

# **Gargoyle's Dominion**

## **Nia K. Foxx**

**All rights reserved.**

**Copyright ©2006 Nia K. Foxx**

**No part of this e-book may be reproduced or shared by any electronic or mechanical means, including but not limited to printing, file sharing, and email, without prior written permission from Changeling Press LLC.**

**ISBN (10) 1-59596-277-8**

**ISBN (13) 978-1-59596-277-5**

**Formats Available:**

**HTML, Adobe PDF,**

**MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader**

**Publisher:**

**Changeling Press LLC**

**PO Box 1561**

**Shepherdstown, WV 25443-1561**

**[www.ChangelingPress.com](http://www.ChangelingPress.com)**

**Editor: Katriena Knights**

**Cover Artist: Fabiano Fabris**



This e-book file contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language which some may find offensive and which is not appropriate for a young audience. Changeling Press E-Books are for sale to adults, only, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

## Chapter 1

The blonde held back the gag that threatened to wrack her body when the smelly green creature finally spilled his seed into her mouth, after what seemed like hours of fellatio. She looked forward to the day when she would be permanently done with the horny being, but that wouldn't happen until he agreed to the last part of her terms.

"You are great," his gruff voice croaked out.

"Thanks," she muttered, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand. Normally she loved giving head to a man, needed it as a source of sustenance, but this was no man, and the slimy fluid he'd ejected in her mouth made her stomach turn.

He could have at least disguised his grotesque form, she thought, taking in his repugnant green wart covered skin. Most gremlins preferred taking the more agreeable human persona. Fer, however, called himself a traditionalist.

*Traditionalist, my ass, she couldn't help but think. He just uses that term as an excuse to be utterly disgusting.*

As if to punctuate her thoughts a loud gaseous sound emitted from the portly life walker, producing an odor that made her want to hold her breath indefinitely. He didn't even have the decency to excuse himself.

"So we have an agreement," the blonde said, scrambling to her feet to put distance between her and the combined dreadful smells emanating from him.

"Of course." His lascivious smile displayed a mouth of yellowed, fang-like teeth. The woman averted her eyes, unable to look at the many gaps where some of the stained daggers were missing.

She wanted to beam, but thought better of it. If he knew just how much his favor meant to her there would surely be additions to his laundry list of sexual demands.

"Good. I will meet you at The Pit tomorrow evening at our scheduled time to give you all the information." She was glad she had the foresight to choose such a public location. At least then he would be forced to take a more pleasing form, in addition to keeping his beefy hands to himself.

The blonde picked up her clothing, ecstatic in the knowledge that her plan had come together so easily, almost as it had over six hundred years ago with the Fledgling suicides. She grinned in remembrance at how easily she'd planted the seeds of hatred in the human/Fledgling communities, turning a once peaceful co-existence into one of disdain and fear. She recalled how she "accidentally" met the mate of Krail after the woman's visits to her family's keep. In actuality she'd watched the fair-haired beauty for many months, loathing her aristocratic appearance, the childlike innocence with which she accepted people. How could Krail truly be in love with such a pathetic creature when he could have had her every night? True, there was the pesky thing about needing Fledglings to ensure their longevity and to produce heirs, but that was no reason to end a two-hundred-year relationship.

"Where do you think you're going?" Fer wheezed, bringing her back to the present with a hard jolt.

"I have things I must attend to elsewhere," she said in her normally breezy tone that fooled many about her true nature.

"Well, I think you'd just better clear your calendar because the only plans you have for the next few hours involve me and Goliath here." He laughed, cupping himself, causing his fleshy naked belly to jiggle in response.

She almost chuckled at the misnomer. There was nothing Goliath about the shriveled piece of flesh that usually hid in the folds of his skin. The laughter died within her swiftly when he began to stroke the pathetic pulp.

"Come and give Fer some of what you give best, my little succubus."

\* \* \*

She'd bided her time, waiting for the right moment to strike. Krail had mated with the Fledgling, breeding two children from her, which left him free of concern over

a shortened lifespan. He didn't need the woman any longer; she'd told him that -- pleaded, in fact -- hating herself for begging him to come back to her. *Would he listen?* She grimaced as she recalled his total rejection. It was then she realized the only way to remove the hold the Fledgling woman had over him would be to get rid of her altogether. She knew Krail's suspicion would immediately turn to her if his mate met with a mysterious end. No, she needed to dispose of her in some other fashion.

She'd secretly attended the annual Mate Choosing ceremonies, an event that was highly awaited and visited by various human communities and Protectors alike. It was at such ceremonies that of age Fledglings would choose their life mates from the eligible group of Protectors. No matter the nation, no two ceremonies were held on the same day, allowing Protectors to travel to each event in the hopes of being selected. Fledglings were said to know their mates by the special mark they bore. Some said that when they were in the presence of their intended it would throb fiercely. Because so many gargoyles came to the ceremonies Fledglings would take their time kissing each Protector until the right one was found.

"I do not care how handsome they are, I would not willingly lay with one of those creatures," a woman next to the succubus said.

The blonde shrugged in her cloak. The peasant woman had no idea what she was missing out on. Her loss.

"Every year all are in such an excitement over this affair. I do not see why. The families are selling their own offspring to monsters to beget more monsters," the woman continued, an exaggerated shiver running through her body.

She was jealous. The succubus could tell as much without her empathic abilities. She gave the woman a brief once over. Although pretty enough she would never be the kind to catch a Protector's eye. Her waifish features were only accentuated by a dress in desperate need of a seamstress. Alabaster skin lacked the luster and shine of her own, and that hair -- the dull brown reminded her of an alley rat. Its limp, tangled tresses looked as if they hadn't seen a brush in the better part of a month.

"Apparently most do not agree with you." The blonde indicated the group of women being escorted into the hall, each dressed in fine silks. The succubus grudgingly noted the cheers of the many onlookers.

"That is where you are wrong, my Lady, and there are many who do not want to give their daughters to these... men," she whispered as an afterthought as if remembering the Protectors' extraordinary hearing.

"So you say," the blonde replied, cognizant of their abilities as well, but certain none of the gargoyles were bothering to listen to the crowd, not when their potential future mates paraded in front of them in their seductively beautiful outfits. She would let it go for now, but made a note to watch in which direction the woman retreated when the festivities waned. Perhaps she could be of service later.

From the corner of her eye she spotted Krail and his wife Laurel as they watched their two sons with hope-filled eyes. The two joined the other unmated Protectors while the procession of women stopped in front of each. Most women shyly kissed the gargoyles on the lips with a gentle peck while a few were bolder in their actions, pressing painted lips firmly against the men until they gave in to the open-mouthed kiss.

The blonde wasn't interested in the antics of Fledglings, couldn't care less about the stiff cocks that became evident in some of the men. She only had eyes for Krail, remembering how he'd once pressed demanding kisses against her lips. She liked it rough and boy, did he give it to her, often times leaving bruises that took a while to heal in spite of her advanced cellular regeneration.

Krail's wife stood on tiptoes while she leaned in to whisper something that made him smile. He placed a gentle kiss on her forehead. The succubus' blood boiled at the sweet gesture, just another reminder that as long as Laurel lived there would never be a place in Krail's heart for her.

## Chapter 2

If anyone had told her a month ago that she would be staying in a French castle with a handsome, wealthy bachelor, Fatima would have told them they were crazy. And if they'd said she'd be the man's lover, well, she would surely be able to get them committed. But here she was, dressing for an outing with Lorn.

Four weeks had passed since her arrival at his estate, weeks of constant affection and mind-blowing orgasms. Just when she thought she'd learned all there was about sexual positions Lorn surprised her with a new one. He'd become particularly fond of late night swims that ended in her shouting his name into the night air, not caring who heard. They were spending fewer hours in the labs and more in their bedroom which, when she could think straight, bothered Fatima quite a bit. At this rate when the year ended there wouldn't be much research to show for it.

She opted for yellow cotton Capri pants and a tee sporting a large Playboy bunny insignia. She'd picked up the shirt and similar trendy ones while on a shopping spree to celebrate her associate professor appointment. Initially, she'd hoped the fashionable clothes would make her more approachable to her students. It had worked, to some degree; plenty of the younger males sought her out during office hours quite frequently. She eventually fell in love with the sassy form fitting tops and picked up more whenever her budget would allow.

"Is this comfortable enough?" she asked after finding him waiting for her in the foyer.

"Perfect," he commented, his eyes perusing her shapely form heatedly.

She blushed at the hot look he gave her. Lately that was all it took to get her juices flowing. She felt like an insatiable sex kitten. Had he done something to turn her into a nympho, she wondered. Did they make a drug that could do that? She dismissed

the thought immediately; if such a thing were available every married man in the Western hemisphere would have a supply on hand.

"So are you ready to tell me where we're going yet?" she questioned.

"And ruin the surprise?" He shook his head, taking her smaller hand in his own and leading her to the waiting Bentley.

"You know you're evil to put me through this sort of suspense," she said an hour into their car ride to the nearby city of Lyon. From there they would take Lorn's private jet to Paris -- that much he did tell her.

"I've been called worse."

"I'm sure I can come up with my own choice names." She pretended to think. "Like meany... or --"

"Lover," he supplied. "Perhaps pleasurer."

"Ha! And risk giving you a bigger head than the one you already have? I think not."

"What? I'm only speaking the truth. My mother was famous for telling us the truth could set you free."

"That sounds like a very motherly thing to say. Do you think she's right?"

She knew Lorn's reference to his mother was not meant as an invite to discuss her or his past. However, if she wanted to learn more about him she'd have to take opportunities as they arose. In their time together he'd learned everything imaginable about her. At his insistence she'd shared everything, but still knew nothing of his past.

"You never talk about your mother. Tell me about her."

For a moment he contemplated refusing. That was a chapter in not only his, but Protector history most would rather omit. All knew they suffered because of his mother's treachery.

"She was beautiful," he began. He paused at the recollection before continuing. "When I was a small child, not more than three or four, she would sit me on her lap while singing. I can't remember the words to any particular song because she was always singing in those days. I remember staring at her while she sang, thinking how



pretty she looked. She had the fairest blonde hair and wore it loose most times. It was so long that it touched her waist, and I used to love twirling my fingers in it."

"She sounds lovely. Where is she now?"

He couldn't keep the chill from his next words. "She died many years ago."

"I'm sorry. How did it happen?" She knew firsthand the devastation that could come from the loss of a parent.

"She committed suicide," he stated flatly, his tone saying nothing more on the subject would be discussed. She took the hint, content with the little information she'd gathered, although she had more unanswered questions now than before.

\* \* \*

By the time they arrived at the small airport for the forty-minute flight to Paris, Lorn had returned to some semblance of the attentive lover he'd become over the course of the few weeks they'd known each other. When they were finally allowed privacy on the mid-sized jet his special treatment turned to full fledged pawing. She swatted at his hands several times when he touched her intimately. He finally became so brazen, fueled by her resistance, that he knelt between her parted thighs, spreading them wide to encompass his girth.

"Someone could come out," she protested, shooting cautious glances at the cockpit.

"Not if they want to keep their jobs and their heads," he replied nonchalantly while raising the hem of her shirt, pushing the material over her bra-clad breasts. "You don't need to wear this. Your breasts are perfect."

"You're just saying that so you can have your wicked way with me." She gave in, the front clasp of the flimsy garment easily coming free in Lorn's capable fingers. He let the offending material drop to her sides.

"Is it working?"

"What do you think?" She moaned when he took a dusky nipple in his mouth. He sucked the puckered flesh until she arched against him. "My God," she exclaimed, clutching the back of his head.

"Your mouth feels so good," she murmured, giving into the throbbing slowly building between her legs. "I want you so bad."

"Are you wet for me, *ma cherie*?" he asked around a nipple.

"Yes."

"Good, because I've wanted to be in you since we left home." He drew her up on unsteady legs as he spoke, sliding Capris and panties off in one swoop. He quickly stepped out of his own pants before taking a seat in her abandoned chair.

"Come," he commanded quickly, with hands on either side of her waist pulling her over him.

"Sit on my lap." He guided her into place, keeping her back to his chest. "Open wider," he instructed, easing her over his largeness. At the first contact of his stiff cock, electricity shot through her body. There was no gentleness, just complete domination. He slammed into her, causing a low howl to erupt.

"I have you, baby. Ride me," he ordered, fucking her over him in long strokes until they were both panting. His hands held onto her small waist as if securing her to him.

His thrusts became more frantic, hands easily spanning her trim waist. Her wet channel felt like heaven sliding tightly up and down his pulsating shaft. She ground down on him, allowing deeper penetration. Her breasts bounced steadily with their increased movements. Lorn reached around between her thighs to stroke her aroused clit, strumming the nubbin with firm circular motions. The added manipulation had her crooning until her cries filled the cabin.

"I'm coming... Lorn!" she chanted, as her body contracted around his thrusting cock, igniting his own climax. He shot up into her over and over, his load exploding inside her in a thick rush. He gathered her to him tightly, burying his face in her neck.

"Dear God," were her first coherent words.

"My sentiments exactly." He held her in place while his body went through several spastic shudders. He nibbled on her shoulder gently.

"You know what this means?"

"What?" She cleared her throat, barely able to think.

"You are now an official member of the mile high club."

## Chapter 3

They had little chance to straighten their clothes before the plane touched down. A car awaited their arrival on the private strip.

"Perhaps we should freshen up before continuing our day," he suggested.

"That would be nice," she agreed. "But since I doubt this thing comes equipped with a built in bath the chances of that are slim to none."

