







# Fated to the Panther (Mated to the Monster: Season 3)

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**Category:** Fantasy

**Description:** Remaining a virgin was never my plan, but when the dangerously sexy shifter saves my life, my scientific brain battles my suddenly very needy body to become what he claims we are—fated mates.

KARA WILDWOOD

I'm a witch with a dream and a botanist with a goal.

Both have brought me to Brazil, the Amazon jungle, to be exact.

Days into my research, demons appear, driving me to take shelter in the jungles canopy and a treehouse.

Wait, a treehouse? I had no clue I was in Tarzan's territory.

But it's no ordinary backyard treehouse. And when its owner arrives, his gaze is hungry, and his words border on the edge of crazy.

This has to be a fever dream. Right?

ROANE SMYTHE

Just when I'd given up hope of discovering my mate, my mother of all people gives me her location: my mate has somehow discovered my magically cloaked jungle home.

Racing through a portal to reach her, I battle demons sent to kidnap her, then deal with my bickering parents just as Kara finally begins to accept me and my panther.

But time isn't on our side and it's not long before the real enemy recovers his full strength.

Kara's everything I ever wanted, but she makes me work to prove my love is real, prophecy or not.

What she doesn't realize is that once challenged, my panther never backs down.

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 4:13 am*

Chapter

One

KARA

N ight fell quickly in the forest.

The trilling of insects, the cries of a hidden howler monkey, the loamy scent of decaying plants and rich soil had become familiar over the past few days since I arrived.

I thought I knew what to expect.

Now, barely a week after sipping coffee and listening to my mentor at the university describe the Amazon jungle and all its wonders, I sensed I was being stalked.

Railing against the unfairness of my predicament and calling myself a fool for burying my true self, my powers were useless. Now that the initial shock of being abandoned by my ancient guide had worn off, I focused on taking the next step. Keeping myself from tripping over fallen trees and getting tangled in vines allowed me to control my fear of being alone—barely.

But no sooner had I locked down my anxiety than an awareness of evil replaced it. The faint scent of sulfur triggered a memory from my aunt's teachings. If only I could recall what she'd told me to do when that happens. Hide or run?

Quickly, I succumbed to sensory overload as the sounds and smells bombarded me. It has been a cross I've had to bear for as long as I could remember. Fortunately, I'd learned to keep tight control of my emotions over the years, as they had a direct line to my innate abilities—levitation of objects.

Fortunately, controlling it had become as easy as breathing after years of practice. But I'd never imagined that during the dream adventure of my life I'd succumb so quickly, and on the precipice of hyperventilating.

When I was a child, I'd kept small worry stones in my pockets to calm me when the anxiousness hit. What I wouldn't give to have those talismans with me now.

Another chill skittered down my spine as an unnatural sound filtered through the ferns hiding me from whatever followed. What did I have on me I could use as a weapon?

Dropping to my knees, I used precious minutes digging through my rucksack for something, anything, to use as a ward. Because I had no weapons on me. Any sharp objects had disappeared along with my gutless guide. The so-called expert on this area of the Brazilian rainforest who had left me.

A zap of energy alerted me to a hidden pouch of widow's breath, sage and clove. Wait? How did I not realize my aunt, because it could have only been her, had stashed one of our coven's emergency kits in my bag?

A surge of hope filled me as I collected a pinch, then rubbed the ingredients together in my palms, blowing the magical mixture into the space around me. I closed my eyes and intoned, "Protection I seek. Turn evil aside. As I will it. So mote it be."

Adding a silent prayer to the goddess, which one didn't matter at this point, digging deep inside, I included a large dose of hope. I hadn't practiced any spells since I left

my coven and they were not my specialty. Born a witch, my powers had appeared much later than my coven sisters, but when they did, the fear I saw in their gazes marked me as the outlier I'd known I was shortly after my father left me there.

Once my aunt saw my powers manifest, I heard her whisper to the elders of a prophecy I was a part of, but they denied it when I asked them to reveal it to me.

Their uncertainty and fear of me had made me separate from my peers to the point I chose to attend a human school, where I not only found my love for plants, but met my best friend.

Her life and early death had led me to this moment. Seeking a cure for cancer in the hidden depths of the Amazon rainforest.

Snapped out of my memories, a loud crack rang out and for a brief second I thought maybe my guide had returned. "Hector?" My voice shook with fear. I stood frozen in place. When seconds turned into minutes, I added more prayers.

Couldn't hurt, but I knew.

I knew rescue wasn't coming.

Even as my overactive imagination had me wishing that an Indiana Jones hero would soon burst through the overgrown plants and sweep me into his arms while battling whatever was stalking me, I took a deep breath and pushed on.

Suddenly, a monkey began to chitter and peeked out from the ferns. Its mother appeared, dragging it into her arms, scolding her wayward offspring, then disappearing as quickly.

Well, at least I knew the protection spell seemed to be doing its job. I wasn't in

danger from a couple of cute monkeys, much.

As I continued, my thoughts turned to my mentor and the look on her face as I showed her the remote sector of the rainforest I'd mapped out, where I insisted on conducting my research. She'd reluctantly approved my request only after securing the guide who'd ditched me at the first sign of trouble.

He'd been highly recommended, and now I regretted foolishly turning down offers of help from my fellow researchers at the base camp we all shared.

If only I'd listened to them all instead of believing nothing bad would ever happen to me.

A distant growl, possibly that of an indigenous animal, made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. Please let it be something cute. The noise filled my ears, was that what had spooked my guide? Please don't let it be what the sulfur smell had me imagining—demons.

To make sure, I inhaled deeply. Sulfur no longer scented the air and probably never had. Again, my imagination got the better of me. Adjusting my pack, I pushed forward. Determined to find Hector, I set aside my dream, at least for now, of discovering the elusive plant with miraculous properties that were whispered about by a local tribe. Finding it on my first day had been wishful thinking. I'd start again tomorrow.

Wait, was I going in circles? That grouping of trees looked familiar. I looked down, searching for signs of the trail we'd been following, when the jungle went suddenly and eerily silent.

The deafening quiet was my only warning before red eyes filled my vision. Too tall to be a four-legged animal, shock and fear filled me. When a second pair of eyes

joined the first and the stench of rotten eggs returned, overwhelming me, I took it as my sign to run.



## Page 2

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Chapter

Two

ROANE

The moment I stepped through the portal, I knew my mate was in danger. And not only from the various everyday dangers to be found in the Amazon such as uneven ground, poisonous snakes, or contaminated water.

The reek of demons scented the air. Demons sent by my family's longtime adversary, no doubt.

The Duke of Hell had a hard-on to rule mankind and stand in the way of the prophecy my five brothers and I have lived under since not long after our birth almost a millennia ago. Dante was determined to capture our fated mates and recently almost succeeded with Mac's mate, Sierra, but my grizzly shifter brother had thankfully rescued her in time.

And now it was my turn. The fifth brother to find his mate, to keep her out of the demon's hands.

When we had all gathered at our Scotland headquarters to welcome our oldest brother Quinn's firstborn into the world, our mother dropped the big bomb that she knew exactly where my mate was. But for how long she'd known, she'd refused to say.

Typical Athena. However, she did tell me that my mate's name was Kara and that she

was, as all of my brother's mates were, a witch. Our Greek goddess mother further shared that my mate had somehow found her way into my territory in the Amazon.

Before I left, I did my duty and stayed until the birth of Quinn's son.

I jumped through not one but two portals that my brothers and I have used for centuries to travel the world as we fulfilled one part of the prophecy, the mandate to protect humankind. But the back-to-back usage of two portals may now very well be my downfall.

One trip through the portal, no problem. Two portals in one day? Yeah, not recommended, even for immortals.

I was at least ten miles away from my mate and the stench of demons—at least three—hit me once again as I pushed back the first stirrings of portal sickness. Nothing was going to keep me from Kara. I did the only thing that would push the sickness back and I shifted.

With a thought, my feet and hands turned into four paws. My skin and bones morphing into my panther form. Racing through the jungle, I no longer cared that when I shifted back into a human, I'd be weaker than a toddler for at least half a day. She was all that mattered.

The cat's superior hearing picked up the movements of the demons before the backs of the stinking creatures came into focus. Their prey, my mate, was losing ground. Terror whipped through me as I accelerated and attacked the demon closest to me. Ripping its jugular from its evil body had never been more satisfying. The evil creature's final shriek filled the air, slowing the others.

"What the hell was that?" the demon in the lead spat out, his forward momentum now frozen.

It was all I needed to ensure Kara's safety.

"Fuck, panther." Those were the demon's last words.

Killing demons mere feet away from my jungle home wasn't an ideal plan, but the one I was handed. All that mattered was keeping my mate safe. I leapt at the last demon, wrestling him to the ground, and clamped my jaw over his jugular, breaking the skin before letting him loose. I wanted, needed, to know if others would be coming.

Shaking away the foul liquid staining my muzzle, I stalked the demon now aiming a gun in my direction. "I hate god damned cats," it shouted.

But I continued forward. Not to get closer to him, but to ensure Kara's retreat into the canopy wouldn't be detected.

So close to being captured, I took my gaze off the demon and made eye contact with my mate as I pushed the command "climb" into her mind. My plan was to shift back after she was safe, then I'd interrogate the demon for information.

Fear glazed her wide brown eyes as our gazes locked, but instead of continuing her climb, she yelled, "Don't shoot!"

A split second before the demon squeezed the trigger, Kara screamed again. The bullet struck my shoulder, but I kept pursuing the demon, even as it ran. Change of plans. I used the rest of my dwindling strength and leapt onto the demon's back and did what I should have done in the first place.

Lying on the forest floor, I knew my only hope of surviving the bullet wound was to shift back into human form. The bullet would expel from my body, but unfortunately the portal sickness would return since I hadn't spent enough time in my panther form

to fully recover.

Shifting, I shouted, “Keep climbing!” and prayed that she wouldn’t faint thirty feet in the air.

As I looked up toward Kara, her eyes round in disbelief, she finally turned and made her way to my treetop home. Enjoying the view, I watched her climb farther up, admiring her curvy hips and lovely bottom as she disappeared through the invisible barrier that kept my home protected.

Only then did I allow myself to close my eyes, succumbing to my immortal healing powers.

## Page 3

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Chapter

Three

TEN MINUTES EARLIER

KARA

D emons.

Scarred skin, knubby horns and claw-tipped hands pushed ferns back as they launched themselves toward me. Stumbling, I was nearly knocked on my ass before I recovered my balance and my nerves.

Shit.

Spinning in the opposite direction, I ran until my lungs burned. Until my legs threatened to give out. Until I could no longer see more than a couple feet in front of me. And then I heard laughter and vile, taunting words that slithered like a snake along my overheated back. Shivers wracked my body in the over hundred-degree heat. Not a good sign.

“You’ll never escape us, witch.” The slimy sounding voice only intensified the creepy moment.

While I processed that I wasn’t going to be saved at the last second by an Indiana Jones wannabe hero bursting through the overgrown ferns and vines, an animalistic

scream filled the humid air. It sounded close, but it hadn't come from the demons chasing me. And it oddly sounded as if it said, "M-a-a-ate."

It was exact distraction I needed as the demons slowed their pursuit. A second burst of energy propelled me forward until a monster-sized bobak tree blocked my path to freedom. As I frantically looked left, then right for an opening through the dense undergrowth, a voice filled my head. "Start climbing."

