

## MARKED BY THE ALPHAS {18+}

Chapter 2

### THE SHADOWS

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

Lorelai

Brax and I crossed through the portal, the magic stripping from us both. I gasped at the lightness it left me with- and the darkness. The weight of it was gone but the shadows grew inside me like they recognized where we were. I didn't.

It was so dark, darker than our white winter that consisted of constant night. It was like every space had a shadow. I shivered as the cold bit into my skin through my clothes. Brax brushed up against me, his lips landing on my cheek.

"We've got to get in the water," he said, his own lips blue.

The cliffs were dark, the water ominous and black. I hesitated, fear trickling through me as my shadows filled every part of me.

Whispers in the air had me spinning but it was only forest behind me, dark, terrifying forest that seemed alive with things my human eyes couldn't see.

The purple magic of the portal was like a film in the air and I chewed my lip.

"Will anything be able to get through?" I asked.

Brax shook his head, "No. Not unless you let it. It's your magic, it is still loyally bound to you. At least that's how it usually works," Brax said, his eyes darting over to the forest too.

"That water looks terrifying," I whispered, my voice raspy against the cold, the silence even more intimidating than the whispers. Brax smirked and nodded.

"Yeah, I'm not looking forward to this so let's get it over with yeah?" He said inching forward, his toes brushing the water. He hissed and pulled his feet back, "It's fucking cold," he said.

I shook my head, "I thought something was actually wrong."

He blew out a breath, "There is, the water's going to give me frostbite on my fucking balls," he shivered.

I laughed, "I guess you're not used to feeling the cold huh?"

He shook his head.

"Well. Now you know how it felt going up that stupid mountain. Enjoy human," I teased and he smirked at me, shaking his head before wading in, trying to prove a point. I waited, still not feeling good about my ability to stay above water.

"Can you see the cave?" I asked and he frowned over at the cliffs, peering through the dark but he shook his head.

"No. But my shadows are pulling me towards it, they know where to go," he shivered and I nodded.

Good, my shadows would too then. I waded in, gasping at the ice water hitting me. My nipples pebbled painfully and I winced. Brax moved over to me and he was right, my shadows were calm, soothing my anxieties, and pulling me toward where we needed to go.

"C'mon. We have to hurry up before the wolves get too wild without my magic," I shivered out and Brax nodded, starting to swim in the direction of the cliffs. I eyed his movements, arm, kick, arm, kick. I could do that.

Except it wasn't as easy as it looked and I flailed in the water, the splashes making me cough, my neck stretched to keep my face out of it but I was a useless swimmer. Brax swam back over, lifting me onto his back, hiding a smirk.

"I am definitely going to remember what that looked like," he laughed and started moving his hands through the water, his legs pushing us towards the cliffside.

"Why? So you can traumatize me with it?"

"What? No way. I'm going to recreate it. In bed," he grinned, peering over his shoulder and I rolled my eyes.

"Yeah, it's the flailing woman position."

"Exactly what we want. Kai can get you making that 'holding your breath' face- he's got a thing for his fingerprints on your throat and then between me and Derik, I bet we can get your arms and legs going like that," he laughed and I clutched him tighter, smiling despite the hurt in my heart.

It seemed wrong to enjoy anything when I didn't have Zale back but my Alphas had a way of distracting me, helping me take a break from the guilt and mind-numbing helplessness. It was working.

Brax smirked at me and I kissed his cheek as we came to the cliff. I sometimes forgot that Brax was so connected with the water.

Maybe his wolf magic was gone but that didn't take away from the fact that his entire ancestry was the water area pack and that gave them something extra when it came to it.

They had the lake in their area, which meant swimming was probably as easy as walking to him.

"It is," he said, his biceps flexing against me as he pulled me around, helping me float with him.

"Small kicks of your feet. We've got to find this cave entrance and I think it's under the water," he said and my heart rate picked up.

"I've never really been underwater," I admitted.

He shrugged, "It's quiet. Peaceful. Just pretend you're in a really big bath, sinking below the surface to collect your thoughts. I've seen you do that so I know you can."

He was right, I did do that. I could do this. I nodded at him, ready to do whatever it took.

"Your shadows should lead you to the entrance but if you need to come up for air before going through then do that, I'll follow your cues," he said and I nodded, taking a few practice breaths.

"I'm guessing you're really good at holding your breath too?"

He grinned, pulling my lips to his.

"How do you think I stay between your legs for so long, Spitfire?"

I laughed and shook my head, "Head out of the gutter," I said then took another breath, "Okay, let's do this," I said then sucked in as much oxygen as I could, holding it in my chest as I sunk below the surface with Brax's hand in mine.

I used the little kicks he'd said to, to move forward but I didn't need to. My shadows fuelled my body, moving me towards the tall, black, jagged rocks that covered the lake bed.

*“Don’t touch them. We don’t know what they’re made of or what will happen if disturbed.”*

*“Yeah because my first thought was to touch the sharp, black rocks that look like they want to skewer me like a spit roast,”* I said back and he laughed down the link.

