

Tonight, Tonight

The Cambion Rider Chronicles, Volume 1.5

Fannie Price

Published by Platinum Dragon Publishing, 2021.

Also by Fannie Price

The Cambion Rider Chronicles

Siren

Demon Hunt

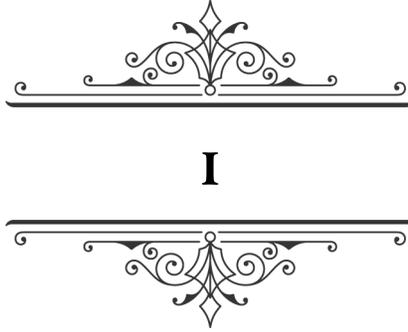
After the Flesh

Tonight, Tonight

Burn

Came Back Haunted

Watch for more at <https://www.fanniepricenovels.net>.



I



“Veronica?”

“Down here,” I call from where I sit on the marina alongside his boat.

Lachlan’s head and upper body appear over the side of his boat. Spotting me, he raises his left eyebrow, shakes his head, and silently disappears from view. My gaze lowers and passes over the name *Moira*, beautifully painted on the back of his boat, before eventually settling on the architectural corpse of the old McCormick Place. Hard to believe once upon a fifty years ago the building was the beating heart of Chicago’s convention circuit, hosting dozens of corporate affairs a year. Rumors swirl about the relic’s current use. I’m partial to the trolls’ lair theory. They prefer places close to water, and the building allows unobstructed access to Lake Michigan. It would also explain why the abandoned structure hasn’t deteriorated.

I redirect my curiosity from the potential new residents in the black, squat building to the name on the back of my lover’s sailboat.

Lachlan spoke of his sister once a couple weeks back, but stopping ritualistic murders meant to unleash a demon upon Chicago took precedence over digging into his backstory. Not knowing why he put her name on his boat brazenly displays how little we know about each other, despite our connubial situation.

Too late for second thoughts. Perfectly timed for regrets.

I hear Lachlan descend the gangplank to the dock, his bare feet hardly audible on the wooden planks as he approaches. He carries the bottle of wine we opened during dinner on his boat. The sight of him swaggering towards me in a pair of blue patchwork shorts and an untucked polo shirt drives me to giggles.

“What?” His Welsh accent devours the ‘t’.

“Your golfer’s outfit undermines your ferocious dragon image.”

“It is not your fear I desire.”

Silently, and still seated in one of the deck chairs, I hold up our wine glasses. Once he fills them, he leans in and brushes his lips to mine. The whisper of a kiss flavored with pancetta and parmesan cheese.

He places the bottle on the ground, plucks his glass from my fingers, and captures my hand. I don’t resist when he tugs me from the chair so he can sit and present his lap to me. I’m not a lap-girl, but I’m compelled to sit on his thighs. My contentment annoys me because I don’t know if the feelings are real, or a synthetic result of our bond.

“A fifty-two-foot vessel and you sit on the docks? I did not realize your antipathy for boats.”

I sip my wine and say, “It’s for water, not boats.”

“I thought you could swim,” he says.

“I can, but I don’t like open water.”

He smiles and swishes the wine around in his glass. “Open water is the best kind.”

“You say that like krakens aren’t real.”

“They do not shelter in lakes or rivers.”

“Can’t survive in fresh water?” I ask. My eyes search Lake Michigan as if my gaze might pierce the murky green depths and find the kraken staring back, but like the city, the water in Burnham Harbor keeps its secrets.

"It is not deep enough, nor is there enough food to sustain them in rivers and lakes."

"You're not helping your case, since you eventually hit the ocean on your way. How long does it take to sail from Chicago to DC, anyway?"

My eyes follow the line of his muscular shoulders when he shrugs and says, "A couple weeks."

I sip my wine. It takes a moment for his words to register. "I can drive across the country twice in two weeks."

"It is not about getting there fast but exploring pleasures along the way."

