

How Zola Got Her Charge

Hidden in plain sight, she walked along the edge of the lake, in a valley, high in the Pyrenees Mountains. No more than an adolescent by Aloja standards, she had spent nearly 50 human years on earth. Zola of the Moirai tribe knelt beside the water, peering at her reflection and smiling, her golden curls flowing around her, glistening in the sun. Her bright green eyes shone back at her while delicate wings flapped lazily in the breeze.

Preoccupied with her reflection, she was unaware of footsteps behind her.
Thump...thump...thump the hunter's heavy boots neared the beautiful fairy.

"You are real." Zola jumped and twirled around, her wings retracting in defense. The fairy's fine features grew wide with fear at the human man standing before her. He stood tall, with wide shoulders and big feet. His forearms looked strong though she didn't desire to find out for certain. Refusing to show panic, she stared at him, her heart pounding deep inside her chest. Tentatively, he took a step closer.

Zola's eyes darted around her. She looked for a way past the man without exposing magic, she was familiar with all of her paths back to the secret Aloja Village. Only those with magic themselves knew of the Alojas—fairies that controlled the fate of all magical beings.

"I always knew you existed. Now I'll be famous." He broke into a wide smile. She cringed at his dirty yellow teeth twisted in his mouth. Scraggly hair sprang from his head and he hadn't shaved in months.

"How did you find this place?" His smirk unsettled her.

"Just followed one of you up here. Lost her a ways back, but I found you."

"You don't belong here. This is hallowed lands." Her back straightened and her wings unfurled, exciting the man. He took another step.

"No!" Gripping her wand, her anger boiled; emerald eyes grew dark until they were black pools. Fear crept across the human's face, as she closed her empty fist into a tight ball.

Taking her chance, Zola sprinted into the nearby trees, just beyond his reach. The hunter took up chase and she made her way up the mountain trail, away from home.

Small, dainty feet carried her over the twigs and rocks that littered the forest floor. A sharp rock dug into her heel. She ignored the pain pushing faster, but not before a human hand grabbed for her wings. In defense they closed and rolled together.

Air grew lighter and colder the higher they climbed. His breathing constricted as he struggled to catch her. She smiled briefly before stepping into a hole and falling forward into a pile of leaves. Zola turned as he came down on her; she completed a jinx throwing him backwards.

Without stopping to fix her swollen ankle, she stumbled up and hobbled along the trail. When the human regained his balance, he followed her. Her wings whipped wildly, wanting to take off, but she wasn't ready, yet.

With the right tree and a quick jump, she levitated herself high, grabbing the branch above her. The man watched in awe and confusion as the young Aloja flew away from him.

Fairy magic coursed and vibrated throughout her body as she landed on the highest branch. Sparks flew from her wand with a spell, befuddlement crept behind his eyes. Emotionless and blank, he stared through the forest, confused.

"How did I get here?" Continuously turning in his spot, she jinxed him again, turning him back down the mountain, gently prodding him along the path. When she could no longer hear his footsteps through the trees, she floated down to the ground, her wings flapping rapidly in relief.

The Moirai tribe lived in a village nestled in the thick trees. Protected by ancient magic, the tribe was well hidden. Their work was far too important for mankind to find them. Zola was merely an extension of the Fates and she understood her role. When she passed the demarcation surrounding her village, her luminescent skin glowed. Worried the human might return, she had hidden in secret nooks of the forest and finally returned home when she was sure he wouldn't find her. Once in her cottage, she smiled warmly for a brief moment, until she realized, this shouldn't be home anymore.

She was past the age when Aloja fairies received their charges. Every time another of her tribe matched a human, she would remain stoic, happy for the friend who found her purpose, sad for herself that it hadn't happened yet. Would it be her destiny to remain with The Fates or did she have a higher purpose?

With the door closed behind her, Zola ran her wand over the candle that hung near the door. The flame flickered; a soft light illuminated her space just enough. She sighed, grabbed the lantern and made her way to the table. The fairy jumped and let out of small squeak, the lantern slipped from her grasp, crashing to the floor; the glass shattering and the candle blowing out. The shadows parted and revealed a small figure sitting on her small chair, Decima. Usually found with her sisters Nona and Morta, they were the Three Fates, the high priestesses of the Moirai tribe. Decima had always been a favorite and had graced the young fairy with her presence that night. Ashamed, Zola raced to clean up the mess.

"Child. Leave it be. Come and sit." Decima's sapphire blue eyes sent a shiver down Zola's back; she obeyed the priestess leaving the glass, bowing slightly to The Fate, and sat at her feet.

“I wasn’t expecting you tonight your highness. Wha...what can I do for you?” Zola bowed her head, her eyes respectfully to the floor. She felt the soft touch of Decima’s long fingers as they caressed her golden curls. She kept her eyes closed and was comforted by her mentor’s scent as she breathed it in.

“I have good news for you my dear Zola.” She cupped her chin and pulled it up so that she could look into the younger fairy’s green eyes. “Yes Zola, your charge. She has finally been born.” Her voice was soft and warm, filled with happiness for the fairy that had waited an especially long time for a charge. This baby was special, in a way that only Zola would be able to care for.

“Finally. A child of my own.” She was breathless with excitement, the news she had so long been waiting for. “Where, when shall I meet the child?” She nervously wrung her hands.

“Patience. She is the second child of the family, but as soon as she was born we knew who should care for her.”

“Why the second child? Why was I not called for the first? Isn’t it the family that I will serve?” Her eyes betrayed her fear; this was not the tradition of the Fates. She had always assumed she would be called for the first born and then she would spend the rest of her time on Earth caring for the family. It had always been so. She wondered if their previous Aloja had met an untimely end and grimaced.

“I understand your apprehension young one. But this family is special and this young girl is as well. She’s destined for great things and her father just now understands that. He wishes for an Aloja fairy to care for his young family and that would be you.” Though she was smiling, it wasn’t large or happy and Zola’s trepidation remained. Every Aloja fairy received a charge, though not every wizard family requested the care and nurture of one.

When requested, the Fates used their ancient magic to place a fairy with a human. It had taken much longer for Zola to be matched. At first this troubled Decima but she soon realized that the fairy was already bonded, a small thread already held her to a child, growing stronger every year as the time approached for the baby’s birth. Unusual, but Zola was no ordinary fairy, and as Decima watched, neither was her charge. “You will leave in the morning with the father. As much as I will miss you, I am so delighted that you have finally received your destiny.” The woman was old, a millennium, but she didn’t look a day over fifteen. She stood slowly as she waved her wand at the broken glass. Instantly, the lantern was repaired and hanging on its hook besides the door.

“May I ask the name of my charge?” Zola spoke in a soft, almost reverential voice as her priestess turned gracefully to face her.

“Yes. Her name is Anne Elizabeth Pearce.” For more about Annie Pearce, find The Day of First Sun on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)
