

The Warder Series  
Book 5



The Warder's  
Gryphon  
Viola Grace

# The Warder' s Gryphon

By

Viola Grace

*The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal, and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.*

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

The Warder's Gryphon - Book 5: The Warders  
Series

Copyright © 2007 Viola Grace

ISBN: Series: 1-55410-630-3

Cover art and design by Martine Jardin

All rights reserved. Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, is forbidden without the written permission of the publisher.

Published by eXtasy Books

Look for us online at:

[www.extasybooks.com](http://www.extasybooks.com)

*To the authors at Extasy books. One could not wish for better competition or cheering sections.*

## Prologue

“I can’t find her. I keep getting stuck on a dead zone.” Serafina slammed her head against her hand in frustration. “This sucks!”

“Easy, Sera. Just relax. The vision will come.” Strong hands began to massage her shoulders and she leaned back into him.

“And what if it doesn’t? How am I supposed to find a woman I have never met in a town I have never been to?” Tears of frustration seeped from her closed lids and she relaxed for a moment with Franc. She was still amazed at his strength and adaptation to her ways.

Within a month of their blood sharing he had developed a complete tolerance to sunlight, his nocturnal habits were now by choice instead of compulsion, and he had moved her into his home, complete with the leather topped desk that she was currently using to focus her search.

“Blood calls to blood. You have narrowed it down more than you thought you could, and the sketch that Vanir made from your description is enough of a starting place.” His warm breath caressed her ear. “Perhaps it is time to call in

professional help.”

“Help? What kind?” Her head tilted back in the grip of his clever fingers.

His twinkling eyes met her own. “I know this Gryphon...”

\* \* \* \*

*Three weeks later...*

“Sera! We have a letter. It seems that he has found your cousin.”

She darted forward to look at the paper in his hand. “What? Where is she? Is she ok?”

“Read it for yourself, sweetheart.”

*Hey Franc,*

*I have found the Warder that you sent me for, and I can tell you that it wasn't easy. She has resisted my efforts to meet her in my human form, so I have had to keep an eye on her by other means. You owe me big time.*

*I will remain with her until the Magus or Demon that is after her makes his move. I haven't seen him yet, but his presence is all around her. It is amazing that she has survived this long.*

*She is stronger than I would have imagined and all that power without focus is gonna get her into trouble if she doesn't get some instruction before she does some*

*damage.*

*As soon as I can get her into Realm, I will. But since she is in a dead zone, it could take some doing.*

*It's absolutely bizarre, there are no traces of wild power in this whole town. It's like something consumed it.*

*I will keep you informed.*

*Timmon Lahey*

"See, honey? She's fine. Tim will keep us informed. You don't have anything to worry about." He gave her a reassuring squeeze, his warmth trying to reach out to soothe her.

"What does he mean, he is keeping an eye on her by other means? What other means does he have?"

"Timmon is the master of several shapes. He has a gryphon form, a human one and a few others. He is probably using one of them to keep an eye on her."

Sera wrapped her arms around her husband and hugged him tightly. "Thanks for your help on this. But you know that we will have to go in and bring her to Realm to meet the family eventually."

"I know. And I really hope that she has a strong constitution."

Sera's dark chuckle was lost in his chest and she smiled into the heat of his body. "If you can handle it, sweetie, so can an actual Warder."

## Chapter One

**I**t was an entirely different universe. Cubes, orbs and amorphous material slid by harmlessly as she watched. Dutifully, she recorded her findings.

Then she removed the slide, tossed it in the biohazard bin and shut off the microscope. The gloves that she wore to protect herself from the substances she handled were tossed into the contaminated trash bin, and she stood to wash her hands for her next patient. The concept of urinalysis was not pleasant, but the actual work was fascinating. There was an entire universe within the human body that no one ever got to see, except her.

Audrina loved working in the lab. The combination of gruelling labour with the satisfaction of assisting patients and calming them before the invasive procedure of having their blood drawn satisfied both passive and aggressive tendencies within her.

Stepping forward, she reached into the drop



slot and took out the first requisition on the pile. "Sara?"

She waited for her patient to rise and begin walking towards her, then asked, "And your year of birth is...?"

"Nineteen forty-five, dear."

"Well, step right this way to the big chair of fun!" At the acerbic look that Sara shot her, she laughed.

"Hey, it stunned you long enough to get you into my clutches, didn't it?" She swiftly assembled the tubes that she would need.

A rueful laugh answered her. The left arm was extended and the samples swiftly drawn.

"So, Sara? How was that on a scale of one to ten?"

"Well, it was at least an eight. Possibly a nine, but you shifted a little on the seventh vial, so you lost points." Her smug features put Audrina firmly in her place as she held the cotton ball to the small puncture in her arm.

"I'll try and do better next time." She placed the band aid quickly over the sealed wound and touched her patient's arm gently. "See yah next month, Sara."

"You too, Rina. I'll have your scarf ready by then."

A grin that seemed to make her countenance glow crossed her features and her patient basked in her energy for a moment before leaving.

"Thanks, Sara. I look forward to it."

\* \* \* \*

The rest of her afternoon flew by. She processed over forty patients in the morning and thirty after lunch. She was exhausted. It had not been nearly this busy four months ago.

The centrifuge was whirring and Dorothy, the other lab tech, was finishing up the processing of the immediate samples, the rest were already packed and ready for transport to the main processing lab. A small wave and a, "See you Monday" and she was on her way.

She dragged herself out of the lab after hanging up her white coat and headed for the coffee shop in the mall.

"Hey, Lincoln."

He began to pour out her regular chai latte. "Hey, Audrina. You look like hell."

"Yeah, the afternoon took a lot out of me."

Steam hissed as foam was generated. "Not too much I hope."

"Well, I hope that there is enough to get me home."

She handed over the money. He was the owner of the shop, yet he didn't let anyone else wait on her. At first she thought the reasons were sexual, but he never made a move. She supposed that he just liked her as a person.

And frankly, she loved the tea.

"Watch out for this one, Audrina. It's extra hot to make it back to your house."

"Thanks, Lincoln. Hey did I tell you? I have a new addition?"

"More staff at the lab?"

"Nope. I got a cat." She laughed ruefully. "Well, he got me. I was out for a walk and he just jumped into my arms."

An expression of distasted crossed Linc's face. "Are you sure that it is healthy to take in a stray?"

"Yeah, I could use the company, and I had a vet give him a thorough once over." She inhaled the steam coming out of the vents in the cup. She smiled at the relaxation that welled over her. "He isn't fixed, but he also seems very tame."

"Are you really going to keep it?"

"Well, I have posted notices around the neighbourhood, but no one has come out to claim him. So he and I are going to share quarters for the time being." She gave him a small wave. "See you next Friday!"

The lab that she worked at had tripled its business in the time she had been working there. It seemed that she only needed to take a patient once and they were loyal customers. The doctors that owned the lab were pleased, but had not bothered to increase their employees' salaries as the business increased. Audrina had simply spread the rumour that she was leaving, and the coffers

suddenly opened. It had been enough to buy her a small home in the town where she worked, and she was glad to be here.

The drive home was not arduous by any means. She had moved to this small town over a year ago when the press of the big city became too much for her. Businesses blended into homes, which became more and more sparse as she approached her new house.

The ginger-breading on the outside was her favourite feature, a little bit too fancy for most, which is what had made her buy the house. It was in her nature to be slightly contrary.

It was also the main reason that she was no longer living near her family. They simply couldn't stand her. She didn't fit in. She never had.

## Chapter Two

“Hey, Timmy! Rina’s home!” She didn’t have to announce herself; he was waiting for her at the door, just like he had every day since she had taken him home with her.

“Mrrrroww.” His head butted against her legs and she almost tripped while carrying her purse and her latte to the kitchen.

As soon as her arms were uncluttered, she scooped him up and scratched him behind his ears, smiling at the rumbling purr that threatened to loosen her fillings.

His tawny fur was sleek and silky beneath her fingers and the insistent head steering her touch around his head made her laugh. The dark tips of his ears, and the kohl circles around his eyes gave him the look of a desert cat.

His body however, was pure Maine Coon. Fourteen-plus pounds of muscle, claws and fur, she would rather have him in her home than any wimpy little toy poodle.

Her energy seemed to return as she held him and she carried him to the table and reached for her latte. Timmy hissed in anger and swatted her hand away from the beverage, then tipped it over with another swipe of his claws.

"Hey! That was a six dollar latte!" She dropped him to the floor and ran for paper towels to mop up the sticky milk spill. As she mopped up the mess her eyes widened at the enormous claw marks that scored the side of the cup. He had torn it so that not one ounce of liquid remained in the paper.

The latte was full of milk as well, and her new cat companion was not making a move toward it. He was, in fact, growling at it from his spot near the puddle.

He kept up his impressive act of hostility until all the residue of the beverage was disposed of.

Then, he sniffed carefully at it and gave the floor a small taste. Only to screw up his face in distaste and shudder hard enough to fluff out his fur.

"You know. Most cats like milk. I don't know why the freak cat shows up at my door." She threw out all of the paper towelling and rinsed her hands.

He made no reply to her freak comment and simply followed her into her bedroom where she stripped off her scrubs, underwear, and socks. She unclipped her hair with a sigh of relief and the

heavy chestnut locks fell down her back in a heavy wave.

"Oh, man. That feels good. You have no idea how nice it is to let down my fur when I get home." She smiled down at Timmy, who was watching her intently. "I really hate tying it up in the morning, but I can't have it getting into any samples, now can I?"

She padded softly into the bathroom and warmed the water, then started the shower. Audrina sighed with enjoyment as the water pounded on her sore muscles. She breathed the heavy and steamy air in with an almost carnal enjoyment.

Her body loosened as she soaped and lathered her puff and worked off the day's worth of anxiety. It was as she washed the soap off and let her hands travel that she realized that she was heading into self-gratification territory.

Her fingers pulled and tweaked at her nipples, bringing them erect in a matter of moments. Her right hand slid across her belly and through the trimmed thatch of hair at the juncture of her thighs.