Lachlan traces the pads of his index and middle fingers in an unhurried line from my wrist up to my shoulder. A shiver that has nothing to do with the summer wind follows his touch. I sip more wine to keep from devouring him from the mouth down. I don't kiss him just to prove to myself I can resist.

His eyes are bright, not glowing yet, but that supernatural illumination is not far off. What thoughts run through his mind? He sold telepathy as being on the bill of goods between riders and dragons, but since our bond is so new, most of my abilities are still dormant.

"We are still talking about sailing, right?"

The left corner of his lips edges into a seductive smirk. He knows the pulse in my throat beats faster because of him. "Come with me."

"That's a hard pass."

"Very hard," he said.

The hint of his smile becomes full-on when my eyes take the bait and trail below his waist. His fingers grip the braids at the back of my neck, but I reduce the space between us without any encouragement from him. With our faces so close, I feel the heat of his breath entering my mouth, but neither of us closes the remaining inch between us.

I trace my nose between his lips, and they part invitingly. Instead of kissing him, I say, "Your attempts to seduce me into a boat trip will fail miserably. Consider yourself forewarned."

"Dragons are known for their persistence," he replies.

"I won't be ready to move to DC for another three weeks, and when I leave, it will be with four wheels on a road."

He tilts his head to the side and caresses the tip of my nose with the centermost part of his lips. "You are adorably stubborn,"

"Is this your ultimate goal tonight? Convince me to sail with you to DC?"

The release of my hair interrupts the moment. He rests his hand on my thigh. Concern nestles alongside the desire in his eyes.

"Tomorrow I leave Chicago. My goal is to spend as much time with my new rider as possible, while cautiously pointing out to her that being separated so soon after *The Calling* ceremony is unprecedented and precarious."

"Unprecedented because it's precarious? Or precarious because it's unprecedented?"

He exhales gruffly. "I do not know why I expected you to take this seriously."

"If you wanted me to take this seriously, you shouldn't have given me wine."

Emphasizing my point, I drain my glass and place it on the ground next to the equally empty bottle. Lachlan sits back completely and stares into the night. I don't need telepathy to know in this moment he's frustrated with me. Our way of handling tension is not compatible, but his new sour mood gives me a twinge of regret.

He's leaving in the morning. He's not even gone yet, and I know I will miss him. This is a first for me and a tricky situation to navigate. Not just Lachlan but all of it. I moved to Chicago at the age of eighteen and have lived here for the past seventeen years. That's longer than anywhere else I've called home. Under normal circumstances I find change exhilarating, but a new life and a new career in a new city is a lot of "new" to deal with at once.

"I get it," I say.

I touch his chest, but he grabs my fingers and holds them aloof when they make contact with the shirt.

“No, you do not, but it is not your fault. You were not raised in a colony with other riders and dragons. You do not understand what it means to be a dragon rider, or the connection the ceremony created between us.”

“I don’t regret our decision, but let’s not kid ourselves. We did this to save lives, not because...”

Damn it. I sensor myself before unintentional, cruel words escape from my mouth, but all it takes is a look into his eyes to know I’ve already said too much.

“Not because of what?” he pushes. “Love?”

A digital ring from his pocket gives me a momentary stay. It also gives me a reason to stand. Lachlan remains seated while he digs the phone out and answers it.

“Hello?”

“Lachlan? Thank god you answered.” A female voice on the other end greets him.

I walk to the end of the pier, but I can still hear both sides of the conversation with perfect clarity. Will there be a day when the increased hearing does not freak me out?

Lachlan stands as Dana, the woman on the other end of the phone, fervently requests he meet her at her summer house. No, not her. Them.

“What is wrong?” Lachlan asks Dana.

“It’s a gargoyle,” she says.

“A gargoyle?” he asks.

“Lachlan, please. I need your help.”

“You have it. I can be there in thirty minutes,” he says.

“If you get there before me, don’t kill him.”

“Why would I kill... hello?” Lachlan pulls his phone away and looks at the screen, but Dana ended the call.