"Let me worry about that." He eased the car into motion.

Paris was just as she'd remembered from a previous visit, its aged architecture holding an appeal that would transcend current building fads. It was midday and the streets were crowded with both tourists and natives going about their weekend activities. A mixture of languages including French, German and English wafted in through the windows as she people watched. Traffic flowed slowly but she didn't care in this foreign paradise.

Lorn maneuvered steadily through the city. Fatima recognized the Louvres Les Halles district from a city tour she couldn't pass up on her last visit. If memory served her correctly, Notre Dame wasn't too far away. Perhaps she could convince Lorn to take her on a visit if it fit into his plans. They slowed in front of one of the city's famous five-star hotels.

"What are we doing here?" she queried with raised eyebrows.

"You want to freshen up, don't you." It was a statement more than a question, one she didn't get a chance to respond to because he'd already bounded from the car. A waiting valet gently opened her door.

"Shall we?" He cocked his arm for her to hook her own through.

Fatima caught her breath as they walked into the impressive lobby, with its vaulted ceilings and magnificent archways leading to various areas of the structure.

"Monsieur De LaRue!" a rather short, well-dressed black man exclaimed as he approached them. The smile on his face showed genuine fondness.

"Henri, *bon soir, mon amie*," Lorn returned with just as much enthusiasm. "I was told you would be off today."

"*Oui*, but I heard you were due in and I didn't want to miss the opportunity. You come in so seldom," he continued in French.

They exchanged a warm hug that was common among Europeans, something rarely seen between men in the States.

"I have been very busy," Lorn apologized.

The man shook his head, holding his hands up to ward off any further explanation. "No need. Your rooms have been prepared per your usual specifications."

"Thank you, Henri. You are an invaluable asset."

The man merely nodded his acceptance.

"I'd like you to meet Dr. Fatima Smith, a very special friend of mine from the States," Lorn introduced, one arm wrapped affectionately around her waist, leaving no doubt as to their actual acquaintance.

"It is very nice to meet you, Dr. Smith," Henri began, openly acknowledging her for the first time.

"Fatima, please."

"I hope your stay with us is a pleasant one."

"I'm sure it will be."

"Please do not hesitate to call on me or any of the staff should you require the slightest thing," he offered.

"Thank you," Fatima said, automatically liking this man.

"How are your wife and daughter?" Lorn inquired.

At his question she couldn't help but wonder exactly how often he'd come into the hotel in the past, and with whom. It was obvious the man knew him beyond an occasional guest. Had he thought to impress her with the fancy hotel he frequented with his other women?

"Very well, thank you. Michelle came through her operation without a complication. She loved the flowers you sent."

"Good. I only wish there was something else I could do."

"Nonsense, you have done more for me and my family than I could ever thank you for."

"I'm glad to hear all is well. I apologize, but we have reservations later."

"Of course, of course, I shouldn't have taken so much of your time."

"You didn't at all. I will talk with you before we leave," Lorn promised.

"He was very nice," she commented as he led her to a set of private elevators.

"Yes, I think so."

"You two must go way back for you to send flowers to his wife."

"We do. He's the hotel's manager. His wife had breast cancer and had to have one removed. Fortunately, the cancer hadn't had a chance to spread."

"How horrible for them," she said sincerely.

"Yes, but not as bad as it could have been."

She nodded at the truth of his statement, reminded of her father's battle with sickle cell before his inevitable death.

"Henri said you haven't been here in a while. I take it at one point you were a frequent guest?" she questioned, wanting to put some distance between them while she learned about what was sure to be a long list of women he'd escorted up this very elevator.

"I stay here when I have business in the city," he admitted, pulling her close, both arms wrapping securely around her waist to keep her in place.

*Business, my foot! Does he think because I didn't have sexual experience before him that I was a complete neophyte where male/female relations were concerned?* she thought.

"Lorn, you don't have to pretend for me. I know you're a very virile man with a strong sexual appetite. I'd just prefer not to stay in a room where you've entertained your other women," she said honestly.

"I do not *entertain* women here."

"It's okay, really. We had lives before each other and we'll have them after this is over. I'd just..." Her last words trailed off as he abruptly turned her to face him.

"Let's get some things straight. First, I've never claimed to be a saint. I've had my share of affairs, but I swear on all that is sacred I've never brought another woman here. Secondly, now that I have you in my life I will be damned if I let you go. You are all the woman I need, and I would suggest you not even allude to another man in your future. I am it." He spoke with such finality that she felt as if a flock of butterflies had taken up permanent residence in her belly.

Within seconds he was bombarding her with the most demanding kiss. She responded to his probing mouth like an addict, automatically melting into his arms.

"We're here," he stated after reluctantly pulling away from her lips.

He reached around her, entering a security code on the keypad above the emergency phone. In response the doors swished open, granting them access to the open sitting room of the penthouse.

The room was done in muted grays and blues. Although its potential was understated by the drab colors, Fatima was taken in by the sheer expanse of the space. Several sitting chairs, one love seat and a large coffee table were its only true furnishings. On the walls were several abstract pieces that served to soften the room's masculine decor.

Lorn led her on a brief tour around the front rooms before moving down a spacious hall, pointing out each room as he went. She counted a kitchen, three bedrooms, office, TV room and two baths. Unlike the sitting room, the others were decorated in rich golds, burgundies or greens. They were both functional and comfortable.

"I'm sure the guests who stay here must think that this is the perfect home away from home."

"No one stays here but me, although I'm told the other suites and rooms are equally comfortable."

"Well, it doesn't seem sensible to hold an entire penthouse for one guest who isn't in residence often," she stated truthfully.

"It does when that guest is the owner."

She should have seen that coming. That explained why the manager would bother to come in on his off day, why Lorn knew such intimate details about the man's family. She really needed to remember to expect the unexpected with someone like him.

"Does that bother you?" he asked at her silence.

"No, of course not... it's just that I'm not accustomed to this."

"Don't worry, you have nothing but time to learn. Come, you should have your shower. We still have so much to do today." She didn't argue. At least they had a year together, she repeated to herself.

Despite the temptation they opted to take separate showers or risk forgetting the day's plans. An hour later, they were clean and dressed in freshly laundered clothes courtesy of the hotel's laundry service. Not wanting to contend with midday traffic they elected to take a taxi to the heart of the city. In what was known as the Haute Couture district they decided to walk. Like teenagers they tackled the streets hand in hand. She surveyed the people, noting the streets seemed even more crowded than before, or at least noisier. The sounds became so overwhelming that she paused in their stroll, pressing index fingers over the openings of her ears. It did little to help.

"Tune it out," Lorn whispered to her. "Focus on the sound of my voice, nothing else. Imagine that we are the only ones here."

She did without question, grateful when the loud noise quieted to a tolerable hum. *How did he do that*, she wondered.

"Better?" he asked. When she nodded he continued their walk. While in the district of Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honore he led her from one shop to the next, encouraging her to try on anything and everything that caught their eye. Initially she'd protested his spending the exorbitant prices charged in the upscale boutiques, but after numerous rounds of word play she finally gave in to his insistence.



"Enough." She called their spree to a halt outside Cartier, where he'd just spent the equivalent of a year's salary on a tennis bracelet for her. "Just because we're sleeping together doesn't mean you have to do this," she said for his ears only.

"I didn't do this out of a sense of obligation. I wanted to. You deserve everything I've bought today and so much more." He lifted her chin with one finger as he bent down for a brief kiss. "You are very important to me. Anything I can do to make you happy is my pleasure."

"Then take me back to your hotel and show me just how deserving I am."

"Hmmm... you've become insatiable." He pecked at her lips again.

"Is that a complaint?"

"Does this feel like one?" he asked, pulling her closer to feel his growing erection against her belly.

"Taxi!" She pulled away quickly, to wave down a passing cab.

\* \* \*

"But I thought we were going to... you know," Fatima protested as she stripped down to her lacy Victoria's Secret bra and panty set.

Lorn's gaze roamed her body slowly while he tried to remember what it was they were supposed to be doing. Whatever it was couldn't be better than ravaging her right there. The recollection of his plans brought him to his senses although it did nothing to ease the near painful erection that plagued him. In their taxi ride she'd tortured him with her hands, obscured from the driver by numerous bags. He hadn't understood her initial reasoning for not wanting to put the purchases in the trunk as suggested, but soon learned there was a method to her madness. Or his madness, as it were.

"We have reservations," he replied shortly.

"I'm sure they would understand a little tardiness," she said, unclasping the front of her bra. "You could use a little of your influence..." She pushed panties over round hips, sliding them slowly down her thighs, finally kicking them aside.

She was always fascinated by the change in the color of his eyes whenever he became aroused. They transformed into a deep, dark hue, beyond black.

She sidled up to him, closing the short distance, before standing on tiptoes to clasp her hands behind his neck. Her brazenness, meant to lure him, was turning her on beyond belief.

"Perhaps you've lost interest in me." She pouted prettily, knowing that if his straining cock were any indication her statement wasn't true.

The growl started from somewhere deep in his chest, vibrating its way up. "Fatima."

"Yes?" she asked innocently.

"If I take you now it won't be gentle."

She swallowed the lump of fear, not sure what he meant by that. They'd shared many experiences where he'd become carried away. She bore the bruises for a couple of days after as proof, but had always enjoyed his rough seduction.

"Did I ask you to?" she said with a bravery built on an almost unnatural sense of trust.

The words were barely out of her mouth before Lorn had her off her feet, taking her the few feet to the bed, where he dropped her unceremoniously onto its center. She watched with wide eyes as he pulled clothes from his body, certain that she heard shredding in the process.

"Do not show fear now. God help me, but I've got to have you." She gasped when he reached for one of her legs, dragging her across the smooth coverlet until her round derrière sat precariously on the bed's high edge. He took mere seconds to position her, spreading dark, soft thighs wide before plunging into her damp sheath.

Fatima let out a cry at the rough entry, unable to take her eyes off the face of her lover. It didn't take long for her body to recognize his signature brand of lovemaking, responding of its own accord to the forceful riding.

Lorn threw his head back at the welcoming warmth of her. His fangs pushed through, only this time he didn't try to hide or conceal them from her.

"My God." The pleasure of his penis ramming in and out of her seemed momentarily forgotten. Lorn knew the moment she caught sight of his incisors, could feel the gradual retreat of her body. His fingers bit into the soft flesh of her thighs, not permitting any mode of escape.

"It's still me," he managed in a husky tone. "Feel me inside you." He thrust deeper. "You are so wonderfully tight, I could bury myself in you forever."

He retracted until only the tip of him remained inside, only to lodge himself deeply in her again at her opposing whimper. His strokes became shorter, deeper until finally she exploded around him, drenching his member with her feminine juices.

"Oh, God," she repeated as each wave washed over her. Vaginal walls contracted around him and his own orgasm wasn't far behind. Her suctioning core finally pushed him over the brink.

He climaxed with a wall-shaking roar that would have had her scurrying if not for the hold on her hips while he pumped his hot seed into her.

For several minutes they remained in the same position, watching, waiting for the other's reaction. Fatima was fascinated by the gradual recession of his incisors, the return of his eyes to their normal emerald color.

"What... what are you?" she finally asked with him still lodged in her body.

"I am a Protector." He eased from her warmth.

"I don't understand. What does that mean?"

"My people are guardians of the human race," he said slowly, allowing her the chance to digest each word.

*Human race? Guardians?* The words reverberated through her brain.

"Can I get up?" she finally asked after several failed attempts.

Reluctantly he turned her loose, allowing her to retreat to the furthest recesses of the bed.

"Why didn't you tell me before now?" she wanted to know, her voice low.

"I wanted to wait for the right opportunity," he began, not taking his eyes from her confused face. "I had every intention of telling you. Tonight, in fact."

"Was this the surprise?"

"Partly." He rose from the bed, going to a chair where one of the smaller Cartier bags sat. He withdrew a box before returning. Fatima recognized the container; it was one the clerk had retrieved from a rear room while they looked at bracelets.

He took a position on the bed, allowing her the space she seemed to need at this moment of reckoning. Flipping open the lid, he revealed a diamond encrusted wedding set that shone brightly even in the dimly lit room.

She looked between him and the ring box several times before speaking. "I don't understand," she repeated.

"I want you to marry me, become my wife. Share the rest of our lives together."

"What?" Her confusion radiated from her, seeming to settle over them like an immovable force. "Tonight I saw a side of you that I've never seen before. You tell me that you're some sort of Protector for humans and then you ask me to marry you?"

"I know it seems like a lot."

"You can bet your fangs it is." She eyed him warily.

He sat silently watching the array of emotions.

"I can't think straight right now." She rose -- he didn't move to stop her. Evidence of what they'd just shared trickled down her thigh. "I want to shower."

Lorn watched her dash toward the bathroom, heard the lock click in place, letting him know it was not an open invitation. He hung his head at the calamity of events. How had everything gotten so messed up? He'd wanted them to have an enjoyable day. In fact, they had. His plans were to take her to a nice dinner and bring her back to the penthouse for a nightcap before popping the question. Sure, she may have thought it was sudden, but he knew she held a fondness for him, more than she'd readily admit to at this point. He'd wanted to wait until he had her answer to talk about his gargoyle side, needed that extra reassurance before going down that avenue.

He gave the ring one last long look before snapping the box shut. He guessed he had his answer; he wasn't comforted by the fact that her agreement at this stage was pointless. She'd already verbally and physically accepted him, which was enough to

bring her over and make her his mate. The gargoyle in him raged at the hurt he felt. Weddings were sentimental human ceremonies that should matter little if at all to a Protector.

