

New Life

Part 1 of my Saga

Von MChrisH

New Life

Previously on *Gargoyles*...

Fang: "Y'know," he muttered to himself, "I could really get into this superhero gig."

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Fang said sourly. "It's locked on."

Reilly looked around carefully before removing his helmet and taking out two slender metal tools. "Fang, m'man, you are in luck today. You're in the hands of a fourth-generation locksmith. I never go anywhere without my lucky picks." He bent to his work on the tiny inset lock. "Keep a eye out, will ya?"

"Why?" Fang asked, the beginning of a plan bubbling in the back of his mind. "Don't want the other guys to know?"

"Bingo. Whenever there's a rash of thefts, the lockpick always gets blamed first. I haven't broken into anything since high school." Reilly stuck his tongue into the corner of his mouth and carefully rotated the picks. There was a loud click, a hiss and the ankle cuff popped open. The fireman smiled and replaced his picks in the webbing inside his helmet. "There you go, one lock opened free of charge."

Fang sat up and rubbed his ankle. "Reilly, you're all right." He pulled himself up, leaning heavily on the wall.

~

"Maggie, Claw and I should probably go back to the Labyrinth and make sure everything's secure. We've changed a lot of things while Fang's been imprisoned but he still might try something."

"I don't know, Talon. He's not the same Fang anymore," Brooklyn commented. "He was really getting into rescuing people and helping out. Maybe after having this little taste of freedom, he just didn't want to go back."

"Maybe," Talon admitted. "But I wish he'd trusted me a little more."

~

Something kept gnawing at Fang. The urgency of the situation back at the hotel fire had put him back into a position of trust, working as an equal with the other mutates, gargoyles and humans. Deep down, he realized he'd missed that feeling, the knowledge that others were counting on him, of being trustworthy.

~ Turncoat ~

New Life

Fang sighed quietly, pulling his cloak tighter around him so the humans around him wouldn't see his mutated features. It had been two nights – in the labyrinth, they had soon started to count the nights instead of the days – since he had left. He had left Manhattan the night Reilly had freed him and this evening he had let also the borders of New York City behind. Now he was walking through the streets of New Jersey, looking for a place to live. "Perhaps I should have asked Reilly if I could stay with him," Fang mumbled to himself. His fur kept him warm but it was still pretty cold outside. He had never been someone for holidays like Christmas but right now, he would really enjoy some company. "I wonder what my folks are doing."

He shook his head to get rid of these thoughts. *From down here, it will take hours till I find something. It's time that I get a better view.* With this thought, Fang entered an alley. After making sure no one was there to see him, he started climbing up a fire stair. "If Sevarius wanted us so badly to resemble gargoyles, why couldn't he plan in some talons?" he grumbled after reaching the top of the building. *...talons... Talon... I wonder how he and the others are doing.* He shook his head again. "Shit, can new freedom drive someone crazy or what?" He jumped off the roof before his thoughts would turn melancholic again.

Fang kept looking for a place where he could live until he decided what he would do now that he was finally free again while he glided over the city. He really hadn't thought much when Reilly had taken off his ankle cuff, he only knew that he would never return to being prisoner again.

A fearful scream tore him from his musings and he stopped surprised. The scream had come from an alley close by. The few humans who were still out cast looks at the alley before passing quickly. Fang hesitated a moment, then he straightened. "Well, there are no gargoyles here to save the night so I guess they'll have to settle for mutant." He landed on one of the buildings on either side of the alley and looked down in it.

Four young men, barely adults, were standing around a scared woman. "P-please, I don't have any money," the woman stuttered.

One of the man tsk-ed. "That's not nice; coming here without any gifts for us. Let's see if we really don't find anything interesting for us."

The woman looked around her frantically, looking for a way to escape. "No, please, leave me alone."

The man who had spoken motioned for the others to close in on her.

Fang jumped down in the alley, knocking one of the attackers out. "Hey, didn't you hear what the lady said?"

The three other men stared at him, trying to understand what he was, before they decided to attack anyway. The woman, seeing their distraction, ran out of the alley as fast as she could.

Fang sighed. "Fine, if you want to do it the hard way, be my guest." He delivered a blow to the jaw of one of them. Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw how another pulled out a knife and prepared to throw it. "Oh no, you don't!" Fang sent an electric blast in his direction, making sure it only knocked him out.

The gang-leader watched in shock how that... whatever it was... took out his men. Cursing his bad luck inwardly, he reached into his coat and pulled out a gun. "Let's see if you aren't also vulnerable!" he shouted and pulled the trigger.

Fang whirled around and saw the gun. *Oh shit!* It was too late to completely avoid being hit so he was already prepared for the pain but it never came. Instead there was a bluish blast and the man dropped to the floor, unconscious. Fang blinked surprised. "Who the hell-?"

His question was answered by the sound of wings and a winged figure that landed in front of him. She was clearly female, dressed in jeans and a red shirt and an orange cloth wrapped around her middle. What really got Fang's attention was that she had dark-blue skin, wings and the head of a raven.

"Hey, I didn't know that there are other gargoyles here." She grinned. "Are you new here?"

"Yeah, I am." He nodded in the direction of the man with the gun. "Thanks for the help."

She shrugged. "It's what gargoyles do." She looked at him curiously. "And I have never met another gargoyle who can throw blasts. My father and I are the only ones in our clan."

"Likewise. You're also the first gargoyle I saw with that ability."

"The first? But what about you?"

Another gargoyle, this one male, landed in the alley, saving him from having to think of an answer. This one had green skin, spiralled horns and short black hair. He was wearing jeans and a black muscle shirt.

"Rowena, what is taking you so long? Professor Daniels is already waiting for us," he said.

"Sorry Jerry, but I wanted to greet the new gargoyle in town," the female retorted, pointing at Fang.

The male stared at Fang in surprise, then he grinned. "Cool. Are you alone? Since when are you here? We never saw or heard about other gargoyles in New Jersey when we visited. By the way, I'm Jerry and that's my sister Rowena." He offered Fang his hand.

Fang hesitated a second before shaking Jerry's hand. "I'm Fang. I arrived here today,

alone.”

“And where are you staying?” Rowena asked.

Fang shrugged. “Where I can find a place, I guess.”

“Hey, why don’t you come with us? Gwen and Brian will be happy to meet another gargoyle,” Jerry suggested.

“Yeah, and Professor Daniels won’t have a problem with it, I’m sure,” Rowena agreed.

Fang looked from one to the other, before shrugging. “Well, why not.”

“Great. Just follow us. It’s not very far.” With that, the two gargoyles climbed up the wall.

Fang waited for them to get higher up so they wouldn’t notice him using the fire stair. When he was up high enough, he followed them in the air. “Who is this Professor Daniels?”

“He is a scientist whose family has a history with our clan but it’s kind of complicated. Our rookery parents know the story better than we do. We can ask Alan when we are there. Some of the clan always spend one half of the year with them,” Jerry explained.

