

Gargoyles 1: Gargoyle's Quest

Nia Foxx

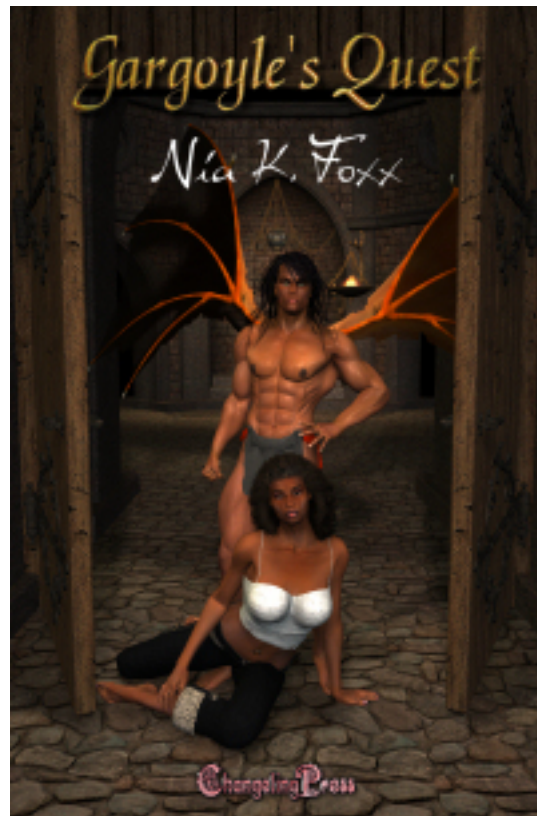
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Prologue

In the pre-dawn hours, a group of women on horseback galloped along the Franco shore-side, casting cautious eyes to the lightening sky above.

They were a small group, just under twenty, but Laurel knew that Fledglings throughout the known world were gathering this morn with the same agenda. "Hurry!" she shouted to the others behind her, raising her voice to be heard over the sound of waves crashing on the rocks below.

"There!" Laurel yelled, pointing to a barely visible outcropping of rocks. "In there lies our salvation. Leave the horses. They will be safe." She knew the animals would eventually return to the lush accommodation of their stables but by then it would be too late for anyone to stop the women.

She dismounted her horse with the ease of an experienced rider, urging all the women up the unmarked path. Inhaling deeply she took in the salty sea air that mingled with the fresh musk of early morning. She was the last to enter the mouth of the dimly lit cave where the women huddled in its tight confines, each contemplating what would come next.

"I am glad to see you all here on such a momentous occasion. I know you all well, as I was there the day each of you crossed over." Laurel looked into each shadowed face like a loving mother to her young. "I have lived on this earth for many years, more than I care to recall, but this is the first time in a long while I have felt so alive."

"Madame," a young soft-spoken unmated Fledgling began, "perhaps there is some other way."

Remembering her sons and mate of over three hundred years, she felt a twinge of sorrow. "My dear, I wish there was another option. I have spent many years trying to

convince the Council that we are distressed over the state of things, but none will listen, not even my beloved husband. They will not even acknowledge that their new policies have yet to produce new Protectors and are pitting gargoyles against each other."

The women let out a long collective sigh over the truth of her statement. There was no other alternative.

Already the town's people shunned the Fledglings, treating the women worse than the lowest of God's creatures any time a Fledgling was caught without a Protector at her side. Laurel had experienced the loathing firsthand from descendants of her own family. She'd taken to disguising her un-aging beauty by swathing herself in drab peasant clothes for her secret visits. For generations she'd mingled with the offspring of her siblings, taking pride in their growth and development.

In the Fledgling pact, Protectors agreed to provide monetary compensation to their mate's families. As a result, her clan had become wealthy beyond her own imaginings with many holdings countrywide.

Her last visit, some thirty years earlier, was met with comments like "demon spawner" and "demon whore." She'd been stunned when the words were hurled at her from one of her favorite great-nephew's progeny. She'd watched the young man, like the rest of her clan, grow, had acted as a midwife in his birth. She'd paid him particular favor, allowing him visits to her keep to play with her own sons. Hearing the words spew from the mouth of her aging kin was nearly her undoing.

Over the years she'd noticed the shift in how she was accepted by her family, her clan's open door policy coming to a slamming halt. She wasn't the only one feeling the effects. Other Fledglings confided in her about their own unfavorable experiences. The trend turned into an underground movement that began to spread like wildfire. Rumors surfaced about random incidents of infanticide and young Fledglings being secreted away to convents. The hearsay became substantiated over the years with the declining number of Fledglings brought for the annual Mate Choosing ceremonies. There were also discoveries of Fledglings whose families had their daughters pass as the "unmarked" rather than see them mated to Protectors.

It was in this rebellious atmosphere that the Council of the Protectors began changing their policies on Fledgling mate selections. The once very public and highly celebrated events became secret ceremonies that excluded even the relatives of the Fledglings. The Council began seeking out young women before the age of puberty, offering the families a king's ransom for the coveted females who were necessary in continuing their race. Once acquired, the Fledglings were not permitted to visit their kin, ensuring that the budding women became completely immersed in their new lives.

Laurel and the few other older Fledglings reluctantly accepted the new policies, understanding that precautions had to be taken in an environment where people questioned the necessity of Protectors. It was the Council's more recent policy that sent them into a panic. Increasing numbers of Protectors began complaining about the waning number of women, concerned about what this would mean for the future propagation of their species and their very lives.

In an almost unanimous vote, it was decided that Fledglings would stay with their chosen mates for a twenty-year period to provide offspring. After the appointed time, and regardless of the number or age of the children produced, the Fledgling would be given to a new Protector. This was to continue until she was beyond birthing years. In theory, it could mean several centuries of exchanging.

In the years to follow, Laurel, beyond childbearing years, watched as the women were traded like chattel. Fledglings began to run away, some trying to reintegrate with their human families, others attempting to escape to foreign lands where they hoped not to be recognized by their extreme beauty and sensuality. Their exodus was to no avail. They were easily captured by Protectors.

Laurel could not sit back in her secure status and watch the degradation of the Fledglings any longer. She knew that she must do something drastic to protect the women from both humans and Protectors. She had to find a way to give them control of their own destinies in a world where they'd become an expendable bartering tool for poor families and broodmares for their temporary mates.

She had planned their liberation for over a year -- it had taken that long to

convince the women her plot could succeed. Soon she and her sisters would be free from humans and Protectors alike.

Chapter 1

Fatima fingered the dull ache just above her breastbone for the umpteenth time that evening. *What's wrong with me?* She risked another glance at the stranger who'd entered the already crowded conference room just moments earlier. The dull ache on her chest turned to a deep throbbing.

The man literally stood head and shoulders above the rest. She estimated that he had to be 6' 7", if not taller. He was smartly dressed in dark slacks, matching collarless shirt and tan blazer. She hadn't had a chance for a closer look, but even from her vantage point she could tell he was attractive. She wondered what university he was with. She was certain that she'd never seen him at any other of the Myths, Legends and Folklore conferences before. She blushed, turning her head quickly when he caught her observing him. At least she thought he'd caught her. From that distance he could've been looking at anyone in her general direction.

"Dr. Smith, I'm looking forward to hearing your lecture on gargoyles tonight," the mousy young man in front of Fatima was saying. He'd been talking for five minutes and she could honestly admit to only hearing a portion of what he'd uttered.

"I had the opportunity to read your article in *Mythology Today* and was very intrigued by your theories on the origins of gargoyles. Your supporting material is some of the best I've seen," he continued.

She tried again to focus on what the young grad student was talking about, but found herself glancing sideways at the giant across the room.

You're here for the conference, to present your findings to fellow students of mythology. "Thank you," she responded appropriately as the man continued to lay it on.

"Excuse me," the voice of her colleague, Professor Gordy Singleton, interrupted. He'd attained his tenured status a few years earlier, and Fatima had aligned herself

with the budding professor after discovering his interest in Gothic folklore.

"They're ready to start seating everyone, and I want to make sure that we're in our places before you're called up for your presentation," he explained.

"Of course, Gordy," Fatima placated, not wanting to experience one of his "high stress" episodes.

"Please excuse me," she apologized to the student as Gordy took a gentle hold of her exposed elbow. His hand felt cold and clammy against her bare skin. She looked down to where their flesh connected, noting the drastic contrast between her almost espresso coloring and his own alabaster fingers.

Over their two-year acquaintance she'd become accustomed to the various peculiarities of his appearance like the perpetual sheen that coated his skin, giving his face an unhealthy glow, and the stringy ill-kempt hair that seemed perpetually plastered to his forehead. His features were delicate, reminding her of a teen on the cusp of manhood. Piercing sky blue eyes were his only redeeming physical quality, but they were perpetually hidden behind oversized spectacles. Gordy seemed to care little about his outward appearance, as he did nothing in the way of improvement.

"Stop worrying. I'm sure things won't start for several minutes," she reassured him quietly.

"I know," he muttered, "but I thought I'd save you from your ever growing fan club." He motioned with his head to the young man they'd abruptly left behind.

"He was just being polite," Fatima explained before wondering why she was even bothering.

"I swear sometimes you are completely oblivious to male/female social cues," he admonished.

She groaned aloud. "Not again."

"What." His look was innocent.

"You know there are actually people who support and believe in my work out there." She hated having to rehash this with him. Over the last two years they'd worked together Gordy had become increasingly protective of her. Why? She wasn't sure; she'd

never given him any indication that she wanted anything other than a professional relationship. If he kept this jealous lover act up she would sever their working ties completely.

"Of course there are," he offered, "it's just that --"

"Don't, Gordy," she interrupted, slipping her elbow from his grasp, determined not to let him dampen her mood. She was one of three speakers in this evening's segment on Gothic folklore. She'd felt honored when the committee approached her about the opportunity seven months ago. As the only associate professor speaking, she felt the need to prove herself worthy of the privilege bestowed, and was determined that Gordy wasn't going to ruin her night with his unwarranted possessiveness.

Gordy resisted the desire to maintain his hold on her, reminding himself that there were still three days left in the conference. Enough time for him to move beyond the position of co-worker that she'd relegated him to for so long. After all, he'd waited patiently until she came into her own, not wanting to start a relationship with some pseudo-professor. No, Fatima was not just a pretty face. She was well on her way to becoming an authority on Gothic folklore. What more could he want in a woman?

He allowed her to take the lead, letting his gaze linger on her firm well-rounded backside swaying seductively in loose fitting slacks. She wore a pink silk top that clung to her slight waist, accentuating perfectly rounded breasts. He could feel the thickening of his cock as he thought about taking what he was sure to be dusky nipples in his mouth. Something caught her attention, causing her to turn her head. He was gifted with the perfection of her profile.

Her pink tongue darted out over full lips and his eyes lingered for a moment as he thought of how those lips would taste, better still how they would look around his pink cock, swallowing him slowly. He imagined those whiskey colored eyes looking up at him with desire. He gave his head a mental shake, dislodging the image that had assisted in many nights of masturbation.

* * *

Lorn ignored the voluptuous catering assistant as she made what had to be her

twentieth pass in front of him. Normally, he would have found her obvious flirtation amusing, but tonight he was on a mission. He'd followed various literary works on gargoyle mythology over the centuries hoping that somewhere a scholar could discover that vital piece of the puzzle he and his kind managed to overlook. Fledglings were the missing variable. The question remained did they still exist?

From across the room his eyes zoomed in on the young woman whose recent research on gargoyle origins had fascinated him above any others. She looked even more beautiful in person than the picture his private investigator had supplied. He'd expected to find a studious face framed by owlsh glasses, complete with a severe bun or some other form of disguise modern day career women used to downplay their looks. Instead, he discovered a woman who could just as easily given any Miss America a run for her money.

The photo he had was taken while she chatted with a group of students in a coffeehouse. Oblivious to the photographer, the woman had been caught laughing over something said, her dark eyes rounded in surprise, teeth gleaming, while her hand clutched her chest. Lorn remembered searching the picture wondering who was responsible for the reaction. Unlike tonight, her thick shoulder length hair had hung loosely about her face, its dark tresses gleaming in the light.

He was surprised at the primal way his body responded to her picture. The more he studied her image the more aroused he became until he finally tossed the photo aside, cursing his body's reaction. He'd wondered if he was so far gone that he was beginning to lose control over his sexual functions. He'd heard of that happening to one of his brethren before the change finally claimed him. The gargoyle had said that his sexual drive was the only thing that provided sanity, emotion and a sense of connection to the world, while his heart became a stoned metaphor for his eventual transformation.

Now standing in the bustling conference room Lorn found his cock stiffening again as it had when he first saw the photo of Dr. Fatima Smith. She talked with a modern day Poindexter, then with a man who seemed a tad too familiar. Lorn found himself grinding his teeth in an effort to keep his incisors from lengthening. Who was

this man and why was he touching her?

In spite of Gordy's overprotective behavior, Fatima found herself enjoying the speakers who presented before her. This was like a dream come true, detailing her research to a group of respected colleagues and aspiring students.

"... presenting her work tonight on Gargoyles in Antiquity, please join me in welcoming a woman that we will be hearing a lot more from in the future, Dr. Fatima Smith."

Fatima smiled graciously as she made her way to the podium, her unpublished paper on gargoyles secured under her arm like the Holy Grail.

"Good evening. First let me start by thanking you all for your gracious welcome. I am honored to be presenting my paper here tonight," she began, ignoring the dull ache on her chest. "When we think of gargoyles, images of water spouts or stone figures that adorn the cathedral of Notre-Dame immediately come to mind. However, indulge me if you will, in thinking of gargoyles not as statues but living breathing creatures that roamed the earth thousands of years ago. These noble giants lived, mated and built communities having their own form of government and social order..."

Lorn couldn't believe what he was hearing as he leaned in closer from his seat at an isolated table. "They were a magnificent race of beings, superior to man in every way, dependent on no one but themselves except for the very continuance of their race..."

His ears tuned into every word she said, turning over each syllable. *Where had she gotten her information?*

"... human females being given to these beings as brides in exchange for protection from enemies, wealth and prosperity. Imagine if you will a complete system of interdependence," she emphasized, intertwining her fingers. "Now that you have that picture in your minds, can visualize these splendid creatures, let's come back to

reality and talk about gargoyles in antiquity." She smiled at her captured audience, her eyes darting throughout the room until they landed on the well-dressed giant who now sat in the shadows of a corner table as if trying to remain inconspicuous.

Fat chance, she thought to herself. The throbbing on her chest intensified as she began to speak, momentarily unable to draw her gaze away.

Fatima concluded her presentation, inviting others to take a closer look at gargoyles. There were a few seconds of silence before the deafening thunder of applause filled the room. Curious to see if the giant had the same reaction, she looked eagerly to the table he occupied. Disappointment set in when she realized he'd already gone.

"Fantastic!" Gordy exclaimed as she re-took her seat next to him. "Absolutely brilliant," he gushed, not at all surprised that he actually meant it. Her presentation only reaffirmed what he'd been thinking over the past few months. He had to have her.

Chapter 2

Exhausted, Fatima was eager to return to her hotel room for a quiet evening. She looked forward to a long soak in the tub with her latest John Grisham novel. What better way to end an event-filled day?

"You can't be serious?" Gordy asked incredulously.

"As a heart attack. I'm not much of a night owl anyway," she found herself explaining.

"But I've already promised some of the other UC professors that we would join them for a nightcap."

"Perhaps you should have checked with me first." She tried to hide her annoyance.

"I just assumed you would want to celebrate your success."

If he'd known her at all he would have realized that she'd never been a praise seeker, had never needed to be. "You go ahead," she urged. "Trust me. I wouldn't be good company anyway."

"Suit yourself." He shrugged nonchalantly, although his body language spoke volumes.

Fatima shook her head at his retreating back, not feeling the smallest bit of remorse for shooting down his high-handed assumption. Perhaps now he would get the hint that he couldn't take liberties with her. On a sigh she turned, wanting to make her exit before anyone else got the notion to stop her.

She barely had a chance to register the dull ache again before she slammed into the hard surface of a wall. *A warm wall*, she thought as she raised her hands to push away from the obstruction that hadn't been there a moment ago. She stared at the synthetic cloth that greeted her, gradually regaining her composure as her eyes traveled

upward, and further still until she was looking at a chin chiseled from granite.

"Oh." The sound escaped as long, strong fingers easily encircled her wrist. "I'm sorry." She managed to take a half step back, which was as far as the giant permitted.

"You!" came out in a croak as she took in the traffic-stopping face of the man she'd been drawn to earlier. Her heart skipped a beat. Never had she seen a man so perfectly put together. To describe him as handsome would be an understatement. He had a Marlboro-Man-meets-Hercules quality about him. He was rugged without looking hardened, possessing the presence of a man accustomed to getting what he wanted, and right now all of his attention was directed at her.