He slides the phone back into his pocket. There is tension when we face each other.

“I must go,” he finally says. “A friend needs my help.”

“With a gargoyle,” I say.

He nods. “I do not know how long it will take. I am not even certain what I will find when I get there.”

“I could go with you,” I offer.

“Racine, Wisconsin, is a bit outside the jurisdiction of Chicago PD.”

“Soon to be a fed, so...” It dawns on me there is a double meaning to the words. “Right. I’ll see you in DC.”

“No, Roni.” Lachlan catches my arm to prevent my departure but releases me when I turn to listen. “I am not angry, I am...”

He pushes all ten fingers into his hair, lacing them behind his head and holding some of the curly locks in place. I’m dying to know what he planned to say, but I don’t know him well enough to guess. Exhaling, he drops his arms to his side.

“Come with me, please,” he finally says. “I want you to. Besides, if Dana wants to fight a gargoyle and not kill it, we will need all the help we can get.”



II



“It seems we have arrived first.”

Lachlan’s words break the silence in the car, interrupted also by the external crunching of his car wheels churning over pebbles. He pulls to a stop in front of a cabin in the woods on the banks of Lake Michigan. Thirty minutes outside Chicago gave Lachlan enough time to brief me on his relationship with Dana, his once-upon-a-time stepdaughter. Her lycanthropy came out as an afterthought. It shouldn’t surprise me. I don’t suppose a dragon sees being a werewolf as a unique trait.

I lower my head and peer into the night sky. There’s an excited child inside me that wants to throw the door open and jump up and down. I’ve never seen a gargoyle, at least not an animated one.

“I thought gargoyles protected people,” I say.

“They do, but there are some ironic scenarios where they turn on humans.”

“Why ironic?”

“Because it is humans that initiate the scenarios that lead to their demise.”

I snort and nod. “Funny how frequently we are responsible for our own demise.”

I pick up my Sig Sauer from where I placed it on the floorboard and needlessly confirm a full clip. When I look at Lachlan, his brows are scrunched together in the hint of a scowl.

“What?”

He shakes his head. “Dana seemed insistent that we do not kill this gargoyle.”

“I won’t. This is just to discourage it from killing me.”

“I will not allow that to happen.”

He places an index finger under my chin and tilts my face up to his. His gaze flickering to my lips suggests potential intentions, but the resignation in his eyes when they return to mine gives me pause.

I recognize the look. Not from Lachlan but from the faces of others along the way when they have something hard to say and know it will be even harder to hear. My anxiety spikes, but lights flood into the back of Lachlan’s car, announcing Dana’s arrival.

We exit, approaching the newly arrived vehicle with a pair of women inside. The driver is toned without being musclebound. Taller than me but shorter than Lachlan, with dark hair twisted in a thick braid. Her fair-haired passenger hesitates, exiting only after the woman I assume to be Dana rounds the front of the car.

“What is she doing here?” Dana asks and gestures to me.

“She is my rider.”

“Your... wow.” She gives me a second look. “Really?”

Lachlan nods, and I feel I’ve missed an inside joke.

“That’s different.”

“And you are?” I ask.

“Do we have time for this?” The nervous blonde steps out of the car and casts her eyes above us. “He will be here any minute.”

"The gargoyle?" I ask.

"Bram," Dana answers with a nod.

Bram the gargoyle. Okay.

"Why is Bram after your friend?" Lachlan asks.

"She's not my friend," Dana says. She toes off her shoes and pulls her tank top up and over her head. I avert my eyes when she reaches behind for her bra closure. "Bram is my friend. She's the idiot that thought it'd be a good idea to betray a gargoyle."

"And why are we here?" I ask.

"There's a panic type room in the basement. If we can get Bram down there, we can hold him until we figure out what to do."

"You can kill him," Nervous Blonde says.

"I'm not killing my friend because he had a lapse in judgement about where to stick his dick."

I like Dana. I wish she stood there in more than a pair of red panties and a sharp wit, but I admire her pluck.

