

A Nexus Xmas



Deciding what to get for her gnomes for their first Xmas was Abby's main concern, until the little buggers tricked her into animating the snow warriors that they had created in her yard. The new creatures rampage throughout the neighbourhood and molest the quiet homes of Sargent in an effort to strip away their holiday magic. Abby and the others must stop the snowmen while keeping the magic hidden from the average populace. When Yeti arrive to help, Abby is more than willing to accept whatever they will offer to stop the holiday horror of a giant Snow Beast created for the purpose of world domination. All this, and she still has to shop for the holidays, what is a Nexus to do?

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A Nexus Xmas

By

Viola Grace

Dedication

*To my Aunty Mary who lost her battle with
breast cancer this fall. Her love of life, joy, fun
and family will be an example I will try to live
up to for the rest of my life.
Merry Christmas, Mary.*

Chapter One

Abby frowned at the list in front of her and looked into her backyard at the snow castles that the gnomes had been building. The tiny drawbridges and catapults were hilarious if historically inaccurate. Xander had shown them websites that had pictures of snowmen and now they were off on a new tangent, creating a small white army.

What am I going to get the little ones for Xmas? They had already stolen everything that they wanted. It was hard to buy something for someone who knew how to get into any shop after hours without being detected. She drummed her fingers on the table and scowled. This was hard. She wanted to make it special for them—it was their first animated Xmas after all.

Gaia's presents were already wrapped and hidden from all of her creatures. Baby stuff was hard to defend when the gnomes were the same size. They wanted to do little fashion shows all the time. It was hard to keep a straight face and even

harder to keep re-wrapping the presents for Seesee to open on Gaia's behalf. Those chubby little hands had no fine motor control yet. The newest Montrose was cute as a button, no amount of effort was too much to give her a good first Xmas.

"Having trouble picking something?" Laura was bouncing the little princess on one hip.

"Yeah. After animating them, I never thought they would need anything else. Xmas never even came to mind."

"Well, if Verne hadn't had the idea to hold Xmas, then we would all have been scrambling to attend our own gatherings and everyone else's. With it being Xmas, we can all enjoy a big gift exchange and a nice night together."

Abby took little Gaia from her Auntie Laura. "And you, little missy, will have your first Xmas with family. I have all kinds of goodies for you. I love starting new holidays." Dancing around the room with the neighbourhood's favourite pretty princess was fun for everyone.

All too soon, the gnomes were piling into the living room, joining in the fun and dancing along with their Nexus.

Decorating the Xmas tree was rather easy. For the first time in Abby's life, she merely needed to sit back and let the critters have at it. The

gargoyles flew laps around the tree carrying the garland with them and the gnomes waited their turn to be hoisted into position to put on the ornaments.

Since the Summit, she had been inundated with gifts arriving in the mail. In the last few weeks, they had taken a holiday turn. Her tree was covered with gargoyles, gnomes, pentacles, blessing glyphs and some items that Abby couldn't name.

Xander was in charge of making sure that the magic that coated the gifts was not hostile. It was something that really kept him busy with the flood of presents that kept coming.

Steven Murdoch, the half-demon mailman, had taken to travelling with a small trailer attached to his delivery vehicle. Some days she could receive a pile that would have made her reel if she didn't have her friends around her to help her deal with all of it. Fortunately, she did.

Abby sipped at the hot cider that her gnomes brought her. She hadn't brought any new creatures to life in the last few months, but with Xander's help, she was still putting regular pulses of new magic into the world. It was the burden of a Nexus to keep producing magic, but with all of the support of the Oak Point Guard, they took the chore part out of it and wove it into her daily life.

Even the joy of watching her critters fight over the trimming of the tree was starting a charge of magic in her blood.

Tomorrow was Yule, the beginning of the holidays that would be celebrated in the neighbourhood. The neighbours would all gather at Seesee Montrose's house to light a log and watch it burn through the night and into the following morning.

Gaia was a little night owl and would definitely keep her mother alert the whole night long. Seesee's boyfriend, Miklos, was a vampire and he would be able to keep watch on the log and the little baby. The sun would be born again with their little family on watch, their first new year together.

Abby had already cleared it with them that she would leave after midnight. If she stayed awake too long, the magic suffered and no one wanted that. The New Year would be brought in with her fast asleep and she would wake to the new, shining sun.

For tonight, she was alone with Xander and her creatures. Her own weird little family starting the magic of the season.

Chapter Two

Harbinger smirked and addressed his siblings. “The warlock has given us this book and I have researched it online. Snowmen are fashionable and traditional this time of year.”

“This is true. I have seen it for myself. The people of Sargent have built them throughout the town,” Bitsy agreed.

“Then I propose that we build some for the Nexus that are really special.”

Out of his leather codpiece, he pulled a small pouch that the rest of the gnomes would recognize.

“I have kept these magically charged stones away from the Nexus. We should have enough here to make her her very own collection of snowmen.”

Mitsy pounded her gloves together. "Why are we going to play with this cold stuff? She has us, she doesn't need more."

"Because it is traditional to give and receive gifts at this time of year. The Nexus has made it clear that she doesn't want anything that we have stolen so that leaves us stuff to make." Harby finished the pronouncement with a nod of his bearded head.

"So what do you want us to do with the magic?" Bitsy was warming to the idea.

"Rub the bead to activate it and then put it into the head of the snowman. I have obtained carrots and coal for the eyes and noses. We can start immediately."

Skint was in charge of activating the beads due to his persistent state of undress. A naked gnome making snowmen wasn't a comfortable thought.

