

The Guardians of St. Giles

OLIVIA STONE
And
The Trouble with Trixies



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Olivia Stone
and the
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Part 1

Shadow

Chapter 1 – Abomination

“Abomination!”

Girls scatter. They flee the courtyard like pigeons from Mouser, the old priory cat. All except Olivia. She turns to face Brother Westerman, fists planted on her hips and scowls right back up at the old priest.

“Aarrgggh,” he growls, his Adam’s-apple bobbing madly under the turkey-skin at his throat. He looks like someone crossed a vulture and an emu to create the world’s tallest predatory bird.

Olivia’s heart pounds and she licks dry lips. “It’s been five years Brother Westerman,” her voice only cracks the tiniest bit. “There are girls at St. Giles now, so get over it.”

Most people, by the time they reach ninety-two, are bent over with the weight of all those years but Brother Westerman's spine is long and broomstick straight. At her words, he seems to grow even taller.

Olivia gulps as his dark hooded eyes glare down at her over an enormous beak-like nose.

He opens his mouth to bellow but no words come out. Brother Westerman gasps and steps back, making the sign of the cross with shaky fingers. He is staring at something on the ground in front of Olivia.

The coarse black material of his coat cracks like a whip as he turns and flees the courtyard.

What a strange old man. Olivia's legs tremble but she holds her stern look until Brother

Westerman disappears inside the school. Finally, she looks down to see what upset him so badly.

Olivia's breath catches in her throat. Her shadow stretches out before her. Large bat-like wings fan out from her shoulders and sharp, curved horns sprout from her head.

Reaching up, Olivia touches... only hair. She sighs with relief.

Squinting up, she sees bright sunlight blazing around the large demonic-looking gargoyle perched on the roof. She steps aside and the horns and wings separate from her own skinny shadow.

Olivia stifles a giggle...

Now, Brother Westerman will truly think I'm an abomination.

Lollie Duff and Darcy Steckel peek out from behind the wall to see if the cranky old priest has really gone.

“What did you do to old Westie?” Lollie asks.

“I have no idea.” Olivia glances back down at the gargoyle’s shadow with a secret smile. She doesn’t want to explain it to her friends. They’d just make a fuss and Darcy would spread the tale to the entire school by the end of the day.

“Looked like he saw a ghost.” Darcy adjusts her glasses.

“There’s no such thing,” Lollie protests, trying to hide a shiver.

“In fact,” Darcy starts counting off on her fingers. “There are at least three known ghosts who

haunt St. Giles School. And that's just the main building. Lots of people have seen dark figures roaming the grounds after dark..."

"Stop it." Lollie looks down her nose at Darcy like only someone from the Heights can do. "My daddy says there's no such thing as ghosts or goblins or any of those other things that go bump in the night."

"Well, why are you shaking?" Darcy hides her smirk behind her hand.

"Am not." The class bell rings and Lollie uses it to make her escape before Darcy can say another word.

"She was shaking," Darcy says.

"You shouldn't tease her like that," Olivia says.

“I wasn’t teasing. There are strange things here.” Darcy sweeps her hand in a broad gesture around the school. “You and Lollie wouldn’t know. You’re never here after dark. Any of the boarders will tell you.”

Olivia shivers a little herself at the thought. At least the talk of ghosts has taken Darcy’s mind off her clash with Brother Westerman. Darcy is like a bulldog when she sniffs out a story.

In class, Olivia takes her seat next to Kellyanne Kazek, happy to have a break from Lollie and Darcy’s constant bickering. Olivia glances at Kellyanne to check what coloured ribbon she has braided into her wild boyish hair today.

Iridescent purple.

Each day, Kellyanne adds a tiny coloured braid at her right temple, a small protest against the schools draconian uniform policy.

Kellyanne is the only person Olivia knows who can get away with using words like draconian and supercilious. Supercilious is what she calls Lollie when she is being more Lollieish than usual.

Olivia's not brave enough to break the rules, even the small ones. But every day Kellyanne comes to school with her protest ribbon, it always makes Olivia smile.

Chapter 2 – Little Bait Fish

The child walking the dark, narrow streets of Old Haven can be no older than five or six. Her pale hair glows silver under the cold moonlight. She steals glances over her shoulder as she walks. The soles of her small, shiny-black shoes click on the cobbles with every hesitant step.