Up close he was breathtaking, she mused. His full arrogant mouth set in a firm line as he quietly considered her. Fatima continued her assessment, swallowing a second gasp when she reached eyes the color of a rain forest after a fresh downpour.

"Do you know me?" He peered through the questioning emerald pools.

"Yes... I mean no," she answered breathlessly. "That is, I noticed you earlier."

"You mean when you were staring at me across the room."

"I wouldn't exactly call it staring," she babbled, embarrassed that she'd been so obvious. "It's just that I didn't remember seeing you at any of the previous events." At his silence she rationalized, "And you do stand out."

"How so?" he asked, arching a dark brow quizzically.

She knew she was rambling but couldn't stop herself. "I shouldn't have said that," she apologized. What if he were self-conscious about his height? She'd always hated being the tallest girl in school, wishing for a more petite frame. The throbbing on her chest seemed to radiate through her entire body.

"Excuse me. It's late and I've had a very busy day." She tried to pull away but couldn't.

"The night has just begun." From him it sounded like a promise, an invitation of spectacular things to come. She was being foolish, she knew, but his lightly accented words conjured images that were best left for the privacy of her room.

"I was fascinated by your presentation." He switched gears, pulling her thoughts

away from the naughty direction they'd deviated to momentarily.

"Fascinated?"

"Yes, by your theories on human and gargoyle dynamics." He answered easy enough, but there was something more in his eyes. Wow, those eyes! Perhaps emerald wasn't the correct description for their odd coloring.

"Oh that." She smiled nervously, wanting to sever the contact he maintained. Maybe then she could get her pulsing body under control. "It was more for dramatic effect than fact. There really is no basis for that supposition."

Except in those oh so erotic dreams that had plagued her for years. She'd never confided in anyone about her subconscious fantasies with one of the fierce looking creatures. The delicious things he did to her body had her climaxing so hard that in the morning there was no denying the evidence of her sinfully erotic dreams.

"And what if I told you there were?"

"Well, then there is some oceanfront property in Kentucky that I'd like to sell you," she responded lightly, despite the fact that he maintained a hold on her.

This man couldn't really believe in the existence of gargoyles. *God, why do all the handsome ones have to be defective*, she wondered to herself.

"What if I were able to provide you with evidence to support this?" he asked, finally releasing her wrist as if realizing he no longer needed the physical restraint.

"And where would this documentation be?" she humored, feeling a momentary sense of loss.

"Stored in my family's vaults," he replied, his eyes fixed on the depths of her amber ones. The excitement that began bubbling inside her at the possibility briefly overpowering the instant physical attraction she felt for him.

"You know the items would have to be authenticated?" she warned.

"Of course."

"Assuming that they are authentic, why is this the first time anyone has ever heard anything about them?"

"Up until recently my family has only been interested in the preservation of

these materials."

"And now?" she asked. This couldn't be true. Gargoyles only existed in fables and her fantasies.

"We are interested in an exchange of information."

"Well, since you're the only one claiming to have actual documents proclaiming the existence of gargoyles, I'm not sure how much of an exchange anyone could provide."

"We will grant you full access to our materials in exchange for your time and scientific know-how."

"Look, I'm not sure who you are, but this isn't funny." She wanted to walk away but couldn't will her legs to obey. "Anyone in their right mind with that kind of evidence could make a fortune. Why seek out an associate professor for this assignment?"

"I already have plenty of money. What I need is information and I believe you're just the person to help me," he stated.

"Help you how? If your documents are authentic --"

"I'd also require your services," he paused before adding, "as a cellular biologist."

Why did she get the feeling that he was suggesting more mutually gratifying ways of being serviced? "Cellular biology." She lowered her voice. "That isn't my specialty any longer." She was surprised that he knew that bit of information. Her work in medical science seemed like a lifetime ago. Today, most people knew her from her work in mythology and folklore, with no idea she'd studied microbiology or received an MD in the field of cellular biology.

In her current position she'd tried to keep her Doogie Howser-esque background out of the forefront. Prior to accepting her teaching post at UCSC she'd asked that her work in microbiology not be listed amongst her credentials. While most would have been proud of an IQ that nearly soared off the charts, Fatima didn't want the attention her genius status brought her or the reminder of her past and the parents she still

missed dearly.

"From my understanding you are one of the best," the giant continued.

Real life gargoyles. She briefly toyed with the idea. Logic dictated that he was off his rocker, while science decreed when you eliminate the impossible, what remains, however improbable, can only be the truth. If his documents were indeed genuine that could only mean one thing.

Lorn watched as she nervously fingered a spot above her breastbone. She'd absently touched the same area several times already, drawing his attention to her pert breasts that were concealed by the silky pink material of her blouse. He wondered what the firm globes would taste like in his mouth, how they would respond to his warm tongue.

When he'd first stumbled across her research he couldn't resist the slight tug of hope that possibly she could be a descendant of a gifted family. Disappointment prevailed when the obvious mark of the Fledglings was not visible on the nape of her neck as it had been with his mother and all other gifted women before her. However, the knowledge that she wasn't a potential mate did not reduce his attraction for her. He was certain that there could be many hours of mutual enjoyment shared between him and the good professor, albeit fleeting.

It never took his kind long to tire of "ordinary" females, and he'd certainly had his share of affairs. The short encounters hadn't disturbed him until now. Over the last millennium his acquaintanceships became fewer and far between, a sure sign that like so many before him he was entering the final cycles of life.

It was a simple biological fact that gargoyles, or Protectors as they had come to be called, needed mates to survive. Procreation was essential to the continuance of their species since mated gargoyles typically produced one or two heirs over their lifetime. Mates were also essential to the very survival of gargoyles because without them their couple-thousand-year lifespan became severely limited. In the final cycles of life, the unmated slowly transformed into the grotesque statues in popular depictions. His kind was on the verge of extinction and his own mother was to blame.

It had been over six hundred years since the mass Fledgling suicides, when the community of Protectors had been torn asunder at their very core. It had taken five hundred of those years and many lives for the community to form some semblance of cohesiveness again.

Now, with the arduous task of reuniting the gargoyles behind him, he could focus his attention on more pressing matters such as the location of Fledglings.

* * *

"This is all very fascinating, but I think I'm a little too old to go chasing after gargoyles and other creatures that go bump in the night." Whoever this guy was, let him go find someone else to pitch his outrageous proposal to.

"Goodbye, Mister..." She paused, not realizing until that point that she didn't even know his name.

"De LaRue, Lorn De LaRue," he supplied, seeming to sense her dilemma. "And I assure you, doctor, that this will not be our last meeting."

You wanna bet, she thought as she huffed off. Even if that meant calling security, she would be sure that she'd had her last conversation with Mr. De LaCrazy.

Fatima was grateful when the elevator opened on her floor. Between Gordy and the giant... what did he say his name was? Lorn, that was it. Well, between the two of them she'd had enough of the male species for one night. Forgoing the long soak she'd craved earlier she opted instead for a quick shower.

Real life gargoyles, she silently ranted as she began pulling clothes from her body, not caring where they fell. Finally free of the fabric she made her way to the surprisingly large bathroom.

What loony bin had he escaped from? She turned on the shower, making sure its settings were on hot. Documents in his family vault indeed. She stood before the misting mirror as she secured her hair underneath a plastic cap. She should have asked him if the family vaults were kept in the east or west wing of chateau De LaCrazy. Smiling at her own thoughts she stepped underneath the sultry spray.

"Whatever," she mumbled. "I don't have time for this nonsense." She closed her

eyes, succumbing to the hard pelting of water. Crazy or not, she couldn't quite shake the vision of him. Lorn De LaRue was one very sexy hunk of maleness. He was handsome in a very rugged way with an old-world feel to him. Very old world, she thought, remembering the long corded ponytail that dipped somewhere between his shoulder blades. Oh and what mighty shoulders they were. She'd never been one to go in for the bodybuilder sort but looking at him had her thinking twice. He wasn't your run of the mill steroid induced type; rather, his body was that of a fine tuned athlete with muscles that called for a woman's touch.

Did they allow weight lifting in mental institutions? She recalled the obvious definition of his chest through the fabric of his shirt. Even his fingers were long and strong, not callused like a man used to physical labor but definitely well defined. She wondered what those fingers would feel like against her breasts. Would he be soft and gentle or would those large hands cup her perfect size Bs with firmness. Definitely firm, she thought, closing her eyes against the fantasy in the making. Yes, his hands would be firm, fingers tweaking her nipples into hardened pebbles. The slow familiar ache began as she pictured them together, his broad hard body behind her own softer form as he massaged her breasts like a man born to conquer. His teeth nipping at the base of her neck increasing until she would cry out half in protest and pleasure. Those fingers would travel down her flat stomach, over her freshly shaven mound seeking until they found the wet treasure betwixt her thighs, one long finger dipping between her dark folds, searching for her clit that throbbed in anticipation of his touch.

Fatima moaned aloud, ashamed that her lust filled thoughts of the stranger had taken such a quick progression, but too turned on to stop. Flipping off the shower's steady jets, she quickly made her way through the bathroom, removing her shower cap and grabbing up a towel to pat dry her overly aroused skin. The feel of the rough cotton material only aided her heightened state. She regretted that she'd left her favorite vibrator at home, but at the time she'd thought that she would be able to control her sexual drive on a four-day trip. Not deterred, she slipped across the thick quilt that covered the queen-sized bed, moving to its center. She wet two of her fingers in her

mouth before letting the moist digits travel down her body while she conjured up the image of the giant named Lorn again.

* * *

For the briefest moment Lorn thought his eyes were playing tricks on him. He'd followed her sweet musky scent to the twentieth floor, settling on the balcony outside her room like a voyeur, hoping for the slightest glimpse of her. What he got was enough to send the blood rushing to his penis.

He stood in the shadows watching through the thinly parted curtains as she stretched naked across the hotel bed, crawling to its center. Her deep dark skin looked edible displayed on the golden coverlet. She didn't hesitate in her rough exploration of her breasts, using both her hands to massage and tweak the dark nipples into firm attention. She arched her back, throwing her head back at the sensations her ministrations had caused. His acute ears picked up on her low aroused moan through the thin glass of the windows.

Dear God, he thought. In his gargoyle form he wasn't hampered by the restraints of clothing, which allowed his aroused cock to strain freely in the night air like a beacon. Firm fingers wrapped around his engorged member as he began a slow masturbation, unable to remove his eyes from the unaware ebony-complexioned woman.

One hand slid from her breast down the length of her torso, stretching further until it skimmed her dark folds. Not wanting to prolong the torture, she spread her lips apart allowing her more access to her pink nubbin.

"Oohhh yes," she moaned softly as if encouraging a lover.

Lorn gasped, his hand increasing its up and down pace over his hard flesh. He wasn't sure how he resisted the urge to rip the sliding doors off their track and join her on the bed. There was no reason why she should be alone when there was a granite cock more than eager and willing to fuck her until she couldn't take any more.

"Faster," she mumbled and he watched as her digits complied, adjusting their rhythm to match her thrusting hips.

"Yes," Lorn found himself responding. Her movements became urgent and he knew that the friction caused by her fingers was bringing her closer to the precipice. She suddenly went still, thrusting her pelvis skyward, her toes curling into the covers.

"Looorrrrrnnnn," she called as her climax hit her full force.

"Oh yes, baby." He found his own release as he heard her call out his name, his seed erupting from him into the night air and over his fingers in warm spurts. His body shuddered as he milked the last of the fluid from his still hard penis. He stood transfixed, watching as she relaxed, sated from her orgasm. She looked innocent and serene rolling on her side to stare at him. Well, maybe not at him, but out into the night where unbeknownst to her he watched.

He smiled to himself. Her fantasy lover had been him. This confirmed it. She might not be a Fledgling but she would be his.

Fatima stiffened. Had she seen something outside on the patio? Ridiculous, she dismissed. She was twenty stories up on an isolated side of the hotel overlooking a man-made lake. The only thing out there was probably a poor sleeping pigeon that she'd surely awakened with her orgasm. Well, she'd say one thing for Lorn De LaCrazy, he was a great fictional lover, she thought before her heavy eyelids began to flutter closed. Her last thought was if she would see her beloved gargoyle in her dreams that night.

Fatima came awake slowly. There it was again, a light tapping like a manic woodpecker at her door. "Fatima, are you up?" she heard Gordy's familiar voice call from the other side of the door.

"Go away," she mumbled, trying to cling to the dream she'd been having. Her gargoyle had not disappointed her even after her vivid fantasy. He'd come to her immediately as he'd always done, her regal creature of the night.

"I need to talk to you," he said in a loud whisper.

"I said go away, Gordy," she yelled, pulling a pillow over her head.

Chapter 3

Fatima stared down at her cell phone as it displayed the duration of her last call. Thirty-three minutes and fourteen seconds it flashed. Thirty-three minutes and fourteen seconds was all it had taken for her life to be properly turned upside down.

The day started off great. Her six o'clock wake up call actually came at six, the hotel's gym was virtually empty leaving her a choice of equipment, she'd somehow missed Gordy at breakfast and lunch, plus there was no sign of Mr. De LaCrazy. All in all it was turning out to be a banner day. She was looking forward to an afternoon seminar entitled 'The Anthropology of Folklore,' taught by a female professor who she strongly admired, when her cell buzzed, illuminating the name of Dr. Jeff Hansen, Dean of Anthropology and her boss.

"Hey, Hansen," she answered, a little surprised to be hearing from him. "Did the university burn down?" she quipped.

He chuckled. She liked her boss, an older man in his late fifties who looked more like a friendly old grandpa than the dean of two social science departments.

"No, but I was made aware of a potentially substantial donation to the university with a large stipend to be allotted to Anthro."

"That's great," she answered, but waited to hear how that related to his phone call to her.

"Apparently, a donation in the amount of two million dollars has been pledged."

"Wow," was the most intelligible thing she could think to say.

"Yeah, my thoughts exactly," he replied. She could hear the smile in his voice.

"So what did we do to earn a piece of the pie?"

"Not we, you."

She wasn't sure that she'd heard him correctly. "Me, but... I don't understand."

"Okay, let me start from the beginning. There is a foundation, the COP, or something like that. They seem to be very interested in your research on gargoyle folklore."

"Oh no," Fatima groaned. "Listen, I ran into a whack job yesterday who approached me about the same thing. He's obviously a few cards short of a full deck."

"Well, when you have the kind of financial backing he does it changes the title from whack job to eccentric."

"You mean he could be legit?" She couldn't suppress the disbelief that laced her voice.

"Apparently, the COP is not only legit but their hands reach far and wide."

"And this Lorn De LaRue?"

"He is not only a member, but he happens to be the president," Jeff filled in lightly.

"Great!" *Fucking great.* "So what does he want?" she asked, already knowing the answer.

"You. Or more precisely that beautiful brain of yours."

"Hansen, he thinks gargoyles really exist," she accused in a whisper.

"Then you will just have to prove him wrong."

"How do you prove a given?" she asked.

"I don't know, but you'll have several months to work on it, assuming you take the project." He paused.

"You mean I have a choice?" she asked hopefully.

"Well... in life there are always choices... and consequences."

Fatima didn't really need a billboard to see the writing on the wall. "What about my classes? I can't just drop everything."

The famous Hansen humor returned. "Why not? Indiana Jones did it all the time."

"Yeah, and you see what kind of trouble he got into." She tried to sound light although she felt slightly queasy. "So when are these sacred documents supposed to

arrive?"

"They won't. You'll be going to them."

What! "And where would *this* place be?"

He did his best impression of Bob Barker. "My dear, you're taking an all expense paid trip to France."

* * *

Fatima tried again to focus on what Dr. Leslie Hoffman was saying but her mind just couldn't wrap itself around the subject matter.

According to Dr. Hansen she would be leaving the day after she returned from Michigan.

"There you are," Gordy whispered as he slid into the empty seat next to her.

She nodded her acknowledgment, feigning interest in the topic of discussion.

"About last night." He leaned in close and Fatima could feel his hot breath warming her ear.

"Not now," she returned his hushed tones.

Gordy was silent for several moments before continuing. "Who was that man you were talking to yesterday?"

"What?" She barely registered what he was saying.

"The freakishly tall Neanderthal you were so cozy with." His tone was accusatory.

She sighed. "His name is Lorn De LaRue," she provided, wondering if she should inform him that it probably wouldn't do to insult a wealthy benefactor. She stopped herself, preferring not to broach the topic with Gordy and risk an argument on a subject that was still too unbelievable to her.

"Lorn." He spat the name as if it left a bitter taste on his tongue.

Whatever, she thought, ignoring his reaction. She had more important things to worry about like how the hell was she going to get out of this mess without the university losing their donation and she her job.

* * *

"Fatima." The slightly familiar voice called softly as Lorn seemed to materialize out of nowhere. Her heart flipped at the seductive caress of his tone. They were on a break, which Fatima needed even if it was to be short lived. Gordy was driving her crazy with all his questions about Lorn.

