

OLIVIA STONE AND THE CALL OF THE
CARNIVAL

BY JEFFERY E DOHERTY

PART ONE

CONFUSION

CHAPTER ONE

TEA AND SARDINES

Olivia rushes past the kitchen door, her left knee stiff, her foot dragging on the carpet. The itch of the coming moonrise tickles the hairs on her arms and the back of her neck.

Only minutes.

"Olivia."

"I'll be back in a minute." She looks back over her shoulder as Mum's head appears around the doorway, eyebrows lowering darkly.

"Olivia Stone!"

Olivia skids to a stop, her hand hovering above the doorknob. She tries to clench her left hand, but her fingers tremble and hardly move at all.

No, no, no.

Mum steps out into the hall and presses her hand against her lower back. Her face is blotchy-red from the lingering afternoon heat.

"Mum, I just need a couple of minutes." Olivia scrunches her face up in what she thinks is a pleading expression. "It is important."

"So is this, Olivia." When Mum uses that tone, even Dad knows there is no use arguing. Olivia wonders if Mum was this moody when she was pregnant with her.

Shoulders slump in resignation. Olivia turns away from the door and follows Mum back into the kitchen. As she sits down at the table, she feels the exact moment the moon's first silver rays breach the horizon.

"There is a new skin specialist visiting the hospital this week," Mum announces.

Olivia sighs. "What's the point?"

Mum's eyebrows lower dangerously again. "He specialises in rare and exotic skin disorders."

Olivia looks at the hard-greyish skin of her arm and her stiff stony fingers. "Well, I certainly feel exotic." Her reply comes out harsher and just a little more sarcastic than she intends.

Mum's eyes fill with tears. "We have to keep trying. It's getting w..." Fear chokes off her reply. She rubs her face with both hands before reaching over and touching the hardening skin at Olivia's shoulder.

"I know it's getting worse, Mum but the doctors can't help." Olivia pulls away from her mother's touch. "Doctors don't know anything."

"That may be true, but we are going to see him on Thursday." Two almost identical sets of eyes lock together in a battle of wills. "The appointment is not until the evening, but you can stay home from school if you like."

"Oh, that means I'll miss out on sport."

A single tear trails down Mum's cheek and Olivia immediately feels horrible. She hates the hospital; the painful poking and prodding tests are never going to discover the real cause of her condition. Science can't test for magic. Science and magic don't mix, and doctors can't stop the guardian magic spreading slowly through her entire body. It is only a matter of time before she becomes solid stone.

They might as well put me in a fountain.

Her dreams are filled with the horrible sensation of being statue-trapped, but perfectly aware, like Yip. But Mum doesn't need to know that. It is no reason to hurt her.

"I'm sorry." Olivia stands up and hugs Mum, tight. "I'm scared too."

They stand like that for a long time...until the baby kicks Olivia in the ribs. She steps back and presses her hand to the spot on Mum's swelling tummy.

"I swear he's going to be a soccer player." Mum groans as the foot presses out again.

"He?" Olivia asks.

"Or she." Mum smiles. "When it kicks like that, it just feels like a boy. They are pains you know."

"Even Dad?"

"Especially your father." Mum gives Olivia a conspiratorial wink.

"I'll tell him you said that."

"Don't worry. He already knows." Mum sits down heavily in one of the kitchen chairs.

"You can go out and do what you were going to do now," Mum says, waving a hand toward the back door.

Olivia looks wistfully out through the kitchen window at the darkening yard. "That's okay, it doesn't matter now."

Mum gives Olivia a curious look.

"Can I help you get dinner ready?"

"Who are you and what have you done with my daughter?"

"Ha, ha. Very funny."

"No, I am fine with dinner, but I would really love a cup of tea."

Olivia crosses to the sink and fills the kettle.

"And maybe a cracker...with gherkins...and sardines..."

"Ewww, gross."

"You did ask."

"I'm never having babies if they make you eat weird stuff like sardines."

"I know," Mum says. "I hate sardines."

CHAPTER TWO

A GHASTLY EXPERIENCE

The first thing Yip does as the moon's light unlocks the guardian magic inside him, is scratch the maddening itch on the end of his pug-ish nose. The second thing is to stretch his aching muscles and crack his sinuous neck. Being a statue for an entire day is surprisingly hard work.

