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Elemental Fury

The Nexus Season One:
Unseen World

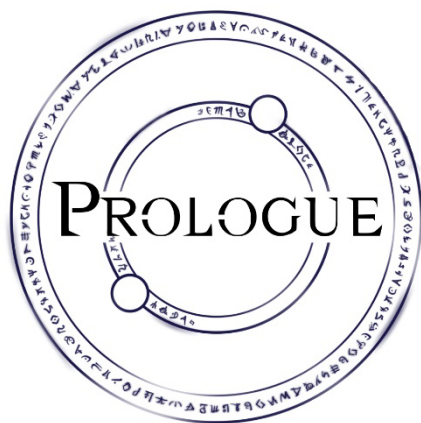
Episode Four

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Thanks for reading!

Sara Blake



ΠΑΤΕΡΑΣ ΠΡΟΣΤΑΤΕΡΣΕ ΜΕ

Mallory checked to be sure her umbrella was in her bag. Judging by the look of the sky, it was going to storm like a bitch any minute now. She hoped it held off, or else started and finished again by the time she was done grocery shopping; she didn't want to be loading bags into the car in a deluge.

Halfway from the car to the front of the store, thunder cracked so loud she jumped. "Idiot," she said, rolling her eyes. She resumed walking.

She'd only gone a few more steps when a gust of wind hit her so hard it nearly knocked her off her feet. "Fuck," she said, regaining her balance. This storm was going to be worse than she'd thought. She'd lived in New Orleans at one time, and the strength of the wind and the general feeling in the air felt like when a hurricane was on the way.

They did not have hurricanes in Arcanum.

We do have tornadoes, though, she thought. She turned back toward the car. Groceries could wait a day; it wasn't exactly a Mother Hubbard situation at home.

Another burst of wind hit her, and this time it actually did knock her down. “Fuck this,” she said, sitting up. Before she could get back to her feet, however, another gust put her flat again. The thought about tornadoes returned as the air around her began to visibly spin and swirl, picking up small debris from the parking lot until the little whirlwind was like a column of spinning razor blades.

She tried once more to sit up, but between the force of the wind and the sharp edges of the spinning detritus, she was pinned in place. She tried to take a deep breath to calm herself but couldn't; the bizarre pressure and movement of the air around her made it impossible to draw more than short, shallow gasps of air into her lungs.

She scooted along the ground, trying to get out from under the inexplicable mini tornado.

“You aren't getting away, Mallory Werner,” said a voice. The tone was that of a whisper, all breath and no vocal cords, but the volume was booming.

She looked around, but there was no whisperer to be seen.

The wind speed increased even more, and then the column of swirling air split into two. One half expanded, surrounding Mallory in a solid wall of air and flying debris. The other column took on a humanoid shape, bent over her, face close to hers.

“Oh, fucking hell,” she said, finding enough breath for the curse. She reached up and pulled the pendant she always wore out from under her blouse. It was a last resort, one she hated using for any number of reasons.

She held the talisman between her thumb and index finger. Concentrating as much as she could, focusing on drawing in enough breath for just three more words, she said “*patéras prostáteψε me!*”

“No time for that,” the wind said. “I wasn’t able to protect my own father; yours can’t protect you from me.”

With that, Mallory’s ability to draw breath ceased entirely. She gasped and writhed, her cells screaming for oxygen. Her eyes burned

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as her capillaries burst. Everything went fuzzy, and then dark.

PREVIEW



STORM

“**T**his storm is getting bad, guys,” Kaden said, looking at his phone. He was checking his weather apps and sites, but also the police scanner. The cops had already received several calls about

fallen trees, downed power lines, and other property damage. “These winds are approaching hurricane levels.”

“What?” Zephyr yelled from the fly space above the stage. He let go of the grid and dropped, making two elaborate flips in the air before landing on the stage his feet with a loud thud.

“Whoa,” Kaden heard Liam mutter.

