

## Chaos at Christmas

An

Immortality Inc

Story

By

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### Chapter One

She'd dumped him at Halloween. Officially, anyway. Not like it mattered much. He'd seen the look in her eyes when she caught him with those two other muses. He was a very sensual man. It wasn't his fault. Not really. And, he was a man that couldn't stand temptation. Having two sexually charged honeys with their hands and lips all over him, well damn, what was he supposed to do? It wasn't as if Jinx indicated she'd wanted anything permanent with him. Besides, he had very little willpower and Jinx should've realized that all by herself. Leave him alone too long and that gave Chaos an opening to create havoc.

And he did. Always. GilContrelle ran his tongue along his teeth and forced the hint of a smirk out of his mind and off his lips. That's why he was Chaos.

Gil meandered his way down the street toward Daley Plaza and the open air market that was modeled after Germany's market of 1545.

The sky was full of puffy, dove gray clouds that seemed content to blow by Chicago without dumping an ounce of snow on the city. Gil ignored the sting of being dumped and dateless around the holidays and tried to concentrate on Christmas Market. Long strands of garland decorated with red bows and gold bells draped over several booths. Twinkling lights beckoned. Gil's lips twisted slightly. He usually picked up a few presents at the market and dateless or not, the holidays still came.

But he wasn't in the mood. Not in the least. One vendor selling pretty pies and other baked goods played holiday music at a level that made Gil cringe as he moved passed. ***“Let it snow, let snow, let it snow...”***

“You like snow?” Gil snarled under his breath, “Sobe it.” Glancing upward, he wiggled his fingers directing a cloud over head and instantly the snow began to fall. Big, fluffy flakes blanketed the vendor's booth in thirty seconds. Gil snickered as a small crowd formed, amazed at the snow and its directional fall.

Sometimes controlling the weather was a hoot. Snickering Gil, dug out a couple of dollars and bought himself a sugar cookie from the vendor before continuing on his way.

"I'm gonna kill him. Wrap his skinny little head in a wreath and string him up on my roof with a strand of lights."

Aurora glanced over the rim of her coffee cup at the muse called Jinx. She was a tiny, fairy with sharp pretty features, cocoa skin and a short crop of wild platinum hair tipped in a color Aurora could only describe as neon, traffic stopping red. Aurora tried not to smile. The girl resembled a metallic candy cane—metallic silver skirt, cropped striped top and giant silver bells dangling from her ears. Thank goodness she was a muse—Aurora couldn't imagine that outfit on anything else than a Christmas parade float.

"Is this about Chaos again?" Aurora stirred a bit of mint-flavored cream into her coffee. She tried a diplomatic tact when Jinx huffed at her. "He got your job back, Jinx."

Jinx eyed the coffee, "If I drank that stuff I'd be bouncing off the walls."

Aurora laughed, raising her glass in salute. "If I had half your energy, I'd be bouncing off the walls."

"Yeah, well. We all can't be perky." She winked. "And I know it wasn't Chaos that got my job back. I'm pretty positive it was you."

"Really?"

"Now, I'm not sure so that was a good idea." Jinx walked over to the soda machine and selected a Red Bull. Not a good idea in Aurora's opinion, Jinx was practically a pinball anyway. "I mean, who would've thought that Chaos would go all stalkerboy on me? He's sent candy, flowers, stuffed animals and this morning," Jinx paused long enough to pop the top on the Red Bull and take a long pull from the vitamin infused drink. "This morning, there is an eleven foot decorated Christmas tree on my doorstep."

Aurora opened her mouth to respond, but Jinx got there first. "Now what the hell am I supposed to do with that thing? I can't even get it inside the door."

"He's just trying to be nice, Jinx."

"I don't want him to be nice. I want him to go away. I swear if he doesn't cut it out, I'm going to tell Nic —"

"Tell Nic what?"

Jinx jumped like a cat on a hotwire. Man, that man had sizzle. Talk about pop! Nic Avalon was one sexy man. If she wasn't off men, she'd definitely give Aurora a run for her money with that one. Jinx cleared her throat, "Tell Nic to keep his pet Chaos away from me."

A dark brow lifted. "Excuse me?"

Jinx clucked her tongue. "I know he's one of your favorites. No use denying it. But tell him enough is enough, I've got to figure out what to do with a giant Christmas tree."

Nic glanced from Jinx to Aurora where his eyes lingered way too long to be friendly. Jinx sighed. Oh well, she was having enough trouble with men these days. She noticed Aurora chuckle and lift her shoulders in a delicate shrug. Nic turned back to her. "Did I miss something?"

"Chaos is driving me insane."

It wasn't funny that Aurora didn't feel for her dilemma. The woman practically blew coffee out her nose when Jinx said Chaos was a nut.

"Maybe he's trying to be nice. Make up to you." Aurora wiped a hand over lips.

"Chaos isn't nice. He's a pain in the—"

Nic held up a hand. "I get the picture." Jinx watched as his hand went to the small of Aurora's back as he reached around her for a coffee cup. Hmm... she'd heard rumors they were on the outs. Didn't look that way to her and she was good at ferreting out that kind of info. "You knew he worked here, Jinx when you came back."

Jinx shifted her weight to her right hip and juttled it forward. Her lips pouted as she stared at tall, dark and dangerous. "Look, I just want him to quit sending me stuff, quit showing up at the lounge, and anywhere else I may have a date and just butt out of my biz."

Aurora's hand brushed over Nic's as she reached for the coffee pot. "She thinks Gil is stalking her."

"What?"

"Mmmhmm..."

Nic turned his full attention on Jinx and she understood why Aurora—hell, any breathing woman would bend over backwards to get their hooks into him. His eyes narrowed slightly and Jinx yanked herself out of a voyeuristic daydream. "I don't think Gil is a stalker."