Rowena noticed that Fang’s expression had darkened when Jerry mentioned that Daniels was a scientist. “What’s the matter, Fang?”

The mutate shook his head. “It’s nothing, just bad experiences with scientists.”

“Really? Well, don’t worry, Professor Daniels has proven to be a good friend,” Jerry said.

Fang nodded, still deep in thoughts.

They soon arrived at an apartment with access to the roof. There were three others gargoyles and a human on the roof and waited for them. Two of the gargoyles, one female and one male, were about the same age as Rowena and Jerry. The girl had pink skin and dark blond hair. Her brow ridges weren’t very prominent. If not for her pink skin, she could have passed as a human. She was wearing a blue dress. The boy was of a dark orange colour. He had blond hair with little horns protruding from it. He was wearing black shorts and a dark green shirt. The third gargoyle was an older male, probably the one named Alan Rowena had mentioned. He also had green skin, but somewhat lighter than Jerry. The human was in his mid-thirties. He had black short hair.

“Rowena, Jerry, what took you so long? Did you encounter any problems?” the younger male asked.

“Yeah, but what’s more important: we met another gargoyle.” Jerry motioned to

Fang. "He's new in the city and looking for a place to stay."

The older male stepped forward and offered Fang his hand to a warrior handshake. "Welcome in New Jersey. My name is Alan. I'm the leader of the current group."

Fang shook the hand, internally relieved to have picked up that gesture when the clan was visiting the Labyrinth. "Hello. I'm Fang. If you don't mind me asking: what do you mean with 'current group'?"

"Well, our clan lives somewhere else but a small group is always here to protect the city where some of our ancestors hatched," Alan explained. "We wouldn't mind another pair of helping hands so you're welcome to stay for as long as you want." He turned to the human. "That is if Anthony has no problems with it."

The human shook his head. "Not at all. As Alan said, you're welcome here. My name is Anthony Daniels. My family has been housing the gargoyles for generations, so don't worry. You will be completely safe here when you sleep."

"Yep, he's right. We've been coming here for years and we were always safe, even when the Quarrymen tried to gain followers here," the other young male gargoyle said. "By the way, I'm Brian and that's Gwen."

"Thank you very much but I can introduce myself," Gwen said.

"Well, so sorry. But you didn't so I did."

"Contrary to others, I don't just take others by surprise."

"You call that taking by surprise? Well, at last I know how to talk to others!"

Fang blinked surprised. "Wha-?"

The other four shook their heads. "Just ignore them. They're always bickering," Alan advised.

"Alan's right. These two are horrible. I don't think I can think of any night when they were not like that," Rowena agreed. "They don't want to hear this but everyone is convinced that they will become mates sooner or later."

Anthony sighed. "Either way, their argument will have to end soon. Sunrise is only a couple of minutes away. You'll have to take your positions for the day."

The gargoyles mumbled in agreement. Fang on the other hand froze. He hadn't thought of that. They would notice that he was no gargoyles when he didn't turn to stone.

Alan looked at him worriedly. "Are you alright, boy?" He placed a hand on Fang's shoulder. "You really don't have to be nervous. This rooftop is completely safe. But if you want, you can stay inside for the day till you're more comfortable."

Fang cleared his throat. "Um, yeah, that'd be nice."

"Well then, follow me. I'll show you a room where you can stay for the day," Anthony said.

The gargoyles smiled at them before taking positions at the edges of the roof.

Once inside, Fang stopped. "Uh, Anthony? You don't have to find me a room for stone sleep. I won't need it."

Anthony looked confused. "Why not? Have you changed your mind about staying inside?"

Fang took a deep breath. "No, I mean I don't need a room because I won't turn to stone." Anthony opened his mouth to speak but Fang continued before he could say anything. "I might look like a gargoyle but I'm not."

Anthony sat down on his couch, shocked. "But if you're no gargoyle, what are you?"

"Well, I was human once but Sevarius mutated me and three others into this." He motioned down his body.

"He-- that-- that's horrible! How can a scientist do something like that?" Anthony jumped up and started pacing. "How long are you--?" He made a gesture to show what he meant.

"Mutated? You can say, I'm used to it. We've encountered worse already. To answer your question," Fang shrugged. "I'm not sure. Somewhat longer than a year."

"One year? But how come no one knows about you? And why are you here, alone?" Anthony stopped. "And what do you mean with 'worse'?"

Fang hesitated. "It's a rather long story."

Anthony took a deep breath. "Well, we have time. Let's just sit down in the kitchen and eat first and then you can tell me everything." He led the way, muttering in under his breath "And I have a bottle of whiskey there. I think I'm gonna need it."

It was almost noon when Fang finished his story. Once he had started talking, he had soon told everything he knew about what had happened in Manhattan.

Anthony leaned back in his chair. "Oh boy. And here I thought *my* life were complicated. At least we don't have to worry about mad scientists and crazy mercenaries."

"I guess you get used to it after a while." Fang hesitated. "What will you do now that

you know of my past?"

Anthony shrugged. "Well, we'll wait till sunset and then we'll let Alan decide."

Fang blinked surprised. "You're not throwing me out?"

"No. I believe in giving second chances." Anthony smiled ruefully. "My ancestor surely needed one."

Fang regarded him curiously. "What do you mean?"

"One of my ancestors was part of a group of British conquerors. They were sent to conquer an island in the Pacific. There was also a gargoyle clan on the island but the soldiers betrayed and killed them. Well, 'massacred them' is more fitting.

"My ancestor regretted their betrayal, so he hid the eggs and later took them with him. He raised them together with his own children until he found a clan for them.

"When the gargoyles were old enough to learn about their parents, they forgave my ancestor.

"Ever since, some of the clan have visited my family here."

Fang shook his head. "Great. Why did Xanatos need us to look so much like gargoyles? They're far from safe," he mumbled before turning to the human again. "Um, Anthony, I'd prefer it if we could keep my history to ourselves for the time being. I'd rather tell them myself later." *About right before I leave for a new place. But right now, I have a place to spend some nights till I get rid of these sentimental thoughts.*

Fang carefully balanced the shopping bags he was carrying while Anthony opened the door. "Not that I'm complaining – I'm really happy you let me stay – but what the hell did you buy all this for?"

Anthony shrugged. "Well, tomorrow night I am celebrating Christmas with five gargoyles and a mutate, so I do need a lot of things. What you're carrying is the food and some of the last presents." He grinned. "It really helpful to have someone to carry all this, so for me, there is already a good reason to keep you around."

"So nice to know my presence is appreciated."

Anthony grinned at him. "Just making sure to keep your ego at a healthy size." He took the presents and carried them in the living room where they would spend their Christmas together. When he returned, he looked more serious. "When did you plan to tell the clan of your past? They still believe you're a gargoyle. Tonight would be a good opportunity, don't you think?"