“I couldn’t hear you over the rain,” Zeph said. “It’s loud up there near the roof.”

“My point exactly,” said Kaden. “It’s getting kinda scary out there.”

“It’s just a thunderstorm,” Zeph said, hopping down off the stage and heading up the right-side aisle.

Kaden, Liam, and Gina followed. They exited the auditorium through one of the three sets of double doors along the back and entered the interior lobby. The sound of the storm was even louder out here, away from the sound-preserving acoustics of the theatre’s performance space.

Zeph led the way past the concession stand and through another set of doors into the exterior lobby. This outer lobby consisted

of the will-call counter along one wall, the coat check room on the other, and floor-to-ceiling plate glass windows across the front, with the box office in the middle. “Oh,” Zephyr said, pulling aside one of the heavy curtains that covered the front windows and looking out.

Or *trying* to look out, anyway. The rain was coming down so hard it was like being inside a car wash. The wind was so strong the water was hitting the windows, despite the shelter of the portico across the front of the theatre.

Kaden could hear the storm sirens going off, ambulances and fire trucks in the distance, all muted by the intense, deafening roar of the rain pounding everything.

“That’s quite a storm,” Arjun said, emerging from his room and joining them.

“Ya think?” Gina said.

BOOM! The thunderclap was so loud the floor vibrated under their feet.

“Okay, that’s it,” Gina said, in her boss voice. “We’re going to the trap room.”

Liam looked to Zeph, eyes wide, then to Gina. “I can’t go in there,” he said.

“It’s the safest place,” Gina said.

“But... I can’t.”

Kaden understood. Less than a month ago, they’d held Liam prisoner in the trap room, the space under the stage, for a day and a half while he was stuck in the form of a wolf. He wouldn’t have wanted to go back in there ever again, either.

“Isn’t there someplace else?” Zeph asked. “What about the storage room?”

“It’s not as secure,” Gina said.

“But it’s full of food,” Kaden countered. He knew his audience. “And it’s still the basement. Let’s go there.”

Gina sighed. She made a show of looking dubious, but Kaden could practically see her counting candy bars in her head. “Fine. But we’re going right now.”

They went back into the interior lobby and toward the door behind the concession stand. “You too,” Gina called, as Arjun turned his back and headed toward his room.

“I’m not in any—”

“You. Too.”

Arjun rolled his eyes spectacularly, then followed.

Kaden didn't know what the storage room under the main lobby had been used for when the theatre had originally been built. From what he'd put together, the full concession stand had been a later addition, when they'd converted the theatre to show movies. Before the need to store popcorn, candy, and other assorted snacks, as well as supplies of straws, cups, and popcorn tubs, he couldn't imagine what they'd needed all this space for. He figured now wasn't the best time to ask.

Liam, for his part, seemed a bit calmer, now the threat of going into the trap room had passed. He still looked like he wanted to climb out of his own skin, though. The full moon was in a week, Kaden remembered; Gina would be getting antsy too, soon enough.

The theatre hadn't been open to the public, even for movies, in almost a decade. Gina, though, still maintained the concession stand as though they were showing a summer blockbuster every night.

With her enthusiasm for both movies and food, living in a theatre and having her own, private, fully-stocked concession stand had to be a dream come true for her.

She grabbed a king-sized Snickers from a shelf, tossing another one to Liam. The closer it got to the full moon, the more calories the werewolves needed. Gina was thin to the point of being slightly underweight, but she could put away more food than three professional football players.

Kaden sat down on the floor, his back leaning against the door of the walk-in freezer. He knew he'd have to move soon, when one of the wolves decided they needed ice cream or something that went in the microwave. He looked at his phone again. The city's weather services department was advising people to do exactly what they'd done and seek shelter. Police reports of car accidents and property damage continued to come in. Kaden couldn't believe anyone was even *trying* to drive in what they'd seen—or not been able to see—outside.

The storm had started late that afternoon, though; people would have still been at work.