*“Spit roast, now there’s another idea for the bed later,”* he teased and I almost let out my air in a scoff.

*“I want her mouth,”* Kai interrupted the link and I ignored both of their sexual comments, trying to see through the dark water, avoiding the spikes of rock that kept coming out of nowhere.

It was hard enough to see but these things were making it harder. My shadows were helping though, avoiding them for me. Without them, I was pretty sure I would’ve fucked this mission over at least four skewers ago.

My chest and lungs started to burn as I blinked hard, panic rising as my shadows moved me faster. I didn’t know how long I had left before I needed to breathe but it didn’t feel like long. Brax grabbed my hand and pulled me along with him but I tugged the connection.

He eyed me and I pointed to the surface. Brax went to pull me up when his head snapped to the water behind him. He frowned and tugged me towards it. I wanted to protest but my shadows were pulling me there too.

I held the last of my oxygen inside, the burning ache in my chest getting worse and worse.

*“I think we’re close or the shadows would’ve let us surface. Hold on, Spitfire.”*

*“I’m trying.”*

*“Don’t panic, you’ll use more air.”*

*“I’m trying,”* I repeated and he kicked harder. Until he yanked me against him and we came face to face with a wall of cliff. He put his palm on it, pressing against it, his eyes wide. I shrugged and felt along it but I needed air.

I strained out my chest, trying not to take a breath but it was taking everything in me.

*“Brax,”* I urged in the link.

*“Get her out of there,”* Derik snapped down the link but Brax was still searching.

*"It's here, it has to be,"* he said back as I gripped the cliff. Black spots started appearing in my vision and I grabbed Brax. He cursed down the link a second before something gripped my ankle.

My air whooshed out in a tornado of bubbles, a scream escaping when whatever had grabbed me, tugged me down.

Panic filled my aching chest and I reached for Brax. He grabbed my hands, trying to pull me back, fighting whatever had me, his biceps straining as his own face looked like air would be really good right about now.

*"Get out of there!"* Kai roared down the link.

*"Don't let her go!"* Derik screamed at Brax.

I tried to kick whatever had me off but it held my ankle tighter. It didn't matter anymore, I had no more breath in me. Darkness edged my vision, Brax's desperate face and wide eyes the last thing I saw before it took me completely.

I was pretty sure I was dead but there was pain. My chest ached and burned. I was sure if I was really dead, it shouldn't feel so awful. My shadows stirred inside me and my throat closed, water rushing out of me.

My eyes flung open as I coughed and spluttered, emptying my lungs and chest of all the swallowed water. My nose burned as it came out of there too and I took heaving breaths to compensate.

"Thank fuck," Brax growled, his voice raw as he enclosed me in his arms. I was used to being warm but he was freezing too. I shivered against him and pulled back to see him.

"What happened?" I wheezed and he nodded towards the cave entrance in the water that was licking my feet. I was on stone and rubble, a bank on the inside of the caves.

"The shadows were trying to show you where to go to get to the entrance. They weren't your shadows but I think ours were speaking to theirs. They weren't trying to drown you though," he said and I coughed again, wincing at the pain that wracked through my chest.

"Okay. That's not creepy at all but thanks shadows," I said to the air and the water bubbled before stilling. I tensed and looked at Brax.

"They understand us, they know why we are here."

"And they'll help?"

“They’re hard to understand since they don’t actually talk but from the feelings I got in my shadows, I want to say yes but there’s a warning.”

“A warning?”

“Like not all of them are on the same side. Some will help but I don’t think all of them will.”

“And I’m guessing there is no way to tell the difference?”

“Only in the feelings our shadows translate to us,” he admitted and I nodded, that was just great. I went to get up and Brax helped me. I clutched him, my head spinning.

*“Beautiful, you good?”* Derik asked in the link.

*“Yeah, I’m okay. Is the portal?”* I asked.

*“It’s holding.”*

*“Just holding? Did something happen?”*

*“It tried to close. When you passed out.”*

*“Oh.”*

*“Don’t do it again or I’m jumping in there and getting locked in there with you,”* Kai threatened and I smiled. They were hot when they were protective.

*“And you’re hot when you’re alive and breathing. Keep it that way. I like Brax, I don’t want to have to kill him for letting you die,”* Kai warned and I laughed.

Brax rolled his eyes, “We need to keep moving, we don’t know where in these caves the beast is,” he said and I sobered, following him into the dark caves that looked unstable as hell.

Rubble and rocks weren’t just on the bank, they made up the pathways of the caves.

It made moving through them a little slower than I wanted. At least the shadows were more alive than they had ever been inside me and Brax in our realm. His were constantly checking on me, soothing, caressing like normal but it felt more intense than usual.

“I feel it too,” Brax said, the sound of his voice echoing through the caves.

“I like it,” I replied.

He grinned, "If only there was time to see how much we could feel here." He wriggled his eyebrows suggestively and I laughed, clutching a piece of rock above my head and ducking as the cave lowered slightly before stretching out again.

"I have a better idea. Remember the game we played with my shadows? And I had to find you?" I asked and he nodded, narrowing his eyes on the tunnels ahead of us.