Her breath caught in her throat as she turned to face the man who'd climbed to number one on her shit list. He was impeccably dressed in all black, sporting a fitted mock turtleneck that clung hungrily to his corded muscles. Like before, his long dark hair was pulled into a plaited ponytail that hung down his back.

"We must talk," he continued in his deep accented voice.

"You're absolutely right," she agreed, resisting the urge to give him a piece of her mind in front of everyone that milled about during the recess.

"Fatima," Gordy urgently called as he rushed toward them. "Where are you going?" he asked all the while eyeballing Lorn.

Is it really any of your business? she thought, but instead introduced the men. "Lorn, this is Gordy. Gordy, Lorn."

Gordy mumbled a barely audible hello while Lorn merely nodded. "Are you going somewhere?" Gordy asked again.

"I'll be back in a few minutes," Fatima promised, before turning to leave the crowded conference area.

Lorn followed as she led them through the hotel lobby and outside. She didn't stop until she found a quiet alcove to properly put him straight. "You had no right calling the university. Do you realize how much you'll be disrupting my life? I have classes, not to mention my own research, my friends, and what about my plants?"

"Is this Gordy fellow one of your *friends*?"

"He's a colleague and of course a friend too, not that it's any of your concern." She sounded breathless as she began to touch the spot below her collarbone. "Our university is very excited over your generous gift, but I'm sure that there are others who could better meet your needs."

The look he gave her seemed to say he strongly doubted that.

"And I still have connections at the CDC if you feel that you really want a cellular biologist."

"No. I want you." The finality in his response sent a shiver down her spine.

She was sure he meant to follow the statement with *to do the research*.

"And if I refuse?"

He cocked his head to one side. "We both know that is not an option."

Why did she get the feeling they were not talking about research any longer?

"I have arranged for your passport to be updated," he stated. "My assistant will meet you at the courtesy desk at five forty-five with the necessary paperwork and a camera for your photo."

"You can't just --" She cut off her own protest. Most people couldn't update a passport that way, but the rules were certainly very different for someone who could hand over two million dollars for a fool's errand.

"Afterward we'll have dinner," he continued.

"I don't think so. You may be blackmailing me into participating in this ridiculous wild goose chase but that's where I draw the line."

Lorn regarded her silently before continuing as if she hadn't spoken.

"There's still much that we need to discuss. Unless of course you'd rather forgo the remainder of today's seminars?"

She hated to admit it, but what he said made perfect sense. She would complete her rounds at the conference as she'd previously mapped out in spite of everything.

"Until tonight," he finished as she quietly acquiesced.

* * *

Gordy ambushed her as soon as she re-entered the hall leading to the various conference rooms. "Okay, now will you tell me what the hell is going on?"

She sighed. "You're probably going to hear about it when we get home." He wet his lips as she tucked a lock of raven hair behind an ear. "Mr. De LaRue represents a foundation interested in pursuing more extensive gargoyle research."

"Gargoyles? You're kidding me."

"I wish I were." She exhaled deeply. "Apparently they would like me to head this effort."

"You can't honestly be serious about doing this. You'll be committing career suicide." He was incredulous, his normally pale face taking on a pink hue, blue eyes staring back at her in disbelief.

"I don't have much choice. The university will receive a hefty donation from my participation."

"Why haven't I heard anything about this?"

"Mr. De LaRue approached me yesterday, and when I refused he went over my head. I got the call from Hansen after lunch."

"Surely there's something else you can do to get out of this?"

"I wish there were," she muttered, remembering Lorn's too perfect form. "I wish there were."

* * *

Fatima handed the silent man, who'd identified himself earlier as Mike, the last of her signed paperwork before nervously glancing at her watch.

He slid the items in a manila folder.

"Your passport will be waiting for you at the terminal when you depart for your international flight." He smiled warmly, his blue eyes twinkling.

Maybe if she prayed hard enough it would get lost somewhere in transit.

"I'll be taking you to meet Mr. De LaRue for dinner now, if you're ready," he continued, giving the dress pants and earth-toned blouse she'd changed into a brief once-over.

This is as good as it gets, she thought at the man's quick perusal. She wondered what Lorn had told him about the nature of their meeting. "I'm ready if you are."

Fatima followed behind Mike, speculating how he'd come to work for Lorn De LaRue. His accent appeared American, maybe Midwestern. He was tall, just above six feet, and well formed. He didn't compare to Lorn, but definitely wasn't shabby by anyone's standards. He dressed much in the same fashion of most style-conscious

twenty-something-year-olds, in light colored flared bottom jeans and a snug button up black top sporting the first two and last button undone. For all intents he could have just as easily been a model. She hazarded a guess at what his hair looked like underneath the black knit cap he wore, obscuring most of his ears and hair. Probably one of those forty-dollar unkempt looks that were so popular among hip white guys, she speculated.

She followed him outside to a waiting silver Bentley Continental that sat unharassed at the hotel's main entrance. *Of course*. Fatima rolled her eyes heavenward. Now if her own Toyota Corolla sat there unattended for more than two seconds she would be making arrangements to pick it up at the local impound. She chalked up one more reason to dislike Lorn De LaRue.

Fatima sat in the rear of the luxury car trying to avoid getting too comfortable in the plush seats. The city scenery faded as they left Ann Arbor's borders, giving way to a tree lined rural setting. She watched in awe, admiring the lush fall colors that burst vibrantly from the trees. This was definitely something you missed out in Los Angeles.

After several miles of quiet contemplation the car slowed as it went down a private paved road. Fatima's heart began to pound erratically when she realized they weren't pulling up to a quaint country restaurant but a home... or rather a Tudor style mini-mansion made of red brick. It was beautifully adorned with overgrown ivy that gave it an aged look. Mike came around, helping her out of the back seat and leading her through the home's large foyer into a sitting room.

"Mr. De LaRue will be with you shortly." He smiled and she felt a sense of calm overtake her. Alone, she allowed her eyes to take in the eclectic ensemble of old world furniture. She wasn't surprised that the room was done in dark woods and deep colors; it suited him.

"Your ride was enjoyable?" The rich timbre that could only belong to one man reached her just as Lorn entered the room. His sudden appearance caused her to start. Why hadn't she heard him coming on the hardwood floors?

"Yes, very... thank you," she added as an afterthought.

"Dinner will be ready shortly. In the meantime can I get you something?" He indicated the bar that sat in one corner.

"No, I'm fine," she answered, drinking in every inch of his enormous height. He'd changed into khaki colored slacks and a cream mock turtleneck that enhanced his physique. His normally bound hair hung loosely past his shoulders, which only accentuated his Viking-esque attributes.

The throbbing had begun again, but Fatima was becoming so accustomed to it that the sensation barely bothered her now.

"When you said dinner I thought you meant at a restaurant," she said, trying not to stare at his firm buns as he made his way to the mini-bar.

"Is that what I said?" he asked, pouring amber liquid into a snifter.

"Well no, I just assumed."

"Incorrectly obviously." He took a sip from his drink. "I hope being alone with me doesn't make you uncomfortable. After all, we'll be working very closely together, sharing many meals at my home." Why did his words sound like a warning?

He took a long swallow, emptying the glass in one gulp. Fatima found her eyes drawn to his throat as he drained the contents.

"I live in a very remote town, so the opportunity to dine out will be limited. Our being alone together is something you'll need to quickly come to terms with." He seemed to study her face for her reaction.

"I assure you, Mr. De LaRue, that I am quite capable of handling the research without your supervision," she began. "I'll take the utmost care with your documents and whatever else given to me to analyze."

"I don't doubt that, however I think once again you have misunderstood. My purpose isn't to supervise but to work with you, under you if you will. It has always been my intention to be very hands-on," he answered without annoyance.

She squirmed at the imagery his words conjured up. Had he intended them to sound so suggestive?

"While I'm sure that you're perfectly capable at whatever it is you do,

anthropological research is a very scientific process requiring a skill that not even money can buy," she replied hotly. How dare he assume that he could just barge in on her area of expertise as if it were as simple as reading the morning paper? Granted the items were his, but if she was to maintain any merit in an already laughable endeavor he would need to respect her craft.

"What is it that you assume I do?" he asked, ignoring her diatribe, finally making his way to an unoccupied chair opposite her own.

"What?" Her brows furrowed at the question.

"You make having wealth sound like a crime. So what exactly is it you think I do?"

"I don't know, and personally I don't care --"

"I'm an engineer by education. Through my foundation I dabble in everything from software to architecture, but my passion is anthropology and archeology. I have funded and been a part of many archeological digs. My primary concern on any venture is the preservation of our discoveries. I don't believe that every find should be displayed in a museum, nor do I condone grave robbing. I am a purist if you will."

Fatima felt immediately ashamed. "I... I'm sorry, I didn't know."

"Now you do."

Before she could offer up the apology on the tip of her tongue, a young woman shyly entered the room, her eyes darting between the two. Quietly she announced dinner, waiting until Lorn nodded a dismissive acknowledgement in her direction before leaving.

They sat opposite each other in the formal dining room and Fatima found herself greedily admiring the first course, a smothered fish and some type of exotic vegetables she'd never tasted before.

"So why is it that your foundation is so interested in proving the existence of gargoyles?" she asked.

"Why not? Gargoyles have just as much right as any other species to have their history validated and chronicled."

Fair enough, she thought, allowing her guard to slip slightly. "I must admit that I'm very excited about seeing the items you have collected."

"And skeptical," he added although her face seemed to transform at the thought of getting her hands on the documents. His breath caught in his throat at the light that radiated from her chocolate skin.

"What I'm really curious about is what samples you have that would necessitate a cellular biologist."

He could see the gears turning in her beautiful head.

"You don't... you don't think you might have the remains of a gargoyle?" she asked with all the excitement of a small child on the precipice of an extraordinary adventure.

"I'm sorry but I'm not at liberty to discuss that now," he apologized, silently cursing at the crestfallen look on her face. "As I said before, I am a preservationist and that applies to information too. There is still the formality of release forms that should be dropped off sometime during our meal."

"Of course."

* * *

Dinner was completed with minimal conversation, although Fatima found her companion quietly observing her on several occasions, his face an unreadable mask. The release forms arrived during dessert and she was eager to read and sign the papers, admitting to herself that this assignment might not be so bad after all. Disappointment sank in an hour after she'd interpreted all the legalese and affixed her signature to ten pages, which basically imposed a gag order on her, after which Lorn hadn't mentioned anything else about the research or the items he held in his vaults.

"Tell me about this Professor Singleton. Will you be able to part from him for the year required?" he asked suddenly as they shared a small sofa while he double-checked the forms she'd signed before pushing them aside on a low table opposite them.

"Gordy? Of course, we're really just co-workers," she supplied. Why was he asking?

He nodded his acceptance of her answer and Fatima could have sworn she heard a barely audible sound similar to a cat purring.

Lorn was pleased with her response, not that it would have changed his decision to have her. There was already a connection between them. He knew she felt it, could tell in the way her heart began to race whenever he was near, the way she stole glances in his direction when she thought he wasn't looking. "Is there anyone else that you'll have a problem putting an ocean's distance between?"

"No," she answered sadly. "I'm the only one left in my family and I don't date much."

"Why?" He'd known about the death of her parents but her lack of a social life baffled him.

She shrugged. "Work, opportunity and the lack of enthusiasm. I've just never been much into modern day dating ethics."

"How's that?"

"I guess I'd prefer to live my life 'game' free. There are too many unspoken rules in dating today."

"Such as?"

"Let's just say that I don't have time to speculate over whether someone is really interested in me or just biding time until Mrs. Right comes along," she told him frankly.

"So you want a man who is honest and forthcoming about his feelings from the onset."

She sighed. "Me and the rest of the female population on the face of the earth."

"I don't agree."

"Of course not." *Women just love being lied to and having men trample over their hearts. It ranks right up there with female circumcision.*

"I don't think women really know what they want from men."

"How chauvinistic!" Her voice rose slightly. "And I bet you proclaim to know exactly what we want."

"You don't believe I possess such knowledge?" He actually sounded surprised.

"Of course not. How could you? I'll have you know that women have been making up their own minds since Eve," she affirmed sarcastically.

"And we all know where that got her." He looked as if he were actually enjoying the asinine conversation.

"Whose fault was that?" Fatima asked, outraged.

"Well, if I remember my creation teachings properly, it was hers," he added with humor.

"That's only based on Judeo-Christian text."

"So you believe yourself to be one of those women who want the truth and nothing but the truth from a man?" he refocused.

"That goes without saying." She could see the humor reflected in his eyes. If it were possible he seemed even more handsome, downright sexy.

"Why don't we just test your supposition, doctor?" he said, his voice a mixture of humor and raw sex appeal.

"I don't see how that's possible."

"No?" he asked, taking her small dark hands in his larger ones. "How would it make you feel to know that I've wanted to kiss you since the moment I first laid eyes on you."

She stumbled at his question. "Um... well, I would have to say I'm flattered. After all, you're a very handsome man."

"Could you be honest enough to admit that the desire is mutual?" he asked as his thumbs began to stroke the back of her hands.

Her pulse quickened. "I think it would be unwise," she began.

"That's not what I asked. Will you admit it?"

"Yes. But that doesn't mean I'm going to act on it, and by the way this has nothing at all to do with the kind of honesty I'm talking about," she added quickly, attempting to remove her hands from his.

"No? Isn't it all part of the honesty of one's feelings you mentioned?"

"You're just talking sexual urges, man's baser needs. I would like to think as humans we've evolved beyond this."

He gave a small laugh. "I doubt even evolution could change that need."

"Speak for yourself." She tried to sound detached.

"You think you're beyond succumbing to your 'baser needs'?"

"Let's just say that I'm happy not having a little head do all the thinking for me."

"So you're saying that you don't give in to your desires?"

"No, I don't."

"Ever?" His voice dropped seductively. "I would think carefully before answering."

He watched her squirm underneath his unwavering gaze, not wanting to back down. Images of her on the hotel bed masturbating flooded his mind, causing his already aroused penis to strain against his pants.

"No."

"Well, let's just test that, shall we? Come to me," he commanded gently, knowing that all it would take would be a slight tug on her hands to have her in his lap, but he wanted her there of her own free will.

"I don't see the point."

"We're testing your evolved resolve, doctor. Perhaps your hypothesis is correct, at least where women are concerned. Maybe your gender has evolved far beyond that of us mere men."

"It's not a hypothesis," she protested.

"Then come here," he repeated.

With hesitation she slid easily across the soft leather until their knees touched.

"More," he urged.

"I'm as close as I can be without sitting on your lap." She looked genuinely perplexed.

He nodded, repeating his command.

* * *

Fatima felt as if she were watching someone else rise slowly and ease onto his muscled thighs.

"Satisfied?" she asked nervously.

"Hardly," he replied as one arm encircled her small waist. "Kiss me."

"What?" She started to rise only to find herself secured by his hold.

"I want you to prove that you're right, doctor. Now kiss me."

Fatima thought to protest, not wanting to fall prey to such juvenile manipulation, but another part of her yearned to feel him against her. Slowly she moved in, giving his lips a tentative kiss. When he didn't move she took the initiative to deepen the touch, her tongue darting out as he opened to give her full access. What started as a tentative inquiry gradually grew into a slow demand, building with each thrust of their tongues. Fatima moaned in his mouth as his free hand crept up to massage one breast through the cotton fabric of her shirt. She nestled closer to give him better access only to find the hard arousal of his manhood straining against his pants.

Damn he was large, she thought, wanting more than anything to see his cock firsthand. A gentle throbbing started between her legs, one that begged to be explored regardless of the fact that she didn't want to let things get out of hand.

* * *

"More," she begged against his mouth.

Not needing any further encouragement, Lorn stood, easily lifting her as he went. He took them quickly across the room to the chair he'd occupied earlier. Fatima gasped when, after sitting, he pulled her onto his lap, helping her straddle his waist. She moaned as his bulge fit firmly against her clit.

"Kiss me," Lorn demanded roughly while his hand kneaded her ample ass, to rub her against his hard cock. Fatima complied, reclaiming his mouth, her tongue darting in and out as she rode him.

"Oh God," she mumbled against his lips.

Lorn knew that at the rate they were going they were both bound to climax in their clothing.

He stilled her hips in his large hands.

"No," she protested, trying to wiggle free.

"Don't worry, I'm going to give you what you want, *ma cherie*," he said huskily, causing a shiver to run down her spine. He stood again, this time allowing her to stand on her own while he made quick work of discarding his pants and boxers.

Next time he would take his time with her. But at this moment he needed to be inside of her more than his next breath.

Fatima barely had a chance to admire him before she felt her own pants being tugged down her legs and tossed out of visual range. She heard the tear before feeling her panties pool awkwardly around her feet. She stepped out of the ruined material, heated even more by his urgency.

Her heart quickened when she saw the primal hunger in Lorn's eyes transforming them to an abnormal hunter green. She sobered up slightly as the reality of the situation seeped in, taking a step back to put some space between herself and this man who left her senses reeling. Fatima resisted the urge to look down at what she already knew to be a well-endowed cock.

