague future. But it had become a reality.

This was the outcome he’d been desperate to avoid. If only he’d put the pieces together sooner.

So he hadn’t saved Ridley from dying in a fire. He’d saved her from dying in one particular fire—the one at Sirene—only to let

her die in another, the one at the car wreck. He'd done everything he could to keep her from meeting the fate he'd seen laid out for her in his dreams, and he had still failed.

*I gave up too easily. I shouldn't have let her leave with that idiot hybrid. I should've asked her to choose me.*

He'd sacrificed everything to protect Ridley—his club, his safety, even his heart. And it had been pointless. He hadn't protected her from anything.

*Then I pushed her right into another guy's arms.*

*I thought he could protect her. I thought he was better for her. Safer.*

*Who's the idiot now?*

"What's wrong, Nox?" Sampson asked.

"Everything." Nox could barely move his jaw, but he forced the words out somehow. "She's in trouble, Sam. We've gotta go. Now."



Finding the location of the crash was the easy part; in Nox's vision, the flames were already melting the road signs, which meant he'd gotten a good look at them in the process. "Hurry, Sam. We don't have much time."

*What if we're already too late?* Nox thought.

Nox stared out the window in a daze, trying to blot out the images of the fire and the sound of Ridley's screams. He pressed against his stitches, trying to feel the pain. At least his pain distracted him from hers.

*She's not dead. I'd know. I would've felt it.*

*Right?*

He pressed harder.

Sampson didn't say a word, but the speedometer inched up past ninety, and he covered a hundred miles in less than an hour.

By the time Nox spotted the cloud of black smoke, he was practically jumping out of his skin. The wind blew the dirty air through the SUV's broken window as they approached the flashing lights—two police cars, a fire engine, and an ambulance on the shoulder of the highway—behind a perimeter of orange cones and flares. One of the cops stood in the road, waving cars past the crash site. Traffic slowed as drivers rubbernecked while passing the wreckage.

Nox scanned the area for any sign of Ridley or a blue and white medical examiner's van.

*It's not here. Not yet.*

Sampson shook his head. "It looks bad."

Up close, it looked even worse. What was left of Link's piece-of-crap car was crushed like a tin can, and firefighters were hosing down the half-melted body of the Beater.

As Sampson guided the SUV toward the shoulder, Nox jumped out and bolted for the ambulance. He held his breath when he glanced at the wreckage. No bodies or body bags. Just a lot of charred and banged-up metal. Smoldering upholstery. Shattered glass.

*Where is she?*

Two paramedics were standing around behind the ambulance.

"Is she okay?" Nox asked, out of breath.

One of them looked up at him, confused. "Excuse me?"

"The girl in the car. Is she okay?" Nox repeated.

The paramedics exchanged a strange look. "There was no

one in the car when we got here. It was a hit-and-run. The police checked the area, but they couldn't find any sign of the driver. Do you know whose car this is?"

"Yeah. It belongs to this guy we know," Nox said as Sampson caught up with him.

One of the paramedics stepped back at the sight of the Darkborn. It was everyone's reaction to Sampson. At over six foot five, he looked like a linebacker.

"The police are trying to figure out what happened to the driver," the paramedic said. "They'll probably want to talk to you guys." He took a closer look at Nox. "What happened to your face?"

Nox stiffened. "I got in a fight."

The paramedic looked at him skeptically.

"More than one," Nox added. "What are you, my mother?"

The paramedic glanced over at the nearest police car. "Wait here."

The moment the guy turned his back on them, Sampson shoved Nox in the direction of the SUV. "We need to bail. As much as I don't like Mortals, I hate cops even more."

Nox agreed, and after seeing the wreckage, part of him was relieved Ridley wasn't there.

*She's not dead. There would be a body.*

But another part of him had a bad feeling.

*Don't fool yourself. Nobody could walk away from an accident like that. The Beater looks like a burnt pretzel.*

Lennox Gates' feelings were never simple when it came to Ridley Duchannes. There was no reason to expect them to be any less complex now. He climbed back into the car and slammed the door. "We need to figure out where she is. Fast."

“I’ll work on that as soon as I get us out of here.” Sampson threw the SUV into reverse, guided the car off the shoulder of the road, and flipped a U-turn. He waited until the flashing lights were out of sight before he hit the gas.

“Relax. It’s not a high-speed chase.” Nox grabbed the door.

The Darkborn glanced at the rearview mirror. “Not yet.”

“We haven’t done anything wrong,” Nox said, though he didn’t sound convinced.

“Yeah? That’s not how it looks.” Sampson kept his eyes on the road. “My hand is bleeding. The window is shattered. And you look like you lost a cage fight.”

“Think it’s possible she walked away from the crash?” Nox asked, hating how desperate he sounded. He didn’t want to say the words out loud.