Seemed as good an option as I'd ever get. I'd never considered myself athletic, so I was surprised that my first leap landed me high enough to grab onto the lowest branch. My thighs screamed as I half walked, half climbed, using a thick vine as my anchor, scrambling to the next branch, then the next.

I don't think I even took a breath as I made my way into the tree's canopy, praying the leaves hid my retreating form. A shimmer of purple light appeared above me like a beacon amidst the dense foliage.

Freedom and safety were so damn close, but before I resumed my climb, I heard the sounds of fighting, screams, and the growl of a cat. No, not a cat, a panther. I scrambled higher, but when my pack slapped hard against my shoulders and back, I couldn't hold back a whimper. I sent out a quick prayer that the soulless monsters hadn't heard me.

More screams filled the humid air as the last struggling rays of light winked out. Now in near total darkness except for the glowing barrier, I continued to climb, no longer caring that my poor hands bled from the sharp spines peppered along the tree's trunk.

Higher and higher I went until I remembered these things could grow to over two hundred feet. But there was no time for an anxiety attack. I needed a hiding place that no one, not even underworld kidnappers, if that's what they were, would think a botanist on her first assignment into the rainforest might hide.

Reaching for the next branch, the sensation that always preceded my power emerged, followed by a bloodcurdling scream. Was it from one of the demons or the panther? Unsure of why it mattered which one had been mortally wounded, as both were a danger to me, something was calling to me that I didn't understand. I looked down and when I did, I was gazing into the black panther's glowing green eyes, not yellow as was typical. The connection overwhelmed me and I almost lost my grip on the vine.

Suddenly, the air around the panther shimmered and a man appeared in its place. Tatted down the entire left side of his body with spots resembling the panther's, he was ripped and handsome beyond belief. Muscle upon muscle covered his huge body. His naked body.

The spectacular male bellowed, "Keep climbing!"

My whole being vibrated and for a moment I thought I heard a voice in my head, his voice. "My mate!"

I knew safety was guaranteed if I listened, but the need to find out who, or what the man was, had me hesitating. Torn between the onslaught of feelings bombarding my senses and my body as I stared at the man now passed out with blood oozing from a shoulder wound and gloriously naked, I knew no matter how crazy it sounded, that my life would never be the same from this moment.

And it would begin with me doing the most insane thing I could have ever done. Wrapping the vine around my right wrist, I made my way toward the unknown.

A few feet from the matted forest floor, I surveyed the area around him and noticed a black goo-like substance covering the now dead demons. As the visual sank in, I realized how close I'd been to the end of my life.

That voice rang in my head again and I swore it sounded like, “ Get your sweet ass back up the tree and into the treehouse, now! ”

Treehouse? That was crazy. He for sure wasn't Tarzan and I certainly wasn't Jane. Maybe he'd suffered a head wound I hadn't noticed? Maybe I had?

But it didn't really matter. There was no way I was going to allow my rescuer, naked or not, to become victim to men, er, demons, who wanted me for what reason I had no clue. They knew I was a witch, but other than that, why'd they put their lives on the line to come after me was a mystery.

That was something I'd figure out later because all of a sudden the forest came alive with screeching and squawking. Getting us both to safety was now key to figuring out what the hell happened, and that meant scaling the massive tree.

Jumping to the ground, I barely had time to get my balance when he stood up and shouted.

“Dammit, Kara, I said get up that tree right now!”

Who was this man and how did he know my name? Why should I accept that he wasn't as evil as the demons after me? “Who are you to order me like this? I'm fully capable of taking care of myself.” The words, of course, were ludicrous considering what had happened, but I would not be treated like a child. I had skills and if I wanted to use them, I could levitate a fallen tree and blast it toward him. If I wanted to.

“You are my mate and you will do as I say when your safety is at risk.” The man swayed for a moment before recovering, and remained standing, his eyes glowing green like the panther's.

I should be freaked out by how massive he was, and that I'd witnessed him shift from



panther to man. Yet all I felt was an urgent pull toward him. As if my future, my life, depended on reaching him. Maybe I wouldn't knock him out...yet.

I stepped closer, my fear gone.

He wrapped a beefy arm around my waist as soon as I was close enough. He grunted, "Do you ever do what you're told?" The words were whispered against my ear right before he yanked me to his side, letting loose an otherworldly growl that made all my girl parts stand at attention as he unbelievably carried me back to the tree.

The ascent was dizzying, electrifying, and I should be terrified, but when I searched down deep, all I encountered was a calming acceptance from his presence. Unexpected, yes, but it was as if a piece of my soul, one I'd never realized was missing, had clicked into place.

The scientist in me waged war with my inner witch who had no trouble accepting the supernatural connection tickling my senses.

Did this man know what I was? If he didn't, what would I do when he found out? There were many in the supernatural world who didn't trust witches, but still had no trouble paying for our spells and potions.

How crazy was it that in the middle of a South American jungle I'd not only faced imminent death by demons while pursuing my dream of discovering a long searched for miracle plant, but I'd been saved by a shape-shifting man claiming I'm his mate? I mean, what in the shitstorm of a day is my life right now?

## Page 4

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Chapter

Four

ROANE

My healing had never been quicker. Must be having my mate in my arms. Who even now was wiggling her curvy form, which ramped my claiming instinct to astronomic levels. “Kara, stop right now, or you may find yourself on your back sooner than you’re ready for.”

She froze against me, but even that didn’t relieve my rising need. Would anything at this point, now that I had my mate in my arms?

“How do you know my name?” Her demanding words echoed throughout my jungle home.

With a reluctant sigh, I relaxed my hold and immediately regretted it as she slid down my body, her hip bumping against my aching and growing erection.

She marched around the room, running her hands through her long blonde hair, which had come free during the pursuit. I was momentarily mesmerized by her beauty and her fortitude. Any other female may have fallen apart much sooner.

Her body vibrated with pent-up emotion and watching her pace fed my panther’s need to chase our mate. Kara was glorious, awe-inspiring, and her lack of fear of me filled me with confidence that I’d soon be planting my seed in her womb, doing my

part in advancing the prophecy my brothers and I had lived under for nearly a millennium.

“You were just pursued by demons and that’s what you’re concerned about?”

At my words, she whirled around, her mouth open to respond. Instead, she slammed her full lips together. Her gaze dropped to the top of my thighs, landing on my straining cock, her eyes wide with shock, but also filled with a curiosity that gave me hope.

The pain of my erection had reached a level I’d never encountered in my centuries-long existence. If this wasn’t proof she was mine, then nothing ever would be.

Instead of blushing or acting uncomfortable about my nudity, my mate directed her gaze away from my midsection, then resumed stomping through my home. “So, this is really a treehouse? If you weren’t bald, I could almost imagine you being Tarzan. But where’s the monkey?” She paused next to the bed, then obviously thinking better of it, she continued checking out the space, next stopping at the table I’d spent hours making.

She ran her hands along the glossy finish and jealously filled me by that innocent gesture. She had no idea how close I was to giving her no choice. But it had to be her choice. I would die before ever hurting her.

Her eyes dipped again to my cock. A sweet blush bloomed on her face before she narrowed her gaze and shrugged her shoulders before she moved away and finished walking around my home.

Not sure how to feel by her reaction to my obvious desire for her, I grabbed a pair of pants, pulling them on carefully as I tucked myself in. But I left the top button undone in deference to comfort and a healthy dose of masculine pride.

“No monkey, but if the image turns you on, I’ll play. Me Tarzan, you Jane.” Thumping my chest, I offered her a grin. My humor did the trick, and her gaze focused back on me. But I wasn’t prepared for the smile that lit her face. If I thought charming her would be that easy, she quickly slammed that door in my face and busted out laughing.

Tears soon streamed down her delicate face, her shoulders shook, and her full breasts bounced. If I hadn’t been a goner from my first scent of her, I was now truly done for. And just like that I was hard as steel—again.

“I’m glad you find me amusing, but I assure you, I never joke around about these things. I realize how intense all of this has been for you. Not many humans would have done what you’ve done or held up as well as you have after being chased by demons. Would you like to sit? I’ll get you some water. Take some time and then I can answer any and all questions you have.”

Her features morphed into an “are you kidding me” look. “Sure, let’s ignore that minutes ago you weren’t a sleek, monster-sized panther ripping apart demons. Or how about the bullet wound. Where’d that go? And yes, when I’m processing, I often turn to humor. But have no doubt, I’m not some helpless female. I’m not without defenses. Now, if you don’t mind, tell me how you know who I am then tell me who you are. Then, if you would so kind as to show me the best way out of here so I can get back to my camp.” Jutting her chin, Kara crossed her arms, lifting her ample breasts. All of it, her words and posture telegraphing the unspoken part, “or else.”

She was spectacular, but challenge noted and accepted.

I wiped my jaw making sure I hadn’t been drooling during her short speech. “So, you think my panther handsome?” I couldn’t help myself. I had this feeling that dialing down the tension between us was the best way to deal with my beautiful mate. Even though Kara seemed to be handling our situation well to this point, I didn’t want to

push her much further. At least not tonight.

“Did you hit your head? Or maybe you’re used to getting by on your brawn and good looks? No need to answer that, but if you could point me in the direction of the bathroom.”

“Sure, right outside I’ve got a bucket and—” Again, it was too easy to tease. Maybe it was the influence of the demons, maybe it’s the high I was feeling from finally, finally discovering my mate that made me act like an adolescent.

“Oh, my god. Please tell me this treehouse has running water, and I really don’t have to go outside and pop a squat? Even our base camp managed to have a latrine.”

I’d never seen someone go from imperious and demanding to incredulous and horror-filled this quickly, actually ever. She hadn’t been this upset when I’d burst through the underbrush and taken out the demons chasing her. Yeah, I needed to dial it down a few notches.

“I was only teasing. Trying for a bit of levity to help you deal with... what you just went through. So, first, I’m sorry. And second, my name is Roane Smythe, and this is my home away from home. The bathroom is back there.” I pointed toward the screen behind her in the corner to the left of the bed. A bed big enough to hold three of me. A bed I’d made with my mate in mind.

Earlier, I’d noticed how Kara had skirted the bed when she was pacing. You’d have to be blind not to realize this one room, as big as it was, was the entire living space. And that there was no second bed.

There were only two locations for one hundred percent privacy, and they were the bathroom and the deck outside. There also weren’t any comfy couches or recliners for lazing around or napping.

Except for the pillow-top mattress I'd paid a fortune to have shipped to the nearest city.

Needless to say, there was no Amazon two-day delivery in the Amazon jungle, and I'd hauled the mattress myself after my truck had taken it until the road ran out. But it was all going to be worth it. Just as soon as I figured out a way to approach Kara without making myself look like someone who had no experience wooing a woman, especially when I didn't. Not really.

How to explain to this glorious woman, “ Um, you're mine, I'm yours. We're fated. The Fates chose you for me and...”

“Hello! Where'd you go?”

Jerking my head at her words, I blinked, then refocused. “I uh, trying to deal with the aftereffects of jumping through the portal to reach you.” This was not quite the beginning I'd imagined for us, but I could fix this. I saw the swirl of questions in her bright hazel eyes, and I wanted to answer every single one. The questions already asked and all the ones to follow.

“So, how about you freshen up, I'll make us dinner, we'll eat, then I'll tell you everything you want to know. Sound good?”