A low growl emanated from somewhere deep within him.

"Lorn," she said weakly, gasping when he pulled her back into his arms. He retook his seat while she stood above him. His eyes held hers as his hands dipped between their bodies. She gasped again when his fingers slid in her wet folds to find her distended clit.

"Oh... oh," she moaned, rocking against his hand. He stroked her slowly, rubbing the hard nub until she felt like that's all she was.

"Please," she begged, feeling the beginnings of her climax.

"Say my name," he ordered.

"Lorn," she moaned, rocking her hips against the onslaught waged on her clit. "Fuck me," she pleaded.

Needing no further persuasion he positioned her above his stiff member, the tip of his cock zeroing in on her warm wet pussy. With a strong hold on her hips he

plowed up into her while pushing her down over his engorged penis.

Lorn cursed, holding her steady, trying not to succumb to the tight feel of her vaginal walls. The last thing he'd thought was she would be a virgin.

"Fatima," his voice sounded raspy to his own ears, "don't move."

"It hurts," she mumbled, wiping away tears as she gingerly began to rise. At his harsh intake of breath she paused. She allowed herself to slide back down ever so slowly. What a predicament.

"I'll try it again."

"No," Lorn almost roared, his fingers on her waist biting into her delicate skin. "Don't... move."

He looked like she felt, she thought, his eyes clenched closed, brows furrowed in pain. Good Lord, he was even sweating.

She contracted her muscles around his cock. Other than the fullness of him inside of her, everything seemed okay. The pain had even subsided somewhat.

"I told you not to move," he groaned through clenched teeth.

"I didn't," she protested. Of their own volition her muscles contracted again.

"Damn it, woman," he cursed, using his hand to slowly lift her off his rigid member, the friction pushing him the remainder of the way over the edge. "Put your hands on my shoulders." He pushed her down slowly to completely impale her.

"Lorn, we can't," she moaned in protest.

"I'm sorry, *ma cherie*, but I cannot stop." He lifted her again, keeping the movements small at first, trying with the last ounce of his restraint to give her a chance to become fully accustomed to his size.

He fucked her over his massive cock, sliding in and out of her wet channel in long strokes, all the while apologizing as she sobbed into his shoulder.

Fatima wasn't sure what to make of the strange sensations coursing through her, pain, pleasure, shame or wantonness. Her trusty little vibrator could in no way compare to what she was experiencing now. The stiff little contraption had never penetrated her so deeply.

He came in one deep thrust that took her breath away, shooting his seed deep within her. When their breathing returned to normal he lifted her off, gathering her to sit on his lap.

He pushed her chin up with one finger. "I'm sorry for causing you pain, *ma cherie*."

She looked at him with sorrowful eyes. "This shouldn't have happened."

"It was inevitable, but if I'd known you were a virgin I would have taken better care."

"So this is my fault?" She pushed off his lap. She gathered her discarded pants, pulling them on with jerky movements.

"There is no blame to be placed." He rose slowly, drawing her attention back to the nude lower half of his body.

Fatima gasped. Even limp he was heavy and large. No wonder she'd felt as if she were being split in half. Her medical training had exposed her to the male anatomy on more than a few occasions but none of her subjects could have ever compared. Her little dildo would have looked nonexistent next to him, she thought.

"I'd like to leave," she announced, turning her back on him.

There was a deep sigh before she heard the gentle rustle of clothing.

"Turn around, Fatima," he said softly. When she ignored his gentle command he added, "please."

Unhurriedly she turned to find him rumpled but fully dressed.

"Lorn, there's nothing else that needs to be said. What happened was a mistake, one I care not to repeat." *Ever*, she added silently.

"*Cherie*, I apologize. If I could turn back time I would have done things much differently." Like taking her upstairs and bringing her to several orgasms before taking his own pleasure.

"Let's not do this. I'd just like to go."

"Avoidance is not the answer. We will be working very closely together." He maintained his position, sensing her confusion, anger and disappointment.

"The operative word is *work*, nothing more. If you can't agree to that here and now then I won't be going to France, job or not," she issued, her voice edged with conviction.

There was a long pause before Lorn responded. "I will only do as you wish."

"Good." She exhaled. "What I would like right now is to return to my hotel."

He bowed slightly in compliance although when their eyes met again the look he gave her promised they were far from being done.

* * *

Gordy had rung her room four times in the last two hours and got the downstairs attendant after five rings each time he called.

"No message," he bit out, letting the phone drop into the cradle. Where the hell could she be?

He knew the answer before the question had fully formed in his mind. Lorn De LaRue was responsible. He wasn't stupid. He'd seen the way the man ogled her like she were a choice steak and he were in desperate need of a meal.

A gentle knock came to the door which he didn't hear while he paced and cursed. When the light tapping finally registered, he'd already worked himself into a frenzy. He jerked the door open to the surprised face of the grad student he'd enjoyed for several hours the night before.

Only a dead man wouldn't notice how absolutely stunning the strawberry blonde was, with her classical features, stony gray eyes and perfect upturned mouth. Right now that mouth smiled at him seductively, displaying perfect teeth. The rest of her was equally as traffic stopping. She seemed to be curved in all the right places with large breasts that greeted him immediately. There wasn't an ounce of fat on her womanly form. God, he even found that he liked her pale pink skin that was unmarred by the sun's rays.

"I thought you might like an evening snack." The woman continued to smile prettily, holding a bottle of champagne in one hand and a basket of strawberries in the other.

Although his first instinct had been to slam the door on his uninvited guest he quickly changed his mind as he took in the barely there peach halter top and matching mini skirt that left little to the imagination. She couldn't help it that he was in a foul mood. That was Fatima's burden.

"Sure," he agreed, swinging the door wider to allow her admittance.

* * *

Fatima was grateful for one thing as she checked out of her hotel two days later; she hadn't seen hide nor hair of Gordy. After her embarrassing night with Lorn she'd come back to the hotel only to find four messages waiting for her at the concierge station. Feeling guilty, she made two attempts over the remainder of the conference to contact him without success. Knowing him, he was pouting and probably thought his absence would teach her a lesson.

She was grateful when the conference ended without further communication from Lorn. Try as she might she couldn't shake the sense of foreboding that settled over her whenever thoughts of her impending trip came to mind. Regardless of her job, several times she considered calling the whole thing off.

Her mind was preoccupied with mentally evaluating everything she would need for a year abroad when it suddenly hit her she would be with Lorn De LaRue, in one of the most romantic countries in the world, for an entire year. Even now, only the overwhelming chore of thinking of all the last minute details of her trip competed with images of him and how luscious it felt to have him kissing her.

How would she be able to stay focused in such close proximity?

Fatima was glad when she finally closed the door on her small two-bedroom condo. Its familiar surroundings engulfed her like a welcoming embrace. She plopped down on the overstuffed cushions of her sofa, ignoring the flashing red light of the phone that sat on a side table. She knew she couldn't avoid the messages for too long because in twenty-four hours she would be heading out on a new flight to New York in preparation for her international journey.

Chapter 4

In his human form, Lorn had already embarked on his private flight to Amsterdam. He was due to arrive after midnight, and would complete the last leg of his trans-Atlantic trek in his gargoyle persona. He relaxed his head against the cushioned headrest, allowing his eyes to drift closed as pictures of Fatima's beautiful mahogany face assaulted him. He could still feel her lips on his. The soft fullness of her mouth left him craving more. Her scent was a part of him now.

He wondered how the intimate recesses of her pussy would taste, how she would respond as he drove his tongue into that deliciously warm tightness of hers. He yearned to hear her call out his name in desire as he'd witnessed when she'd masturbated to a fantasy of him. Had she thought of him nibbling on her clit while she fondled herself so enthusiastically? His cock grew hard at the idea of what he would do to properly introduce her to the art of lovemaking.

He was pleased with his decision to request her immediate presence at his home because the urgency he felt to have her was almost overpowering. It had taken his very best efforts not to attempt to see her again before she'd left Michigan. Never had a woman affected him so, which partially reawakened a concern he'd pushed to the back of his mind. How close was he to turning? Departing his current consciousness for the isolated existence of the dark side did not hold any appeal.

His thoughts drifted back to the lovely Fatima and a calm settled over his very soul. There was something truly special about this woman.

* * *

Gordy drifted out of a sleep induced haze feeling slightly disoriented.

A sultry voice greeted him "You're finally awake."

"Is it morning?" he asked.

"No, my darling, it's evening."

"What?" He sprang up in bed, instantly regretting the sudden movement as a pounding in his head threatened to split his skull.

"Easy, my darling, you are not fully well."

What? He settled into the satin cushions he hadn't remembered adorning his hotel bed... and what the hell was it with this 'my darling' crap?

"You must relax, gain your strength." The soothing quality of her voice seemed to will his tired limbs into submission. Gordy felt at peace and would've drifted back to sleep if it weren't for the butterfly kisses she trailed down his exposed abdomen. He exhaled slowly when he felt the warm, moist mouth of the woman encircle his cock. The blood rushed to his limp flesh in a sudden injection of desire.

"Yes, grow for me, my darling," she moaned, before taking his penis deeper in her mouth. She deep throated him several times until he was a mass of quivering sensations. Gordy felt helpless to do anything but feel, enjoying the pressure of her tongue as it laved at the pronounced veins of his cock. He felt his climax grab him quickly as he was wrung dry by her sucking mouth.

* * *

Although Fatima was no neophyte to international travel, excitement had bubbled within her from the moment she awakened to embark on her journey. The feeling stayed with her until after the flight landed and she was seated comfortably in the luxury of another Bentley, this time navy in color. She watched in exhausted joy as the city skyline gave way to lush countryside. They passed several vineyards, and each time she was certain their journey had come to its conclusion, they would take another windy route.

Lulled by the easy rhythm of the car and never-ending greenery, Fatima fell asleep only to come to a startled wakefulness when the vehicle stopped. She heard the driver, a handsome young man, speak into the intercom of the front gate of what she only assumed to be Lorn's property.

They pulled slowly through the wrought iron gates, and up the long drive. Her

first sight was of lush greenery. The manicured foliage that seemed to swarm the grounds instantly took her in.

"My God!" she exclaimed in a whisper when they came to a stop in front of what could only be described as an old world castle.

"Mademoiselle?" the young driver repeated, extending a hand through the open rear door.

"Excusé moi." Fatima blushed at being caught gawking. She took the man's hand, stepping onto the pebbled drive, staring up at the three-story aged structure with its stone walls and high minaret. Another man, much older, yet perfectly preserved, stood at the top of the steps that would take her inside.

"Mademoiselle." He bowed slightly; she caught the twinkle in his blue eyes, which reminded her oddly of Lorn's personal assistant and current driver.

If she thought the elegant exterior was something to behold she was bowled over at the beautifully restored foyer that greeted her. She felt as if she'd stepped back in time to an age when damsels were perpetually in distress and lords were literally master and king of all they surveyed.

"I will show you to your room so that you may settle in. Monsieur De LaRue will be back shortly."

"Thank you. May I ask your name?" Servants or not, if she was going to be living there for the next year she would need to get to know the staff.

"Of course, where have my manners gone. I am Pierre. My son Luc escorted you here and I believe you met his older brother Mike in the States."

"Yes." So that was it. She realized why he'd seemed so familiar. "It's amazing that the three of you work for Lor... Mr. De LaRue."

"Actually several members of my family work for him," he added as he led her up a grand staircase. "Mike has resided overseas for nearly fifteen years. You will meet my wife and daughter later when Monsieur De LaRue introduces you to the staff," he continued.

Fifteen years? She wanted to ask him more about it but became sidetracked while

they walked down a long corridor passing a series of rooms. An eclectic collection of tapestries adorned the walls seeming to tell a story. Fatima paused in front of one, studying the brutal images. She identified gargoyles, humans, what appeared to be vampires, werewolves, large fairylike creatures and several other figures she couldn't quite pinpoint. It appeared as if they were embroiled in a monstrous battle. She noted that the humans were poorly outmatched with swords against gargantuan creatures with fangs, claws and obvious superior strength.

"It's quite ghastly, I agree." Pierre stepped beside her, his voice seeming to catch in his throat. "This way," he encouraged after several seconds of quiet contemplation. Fatima proceeded to follow him, watching as he tugged on the black knit cap he wore.

She wondered at that. Mike had worn one like it in Michigan, as had Luc. Did it denote some sort of caste? She shook her head. That sort of thing didn't exist in modern day France. *Neither do fully functioning castles*, she reminded herself, *unless they are part of a tour package for foreigners*.

"Please make yourself comfortable. Dinner will be in a couple of hours. Perhaps you would like to freshen up or have a nap after your long journey?"

His offer sounded inviting. She hadn't had a chance to recoup from her Michigan trip before flying across the world. Pierre closed the heavy wooden door as he left, leaving her completely alone in the massive room. She took in the beauty of the space from its high ceilings and fireplace to the four-poster bed that would have taken up her entire bedroom. As an interesting contrast to the dark wood tones the room was decorated in deep blues and yellows, her favorite color combination.

Could Lorn have known? She dismissed the thought just as quickly as it had come. A gentle knock on the door caused her heart rate to go into overdrive. Self-consciously she touched her neat ponytail, trying to calm her erratic pulse.

"Come in," she called, bracing herself for the devastating image of Lorn De LaRue. Instead the driver, weighed down with a couple of her suitcases, greeted her.

"Where would you like these?"

"Um... anywhere," she answered, upset with herself for feeling disappointed.

"Don't bother yourself with unpacking. My sister will take care of it for you," the driver continued as he strutted back into the hall for another batch of cases.

Fatima's gaze was drawn to his firm backside, molded perfectly in jeans.

Nice, she thought before turning to grab one of the bags that held her summer wear. She was dying for a shower and change of clothes.

"Is there anything else you would like?" he asked as he arranged the last of her cases near the wide bed.

"No, thank you," she replied, pulling out a cotton shirt and shorts. When she realized that he made no move to leave she looked up, amber eyes locking with blue.

"Are you sure there's nothing else?" he asked slowly, enunciating each word. Images of her in his arms, his lips trailing kisses down her neck, bombarded Fatima. She gasped aloud at the vivid pictures. *Boy, am I jetlagged*, she thought.

"Luc!" Pierre seemed to appear out of nowhere. "I believe you have other duties to attend to instead of loitering around here."

The young man looked annoyed before nodding in her direction. "Perhaps another time," he added before turning away.

The door was drawn closed in his wake, but not before she heard Pierre launch into a language she was certain she hadn't heard before.

Dismissing the entire exchange, she made her way to the luxurious adjoining bathroom, determined not to be distracted by Lorn or his horde of cap-adorned employees. She was there to do a job. One that she was certain wouldn't require an entire year of her time, because anyone in their right mind knew gargoyles didn't exist.

Chapter 5

A very real, very aroused Lorn De LaRue made a conscious effort to stay away from his castle where he knew Fatima was safely ensconced. He was aware the moment she arrived. Her scent wafted to him on a gentle breeze, beckoning him. Instantly his body reacted, and memories of them at his home in Michigan flooded his brain. He remembered everything from the taste of her mouth to her oh-so-tight sheath that had struggled to welcome his rod.

He took several calming breaths, which only aided in filling his nostrils with more of her fragrance. Feeling confined in his human form he allowed his gargoyle self to burst forth, not caring that his clothes ripped at the seams, landing at his feet.

His erect cock stood at attention as he tuned his sensitive ears to her. He let out a primal groan as the sound of her voice had him growing harder than he thought possible. He listened after Pierre left while she moved silently about her room. When Luc returned he could almost see the handsome young man flirting with her. He smelled his arousal in the air.

Lorn cursed silently as he remembered the amorous appetite of the young elf. At the pubescent age of one hundred, Luc was still sowing his wild oats in whatever willing female he happened across. He realized Fatima must have presented a tempting package with her smooth ebony skin, full lips and exotic eyes, not to mention her thin, firm body that just begged to be ravaged.

He growled in warning as Pierre scolded his youngest son in lyrical Elvish. "She's off limits, you know this."

"What's the big deal?" Luc pouted. "Lorn has shared with me before."

"Not this time, young one."

"Perhaps we should let the lady decide. I caught her checking out my ass. She

was obviously interested."

Lorn's initial warning growl changed to a full-fledged challenge that he was certain both elves heard. The silence that followed was answer enough. Luc wasn't smitten enough to accept a gargoyle's challenge -- especially if that gargoyle was Lorn.

Lorn redirected his focus to Fatima's bedroom again as she quietly padded to the adjoining bath. He heard the gentle thud as her clothes slid to the floor followed by the spray of the shower. He could picture her naked, small upturned dark nipples coated to a glistening sheen by the shower, begging to be kissed and suckled. In his urgency to have her before, he hadn't taken the time necessary to explore her dark contours. A mistake he wouldn't repeat. He gripped his large cock with one hand as he imagined Fatima's body under the warm downpour, water causing her skin to gleam. He stroked his penis slowly at first until the tension in his body reached its breaking point. She made sounds of contentment, which were his undoing. He spewed his milky seed over nearby foliage, throwing his head back in a roar of completion.

