

## Owned by the Alphas |

### The Battle

I wasn't strong enough.

Every time Elias's shadows hit me, I went down. He blew through mine easily, like I wasn't even an issue.

I grimaced as I hit the concrete wall of the crypt, Elias's shadows, mixed with my brother's, poured over me, sliding over my body as they pinned me there.

When they let me go, I dropped to the ground, wincing as Elias chuckled, straightening his clothes, patiently waiting for me to get back up and try again. Because that's what I kept doing.

I had no choice, I couldn't give up like my sore, aching muscles wanted me to.

I gritted my teeth and climbed to my feet again, rolling my shoulders back. My stomach turned, my forehead beading with sweat as I reached for the link and my alphas' powers that connected us.

I needed their strength, but the link was getting weaker and I had no idea what that meant, whether it was because I was weaker or because my alphas were in trouble.

Either way, I had to end this thing—and fast.

I summoned everything I had, connecting as strongly as I could to my alphas and my shadows, throwing them back at him.

Elias flicked his wrist, and mine hit his. His were much darker, pushing against mine. But it didn't even look like he was straining. There was no sweat, no falter in the shadows that were slowly overtaking mine.

I shoved harder, pushing more against him, but with another flick of his wrist, Elias threw me back against the wall. My head hit with a harsh crack, and I slumped to the ground, my head spinning.

I swallowed hard and used the wall to help me stand up, breathing heavily as I felt the back of my head. Warm blood seeped out of a cut there, and I clenched my fists shut.

I turned to my brother.

"Is this what you want?! To kill me? How will that help? The wolves will still stop you from hurting them," I snapped.

"I don't want to kill you, sister. I want you to pay for choosing the werewolves over your own kind and for choosing them over me!" Lucas bit back, and my jaw fell open.

"So it really is you? You're letting Elias do this?"

"I'm sacrificing myself for our race," he said, his chin held high.

I shook my head, which hurt more than I had expected.

"No, you're not. The humans aren't in any danger, they don't need rescuing from anyone but Elias. Do you really think he'll stop there? He'll be happy just taking over the werewolves?"

"That's not how it will happen, Lucas. He'll take the werewolves, then the vampires, and then there will be no one left to control but the humans, and he'll take them too. It's how greed works," I said, trying to get through to him because I knew physically I didn't have enough strength in my shadows.

Not while Elias was a part of him.

And maybe it was hesitation. I didn't want to kill my brother, but I wanted Elias dead. I had no idea how to make that happen, so I was going in blind to it all.

"Elias promised the humans would be safe."

"And you trust that? How has he ever proven his word?" I argued.

Lucas hesitated. I could see it in his eyes, even the shadows that I could feel lingering from him growing weaker.

"The wolves need to stop having control of us. We should not serve them," Lucas said, but there was less conviction in his voice.

“So we’ll discuss it with them. They probably don’t even know that humans want more. When do we ever tell them? We don’t have to go to war over this,” I tried, and his face fell, his eyes dropping as he looked over his hands and stepped back.

I stepped forward.

“I don’t know who to trust or what to believe,” Lucas murmured, and that was better than refusing me, so I came forward, closer than I should have because Elias took advantage, probably letting Lucas take over to trick me.

He took control back from my brother in a second and grabbed me, swinging me into him, my back against his front as he brought the stolen dagger to my throat.

“It doesn’t matter what you convince your brother of. He has already promised himself to me and my cause. He’s mine. And you will be too.”

He grinned against me and I struggled against him, my shadows pushing him back, but he held my throat tight.

I swallowed past the blade, wincing as it nicked my skin.

“So you bleed me dry like your other victims and then steal my shadows? They won’t be loyal to you,” I said, knowing that for sure.

“It won’t matter. Mine are strong enough with your brother’s to suffocate them. I will still be able to use their power, even if they resist.”

He chuckled maliciously, and I gripped his wrist, trying to pry him off, but his shadows covered his hand, burning me whenever I tried to get near them.

Then they moved down my body, coating me in them so mine couldn’t get out. I tried to push them out to help, but they were locked inside me, thrashing and angry as they tried to help but couldn’t.

I’d never had a chance. Not while Elias was some kind of ghost controlling my brother. But I wasn’t just a winter born with shadows, and he had forgotten that.

So had I for a while there.

But I had been bullied my entire life, and I knew how to defend myself.

I brought my elbow into his gut, smashing the point into him hard. He let out a huff of breath before I stamped down on his foot with my boot.

His hold on me loosened, and I grabbed his hand, gritting my teeth against the burn, twisting his wrist until he dropped the dagger.

He yelped and I grabbed it, ready to sink it into him, when he met my gaze and dared me to do it. I froze.

“Do it. Kill your brother. His sacrifice will be most appreciated,” Elias growled, and I frowned, looking down at the dagger, then back at him.