With a nod and a sigh that shouldn't have been sexy but it so fucking was, Kara lifted her right hand and ran her fingers through her hair, lifting silky strands of gold. There were bits and pieces of plants and forest muck sticking out all over her head and her clothes, but it did little to take away from her allure. And the primal call urging me to make her mine. But first, dinner.

## Page 5

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Chapter

Five

KARA

The scarily gorgeous man settled his hands on his narrow hips, drawing my gaze to his huge erection which hadn't gone down one bit the entire time we'd been together. As I searched his features, no hint of embarrassment marred his face.

A face and body so finely sculpted, along with unyielding strength emanating off him, a wave of want enveloped me. I felt it to my very soul, and the intensity of which I had no experience, suddenly overtook me as I walked to the bathroom.

Swaying, I lifted my arms, seeking balance before I did something stupid like fainting from intense desire, as if there was even such a thing. Was there?

As I steadied myself, I felt compelled to look toward him. Big mistake. Concern had filled his dark emerald eyes and for a moment, as we stood there, me lusting for a man who I'd just met, time stood still.

My ears filled with a roaring that should have brought me to my knees, yet I took it as a signal that I inherently knew what he claimed was true. It was the connection that began the first moment our gazes clashed, that even now morphed into a promise that we'd be together—forever.

What the actual hell is happening right now?

“Kara?” Snapping me out from the sensual fog that had grown thicker, his concerned plea dragged me from a dreamlike state. As if he’d caressed me without touching, and leaving me breathless as my heart and body were begging to get closer to him, and unashamedly, getting naked as he’d been moments ago.

“I, um, I’m fine. Maybe you could find some more clothes to put on, and I’ll be, uh. I’ll be right back.” On shaky legs, I made my way behind the screen he’d indicated. The modern plumbing almost made me weep. Dropping my pack on the tiled floor, I quickly used the toilet, then washed my face and attempted to tame the bird’s nest that my once tidy braided hair had become.

Staring into the mirror, my situation came into clear focus. This was no dream, no illusion, it was real and somehow, I’d escaped evil.

Holding back a sob of relief at being safe high above the forest floor, I opened my senses, reaching out to my magic. I needed to rebuild it. I had no idea if the demons would return and be able to locate me.

As I tapped deeper within myself, I felt the magic that kept this unbelievable treehouse hidden. Did Roane also practice? Who was he really? And how could I have not been aware that demons, shifters—for surely this man was one—and magic lived in the Amazon? My education as a witch had obviously overlooked this entire region as one that held supernatural wonders. However, I was not about to let the unexpected keep me from saving myself.

Exiting the bathroom, I walked into the open floor plan and searched for my unlikely rescuer. There was no sign of him, so I took the time to explore further. The structure amazed me in its incorporation of the tree in the middle of the space. Its branches were used as rafters and had both live and dried plants woven into the walls and ceiling, with a few chairs, a dining table, and a massive bed carved out of the same wood the treehouse was perched upon. A bed I needed to avoid as much as I wanted



to dive into its comfort and sleep off the lethargy from the day.

Where did he go? He promised me answers and now that the shock had worn off, I expected them.

As if conjured by my thoughts, he stepped into the room through a woven vine covered door that I vaguely recalled led to a large balcony where we'd broken through the shimmering barrier. He'd put on a skintight black t-shirt that outlined his pecs and his massive arms, and had thankfully buttoned up his cargo pants. There was still a bulge behind his zipper, but it seemed to have gone down a bit. The outfit was similar to what the explorers and scientists from my base camp wore.

Thinking of them made me wonder if anyone had missed me yet. Had Hector been captured by the demons or was he even now alerting my colleagues to the attack?

"Better?" Roane asked as his eyes roamed my body.

Must resist the pull . "Much. Thank you. Could we set aside the niceties though? I think seeing you naked has propelled us past the awkward getting to know each other phase. I'd like some answers now. And what in the heck," I threw up my hands and twirled, "is this place?"

Dramatic much, Kara? Feeling calmer now that I'd released some of the pent-up frustration that wasn't only from demons suddenly appearing, but my body's instant attraction to him, I took a cleansing breath then added, "Please?"

"Of course. It was never my intent to keep information from you, merely to allow you to settle in." He walked to a pair of chairs and said, "It's not a short story. Please, sit." His full lips lifted into a smile, transforming his hard features into a panty-melting dazzler. The cliché had never been more appropriate.

“To answer in the order asked, my name is Roane Smythe. I know your name from my mother, and this is my home. One of them anyway. I had not planned to meet in such a way, although if we hadn’t, you’d be in the hands of my family’s greatest enemy, so I would not change you witnessing my other form so soon.”

His other form. So, I hadn’t dreamed that he was a panther shifter.

With each word he spoke, my heart rate once increased, and my skin broke out in goose bumps. “Your mother? Do I know her?”

“If you’d ever met my mother, you’d remember. In a word, she’s unforgettable. And a regular pain in the ass for me and each of my five brothers.”

The last bit was muttered under his breath, as if saying the words out loud might produce her in the flesh.

Oh, my. There are five more of him out there? “Okay, but why? Why were you there in the exact moment I needed you, and how are we safe from more demons finding us?”

Roane. I repeated his name silently several times. Had I heard his name before and if not, why did it...why did it feel as if we were always meant to meet? Long-ago dreams began to filter into my mind, adding to the weirdness of the day.

“Magic protects my home. All of our homes. Magic on behalf of my goddess mother.”

“Wait, goddess? Did I miss something? You obviously are a shifter and I’m... well, I’m a witch. I’m not sure you knew that. And wow, I’ve never been able to say that out loud to anyone else before. Well, not outside of the coven. So that’s why I’m not shocked that there are immortals out there, even demons. But a goddess?”

He stood and began pacing. His movements sleek, mimicking his panther half.

I marveled at his muscles as they bunched beneath his clothes with every stride. I wiped my chin, checking for drool as my gaze then roamed up his wide chest to his corded neck and the smooth skin of his head. I'd never been attracted to a bald man and yet, as I continued eating him up with my gaze, I couldn't imagine wanting anyone else. What was I missing?

As each second ticked by, I wondered if this pull toward Roane was what my coven sisters and my college friends felt when they met the men who'd taken their virginity? I'd never felt strongly enough toward the handful of men, boys really, who I'd dated in the past, to give my virginity to, and now that felt like the best decision I'd ever made.

"Kara, unless you want me to claim you right now, you need to stop looking at me like...."

The air between us crackled. Filled with unexplored sexual need to the point of compulsion to be stripped bare, giving myself to Roane and only to him. Was I under a spell? Or was this the moment I'd been waiting my entire adult life to experience? To finally feel, to crave a man beyond reason. A man who, with his simple gaze and mere touch, sparks an uncontrollable need within. To welcome him inside my body and maybe my heart?

"Looking at you like what?" I whispered.

"Like you mean to use that delectable pink tongue of yours, which you keep licking your lips with, to lick my length until I can no longer take the lashing and bury myself so deep?—"

"Stop!" Sweat beaded upon my skin and it had nothing to do with the jungle heat. His

words painted a picture I would have no trouble fulfilling if he were naked once again.

The room suddenly filled with an animalistic mixture of purring and low growls. Panting and dazed, we seemed to be in a standoff. On the edge of making each other our next meal, I barely held myself back from launching into his arms, begging for a shared orgasm I so desperately wanted.

“It’s the mating pull. A prophecy has brought us together, love, and until we, and I know this sounds corny, but until we become one, it’s only going to grow. As much as I would like to give in, I know by the confusion you’re radiating under all that delicious desire I can taste, that you have no idea what I’m talking about. For what it’s worth, all the others were equally in the dark.”

But it wasn’t confusion. What he thought I needed was time, when in reality everything I felt for him was... did he say “others?”

“Wait a minute, what others?” Was this how he scored with women? Saving them from a demon attack and carrying them off to his magical treehouse?

“Now don’t get your panties in a twist. You’re my mate, my only mate. The only woman I’ve ever felt this for. My brothers also went through an awkwardness with their fated mates. But they’re all happily mated, and some are even expecting the next generation. Well, except Gavin. He’s the last of us, now that I’ve discovered you.” Roane released a long sigh. His emotions seeming to match my own. Raw and undeniable.

“I hate to be the one to break this to you, but witches don’t have fated mates. We’ve never believed in them.” But how could I deny the need to give myself to him? Right now, this feeling was only equaled my need for more information. I came to South America to find a rare plant, a cure that I’d been dreaming of since my best friend

succumbed to cancer, but what if this, what if Roane had been the reason all along?

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*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 4:13 am*

Chapter

Six

ROANE

“I had no idea witches didn’t believe in fate. And if we had more time, I’d figure out a way to call on the Moirai. But I think now is a good time to take a bit of a break. I’ll make us something to eat, as I’m sure you’re hungry.” I forced myself from touching her, forced myself to lock down the mating bond screaming within me that she was mine. “I certainly am.”

I’ve never had to work harder for anything in my almost thousand years of life than keeping myself from dragging my gorgeous mate to bed and claiming her. If she needed more time, then I’d give it to her. For now.

“Y-yes. That sounds like a good idea.” Kara averted her gaze.

Was that disappointment I heard in her voice? Good, at least I wasn’t suffering alone.

Standing, I stomped into the kitchen area, making sure to stay as far away from Kara as possible. “How does steak sound? Or I might have some beans and rice if you don’t eat meat.” Banging pots and pans helped a bit to release my frustration, but I feared nothing would be enough.

“How do you keep meat fresh—wait, maybe I don’t want to know where you got it from. I uh, that sounds fine. I’d love some water too.”

Chuckling, I knew what her pretty mind worried about. “No, I didn’t make the kill for this meat. Rest assured, I have no issues, as deep as we are in the jungle, with securing food. But I also have protein shakes if you’d rather have one of those. I’m fresh out of veggies though. I don’t require them, but now that you’re here, once I’ve made sure we’re no longer in danger from more demon attacks, I’ll go into the nearest town.”

Kara remained at the table while I took out the steak from the refrigerator and lit the gas stove. Her eyes followed my every movement. She may not know me, or believe me, but she wanted me.

After denying myself for centuries from sinking into any other female’s sheath, the pulsing need to do so now with my mate, Kara, sweet Kara, would simply not lessen, not for a second, even as I kept my back to her and grilled the meat.

This fucking mating bond wouldn’t cease its hold until I was balls-deep inside of her. But I wanted her to go into this fully accepting of me and the role she will play along with the other mates, the mothers of the next generation tasked with keeping the human race safe.

The one good bit of news that we’d recently learned was that what we once thought had been a vital part of the prophecy had not been true. We did not need the official binding ceremony decreed by the Moirai, or the Fates, which I’d originally been tasked with, in order to claim our mates. Meaning all we needed to do to complete the bond, was to have sex.

And it couldn’t happen soon enough for me. My panther panted at the thought, and for once we were in total agreement. Hopefully, Kara was feeling the same effects of our mystical bond.

With thoughts in my head of having her naked beneath me, I placed the meal on the

table with a bang. Perhaps the meal would settle me.

“How long do you think we have to stay here?” Kara cut into her steak, slicing several small pieces before taking a tentative bite.

Cursing inwardly, I should have asked her first if she minded a rare steak. “I can put that back on the heat if you prefer it...less bloody?”

Shaking her head, she covered her mouth as she finished chewing. “Maybe I’ll take that protein shake after all. I rarely eat red meat, sorry.”

