

Brought together by circumstance.  
Bound together by chance.

Despite the danger,  
passions ignite...

# SHADOW'S PLEASURE

THE  
SHADOW WARDER  
SERIES

MOLLE MCGREGOR

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# **Shadow's Pleasure**

**The Shadow Warder Series: Book Two**

**Molle McGregor**

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Prequel Novella: [Shadow's Passion](#)

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# Chapter One

*Breathe*, Sorcha told herself. *Take a breath and just relax. They're not all watching you. Judging you. Looking for weakness.* She shifted in the stiff wooden chair, nerves vibrating with anxiety, hiding her tension beneath a mask of inscrutable calm. All eyes were on the three newcomers, ears tuned to their story. No one was paying attention to Sorcha. Yet. If this meeting went the way she thought it might, it could be her ticket to freedom.

Was it wrong to use her friend's misfortune to untangle her own disaster? Maybe. But Caerwyn would be the first to encourage her to do what she had to. For a decade, Sorcha

had been trapped in this Sanctuary. Treated like an invalid. Useless. This could be her only chance to make a move.

Ten months ago, Caerwyn, her younger sister Lissa, and another Shadow had disappeared. They'd left to go shopping in Knoxville and had vanished. Cell records showed the last call Caerwyn had made was from the mall outside the city. A short conversation with her mother, saying they were on their way home. Then nothing. Caerwyn's car, her phone, every sign of them had disappeared.

No one would clear Sorcha to search for them. Her mentor, her parents, even Iris and Garran had deemed Sorcha too fragile to leave the Sanctuary. It was bullshit. She wasn't fragile. Not anymore. If she could hold it together long enough to get through this meeting, she'd prove it to them.

Sorcha took a sip of the lukewarm coffee in front of her. The remains of their breakfast were scattered across the table,

mostly ignored as the gathered Shadows and two new Warders tried to work out a game plan. So far, they hadn't accomplished much. The new Shadow, Hannah, her bonded Warder, and his friend were telling their story a second time. Recounting how Hannah had escaped a secret lab run by a corrupt Warder, while those around the table listened intently, hoping to scavenge any details they'd missed the night before.

Iris, the Keeper of the Sanctuary, sat at the head of the long table wearing yet another of her loose dresses, her graying hair in its customary bun. Sorcha had no idea why she liked the hippie grandmother look. As a Shadow, Iris could have kept her hair the same rich brown it had been in her youth, could have smoothed every wrinkle from her skin.

Then again, Sorcha wasn't exactly the height of fashion herself. This morning she wore an embroidered tunic over dark cotton leggings. She hated that tunic, and not just



because her mother had made it for her. Decades out of fashion, it wasn't her style. Most days, she put on jeans and a graphic t-shirt. But today Sorcha needed those in charge of their Sanctuary on her side. If dressing to please would help, Sorcha would do it. When she got out of here she was leaving the ugly tunic, and all the others like it, behind.

Garran sat opposite Iris at the other end of the table, absently stirring his coffee. The burly, grizzled, Elder Shadow looked bored, but he listened to every word. The renegade Warders and Hannah were their best lead on Caerwyn, Lissa, and Sara. So far, the information they'd shared about Hannah's captivity was both encouraging and deflating. Finally, after all these months, they knew who had the missing Shadows. They knew all three had been alive as recently as a few days before. They also knew the Shadows were being held as part of a sinister plan to breed a Shadow-

Warder. It was ridiculous. Kate, sitting beside her and waiting for the chance to describe her part in Hannah's escape, was the only living Shadow-Warder. There wouldn't be another until she died. They couldn't be manufactured in a lab.

Sorcha tried not to listen as Hannah described talking to Lissa while they'd been imprisoned together. Hannah's light, clear voice faltered. Lissa had told Hannah the Warder Director who'd held them was trying to create his Shadow-Warder the old-fashioned way. Sorcha focused on the golden surface of the pine table, concentrating on the cycle of air in her lungs. *In and out.* Moisture prickled the corners of her eyes. Bright, sunny Caerwyn was being raped. Repeatedly. Possibly since the day of her capture. According to Lissa, Caerwyn of the quick smile and goofy jokes no longer spoke, had completely withdrawn. Hannah's guilt at leaving them

behind flooded across the table, almost swamping Sorcha's shield.