Unfazed by Dana's nudity, Lachlan takes command of the situation, saying, "Roni, take..." he looks expectantly to the blonde.

"...Nina..." the woman answers.

"...into the cabin, please."

I gesture for Nina to follow me. We make it halfway to the home when something impacting the ground stops us in our tracks. Bram drops into a superhero landing in front of us, blocking our path to the front door. His wings are how I imagine a pterodactyl's might appear. Not leathery and not feathery, but with skin resembling an alligator stretching across the bone, and a thick membrane filling in the gaps between.

He rises from his kneeling position to his full height, towering above me. His entire build is slender with spikes jutting out from his knees, elbows and in a crown around his head.

"Oh damn," I say.

When I move, I step on Nina's foot, since she jumped behind me as soon as Bram touched down.

"I mean you no harm," Bram says to me, and then points a finger at Nina. "But she must die."

"Not going to happen," I say.

I want to move backward, but Nina huddles against me and doesn't take the hint when I try to step back.

"Think this through." There's a gravelly sound in Lachlan's voice. I don't see him, since I keep my eyes on the threat in front of me, but I can tell he has transformed into his hybrid shape.

"Bram, listen to me. You don't have to do this," Dana says.

"Leave," Bram says.

"You know we can't do that," she says.

"I have... no choice."

"You do," Dana says insistently. "You can fight this."

"I am sorry."

Bram charges forward. His movement's so quick it is like blinking in and out of existence.

Twelve feet away.

Blink.

Right in front of me.

Instinctively, I fall back, closing the few centimeters of space Nina's cowered body hadn't managed to fill. As we fall, I reach for the gun in the waistband at the small of my back, but my weight on top of Nina traps my fingers around the handle of the Sig. Bram plants a foot my stomach before I'm able to free my hand, yet he only applies enough pressure to keep us pinned without crushing my diaphragm. He reaches out, presumably to pull me away from his quarry.

Air rushes over me as Lachlan careens into Bram's midsection, knocking him to the ground. I roll onto my stomach and pull my weapon. A large gray wolf with brown spots speckling her coat bounds forward. Dana vaults over me and Nina to join Lachlan as Bram tosses the dragon towards the trunk of a massive tree.

Lachlan spreads his wings. Beating them, he twists his body and manages to hit the tree with soles of his feet, using the bark as a springboard to return to the fight.

It's only the third time I've seen Lachlan in his hybrid form. Not dragon nor human, but a mixture of them both. Wings with a thinner bone structure than Bram's spread out from his back. Coppery scales replace his skin and lie flat over his entire body, forming a scaly armor. His ears are pointed like an elf's, with a lean, lithe body to go with them. The new length nearly converts the golf shorts into Daisy Duke's.

Under different circumstances, I would find the fashion faux pas hilarious.

A kick to the side sends Dana sailing through the air, but I hear Lachlan's snarl followed by the clash of bodies. Bram doesn't want to hurt them. It's Nina he after.

"Get your ass up!" I shout at Nina.

I clasp her arm and drag her towards the house until she finally gets her feet working and moves on her own. I release her hand when we reach the porch in favor of wrapping my fingers around the doorknob. Turning it only rattles the locked door. Nina screaming in my ear causes me to look over my shoulder and see Bram, unhindered by Dana or Lachlan, swooping towards us.

His wings spread wide, and he glides towards the cabin with his face contorted in a snarl. He pivots his body and aims his feet at us. I catch sight of Lachlan coming up from behind him, beating his wings fiercely to reach us before Bram. He won't, but then he doesn't need to as long as my timing isn't off.

I take a breath and yank Nina to the left with me. We collapse to the ground, but unable to pivot that quickly, Bram slams through the door, opening the path for us.

Poking my head inside gives me a quick layout. I see a staircase going up to the second level. A living room and a hallway lead deeper into the house. From my angle, I can't tell if there's a door under the stair or not, but I'm willing to make an assumption.

Bram shakes off the initial shock the collision brought and sees me peering inside. I aim the gun at him. I'm sure the bullets won't kill him, but hopefully they will slow him.