“No need to be sorry. It’s not a deal-breaker for me.” I gave her a smile before I left the table to get her shake.

“Thank you. So, how long?” She accepted the bottle, both of us making sure not to touch the other in the exchange.

“As long as it takes to ensure you’re safe. That the threat from the demons is over.” Digging back into my steak, I finished it in four bites. Yeah, the hunger in my stomach may have been sated, but for Kara, not so much.

“But I thought you, uh, killed them.” The tremor in her voice roused my panther.

The need to return to the jungle and prowl for further threats became a chant as it attempted to compel me below. “Protect our mate. Kill all the demons.” With a simple command, my other half settled, bending to my will. I was the alpha in this relationship. Without me and my mother’s twisted sense of humor, he wouldn’t have existed.

“Unfortunately, they’re like rats. There’s always another pack. And their leader has spent centuries plotting for when our mates finally showed up. His name is Dante or



Dantalion and he's a Duke of Hell. But lucky for us, he's recently been tethered to the underworld by Lucifer, and unable to venture topside. But he can use astral projection and does so often."

Kara remained silent; however, she didn't show any signs of fear. Her expression contemplative as she drank her shake.

"I may know what you're talking about. Something I overheard my aunt telling the older members of the coven not long after my father dropped me off."

"What did you hear?" I held my breath. Had she known about me all along?

"Only that I was chosen. But anytime I tried to get more information, they'd brush it off as my overactive imagination." Shadows appeared in her eyes as she spoke.

"Alright. I'm sorry they made you feel you had no right to know your future. You also said your father 'dropped you off.' Does that mean he never returned? What about your mother?"

"Never as in never. And I don't remember my mother. She took off when I was an infant. It was only my father and me, until I was six."

My mate was an orphan like the others. My parents may have distanced themselves, leaving us to our task for centuries, but at least we knew they still lived. In fact, we preferred them not interfering in our lives. But to have been purposely abandoned? To not know one's ancestry seemed cruel to me.

"How do I know that you're not as evil as those men, demons? How do I know all you've told me isn't some lie to get me to believe a prophecy that could be made up for all I know?"

Stricken by the desperation in her voice for the truth, I pushed my empty plate away and reached out my hands toward hers. She hesitated, then cautiously placed her hands in mine. The contact humbled me. A first step toward trust.

“You don’t. Not by my words alone. Ask yourself if you’ve ever felt this way toward any other man, like you do me? Have you ever felt such an immediate connection?”

Her eyes had widened, and she gasped. “Your eyes. They’re green. And glowing.” She may have been frightened, but she didn’t release my grip. Kara’s gaze stayed locked on me, and I read the truth in her eyes.

Ignoring her statement, I didn’t doubt that my eyes had changed. The mating bond was becoming more insistent the longer we were together. It wasn’t going to be tamed by sharing a polite dinner. “Deep down, Kara, what is your soul signaling to you in this exact moment?”

Raw need continued to fill me as our gazes were locked in an impasse that soon would be untenable. Destiny and the Moirai would not accept defeat.

“What’s happening is merely physical. The fact that I’m turned on by you doesn’t mean anything. It’s simple biology. I’m a trained scientist as well as a witch. And I’ve heard of many prophecies, but how do you explain that my coven, my aunt, knew about this one that I wouldn’t have been told?”

Ignoring her demand, I pushed her to face the truth of our connection. “Have any of your former...lovers,” I had to force the word out, “did they ever make you feel as I do? I see the lust in your eyes, I scent your need. Was it so easy for you to accept another male when some part of you knew your true mate was someone else?” The thought of another man taking what was mine clawed at my brain, and my panther screamed to be released to track any and all who had come before us.

“Your hands!”

Unbidden, my nails had lengthened, the shift to my beast seconds from happening. I had to put distance between us quickly. She had to see I was able to control myself. Releasing her hands, I stood. She had to see I would never place her in danger by my hand or my panther’s.

“Forgive me. The thought of you with someone else. It’s unbearable, but I will accept it. You say you knew nothing of the prophecy or that you had a fated mate, and I will get past this.” As I paced, my claws retreated, and my breathing settled. The need to rip something apart remained, however. Perhaps I should go back into the jungle. Nothing would quiet my panther more than taking out another demon.

“I, uh, there’s no reason to beat yourself up. I’m fine. It’s fine.” Visibly shaken, her delicate throat constricted as she swallowed. “Please, there’s been no one, not that it’s really your business. But you’re right. I’ve never felt this before. With anyone else. Until today. Until you. My skin is tight and there’s this unending ache inside me and?—”

Stunned by her admission, I stopped, frozen in place. I watched with hope as she rose from the table pushed in her chair, then gripped its top rail. My mate was still unsure about me and that did not sit well. Taking in another calming breath, I made myself relax each muscle group before I attempted to speak.

“Never? So, you’re a virgin?” My voice, raspy and louder than I’d wished, made her wince. Regret filled me at the harshness, but I was so damn grateful she’d known no other man, I hoped she would understand.

“Yes, damn it. I’m twenty-six and never, well I’ve been kissed, and other things, but I’ve never gone all the way.” Her hands twisted in front of her, something more than embarrassment filling her bright hazel eyes. Her shoulders went back, which lifted

her breasts, and I couldn't, even on the threat of dismemberment, tear my gaze from their fullness.

Her nipples pearled against her tank top, begging for my attention. Did she realize how beautiful she was or how I feared my resolve to let her make the first move was being tested to the point of harming myself?

“Well, you don't need to look so surprised. There are a few of us left. Even though I'm sure you've had plenty of conquests, looking like, well, like you do.” Kara's gaze roamed my body, lingering on my erection. If she kept up her hungry perusal, my cock was in danger of breaching my waistband. My hunger for her touch was fast reaching a breaking point from just the fire in her eyes.

Something needed to be done.

“How do I look Kara?” The deep tenor of my words boomed across the room, but I barely recognized the voice coming from my mouth.

Her tongue shot out and swept across her lower lip. Her tongue would be the death of me, There was no holding back as a moan ripped from me. Another wave of her arousal filled the air. Good to know she as affected as I was.

“You know. I shouldn't have to tell you. Men like you have women lining up to share your bed. Not that I'm judging you, because I don't want to be judged either. I guess what I'm getting at and not doing a very good job of is letting you know that if we truly are mates, I'm not going to hold it against you that you're not a virgin like me. After all, you look to be in your thirties, at least. A person would be crazy to think a man like you wouldn't have had sex by now.”

Her statement tamped down my need, barely. The double standard had been around so long, since even my youth, that I understood her theory about me. What she may

not yet understand was that men like me weren't even men. Especially with my parentage. And she had it wrong, so very, very wrong.

"I hate to break it to you, love, but you're incorrect about your assumptions." No longer able to keep myself away, I moved closer. Stopping opposite her on the other side of the table, behind the chair I'd occupied during dinner. I waited for her to ask me what I was referring to, but instead she continued to work her hands back and forth, over the chair's top rail. I'd never been so jealous of an inanimate object in my entire life.

"You're not afraid to ask the question, are you?" Giving her an out, I waited.

She tilted her head and grinned. "No, but again. I'm a scientist. We thrive on hypothesis. But please enlighten me. What did I get wrong?"

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*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 4:13 am*

Chapter

Seven

KARA

The day, no evening, had been one giant roller coaster. And the panther shifter standing less than five feet from me sent my stomach on another deep plunge with only his wicked smile. Revealing the status of my sex life, okay, lack of a sex life, to him had stirred up mixed emotions. I'd shut myself away from any type of social life when I went to university. Driven to finish my doctorate in half the time had been my only goal. But now I wish I'd had a bit more experience with men, so I didn't feel so inadequate around Roane.

If there ever was a sculpted version of a Greek god come to life, he was it. I'd rarely allowed myself to be swayed by looks. Not even when I tutored a football player who was considered the hottest guy on campus in my senior year of college. He'd tried to get me into bed after each session. Then, after too many refusals to count, he called me a cold fish in front of his buddies when I'd agreed to meet him at a cafe instead of the library, but it had really been a dance club.

That was the last time I was tempted to draw on my magic, to teach him more than the biochemistry class he was on the verge of failing. Funny to think back now that the only physical response I had for him was attempting to recall a shrinking spell aimed at his favorite appendage.

So funny because Roane put that college athlete to shame.

“I may look thirty, but that’s only because myself and my brothers came into our full immortality at that age. In reality, we were born almost a millennia ago.” One of his eyebrows twitched upward as he waited and watched for my reaction.

Was that his attempt at being dramatic? Maybe I should humor him, but honestly, I was getting tired after the events of the day, and I no longer had the energy to play along.

“You seem unfazed by this news,” he said.

“Is that an opinion or a question?” Although I knew he was probably much older than the age he looked, I hadn’t thought he’d be almost a thousand years old.

“Touché. I never would have guessed that my mate would be sassy and sexy. And I can think of better things to do with that sinful mouth of yours than give me a hard time.” Roane crossed his arms.

I could have stared at his bulging and ropy muscles all day. What was it about a man's arms, this man’s arms, that made me want to taste all that lickable flesh?

A loud purr rumbled from his chest and I went from lusting after his bodybuilder arms to needing to run my hands over his carved pecs and the eight-pack abs I knew was under his shirt. Did I have the courage to act on this newly unleashed femme fatale side?

“Not sure if you realize this, but I’m very good at reading body language and yours is telling me some very...” He took a step closer. “Naughty.” Another step. “Things.” Roane had shrunk the distance between us by half and goose bumps erupted all over me.

“Wait, I uh. You can’t really expect me to—to sleep with you right now.” That

naughty side he'd called out was even now screaming "yes, now please!" But did I really believe him?

"It's alright, Kara. I don't expect you to sleep—make love with me tonight, because when we do have sex, there will be very little sleeping going on. So, I'll share with you the other thing you got wrong about me."

I sighed with relief. Or was it over the promise of being kept awake by Roane to discover exactly how good great sex can be. And I'd be able to do all those naughty ideas that have been bombarding me since we met. Like finding out how hard his cock actually felt and what having it in my mouth would feel and taste like.

More loud purring, then a frustrated moan escaped him. He ran a hand up and over his forehead, then down the back of his head to rub his neck. The move was so sexy, it triggered an intense fluttering in my abdomen. Focusing on his long fingers, the vision of them inside me, flashed bright. I wanted him touching me where I'd let no man venture. Deep and probing as he brought me to the very edge of something that had always been intangible to me but now it was mere feet away. Who was I right now?

I saw his lips moving, but I was so wound up that the words didn't register. "Um, I'm sorry. Could you repeat that?"

"I said, you're not the only virgin in this room."

His words were a douse of ice-cold water quickly followed by the steam of a hot sauna. Not typically ever at a loss for words, I found myself gaping at the poster boy for guaranteed orgasms. His declaration made no sense and the fact he felt the need to lie pissed me off. I mean what the actual hell?

"Do I look like a fool? Do you expect me to believe at nearly a thousand years old,



you've never been with a woman?" Suddenly, the fact I'd been fantasizing about having him touch me so intimately while he attempted to manipulate me left me a bit disappointed in myself. Until that moment, I'd been ready to take that step with him and finally experience the ultimate pleasure. Damn him.

"I do."

Two words. His response was uttered with such truth, such utter conviction, I wanted to believe him.