Clatter Scrape. Stone claws skitter across brick.

The girl whirls around. Large, forget-me-not coloured eyes peer up into the night.

Mortar dust sifts down from high on the wall where the creature hugs the shadows.

“Careful,” the creature chides itself. A small piggish tail flicks in frustration.

The girl turns and hurries on.

A face rises into a sliver of moonlight. It looks part Chinese dragon and part snuffling pug dog, but has none of the redeeming features of either. Slitted yellow eyes blink and corded muscles slide under rough grey, stony skin. It scuttles spider-like across the wall, trailing after the child. Each time the girl glances back, the creature goes statue-still, becoming just another shadow.

When the child turns into the blind alley by Fat Jorge's Curio Shop a nasty, fanged smile appears on the creature's ugly face. There is no way out for the child. No escape.

The creature pushes off the wall and stone wings snap open. The grotesque glides through a cone of dirty yellow light to land. Claws crack into the cobblestone street, at the entrance to the alley.

Hisssss!

The child spins to face the noise, backing over a spider-lace of shadows until her spine touches the high stone wall at the alley's end. Slivers of moonlight streak her face, her Hello Kitty T-shirt and skinny knees.

"I have you, trixie," Yip says, moving toward the child-thing.

The terror in her eyes...

...Isn't there?

Something is not right. If grotesques know anything, they know about shadows. And the shadows in the alley are all wrong. Yip glances down then looks up into the trickster imp's own fanged smile.

The smile turns Yip's heart cold.

Her eyes change from powdery blue to glowing red as she releases the glamour that hides

her true nature. A second set of glowing eyes appear and a third. Other trixies steps into view.

Four, five, six... Yip snakes his head toward a noise behind him. Four more trixies block the entrance to the alley.

Ten trixies working together. Unheard of. Yip's mind races. Trixies are loners, nothing but nuisance-pests. *This isn't right.*

All pretence of the child disguise is gone from the first trixie as she stalks forward. Her thin arms and legs are too long and don't work quite like the human child she had been pretending to be. Slender fingers jitter in anticipation, like bony spiders stalking a trapped fly. The other trixies crowd in, tightening the circle around Yip.

"Oh, little guardian," Hello Kitty laughs and makes mocking *tisk, tisk* sounds.

Another claps, ravenously impatient like a child about to tear open a birthday present.

I'm no one's birthday gift. Yip flares his wings and launches skyward. Wings tangle in a web of fine cables criss-crossing between the buildings above the alley. His own laugh is cut short.

Yip hits the ground with a crunch of stone on stone. He rolls aside just as a metal bar slams down into the space where his head had been a fraction of an instant before. He leaps back to his feet, eyes widening at the sight of the split cobble stone.

"Stronger than we look," Hello Kitty says.

"Stronger than stone," a second trixie teases.

Yip lets out a high keening cry and leaps for a second floor window sill. He scrambles up the wall, trying to squeeze through the tangle of cables.

“Tricked you,” Hello Kitty says. “You have just set the trap.”

“Tricked.” Yip stops, just for a second, looking down.

A stone the size of a fist punches into his lower back. His talons spasm and he is falling. Pain lances through him as his rump hits the ground with a splintering snap.

Yip looks up into a ring of trixie faces. Ten ghastly smiles. Nine fade back into the shadows.

“You are such a tiny prize, little bait-fish.” A shiny black child’s shoe slams into Yip’s head with more force than it has any right to. “Which one of your friends will come to your rescue?”

Yip’s mind reels dizzily. The Hello Kitty picture on the trixie’s shirt blurs and he blacks out to the sound of the trixies complaining about stone fish.

Poisonous...

you can't eat them...

should just...

Darkness.

Chapter 3 - A Trixie Trap

A high keening cry startles Olivia from sleep. She rubs tired eyes and looks down to the empty spot at the bottom of her bed where Rum-Tum should be curled up sleeping.

“Rum-Tum,” she says, shoving off the covers and stalking to the window.

The shadows in the small courtyard at the rear of their terrace make the cubbyhouse look sinister. Its cross-paned windows are angry black eyes and the door, a sneering mouth.