As his body calmed he returned to his human form. He couldn't remember a woman having that effect on him before. He only knew that he had to have her again and soon.

* * *

Fatima drifted from the edge of sleep into wakefulness as a knock sounded again on the heavy wood door.

"Yes?" she called, pulling herself into a sitting position.

The door opened quietly on well-oiled hinges, admitting a slender woman with blond hair that hung loosely to her waist. She regarded Fatima with curious blue eyes. Pierre's daughter, Fatima assumed, taking in the shy beauty.

"Dinner will be served shortly," she announced.

"Thank you," Fatima answered, pushing wild curls from her face. She hadn't bothered to blow dry her hair after the shower, and the results were thick curly ringlets that took over.

"If you'd like I can wait for you," the girl offered.

"Yes, I'd like that," she agreed, hurrying from the bed to the bathroom where she could repair the damage of a couple hours of comfortable sleep.

"I'm Sara," the girl volunteered from the bedroom while Fatima secured her hair once more in a neat ponytail.

"Fatima," she answered, taking a wet cloth to her face. She hadn't meant to sleep so deeply, but her weary body needed the break, she surmised. She gave herself a quick once over. Her makeup free face wasn't exactly glamorous but it would have to do. She took in the white T-shirt that hugged her upper body. The word 'Adorable,' pronounced in hot pink glitter, matched the shorts that clung to her ample hips.

"Ready," she declared as she rejoined the waiting young woman.

The woman nodded, causing unhampered corn silk hair to fall slightly forward. Fatima resisted the urge to tuck the shiny strands behind her ears to keep it from her face when Sara made no move of her own to do so. Maybe the caps were for men only.

"You're Pierre's daughter?" Fatima asked as she followed the woman down the long corridor and stairs she'd taken earlier.

"Yes. I'm the youngest of seven," she supplied in her nearly flawless English. "My brother Luc is just a few years older."

"Seven, wow." She couldn't suppress the envy in her voice. "I'm sure you all kept your parents busy."

Sara giggled, her innocent laughter reminding Fatima of a child. "I think that's putting it mildly."

"I've always wondered what it would be like to have a sibling, but six, I couldn't imagine."

"I liken us to a dysfunctional Brady Bunch minus the step-parents and Alice." She smiled, taking Fatima down another corridor on the lower level. They passed a formal dining room.

"You'll be eating outside," Sara answered her unasked question. "It has the best view of the garden. Here we are," she announced after a few more turns.

Fatima stepped through double doors onto the granite tiles.

"I trust you slept well?" Lorn asked, seeming to appear from the shadows behind her.

"Yes." She silently cursed her pulse's erratic beat. "Thank you." She turned, plastering a smile on her face.

"I'm glad to hear it." He took another step forward, leaving little room between them.

Fatima gasped at the sight of him, dark hair secured in a single braid down the middle of his back. He wore a gray shirt made to cling to a man's well-muscled form and, boy, was it doing its job. White linen pants hung perfectly off narrow hips.

"Have the food brought out," he ordered the young woman without taking his eyes off Fatima.

"You have a lovely home," Fatima complimented, resisting the urge to put distance between them.

"Thank you. Perhaps after dinner I can give you the full tour."

"Yes, I'm particularly eager to see your vaults."

"Of course. Shall we sit?" He finally stepped aside, revealing an intimate circular table. Two candles glowed from round crystal containers.

Fatima could feel his eyes on her as she preceded him to the table. The heat from his gaze traveled up her bare legs, hovering on her rounded backside.

He stopped to pull her chair out, leaning toward her to whisper. "You are more beautiful than I remembered." His warm breath caressed her ear.

"Thank you," she managed. "But I'm not here because of my looks," she reminded him.

"Of course not," he agreed, taking his own seat.

"And while we're on the subject, I feel that I should remind you of our agreement."

"I am well aware of our previous conversation."

"Good." She paused for courage, her voice taking on the formal tone she was searching for. "There is something else I'd like to clear up."

He raised a dark questioning eyebrow, but remained silent.

She tried to maintain eye contact but found it difficult.

"In Michigan when we... that is, when you..." She could have screamed in frustration at her rambling. His silence wasn't helping. He knew what she was referring to but offered nothing.

"Well, when *that* happened, I think it was fairly obvious that I haven't been with anyone before." She still had the soreness between her thighs to prove it. At his silence she hurried on. "But I'm sure that... well, someone like you has had plenty of experiences."

"Someone like me?" he queried, one arm resting casually on the table while he regarded her.

"Yes... you're rich, you obviously travel and..." She trailed off.

"And?" He wasn't going to let her off that easy.

"You're handsome," she added lowly, looking out onto the garden.

"I see. If you are concerned about STDs, you needn't be. I'm clean." He didn't tell her that gargoyles were immune to human ailments. He would save that for another conversation.

"I'm not on any type of birth control either."

"Ah." His response had her whipping her head around, staring at him with wide eyes. "Does the idea of my child growing inside of you frighten you so much?"

"Yes," she stammered, "I mean... no... oh my..." She trailed off.

He watched the emotions on her face change from shock and fear to something bordering on acceptance.

How he wished that one of his sperm, shot so deeply in her womb, could have taken root, giving him the much-needed offspring.

"There is no need to worry about a child either."

Her mouth formed an "o" at the implications of his revelation.

The awkward silence was interrupted by the evening meal.

Through dinner she stole glances in his direction. Had something happened to him or was he born sterile? She'd never really given much thought to the idea of children, probably because she assumed that when the time was right she would have them. Never once had she considered the possibility that she was barren. She couldn't imagine how he must feel, knowing that all his wealth wouldn't be passed on to a child. There would never be the pitter-patter of little feet in this overly large palace he called home.

Lorn spoke in a low voice. "I do not want your pity."

"I'm not giving it," she lied, cutting into the succulent chicken laid in front of her.

* * *

Thirty minutes into her tour, Fatima felt thoroughly lost. They'd met the small army it took to run a place that size, briefly. She seriously entertained the thought of making up nametags for everyone until she got them straight. As she noted earlier with Pierre and Luc, all of Lorn's employees, with the exception of a couple of women, wore the same knit caps. Her earlier suspicion of some medieval caste system came back to mind. Would he insist she wear one of the drab caps as a member of his staff? Better to wait until he broached the topic before lodging her formal complaint.

"Do you hand out maps to visitors?" she half joked as he showed her his library that any university would applaud.

"I don't get many visitors. Lately I've been doing more traveling. This is the first time I've been here in over a year."

"Well, may I be the first to request a map, or a personal tour guide for the first couple of weeks at least."

"I'd be more than happy to provide you with the latter," he offered, the thick rich timbre of his voice like silk. "In fact, I can personally offer my services."

No, thank you. The least amount of time she spent in his presence the better she would feel. Her hormones had already gone into double overtime since they'd sat down to dinner.

"Where exactly are your vaults," she continued, ignoring his suggestion.

"Everything you will need is in the east wing."

East wing. How many people use that in reference to their homes? "How long have you had this place?"

"It's been in my family for generations," he answered easily. No need telling her that he had picked the location, laying the first stones for its foundation. "I have made several modernizing upgrades but for the most part she is as she was over six hundred years ago."

"Unbelievable. If only these walls could talk."

Lorn blanched at her comment. He didn't need a recanting of its history; it was all permanently etched in his memory. His own mother had roamed these very halls for a year after its completion before that fateful night.

They passed through a metal security door camouflaged behind a heavy oak one. Lorn rattled off the six-digit code for her benefit as he punched it into the keypad. "To the left is the room that houses all texts that we have collected over the years. To the right are a series of sterile research rooms where you can perform your carbon dating and biological research. Which would you like to see first?"

Fatima swallowed to remove the lump that had formed in her throat. "I'd like to see the texts."

Lorn nodded, leading her through another secured door, this one responding to hand scans from a panel. "To minimize any foreign contamination, you must always scrub up and wear one of the sterile gowns over your clothing." He indicated both a sink and metal wardrobe where several long-sleeved hospital type garments hung.

For a hoax he'd gone all out. Sterilized and properly adorned, they entered another adjoining room that would have resembled a library if not for its metallic walls and shelves. One wall was completely covered with aged books in an assortment of bindings, each shelf depicting its own numerical value.

"These," Lorn began, indicating the wall unit, "are divided by year and language

of origin."

"Language?" She looked at him in surprise. "Exactly how many languages are we talking?"

"About ten," he answered nonchalantly. "Four of which should present no problem for you. The others I will aid you with."

"How did you know I spoke four other languages?" She turned on him, temporarily forgetting the gold mine in front of her.

"There's little about your background that I don't know," he answered matter-of-factly.

Anyone who'd invested that much money in security and acquiring her services had probably investigated her background better than any US governmental agency. "You said these were family texts. How could that be in ten different languages?"

"My ancestors were collectors, and went to great lengths to acquire materials," Lorn supplied. "Have you seen enough for this evening?" he asked after she'd skimmed each item on the shelves.

"Yes. I mean I'd like to see the biological facility too, but I can wait until the morning."

"Good." He helped her dispose of her robe, making sure to turn out each light. "Breakfast is served after seven. I will make sure someone calls up before."

"Thank you."

"I'm curious about something."

"Hmm." She was already making mental notes of things she would need to do the following day.

"Why did you remain a virgin for so long?"

Whatever she'd expected it wasn't that. "I... I don't see how that's any of your business," she stammered, angry for letting her guard down.

"You're intelligent, beautiful, with a body made for sex -- hot, long sex," he added.

Fatima gasped, taking a step back. She found herself pressed against the heavy

oak door that separated them from the lab.

He advanced. "Were you always surrounded by men more eager to plow through books instead of your lush body, or have you been waiting for someone like me?"

"I'm not waiting for anyone, least of all you. There are things more important than sex."

"That may be true, but most are not as much fun."

"Well, that's neither here nor there," she said, trying not to be affected by his close proximity. Mere inches separated them and she could feel the warmth from his body. "My personal life is off limits for discussion."

He shrugged. "Talking isn't exactly what I had in mind anyway."

Before she could make a move to stop him, his head swooped down. He brushed his lips against hers. Fatima's gasp allowed him to easily slip his tongue between her teeth.

A slow burn began to build up in her at his tongue play. She tried to resist the urge to kiss him back but found herself liking the feel of his questing mouth.

A deep guttural groan escaped from somewhere within him as he gathered her up close, her feet barely touching the floor. He trailed heated kisses down her neck, nipping gently on her skin.

The need to touch and taste her pushed him on. Lorn responded to her like a man deprived of his heart's desire, lifting her more until her shirt-clad breasts were level with his seeking mouth.

"Wrap your legs around me," he demanded. At her hesitation, he latched onto a sensitized nipple visible through her shirt. His teeth gently plucked it before suckling it into his mouth entirely.

Fatima arched her back against the sensation and complied.

Impatient with the barrier between his mouth and the sweet taste of her skin, he pushed her shirt up revealing a blue satin bra. The contrast of the material against her

dark silky skin sent another rush of blood to his already engorged penis. He wanted more than anything to take her against the door, pushing into her warm sheath.

"Lorn," she moaned, as he easily unsnapped the front clasp of her bra.

"Yes, *ma cherie*," he answered before taking the treasure of a dusky nipple in his mouth. She tasted better than he expected, like the sweetest nectar, and he wanted more, so much more.

Her pussy throbbed as his mouth teased her into submission.

"More," he growled against her other breast. Fatima thought she would come undone.

"Please," she begged, gyrating her hips against his flat stomach.

"Tell me you want me."

"I... I want... you," she managed between moans of pleasure.

"What do you want from me?" His voice was deep, guttural. He leveled her to give one hand free dominion over her body.

"I want you... you..." She felt her self being lost in the heat he created. "... to make me come."

"I want that too, *ma cherie*," he agreed, inching a large hand up the loose cotton shorts.

He wasn't surprised to find that she wore no panties, giving him carte blanche to her warm, wet channel. He pressed thick fingers through the folds of her labia, finding her distended clit.

"Oooooohhhh," she moaned when his thumb pushed against the fleshy nub, rubbing her in long, strong strokes.

Lorn fought against the incisors that threatened to explode from his mouth. He captured her lips once again, silencing her crooning as he slipped one finger inside of her while he continued to fondle her clit with his thumb.

He knew she was coming apart fast, fucking his thick finger that he rammed in and out of her wet body.

She was tight against his digit and he made sure she was completely dripping before adding another to the barrage. He wished it were his mouth covering her mons, his tongue fucking her until she couldn't take anymore.

"Mine," he murmured against her mouth, stretching her with three fingers now.

"Oh yes." She ground against him faster.

"Say it," he demanded.

Say what? She couldn't think, let alone talk. Suddenly everything stopped.

"Nooo," she protested, grinding her hips against his unmoving hands.

"Say it," he demanded, watching her with a look so intense it commanded her acquiesce.

"I'm yours," she submitted.

"Again." He caressed her nub.

"I'm... yours," she accepted, riding his fingers. "Ooohhh yes," she screamed as she came against him with such an intensity her head reared back against the door, eyes closing to a kaleidoscope of colors.

When the world came back into focus, she bit her bottom lip to prevent the curse that formed in her brain from slipping out. Lorn's own breathing was ragged and Fatima realized that he had done nothing to alleviate his own arousal.

"Lorn." Her voice sounded weak to her own ears.

"Give me a minute." He'd closed his eyes as he regained control.

"We shouldn't have --" she began.

"Don't," he interrupted sharply. "What happened has proven how much we desire each other and I don't plan to back down now or ever." He looked at her now with eyes as dark as a midnight forest. "You are mine."

Fatima stared at him as he deposited her outside her bedroom door. The troubling thing was she couldn't remember how they got there.

"If you need anything, my rooms are there." He pointed to large double doors only a few feet away. He reached around her to push the door open. "Get some rest."

Later Fatima stood under the warm spray of her shower thoroughly confused.

Lorn had turned her into a quivering mass of nerves, but he hadn't acted on his own obvious arousal. He could've taken her in the hall and she wouldn't have fought him. He could have easily pushed his way into her room without so much as a protest from her, but he hadn't. She wasn't sure what type of game he was playing, but if he were waiting for her to knock on his door then he had a long wait coming.

* * *

Lorn hadn't gone to bed hot and bothered since he was a young man, but that's exactly what he found himself doing after the icy shower failed to assuage his desire for the woman who slept down the hall. He fought the urge to go to her, throwing all caution to the wind. It was obvious their attraction was mutual. No one could fake the way she'd responded to him. What was it about this woman that affected him so deeply?

He closed his eyes against the recollection of how she'd felt in his arms, re-directing his attention to the reason he'd brought her here in the first place. Although her eventual submission would be an added bonus, he needed to keep the research at the forefront. His brethren were counting on him and he wouldn't fail them. Slowly he drifted to sleep with the haunting memories of the past vying for dominance of his subconscious mind.

The Protectors had been alerted to unusual vampire and succubus activity in various Germanic regions that were too ominous to ignore. A young gargoyle, Lorn along with his brother had gone with their father and several others to northern regions while another contingent went south.

Typically, succubae weren't worth the trouble of more than a couple of experienced Protectors; however, the vampire component made any situation lethal. Gargoyles and vampires had always maintained a cold truce, partnering on rare occasions against forces that could decimate their numbers without their alliances. Traditionally, vamps and succubae mingled more for the fulfillment of their wild sexual appetites not able to be withstood by humans, but never had they forged a coalition to fight, especially not against Protectors.

They'd flown in gargoyle form under the cover of night. Lorn remembered the grisly scene as if it were present day. Bloodied human corpses lay strewn in a field once lush with vegetation. Most of the fatally wounded had their throats ripped as if attacked by wild animals. The unlucky survivors suffered from near-fatal wounds or were so severely shocked that none could be relied on as witnesses. They searched through the wee hours of the night for the culprits but came up empty-handed.

Lorn's father risked contacting his vampire confidantes only to learn that they were just as shocked by the atrocities as the Protectors.

Contrary to accepted vampiric mythology, the immortals were not sinister creatures that held human life as insignificant. Vamps, much like Protectors, tried living in harmony with humans, resorting to feeding from them when no other food source could be found, and even then only taking enough for sustenance. Once done, vampires were thorough at erasing all traces of memory from their prey.

Exhausted and no closer to solving the mysteries, the Protectors returned to their own holdings promising to regroup in a meeting of the Council of Protectors the following evening.

The treachery of the Fledglings was discovered immediately, when the one Protector left to guard the small group was discovered slumped over at his post, unconscious from a potion slipped into his drink. At first Lorn's father worried that the fate suffered by the humans in the fields had befallen his mate and the other Fledglings. They'd searched well into the morning until horses from the family's stable were spotted returning, minus their riders.