He sighs in relief.

The little guardian stands on the roof of the St. Giles Old Priory School. He averts his eyes from the empty plinths where the other guardians, the proper guardians, used to stand watch over the city. A wave of regret and guilt wash over him. In his head, he knows he didn't cause Cygnet's death. He knows the loss of Leonine, Tank and Angel is not his fault, but in his heart the shame still burns deep.

Yip rarely spends the day on the roof of St. Giles anymore. Frozen in his statue form and staring at the empty roof all day, leaves him too much time to think. His niche tucked behind the chimney of Olivia's terrace is his home of choice now. Besides, his dark thoughts at the school often distract Olivia from her schoolwork.

He sent Olivia home after their run-in with the nest of ghastrs last night, but he couldn't make it before the sunrise. Three of the ghastrs got away. He chased them through the back streets of Haven until the dawn's light sent him scurrying for the roof tops. With no time to make it across town to Olivia's, he made for the school and the protection of its wards.

Yip's only consolation is that ghastrs, like many of the fey and spirit creatures, can't stand the sunlight either. They would be hiding in some shadowy place, waiting for the sun to set. If he can get

back to where he lost them soon, he can continue the chase. If they think they lost him, they may linger long enough for him to track them down and banish them back behind the veil.

"Ready or not," Yip says and leaps from the roof.

Stony wings snap open, and he soars up into the evening sky. He flies hard and reaches the tight alleys among the maze of industrial estate buildings. It is barely ten minutes since moonrise and the sky is still bright with the orange and coral glow of sunset.

They can't have gone yet.

Yip lands on a billboard near the entrance to a collection of workshops and small factories. He glances down at the sign. A tall man in a dark ringmaster's coat stands in front of an eerie carousel and sinister Ferris wheel.

Dark Carnival

Opening Night Friday.

The little grotesque leaps up, winging across to the peak of the highest building in the estate. He becomes one with the shadows. Patience is far from Yip's greatest virtue, but grotesques have a natural ability for stillness. Between scanning the surrounding yards and buildings, he watches the progress of the moon creeping across the darkening sky.

Something moves in the garden centre across from him. Yip tenses his wiry muscles, but it is just a prowling cat.

Two hand spans, he thinks. Two hand spans of the moon across the sky, then I'm going down to find them.

The time it takes the moon to track two hand spans along its path seems like an eternity to Yip. It is half a hand width short before Yip gives up and scurries down the wall to the shadowed lane below. He lets his senses drift out, trying to feel some small supernatural disturbance.

A heavy metal door swings open, less than a metre in front of him. It bangs into the corrugated iron wall with an ear-splitting *clang*. A huge, dirty booted foot *crunches* down right beside Yip.

CHAPTER THREE
THE LOTUS FLOWER

"Mum ate sardines," Olivia yells as Dad comes in through the front door.

"Ewww..." Dad says as he ruffles Olivia's raven dark hair.

"With gherkins," she adds.

Mum steps out of the kitchen and pokes her tongue out at them both. "We might have it for dinner as well."

Olivia and Dad turn to each other.

"Take-away!" they yell together.

Mum shakes her head in mock disgust. "You two are incorrigible."

"What does that actually mean?" Olivia asks.

Dad shrugs. "I think it means we are getting take-away."

"Burgers?" Olivia asks. "Pizza?"

Mum turns her nose up.

"Burgers have pickles... they are almost gherkins." Olivia grins mischievously.

"Why don't we go to The Lotus Flower?" Dad holds his hand up. "I know their food is not as nice as your mother's cooking."

"You can't beat traditional..." Mum begins.

"We know, but it is the best Asian food in town."

"And it is not exactly take-away."

"We can do take-away if you want," Dad says.

"Not on your life," Mum says. "If we do that, I have to wash up."

Dad smiles and nudges Olivia. She grins back up at him.

"I'll just go and get changed." Mum throws her apron back through the kitchen door and hurries up the stair.

Half an hour later, they are in the car and driving toward the bright neon lights of Central.