\* \* \*

Fatima took her time in the shower until her fingers began to prune, after which she blew-dry her hair, combing through the thick mop until it was manageable. When she finally emerged from the bathroom, there was no sign of Lorn in the room. She released a grateful breath before donning the expensive underwear they'd purchased that afternoon.

"Our reservations have been moved back an hour." Lorn entered the bedroom without preamble just as she secured the bra's front clasp.

"I didn't think we would be..." She trailed off at his hard stare.

"We still need to eat." He turned on his heels. "Don't take too long." He threw the comment over his shoulder before departing as quickly as he had appeared.

She dressed in the black Chanel evening gown he'd bought for her while they were out. It was a simple design that dipped seductively low in the front. She twisted her hair up into a neat bun, deciding as an afterthought to allow a couple of strands to dangle from her temples, adding the diamond tennis bracelet and earrings to complete the ensemble. Her only makeup was a touch of lip-gloss. She stared at her reflection in the mirror, not recognizing the woman who looked back at her. She was different somehow. She could see it in her image, feel it in the innermost workings of her body.

"I'm ready," she announced, coming into the sitting room where Lorn lounged on the love seat, his head reclined and eyes closed, long limbs stretched out in front of him. For a moment she thought he was sleeping, until his head raised, eyes drifting open like a tired man. He took in her attire in one lingering look before rising to his full height.

Fatima bit her bottom lip at his magnificence. He really was a beautiful man. Protector. Whatever, she thought. He sported a black dinner suit with a white collarless shirt, his bound hair secured in the middle of his back by several bands.

"Shall we?"

\* \* \*

Gordy watched as the giant assisted Fatima into the expensive luxury automobile. His stomach clenched at the first sight of her walking through the hotel's sliding double doors. She was more gorgeous than he remembered, had developed a sophistication about her that wasn't there in California. He knew that being with that creature had changed her somehow, much the way the blonde succubus had affected him. His blood boiled at the thought of the monster taking advantage of her. Had he forced her?

He waited until the creature, disguised as a man, slid into the driver's seat before pulling out his cell phone.

"Your contact was correct. They're here in Paris."

"Good, perhaps he's made this easier for us," the woman on the other end said.

"It'll only be easy if you can get him far enough away for me to get a chance to talk to her."

"You'll have your chance," the blonde promised. "If all goes well he should be leaving tonight. You'll need to act fast. Get the woman out of France and back to the safe house as soon as possible. If he catches her scent he will hunt you both down quickly."

"I know. They have noses a pack of bloodhounds would envy. What should I do until then?"

"Wait, keep your eyes to the sky. He will most likely take his gargoyle form to save time."

Gordy nodded, hunkering down in the darkness of the alley. It was only a matter of time before he was reunited with his woman. He couldn't wait for Fatima to see his new and improved self. There was no way she'd want to spurn his advances now. He'd heard one teenage girl in the airport describe him as a hunk to her mother, and it had taken everything for him not to smile as he pretended not to hear the comment, but he'd found her description defined exactly how he felt. His lean muscular physique was

impressive -- he couldn't walk past a mirror now without admiring his new form -- but that was only the half of it. His cock was massive, and he'd spent many hours fondling the long thick organ, that is, when the greedy blonde wasn't busy sucking him off. He'd never met a woman so into giving head before, not that he minded, but just once he'd like to ram his new appendage up her warm channel. He would, he promised himself, after he got his Fatima safely away from that gargoyle menace.

\* \* \*

Dinner passed in silence, neither knowing the right words to say to the other. Fatima had a whole battery of questions she wanted to ask about this Protector business, almost wishing she hadn't seen the fangs growing and retracting in his mouth. However, if he'd told her the guardians of humans story without seeing the evidence she would have thought he was joking.

"Exactly what are you guarding us from?" she finally asked over a half eaten plate. They sat in a private section, no doubt cleared especially per Lorn's request.

"Are you sure you want to hear this?"

No, she thought, but said, "I asked."

"There are many creatures that inhabit the earth with the known species of this planet. Some are fairly harmless. Like humans most only want to live in peace, mate, raise their offspring and die of old age. There are others determined not to see this happen. That's where we come in."

"We?" she repeated.

"Yes. The Council of Protectors is made up of a group of one hundred or so gargoyles."

"Did you say gargoyles?" She stared at him in disbelief.

"Yes, Fatima, that is what I truly am."

"You're kidding, right?"

"No."

"You mean with wings and all, because I don't need to remind you that I've been up and down your body and found no indication of anything out of the ordinary," she argued in disbelief.

"They are available when I need them."

She almost laughed out loud. "You mean like strap-ons? Do you have them somewhere in the back of your closet?"

"Let's go." He rose abruptly. Not giving her a chance to object, he pulled her out of her chair.

"Where are we going?"

"To give you your proof."

Fatima felt like they were on the Autobahn as Lorn drove them back to the hotel. He dropped the keys on a table in the entryway before drawing her through the penthouse to the balcony. For one heart stopping moment she thought maybe he would toss her over the metal rail, down the twenty stories to her death. Instead he finally released her wrist and began to swiftly strip. Naked, he held her gaze while his body went through the metamorphosis that would change him into his gargoyle form, deliberately making it slow in order for her to become accustomed to each new nuance.

She stumbled backwards several steps until she was pressed against a stone post. Part of her wanted Lorn to be lying, to be crazy, not transforming into the gray figure he was becoming. He reached a full seven feet in height if not more, his broad chest expanding. Everything about him was larger -- everything. As if his change wasn't spectacular enough he sprouted enormous wings right before her eyes. The sheer span of them was mind-boggling, their height just as long as her tall frame.

"Oh, my God," she muttered. "That's you in the tapestry above your fireplace." And the gargoyle from her dreams. How? Why?

"Can you talk this way?" she asked after several moments of silence.

"Of course," his voice boomed. "I am still Lorn."



He could have fooled her. But she found if she looked close enough there were some vague similarities between creature and man, like those unmistakable eyes, the serious set of his mouth and billowing raven hair that came unbound in his change.

The reality of everything hit her at once. "You didn't need me for gargoyle research." She'd never felt so vulnerable, becoming nervous standing in front of this formidable creature. "Why did you bring me here?"

The gargoyle regarded her silently for several seconds. "You have nothing to fear from me, Fatima. I did need your help, still do for documenting and cataloging the various papers I've collected."

She breathed a sigh of relief. For some reason she'd had an image of herself being used as part of some ritualistic sacrifice.

From somewhere inside his discarded clothes his cell phone sounded with its shrill ring.

The gargoyle swore under his breath, recognizing the tone as coming from Sergi Romonov, brother to Vladimir and third in line after him on the Council's seat. Sergi was a man of few words and rarely called for leisurely conversation.

He located the small object after several seconds, transforming back into his human form as he flipped open the compact item.

"Lorn here," he said, walking into the sitting room completely naked.

Fatima took several seconds to gather herself, trying to come to terms with what she'd witnessed. Gargoyles existed -- a network of them in fact. The implications of their existence were mind-boggling. Were they ready to go public? she wondered, following Lorn inside.

"Are you certain?" Lorn spoke calmly into the phone, which belied the tension she could see rippling through his body.

Whoever was on the other end of that phone hadn't called with good news, she could tell.

"Where were they spotted?" Silence. "And you trust this gremlin?"

Lorn snorted at the reply.

*Gremlin*. The word conjured up images of little green destructive monsters.

"I'll need to dispatch Pierre to get Fatima safely home. I should be there before sunset." He flipped the phone closed.

"What's happened?" Fatima wanted to know, trying to ignore his naked form. Gargoyle or man, he was truly a work of art.

"An emergency that I must see to. I will have Pierre come to you tonight and take you home."

"What kind of emergency?"

"One that involves my immediate assistance," he replied, not ready to share with her the types of atrocities that could be committed by life walkers and immortals.

"Can't I just wait for you here?"

"It would be safer for you at the estate," he said with finality.

"Safer because you say so. I'll have you know that I've been taking care of myself for years without incident." What the hell kind of danger was he running to and why was he having her whisked off to his estate instead of waiting?

"That was before." He didn't have time to argue with her. If Sergi's informant was correct he didn't have a moment to spare getting across the Atlantic to New York. A group of succubi was converging on the city for only one thing -- mayhem, destruction and murder. Why now? he wondered. Succubus activity had been dormant for many years. Their depleted numbers kept them in hibernation until they could recoup from their last encounter with gargoyles. It should have taken them many more centuries to surface again.

Succubi were nasty bothersome creatures, who like gremlins could shift into various human forms, which they readily did -- anything was better than their horrific natural states. He'd heard rumors of one rogue succubus who hid amongst humans, feeding and mating without killing, something truly beyond their nature. He'd tried tracking the fictional rogue for a while but gave up the wild goose chase for more important pursuits.

"Before what?" she wanted to know.

"Before you became involved with me," he admitted partially, leaving out that as his mate it would be easier for other beings to recognize his claim on her.

"My God!" All color drained from her face. "But we were just out without anything happening."

"None would risk a direct confrontation with a gargoyle," he said with arrogance born from centuries of successful warfare.

"Is Pierre a gargoyle too?"

"No, he and his family are elves."

"Elves?" Weren't elves supposed to be cute little woodland creatures? "You're sending an elf to protect me from whatever beasts lie in wait?"

Lorn was all too aware of the rapidly passing time. "Do not judge them by your human fables and fairy tales. They are actually quite astounding opponents with abilities of their own."

"So I'm to wait here for Pierre, the elf, to take me back to your castle and then what?"

He couldn't get into everything with her right then. She would have to be patient. "You wait. When I return we will talk more."

He made a quick call on his cell phone giving Pierre, she assumed, instructions. She'd hoped to learn more from his conversation with the servant but was sorely disappointed. Lorn completed his call and headed for the balcony, instantly transforming when he stepped into the night air.

She followed closely behind him, ready to tell him just what he could do with his orders. The reprimand died on her lips when she barreled into the granite back of the gargoyle. She would have stumbled if not for his quick reflexes.

"Oh my," she muttered at his solid form. He was almost as hard as stone, although he looked very much like a living, breathing, warm blooded creature. Her hands pressed against his firm chest. He felt warm enough.

He swooped down for the briefest of kisses before turning to leap off the balcony.

"Oh my," she repeated, watching in amazement as he catapulted into the air. She wasn't sure how long she stood there staring into the empty night sky waiting to wake from the *Alice in Wonderland* fantasy she'd slipped into.

The sound of the hotel phone propelled her into action and she moved on lead feet to the familiar noise.

"Hello." She sounded breathless to her own ears.

"Fatima, it's me, Gordy. I need to see you right away."

\* \* \*

Fatima felt a combination of relief and surprise at hearing Gordy's hurried tones on the other end of the phone. He'd said he was there -- not just in France but downstairs in the lobby. He wanted to speak with her. The urgency in his voice moved her to immediate action.

Still dressed in the evening gown she'd worn to dinner, Fatima made her way down to the lobby. She scanned the large area quickly, noting how busy it was even at that late hour.

*He said he was downstairs,* she thought. Fear began to sink in when she considered that this could be some sort of trap. Hadn't Lorn warned her she would be a target now? She turned back toward the private elevator, trying to remain rational.

"I'm sorry," she croaked as she slammed into one of the guests.

*Great, Fatima, you're letting your paranoia get the best of you,* she admonished silently.

"It's okay, Fatima. I should have let you know I was behind you."

She took a startled step back to get a good look at the owner of the familiar voice. "Gordy?"

"Surprise." He smiled at her brightly.

"My God, you look..."

"I know." His smile broadened. She was speechless.

Fatima took in the changes in him. He was tanned, athletic, his once limp hair now feathered naturally. Gone were the pasty complexion and too large glasses.

"What happened?"

"I've made some changes -- for the better, obviously."

"Wow." He looked great. "What are you doing here? I know you didn't travel all this way to show me the new you."

"I came to warn you." His smile faded.

"Warn me about what?" She did another sweep of the lobby. Everything looked fine.

"Lorn De LaRue," he whispered. "He's not what he appears to be. I came to get you out of here before something happens to you."

"Happens like what?"

"We can't talk here. Come with me." He grabbed her wrist.

"Dressed like this?" She looked down at her formal gown.

"We don't have time for you to change."

She considered it for a moment, the urgency in his voice making the decision for her. "Where are we going?" she questioned, allowing him to lead her.

"Home, back to the States."

She paused. "I don't know... Lorn told me what he was tonight. He said his kind are Protectors to humans," she explained hurriedly as he ushered her through the lobby.

Gordy snorted. "And you believed that? Did he tell you exactly why he wants you to help with the research?"

"My expertise in the field of biology and anthropology," she supplied.

"Yes, but why?"

"He said he wanted to chronicle the history of gargoyles. At the time I thought he wanted to prove their existence. Now I'm not so sure."

"Let me tell you something, Doctor. He is using you to help him find a way to further propagate his race in order to dominate the earth. He hopes to breed women with gargoyles."

## Chapter 4

"I thought you said he was a reliable source, Sergi," Lorn commented from his perch atop the Empire State Building.

Like his friend, Sergi scanned the nightlife below, tuning in to any potential disturbances. The building had only closed thirty minutes earlier, and until that moment they'd taken turns circling the city to catch something to substantiate the gremlin's claim that succubi would be on the hunt tonight.

"It looks like we'll be hunting a gremlin instead," Sergi said before leaping into the air.

They found said gremlin in one of his favorite hangouts -- the city dump.