“And what happens to you?”

“I find another angry human to take his place. They won’t hold me very well, not being winter born, but I can move through hosts like underwear. Their deaths will only add to my cause, and their blood will be on your hands.” He shrugged.

I stepped back, the dagger still poised in my hand but my will diminishing. I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t kill my brother. But maybe hurting him would be enough.

Adrenaline pumping, my heart in my chest, not sure whether I was going to be quick enough, I dropped the sacrificial dagger then knelt down, yanking my own dagger from my boot, going for his leg with the blade.

But it wasn’t his leg in front of me. The blade plunged into his shoulder, his face twisting as the air rushed out of my body, the dead stare of Elias right in front of me.

He was grinning. He was meant to be standing, but he was knelt down in front of me.

I looked down between us, gasping as the pain of his blade registered. He had cut down my arm with the sacrificial dagger as I had stuck his shoulder with mine. I hadn’t been quick enough.

Blood spilled from the cut as long as my forearm, and I fell back. Elias stood up over me, smirking as he licked the red from the blade.

I shivered, my body going cold as I held my arm, trying to stop the bleeding. I tore the bottom of my shirt off with my teeth before wrapping it around the cut, my movements fast and shaky.

I tried to use my erratic thoughts, but all I could think about was how I was losing and what was going to happen if I let Elias win.

If I failed, he might kill my alphas. I believed in them, but I also knew how powerful he was.

I looked over to him, frowning as he retreated back to the fireplace. He stood there, highlighted by the flames, my brother who wasn't my brother.

I stood on shaky legs, my head swimming, my skin bruised, my clothes bloodied. I felt as bad as I looked, and I was pretty sure he knew that.

My shadows were weakening, something in the dagger making sure they were being drained with my blood.

He was still grinning, but his eyes went to the pentagram I stood in. I looked down to where my blood mixed in with it, a pool in the middle that now connected all the lines.

My head snapped to him as he chuckled darkly.

"Just a little of your blood, that was all I needed." He grinned. "And the final sacrifice of course."

He beamed before he buried the sacrificial dagger into the stomach of my brother.

"No!" I screamed, and my shadows burst out of me, going for the dagger.

I barely had a thought before my shadows threw the dagger across the room. I ran for my brother, falling to the ground with him as he looked up at me.

"He's gone," my brother whispered, blood coating his white lips.

I held my hand over his stomach that was pumping blood out of the wound. I tried to stop it, but there was too much. Tears fell from my eyes as I held him.

"Just hold on. I'll help you," I begged, but he shook his head, his eyelids drooping, his skin growing cold.

"You can't. You have to stop him. He needed a winter born body and blood to complete the ritual."

"Which he just got," I realized, my heart racing, knowing it wasn't over, that he was about to be more powerful thanks to whatever he had just done.

"You were meant to be the body, your shadows are stronger, but I heard his thoughts, Lorelai. He couldn't beat you. He was giving you everything he had. He wasn't showing it, but you were tapping him out.

"His shadows aren't as loyal as yours, they won't keep fighting once they tire. Yours will. He knew you'd outlast him, so he changed his plan. But it doesn't matter now, he got what he wanted," Lucas wheezed before coughing, spatters of blood landing on his pale skin.

"What does he want, Lucas? What was the ritual?" I demanded, and Lucas's eyes closed. I shook him back awake, and he met my gaze.

"He's human again. He brought his body back; he doesn't need a host. He's more powerful."

"No, that's impossible."

"Before the final battle, he bribed a witch into putting a brand on him. It kept his body healthy. He knew eventually there would be another winter born. All he had to do was wait."

Lucas breathed harshly, and I looked over my shoulder, checking the crypt, but I couldn't see anything. I had no idea where he had gone, and that was scarier than if he was standing right behind me.

"I need to go find him. You have to stay alive, Lucas, I'll save you. Just keep pressure on it," I urged, laying him down and ripping off some of his shirt to hold over his own wound.

He nodded weakly, but his eyes closed. "I love you, Lorelai. I hate that you love the wolves, but I still love you," he said quietly.

I clenched my eyes shut, tears falling, my heart aching so bad I almost heard my alphas howl through the link. They had to be close by now.

I leaned down and kissed Lucas on the cheek. "I love you, Lucas. Stay alive. I'll finish this," I promised, then stood up, determined to end this once and for all.

Elias was dying tonight. Permanently.

He may be more powerful with his shadows, but now he had a body I could hurt. He was a human, just like me, and he'd bleed like one too.

I just had to make sure he didn't come back by destroying that brand that kept his body so this could never happen again.

I turned away from my brother, about to leave the crypt, when Elias came down the stairs, brushing dirt off his worn clothes, a smirk on his face, his shadows swirling around him.