“Get a grip, Olivia Stone,” Olivia tells herself. She pushes open the window. “Rum-Tum... Are you out fighting again?”

She scans the top of the high brick fence, the roof of the playhouse and the fork in the tree, just

below the bird-feeder. All of Rum-Tum's favourite places, but the old tom cat is nowhere to be seen.

"Rum-Tum." She sighs and slips her feet into soft bunny slippers.

Olivia can hear her dad's snores as she creeps past her parent's room and down the stair. She grabs the torch from the hall table and opens the back door.

"Rum-Tum." Olivia sweeps the beam of the torch across the yard. "If you get hurt again, dad says he is not going to take you to the vet." She searches every corner of the small yard, in the playhouse, even behind the garbage bins near the low wooden door in the tall back wall. Olivia covers a yawn and rubs her tired eyes again.

"Oh suit yourself you naughty cat." She stomps back toward the house. "Don't come crying to me if you get hurt."

A shadow cuts across the moon. Olivia swings the torch up as something large and black flashes past. Olivia shudders, cold shivers trail down her spine. She hurries back into the house, latching the door, sliding the security bolt as well.

As Olivia rushes up the stairs, a louder yowling chills her blood.

“Please, don’t be Rum-Tum,” she wishes, jumping into bed and pulling the covers up to her chin.

A third yowl, high and pain wracked, follows a sound like hammers smashing rocks.

It is over an hour until dawn but there is no way she is going back to sleep tonight.



Yip hears the flap of wings an instant before the large grey shape lands in a crouch at the entrance to the alley. He turns his head to see the looming shadow of one of the guardians stretching toward him. Hazy yellow light silhouettes a round bat-eared head, curved horns and broad muscular shoulders.

Cygnets! Yip's heart sinks. Cygnets is the last guardian he wants to see right now. None of the grotesques take Yip seriously but Cygnets is by far the worst. Why did it have to be him to come to his rescue.

"Tra..." Yip's warning is cut off as Hello Kitty's foot crunches down on his face.

Cygnets stalks forward, shaking his head. Yip can see the disappointment in that gesture. *Useless little Yip is in trouble again... and from a trixie.*

Yip rakes stone claws into the trixie's spindly leg. Her foot comes off his face.

"Trap," he yells then grunts as the shoe thuds into the side of his head again.

The ally dissolves into a mass of darting movement, flickering shadows and dancing lights as the trixies spring their trap. Yip blinks his vision clear as a mob of spindle-limbed almost-children swarm over Cygnet.

The little grotesque staggers up, reeling unsteadily. Before he has time to even think about helping Cygnet, three trixies are on him. Yip tries to get past them but has to back away from their swinging clubs of wood and metal.

A trixie sails through the air, smacking into the wall. It spills to the ground but untangles itself. It glances around nervously then takes several shaky steps toward the deep shadows at the end of

the alley. The trixie freezes, eyes wide with fear then hobbles back into the fight with Cygnet.

Cygnet's stone fists smash into the smaller creatures. Each time he knocks one down, two more rush in to attack.

What scares a trixie more than an angry guardian? And Cygnet is definitely angry now. Yip decides, he doesn't really want to find out. Yip's three attackers dart in again. He turns and runs away.

Away from Cygnet.

He can hear them closing in as he reaches the dark end of the alley. Yip grins, leaps up the wall, twists and springs back, just out of their reach.

I might not be big but I'm fast. Yip gives four furious flaps of his wings. At the last second, he angles toward a red-haired trixie creeping up

behind Cygnet, crashing into it with the force of a cannon ball. They tumble, a tangled pinwheel of pale and dark limbs. They hit the wall with a sickening crunch and the trixie comes apart in a tatter of dissolving shadows.

“Got one,” Yip snarls but hammer blows rain down on him and his triumphant shout turns into a high pain-wracked yowl. Chips of stone fly from each blow. He squeals when the little finger of his left hand snaps off and skitters across the rough ground. In a daze, he follows his finger’s progress. It spins to a stop near Cygnet’s clawed foot.

Cygnet has one of the trixies by the throat. He lifts and squeezes. As the trixie begins to dissolve, a metal bar slams down on the huge grotesque’s wrist. The crack sounds like a gunshot.