"Maybe not in the traditional sense, but in the crazy hopped up Santa sense he is."

Nic shook his head as if a fly was buzzing around. "I'm sorry. I missed something here again."

Aurora sat her cup down on the counter and put a hand on his shoulder. She pointed at Jinx with the other hand. "Jinx got an early holiday gift this morning. A very large Christmas tree."

"Fully decorated."

"Ah," he nodded catching on.

"It won't fit through my front door. It's got lights, ornaments and freakin' garland that could blind you all over it!"

Aurora leaned closer and whispered in Nic's ear. He turned his head and smiled. "That's a great idea."

Nic looked over at Jinx. "What if I have one of my assistants make a few calls and see if the Children's hospital needs some holiday cheer?"

Jinx liked that idea a lot. And she could off load some of those damn teddy bears that Gil sent over. "Super! Get it off my porch."

Nic snapped his fingers. "Piece of cake."

Jinx hit the door to her house at hyper speed, peeling off her blouse and kicking off her shoes. She was late and had exactly fifteen minutes to get ready for a date with... What was his name again? Mitch? Mike? Myron? No, she wouldn't date a Myron.

"Going somewhere?"

"Jeez! Shit, you scared the hell out of me!" Jinx slammed her front door shut and stopped with her hand on the waistband of her slacks. Her light gray eyes went positively frosty at the sight of Chaos sitting in her living room drinking a beer as big as you please. "What are you doing here?"

He fingered the neck of the bottle and grinned. "Drinking your beer."

"I see that. What are you doing in my house?" Jinx moved further into the room with its wild splash of color and pendant lamps hanging from the ceiling. She liked color. It gave her a jolt to see red, purple, blue and green all coexisting in her living room. What stood out, was the slouching, lean frame of Gil Contrelle sitting so casually in her living room as if he belonged there.

She took a quick glance at her watch, then back at her beer drinking intruder. "You were supposed to give your key back."

"Was I?" he smiled and it was as irritating as it was sexy. That probably made it even more irritating.

"Yeah, you was. Now get out, I've got exactly six and a half minutes to get ready for my date."

He shifted his feet off the end of the couch and sat up. "You have a date?" He reached out for his beer bottle. "Why?"

Jinx was halfway down the hall to her bedroom with her slacks unzipped when she turned back to stare at him. "Why? Are you kidding?"

"No," it was that slow drawl that he used when he was going for that sexy image, "I'm not kidding."

"Look Gil, I really don't have time for this now. Seriously. I have a date that I'm going to be late for and you shouldn't be here." Jinx swung right out of the hallway and into her bedroom. She slammed the door shut and hoped he'd take the hint.

She stripped down to her bra and panties in under thirty seconds tossing clothing across her bed and nightstand. She'd pick them up later. Right now, she was behind schedule. No time for a shower and fresh makeup, just have to rough it. Jinx sniffed her pits, pleased that she still smelled fresh as she picked up some lightly scented, shimmering powder and poofed it down her midriff. A cloud of powder tickled her nose and Jinx turned her head away to keep from sneezing just as the door to her bedroom

opened.

“You’re going to be late for your date.”

Jinx looked up into the amber eyes of Chaos and dug her toes into the carpet to keep from instantaneously melting. Damn, he wasn’t supposed to be able to do that anymore. But the look in his eyes, the glitter of hunger.

She put her powder pouf down on the vanity and smiled thinly, “Unless you want that Christmas tree of yours shoved into your ear, I’d advise you to vacate my bedroom.”

He glanced around and she noticed he’d let the bleached blonde look of his wild hair fade into darker chocolate brown streaks. Interesting look, it made his hair look softer and she already knew it felt like velvet.

“Hey, what did you do with the tree?”

“It went to the children’s hospital. I figured they could use more holiday cheer than me.”

“You haven’t even decorated yet? What’s the matter with you?”

Jinx moved, finally able to unclench her toes from the strands of carpet. “The only thing wrong with me is that my ex is standing in my bedroom while I’m half naked.”

He made a stabbing motion toward his heart, “You wound me.”

“Yeah, well, what you did to me wasn’t exactly fun.”

He put one hand on his goatee and stroked it thoughtfully. “I told you, it wasn’t what it looked like.”

“Yeah, well, I know what I saw.” Jinx went to her closet and selected a pair of skin tight black jeans. If he was going to stand in here and watch her get dressed, he could suffer. She wiggled into them and got a happy tickle when his eyes dilated. “Two chicks, who were sisters of mine in the Muses, with their hands down your jeans and their lips all over you.”

“It was just a joke—“

“On who?” Jinx zipped up her jeans and the button then pulled a tight black tee from her closet. “Me?” She stuck her head through the neck of the tee and peered at him through the material. “Gee, I guess I didn’t find it funny seeing my boyfriend with his cock in someone else’s hands.”

“Jinx?”

“Get out! Now!” She moved fast when she wanted to and shoved him hard in the chest. “Get the hell out of my house and my life. I don’t want to see you again, Gil.”

He tilted his head at her, “But we work together.”

“Not for long, I’m going to transfer.”

“What?”

“You heard me. I hear Lucien has an opening.”

Chaos huffed, “Yeah for a fuck buddy.”

Jinx picked up her shoes and her keys. “Yeah well, so do you now.” She walked passed him and headed down the hall. “Lock the door and leave the key.”

## Chapter Two

Gil scratched his goatee thoughtfully as he walked down the corridor of Immortality Inc. leading to Aurora’s office. The locator on the main computer told him Jess was in Aurora’s office and since he needed both Desire and Fate. He was determined to make this Christmas a memorable one—and in a good way—he wasn’t doing the Scrooge thing.