The heat coming from her cunt was astonishing. Her body had been flaring out of her control lately and it was driving her to distraction.

Her clit begged for her touch and it shrieked to attention as she circled it with a finger that was slick with her own juices.

Her hand left her breast to support her against the shower wall as the attentions of her fingers made her knees go weak. She gasped, shuddered, and stopped.

With her body screaming in denial she took her hands away and turned off the water. Her knees were still wobbling as she wrapped a towel around her body and another around her hair.

First things were first. She dragged her brush through her hair and towelled it almost dry, then got out the body lotion as she sat on the edge of her bed.

Ah, to be safely in her own bed, with no fear of falling and breaking something. Her hands spread the smooth and cool lotion over her body and the blaze that had had attacked her in the shower flared to life again.

She loved the slick lack of friction that let her hands glide down her body and across her stomach. The very tips of her fingers trailed across her lower belly and she arched and sighed in response. Low moans took over as she moved her clever fingers between the thighs that spread eagerly, and once again began to flick and circle her clitoris.

As she progressed further and further into sensation her thighs began to lock tight in a rigor that her body had designed to hold a lover close. The tension increased her sensitivity and in seconds she was gasping and moaning as her hips



rocked, seeking a cock that wasn't there.

She pulled her fingers away when the sensitivity got to be too much and waited for her breathing to settle.

Filled with energy she bounced up out of bed, washed the cum and lotion from her hands and got dressed.

At Timmy's plaintive meowing she let him out the back door.

Now that was the way to start the weekend.

She got her dinner together out of the assortment of leftovers in her fridge and pondered the food she needed to get the next day at the store.

She was halfway into her meal when there was a thump and a scratch at the backdoor. "I'm coming, Timmy." She put her plate aside and opened the door.

He was soaked to the skin. She sighed and got the towel that she kept near the door for just such an event. "You know, it is most unnatural for you to go swimming in a cold pond, Timmy. Most cats don't even like the water."

He gave her a baleful glare and she kept all further observations to herself. Apparently, his evening swim was her fault.

She snuggled him against her chest as she rubbed him down. In moments, he grudgingly began to purr. She fished out a cooked chicken breast out of the fridge and warmed it for him,

dicing it into small pieces, then she reheated her own food and resumed her spot in front of the TV.

She dropped Timmy onto the couch next to her, and placed the dish of chicken on the couch. He curled up next to her and nibbled at the food.

With her purring cat and a sated body she had to admit, her life was good.

## Chapter Three

The Saturday dawned bright and clear, and Audrina resented the heck out of it. Ever since she had moved to this town, weekend mornings had been draining on her.

It was only when she left her little house that her energy level returned. So, out she went. She let Timmy out and headed off for her errand run.

As she drove her sedan down the street, she noted with pleasant surprise that the house next to hers, a few hundred meters away, was being filled with the contents from a moving van.

Apparently she was getting a new neighbour.

\* \* \* \*

Three hours and seven shops later, she returned home tired and triumphant. The moving van was gone from the front of her neighbour's yard, and she made a batch of cookies for the new arrival.

The baking sheet was cooling with its chocolate

payload when she noticed something. Timmy hadn't banged on her door.

She went to the backdoor and opened it, looking for any trace of the feline and was disappointed to see no hint of her pal.

She sighed heavily and waited an hour for him to show up. Perhaps he had gone back to the home that he had come from. He wasn't hers after all.

She put the cookies on a plate and covered them with cling wrap. She left her back door open in case he came back and went over to greet her new neighbour.

She rang the doorbell and waited for the occupant.

When he arrived, she almost fell back in astonishment. She recovered quickly. "Hi! Welcome to the neighbourhood. I just live next door." She was babbling, but she couldn't help herself.

A few weeks earlier, she had 'met' this particular hunk of masculinity at the coffee shop near work. He had begun to speak to her in a friendly manner and she froze. She hadn't been able to put a complete sentence together with those dark golden eyes framed by thick lashes watching her with heated interest.

His skin was a few shades darker than those fascinating eyes, and his hair several darker. His body put the hunks on romance covers to shame.

The way his t-shirt hugged the muscled contours of his chest was completely devoted to outlining every detail faithfully. The fit of his jeans should have been illegal.

"Are those for me?"

"You, your wife, whoever is home." *Please not a wife, please not a wife.*

The predatory grin she had noticed at the coffee house was back, "No wife. Would you care to come in? I was just unpacking a few things."

"Sure. Um, that would be great." She stepped forward as he stepped back and then remembered, "Oh, my name is Audrina."

"And mine is Tim. Come on in. The kitchen is in the back." He led the way and her eyes immediately fixated on his tush. You could crack granite on his ass. She might be going crazy, but she would swear that he smelled like cinnamon.

"Tim, huh. My cat's name is Timmy." She smiled at the look he flashed her over his shoulder. "Well, he isn't really my cat. I don't know who he belongs to. But if you see him, could you let me know?"

He seemed nonplussed. "Uh, okay. What does he look like?"

"Well, kinda like you, if you were a cat. He is gold all over, kinda big for a domestic cat, and has freaky golden eyes."

"So, you think I have freaky golden eyes?" He placed the cookies on the table that he quickly set

up with two chairs. He then rummaged in his fridge for milk. "Sorry, I don't have any milk. I don't have anything really. I do believe that I need to get some food this afternoon."

"Oh, well if you would like, I can be on my way." She was a little nervous as he sat down across from her.

"You never answered. You think my eyes are freaky?"

She blushed, her own grey eyes firmly assessing the chip-count on the cookies. "Well, golden eyes are a little unusual, you must admit."

That damned smile was back. "Not in my family. They are quite common, in fact."

"Oh yeah. I can see how they would be." She took a cookie and refuge in the act of chewing. The better to keep herself from saying something else that was asinine.

With that smile still in place, he took a cookie of his own. After the first bite, he chewed thoughtfully, then reached for another. Half a dozen cookies disappeared behind those white teeth until finally she dared to ask, "So, do you like them? The cookies, I mean."

"Why aren't you three hundred pounds? If I could bake like that, I would never stop eating." He looked at the plate. "I can keep these, right? I am not exactly up on the new neighbour etiquette."

"Oh, sure. That is why I brought them. They are

all for you. The idea is that when you bring back the plate we will have another nice exchange and chat." Finally back on stable social ground, she smiled, and stood to leave.

"You are leaving so soon?" He rose as well and she noted absently that his shoulder was even with her head. He could park his chin on the top of her head comfortably.

"Yes, well. You have to go and find food, and I need to mow my lawn and look for my cat." She began to back slowly toward the door. Uncomfortable letting him enjoy the view of her backside that she had been assured was pleasant to look at.

He sighed deeply. "You are quite right. But, I would like to invite you over for dinner this evening. I always need a second opinion when I cook on a new stove." He followed her down the hall and she was glad that there was nothing in place in the house yet to block her undignified retreat.

"Um, tonight?" The solid thud against her back let her know that the front door was at hand, that and the doorknob in her spine.

"Do you have plans?"

"No. But I thought you might need some time to move in." The knob was in her hand and she closed her eyes at the image that flashed through her hormonally charged brain.

"I only moved in the basics for the first month

or so, table, chairs, TV, couch, clothes, and of course a bed."

The door was open now and she navigated her exit while keeping contact with his freaky golden eyes. A bed, why did that have to be the last piece of furniture that he mentioned, and why the hell were her hormones out of control?

"So, will you come for dinner? I promise that I can cook."

"Yeah. What time?"

"Make it seven; I'll need time to find what I need at the local stores."

"Well, Tim, see you at seven." She stuck out her hand and was as surprised as he. His fingers were warm, calloused and very strong. A woman would be safe in those hands. And at their mercy. What would make her think that he's surprised?

Oh, man. She had to go. "See you tonight, Tim." She spun on her heel and walked slowly and deliberately to her house. She looked back only once when she was opening her door and her hormones rushed to the fore again as he was leaning against the wall on his porch, watching her walk the distance to her home. She could see his grin from there.

Oh lord. Just what she needed. The world's sexiest neighbour. Who had just watched her ass all the way back to her place. Crud.



## Chapter Four

Her lawn was mowed in record time, her bed made and house cleaned. Timmy still had not resurfaced, but his stuffed gryphon was missing from its spot next to her pillow. It had been there in the morning, but was gone now. He loved to tuck that stuffed gryphon between them and then curl up against her.

It was weird, but since she had moved into this odd little town, she was haunted by nightmares. Dark and sinister shadows stalked her dreams. Until the day that Timmy had come to her doorstep. That day her nightmares stopped.

It was also the day that she first saw Tim in the coffee shop. It was also incidentally the day that her slightly more lascivious dreams began. He had starred quiet heavily in her dreams. His golden hands moving across her skin with deliberate intent. And always that sexy smile.

Timmy must have come back while she was at the neighbour's and taken his toy. She smiled in

relief.

The thought of his beautiful feline body on a road somewhere had been so untenable that she had refused to let it enter her mind.

If he had his gryphon, he was safe, she was sure of it.

\* \* \* \*

She kept up her frenzy of activity until after six. At that point she realized what time it was and, cursing all the way, she took a shower to remove the sweat and dust of the impromptu spring cleaning.

She was towelling herself dry and wrestling with her underwear drawer when the fleeting thought of skipping her underwear ran through her mind unchecked. She stopped multi-tasking for a moment, and smacked the lustful thoughts of Tim on her white sheets out of her mind. He would glow against the pristine white, she just knew it.

*Alright, regroup.* She stood for a moment, then calmly and deliberately picked out her lime green panties and bra. She put them on, wincing at the damp reaction of her body to contact between her thighs. Her nipples were pebbled in her bra and she looked for a button-down shirt with a crisp enough fabric to camouflage them.

Audrina carefully and deliberately picked out

her most flattering pair of jeans, slithering into them before she could change her mind.

Her sandals went on quickly and she was on her way over to his place with slightly damp hair five minutes early. Her hand was raised to knock and the door swung open.

The golden god was wearing an apron, and he smelled *good*.