Something whacks into the back of Yip’s head and darkness swallows him again...

Chapter 4 - Racing the Sun

... Yip jolts awake and immediately wishes he wasn't. Pain flares in places he never knew existed and something keeps pounding rhythmically into his guts. He chokes back the urge to vomit and begins to wriggle.

"About time," Cygnet snaps. His voice is harsh, strained.

Yip realizes he is slung over the larger grotesque's shoulder... *and they are running?* Yip tries to see.

One of Cygnet's big bat-like wings hangs limp, well as limp as stone can be, and his right arm is tucked in tight to his chest. Cygnet is the leader of the guardians, the most powerful grotesque since The Lady gave herself to the sun. But the

trixies have left him battered, broken and on the run.

Trixies aren't dangerous...

Cygnnet grunts and stumbles as something smacks into his lower back. They crash into a clutter of metal garbage cans.

Not dangerous my little stone tail... Yip reaches back to discover he no longer has a little stone tail. The sense of loss hurts more than the jagged wound.

Cygnnet scrambles back up, a garbage tin lid grasped in his good hand. He hurls it like a Frisbee. It arcs back tearing one of the pursuing trixies in half. The creature glances down as it shreds into tatters of shadow. It's eyes are the last part to disappear. They look... sad?

"Hold onto my neck," Cygnnet says as he swings Yip up onto his back.

Yip hangs on, pressing his face into Cygnets strong, muscular back.

“We’re almost home,” Cygnet says, “They shouldn’t be able to cross into the Priory grounds.” His confident tone is ruined by his nervous glance at the lightening sky to the east.

The first and, by far, the most important rule for a grotesque in its living-stone form is; be in contact with a rooftop before sunrise or be trapped as a statue forever.

“We have to get back to the Priory roof before the sun rises.” Yip says. Any roof would do but without the wards protecting the old priory grounds, the trixies could spend the day smashing them into rubble.

Cygnet’s abrupt grunt tells Yip he’s already worked that out for himself.

Yip clamps his mouth shut, not wanting to disappoint his leader with any more stupid comments.

Cygnets leap the Old Priory School's fence in one giant bound and slump heavily against the thick trunk of a spreading oak tree.

One of the trixies scrambles up the wrought iron fence. It yelps each time its bare skin touches the cold iron. The creature leaps down into the grounds. It takes three steps before it hesitates and looks down at its feet. When it looks back up the fangs and glowing eyes disappear. The trixie is all child-like again, her eyes wide with fear.

The old priory might be a school now, but the grounds still hold the memory of years of sacred prayer. And creatures of shadow can't stand on hallowed ground.

The trixie watches her hands as they slowly unravel and tatter into nothing.

“Sunrise,” Yip says, tapping Cygnet’s broad shoulder.

The larger grotesque glances east and staggers up again. He bounds toward the school buildings. Cygnet begins clawing his way up the rough stone wall.

There is a feeling as the sun starts to rise and the itch of sunrise is crawling up Yips spine. “Hurry,” he says.

Cygnet stops bracing his taloned feet and the elbow of his injured arm into the bricks. He grabs Yip off his back with his good hand and flings him high in the air.

Yip hits the tiled roof hard. He slips and scrambles for a grip. Chips of tile skitter down the steep roof. He clasps the guttering with a clawed

foot, dangling upside down over the courtyard. A piece of tile the size of a dinner plate slides past him. Yip tries to catch it but it deflects off his hand and smashes into pieces on the top of Cygnet's head.

"Sorry."

Cygnet glares up at him, still clawing his way up the rough stone wall.

Yip pulls himself back up onto the roof.

"Angel."

On the far side of the roof a grotesque carved in the form of a winged angel turns to him. She sees his battered body and sagging wings but before she can move to help, the sun's first rays breach the horizon.

Sunlight glints off her white stone hair. In that instant living stone changes back to its frozen statue form.

Yip ducks, keeping to the shadows, reaching down even though he is nowhere near strong enough to help Cygnet onto the roof.

Cygnet continues his slow, painful climb as the sunlight inches across the roof tiles.

“Come on,” Yip urges.

If Cygnet does not win the race against the sun he will be gone. Statue-trapped, never to move again.