Fourteen snowmen were created, a lovely collection of ice with cheerful grins. Each with a magical bead inside them.

The gnomes gathered around and watched carefully, eye to eye with their creations. Nothing happened. The snowmen didn't move and soon, the gnomes turned in dejection.

"It didn't work. I thought it would work." Harby was disappointed as they filed inside to prepare dinner for the Nexus, the mermaid and that scary little baby.

They left their creations alone in the falling snow of the week before Xmas.

* * * *

A swirl of wild magic rippled through the yard, borne on the backs of snowflakes. It danced and twirled before resting on the source of the small pulse of Nexus magic. Each snowman was encased in crystalline armour of magic and slowly sprang into motion in the darkness of the night.

As a group, they looked at each other and then the snowy world that they were born into.

"We are alive."

"We are. Why are we alive?"

"I don't know."

"What shall we do?"

"Go exploring?"

"That sounds good. Where shall we go?"

"I feel a large quantity of ice over there." He gestured with a snowy arm and fingers sprouted from the round stub that he had been given.

Fighting their limbs free of the snow, feet appeared. Their bodies grew more streamlined. As one, they moved to the river with its thick layer of ice.

The darkness was their daylight. They danced and capered in the moonlight. Their limbs

elongated and bodies grew more graceful when one of them saw a glimmer in the night.

“Look. Look at that. Jewels in the night. I wonder what they are?”

When they all saw what their sibling had pointed out, they started to move rapidly through the snow.

It was beautiful. A collection of houses all covered with glowing jewels. The lights caused a warm sensation in the hearts of the snowmen and an idea began to form.

Being born of the same snow was a handy thing. They could see into each other’s minds and develop an idea more rapidly than any individual. They needed to come up with a plan to make their idea come to fruition.

This winter wonderland was far too beautiful to let it fade in the spring. Steps would have to be taken.

* * * *

Bitsy looked out the window at their snowman collection. It seemed that they were slightly out of formation from the day before, but not by much. Perhaps they were coming to life slowly.

“When do we tell the Nexus? About her present, I mean.”

Harby looked thoughtful. "Well, they are out there right now so perhaps today would be a good day? It isn't like we can hide them. I just wish that they were able to move."

"Well, Harb, I think they may be picking it up slowly. They have shifted since we came in last night."

"Really? That's fantastic. Let's make her a card and give them to her." Harby was suddenly very enthusiastic. He had been practicing spelling his full name and loved a chance to do it.

Bitsy merely shook his head in amusement.

Together, the gnomes prepared a card and signed it, one by one. They finished Abby's breakfast preparation and put the card on her place mat. Now, they just had to wait for her to finish snuggling with the warlock and she would get her breakfast and her Xmas present.

* * * *

Waking up in Xander's arms was Abby's favourite time of the day. She snuggled back against him and sighed happily. "Is there anything better than a snowy day?"

"Only unlimited time with you, Abby." His breath was warm in her ear and she shivered a little.

She heard him sniff the air and smiled. His next words were unromantic but not unexpected. "Are they making bacon?"

"Yes. But as always, I get first dibs."

"Of course, but the bacon will keep. I have other things I would rather keep warm right now." He kissed his way down her neck leaving her all goosepimply in reaction.

"And what would those other things be?"

She laughed as he rolled her to her back. In the long minutes that followed, he showed her those other things and a few that caught her by surprise.

"I love snowy mornings with you, but I think we should hit the shower and then grab breakfast. The gnomes will only wait so long before setting up for lunch."

"Then let's not waste a moment." Spry and chipper, Xander popped out of her bed like it was a toaster. A muttered spell and wave of his hand and they were both daisy fresh and ready for the day. Clothing and all.

"Have I mentioned how much I love you?"

"Keep it up, dear Nexus. I can listen to that all day long." He chuckled and escorted her into her dining room.

The dining room was a new addition. The house had put it on the last time she had powered it up with overflow and Abby wasn't complaining.

Xander tucked her chair in under her and soon, the gnomes were trouping in with the piping-hot food in their grasp. The gargoyles flew in the napkins and soon, breakfast was served.

There was a card next to Abby's place, but as soon as she reached for it, the gnomes waved her off. They wanted her to open it after her breakfast.

Eating bacon everyday was not good for her, but the gnomes rationed it out and her latest medical tests indicated that her diet was fine. Which was good, it was one of her favourites. They had tried to switch her to soy bacon at Laura's request, but Abby didn't like it and they returned to the regular kind with only the occasional foray into turkey bacon.

The card beckoned to her as only a secret could. She finished her food quickly and then turned to the mysterious folded paper.

Dear Nexus. We made you an army of snowmen. They have magic in them and can be your snow gnomes. We love you lots, Bitsy, Mitsy, Harby, Skint, Splint, Ruffles.

"Aw. Isn't that cute, Xander? They made me snowmen."

Her boyfriend stilled and an appalled look crossed his features. "What do they mean there is magic in them?"

Bitsy was standing nearby. He mimed putting something into the snow and then rolling it.

"You put something magical into the snowmen?" She was struggling to think what they could have put in that held magic.

Harby showed her the pouch where glass beads had been kept at the Magical Summit.

Xander cursed. "Yesterday was the eve of Yule. The snow that fell will make it very difficult to remove the magic from those snowmen. They are functionally immortal if we don't pull that magic out."

"You are kidding right? I can pull any kind of magic."