"You're lying. And you're crazy if you think I would believe someone who looks like you." I raised my hands toward him, then my gaze locked on his erection, and dammit if I forget what I wanted to say next.

Roane's laughter, low and rolling, wrapped around me. "Oh, how I love your spirit. However, I assure you I haven't been a total saint, and there are ways to have pleasure with another that need not include penetration. I saved myself for my mate, and to know that you have as well...is a gift I will always cherish."

I took in the truth of his words, and absorbed the mood shift between us. My anger began to melt away and morphed into hopefulness. But not before one last grasp at assurance. "You want me to give you blind faith in this? Remember, I didn't place this condition on you, you offered it. I may be much younger than you, but I'm open enough to accept this connection I feel toward you. I may not fully believe that a prophecy made it possible that we are together now, but I do know I want you."

Roane's eyes flashed that unearthly green again. He moved so swiftly, stealthily, at my confession, I had no time to react other than to say, "But not right this minute." My words were muffled as his lips covered mine and I was lost to the whirlwind of desire flashing between us. My concern over how long I'd known him vanished.

Kissing Roane was nothing like I'd dreamed about when I'd finally be with a man who'd be my first lover. The kiss exceeded everything I thought a kiss was supposed to be. It blew past every fevered dream I'd entertained secretly, while on the outside assuring my friends I was fine without a man. Had I known about this prophecy, I would have given up years of self-denial and searched him out somehow, some way.

His tongue swirled over mine. It was all-consuming and I couldn't get closer to him than I already was, so I placed my fingers on top of his head, holding him, silently begging him for more. When he sucked my lower lip into his hot mouth, my knees failed me, and I felt a rush of a liquid heat pool in my panties. The deeper he kissed me, the wilder I became.

I heard panting as I desperately rubbed myself against his hardness, seeking the sweet relief I'd only felt with my own hand. When the edge of his cock pressed against my clitoris through my pants, stars exploded behind my eyelids, and again someone's panting filled my ears.

It was me.

I was the one panting.

My wantonness surprised me, never really believing such pleasure existed. I'm so happy I was so very wrong.

"Bed. I want you laid out for me on my bed." Roane's whispered demand against my ear shot another tremor through me.

I moaned yes, again not recognizing my own voice.

Roane grasped the back of my thighs and lifted me against him as he marched to the bed. The change in pressure and a different angle against my clit almost made me

come, and I let out a frustrated sigh. “Wait, more.”

His chest rumbled at my disappointment. “Don’t worry, love. I’ll make you come as many times as you need.”

I expected to be tossed onto the mattress, but a loud trill filled the room. Roane froze and dropped his forehead to mine. “Fucking perimeter alarm,” he rasped, “Dammit. We’re not alone.”

Dazed, I managed a nod before the heat from Roane’s body left me and for the first time in my life, I felt no shame in calling upon my long-buried magic to take care of whatever dared to come between me and losing my virginity.

### Chapter

### Eight

### ROANE

A amazement filled me at the sight of my mate on my bed. But was more incredible was the power emanating from her. Her palms had risen, and balls of light hovered over her flesh.

“Uh, love. Easy. Tell me what’s happening right now?” Nodding toward her hands, I held my arms out as I tried to calm the tempest brewing in her eyes. “It’s okay. I’ll handle things. Can you lower your arms for me?”

She slowly did as I asked. I sensed the magic she’d called up lessening until the light she held in her hands winked out. “What was all that about, love?”

Rapidly blinking, her eyes returned to normal, she shook her head, then focused on me. “I, that hasn’t...it’s been forever since I’ve used my magic. I can use it to uh, move things.” Her grin lit up her face.

“Well, damn. That’ll come in handy. But not tonight, okay?” I couldn’t wait to quiz her on what else her power could do, but like everything today, it would have to wait.

Whoever interrupted us would soon beg for their lives as my hypersensitive hearing tuned in to the indistinct murmurs and movement from the balcony. There were two distinct voices. One I’d spoken with not hours ago, and the other, what seemed like a

lifetime had passed since our last meeting.

My parents.

“Demons?” Kara asked.

The worry in her voice hit me hard. I never wanted her to believe I couldn’t protect her. More so my panther, who began to chuff insistently.

“Unfortunately, worse. Stay right there. I expect to pick back up exactly where we left off as soon as I get rid of them.”

“What could possibly be worse than demons? Do panthers have a natural enemy I’m not aware of?”

I snorted. “If you count a goddess and an otherworlder as enemies, then yes. But these enemies? I can handle.”

“Wait. Otherworlder. Is that a nonthreatening way of saying alien? As in capital A-L-I-E-N, alien?” Kara’s kiss-bruised lips were a beacon I had to ignore because, of course, my parents chose now to insert themselves in my life.

Not sure how much time I had, but it definitely wasn’t enough to give an explanation about my father and equally unexplainable mother, I crept to the doorway and observed what could only be described as an unprecedented event. To my memory, they had gone centuries without seeing each other.

Dammit, Kara had witnessed merely a fraction of my capabilities. What I hadn’t had time to tell her was that my brothers and I were unique in the immortal world thanks to our parentage. And I wasn’t sure what to expect from my father, especially which form he’d decided to take for this visit.

When my parents didn't attempt to enter, I did what any son would do when faced with beings who could end me with a mere thought. I eavesdropped.

"Whatever. Just tell me why you're here?" Athena, Goddess of War and a dozen other titles, her tone as imperial as ever, looked down her nose at Tiegh, or rather at his chest as he was almost eight feet tall. His form human, towering, muscular and lethal. The thing about our father was he was able to shift into any form imaginable and, thankfully, today, he chose to look like his sons.

We'd heard the humans describe us a cross between MMA fighters and bodybuilders. The only feature that distinguished us from one another was our hair, from my shaved skull. I loathed taking care of it ever since I became frozen in my immortality during my third decade. The rest ranged from silver to dark brown in varying lengths.

My favorite prank ever was sending them hot rollers and a year's supply of conditioner which I'd ordered from the humans' favorite twenty-four-hour shopping network. Looked as if Tiegh needed a set of rollers as his mane of hair rivaled that of Trace's, our youngest brother who wore his flowing white-blond locks the longest.

"To be clear, goddess..." Tiegh crossed his arms, then widened his stance and settled his feet encased in combat boots far apart. Peacocking much? Our parents' hatred for each other was legendary, but I sensed that our age-unknown sire was attempting to impress Athena. "My presence here is none of your concern. Why are you here?" His voice boomed, setting off a chorus of squawking by the harpy eagles roosting nearby.

As far as I knew, he'd been self-exiled to guarding the Olympian gods he'd vanquished to the heavenly plane shortly after our birth a millennia ago. His appearance more than my mother's was a puzzle I planned on solving. Nothing with our father was as simple as it seemed.

"Enlighten me, alien. Your sudden interest in our sons can't only be because their

mates have finally appeared. I sense something else. Something...self-serving.”

My mother had crowded into Tiegh’s personal space. Her flowing robe swirled around her legs, then around her estranged lover’s, and according to the three Fates, the Moirai, her fated mate. I suddenly felt like a young boy finding out that his parents had to have gotten naked together in order for me and the rest of my brothers to be here. The sexual tension between them changed the very essence and temperature of the air. Electricity shimmered around me, but it wasn’t only because of my parents.

Kara had snuck up behind me. Looking over my shoulder, I zeroed in on her tousled hair, one lock curling under her breast, her unique scent tempting me to ignore my bickering parents and drag her back to bed.

Instead, I tore my gaze from her. Intent on ending the soap opera playing outside my home, I turned and leaned to take a step outside. But then my mother did the unexpected and ran her fingers along Tiegh’s upper arm and fireworks exploded. Honest to god real fireworks.

Centuries of avoiding each other melted away and the kiss they shared knocked me backward, literally. The shock tore a guttural shout from me, and I spun around, took Kara with me and walked her backward toward the kitchen.

Attempting to rid myself of what I’d witnessed, I shook my head, then rubbed my eyes as if that would banish the vision. My mate’s soft chuckling brought me back from the edge.

“You find humor in my discomfort?” I growled.

“Aw, seeing your parents kiss just yucked your yum, didn’t it? Well, you do know how little immortals are made, right?”

My jaw dropped. “Don’t. I don’t need you putting those images into my mind.” I strode back to the balcony door and did something I never thought I’d need to do.

I ordered my parents inside.

Jumping apart at my voice, their faces appearing guilty for a brief moment before they blanked their expressions and acted as if they hadn’t been wrapped up in a clinch.

“Introduce us to your mate. We have much to discuss,” Tiegh ordered, then strode inside.

Athena followed at a slower pace, practically floating into my home.

“Son, how nice to see you again. In case you’re wondering, I’m here to meet your delightful mate. Not sure about your father as he’s never shown such interest before in the rest of your brothers’ fated ones. Tiegh?” Mother fluffed the folds of her gold-threaded toga, smoothing wrinkles that weren’t there, as the heavenly made material was not only self-cleaning, it prevented any hint of a crease. For this trip, her beloved owl nor her spear were with her, so at least she wasn’t expecting any real danger.

“Do I need a reason to visit anyone? And I have visited my sons and their mates recently. You weren’t around when I did. Besides, I was in the area and felt the buzz of demons and thought I’d drop in. It’s been so long since I was part of a good slay-fest.”

“My point exactly. You’ve never taken the wants or needs of others into account, so why should you begin now?” Athena accused.

“Not so, my goddess. I seem to recall not long after you arrived on the Isle of Legend, where you and your brothers were conceived by the way, I gave you and your needs



my unwavering attention, to the point of?—”

“Stop. Please stop,” I shouted.

“I’m sure the children aren’t interested.” Athena spoke at the same time as me.

Lord, now I needed to poke something into my ears. “I don’t know what’s worse. Being called children or the embarrassment of hearing about my parents’ sex life.”

“Hi, I’m Kara Wildwood.” Stepping around me, where I’d tried to keep her hidden, my little mate showed she wasn’t intimidated.

Athena reached out to take her hand while Tiegh continued speaking as if none of us had said a word.

“I’d say our son could use a lesson from our shared history, goddess. Especially as I detect their bond has yet to be consummated.”

“ Argh . Father, it’s been less than a day. I think Kara deserves a bit more respect and time to come to terms with her new life.” Reaching out, I wrapped an arm around her shoulders and pulled her into my side. The need to protect my mate rode me hard, even from my parents.

“More than enough time. As lovely as Kara is, and indeed she will provide you with a fine son, she’s not the mate I’d anticipated meeting today. My dear, do you have a sister? Is she an earth witch like you?” Tiegh had no filter. He had zero issues laying it out there whether he stepped on feelings or not.

“Roane, I do apologize, son, for the interruption. Kara, in this I agree with Tiegh. You are beyond lovely, and I look forward to spending time with you once we all return to the castle.” Turning to my father, Athena asked, “Shall we go and let them

continue their get-to-know-you phase?”

I gave Kara a gentle squeeze, hoping to soothe any hurt feelings. “I’m sorry, love. As you can see, they’re uncontrollable, but they do have one redeeming quality that I should share with you, as much as it pains me.”

“Sorry, son. I sense what you’re about to ask, but like your brother Trace and his mate Bex, you need your alone time. Believe me Kara, you’re better off here than in Scotland. I don’t think you want your first time with Roane to happen in castle filled with in-laws and a newborn.” Athena offered Kara a sympathetic smile and vanished.