"Hi! Am I too early?" Oh, God, her voice was high-pitched and perky, even to her own ears.

"Nope, right on time. Come on in." He stepped aside to let her enter and she was amazed at what he could accomplish in a few hours.

The house was immaculate. It looked more lived in than her place, and he had been there less than twenty-four hours.

His shopping expedition had been fruitful as well. Daisies and blue irises filled vases in the house, bringing an unexpected burst of cheer to every room.

Oh hell. Flowers, apron, cooking and an immaculate house. "Tim, are you gay?"

He froze in place. The astonished look on his face was answer enough, and she flushed in embarrassment.

"No, Audrina. I am not gay." The arch of his brow asked for an explanation.

"I am so sorry. Your house is just so neat, and you have already moved in, you can cook and you have the same taste in flowers as I do." Her face

was on fire now. If she didn't know better she would swear that her body was actually cooking from the inside out.

"So, if I was a slob, left everything in boxes and had burned dinner, you would think I was straight? Interesting criteria." He was laughing at her.

Her chin almost touched her chest as she mumbled, "I don't get out much." Taking a deep and shaking breath, "Can we start over?"

"Of course. Go ahead." The challenge was obvious, as was his plan to bring this up at a later time, based on the raised eyebrows and the challenge in his gaze.

"Hiya, Tim. Something smells terrific. Am I too early?" She began a slow and steady walk to the kitchen to hide her face from his implacable amusement.

"No, you are right on time. I was just finishing up the mashed potatoes." As he passed her in the hall, he gave her butt a light pat. "We are having pot roast. Do you care for beef?" He ignored the startled jump that she executed in the tight quarters and started to set the table for two.

"Oh, I love pot roast. It's my favourite."

"Let me just put the apple cobbler in the oven."

It was on the tip of her tongue to ask him again if he was gay, but she had a feeling that he might just throw her on the table and cover her body with his if she did. Wow, there was an image.

She sat quickly to stop her buckling knees.

"So, why did you move to this tiny little hamlet?" Ah, there was a nice safe topic.

He straightened and finished prepping the dessert, then loaded the table with more food than she could eat in a week. Apparently, he was not a cheap date.

"I work for an architectural design firm that is assisting on a historical renovation in Melville."

She blinked in surprise. "That's just fifteen miles away."

"I know. The location of this house was ideal, and the price was right."

"So, what do you do?"

It proved to be a deadly question. In the next hour over the juiciest pot roast that she had ever consumed she learned about working modern safety and materials into historic homes. It was apparently not an easy task, but with modern fabrication, you could get the look of antique structure, with modern materials.

Before she knew it he had turned the tables and asked her what she did.

"I am a professional mosquito." And she left it at that.

"What?" His hands were busy washing dishes and she had an amazing view of his ass as he cleaned up after his orgy of consumption. Nearly the entire roast had disappeared, and into that very fit body. She wondered how he worked it off.

Oh, down girl!

"I work in a lab and draw blood for medical testing. It isn't very exciting work." She remembered the past week. "Well, unless we get a Damsel in Distress."

"A fainting woman?"

"Nope, a fainting man. A woman I can shift around on my own, a three hundred pound man who passes out while standing up, however is quite another story."

"So, what do you do with them?"

"Well, I prop them up, tell my co-worker quietly that I have a damsel, and we move him into a recovery room with a bed, cold water, cold towels and usually something like a sucker if he isn't diabetic. Then we just hope he can start moving around on his own."

"Doesn't it embarrass them to be called Damsels?"

"Uh, well, I usually only call them that when I need help from my co-worker so as not to freak out the people in the waiting room. But, you are right, they are usually mortified."

A hot cup of coffee was put in front of her.

"So, why do they faint?"

"Um, they will correct you to say that they have 'passed out'. But usually it is because they are fasting, are afraid of needles, or the sight of blood. Especially their own. It is actually a healthy response. It is a basic reaction to being injured."

“Yes, that may be, but it isn’t very convenient if the predator is going to start eating you.” He toasted her with his cup of coffee and smirked.

She burst out laughing. “You are quite correct. Just look at the fainting goats. It isn’t exactly an effective defence mechanism.”

They shared a laugh at the image of a herd of three-hundred-pound males being startled into a mass fainting spell.

One moment they were laughing, and the next he had gripped her hand and tugged her into his lap.

## Chapter Five

She didn't say anything. The smouldering heat in his eyes was weaving a spell on her senses that she didn't want to break.

She felt tiny and protected in his embrace. An unusual feeling that she wanted to savour.

Her body slowly relaxed against his and he took that as her silent assent. His lips gently touched her own, and as she remained pliant, he increased his attentions. Yep, cinnamon. It was him, his scent and his taste.

Audrina felt like she had known him for weeks, not less than twelve hours. It was with only a fleeting flicker of guilt that she wrapped one hand around his neck and returned his kiss, with interest.

He growled in response to her, one hand tightening on her hip, the other pulling her thighs firmly against him.

As their kisses deepened and tongues came into play, he suddenly stopped. Her eyes had closed



and she blinked with lids heavy with passion to meet his serious face.

"If you don't want this, Audrina, say so now. I will escort you home and we can slow this down." His face was earnest and she knew in that instant that he would do whatever she agreed to.

"So, you would just take me home, leave me at the door, and come home to jerk off?"

He laughed. "Something like that."

The erection under her thighs throbbed gently and she wanted it inside her when it released itself. More to the point she wanted her body wrapped around his while that hard cock was inside her.

She shuddered heavily. This was out of character for her, but it just felt so right. "Can you take me home...later?"

His smile was blinding and the heat was scorching, "I can indeed." In a move that made her head spin he stood with her in his arms.

"I am not a fainting heroine, Tim. You don't have to carry me." She squirmed a bit in discomfort, tacky romance novel covers flashed through her mind.

"Oh, but I want to carry you. That way, you can't get away from my fiendish clutches."

Her bark of laughter caught her by surprise. It was like he had picked up on her thoughts and voiced them. "Oh, but I want to be in your fiendish clutches. At least for today."

"I was hoping that you would say that." He carried her up a set of stairs and into a bedroom that was sparse and tidy. Even here there was a vase with daisies and irises, she giggled softly and kept her mouth shut as he deposited her on the bed.

He watched her carefully for several long moments, his head tilted as he assessed her body from head to toe. With a snarl he pounced on her, rolling her across the covers until she was breathless with laughter. She was firmly tucked under him when he stilled.

As the giddy joy welling up in her faded she stroked the sides of his face. She craned her neck up to help her mouth meet his and giggled when his teeth nipped her lips. He bit and fed at her mouth until she was moaning and her hands were knotted in his hair trying to hold his mouth to hers.

"Audrina, you are overdressed." He leaned back and unfastened the buttons marching down the front of her shirt, kissing and licking at the skin that he exposed as he peeled the fabric away. The lime green bra made him blink, and he smiled, passion pushed to the back-burner as he asked, "Do your panties match?"

Her face, neck and chest flared red as her embarrassment took over. She had worn them to give her confidence, with no inkling that they would be seen.

One of her hands covered her eyes as his clever fingers fell to the button of her jeans. The slow drag of the zipper had her biting her lip and the hot breath in the vee of the opened fabric forced her to still hips that wanted to squirm closer.

"Hah! They do match!"

Once again she was laughing, and once again he joined her. With precise movements and a little bit of tickling he tugged her jeans and shirt from her. Instead of distracting her, the playful tone that he set was bringing her lust to a fevered pitch.

He rapidly divested himself of his clothing and stood before her, golden and perfect. The layers of muscle that she had speculated about were more detailed and sculpted than anything she could have imagined. The hard and bronze cock that beckoned her was larger than anything her mind would have supplied as well. A creamy drop of fluid gathered at the tip and she could control herself no longer.

She reached up with a pleading and innocent look in her eyes, begging without words for him to come to her. The instant that he took her hand she yanked hard and he tumbled to the bed beside her.

Crowing with victory, she crawled on top of him and slowly rubbed her body against his. He reached up to stroke her back with long slow touches. As if he were petting a cat.

She arched into his touch and was unsurprised

to feel her bra loosen, with an impatient snarl she threw it aside. Her hips rubbed her clit against his erection where it was sandwiched between them and the panties that were still in place became damp from both sides.

Audrina sighed, groaned and purred at the feel of him against her, and minutes of this torture later, he had had enough of her playing and took charge once again.

"My turn." She was flipped to her back and her panties were skinned from her to be flung across the room unceremoniously.

"Grab the headboard and don't let go. Whatever you do," His head leaned down and his tongue lapped roughly at her collarbone, "Don't let go."

She wrapped her fingers around the wrought iron vines that made up the framework of his bed. As the heat of his tongue began to explore her, she hung on.

She knew that her skin was sensitive and that the slightest touch would arouse her. She was very surprised that he had figured it out. Most men she had been with were heavy-handed and fumbled briefly before grabbing at her crotch. She knew that this would not be one of those unsatisfying encounters.

Delicate tracing of his fingers and tongue caught her skin on fire. Each nerve that was called to attention sent a racing impulse through her

entire body and in no time she was panting with a fine sheen of sweat across her breasts and belly.

His tongue paid homage to each breast, laving each in turn with a slow and steady stroke. She was arching and hissing in reaction to the wet touch of his mouth on hers and he hadn't even crossed her ribcage yet.

The slow progress of his mouth began, preceded by his hands. The outer surface of her belly was caressed as his mouth worshipped the underside of her breasts. The hands left her belly to stroke her hips, and then further down to her outer thighs.

At that point, they changed direction. His fingers delicately dragged up the inside of her thighs, parting them with gentle insistence. They parted eagerly, her dignity long forgotten in the flares of lust that he was bringing to her with his hands and mouth. "More" was the only gasp that she could manage, entreating him to take her.

Her body was an arch, her grip on the headboard and her heels the points of contact. Oh, he was good.

His head had reached the juncture of her thighs and the heat from his mouth was causing the moisture emanating from her body to flow more freely than she would have imagined. He settled himself between her straining thighs and parted her labia with his thumbs. A long slow swipe of his tongue had her mewling and by the third

stroke running from her opening to her clit, she was shrieking and shaking in the grip of her orgasm.