The Lotus Flower's menu boasts, *All the Flavours of the Orient*. It is owned by Johnny Nguyen, a short, rotund Vietnamese man with a huge range of Elton John glasses and his six-foot-tall Korean wife, Martha Kim. There are dishes from Vietnam, Korea, Japan and China as well as a section called, *The Chef's Blends*. Olivia's favourite is Green Curry Chicken Sushi.

The restaurant is always busy, even mid-week. Dad looks worried as they reach the door. All the tables look full. He holds the door open and lets Mum and Olivia through. He approaches the maître d' a little sheepishly.

"Do you have a reservation?" the maître d' asks, looking over half-moon spectacles worn right at the end of his nose.

"Ah, not exactly...last minute decision." Dad gives the officious man a lopsided but hopeful grin. "It was this or sardines and gherkins on crackers."

"Oh, look." Olivia points to a table for four right by the front window.

The diners are just standing and pushing in their chairs.

The maître d' sighs. "It will take a few minutes to clear and set the table, if you would like to wait."

"Thank you." Dad takes the maître d's hand and pumps it enthusiastically.

The deep red walls of the restaurant are crowded with oriental pictures in gaudy, golden frames. One picture catches Olivia's eye. A dark river flows down from a distant mountain.

Dominating the picture is a creature out of a nightmare. It looks part lion, part monkey. It has wicked talons and a long serpent-like tail.

Olivia walks over to the maître d' and points at the picture. "Excuse me, what is that?"

The maître d' looks up and smiles. "Scary, isn't it?"

Olivia gives him a long serious look. "I've seen worse."

He laughs and his stern, officious demeanour vanishes behind a bright smile.

"I like you," he says. "That, young lady, is a nue. It is a monster from Japanese mythology."

He bends down and whispers conspiratorially. "It is their version of the Greek Chimera. I'm pretty sure the Greeks invented it first."

Olivia frowns at the word, *invented*. From her own experience, she knows monsters are real.

"Ah, look. Your table is ready." He makes a grand gesture with his arm and bows.

As they cross to the table, Dad glances back then nudges Olivia. "Looks like you made yourself a friend."

"Common interests," Olivia says.

"Since when have you been interested in monsters?" Mum asks.

"Since a grotesque fell on me." The moment she says it, Olivia realises she has made a mistake. Tonight is supposed to be a fun distraction from talk of her spreading skin disorder. It had been working, but now a shadow is spreading across Mum's face.

Tears begin to brim in Mum's eyes again.

"Sorry, Mum... I didn't mean..." Olivia touches Mum's arm. "Let's just enjoy a nice dinner."

Mum tries to force a smile, but it is weak, and her eyes are dark with worry.

They sit and after a quick glance at the menu, Olivia stares out of the window at the street, kicking herself for ruining their night out. A huge shadow blocks most of the light from outside.

Olivia presses her face to the glass to get a better look. Two red-flecked golden eyes, as large as her fist, blink open directly in front of her. The pupils are dark oval pools that snap into narrow

slits, like a cat's in bright light, when it sees her. It snorts out a burst of hot breath that steams up the window. Olivia jolts back so quickly, she almost falls off her chair.

Mum and Dad look up from their menus.

"Are you okay?" Dad asks.

Olivia nods, not trusting her voice to answer.

When the mist clears from the glass, the street is empty.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE TROUBLE WITH HUMANS

Yip freezes as the boot crunches down. The oily smell of grease is thick in his nose and he struggles against the urge to sneeze.

"Come on, Simon. We're late, and I've got things to do."

"Keep your pants on, Kurt," Simon calls from inside. "I have to set the ruddy alarm."

Kurt swings around, his boot cracking hard into Yip's ribs.

Crack-clatter-crunch. Yip flips into the steel-clad wall with a *crash*.

Kurt hops about on one foot, cursing and swearing. "Damn kids...broke my flipping toe." He raises his foot to kick Yip again but thinks better of it and continues to hop.

"For goodness sake, what's all the racket?" Simon pokes his head out through the door.

"You'll have Officer Don ponsing over here if you keep that up. Then we'll be stuck here for ages filling out his endless forms."

They both groan.

Kurt tests his injured foot and manages to walk with only a slight limp. "Looks like kids trying to pinch a gnome from the garden centre again."