“Morning, ladies,” Gil leaned against the doorway with a lazy smile on his face. It was a patented move but he needed all the charm he could get with this one. Besides, he was lucky if these two ladies would talk to him let alone go along with the plan. He’d been instrumental—on purpose or not—in screwing with their love lives on occasion. Now, he wanted them to help him piece his own back together.

“Good morning, Gil.”

“Looking good, Jess. Must be that diet of love Cupid keeps you on.”

Jess lifted a brow at him. “What do you want?”

“Now who said I wanted anything? I mean, come on, can’t a guy compliment a lady?”

“Oh your reputation precedes you in this case.” Jess pulled out a chair and sat down. “Don’t you think, Aurora?”

Aurora leaned against the counter eyeing a blueberry muffin. “I think you have the innate ability of causing trouble in people’s love lives.”

Gil sighed dramatically. “It’s not my fault.”

“Yeah well, it’s only fair now that your love life is trash.” Jess reached for a chocolate muffin. She peeled the paper off the muffin and tore off a piece. “But I appreciate the compliment.”

“You’re a hard woman, Jess.” Gil poured himself a cup of coffee.

“Yeah, but I’m cute.”

Gil sipped his coffee, “That’s why I need your help.” He winked at Aurora, “Both of you.”

Aurora’s brow furrowed slightly and her blue eyes developed a suspicious glow. “With what?”

“Christmas is three days away. I want Jinx back and I’ve got a plan.”

It was a bit disconcerting listening to the two women snort and giggle knowing he was the object of their amusement. “I don’t see that happening,” Jess hooted with laughter.

“No, probably not this year.” Aurorasnickered and then had the good taste to cover her mouth with her hand and pretend to search for the coffee cream.

“Yeah, this year.” Gil huffed and dug around in his pocket producing a small velvet box. He flicked the lid open and placed it on the table. “And I’m upping the ante.”

“Shit...” Jess stopped laughing and started staring.

Gil smiled sly, “Think that will do it?” Both women stared at the eight-carat pear shaped yellow diamond twinkling up them from a bed of white gold. “I think that will do the trick.” He reached down and picked the ring up, grinning at it.

“Gil, either you’ve just made a colossal mistake or—”  
He held up a hand. “It’s Christmas. The season of surprises.”

“Oh that’s going to be a surprise all right.”

“I’m not sure which one of you is going to be more surprised,” Auroracommented, a careful note of warning to her voice.

“That’s why I need your help.”

“If you think we’re going to propose for you, you’re out of your mind.” Jess nibbled the chocolate muffin with a relish Gil admired.

“I don’t want you to propose. I want you to help me buy her some Christmas presents and decorate her house before she gets home.”

“Tonight?”

Gil nodded and snapped the lid on the jewelry box closed before putting it into his pocket. “Yep, we’d better get started. I’ve got a big list.”

“*Tonight?*”

“Well we could get an early start on things if you wanted. MaybeNic and goodol’ Cupid would help a guy out in need.”

“There is no way I’m going to a mall tonight.” Jess shook her head. “That’s just crazy.”

Gil slid his tongue over his teeth, his eyes sparkling like diamonds. "Come on Jess, where's your Christmas spirit?"

"Tucked nicely under my tree when I did my shopping four months ago."

"Scrooge," Gil grinned and slid over to put his arm around Jess. "Come on, girl!" He jiggled her shoulders, "I know you've got some holiday spirit in you."

"You know, Chaos, a couple of months ago, I would've cheerfully broken both your arms." Gil glanced up to see Damon leaning in the doorway and Nic inside the door with a quizzical expression on his dark features.

Gil removed his arm and stood up. He rubbed his hands together greedily. "Great the whole gang is here. Now we can get started." He dug around in his pockets coming up with several bent sheets of paper.

"What the hell is he talking about?"

Aurora smiled, "He wants us to go Christmas shopping with him for Jinx."

"How did we get involved?" Nic moved into the break room glancing at Aurora and then over at him.

"I figured it's a good way for me to make things up to you guys."

Cupid folded his arms across his chest. "By torturing us unmercifully?"

"By getting you all in the holiday spirit."

Aurora nudged Nic in the arm. "He's going to propose to Jinx."

Nic coughed, "But she thinks he's stalk—"

Aurora slammed her elbow in his ribs and Gil noticed his boss wheezing. "Yes, Nic, she's probably going to get something nice in her stocking."

"I never knew Chaos perpetuated good cheer."

"I'd hate to sock Chicago in with the biggest snow storm of the last hundred years." Gil's smile had a distinctly Grinch-like quality. "I can. Now come shopping with me." He waved the lists he had, "I need help or I'm never going to get this done." Before anyone could react he passed the lists out to everyone. "You know with everyone helping, we'll get this done in two-three hours tops."

Groans of dismay filled the air but he noticed everyone at least looked at their lists. "You're kidding me right? You can't really believe we'll find anything of this stuff this close to Christmas."

"Won't know until we try."

Cupid waved his list at him. "You really think buying Jinx a Prada whatever this thing is will get you off of her shit list?"



"It's a start." Gil got the feeling everyone doubted him. Ha! They'd never seen Chaos in full form especially when it was something this important.

It was as advertised. Insane. Pandemonium and exactly what Chaos ordered. Electronically synthesized versions of old Christmas carols blazed over the speakers seeming to drive the shoppers into a flurried frenzy. Lights twinkled and reindeers danced down aisles of red and green. Barking orders, Gil grabbed a tiny shopping cart and headed off into the mayhem. He wanted to pick up some things to spruce up Jinx's house and give her some holiday sparkle. "Fan out we'll meet back here in a half hour."

"You're nuts, it's going to take a half hour just to find the end of the line."

Gil's first stop was a lightdisplay, he picked over the remnants of the outdoor twinklers and tapped a clerk on the shoulder. "Is this all that's left?"

"Yeah, man. What you see is what you get."