Fang stopped. "Well, I-I'll see. Perhaps I will."

"Fine, I don't want to pressure you." Anthony glimpsed out of the window. "Either way, they should be awake now. Let's go see what Alan planned."

The five gargoyles had just awoken and were still stretching their wings. Jerry walked over to Alan. "So, what are we doing tonight? Hunting some criminals or just celebrating?"

Gwen spoke before the older gargoyle could answer. "We should wait for Fang. It'd be unfair to keep him out, just because he sleeps inside."

"Oh, someone has a crush, huh?" Brian teased.

"That's bullshit."

"Really? I've seen you sneaking glances at him the last couple of nights," Jerry said.

"But not because I'm interested in him. It's just the first time I've seen another gargoyle beside Rowena and Coronus who looks like that. And even if I were in love with him, I don't think that's any of your business."

Brian looked at her closely. "Oh yeah? Well, you're our rookery sister, so I have a right to know it if you decided to run off with some unknown stranger."

Jerry and Rowena winced while Alan just shook his head in exaggeration.

Gwen's eyes glowed slightly red. "I'm no hatchling. I don't need my siblings to protect me anymore. And I certainly don't need you to act as if..."
She stopped when the door to Anthony's apartment opened.

"evening," Fang greeted them.

Brian just growled at him, shoved him out of the way and went inside. Gwen huffed, jumped off the roof and glided away.

Fang looked to the other gargoyles questioning. "Did I do something wrong?"

Alan shook his head. "Don't worry, the two of them are just too stubborn again to see what's right in front of them. Jerry, go look what Brian is doing and then patrol in northern direction. Rowena, you and Gwen are taking the south. Hopefully these two will have calmed down until later." When the two younger gargoyles had left, he turned to Fang. "And we are taking the east. Except naturally you prefer to stay here."

Fang hesitated a second then shrugged. "Why not. I'd like a chance to stretch my wings."

Jerry and Anthony found Brian pacing in the living room. They watched the orange gargoyle for a couple of minutes before Jerry motioned Anthony to leave the two brothers alone. When the human had left the room to prepare the meal, he stepped in to get Brian's attention.

Brian just growled. "What do you want?"

"Alan decided that we should go on patrol before celebrating and the two of us are assigned the northern direction."

"Oh and our dear new friend is out on patrol with Gwen, isn't he?"

Jerry rolled his eyes. "You do know that you're behaving like an overly jealous idiot, do you?" He kept talking before his brother could interrupt him. "I was only teasing Gwen when I said she'd been watching Fang. I haven't seen them flirting at all."

Brian turned away. "Why are you telling me that? It's not as if it's of any interest to me."

The green gargoyle groaned. "Who do you think you're kidding, Bri? We've always been good friends so I do think that I know you. You're obviously in love with Gwen."

"So what if I am?"

"Then I think that you should apologize when we return if you don't want her to stay angry with you."

Brian sighed. "You're right. I overreacted. – Why does it have to be that difficult with Gwen and me? You and Tess don't have this kind of problems."

"Probably because we're less stubborn."

Brian sighed again. "Probably."

It took Rowena a while to reach her rookery sister. Gwen was gliding as fast as she could before suddenly slowing and landing on the roof of a building in front of her. She just stood there, her wings wrapped around her.

Rowena landed behind her and slowly stepped closer. "Gwen?" she asked carefully.

Her sister just growled annoyed. "I don't believe him! What does he think I am? Sure, Fang's nice and we haven't really seen that many gargoyles who resemble animals but that doesn't mean that I'm interested in him. Why the hell do they always have to believe it's a relationship you're after when you're talking to a guy?"

Rowena just listened to her sister's rant. "Well, you know Brian. He often speaks

before he thinks. I'm sure he didn't mean it," she soothed her.

Gwen sighed. "Yeah, boys. You can't live with them but you also can't live without them."

Rowena laughed. "Too true. Now, let's get on with our patrol and we can plan a nice girls' night out for the next night we have time."

Gwen grinned. "Sounds perfect."

Fang and Alan glided over the city. Alan was looking around, trying to see if there were any criminals out. Fang on the other hand was just enjoying the chance to glide freely.

"Now, have you decided whether you stay with us?" Alan asked after a while. "I'm sure Kenneth, our leader, will be happy to accept you in our clan. A gargoyle shouldn't have to live alone."

Fang was somewhat startled. He thought about Alan's question. *Well, why shouldn't I tell them that I won't stay?* "I..." He stopped when he looked into Alan's face, saw the trust there. He couldn't remember the last time someone had trusted him. "I... well, I..."

His stuttering was interrupted by screaming on the ground. "Let's talk about it later. Now we have to deal with what is happening down there," Alan said and dived down. Fang followed him hesitantly to the rooftop of an older building.

They looked down in a small alley. Five teenagers were standing in front of the backdoor of a shop. They were wearing black leader jackets. One of them had a gun in his hand and was pointing it at a clearly frightened elderly shopkeeper.

"Let's help the poor man," Alan said.

"What about the gun?" Fang asked.

"If we're quick and surprise them, he probably won't shot us. Still, be careful and don't take any unnecessary risks, okay?" Alan looked at him seriously.

Fang just nodded, too surprised and – even if he didn't like to admit it – touched by the worry in the gargoyle's voice.

With a battle cry, both of them dived down, Alan heading for the teenager's leader. He hit the youth, making him drop the gun. Fang threw another young man away from the shopkeeper. "You will not hurt anyone or steal anything, not while we can prevent it," Alan declared.

The youths stared in shock but then their leader shook himself out of it. "Oh yeah?

We'll see if you can prevent it at all."

"That we will, boy," Alan replied.

"Don't you dare call me boy!" the youth yelled and rushed up to challenge the gargoyles. The other four followed his lead.

Fang grinned. *Finally some action again*, he thought. He sent two of the youth down with low-level electric blasts knocking them out. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed that Alan had also knocked out one boy and was just throwing back their leader which left only one more boy. He looked around for him but when he finally saw him, he froze.

The boy had picked up his leader's gun and was aiming it at Alan and Fang with shaking hands.

"That's it, Bill! Shot these freaks!" his leader said.

The boy, Bill, hesitated, clearly frightened by the idea of shooting someone. "Are... are you sure?"

"Fuck, just do it! You're already involved, so you won't get out. You already are a criminal so you better do what you can to avoid being known as one. Shot them, all three of them," his leader said. "You have no other choice."

"Don't listen to him!" Fang contradicted. "You always have a choice. There is a big difference between being a thief and being a murderer."

"What does something like you know? I'm on my own! My brother Jack got killed and my parents don't give a shit about me!" Bill yelled.

Fang swallowed. *Well, now or never*. "I do know what you're talking about because I was human once."

"Oh yeah? Can you prove it?" Bill yelled.