People would brave a lot to avoid being trapped at their jobs. The thought of people who'd have been at work when the storm hit brought something else to mind.

He switched from the scanner app to messages, pulling up his conversation thread with Ella. It was Wednesday; she'd have been working at the library when the storm started. He typed out a text, to see if she'd made it home all right, but stopped before hitting *send*. The last messages they'd exchanged had been two months ago, when Ella had texted to let Kaden know a book he'd requested through an inter-library loan program had come in. They talked a few times a week at the library, but they didn't regularly chat via text. Would it seem weird and creepy for him to text now?

He deleted the message.

Across the room, Liam paced, his candy bar devoured already. Zephyr watched him, looking worried. Zeph, too, Kaden knew, would start going stir crazy down here soon enough, with nothing to climb. He expected him to start doing push-ups or something soon, just to expend the excess energy.

It was going to be a long night.



Kaden had to change his route to the library four times due to streets being closed from storm damage. Floods, fallen branches, and downed power lines had rendered the city almost unnavigable. The many car accidents that had occurred during the storm had been cleared away, but Kaden saw hints of them in a few intersections, in the form of scattered glass pebbles and plastic shards on the ground. He wondered whether the library would even be open when he arrived.

It was, but the garage was not, due to the bottom level being flooded. He managed to find a parking space along the street, after circling the building twice, then went inside.

Ella was wearing jeans and a t-shirt today, something Kaden didn't think the library normally allowed employees to wear. It was an Arcanum Public Library shirt, though, so maybe. "Hey, Ella," he said, approaching the Research desk.

“Oh, hi, Kaden,” she said. “Sorry, I’m not organized yet. It took me an hour to get here this morning, then I had to find a place to park.”

“I know the feeling,” he said. “The city’s a mess after that storm.”

She nodded. “They said on the news this morning the winds were almost as bad as a hurricane.”

“I believe it. Did you have to spend the night hiding in the basement, too?”

Ella shrugged. “Wasn’t really an option,” she said. “I live in an apartment. I pretty much had to just wait it out and hope for the best. I thought you lived in an apartment, too. Your building has a basement?”

“It does,” he said. “The laundry room.” He wondered whether his neighbors had gathered there, waiting out the storm with a mix of sight-only acquaintances and total strangers.

“You had to spend the night in the laundry room?”

“I— No. I... wasn’t there.”

“Oh,” she said. She went back to moving things around on the desk, getting ready for

her workday. She could tell he was obfuscating, and she was annoyed. Great.

“I was at a friend’s place,” he said. “She made us go to the basement.”

Ella nodded.

He was making things worse. He’d hoped the storm would provide a good starting point to a more personal conversation with Ella. They might have discussed how they’d fared, shared stories, then moved on to speculating whether there might be anything weird or supernatural about the storm. Instead, he’d made her feel lied to, then made it sound like he’d spent the night at another girl’s house.

She went to the back of the desk and opened a drawer. She pulled out the notebook she used to track the weirdest questions and research topics she got from library patrons, things she thought might be useful for Kaden’s blog, *Arcanum City Secrets*.

Maybe, he thought, he hadn’t screwed things up too badly after all.

But when she dropped the notebook on the desk in front of him then went straight to her computer terminal and started looking

things up in the card catalog, he knew better. He turned and left, not even checking the notebook for new entries.



The trip back to Kaden's apartment was as treacherous and slow as the drive to the library had been. He was relieved to find the building intact, none of his windows broken, and the utilities all working.

He took a shower and put on clean clothes, then headed right back out. Gina had been suggesting he give up the apartment and move into the theatre. He'd been resisting, saying he liked having his own space, but he'd been spending less and less time here. It might be time to consider her offer.

The theatre was only a couple of miles from his apartment. He decided to walk rather than deal with the obstructed streets again. His building was on Oak Street, one of the three streets that framed the triangle of Sylvan Park. He rounded the corner onto Ash, and approached what people often

referred to as the Ash Street Food Court, a semi-permanent cluster of food trucks grouped outside the park.