"Down!"

I do exactly what Lachlan commands. A rush of air passes over me and then a second. Both dragon and wolf are inside.

"Up," I say to Nina. "Move!"

I grab hold of her arm and pull Nina inside and down the hallway. We stay low as the fight rages on. Dana's growl is followed by a thump and a snarl. From the corner of my eye, I see Lachlan straddling Bram's back with his arm around the gargoyle's throat. Lachlan and I lock eyes, and he nods.

Does he know my plan? God, I hope so.

The sight of the door under the stairs floods me with relief. I fling the door open and start down the stairs when Nina pulls back.

"Let's go, girl," I say.

"Are you crazy? We can't see a thing," Nina says.

I look down the stairs, but instead of darkness, the area ahead appears only slightly darker than the floor above.

"Light switch, five o'clock," I say.

"What?" she asks.

"For fuck sakes."

I backtrack to the sound of furniture breaking and something slamming into the wall to flick the switch. The basement is an entertainment room. A big-screen television takes up half of one wall, with suede couches, loveseats and chairs arranged family room style.

There are two doors at opposite ends of the room. I lead us to the one straight ahead without a diamond-shaped glass window in the center, but with two thick metal bars ready to latch it closed. Nina opts to stand next to me blubbering instead of helping to move either of the bars.

“Ready!” I shout upstairs. “Get in,” I say to Nina.

“I’m not getting in there.”

“There are two ways you can go in that room.”

After several moments of hesitation, she steps into the room and turns around.

“When I say, move against the wall and then get the hell out.”

She nods, and then her eyes widen.

“Bram. I’m sorry,” she says.

“Too late for sorry,” Bram replies.

I turn to face the gargoyle at the top of the stairs and point my gun at his chest. Dana appears behind him, her teeth bared in a snarl, ears flattened and sticking out to the side. I move my head to each side in the most subtle shake ever.

Bram moves with deliberate slowness down the stairs.

“I don’t want to shoot you.”

“And I don’t want to kill you,” he says.

I retreat as he advances and widen my eyes with panic as I ease back into the room. I make a quick move to close the door. Bram beats me to it, grabs hold of my shoulder, and yanks me out of the room. Sprawled on the floor and winded, I don’t have the breath to tell Nina to move.

I can’t see the blonde, but I see Dana. Having inched down the stairs behind Bram, she vaults into the air. Her solid land on his back propels him into the room. Screaming, Nina scrambles out. I scuttle to the door and begin to push it closed as Dana bounds back out. Bram rights himself and rushes forward, but Lachlan reaches us first. He uses his weight to slam the door shut, and his strength to keep it that way until I secure both bars.

I sink down to the floor, giggling from the absurdity of trapping a gargoyle in a panic room.

“That was close,” I say.

“It is not over yet,” Lachlan says in that growling voice.

I frown. “What do you mean? The gargoyle’s in the box. That was the plan.”

“Unless we can thwart his instinct to kill Nina, we will have to kill him,” Lachlan says.



III

We watch Bram via a monitor.

It becomes obvious the room is less a panic room and more a place to store a raging werewolf where they won't be a danger to anyone. For the first five minutes, Bram hurls his body against the door, eventually giving up when he realizes his shoulder would give out before the metal. Now he simply paces the length of the room. He either doesn't know about the camera or doesn't care.

"Can he hear us?" I ask.

"There's an intercom," Dana points to the voice box on the wall. "But it has to be engaged."

She and Lachlan are back in their human disguise, and thankfully she has retrieved her clothing.

"And you're telling me he's like that now because she," I point to Nina near the stairs hugging herself, "told someone about Bram?"

"Not just about Bram," Dana says, correcting me. "But that he's a gargoyle."

I must look confused because Lachlan offers a deeper explanation. "There are two ways for a gargoyle to claim a human visage. The most common is to save someone. If the human sees the gargoyle in the act and promises to never tell anyone what happened, the gargoyle becomes living flesh and remains so until the human dies or breaks their promise."