Fang looked at him again, seeing clearly now what he had only guessed before. "I can. I think you know me. Your real name is William Adams, isn't it?" The boy's sharp intake of breath was answer enough. "I'm Steven, Steven Fisher. I used to hang out with your brother. You always asked us to take you with us when we went out but Jack always refused because he didn't want you to get involved in such dangerous things. Things like this." Fang gestured around the alley, slowly stepping closer. "I'm really sorry he was killed. As for your parents, I might not have known them very well but I know that they loved the two of you. So don't tell me you're on your own and that you want this life. I thought so, too, and look what it brought me. You still have a way out. If you put the gun down, everything will be okay. You can still return home and have a good, normal life. But what if you shot? You'll end up in prison, yes, but the important question is: can you live with the knowledge that you killed someone? I don't think so. I remember you to be a good, kind boy who couldn't harm a thing and I don't think you

have changed that much. I don't think Jack would have let you. So give me the gun, okay, Bill? Please give me the gun!"

The boy's shaking had increased and he allowed Fang to take the gun out of his hands. He blinked hard, trying to keep the tears at bay.

Fang took the gun, looking down at the boy. He clearly remembered Bill and his older brother Jack. The bittersweet memories caused him to do something very unusual for him. He dropped the gun and reached for Bill instead.

Bill allowed himself to be hugged by the mutate, wrapping his own arms around Fang and burrowing his face in his fur, unable to further contain his sobs.

Fang wrapped his wings around the smaller figure protectively, stroking his back. His gaze wandered to the shopkeeper, who looked at him in awe, and to Alan, who wore an unreadable expression causing Fang's heart to clench. *Well, seems I don't have to find an excuse to leave.* He tried to play it down but couldn't keep from feeling sad at losing their friendship.

The shopkeeper looked from one winged figure to the next. "I don't know what to say. I heard about gargoyles but I thought you only live in New York."

Fang smiled tightly. "That's a different clan."

"Well, wherever you are from, thank you for your help," he said. He looked at the boy in Fang's embrace. "I have to tell the police about the thieves but I'll put in a good word for the boy."

"Thank you," Fang replied. He looked down at the boy. "If I take you to your parents' home now, will you go to the police tomorrow?"

Bill nodded. "I promise."

"Good. Put your arms around my neck and hold on. I have to climb up the house a bit before I can glide." When Bill did as told, Fang just started climbing up a fire-escape, not daring to look back to Alan.

The flight to Bill's home was short and quiet. Fang landed in an alley close to the apartment building and set Bill down.

"Thanks Steven, for keeping me from becoming a murderer," Bill said, "and for talking some sense into me."

"It was nothing. I just couldn't let Jack's baby brother make the same mistakes I did."

"Still, thanks a lot. Will you stay here longer?"

"I don't know, Bill, I don't even know if I still have a place to stay."

"If you don't you can stay with us!"

Fang laughed. "I don't think your parents would be all that happy with that. They didn't like me when I was human so I don't think they'll prefer me as a mutate. Still, thanks for the offer. I'll check in on you tomorrow night and then I'll tell you whether I'll stay here. Deal?"

Bill shook his hand. "Deal."

Fang watched him turn and walk away. He stayed there, staring out of the alley, deep in thoughts, in memories. He barely noticed that it started snowing. He remembered the time he had spent in New Jersey, his friendship with Jack and some others. He now regretted leaving the city years ago. Sure, he didn't really regret becoming a mutate, unlike the other three but contrary to them, he hadn't had a real life anymore. Still he now found himself wishing to be back in time to when he had been friends with Jack and the others. He found himself feeling illogically guilty for not being there for Jack and Bill, allowing Jack to be killed and Bill to end up in such a gang.

"Well, you handled that really well," a male voice said, pulling him out of his thoughts. He turned surprised to see Alan. "Alan," he said pretending to be calm, "decided to check where he lives?"

"No, I'm here so we can go back to the others."

Fang stared at him. "What do you mean?"

Alan smiled slightly. "Well, we do have a meal prepared. Now we have another thing to do. Your story seems to be even more interesting than you let on. You certainly got me interested."

Fang hesitated for a few seconds, then nodded. "Alright, I'll tell you everything."

"So let me get this straight. You were human once, a petty thief nonetheless, until last year when you were turned into this form," Jerry repeated after Fang finished his story. They were all sitting in Anthony's living room. The girls were sharing one couch and the boys the other. Alan was sitting in an arm-chair beside the boys' couch. Anthony had already gone to sleep after explaining that he already knew.

Fang had been pacing nervously while telling them about his past but now he slumped into a chair. "Yes, that's about it."

"Why didn't you tell us?" Alan asked after a little while.

Fang shrugged. "Didn't seem necessary to tell you considering we probably won't see each other again."

"Don't you want to stay with us?" Rowena asked.

Fang opened his mouth but no words came out. "But...but I'm not a gargoyle. I-I..." He took a deep breath to calm himself and stop stammering. "I never thought about it." He gave a dry smile. "I'm not exactly the type for honourable heroics."

Alan stood up and went over to him. "I think you're fooling yourself, boy. You try to convince everyone, including yourself, how bad you are. But your actions at the burning hotel and tonight show that you aren't. You told the boy that he can still have a good life. I'd like to think that *we* can offer *you* a good life. Perhaps not what you imagined years ago but still a good life."

Fang shook his head. "I don't understand you. Why are you that convinced that I could be part of your clan?"

"Robin, the man who saved our clan and gave them their home, always said that everyone deserved a second chance," Brian said.

"Yes, and this might be yours," Gwen added.

"So what do you say?" Jerry asked.

Fang looked from one gargoyle to the next, clearly lost.

"How about you take some time to think about it?" Alan suggested. "You have all day to yourself. We have to go outside now."

The four younger gargoyles mumbled some complains but went out.

Fang held Alan back. "I don't know what I'll do or if I can really do this but still... thank you for believing in me."

Alan smiled and patted his shoulder. "Your welcome." Then he also left.

Fang looked after them. He had no idea what to do. He sighed. *Well, not much sleep for me today.*

Bill sighed relieved when he left the police precinct. It had gone surprisingly well. He slowly went home where his parents probably were already waiting. Suddenly a figure in a long cloak went to him. He tensed nervously.

"Hey, Bill, everything okay?" the stranger asked.

"Steven?" he asked surprised, trying to see his features.

The other nodded. "Listen, can we talk somewhere less open so I can take off this stupid cloak?"

"Sure, I know just the right place," Bill said. He entered a small alley, leaving the Christmas crowd behind them. After some minutes walk, they arrived at an old factory.

Fang looked around taking in the boxes arranged to sit on. "Is this a meeting place of that gang you were in?"

"No, Jack and I used to come here when we wanted to get away from everything." Bill's expression saddened briefly but then he smiled up at Fang. "Well, let's sit down."