"Not holiday magic. It is not meant to be held by any one person. It starts falling at midnight on Yule and keeps coming down until New Year's." Xander took her hand in his. "You have no power over that magic. It is true wild magic and you can't manipulate it."

"Whoa. When were you planning to tell me that I am not all powerful?" With her lips twitching, she tried to stifle a smile. "Relax, Xander. I am sure that everything will be fine. Now, let's go look at my snowman army."

The gnomes capered in front of her, eager to show her what they had made. The gargoyles grabbed her wrap and draped it over her before

she left the house. Xander was on his own in the icy December weather.

"Oh my. They are quite something." Abby counted slowly and watched the heads of the snowmen rotate to look at her. Their black eyes were cold. It was a cold that went beyond the coal that had been used to create them. The magic that covered them was icy. A frost coating of magic that defied her brief attempt to pull it into her.

"Fourteen? That is quite a few. They all seem very well constructed. Thank you." She leaned down to hug all of her critters, then moved inside with a sigh of relief.

Xander hugged her close so the gnomes wouldn't overhear. "What do you think?"

"That if they move much faster, they would be dangerous. Good thing they are so sluggish."

"Only during the day. The night is their time to move, when the magic flows freely."

"Should we cancel Seesee's?"

"And miss the Yule celebration? No way. We will only be gone a few hours and be on guard against whatever the magic will come up with. In the meantime, I will put some effort into finding a solution for this problem." He gave her a light squeeze and let her go. "I will pick you up at four. We need to get there before the sun goes down."

"I'll be ready and the gnomes are staying home."

He looked a little surprised. "Why is that?"

"Gaia freaks them out. It is either her size or her talent, but they are always on guard around her. Now that she has started crawling, they are completely icked out."

Arm in arm, they walked to the front door where Xander got his coat on.

"I will pick you up at four. Be prepared for Verne to sing carols. He has quite the dramatic voice when he half-shifts." A quick kiss and he was gone, leaving her to her imagination and her wondering about werewolves and Xmas carols.

Chapter Three

Abby spent her afternoon updating the Nexus website and chatting on the forums. New magic users were finding the site all the time and they needed help.

The enchantments that they had guarding the site from outside influence were so thick that, at times, Abby was shocked that anyone could get through, but they did. She had spoken to healers, magicians, seers and dozens of others since it was up and running. To say nothing of the half bloods that were coming to the site in droves. With a few complications, the Halloween event at Hotel Spectre had been successful, but the danger that had been posed by the pure bloods was something that could not be ignored.

Some arrogant bastards in the magical community had tried to assassinate the first group of Halflings to gather in their precious hotel not

realizing that the first Nexus was in the basement and sending an army to defend the Halflings' right to a magical education and understanding of their talents.

Terranor was a well-guarded secret and only her extensive family knew of her existence. The first Nexus on record had married and had a normal life in a bubble outside of time. It was not a life that Abby aspired to, but it seemed to work for the elder Nexus.

With some effort on her family's part, they had even gotten Terranor online to counsel some of the new arrivals into their community. Running a wifi link through a time bubble was tricky, but someone managed to get it going.

Terranor was, also, getting into creating new creatures and they often communicated via magic on the logistics of animating new beings. One at a time was the best thought. No flocks of anything that could be captured or abused by those seeking to take their magic by force. Abby's gnomes had been her creations long before they started to move and they were now independent of her original magic. The gargoyles were almost to that stage. They still needed booster shots now and then.

Signing off, Abby gasped at the time and sprinted to her room. Xander may have dressed

her, but he always neglected the underwear. He didn't forget, he was just optimistic.

A long blue gown that had been a gift from her newest favourite designer, Galfor, seemed appropriate. The goblin adored payment in magic and loved having the Nexus wearing her gowns. She was now so busy that she could pick and choose her clients, but she always had time for the Nexus or her Oak Point Guard.

She was just fastening some elegant boots that, oddly enough, did not clash with the gown when the ring of a doorbell alerted her creatures to someone at the door. Xander insisted on ringing, even if he was expected. It was safer, he said, than being mobbed by gnomes. They loved Abby and were fiercely protective and anyone entering her territory should be aware of the Guard Gnomes.

She quickly ran a brush through her hair and then met her gentleman caller at the door. "How do I look?" She twirled a little and laughed as he caught her.

"Lovely. Do you have a wrap?"

Harby brought it to her and Buffy and Firefly placed it on her shoulders. They were only going two houses down, so Abby skipped a coat in favour of the thick velvet. She did tug on some elbow-length gloves that Bitsy brought to her and then nodded her readiness.

"Shall we?" Taking his arm, she walked daintily across the ice and snow, kicking up little puffs of the stuff as she went. "It's a beautiful day. I can believe in the wild magic easily on an afternoon like this."

"You should believe it in. Your talent is made of it. You filter magic, but this power is already here in its complete form. It doesn't want to be controlled or channelled and it will fight you every step of the way."

"That was a little dark for such a beautiful day. Do you want to get me a puppy so you can kick it?"

His laugh echoed through the night as they climbed the stairs to Seesee's door. "Just keeping you from getting too enamoured with things you can't control."

"Does that include you?"

"No. I am under your little thumb." He raised her hand to kiss it and knocked softly at the door. Seesee opened it with a grin, her hair writhing wildly and beckoned them to enter.

Miklos was on one of the couches with Gaia in his arms. She seemed to be staring him down. Laura and Verne were on a love seat, their hands together and a look of ease on their faces.

They were recently engaged and mired in the details of a wedding between two species, so it had been decided that they would get married on

the coast of Labrador. So that the landed werewolves and the merfolk could get together.