Garden gnomes! Yip's fury burns. He wants to stand up and kick the clumsy oaf in the shin. *I'll show you the difference between a garden gnome and a living grotesque, a guardian, protector of the city.* But, the second rule of being a guardian is not to be seen by the stupid humans. Well, not while animated at least.

Simon locks the door and looks down. "Ugliest darn garden gnome I've ever seen." He prods Yip with the toe of his boot, turning him face up to the sky.

"Woah...who would buy something like that?" Kurt asks.

"Yeah, bit early for Halloween." Simon laughs and reaches down.

Touch me and I will bite you.

Simon grunts. "This thing is heavy."

"What are you doing?" Kurt asks.

"Can't leave it here, some idiot will trip over it." Simon gives Karl a bright grin.

"Ha, blinkin' ha."

"Come on, give us a hand."

Karl gives a grumpy huff then limps over to help Simon carry Yip across to the garden centre's fence. "I'm not carrying the ugly thing all the way to the gate."

"We can't just leave it here." Simon looks through the fence at the rows of concrete figures and statues.

"Let's just toss it over the fence."

Yip narrows his eyes at Kurt. *Toss me over the fence...you better hope you're never in trouble.*

"What if it breaks?"

Breaks?

Kurt snarls. "Hope it does."

Yip flexes his claws. *I'd gladly stand by and watch a ghoul tear off your face.*

Kurt and Simon swing Yip, *one...*

From the corner of his eye, Yip sees a shadow of movement.

Two...

The three ghastrs sneak out from behind a shipping container. They see him, snicker, then run. There is nothing Yip can do to stop them.

Three...

Kurt and Simon heave Yip up and over the cyclone fence.

As they let go, Yip extends his claws. One sharp stone talon cuts into the meaty part of Kurt's thumb. A second talon slices into the tip of Simon's index finger.

Kurt shakes his hand. A fine spray of blood splatters across the path. "Should've tossed the ugly thing in the bin," he yells.

"Ouch." Simon looks down at the bead of blood welling from the cut on his finger. He puts it in his mouth.

Yip lands stiffly on the grass, trying to soften his landing without giving himself away to the glaring humans. He lays there on his side, watching the last of the three ghastrs slip away into the shadows. His only satisfaction is the grumbling of the two men on the far side of the fence.

As they walk away, Kurt looks back. "I might come back tomorrow and buy that ugly lump of rock."

"Whatever for?"

"So, I can take it home and hit it with a flaming hammer."

Simon laughs.

Yip glares. That's the trouble with humans. Most aren't very nice. They are rude and obnoxious, and he doesn't know why he has the instinctive urge to protect them.

As soon as the men are out of sight, Yip clammers up and leaps back over the fence. He has to hunt down the ghastrs but he doubts he will find them now.

CHAPTER FIVE
NEW ENCOUNTERS

Once Olivia's hands stop shaking, she looks over at the maître d'. Behind him, she notices a restroom sign beside the kitchen door. A corridor leads toward the rear of the building.

"Mum, can you order my usual? I need to visit the bathroom." She points to the back of the restaurant.

"Sushi again?" Dad gives her a lopsided grin. "Live dangerously, Sweetheart. Sometimes you need to try new things."

Olivia stands and pats Dad's arm. "Are you sure you want your only daughter to start living dangerously?"

"Good point," he says. "Sushi it is."

Olivia limps a weaving path through the tables toward the back of the room. The kitchen door swings out as she reaches it and a startled waitress almost drops her tray, trying not to decapitate her.

"Sorry." The waitress gives a harried half-smile as Olivia shuffles clear of the doorway.

The corridor is full of doors. There are three on the right; two normal doors with plastic male and female signs above them, and a large metal, cooler door. It is directly across from the rear entrance into the kitchen. The door she wants is the one at the very end. The one that leads outside. Olivia walks past both toilets and stops to glance into the back of the bustling kitchen.

It is steamy, and the cooks look too busy to notice her, but she ducks down below the window panel anyway as she sneaks past. Olivia checks the door leading to the back alley. It is unlocked.

Olivia slips outside, into the dark. Thin grey light slants down from above, painting pools of faded colour across the large wheelie-bins that line the path. The air is surprisingly chill, and her breath comes out in small steaming puffs.