Fang did so. "Now, back to my question: are you okay?"

Bill nodded. "The shopkeeper was really nice, stressing that I hadn't really done anything and he even told the police I'd helped him. The officer I talked to, Detective McCormick, was also very understanding. I told him everything, and he said he'd see what he can do. He even let me go, saying that because I came on my own, I wouldn't try to run away now. He said that if I testify against the others, I even might now have to go to prison."

Fang smiled. "That *is* good news."

"That it is. Mom and Dad are happy to have me back. You were right, you know, about them caring for me." Bill smiled, obviously happy. "And what about you? Are you staying in Jersey?"

"I'm not sure yet."

Bill frowned. "Can't you stay with the other guy from last night? You know, if they won't let you, I can talk to my parents."

Fang shook his head, smiling. "I already told you I won't ask that of them. As for the clan, they are ready to accept me but I don't think I'm right in a gargoyle clan. A clan always protects something and I'm hardly someone to do police work."

"Is that what they do? I never heart of gargoyles before. How did you meet them?"

"In Manhattan or here?"

"Both."

Fang sighed. *Here we go again.* He told Bill shortly about his encounter with gargoyles.

Bill tilted his head. "Why don't you try living with them? They seem nice enough and you already showed that you can do this hero act. Plus if you stay with them, we can talk some more." He played with the hem of his shirt. "You know, about Jack and stuff."

Fang hesitated, then nodded. "Alright Bill, I'll stay for a while."

When the gargoyles awoke that evening, they found not only Anthony but also Fang standing behind them, waiting for them to wake up.

"So, boy, have you decided?" Alan asked.

Fang nodded. "I'll stay with you but I can't say for sure whether I'll stay for long."

"Good enough," Alan said. "We stay here until January the 10th, then we leave for the mansion and another group comes here."

Fang blinked. "Whoa, wait a minute. Mansion? Okay, you gargoyles are often in danger but you certainly have a good lifestyle."

"Yeah, well, it depends on who your allies for daytime protection are and we are very lucky to have not only mortal allies but also some very powerful immortal allies," Brian said.

"Immortal?" Fang echoed surprised.

"Oh, right, we forgot. Most mortals today don't believe in magic or immortality anymore but..."

Fang interrupted Jerry. "It's okay, I've seen an immortal gargoyle who turns into a human during the day, so I do believe in it. I was just surprised, that's all."

"Ah yes, we've heard of her, too. Demona, isn't it?" Alan said. "Well then I hope you won't have a problem with travelling magically."

"Wait a minute. That was not mentioned. If they have a mansion, can't they transport you in another way? By helicopter or something?"

"Theoretically yes but travelling to Great Britain by magic is a lot faster," Gwen replied.

"Great Britain?" Fang repeated. "Okay, I think I'd like some more information now before I turn into a parrot. What kind of clan are you? I mean from what I picked up about the Manhattan clan, they already have an almost unbelievable history but you seem to top it."

"Let's go inside so we can have breakfast while I tell you everything," Alan suggested.

Once everyone was in the kitchen, Alan started talking again. "Well, first things first: our clan calls themselves 'Seelie Clan' because Robin, the heir of the Seelie Court (which is, by the way, a fraction of Fay), saved some gargoyles of the kingdom of Ys and their rookery back in the early fifth century. Later, he offered them one of his

mansions which is on an island, the same island where most of the Elder Court live.

"When we return there, I'll talk to the leading group of our clan about you. The leading group are Kenneth, our leader, Rob, his second in command and Maude, our story teller and historian. They have the final decision whether or not you can stay with us permanently. You can talk to them about whether you want the rest of the clan to know about your past or if you just want to ignore it."

"I'm not sure yet which of it. Heck, I'm not even sure if I will stay that long," Fang said.

"We'll see, boy," Alan said. "Now, let's go on a quick patrol so we can finally start celebrating." The younger gargoyles went out on the roof again but Alan waited. He looked at the mutate. "Are you coming, Fang?"

Fang hesitated, then nodded. "Why not."

On the roof, Alan looked at the younger people. "Okay, we'll just take a quick sweep in two directions. Jerry, you go north and then west with Rowena and Fang. I'll go south and east with Gwen and Brian." He looked at the latter two. "That is if the two of you can go on patrol together without biting each other's head off."

The two ducked. "We won't," they said together.

"Good, then let's go," Alan said.

"Yeah, the sooner we go, the sooner we're back to celebrate," Jerry said.

"So you're from here originally?" Rowena asked Fang when they had been gliding around for a while.

"Well, among other cities. I lived here for some years when I was a teenager."

"And you never saw any of us before?" Jerry asked.

"Nope." Fang grinned. "I don't think I'd have come here if I'd known. My previous encounters with gargoyles weren't all that good. I've grown up learning to care only for myself and those closest to me so I don't understand how you can protect everyone even though they barely tolerate you."

Jerry shrugged. "I guess it's really how we grow up. We learned to help others and we sometimes receive a thanks. Plus we have some human friends like Professor Daniels so it's okay."

"And our family, our clan, is very close," Rowena added. "What about your family? Didn't they accept your... mutation?"

"I don't really have a family. My mother's dead and my father doesn't give a damn,

never did," Fang answered.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Rowena said.

"Yeah, me too," Jerry added.

Fang shrugged, clearly uncomfortable with the sympathetic behaviour. He didn't even know why he had told them. Not even Talon, Maggie and Claw knew that much about his past.

"I'm curious who they're going to send here for next year," Jerry said, changing the subject. "You see, the current group, as we call it, stays with Professor Daniels for one year. They arrive on December 31 and both groups patrol together until January 10. We don't know exactly who they will be, however."

"And who decides who is in the group?" Fang asked, grateful for the change of topic.

"Kenneth, our leader, makes the final decision. We can volunteer but cannot be sure. Sometimes someone is also sent because Kenneth and the elders think it's good for him or her," Rowena said.

"But they'd never sent someone if they weren't sure they would be okay," Jerry added.

"Sounds as if you speak from experience," Fang stated.

The two gargoyles nodded. "Yeah, our second-in-command, Robin, isn't really comfortable with the responsibility, so Kenneth often sends him here so he can get used to leading," Jerry explained.

Fang grinned. "Seems like a usual problem." He remembered how Brooklyn had helped Talon to catch him.

For a while they glided in silence, Fang looking around to re-familiarize himself with the city. He suddenly saw a house he recognized. "Hey, what exactly is this Christmas celebrating like?"

"Well, as far as we know, like any other family Christmas: we eat something special, talk and exchange gifts. Why do you ask?" Rowena asked.

Fang cleared his throat. "Well, I'd like to visit an acquaintance if we have the time for it."

The two gargoyles looked at each other, then shrugged. "Why not," Jerry said.

Fang glided over to the house he'd noticed. He quickly looked into the windows, then landed on the window-sill of one of the windows and gently knocked against the

glass. The window opened and Bill looked out. "Steven? What are you doing here?"