He paused, letting her body drink in the fullness of it's release, only flicking at her clit and slipping a finger into her to keep the spasms going.

As she slowly slumped back into the sheets, she met his dark golden eyes as he had his head propped up on her pelvis. The fire was there, but ruthlessly banked.

"You let yourself go, and now I have to start from the bottom and work my way up."

Her hoarse voice could only groan in anticipation as his fingers separated her once again and he slowly thrust two of the digits inside her. She could feel the wet embrace of her body on those fingers and tightened to pull them further and further into herself.

He added a third finger, and began to slowly pull almost out of her and then thrust back in a controlled beat. The noise of the wet suction normally would have mortified her, but those long fingers twisting within her made her crave the heat and thickness of Tim's cock moving into her with savage enthusiasm.

"Tim. I want your cock inside me. Now!" She was really in no position to be making demands, but as a partner in this event, it was exactly what she was supposed to be doing.

With feline grace he slunk up the length of her body, licking, biting and sucking all the way. He seemed obsessed with tasting her, and as his head hung against hers, she tasted herself on his lips. Sweat was dripping from them both, and his dark sheets were damp with their exertions.

The blunt head of his cock was seeking entrance to her and her hips were rising to capture him. "Are you sure you want me, Audrina? It's not too late to change your mind."

A snarling growl was all that she gave him as she hooked a thigh round his hips and move her opening onto his cock. Once the head was in place, she wrapped her other leg around him and crossed her ankles tightly together, pulling him inside.

His breathless groan, "I will take that as a yes." were the last words spoken as he slid fully into her with closed eyes as he fought to enjoy the moment.

Each time he impaled her on his cock, she squirmed against him, seeking more contact. Her hands were still wrapped around cold iron and she was arching and bucking against him with every slow thrust.

Her blood was roaring in her ears as he began to use a little more force and speed. Her body was being played like a classical instrument and she was loving ever minute of it. But, if he didn't hurry up and make her come soon, she was going

to pass out from frustration.

Mewling cries like a kitten in distress were coming from her throat, and she could swear that she was begging him to fuck her hard and let her come, but she couldn't be sure.

It must have worked, as suddenly his hands lifted her legs to either of his shoulders and he began to pound into her as if he were trying to pave a path to the pillow.

At the first pounding thrust her body was shocked, by the second it was enjoyment, and on the third she peeled away from reality in a paroxysm of sensation. His reaction was to release her legs, lean far enough forward to kiss her fast and to thrust into her in a frenzy of mating that left her breathless as her own body was limp from its exertions.

His head had fallen hollow of her neck and shoulder, and as a snarling groan broke from him as his balls emptied themselves into her, he bit her.

With teeth that felt exceptionally sharp, his teeth dug lightly through her skin until her blood broke into his mouth and at the taste, a harder seizure gripped him his body pumping itself dry within her.

As they gasped for air, the tingling on her shoulder barely noticeable, she thought to herself, that this definitely set the bar for all first dates.



"Did we just...?" Her eyes tried to memorize the pattern on the crown moulding in his bedroom. Geometric with just a hint of fleur-de-lis.

"We did." The amused voice reverberated in his chest. Her position with her head propped up, using his torso as a pillow, gave her the effect of lying on a speaker.

"And you are sure that you aren't gay?"

The pillow fight that ensued resulted in minimal damage to the wrestlers, the furniture and the bedding. Only one small chair got tipped over in the melee, which they carefully righted.

## Chapter Six

Good to his word, Tim escorted her home. He had to. Even after their shower her thighs were incapable of closing to a point that would allow her to walk comfortably. Instead of forcing her to waddle, she was carried piggy-back to her front door.

There went dignity out the window again.

He seemed only too cheerful to have reduced her to that state, and the look in his eyes as they had dressed told her that he wanted to do it again. Soon.

"Your keys?"

Oh, right she released the grip of one of her arms and dug in her hip pocket, then handed the key to him. "It's the big one with the short teeth."

"Thanks." He moved into the house and carried her straight into the bedroom, dropping her down onto her own bed. He had looked fantastic against his black cotton sheets, but she bet he would look better in her bed.

"Uh, I am exhausted." She stretched the muscles that were not exactly used to this type of exertion. Wow, what a night.

"Me too." He sat down and began to remove his shoes and clothing.

"So, you're staying here tonight?"

"Well, we did get my sheets all sweaty. I need a nice clean bed to rest in."

She eyed him speculatively, his face was all innocence. "Fine, but just sleep. I don't think my body could handle any more activity tonight."

"Fair enough." Splendidly nude, he crawled between her white sheets under the handmade quilt.

She shed her own clothes and crawled between the same sheets. His hands came to her and held her close, and that was the only way he touched her as he snuggled close. Having a man in her bed was unusual enough for her, but to have one holding her in the darkness was completely new. The rumbling purr that seemed to be coming from him was exceptionally soothing as well.

Within fifteen minutes, she was sound asleep.

\* \* \* \*

The pounding on her door was a rude awakening. She sat up and looked over at Tim, who had flown out of bed, and was crouched next to it, facing the door.

"Uh, I don't think that burglars knock Tim. It must be someone I know." She grabbed for a robe and tugged it into place.

As the knock repeated, she made her way down the hall to the front door. The face peeking in the window was familiar, but surprising.

"Lincoln!" She drew her robe more closely around her, a flush grew across her cheeks as she realized that the collar of the robe did not completely cover Tim's bites. "What are you doing here?"

"I thought you might not be feeling well."

"I am feeling fine. Why would you think that?"

"There was something going around the mall and we linked it to the lattes."

"Really? Well, thanks for checking on me."

"I was wondering if I could come in?"

"Um, that isn't really convenient, I have a visitor."

Lincoln's dark features suddenly became sinister. "Yes we know. We watched you come home tonight. He didn't leave."

A thump and a groan and she saw two men who must have come through her back door dragging Tim between them.

"What have you done to him?" She turned in a fury and she felt a pulse of energy that she hadn't before. Only a handful of times in her life had she felt like this. Each time, she had almost died.

The power seemed to be coming from within

her.

"We? We did nothing." He looked at her with eyes gone black and cold "The shadows however nibbled at his soul." His hand came up and it was full of inky darkness, her first instinct was to recoil and as the icy tendril wrapped around her wrist and started to pull at her consciousness, she screamed and fought back with everything in her.

A bright blast of energy caused Lincoln to stagger out of the doorway and in a trice she was past him and into the yard, heading for the safety of the woods.

They wouldn't be able to find her there.

With her muscles stiff, her body nude and the thin protection of her robe was almost no protection at all, she did not feel ready for a jaunt into the forest. But here she went.

The branches moved out of her way, drawing a pathway to her safe spot. In this portion of the woods, there was one spot that she had made her own. She raced on bruised and bleeding feet to that spot near the icy pond where her Timmy was fond of his evening constitutionals.

She clambered up onto the rock, her rock and sat with her knees drawn up. Audrina concentrated in spilling her energy into the stones around her, guarding her and making her feel safe from all that would come.

"We have your boy-toy, Audrina." There was a large group of men, Tim hanging between them.

"He isn't my boy-toy. He's my neighbour." Her voice sounded petulant to her own ears, but if she wasn't mistaken she had just been attacked by shadows, wielded by a barrista.

They let the shadows form tendrils and had them wrap around Tim. She gasped at the pain that flooded Tim's features. What ever they were doing to him, it hurt. "Don't drop the Ward, Audrina. Stay where you are."

"Stay where you are, and your golden boy here dies." A tendril of shadow ran through Tim and he gasped in agony.

"Fine. But before I do...what the hell is going on?"

She gathered her little energy to her and kept it there as shadows began to dance on the perimeter.

"You are a woman of power. In our town, that makes you fair prey."

"Prey for what purpose?"

"For the purpose of increasing our energies." Lincoln was at his most pompous.

"What happens to me after?"

"We drain you of your magic, then we will send you on your way." With sudden insight, Audrina knew exactly what that meant. Her dead.

But if there was a chance that Tim would be let go, she would do it.

"Fine. It's coming down." There was a muffled "No!" from Tim before they hit him in the back of the head, and then nothing.

Slowly and carefully, she retracted her energies. As the power came in, the shadows grew closer, writhing in closer and closer proximity to her. As they came within touching distance, she began to be haunted by memories of pain and loss, fear and agony, and in seconds it overwhelmed her. With a scream of panic her power winked out. Pain and fear waited for her in the dark.

## Chapter Seven

Her shoulders were screaming. She could hear the tissues protesting the position that they had her in. Her arms shackled over her head were forcing her shoulders to take most of the weight and they didn't like it.

"As soon as the elders are assembled, I will drain your energy and your magic will become mine." Lincoln was there when she opened her eyes. He was surrounded by wildly flickering light that she had to attribute to the pain that was flooding her.

"Why do you have to wait for the elders? Why can't you just do it yourself?" Her voice was hoarse and she remembered screaming as the darkness overtook her.

The dark and shadowy robes flowed around him. "It is a tradition and a ritual. Each member will taste your power before you die."

"Oh, so it doesn't count if other guys don't see it." She shifted awkwardly, transferring some of



her weight onto her feet. "Funny, but you don't seem like the sharing type."

He paced away from her with a snarl.

"Lincoln! What did you do with Tim?"

He turned and smirked at her, "Your boy toy? He's sharing your cell. Just look behind you."

She craned her neck and caught a glimpse of a bare masculine foot in one corner. "What did you do to him?"

"Just knocked him out with shadows while he wasn't looking. After the way you screamed, it was easy to distract him."

She closed her eyes and let a tear fall slowly down one cheek. The mocking laughter of her captor was just the final insult to her senses and she let her consciousness creep back into the darkness.

His footsteps fell away and the warm scent of cinnamon overtook her. Her eyes flew open, and there was Tim standing before her as naked as the day he was born.

"How?" She was at a loss for words. He seemed completely unharmed.

He was scowling at her. "Damn it! I thought I would have more time."

