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POSITION WANTED

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"Do you need a pencil?" The woman at the desk of the employment agency held the writing implement out to me.

"Yes, please."

"Fill out this form, give it back to me, then wait over there until you're called."

I sat at the end of the row in a metal chair. One of my wings rested uncomfortably on the seat next to me, the other drooped into the narrow walkway. A large woman glared at me for taking up two places, not appreciating that I had chosen the end seat so as not to take up three.

I worked on the form, trying to remember to write in English rather than Latin or Italian. Last place of employment: Our Lady of the Pines Cathedral. Length of employment: 583 years. Reason for leaving. What would fit in this little blank space?

"Cathedral destroyed by earthquake" was too long. I tried to squeeze it into the space anyway.

After a long wait someone called, "Next." The large woman glared at me again, so I stood up and walked to the desk.

"This way, please," the desk clerk said, taking the paper from me and leading me to a small office deeper inside the employment agency building. A faded man took the form from her and gestured toward the chair by his desk. I tried to fit into it.

"Hmmm," he said as he read the sheet of paper. "You weren't damaged at all during the earthquake?" It was not a question of concern or compassion. He wanted to know if I was disabled in any way.

"One of my hind talons was broken, nothing else."

He hummed again and finally looked up from the form.

"Well, the problem, Mr..." he referred to the paper, "Nicodemis, is you're so large."

"Just under eight feet."

"Precisely. We've had some success placing the smaller gargoyles as lawn ornaments. They're actually quite in demand these days, but you're just too big. However, there is one position for which you might be suited. We have an opening for a closet monster. It's in a large old home in New England, in a little girl's bedroom closet."

"That does not sound...."

"You have to give us some indication of your good faith by at least trying the positions we find for you. This may only be temporary. We have new listings every day." He said this like memorized text. "But quite frankly," he was continuing in a more plain-spoken form, "this is the only thing I can offer you at the moment, and you're lucky to get

it. Just last week we had a gargoyle in here, about your size, with a broken leg. Nothing we could do for her."

Could Glasya have been here? It must be Glasya. We were a matched pair and looked much alike. Her leg had been broken. There could not be so many of us. Perhaps I could find her. After the earthquake we had become separated. If I could find her, this confusing new world might be more bearable. If I could find a position, I decided, I would try to find her. If I could find a position.

The closet was cramped and completely black, darker than any night I had spent under the sky on the cathedral parapet, without star or moon or city light. When I tried to shift one of my wings, something fell from a shelf behind me and said, "Mama."

Suddenly the door swung open, and I was blinded by light. I threw my arm across my eyes. A high-pitched voice, very close to the ground demanded "What are you doing in my closet?"

I looked carefully from under my arm and saw a dark-haired little girl in a white gown covered with spotted dogs. I stammered, "Working."

She looked me up and down, then stepped aside. "You'd better come out. You can't be comfortable in there."

I ducked through the doorway into her room. I had never been in a little girl's room before. Actually, I had been in very few rooms altogether.

She reached up and wrapped her hand around one of the claws on my right hand to lead me further into the pink and white room. "You can tuck me in," she said. She had to show me how. It seemed there were very many things I did not know that I had never suspected I did not know.

"You're not afraid of me then?" I asked her when she was settled in her bed.

She pointed to the edge of the bed, and I sat down beside her. "Don't be silly. I watch gargoyles like you on TV."

"What is TV?"

She looked at me with solemn, dark eyes. "Where are you from? Don't they have televisions there?"

"I am from a city in northern Italy. I lived on a cathedral."

"Why are you here, then?"

"My home was destroyed by an earthquake. All of my friends are scattered and lost."

She nodded and patted my leg. "Don't be sad. I was sad when Mother and Father died, but my grandfather is wonderful. Now I'm not so sad, but I still miss them."

"Did they die in an earthquake?"

"No. A plane crash."

"Oh. I know about planes. Some of them dropped bombs on our city once. They did not harm the cathedral, though."

"What was your cathedral like?"

"It was very beautiful. The walls were high and tapering. The windows were many-colored, and it had flying buttresses. Do you know what those are?" She shook her head. "I can show you if you have a quill and parchment." I stopped and thought. "I mean, a pencil and paper." I was learning.

"Well, how did it go?" The faded man at the employment service looked up from my papers.

"You did not tell me about television."

"What does television have to do with anything?"

"I can not frighten little children when gargoyles play for them every Saturday morning on television. I am afraid I was not very successful."

The man's face looked like soured fruit. "I think you may not have given it your best effort. Let's give it one more night. You've got to try to be menacing." He pushed the papers roughly into the folder. "For heaven's sake, you're big enough to frighten most people. You're just not trying."