"Did you know this?" I ask Nina.

She hesitates but eventually nods.

"Then why?" There is a bigger picture to focus on, but I am curious all the same.

"It just came out."

"You are so full of shit," Dana says.

Silently, I agree. I don't need supernatural senses to know revealing someone is a gargoyle doesn't just slip out during dinner conversation.

"What now? He's going to come after me unless we stop him," Nina cries.

"You have a suggestion?" I ask Nina.

"We have to kill him," she says.

"Be easier, and fair, if we kill you instead," Dana says.

I raise my finger in a quick motion. "How about we don't propose murder in front of the law officer?"

Will DC have gargoyles? Hell, I didn't know Chicago had them. Seventeen years... what else have I not discovered about the city? In an instant, I understand Bram. He doesn't want to kill Nina, but he cannot fight what's coded in his DNA. I don't want to leave Chicago, but I cannot stop an avalanche when the snow's already been disturbed.

Dana's scoff pulls me out of my thoughts. "If she hadn't broken her promise, we wouldn't be here now."

"But here is where we are," Lachlan says. "So, let us find a path where everyone lives."

I nod and walk to the second door that turns out to be the doorway to the wine. The bottles offer no solution to our troubles. I place my hands on my hip and realize my right hand continues to clutch my gun.

"I don't know enough about gargoyles to see us clear of this situation." I cast my gaze to the three faces and settle on Lachlan. "What are our options?"

“Non-lethal solutions?” Lachlan holds up two fingers. “What are the chances Bram possesses the constitution to rebel against his nature and not kill Nina?”

“Bram has a lot of strengths, but that’s not one of them,” Dana says. “You might as well ask a new wolf to not change under the first full moon.”

“What’s option two?” I ask.

“We give him a secret,” Lachlan replies.

“Will that work?” Dana asks. Her eyes brim with unshed tears.

Nothing trails down her cheeks, but she’s not far from it. Whatever she and Bram are to each other, it’s obvious he means a lot.

“I have heard of gargoyles being made living flesh, not because they share their secret, but because a human does,” Lachlan says.

“But?” I push when he smooths his right hand over his beard and avoids eye contact with me.

“In the instances where I have heard this working, the gargoyle was inanimate stone, and the secret was substantial.”

“An exchange of secrets one way or the other creates the pact?” I ask.

“Casts the spell,” Lachlan says, “But yes, close enough.”

“We’re screwed,” Dana says.

She turns her back, but the quiet of the room amplifies her sniffles. She wraps one arm around her waist and rests the elbow of the other on top, masking wiping her face.

“How is this not a good thing?” I ask.

She turns to face us, cool composure once again pulled up like bootstraps. “I don’t have any substantial secrets to offer him.”

“None?” I ask.

She shakes her head. “He’s my best friend and I’m a werewolf. Once knowledge about us went public, that didn’t leave a lot of secrets between us.”

“What about your pack?” Lachlan asks.

“I left the pack.”

“When?” he asks.

“When Sophia Legend forced all the packs under one single umbrella with her as the alpha.”

“And even your former packmates won’t help?” he asks.

Dana releases a bark of laughter. “Pack first. Above everything. Above friendship. When I wouldn’t fall down to lick her boots, Sophia excommunicated me. No one will help. Unless...”

“No.” Lachlan says.

“I know it’s a lot to ask, but can you, anything you have.”

He shakes his head. “I cannot. I am sorry.”

“Please,” she pleads. “I know you have something you can use.”

“The secrets I have of that magnitude are not mine to share.”

“No one will know what you tell him,” Dana says.

“She will know,” Lachlan gives a nod in Nina’s direction. “And she has proven to be quite untrustworthy.”

I think back to Moira. How many secrets does Lachlan have? Is it fair to call them secrets if it’s just information he hasn’t shared yet? It dawns on me I need to worry less about his secrets, and more about the ones I plan to keep from him.

“I’ll do it,” I say.