Sorcha withdrew mentally, furiously shoving Hannah's emotions away. If she were a better empath, Sorcha would draw all that dark, sticky guilt from the girl, soothe her, help her work through the pain. Hannah had no reason to feel guilty. Her own escape was a miracle. Trying to save the others would have doomed her. At least now they had some idea what had happened to their missing.

Sorcha was going to get out of the Sanctuary. She was going to find Caerwyn. She was not going to think about the hell Caerwyn was going through. She couldn't. Not yet. When Sorcha found her friend, she'd use every bit of her empathic ability to help her heal. If Sorcha let the reality of Caerwyn's circumstances get to her, she'd never be able to do anything. Sending part of her consciousness to her inner

mind, Sorcha wove reinforcements into her shield, strong enough to block Hannah's emotions. Sorcha was the one Shadow with the skills to find Caerwyn and the other girls. She had to maintain the illusion that she could handle the outside world, or they'd never agree to send her.

Even with the reinforcements to her shield, their emotions battered at her, a tidal wave she struggled to hold back. Sorcha's only chance was physical distance. For ten years, the greatest danger to her safety had come from within the Sanctuary. If she could get far enough away, she could rebuild her shield. This time strong enough to keep herself safe. It all depended on what happened in the next few minutes.

The Warders and Hannah had finished their story. Voices rose around the table, distracting Sorcha from the thoughts of her friends. It seemed the Shadows couldn't decide what to do

next. The two Warders and Kate looked faintly disgusted. Sorcha agreed. She loved her people, but sometimes they were all talk, no balls. Taking a deep breath, she leaned forward in her seat. *Showtime.*

Into the argument, Sorcha said, “I’ll find them.” Silence fell as the room turned to her. Surprise on half the faces. She hadn’t spoken since she’d entered, so it was possible most of them had forgotten she was there. “I’ll find them,” she repeated. “That’s why you asked me here, isn’t it?”

“Sorcha,” Iris said in a placating tone that made Sorcha grind her teeth. “You can’t go out there alone.”

“I was a tracker,” Sorcha responded, willing herself to be calm. Reasonable. Mature. “I’m trained to fight. And I’m the best we have at finding what is lost. I should have been out there before this. Now that we have an idea where to look,

I'm going.”

“It’s more than you can handle,” Iris protested. “I’d hoped you could guide one of the others from here.”

“No,” SORCHA said. “It’s too complicated. This Director is using spell craft. I have to be closer.”

SORCHA didn’t know for certain that it was true, but it probably was. Kate leaned in, anticipation pulsing over her skin. SORCHA tried not to flinch. Kate was a great friend, but her energy was potent stuff.

“I’ll go with her,” Kate said. “I can keep her safe long enough to find them. I can help her get them out.”

“Hell no, girl,” came booming from GARRAN’S end of the table. He waved his big hand at Kate, gesturing for her to sit back. “If I’d had a say in it, you’d never have stepped into this one’s escape.” He pointed a thick finger at Hannah, who looked surprised and uncomfortable at the attention. “You’re

unreliable and half crazy, Katherine. Drunk more than sober, holing up on your island, turning your back on your people more often than not. Denying your birthright...”

“Fuck you, old man,” Kate shouted, her face red, eyes wet with rage. “You don’t know what you’re talking about—”

“I know we’re not risking Sorcha or these girls to you. If you want to contribute, get your shit together. Otherwise, sit back and shut up.” Garran slapped his bear paw of a hand on the table for emphasis.

Kate slumped in her seat, vibrating with humiliation and fury. Sorcha knew her well enough to know that Kate wanted to storm from the room in a fit of temper. In other circumstances, she might have done it, proving Garran right. But she, like Sorcha, loved Caerwyn. Kate would stay. She might be imagining inventive ways to kill Garran, but she’d stay.

The room was silent. Sorcha sensed she'd gained ground. Garran hadn't said it was a bad idea for Sorcha to go in search of the Shadows, just that Kate couldn't go with her. Progress.

Wondering what argument to bring up next, she heard someone say, "I'll take her. I can keep her safe."

Looking up, Sorcha locked eyes with the owner of the deep voice. It was the Warder. Not Hannah's. The other one. He studied her with eyes of opalescent hazel. They shimmered in warm shades of green and amber, set in golden skin. His hair was longish, shaggy around his face, thick, and dark blond. Add in sharp cheekbones, lush lips and a warrior's build, and you had one hell of a sexy man.