"Hello, sweetness." Abby's voice broke Gaia's concentration and she immediately held out chubby arms to her. Lifting the baby was not as easy as it had been when she had first come to them, but her cheerful joy lifted Abby's heart every time.

"Thanks, Abby. I think she was winning." Miklos rubbed his eyes and looked ruefully over at the happy baby. "She blinked when we started but not after that."

They smiled at the vampire's discomfort, but soon, Seesee was laying out snacks and they were talking about the logistics of the wedding and going over the very long year that they had had.

Bringing new magic into the world and guarding the one who did it was not a task for the faint of heart.

Long into the night, they talked, laughed and enjoyed being together. Abby was smiling at the joy that filled her and she sent several magic bursts that night, propelled by the feeling of being with friends that she would have chosen in any life.

Verne did have a lovely singing voice, though the half-wolf countenance was a little off putting.

* * * *

Only a few houses down, the snowmen came to an agreement, created the weaponry that they would need and set out to bring to fruition an eternal winter.

Chapter Four

Nothing broke one's sense of warm snugliness more than hearing, "Your snowmen were on the news. They froze someone in a solid cocoon of ice."

"It's a bad habit of yours to watch the news before you are awake, Xander. Give me a minute and I will prove you are insane."

Abby yanked the covers over her ears and tried to roll over. He stopped her by making the covers disappear. "Bastard."

"You have met my parents and they are married. Now get up. We need to get to the bottom of this and we have to examine that poor frozen man."

If Xander was going to insist she get up, he could at least dress her. She grumped into the shower and had a quick scrub. She was towelling her hair dry as she walked back to her room and

still muttering to herself. Her clothes were laid out, so she jerked on the underwear, which let her know that the gnomes had done it.

The warlock had his panties in a twist.

Her gnomes had oatmeal on the table today. When Xander stayed over, they alternated good breakfasts with healthy ones, just to throw him off.

Abby scowled and munched her gray paste with a distinct lack of enthusiasm. They tried to make it tastier by adding chocolate chips and blueberries, but it was no plate of bacon.

"Come on, Abby. We have to look at the man who was frozen." Xander was on his feet and he had her jacket in hand.

"Fine, but my hair is going to freeze."

He waved his hand and it was bone dry.

"Nice trick. Let's move." She grabbed her jacket and stomped into her boots at the front door.

His car was waiting, warm and ready. They made quick time to the street in Sargent where the frozen man was making quite the stir.

The fire department was there, trying to cut him loose, but Abby could see with her inner eye that he was bound, not by ice but by magic. It was nothing like she had ever seen before. The snowmen were gently crusted, but this was a thick mass of magic that was as clear and hard as the ice that held him.

Tears clogged her voice. "We have to get him out."

"We can't. He is safe enough for now. Nothing can be done to save him, but nothing can be done to harm him." Xander turned the car back to Oak Point Way.

"If we destroy the snowmen, will that eradicate the ice?"

"It should. They are the binding magic after all."

"Why him? Why did they attack him?"

"He was defending his Christmas lights. There were, also, several other thefts of lights and generators. Whatever they are up to, it isn't good."

They were on the short span between their street and the main town when a snowman darted across the road in front of them. It disappeared into the woods, but it left Abby shaken.

"I thought they were slower in sunlight."

"They should be. It must be your magic that is speeding them up." He turned carefully on the slippery road and soon was in front of her house. "I am going to contact the specialists and see if they will come to help. If not, I will try to get what information I can from them. I will see you in three hours, alright?"

"Alright. I will give the gnomes a pep talk and try to keep them inside. Same for the gargoyles. I

don't want them out there with those psycho snowmen in the yard."

"I doubt very much that they are still in your yard, but it is a good precaution." He leaned over and they kissed. "See you in a few hours and don't do anything reckless. I will be back as soon as I can."

"Back? From where?"

"The consultation with the experts. I have to transport myself to them. They won't talk over the mirrors."

"Okay. I won't do anything stupid and you will get back as quickly as you can? See you soon."

Abby hopped out of the car and held the door until her feet stabilized on the ice. Sliding her feet in a skating motion, she made her way to her door. As Xander entered his house, she had a feeling of foreboding. The gnomes were usually pretty good about keeping the walkways clear.

The house was silent. She took a deep breath and called for her creatures. "Everybody, front and centre."

It took a lot longer than it should have, but they came to her in the front room. All the gnomes but none of the gargoyles. "Where are Buffy, Angel and Firefly?"

Shaking with terror, Bitsy climbed into her arms and directed her to the patio door. He pointed up into the large oak near the riverbank

and Abby's heart almost stopped. A lump of ice was in the tangle of limbs where the gargoyles were making their nest. If she looked carefully, she could see her creatures inside.

"Oh no."

A quick survey of the yard showed her only one snowman, but he had a bazooka made of ice and it was aimed at the door between her yard and Laura's. Darting to the phone, Abby called the mermaid and she shook as the machine picked up. If Laura was home, she would have answered. Verne's cell phone gave her the same response, nothing.

"Oh hell."

She tried Seesee's number and was even more freaked out. Seesee always answered, even if the baby was napping or she was on a date. Gaia could sleep through anything.

Abby quickly tried to see the gorgon with her inner eye and to her horror, her energy was almost to Abby's back gate. Abby was halfway to the sliding door when her friend appeared in the fenced doorway of the backyard and was frozen in place while holding her infant.

The Nexus fell to her knees and cried.