Olivia closes her eyes and lets her other senses take over. She filters out the background drone of traffic and the hum of air conditioners, searching for sounds that shouldn't be there. A soft scratching, most likely rats scavenging through the bins. Faint voices drift on the night wind and...

Scrape...

Olivia's head snaps to the right, peering at the lane that runs along the side of the restaurant. She edges slowly toward the sound. As she nears the corner, a bitter musky smell catches in the back of her throat.

Olivia takes an involuntary step back into the side of a wheelie-bin.

The creature's head swivels into view. It slinks into the alley like a cat, but a cat as big as a pony. Its legs shimmer with scales and end in taloned monkey-like paws...hands. Golden eyes lock onto Olivia.

Olivia's first thought is to flip, up and back, over the bin and run like the wind. She tenses but her left leg fails her, and the fingers of her left hand hardly flex at all.

Damn...I missed moonrise!

She raises her stony-skinned left arm to protect her face. Not that it will do much to stop those wicked teeth. It steps forward again, hot meaty breath washing over Olivia's face. She closes her eyes.

Something loud and metallic clatters at the far end of the alley.

When Olivia carefully opens her eyes, the creature is gone.

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*For someone who doesn't want to fight monsters anymore, that was a pretty stupid thing to do.* Olivia chides herself as she splashes cold water on her face. She looks up into the washroom mirror and shakes her head. *Deep breaths.*

Olivia tries to smile and look calm as she makes her way back to the table.

"We were about to send out a search party," Mum says.

"We thought you might have fallen in," Dad adds.

"Ha, ha." Olivia desperately wants a drink of water, but her hands are shaking too much to pick up the glass. She stares out at the empty street beyond. For a moment, she can see those terrible eyes again, but it is just the flash of headlights across the window.

## CHAPTER SIX

### WAITING IMPATIENTLY

Yip lands on the window ledge and taps on Olivia's window. The room beyond is dark and silent. He taps harder and presses his face up to the glass to peer inside. There is one tiny slit between the curtains that gives him a narrow view of carpet, a bookcase and the bottom corner of Olivia's bed.

There is a flicker of movement. Yip's night vision cuts through the shadows. There, on the end of the bed...the long ginger tail of old Rum-Tum the tom cat.

"Typical. The girl's never here when I need her."

Yip flies up to the roof of the terrace house and begins to pace back and forward, waiting for Olivia to come home. He needs her help to deal with the ghosts.

Ghosts aren't difficult to banish once you trap them, but they are slippery little creatures and tricky to corner on your own. If they don't get them all, within a few days, the ones that got away will call the others back and create a new nest. If that happens, he will have to start all over again.

Yip's limited patience is completely gone when the car pulls up in front to the terrace.

*About time*, he mentally snaps at Olivia.

Olivia looks up to the high rooftop and sees Yip's pugish face peering down at her. She narrows her eyes, glaring back up at him. *Bite me*.

*Yuck*, Yip replies. *Have you ever tasted a human?*

*Do I look like a cannibal?*

Yip doesn't answer her question. *Come up to your room, as quick as you can.*

When Olivia finally makes it up to her room and opens the curtains, Yip is standing on the window ledge pressing his face to the glass. She jumps back muttering darkly to herself before opening the window.

Yip clammers inside and hops across to the wardrobe. He pulls out a pair of dark jeans and her burgundy coloured jacket. He throws them onto the bed then begins to rummage in her draws.

"What are you doing?"

"Helping you get ready."

Olivia limps toward the little grotesque who is now holding a pink bra out at arm's length. He looks wonderingly at the tangle of straps, stretches it like a slingshot and drops it on the floor.

"Leave that alone," she snaps and shoves the drawer shut.

If Yip's fingers weren't made of stone, she might have taken several of them off in her haste to stop him pulling out anything more embarrassing.

"Ouch!"

"Serves yourself right." Olivia picks up the discarded undergarment and tucks it back into the drawer.

"How long before your parents go to sleep?" Yip asks.

"How should I know? It's not that late yet. It could be a couple of hours." Olivia shuffles over and slumps heavily onto the bed.

