

Part 1

Shadow

Chapter 1—Abomination

“Abomination!”

The girls scatter. They flee the courtyard like pigeons from Mouser, the old priory cat. That is, everyone 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 loose flaps of turkey-like skin at his throat. Olivia thinks he looks like someone’s 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.

I’m twelve years old now. I won’t let him scare me!

He opens his mouth to bellow but no words come out. Brother Westerman gasps and steps back, making a 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 had upset him so badly.

Olivia's breath catches in her throat. A 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.

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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 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 a 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 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.

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In class, Olivia takes a 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.

It’s iridescent purple.

Each day, Kellyanne wears 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 a protest ribbon, it makes Olivia smile.

Chapter 2—Little Bait-fish

The child walking the dark, narrow streets of Old Haven looks no older than five or six. Her pale hair glows silver under the 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 spins 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. Its small piggish tail flicking 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.

Hissss!

The child spins to face the noise, backing over the spider web like shadows until her spine touches the high stone wall at the alley’s end. Slivers of moonlight streak her face, her Hello Kitty tee-shirt and skinny knees.

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

The terror Yip expects to see in its eyes isn't there. Something's not right. If grotesques know anything, they know about shadows. And the shadows in the alley are all wrong. Yip looks up into the Trickster Imp's own fanged smile.

Yip's heart turns cold.

Its eyes change from powdery blue to glowing red as the glamour that hides its true nature is released. A second set of glowing eyes appear and then a third. Other trixies step 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 it stalks forward. Its thin arms and legs are too long and don't work quite like the human child it was pretending to be. Slender fingers jitter in anticipation, like a bony spider 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 trixie 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 the fine cables criss-crossing between the buildings above the alley. His laugh at escaping is cut short.

Yip hits the ground with a crunch of stone-on-stone. He rolls aside just as a metal bar slams into the space where his head had been an instant before. He jumps up, 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 falls. 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-pitched keening startles Olivia from her sleep. She rubs tired eyes and looks to the empty spot at the bottom of her bed where Rum-Tum should be curled up asleep.

“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 is nowhere to be seen.

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

Olivia hears her dad’s snores as she creeps past her parents’ room and down the stairs. 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’s not going to take you to the vet.” She searches every corner of the small yard, in the playhouse and even behind the garbage bins near the low wooden door in the tall back wall. Olivia covers a yawn and rubs her eyes again.

“Oh suit yourself you naughty cat.” She stomps toward the house. “Don’t come crying to me if you get hurt.”

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

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. There's a sound like hammers smashing rocks followed by a third high and pain-wracked yowl. It's an hour until dawn but there is no way she is going back to sleep tonight.

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Yip hears the flap of wings an instant before a 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. Cygnet is the last guardian he wants to see right now. None of the grotesques take Yip seriously but Cygnet 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.

Cygnet stalks forward, shaking his head. Yip sees the disappointment in the gesture.

“Useless little Yip is in trouble again...and from a trixie.”

Yip rakes stone claws into the trixie's spindly leg. Its foot comes off his face. “Trap!” He grunts as the shoe thuds into the side of his head again.

The alley becomes 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.

Cygnets 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 dissolves in shadowy tatters.

"I got one!" Yip snarls but two more trixies attack 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 to 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 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—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...*

Cygnet 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.

Cygnet scrambles back up, a garbage tin lid grasped in his good hand. He hurls it like a Frisbee. It arcs back cutting one of the pursuing trixies in half. The creature glances down as it shreds into tatters of shadow. Its eyes are the last part to disappear and Yip thinks that they look...*sad*.

“Hold onto my neck,” Cygnet says. Yip gets on and presses his face into Cygnet's 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 to 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 the grotesques 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.

Cygnet leaps the Old Priory School’s fence in one giant bound and slumps heavily against the thick trunk of a spreading oak tree.

One of the trixies scrambles up the wrought iron fence. It yelps each time it’s bare skin touches the cold iron. The creature leaps down into the grounds. It takes three steps before it hesitates and looks at its feet. It looks back up and the fangs and glowing eyes have disappeared. The trixie is all child-like again, its 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 its hands as they slowly unravel 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 and begins clawing his way up the rough stone wall.

A familiar feeling assaults Yip. The itch of sunrise is crawling up Yips spine.

“Hurry,” he says.

Cygnet stops bracing his taloned feet and the elbow of his injured wing 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 trying to get a grip. Chips of tile skitter down from 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. Yip tries to catch it but it deflects off his hand and smashes into pieces on the top of Cygnet’s head.

“Sorry.”

Cygnnet 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 Cygnnet onto the roof.

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

“Come on,” Yip urges.

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

Cygnnet bunches his legs and pushes off a second-storey 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 turns him back to stone.

*He made it*, Yip thinks as the sunlight 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 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 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 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 belly-slides under the low bed; fur-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 from the hall.

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

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

“Ouch.”

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

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 shoulders 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 into the back courtyard. Cutting through the alley will save 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 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.*

Thin cables are stretched like a metal spider's web across the alley above her. Halfway along, close to the right-hand wall, four cables hang loose. Something strong has 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.

## Chapter 6—Falling

*Darn.*

The thought strikes Yip just after the sunlight turns him to stone—he hadn't shut his eyes. He cringes inside at the memory of the last time this happened—over twenty years ago.

When a young Brother Westerman created him, something went wrong. Unlike the other grotesques, Yip stays aware when he is 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 he has to wait until dark 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's just Yip's luck there isn't a cloud in the sky so he'll probably be blind for days.

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

His frozen daylight hours are usually spent watching the comings and goings of the humans through slitted eyelids. At night all the grotesques watch the children who creep giggling into the graveyard at night on a dare, or who raid the kitchens for a midnight snack.

“Silly humans,” Cygnet says on those nights. “I don't know why we bother protecting them.”

Yip knows the children better than the others. 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.

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



When things changed many of the teacher-Brothers left and new teachers arrived to take their places. On the surface nothing seemed too different. Some of the tiny new children now had longer hair and wore skirts instead of trousers.

Brother Westerman had 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's her confidence that attracts Yip—the confidence he lacks in himself. She isn't one of the boarders so he hasn't seen her up close.

*Pity.*

The girl is the only one who stands up to Brother Westerman. 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. He is grateful to Brother Westerman for creating him but it's still funny when the girl flusters him so badly.

The sun hasn't taken his sight yet and he watches her 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 could close his eyes. The broken leader of the guardians topples backward toward the girl and Brother Westerman. Yip 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 scamper 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 teacher-Brothers who remain at the school get really mad when they find kids playing there. The other teachers aren’t nearly as fussy, even when the boarders sneak in 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 some modern buildings in the school but the brochures all show the same scene—a huge courtyard and 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 most favourite statue of all 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.

*It’s 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 for her, that's 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 blonde ringlets."

Everyone braces for Darcy's, 'I hate my hair' speech. Yes, it's 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 approaches 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 thunder, 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 towering figure.

“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 the yard.

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

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. The shadows are the wrong shapes—and one of them is moving.

Olivia looks up.

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

Olivia shoves the young girl back as the gargoyle crashes 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 is a thousand times worse than Rum-Tum's scratch.

A large chunk of stone cracks into Olivia's temple and everything goes dark.