"Hey, Sergi," the creature greeted, rising to his full six-foot height. They'd interrupted him as he rummaged through a wretched smelling pile.

"You lied." The accusation was hurled from a normally reserved Sergi.

"Lied?" The gremlin looked between the two angry gargoyles. One of the beings was bad enough, but two? The gremlin quickly assessed the fastest mode of escape; the entrance to his den was about a yard away. Gremlins were fast, but definitely not gargoyle fast. Only vampires and jinn equaled them in speed.

"Look, fellas. I'm not quite sure what you're talking about, but I'm certain it's just some misunderstanding." The gremlin shifted into human form, hoping the two Protectors would be less likely to do harm to him.

"Don't stand there acting innocent, Turt." Sergi stalked the man. "You told me you overheard plans of a succubus frenzy."

"I did?" He looked confused.

"Why you little rodent." Sergi grabbed up the smaller life walker by the collar. "You demanded to meet me this afternoon and told me about a succubus plan."

"Look, Sergi, I'm not normally one to argue with someone three times my size, but I swear I don't know what you're talking about."

"Sergi, put him down," Lorn said. Something about the frightened creature struck a chord.

Sergi hesitated a moment before dropping the miscreant none too gently on his feet.

"Where were you this afternoon, Turt?" Lorn asked.

"Um... with a friend... a lady friend." He looked between the two.

"I believe him," Lorn said after quiet contemplation, knowing the gremlin was too scared to lie to them.

"Okay, Turt, you're free to go," Sergi dismissed him.

"I would like to help," he volunteered. "After all, someone was impersonating me and I would like to know why."

The two gargoyles exchanged looks before agreeing.

"All right. Looks like we'll be heading to gremlin central," Turt offered.

\* \* \*

"Tell me why we're going to Catalina Island?" Fatima asked as they boarded the ferry that would take them from Long Beach to the tiny island. She was exhausted. As if the twelve-hour flight from Paris to JFK hadn't been enough, they took an immediate connector on a non-stop to LAX. In the crowded LA airport they made a quick pit stop to purchase some casual wear.

"It's nearly impossible for gargoyles to track near salt water," he answered simply.

"How do you know so much about it? If memory serves me you were more opposed than I was to doing the research to prove they existed."

"Let's just say I've had a total re-education since last we met. I don't pretend to have all the answers but what I have learned is enough to make me more cautious about everything."

Drained, she flopped into the nearest available seat. Gordy had booked them passage on the first ferry out so thankfully they didn't have too many people to contend with over space.

"I can't believe this is happening," she muttered more to herself than to the man seated next to her.

"Tell me about it. No matter what, we have to stick together, trusting each other implicitly."

She tiredly nodded her agreement. What she wouldn't give for a shower and a few hours of undisturbed sleep. As her mind drifted between wakefulness and the dream world she wondered if she'd done the right thing by leaving Lorn so abruptly. In retrospect he'd never done anything to harm her, but then again he hadn't been completely honest about things.

She yawned.

What would he do when he discovered Pierre hadn't gotten to her in time?

\* \* \*

"I suggest you talk now before my friend here remembers that he left his mate on another continent because of some gremlin prank." Sergi shoved the grotesque creature into the wall of the dark alley.

"Hey, I swear I don't know what you're talking about," the beastie screeched, cowering as the silent Protector, in human form, stalked him slowly.

Large hands flexed as if preparing for battle, and the gremlin watched in horror as the Protector's incisors lengthened. He'd heard of Lorn De LaRue but had never had the misfortune of dealing with him until tonight. If he lived through this he would strangle the very life out of that conniving little succubus. She'd asked him to steal the file on the human woman some cracker jack PI had collected. Later, she'd wanted him to impersonate Turt, a low-level gremlin and relative, passing on information to one Sergi Romonov. Initially Fer thought he would be meeting with an elf. To his surprise the giant that met him bore no resemblance to the fair elves, and there was no mistaking the origin of the green eyes that stared back at him. Only gargoyles were known to



possess eyes the color of leaves hit by morning's first light. Fer almost backed down, but fear at being discovered in his impersonation urged him on. He was glad when the man accepted his information with only a modicum of questions. He'd hoped that would be the last time he'd see him or that stool pigeon Turt again. He'd thought he would come out the winner all the way around, mind blowing fucking from a famed succubus and possibly getting rid of his bothersome cousin at the same time.

"It would be better for you, cousin, if you tell them what you know," Turt commented, looking more than amused at his predicament.

"Go to hell, you little weasel. You're a dis..." An unseen force gripped his throat, lifting his portly body off the ground, cutting off words.

"I'll only ask this one time. Who put you up to this?" Lorn gritted.

Fer made several croaking sounds in an attempt to talk his way out of the dangerous situation, but he found it impossible.

"Perhaps if you allow him to breathe he can provide the vital information we are seeking," Sergi commented at Lorn's side. Honestly, he could care less whether the little toad lived or died.

Lorn relaxed his telekinetic hold enough for the gremlin to speak.

"It was a succubus. She said I could get rid of Turt and help her play a trick on you Protectors at the same time."

The hold tightened again.

"Why?"

"I don't know, I swear," he gasped. "I thought I was getting the better end of the deal, and she could sure suck a mean dick... you know what they say about succubi."

Lorn knew, but had never been interested in getting firsthand experience; the creatures were crafty, untrustworthy and dangerous, plain and simple. They were noted to have a vengeful streak that went unrivaled.

"How did you contact her?"

"I didn't. She found me."

"Do you have plans to see her again?"

"No." She probably hadn't expected him to live long enough. He realized now that he was an expendable stooge for her.

"For your sake, you'd better hope she comes looking for you." Lorn let him go suddenly. The gremlin fell to his knees in front of him. "From now on you will report any communication with this creature to Turt."

"Of course," the gremlin managed between gulps of much needed air.

\* \* \*

Gordy looked down at the woman dozing trustingly on his shoulder. She was truly more beautiful than he remembered. He couldn't believe his luck, she was finally all his. She hadn't mentioned any intimate details about her time with Lorn, but he could tell something had happened during her hiatus. Gargoyle or not, men who looked like he did, with as much wealth as he possessed, had unknowing women ready to bang down his front door. He couldn't fault Fatima if she succumbed to the man's charms. She was the innocent in all this and he would forgive her this slight.

She slowly came to from Gordy's gentle nudging.

"We're here," he announced softly.

She looked around, groggily taking in the Mediterranean style city of Avalon. It was a quaint little seaside town, she noted as they left the ferry. Golf carts trudged by with people making their way from one destination to the next. For a moment she couldn't believe that a place like this existed in Northern America.

"We've a small bungalow rented on the edge of town," he advised, hailing one of the golf cart taxis.

"How small is small?" she asked. Although grateful for the lengths he had gone through to get her back to the States, she didn't want to give him the wrong impression about how things would proceed. As far as she was concerned they were still colleagues, even friends, but that was where she drew the line.

"There are two bedrooms, if that's what you're asking." There was an edge to his response.

She nodded. "Gordy, I want you to know that I really appreciate everything you've done for me, but I just don't want things to get convoluted in all this craziness."

He sat tight-lipped, looking straight ahead as the golf cart bounced along the coastline. "If you think I came to get you for some ulterior motive then you're wrong," he finally began.

She sighed heavily, feeling guilty for her assumptions. "I'm sorry, it's just that this is all so fantastical and I'm really tired. Maybe after a shower and half a day's sleep I'll be able to think clearly again." She doubted it, and after all that had happened in the last few weeks she was certain she would never feel normal again.

"It's okay," he excused. "You've just had a big shock, not to mention flying halfway across the world. I think you're entitled to feel suspicious of anyone's motives."

She appreciated his understanding; the irony of the situation wasn't lost on her. Here she had done her best to put off any sort of personal involvement with the man, yet it was Gordy who'd come to her rescue like a knight in shining armor. She knew she should feel grateful to him, but somehow gratitude was an elusive emotion.

\* \* \*

"What!" Lorn roared at an already flustered Pierre.

"She wasn't there, Monsieur. You know my telekinetic abilities could not reach you across the ocean. I tried leaving messages for you on Sergi's machine --"

"Enough with the excuses. Tell me what you know," Lorn continued his rant, pacing in human form across the kitchen's granite floors, dressed only in a pair of jeans. He'd barely managed to pull those on when he realized Fatima's faint scent should have been more potent to his sensitive senses if she were nearby. He'd torn through the castle, calling to her. Finally Pierre had rushed in, interrupting his bellows.

"I arrived at the hotel, and she was gone. According to the concierge, she left with a blond American man soon after your return."

"American? Are you certain?" he barked. At the elf's nod he continued, "Why didn't someone stop her?"

"Apparently she didn't seem to need assistance." Pierre swallowed, not wanting to be the one to give him the news. "She left with him without resistance," he added quietly.

No! Lorn's brain rebelled against what he was being told. It wasn't true, she couldn't have left him. He mentally searched his mind for other possibilities, various scenarios playing out rapidly, but none added up. He remembered the way she'd begun to recoil at seeing his fangs, how she stared unemotionally at his offered wedding ring, and the look of fright when he transformed into his gargoyle self. There was no denying the obvious. She had in fact run away, escaping back to America where she thought she would be safe from the monster.

"I'm going to Paris. Call the hotel and inform them that I want the lobby's surveillance tapes for that evening after our arrival from dinner."

"Of course, sir. Should I have the helicopter readied?"

"No, I will fly on my own."

"But, Monsieur, do you think that is wise? The sun will be rising soon and you might be spotted."

"I do not employ you to think," he threw over his shoulder as he stormed from the room in mid transformation.

\* \* \*

Lorn barely recognized the man on the tape; he'd changed dramatically since their last encounter but every fiber of his being knew it was Dr. Gordy Singleton with his hand clasping that of his mate's. Audio wasn't possible but it was evident from Fatima's reaction that she was surprised to see him. Their exchange was brief before the two rushed out of the hotel. Outside, the man hailed a passing taxi, holding the door open for Fatima to precede him into the waiting car. She did without the slightest hesitation.

Her abandonment washed over him like an icy shower, creeping through every crevice of his body until he was left numb. Lorn's emerald colored eyes glowed with an intensity that made the two male security guards retreat in fear. He was too lost in his

own thoughts to care what the men saw. His focus was on finding his mate and that human. He wanted to know the extent of their involvement with the succubus, and to make Fatima pay for her betrayal.

\* \* \*

Fatima awoke feeling refreshed and more alert, albeit confused over what had transpired over the last forty-eight hours. She sat up in the strange spacious bed, taking in the white adobe walls. A gentle breeze wafted in from an open window, bringing with it the fragrance of salty ocean air. With the exception of the steady sound of waves crashing onto rocks somewhere outside, all was quiet within the dwelling. Fatima had a faint recollection of entering the single story bungalow and Gordy giving her a brief tour of the residence while all she'd really wanted was a nice soft bed.

She made her way into the medium sized living room. "Look who's rejoined the land of the living," Gordy greeted her, stepping through an open patio door, his sudden appearance giving her a start.

"You were so quiet I didn't know anyone was here."

"Just catching up on some reading." He held up a book.

Fatima nodded her acknowledgement, although she found it absurd that he could calmly sit down and read when all that they had known about the world had been tossed out the window.

"Are you hungry? The refrigerator is stocked with almost anything you can think of."

"No, maybe I'll have something later." She felt as if she should be doing something, informing people of the threats out there, but she couldn't do that until she had enough information herself.

"How did you find out about the gargoyles?" she asked, finally opting to take a seat on the cream-colored love seat. Tucking her legs beneath her bottom seemed to calm the restlessness that was slowly building.

"I learned from a woman who calls her kind succubi."

"You mean like the mythical demons?"

"There is nothing mythical about her, and as for the demon part I doubt she has an evil bone in her body."

"Why did she tell you about Lorn, or gargoyles?" she had to know.

"She wanted me to help you. She knew De LaRue had been tracking you for months. He'd hired a private investigator to dig up anything on you that he could."

Fatima had suspected Lorn had done his homework, but she wasn't sure to what degree until that moment.

"Apparently, Lorn and his kind have been looking for a viable means to breed with human females. If they succeed it will be only a matter of time before we're up to our neck in the giant flying demons."

"What's to stop him from finding someone else for his research? There are plenty of other scientists out there, some who would love the opportunity to dabble in this sort of thing."

For a moment he looked truly baffled, as if she'd said something he hadn't considered before.

"I'm sure my succubus friend has a plan for preventing that. She is quite the intelligent creature."

"Are you sure you can trust her? I mean, what do we honestly know about any of these beings? Lorn told me his kind protect humans, but if he were lying what makes you so certain about her?"

"She wouldn't lie," he barked instantly, enraged by the suggestion.

"I'm sorry, it's just what do we really know about any of this? According to Lorn most of these 'unknown' creatures want to live in peace. How do we know which is friend and which is foe?"

"Well, I think it's obvious. Any who want to suck our blood or use us as guinea pigs for their genetic experiments must be the enemy." He tried to make light of the situation.

“I seem to remember my mother saying ‘beware of strangers bearing gifts,’ too,” she retorted, knowing they would need a more concrete way to determine who to trust and what to do next.

## Chapter 5

Krail stiffened as he listened to his older son describe the events leading up to his mate's disappearance. He'd said that a succubus and gremlin were behind the lure to get Fatima alone, but what he didn't say, what they all knew, was that ultimately the woman had left of her own free will.

"Do what you must, but I want her returned," Lorn stated vehemently, looking into the faces of each Protector assembled. The twenty gargoyles gathered in Lorn's Chicago home each paid close attention as their brethren ran down what transpired in Paris and New York.