*She’s alive. She has to be.*

“I don’t know.” Sampson seemed doubtful. “The back of the car was crushed.” He glanced at Nox. “But yeah, anything’s possible.”

As Sampson turned back onto the highway, Nox noticed something on the side of the road. Something small, and furry, and out of place.

*An animal.*

*A cat.*

Lucille Ball. She was sitting on the shoulder, as if she was waiting for them.

“Pull over. That’s Link’s cat.”

“I wonder how she got all the way out here.” Sampson stopped the car a few feet away from Lucille.

The cat didn’t move until they both got out. Then she trotted off into the trees.

Nox took off after her. “I think she wants us to follow her.”

Sampson shook his head. “It looks more like she’s running away from us.”

“But toward what?” Nox asked. Ridley had told Nox a story about how Lucille had practically led Rid and her friends to her cousin Lena when she was missing once. He had no idea how much of it was true, but that cat was definitely different.

Lucille scampered ahead, stopping every now and then to make sure they were still behind her. Nox wasn’t that interested in chasing mangy cats through the bushes, but he followed her anyway.

*If that stupid cat was in the car with them...she could be leading us to Rid.*

Nox wasn’t so sure when the cat led them through a cluster of trees and he saw Link slumped against a trunk ahead of them. The ridiculous spiked blond hair and threadbare Black Sabbath T-shirt were unmistakable. Above Link, the branches were cracked and broken as if he’d hit every one of them before he finally made it to the ground.

*Headfirst, knowing him.*

“What are you doing out here, Link?” Sampson asked as they made their way through the brush.

Link barely moved. His skin was smudged with black smoke and ash, and one side of his shirt was singed above the burns running down his arm.

Nox leaned closer and grabbed a handful of Link’s ripped shirt. “Hey. Wake up.”

*Confused* didn’t begin to describe the expression on Link’s face. He opened and closed his eyes, shaking his head at the sight of Nox. “Aw, great. I’m in Hell. My mom was right.”

“You’re not in Hell. You’re in New Jersey.” Nox squatted in front of him. “Where’s Ridley?”

Link jerked his head up at the mention of her name. “Wait. You don’t know where she is, either?”

Nox stiffened. It was the million-dollar question, and Link didn’t have the answer any more than he did.

“We were hoping you knew,” Sampson said.

Link rubbed his eyes, wincing as he lifted his arm. “It all happened so fast. ‘Stairway to Heaven’ came on the radio. That’s all I remember, until this black truck ran a red light and plowed right into the Beater.” His face clouded over as he realized what he was saying. “Aw, man. The Beater.”

“Mangled,” Nox said, with a shred of satisfaction.

Sampson nodded. “You don’t want to know.”

Link pressed his hands against his temples. “The driver didn’t even try to swerve out of the way. It was like he was headin’ right for us.” He rubbed his eyes like he was fighting the worst headache of his life. “The only thing I remember after that was the sound of metal crunchin’ and Ridley screamin’. There was so much smoke I couldn’t see her. I kept callin’ her name, but she didn’t answer. Then the Beater caught on fire.”

Sampson examined Link’s eyes. “Do you remember how you got here? You’re pretty far from the crash site. I doubt you walked.”

Link squinted, as if he was trying to piece everything together in his mind. “I didn’t walk. I Ripped.”

“And you didn’t take Ridley with you?” Nox snapped. He didn’t bother to hide the rage in his voice.

*Why did she leave with this clown in the first place?*

Link shook his head. “It wasn’t like that. I reached out for

her, but she wasn't in the passenger seat. The fire kept gettin' bigger, and then my shirt started burnin'. I don't know what happened. I wasn't tryin' to Rip, but the next thing I knew, I was out here."

Sampson glanced at Nox. "I bet it was some kind of defense mechanism. An Incubus fight or flight response."

"A cowardly one," Nox muttered. "All you had to do was get her out of here. You had her back for, what, two hours? And this was the best you could manage?"

"It's not like I had a choice." Link was trying to stay focused, but his vision was fuzzy. He fell back, pushing his hands against his temples.

Nox grabbed his arm and yanked hard. There it was. The Binding Ring—the one that should've been going off like a three-alarm fire.

It was completely dark now.

They all stared at it in horror. Even Link looked like he wanted to chuck it in the bushes.

"Maybe it's broken."

Nox's voice was hard. "Maybe you were just born an idiot."

Link rolled to one side. "I was right the first time. If I've gotta listen to you, Rich Boy, I might as well be in Hell." He winced, sounding more miserable than pained.

"This is real productive," Sampson said. Now everyone was annoyed.

Even though the hybrid had ruined everything, Nox knew it wasn't that simple.

*Link didn't have a choice, but I did. I chose not to fight. I chose to give in—to give up everything so she'd have a better shot at being happy.*



*Or at least staying alive.*

Nox sighed and bent down in front of Link. “Think. Do you remember anything else? Were there any other cars around, or people who might have witnessed the accident?”