"No!" Lorn's father wailed as they retraced the animal's tracks along the seashore, forced to rely on their extraordinary sight and hearing. Salt water wreaked havoc on their sense of smell, which would have made their task far easier. Eventually, they stumbled across the eerily silent cave. Lorn had never heard a wail so heartbreakingly painful as the one that emanated from his father upon seeing his lifeless mate.

Chapter 6

After her wakeup call the next morning, Fatima dressed in white cotton Capri pants and a red short-sleeved button up blouse meant to downplay her curvy figure. She wished now that she'd had an opportunity to shop for less revealing clothes, something that would detract from her curves. She plaited her hair in a thick braid down the center of her head; opting for a natural look, she only added lip-gloss to her shapely mouth. It was amazing how refreshed she felt after a night of undisturbed slumber, not to mention an earth-shattering climax. Even her gargoyle stayed away that night.

"Yesterday I was tired and jetlagged," she gave herself a pep talk. "Today I'm well rested and ready for anything Lorn De LaRue can dish out," she continued as she made her bed. No need having someone else do what she was perfectly capable of handling herself.

"Do you think you could handle accompanying me to breakfast?" Lorn's voice invaded the room, causing her to whirl around. He easily filled her doorway with his large frame. This morning he was dressed in a blue collarless pullover and black linen pants. His folded arms only accentuated bulging biceps. Fatima blushed at being discovered talking to herself, especially about him.

"I'm glad to know that you're well rested," Lorn continued at her silence.

"Who wouldn't be? The bed is a slice of heaven."

"Really. I would've thought your mind-blowing orgasm might have played a role."

He was certainly sure of himself she huffed silently. "Probably more like the combination of jet lag and time difference."

He raised a brow. "Of course, you're right. Shall we go?"

Seeing an opportunity to escape a potentially dangerous situation, she agreed. The last thing they needed in their presence was an available bed.

Breakfast was served in the formal dining room that morning, although the place settings were arranged so that Lorn sat at the head of the table with her to his immediate right. Fatima fidgeted at their closeness, vowing that no matter the situation there would not be a repeat of last night.

Lorn watched as she gingerly picked at her breakfast, trying her best to ignore him. He marveled at his overwhelming desire to possess her body and soul. Last night he'd only meant to kiss her, to make her feel a fraction of the need that consumed him when she was around. He hadn't meant for things to go so far so fast, but because they had there would be no turning back for either of them.

Just thinking of how eagerly she responded to him set his blood to boiling. Now he noticed how prim and proper she was, hiding underneath loose fitting clothing, keeping their conversation 'strictly professional' while she ran down her modus operandi for research. He listened with half an ear, fully aware of the fluctuation in her heartbeat when she looked at him.

"Shall we?" he asked when it was obvious that neither of them were interested in anything else on their plates.

"What?" Her voice raised a notch, heart going into overdrive.

Lorn chuckled, something he couldn't remember doing in a long while. "Go to the lab?"

"Oh." She blushed at the disappointment in her voice.

"Of course if you'd much rather do other things," he offered.

"I'm here to work... not... *socialize*," she sputtered.

"Is that the name for it these days?" he asked with mock innocence.

* * *

In the lab Lorn turned into a different person. Although he did crowd her on occasion to purposefully draw attention to the magnetism between them, he refrained

from actual physical contact. She reluctantly admitted that he was a great researcher, having already begun the preliminary study on gargoyle/human breeding.

"You're trying to prove something based on a myth." She looked at him in frustration an hour after they began. "We first need to prove the existence of gargoyles before we go into some farfetched hypothesis about humans and gargoyles reproducing."

She ran a frustrated hand over her head. "In these documents no one ever questions the reality of gargoyles. They speak of them the way one would talk about a car."

"Would it help you if we carbon date some of these?" he suggested.

"Why? They were obviously written by people with two feet firmly planted in fairytale land. They talk about elves, sprites, werewolves, succubae and vampires." She sighed in irritation. "At any moment I'm waiting to see Bigfoot's name mentioned."

"The sasquatch is in section 532 under Native dialects of Northern America."

"You're joking." She stared at him incredulously.

He returned her gaze evenly.

"Come on, you can't be that close to not realize the fantastical when it's staring you in the face."

"I could ask the same of you," he countered. "You're so ready to pass this off as fiction without even opening your mind to the possibility."

"Lorn, you're not some backwoods inbreed who really buys into this." When he didn't respond she continued. "Come on, don't you think if any of these creatures actually existed we would know by now?"

"Not if they didn't want you to," he answered simply.

She shook her head at the ridiculous notion. "I'd like to carbon date this." She indicated the book in her hand.

* * *

Fatima rechecked her notes for the fourth time, certain that she had done something wrong. Maybe she'd missed a step or mixed the wrong solutions.

"If you do it twenty times it will not change the outcome," Lorn said, leaning against a stainless steel counter.

"Okay, so this is from around 500 AD, but carbon dating will not tell me if its author was in full control of his or her faculties."

"Perhaps you'd like to check each of the over fifteen hundred texts in there. Surely you can't think everyone was crazy?"

It was just after 10 p.m. and Fatima was on document 562. She'd thought to weed out the materials that could be authenticated from the ones that were obvious fakes. So far, the authentic side was in the lead by 100% and she couldn't understand it.

* * *

Lorn left Fatima to the carbon dating while he focused on a recently acquired document given to him by a Protector from Russia who'd migrated to Texas. Fatima was a diligent worker, he had to give her that. She'd dived into the project with gusto, having to be reminded to take a break for both lunch and dinner. She came in again from the biology labs mumbling something about improbabilities as she put away documents only to begin reaching for new materials.

"I think we've done enough tonight," Lorn said, placing a marker in the bound text he read to keep his place.

"What?" she asked distractedly. "There's still several more hours of carbon dating to be done."

"More like days."

"An even better reason to keep working. The sooner this is done the sooner I can get to work helping you with the actual research and translations."

"Agreed, but it will all be here in the morning," he promised, rising from the plush wheeled leather chair to his full height.

"If you're tired, please don't let me stop you from leaving." She tried to ignore his approaching form but was a dismal failure.

"I think it's time we both went to bed." He pressed a kiss on the top of her head, wrapping long arms around her waist.

Fatima thought to protest but in the end decided against it. Maybe she did need to rest, to take some hours away from what she was discovering. The ramifications of the ideas she read were mind-boggling. What if there were otherworldly creatures out there co-existing with the human race. Would the world be ready for that knowledge? Was she? And what was Lorn's interest in all this? He'd obviously read several if not all of the documents before recruiting her and seemed to accept it all without question.

Lorn silently observed Fatima as she quietly processed everything. She'd reacted the way he'd expected a human of this era to. Even now, after verifying the authenticity of some of the materials, she'd rather believe that the writers belonged to a deranged segment of society instead of entertaining the possibility that the writings were true. Well, he knew one surefire way to counter her disbelief, but in doing so he would be removing all choice from her of ever leaving.

There was merit in the idea, of course. The way he felt now, he couldn't bear the thought of her leaving him, but how long would he feel this way? One human never held a gargoyle's interest beyond a few sexual encounters, even less when they were as close as he was to the dark side. Would it be fair of him to doom her to an existence of uncertainty?

Even as he thought this, Lorn ushered her past her bedroom door. It took her several moments to realize that they stood in front of his room.

"Lorn, I don't think..."

"Good, don't. Just feel," he encouraged. He'd worked so closely with her all day, fighting against his urges to take her mouth beneath his own, touch her smooth skin.

"Monsieur De LaRue, pardon the interruption," Luc called as he hurried down the hall toward them. Lorn whirled on the young elf with a warning growl. The younger man flinched as if being visibly struck, but regained quickly.

"Monsieur, your father is on the phone. He says that it's urgent he speak with you."

Lorn swore under his breath, angry about the interruption but even more upset

for the telekinetic shove he'd given the man. He didn't like the idea of the sexually charged creature anywhere near Fatima. There wasn't a human alive who was immune to an elf's power of suggestion. Luc had used it to his complete advantage while living among the human population, which was why the Elfin Council had banished him for an undetermined amount of time to work in Lorn's castle.

It seemed like a good solution, but with Fatima in residence Lorn wasn't so certain he wanted Luc to remain in his service. "I'll answer the call in my office," Lorn agreed, dismissing the messenger.

"I want you to wait for me here," he said after turning back to a bewildered Fatima. "I won't be long."

* * *

Almost of their own volition, Fatima's legs propelled her into Lorn's bedroom. The door closed behind her with a soft click, leaving her alone in his domain. If she'd thought her own room was large, it was a matchbox compared to his. She explored, slowly touching each item in his sparsely decorated space.

"Oh my," she uttered as she stood in front of his fireplace. Above it was a massive portrait of a gargoyle posing like an aristocratic king in all his nude glory. Fatima was in awe of the larger-than-life image of the gray-skinned creature. She tore her eyes away from his heavy penis that hung imposingly between thickly muscled thighs, her eyes traveling up his corded stomach, past the wide expanse of his chest.

Massive wings, large enough to wrap his body, stood wide on either side of him. Her gaze stopped on his strong facial features. He wasn't grotesque like one might suspect of a gargoyle. In fact... he was quite handsome. He actually reminded her of the creatures who visited her in her dreams. An odd sense of familiarity set in as she studied the long dark mane of hair swirling around him. Green eyes stared back at her from the picture, pinning her in place. They were Lorn's eyes.

* * *

"What is it, sire?" Lorn began quickly after cursory salutations.

Not one for pleasantries himself, Krail De LaRue seemed to overlook his son's

abruptness. "We have lost another one."

"Who?" Lorn asked with complete understanding.

"Vladimir," Krail answered on a sigh.

"Damn!" He'd spent many years at the Krosovich compound after the Fledgling suicides. Vladimir was senior to him by only a hundred years, but the slight gap was never felt amongst the friends.

"We will get him back, sire," Lorn promised.

"I know you will try." The hopelessness in his father's voice struck a nerve.

"I have acquired the services of the woman I mentioned to you before," he added.

"And you are certain that she is not --"

"No, she's not a Fledgling." As much as he would've liked to, he couldn't get his father's hopes up falsely.

"But her writings?"

"Are that of a scholarly associate professor," he enlightened.

There was a long pause. "We will be bringing Vladimir to the castle by the next moon rising."

Normally his father's old world way of speaking was a source of ribbing, but there would be none tonight. The gargoyles had lost a great Protector, hopefully only temporarily.

* * *

Fatima lay awake, secure in the room that would be hers for the next year. The portrait of the gargoyle with Lorn's eyes remained fixed in her mind.

"Fatima." Her name came like a whisper through the door after a gentle tapping.

He'd go away, she convinced herself.

There was another succession of knocks, more demanding this time. The silence that followed was eerily deceptive; she listened intently for any sign of him. Mere seconds had gone by before she heard the lock give, followed by the sound of her door sliding open.

"Please leave," she demanded, sitting up quickly in bed as she spoke.

"Why didn't you stay in my rooms?" he asked, ignoring her protest.

"Because it wasn't a good idea. We agreed before I came here that our relationship would be a business one."

"I don't remember that." He stalked toward the bed. "I do however remember promising to do as you wished."

"Okay, I don't want you here," she stated firmly.

"Really? Is it here you don't want me?" He took another step. "Or perhaps here."

"You know damned well what I mean."

"Do I? Perhaps my English is failing. I'm sure you could help me with it, professor." He took the remaining steps that would bring him to the bed.

Fatima waited until the last moment to dodge him, hoping to catch him by surprise. All she succeeded in doing was getting her ankles secured in his firm hold. He easily flipped her over onto her back, and with one tug brought her within a breath's reach. She lay with him on his knees between her thighs, her nightshirt riding up just below firm breasts.

"Nice," he said, fingering her bikini briefs. "But I like it better when you don't wear any at all." He punctuated his comment by giving the offending garment a swift jerk on either side.

Fatima gasped at feeling the skimpy material ripped from her body, waiting for fear to set in at his aggressive behavior.

"Would you like me to stop?" he asked as he began to gently palm her hairless mound. At her aroused sigh, he added more pressure. "Maybe you would like me to fuck you with my fingers like before?"

With the exception of her aroused whimpers, she remained silent, which only encouraged his intense assault. "Ooohhh," she moaned, pushing her hips up to meet his large hand.

"Look at me," he commanded, after she closed her eyes against the pleasure he caused.

When she complied, he rewarded her with one long finger pushed into her welcoming heat. "Do you want more?" His voice was husky.

"Oh yes," she begged.

"Good, because I want to give you more." He removed his now drenched finger. Fatima sobbed in protest, ashamed at how quickly he had her craving him. She watched with lust-filled eyes as his legs slid from underneath his body, allowing him to sprawl between her compliant thighs.

For several seconds she wondered what he would do to her body next. She didn't have long to wait. Like a cat lapping up cream, Lorn's tongue snaked out, delving between the folds of her labia, taking one long slow taste.

She turned her head into the rumpled bedspread to muffle the sound of her pleasure.

He spread her folds exposing her pink nub to him, inhaling her scent before diving in to devour her.

Fatima's toes curled into the soft sheets as his tongue stroked her hard nubbin. Her hands threaded into his silky hair while she ground into his eager mouth. He sucked her clit in and out in rapid motions, enjoying the crooning noises that emanated from her.

He knew she was close, could hear the increased rate of her heart, her hands becoming more insistent on the back of his head.

He pushed two fingers into her throbbing pussy while he lapped at her clit with strong forceful movements.

"Oh... Lorn... yess. I'm commiinnngggg!" she shrieked as her body exploded into a series of contractions and spasms around his digits. Lorn removed his fingers, delving his long tongue deep in her vibrating pussy, wanting to consume every drop of her essence. When he was satisfied there was no more to be gotten he stroked his tongue back up again, pushing at her humming clit.

"I can't," she protested, feeling completely drained.

His response was to drag her legs over his shoulders, holding them in place

while he started a fierce licking on her clit that soon had her bellowing his name in orgasm.

Fatima mumbled something incoherently against his chest as he carried her the short distance from her room to his. She dozed lightly against him, no longer able to fight the sleep that finally claimed her.

Despite his body's protest, he tucked her gently beneath the covers of his bed, leaving her to sleep while he stepped onto the balcony, swiftly shifting into his gargoyle form. He leapt from the cold stones, soaring into the night air.

Chapter 7

Fatima came awake slowly, groggily noting the nightshirt pushed up over her hips, enjoying the feel of satiny sheets under her bare legs. She stretched languidly. Early morning sunlight shone through opened blinds.

"I'm glad you're awake," the now all too familiar male voice greeted as one arm snaked around her waist, dragging her the short distance that separated them, bringing her into oh so intimate contact with every naked, aroused inch of him.

"Oh my," Fatima muttered, feeling the stimulated length of him against her ass as he nuzzled her neck.

He inhaled her intoxicating scent deeply, wanting to bury himself inside of her. He could with just a little maneuvering, but he vowed to take their ultimate joining slow this time, to wring out every ounce of her pleasure before taking his gluttonous fill.

He rose up on one elbow, positioning her until she lay on her back.

"I want to see every inch of you," he said with intensity, feeling her melt from his heated words. "I want to taste all of you, bury my cock so deeply inside of you that it takes your breath away."

"What do you want me to do?" Her voice was weak with compliant desire.

A wave of pleasure shot through him at her utter submission.

"I want to see all of you," he repeated, even as he raised to a sitting position, one leg folded in front of him, the other long limb hanging off the side of the bed. He knew he would need to tread carefully. There would be no turning back. Neither man nor gargoyle could go without having her now.

Fatima's eyes rounded at the sight of his aroused appendage, her nerve faltering as she remembered the pain of his initial entrance only a few days before.

"Look at my eyes," he ordered, as if sensing the course of her thoughts.

Her gaze shot up to meet his, like a child caught doing something wicked.

"Sit up," he commanded. She sat up, folding her legs in front of her as she gazed into his strangely colored eyes, studying them while they changed from their original rain forest green to a darker hue. The smooth satin sheet felt erotic against her bare bottom.

"Remove your top," he instructed.

She hesitated before reaching for the shirt's edges, lifting it over her head.

Lorn considered her with controlled hunger, following the path of the material as it traveled leisurely up her body. He was eager for his hands to follow the same trail over her flat soft stomach, his tongue dipping in her concave belly button. His fingers ached to cup the delectable swells of her breast in his hands, tweaking one nipple while he fondled the other between his teeth and tongue.

"What the fuck?" he swore loudly as she removed the shirt, tossing it aside.

"Did I do something wrong?" Fatima started nervously, crossing her arms over her chest to shield her breast.

Lorn exhaled deeply, momentarily ignoring her actions. He wasn't looking at her breast, but at the winged birthmark just inches below her collarbone. He stared at the mark of the Fledgling while he regulated his breathing, remembering how she'd fingered the exact spot several times.