"Wishing you a merry Christmas. But can we please talk somewhere more comfortable for me?"

"Sure. I'll come to the roof, okay? Just give me a sec."

"Kay." Fang glided up to the roof.

It didn't take long for Bill to arrive on the roof. He grinned at Fang. "Sorry, I didn't expect your visit, Steven." I was celebrating with my parents."

"Nah, that's alright. We were just passing by on patrol. How are your parents?"

"Great. They're really happy that we're finally having a family Christmas again." He looked down self-consciously. "They even have presents for me but I have no money to buy them anything."

"I don't think they expect you to give them presents," Fang replied.

"Still, I'd like to give them something." Bill looked thoughtful. "Do you think they'd be happy if I restarted going to school and graduated?"

"Good idea. 'm sure they're gonna be pleased." Fang looked at him seriously. "It's also good for you."

"Jack and you didn't, did you?" Bill asked.

"No, we didn't. But I hope you're not as stupid as we were." Fang grinned, ruffling Bill's hair.

"Hey, Steven, don't!" Bill batted his hand away but he was also grinning.

"Well, you better go inside again. You don't have the advantage of a warm fur." Fang glanced at the door. "Plus your parents might worry and come looking for you."

"You're right." Bill also looked at the door, a happy smile dancing on his lips. He looked up at Fang. "Thanks for visiting, Steven." He quickly hugged him, then returned inside.

Rowena and Jerry landed beside him. "Was that the boy Alan told us about?" Jerry asked.

"Yeah. He's the younger brother of a friend – a dead friend," Fang explained.

"And why did he call you Steven?" Rowena asked.

Fang hesitated before answering. "Because that my real name, Steven Fisher. I only started callin' myself Fang after I was mutated."

"Would you mind us calling you Steven?" Jerry wanted to know.

Fang stared at him in surprise. "Uh, no. Even if I don't understand why."

"Great. Now, let's finish patrol so we can start celebrating," Jerry said.

The three jumped off the roof, gliding away.

On the street in front of the house, a car stopped and a middle-aged man with light brown hair got out. He checked the address again which he had written down on a note block, then went to the door and rang. Suddenly three shadows passed over him. He looked up to see three forms gliding away. "What the...?"

The door opened, keeping him from checking what it was. He went up to the apartment.

"Yes?" an elder man asked.

"Good evening. I'm Detective Simon McCormick. Is William Adams living here?"

"Yes, why?"

"I'm working on the case of the robbery he is involved in. I'd like to talk to him again about his testifying," McCormick explained.

"Please come in. I'll call my son."

McCormick followed the man into the living room, taking in the interior of the apartment. It was tastefully furnished and there were Christmas decoration in the living room. A woman, about the same age as Mr Adams, was sitting on the couch. She stood up and nodded in greeting. "Please sit down. Can I get you something to drink?" She smiled politely.

McCormick could see how unsure she was. She had probably heard who he was. "Don't trouble yourself. I'm only here to explain a few things and to tell him when he will have to come and testify. I didn't have the time when he was at the station."

Mr Adams returned with Bill. "I'm sorry, sir, he was out on the roof."

"No problem." He turned to the young man. "Hello William."

"Good evening," Bill replied, eyeing him suspiciously.

"I'm not here to arrest your or anything, don't worry about that. I was told it will take a while before the trial starts. The other youths are arrested but you're allowed to stay with your family. Depending on how long it will take, you have to show up at the

station every two weeks. They'll send you a letter with the date of the trial. Okay?"

Bill nodded. "Yes, Sir."

"Well then, I wish you and your family a merry Christmas," McCormick said.

"Thank you, Detective," Mr Adams said. "To you too."

McCormick smiled. "Don't mention it." He nodded at them before he left.

Bill took a deep breath. "Mom, Dad, about my being on the roof... I was thinking and...well, I have no real present for you but I figured out something else. I was thinking about restarting school."

His mother hugged him. "Oh William, that's wonderful. And you don't have to give us a present. We are more than happy to have you back."

Bill smiled, returning the hug. "Seems Steven was right," he mumbled.

His mother pulled back to look at him. "What did you say?"

Bill cleared his throat. "Well, there's something else. ...The... day of the robbery, I met Steven – you know, Steven Fisher – on the streets. He talked to me, told me to return home. I also talked to him on the roof – phoned him, I mean."

His parents exchanged a look. "Fisher is here?" his father repeated. "What did he want?"

"Nothing. I met him purely by accident."

"Where did you meet him? By another robbery?" Mr Adams demanded to know.

"Vincent, please," his wife said.

"He wasn't...involved in a crime. In fact quite the opposite," Bill defended.

Mr Adams wanted to reply but his wife laid her hand on his arm, stopping him. "How about we talk about this tomorrow? It is quite late already."

"You're right, dear. We can talk about it tomorrow," Vincent said.

Bill nodded. "Okay, Mom." He hugged both of them. "Goodnight, then."

"Goodnight, my boy," his mother said.

Bill smiled at them before retiring to his room.

"What do you think about that?" Mr Adams asked when Bill was out of earshot.

His wife sighed. "I don't know. I never really liked him but I don't want to fight so soon with William."

"Neither do I. And if it's right what he said, then we owe him our thanks."

"So what do you plan to do?"

"Well, as you suggested, tomorrow we'll talk to William. But I'd also like to hear what Fisher has to say about that. Do we still have his telephone number?"

"You want to phone him *now*? You'll wake him."

Vincent snorted. "If he's anything like he was, we'll only wake him if we phone during the day. So do you know if we still have the number and where?"

"I think it's still in our address book. Wait a minute." She went to get a black book lying beside the phone and leafed through it. "Ah, here it is." She showed it to her husband.

"Thank you, dear." He took the phone and dialled.

It took a while but finally someone picked up. "Yeah? Who t'hell's there?" a male voice mumbled.

"Adams," Vincent said shortly. "I want to talk to Steven."

"Steven? That bastard ova son hasn't been here for years."

"We know he is here, so call him to the phone!"

"Wha' the hell? I don' know what yer talkin' 'bout!"

Vincent and his wife exchanged a glance. "I see. Then excuse the late call."

"Wait! Where's that bastard?"

"We don't know. Now, good night." Vincent ended the call. "That guy gives me the creeps."

"I know. I don't like him either." She yawned. "What now?"

He wrapped his arm around her shoulders. "Now we also go to sleep."

When Fang, Jerry and Rowena returned to Anthony's apartment, the other patrol group was already waiting for them.

"Did you encounter any criminals?" Alan asked.

"Nah, don't worry. It was a quiet night. We just visited one of Steven's friends," Jerry replied.

"Steven?" Gwen echoed confused.

"It's my real name," Fang explained. He was somewhat uncomfortable with their wish to refer to him by his birth name, something he wasn't used to anymore.