"Why should we waste our time helping you when our own mates have yet to be found? Simply because you can't keep yours under wraps doesn't mean the rest of us should join in your quest to locate a woman who'd rather not be with you," Alexi responded from his vantage point near a window.

"If you do not wish to help, Alexi, then by all means leave," Lorn retorted, eyeing the man. He was wound tighter than a drum and would be very willing to indulge Alexi in the fight the Protector always seemed to be spoiling for when the two were in each other's presence.

Alexi shrugged nonchalantly as if to suggest it didn't matter either way.

"Why do you think this succubus would risk involving herself in gargoyle matters?" Jean asked.

"I don't know but I mean to find out." Lorn's jaw clenched automatically at the thought of the elusive female creature with his mate. Fatima had been missing for over two weeks, and he was no closer to finding her than he had been when she first disappeared.



"I believe she has Fatima in a coastal state, most likely as close to the ocean as possible," he provided.

The Protectors nodded their agreement; it explained why none had been able to fix on her scent. The other reason -- well, no one was willing to accept it, least of all Lorn. There was no way she would cheat him out of his vengeance through death.

"We will need to use all our other abilities, as well as alert any trusted life walkers and immortals."

"Do you think it wise to draw so much attention to an unguarded Fledgling?" another Protector asked.

"It is not something I relish doing, but too much time has elapsed. If Fatima is in the company of a succubus she is already in harm's way."

"Very true," Krail agreed aloud. "And I have a sinking suspicion that this particular succubus is one of the most lethal."

"Sire?" Lorn questioned.

"As one of the oldest living Protectors, I have been a part of and seen many things all of you present cannot begin to imagine." He shook his head as if to ward off a bad memory. "We have always known that one or more succubi played a role in the Fledgling suicides, but what their exact involvement was has always eluded us. I think the same culprit may be responsible now."

Green eyes shone on the wizened Protector as he spoke. The Fledgling suicides were a topic not readily discussed among Protectors. "I believe I know the creature responsible for so much pain. Her name is one almost as old as time itself, but none can ever remember it. By all rights she is a life walker, though she has managed to live like an immortal."

He paused; the consequences of his long ago affair hit him with the force that temporarily knocked the wind out of his body. "I was involved with this creature for a couple hundred years before meeting my mate."

The silence in the room was unearthly.

"She was a very jealous sort. I thought nothing of it because succubi are not known for their fidelity. She was different. After I was mated I could only think of Laurel." The anguish in his voice illustrated the years of loneliness he'd endured without his woman.

"She came to me many times seeking to continue our relationship, and each time I refused she became more incensed. She suddenly stopped altogether. Until the hundredth year anniversary of the suicides," he remembered.

"*You* do not need to mourn so, my love. I am here for you." The blonde seemed to appear out of nowhere as he knelt over his wife's grave. A lone tear trickled down the side of his face, although his grief consumed him like a thousand wildfires.

"Go away," he mumbled, not taking his eyes from the headstone that read, "Your wisdom in life went unrecognized."

"No matter how often you come it will not bring her back. Why do you torture yourself by lusting over a rotting corpse when a warm body eagerly seeks your attention?" The woman huffed like an exasperated child.

"If you do not leave me now I will not be responsible for my actions." He held his anger in check, not wanting to sully his mate's resting place with his fury.

"Now we're getting somewhere. Tell me, lover, what will you do to me?" She sashayed around his crouched form, stopping to rest a hip on the headstone.

Krail wasn't sure what happened next. One moment he was touching the earth that covered Laurel's body, the next he had the blonde creature by the throat, squeezing the very life force from her. Her look of astonishment soon gave way to fear. Krail fought against every instinct in his body that wanted to terminate the life of the woman. At the last moment he tossed her away from him, her small body thudding against a nearby tree. There was no remorse as he sank to the earth on both knees.

After several moments of silence the succubus wailed in a voice that would have put any banshee to shame. "How dare you! I promise you, Krail, you will live to regret this."

"Trust me, there is nothing you could do to me that would make me feel any worse than I have this past century," he said without looking up.

"You think this is the same succubus?" Alexi asked.

"I cannot say with certainty, but my intuition is strong on this matter."

"How do we find her, Sire?"

"You do not, if she is not interested in being found."

\* \* \*

Gordy came instantly awake, his body drenched in sweat. It was the third night in a row he'd awakened in the early morning hours this way. Stumbling from bed he made for the bathroom, turning on the shower's cold spray.

He let out a sigh of relief as the frigid stream doused his heated flesh. Knowing from his previous experiences that his bed sheets would need replacing, he hoped Fatima wouldn't question him about the change in linen for the third time that week. The first night he'd woken in this state he'd had a moment of pure embarrassment because he was certain he'd wet the bed like some freshly potty-trained toddler. He quickly deduced that the odorless sheets and his inflamed body temperature were not signs of a bed wetter but someone suffering the effects of major night sweats.

The blonde had promised him perfect health and strength. Was this some sort of weird byproduct of his transformation? He would ask her the next time he saw her, whenever that might be. The woman had become scarce the last few days, not returning his numerous calls to her cell phone. He briefly thought something had happened to her, but for some reason doubted that. She was definitely capable of handling herself. He would try her again later while Fatima joined her conservation group for their bi-weekly hike and trail restoration.

*Fatima.* His thoughts drifted. He still couldn't believe his good fortune at having her with him where she belonged. He could suffer through their brief separation a couple times a week if that meant having her come home to him. She'd signed up for the group after deciding there was only so much in Avalon City one could do without

dying from overindulgence or boredom. Neither was any closer to settling on how to handle their newfound knowledge.

Gordy managed to slip away to the mainland a few times over the brief period to meet with the succubus. He kept his visits a secret, knowing Fatima wasn't too keen on trusting anything not human, not until she could find some tangible information to determine the difference between good and bad 'otherlings,' her new pet name for non-humans.

\* \* \*

Fatima's own beginning to the morning wasn't much better than Gordy's. However, instead of spending it in the shower, she hung her head over a toilet bowl while the contents of her evening meal revisited her. She heaved until there was nothing left to give to the porcelain throne. Nausea had become a constant companion over the last week but this was the first time it had progressed to full-fledged retching. She rinsed her mouth before beginning her brushing ritual. Giving herself a brief once over, she checked her temperature and vitals to make sure everything was within normal range. Satisfied with the state of her body, she prepared herself for a busy day of conservation work.

"Are you sure you're all right?" Fatima asked, hesitant about leaving a clammy looking Gordy alone. She'd found him lounging haphazardly on the love seat, looking hot and utterly miserable.

"Yes, I'm fine. Just go... have fun sifting through rocks." He tried to sound light but failed miserably.

"I don't have to go today."

"Fatima, please, you would just drive me crazy playing mother hen all day long."

"All right, I know when I'm not wanted, but can you just promise me that you will take it easy today?"

"Aye, aye, doctor," he agreed. "Now go and protect the environment from all the vacationing city dwellers," he urged.

Fatima left, making a mental note to return on the early bus that afternoon to check on Gordy. He hadn't looked good over the last couple of days, and she realized she'd probably caught some version of whatever bug had infected him. Her strain of the virus seemed to have little effect on her other than the occasional nausea, and even that was tolerable.

She felt a twinge of guilt for wanting to be outside of the house lately. Yearning for the remote protected areas of the island away from Gordy and the vacationing hordes. Her work as a conservationist allowed her to enjoy nature while giving her something to do with her time. Gordy on the other hand seemed lethargic and irritable lately. His newly acquired tan had faded, leaving him a sallow color. The bathroom was next to her room, which enabled her to hear his early morning showers, and she'd discovered the damp sheets he'd hidden at the bottom of the clothes hamper when starting laundry that morning. Poor Gordy, she thought, taking some solace in learning that the moisture on his sheets was not urine.

That afternoon she returned only to find their little bungalow silent. Immediate concern rushed through her body as she searched every room for any sign of her sickly roommate. Had he gotten worse? Had he gone to see a doctor, or to the mainland to a hospital? She paced the floor, afraid that if she left he would show up and need her help. At times like this she wished they conversed more with their neighbors instead of isolating themselves but they'd both agreed to try and maintain a low profile. He'd even protested her joining the conservation group initially, finally conceding after she argued that they couldn't stay holed up in the small bungalow indefinitely.

Afternoon gave way to evening, and she found herself hunkered down on the little love seat, TV on for company while she waited. She'd just started to drift when the door opened, admitting a grocery-toting Gordy.

"Where have you been?" she started, sitting up while simultaneously clicking off the television with the remote.

"I went to get food," he offered, going into the adjoining kitchen. "I picked up some of your favorites."

"Gordy, you can't just go out like that in your condition," she nagged, taking her tirade to the kitchen behind him. She paused in the archway at the sight of him. Gone was the pale pasty complexion and sunken eyes. He looked great.

"What did you do?" she gasped.

"I told you, got some groceries."

"That's not what I mean and you know it. This morning you were barely able to move, and now you look like you could run a marathon. What did you do?" she drilled, taking items out of his hands, forcing him to look at her.

"I felt better and didn't want to waste the day sitting in here."

"That's impossible. Even medicine couldn't take effect this soon. What's going on?"

He sighed, contemplating making up another story. "I went to see my friend, and she gave me something for my illness." Yeah, a good long blowjob that seemed to suck the virus right out of him.

"I thought we decided you shouldn't see her again, not until we can determine who's who in the whole otherlings scheme of things."

"And how do you suggest we do that? We can't even go back to the university right now because your little gargoyle buddy has friends stationed everywhere." He exhaled noisily.

"How do you know that?" She was temporarily distracted by the new bit of information.

"The succubus told me. Apparently they're staking out our apartments as well as the school." He gave a quick chuckle. "If they only knew how close they were." He shook his head, continuing the task of unloading the groceries.

"Are you certain that they can't find us here?"

"Nope, like I told you before salt water is the so-called Protectors' kryptonite. We're safe as long as we stay near the ocean."

"Which leads me to another point. You can't keep risking your little jaunts to the mainland if they are this close."

"You're worrying too much. I stay in coastal cities, and besides, you're forgetting our secret weapon."

"What?" She looked confused.

"Our very own succubus," he responded as if she were daft.

"You're putting a lot of faith in her. Will I ever get to meet this *woman*? Why is she so damned elusive?" she bombarded.

He shrugged. "I'm sure she had her reasons for staying away before, but she has agreed to come for dinner tonight."

*What?* "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"You didn't give me a chance. I'm glad you will have an opportunity to see for yourself that she's a good person," he said with the excitement of a child.

## Chapter 6

The woman was beautiful -- stunning in fact, Fatima noted, as she seemed to float into the living room. She wore her strawberry blonde hair cropped short in a fashionable bob that swayed with every movement. Gray, intelligent eyes were framed by long lashes.

"I'm glad you could make it. For a while there I was afraid you wouldn't show," Gordy began.

"I promised, didn't I, my pet." She patted his cheek briefly, but her eyes were fixed on Fatima from the moment she entered.

"You must be dear Fatima," she said sweetly.

"Yes, and you are?"

"Very enchanted to meet you," the woman avoided smoothly, coming to give her the briefest of hugs. When she stepped back, Fatima thought she saw a frown crease the succubus' beautiful forehead, but it was gone so quickly she couldn't be certain. Quietly, the woman took a seat in a lone chair across the room.

"Fatima has prepared a wonderful meal. She is an excellent cook," Gordy gushed.

"I'm certain, but I had a little snack before coming so I'm really not hungry," she admitted, remembering the young Asian man who lay in stasis at her dwelling. There was so much unbridled potential in him just waiting for someone like her to bring it out.

"Oh, didn't Gordy tell you that we were serving dinner?" Fatima questioned.

"I'm sure he mentioned it but I've had so much on my mind lately," she replied with her honeyed tone.

Fatima thought if the woman laid it on any thicker she would get a toothache.



"Has something happened?" Gordy motioned for Fatima to join him on the love seat.

"Yes." The woman leaned in as if she were about to reveal a juicy bit of gossip. "It looks like Lorn has enlisted the services of several minions. Among them are gremlins and vampires. I don't need to tell you what a nasty sort they can be." She wrinkled her pert little nose as if sampling something distasteful.

"Yes, maybe you should tell us. After all, this is very new to both Gordy and myself. As far as I'm concerned, I'm not sure we can totally trust you."

"Why, I never." The woman looked more angry than surprised.

"Fatima, that was uncalled for." Gordy came to the succubus' defense. "She has been nothing but kind to us. You have her to thank for getting you away from that monster."

"Don't be mad at her," the woman started again, quickly regaining her composure. "She has every reason to be cautious."

Her velvety voice was grating on Fatima's nerves. She didn't like her, plain and simple. Her outer beauty seemed to be a mask for something more sinister. Gordy could believe the sweet-talking being all day long, but as far as she was concerned she didn't trust the woman farther than she could toss her.

"I brought something I thought you might be interested in." The succubus dug in her overly large handbag. With a dramatic flourish she pulled out a rectangular box, removing its top to reveal a stack of parchment paper.

"This might explain some things to you about gargoyles." She came to drop the item on the coffee table in front of them.

Fatima stared at the aged papers as if expecting something more to jump from the box and attack.

"What is it?"

"An accounting of gargoyle history from a woman who had firsthand knowledge," the blonde answered smoothly.

The creature was going to bleed this for all it was worth. "Who?"

"Laurel, the mother of Lorn."