He knew she felt self-conscious under his quiet scrutiny but was too overwhelmed to speak. She reached for the forgotten blanket to cover herself. "Maybe this wasn't such a good idea."

"Don't," he ordered through clenched teeth, trying to keep the lengthening incisors in his mouth from showing. "You will never shield yourself from me again."

Fatima stared at him in disbelief. What was wrong with him? One minute he was turned on, looking as if he were ready to pounce on her, the next he sat there with accusing eyes as if she'd done something wrong. She looked to where her discarded nightshirt lay on the floor, calculating the distance between it and how long it would

take her to get to the door. Worst case scenario she could run to her room naked. It was only a few feet away.

"You wouldn't make it," he said, as if reading her mind, his voice rough while he followed her train of thought. "Does it throb?" He looked back at the mark on her chest.

How did he know? "Yes... well, not so much anymore," she confessed nervously.

He nodded in understanding, all the while his heart sang an elated chorus.

A Fledgling! And not just any Fledgling but the one created for him. He swore under his breath at the wasted months. He would have to report this to the Council, let them know that Fledglings still lived. They would want to meet Fatima and learn everything about her family history, trace her lineage to other possible marked women. He knew that others on the brink would protest his claiming her for himself, but there was no way he would let her stand before his brethren to choose her mate. It was a completely selfish move but he wasn't willing to give her up, sure that if he did it would push him completely over the edge into darkness. Besides, he knew she wanted him, felt it in every reaction to his touch. By her own admission, her mark had responded to him, the true indication that they were destined as mates. She would be his forever.

"Come with me," he said, extending his hand to her.

Warily she accepted it, unsure of the change in his mood.

Naked, he led her to a spacious connecting bathroom. In front of a sizeable picture window sat a sunken bath, large enough to fit four people of his considerable stature. Lorn guided her to a glass shower built for two that stood in an opposite corner. He pulled her in behind him, rotating briefly to turn on the water and adjust the temperature. Warm spray streamed from nozzles on either side of the shower, drenching their nude forms. Fatima continued to watch him, trying to gauge his next move.

"Don't worry, *ma cherie*, I want you now more than ever, if that's at all possible." He accentuated the statement by tracing the outline of her face with the back of his hand. Fatima shuddered at the contact, closing her eyes, enjoying the feel of the roped

veins on the back of his hand.

Lorn dipped his head, unable to resist the need to kiss her again. Fatima yielded to him, welcoming the firm pressure of his lips. He easily slid his tongue into her mouth, all the while drawing her closer to his soaked body. The water felt hotter against her skin as he plundered her mouth, his hands sliding down her wet back to cup her firm, rounded derriere. She felt the length of him press into her stomach, his cock jumping in anticipation of what was to come.

Effortlessly, he lifted her against the wall, moaning his satisfaction into her mouth when she wrapped her long legs around his waist. He trailed hot kisses down her neck, dipping his head to take one rigid nipple in his mouth. She dug her hands in his hair, arching her back for him to take more.

"Is this what you want?" he mumbled around her nipple after giving it a firm tug. The sensation traveled down her body further inflaming her already pulsating core.

"Yes," she whimpered, wanting to touch him, have him aching the way she did. There had to be a law against what he was doing to her with his tongue and teeth, sucking her until her hips rocked uncontrollably. She was on the verge of an unbelievable climax when Lorn redirected his attention to her neck again, nipping her.

"You are mine," he ground out. "Say it."

"Yes."

"Say it." He suckled her neck firmly.

"I'm... I'm yours."

"Forever."

"More," she begged. She felt the sharp prick of teeth penetrating her delicate skin, the pain only accentuating the peak that she could no longer prevent. "Aaaaaaaahhhhhhhh," she yelled into the echoing room.

Fatima didn't remember him turning off the shower. Hell, she didn't remember them coming back into his bedroom, but there they were, slightly damp on his bed, while he lazily rubbed a hand up and down her stomach.

"What happened?"

"I believe some call it the little death," he answered, watching her reaction.

"Did you bite me?" she asked, her hand reaching up to touch the bruise on her neck as the question came out.

"Did it hurt much?" he queried.

She shook her head.

"Good, I don't want to ever cause you pain."

Her heart warmed to him even more. What was it about this man?

"I think I'll go crazy if I don't have you, *ma cherie*."

"We can't have that." She smiled coyly, wanting him more than she wanted anything in her life. Before he could stop her, she straddled his waist with her thighs, bending to give his surprised mouth a delicate kiss.

"Fatima, you don't know what you're doing."

"I disagree, Mr. De LaRue," she said before silencing him with a kiss meant to show him just how wrong he was.

Fatima took full advantage of his surprise, eagerly moving her lips over his, darting a teasing tongue in his mouth. She was torn between watching his responses and losing herself completely to their kiss. Prompted by his acquiescence she became bolder in her actions, dropping down the mere inches needed to rub her warm core against his length.

"Dammnnnn," he grunted, his hands going to her hips to still her sensuous movements. "You're not ready."

"Like hell I'm not," she objected, not sure how she managed to wiggle free from his strong grip. She gave him one last long kiss before sliding slowly down his body, trailing kisses as she went. At his navel she dipped her tongue in gently, circling the damp orifice before moving further.

"Fatima, I can't allow this." His words were firm but his reaction wasn't quick enough to deflect her from her target, and what a wonderfully large target it was.

Certain that she wouldn't be able to get it all in her mouth, but damn sure willing

to try, she tasted his huge member with a flick of her tongue before firmly grasping him in her hand. Shouldn't her fingers be able to touch? she wondered briefly.

"What are you doing, woman?" he growled, as she eased her mouth over his tip, only able to take a small portion of the veined appendage. Steadily she worked her mouth over him while pumping the rest with her hand. Wanting to sample all of him, she let her tongue trail over his cock's thick base, lapping him as if he were her favorite flavor Popsicle. She would have returned to sucking if he hadn't managed to maneuver away from her inquisitive mouth.

"Are you trying to make me spill my seed in your mouth?" he demanded.

"There's a thought." She smiled up at him, encouraged to know that she had him so close.

"You are turning out to be quite the vixen," he commented, reaching for her.

"I'm trying. After all, I'm learning from a very apt teacher," she agreed.

"Well, why don't I educate you on my version of the alphabet." He laid back again, bringing her on top of him.

Ready to question him about the whole ABC thing, she was startled as he slid down between her legs until she hovered just above his face.

"Hold on," he warned, wrapping his arms around her thighs to pull her down.

"Oh my," she gasped when his tongue came in contact with an already excited clit. Bracing her arms on the massive headboard as Lorn did wonderfully erotic things to her sensitive nub, she tried to maintain some semblance of control while he caressed her over and over. She looked down in aroused awe as his head dived in, his lapping so wild that she knew she couldn't last long. Seemingly of their own volition her hips rode his face while his tongue alternated between plunging into her creaming canal and licking on her hard nub.

"Ooooooohhhhhh... I'm... gonna cccccccooooooooommmmmmmeeee!" she screeched as the orgasm took hold of her. She rode the wave out until the end, pumping against his vigorous tongue.

With the haste of a man pushed to his limit, he flipped her onto her back in one

easy movement, positioning himself above her. He pushed into her in a painstakingly slow motion, her tight sheath stretching to accommodate his girth.

Fatima exhaled bit by bit as he entered her, pushing forward for what seemed like forever until she encompassed all of him. Good Lord, was he large! She realized that he waited for her to become accustomed to him.

"Don't stop," she encouraged.

"Thank you," he growled, retreating slightly only to plunge balls deep inside her. His grip on her waist was steadfast, keeping her anchored for his plundering cock.

She didn't realize that she could be so totally filled by another person, so totally aroused by the friction of strong never-ending strokes. She lifted her hips to match his downward thrusts, feeling the beginnings of a new orgasm. Frantically she increased their pace.

"Uuuuuuughhh, woman, you're killing me," he groaned.

Fatima was beyond words; all she wanted to do was feel.

"Mine... all mine," he roared as his climax slammed through him. He pumped into her harder, shooting his seed into the deep recesses of her womb. Her own completion wasn't far behind, causing her to cry out again while her contractions milked him dry.

Once he was able to regulate his breathing he pulled her up on his chest like a limp doll.

"Sleep," he commanded, not bothering to cover their hot sweaty bodies.

Chapter 8

Her first conscious thought was that she was alone in bed; her second was that she was thirsty and famished. Her eyes widened as she stared unblinkingly at the bedside clock. It was already after 5 pm. How in God's name had she slept for ten hours? That couldn't be right. She slipped to the edge of Lorn's bed searching the area for her nightshirt. There was nothing. Until she knew what was going on, she wasn't going to risk running down the hall naked when the staff could be about. She scanned his room quickly taking in a door-less archway that probably led to a retreat room or something similar.

"One of these has got to be a closet," she muttered aloud, going to one of the three doors she spotted. Door number two gave way to a walk-in closet that would make any woman drool, but Fatima didn't notice as she eyed the familiar female clothing hanging on one side of the small room.

"What the...?" She thumbed through several items. They were all hers! Everything she'd brought with her from LA was neatly hung or packed away in drawers. She grabbed a spaghetti-strapped sundress, sliding it easily over her naked body.

What was going on? She ran a hand over wild hair. She wouldn't be able to do much without a comb and brush, but right now getting some answers was more important.

She padded down to the lower level on bare feet, not sure in what direction to go. As large as the place was she could search it all day and never find anyone.

"Lorn," she called from the base of the stairs in as loud a voice as she could muster.

"Madame, what are you doing out of your bed?" Pierre came scurrying into the

hall.

"First of all, I wasn't in my bed, but I think you already know that. Secondly, I would like a word with Mr. De LaRue."

"Come, let me help you back upstairs. Monsieur De LaRue is meeting with members of the Council and cannot be disturbed," he said hurriedly, trying to guide her back upstairs.

"Members of the Council?" He hadn't mentioned anything about a meeting. "Look, if you're trying to run interference for him, don't bother. I'll find him myself." She whirled around, thinking the library might be a good place to start. The sudden movement had her grabbing onto the base of the stair railing to steady herself.

"Madame, you really need to be in bed," he repeated.

"Why are you calling me that?" she bit out. The term was designated for married women and she was certain he knew that she didn't have a husband. She closed her eyes against the spinning room. After several seconds she tested everything by opening them slowly.

"I'm not going anywhere until I talk to Lorn," she demanded.

"Madame, he is unavailable --"

"It's okay, Pierre." A man exited a door from somewhere behind him, all the while gazing at Fatima.

She stared back, unable to mask the amazed look on her face. If she didn't know better she would have sworn that Lorn had aged about thirty years, and quite well. Pierre bowed out gracefully but not before he threw a disapproving look in her direction.

"So you are Fatima," his thickly accented voice greeted.

"Yes." Her brows furrowed.

"I am Krail De LaRue, Lorn's --"

"She is a doctor, sire. I'm certain that she is able to put two and two together."

Lorn exited through the same door followed by six other imposing figures.

Good Lord, had the whole De LaRue clan converged on her, and why did they

all have to be giants? Very, very handsome giants.

"You should be in our rooms resting," Lorn, dressed in jeans and a pullover T-shirt, stated as he came to stand beside her.

She looked to the group of silent men, before registering his comment.

"About that," she began in a whisper meant for his ears only. "Why are my things in your room, just because we... you know... doesn't mean that --"

"See, the woman hasn't chosen him," a voice boomed from one of the men.

Chosen? Had he heard her? And what the hell was he going on about? She looked at Lorn questioningly only to find stormy green eyes fixed coldly on the man who'd spoken. He stepped in front of her, obscuring her from view.

His voice was deceptively calm as he said, "I've already confirmed with you all that the choice has been made." He paused, waiting while each man nodded his acknowledgement, all but the author of the earlier outburst.

"I will rejoin you shortly after I see to the comfort of my... Fatima."

His Fatima, what did he mean by that?

"Let's go upstairs." Lorn turned to her, continuing the calm tone he'd used to address the other men.

"I think I've had enough sleep, thank you. What I would like are my things returned to my room," she hissed for his ears, not sure how much good that would do with super-sonic over there.

Several of the spectators cleared their throats simultaneously.

"You can either walk back upstairs of your own volition or I can carry you," he returned just as low.

More throat clearing.

"You wouldn't dare," she fumed. Of all the gall.

She didn't get another warning before Lorn tossed her over his shoulder as if she weighed nothing and proceeded up the long staircase.

"It was very nice meeting you, young lady. I look forward to speaking with you at length," Krail added, beaming from ear to ear.

* * *

That wasn't exactly the introduction Lorn had in mind, but he wouldn't let himself worry about what had already been done. He was more concerned with how things were going to go from that point on. When his father had arrived with the other Protectors in tow, he smelled trouble, which was exactly what he got after informing them all that there was a Fledgling upstairs in his bed. His announcement was followed by utter silence before the room erupted in accusations.

"You had no right to take her," Mikhail Ludwick began. "How do we know that she would have chosen you if all of the Protectors were present?"

"Exactly. As far as we know you could have her bound to your bed," Alejandro Saldano added.

"When I met her I didn't know she was a Fledgling. Her mark is not in the traditional spot. I discovered it after we became lovers, which makes it obvious that she has chosen me."

"How can we be certain that you didn't force her?" Alexi Dracon questioned quietly from his chair in a corner.

"Because I don't resort to rape in order to get a woman in my bed." He resisted the urge to throw the brooding Protector out of his home. All knew that there was no love lost between the two gargoyles. "Yes, I have found my mate, but I'm still dedicated to the cause. This should be a day of rejoicing because we now have concrete proof that there are Fledglings in the world. We just need to find them."

Each man digested the meaning of his words, agreeing.

"How do we go about finding them?" Lorn's father questioned. "In my day the marked women were presented to us in our annual celebrations," he remembered nostalgically.

"We could run an ad," Alejandro suggested.

Most of the men, including Lorn, snorted aloud.

"No, I think Alejandro is on to something," Jean, his younger brother, piped in.

"And what should it say... Fledglings wanted," Alexi grunted.

"No, but give me a few days to think on it and I'll come up with an idea," Jean offered.

"You do that. In the meantime we must first address the issue of Vladimir and secondly allow our brother to return to his new mate. The sooner they can get their coupling out of their systems the sooner they can continue their research," Mikhail added jokingly, getting the barest cursory chortle. None of them had much to laugh about these days and losing another brother to the dark side only punctuated things. Lorn might have found his mate but until more Fledglings were found the rest of them were on borrowed time.

* * *

As Lorn allowed a steaming Fatima to slide to the floor he couldn't help but think that there wouldn't be much loving going on any time soon.

"You should be in the bed. I instructed Pierre to bring you a tray once you'd awaken."

"I'm not hungry," she lied. "What I would like are some answers. First, why are my clothes here and what the hell was that whole Conan the Conqueror thing you just pulled downstairs?"

"Your things are here because this is where you belong, with me every night." His voice dropped seductively, causing Fatima to take several steps back.

"You should have consulted me first before doing that. Did you ever think that I didn't want your household to know that we're sleeping together?"

"That's not their concern."

"Well, it's mine. What if the university were to hear about this? It could compromise the whole credibility of the research."

"To hell with the research and the university for that matter. I'm not going to sneak around with you like some guilty teenager."

"You don't get it." She bit her bottom lip in agitation. "I want everything put back."

"No."

"Fine, if you won't do it then I will." She stalked off to the closet that held both their belongings.

"Fatima," he cautioned.

Whatever! He had no right to make decisions for her, especially ones that could be potentially detrimental to her job. She gasped when he stopped her in her tracks, seeming to speed across the room at an unbelievable velocity.

"How did you do that?" What was going on around here? Maybe something was wrong with her. After all, she'd slept for so long. Had she been ill, was that why everyone wanted her in bed?

"I don't want to argue with you, *ma cherie*, please." He sighed. "You're right, I should have talked to you about this first. After last night I was certain that you felt the same way I do."

"I do," she admitted hurriedly. "It's just that I woke up so late, and all my things were here, then Pierre and the whole scene downstairs," she rambled. "Your father must think you've gotten involved with a lunatic. I'm sure I look a fright."

"You look beautiful," he reassured, pulling her gingerly into his arms.

"Who were those other men, brothers, cousins?"

"Some. Come to bed."

Feeling suddenly drained, she allowed him to lead her across the room.

"I have to get back to our guests. Promise me that you'll rest? If you need anything call downstairs. Remotes are in the top drawer of the end table. If you want to watch television the screen slides down from the ceiling."

"Will you be long?" she mumbled.

"I'll try not to be."

* * *

Gordy paced the length of his small living room. "Okay, give it to me again."

The pert blonde lounged against the sofa looking bored. She'd thought professors were supposed to be intelligent. Why was he wasting his time going over something she'd spent an hour explaining already, especially when they could be doing

much more interesting things. Her stomach growled hungrily. She hadn't fed since the night before and Gordy looked like a tasty entrée right about now.