"Well, be that as it may. We should go inside. Anthony's probably prepared the meal already," Alan said.

True to his word, Anthony stood beside a table full of food. A lit Christmas tree with presents underneath it stood in a corner.

Fang blinked, surprised. "Whoa, you've done quite a job, Anthony."

Jerry grinned. "It's great, isn't it? But you should see how we celebrate the Solstice at the manor."

"Didn't you celebrate Christmas the last few years?" Rowena asked.

Fang cleared his throat. "Yeah well, wasn't exactly in a fitting situation," he said as nonchalantly as he could.

"Then it's about time," Anthony said.

They all sat down at the table. "We're eating first and then we're exchanging gifts," Alan explained.

Fang nodded, accepting the bowl with food. The silence during the meal was unusual for him but it wasn't uncomfortable. He relaxed, watching the others. When they had all finished their meal, Alan went to the tree.

"As the oldest here, Alan will give out the presents," Jerry explained quietly to Fang.

Alan took the first present, a thick rectangle wrapped in blue paper. "Rowena, it's for you, from the clan."

Her rookery siblings, Fang and Anthony watched her unwrap it carefully. An old book appeared beneath the paper. Rowena looked through it, then her head shot up. "That's..."

Alan grinned. "We asked the Court for it and they were more than happy to send one."

"Thank you," Rowena said, hugging the other gargoyles enthusiastically.

"What kind of book is it?" Fang asked curious.

"A spell book," Rowena explained. "Remember how I knocked out the criminal when we met? I was using magic then."

Fang nodded in understanding before turning his attention back to Alan who had returned to the presents and selected another. "Gwen," he read.

The pink gargoyle took the present but opened it somewhat less patiently than Rowena had done. Inside was a hairclip in the form of a flower with blue petals.

"How did you get that?" Fang asked Jerry surprised. "I mean you can hardly just walk into a shop."

"It depends. Sometimes Professor Daniels buys it for us, sometimes the Court gives them to us."

"How does Anthony get the money for it? I don't know how much a scientist earns but it seems like he needs quite some money," Fang commented.

"Well, yes, but Robin pays him...well, you could call it rent, so that's no problem," Rowena said, while Jerry concentrated on the present Alan had given him.

"Cool," Jerry exclaimed, holding up a DVD. "I've been hoping to get this film."

"You're really lucky, bro," Brian said. "That movie's part of a great series. Can I borrow it sometime?"

"Sure you can. Depends on what you'll lend me," Jerry teased.

"Well then let's see what you have," Alan said, giving Brian his present.

Brian laughed when he saw that his also was a DVD. "Hey, how about I borrow your DVD in return for the second part of the series?"

Jerry grinned. "I'll think about it."

Alan and Anthony watched them before Alan took the next present. "Ah, this one's for you, Anthony."

The human accepted it with a smile. "Thank you and please also give the rest of the clan my thanks when you return." He carefully unwrapped the present. His eyes lit up. "Ah, whoever you asked, he knows what good books are."

Alan took another smaller present. "Oh, another one for you, Gwen."

"Another?" Gwen asked surprised. She unwrapped this one more carefully. Inside was a potted rose. Gwen looked at it in awe. "It's beautiful but who is it from?"

Brian cleared his throat. "From me. To, you know, apologize for last night. It was wrong of me but I... I was jealous."

Gwen smiled. "For which you had no reason. Still, thank you."

The others smiled, happy to see them reconcile.

Jerry leaned to Fang. "You see, the two youngest generations of our clan receive Christmas presents from the clan, so for us this is the second to last time. Later on, it's only one's mate who sometimes gives you a Christmas present. Well, and in their case, also as courting gifts."

"Well, let's open the last two presents," Alan said. He retook his seat, placing one present in front of himself and giving the other to Fang.

Fang stared at the present. "What's that?"

"Your Christmas present," Anthony said, grinning at his surprise. "Don't you want to open it?"

Fang looked around, seeing all the friendly faces. He swallowed, then slowly started to open his present.

"Well, you see, I wasn't sure what to get you. Pants are a cliché, I know, but I guessed I couldn't go too wrong with it," Anthony explained.

Fang looked at the jeans. They were big, big enough to fit a gargoyle – or a mutate – and were cut off at the knees. "Thank you," he said quietly, still surprised that they'd got him something. "Thank you," he repeated more loudly, smiling at them.

"So, you gonna try them on, Steven?" Jerry asked.

"Sure, why not."

"So you're really considering leaving Jersey again?" Bill asked Fang. The two of them were sitting in the factory again, talking. "Why? And when?"

"Well, Alan, Jerry, Rowena, Brian and Gwen are leaving tomorrow night and they invited me to come with them."

"But didn't you tell me that some others of the... 'clan', I think you called it, are here now? Why don't you stay with them?"

"Yeah, at the start of the new year, they arrived. They're okay. Rob, the second in command of the clan, and his mate – we'd say 'wife' – Virginia are especially nice and welcoming. Still, Alan offered to take me with them, to meet Kenneth, their leader. After all, it's his decision if I can stay with the clan."

"And for how long?"

"To say the truth, I have no idea. I stopped trying to plan my life. I'll just see what will happen and for the moment, staying with them sounds good, especially considering the other possibilities. I'm sick of hiding."

"I see," Bill said. "So you don't know how long you'll stay with them?"

"No, not yet. They always stay for one year here before another group comes to Jersey so I guess at least a year. Well, and if I don't like it there, I'll return sooner. We'll see." Seeing Bill's expression, he changed the topic. "Now, tell me how it is with your parents. Everything okay?"

"It's great. We're getting along really well again. Well, okay, they weren't all that happy when they learned you're back but now they're okay with it."

"You told them about me?"

"Well, yes. At first Dad was angry but not anymore. But they'd still like to talk to you."

"I see. Perhaps I'll call tomorrow. But..." He stopped, holding his hand up to signal Bill to be silent. He listened. Steps were coming closer. Quickly, Fang went to a dark corner where he wouldn't be seen by whoever was there.

Before Bill could decide whether to leave or hide as well, an elderly man staggered inside. "Where's he, boy?" he demanded.

"Who?" Bill asked, surprised that the man was talking to him.

"That bastard ova son, Steven," the man yelled.

Bill took a step back. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't shit with me! I heard ye talkin'!" He grabbed Bill's arm. "Ye know where 'e is, so tell me, now!"

"Let him go!" Fang demanded.

"Then come out!"

Fang slowly stepped out of the shadows. "Well, here I am, father."

"Ha, 'bout time," Mr Fisher said. He turned to where the voice had come from. "Then ye explain... What the devil-?" He stared at the winged, furred figure.

"What, don't you want to greet your son?" Fang mocked.

"Wha-wha-? Steven?" Suddenly Fisher exploded. "What the hell did ye do?"

