

MARKED BY THE ALPHAS {18+} - by JenCooper

Chapter 1

THE PORTAL

THIS IS AN EXCERPT ONLY. FULL STORY COMING TO GALATEA. IT IS THE THIRD BOOK IN THE SERIES.

Lorelai

Derik's mouth took mine, his breaths heavy with mine as I fucked him, slamming my hips down on his. The cushions on the bottom of the tent were everywhere, the fur blankets crumpled to the side as I took what I needed.

A moment of peace in the chaos so I could focus for the day. Without my Alphas' touch, I was a mess and I couldn't afford to be. Not when I was hunting.

Derik gripped my loose braid in his hand, his kisses moving down my neck as he met my hips on each thrust. Pleasure kept me warm, fire melting away the stress that I knew was waiting to eat at me but I had to be stronger than it was.

It had been four days and we still hadn't caught up to Adrenna. We were on her trail, keeping her running. Keeping her from making it to Silas without us intercepting but it was killing me inside.

My soul was screaming for Zale, only soothed by the few moments I allowed in my Alphas arms and when Enzi was with me. She had been unsettled, crying and I felt her need as my own, her shadows leaking out of her all the time, looking for her brother.

It was breaking me but that's why I had to let my Alphas put me back together. Their skin on mine, their breaths sharing mine. Their bodies gave me a respite so I could do what I needed to.

Kill Adrenna.

I moved faster on Derik, desperate for the finish line, desperate for the relief in my brain so I could get back to work. I didn't have time for the intimacy I knew they craved and they had been understanding so far but they didn't have a choice.

Derik laid back down against the cushions, his hips bucking into mine as his hands went to my waist, gripping me so he could bury himself further inside. It was exactly what I needed. I gasped, moaning as pleasure spurred in my core, bubbling over the surface.

“Yes,” I moaned breathily, riding him hard until he was cursing and just as damp with sweat as I was. My orgasm stole my breath, the pleasure making me shudder against him, my claws digging into his chest.

He groaned and emptied himself inside, my pussy clutching him tightly before I collapsed on him. He brushed my hair down, kissing the top of my head as he caught his breath. I didn't give myself that luxury, climbing off his waist, and moving away to shrug into my clothes.

He sat up, running a hand through his short, dark brown hair that had grown slightly longer, curling a little at the top, the front falling over his forehead again.

“Brax is with Enzi and Kai is getting the hunting teams organized this morning, Beautiful. We've got a couple of minutes,” he tried as they all did but I needed to be out there, finding Zale.

I could feel him, his shadows, they were connected to his sister who I could tap into. I had to make sure he was okay this morning. He hadn't been in any pain, he was comfortable, but he ached for me like I did for him.

I wasn't going to rest properly or take the time to catch my breath. The few moments after giving in to my Alphas were the only times my head was clear enough to function.

“Don't need them. Get dressed. We're breaking that beast out of its cage today even if it kills me,” I said, tugging on some leather pants before securing a muslin shirt and vest over my chest. Fuck corsets and dresses. Much to my mother's horror of course.

I pulled on my boots and then brushed my hair back as Derik moved over to me, kissing my neck. I sighed, his lips on me never failing to calm my erratic thoughts that had been driving everyone crazy.

“Tabby is meeting us today, Beautiful. She's got what we need to break it out, after that, we'll have Zale back okay?” He said.

I nodded, turning to him, and giving him a small kiss before leaving our tent. It was bigger than the others but that was only because the alphas were freakishly big.

Since I had turned-half turned- the others had grown. I wasn't sure whether that was the mating being complete, the fact that I was stronger than before, or whether it was a natural progression but either way, they towered over everyone now.

Brax was still the leanest but even he had filled out. Kai was a monster, fucking huge, terrifying everyone with his brawn. His wide shoulders and height alone kept him intimidating even his pack.

Derik had become as tall as Kai, his arms getting thicker, his waist trimming. If I wasn't literally losing my mind, I would have taken full advantage of the fact that my Alphas were now ridiculously stacked and grown in *every* area.

