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Poison Princess (The Arcana Chronicles Book 1)

By Kresley Cole



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#1 New York Times bestselling author Kresley Cole introduces The Arcana Chronicles, post-apocalyptic tales filled with riveting action, the dark mysticism of Tarot cards, and breathtaking romance.

She could save the world—or destroy it.

Sixteen year old Evangeline “Evie” Greene leads a charmed life—until she begins experiencing horrifying hallucinations. When an apocalyptic event decimates her Louisiana hometown, killing everyone she loves, Evie realizes her hallucinations were actually visions of the future—and they’re still happening. Fighting for her life and desperate for answers, she must turn to her wrong-side-of-the-bayou classmate: Jack Deveaux.

But she can’t do either alone.

With his mile-long rap sheet, wicked grin, and bad attitude, Jack is like no boy Evie has ever known. Even though he once scorned her and everything she represented, he agrees to protect Evie on her quest. She knows she can’t totally trust Jack. If he ever cast that wicked grin her way, could she possibly resist him?

Who can Evie trust?

As Jack and Evie race to find the source of her visions, they meet others who have gotten the same call. An ancient prophesy is being played out, and Evie is not the only one with special powers. A group of teens has been chosen to reenact the ultimate battle between good and evil. But it’s not always clear who is on which side...

In *Poison Princess*, *New York Times* bestselling author Kresley Cole introduces a dark and intriguing world, full of unspeakable danger and irresistible romance.



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Editorial Review

Review

"The prose crackles with energy and interest, the content is on target in terms of current demand, and this could be the next Twilight." *Booklist*

About the Author

Kresley Cole is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the electrifying Immortals After Dark paranormal series, the young adult Arcana Chronicles series, the erotic Game Makers series, and five award-winning historical romances. A master's grad and former athlete, she has traveled over much of the world and draws from those experiences to create her memorable characters and settings. You can learn more about her and her work at KresleyCole.com or [Facebook.com/KresleyCole](https://www.facebook.com/KresleyCole). Sign up for Kresley's email newsletter to receive the latest book release updates, as well as info about contests and giveaways (KresleyCole.com/Newsletter).

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DAY 6 B.F.

STERLING, LOUISIANA

"How are you feeling?" Mom asked with an appraising eye. "You sure you're up for this?"

I finished my hair, pasted on a smile, and lied through my teeth, "Definitely." Though we'd been over this, I patiently said, "The docs told me that settling back into a normal routine might be good for someone like me." Well, at least three out of my five shrinks had.

The other two insisted that I was still unstable. A loaded gun. Trouble with the possibility of rubble.

"I just need to get back to school, around all my friends."

Whenever I quoted shrinks to her, Mom relaxed somewhat, as if it was proof that I'd actually listened to them.

I could remember a lot of what the docs said—because they'd made me forget so much of my life before the clinic.

With her hands clasped behind her back, Mom began strolling around my room, her gaze flickering over my belongings—a pretty, blond Sherlock Holmes sniffing for any secrets she didn't yet know.

She'd find nothing; I'd already hidden my contraband in my book bag.

"Did you have a nightmare last night?"

Had she heard me shoot upright with a cry? "Nope."

"When you were catching up with your friends, did you confide to anyone where you really were?"

Mom and I had told everyone that I'd gone to a special school for "deportment." After all, you can't prep a

daughter too early for those competitive sororities in the South.

In reality, I'd been locked up at the Children's Learning Center, a behavioral clinic for kids. Also known as Child's Last Chance.

"I haven't told *anyone* about CLC," I said, horrified by the idea of my friends, or my boyfriend, finding out.

Especially not him. Brandon Radcliffe. With his hazel eyes, movie-star grin, and curling light-brown hair.

"Good. It's our business only." She paused before my room's big wall mural, tilting her head uneasily. Instead of a nice watercolor or a retro-funk design, I'd painted an eerie landscape of tangled vines, looming oaks, and darkening skies descending over hills of cane. I knew she'd considered painting over the mural but feared I'd reach my limit and mutiny.

"Have you taken your medicine this morning?"

"Like I always do, Mom." Though I couldn't say my bitter little pills had done much for my nightmares, they did stave off the delusions that had plagued me last spring.

Those terrifying hallucinations had been so lifelike, leaving me temporarily blinded to the world around me. I'd barely completed my sophomore year, brazening out the visions, training myself to act like nothing was wrong.

In one of those delusions, I'd seen flames blazing across a night sky. Beneath the waves of fire, fleeing rats and serpents had roiled over Haven's front lawn, until the ground looked like it was rippling.