"More time? For what?" Couldn't he get sex off his mind? She looked down at his partial erection. At least for a while? Good lord. Now she was ogling his body. While tied like a sacrificial lamb. She had to be going nuts.

"To explain your talents and family history."

"What do you know about my family? I was adopted after being abandoned."

"Do you believe in the powers that you have displayed? That if they exist they can be controlled?"

She thought about it for a long moment, "Yeah, I guess I do. I have always felt something different about myself compared to others. Ok, my talents are actual provable power. They have to be, or they wouldn't be planning to suck them out of me.

"Fine. I have power. Now what can I do with it?"

Tim leaned forward to give her a quick kiss. "Good girl. Now for the complicated part."

He took a deep breath and started, "You are from a magical family known as the Warders. They have one main talent and that is to create protective barriers for themselves and others. With most, this is instinctual after seeing family members do it. You have been doing bits and pieces without knowing it."

She took a deep breath, "So, how do I put it all together?"

"You trust me. To stop them from doing this to someone else and to yourself, you need to use those powers properly."

She shuddered as she thought about those shadows closing over the faces of friends and innocent women who had the bad luck to be born

with power. "Tell me what I need to do."

He sighed heavily and caressed her hair with his fingers. "What you are going to need is a doubled ward, what you have to do is..."

The whispers in the dark continued and it was only after she had confirmed and tried out the described technique that he took up his place as the unconscious 'boy toy.'

Lincoln and a few of his creepy friends were at the doorway to her cage a few minutes later. They loosened her cuffs and she almost blacked out as the blood rushed into her limbs. Her comfort was not one of their main concerns as they dragged her out into a gathering chamber.

Or more to the point, a sacrificial chamber. There was a raised dais with an altar in the center of the room. She would be surrounded on all sides, and she was still stark naked. It was a full house, and she recognized quite a few faces that she could never forgive for their part in this.

Who builds this kind of thing?

Sparks shot behind her eyes as they fastened her to the altar. Her shoulders would never forgive them for this. But if Tim's plan worked, she wouldn't have to.

Lincoln took the position near her head and placed his hands on her forehead and face. "We gather here to drain this woman of power from those energies which are not rightly hers."

The crowd roared their assent.

"It is up to us to drag her light into the shadow. To absorb it and use it to further the development of our families and town."

The roar of hostility rang around her and she could feel the gathering darkness around her.

Okay, time to implement phase one. She focused on her body and soul. Loose tendrils of energy that would unwrap at the slightest touch became her shield. Her soul she wrapped in a core of flaming plasma.

Of course, they had no idea that she was doing anything. All that they could see was her aura of energy flickering as it would when distressed. She had plenty of reason to react that way.

"Now, my brothers! We feed!" Lincoln began to draw the loose tendrils of energy from her and she drew a few taut just to make him work for it.

Other tugs at her energy began to creep into her consciousness, each man taking from her body the magic that would enhance his own power.

The core that surrounded her soul was rock solid. No cracks or crevasses. She was ready for phase two.

Now if Tim would just show up, she could stop the power tendrils that were trying to get to her soul.

As if summoned by her thoughts, "*Audrina! Now do it now!*"

Taking a deep and shaking breath, she did what her family had done for centuries, she created

wards. One ward for every soul-sucking bastard that was out there. Each and every tendril that they had taken into their own psyches was turned into a razor of energy that released all the stolen energy that had been robbed before.

Masculine screams rent the air as the stolen power flowed freely, and away from it's captors. The soul of each woman who had been drained, as they were attempting to do to Audrina, was now released and furious.

The glowing and powered ghosts were attacking those who had dared to claim their talents, and they were angry.

Lincoln's hands had fallen away from her as the power sliced through him for the first time, but now his attention was back. "You, you have done this."

"No, a Warder has done this. And if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't have known that I was one jackass."

"Not for long." With that melodramatic statement, he had wrapped his hands around her throat and was squeezing the life out of her.

If only Tim's lessons had covered this. With her hands shackled she couldn't fight, but with her fading consciousness, she tried to make a ward around Lincoln. A ward that would block his air.

He glowed in the embrace of her power and the light in her eyes faded as her own lack of oxygen took over.

She must have been delirious with lack of air, because nothing else would explain the huge golden gryphon breaking through a doorway and using its vicious claws to make its way through the screaming crowd still dodging ghosts.

Another swipe of the claws took Lincoln off the altar and the sharp snap of the beak severed the head from shoulders. Hot blood sprayed across her and for another moment in her life, she was happy that she didn't have any fear of blood.

*"Relax, Rina, I am going to set you loose and take you somewhere safe."* Four sharp snaps and she was being held in claws against a leonine chest as the enormous wings beat heavily at the air.

*"We have to travel a bit to get to the portal, so just relax. I won't drop you."*

*"Portal? To where?"* Thinking the question to him came naturally, and it did help as she was fighting for oxygen to compensate for the speed of the flight.

*"We are going to Realm. You need healing and an infusion of power. You used far too much in fending off the shadows."*

*"Is that what you call them?"*

*"They are soul-suckers in human form. They tend to congregate in groups like this."*

*"Great. How long have you known about them?"*

*"Only since I was sent to watch you."*

*"Sent?"* This was astonishing, and rather embarrassing, *"By whom?"*

## *The Warder's Gryphon*

---

*"By a group of people who want nothing more than your safety and who are dying to meet you."*

## Chapter Eight

She was dangling from the claws of a mythological beast, flying through the night sky with not a stitch on, trusting him to take her to people that she had never even conceived of. And if the voice in her mind was any indication, the beast that held her was also the man who had screwed her brains out earlier in the evening.

When had her life gotten so weird?

A swirl of melting silver energy opened up into a gateway in front of them. She would have squealed in panic if she hadn't been wracked with pain and exhaustion. Her first trip to Realm was managed while she was unconscious. Her body had finally had enough.

The air was wild and heavy with energy, and Audrina was comfortable. The sheets that she was snuggled between were softer than anything that she had ever felt.

"Audrina. You can open your eyes now." The voice was gentle and feminine. A soft damp cloth



trailed across her forehead and down her cheeks.

Dang. No pretending that she was asleep then to avoid whatever was coming next.

Her bleary eyes opened and she was greeted by a view of several women all grouped around her bed. Only one male was in the room, and he looked distinctly uncomfortable. At least she thought that she read the expression correctly, it was hard to do on blue skin with silver tattoos.

Only one woman stood alone. Rina blinked hard. No, her eyes hadn't deceived her, those were indeed pointy ears.

"Welcome to Realm, Audrina. We are members of the Warder's clan. Your family." The elf moved toward her. "My name is Eylonwy, and you are my great grand-niece. Well actually there are fifteen greats in there, but that would take too long."

She took a seat on the side of Audrina's bed. "What do you know of your family?"

"You mean before I was adopted? I was abandoned as a baby. There were no records of my mother, she just left me in the hospital."

"So, you have no way of tracing your family history? What of your adoptive family?"

She closed her eyes, a small tear trickled down her cheek. "I never did fit. They did try, but it wasn't up to me or them."

"If you are up to trying, we have a family here for you to try on for size."

"What?" She struggled up onto her elbows, tucking the sheet under her arms when she realized that it was all that she was wearing.

Eylonwy took her hand. "I have a story to tell you, and it will let you know how you got here. Will you listen?"

She thought about it for a moment. There were enough freaks in this room to fill a circus. And she was one of them. What could it hurt to listen?

"Tell me the story, and I will tell you what I think."

Audrina was told the story of the great Warder attack, the seven surviving women, the great Curse that was to keep them from building a clan again.

She was told of the inability of the Warder's to reproduce with humans every generation, and that they needed to take a mate of the magical races every other generation at least. Audrina had been the product of one such mating.

Eylonwy explained about her sister, Amarante, the loveless marriage to a human that resulted in her death. She told the tale of the twin nieces that she had had. The one being brought to be raised in Realm, and the other being stolen by her brother-in-law's family.

The lost girl had had no choice but to take a member of a supernatural race as her lover, it was a compulsion; and so the separation of bloodlines had begun. One girl per generation, one child

each. A slender thread in history that lead straight to Audrina. A pale and exotic creature stepped forward. "I am Serafina, and the next chapter in your life was written on my mind."

"What?" This was a little much. Magical races, lost families and elves with twins were running through her mind. It was a great story.

Serafina took the other side of her bed and sat daintily. "On hallowe'en, I was watching the Repository of Magical Artifacts and I was possessed by the ghost of your ancestor, well our ancestor. I am descended from the other twin baby.

"Amarante took over my mind and told Eylonwy about her death, and the children. None of the Warders even knew that there had been a second child. The humans had left the elven child to die.

"She wanted us to look for you because you were in immediate danger. I was given the assignment to find you. Blood called to blood."

"What?"

"Well, we are related, and I have an affinity for blood." She smiled and her fangs exposed. "I am the product of a Warder and vampire mating. My own father knocked up my mother and bugged off. Similar to your situation, but the Warders are a helluva family to be related to.

"Anyway, I managed to narrow it down to a thirty five mile radius. After that, it was a

complete dead zone. There was no way for me to locate you from a distance, and my husband would not let me go in person.

"He contacted Timmon and sent him to watch you."

"Timmon?" Oh, she had a bad feeling about this.

"Timmon Lahey, the gryphon who brought you to us. He is a tracker in Realm and works for an architectural company in the human world."

"Tim was sent to me? He didn't come willingly?" Tears were threatening again. She was really overwhelmed right now.

"He was asked only to locate you. He volunteered to protect you and stay by you." Serafina spoke quickly to stop any emotional cascade.

"But, he only showed up yesterday? How could he have been watching me?"

"He is a shapeshifter, you might have noticed. His gryphon form is only one of them." She smiled and patted Audrina's hand. "Did you want to get dressed and have a tour? There are really some fantastic places to visit, and at least three that serve a terrific lunch."

"That sounds good." She looked around more carefully. She was in a tent. A powder blue and gauzy tent. It was huge, but the Warders were the only ones in it. "Is Tim here?"