Gil's lips pursed slightly. Red it was. At least, there were a few boxes of those. He scooped them up and dumped them into the cart, noticing the dancing snowman and reindeer lawn decorations. "Hey, you got anymore of those?"

"Just the display, man."

They were cute and had enough color to set off the red twinkle lights. "Do I have to take them myself or will someone wrap them up for me?"

The clerk looked at him with sleepy eyes. Gil figured most of these people worked twelve, fifteen hour shifts during the holidays. Not fun. The clerk looked at his watch. "Where you parked?"

Gil dug into his pocket and pulled out a hundred dollar bill. "Black limo, with an IM insignia out front." He handed the bill to the stunned clerk. "Write me a ticket on these bad boys and make sure they don't break getting out to the limo and I'll give you another hundred."

The clerk swallowed hard, "You got it, man."

"That tree over there, with all the decorations on it. The dolls and teddy bears."

"Yeah?"

"You selling that?" Gil eyed the tree closely. It was the right size and decorated to the nines in red, green and gold. Perfect for Jinx's house, not too tall but full and festive looking. She'd love it.

"I don't know. I could ask my manager." The clerk shifted nervously from foot to foot. "Dude, how you plan on getting that thing in the trunk of your limo?"

"You let me worry about that. Just get the tree."

"How did we get stuck with the raspberry vinaigrette and the deluxe Crème Brule with torch

set?" Damon stared at Nic with confused exasperation. "I need a beer."

"The alternative was Bath & Body works. Have you seen the lines for that place?" Nic sighed, his eyes darting around the aisles with the efficiency of a soldier on a seek and destroy mission. He located the vinaigrette and dumped it into Cupid's outstretched hands.

"What makes Chaos think Jinx is even going to like this stuff? It's not like they were together that long."

Nic smiled seeing a sign for ramekins. The Crème Brule set wouldn't be far away. "Jinx likes to cook. Makes sense."

"You think this going to work?" Damon glanced around and settled pointedly on the item in his hands.

"I'm not Cupid. You tell me." Nic reached out and picked up the set he was after.

Shifting his two items to one arm, Nic counted down Gil's list. "That's it, we're done."

Damon coughed and tilted his head toward the line, "Oh no, the battle's just beginning."

"This smells delicious!" Aurora held a bottle up for Jess.

"Oh God, you're right." She picked up a sample and dabbed some on her wrist. "I wonder if Damon—" She shook her head and stopped herself. No way would Damon think of anything like this. "How do you think Nic did?"

Aurora added a few more items to her basket. "With what?"

"The whole Christmas shopping thing. Technically, this is your first Christmas."

"And I sense a whole hidden meaning to that question." Aurora maneuvered through several groups of people and Jess tailed after her.

"Maybe. I don't know. I've just always thought the holidays were kind of an important test."

Aurora chuckled, "Never mind us, how do you think Chaos is going to do?"

"I don't know Jinx that well but this has all the makings of a train wreck." Jess shook her head. She didn't get laying yourself out there just to get your heart trampled and the humiliation... It was going to be ugly.

She knew what Chaos did. Hell, half of Immortality Incorporated knew. That was the fun part about working for such a tight knit company. It might be a huge conglomerate, but everyone still made it their business to know your business.

Jess followed Aurora into line. She liked Chaos, most of the time. Maybe he needed a bit of break.

## Chapter Three

Jinx hated the holidays. All the glitter, the glow, the shoving the pushing the whole business wrapped up in a pretty gold bow. She tapped the keys on her keyboard with increasing irritation. Because she hated them so, it didn't matter to her that she was working late on a night when most people were sipping mulled wine and hanging out with family.

She didn't have family. Born in a not so nice area of LA, Jinx's dad left when she was born and her mother died of a drug overdose when she was four. Sorting through files on her desk, she ran a scan on them to keep her mind busy. She didn't like thinking about her childhood.

Jinx snickered and picked up a half full can of Redbull. She'd been sent to live with her uncle, a crack dealer who met an unfortunate end when she was eight. That's when foster care kicked in. She was out on her own and on the street when she turned thirteen. She finished the can in one swallow. She'd spent five years on the street before a public school teacher recognized something in her she'd never seen in herself.

She had a talent of creativity. Whether it was painting, creative writing, drama or singing, Jinx excelled and this teacher found a way to channel the hurt, angry young woman into a gifted student.

Mrs. Govalle made a difference in her life. And Jinx never forgot how the woman encouraged and challenged her into finding her goals and a path that belonged just to Jinx. Because of that, Jinx never forgot her. And when she became a Muse, she saw to it that Mrs. Govalle got anything she ever desired for herself and her students.

Her teacher always invited her to her home for the holidays. Jinx attended a few of the Govalle's holiday functions. It was sheer chaos, loud boisterous laughter set in a houseful of antique ornaments and flickering candles. Jinx felt displaced by the love and warmth something she'd never experienced herself. Something she'd always wished for but never expressed.

It was easier to play Scrooge during the holidays than to have someone feel sorry for her. She'd work another couple of hours then call it a night. Her desk clock said eight o'clock. So she would only have to survive another day and a half and things worked themselves back to normal.

Moisture filled her eyes blurring her vision. Jinx spun in her chair and picked up a tissue to dab her eyes and blow her nose. Damn it, this was Chaos' fault. He let her hope. Gave her a glimpse, a tiny inkling of a holiday season that rivaled Santa's parties and she wanted that—yeah, that was a shocker. When she joined Immortality Incorporated, she was required to attend several parties and social events that would blow your mind. The first holiday party she went to at the North Pole, well that was another story...

She'd never felt sorry for herself before and she damned well wasn't going to start now. Even if that two timing son of a?

"You workinglate?" Jinx knew the voice and tried to ignore it. Emily, one of her sister Muses who liked putting her greedy little fingers on other people's boyfriends. "Jinx?"