Link shook his head. “No. The only car I saw was the truck that hit us. It wasn’t a pickup like the junkers folks drive back home in Gatlin. It was one of those fancy black Raptors with the big tires and everything.”

*A black Raptor.*

Sampson stared at Nox. “You know what that means, right?”

Nox nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

“What am I missin’?” Link asked, pushing himself off the ground.

Sampson grabbed his arm and pulled him up, so fast that Link’s legs dangled above the ground for a second. “Do you remember if the truck had a huge bird on the hood?”

“Yeah,” Link answered. “Full-on Big Bird sized. How’d you know?”

Sampson dropped him. Link stumbled, like his knees were going to buckle, and Nox grabbed him before he could fall.

“It’s a raven.” Nox tried not to think about all the things that might be happening to Ridley right now. “It was one of Silas Ravenwood’s trucks.”

## *Don't Know What You Got (Till It's Gone)*

*Silas Ravenwood.* The thought sent Link reeling. It was a punch to the gut multiplied by a hundred.

*What if she didn't make it?*

*Don't do this to me, Rid. I just got you back.*

"I'm the one they wanted. This is all my fault." Link couldn't bring himself to look at Sampson and Nox as they searched the area. Link hadn't been this banged up since he stopped being a hundred percent Mortal. But he felt even worse on the inside, like his heart was limping, too.

All he could think about was Ridley. He slipped his hand out of his pocket and stared at the lifeless ring on his finger.

*Where are you, Rid?*

"You're right. Your fault. No one's arguing with you," Nox said, walking ahead of them. He didn't bother to turn around.

Link ignored him. "She must've made it out of the car. Like I said, I reached for her and she wasn't there."

“Or whoever was driving Silas Ravenwood’s truck grabbed her,” Nox snapped. “Did you think of that?”

Link frowned. “Are you sure it was Silas’ car?”

“Everyone knows that truck,” Sampson said.

Link stopped walking. “I’m the one who killed Abraham Ravenwood, not Rid. His psychotic grandson shoulda taken me.”

“Finally we agree on something,” Nox said.

Link’s expression hardened. “You can stop actin’ like you’re a big hero. The way I see it, we both let her down. At least I’m man enough to admit it.”

Nox’s eyes narrowed. “I wasn’t the one behind the wheel.”

Link stepped forward, moving closer to Nox. “You might as well have been.”

Nox’s hands curled into fists. “You have no idea how much I wish I was. Then I could’ve done something. Unlike some of us.”

Sampson stepped between them. “You two can fight it out after we find her.”

“After we find her, I’m taking her somewhere safe where you’ll never see her again.” Nox didn’t take his eyes off Link.

Link barely kept himself from punching the guy in the face. “I’d like to see you try.”

“And I’d like to beat the crap out of you both. Unfortunately, as Mick Jagger would say, you can’t always get what you want.” Sam shoved them both. “Now move.”



Link didn’t care if Lennox Gates had saved their lives at Sirene. As far as he was concerned, the guy was still a tool. Another

piece of Underground club trash who was too rich and too slick for anybody's good. Not to mention the other thing.

*A tool who spent the last few months tryin' to steal my girlfriend. Who only wants to find her so he can steal her again.*

*If she's even still alive.*

Link tried not to think that way. Especially since now the three of them were holed up in a diner off the highway, doing their best to figure out a way to find Rid before they killed each other. Only exhaustion had prevented it from happening so far.

The three of them—four, if you counted Lucille—had searched the woods for hours, looking for any sign of Ridley, even though the odds seemed pretty high that Silas or one of his thugs had taken her.

*Or her body.*

That was the part no one said out loud.

The situation sucked.

*I suck.*

Link didn't have to say that out loud, either. He pushed the fries he'd never consider eating around on his plate. Mortal food tasted like cardboard, another downside of being a quarter Incubus. Not that he would've been able to eat at a time like this. "You really think Silas might have her?"

Nox didn't respond right away. Instead, he stared into the coffee cup in his hand.

*A bad sign.*

"If she's still alive," Nox said finally.

"Don't say that." Link started to lunge across the table, but Sampson caught him. "Don't ever say that again. She's alive. We just have to find her."

"Your ring—" Nox stared at it.

“Is busted.” Link glared.

“Grow up,” Nox shot back. “It’s called reality. We let him take her.”

Link lunged again, and Sampson picked him up by the scruff of his neck, as if the hulking hybrid was a harmless kitten.

“We don’t know anything for sure yet.” Sampson hauled Link back down to his seat. “And I’m not sure Ridley Duchannes ever *let* anyone do anything. So let’s all relax. We’re not gonna figure this out if we can’t work together.”