"He and some of the others went off to clean up

the rest of the shadows. Apparently the entire population of that little cess pool were soul suckers. They grabbed any passing woman with power and drained her dry."

"How many before me?" The knowledge that she was just the latest in a long line was scary. If she hadn't had a tenuous link to this group of people, no one would have come for her.

"At least two per year for the last fifty years. They had quite the racket. They drew them in with promises of employment, and kept them there with cheap housing until it was time for one of their boys to run the ceremony."

"So, they took turns then? It wasn't always Lincoln."

"No. They each got one turn as primary. Quite creepy really."

Audrina shuddered. "I would like to get up now. I feel fine. You mentioned lunch?"

One of the ladies with snow-white hair turned to the blue skinned man and whispered in his ear. A glowing tunic and trouser set appeared in front of her. The underwear appeared fitted directly to her skin and the blue man left the room.

"Arov hates making clothing for women that belong to someone else. It offends his djinn sensibilities."

She slipped on the tunic and pants then stood. Her feet knocked against a pair of sandals that were jewelled to match her outfit, "Well, I admire

his attention to detail.”

The women all giggled.

“Can we have introductions?”

“After we all are seated with something to eat. We are not a delicate breed.” Serafina’s fangs exposed again and she giggled like a teenager.

Audrina supposed that there were worse families out there.

## Chapter Nine

The tent that they had had her in was pitched near a marketplace. Folk of every variety were wandering through it. And she did see every variety.

Elves, fairies, goblins, more of the blue djinn, green women who bore a startling resemblance to one of her 'cousins', a dragon landed nearby and changed into the form of a human man and Audrina couldn't help but gawk. Either she was nuts, or this was a magical place.

"Hey! Why don't we head to Denna's? She does an amazing al fresco brunch." The slightly green and pregnant cousin spoke. She looked Mediterranean, but when Audrina got closer, she was definitely green.

"You are just in favour of Denna's because she feeds you for free." The white haired woman elbowed the pregnant woman in the side.

"Yep. Let's go." She set off at a quick clip, and two of the other cousins took Rina's hand and

tugged her along.

They passed modern buildings, tents, and antique-style taverns. It was outside one of these taverns that the cousins took a seat, Rina with them.

The green woman spoke again. "Alrighty. Time for introductions. You have already met Serafina. She is hand fasted to a vampire named Francesco and will be married in the spring. She is also going to be an aunty around that time, so she has an intense interest in my pregnancy."

"I am Anryn. My husband is Decklyn. He's a dragon. He has a nasty temper and a great ass." The table burst into giggles.

The very pale woman spoke, "He does actually. He has a tendency to run around naked. You should see my wedding pictures." She stood to take Audrina's hand. "I am Albina Warder Lakin Arov. My husband is Imaran, the blue djinn you saw earlier."

"Ok, Anryn and Decklyn, Albina and Imaran, Serafina and Francesco. So far so good. Uh, do you all have non-human husbands?" She felt a little queasy. This was all coming at her rather fast.

The woman who appeared shy and quiet spoke. "It is a lot to take in. My husband had to get used to it as well, his family didn't even know Realm existed."

"Oh, so he's human?"

She flushed pink, "No, he's a werewolf. But the



wers left Realm centuries ago, just like the vampires. Oh, I am Ruana by the way."

"Nice to meet you, Ruana. So, your husband is a werewolf huh? Oooookkaaayyyy."

Ruana laughed at her, "I know, you can accept the dragons, that Anryn is half dyrad and therefore green, that Albina's husband is a djinn, but the little fact that both my father and my mate are werewolves is a little beyond the scope of imagination."

Now it was Albina's turn to blush. "You are right. Sorry."

"It's alright, my mate's name is Aleczander, Zan for short, and he is with the rest of the guys mopping up the shadows that tried to drain you."

"What about the rest of the people in the town?"

"They have been told that there was a chemical spill. Big disaster and everyone has to move. Only those who followed the path of the shadows will be eliminated as casualties." Anryn looked regretful, but firm. "Those who were wounded and didn't die would have engaged in a massive search to replace the power that was lost. They would have killed hundreds, if not thousands."

She buried her face in her hands and was quiet for a moment. "I know. But I haven't ever been in that sort of a situation before. I didn't even know that people or creatures like that existed."

"And now that you do?"

"I want lunch." She smiled at the collection of faces that were all watching her with a warmth that she had never seen in a stranger before. She felt like part of a select group. A family.

\* \* \* \*

Lunch was served by a grousing goblin, the Denna of earlier mention. Anryn was delighted as her plate was constantly filled with pancakes, fruit and bacon by a watchful proprietor.

"Why is she watching you like that?" Rina just had to ask.

"Well, Serafina here is about to become the aunt of Denna's first granddaughter and grandson actually." Anryn kept her head down to her plate, and yet managed to enunciate around the forkfuls of food. "The better she treats the Warders, the better chance of her new grandchildren becoming fully trained and welcomed into the family. It is a goblin tradition."

"What is precisely?"

"Well, we have taken a useless male off her hands; although Hiruki is not useless by any means; and she is satisfying family obligation by catering to the matriarchal line. Only a mother is left at the moment of birth after all. It is up to her and her family to protect the child." Serafina finished dissection of a sausage and licked her fingers with precise motions.

"Huh, I never thought of it that way."

"And my dear, if we had known of the existence of your line, you would not have had one moment alone without family." Eylonwy touched her hand and that was all that it took.

With her body recovered, her belly full, and her mind bursting, this last stone in the overflowing dam of emotional strain threw her over the edge. Audrina began to cry. Huge wracking sobs that shook her to her very soul.

A family. A real family that accepted her freak factor for what it was. Tears flowed fast and furiously down her cheeks. She felt arms hold her close and she clung to the comfort they offered with desperation.

Instead of trying to hide her emotional outburst, they let her cry herself out. When she cried herself out, she was slumped against Eylonwy and the others were gathered around her all with a hand on her hand or arm. The strength that she was gaining from the contact was not a figment of her imagination. She was actually drawing strength from them. Literally.

Albina's patience, Anryn's good humor, Ruana's gentleness, Serafina's compassion and Eylonwy's boundless love for those of her line. She looked at them, exhausted, "How am I doing that?"

"Blood calls to blood, Audrina. You call us, and we are there."

A watery smile broke over her, "Call me Rina."

"Rina then. So when are you and Timmon planning to wed?"

"What?!" Her startled jump caused a chain reaction of falling cutlery and water glasses.

Serafina smiled at her, "Well, gryphons choose their mates carefully. They only have one per lifetime, and it is a really long lifetime."

"Gryphons?"

"Yeah, you remember Timmon?"

"Tim, right. Of course." She blinked, "Mates?"

"Well given the way that he wouldn't let you go until we had a healer present and he had personally overseen the power transfer. The way he held your hand until he was sure you had been recharged, and the bite marks on your neck, I figured that he had chosen you. And based on the claw marks on his back, you put up a heckuva struggle." Serafina was smiling and leaning back as Anryn got her fourths served to her. She was too full of food for her normal witty commentary, so the rest of the girls had to fill in.

"But, I only met him the day before I was taken. He just moved in." It was another emotional blow and she could only sit in astonishment as she replayed everything that they had mentioned about gryphons.

Serafina smiled. It wasn't a cruel smile, just an 'I know something you don't know' kind of smile.

"Of course. You must be correct."

Ruana looked up from watching Anryn stuff her face with the look of a predator picking up on a wounded animal. Her focus was behind them. "Oh, look. The boys are back."

The entire table turned to look, and Audrina's face flamed bright. There were four men coming towards them, and three of them were naked.

She recognized Tim right off. Heated memories of the one time that they spent together made tiny smile play at the corners of her mouth.

The other two naked men were quite obviously Ruana and Anryn's mates. The clothed one swept Serafina into his arms.

The nude males claimed their women with passionate embraces, and she squawked in surprise when she was plucked out of her seat to greet the ardent kiss of a nude gryphon.

"Hello. Audrina. I am so happy to see you up and about." The erection that was prodding her through the thin fabric of her new tunic indicated his sincerity.

Albina stood to one side and closed her eyes. Her husband appeared near her and sighed deeply at the public display. With a clap of his hands, the table cloths disappeared and drawstring trousers replace them.

One pair for each of the naked shifters.

Laughing and joking about human and djinn sensibilities, the men got dressed. Then introductions were issued. Having been in

conversation with their wives, the matches were easy to make.

With both of his arms now wrapped around her, he turned to the assemblage, "So, have you filled her in?"

"She has heard all pertinent details. A more in depth discussion of Warder history is in her future though." Eylonwy became the spokesperson as the others stood in the embrace of their spouses.

"Can she rest at my place then? And you can send someone up tomorrow?"

"I suppose that it can be arranged. Don't tire her out. She is still getting used to the idea of magic and it has been one helluva introduction."

"Yes, ma'am."

He turned to Rina with his golden eyes blazing with happiness, "C'mon. I want to show you my place." Timmon smiled slyly at her and dragged her away from her newly-found family.

Audrina was a little shocked, and terrified. They had embraced her wholeheartedly on the basis that the ghost of an elf told them to look for her. Unbelievable.

They had sent a guardian to her to protect her from the shadows and bring her into the warmth of their family. It was simply bizarre.

Yet, here she was. Now a gryphon that she had slept with was offering to 'show her his place.'

She shrugged in acceptance, "Sure, what have I got to lose?"

He grinned and wagged his eyebrows as he shifted into the graceful and golden beast that had rescued her from the soul-sucking shadows. He was huge. Ten feet high at least with an eagle's head, a lion's body and eagle's wings sprouting from his back. Fantastic.

His paws clawed the air for a moment before settling onto the ground. He seemed giddy to be showing off for her and the words '*Get on*' rang in her head.

She shifted around, then stepped forward and let him boost her into place in front of his wings. The warmth of his hide was still astonishing, and caused a cascade of memories of his human form pressed against, and within hers.

A flutter deep in her belly caused a blush and she heard a small chuckle in her head as he leapt off the ground and into the air.