“Mother, wait, take us....”

“For once, I agree with your mother. We’ll have a sit-down once Gavin’s mate is discovered, and by then, hopefully, you’ll forgive our interruption.” Between one blink and the next, Tiegh too disappeared.

Kara wore a stunned expression on her beautiful face. “What...how did they do that?”

Instead of answering, I cupped her shoulders and aimed her toward the bathroom.

“But, but...” Her confusion stabbed me in the heart.

There would be no picking up where Kara and I had left off, as hoped. From the lines around her mouth and drooping of her shoulders, I now saw that the encounter with my parents had sucked the last bit of energy from my mate.

“Grab a shower, I’ll leave a t-shirt on the bed for you that you can sleep in. It’s late and when we do make love for the first time, I want you refreshed and with no doubts about me. I’ll be back soon.”

She needed sleep and I needed to return below. Especially now that my parents had left us here instead of flashing us to the home base in Scotland.

Now was not the time to pick a fight with Athena and Tiegh. I needed to make sure the demon threat had passed now that I had a mate to protect.

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*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 4:13 am*

Chapter

Nine

ROANE

Once down on the forest floor, I debated shifting. My panther wanted out and yet for the first time in recent memory, I wanted to remain in human form as I hunted. Any hint of sulfur had vanished, however there was one being this did not currently apply to.

As if my unspoken thoughts willed his presence, the cause of my unease and urgency to protect my mate appeared in front of me.

Dante, looked like shit. The demon had often been mistaken for a movie star when he moved among the humans, when he'd still be able to walk the earth in corporeal form. Back then, he relied on his ability to project his will into the minds of both men and women, controlling their actions and thoughts. Now, not so much.

When Dante had attempted to take my oldest brother's mate, for the first time in centuries, he was injured. The plasma blast he took from the combined efforts of Quinn and Britt had damaged half his face and a good part of his upper body.

Unfortunately, it had also heightened his madness. Lucifer had locked him down full time, so no more hall passes. All Dante could do now was send the lesser demons, his soldiers to the earthly plane, to do his dirty work. Thankfully, they were inept and failed miserably. Our mates remained safe.

“So, what brings you here, Dante? Your sick attachment to the Brethren’s Prophecy, our mates has turned you more pathetic with every appearance.”

“That’s one thing about being a demon. We thrive on pain and torture. Even if it’s our own.” His form flickered for a split second. Proof that he hadn’t managed to break free yet from the underworld.

Too bad. My panther was begging me to let him out so he could rip out Dante’s jugular. Perhaps one day, I’d get to have that chance. “Still relying on astral projection, I see. Good doctors hard to come by in hell, are they?”

“What is it with you brethren and your sarcasm. Perhaps what you should all be focusing on is how I came by this.” Dante lifted the arm that hadn’t been damaged. Clutched in his clawed hand was a tablet. Not one of the human’s electronic devices, but one made from a green material and stardust, forged on our father’s home world. One of the Emerald Tablets we’d been searching for, along with our mates.

Tiegh had three with him when he arrived. Combined, they contained all the secrets of the universe. We had retrieved one, now in Tiegh’s possession, and the other two had remained elusive. They had been long thought a myth, and written into prehistory attached to other gods, but what the humans never truly grasped was that they were indeed real.

The shock of Dante having one stole my breath. “How?”

“A close ally presented it in exchange for...well, let’s just say it seems even archeologists can be corrupted.” His laugh, unironically, was demonic. Its sinister ring had me seeing red. Or rather black. Black demon blood needed to be spilled.

“I had almost thought Quinn’s mate was close to discovering this one like she did the first, but it seems her pregnancy may have hindered her ability, hmm? Any insights

on that, Roane? No. Oh well, it seems like a moot point, so I'll leave you with this offer. I'd be willing to make a trade. To prevent me from sharing this," Dante waved the tablet, "with another of my...allies...an American government official who I've been besties with. So sad that Tiegh foolishly lost them to begin with. Anyway, I'd be happy to trade mine for Gavin's mate. I can't imagine being the last brother to find his mate, only to lose her to me, but that's life, right?"

"Enough! I don't need to hear any more of your rantings. We will never , and I speak for Gavin in this—none of us will ever —forsake a mate." Vibrating with barely contained rage, the shift happened in a blink and my panther launched toward the vile demon.

Dante's projection blinked out as I pounced, but the demon's laughter rang so loud, the nesting birds took off, squawking their displeasure at having their sleep disturbed.

"Tell Gavin, to expect a visit. Soon." The demon's final threat was nearly lost in the thundering noise of the jungle.

I shifted back and returned to Kara. Time, more than ever, was now our greatest enemy, and claiming my mate had never been more urgent.

Chapter

Ten

KARA

As soon as I woke, and before I could clear my mind of its typical haziness, I knew I wasn't in my bedroll at base camp. It was the understatement of my life that yesterday had not gone as planned.

No, the events had really happened, as surely as I was lying on the most incredible mattress I'd ever slept on. And the second reason was because there was a blazing furnace in the form of a man behind me, along with the sounds of soft snoring. Which could really be better described as purring. Did his panther sleep too?

I let my mind wander to the man who'd saved me yesterday. The man who wasn't a man. A shifter with, in his words, a complicated family origin. Exhaustion had won out before he returned last night, but I hadn't expected to wake up with him in bed, since he'd told me he wanted to give me more time. So much had happened in less than a day, it left me wondering how I could avoid what seemed all but inevitable.

Subconsciously, I must have known he was next to me because my dreams had been filled with Roane and the kiss we'd shared. And so many other things I wanted him to do, that even replaying them now heated my face. But was he really my fated one? Was I his? Did my intense reaction to him, the full body ache I felt when he left to prowl the jungle until sleep finally took over me, did I have the strength to call a halt to everything and try to make it back to camp. Back to my life, and make him date

me?

Even now, it was all I could do not to turn over and wrap myself around him. Then he'd know there would be no stopping this time, even if his parents decided to return. Oh, please don't let his parents come back. Did I just make a decision?

“Female, your need, your scent is driving me insane. Please tell me you've come to believe we're fated. But, if you need more time, I will give it. However, I will need to take the longest, coldest shower of my life before I can be around you any longer.”

His voice hypnotized me with its smokey rasp and melodic tone as it spoke directly to my heart. Did this mean that my destiny was not only as Roane's mate, but to assist in some way with the prophecy he and his brothers had waited their entire lives to fulfill? And to also become a mother and that my son, our son, would also play a part? So, yeah, no pressure.

But those were details to be figured out later. It was crazy, but the simple knowing I felt in every cell of my body that he was mine, and the intense craving of my body for him, should be all the proof I needed. Plus, I was never more tapped into my magic then I had been with him. As if I had never buried it all those years ago.

Apparently, I had made my decision. Rolling over to face him, I trailed my hands up his muscled torso. I couldn't keep myself from touching him any longer. “More time is overrated. I need you. Now.”

With newfound confidence, I snaked a hand behind his neck, then cupped the back of his head and guided him down to my eager mouth. I weaved my tongue between his lips, exploring, learning his taste, stoking our desire.

Breaking our kiss, when air became an issue, Roane gently pushed me onto my back, then lifted the t-shirt he'd given me up and over my head. He cradled my breasts



reverently with his warm, large hands and instinctively, I arched closer, needing more contact. He plucked, then rubbed his thumbs in slow circles over each of my aching nipples. He dipped his head and captured one in his hot mouth, his tongue taking over where his fingers had been. Taking his time, he worshipped each puckered point. Heat continued to build in my abdomen, the sensations he ignited deep inside had me writhing below him, seeking his touch between my folds which were now drenched for him.

Roane's panther purred so loudly, I felt the vibration deep in my chest.

He ran a hand slowly down my side, squeezing and caressing my hip, then dipped to the apex of my thighs. "I need to taste you," he pressed the heel of his hand against my sensitive bud, "here. Please tell me yes, Kara."

His whispered plea tickled my ear, driving my need higher as I reflexively lifted my hips.

"Yes!" There wasn't anything I'd refuse him. I needed to experience all my firsts with him.

Roane rolled to his knees, grabbed my hips, then delved his tongue inside me. He suckled my clit and I screamed. Oh my god, how could I not have known such pleasure existed? When he switched to flicking his tongue over my swollen folds, I nearly lifted off the bed from his soul-shattering strokes.

Pinpricks of energy pulsed within my core from the wicked back and forth over my engorged flesh. "Roane don't stop, yes—oh gods, that feels...." My breath hitched as my orgasm slammed into me and for a brief second, it was as if my body levitated. Wave after wave of a divine, tingling current flowed through me, building until I finally released the breath I'd been holding and sobbed out his name.

Roane moved to his side, then stretched out next to me on the mattress.

Bereft at the separation, I asked, “What are you doing. Why’d you stop?”

Cupping my chin in his large hand with tender care, his hot gaze told me how very close he was to his own release. “I need a moment and... I’m afraid of being too rough with you until I get myself under better control. You deserve your first time to be special, gentle even.”

“I don’t want gentle, Roane. All I want is you inside me. Now.” Wow, where had this Kara been hiding?

A grin appeared on his handsome face. “So demanding. Ah, love. I’m unable to deny you anything.” Taking swift possession of my mouth, he kissed me until I couldn’t breathe. He had a habit of doing that but I didn’t care. I knew with this kiss, Roane had marked me as his. With the flavor of my release on his tongue, he reached between us and tunneled one, then two, fingers inside me.

He drove them into me, over and over, building yet another release. His fingers danced between my folds, swirled around my clit, teasing me fast and hard, then a slow and a barely there touch that sent me into the depths of another orgasm.

Wetter than I’d ever been, he rode out the last of my orgasm on his fingers. Roane nuzzled my neck. “I hope you enjoyed that, love.”

He expected me to speak after that? All I could do was nod, wearing a goofy grin, I’m sure.

“Now I want you to do something for me. Watch me, love.”

I loved that he called me love. He’d had no hesitation using the endearment from the

beginning. And now, as he wrapped a hand at the base of his cock and placed himself at my dripping entrance, I opened my legs wider and did as he asked. I watched as he pushed himself inside me.

The stretch was a pleasure pain combo like no other as my body accommodated him. In and out, with each slide of his penis, he drove my need higher.

The rhythmic pace mesmerized me, but it wasn't enough. I knew there was more wonder to be had once that final barrier was breached. "More, Roane, please, I need more of you," I pleaded, my voice sounding raw and husky.

"Love, any faster and I'm not going to last much longer. I don't want to hurt you."

I squeezed his cock and he released a deep groan. My body innately knowing what to do, I felt pride at pleasing my mate. My inner walls started pulsing again, and I knew I was getting close again, so close. And dammit, now I realized why he wanted to go slow. So we could savor, but I was too far gone now. Slow and gentle wouldn't do.

"Doesn't matter." I panted. "We'll go slow next time." I grabbed on to his shoulders to brace myself, then rolled my hips, riding his cock until he took over. My mate wasn't having it and I could have screamed. So I did as he pulled from me and took back control, changing the tempo.

With each of his thrusts, I met him full force, but he only pulled himself back.

"Please, please, please." Barely recognizing the passion-filled voice that could only be mine, I made a demand that would have made the Kara of days ago blush. "I'll gladly take the pain. Just fuck me. I want you deeper!"