For the first time since they were created, her creatures stood back and watched her, guilt written on their faces. They had created the

snowmen and the hostile little bastards were freezing the people that she loved and trusted. They couldn't do anything.

For the first time since Abby had come into her powers, she was completely helpless. It was enough to send her screaming for her mother.

She was out of her depth.

* * * *

Xander sent a flare and followed it closely with a message. When he received the response, he tightened his parka and stepped through the ice mirror that he kept for exactly this purpose.

"Clan leader, I request an audience." He bowed low to the furry being that sat on a low cushion in front of him.

The yeti clan leader spoke, "Be at ease and be welcome. We will have tea and then we will speak of your reason for coming to our land of snow."

As impatient as he was, Xander could not flout tradition. The yeti were temperamental and only their traditions kept them civilized. It was not a good idea to disrupt their careful strictures.

"Tea sounds wonderful. Thank you, clan leader."

"You are welcome, warlock. Now sit and tell me of your family."

Their first hour passed quietly with the polite exchanges of family status and weather reports. Finally, the leader looked up and asked, "Now, what brings you here today?"

"There has been a development on Oak Point Way. Snowmen have been created with the Nexus magic at their heart and a coating of wild magic."

The elder frowned, showing his teeth. "That isn't good."

"I realise that. I have come to request help in removing the threat."

"What have they done?"

"Stolen Christmas lights, generators and frozen some hapless human in a casing of wild magic and ice."

It was odd to see a yeti whistle in surprise, but he did it without any self-consciousness. "Very serious. I will send Rath and his wife to help you. She is an amazing tracker and will be able to assist you in locating their nest."

"You think they are nesting for a purpose?"

"If they have begun to attack humans, they have a purpose."

He raised his head and roared. A young yeti scuttled into the room and waited for an order. "I want Rath and Gralith here as quickly as possible. They were to spend the day at the hot springs so start looking there. It is a matter of urgency."

At the releasing nod from the clan leader, the young one ran out one of the cave entrances.

"Now we wait, Xander. I only hope that there is time."

* * * *

Abby didn't know what to do. Huddled on the floor with her gnomes, she could only shake in terror and watch the snowmen begin to gather in her backyard.

With all of her friends presumed frozen, the only hope she had was that Xander would get some help. She held her gnomes to her as the sun slowly made its way across the sky. A sharp rapping on her glass door made her look up.

The frozen grimace of that snowman chilled her blood. It gestured for her to come out.

She shook her head.

Two more snowmen joined him, including the one with the bazooka. The armed creature took aim and fired. The blast of magic went through the window and struck Bitsy and Mitsy. Another shot took out Skint and Harby. The third iced over Splint and Ruffles. The last shot was amazing because the gnomes were not even in the line of sight for the launcher. The ice and magic travelled around a corner to do its damage.

The snowman gestured again.

Abby bundled up and went out to her doom. All she could do was stall until Xander came to her rescue. She hoped that whatever he had in mind was enough to blow these snowmen to hell.

Chapter Five

The snowman army marched Abby across the river and through the woods. Whatever they had been building was in those woods and it was big.

“Holy crap.”

A fourteen-foot-high snow warrior stood in a well-trampled grove. A few unlucky witnesses to the work of the snowmen stood encased in the same magical ice that had struck the people of Sargent foolish enough to defend their Xmas decorations.

The lights and mechanical devices were wired to the snow warrior, ready to infuse him with life. Generators stood by to power the lights and a podium had been set up with another set of wires. When they prodded her to it, she assumed that it was her stage.

“Fine. I am here. What do you want me to do?”

They handed her a schematic that bore similar handwriting to those of her gnomes. It depicted a stick figure with its hands on two circles on the podium. There was a fuzzy halo around the hands and Abby had to guess that it was her magic.

"I am not doing anything until you free those people and any others that you have coated with ice magic."

She crossed her arms and they prodded her with the bazooka that she used to think was so cute. Not so cute after she watched it freeze her friends.

Where is Xander?

* * * *

The instant that Xander had his yeti with him and they were briefed on the outing, they were on their way. He searched the area for Abby's power signature and found it faint and nowhere near her house.

"We have to hurry. They have taken her!" He was frantic. The gargoyles were iced into their trees, gnomes were frozen, as were all of the inhabitants of Oak Point Way. Even little Gaia had been frozen in her mother's arms.

But there was no trace of Abby.

Where can she be?

"Be calm, Xander. We will find her and we will deal with this problem." Rath's furry hand clapped him on the shoulder.

"I thank you for coming so quickly, but I don't even know where to start looking." It was hopeless. With all of the magic in the ice, he couldn't even sense her.

"I think they went this way, across the ice." Gralith lifted her head and sniffed the air. "Magic and human. That must be your Nexus."

"Let's go then."

"You will need to dress properly, Xander. We are built for the snow. You are not."

Rath took his weapon and strapped it to his hip. His wife did the same. They were ready for battle. Xander quickly put on his parka and gloves, stomped into his boots and picked up his own curse-breaker blade. He nodded curtly and they left his home to pursue his love.

Gralith led the way. She was the best tracker that their clan had to offer and Rath had been lucky to win her. She cruised through the snow like a spirit, barely even leaving a footprint on the surface. Xander felt clumsy in comparison.

An impulse made him grab Harby as they left the yard. If their efforts worked, it would be nice to see the little critter come back to himself. The ice made him heavier than Xander remembered,

but if he could see him pop out of that shell, he wouldn't mind the weight.