The bells on the door of the diner chimed and Necro and Floyd walked in, scanning the restaurant. Sampson had called them as soon as he’d sat down. The girls had been laying low in a crappy Motel 6 outside Brooklyn, waiting for Sam to rescue Nox from Silas’ thugs so the band could head out to LA as planned. When Sam called to tell them about the accident, Link’s bandmates hadn’t wasted any time getting there.

Floyd’s stringy blond hair swung over her shoulders as she searched for Link. When she saw him, her face broke into a thousand pieces, like she was about to start smiling or sobbing. Link couldn’t tell which. She practically ran toward their booth, in her holey jeans and faded Pink Floyd *Dark Side of the Moon* concert tee, and caught Link around the neck in a huge hug. “You okay? We were so worried.”

Link squeezed her tight. He knew Floyd still had a thing for him, but at that moment, he was so happy to see his friends that he didn’t care. At least she didn’t blame him for everything that had happened, like some people.

*Myself included*, he thought miserably.

Someone coughed, and Necro stood behind Floyd, flashing Link a pierced smile. Her short blue faux-hawk seemed bluer

and her futuristic leather jacket looked even more Mad Max than usual. Maybe everything was a little sharper after you'd dodged death.

"Hey, man." Link reached to hug her, but she held up her fist instead.

"Pound it," she said, smiling.

*Same old Nec. Thank god they're here.*

Necro squeezed in next to Sampson, across from Link and Floyd. Nox was sitting on the other side of Sam, and the Dark-born took up more than his share of the booth.

"That was fast," Sampson said.

Necro nodded. "Hopped in the first cab we could find."

"A fifty-buck cab ride. Don't act like we don't love you." Floyd turned red as she stumbled over the words.

"And don't act like you actually paid the driver," Nox countered.

"So what happened?" Necro asked.

"Silas Ravenwood—or someone drivin' one of his trucks. That's what happened." Link shrugged. "The Beater took her last beatin', and Rid—" His voice faltered. He couldn't tell the story again.

*Not without puking.*

Floyd squeezed his shoulder. "Sampson gave us the high-lights on the phone. He said Ridley's missing." Even though she had feelings for Link, she almost sounded sorry.

"We looked everywhere, and there was no sign of her," Nox said. "Our guess is Silas has her, but we don't know where he took her."

Sampson chugged what had to be his fifth glass of milk. The guy ate more than Link used to when he was still a Mortal. It

was hard to know how things worked with Darkborns, since there had never been any until the Order of Things was broken last year. Everyone was still figuring it out, including Sampson. “Silas is the head of the Syndicate. He can’t run an operation like that without a place to meet his scumbag associates. It’s not like he can rent out office space.”

“The Syndicate?” Link had never heard of it before. “As in a *crime* syndicate?”

“The Underground has even more organized crime than the Mortal world,” Floyd said. “Gambling, drugs, power trafficking—you name it. And the Syndicate runs most of it.”

“So you’re sayin’ Silas is the head a the Mob?” The thought made Link nervous. “You mean like Don Corleone, that fat guy from *The Godfather*?”

Sampson shoved the empty glass across the table. “The Syndicate makes the Mob look like a charity organization.”

Link almost made a joke about his mom and her cutthroat Daughters of the American Revolution meetings; the DAR could give the Mob a run for its money, any day of the week. But then he remembered Rid wasn’t there, which meant there was no one around to laugh at his Gatlin jokes.

*Nothing’s the same without her.*

Then another thought crossed his mind.

*The DAR. My mom.*

Link bolted upright in his seat. “Holy crap. I’ve gotta call my mom.”

“You didn’t call her yet?” Sam shook his head. “The cops probably traced the license plates on the Beater by now. I bet they already called her.”

Link dialed his home number as fast as he could. His mom

was going to kill him for not calling. The preacher and all her DAR friends were probably already at the house in one of their prayer circles.

His mom picked up on the first ring, and Link could tell from all the sniffing that she'd been crying.

“Ma? It’s Link. I mean, Wesley—”

“Wesley!” He heard a muffled sound like she was covering the mouthpiece. “It’s Wesley. The Good Lord Almighty answered our prayers.”

Link could imagine the chorus of hallelujahs, in between big bites of *I Told You That Boy Was Trouble Casserole* and *Hope Your Son Doesn’t Smoke Pot Pie*.

A moment later, his mom was back on the line. “What happened? The police called and told me they found your car totaled on the highway, but you were missing. *Up North*.” She said the words the way someone else would say “on the *Titanic*.” Then she went on. “Are you all right? Do you have amnesia? Lord, please don’t let him have amnesia.”

“Calm down, Mom. If I had amnesia, I wouldn’t have remembered our phone number. I’m okay. I wasn’t even in the car.” Link had only come up with that detail a moment ago, and he was pretty proud of himself. “It was a mix-up. Somebody stole the Beater, but I hadn’t reported it yet, so when they got to the crash site, they thought I was the one drivin’.”