I clenched my jaw and my fists, glaring at him. I picked up my dagger and readied myself against him.

This time was different. I wasn't intimidated, scared, or worrying about hurting my brother. Now I had a fire in me that demanded revenge for everyone Elias had ever hurt, including my brother.

Maybe Lucas had been wrong to do what he did, he shouldn't have said yes, but no one ever told us anything about the shadows, only how bad they were, how horrible we were for being winter born and possibly having them.

Not that they could be good or help us.

If we had known a decision like that existed maybe he would have chosen differently.

Maybe the humans did need to change a few things, maybe the wolves needed to, it didn't mean Elias could force everyone's hand through fear and murder.

I was done being diplomatic about it.

"Now's the perfect time for you to surrender. Stick the dagger in you and let your shadows find mine. I'll make sure everyone knows of your sacrifice," Elias said, his voice higher than I expected after hearing him as my brother.

I shook my head, my eyes narrowing. "If you want me dead, you're going to have to do it yourself."

"Oh no, I don't fight like a barbarian. I fight like a winner. Dirty."

He grinned before his shadows were on me. They pushed me back, surrounding me so I couldn't see Elias, the crypt, or my brother.

But I didn't panic. The link with my wolves was growing stronger. I didn't know whether that was because of how confident I was now or whether they were close, but it did help.

I drew on their magic, making my shadows much stronger. I blasted them out from me, pinning Elias's shadows to the walls of the crypt.

They hissed and squealed, but mine kept them there. It was hard, they were strong, but I didn't need much of my strength to kill him now. He was essentially human, no shadows to cry to. No shadows to protect him.

And he knew it too.

He was frowning, straining as I walked forward with a smirk, twisting the dagger in my hands. His shadows pushed harder on mine, but they stayed pinned against the crypt.

I stood in front of Elias, who was glaring with a clenched jaw.

"Shall we do this like barbarians?" I snickered, and he growled.

"You want to defend humans? Pretend like you are doing this for them? Then why don't you fight like one, hmm?" I antagonized, kicking his blade toward him.

He picked it up quickly and held it out. I grinned and got into a fighting stance, holding my dagger out, ready to sink it into his flesh. He copied what I did, his feet apart, a long stride, knees bent, arm up, ready to strike.

And that's when I saw it. The brand. A red, lumpy brand like a burned-in welt, the shape of a pentagram resting on the inner part of his forearm.

I grinned and charged for him.



He could fight better than I thought he would be able to, but it was sparring for me.

I held his shadows, the fight easier because he couldn't concentrate on both things. And the fact that he thought I was going for his heart or a fatal stab.

But I wasn't. I was going to destroy that brand on his arm.

He shoved me back as I got closer before I swung and swiped on the attack, determined to take him down. He kept on the defense before his blade nicked my face. I winced and stumbled back, wiping the dripping blood away. Lucky shot.

I went in again, not letting him recover the breaths he was trying to take. Finally he fucked up, and my dagger sliced through the brand. He cried out and fell to his knees, holding his arm.

Karma's a bitch.

I stood over him as he glared, breathing hard.

"No safety net, no coming back from the dead." I glared at him, and he grunted, getting back to his feet with a scowl. But there was a fear there now that hadn't been there before.

Good. It was how I had come into this, and now that the tables had turned, I knew I had to be done with it.

"Kill me and you absorb my shadows—and your brother's," he threatened, but I shrugged.

"My brother is not dead yet, and yours will be loyal to me," I said, not knowing if that was the truth but willing to bluff it anyway.

I did know my brother wasn't dead yet, though. His were not a part of the shadows I had pinned; otherwise, they would be a lot harder to hold there. Elias's were hard enough but not as bad as they were before.

They were getting stronger, though, now that I wasn't distracting Elias. He shrugged and looked over at my brother with a smirk.

“He will be any minute, and then this little game will be over. Once he dies, his shadows will be mine as promised, and then your little hostage trick is not going to work.”

He grinned. “All I have to do is keep you busy a little while longer.”

He laughed, getting ready to fight again.

I gritted my teeth and looked over at Lucas. So Elias was just keeping me distracted, same as I was.

And if he was telling the truth, that my brother’s shadows would go to him once he died and that I didn’t have long, then I needed to hurry up and end this.

I couldn’t let my brother die or Elias get the shadows his ritual promised.

So I went for him.

I stabbed at him, swiped at him, his reflexes not as impressive as before. I caught his body, slicing through the flesh on his chest before sinking the blade into his stomach.

He grunted and coughed, dropping to the ground, blood falling from his wound like it had done from mine. I wanted to feel good about that, but I just wanted it to be over.

I moved behind him, gripping his hair in my hand, tipping his head back so I could press my dagger against his throat, just like he had done to me.