"Oh, I will, have no doubt, love. But I want you ready, and very wet, to ease the pain." His throaty chuckle and chest-rumbling purr merely enflamed me. Instead of

giving me what I'd shamelessly begged for, he rolled one of my nipples between his thumb and forefinger. The new pleasure, along with his steady and slow thrusting, triggered a sudden rush of liquid heat and incredibly a second, or was it a third? orgasm rolled through me.

Growling my name, Roane pressed inside me another inch. And another. Suddenly, I understood why he wanted to wait until my body was ready as he pushed past my barrier. I'd worried that he would never fit all the way, yet he did. Thank the goddess he did.

"It will hurt for only a moment, love. I promise."

The sting lasted barely a moment as I took in a deep breath, but on the second, I began moving my hips, rubbing against his harder-than-steel penis, and pleasure returned.

"That's it, love, take me in. Take all of me." Whispering sweet words of praise, he pounded into me.

Our gazes locked, the sound of our flesh slapping together filled the room, and I felt something bloom within me.

"Ah, love, almost there." He growled.

Lost in this wondrous haze, I welcomed the delicious friction of his cock pounding into me, and when he shifted his angle ever so slightly, oh my. "Yes, yes, yes." My head fell back as I moaned his name.

"Come with me, Kara." With one last swipe against my swollen clit, he drove into me harder, faster, the divine pressure building, building, until it burst white hot, igniting bright stars behind my eyelids.

When I thought I'd pass out from the intensity of it all, Roane gave a final thrust, roaring his release. His seed filled me, its heat bathing my womb. Virgins no more, we collapsed tangled up in each other.

His head rested between my breasts with our breaths mingling and syncing, and I swore our heartbeats did as well. Would it always be this way? After this, how could I deny that this shifter was my fated mate?

"No words," I whispered. Sated and happy, I wiggled my hips against him, then, only half kidding, asked, "So, when can we do that again?"

"You're playing with fire, Kara."

"Maybe. But I'm not sure how...never having...how was I able to orgasm so many times."

"I'd love to take all the credit. But it's the mating bond, love. And yes, we will be doing that again. But first a short rest. It was your first time, and I wasn't as gentle as I wanted to be. So, in this I will win."

And he did.

Chapter

Eleven

ROANE

A fter a few hours of sleep interrupted by another go at each other, I held my mate in my arms, ready for another round.

“I can’t help but feel as if our relationship has run in reverse. Did it happen this fast for your brothers and their mates?” Kara traced random patterns on my chest, challenging my control to not take her again until we had a heart-to-heart talk.

“It’s hard to know and I haven’t swapped stories with my brothers since Britt and Quinn found each other, but I think it’s safe to say the mating bond is impossible to ignore. It eventually gets it way, as do the Moirai.”

She remained quiet for so long, I thought she’d fallen asleep again. But when she ran her foot along my leg, rubbing back and forth, all thoughts of recovery time disappeared.

“I do believe I’ve unlocked your inner vixen.”

“Vixen, huh? I think you may be right, but all I know is I have this unexplainable urge to make up for lost time. I can’t imagine if I’d been the one to have to wait centuries to experience this bliss. Imagine if I hadn’t found you, I would have turned into a crabby old crone.”

I flipped her onto her back and settled my raging hard-on against her core. “Who are you calling old.” As I thrust my hips slowly, her knees fell open, accepting me as I rubbed her still swollen flesh with precision. Intent on driving her wild, I loved hearing her call out my name, whether it was on a sigh or a scream.

“But that’s all you get for now. We have the rest of our lives to explore each other and it’s time I told you more about our shared destiny.” The last round had been hard and fast at her urging, and I knew we had created a new life. How had I ever lived without this female? Reluctantly, I shifted my weight off her, then arranged her still flushed body so I could spoon her.

Kara needed further information, so she felt secure about her place in my life and the prophecy.

“Our story begins over eight millennia ago. Our father crash-landed in the desert of Africa and with no chance of repairing his craft. He used his powers and assumed the form of humans and became an Egyptian god.

Thoth, and alternately Hermes by the Greeks, was worshiped for many things: writing, divine order and justice. He’d brought with him from his home world, tablets inscribed with all the secrets of the universe. His world was ending, and he’d been sent to find a new home world. Still with me?”

Kara nodded.

“The tablets, which through history became the Emerald Tablets, although he claims there was no official name for them, they were supposed to be entrusted to myself and my brothers to guard. We were also tasked with overseeing the safety of humankind against the demon race who had ruled the underworld long before any other immortals walked the earth.”

“And your brothers, are they panther shifters as well?”

“No. They each take a different form. A dragon, a wolf, a phoenix, and a grizzly.”

“Wait, that’s only four. You and your panther make five,” Kara accused.

“Well, Gavin, he’s now the remaining unmated brother, his is...unique and a story for another time.”

This was harder than I thought it would be. Each revelation created more questions and none of us had ever had to share our backstory with anyone outside our family.

“Toward the end of my father’s rule, he and Zeus battled and that’s when he met Athena. Neither have shared the details of their explosive relationship, but for reasons we’re only now discovering, they hid us from the other gods, claiming we would have been murdered before we’d attained immortality. But you can’t hide from fate forever, especially from the Moirai, Athena’s sisters.

“The Moirai spun the Brethren’s Prophecy. Probably out of spite, but who really knows. Anyway, they decreed we would have a thousand years to find our fated mates and produce the next generation, ensuring the continued safety of the humans from demon rule.

“But should any of us fail to find our mate and produce a son, then the demons would be freed from the underworld. There’s plenty of conditions thrown in for the amusement of the Fates. But that’s the gist of it anyway.” One of us should really write this stuff down.

“So how were we chosen? Are the other women like me in any way?”

“The only connection we are certain of is that each of you are Wicca. It’s rumored



that Tiegh made a deal with a goddess, Brigid of the Celts. Her daughters were promised to us. He wanted to jumpstart the prophecy, but then Dante heard of the deal and he ended the lives of Brigid's daughters before we even knew they were to be our brides, if not fated mates.

“Somehow, Brigid found out, almost too late, that Dante would arrive, and she sent her only son away to be hidden. He was cared for by a nonmagical family, but Athena has theorized that through him, you are a descendant of Brigid, thus carrying on her promise to Tiegh to provide his sons with our true fated mates.”

Clearing my throat, I swallowed the emotion that had snuck up on me, marveling at how lucky I was. So many things could have gone wrong, but thanks to a long-ago boy who escaped Dante's vengeance, I was holding my mate.

“In the end, we are nothing more than broodmares then, right?” Kara's indignancy pierced my heart.

“Oh, love, you, like the others, are so much more. Besides the mating bond, I see your strength, your intelligence and your beauty. It all calls to me and no matter how we met, know that you were made for me as surely as I was made for you.”

“Damn you, shifter. Your soft words along with that wicked tongue of yours should not sway me. But how can I deny that the only thing that really matters is what's in my heart right now, and that no matter how all this began, I want my ending, no matter how it comes, to be spent with you.” From anger to acceptance within seconds, Kara's words filled me with hope that she will not deny us. But I needed to hear more. My soul and panther were begging for it, her love spoken into existence.

Grasping my mate's hand, I pulled it up to my chest and placed our joined flesh over my heart. “You feel that? My heart beats for you, Kara. Now and forever. As you said, time is overrated, unless I spend the rest of mine with you. I do not need any

more of it to know I love you, Kara Wildwood, prophecy or no prophecy.”

Kara swung a leg over my hips, perching on top of my waist. With her hair in wild disarray and a naughty grin on her face, she lifted her hips, took my cock in hand, and impaled herself. This woman was determined to wear me out.

“I love you, Roane Smythe. Now, about that mating bond. I think we need to make sure it’s truly set.”

“Anything for you, mate. Anything.” I clasped her hips and watched my mate take her pleasure.

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*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 4:13 am*

ROANE

I stared at my brother, Gavin as he stood off alone, watching from the shadows as me and the rest of our brothers kept watch over our mates. I'd updated him and our brothers about Dante's demand for Gavin's mate in exchange for one of the Emerald Tablets.

The stakes had never been higher.

For humanity.

And for the Brethren.

The prophecy we've lived under for centuries was so close to fruition, even our long-separated parents were now showing signs of thawing whatever had driven them apart shortly after our birth.

Athena had never been the motherly type. In fact, she'd trained us in battle techniques and strategy, but as soon as she'd deemed us ready to handle ourselves against any and all evil, including Dante, she'd disappeared from our lives for long periods of time.

And now that she was bent on correcting her centuries-long neglect, she was making the discovery of Gavin's mate, her priority. Perhaps that's why Tiegh had also returned? Yet, as determined as she'd sounded, she was still here. Currently, she was sitting with Kara, both relaxing in the great room of our family castle in Scotland, giving her newest daughter-in-law advice on overcoming morning sickness while

cuddling her firstborn grandson and waving a tiny stuffed dragon near his face. Even I knew that newborns had poor eyesight, but at least she was making an attempt.

His mama, Britt, was taking the opportunity to translate another spell from the grimoire, an ancient spell book that had magically appeared to her not long after she and Quinn had mated and returned to Scotland.

Keir's mate, Rhia was due any day, and one of the reasons everyone had gathered at home base. Both Trace's and Mac's mates, Bexley and Sierra, were due in the next few months. Soon the castle would be filled with more play mats, teething toys and stuffed animals depicting each of their father's shifter forms.

But today marked the beginning of the end of our centuries-long calendar to all be mated. Gavin now had three hundred and sixty-four days to find his. If he didn't, all hell would break loose. Literally.

"Roane, stop worrying." Quinn's voice filled the room as he walked over to me. "Kara will get past this phase. Your brothers' mates did. Come join us in the meeting room. Tiegh has promised to show up today and provide an update on how, if true, Dante found the second tablet. And we need to discuss our strategy for finding the third."

Was it possible that since he'd mated and become a father, my eldest brother had gotten even bossier and annoying? Yes, the answer is yes.

"I want to know what he's done with the first tablet as well. Perhaps it will have something we can use to defeat Dante. I need to ensure he won't find my mate before I can get to her." Gavin growled the words as he stared at Athena.

She had promised to help him as she had me, but told him she would not give him the information until I'd returned home with Kara.

We'd been back at the castle for two days and still, she refused. The games our parents seemed to thrive on had worn thin. After years of ignoring us, their insistence on being in our lives now had caused more frustration than help, and by the looks of Gavin, he was close to crossing a line with our mother he may not have a chance of recovering from.

We may be immortal and carry powers from both Athena and Tiegh, but they were still more powerful. I wasn't even sure the six of us together could equal them in a battle. And I hoped to never find out.

"Gavin, you know her. She'll share when she deems it time. Like our grandfather, she can't handle being questioned over her commands. Take heart in knowing you will find your mate as we have." My words seemed to satisfy him for the moment. But what about tomorrow?

"We'll all help, if need be. We'll take turns so there is always someone here guarding the females and children. Because failure, as those arrogant Americans are so fond of saying, is not an option, brother." Trace took a seat next to Gavin in the meeting room. The ancient walls, covered in glyphs that were a combination of Egyptian and Celtic, lined the room we used to plan for war and to monitor anyone who dared to venture close to the castle.

I couldn't remember the last time all six of us had gathered here, probably before Quinn discovered Britt, but it was good to be together again.

Before any of us could say anything else, Tiegh flashed into the room. Notably disheveled, his clothing torn and there were scorch marks covering his chest.