I stalked through the huts, scowling at the wolves that were enjoying their morning meal instead of being useful. I disappeared into the main hut like I hadn't just stolen a few minutes to myself too.

Brax was in there, Enzi tucked against his chest as he and Kai looked over the map of the realm. We had already traced Adrenna all through the forest area, along the borderline.

She was in the vampire territory now and we weren't far away but it meant staying on even higher alert. Not that it really mattered anymore. The border was down. We could come across vampires at any point and I wasn't willing to wait until they found us to find Zale.

"When are we leaving?" I asked, looking at today's hunting plans. Little wooden wolves were in place where we were, and no teams were organized for where they were heading.

Kai shook his head, "We're not. Tabby is heading here so we're staying," he said sternly. His own fury channeled into the pack at all times and kept Adrenna cornered as much as possible.

We had cut her off a few times but she always slipped passed and it was infuriating every time.

"So the pack can search the areas."

"No, Little Luna. We may need the pack numbers to get this beast unlocked and pulled through to this realm. We will lose time and Adrenna will get further ahead, possibly closer to Silas but once the beast is unleashed, that won't matter."

I dropped my jaw, "And what if she makes it to Silas?!" I demanded. My patience and willingness to understand anything that wasn't moving forward was non-existent at this point.

"She has been leading us on a hunt, one she is enjoying so until we make it boring for her, I'm guessing she will keep entertaining herself. She's not an idiot, Spitfire, once she hands over that baby, Silas could very well decide she has lost her usefulness too," Brax said as Enzi started fussing.

I approached her, smiling softly at her perfect face before pulling her from him. I tucked her into my chest and she turned straight into my chest, nuzzling for her breakfast. I smiled and undid my vest to feed her.

She suckled easily as Derik came in, bathed and dressed. He kissed my forehead before looking over the map.

“How’s the city? Have the vampires made a move?” Derik asked.

Kai shook his head, “No sightings. They’ve left them alone so far. The wolves covering the human scent seems to be working against the bloodlust. Galen and Cain have things managed. Pearl is heading the humans,” Kai explained.

Pride bloomed in my chest for how far my mom had come.

I think a certain werewolf elder may have influenced that but it still made me smile. She was training, keeping the humans trained. They were learning to fight with the wolves, instead of against them and maybe that would give us a chance against the vampires.

Maybe it wouldn’t but I had to cling to the hope that it would or I wouldn’t survive the days in the snow, hunting a witch who had stolen my son.

My magic flexed inside me and I soothed it. I wanted to lash out too, burn the world down to find him but I couldn’t if it risked Enzi and my Alphas. The pack, my mom. They were my family, one I had wanted for my entire life.

I had to make sure we all came out of this shit with our lives.

“Has anyone spoken to Silas? Heard from him since the border? He must’ve had a reason for this,” I said. I was not comforted by the silent treatment he was giving us. It was like he was waiting, preparing for something we had no hope of surviving.

Or he was using the wait as a mind game. He did enjoy those. Just as Adrenna enjoyed fucking with us.

“No. He’s silent. He’s refusing the witches’ call too according to Tabby,” Kai bit, the vamps fucking with his head more than the others because of the past.

“When will Tabby be here?”

“She didn’t say.” Brax scowled and I had to admit, that hit a nerve with me too.

I looked down at Enzi feeding, touching her soft face, reaching my shadows inside her lightly to see how she and her brother were feeling today.

He was warm, not hungry which I'm sure Adrenna must've been using magic for. Or Enzi was keeping him fed through her. He was feeling the connection more today though, his need for me and the Alphas growing.

His wolf was restless, needing the pack and I hated that I could do nothing but soothe him through Enzi. It wasn't enough, I wanted to hold him, to comfort him, to feel him at my breast, in my arms. Tears stung in my eyes as frustration consumed me.