“And you’re just calling now?” The anger was already brewing in his mom’s voice. “Do you have any conception of how worried I’ve been? I already called old Buck Petty and asked him to load up his hounds!”

Link sighed, rubbing his spiky hair.

“What were you gonna do? Drive down to Georgia Redeemer



with a truck fulla bloodhounds?” Link was proud of himself for remembering the name of the college he was supposed to be attending.

“That is what *good mothers* do when their sons are missing, Wesley Jefferson Lincoln! I have been absolutely *beside* myself. Did you forget how to call collect? We practiced before you left.”

“I’m sorry, Mom. I just found out what happened a little while ago, and I can’t talk ’cause the police need me to fill out a report.” And his mom thought all those hours he’d spent watching *Matlock* were a waste of time.

“Why would someone steal a car from Georgia Redeemer and drive it all the way to the New Jersey Turnpike?”

“I don’t know, but you’d better activate the phone tree and call everybody before the ladies in the DAR drive to Georgia and start nailin’ my picture to telephone poles.”

“You’d better call me back later, Wesley,” Link’s mother said under her breath. “This conversation isn’t over.”

“Okay, Mom. Gotta go. I’m losin’ ya.” Link crumpled a napkin into the speaker for good measure as he hung up.

Some things never changed, no matter how bad you wanted them to.

When he turned back to the table, everyone was trying not to smile—except the rich boy. “All right. All right. Show’s over,” Link said. “So where do we find Silas?”

“When Silas isn’t throwing his weight around, he likes to lay low,” Sampson said. “So he probably runs his operation from somewhere off the grid.”

“That is about as low as things get,” Necro said, turning to Nox. “You know Silas better than the rest of us. If he’s got Ridley, where would he take her?”

“I don’t know him as well as you think.” Nox looked annoyed. “I’m not on his payroll. Silas comes around and causes trouble, then disappears. If he’s using the Tunnels to get around, which I would, he could be anywhere.” The Caster Tunnels ran below the Mortal world, and time and distance didn’t follow the same rules down there.

Floyd looked at Nox. “And Abraham never mentioned anything back when”—she hesitated—“you knew him.”

Nox rolled up the sleeves of what looked to Link like another one of his overpriced hipster shirts. “Like I said, I didn’t spend a lot of time with him. Considering he pretty much kidnapped my mom. He only let me visit her a few times when I was young.” Nox stopped talking and looked up at the ceiling. “The rest of the time he was in his labs.”

*I guess Fancy Pants has feelings, too,* Link thought. Funny how it didn’t make him want to punch the guy any less.

“Okay. At least that’s something to go on. Did you ever hear him talk about the labs?” Sampson asked.

“Sure. Abraham was obsessed with them and his projects—that’s what he called them. But he never invited me on a tour. They were somewhere behind his house.”

“You know that for sure?” Link was suspicious.

“Like I said, I spent some time at his house. So did Silas. He even had his own room. I made the mistake of going in there by accident once.” Nox shook his head, remembering. “I noticed this old record player in one of the bedrooms, and I wanted to see how the thing worked. Abraham was standing in the hall when I came back out. I’ll never forget what he said. *I tolerate the way you sneak around my house, boy. But if Silas catches*

*you near his room, he might think you're a thief and cut off your hand."*

"Thanks for sharin' your creepy childhood memories," Link said. "That'll really help me sleep."

Nox frowned. "All I know is, Silas never stayed away from the labs for long, like his old man. If we find the labs, I bet we'll find him."

"So where's the house?" Sampson asked.

Nox shook his head. "I don't know. Abraham's men blindfolded me whenever they took me through the Tunnels to visit my mom. And the place is under some kind of Cloaking Cast, so Mortals can't see it."

*Another dead end*, Link thought. *Great.*

He considered calling Ethan, who was a thousand times smarter than him. But Ethan messing with Silas Ravenwood was a suicide mission. Link couldn't let anything happen to his best friend, not after Ethan had already died twice.

"There's gotta be someone who knows how to find those labs," Sampson said.

A thought formed in Link's mind slowly, like syrup pouring out of a bottle. "There is. The guy who grew up in them." He looked up. "John Breed."

"Who?" Sampson sounded suspicious, which seemed like part of his Darkborn nature.

"He's one a the good guys," Link said. "But he was a bad dude for a long time before that. So he's kind of my Dark Caster Wikipedia."

Nox crossed his arms. "I'm not sure a good guy is gonna cut it in this situation."

“He’ll cut it and then some. Trust me.”

Nox didn’t respond.

“How can you be so sure?” Necro asked.

“Abraham Ravenwood engineered him in one of his creepy science labs.” Link grinned. “And John’s the one who helped me kill him.”

“Are you saying one of Abraham’s science experiments went rogue?” Sampson asked.

“We’re talkin’ Frankenstein meets RoboCop,” Link said proudly.