That evening I was back in Emily's closet. She opened the door a crack and looked in, careful not to blind me.

"Are you there?" she whispered.

"Yes." I whispered back.

"Oh, good. I was afraid you wouldn't come back." She took me by the hand again and led me out of the closet.

"This may be the last night," I told her. "This is not my usual sort of position."

"We have to talk about that. Tuck me in."

I now knew how to do this correctly. My list of skills was growing.

"I talked to my grandfather. He's given money to fix up a building at the university where my father and mother taught. I told him it had to have a gargoyle on top of it."

"A cathedral?"

"No, it's a library, but it's really big. He said you can't have just one gargoyle. I'm going to keep asking. Sometimes he gives in when I ask for things that are reasonable and aren't bad for me. I think this is reasonable."

"Would it help if I could find another gargoyle? One who is a lot like me? If there were two gargoyles would he find the idea more favorable?"

"Oh, yes! That would be perfect. But you're so big. Where could you find someone like you? Not in my closet." She giggled.

"I am one of a matched pair. I may be able to find her. I believe she is nearby and also looking for a position." I did not mention her broken leg. A cathedral gargoyle should not lie, but it was not a lie as much as an omission. Having no training and only two nights of experience, I could not know whether or not closet monsters lie.

"So how did it go last night?"

"I tried to frighten her. I told her about the Black Death."

"That doesn't sound very frightening."

"It frightened me. But she, like you, was unimpressed. Are you certain that she requires a closet monster?"

He opened the file and read for a moment, then answered, "Well, it says here her parents were killed and she's afraid of the dark, so of course, a monster is in order."

"She seems to me to be afraid of nothing."

He looked at the papers for a few minutes more. "Ah, this may be the problem. This file has been open for about two years. She may have outgrown monsters. This position may have become obsolete which would mean you are no longer required." He closed the folder sharply and finally looked up at me. "Well. I'm sorry, but this really was the only thing I have. I'll get in touch if I hear of anything."

"I have heard of another possibility, but it requires a pair of gargoyles. For a university library."

"That's a shame since we only have the one of you." He started turn away to put the files in a cabinet.

"But what about the other that you mentioned? The one with the broken leg?"

"Well, what about her? She's damaged as you say. It's obvious."

"Nevertheless, perhaps we may try. We are a good pair and have been together before. We are," I drew upon my new words, learned from Emily, "your only option."

He turned back with the files and grudgingly agreed.

"Here they are, lot 57. 'Two cathedral gargoyles, Italian, fifteenth century. Beautiful examples of medieval stone work.' One is damaged, it says." A tall gray-haired man compared the numbers on our crates to a book in his hands. He had the air of a prince or bishop. Emily, wearing a blue dress instead of her spotted dogs, was with him and another, younger man with broad shoulders and black hair.

"It's them, Grandfather." Emily stroked my talons, and smiled at me. "Aren't they beautiful?"

"There are other sculptures that aren't damaged. Do you want to look at some of them? There are a lot of options here."

"Please, Grandfather, I like the gargoyles. Can't we fix the broken one?"

"Take a look, Alfio. Do you think the one can be repaired?"

The younger, shorter man ran his hands over Glasya's leg. Not since the earliest days of my memory had I seen one like him. He was a stone worker of the ancient type.

"My grandfather repaired breaks worst than this. See, all the parts are here, no powdering or fragmenting. To force the epoxy deep into the break I will have to build a large vise. Yes, with care this can be repaired." He stroked Glasya's wing and spoke to

Emily. "They are very beautiful. And better yet, there is very little corrosion. We would protect them from dirty air and acid rain so they will stay beautiful for another five hundred years."

"Well, I'll expect to get a deal on the damaged one. And I overheard someone saying he wanted the other one for a cemetery in Oklahoma. If he wants it badly enough the price may get too high. We'll see."

"But Grandfather, a cemetery is nothing like a cathedral. That wouldn't be right."

"We'll see," the prince or bishop told the child.

The sun's warmth caused the air scented with tree blossoms to rise. Glasya and I could feel the warmth on our wings and smell the flowers. Far below us an old woman stood beside a solemn, dark-haired girl who carried a small cloth unicorn. The woman pointed up at us.

"My grandfather put them there in memory of my father and mother. The one on the right is the male and the left one is the female. They're over six hundred years old."

"Are they really from Italy?" the little girl asked.

"Yes. From a cathedral that was destroyed by an earthquake." They stood for a moment more then the old woman said, "Wave goodbye, then we'll go get some lunch."

The little girl waved at us and started to turn away, then turned back.

"Grandmother, I think that one on the right winked at me."

"Yes. It's very likely that he did. That's one of our family secrets. You must never tell anyone, but you must always remember and someday tell your own granddaughter."

Of course, she did.