"You don't like it?" Fang asked innocently.

"You selfish bastard! How dare ye do that? It is yer job to earn money for me. How the hell are ye gonna do that now!?"

"What? You're calling me 'selfish'? Then what are you?"

"Don't talk to me like that! You are my son, so it is your job to provide for me!"

"Your son?" Fang hissed. "You stopped being my father years ago."

"Well, good, who would want a monster like you in his family?"

"Who are you calling a monster?" another voice asked. Alan, Jerry and Rowena landed beside Fang.

"F-fuck," Fisher stuttered. Even in his drunken state, he saw that he could not go on against them. "You'll see what your life will go to like this, boy. Don't come back crying when you see your life crashing down on you." He turned and left.

Alan went to Fang. "Are you okay, boy?"

Fang was surprised how different a word could sound. When used by his father, "boy" was an insult, used from the beginning to make him feel small but when Alan used it, it spoke of care and respect. "It's okay. I knew what to expect, I just didn't know he'd find out I'm back."

"I'm sorry, Steven. I'm afraid my parents phoned him," Bill said quietly.

Fang sighed. "I see. Well, don't think about it. You couldn't know. Now, it's late, so you better go home before your parents start worrying. I'll phone tomorrow and tell you what I decided."

"Okay. Bye." Bill smiled at the gargoyles and left.

"Steven, I'm sorry for what your father said. I know what you said about your father but that..." Jerry shook his head.

Fang shrugged. "Forget it. I've long ago gotten used to not having a family," he said tiredly.

"Oh but you do have a family, Steven, us," Alan said.

Fang's head shot up and he stared at Alan. "What did you say?"

"Steven, no matter what happened in your past, you're very welcome in our clan, in our family," Alan said.

"Thank you," Fang said softly.

"So, how about a quick last patrol for this year?" Rowena said.

"Sure."

When Anthony returned to his apartment that evening, he found Fang pacing in the living room. "Hey, what's the matter, Steven?"

"I promised Bill to phone today. I just don't know how to react to his parents," Fang explained.

"Well, if you promised him..."

Fang grinned. "Yeah, I know. So, can I use your phone?"

"Sure. The telephone directory is in the drawer below it."

"Thanks." Fang said down on a chair near the phone awkwardly and dialled Bill's number.

"Adams," a male voice answered.

Fang cleared his throat. "Ah, good evening, Mr Adams. Here's Steven...Fisher. I...promised Bill to call today."

"He mentioned something like this but I'm afraid he just left with his mother to go to the store."

"Oh, I see. Could you...give him a message?"

"What is it?" Mr Adams asked reluctantly.

"I...decided to accept the offer of the people I'm staying with, so I'll leave New Jersey tonight for about a year."

"The people you're staying with?" Mr Adams repeated suspiciously.

"They are...street workers," Fang explained.

"Well, Bill said that you'd changed."

"I certainly hope I did," Fang said dryly.

"Just out of curiosity: what did you do in New York?" Fang was about to give a sarcastic answer when Mr Adams added "I don't want my son to follow another wrong dream."

"Neither do I," Fang said. "I... did some odd jobs before helping an ex-cop... ex-police

officer to start a homeless centre."

Mr Adams stayed quiet, stunned. "Oh," he said finally. He cleared his throat. "I'll give Bill your message."

"Ah, Mr Adams?" Fang said quickly before he could hang up.

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry for what happened to Jake. I don't know if you want to hear it – probably not – but I – I really feel bad for leaving him behind, for not being there to help him. I'd like to... visit his grave before I leave. Could you tell me where it is, please?"

Again Mr Adams stayed quiet for a moment, obviously thinking about what he'd said. "Okay." He described where the grave was. "And Steven," he added as an afterthought. "I'm also sorry. Billy told us about your encounter with your father yesterday. We didn't know that would happen."

"It's okay. You couldn't know. So, goodbye then."

"Goodbye Steven. Oh, and thank you for giving us back our son."

"Your welcome."

Fang looked out of the window, watching the setting sun. "Hey, Anthony!"

The human looked into the room. "Yes?"

"Tell the clan I'm visiting the graveyard, would you?"

"Sure but why?" Anthony asked in surprise.

"To say goodbye," Fang answered shortly. "Thanks, Anthony." Before the human could reply, he left.

Wrapped in the cloak in which he had first travelled New Jersey after arriving from Manhattan, Fang stood before the grave of his best friend, deep in thoughts. "Hey, Jake," he said quietly. "I'm sorry I didn't stay but left you behind. I just never gave it enough thought. I was just happy to finally be rid of my father." He looked down on his furred hands. "You'd be surprised why he now decided that he doesn't want anything to do with me.

"You see, I did return. You'd probably be happy to know that your bro's back with your parents and off the streets. He'll even finish school. I'll leave New Jersey again for a while but I'll return next year and then, well, I'll keep an eye on Bill. I owe you that.

"But that's the only thing of my old life – both my old lives – I will keep. I'm starting

new. Just as Steven, not Steven Fisher, not Fang, just Steven. And I hope that this time, it will be better."

"Steven?" Again the five gargoyles he'd met some weeks ago stood behind him. "We're about to return. Are you coming?" Jerry asked.

Fang looked back at the grave, then turned to them. "Yes, I am."

"So you're coming back with us?" Rowena wanted to make sure.

Fang nodded. "Yep."

"Good. Then let's go back to the apartment. Someone's probably already there to pick us up," Alan said.

They climbed a tree to get high enough. Then they turned back in the direction of Anthony's apartment.

"How much did you tell your leader again?" Fang asked, growing more and more nervous.

"He and the rest of the leading group know everything you told us. The rest of the clan only knows that you were human," Alan answered.

"Ah, good, good," Fang said.

When they arrived at the apartment, Anthony and another humanlike figure were standing on the roof. Upon closer inspection, Fang saw that the woman's hair was a greenish blue colour, like deep water, and that her ears were pointed.

"Hey, good to see you again," she greeted the gargoyles, then turned to smile at Fang. "So you're Steven? Nice to meet you. I'm Nesaea."

"Uh, likewise." He hesitantly shook her hand.

"So, ready to return home?" Nesaea asked.

"Absolutely," the four younger gargoyles answered while Alan simply nodded.

"Well then, let's go." She made a quick move with her hand and suddenly the air shimmered and a portal appeared.

Fang turned to Anthony. "So, goodbye then. Thank you for your hospitality."

"Your welcome, Steven. I hope you visit again."

"I will," Fang promised. Then he turned and followed the others through the portal.

When they arrived on the other side, three gargoyles were already waiting for them, two females – one younger and one very old – and a male, about the age of the

younger female. The male stepped forward. "Hello Steven. I'm Kenneth, the leader of the Seelie Clan. Welcome in our clan."

"I hope you will feel at home here with us," the younger female added.

"So do I," Steven said. "So do I."

The End