Moving silently across the frozen expanse of the river, they followed the obvious path of the snowmen marching Abby through the woods. The little buggers didn't leave tracks, but Gralith followed Abby's trail as if it was neon.

They were about fifty meters into the forest when Xander got his wish. What had been a solid gnome was now a wriggling body of flesh and leather. He put the gnome down and looked him over. There was no visible damage and Harby looked more pissed than wounded. He straightened his little shoulders and took his place in their stalking parade.

While Xander was delighted that those affected were now released, he didn't know why and that worried him.

* * * *

The stunned humans were released and they quickly ran back the way that they had come. The instant that the shells shattered, part of Abby started to breathe again.

The circles on the drawing translated into disks of metal. The instant that she touched them her flesh fused to the substance. "Oh crap." She

tugged lightly, but being Canadian, knew better than to yank herself free. Her skin would eventually warm the metal enough to release her. That or she would be turned into one of those wind-up, clapping monkeys. At least she had options.

She looked again at the snow beast that they had created. A warrior designed to turn the world into ice and snow. It had been created by hands that were in favour of the Roman archetype, breastplate and all.

The bazooka prodded her again and a grumpy snow face jerked its carrot nose to the empty space formerly occupied by the humans. They had done what she wanted. Now, it was their turn to get something.

It was really ingenious, their design. It would take her personal markings off the magic and make it more difficult to recall. Of course, if she were encased in ice as soon as the warrior was moving, that would solve that little problem. Abby was pretty sure that it was their little snow-brained plan—freeze her as soon as they were done with her.

Another prod and she couldn't stall any longer. She began to trickle power into her hands and the instant that it flowed, she was in a dancing forest of lights. Batteries began to supplement her power and she could feel it pooling in the snow warrior.

He started to move and the excitement of the watching snowmen rippled through the clearing seconds before her cavalry arrived. She was so surprised by the yeti rushing into the clearing screaming, “The noses—get the noses!” that she sent a burst of power through the plates holding her hands.

It was enough to wake the warrior.

Ponderous and clumsy, as if he had just woken from a heavy sleep, the warrior pointed at one of the yeti and fired off a blast of ice. The yeti ducked and swung in under the snow warrior’s arm, a blade flashing and the warrior stumbled back.

Abby could only stand and watch while the battle raged around her. Each nose ripped from the snowmen rendered them immobile. Harby was up and moving, reaching into the snowmen’s heads to retrieve the magic hidden there. She counted as he smashed his little fist through the heads and sobbed in relief when the snowmen stayed down. With the yeti now focussed on the warrior, her little one took out the army that he had helped create. Xander’s hands covered hers and her relief was complete.

“It’s okay, Abby. We are here, it’s under control.” He tugged lightly on her hands. “You seem to be stuck.”

"I am frozen to the plate. I think it is something a little worse than metal bonding. I am going to need a lot of heat. And you are going to need to duck. The warrior is coming this way." She could only bend her knees as the immense arm swung toward her.

Xander whipped a sword out of what seemed to be nowhere and it cleanly sliced off the arm. Separated from the body it exploded in a burst of fine powdery crystals. They floated lightly onto Abby's head and arms so that she could calmly witness what happened next.

The arm grew back and swung again. Xander sliced again and it grew back again.

It was endless. Abby was stuck frozen to the block and eventually she began to notice a tug at her hands. It was magic, pulling the power from her in tiny increments, magnified by the Xmas lights and car batteries.

That was enough. Pain lanced through her as she pulled the wild magic into her. It wasn't comfortable, but she got used to it, pulling the magic into her in tiny bursts. The snow warrior was slowing in his regeneration.

Abby pulled in as much as she could, but it was the yeti that did him in. The larger one held out its hands and launched the smaller one at the warrior's head. With a cry of triumph, it grabbed the head and dissected it in seconds. It held a

hairy hand aloft with a frozen carrot in its hand and howled.

Abby's hands came free and she stumbled back. Xander caught her in the manner of swashbucklers throughout history. He gave her a kiss that should have melted the snow around them, holding her until two throats cleared and Harby was tapping her leg for attention.

"Um. Hello. I'm Abby. Nexus. Nice to meet you." Xander righted her and the yeti shook her hand.

"I am Rath and this is my wife, Gralith. We are experts at snow-related magic." The voice from the taller of the two was deep and urbane. The voice of an Oxford professor.

"Apparently. It seems you knew just what to do with the psychotic snowmen."

Gralith laughed. Her voice surprisingly light for a seven-foot female. "It happens all the time."

Chapter Six

“Gralith, Rath, I would like you to stay for our Xmas feast. We are all getting together at Oak Point Way to have a potluck. We all bring a dish and celebrate whatever holiday we choose.”

The couple looked at each other and a silent communication ran between them. They were all making their way back to Oak Point Way, the tracks that Abby had left coming in easy to follow going back home.

Gralith finally answered, “Certainly. We have no plans for the next few days, but do you have a place for us to stay? We need slightly cooler quarters to be comfortable.”

“I am sure my house can arrange something. It’s even given my gnomes rooms of their own when they choose to stay indoors.” Abby was chatty. Dazed and chatty. The wild magic was burning through her like a bad case of heartburn. Funny, before today, she had never met a magic

she didn't like. The gargoyles were flying in front of them, as they reached the river, the pitter-patter of little feet reached her ears. Bitsy, Mitsy, Ruffles, Skint and Splint were making their way to her in rapid order.