I pulled back before it tainted him and gritted my teeth. Brax was with me then, kissing me, wiping a stray tear away.

"I feel him too. We'll find him and she's not hurting him. They need him alive and we have to be grateful for that right now," he reassured but it wasn't enough.

Enzi un-latched and I did myself back up. I put her on my shoulder to tap the wind out of her before going to the table with the map.

Our camp was next to the cliff edges I had seen in my vision. It was on the edge of the water area and the border of the vamp area.

I had searched all over the cliffs, going so far in every direction trying to catch a scent but the snow still covered the ground. It covered Adrenna's footsteps and I was pretty sure she was using magic to lead us in circles.

I tried to contradict her with my own but I was still lending mine to the wolves as much as possible to keep them tame with the humans. I think she knew I didn't have as much to spare and was banking on it.

A fact that made every day even more frustrating.

It was always dark, always cold, winter making the hunt harder but we were all just as determined. So we stayed, every day following another dead-end Adrenna tail, searching, hoping to catch her before she got to Silas.

I was over it. I needed to get my hands on her, to feel like we weren't wasting every damn minute. But that's all it felt like at the moment.

"And the wolves patrolling the camp, no signs of vamps?" I checked despite having already checked and knowing that anything that went wrong would come up in the link for everyone. The Alphas stayed silent, they knew I didn't need an answer.

The thing I needed was my son back and that seemed to be constantly out of reach. Unless I went straight to the source. Silas.

"No," Kai bit but I growled at his authoritative tone with me. If I wanted to go and kill that asshole while I still could then I fucking would.

“He’s saying no because Silas is too strong for you, Spitfire. Especially with Adrenna. We have to take this one step at a time or they will win,” Brax said. His shadows moved inside me to soothe mine, tame them out of the anger and darkness they were being lured to.

It was dangerous to be feeling so much anger all the time, feeding my shadows that, instead of the other- safer- emotions. It was showing and I was trying but I had never felt pain like the one that was settled so firm in my chest.

Like a hole, constantly bleeding into me with nothing to stop it except Zale in my arms. Then I could fix whatever I broke trying to find him. Until then, I would stop at nothing.

“Then what can I do before Tabby gets here? Because if I have to sit around and wait then I’ll go crazy.”

“Take a breath. Once that beast is out, it will go straight for Adrenna. We need to be ready to track it to her. Her magic doesn’t work on it, the witches made sure of that but Tabby said it would not be easy getting it out. Magic comes with a price and you have to be ready to pay it, we all do,” Derik explained.

I nodded, determined to do what I had to, “I will. Did she say what we would have to do?”

“Not yet. She said she’ll discuss it when she gets here.”

“Did she say why?” I huffed.

I was trying to be grateful that she had gone to the witches in the first place and gotten the information we needed but I was wearing thin on patience and gratitude. It had already been four days which was four days too long.

“Unfortunately not,” Derik sighed and I clenched my jaw from lashing out.

“She’s here, the witch is here,” Tatum announced, peering into the tent. I sucked in a breath, tension filling the tent as we waited for her to be shown to us.

Tabitha hobbled in seconds later with a smile and her cane tucked in her hand. She wore a purple knitted shawl over her coats with her cowl over her graying hair. I smiled at her and walked forward to hug her.

She returned the gesture, not too tightly since Enzi was between us. Tabby’s eyes went straight there.

“Oh, this one is going to be trouble. Our little secret winter born hmm?” She teased. Enzi stared up at Tabby, her eyes full of wonder.

“She’s our only connection to Zale at the moment. Adrenna has me locked out of his mind but through the shadows, I can still feel him,” I said.

Tabby nodded, “As expected. It is surprising she has not taken him straight to Silas though. That, I assume is making Silas quite irritated and probably the only reason he has not sent his vampires to the city. He is waiting for the child.”

It made sense but I had to be honest; I didn’t care why. I just needed Zale back.

Kai came forward and kissed Tabby on the cheek then led her over to the seat in the corner of the room. She brushed him off and leaned on her cane instead.