The Food Court had been hit hard. The sign had blown off the top of the Bayou Brew truck, and On a Bun was under a tree. Kaden looked around for one truck in particular.

Tío's Tacos was parked in one of the spots farthest from the park. The side door was open, and a girl with a dark brown ponytail stepped out with a dripping cardboard box. Kaden rushed across the pavement.

"Hey, Mari," he said.

She looked in his direction but didn't speak right away. The box looked heavy.

"Can I help?"

"Hi... it's Kaden, right?"

He hadn't been sure she'd remember his name. He nodded, trying not to smile. Whenever he had reason to interact with her beyond just ordering tacos, it seemed, the circumstances were terrible. Last month, he'd pulled her out of the path of a rogue werewolf and locked them both in the truck while the wolf had literally eaten her boss.

Now a freak storm had flooded the truck, and here was Kaden, showing up yet again.

“Yeah,” he said. “What can I do?”

“You’re sure?”

“Absolutely.”

She sighed. “Something flying in the wind hit a vent at the top of the truck and knocked it off. That left a hole, and the whole truck flooded. Right now, I’m trying to get the soggy, ruined shit out of there so I can assess the actual damage to the equipment.”

“So, soggy box duty?”

“Still not too late to back out.”

Now, he smiled. “Wouldn’t dream of it. Point me where you want me.”

After an hour of lugging mushy, water-logged boxes out of the truck and hauling them to the dumpster, they took a break. She pulled two Mexican Cokes from the cooler and handed one to Kaden. “They’re not very cold at this point,” she said. “The generator isn’t working, either.”

Kaden took his slightly cool soda and led the way across the lot, to the picnic tables by the park entrance. He hesitated when they

got there, looking down at the bench. “It’s still wet from the rain.”

“So are we,” Mari said, sitting down.

She made an excellent point. Kaden sat down across from her.

“We’ve seen *my* storm damage,” she said, taking a sip of her drink. “How’d you do?”

“My apartment’s good,” he said. “I got lucky.”

“Yeah, my place did okay, too. I’m on the tenth floor though—that was kinda scary with all that wind. Are you on a higher floor?”

“Third,” Kaden said. “But I wasn’t home. I spent the night in a basement.”

Mari raised her eyebrows, urging him to continue.

After another sip of his Coke, Kaden gave a mostly true, if highly edited, explanation. “A friend of mine is a sort of caretaker for a closed-up theatre. A bunch of us were there when the storm hit. We spent the night in a basement storage room.”

“You were hanging out in a closed theatre?”

Kaden nodded. “Yeah. It’s pretty cool, having the whole auditorium empty, standing on

the stage. She's got a digital projector set up and we watch movies and Netflix on the big screen. We have one friend who I swear must be at least forty percent monkey. He climbs all over the place. It's pretty entertaining."

Mari laughed. In light of everything that had happened to her over the past month, it was great to see that. Even greater, he realized, to be the cause of it. "What is he, twelve?" she said.

Kaden laughed with her. "Actually, I think he's twenty-six. He does parkour. He's kind of like something out of Cirque du Soliel."

"That must be something to watch, then."

"That it is."

After standing the public recycling bin back up and dropping their empty bottles into it, Mari asked, "Are you hungry?"

Kaden was.

"Let me take you to lunch to thank you for all your help today? I'd still be lugging boxes if it wasn't for you."

"You don't have to—"

"I know I don't," she said. "But I want to."

"Okay, then. Thanks."

"Help me with one last thing, first?"

They used a tarp to cover the hole in the roof of the truck in case it started raining again. As they walked up Ash Street toward Castor Avenue, Kaden marveled that he hadn't humiliated himself, pissed Mari off, or revealed the supernatural at all so far. All things considered, it was shaping up to be an okay day.

PREVIEW

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