## Chapter Ten

*“That is the wood where the elves have their villages, those are the entrances to the dwarf caverns, over there are the spires where the dragon council meets, and the meadows below are often used for Warder functions. Parties, weddings, that sort of thing. Your cousin Ruana will be getting formally married soon, as will Serafina and Franc.”*

The tour of Realm was being conducted from a few thousand feet in the air, and Rina only opened her eyes to peek every few seconds. *“I know that Tim, they told me all about it.”*

*“Anryn is very pregnant you know. She could blow at any moment. It’s why Decklyn insisted that Imaran stayed back. If anything happened in Realm, he could transport to us and back in seconds. He missed a good fight though.”*

*“So, you got all the shadows?”*

*“Yep, had to sniff out a few that were trying to hide, but we got ‘em all.”*

In a desperate attempt to change the subject, *“Do you prefer Tim or Timmon?”*

*“Tim is fine.”* Her mind warmed with the smile



that he injected into his thought. *"I have been called worse in my lifetime."*

*"As for the lifetime thing, how old are you anyway?"*

*"I think you have had enough shocks for one day."* A dark chuckle broke into her thoughts. He banked left and she squealed and held tightly to the feathers that crowned his head and neck.

*"I think I just lost one of my shoes, Tim."*

His beak let out a squawk of laughter. *"Sorry about that. There are clothes for you back at my place."*

*"Where exactly is your place, Tim? We seem to be climbing awfully high."*

*"Do you see that faint sparkle at the top of that mountain?"*

Her eyes opened and she looked quickly, ignoring the chuckle from the beast between her thighs. *"Yep."*

*"That is my aerie. My family home."*

*"It's really high."*

*"Yep. Don't worry, I won't let you fall."*

The rest of the trip was accomplished in silence. As his heavy wing beats pulled them closer, she opened her eyes for longer moments. It was a crystal palace, glittering and sparkling in the mist at the top of the mountain.

Mindful of his human cargo, he slowly circled into landing in a central courtyard. Central, because the structure surrounded this circular and grassed in yard. Sculptures of mythological beings

ringed the yard, the middle was obviously a landing pad of sorts.

"Wow." Now that the air was no longer rushing past her, she could speak normally, well croak actually. It had seemed natural to use telepathy while he was flying, but she didn't know how she had done it.

His shoulders shifted under her thighs as he walked toward an open doorway flanked by a gryphon and a cyclops.

"Um, should I get off of you now?" It felt weird to be riding someone that she knew.

*"You are lighter while I am in this form then when I took you home."*

Oops. Right, he had given her a piggy-back ride home because she was too stiff to walk. She was glad that he couldn't see her face.

As that thought finished he stopped and his eagle head swivelled back to look at her with one golden avian eye.

Right, birds could do that. She had forgotten that a bird needed to be able to groom themselves with their heads. Apparently the same held for him.

"Uh, did you want something?" She tried to be aloof, but it was hard to meet that piercing eye while less than two feet away.

*"Yeah. I do. But not in this form. You might want to dismount now."* There was a certain heat to his thoughts, and she swung her leg over his back and

slithered down his side on her belly.

His hide was warm under her hands and she quickly stepped back as he shook himself and began to shrink. The wings retreated into his back, the feathered head turned into his familiar features and his clawed paws became his hands and feet as his tail disappeared completely.

"Wow. Cool." She stood back and her surroundings didn't even enter into her consciousness. Not when she had Tim coming toward her with concern in his eyes.

The gentle hug was unexpected given the heat of his earlier thoughts. He held her tightly, but gently. "Are you sure that you are alright? You have been through a lot these last few days."

She returned the hug, with interest, "I'm fine. Yeah, it has been stressful, but also kinda freeing in a way. At least I am not alone anymore."

"No, you are not alone anymore." His fingers tilted her chin up and he took her mouth with his own.

She let her body conform to the planes of his and her hands raised to tangle in his hair.

She kept his mouth glued to hers as long as she could. "Wow. Was your tongue always like that?"

A hint of bronze coloured the tight skin across his cheeks. "Hmm. It is my natural form. I have a few feline characteristics that I relax at home."

"It feels nice." Better than nice. The delicate scraping against her mouth had a suspicious

dampness forming between her thighs. "I like it."

The grin that bloomed on his face warmed her to the depths of her soul. Her acceptance of his physical quirks was the final straw to his constraint.

He let out a roar of joy and lifted her high into the air over his head and twirled her around and around until she was dizzy.

Before she had recovered, he had stopped, stripped her out of her clothing and shed his in a few economical movements. The next moment she was sailing through the air heading for she-knew-not-what, and ended up skidding across black sheets. Apparently it was his color of choice.

Her breath was knocked out of her when she landed, and again when he jumped and landed with his hands and knees to either side of her. "Do you know how long I have been looking for a woman like you?" His lips nuzzled at her neck and a deep purring noise began in his chest.

Her fingers tangled in his mane once again and she exposed as much of her neck as she could to his lips and tongue. "I am guessing, quite a while?"

"Mmm. Lifetimes." The purring was very strong now. It reminded her of Timmy when they would watch movies.

Wait, Tim, Timmon, Timmy? "Tim, were you my cat?" She had to tug hard at his hair to get him to look her in the eyes. "Are you?"

With a sigh, he reached under one of the pillows and drew out the stuffed gryphon. "Yes, I was your cat. It seemed the best way to keep an eye on you in the evenings."

Her mind ran through all of her moments with the cat, the cat in her lap. Watching her shower, and his own dips in the cold pond. They always coincided with...oh god. "So, all those times that you jumped in the pond..."

"It was to keep from shifting shape and taking you right there. You were magnificent in your passions, and I wanted desperately to join you in your bed." His lips skated over her flaming cheeks and he lapped at the pool of flushed skin at the base of her throat.

"So you watched me..." She couldn't find the words, and his hands had now joined the effort to distract her.

"Yes, I watched your clever fingers circling your clit, like this." He set words into action and she shivered at the light touch. Exactly what would drive her high and fast.

"And I watched you take two more fingers and slide them into your passage, like this." She arched back as his thicker fingers teased her more than her own ever had.

With his two hands at work and his purring moving in time to his hands, her own breathless moans and sighs joined the symphony and in moments she was gasping, shivering and

thrusting her hips against his hands.

His hands withdrew and he took their place between her thighs, licking up the juice from her orgasm and soothing her clit from the relentless pressure that he had put on it. His long and slow strokes with his sandpaper tongue were quickly rebuilding the flames in her body. Every inch of skin craved his touch and only that one center was receiving it.

Her fingers fisted in his hair and tugged his head up, "Timmon, if you don't fuck me now, I am going to scream so hard that the roof will collapse."

His dark and lust-filled eyes focussed on her and he smiled again. Moving far too slowly for her peace of mind, the blunt head of his cock began to press for entrance. Relaxing the muscles that only wanted to grip him tight took most of her self-control, but she managed it until he was fully imbedded in her wet heat.

Then he stopped. He didn't move one inch. She waited for him to move, to do something.

He didn't.

"Listen mister, either you get your tight ass in gear, or I am gonna wiggle out of here and find my way down the mountain."

"You said you wanted me inside you." He was smug, but sweat dripped from his brow, the sign of his effort to hold himself still in her tight embrace.

“No, I said I wanted you to fuck me. This is just parking.” Her internal muscles fluttered around him, once, twice, and then she settled into a rhythm that had his eyes closing and a lot more sweat pouring off his head and body.

The spasms of sensation that her own body was generating were becoming more powerful with every contraction. Her hips were arching against him, grinding and twisting in an effort to gain the pleasure that they craved. Finally, she just hooked both thighs around him and locked her ankles behind his back. Using his body for leverage to drive him into her was the last straw.

He subdued her efforts simply by dropping his entire weight onto her. She was flattened and her grip on his hips loosened. “Why did you stop me? I was having fun.”

He didn’t answer, but leaned off her, snarled in her face and shoved his hips forward to show her that he was now in the game. He drew back almost to the point of her body releasing his cock, then thrust forward with a groan and another snarl.

His neck was arched back as he pounded into her, his face in a rictus of pain. His mouth opened and she saw his ‘at home’ teeth, delicately pointed fangs, much like his feline form.

Gathering an idea, she leaned forward and closed her own teeth across his neck. She bit down lightly and growled in her chest.

The response was immediate. He began to pound in and out of her with wild ferocity, snarling and growling at her as soon as she released his neck.

He moved in and out with deliberation and one of his hands reached across to press on her clit, she squealed in her release, and that was his final barrier.

His head dropped to her shoulder and his hips hammered into her with only one purpose, to seek his own release. Her head was tilted to the side and she welcomed the feel of his teeth on her neck when they came. And when he bit down, it was with the same triumphant growl that he had given at her acceptance.

He roared his release into the night, then slowly collapsed on top of her. He moved his limbs carefully so as not to crush her, but she was still a little stifled when he finally came to rest on her.

"So, Timmon. Are you sure you aren't gay?" The whisper in the dark was her last bit of defence against the feelings that she was having for this beautiful golden man.

With one hand on her ass, he rolled so that she was now on top. "Yeah, I am, and when I find the man of my dreams, your fantastic ass is history lady. I may only bother to fuck you twice a day."

Yep. It had to be love. Nothing else would make her feel this serene and giddy and insane all at the same time.



## Chapter Eleven

**B**lack sheets, warm skin, a stuffed gryphon, and a large cat licking her forehead.

"Go away Timmy! I wanna sleep." She rolled away and wrinkled her nose as he followed her, his small and raspy tongue insistently working at her face until she sat up. "Fine. I am up. Are you happy?"

He slowly shifted from feline to human and stretched as he finished his transformation. "Yes. I am happy, how are you this morning?"

She stretched under the sheets and took stock of her body. "A little stiff, a little sticky, and still giddy." Her hand came up and drew him to her by the expedience of grabbing his neck and tugging. Their lips met and clung, smiles making a more serious effort at necking awkward.

"You need to get up. One of your cousins is coming to teach you the basics of warding this morning." He stood, stretched again, and yanked the sheet off of her with no ceremony. "The

bathroom is this way."