“What?” they ask in unison.

“I’ll give Bram a secret.”

Lachlan shakes his head. “You understand it must be—”

“—substantial? I know.”

“And one no one else knows about.”

I nod, and he looks worried. Behind those copper eyes I see his mind shifting through what he knows about me to come up with what the secret may be.

“You would do that?” Dana asks. Notes of hopefulness return to her voice.

“He didn’t hurt me when he had the chance. He doesn’t *want* to kill Nina, he *has* to. If my secret lets him walk away without bloodshed, then yes, I’ll do it.”

“Looks like I was wrong about you,” Dana says.

“Veronica—”

“—It’s all good, Lachlan.”

“It most certainly is *not* all good.”

He looks away, but not before I see the muscle of his jaw pulsating with the efforts of him clenching and unclenching it.

“You people are crazy,” Nina says and brings the attention of the room upon her.

“I’m undoing your mess,” I say. “I’d watch who I call crazy.”

“He’s...” A monster? Not worthy? Whatever words she intends to speak, she reads the room and swallows them and says, “Take me home.”

“Excuse me?” Dana asks.

“I said, take—”

“—bitch, you don’t—”

“—if I may?” Lachlan intercedes.

Circling his fingers around her bicep, he pulls Nina to her feet. His back is to me so I cannot see his eyes, but I see Nina’s face go slack. I remember the night I felt the pull of his eyes. Any doubts I held of a dragon’s ability to mesmerize people with their gaze evaporate.

“You will walk until you reach the highway and then call for a car. You will remember Dana saved you from Bram, but nothing more.”

He nods to the stairs and without protest she walks up and disappears from sight. A moment later we hear her footsteps on the porch. I don’t ask how he did that, since I’m pretty sure I don’t want to know. Just as Lachlan does not ask the nature of the secret I will share, even though I’m pretty sure he’s desperate to know.

Lachlan and I watch the screen, while Dana speaks into the intercom. Bram’s head jerks up to the speakers when he hears her voice. It’s a one-sided conversation, but he becomes calm as she explains our plan.

“There is no guarantee this will work, and you’re going to be in tight quarters with him,” Lachlan says softly.

“He’s not a mindless monster,” Dana says.

“You’ll be right outside,” I say.

I kiss Lachlan’s cheek, purposely avoiding his eyes before heading to the room. With a nod from me, Dana unbars the door and I step inside, just far enough for them to close it behind me. My gun is tucked back in my waistband, and it takes effort not to pull it when he stands from his squatted position in the corner.

“They cannot hear us?”

“Nope. As long as you don’t lean against the intercom.”

He paces the short wall on his side of the room. “Make this quick. My hold on rational thought is tenuous.”

I nod. I spent the past ten minutes plotting out how to tell him. When I speak, the words tumble out in contrast to my methodical plan.

“I killed my mother when I was a little girl. She was a demon, not my real mother, but I didn’t know that when I killed her. All I knew was she murdered my father and several other men. She wanted me to kill, yet she was surprised when I cut her wrists.”

Bram stops pacing and stares at me like I’m bad weather. “How is it a child murders her parents, and no one knows?”

“Parent,” I amend for him. I stop short of emphasizing she wasn’t really my mother since it’s a copout. A poor attempt to justify something horrific by making it sound slightly less horrific. “Sometimes, people believe what’s easiest because the truth is too horrible. It looked like suicide. No one wanted to believe different, and my silence let them settle on the conclusions they jumped to.”

“And your dragon?”

I shake my head. “I have no intentions of telling him.”

“Why?”

“Does it matter?”

“Not to me. But perhaps you should consider why you feel safer keeping this from him.”

“Lucky for you that I did,” I snap.

I immediately regret my tone, even though Bram appears unfazed. It’s my own foolishness that annoys me. My insecurities. I don’t want Lachlan to see the blood on my palms. Knowing I’m imperfect is different than bearing witness to all my ugly imperfections.