"Yeah, oh sorry, Em. Didn't see you."

"Sure you did." Emily sighed. "I did it as a gag, Jinx. We all did. Lucien was pissed at Chaos and told us to—"

"I don't want to hear this."

"Not even if it's the truth."

Jinx raised blazing eyes at her sister. "I know what I saw."

"What you saw was Lucien's way of getting back at Chaos." Emily looked back at her dead serious. "That guy is crazy about you."

"Yeah, I could see that."

Emily sniffed, "Wow, I had no idea you were so intolerant. Must be nice to have never made a mistake in your life." Emily strolled away and Jinx fought the urge not to throw something at her.

Gil unrolled a wad of money and began peeling off bills while the chauffeur and several store attendants loadeddecorations, and gifts into the massive trunk. Snow fell in lazy flakes in the crisp night air and Michigan Avenuewas lit up like a Christmas tree.

Jess rubbed her hands up and down her arms and then stopped suddenly to look at him. "What was that?"

Handing the cash to the store employees, he grinned. "What was what?"

Nic'sgaze went from Jess over to him. "I heard it. What's in the car?"

Damon leaned forward, "Sounds like a dog."

Gil shook his head. "It isn't a dog. Come on everybody, get in. Champagne and hot chocolate. And I've got a catered dinner waiting at Jinx's."

A high pitched bark followed by a series of howls brought four people to a halt.

"You said it wasn't a dog."

The chauffeur opened the door to let his passengers in. Tworollicking Golden Retriever pups bounced and pounced over the seats of the limousine, slipping and sliding across the leather.

“It isn’t a dog. It’s puppies.” Gil slid into the seat beside them and ruffled the fur on the pups.  
“Gorgeous aren’t they?”

“Does Jinx like dogs?” Auroramoved in beside him and ended up with a pup in her lap.

“I don’t know.”

Damon crawled across to his seat. “Now’s a hell of a time to find out.”

“She didn’t have much of a childhood. It was kind of crappy.” The others found seats and the limo moved into traffic. “I want to fix that. Give her the best holiday she’s ever had.”

The limo glided through the busy holiday traffic before turning off and heading into the suburbs where Jinx lived. Gil absently stroked both the puppies and received the ultimate reward of brother and sister laying their heads on his lap and falling to sleep.

“What are you trying to make up for? Twenty years worth?” Damon crossed his legs and toyed with the buckle on the side of his worn leather boot.

“Yeah, I am,” his voice was husky with emotion and he cleared his throat. His eyes went out the darkened window, watching the colored lights blink. “I made a mistake with her. I should’ve taken more care, you know?”

“We all make mistakes, Gil.” It was Jess who spoke and she reached out a squeezed his knee. “This just might be a bit overwhelming.”

He laughed, “It’s supposed to be, hon. It’s supposed to be.”

“Why didn’t you think about this plan sooner? You could’ve hired someone to decorate all this instead of shanghaiing us.”

“I could’ve. But I’ve got this whole holiday cheer thing going on and I just wanted to share the love.” Gilgrinned a big toothy smile.

“You’re a nut,” Jess accused as her hand slid onto Cupid’s lap.

“Hmm...”

The limo came to a stop in front of Jinx’s house, a quiet little neighborhood with old trees and pretty, little houses. Gil glanced down at his watch, “Okay people. I figure we’ve got a good two hours before she shows up. Let’s haul some ass.” The limo doors opened and people began moving.

He scooped both the pups up into one arm and used his other hand to dig around for a key. “HeyNic , you want to bring the tree in here,” he shouted back as he unlocked the door. Good thing he didn’t give the key back. “Aurora, would you bring the pups bed?”

Gil flicked on the light in the foyer and moved into the living room. Yep, his plan was coming together nicely.

“Hey slick, where’s the catered dinner you promised? Cupid’s don’t work for free.”

A new Volkswagen bug skidded to a stop behind the limo barely avoiding a fender bender in the slippery street. On the roof of the bug was a magnetic sign blinking the neon logo of a local pizza delivery place. A young delivery man climbed out of the car and hoisted a stack of pizzas and a carton of chicken wings. Damon appeared around the door at him, "You'd better have beer."

"Case. Down on the seat, you want to get it for me?"

"Sure thing." Damon grabbed the beer and followed the delivery man inside the house. "This your idea of catered?"

"Hey there aren't many places open this time of night for a quickie." Gil situated the sleeping puppies into the puffy bed that Aurorasat next to the fireplace. He made sure it was a safe distance and adjusted the screen incase the critters got nosey.

The pizza guy sat the stack of pizza on the small dining table along with the chicken wings. Damon sat the case of beer next to the food and grinned as the pizza guy looked at him expectantly. "Not me. He's your guy."

He pointed to Gil and the delivery man stepped forward. "That's \$83.50. Six pizzas, two dozen wings and the case of Bud."

Gil handed him the money as the sound of ornaments striking hard objects tinkled through the air.

"Jeez, where'd you get that!"

Gil put a hand on the young man's shoulder and pushed him toward the door. He shoved him through the doorway as the tree made its entrance. The poor kid got caught in a crazy limbo as Nic and the tree entered. It brought back memories of the cartoon of "*How the Grinch Stole Christmas*" when the Grinch shoved the huge decorated Christmas tree up the chimney. Balls jingled, lights and garland trailed behind and for a second Gil thought the kid had been swallowed up in the decorations. He heard a gasp of air and saw tennis shoes fleeing down the path just as the tree came through the doorway shoved hard.

It looked like some wide, decorated jousting pole and it nearly impaled Cupid as he foraged through the pizza. Gil caught hold of the tree and redirected the off balanced Nic into the corner of the living room. The two girls picked up the debris of garland and a few errant ornaments.