Link skimmed over the details, like how John Breed was the hybrid Incubus who had bitten him, transforming him into the quarter Incubus he was today. It felt weird talking about it, like he was standing in front of everyone in his underwear. It was a hard thing to forgive, but it wasn’t John’s fault; Abraham had really screwed him up. Besides, John came through for him and his friends when it counted—and he and John killed Abraham together. It was the kind of bond you couldn’t break.

Instead, Link told them how Abraham Ravenwood had handpicked John’s parents, a Blood Incubus and an Evo—an Evo being a powerful Caster who can borrow the powers of any Caster they touch. Abraham used the two to create the perfect hybrid—with all the power of an Incubus and none of the weaknesses.

John could Travel and possessed the superstrength of a traditional Incubus, but he also had the powers of an Evo. And he could do the one thing no other Incubus could, except Link: John could walk in the sunlight.

If anyone could find the labs, it was John.

“So what are we waiting for?” Floyd asked. “Call him.”

Link sighed. “He’s not in Gatlin. He’s at Oxford with his girlfriend, Liv.”

“Again, it’s called a phone.” Floyd wasn’t helping.

“You don’t get it. Liv’s this crazy genius who spends all her time in the library. She never carried a cell phone back in Gatlin, and John isn’t any better now. I tried the number he gave me a buncha times, but it went straight to voice mail.”

“Okay,” Floyd said. “Then you’ll have to Rip us all there.”

“I don’t fly.” Sampson leaned back in the booth, arms crossed.

“Really?” Necro looked amused and nudged him playfully. “You?”

Sampson shoved his hands into his pockets, looking embarrassed.

“Rippin’ isn’t exactly the same as flyin’,” Link said. “It feels more like gettin’ sucked into a vacuum cleaner.”

The Darkborn stared at him. “Even though you make it sound so appealing, I’ll still pass.”

“I hate to say it, but I’m with Sampson,” Necro said. “Traveling in and out of my own body is bad enough.”

Nox looked away. Necro had barely recovered from using her powers as a Necromancer to let Abraham take over her body and getting poisoned. Even now, Link noticed that the shadows under her eyes were darker than usual.

*They’ve all been through enough, on account of Rid and me. And Nox, too—he’s caused his share of trouble.*

*But Floyd and Necro and Sampson? Think about how much easier their lives would be if Abraham and Silas had gotten what they wanted the first time around.*

*How can I ask them to sign up for round two of the Caster smackdown?*

“I’ll go,” Floyd said right away.

Link was grateful, but he also felt guilty. “You don’t have to do anything you don’t wanna do.” Like it or not, Link’s heart had always belonged to one particular Siren, and he was going to find her, no matter what it took.

“Thanks for the clarification.” Floyd smiled.

“I’m coming, too,” Nox said from across the table.

“I don’t think that’s such a good idea,” Link said. “John’s kinda like Sammy Boy. It takes him a while to warm up to people. And you two don’t have much in common.”

“I’m going.” Nox started to stand up, but Necro caught his arm.

“Let me put it another way,” Link said. “You’re not comin’. So unless you can Rip, you’re outta luck. And if you really care about Ridley, you’ll stop screwin’ around and wastin’ time.”

The accusation seemed to hit a nerve, and Nox backed off.

“Don’t worry, Nox.” Floyd jumped in. “We’ll find this John Breed guy.”

Everyone followed Link outside. He led them behind the diner so he and Floyd could dematerialize without anyone noticing.

Link held out his hand. “Ready?”

Floyd nodded and took it.

Necro gave her a quick hug. “Good luck.”

“We won’t need it.” By the time the words left Floyd’s lips, they were gone.

## *Street of Dreams*

**N**ewark? As in New Jersey? I still don't get it. You know the Tri-State Area isn't our friend." Necro sounded annoyed as she followed Nox and Sam down the sidewalk. "Or am I the only one with the less-than-happy memories?"

"We'll be fine," Nox said. "Between the soccer moms and the Mortal Mafia, even Silas' thugs avoid the Garden State like the plague."

"Isn't it a little close to home, after the fire at Sirene?" Necro looked skeptical. "Because the place was swarming with Silas' men. I was there, in case you forgot."

"That's *why* Jersey's safe. The club is gone. Silas has bigger things to think about now."

Sampson stopped in front of a tacky condo complex made to look like a fake Tudor village. "The Essex House. This is April's

place, or maybe June's. She's named after a month. That's about all I remember."

"Charming," Necro said. "It's nice to see how much your girlfriends mean to you."

"She wasn't my girlfriend," Sampson said, turning red. "Just someone I hooked up with once."

"As if that's better?" Necro raised an eyebrow.

"I don't care who she is as long as she left us the key," Nox said. After eavesdropping on Sampson's end of an awkward phone conversation, all he knew was that April or June—or whatever the girl's name was—seemed happy to let them hang out at her place in the hopes of reconnecting with Sampson.