She fell to her knees on the ice and hugged them all. Harby got two because she hadn't greeted him earlier. Then the gargoyles landed on her, so she ruffled their hair and stroked their wings. "Yes. I am fine and yes, the snowmen are gone. You are all restricted to best behaviour for the rest of the week."

Another group hug ensued and even Xander joined in. The ice gave an ominous creak, so they decided to take their reunion to the safety of Abby's backyard.

They broke from a group into a line and made their way safely across. Abby hugged Seesee and cooed at Gaia. "I am so glad that you two made it out of the ice alright. I was worried."

"Don't worry about us. I insulated her with my hair before the blast hit. I would worry more about Laura. She was in her pool when they got her and fit to spit when the ice let her out. Verne was jammed in the hot tub so he melted out but couldn't help." Seesee's hair picked the baby up and tilted her until she giggled.

"Are you still coming for Xmas tomorrow?"

"Despite everything, yes. I wouldn't miss Gaia's first Xmas for the world. I think she is getting close to talking, too. It could be a momentous day for everyone."

The baby chuckled and clapped her hands.

"I invited the yetis that took care of the snowmen. Now, I just need some gifts and the last few days of weirdness have given me an idea."

Time was short, but Abby knew what she wanted to do. "Can you watch the gnomes for me? I don't want them peeking before I get it boxed up."

"They seem to be obsessed with getting all of the snow out of your yard, but I'll supervise them. If they get rowdy, I'll point the baby at them. They are terrified of her."

Gaia let out one of those high-pitched squeals that only a happy baby could manage.

"Do what you have to. Keep them busy. I have presents to make. Thanks, Seesee." Chuckling evilly, Abby sprinted to her craft room and closed the door. It was time to create something special.

* * * *

Xander glanced at Abby's craft-room door for the thousandth time. She had been in there for hours and he was getting worried. When a burst of animating energy came through the walls and was

immediately followed by cursing, he knew that she was done.

There was the noise of stumbling, falling and a bit of slamming before Abby made her re-entry into her living room. "Oh. Hiya, Xander, Gralith, Rath. Nice to see you all again."

As Abby cuddled against his body, he smiled. The magic humming off her was incredible and completely under her control.

"What were you up to, sweetheart?" He nuzzled at her hair and she sighed before relaxing against him.

"Fixing up something special for my little critters. They have learned the lesson that they can't simply shove magic into something and have it turn out the way they planned." Abby chuckled. "That's my job."

Rath looked at Abby and asked her a question. "I have been hearing Xander and others talking about Xmas. What is it? I have heard of Christmas, Kwanza, Chanukah and Yule, but never Xmas."

Abby chuckled, "It was Verne's idea to combine all the gift giving into one big celebration with no particular name. Xmas. As in X marks the spot. A treasure of giving and receiving on this one spot."

"Ah. That is a very interesting idea." Rath nodded wisely and cuddled up with his wife. "Thank you for the accommodation, Nexus."

"It wasn't me. It was the house. Is the temperature to your liking?" She stretched her legs and nodded thanks to Harby as he brought her a snack. She inclined her head to the yeti and the gnome nodded.

She waited until her guests had been served and then tucked in to the sandwich.

"This is quite nice. Do they handle all your food?"

"Most of it. Don't worry. They stopped drugging my guests months ago." Abby laughed as the yeti froze with their food halfway to their mouths.

Gralith was appalled. "You are joking."

"There was someone trying to kill me at the time. The gnomes thought I would be safer if everyone around me was unconscious. They were right, but it was still disconcerting. They have ceased the practice." She waited until they resumed eating and then returned to her own food.

"Will you tell us this tale? I am always interested in stories of the modern world." Gralith leaned forward, her full attention on Abby.

Rath explained his wife's fascination. "She is our storyteller and it is her responsibility to keep the young ones apprised of changes in the world around us. Shangrila is a quiet place and the stories are our entertainment."

Abby checked the time and smiled. "The others may fill you in on some places that I was not, but for me, this is how it started. I was moving in to Oak Point Way and suddenly the boxes that I was lifting started to fly out of the truck on their own. I needed them to move quickly and they did. After the moving truck had left, I was exhausted and I met the first of my new neighbour. Laura almost seemed green in the light and she helped me to my feet..."

Xander smiled at Abby's tale and the rapt expressions of the yeti. The others would be arriving soon and it was almost time to party.

Chapter Seven

The gnomes were in charge of the bar, so spiced wine and mulled cider flowed freely. Laura brought salted fish, Verne cured venison. Seesee and Miklos carried in fresh fruit and pastries from her shop. Xander was in charge of the turkey and if there was a little magic involved in the preparation, no one was complaining.

Abby smashed the potatoes herself, venting her frustration at being helpless into the defenceless cooked tubers. Those fluffy white vegetables never even knew what hit them.

Everyone steered clear of the kitchen while she worked to add garlic, cream and butter to the mix. She needed a moment of solitude and she got it.

Wild magic was now on her hit list. She hated it with a passion that she was only now beginning to discover. She had been growing a little arrogant. She knew it. But to have her friends and critters

threatened brought home how vulnerable she could be. She didn't like it.

Her potatoes didn't need to carry hostility, so she took a deep breath and concentrated on the reason that the food was being prepared. Friends, her adopted family. Xander, the man she loved. The gnomes, the gargoyles and the little surprises that she had placed under the tree.

Her table would have groaned if it hadn't been supported by the magic she imbued into it. The gnomes had prepared the side dishes with the exception of the garlic mashed potatoes. They were her favourite and she loved making them. With the last of the dishes in place, she called out, "Let the first annual Oak Point Way Xmas celebration begin!"