Nic staggered backward and caught himself on his knees. Aurorasat tossed a few pieces of garland back onto the tree. She grinned down at Nic. "You know, this gives me all sorts of ideas." Plucking a strand of lights from his shoulder tangled in garland, she winked, "Gives new meaning to bondage."

His hands went to her hips and he levered himself to his feet. "Am I tying you up?"

"Oh no..."

A gleam lit his eyes. "That's what I thought."

Plugging the tree's lights into the outlet, Gil stood up. He put a hand on both their shoulders. "Looks great, huh?"

A small smile played around Nic's lips. "Yeah, it does."

“Comeon, get some food before Cupid eats it all.”

With herearbuds tucked tightly in her ears and heriPod playing a selection of the top R&B hits, Jinx settled into her tub filled with warm, soapy water scented with lavender. She'd given up on work and figured a nice, hot relaxing bath was just the thing to get her out of her funk. That and some hot tunes. She'd be ready for the daily grind tomorrow morning after a night spent in her fuzzy green robe and old comfy slippers. Maybe she'd stick in one of those Lean Cuisine dinners and her nose twitched. *Did she smell pizza?* Man, would she love a pizza instead of a frozen dinner. Pepperoni with a thick layer of cheese. It made her mouth water and Jinx sighed. Nah, she sniffed the air again and only smelled the bubble bath. Just wishful thinking on her behalf.

Kind of like thinking Chaos was different.

Different than all the other guys she'd ever met, dated, whatever. Different like he'd want something real with her, something permanent. But guys like Chaos were players and players never settled down. Not for real anyway and definitely not with chicks like her. It wasn't that she didn't think she was worthy of a one and only. She knew she could do the whole monogamous ball of wax. She was a good person, a solid person.

She thought Gil was too.

Her bad. Jinx picked up a sponge and scooped up some bubbles to smooth over her knee. She'd get over it. Maybe not in the near future, but she'd managed. And damned if he'd ever know how he'd broke her heart. She let the music soothe her and sunk farther into the bubbles letting them tickle her earlobes.

Too bad, it couldn't soothe her heart. She thought about what Emily had said. That it'd been a bad joke. Lucien's sick sense of humor getting back at Chaos from something. The Muses had a rep. They also did their share of trouble making. She let that twirl around in her brain for a bit. Lucien was trouble with a capital T. But damn, if you were going to set someone up, wouldn't you think about the consequences it might have on the other people involved.

Jinx laughed out loud.

Notthat fuck Lucien. He'd do it just for a joke. And he'd want to hurt people. That shit was probably laughing his ass off that it broke her and Gil up. Maybe it was time that jackass lost some of his own *creative ability*. Lucien prided himself as a ladies man. Jinx could arrange for certain appendages to go south for the winter.

The idea brought a nice warm fuzzy feeling in the center of her chest. Yeah, if she couldn't have Chaos for Christmas then she would make sure Lucien's holiday was just assucky. Of course, that didn't solve her problem with Gil. She really liked the guy. Hell, if she thought about it hard and long, it was more than like, it was much more than that. She never expected anything like that.

A chill in the water made Jinx shift and pull the chain on the drain. The water level began to sink and Jinx shifted. She sloshed water over her shoulders rinsing the remnants of bubbles. She listened to the last vibes of the latest Destiny's Child song and rose to her feet to pull her favorite burgundy towel off the rack. She slathereda rich vanilla body butter on to the tunes of Nellie before slipping into a pair of Christmas red tap pants and aTinkerbelle t-shirt. Pulling her favorite, fluffy ice blue robe off the hook on



the door, Jinx tied the belt on the front and hoped she had a frozen pizza in her fridge.

Pizza was definitely on the brain. She could practically test the spicy tomato sauce, the stringy cheese... damn! Talk about extreme visualization. She was suffering from pizza overdrive. Halfway down the hall she tugged the iPod earbuds out of her ears and tossed the MP3 player onto her bed. She'd find a nice classic holiday movie on TV and snuggle down with her frozen dinner for a cozy night then?

Jinx flattened herself up against the wall in the corridor. ***What the hell was that? Her heartbeat slammed against her ribcage and Jinx swallowed the oxygen around her. Someone was in her house. Oh God, a Christmas burglary. She'd heard of these. And here she was, alone and unarmed in the house. Just freakin' great, it wasn't like someone could kill her, but the idea of someone invading her personal space just gave her the creeps.***

What the hell was that noise? A clinking? No, not quite. Something lighter, almost musical. It was a tinkling, like ringing of fine crystal when it touched. Jinx raised her head and sniffed. Damn it, she could smell pizza and now, hot wings. What the hell kind of burglar smelled like pizza and wings? Either she was losing it or the thief was a pizza delivery guy. In which case, she'd kick his cheesy ass right out the door.

Oh damn. What was that? A snort. Snickers? She shuddered against the wall. Was there more than one? Shit. Jinx ran through her defenses. With the power of jinxing and creative thought, she had quite a repertoire. Still, it was a bit frightening. The idea of someone invading your home, immortal or not, was just a bit on the creepy side.

"Who's there?" her voice cracked and she wasn't even sure she said it aloud. "Anyone?" Jinx edged along the wall in the hallway, creeping slowly toward the living room. No one answered. Okay, this was definitely creeping her out.

Jinx inhaled and braced herself. "Okay, folks. I've got a gun and I will so shoot your asses off if you don't vacate my premises."

"Jinx stop." Nic held out one hand halting Time for Jinx. The head of Immortality Incorporated looked over at Gil with a scowl. "I thought you said she was working late. It would appear that she foiled your plans."

Gil cringed. "Shit, she was supposed to be tied up till after eleven. Damn, it's only ten. I don't know what happened."

"Honey, we about done?" Jess yelled out the front door to Damon who balanced precariously on a ladder. A chicken wing hung out his lips while he strung the red twinkle lights along the roof.