For several moments Fatima stared at the woman in disbelief before gazing back down at the object.

"How can I be sure this is really hers?" Fatima asked.

"How can you be sure it's not?" the succubus countered. "I recommend you read it, that is, if you really want to know what type of animals they are." The blonde checked her watch. "I will be in contact, Gordy, but right now I have a prior engagement."

"Must you leave so soon?" the man protested, looking like a lost puppy.

"Unfortunately this is an appointment I can't miss," she apologized sweetly. "But I promise we will see each other soon."

Fatima witnessed the silent exchange between the two before Gordy got up to escort their guest out. She wondered about the true nature of their relationship, hoping for his sake that her instincts weren't right.

"Are you going to open it?" Gordy asked some fifteen minutes later as she sat absently twirling her spoon through mashed potatoes.

"What?" She looked at him before glancing to the recapped box across the room. "Oh that, I'll get to it."

"For goodness' sake." He rolled his eyes heavenward, pushing away from the dining table. Tossing the top aside, he removed the crinkly parchment paper. "Well, that's just great," he said after thumbing through several pages. "It's all in French."

"That would make sense if it were authentic, and Lorn is French, after all." She finally stood, taking it from him with almost shaking fingers. "I can translate it."

"You speak French?"

"Among other languages," she admitted distractedly.

"Wonders never cease," he muttered. "You really are full of surprises."

\* \* \*

The succubus cursed under her breath. A fucking Fledgling! She knew the woman was important to Lorn but hadn't realized why until she'd met her. No wonder so many of the Protectors were seeking her. She hadn't actually seen the mark of the gifted ones on her, but she could sense that the woman's body was almost to the end of the cycle of transformation. She'd probably already developed heightened sensory awareness. She doubted the black woman even knew what was going on within her body. The succubus almost patted herself on the back for having the foresight to bring the diary of Krail's mate with her. She'd given it to the Fledgling knowing that the temptation of learning what was inside would be more than she could endure. It was her own Pandora's box.

It was only a matter of time before the little hideaway she'd secured for the humans would be discovered, but with any luck by the time Lorn found his mate she would be totally convinced that gargoyles were the enemy.

\* \* \*

"So are you going to tell me what it says?" Gordy finally asked, putting away the text he was pretending to read on ancient myths. They'd both spent their fair share of time borrowing books on the topic from the local library in the hopes of learning some new bits of information. It was proving to be a very frustrating process.

"I'd like to go through it again, make sure my translations are correct," she said, tearing her eyes away from the final entry. Although the text was written in an early Franco-German dialect, she was very certain her interpretation was correct, but she just wasn't ready to share it with Gordy yet.

"I'd like to go to the library in the morning and see what I can find by way of foreign language dictionaries," she fibbed.

"Good luck." Gordy snorted. "I think I'll call it a night." He stood, coming to stand in front of her. "Get me up in the morning before you leave," he requested, before quickly swooping down to give her a familiar peck on the lips. He exited the room before she had a chance to comment.

She sat up for several more hours re-reading the entries. It was obvious that several pages were missing from the beginning and middle of the document but what remained told its own story.

Entry 72950

*The Council informed all Fledglings of a new law whereby all mating would last for a period of twenty years, after which a new mate would be assigned to Fledglings for procreation. The distress over the judgment is evident in all the faces of my sisters, although no one chose to speak out, except to confide in me. I am but one woman -- what can I do to sway the Council?*

Entry 72951

*Willow was brought back to the Keep today. I was the only Fledgling present to witness her battered state. I stood in the entry when Reem carried her to their rooms. I have never seen such a pure look of fierceness on his face. He turned to show me her bruised body. "This is the fate you all will suffer if you attempt to run away." I was sickened by the sight of her, wanting to reach out and help her, but Reem would not allow it. He said she would remain in isolation until he determined otherwise.*

Entry 72952

*Another Fledgling ran away today. She was the mate of Jare. I was almost glad to hear of her escape. They fought often since the decree. It was evident to us all that Jare has become abusive to her but none of the Protectors made an attempt to stop him. Even my Krail defended his actions by saying the transition would be stressful to us all, explaining that Jare would never do anything to seriously harm his woman. Tell that to Genevieve who wore a black eye for nearly a week after a previous argument.*

Entry 72953

*I spoke to the Council today about the plight of the Fledglings, hoping I could impress upon them our dissatisfaction over the decree. None would even listen to our pleas; even Krail turned a blind eye. What is to become of us?*

Entry 72954

*The new young Fledgling, Michelle, has cried nearly every night of her separation from her sister. Elizabeth has been in seclusion with her new mate Erik for nearly a week, and I have begun to worry for her safety. Erik lived in the harsher climates of the east, only coming to visit our Keep to participate in the Mate Choosing ceremonies. He happened to be one of the Protectors present when they intercepted the carriage en route to the convent. Krail has said that Erik plans to leave in a fortnight without the little one. How could anyone be so cruel as to separate two sisters who obviously need each other?*

Entry 72955

*The body of Genevieve was discovered in a glen not far from the Keep. Some of the Fledglings are speculating that Jare murdered her as punishment for running away. I am not certain either way but I know that we cannot continue to go on this way.*

Entry 72956

*Willow has come out of seclusion today. Physically she looks healed but there is nothing behind her eyes. We have tried many different ways to pull her from her silent stupor, to no avail. It saddens me to see her this way. I knew her when she first came to the Keep, so vibrant and full of life.*

Fatima skimmed several more pages of the atrocities Fledglings had been subjected to at the hands of the so-called Protectors.

Entry 72975

*I have decided to embark on my journey to the gargoyles' various holdings as an Ambassador, or so the Council believes. If I can win the support of the Fledglings in those regions I can begin to put our plan in motion.*

Fatima put the journal away, not needing to go on; she knew the plan, from her first reading. The Fledglings had plotted their own Jonestown type of mass suicide. Laurel had delivered the deadly elixir to all the known gargoyle keeps with instructions that it not be used until the majority of the Protectors' forces were called away on a mission. Apparently, her plan had succeeded, otherwise Lorn wouldn't be looking for a new way to breed his species.

## Chapter 7

She awoke from a fitful sleep only to be greeted by the roiling of her stomach. She scarcely made it into the bathroom before heaving the sparse contents into the toilet bowl. Fatima sat on the cold tile for several moments to make sure the retching had stopped before going through the ritual of cleaning her face and mouth.

"Seems to only affect you in the morning," Gordy said from the bathroom doorway where he leaned casually.

"How long have you been there?" she asked his reflection through the mirror.

"Long enough to see you lose the dinner you barely touched last night," he replied.

"The polite thing would have been for you to close the door," she admonished.

"You're probably right. So are you keeping it?"

"What are you talking about?" She looked away, taking the cool wet towel and wiping her face.

"The baby, or whatever it is that is growing in you."

"There isn't a baby or anything else inside me," she replied a little shakily.

"Sure... and De Nile is just a river in Egypt."

She whirled on him, hackles raised. "Look, I don't have to stand here and listen to your crap." She made to brush past him only to have her path blocked.

"Don't be upset with me. I'm just trying to make you face reality here. I heard you yesterday morning and have seen you just about lose it a few times before."

"I... I can't be pregnant," she said in a near whisper, unable to meet his eyes.

"And why not?"

"Lorn said he couldn't have children," she blurted out. At Gordy's raised eyebrows she blathered on. "Even your succubus friend said they needed to do experiments on humans before they could breed with them."

"Apparently they found a loophole. I don't know. The fact remains that you, my dear, are very pregnant and need to decide what you're going to do about it."

\* \* \*

Fledglings were what Lorn's mother called the women who could breed with gargoyles. Was it possible she was one? Did that mean she was something other than human?

She wondered as she stared down at the positive blue indicator on the narrow pregnancy strip. She was going to have a baby, a gargoyle or something in between, she thought wearily. How had she ended up in this predicament? she silently lamented.

"Well?" Gordy asked expectantly from his seat in the living room as she re-emerged.

"Just goes to show you who you can trust nowadays," she tried to joke, although she'd never felt less funny in her life.

\* \* \*

The small island of Catalina waited like the last vestige of hope for the somnolent gargoyle. He'd gotten word of a young black woman and white male who fit the description of Fatima and Gordy. The two were said to be residing in a bungalow on the edge of town under assumed names. The island made the perfect refuge from a gargoyle, and it therefore made complete sense that the two would be there, or any island in the world for that matter. He hoped his informants were correct.

\* \* \*

"Thank you for dinner," Fatima said as they left the quaint little restaurant nestled on a narrow street. It was a favorite of locals looking for a place to get good food without all the tourist traffic.



"Don't mention it. I'm trying to atone for my rude comment earlier about the baby. Have you decided about whether or not to keep it?" he inquired.

"I still don't know. This baby could be perfectly normal, not possessing any of the gargoyle traits of its father." Confusion etched her voice, although a part of her, a very large part of her, was completely opposed to the possibility of an abortion.

"Or it could possess all of them. Genetics can be very funny that way," he added.

Fatima didn't need him to tell her that.

"Listen, whatever you decide just know that I support you a hundred and ten percent."

"Thanks for everything. I owe you more than I could ever repay for all you've done for me."

"Well, well, what a cozy little scene I've come across," Lorn sneered as he stepped out of the shadows of a nearby alley. His mind was still absorbing the most important part of their conversation. He'd stood silently listening to every word as the couple approached his secluded hiding space. He was going to be a father. Lorn took in her revealing white mini dress, his blood boiling over the thought of her wearing it for the human. There was no mistaking the obvious bond between the two. His heart ached at the idea of her giving herself to another man.

Fatima stumbled as she came to an abrupt halt, as if she couldn't believe her eyes.

"Leave her alone, Gargoyle," Gordy spoke up, pushing her protectively behind him, his actions reminding Lorn that he didn't have time for foolish emotions. He needed to remember her betrayal.

"So you have appointed yourself protector of my mate?"

When she first caught sight of Lorn, Fatima thought he was nude, but the light from the street lamp caught the tan material of what appeared to be a loincloth tied around his waist. Unbound raven colored hair draped his shoulders. Primitive and dangerous was the first thought that came to mind.

Lorn closed the distance between them slowly, each step thudding in her ear while she peered over Gordy's shoulder at the man who had changed her life.

"She's not your mate, and if memory serves me she left you."

"Yes, she did." He stopped in front of them, his eyes meeting hers. For a moment Fatima thought she saw something akin to pain cross his features.

"Gordy, don't provoke him," she whispered, placing a delicate hand on his shoulder.

Lorn's eyes were immediately drawn to the comforting touch. "I believe it's too late for that, *mon cher*."

"Lorn, it's me you're mad at. Let him go and we can talk."

He gave a laugh that sounded dangerously like a growl. "Is that why you think I've searched the entire U.S., for us to talk? I assure you, my dear, the time for talking is over."

"If you think you're going to..." Gordy's words trailed off with a loud yelp as he was hurled across the narrow road. He landed with a thud in a silent heap.

"Gordy!" she gasped. She wanted to check to make sure he was all right but was stopped by an unseen force.

"If you touch him again I swear I will kill him where he lays."

"Lorn, please just leave. I promise we won't tell anyone about you or your kind. We'd probably be locked away if we did," she assured him.

"And what of my son, or are you still undecided on that front?"

"How..."

"If you think I would leave my child with you and that succubus slave for one more second you have another think coming." He closed in on her, folding her in his steely embrace. Fatima felt more than saw the transformation into his gargoyle form. In a matter of seconds they were airborne, putting distance between them and the city of Avalon in record time. Fatima sent up a silent prayer for Gordy, and another for herself because from the look Lorn had given her, she would need all the divine intervention she could get.

\* \* \*

Their landing was softer than she'd anticipated in his current state, but she was grateful for small favors. She'd just gotten her bearings when he escorted her into a sprawling log cabin nestled between dense redwoods.

"It's good to see that your trip was successful, brother," Jean greeted him. "Hello, little sister." He smiled warmly at her.

"Hello," Fatima managed before she was nearly dragged behind the loincloth clad Lorn. He took the stairs up to the second floor two at a time while she stumbled behind him.

When he finally relinquished his hold on her arm she was grateful it remained attached. She took several steps into the bedroom they'd entered to put distance between them. Fatima watched in awe as the bedroom door closed behind him without so much as a backwards glance. Fear crept up her spine as she realized the full extent of his powers was still unknown to her. "What are you going to do with me?" she asked nervously.

"Whatever I want," came his harsh reply. "Remove your clothes."

"You can't be... serious."

"I am not interested in debating the issue. Either you take them off or I will."

Seeing the seriousness in his eyes she complied, kicking off the strappy heeled sandals. The white halter dress she wore tied at the neck, allowing for one tug release. His already smoldering gaze turned to an inferno as the dress slid easily off her body, revealing dark firm breasts and upturned nipples that puckered in the chilly room. She wore silk bikini briefs that hugged her rounded hips seductively.

"Did you wear that for him?" he rasped.

"No." Her voice came out in a barely audible squeak.

"Do not lie to me," he barked. "I smell his scent on you. Your body reeks of him." He advanced on her so quickly his form blurred in front of her eyes. She froze when the thin fabric of her panties was ripped from her body, leaving her completely bare.

Lorn hauled her over his shoulder into the connecting bathroom, forcing her into the shower while he adjusted the temperature of the harsh spray. He tossed his own loincloth aside, joining her in the small space.

"No," she protested as he began to vigorously scrub her from head to toe. "We didn't do anything," she cried, her skin feeling raw from every place he touched.