Stunned, I'd never once seen him in such a state. He was big on always projecting strength and power, and there had never been a time when we'd witnessed him drained.

As we looked around the table at each other, wondering who was going to be the first to address him, Quinn took one for the team. “Father, welcome. Are you?—”

Tiegh waved Quinn off, then sat down. He briefly closed his eyes and without any discernable movement, he and his clothes were again set to rights. When he opened his eyes, they glowed green, as all of ours did when in battle or with our mates. “Dante has the second tablet. It was no illusion, Roane.”

Athena appeared behind him. “I could have told you that was true yesterday if only you’d asked.”

Unsurprised at her presence, Tiegh greeted her. “Can’t pass up an opportunity to be around me, can you, goddess. I’ll take your silence as agreement. Now, I suggest that we look for Gavin’s mate first. Dante’s not going anywhere, and I just left Zeus. He’s agreed to work on getting Lucifer to agree to permanently take care of our Dante problem.”

Again, the six of us looked from one to the other. Confusion, frustration and anger appeared on my brother’s faces. Deference be damned, I could not sit there as if we had no say in our destiny.

But Gavin stood first. His hands balled into fists, then with barely contained malice, he said, “We will not be kept in the dark any longer. And since when do we make deals with our grandfather? How do we know we can trust Zeus to keep his word when you’ve never allowed us to seek him out before. And Athena, I’ve waited long enough for the promised information on my mate. Tell me now. Where. Is. She?”

“That’s what I came to tell you. Not that any of you thought to include me in your little meeting?—”

“Mother!” Gavin roared. His body rocked, vibrating and flashes of a creature thought

lost to history shimmered over his human form, then disappeared.

We all suspected he could choose whatever animal he could imagine, like Tiegh, but this? Unfathomable.

“Gavin, no need to shout. She’s resting.” Athena appeared hurt, yet we knew her well enough to know she was enjoying the drama.

“I brought Willow here yesterday. She’s in one of the guest rooms. But I caution you, Gavin, she’s not well.”

My brother returned to his human form, taking in lungsful of air. His gaze narrowed and laser focused on our mother.

Tiegh stood and incredibly put himself between Athena and Gavin. Yet another show of affection. “Stand down, son.”

Moments of uncertainty passed before Gavin turned on his heel and stalked from the room.

Athena shouted after him, “She has no memory of who she is. Be gentle with her, Gavin.”

Another roar sounded, bouncing off the walls outside the room.

“Well, at the very least, he could have said thank you before he left.” Athena harumphed, then in usual fashion, made a dramatic exit.

“So, now that she’s gone. I can spend some quality time with my grandson. Don’t worry about me. I’ll pick a room to use later.” Tiegh walked out, a smirk lining his face.

“Well, shit.” I muttered.

Thank you for reading Roane and Kara’s story. If you enjoyed it, and you have a moment to leave a review on the site you purchased your copy from I would be grateful.



### CHAPTER ONE

"Don't move. Don't scream...act as if you know me, and all will be well."

Dr. Britt Harmony, engrossed in her thoughts, heard the words, yet their meaning was lost on her. She had an important speech to present. Perhaps the most important of her career. She offered a quick nod to the man, hoping he wouldn't realize she had no idea what he'd said. She tried to make a habit of never being rude to people, but she had no time to deal with anyone right now.

She continued striding toward the conference hall, all thought focused on her upcoming speech. She stumbled to a halt as large combat boots came into view. Her gaze traveled up to the man blocking her path. A man in a dark-gray, long-sleeved Henley, and black cargo pants, a man who unnervingly reminded her of a modern-day highlander.

When she moved to step around him, he slid sideways in front of her. She stopped short as a spark of unease hit her, followed by a snap of desire.

At the dual hit to her senses, he had her full attention. She gazed upward and took in his sharp, chiseled features, long silver hair twisted at the temples in intricate braids and pulled severely back, tied into a leather holder. Her breath hitched as she locked onto his narrowed eyes. Their color, an odd near black, swallowed the pupil with a ring of dark green around the irises. But that wasn't the most bizarre part. No, it wasn't the color of his eyes, but the instant flash of light as their gazes clashed.

A full body flush engulfed her.

His gaze went from intense to wide-eyed and confused as the corners of his mouth turned downward.

She swore she heard him say, "Tis not possible."

But she didn't have time to figure out or ask what he meant. Her boss was waiting to see how her announcement was received. This was the most important day of her career, and she needed his blessing to proceed with the next phase of her research. This would not be done in her lab, her office, or some centuries-old and dusty library. No, it would need to be in the field where she worked best. If he turned her down, then this was potentially her last day as a fellow at the London conservatory.

Without warning, the stranger pushed up her against the wall. Her forehead bounced off the man's shoulder. Britt raised a hand to the tender area as a thick, muscled arm wound around her waist, and she was pulled into a hard, unyielding body. His heat overwhelmed her senses, and she jerked away from the close, too intimate contact.

"Listen, I think you have me mistaken with someone else. I?—"

His large hand pinned her face into the man's massive chest, effectively cutting off her protest.

Shooting pain erupted above her right eye. Britt raised her head to get a closer look at the face of her attacker. But her head throbbed from the impact; her vision blurred, she was unable to make out any more details. She needed to escape. Now. Her life depended on it.

She stomped on the stranger's foot and lifted her leg to knee him in the groin but froze when she noticed a knife in his hand. A very long, very sharp blade that emitted an ethereal glow. Mesmerized more at first by the blade's beauty than by its wicked intent, she shook her head in hopes of regaining her full vision and clearing her thoughts.

Scream. Scream the building down. As she heeded her internal command, she took in a breath to scream for help and inhaled an earthy scent mingled with a bite of the sea. It overwhelmed her and prevented her scream from forming.

His scent imprinted upon her and relaxed her. It was—familiar—yet odd, as she was sure she'd never encountered it before today.

Her gaze slammed into his. His eyes were not black as she'd thought, but a deep, dark green, several shades darker than her own pale green. And his expression matched the shock she felt.

Both now frozen, neither one of them seemed able to look away. Seconds ticked by before the wanna-be highlander let loose a growl; its vibration resonated in her core, and her stomach dipped at the tenor of his voice. Confused by her reaction, and his, she was robbed of the opportunity to defend herself as he recovered first and propelled them toward the exit. Britt struggled to find words to make him stop. To make sense of what was happening to her.

She fought the hold he had on her only to be met with an unmovable force. Sure, he was MMA big, but she worked out and kept her body in top physical condition. She'd spent most of her life preparing for danger, but until this very moment, she hadn't had to put her years of training to the test.

Why today of all days? Her chance at the much-needed funding slipped away with each step taken in the opposite direction of the conference room.

"Lass, you need to understand two things straight off. One, I'm stronger than you, and two, your lecturing days are over."

The sound of his voice elicited another spark of awareness. Ignoring her body's reaction, she tested his first theory again and wrenched her arm in the process. Ow! Okay, so he's strong, freakishly so. As for his second point, he couldn't have been

more wrong. "You obviously have the wrong person. Perhaps I look like whomever you were searching for, but I can assure you I would remember if we'd met before. I never forget an asshole."

"This is not a case of mistaken identity, Dr. Harmony. You're the senior archeologist for the Ancient Artifact Conservatory of London. You graduated from Yale with honors in archeology and a minor in mythology, and you're on your way to convince your boss that you need funding to go back into the field.

Britt dug in her heels. "How do you?—"

"Because it's my job to know. To protect."

"Me?"

"No. The world."

Her heart skipped, and her body went cold at his words.

She looked the man up and down again. He was straight out of central casting. Someone was pulling a prank on her. Yes, that's what this was. She'd seen signs for a movie audition in the lobby of the hotel. A local production company was seeking an actor to portray the hero—a highlander. Men had been coming and going, wearing kilts of varying types of plaids, since she arrived from London yesterday. She'd even been hit on by a few of them in the bar last night. This one was taking his role a bit too seriously.

Maybe someone had paid him to do this? She wouldn't have put it past Greg, her creep of a coworker, to orchestrate this farce as payback. "Jealous much" should have been the whiny researcher's middle name. At least he'd chosen a convincing actor.

"Look, Mister. I'm not sure how much Greg paid you, but I'll double it if you go back

and join your fellow actors. I don't have time to play. I'm the keynote?—"

"Lass—" He grabbed her above the elbow and propelled her through the milling crowd in the hall outside the main conference room.

"Doctor."

"Lass, I'm no actor, and I've never spoken to or met a man named Greg. Rest assured, every word I've said is truth. Now move."

Five minutes. Five minutes until she needed to be at the lectern. Dammit. She was not going to miss her opportunity.

She pulled her arm again, but he would not budge. The man was solid as a mass of granite. "Tell me who you are right now, why you're dragging me away from my job, or I will scream my head off."

He ignored her demand and managed to get them within twenty feet of the main exit. Now in full panic mode, she searched for someone to help her. He pulled her tighter to him, squeezing her. Even if she wanted to scream, she could not take a full breath, and the reality of the situation set in. Oh my god. Oh my god, this is really happening! Britt began wiggling to loosen his hold, to no avail.

She took in what air she could and managed to let out a weak sounding, "Help me, please?" Britt moved her head slightly to the right and focused on a group of older women as she tried again to call out. They stared back at her and her kidnapper with some interest but were still too far away to hear her muted pleas.

She felt him run a hand down her arm and then pat her on her head. To anyone paying attention to them, he probably looked as if he was comforting her instead of kidnapping her. The word bounced around in her head. Why would anyone want to kidnap her?

Now steps away from the exit, she noticed a man who equaled him in height standing next to a dirt-covered Land Rover just beyond the revolving doors. He lifted a hand, and her kidnapper returned the signal with a nod.

"Once we're outside, I'll explain further. But right now, I need you to calm down."

"Fuck calm. You're not taking me anywhere."

## CHAPTER TWO

Frantic to end this charade or whatever the hell it was, Britt stopped walking and put all her weight on her heels to keep him from dragging her farther.

That worked for all of point-five seconds. Her world tilted, and she was swung up into his arms and cradled against his massive chest. She took her first full breath in minutes, inhaling his spicy scent. Instead of using the opportunity to scream her head off, a sense of contentment overcame her, and a pull in her abdomen and the intense need to climb him and let him do whatever he wanted confused her.

She shook her head to ward off the unwelcome sexual desire toward this man who meant her harm. For a moment, she thought maybe he'd drugged her somehow as her body went lax.

"Now, Lass. I'll only do this one more time. I know how much you enjoy me carrying you across thresholds, but 'tis the last time. Having you so close gives me too many ideas, and I don't want to embarrass these nice folks." His voice boomed and carried a hint of sensuality.

His words broke her out of the weird spell she'd fallen under, and Britt watched in amazement as a smile split his face before he made a show of looking at a few people who finally stopped to watch the spectacle. What was it with this guy? Did he really think he could get away with forcing her to his will?

"Ugh. No one believes your bullshit. Put me down." Did he think anyone with a lick of sense would believe such nonsense?

"Look around, lass, no one is paying attention."

She looked, and he was right, except for the doorman, who was grinning and propping the revolving doors open so they could pass through without falling.

If he got her in that car... no, it was not going to happen. She opened her mouth, and in the time it took for her to suck in a mouthful of air, he'd stopped walking, flipped her to face him. Her legs dangled, her chest plastered against his, and he ...