“I’m quite alright, sweetness.” She beamed at him and he nodded, standing close.

I stopped at the war table. Brax stood beside me, shadowing Enzi like he was still not sold on working with Tabby while Derik headed the table.

“We have searched everywhere but Adrenna slips past every time,” he said shaking his head.

“And she will continue to do so while the magic is inside her. She is avoiding you and the vampires it seems. Dancing along that border is her way of alluding you both but I do worry she has not decided which side she wants to fall on. Silas has no use for her once he has the child and I will not sugar coat things- she has always longed for a child. I’m guessing thoughts on keeping Zale for herself is keeping her from going to Silas,” Tabby sighed, sorrow and regret in her eyes.

So Adrenna really was nice once. Just a witch who fell in love outside of the box she had been put in. It was a horrible fate to have for such a crime but I couldn’t change it and I only wanted the beast out so I could track it and get my son back.

“How do we get the beast out, Tabitha?” I asked, cutting to the chase.

“It will take a lot. This shadow world- it did break when Adrenna got out but the beast. The beast is stuck in it. She trapped it in some caves when Fractum was uttered and the mountain came down on it,” she sighed and I felt the hesitation in her words.

“What does that mean for a rescue mission?”

“It means that the caves are unstable and going in there could be dangerous.”

“I’ll use my magic, I have enough of it to clear the way.”

“No child, there is no magic in this world.”

Oh. That was inconvenient.

“Wait, no magic at all? No werewolf, no winter born?” Brax frowned and Tabby shook her head.

“No werewolf magic, no witch magic at all except in the beast. But the shadows, I can’t say. They come from that realm, only breaking through from their realm when the veil is thin enough in the winter with no moon to stop it. I think they will be stronger over there if I am to guess but even then, it is a guess.”

“Then Brax and I go. We’ll use the shadows, clear the caves, and get The Beast free. Once we’ve done that, we’ll go through the portal with it and you all need to be ready to track it when it goes for Adrenna.”

“You think that will work?” Kai asked Tabby.

She tilted her head to the side, her eyes hooding as she thought or talked to whatever part of her or the witches that helped her see what we couldn’t.

“It is unclear. The shadow realm is unpredictable. It may get hostile for having power pushed back into it from your shadows or it will help, recognizing its own,” she sighed then shivered a little and lowered into the seat behind her.

I frowned at her and turned to Tatum who was still at the opening of the tent.

“Can you please fetch Tabby some tea?” I asked and he nodded, leaving straight away.

“It has been a while since I have left my swamp, unfortunately, it makes my abilities a little uncomfortable.”

“And the witches are okay with you helping us?”

“They do not want Adrenna with her powers helping Silas. It upsets the balance so I am to advise not assist,” she mimicked with a roll of her eyes. I smiled and she lifted her arms.

“May I hold her?” She asked. I nodded and moved towards her, lowering Enzi into her arms. She snuggled her in then sucked in a breath and frowned.

“She is...” Then Tabby trailed off, her eyes going a cloudy color as she held Enzi, her fingers pressing against her forehead. Brax snarled and surged forward but I stopped him.

“No, I want to know,” I said but he glared at me, the first real glare.

“Get her magic off our daughter, Spitfire. I have control but not that much,” he snapped and I knew he was right. I could feel it in the link, sizzling and burning as his shadows started to leak.

“Tabitha, we need to know what you’re doing,” I urged, kneeling next to her, scared to touch either of them in case it hurt them. Enzi didn’t look scared or in pain and I couldn’t feel that but Brax was right, we had to know- especially after being betrayed.

“I am looking through your history. There is a thread in her DNA that suggests magic is already a part of her. I don’t think she is human but I am trying to determine if it is due to the border magic in you during pregnancy or whether this is something you have passed down. If it is, then your lineage originates from somewhere other than human,” Tabitha said before her eyes returned to normal and her breath released.