After, she stood like a child while he dried her with as much energy as he expended in the cleaning process, but she held back the tears that threatened to fall at his harsh treatment.

"Put this on." He grabbed some garments from a nearby wardrobe and tossed them on the bed.

She grabbed up the familiar items, pulling them on with vigor.

"We will be returning to France in the morning after breakfast," he informed her. "Sleep now -- my son needs the rest," were his parting words.

\* \* \*

"Brother, you know she did not sleep with the human," Jean said to the brooding man next to him after thirty minutes of silence.

"I know," Lorn replied. He'd known from the moment he had her alone, but felt the need to remove the faint scent from her daily contact with the human male.

"Perhaps you should talk to her. I'm sure there are reasons why she left with him."

"Save your sage advice for someone else, little brother. I thank you for your help in the search and for the use of your home, but how I choose to handle my mate is no one's concern," he said quietly, before leaving the room.

For a brief moment he contemplated returning to the bedroom where his mate slept but thought better of it. In his current state there was no telling how he would react to being so close to her. For the sake of her and their unborn child it was better if he kept his distance for now.

\* \* \*

"Fatima!" Gordy came to with a start, looking around the familiar room of their bungalow with questioning eyes.

"Where is she?" he asked the woman snuggled up at his side.

"Her gargoyle has come for her, don't you remember?" the succubus offered softly.

He fell back against the plush pillows. He did remember. The man had come out of an alley and attacked him before he had a chance to get one punch off.

"Yes, I remember. We have to get her back."

"That will prove impossible. The gargoyle is aware of my assistance and will make sure he takes all necessary precautions to prevent any such happenstance in the future."

"You can't think I will just leave her to him."

"What other choice do you have, unless you have a death wish?" She began a slow massage on his chest and belly. "Does this woman really mean that much to you?"

"Yes," he answered after a slow intake of breath. She held his cock firmly in her hands, massaging him until he grew rigid.

"Then you shall have her," she said.

He would have questioned her statement but was silenced as she transformed into the object of his obsession. He blinked rapidly as the dark woman straddled his waist.

"Is this what you want?" she asked.

He nodded slowly. Even her voice sounded like Fatima's.

"What would you have me do, Gordy?"

"Take my cock into that tight warm pussy, baby," he murmured, licking his lips in anticipation. She hovered over him, rubbing his flesh vigorously until he moaned aloud.

"Like this." She eased down onto his length, her sheath swallowing the hardness inside of her.

"Oh, yes." He arched into her while she rode him gently at first, her rhythm seeming to gain momentum from his lustful moans.

Gordy watched with half closed eyes as Fatima's perfect breasts bounced for his enjoyment. He reached for the globes, tweaking each nipple.

"Harder," she ordered.

He complied eagerly, exerting pressure until she cried out in pleasure. She ground her hips into him with such force he thought they would meld permanently.

"That's it, baby, fuck me. I've wanted you for so long, I knew it would be like this."

"Less talking, more fucking," she gasped, leaning over, which allowed him to take her hard nipples in his mouth.

"So sweet," he said from around one dark nub, biting firmly until she yelped.

"It's so good, so good," he chanted, feeling the build up beginning. He wanted to prolong the sensation for as long as possible, but the faster she slammed over his arousal the less likely he was to last as long as he knew she wanted.

"I'm going to come, baby," he groaned.

"Oh, yes, fill me up with your cum. My body is so hungry for you," she begged, convulsing around him until he did just that. Her vaginal walls contracted to milk every drop.

Just when Gordy thought he couldn't give any more he felt her thirsty channel drinking him dry.

"Give me a minute, baby," he complained, trying to dislodge her rotating hips from him.

"No, I want more." Her voice was strained as she pushed his arms away with unbelievable strength.

Gordy tried to force a laugh. "I promise in a minute, five tops."

"No... must have more... now," she panted, riding him harder.

Gordy heard the distinct sound of bones cracking before the pain registered in his brain.

"Get off me!" he said, panic-stricken, trying frantically to dislodge her.

"I want it all, all of you." She pounded into him with added force.

He tried to speak but found his vocal cords didn't work beyond allowing for several squeaking sounds to emit. His body throbbed painfully while the woman rode him fiercely. He was weakened from the continuous sucking of her hungry pussy. For a brief moment he wondered why Fatima would do this to him, but through the haze of pain remembered it wasn't her. It was the succubus, the demon who was sucking the very life out of his body. His last thoughts were of how he should have listened to Fatima's warnings.

## Chapter 8

The trans-Atlantic flight ended as the private plane landed in the Lyon airport. Fatima expected them to drive the remainder of the way only to find herself escorted to a helicopter. She settled in the back seat while Lorn rode shotgun. He'd said little more than two words to her the entire time with the exception of ordering her to eat.

"My son will require sustenance beyond the meager snacks that you call meals," he informed her.

If she had any doubts as to why he wanted her back, his comment said it all. Like the women discussed in his mother's journal, she was going to be used as a brood mare for him. How long would he keep her before passing her on to the next gargoyle? she wondered, staring out the window.

She felt like a prisoner being returned to jail after a failed escape. Their silent ride was filled with thoughts of horrendous forms of punishment she might endure at Lorn's hands. Would he beat her once he got her to his estate?

Pierre was present as she entered the castle.

"Hello, Madame." He bowed. Fatima paused at the sight of him without the black cap. Pointed ears jutted upward from underneath thick white hair that hung halfway down his back.

"Hello, Pierre."

"It is good to have you home." Sincerity etched his voice.

*Home. Is that what it is supposed to be?* she thought as she smiled politely.

"Take her upstairs," Lorn ordered without preamble. "I'll be in my offices."

"I hear congratulations are in order," Pierre commented once they reached the second story landing.



*For what*, she almost asked, but immediately remembered her pregnancy. "Thank you," she replied. He led her to the bedroom she'd previously shared with Lorn. It seemed like a lifetime ago since she'd been in his home enjoying all the wonderful lessons in lovemaking he had to share. She paused just outside the room, remembering how things were the last time she'd slept there.

"Can I bring you anything up before you retire?"

"No, thank you," she answered graciously. "Good night, Pierre."

"Good night, Madame."

She showered before slipping into a nightshirt. Climbing in between the soft rich sheets that smelled so much like Lorn, she tried to remember what his mother had written about the cruelties his kind inflicted on the Fledglings. Finally she drifted to sleep contemplating what fate awaited her at his hands.

\* \* \*

Lorn watched the sleeping woman for several seconds, struggling to resist the urge to climb in the bed next to her, to feel her against him. He'd dreamt of her so many nights right there waiting for him, calling his name as she begged for his touch. He wished that he were strong enough to walk away from her, but God have mercy on his soul, he was weak where she was concerned.

Fatima arched against the hungry mouth that feasted on her distended clit. It felt so real. She reached down expecting to touch air but instead coming in contact with thick soft hair.

"No." She moaned, her eyes opening to see familiar emerald ones looking up at her heatedly. "Please," she begged but wasn't certain herself if she wanted him to stop or continue.

Lorn ignored her whimpers as he indulged himself on her woman's juices. His tongue flicked over her hard nub while she ground her hairless mound into his mouth. He lapped at her in long strokes, enjoying how she squirmed in response, keeping her legs spread wide, with gentle hands, for his lips' feasting.

"I'm going to come," she panted.

In response Lorn hummed against her sensitive nub, delving two fingers deeply into her welcoming core until she contracted against his digits, her orgasm wracking every fiber of her body.

She didn't have a chance to completely recover from the sensation before he was kneeling over her, pushing his ready cock into her wet channel, reacquainting her with his thickness. Her body stretched around his staff as if welcoming him home.

"Mine," he rasped, punctuating his word with a thrust that brought him balls-deep inside of her. "All mine."

"Ooohhh, Lorn," she moaned.

"Yes, *ma cherie*, I know." He stroked her with long deep thrusts. "Too long," he moaned, his thrusts increasing, becoming more demanding.

Her nightshirt rode up over her breasts, giving him full view of the bouncing dark globes. He anchored one of her legs around his waist while leaning over her to take a rigid nipple in his mouth. He plucked the sensitive skin, grazing teeth over it until she arched into him. Her fingers buried in his hair, taking a firm hold.

How she hated that he could easily reduce her to this.

"More," she begged, and wasn't disappointed when he sought her other nipple for equal enjoyment.

She was coming undone again from the force of his relentless cock and pleasuring mouth.

"Dear God!"

He raised his head, staring into her aroused eyes. "That's it, baby, come for me."

Almost on cue she did, but only seconds before he exploded in her with a strangled cry. His seed flooded her womb in several warm spurts.

\* \* \*

Within a week after her return, things had fallen into some semblance of normalcy that she assumed would be her life for as long as she remained with Lorn. In the mornings she slept late only to come down to a breakfast large enough for two. Lorn

was usually holed up in his office or out and about on the grounds by the time she awoke. Most days she wouldn't see him until lunch or dinner. At night he seemed to make a point of reintroducing her to his brand of lovemaking, sometimes rough, other times gentle, but always satisfying.

She hated her body for betraying her the way it did each night, when she begged for him, all the while knowing that what she needed to do was keep her wits about her.

One afternoon she'd gone for a leisurely swim with Sara and Luc, who were grateful to be rid of the ridiculous caps that hid elfish ears, when Lorn stormed in on them.

"What the hell are you doing?" he raged.

Not sure whom he was addressing, they all began to speak at once.

"Leave us," he ordered her two friends, eyes fastened on his bikini-clad mate, who tread water in the deep end of the pool.

Fatima was tempted to follow the two elves but knew such an action would add to his already unsavory disposition.

"We were just swimming," she began, deciding to exit the pool on the side farthest from him.

"In your condition."

"I'm pregnant, not injured, and exercise is recommended for pregnant women," she defended, grabbing up a towel.

"And do you think that is appropriate attire for a pregnant woman?" He indicated her suit.

She looked down at the white bikini. "I think it's quite appropriate for the pool," she answered, knowing he was spoiling for a fight. "But since I'm obviously done I'll go upstairs and change."

"No." He crossed the length of the pool with supernatural speed. "Perhaps I will join you."

"I think I've had enough water for today." She tried to back away only to be held in place by a restraining hand.

"So, do you just object to swimming with me, or would you much prefer the company of a certain little elf?"

"What?" she asked with genuine surprise.

"Don't tell me you haven't noticed the way he ogles you."

"As a matter of fact, I haven't. I rarely see Luc. He's always on some errand for you."

"Apparently I need to keep him better occupied."

"What does it matter if I show interest in him or anyone else? It's just a matter of time before you trade me off to another gargoyle. Or is that it -- I can't be involved with an elf?"

"You can't be involved with anyone but me," he barked.

"Yeah, for how long?" At his silence she continued with her tirade. "Five years, ten, or is twenty customary?"

"What are you talking about?"

"I read your mother's journal. I know what happens to Fledglings. That's what I am, isn't it? A breeder for your kind?"

"What journal are you talking about?" His eyes narrowed.

"The one the succubus gave me. It told what happened to the Fledglings. I know why your mother and the other women committed suicide. They would rather die than be treated like chattel by you so-called Protectors," she spat. "So when is my time here over? Who will I be given to next? If I have much of a choice I think Jean would make a good temporary mate."

"Shut up!" he roared, his arms tightening around her until she blanched in pain. "You do not know what you speak of. You've allowed yourself to be misled by that creature."

"I didn't need to hear anything from her. I read the journal with my own eyes. You all were guilty of mistreating the women. Your own father would not listen to your mother when she came to him to complain. They had no other choice. It was the gargoyles that caused this mess," she accused.

"Where is this journal?" he demanded.

"I left it in the bungalow. Why, do you want to destroy the evidence of your ancestors' misdoings?"

"I suggest you stop while you're ahead. I will go for this journal, and in my absence you are to remain on the grounds. Is that understood?"

"Do I have any other option?"

"No."

*Of course not.* "May I go and change now?"

"Go, but stay away from Luc while I'm away."

## Chapter 9

Lorn had been gone for three days. Despite her best efforts, Fatima couldn't help but think about him. During that time he hadn't bothered to call or send word through anyone, at least not to her. She'd even listened for any comments from the staff but there was no information.

"He's fine," Sara assured her one evening while they sat out enjoying the crisp night air. Winter was rapidly approaching. There would be very few days left where they could swim without heating the pool, until next spring.

"How can you be so certain?"

"Elves are empathic. If something had befallen him I would know."

Fatima nodded, accepting the information without question. She'd learned much since her return about the elfin kind, quickly deciding that she needed at least one ally in the enemy camp. Sara seemed like the best choice since they had developed a friendship during those weeks when she first arrived.

"In spite of what has happened in the past the gargoyles are truly good. If it weren't for their intervention mankind would have been doomed a long time ago."

Fatima listened quietly, feeling as if she needed to hear what the young elfin woman had to say.

"Don't assume that they are infallible. No one is. They have made grievous errors where the Fledglings are concerned but I believe that they have truly learned from their mistakes. Besides, Lorn was just a young man when this all happened. You cannot shoulder him with this burden."

She understood the truth in the woman's words, silently digesting them.

\* \* \*

She was aware the moment Lorn returned home, could feel the electric buzz radiate throughout the castle. It was an unusually balmy fall night and she'd changed into shorts and T-shirt to enjoy the cool air that flowed through the air-conditioned castle.

*He is here*, Sara relayed to her telepathically. Fatima smiled at her friend's excited communiqué.

Trying to appear reserved Fatima made her way down the stairs.

*They're in the library*, the elf volunteered.