*Warder. Not a man.*

Either way, Sorcha wasn't sure she wanted to go anywhere with this guy. Males who looked like him were usually trouble.



On the other hand, he'd risked everything to help his friend save the woman he loved. Loyalty like that said a lot. Carefully, Sorcha extended her empathic senses toward the Warder. Nothing. She tried harder, reaching for him. Still nothing. Odd. Even focusing just on the Warder, she felt the others' emotions pushing through. But not his. His emotions were tightly contained, not bothering her at all. Unable to stop herself, Sorcha smiled, believing for the first time this was going to work.

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Kiernan sat back when the Shadow smiled at him. Fuck, she was gorgeous. He was going to have to watch himself with her. Long, thick red hair, milky skin, green eyes, full lips. That ugly hippie shirt hid a lot, but he was pretty sure she was all curves under her dumpy clothes.

At first, he'd thought she was a little mouse. Creeping into

the room, head down, staying silent as the others spoke. He'd wondered why she was there at all. Apparently she was some kind of tracker. Good, since a tracker was exactly what they needed. For some reason, the others didn't want her out in the human world. He'd been shocked as hell when she'd spoken up. She was quiet, but her voice had been firm, her eyes direct. He got the feeling she wasn't prepared to give in. She'd need a backbone if he took her to Charlotte with him.

“It sounds like you left a mess behind when you helped Hannah escape,” said the bulky, rough-looking Shadow at the other end of the table. Kiernan wasn't sure of his name. Garran? “How can you guarantee Sorcha's safety when you don't know what you'll be walking into?”

“I can't guarantee anything,” Kiernan said evenly. “Conner can't go back. But I should be clean. There's only one person who knows I was involved in helping Hannah get

out. And since she helped Hannah herself, I think she'll keep her mouth shut.”

“Still, going back at all is extremely risky.” This from Iris at the other end of the table. The older Shadow leaned forward, hands folded in front of her. “Bringing Sorcha with you elevates the risk. She hasn't been out in the human world for years. Her shield is too weak.”

“I am not weak,” the redhead said. Kiernan could tell she was trying not to raise her voice. Despite her even tone, her eyes sparked with aggravation.

Sorcha. An old Scots name. With that hair, he would have guessed Scottish or Irish.

“Sorcha,” Iris said, in the same overly patient tone she'd used earlier.

Sorcha gave a sharp shake of her head, cutting Iris off. She turned her green eyes to Kiernan. “Iris is right,” she said.

“Going back is dangerous, even if you think you’re clean. You got out. We’ve offered you safe harbor here. Why would you be willing to take the risk?”

Kiernan was surprised. He’d thought she wanted to go. But Sorcha was smart to question his motives. He didn’t know the captive Shadows. His single point of loyalty in this room was Conner, and he’d already helped his friend save Hannah. Kiernan’s job should be done.

On top of that, Shadows and Warders were forbidden contact. Just sitting here surrounded by Shadows broke fifteen hundred years of separation. If the Warders found out where Kiernan had been for the past twenty-four hours, he’d be in a world of hurt. If they caught the redheaded Shadow with him, so would she.

“Look,” he said, leaning toward Sorcha, meeting her green eyes with a steady gaze. “You don’t know me. And I don’t

know your missing females. But I've never turned my back on an innocent. Not when my job is to save them. Especially not when one of my own is working with demons to rape and torture them. I don't care about walking away from the Warders. But I'm not leaving those girls with the Director. Michael is insane."

"What's your plan?" Sorcha asked, her tone a challenge.

Kiernan grinned at her. He was pleased to see a flush bloom in her cheeks. Nothing could happen between them. They'd be walking into enough danger without adding the complications of sex. Still, he'd never been able to resist flirting with a woman, pretty or not. And this one was even more beautiful when she blushed.

"I thought we'd work that out together," he said, his grin widening further as the pink of her cheeks deepened. A throat was cleared at the other end of the table. The older Shadow,

he thought. Garran. Just as Kiernan turned to address the interruption, the door to the room slammed open. A male Shadow stepped through. Tall and spindly, he should have appeared weak. Instead, he radiated energy. Whoever the male was, he was powerful. And he looked pissed.