Cygnet bunches his legs and pushes off a second story window ledge. He grasps a jutting piece of stone with his good hand and drags himself up. The fingers of his injured arm curl around the roof’s guttering. His scream of pain is cut off as the sunlight turned him back to stone.

He made it. Yip thinks as the sun’s light freezes him too.

Chapter 5 – Not a Cat Fight

Olivia shuffles into the kitchen, yawning and rubbing her eyes.

“Olivia Stone.” Mum frowns darkly. “I hope you weren’t sitting up reading half the night, again.”

“No,” Olivia’s reply is as grumpy as her mum’s. “I think Rum-Tum was out fighting again and I couldn’t get back to sleep.” She doesn’t mention the shadow crossing the sky or how the horrid yowling terrified her so much she was afraid to even close her eyes, let alone try and go back to sleep.

Olivia sits down to breakfast. She chews her toast absently and screws up her face at the first taste of the tart orange juice.

“It’s good for you,” Mum says, putting a hand to her back and stretching. “Vitamin C.”

Olivia gives Mum a sour look but finishes the drink. She gently pats Mum's swollen tummy where her baby brother or sister is growing inside.

After breakfast, Olivia trudges back upstairs to wash and dress for school. As she reaches into the wardrobe for her shoes, Rum-Tum darts out from behind the shoe rack.

“Blast it, Rum-Tum. You scared me half to death,” Olivia scolds, but the cat bellies under the low bed, bristled and wide eyed.

No matter how hard she coaxes, Rum-Tum refuses to come out.

“Hurry up, Olivia. You’re going to be late for school,” Mum shouts up from the hall.

“Coming, Mum.” Olivia looks back under the bed.

“They frightened you too, Rum-Tum.” She tries to give him a reassuring pat but snatches her hand back, staring at the three stinging welts on the back of her hand.

“Ouch.”

Rum-Tum has never scratched her before. Olivia isn't sure if her tears are because of that or from the actual pain of the scratches.

Her backpack is hooked on the polished wooden ball that stops her sliding down the balustrade, instead of walking down the steps, *like a proper lady*.

She did try it side-saddle one morning, meaning to push clear just before the bottom. Olivia ended up with a bruise on her hip and Mum's favourite vase smashed to pieces when she landed on the side table. She has never tried to do it again.

Mum pokes her head out through the kitchen door. "Your lunch is packed and don't forget to hand in your excursion note."

"I won't forget." Olivia slings her bag across one shoulder.

"Are you OK?" Mum asks, coming forward and wiping wet hands on her apron.

"Yeah, Rum-Tum scratched me." She holds up her hand for Mum to see.

"That's it!" Dad bellows. He stalks out of the kitchen, rolling up the newspaper he had been reading into a weapon.

"No, Dad," Olivia begs. "He didn't mean it."

Dad doesn't break his stride. "He's caused enough trouble."

Olivia blocks the stairway. "It's not his fault. Something frightened him."

After a long standoff, Dad's shoulder's loosen and he lets the paper unravel in his hand. "I don't know why you like that cantankerous old cat."

Olivia gives Dad a hug. "He reminds me of you," she whispers in his ear. She dances back as Dad aims a playful smack at her with the newspaper.

"You two." Mum glowers.

Olivia and Dad burst out laughing.

"Go on, off with you," Dad says.

Olivia hurries out into the back courtyard. Cutting through the alley saves her walking all the way around the block on her way to school. The low wooden door opens with a squeal of rusty hinges. She steps out into the blind alley by Fat Jorge's Curio shop.

A prickling sensation runs up Olivia's back. Garbage bins and rubbish are scattered across the cobblestones and there are strange gouges ripped into the brick walls. She steps out into a criss-cross of shadows and looks up.

Strange.

Someone had stretched thin cables across the ally, like a metal spider's web above her. Half way along, close to the right hand wall, four cables hang loose. Something strong snapped them like string. Olivia thinks about the yowls in the night.

She shivers. Cold fingers of fear tickle down her spine.

This was no cat fight.

Something clinks away from Olivia's foot. The piece of stone is dark grey, about the length of her little finger, almost as thin and curly as a pig's tail. She picks it up and looks closely at the broken

end before slipping it into her pocket. With a nervous glance around, she hurries out of the alley.