She shook her head and sighed, “It is hidden from me, buried too deep to pull on. Very interesting though,” she said, looking at me with a new interest and my heart raced a little faster.

“Okay, one crazy theory at a time. The caves Tabby, we can talk about my past later but right now, I have to make sure Zale has a future.”

She nodded, “Of course.”

Tatum came in with tea then and Tabby took a grateful sip before sighing and leaning back in the chair.

“You need to be aware of the consequences.”

“What consequences?” Derik asked, a frown permanent on his face when we were in this hut. I wish I could make it go away but I couldn’t even heal myself at the moment.

“If Lorelai goes through the portal, her magic will go with it. She will get it back once she comes through but it will be holding the portal open.”

“So the wolves will be left without turning magic,” Derik realized. Tabby nodded.

“And if she gets hurt or passes out, will the portal close them in there? With no magic?” Kai demanded. Tabby nodded.

Everyone fell silent at the truth but I shook my head, standing up.

“I didn’t go through that pregnancy and the pain of birth to give up at the first sacrifice I have to make as a parent. I promised I would do whatever it took to get Zale back and I’m keeping that promise,” I vowed before turning to Tabby, “Where are the caves we need to portal to?” I asked.

She smirked, “On the water side of those cliffs. It is why I told you to camp here and wait for me,” she said and I nodded, already turning out of the tent.

Derik grabbed Enzi as Kai helped Tabby out.

We stood in front of the water's edge, the dark night making it seem more sinister than it was. Brax liked it more than I did but I could swim-ish. I'd never really needed to but I was pretty sure I could stay above water. Brax grabbed my hand.

"I'll keep us afloat, Spitfire," he said and I nodded.

"To the east of the cliffs, just below the waterline is a cave. Go in there. It's only a few seconds but you will come to a maze of tunnels. The beast is trapped somewhere in there. Get him out then get back to the portal, once he goes through- and he is fast so he will reach it before you- your magic will take a significant hit without you there to wield it. It is more than likely, that it will start to close," Tabby warned, her voice shaky as she shivered. Kai pulled his furred coat off and layered it on her.

She tugged it closer and smiled up at him. Kai gave her one back and then walked over to me. Fear was trickling in at all the things that could go wrong but I had to trust that I could do this, believe in the balance.

"I wish I could come with you. I wish it was me making sure you made it back to us," Kai breathed and I kissed him. He held me close, kissing me harder.

"I'll come back," I promised and he nodded. He couldn't come with us- we all knew that. My magic couldn't get us all over there and I needed him and Derik here, protecting Enzi, the pack, the humans.

"You better, Beautiful," Derik said coming over to steal me from Kai. I kissed him too, his lips soft and tender as his arms enveloped me. Kai said goodbye to Brax, and then Derik did.

Even though we were all nervous, I had an excitement in me. We were finally going to have what we needed, not just chasing our tails.

This was a real step in getting Zale back and I needed it so fucking much. I clung to that, letting all my desperation fill me as Tabby nodded at me, telling me to make the portal. I wasn't sure how but she said my magic would and I trusted that.

I lifted my hand, the purple mist stretching from my body and forming a circle in the air that shimmered and glowed with magic.

"Remember this is a shadow world, there is no telling what the shadows there hold. I don't know what hell the witches put in there for Adrenna but I know it wasn't fun. It was meant to make it easier for the beast to have her so if you think a shadow is coming for you, it probably is, and get out of its way," Tabby said.

I looked over my shoulder at her with a droll stare, "Any good news before we go?"

“Yes. The mating link will survive even in the portal so you will be able to communicate with this side,” she said and that was reassuring.

I blew out a breath and looked at Brax who had a stern look in his eyes too, *‘Kiss Enzi for us. I can’t say goodbye to her too after Zale, I’ll come back to her. Keep her safe,’* I said through the mind link to my mates. Kai nodded as Derik kissed Enzi on the forehead.

‘We’ve got her. Be safe,’ Derik sent back a second before Brax and I stepped through the portal.