Fatima wondered about the 'they' as she entered the room. Lorn was the first one she noticed, taking in his serious expression. A man she didn't recognize, his father and his brother Jean joined him. Each man wore the same expression.

"Did something happen?" she asked, looking for some sort of clue on the men's stoic visages.

Lorn spoke up first. "We were able to recover the journal." Pausing, he followed up with, "Perhaps you should have a seat."

"What?" she asked, padding over to him instead.

"Gordy is dead."

"Gordy? But how?"

"I think it better if you don't know the details, but from the sound of it, it was definitely the handiwork of the succubus."

"Poor Gordy."

"That's not all," he continued. "The police are looking for you in connection with the murder."

"Me? Why?"

"Apparently you were seen leaving the apartment just after his screams were heard."

"Me?" She looked between all the men. "That's impossible. I'll just have to go back and clear my name."

"You can't. No one would ever believe you."

"But you could vouch for me."

"I doubt if the word of your lover would carry much weight over those in the community who saw you fleeing the scene."

"How is that possible?"

"Succubi are skilled at shape shifting and can take any form," Krail answered.

"Oh, God." She was a fugitive, and poor Gordy was dead. "There must be something I can do."

"You will stay here where you belong," Lorn ordered.

Was this a ploy to gain her complacency? "What about the succubus? You can't just let her get away with this?"

"Trust me. She will not elude us forever. When we do find her she will pay for all the wrongs she has committed," Lorn promised.

Fatima regarded his stern face, knowing he meant every word. "I need some time to take this all in."

"You will have the rest of our lives," Lorn affirmed. "I think there is something you need to see."

"What?" She wasn't sure she could handle another surprise.

"The journal you read did in fact belong to my mother, but that was only part of it. I have the other part in the labs, although it looks as if there are still sections missing, maybe lost over time, but more likely in the possession of the succubus."

"I don't understand."

"The part of the journal I have tells the story from the time my parents first became mated. I think it would do more justice for you to read it for yourself."

\* \* \*

Fatima closed the journal, wiping away stray tears that seemed to flow endlessly. In all of her life she'd never read, heard about or witnessed such a declaration of devotion. Laurel and Krail De LaRue truly loved each other. Their story was one that epics were based on.



Fatima quietly entered the bedroom she shared with Lorn. He stood on the patio overlooking his vast property.

"Is the jury still out?" he asked with his back to her.

"No."

"Do I want to know what the verdict is?"

"Why don't you turn around and ask me that."

He complied, the look on his face turning to concern at her moist eyes. "Why are you crying, *ma cherie*?"

"It was beautiful. Your mother loved you all so much, especially your father."

"I know. That's why I could never understand why she did what she did. Why any of them chose death." There was so much pain in his voice.

"They felt helpless, like there was no other choice left to them."

"How do you feel?"

"Confused, a little scared," she admitted.

"I promise you that I will do everything in my power to make this transition easy for you."

"Thank you, but you know what I would like most of all?"

"Name it." He looked into her amber eyes knowing he couldn't deny her anything.

"To have you inside me. It's been too long."

"Your wish is my command," he answered, scooping her up into his arms. "Does this mean you're going to marry me?"

"Isn't that what the whole mated thing is about?" she asked as he carried her into their bedroom.

"Yes, but call me a traditionalist," he said, tossing her on the bed.

She bounced with a laugh. "I don't know. For some reason you don't strike me as the traditional sort."

"Really?" He was tugging clothes off as he followed her.

"Wait." She stopped him as he propped one knee on the edge of the bed.

"You're kidding, right?" He stared at her in disbelief.

"It's just that..." She felt suddenly nervous. "I was wondering if... well, if you... can you enjoy sex in your gargoyle form?"

A wicked smile crept up his full lips. "More than you can ever imagine, but it's not something that I would recommend, for obvious reasons." He could feel himself growing hard at the thought of taking her in his altered state.

"I got used to your normal size pretty quickly."

He regarded her with doubt in his eyes.

"Okay, let's compromise. Why don't you only partially transform?" she suggested coquettishly.

"As you wish, *ma cherie*," he agreed, each move he made toward her on the bed bringing about subtle changes in his body until his physique was that of both man and gargoyle. In mid transformation Wings sprouted from behind his back. They weren't massive in his current state, but impressive nonetheless. Emerald eyes darkened in hue, and he regarded her with raw lust.

She couldn't believe her body's instant reaction to him.

He stopped mere inches from her on the bed, sitting back on his heels, wings slightly open, thighs spread, drawing attention to his colossal erection. Fatima took in his changed state, allowing her eyes to roam slowly over every nuance.

"Would you like me to change back?" he asked, worry evident in his voice, after her extended silence.

"No. I was just wondering where I should begin."

"Anywhere you'd like."

"Are your wings sensitive?"

"Why don't you see for yourself?"

With a boldness that was not natural to her she sidled behind him, marveling at the deep creases in his extra appendages. She touched them tentatively, tracing every crevice. A low rumble started from deep within Lorn, a sound somewhere between a purr and growl. Feeling bolder, she allowed both her hands free rein over the contours

of his wings. Edging closer, she traced the path her fingers had taken with her tongue, enjoying the texture of him against her. She trailed leisurely up and down his spine where his wings met.

“Good God, woman, what are you doing to me?”

“You ain’t seen nothing yet, big boy,” she purred, sliding around his body until she sat in front of him, knee to knee. Leaning in she kissed him tenderly at first, edging closer when the gentle brush of lips wouldn’t suffice. She groaned against his mouth, slipping her tongue between his teeth, cautiously tracing it against an incisor. Needing to feel him, she ran her hands up the soft thin patch of fur that covered his chest. One hand slipped between their bodies, seeking out his thrusting penis. His veined cock was hard and throbbing as he pushed into her caress. She massaged the length of him, her other hand joining in the stroking in order to fully encompass his girth.

“Yes,” he moaned, and creamy moisture trickled from his tip giving her just the amount of lubrication she needed to increase the rhythm. Fatima couldn’t believe how turned on she was becoming simply by touching him. Without preamble she slid down on the bed, bracing herself on her elbows while she did her best to take him in her mouth. Her full lips were stretched to capacity with only a couple of inches of him. Not deterred, she worked her mouth around the head as if he were her favorite flavor ice cream, while her hands continued stroking his length.

“Oooooohhhh yes,” he mumbled, grabbing fists full of her thick mane as she worked her mouth over him.

In all his years he’d never felt anything so deliciously addicting. He would never get tired of feeling her warm mouth on him, tongue swirling around the head of his cock, dipping into its opening. Needing to touch her, he reached over, stroking his hands over her T-shirt clad back, down to her firm round ass. He kneaded the tight cheeks through khaki shorts, forcing her legs apart until he could cup her mound through the thick fabric.

Impatient to feel her bare skin he pulled her from her greedy ministrations.

She pouted at him.

"I want to see you."

Fatima easily slipped the T-shirt over her head, allowing her mahogany breasts to spring free. Drawn to the sway of her rounded globes, Lorn's eyes feasted on her while she lay down to wiggle out of her shorts.

"Come here," he ordered, pulling her up. "I have to taste you."

"How?" she asked, remembering all the ways he had enjoyed cunnilingus on her in the past.

"Sixty-nine."

She smiled knowingly -- that was definitely one of her favorites. He eased down on the bed. Impatient to have her over him, he easily lifted her into mounting position.

Fatima cursed softly when his mouth latched onto its target. He laved her with the fervor of a man possessed, roughly stroking her clit with his tongue while he fingered her moist warmth. So vigorous was his assault that she nearly forgot about his cock. Encouraged by his enthusiasm she assailed him with equal passion, her head bobbing over his distended member.

She tried to hold on as long as she could but the combined attention of his tongue and fingers pushed her closer and closer to the edge. He lapped at her clit, pressing his tongue firmly against her little nub, twirling his wet flesh around it until --

"Oh!" she shouted, grinding her hips into his rapidly drumming tongue. She didn't have a chance to recuperate before he had her on her back, spreading her thighs wide to make way for his added width. With surprising restraint he pushed into her slowly, her walls stretching to encompass him.

"So tight," he gritted, edging in further, each slow surge bringing him deeper into her hot channel.

"Oh, God, you're so big." She met his thrusts with eagerness.

He leveraged her legs on his arms, giving him better access to drive into her with long strokes. Plunging into her repeatedly while grinding against her sensitized clitoris with each motion, until he brought her to a second climax. Her body contracted around him rapidly, sending him rushing to his own completion.

He shouted his orgasm as he made one final downward thrust. Shooting his seed into her satiated body, he convulsed in a series of shudders before relaxing in his human form.

After several seconds he pulled his weight off her. "Are you okay?" He searched her face for any indication of discomfort.

"I feel great." She smiled. "Better than great, in fact."

"Thank you." He gathered her up in his arms, bringing her limp body to lie on his larger one.

"For what?" she mumbled.

"You're kidding, right?" He kissed the top of her head.

"I should be thanking you," she replied, feeling completely relaxed.

"Why?"

"For making it so easy for me to love you."

"What did you say?" He shifted them to get a better look at her face.

"I said thank you," she said sleepily.

"Oh, no, you don't." He cupped her chin. "Did you say you loved me?"

"Did I?"

"Fatima!" he gave a warning growl.

"Oh, all right. If you're going to go get all gargoyle on me, then yes, I said I love you. Now can a sista get some sleep around here?"

"Yes, *ma cherie*," he chuckled.

"Is that all I get?" She eyed him.

"Was there something else you're wanting? You seemed a little too tired for additional activity."

"You know what I'm talking about." She punched him squarely in the shoulder.

"Ah, yes, *amore*. *Ma cherie*, I love you more than words can express."

"Really?"

"Truly."

"Good, cause you're stuck with me."

“Forever,” he promised.

## Epilogue

"I can't believe they actually ran this ad!" Fatima gasped, shifting to a more comfortable position in her lounge chair. It was a surprisingly warm spring afternoon, too beautiful to be spent indoors. She loved the winter in her new home but had looked forward to the warming weather. Today, it was as if it had been served up special for her.

"I don't know, I think it has a certain charm to it," Lorn defended.

She shook her head at her husband and mate before reading the advertisement aloud for the third time:

**Ebony Beauties Wanted To Marry Rich Bachelors.  
Age unimportant. Must be willing to relocate.  
Criterion: Winged-Shaped Birthmark.  
Tattoos are not acceptable!!!**

"Do you know what kind of nuts they're going to get responding to this thing?"

Lorn shrugged, reaching over to the poolside table for the tube of aloe vera cream. He squirted an ample amount into his large hands before rubbing the thick substance on his mate's extremely rounded belly. He'd told her once before that the preventative measure was unnecessary. As a Fledgling her body would recuperate without the faintest hint of a stretch mark, but he indulged her anyway, loving any opportunity to touch her.

"Aren't you the slightest bit concerned about the kind of wacko your brother could end up with?"

"So long as she's a Fledgling."

"Oh, so just any ole Fledgling will do?"

Lorn rolled his eyes heavenward. Although he'd become accustomed to her mood swings during pregnancy he still hadn't learned when to keep his mouth closed.

"There you two are," Krail greeted, stepping out onto the patio.

"Hello, Sire." Lorn jumped at the welcome interruption.

"Hello, Father," Fatima returned.

"My goodness, you blossom even more into a spring flower every time I see you."

"Thank you, but there is no need to be polite. I know I look like a brown whale, Father."

"Nonsense," he chastised. "And I would cut anyone down who suggested otherwise." He shot Lorn a threatening look that his son pointedly ignored.

"Hey, I tell her every day how beautiful she looks, but it's only your opinion she values." Lorn looked affronted.

Fatima quirked an eyebrow in her mate's direction. "That's because I can tell who's being sincere and who's just trying not to get kicked out of our bed."

"Your point being?" he asked.

"Whatever. Have you seen the ad the other Protectors are running world wide?"

"Ah, yes. Not the approach I would have taken." He shook his head disapprovingly.

"I agree whole-heartedly. Number one, they're going to have every crazy from here to San Diego responding. Two, there is no basis to assume that only women of African descent still carry the mark of the Fledgling. If they had just consulted me before running the thing."

"You would have begun a scientific analysis that might take years to complete. Some of them don't have years," he said remembering Vladimir.

"I know, but --"

"What's done is done," Lorn dismissed. "All you need to worry your pretty little head about now is resting up for the birth of our son."



"Lorn Berenger De LaRue, did you just *shush* me?" She rose up enough to give him the evil eye.

"Me, shush *you*? I wouldn't think of it in a million years."

She harrumphed. "On that note, I think I'll go and finish that smidgeon of Ben & Jerry's left over in the freezer before I end up beating you with a seat cushion."

Lorn waited until she'd waddled inside before saying to his father, "At this rate the next time you see her she will have blossomed enough to make a bouquet."

"Lorn, you know I can still hear you," she yelled from somewhere in the house.

He winked at his father. He knew he would probably pay for the comment later, and smiled at the numerous ways he would make the teasing remark up to her. He couldn't remember a time when he'd been happier.

**The End**

## **Nia Foxx**

N. K. Foxx is the proud mother of three beautiful, very active children, all under 10 years of age. They currently reside in a picturesque small-town burg in Michigan, where they enjoy biking, swimming, fairs and traveling in their minivan. Ms. Foxx holds a BA from the University of California, Santa Cruz, in International Politics and Literature. She began an interest in writing romantic stories at the age of twelve, trying her hand at erotica only recently. Ms. Foxx has written several unpublished novellas and novels, mostly writing for her own enjoyment until now.