She loved the transformation in him since she'd made him a slave. Gone was the pasty pale complexion that once begged for sunlight. In its place was a deep even tan that she knew would last year round. His former slight frame had filled out some, providing him with an athletic build he could never have achieved on his own. Even his blue eyes seemed to have gained an intensity he would've otherwise never attained. Yup, he was the best so far. Too bad he wouldn't be around long enough to enjoy it. They never were.

Her gaze wandered down to the bulge hidden by loose fitting sweats. Even his cock had grown, something that she'd never experienced before in her two thousand years of existence.

"Okay, but this is the last time." She rolled her eyes skyward, beginning again as if he were a child. "In addition to insects, and your run of the mill animal communities, this world is made up of 'higher intelligence' creatures both seen and unseen. Mortals or humans make up a large portion. Life walkers, succubae like myself, weres, elves, gremlins and gargoyles would be the next group, although our numbers are considerably smaller. Then you have the immortals, usually vampires and jinn, although there are some beasties that I would be insulted to consider as 'higher intelligence' in that category."

Gordy nodded as if the order of things made sense to him.

"To maintain a balance, none of the life-walkers or immortals are allowed to propagate their species outside of the natural order of things. If this were to happen... well, I don't need to tell you how easily the balance could be disrupted."

"Makes sense."

"I know for a fact that the gargoyles are looking at genetically altering human females to breed with in order to ensure that their species dominates." The lie slipped easily from her pouty lips.

"And you think that's why this Lorn De LaRue fellow, who you say is a

gargoyle, wants Fatima, to use her as a guinea pig?" Gordy stopped his pacing, rounding on the enticing blonde.

"Possibly, but more importantly he needs her expertise as a cellular biologist."

"Well, he's barking up the wrong tree there. She's not that type of scientist."

"Oh, I beg to differ," she disagreed, reaching for her oversized bag that lay discarded on the floor. Pulling out the thick file she handed it over. "It seems your little girlfriend has been keeping secrets," she remarked snidely as he perused the file. It had taken a lot for her to get that information, agreeing to some very unsavory things with an awfully pungent gremlin, but it was worth it, especially if it meant convincing Professor Gullible to go along with her plans.

"This can't be," he croaked.

"Fraid so. Your little anthropologist is a lot more than she appears."

"Why didn't she tell me?"

"Don't know." She tried looking empathetic, an emotion that didn't come naturally to her kind. Seeing an opportunity, she rose, striding across the room to where he stood frozen, her hips swaying as she went. "Maybe you can ask her that the next time you see her, hmmm?" At his silence she continued. "I'm sure you can appreciate the severity of the situation." She sidled up to him, arms wrapping around his waist as she pressed against him in what she hoped was a consolatory hug. She caught his delectable scent, and her stomach growled loudly.

"What do you need me to do?"

A sweet smile broke out across her face belying the truly evil nature that dwelled within. She licked her lips in anticipation of her plot coming to fruition, but before she got down to business it was time for a little pleasure and feeding.

Chapter 9

Whatever had ailed her before was completely knocked out of her system the next day. She felt good, better than good in fact. Lorn had joined her in bed sometime during the evening, cuddling her as she slept, waking her on occasion to make sure she ate and had plenty of fluids. When she woke that morning, they enjoyed a leisurely shower that left her completely frustrated and unsatisfied.

"If you're feeling up to it, my father would like us to join him for breakfast this morning," he started, after they'd dressed silently.

"That's fine with me," Fatima answered, silently considering what could be on his mind. He'd been distracted since they rolled out of bed that morning, giving her a gentle kiss on her forehead. At first, she thought he assumed she was still ill, but she'd quickly dispelled the worry, eager to have his hands on her body. She was certain that when he'd suggested their shower together it would lead to some clean fun. Instead Lorn seemed preoccupied as he bathed her body. He was obviously aroused but proceeded to wash her down with little interest.

Had she done something wrong? she contemplated as they made their way down to the lower level of the house to the formal dining room.

"Good morning," Krail greeted, rising from his seat at the dining table and coming around to give her a brief kiss on the cheek.

Fatima instantly liked the cheery man, reminding her of her own father before the sickle cell took hold of him. She was also aware of the other man opposite the older version of Lorn as he too rose.

"Good morning." He nodded, his voice lacking the warmth of the older man.

"This is my youngest son, Jean."

Fatima couldn't help but stare at the almost mirror image of Lorn with mouth

slightly agape. When the men had stepped into the foyer yesterday, she was surprised at how greatly they resembled each other, but now less distracted she was able to appreciate the subtle differences. Unlike Lorn's long mane, Jean wore his hair in a more conservative fashion, tapered closely on the sides. He looked a tad younger, maybe a couple of years, definitely not by much.

"Fatima," Lorn bit out from the head of the table.

"I'm sorry," she apologized, realizing she'd been staring. "It's just that you all look so much alike, it's uncanny," she said taking her seat.

"Yes, it can be a little unnerving to most," Krail accepted.

"Were all the other men relatives of yours?"

"Of sorts," Lorn interjected.

"We have all known each other for so long that we are like brothers," Jean added.

"It must be nice having such a close knit group of friends," she commented, remembering the almost solitary existence she would be returning to in Los Angeles. Sure, she had a few acquaintances but no deep friendships to speak of. She doubted that anyone would even notice her absence.

"Surely a woman such as yourself must have many friends and family," his father continued.

Fatima looked absently down at her plate. Just a moment before, she'd been starved. "No."

"Fatima is an only child. Both of her parents are deceased," Lorn explained, his voice surprisingly soft.

Their eyes met across the wide expanse of the table. Although she had never talked to him about her parents, she was certain that any background check he'd done on her had turned up that much information.

"I am sorry to hear that," Krail answered with all sincerity.

"Thank you," she mumbled. How many times had she heard that sentiment over the years?

"Lorn says that you are helping him with his research," Jean switched topics.

"Yes, although my sickness has set us back a couple of days. There's so much to be done, a year will pass by so quickly."

"If you need any extra help I'd be happy to stay on and offer my services," Jean offered.

"No," Lorn eyed his brother, "I'm sure we'll be back on track in a few days."

"Of course." The younger man nodded his agreement.

"So what brought you all here?" At their silence she added, "If you don't mind me asking, that is?"

"An emergency meeting of the Council. Those of us in the vicinity gather and the others usually join via conference call."

"Am I keeping you from something important?" she asked Lorn. "As I said before, I'm perfectly capable of handling the research if you need to be conducting business."

"We have laid the matter to rest already," he informed her.

There was another moment of silence before Krail continued with his questioning.

"I know that your parents have passed on, but what of other relations, perhaps cousins?"

"There are some," she admitted. "But where they are exactly I have no idea. My father was an orphan and my mother didn't keep in touch much with her own family."

Each man clung to her every word as if she were telling him the secret combination to Fort Knox.

"What was the cause for her separation?" Krail again.

"I'm not really sure, I just know that she and her sisters took their own paths in life. Mother never spoke of them." Fatima remembered asking her mother once about her family only to be told that she wouldn't meet them. The look of sadness that crossed her mother's face was enough to prevent her from broaching the topic again.

Fatima missed the exchange of looks between the men as she bit into her

breakfast in reverie. She knew very little about her parents' past and upbringing. In her youth it had never mattered much because they'd loved her unconditionally.

The remainder of breakfast was eaten with light conversation. Fatima tried to learn about Lorn through his family but found them to be a very close-mouthed group about private matters. Of course, she reminded herself, as far as they were concerned she was just the hired help that happened to be sleeping with her boss. The thought made her uneasy. This was all a very new realm for her. She knew that people did this sort of thing all the time, but Krail and his sons seemed of a different era. Did he think less of her because of their sleeping arrangements? And why did she even care?

* * *

"I hope my father and brother didn't pry too much into your personal life," Lorn began later that day as they made their way into the labs. His family left immediately following breakfast making their apologies for their quick departures. Fatima grabbed up her notebook pretending to read over notes from their last time in the secured room.

"They were fine," she muttered, still wondering with unease over his family's opinion of their current cohabitation. Maybe she should insist that they return back to the status quo. She paused, realizing that she didn't know what the status quo was for them. Virgin or not, she'd had sex with him only a day after meeting and allowed him to virtually make love to her in a hallway, not to mention her bedroom or the things they'd done in his rooms. She groaned softly. What was wrong with her, how could one man have her acting so out of character?

"Is something wrong?" Lorn was at her side in a matter of seconds, tilting her head up with a finger under her chin. He searched her eyes as if they were truly the windows to her soul.

"Nothing." She took several steps back to put some distance between them. "I want to finish the carbon dating on this stuff," she added quickly before hurriedly taking several documents off their shelves.

Lorn contemplated stopping her, in the end deciding to give her the space that

she needed for now. He'd noted her inquiries into his youth and her later preoccupation when she didn't seem to get the answers she wanted. She was hurt, and quite possibly drawing all the wrong conclusions because of their evasiveness. He knew that his time was running out in telling her about his kind... their kind. Soon her senses would begin to sharpen. Already her beauty had become more pronounced, but she'd had little time to notice.

* * *

Absently, she kneaded a knot in the back of her neck, not sure how much time had passed since her last visit into the research room. She tried to block him out when she went to retrieve her next set of items, much the same way he'd done her all day. His broad back was to her. When she entered the room, he scribbled notes into a binder. She wasn't sure of the time, just knew that it was late. They'd had a quick separate lunch and dinner. Her mood darkened after Lorn made no attempt to join her when she opted to eat in one of the small adjoining offices. She watched through the two-way Plexiglas as he continued flipping through his notes. She could've been invisible for all the attention he paid her.

"I'm going to call it a night," she announced, putting away her items for the evening. Despite her racing thoughts, she'd still managed to make a considerable dent in the carbon dating. At this pace she would be done by tomorrow, leaving her no choice but to work with him in the close quarters.

"I'll be up shortly," he replied without looking up.

She bit her bottom lip to distract from the sudden knot in her chest. *What's wrong with you*, she berated herself as she left the room with controlled footsteps. *What did you expect, for him to declare his undying love? How absurd is that?*

She entered his rooms, for the briefest moment entertaining the idea of showering and waiting for him to come up. Her pride wouldn't allow her to do that. Instead she grabbed a few things from his closet, making her way into her abandoned room. She doubted that there would be much discussion now over where she spent the remainder of her stay.

In the shower, she allowed her embarrassment to wash over her, giving free rein to emotions that she'd bottled up all day.

* * *

Lorn heard her soft footfalls as she made her way to their rooms, fighting the urge to follow her. She paused before padding to the closet, her steps carrying her back across the room. He'd expected to hear the gentle sound of clothes dropping, perhaps a shower. Instead what he heard next had his back stiffening. She walked back down the hall, to her old room. He waited. Maybe something had been left behind. He ground his teeth when he heard the shower turn on from the one place she'd been forbidden.

With the speed known to gargoyles, he was out of the lab and up the stairs in the time that it would take a heart to beat. He'd tried giving her space today, allowed her to focus on their work, and what thanks did he get? Disobedience.

He registered the shocked look on her face as he reached into the shower to stop the water's hot flow. The next instance he had her drenched naked body cradled in his arms as he strode down the hall to his rooms.

Fatima let out a yelp as he dumped her unceremoniously onto the large bed.

"What are you doing?" she gasped as he jerked clothes off his body. He was naked in seconds, his erection illustrating his arousal. She scrambled to the center of the bed. "If you think that I'm having sex with you tonight, then you have another think coming." She was glad her words sounded braver than she felt.

The expression 'the calm before the storm' came instantly to mind, as he stood regarding her in all his nude glory, body still as stone. She was reminded of the tapestry of the gargoyle that hung above his fireplace.

"If you think standing there like the brooding lord of the castle is supposed to intimidate me, let me reassure you it doesn't." She edged closer to the side of the bed furthest from him.

"Stay." He snapped the order, not making any other attempt to halt her movements.

"I don't think so," she said before bounding from the bed. Conscious of her nakedness but not caring, she made for the closed door. The taste of freedom was bittersweet as she turned the knob but couldn't get the door to budge. She jiggled the knob again, looking over her shoulder to where Lorn stood watching her before giving the handle a quick examination. There was no lock. She jerked on the door again.

"Return to bed, Fatima." This time the command came out evenly.

"You know this whole ordering thing you're so fond of is getting old."

"This is your final warning."

"Whatever," she said, crossing arms over her breasts, the gesture more to cover than in defiance.

Something akin to a growl erupted from him before he was on her, tossing her over his shoulders like a sack of potatoes.

He dumped her none too gently on the bed, the impact knocking the wind out of her, leaving her gasping for air. No sooner had she regained her ability to breathe than Lorn lodged himself between her legs, holding her hands on either side of her head.

"This is the last time I will tell you this," he began. "These are your rooms. This is where you will sleep, wake and be taken by me. I will not have you disobey me again."

Disobey? Who did he think he was?

"Let me go, Lorn." She tried wiggling loose. "I don't know what kind of women you're used to but I'm not stupid nor will I have a man dictate to me."

"You will obey me in all things, but especially this." His gaze was so intense she caught her breath.

"I'm my own woman," she said, her words sounding as weak as she felt.

"That, my little ebony beauty, is where you're wrong. You are mine, mind and body."

She sputtered at his arrogance.

"Shall I show you?" It was a statement more than a question. He easily clasped both her hands in one of his larger ones, securing her wrists above her head.

"No," she protested, bucking under him, which only managed to bring her warm

core in contact with his stiff erection.

"Oh yes, my little one," he assured, trailing his free hand down her body, his thumb flicking the already sensitized nipples.

"Your body already knows who it belongs to," he commented before swooping down to take a turgid brown aureole between his lips, laving the sensitive bud until she arched underneath him, her breathing becoming shallow.

She silently cursed her treacherous body, wishing that she could lie there unresponsive to his strong fingers and seeking mouth.

"Have I neglected you so long that you felt the need to test me?" His voice was deeper, his breath warm against her breast. He allowed his fingers to trail down further, palming her mound until she arched against his hand. He easily dipped one finger inside her wetness. "I don't ever wish to punish you, *ma cherie*, but I will if you continue to defy me." He dipped a second finger inside her.

Fatima's traitorous body responded to the timbre of his voice as easily as to his plundering fingers. When he removed the thick digits from her pussy, she cried out in frustration.

"Please," she begged.

"What is it that you want, *ma cherie*?"

"Don't make me say it," she groaned at the absence of his touch.

"You will tell me what you want."

Time seemed to pass slowly before she finally capitulated. "I want you to fuck me."

"Good girl." He let her wrists go.

For a moment she thought that he was going to stop altogether, until she found herself flipped onto her belly.

"On your knees," he ordered.

She complied.

"Spread your legs for me so I can see my pussy."

Her already wet channel creamed even more at his words. His hands gripped

her waist as he roughly massaged her rear. "Take me," she pleaded.

If he'd heard her it wasn't evident by his response. She reached under her, finding his thick cock. Greedily she tried to shove him inside of her.

"Not yet." He gave her upturned derriere a stinging smack that reverberated throughout the room.

She yelped at his heavy-handedness, whimpering near tears at the painful blow and sexual tension coiling in her. Two fingers slipped into her moist cunt again, stroking her until she mewled in pleasure. He withdrew the digits again, palming her ass before positioning himself at her hot entrance. He rammed into her in one deep downward thrust.

"My God," she cried out as he filled her so suddenly. He grasped her waist in an almost bruising grip, pushing in and out of her suctioning vagina. Her breasts bounced with the force of each thrust. His rhythm was swift, sweeping her into a whirlwind of sensations.

"Whose pussy is this?" he growled.

"Yours," she croaked.

"Mine. No one else will touch you this way," he grunted, reaching down to finger her clit while he ground into her. He nipped her neck. "Come for me, baby," he willed, fingering her clit until she did just that.

"All mine... mine..." he repeated as his climax took him over the edge. He continued pumping into her until he shot his load deep within her warmth.

They were both breathing raggedly when Lorn's body finally stopped rocking into hers. He pulled her up against him, spooning her back while their bodies returned to normal.

"This doesn't change anything, Lorn. I won't let you control me," she mumbled into the downy soft pillow.

He stroked her hair, inhaling its fresh scent and choosing to ignore her words. He'd never craved someone so much in his life, never wanted a woman's total submission the way he did hers.

"Go to sleep," he whispered. A smile touched his lips when, without protest, she did.

Here ends Gargoyles 1: Gargoyle's Quest
Stay tuned for more exciting adventure in
Gargoyles 2: Gargoyle's Dominion

Nia Foxx

Nia Foxx is the proud mother of three beautiful, very active children, all under ten years of age. They currently reside in a picturesque, small town burg of Michigan, where they enjoy biking, swimming, fairs and traveling in their minivan. Nia holds a BA from the University of California, Santa Cruz, in International Politics and Literature. She began writing romantic stories at the age of twelve, trying her hand at erotica only recently.