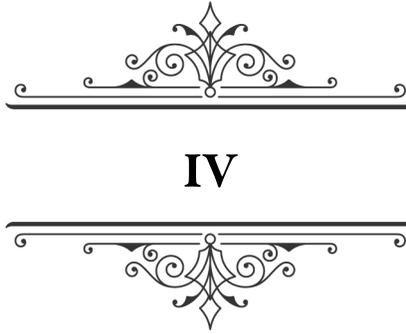
Bram considers my words, nods and says, “Give me your hand.”

When I extend it, he slices my palm open with a talon, repeats the action on himself, and presses our wounds together.

“Thank you, Veronica.”

“That’s it?”

He nods. “Please, leave me now.”



IV



“Will Bram be okay?” I ask.

I lean against the passenger door of Lachlan’s car and study my palm. The wound already looks five days old, not inflicted five minutes ago.

Lachlan nods. “Thanks to you. The metamorphosis takes several hours.”

“I’m sorry,” I begin. “I’m guessing riders and dragons keeping secrets from each other is a big no-no.”

Lachlan raises my hand and places a kiss on the wound. “Yes, I wish I knew all of your secrets, but perhaps that is why we work. We do not need to know everything to trust one another.”

Do I not deserve him, or do we deserve each other? As my thoughts wander, so does my gaze over the water. Can I truly see the lights from Chicago over the lake, or is it my imagination?

“Is everything all right?” Lachlan asks.

He’s facing me, and there’s something in the earnest way he studies me. It feels like a defining moment in our relationship. Either dismiss him and his concerns, or choose to let him in.

“I am scared, and I don’t want to leave,” I confess. “I know I should be excited, but all I feel is lost. Here I have the home-field advantage in dealing with things, but in three weeks that’s gone. No more Molly’s Cupcakes or knowing where something is just from the address. No more Winter Wonderland at Navy Pier or summertime drives past Buckingham Fountain. As dangerous as this city is, I feel safe here.”

“It’s your home. There’s safety in familiarity.”

Lachlan pulls me to his chest and folds his arms around me. With his cheek resting on the top of my head, I find comfort in the way his right hand moves in a large circle across my back. I shelter in the naked vulnerability I can display around him without judgement.

“If I ask, will you stay?”

I feel him nod. “I can put off my departure for a week.”

The warmth I hear in his voice is as comforting as the words he speaks. I wrap my arms around his waist and clutch him tightly. Inhaling his scent and snuggling into the warmth of his body and the security of his arms is enough.

It changes nothing, but for now, it’s enough.

TONIGHT, TONIGHT, is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people or events are entirely coincidental.

Copyright © Fannie Price, 2021

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems without the permission in writing from the author, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

Second edition, November 2021

Published by Platinum Dragon Publishing and Fannie Price

fanniepricenovels@gmail.com

<https://www.fanniepricenovels.net>

Don't miss out!

Visit the website below and you can sign up to receive emails whenever Fannie Price publishes a new book. There's no charge and no obligation.

<https://books2read.com/r/B-A-HXTI-XIWSB>



Connecting independent readers to independent writers.

Did you love *Tonight, Tonight*? Then you should read *Burn*¹ by Fannie Price!



Dragons and cambions do not mingle, they certainly should never mate. As Lachlan and Veronica's bond deepens, it manifests with uniquely dire consequences.

A new city.

A new job.

A new brutal murder.

Cambion-dragon rider, Veronica Sykes, attempts to navigate the pitfalls of her new position as a Special Agent for the FBI's Predator Crime Unit, adjust to her expanding senses, and meet other dragons and riders. An already stressful situation turns toxic when her dragon, Lachlan Brynmor, is attacked and her demon lineage may be to blame.

Now, Veronica must expose the sadistic creature behind a rash of vicious murders, earn the trust of Lachlan's weary fellow dragons, and resist the seductive allure of her demonic blood.

Read more at <https://www.fanniepricenovels.net>.

1. <https://books2read.com/u/mVww1p>

2. <https://books2read.com/u/mVww1p>