Necro shook her head. "Have you ever had a relationship that lasted more than one night?" The Necromancer sounded like she was joking, but from the look on her face, she wasn't giving up until she got a real answer.

Sampson frowned. "Maybe I just haven't found the right girl."

"Keep telling yourself that," Nox said. "You still need to cover the other ten months in the year—why stop at April and June? There's September and October, November and December..."

"Enough." Sampson swiped the key from beneath a flower-pot on the stoop.

As soon as they got inside, Necro made herself at home and flopped down in a machine-distressed armchair. She picked up a decorative pillow covered with embroidered birds and a fat yellow sun and glanced at Sampson. "It's official. You win. You have the worst taste in girls."

Nox just stared at the pillow as if he'd seen a ghost. In a way, he felt like he had.

*Is it possible? Could I really be that stupid?*



The others hardly noticed.

“Fine. She wasn’t a rocket scientist.” Sampson sounded embarrassed as he opened the refrigerator, hiding behind the door. “At least I found us a place to stay. Nox can’t go back to his apartment. And I can’t go back to ours, not after I put my fist through the window of one of Silas’ cars.”

“And then stole it,” Nox added. He glanced out the window, where the immense black car looked out of place in the condo lot full of silver minivans. Suddenly, he felt like he’d give anything to be out there, instead of stuck inside the cloying apartment.

He had to get his head straight and remember.

Sampson took out a loaf of bread and a mountain of sandwich ingredients, including a whole jar of pickles. “Artisanal mayonnaise? What’s artisanal mayonnaise?” He popped open the jar with the hand-drawn label and smelled the mayo and made a face. “I’m pretty sure it’s not food.”

Nox grabbed his coat. “I’m gonna take a walk. I need some air.”

*I have to try to remember.*

Necro propped her combat boots up on the arm of the chair and opened a coffee table book about coffee table books. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

As Nox closed the front door behind him, he knew what he needed to do. He’d barely reached the sidewalk before he drew the lighter out of his pocket. Then the world blurred and the vision hit him....



*Two men in a car, speeding down the highway with a trail of cigar smoke curling behind them.*

*“What do you want me to do with her?” the bigger of the two men asks.*

*“Depends.” His voice... it’s familiar.*

*Silas.*

*“Let’s see how she reacts to the infusion. I have a good feeling about this one: lucky Number 13.”*

*“Don’t get your hopes up. You’ve been working on this for years, and it hasn’t worked yet.”*

*“Trial and error,” Silas says. “That’s the way science works. The doc thinks we’ve finally perfected the formula, and this girl isn’t your average Caster. She comes from a strong bloodline.”*

*“And if the infusion doesn’t take?” the hulking man asks. He’s so huge that he must be a Darkborn.*

*Silas flicks his ash out the window. “You can kill her like the rest of the failures, or keep her. Your choice.”*

*“After all the trouble you went to to get her? Sure you don’t want the leftovers?”*

*“I’m not interested in damaged goods,” Silas says.*

*Nothing but miles of highway stretch in front of the car, until a green sign comes into view: NEW ORLEANS 42 MILES.*

*“If you pull this off, the Syndicate will be unstoppable,” the Darkborn says.*

*Silas stops and turns to look at his associate. “No. I’ll be unstoppable.”*



The edges of the world bled back into Nox’s peripheral vision, and his heart thudded in his chest as he struggled to push the fog out of his mind.

*Damaged goods.*

Silas had to be talking about Ridley. He'd gone to enough trouble to take her. But if he was still talking about her now—

*She's alive.*

Nox forced himself to be logical, even as the adrenaline pounded in his veins.

*Silas could've been referring to someone else. But I wouldn't have a vision about a random girl.*

The second conclusion was the one that mattered.

*He's got Ridley. Somewhere in New Orleans or close to it.*

*It means we still have some time.*

*Not much.*

Nox let himself breathe again, but only for a minute. If he was right and Rid was still alive, the clock was ticking. He wasn't sure what kind of infusion Silas was talking about, but if it involved one of his experiments, it wasn't good.

*At least I know where Silas has her.*

If Silas was headed for New Orleans, it meant he was going to Ravenwood Oaks—Abraham's plantation. The place where Nox had visited his mom. That must be where the labs were, too.

*I should tell Necro and Sam. But I can't.*

They'd bought into Link's crazy plan to find this John person.

*But come on. Who are they kidding?*

*No friend of Link's is going to be any help to us. The hybrid is a fool surrounded by fools.*

Nox looked back up at the condo complex behind him, hands jammed in his pockets.

*I can't take Necro and Sampson with me. I've hurt them enough. Especially Necro—she almost got killed because of me.*

*And Sam's taken a bullet for me more times than I can count. They'll only end up getting hurt.*

Because the people he cared about always ended up getting hurt.