“The best part about your ritual? It makes you as human as me,” I taunted, not giving him a chance to respond with some threat before I cut his throat.

He gurgled and splattered, his shadows curling around mine as they felt their winter born dying. I let him go, and he slumped forward, landing on the ground with a thud, his blood pooling over the concrete.

I let out a breath, closing my eyes for a second before putting my hands on my knees and trying to get my head together.

I felt so sick, my stomach turning, my forehead sweating, the reality of actually ending Elias snapping in my head so sharp it made me wince.

An ache formed in my bones, and I sucked in a breath. A weight fell inside me, and I went to my knees, my hand splaying on the ground. My shadows retreated to my body, but they were different, a little darker and heavier.

I looked up, gasping, falling back as my shadows, light gray mixed with Elias's black, turned and mixed in a huge cloud before me.

They fused into each other, pouring back into me as I winced, the ache and pain throbbing in every part of me as I took on his shadows. There was so much power and potency it had me coughing and clutching my stomach.

My brother coughed next to me, and I forgot about the shadows. I crawled over to him, my knees scraping on the concrete as I did. I lifted his head into my lap, brushing his hair back from his face.

"Lucas?" I asked, looking over his pale face for a clue as to whether he was going to survive. He coughed again, and the tears welled.

"My shadows are mine again," he wheezed. "They're keeping me alive, but it's not permanent, Lorelai. I've lost a lot of blood," Lucas murmured, looking at me with that soft, patronizing look.

I shook my head fiercely.

"No. I'm going to save you," I bit, but he just smiled softly before his eyes closed. "Lucas!" I cried, but he didn't move.

I pressed my bloodied fingers against the pulse in his neck. It was weakening. I panicked, not sure what to do, crying as the life literally left him.

My shadows filled me, but they somehow got heavier, and I knew it would be too late to save him any minute. But I had just gotten him back, I wasn't going to give him up.

I called down the link, trying to find out how close the werewolves were.

"*We're close,*" Derik said, sounding like he was panting, probably running.

"*Elias had a trap for the pack, we were fighting a spell in the city,*" Brax explained.

"*You beat him, Little Human. I knew you could,*" Kai said proudly, but I didn't feel proud, just pain.

*"My brother is dying. Can you turn him?"* I asked.

The link went silent, but there was hesitation there. And my answer.

*"Why not?!"* I cried.

*"If he's dying, he's not strong enough. A bite can be rejected,"* Derik said, and I cried harder, the pain getting worse.

*"There has to be something,"* I said.

*"There is,"* Kai said, but Brax snarled.

*"No."*

*"A vampire bite is guaranteed,"* Kai bit back.

*"You want me to turn him into a vampire?"* I asked, surprised any of them would suggest that.

*"It means they would get a winter born and he would survive,"* Derik said, realization in his voice.

I chewed my lip, looking down at his face that held a gray sheen over it that wasn't getting better. There wasn't long to make my decision, but in my heart, it was already made. A vampire had to be better than being dead.

*"And then we'd owe the vamps a favor! No, Lorelai!"* Brax snapped, and I hated that I was going against him, but I had to save my brother.

*"I have to."*

*"Brax, the wolves will want his head for what he has done, the humans too. With the vampires, he is immune,"* Kai explained, and that made my decision for me.

I was summoning Silas.

*"Don't make any deals before we get there, Lorelai,"* Derik warned, and I stayed silent on that.

*"Summon him to the crypt in the cemetery."*

*"We will. How hurt are you? Can you defend yourself?" Kai asked.*

I looked down at my injuries, not entirely sure I could win another barbarian fight, but the shadows in me were stronger than ever and I knew I could handle Silas.

*"That's our girl."* Kai grinned down the link, and I smiled. I missed them.

*"We miss you too, we'll be there soon. Silas is on his way,"* Derik said.

*"When Elias died, it cut the spell he had us fighting. Did you absorb his shadows?"* Brax asked.

*"Yeah. I didn't mean to,"* I admitted, but my conversation was cut short when Silas's red velvet cape appeared in my peripheral. I gasped and turned to him as he tucked his wings in behind him.

He was an impressive vamp, one of those ones that looked like he belonged in one of the sexy books I liked to read, but he was no wolf.

He smirked as he kicked Elias's dead body. It exploded into ash, and I coughed away the dust. Silas came over and bent down by my brother, running his talons over his face.

"The other winter born."

"Don't touch him unless you're going to turn him," I snapped, edging us away.

Silas stood up and leaned against the crypt wall. "I'll turn him, but nothing comes for free, winter born. So, shall we start the negotiation?" He grinned, his eyes running over me, making me shiver.

I may have just asked to make a deal with the devil, but it was worth it to save my brother. At least, I hoped it would be.