In another, the sun had shone—at night—searing people's eyes till they ran with pus, mutating their bodies and rotting their brains. They became zombielike blood drinkers, with skin that looked like crinkled paper bags and oozed a rancid slime. I called them *bogeymen*. . . .

My short-term goal was simple: Don't get exiled back to CLC. My long-term goal was a bit more challenging: Survive the rest of high school so I could escape to college.

"And you and Brandon are still an item?" Mom almost sounded disbelieving, as if she didn't understand why he would still be going out with me after my three-month absence.

"He'll be here soon," I said in an insistent tone. Now she'd gotten me nervous.

No, no. All summer, he'd faithfully texted me, though I'd only been allowed to respond twice a month. And ever since my return last week, he'd been wonderful—my cheerful, smiling boyfriend bringing me flowers and taking me to movies.

"I like Brandon. He's such a good boy." At last, Mom concluded this morning's interrogation. "I'm glad you're back, honey. It's been so quiet around Haven without you."

Quiet? I yearned to say, "Really, Karen? You know what's worse than quiet? Fluorescent bulbs crackling twenty-four hours a day in the center. Or maybe the sound of my cutter roommate weeping as she attacked her thigh with a spork? How about disconnected laughter with no punch line?"

But then, that last one had been me.

In the end, I said nothing about the center. *Just two years and out.*

“Mom, I’ve got a big day.” I shouldered my backpack. “And I want to be outside when Brand shows.” I’d already made him wait for me all summer.

“Oh, of course.” She shadowed me down the grand staircase, our steps echoing in unison. At the door, she tucked my hair behind my ears and gave me a kiss on my forehead, as if I were a little girl. “Your shampoo smells nice—might have to borrow some.”

“Sure.” I forced another smile, then walked outside. The foggy air was so still—as if the earth had exhaled but forgotten to inhale once more.

I descended the front steps, then turned to gaze at the imposing home I’d missed so much.

Haven House was a grand twenty-two-room mansion, fronted by twelve stately columns. Its colors—wood siding of the lightest cream, hurricane shutters of the darkest forest green—had remained unchanged since it’d originally been built for my great-great-great-grandmother.

Twelve massive oak trees encircled the structure, their sprawling limbs grown together in places, like hundred-ton hydras trapping prey.

The locals thought Haven House looked haunted. Seeing the place bathed in fog, I had to admit that was fair.

As I waited, I meandered across the front lawn to a nearby cane row, leaning in to smell a purple stalk. Crisp but sweet. One of the feathery green leaves was curled so that it looked like it was embracing my hand. That made me smile.

“You’ll get rain soon,” I murmured, hoping Sterling’s drought would finally end.

My smile deepened when I saw a sleek Porsche convertible speeding down our oystershell drive, a blur of red.

Brandon. He was the most enviable catch in our parish. Senior. Quarterback. Rich. The trifecta of boyfriends.

When he pulled up, I opened the passenger door with a grin. “Hey, big guy.”

But he frowned. “You look . . . tired.”

“I didn’t get to bed till late,” I replied, darting a glance over my shoulder as I tossed my bag into the minuscule backseat. When the kitchen curtain fluttered to the side, I just stopped myself from rolling my eyes. *Two years and out . . .*

“You feeling okay?” His gaze was filled with concern. “We can pick up some coffee on the way.”

I shut the door behind me. “Sure. Whatever.” He hadn’t complimented me on my hair or outfit—my Chloé baby-blue sleeveless dress with the hem no more than four regulation inches above the knee, the silky black

ribbon that held my hair back in a curling ponytail, my matching black Miu Miu ankle-wrap heels.

My diamond earrings and Patek Philippe wristwatch served as my only jewelry.

I'd spent weeks planning this outfit, two days in Atlanta acquiring it, and the last hour convincing myself I'd never looked better.

He hiked his wide shoulders, the matter forgotten, then peeled down Haven's drive, tires spitting up an arc of shell fragments as we zoomed past acre after acre of cane.

Once we'd reached the highway, a seamed and worn-out stretch of old Louisiana road, he said, "You're so quiet this morning."

"I had weird dreams last night." Nightmares. Nothing new there.

Without fail, my good dreams were filled with plants. I'd see ivy and roses growing before my eyes or crops sprouting all around me.

But lately in my nightmares, a crazed redheaded woman with gleaming green eyes used those same plants to . . . hurt people, in grisly ways. When her victims begged for mercy, she would cackle with delight.