"Hours! We have work to do." Yip starts to pace again, this time across Olivia's bedroom floor.

"I can't go out tonight." Olivia says.

"What." Yip gives Olivia an incredulous look. "We had a deal." He jumps up beside her and pokes her arm with a stony finger.

"Stop that."

Yip continues, ignoring her protest. He pokes her again. "You don't have to patrol, but when I find a monster, you promised you would come out to help." Anger flares in the little grotesques slitted eyes.

"But..."

"No buts. A promise is a promise." He pokes her again.

Olivia smacks Yip on the nose with her slipper. "If you poke me again, you be wearing this as a hat...backwards."

Yip sits back on the bed rubbing his nose. "If we don't catch the three ghastrs that got away last night..."

Olivia holds up her hand for Yip to stop. "It's not that I don't want to go out and help tonight. I can't go out."

"And why not?" Yip asks a little huffily.

"I didn't make it to the roof for moonrise tonight."

"Oh."

"Even if I could go out, I wouldn't be much help."

*Well, that makes a bad night worse.*

"Let's not get into a who has had the worst night contest." Olivia pleads.

"Okay..." Yip sighs, thinking back to his humiliating encounter with Kurt and Simon. "...but I would win."

"Bet you wouldn't." Olivia puts her jeans and jacket back in the wardrobe and closes the door before returning to sit beside Yip again.

"Anyway, ghastrs are the least of our troubles. There is something large and dark with big golden eyes loose in the city."

"Golden eyes?"

"With glowing red flecks... This big." Olivia holds up her hand at chest height.

"I think I saw a nue."

"A new what?" Yip asks.

Olivia shakes her head. "Not a new anything.

Yip gives her a confused look.

"A nue. NUE." She spells out the word. "It's like a Japanese chimera."

Yip's eyes widen in excitement. "I wonder how it got here?"

Olivia shrugs.

"What mix of creatures does it have?"

"I don't know," Olivia admits.

"Well, what did it look like?"

"It is definitely part cat, but it had scaly legs and hands like a monkey, if monkeys had claws this long." Olivia spreads her pointer finger and thumb as far apart as they can reach.

Yip looks doubtfully at Olivia and scratches his ear. "Don't take this the wrong way, Olivia but what makes you think it's a nue?"

"Well, we were at The Lotus Flower," Olivia offers.

"And nues like gardens?" Yip asks.

"What do gardens have to do with it?" Olivia asks.

"You said it was standing near the lotus flowers."

"No, The Lotus Flower restaurant." Olivia says. "I wish you would listen. This could be important."

Yip closes his eyes and takes a few moments to calm down before asking the question again.

"How do you know it is a nue?"

"The maitre d' told me all about them, and there was a picture of one on the wall in the restaurant."

"So, it might not be a nue."

"True, but don't you think it's a bit of a coincidence?" She asks. "It might have been attracted to the scent of Asian food...or they could have caught a nue and were hiding it at the restaurant, but it escaped."

"Stranger things have happened, I suppose." Yip concedes.

"Are you going to look for it?" Olivia asks.

Yip considers his options for a moment. "I will look into it once I deal with the ghosts."

"You can always see if Glori can help you track them down." Olivia suggests as Yip leaps up to the window frame.

"You do know Glori doesn't like me?" he asks. A wicked grin lights up Yip's face. "What a brilliant idea."

Yip laughs as he jumps out into the darkness.

CHAPTER SEVEN  
MEMORIES OF FLIGHT

Glori adjusts the straps on his new maple cloak, making sure the hand grips at the sides won't pull free. He has followed all the instructions to the letter. He'd picked the leaf from the flame-maple tree deep in the Border Forest just as it changed from orange-red to deep burgundy. It is slightly longer than he is tall. Alternating layers of thistle oil and wasp wax rubbed into the surface made the cloak soft and supple but tough enough to protect him from thorn-blades or stings.

The little grave sprite looks out over the graveyard. He stands tall on the head of the angel statue at the gate. The dreamweavers nearly trapped him here, two months earlier.

*Never again.* He tells himself. *I'm never going to get trapped up high again, with falling the only escape.*

Glori looks across to the crypt where he'd buried Swiftwing. He gulps and clenches his fist at the memory.