“I think I might walk home the long way,” Olivia tells herself as she reaches the street and turns toward the school. Something about the alley is giving her creepy tingles. The hair on the back of her neck stands up.

It feels like someone, or something is watching her.

Chapter 6 - Falling

Damn.

The thought strikes Yip as the sunlight turns him back to stone. Cygnet is safe but in all the excitement, Yip forgot to shut his eyes to the sun. He cringes inside at the memory of the last time. And that was over twenty years earlier.

Something went wrong when a young Brother Westerman created him. Unlike the other grotesques, Yip stays aware after the sunlight turns him back to stone. He has learned to live with the annoying itches that creep across his skin during the long day. They usually start on his nose. Itches are like torture when there are twelve hours to wait to scratch them.

The itches won't bother him today though. In a couple of hours, once the sun swings past the

North Tower, the light will start to burn his eyes. It is just Yip's luck. There isn't a cloud in the sky today so he'll probably be blind for days.

The first time it happened, Yip thought he'd never see again.

There is a spot on the roof that gets less than an hour of direct sunlight. This isn't that spot.

Yip doesn't usually envy the other grotesques lack of awareness. They get sun-touched, and then they wake in – to them - a blink of time when the moonlight silvers their stony skin again.

Yip usually spends his frozen daylight hours watching the comings and goings of the humans through slitted eyelids. The only children the others know are the ones who creep, giggling into the graveyard at night on a dare or who raid the kitchens for a midnight snack.

“Silly humans,” Cygnet would say on those nights. “I don’t know why we bother protecting them.”

Yip knows the children better. There are only a few who violate the sacred ground of the cemetery. Most are better behaved. They scurry like ants in the courtyard and playground. Most look and act the same but from time to time; one stands out from the rest.

Yip has seen a dozen of these special children since Brother Westerman’s ritual breathed life into him. He watched them all grow over the years and eventually leave the school. The latest of his special children turned up nearly six years earlier in the time of change.

Many of the teaching brothers left and new teachers arrived to take their places. On the surface nothing seemed too different except some of the

tiny new children had long hair and wore skirts instead of trousers.

Brother Westerman stormed about the grounds for months in a fury over these new children. It took some careful listening at windows to discover the source of the trouble.

Girls at St. Giles! An abomination.

Yip doesn't know why they bother Brother Westerman so much. Even with all his snooping, he still can't figure out exactly what the problem is.

One of these *girls* is Yip's latest special child. She is feisty, striding about the school like she owns it. It is her confidence that attracts Yip. She has the confidence he lacks in himself. She isn't one of the boarders so he hasn't seen her up close.

Pity.

Sometimes he sneaks into the dormitories at night to look at the sleeping children.

All of the girls, except for her are terrified of Brother Westerman. If she is, she doesn't show it. She even stood up to him yesterday, in the courtyard, right below where he was crouching.

Yip finds it funny and feels a little guilty. Years ago, a much younger Brother Westerman created him but it is still funny when the girl flusters him so badly.

Yip watches the girl enter the school gate. She stops to talk to some other girls then storms across the courtyard, straight toward Brother Westerman. Guilt and amusement stir inside of Yip.

A shadow slides across the roof. Whoever it is stops behind him. The shadow moves again and Yip sees a metal bar lash down. It slams into Cygnet's wrist. The crunch of stone is sickening.

Yip sees a crack widen and the stone of Cygnet's arm breaks apart.

No!

Yip wishes he can close his eyes. The leader of the guardians topples backward toward the girl and Brother Westerman. He is forced to watch as Cygnet shatters into hundreds of pieces of sharp lifeless stone. He watches the dust rise up and sees blood spread on the ground.

The footsteps on the roof scampered away behind him.

Chapter 7 – All the King's Horses

St. Giles Old Priory School is the only school in Haven with its own graveyard. The graveyard is strictly out of bounds and the few teaching Brothers who remain at the school get really mad when they find kids playing there. The proper teachers aren't nearly as fussy, even when the boarders sneak down there after dark on a dare.

Olivia likes the stone angels in the older part of the cemetery. They are much more interesting than the brass plates in the little concrete blocks lining the newer sections. She even likes the tall hooded figure of The Lady that creeps out all the other kids.