It was the most painful recognition of all.

*I'm the real threat, but I've always known that.*

Nox was better off on his own. Rid was the only person who understood how it felt to be the reason the people around you were always in pain—even if you didn't want them to be.

*Wishing you could trade places with them.*

It was selfish to put them in danger when Nox had collected more than enough talents, favors, and powers at the gambling tables in his clubs. Those TFPs would compensate for going in alone. Not to mention the fact that taking more people only increased the odds of getting caught.

*I can get more done by myself. Without risking all of their lives again.*

Nox knew where this was all headed—and what was about to happen.

*Rid would tell me to do it. She'd understand.*

*She'd say, quit whining. Get off your butt and go.*

Nox made his way down the sidewalk, still sensing Sampson's eyes on him from the window above. When he turned the corner, he picked up his pace and headed straight for the commuter train station. It also happened to be the location of the nearest Outer Door, one of the magical doorways that led from the Mortal world into the Caster Tunnels.

He wasn't waiting around for Link and Floyd to come back. Not now. If Ridley was still alive, she didn't have that kind of time, and he wasn't leaving her fate in the hands of her idiot

boyfriend or John Breed, another hybrid Nox didn't know if he could trust.

*Damaged goods.*

His hands formed fists at the thought of Silas saying it.

*And if she's gone when I get there—or if it isn't her and she's already dead—I'll make Silas pay.*

Link was wrong about one thing: John Breed wasn't the only person who knew the location of Abraham's labs in New Orleans and the Syndicate.

Nox had known from the minute he first saw the stupid embroidered pillow in the Mortal girl's apartment—the one that looked like a giant yellow sun.

It had triggered the memory that told him where he needed to go and what he needed to do next.

He tried to silence the voice in his head, shouldering past the commuters on the platform waiting for the train, and slipped through an access door behind the elevators. The hallway was dark, the smell of mold clinging to the air. He passed abandoned electrical panels that hadn't been used since the city upgraded the station almost a decade ago. At the end of the hall, he spotted the Outer Door.

Nox bent down and touched the top of the manhole cover, whispering the Cast to access it. "*Aperi portam.*"

*In other words, open the damn door.*

It slid aside easily, and he lowered himself toward what looked like a deadly drop. But Nox knew that the invisible steps were waiting below. Once his feet touched the first stair, he jumped the rest of them, leaving the Mortal world behind.

The predictability of the Caster world was comforting. The invisible stairs were always where the invisible stairs were

supposed to be, and the Casts invariably opened the Caster doors.

Aside from the fact that time and distance operated differently in the Caster Tunnels, most of them weren't much different from the cities and streets in the Mortal world. Sure, some of them looked like you were walking through the pages of a history book—the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, Victorian London—while others reminded him of the fantasy novels he read as a kid.

This Tunnel wasn't one of them.

As his boots splashed through the rancid water, rats scurried through the watery sludge. Nox was grateful the Tunnel wasn't well lit. Though he didn't spend a lot of time hanging out in sewage tunnels, this probably wasn't far off—which was a depressing thought, considering that the place he was going was far worse.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © 2015 by Kami Garcia, LLC, and Margaret Stohl, Inc.  
Excerpt from *Icons* copyright © 2013 by Margaret Stohl, Inc.  
Excerpt from *Unbreakable* copyright © 2013 by Kami Garcia, LLC.

All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property. If you would like to use material from the book (other than for review purposes), prior written permission must be obtained by contacting the publisher at [permissions@hbgusa.com](mailto:permissions@hbgusa.com). Thank you for your support of the author's rights.

Little, Brown and Company

Hachette Book Group  
1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104  
Visit us at [lb-teens.com](http://lb-teens.com)

Little, Brown and Company is a division of Hachette Book Group, Inc.  
The Little, Brown name and logo are trademarks of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

First Edition: May 2015  
First International Edition: May 2015

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Garcia, Kami.

Dangerous deception / by Kami Garcia & Margaret Stohl. — First edition. First international edition.

pages cm. — (Dangerous creatures ; book 2)

Summary: "When Ridley goes missing after a car crash, Link, his bandmates, and Lennox Gates, joined by Liv and John Breed, embark on a search for the Siren, taking them to Mississippi, where they encounter legendary blues guitarist Robert Johnson, and then to New Orleans, where an evil threatens to destroy them all."— Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-316-37034-9 (hardcover) — ISBN 978-0-316-38363-9 (international) — ISBN 978-0-316-37033-2 (ebook) — ISBN 978-0-316-37082-0 (library edition ebook) [1. Sirens (Mythology)—Fiction. 2. Rock groups—Fiction. 3. Good and evil—Fiction.] I. Stohl, Margaret. II. Title.

PZ7.G155627Dar 2015

[Fic]—dc23 2014030361

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

RRD-C

Printed in the United States of America