"Just a minute. You know this isn't easy to do in the dark."

Nic shook his head as he took in the scene. His dark eyes went to Gil. "How long do you want me to



hold this?"

Gil licked his lips. He glanced back where Nic had Jinx held in limbo. "The tree's up, the presents are under it, we're just waiting on Cupid."

"Did you hear that, Damon? We're just waiting for your cute ass to finish."

Damon leaped off the ladder and stuck his head in the front door. "Well it looks like a runway, but hey... it's Christmas."

Jess skipped over to him and twined her fingers in his long hair. "We need to beat feet, my dear."

"But there's still half a meat pizza."

"Yeah and Jinx is frozen in the hall."

"Really," Damon chuckled. "How interesting."

Jess slugged him. "She isn't naked."

He shrugged, "Oh well." He threw an arm around her shoulder. "Let's go, babe. I'll let you unwrap me under the tree."

"Sounds like a plan."

"Aurora." Nic walked up to where the redheaded woman bent over the two puppies.

"Aren't they adorable?"

"Yes, they are." Nic folded his arms. "Why do I have the feeling you want puppies?"

She glanced back at him and what she said took Gil's breath away. "Or kids."

Gil stared at his boss. He knew exactly what the whole concept of kids would do to him. It stole your breath. Made you shudder and shake and then you got proud and shocked all at once that a woman wanted to bear your children. His eyes dilated as he stared at Nic.

"Puppies?" Nic leaned down and smoothed the hair from the side of her face. "Seems like a good starting point."

Aurora's eyes shown like brilliant sapphires amidst the twinkling holiday lights. "Really?"

"Yes."

He drew her to her feet. "Now let's go home and let Gil get on with his holiday."

Aurora smiled, "Okay."

Nic's dark eyes went back to Gil. "Are you ready?"

This was it. His big chance. Gil sucked air into his lungs and held it. Who was he kidding? This was his one and only chance. If he wanted Jinx, he'd had to play all of his cards right now. Every last single

one of them and if she tossed the deck back in his face, he had to know he'd given it his all.

Gil twisted his lips and his eyes scanned the frozen version of Jinx in the hall. "Yeah, I'm ready.

Nicinhaled. He waited until Jess and Damon had left the house. A small smile lingered about his lips as he noted the sparkle in the air that seemed to glimmer along with the holiday decorations. Cupid and Desire left their tell tale signs behind in an effort to help these two along. "All right, Chaos. Here's your chance. Your only chance. Don't screw it up."

Gil saluted. "I have it handled, boss."

The door closed behind Nic and Jinx burst into the living room prepared for battle. Her eyes blazed with fire as she skidded to a stop and took in the scene. He waited for the outburst and sure enough, it came. "What the hell do you think you're doing?" He let her yell as his eyes ran over her petite form taking in the dampness of her smooth skin and the light floral scent. Her big fluffy slippers tromped over to him and she eyed him with hostility. "Why can't you take a hint? What's wrong with you anyway? Don't you get it? I don't like Christmas and I don't like—"

She froze. A complete dead stop and Gil took a moment to scan the room thinking Nic had returned. She didn't breathe, just stood there, her eyes glittering.

And then he saw what she did, one of the pups whimpered in a dream and the snuggled up tighter to his sister. Her hand trembled as she raised it to her lips and that glittering in her eyes vanished. "What are those?"

"Puppies," Gil smiled gently as he moved very slowly to take her hand. "Come on, you have to pet them. You've never felt anything so soft in your life."

Jinx shook. Whatever icy demeanor she'd been going for melted at the sign of the puppies snuggled in their own bed next to the fireplace. "Whose puppies?"

Gil figured it was a good sign that she leaned against him a bit as he walked her over to the puppies. He tried to ignore how the curve of her body against felt but he wasn't really succeeding in that area. She smelled good too and that did odd things to his concentration. "Yours."

Moist eyes wavered up at him. "You got me puppies?" She knelt down and ran her hand carefully over the warm bodies of fur. "I don't understand. Why would you do this?"

Gil sat on the carpet cross-legged. "Because you need them. They'll love you all time, unconditionally. Whether you're having a bad hair day or not, they won't care."

Jinx tugged at a wild strand of hair and blinked. Her eyes whipped around the room taking in the tree and decorations while her fingers stroked a pup. "Wha—H—how did you do all this?"

He winked at her and leaned forward to ruffle the fur on a pup buried under the small blanket that came with the bed. "I had a little help from my friends."

"I can't believe you did all this." She swiped at her eyes and Gil's long lashes fluttered downward. "Why would you?"

Here it comes. Gil sucked in a breath and hung onto his courage. He'd never done this before. So it was about as frightening and exhilarating as jumping out of a plane without a parachute. "I'm not sure how to do this, you know? Half of me thinks you're going to just kick me to the curb. But the other half..." Gil rolled to his knees and adopted the traditional 'proposal pose' and saw Jinx's eyes narrow. Before he lost his nerve, he pulled out the ring box. His hands shook a bit as he fumbled with the opening but the reward was worth it.

Jinx's gasp was so loud he thought she'd sucked in half the logs in the fireplace. When she started to speak, he held up a hand. "Give me a minute, okay. I want to do this right for a change."

"Gil..."

"Please?" His eyes were clear with sincerity. "I know I messed up. I screwed everything up and for awhile I was mad because I tried to blame you for my screw up."

"What?"

"Hang on. Give me a second."

"If this is a proposal GilContrelle, you're going about it the weirdest way."

Gil ran his tongue over the ridge of his top teeth. He waited a moment trying to find the right words. Romantic, poetic words that she'd remember forever. Even if she did throw him out. "I've never done this, you know? So cut me some slack."

"Done what?"