Everyone tramped to the table and piled their plates high. Laughter, stories of the gnomes and their fear of babies, tales of the Magic Summit and of holidays past with family all lit the air around the table.

Abby could feel the magic of the holiday and she let it wash over her. This was the wild magic that she could not control. She examined it closely and found she didn't want to. It seemed that anyone could generate magic, they just had to give in to the holiday spirit. Whatever that holiday was.

The presents piled under the tree beckoned after some cheesecake and coffee. Some of them danced.

Abby handed each of her creatures a box that contained a traditional Xmas gift—clothes. They all had a new outfit of standard appearance to wear. Trousers, boots, tunics and hats. Unisex for boys and girls but no two were alike. It would have been easier on the guests if the gnomes hadn't immediately shucked their old clothing and put on the new, right in the middle of the living room.

The gargoyles were given the softest fabrics to line their nests with—they didn't wear clothing beyond small togas.

Now it was time for her to give the gift that would give her some peace of mind. Each of the gnomes received a box and they had to open them together.

At her signal, they opened the boxes. Six-inch elves popped out dressed in blue and white. "My dearest creatures, you are my first and most detailed creations, but you cannot be trusted to enact good judgement. These little guardians will follow you each, girls with girls and boys with boys. When you are doing something stupid, they will come and tell me. They have a great deal of intelligence and even more judgement. They will

tell you when you should not do something and tell me if you do it.”

The elves stood solemn and dignified. Right up until the moment that little Gaia squealed and lunged for them. Then it was all elves for themselves.

At the sudden turn of events, the gnomes sat back and looked pleased. It was obvious that they were happy with the gift just for the effect of distracting the infant.

“Well, Seesee, since the critters are taken care of, how about opening some of Gaia’s presents for her?” Abby snuggled next to Xander’s legs and gestured for the gnomes to start the present shuttling.

With the presents piling up, Abby smiled at the surprise in the yeti’s eyes as they each received a gift. They drew the items from the boxes and looked surprised.

“I do not believe that giving a blade severs a friendship. They are curse breakers. One touch and the blade will shatter the most basic of magics.” Abby held up one finger. “But only if you will it to. Otherwise, it is a regular knife.”

The group at large oh’d and ah’d. It was like a weird Tupperware party. The other presents that she had prepared were opened and some admiration and laughter was shared equally.

Abby turned to the pile of presents on her left and began opening one after another. A Galfor gown from Laura, matching shoes and wrap from Seesee, a leather jacket from Verne, five bottles of very old wine from Miklos and an empty set of journals from Xander.

Xander leaned over to whisper in her ear. "As the new Nexus, you have to record as much of your journey as you can. These journals are from the Council. Harby's little guardian over there has the present from me."

The tiny creature had to enlist help to drag the jewellery box over to Abby, but he managed it. Abby took it gratefully and realized that the room had fallen silent. Everyone was looking.

She untied the bow and pried the box open. Inside was a collection of jewels that made her heart stop. They were lovely—a Victorian style of drapes and drops in a necklace with brilliant blue opals in place.

"I didn't know that blue opals existed."

Seesee was leaning into Xander's lap to see the contents of the box over Abby's shoulder. "They don't anymore. There was one deposit and the majority of the deposit was shattered while excavating. This is the last set of blue opal jewellery in existence."

Abby lifted the necklace up and draped it around her neck. Xander obligingly fastened it for her.

“What makes them so rare?”

Laura came over to admire the necklace. “They are thought to have occurred where a dragon imploded. It doesn’t happen often.”

Abby put on the earrings and bracelet. “That is probably a good thing. Thank you, Xander. Now open your present.”

He tore open the wrapping with the enthusiasm of a five year old and blinked in shock at the contents. A chain mail shirt, gleaming with magic enough to power a city lay in a nest of tissue paper.

Abby climbed up into his lap and kissed him, pushing the present aside. “For my knight in shining armour. If you are going to run to my rescue, I want you safe.”

She tangled her fingers in his hair and held him still while she ravaged him to hoots and hollers from the audience. Abby sighed and rested against him when the applause broke out.

She climbed off his lap and collected a box that was sitting under the tree. “Alright everyone, to the window. I have one more treat for today.”

Abby wandered to the door and opened the box. Thirty tiny baubles with wings were inside

the box covered with glitter. With a touch of magic, they lifted out of the box to float and flutter around the neighbourhood.

They were set to explode into glitter at random intervals, so Abby ran inside to watch with the others once they were all released.

One by one, they exploded into sparks and fireworks, flitting and popping into nothing.

As her friends laughed and pointed at the display, she looked around. Her friends, her creatures, the man she loved.

This was truly the best Xmas ever.

About the Author

Viola Grace was born in Manitoba, Canada where she still resides today. She really likes it there.

She has no pets and can barely keep sea monkeys alive for a reasonable amount of time. Her line of day job tends to be analytical which leaves her mind hopping to weave stories. No co-worker is safe from her character analysis.

In keeping with busy hands are happy hands, her hobbies have included cross-stitch, needlepoint, quilting, costuming, cake decorating, baking, cooking, metal work, beading, sculpting, painting, doll making, henna tattoos, chain mail, and a few others that have been forgotten. It is quite often that these hobbies make their way into her tales.

Viola's fetishes include boots and corsetry, and her greatest weakness is her uncontrollable blush.

Her writing actively pursues the Happily Ever After that so rarely occurs in nature. It is an admirable thing and something that we should all strive for. To find one that we truly like, as well as love.

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