"Yeah, want to try it to find the beast?" he guessed.

I nodded, "We may not know what it looks like or anything but we project our shadows out and it'll tell us when we're not alone," I said. Brax nodded, his shadows pouring from him. I let mine out too and they were off, running like children through the caves.

They were almost giddy, like they were being let out to play and it was kind of adorable. I missed being able to use them while I was pregnant. I had been relying so much on magic that it was kind of refreshing not to be able to.

My shadows moved fast, searching the tunnels, racing Brax's in a game they played together. I smiled at Brax and he grabbed my hand, helping me over bigger rocks that blocked the path more than the rest.

I could've done it myself but I liked his touch too much to refuse the hand extended to me.

We came up on a wall of rock that took more time to move and just as we cleared the path enough to squeeze through, there was an enormous roar through the caves. I shrunk back from it, the echoing throbbing in my eardrums as I covered my ears.

The cliffs shook, the caves threatening us with dropping rubble and rock, showering us in dust. I brushed myself off as my shadows raced back inside of me, urging me forward. I peered through the dust and followed the way my shadows led me.

They had found the beast.

Brax followed me too, his shadows back as he eyed the jagged, rough ceiling of the cave tunnels. They were holding but neither of us knew how long for.

"We need to move faster. My shadows aren't liking us being in here this long," he whispered and I nodded, trudging faster over the uneven path.

My shadows led my body and Brax where we needed to go. I was so glad I didn't have to do this on my own because my sense of direction was terrible. I would've been lost three turns ago.

*“No, you wouldn’t have, Beautiful because I’ve memorized every turn you’ve taken,”* Derik said and his words warmed my freezing body. My damp clothes still stuck to me but the way he made sure I was okay had me heating up.

*“Why? I have Brax.”*

*“You also tend to run off from us at the worst possible times. I am making sure you get out of there even if you get separated. Both of you,”* Derik said and I licked my lips.

I wished I had spent those few extra moments this morning admiring that gorgeous body of his and appreciating the love he had for me.

I would make it up to him though, make it up to all of them. I had been a crazy bitch the last four days and that wasn’t likely to change until I had Zale back but maybe I could relent just a little and enjoy my Alphas for the comfort they were to me.

*“We know, Little Luna. You don’t need to feel guilty but if you want to make it up to me in the form of more time on my cock then I’m all for it,”* Kai chuckled down the link and I laughed.

I covered my mouth as the beast let out another roar, it’s anger turning to a whimper as we drew closer.

“We’re almost there,” I whispered to Brax.

“Careful spitfire, it senses us,” he warned and moved in closer to me, his hand hovering over my lower back.

“I can sense it too,” I said, my shadows writhing beneath my skin but they didn’t feel scared, more urgent. I was trying to understand them the same way Brax did but they were too worked up.

We turned a corner, the dark opening to a wall of rocks and debris covering a mountain of a man. If it was a man. It had skin, but it was scarred and stretched with tattoos covering it.

But they weren’t territory tattoos like my Alphas, these ones looked magical, like they were runes or something.

“They locked Adrenna’s lover in that body,” Brax whispered and the beast snarled, shaking and moving, trying to get out but the cave shook with every move he made.

I stumbled into Brax and he caught me. I steadied myself against him then moved towards the beast. His eyes snapped to me between the rocks of his cage and they looked...sad.



I frowned, the black eyes so intimidating but so deep. A scar ran down one eye, right through the cheek and his face was distorted. His skin was lightly furred too. His hands almost paws, claws out, his teeth gnashing angrily as I stepped closer.

“He was human once?”

“According to Tabitha, whatever her word means to you,” Brax shrugged and he knew it meant a whole damn lot.

“We’re going to get you out of here,” I said to the beast. He gnashed his teeth angrily, thrashing more so more rocks pushed down on him. A boulder broke free and rolled down, almost taking me with it but Brax swung me out of the way before it hit, and we toppled to the ground.

I landed with a thud on the ground as Brax did.

“Careful,” he coughed, wincing as he stood up and helped me up, debris dust filling the air. I moved through it and back to the beast.

“We need you to stay still so we can get you out without being crushed,” I said to him, not even sure if he could understand me. He eyed me, his head turning before he whined and shook a small amount. When he did, blood trickled down his thick veining neck.

“He’s hurt. I don’t know if he can die but I really don’t want that happening before he’s killed Adrenna,” I snapped and at the mention of her name, he let out another roar that crossed into a howl. I covered my ears, hiding in Brax’s arms as the entire cave roared with him.

It shook and thundered, before releasing another load of rocks and obstructive boulders. The beast gnashed its teeth, gnarling, as it frothed. It was some kind of human-wolf crossover that went wrong.

Like he was stuck mid-transition and couldn’t get through either side of human or wolf. And the size of a dragon, that too. It made the idea of getting him out, ridiculously unlikely but I had to try.

I ignored the debris that fell after the mini earthquake, ignored the small rocks that tore through my shirt, left scratches, and cut my skin. I didn’t have time to wallow or worry about the magnitude of what we had to do, I just had to do it.