"I miss you," he says, and stands letting the cool breeze whip his hair into even more wild tangles.

A grave sprite born without wings should be used to being land-bound. But flying with Swiftwing and then K'Aah, the Gore Crow, have left Glori heartsick with the need for flight.

*What I wouldn't give to have wings.*

Glori sighs. He knew K'Aah wouldn't stay after the defeat of the dreamweavers but still, the big crow's leaving cut him to the core. His desperation for the cloak to work, all comes back to his memories of flight.



The scrape of stone on stone makes Glori jump and curse.

He spins toward the sound.

"Whatever you want, the answer is no!"

"What kind of welcome is that for an old friend?" Yip asks.

Glori snarls up at the annoying grotesque. "We have never been friends."

"I need your help." Yip steps toward Glori but the grave sprite backs away until his feet are on the very edge of the statue.

"Go and get help from your little human girl."

"She can't come out tonight," Yip admits.

"Pity, I actually like her." Glori tucks his hands inside his cloak, fingers curling around the straps. "I'd rather jump than help you."

"I don't have time for this." Yip lunges forward but his clawed fingers snap closed on nothing but air. His yellow slitted eyes flare wide as Glori leaps out into the night.

*Please, please, please,* Glori thinks as he throws his arms wide. Air billows up under the cloak. His chest muscles strain as he is buffeted from side to side by the wind.

*Come on.*

Glori's arms find the right position and he glides out of his spiralling fall and shoots out across the graveyard.

A quick glance over his shoulder shows Yip leaping after him. A solid stone grotesque, even one as small as Yip, swoops much faster than a grave sprite the size of a dragon-fly.

Yip almost has Glori but the sprite drops his left shoulder and cuts sharply to the side. The grotesque banks hard, but the tip of his wing clips the raised trumpet of a cherub statue. The stone instrument snaps, taking half the cherub's hand with it. Yip tumbles out of control, through a bush, smacking face first into a headstone. He staggers up shaking his head then springs up and after the sprite.

Glori's glide ends between two lichen covered headstones. He slips his hands free of the straps and runs as fast as his legs will carry him. He zigzags between graves and ducks under shrubs.

Yip catches up to Glori as he stumbles out into the open next to a crumbling old crypt.

"Have you had enough?" Yip demands from the top of the crypt.

"No!" Glori shouts his defiance and jumps through a small jagged hole in the base of the wall.

Yip drops down and peers inside. Glori is backed up to an inner wall. Yip reaches his hand in but the sprite scampers to the side toward a second hole in the wall. With a laugh, Yip thrusts his other arm into that hole, blocking any chance of escape.

Glori grins and reaches up. He pulls hard on a string.

*Snick, clack.*

A heavy piece of stone drops down pinning Yip's arms at the elbows.

Glori jumps forward and slots a long pin into place above the stone.

Yip struggles but the awkward angle of his pinned arms gives him no leverage. He growls and mutters unintelligibly until Glori drops down to the ground beside his ugly face.

"Let me out of here," Yip demands.

Glori raps his knuckles on the side of Yip's head but jumps back when the grotesque tries to bite him.

"Oh, no." Glori waggles a finger at Yip. "That is no way to ask for help."

Yip snorts and struggles even harder.

Glori pats the side of the crypt. "I made this little surprise to show you that you can't push me around anymore."

Yip gives one last mighty effort to pull free, then sighs and goes still.

"If you want my help...you need to ask, nicely."

Yip gives Glori a confused look.

“Say please.”

Yip growls.

“Okay,” Glori turns and starts to walk away.

“Wait,” Yip says.

Glori puts his hand up to his ear. “I’m waiting.”

Yip’s shoulders slump in defeat. “Please.” The word comes out in a low mumble.

“I can’t hear you.”

“Please!”

“See, that didn’t hurt. Did it?” Glori walks casually back to the side of the crypt and grasps a shiny pin of metal poking out of the wall, right in front of Yip’s eyes. He slides it out of the stone.

“Try it now,” he says.

Yip pulls hard. The weight across his arms shifts just enough to drag his arms painfully free.

As Yip scrambles back from the crypt, Glori leaps up onto his back.

“Okay, what do you need help with?”