The bathroom was built along the same Grecian lines as the rest of the house. Pools and waterfalls replaced the whole tub and shower assembly. "I thought cats didn't like water."

"Some do, some don't. Now get into the shower before I can't control myself." His erection led her mind straight into the gutter and she turned back to him with parted lips.

"Don't even think it. The Warder's are open minded, but catching us together screwing is gonna lead to all kinds of fun at family gatherings."

Wow. With all of his charms staring her in the face, she had forgotten about the company that was arriving shortly.

"Fine. But you owe me one." She stepped under a waterfall and was pleasantly surprised to find it warm. She reached for the soap and was unsurprised that he was there to hand it to her. He leaned calmly back against a nearby pillar and watched her soap and lather herself.

His eyes grew especially intent as her hands drew the soap across her breasts, building a lather of bubbles across her nipples. She then coasted the soap down her belly and between her thighs, searching out ever swollen fold of skin and making sure that it was squeaky clean.

With a smirk over his fixation, she turned her back to him and soaped her back and buttocks.

"Heads up!" She flipped the bar at him and was unsurprised when he caught it handily, though his eyes hadn't left their focus on her ass. Mechanically, not wanting to tease either herself or him anymore, she finished rubbing herself down and rinsed out her hair. The soap left her smelling vaguely of lavender and reminded her of the soap she had at home.

"Tim, do you have a towel?" She was as clean as she was gonna get with an audience watching. She walked toward him, water pooling around her feet with each step. A fluffy towel landed around her shoulders and she turned rapidly to look behind her. Too rapidly. If Tim hadn't been so close she would have hit the marble floor with a thud.

"Good morning, Rina!" Anryn was particularly cheerful as she followed after the couple. Tim was taking her back to the bedroom and finding some clothing for her. "Don't get dressed on my account. I wear clothing as minimally as possible."

She looked out the window at the dragon in the landing area. "Decklyn can't stand it. But, hey, I was raised by a dryad, so what are you going to do? Besides, he runs around naked all the time and I don't complain about it."

"The clothing isn't for your benefit, Anryn. I am just not a fan of Audrina being ogled by your husband." At last he located a fresh tunic and trousers for her. No underwear though.

Tugging her to her feet, he towelled Rina dry and dressed her like a life-sized doll.

"Good morning, Anryn. I'd hug you, but I was wondering if Timmon would like to do that for me as well?"

As he fussed with the line of her tunic he froze and blushed. "Aw, geez. Sorry, Rina. I panicked."

He stood and hugged her to him tightly. "For the first time ever, all I could think of was getting clothes on you."

"Fine. But can I get some breakfast? I haven't eaten anything since lunch yesterday."

"Breakfast will be in the courtyard in ten minutes. Enjoy your lessons."

Anryn was glowing this morning. She also looked like she was going to give birth to a small village. Rina went to her and hesitated.

Anryn closed the distance and hugged her, "Morning cousin. I confess, I thought that I would catch you and Timmon in bed, not the shower."

"He thought you might. Apparently he is very familiar with the Warder family."

"Yeah, he gets invited to all the parties is pretty aware of our quirky brand of humour."

Across the yard Decklyn was resuming his human form and he appeared to have pants on this time. "Can he transform with or without clothing?"

"Yep. He wore pants so that Timmon wouldn't launch him off the aerie."

The women giggled and made their way to an alcove in the courtyard with a table and a set of chairs.

"So, are you ready to begin basic training?"

"What?"

"To learn to use the talents that you have."

"Oh, the warding thing?"

"That's the one. It is quite useful actually. For example. This entire aerie is warded. Each support post on the outer edge contains a ward. There has not been one successful break in here in over five hundred years."

"So you can use them for more than self defence? Cool."

"Yeah, they can be useful. For example if Timmon ticks you off, you can ward portions of your anatomy from access." She giggled girlishly and Rina knew that this would be one of her best friends in the Warder world.

"Okay, explain the process from the beginning."

"Hmm...setting a ward..." She steepled her fingers together and spoke of anchoring, focussing, draining, expulsion, harnessing, and channelling. By the time she was done, Tim had brought out breakfast, and Rina was stunned.

"So, you mean that there are actually hundreds of uses for this particular talent? Holy crud." Toast and eggs were mechanically piled on her plate as her mind grappled with the enormity of

possibilities presented to her. She ate while deep in thought.

It seemed that she had fought her entire life for control and power over her environment, and she had had the power to do it all along.

Distantly she heard Anryn announcing that it was enough for now and that she would be back later, felt a hug and then was alone with Timmon again. The dragon's bulk retreated into the sky.

"I know that it is a lot to take in, Rina. You will get the hang of it in time." Tim's hand covered hers in a comforting grip.

He cleared his throat, "I also have to tell you something else, Rina."

She looked at him, unsure of his tone. "What else could there be?"

He gripped her hand tightly, "You're dead."

## Chapter Twelve

That got her attention. "Uh, Tim. That isn't funny."

"Oh shit. I didn't mean it to sound like that." He ran one hand through his hair in frustration. "I mean that the day that the shadows planned to drain you, they burned your house and created an obituary in the local and cross-country papers. According to official records, you died in a house fire that day."

Her house, her stuff, and dear god, her clothing! "Wait, so that means that I have absolutely nothing left of my life?"

"I am afraid not. We couldn't get back in time to save anything." He looked devastated. His handsome features collapsed in dismay.

Suddenly she found herself in the odd position of comforting him. "Hey, you saved my gryphon, or rather Timmy's gryphon, and that was really the only thing that I was worried about.

"Speaking of your sojourn as my cat, when did

you decide that you had to meet me in person? Or as a person I suppose I should say."

His smile bloomed across his face in an instant. "The day that you took me in and shared dinner with me instead of cracking open a can of tuna. Any woman who would treat a stray like family had to be worth knowing, and the longer I spent with you, the more I wanted to take advantage of your sense of humour and your hormonal surges."

"Ah that." She was embarrassed, but wasn't sure how much was showing on her face. "Well, my sex drive was never that intense."

He looked at her sceptically.

"No, really. It began to pick up when I picked up a stray." She shrugged. "I guess it was just having a warm body around." Rina looked at him dismissively. He didn't like that. Her face fought a smirk and she held her aura of unconcern.

Snarling at her, he grabbed her by the arms and hauled her to her feet. "It wasn't just any body. It was mine. As you are mine!" This was the first real flash of temper she had seen from him, and it's result was that he was pulling her to the bedroom by a grip on one wrist.

*Gryphon's are possessive by their very nature, and only select one mate in a very long lifetime.* The information rang in her head and she stood still as he stripped her of the clothing that he had tucked her into earlier, his own followed.

Not a word was spoken. He sat her on the edge



of the bed, his eyes molten. He knelt before her in silence and their eyes met and held. His hands took hers and stilled.

"As I am yours, so you are mine. Mated and bound." The words sprang into her mind.

"As you are mine, so I am yours. Mated and bound." He leaned forward to kiss her, and she met him halfway.

Energy swirled around them as he bore her back onto the bed. Their minds twisted together as they used their previous knowledge of the other's body to drive them higher.

Rina shoved him onto his back and rubbed her breasts against the flat planes of his chest. Her hands stroked his warm golden skin over and over as she luxuriated in the feel of his body under her. A soft noise crept out of her throat and she noted with amusement that she was purring in enjoyment at the feel of him. He was purring as well and it drove her on.

The hard and throbbing length of him was nudging between her folds and her hips shifted until his heat was teasing at her slick opening. She paused, savouring the sensations, then squirmed to rub against him.

His hands caressed her ribs, then stroked each breast pinching and flicking lightly at the tip. As her hips rocked back against him, coating his erection with her own slick juices, his hips began to rise and fall to her rhythm.

When she recognized the imminent tightening of her body in orgasm, she lifted herself and impaled her channel on his willing and ready member.

The slow thrust of his cock into her wet and willing cunt was enough. She screamed in release and kept gasping for air as he began to pump into her in earnest. His hands on her hips slammed her down to meet him and kept the waves of her orgasm flowing through her. Sparks of light sparked behind her eyes and she felt faint as he controlled her body.

In the blink of an eye he had withdrawn and flipped he to her stomach. She grunted and pushed back against him as he slid back into her with a groan of his own.

She moaned as his new angle stroked her g-spot. Her body began to shiver and he lay flat across her, using his knees for leverage and holding her hands with his own, anchoring her to the bed completely.

Every nerve was humming as the head of his cock stroked back and forth within her. Her body was held immobile and her focus was on the heat, friction and pleasure that it was experiencing. His body was pummeling more rapidly at hers and she knew he was close to culmination. She shrieked into the pillows as her own nerves lit on fire and flew apart with her second orgasm.

She felt teeth in her shoulder and shrieked

again as a second wave of fire ran through her body and shattered her into pieces. His own roar of satisfaction was not long in coming. He arched his back and thrust into her as his cock spewed it's payload into her belly. His body shook with the violence of his release and he slowly slumped onto her as he relaxed.

Long minutes ticked by as sweat dried on their bodies. He slid an arm under her and rolled to his side with her attached to him, spooning around her. He still had not slipped from her, and she revelled in the joining, even though it wouldn't last.

A small thought crept into her mind. She giggled. It wouldn't leave, so she giggled again.

"Rina, what is so funny?" The husky voice in her ear sent shivers through her.

"Well, you are obviously not gay."

"Right." He seemed resigned to whatever she would say next.

"And I am technically dead in the normal world?"

"Yep." He could tell where she was heading.

"That makes you a necrophiliac."

The slap on her ass was answer enough, and she settle further into his warm embrace. Her life was actually good.

Now, how to get down the mountain on her own was her next challenge. Anryn could probably help her with that.

## About the Author

A compulsive crafter and sucker for a 'happily ever after', I spend my time avoiding anything related to housework. My hobbies have included needlework, metalwork, henna tattoos and costume design. Oh yeah, and writing. I love to write. A rabid sci-fi buff and nerd to the core.