She was cloaked and partially hooded, so I couldn't make out all of her face, but she had pale skin and green ivylike tattoos running down both her cheeks. Her wild red hair was strewn with leaves.

I called her the red witch. "Sorry," I said with a shiver. "They kind of put me in a funk."

"Oh." His demeanor told me he felt way out of his depth. I'd once asked him if he had nightmares, and he'd looked at me blankly, unable to remember one.

That was the thing about Brandon—he was the most happy-go-lucky boy I'd ever met. Though he was built like a bear—or a pro football player—his temperament was more adoring canine than grizzly.

Secretly, I put a lot of store in him, hoping his normal could drag me back from my wasteland-visions brink. Which was why I'd fretted about him finding another girl and breaking up with me while I was locked up at CLC.

Now it seemed like at least one thing was going to work out. Brandon had stayed true to me. With every mile we drove away from Haven, the sun shone brighter and brighter, the fog lifting.

"Well, I know how to put my girl in a good mood." He gave me his mischievous grin.

I was helpless not to be charmed. "Oh, yeah, big guy? How's that?"

He pulled off the road under the shade of a pecan tree, tires popping the fallen pecans. After waiting for the dust to pass us, he pressed a button and put down the convertible top. "How fast you wanna go, Eves?"

Few things exhilarated me more than flying down the highway with the top down. For about a nanosecond I considered how to repair the utter loss of my hairstyling—*braid a loose fishtail over your shoulder*—then told him, "Kick her in the guts."

He peeled out, the engine purring with power. Hands raised, I threw my head back and yelled, “Faster!”

At each gear, he redlined before shifting, until the car stretched her legs. As houses whizzed past, I laughed with delight.

The months before were a dim memory compared to this—the sun, the wind, Brandon sliding me excited grins. He was right; this was just what I needed.

Leave it to my teddy bear of a football player to make me feel carefree and sane again.

And didn’t that deserve a kiss?

Unbuckling my seat belt, I clambered up on my knees, tugging my dress up a couple of inches so I could lean over to him. I pressed my lips against the smooth-shaven skin of his cheek. “Just what the doctor ordered, Brand.”

“You know it!”

I kissed his broad jaw, then—as my experienced best friend Melissa had instructed—I nuzzled his ear, letting him feel my breath.

“Ah, Evie,” he rasped. “You drive me crazy, you know that?”

I was getting an idea. I knew I played with fire, teasing him like this. He’d already been reminding me of a promise I’d made right before I left for *deportment school*: If we were still going out when I turned sixteen (I was a *young* junior), I would play my V card. My birthday was next Monday—

“What the hell does that guy want?” he suddenly exclaimed.

I drew my head back from Brandon, saw he was glancing past me. I darted a look back, and my stomach plummeted.

A guy on a motorcycle had pulled up right next to us, keeping pace with the car, checking me out. His helmet had a tinted visor so I couldn’t see his face, but I knew he was staring at my ass.

First instinct? Drop my butt in the seat, willing my body to disappear into the upholstery. Second instinct? Stay where I was and glare at the pervert. This was *my* morning, my laughter, my fast drive in my boyfriend’s luxury sports car.

After a summer spent in a fluorescent hell, I *deserved* this morning.

When I twisted around to glare over my shoulder, I saw the guy’s helmet had dipped, attention definitely on my ass. Then he slowly raised his head, as if he was raking his gaze over every inch of me.

It felt like hours passed before he reached my eyes. I tugged my hair off my face, and we stared at each other for so long that I wondered when he was going to run off the road.

Then he gave me a curt nod and sped past us, expertly dodging a pothole. Two more motorcycles followed, each carrying two people. They honked and cheered, while Brandon’s face turned as red as his car.

I consoled myself with the knowledge that I'd probably never have to see them again.

Users Review

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James Roberts:

Playing with family in the park, coming to see the marine world or hanging out with friends is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, and then why you don't try point that really opposite from that. Just one activity that make you not sensation tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you are ride on and with addition of information. Even you love Poison Princess (The Arcana Chronicles Book 1), it is possible to enjoy both. It is excellent combination right, you still desire to miss it? What kind of hang type is it? Oh can happen its mind hangout folks. What? Still don't obtain it, oh come on its identified as reading friends.

Raymond Crandall:

Is it anyone who having spare time subsequently spend it whole day simply by watching television programs or just laying on the bed? Do you need something new? This Poison Princess (The Arcana Chronicles Book 1) can be the reply, oh how comes? It's a book you know. You are consequently out of date, spending your time by reading in this new era is common not a nerd activity. So what these books have than the others?

Donald Shelton:

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