He raised his head and looked at her hoping that all the longing, all the love that wrapped around him like some bizarre Christmas bow was enough. "I'm in love with you, Jinx. And no matter what you say to that, no matter what happens next, nothing is ever going to change that." He inhaled a shuddering breath. "I didn't know it would feel like this. I didn't know I could feel like this." He held the ring up and watched her eyes carefully. "I want to marry you." Pulling the ring out of the box, he held it out and with it his heart and soul. "I won't hurt you, Jinx. Not ever again."

"You don't have to ask me to marry you just to apologize."

He raised her hand letting his fingers intertwine with hers. "I'm not. I want to marry you. I fell in love with you instantly—I was just stupid about it." He slid the ring onto her finger half expecting her to jerk back. "It looks good."

She blew a slow breath out. "Yeah it does."

"So what do you say Jinx? You want to have chaos in your life permanently?"

Jinx leaned forward and tilted her head. Her lips were so close to his, he could almost taste the sweetness. "Are you going to be naughty or nice?" Her breath mingled with his and every ounce of blood slammed hard and fast into his shaft. He shifted allowing a bit of room in his suddenly way too tight jeans.

"I can be both." His fingers cupped the side of her face and brought her lips to his. Her mouth was soft

as a petal and totally devoid of any lip-gloss, which was a unique thing for Jinx. He smiled against her mouth. He didn't remember a time he hadn't seen her without the makeup. His tongue swept across her lips and she parted them willingly.

If you could describe a single kiss as beautiful this was that kiss. Long, sweet and achingly sensual, Gil finally broke the kiss and gazed down at the woman he hoped would say yes to his proposal. "The ring looks good. You going to keep it?"

"Hmm..." Jinx leaned closer and Gil pulled her into his lap. She wound her arms around his neck. "Yeah. I'm going to keep it."

He kissed her again slow and enticing as he scooped her up into his arms. "Not in front of the kids." He nodded back at the softly snoring puppies before carrying Jinx down the hall to her bedroom.

Laying her down on the pillows, he peeled off his shirt exposing lean hard muscles. Gil bent over kicked off his shoes and undid the button on his jeans. She never knew the sound of zipper teeth scraping against fabric could be so tantalizing.

His amber eyes gleamed at her in the dimly lit room. "As sexy as the fuzzy robe and slippers are, the only thing I want you wearing right now is that ring."

Jinx purred at the idea. Untying the robe belt, she tugged it off and kicked off her slippers onto the floor. Stripping off her shorts and tee, Jinx laid back in anticipation.

He started with her toes. Wrapping his fingers around her ankle, he lifted her foot up to her lips and began to lick and stroke each toe before sucking them one by one. Jinx arched her back caught in a sensation somewhere between a giggle and hot syrup flooding through her veins. He took his time, nibbling and tasting all her toes before using his mouth up the side of one thigh.

Serious heat rushed through her veins and she sat up trying to pull him closer. He eased her back. "Not yet. The pups will probably sleep another hour. So we don't need to rush."

"I need to rush." Her fingers dug into his shoulders but he shifted and forced her back down on her back.

Bringing her knees up, he spread her legs wide and dipped his head. His fingers parted her folds, delved the tip of his tongue along her clit, and stroked it until it was a hard bud. Jinx's fingers gripped the blankets in a strangle hold to keep from shouting. Liquid flame coated her pussy as Gil's tongue did the most magical things. "You're going to make me come!" It was half plea, half warning on a gasping puff of air.

"That's the idea." He raised his head just long enough to answer before he began fucking her with his tongue.

"Oh God, I love that."

She would've sworn he snickered but she was too far gone to tell. The first lash tipped her equilibrium and sent her flailing for balance. By then, a wall of fire engulfed her and Jinx could only shudder.

Wet, hot and quivering. Just the way he liked her. Gil raised his head and slid up her body enjoying the friction of warm skin against skin. His cock strained for her pussy and his balls tightened with need. Slow. His cock wanted to fuck her brains out, but his heart... Oh hell, his heart wanted to make love to her all night long.

He eased the tip over her pussy lips and rubbed the head along her clit. She jerked and curled her legs around his waist. The invitation was clear. Gil's cock was eager and hard. He shifted his weight back and slid the long length into her. Inch by inch her pussy engulfed him and Gil swore he heard ringing in his ears a melodic joyful sound that told him this was where he was supposed to be. He buried himself to the hilt in her wet heat and braced himself on his elbows as he gazed down at her. "I can't believe I almost lost you."

Jinx's eyes were wild. "Me either." She tangled her fingers through his hair and yanked. "Let's not screw this up."

He pulled his cock out slowly and the sensation ripped through him like lightning. "No. We won't." He rocked back, stroking in and out. Trying to keep it slow and tantalizing. But the thousand charged bolts zapping through his system refused to obey and he found himself on his hands and knees with his hands around Jinx's waist fucking her so deep and hard his balls made a slapping sound against her wet pussy.

Her legs clenched around him and he watched her eyes lose focus as her back arched. Her pussy grabbed hold of his wild pumping cock and didn't release as she rode the waves of her orgasm. It squeezed hold of him and every cell in his body strained out his cock as his first shot of hot sperm left his body. Gil hung on, pumping with what remaining energy he had, his entire body a chaotic lightning bolt.

Gasping for air, his sweat slicked body collapsed against her damp one. "Keep that up and our kids won't be of the furry kind."

She stroked damp bangs out of his eyes. "Would that be so bad?"

He kissed her hard on the lips. "Nah, but I don't think the world is quite ready for Chaos Junior yet." He rolled off her and pulled her onto his chest. "Maybe next Christmas."

She grinned foolishly. "Yeah. Good point. Next Christmas."

"Sounds like a very good plan."

She snuggled against him, "Merry Christmas, Chaos."