The main building of the school is longer than a football field. Three levels of rough sandstone surround three sides of a white gravel

courtyard. There are modern buildings in the school but the brochures all show the same scene; a huge courtyard, the original old building with its towers and parade of gargoyles looking out over the city.

Most people think there are only four gargoyles, they miss the tiny one that crouches on the roof above Brother Westerman's room in the West Tower. It can only be seen from a few places on the grounds. Olivia's favourite is the stone angel standing tall, high above the school's main doors and bright crest.

Lollie follows Olivia's gaze. "It's not a real gargoyle because real gargoyles are ugly."

Olivia blinks. She didn't even see Lollie arrive.

Olivia groans inwardly at Lollie's dark scowl and tightly crossed arms. Kellyanne is

standing off to the side, tugging anxiously on the tiny coloured braid behind her right ear.

Orange today.

Darcy cringes like she is stuck in the middle of a minefield, waiting for a very loud *Kaboom*. Everything's a minefield when Lollie has the cranks.

"Hi Olivia." Darcy rolls her eyes, although she makes sure Lollie can't see her do it.

It's going to be one of those days.

"We're not talking to the gypsy princess today," Lollie says.

Kellyanne's lips pull tight.

"What happened this time?" Olivia's tone is more annoyed than she means and Lollie's arms cross even tighter.

"She's just a pain," Lollie announces.

"That's why."

Olivia sighs. "If you don't want to talk to Kellyanne, that's fine by me but I'm not playing silly games today."

"But..."

Darcy relaxes and Kellyanne eases back toward the group.

Lollie glares daggers at them all.

She'll sulk for a while, she always does but she won't storm. If she does, she'll be the one left out of the group and that is unacceptable.

"There's a new girl at school," Darcy says, looking over her shoulder toward the administration door.

"What's her name," Olivia asks.

"Don't know. I just saw her going into the office." Darcy adjusts her glasses. "She's got new shoes though."

"New shoes?" Olivia asks.

“Must have, she was walking like her shoes were too tight,” Darcy says. “She has beautiful hair though, lots of long blond ringlets.”

Everyone braces for Darcy’s, *I hate my hair* speech. Yes, it is brown and bobby but there’s no reason to keep on about it. Olivia is about to cut her off when she glances across the courtyard.

“I don’t believe this! Two days in a row.”

Brother Westerman has one of the year two girls in his sights and he is roiling toward her like a storm cloud.

“Olivia...” Kellyanne grabs at her sleeve.

Olivia doesn’t know why every one’s so scared of the grumpy old priest. Sure, he’s tall and has a voice like a hammer smashing rocks, but he’s just a cranky old man who hasn’t moved with the times.

The young girl looks terrified, hiding her eyes from the figure towering above her.

“You leave her alone.” Olivia delivers her demand like each word is its own sentence. Her feet crunch in the gravel as she strides across to meet him.

Brother Westerman whirls on her. “You.” The word comes out like a curse. His face flushes and he glares down at her.

Olivia looks down to check if she has wings today but it’s just her own skinny shadow on the ground.

Pity.

Olivia’s stomach tightens. There are no wings on the ground at all. The shadows are wrong and one of them is moving.

Olivia looks up.

One of the gargoyles is hanging from the guttering by one hand. There is a glint of sunlight on gold, movement sweeping down and a loud ringing crack.

Olivia shoves the younger girl back as the gargoyle crashes down to the ground. She throws her left arm up in front of her face. Shattered shards of stone rip into her hand, forearm and elbow. Pieces slash into her left shin, knee and her side. The pain hits her a thousand times worse than Rum-Tum's scratch.

A large chunk of stone bounces up and cracks into Olivia's temple.

Everything goes dark.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Thank you for taking the time to read these teaser chapters of my book. I hope you have enjoyed the story so far.

If you would like to read more of Olivia and Yip's adventures, this first book in the series, *Olivia Stone and the Trouble with Trixies*, is available in print or e-book formats. It can be purchased from your local book store, on line book sellers or direct from the author.

Book two of the series, *Olivia Stone and the Dread of the Dreamers*, will be available in mid 2018.

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