Ignoring the rest of the room, the stranger narrowed his dark eyes on Iris. He set one bony hand down on Sorcha's shoulder without looking at her and barked, "What is the meaning of this? Why has Sorcha been included in this meeting?"

At the mention of her name, the hand on her shoulder tightened. Sorcha twisted, trying to dislodge the fingers digging into her flesh. She winced, her eyes dulled. He was hurting her. Was Kiernan the only one who saw it? Sorcha shifted to the side. The intruder's grip tensed. Why didn't anyone stop him? Kiernan pushed his chair back, prepared to

intercede when Sorcha raised her gaze to his. The luminous green was muddy with pain, but she shook her head in an almost imperceptible negative. Against his will, Kiernan sat back, giving her a chance to deal with the situation on her own.

With a jolt, Sorcha came to her feet. The sudden movement jarred the man behind her, forcing him to step back, highlighting the harsh grip he'd had on her shoulder. Kiernan was gratified to see the two elder Shadows raise their eyebrows at the sight of his rough treatment. Good to know they didn't condone it, they just hadn't noticed.

Now that all eyes were on his contact with Sorcha, the older Shadow dropped his hand. Sorcha took advantage of the space to shift away, placing herself behind Kate's seat. Kate glared at the newcomer with undisguised hatred. Interesting. Kate was a live wire, but she'd stepped in for Hannah and had

fought with them the day before. She might be a little wild, but she was a powerful fighter and brave as hell. If she disliked this man, he was likely a threat.

“Steven,” Sorcha said in the same annoyingly calm tone Iris had used on her a few minutes before. “We’re discussing Caerwyn, Lissa, and Sara. The Warders have a solid lead on their location. We’re going to bring them home.”

“Out of the question. You cannot leave this Sanctuary. You’re too weak.” Steven dismissed her and turned to Iris again. “Sorcha’s not stable. Her power can’t be focused. She’ll be a danger to the girls and to herself. I was against her cutting back on her training with me, but she insisted. If I’d known she’d get an idea like this...” Steven trailed off, shaking his head as if in remorse, clearly trying to give the impression that Sorcha wasn’t able to make her own decisions.



Was he right? Would she be a liability? Kiernan met Sorcha's eyes again. The pain had cleared, leaving them bright with annoyance. Her shoulders straightened as she faced Steven.

“As you're well aware,” she said. “I'm fine. My shield needs to be maintained, but I can do that outside the Sanctuary. I have the training to deal with anything we might encounter, and no other Shadow in North America has the ability to find Caerwyn through the spell craft that's blocking her location. We can't afford for me to be locked away here.”

“You're not locked away, Sorcha,” Iris protested, looking disturbed at Sorcha's description of her circumstances.

“What do you call it when you refuse to allow me to leave?” Sorcha countered.

“It's for your safety,” Steven said, reaching for her arm. Sorcha stepped back, evading him. Garran cleared his

throat a second time. The brusque sound was enough to freeze Steven in place. His arm floated back to his side. Sorcha took another sliding step away.

Garran leaned forward, pinning Sorcha with his eyes. “Think carefully, girl.”

“Garran,” Steven interrupted.

He was treated to a raised palm. Steven’s bony face mottled with anger when Garran didn’t spare him a glance.

“The past few years have been difficult,” Garran continued. “There’s no shame if you need more time to regroup.”

Sorcha drew a breath as if to speak, then seemed to think better of it. Wisely, she waited for Garran to continue.

“If you leave here with this Warder and go after our missing females, be certain you can do what you intend. If you fail, you don’t just endanger yourself. You risk

sabotaging our only chance of bringing them home. Are you willing to take that on your shoulders?”

Standing across the table, Sorcha held Garran’s eyes. Without hesitation, she said, “I understand this will be dangerous. I wouldn’t volunteer if I didn’t think I could succeed. I’ll need to take precautions, but I know I can maintain my shield in the city. It’s much stronger than it used to be. And Caerwyn has been my friend since we were children. I love her like a sister. I used to watch Sara and Lissa when they were babies. There’s no way I’d risk them if I wasn’t sure I could bring them home. I promise you.”

Garran gave a sharp nod, then shared a long look with Iris. After a silent moment, she answered with a sigh. As one, they both looked at Steven, whose back straightened to painful stiffness. His dark eyes radiated fury.

“You can’t seriously be willing to listen to Sorcha’s

opinion over mine,” he began, flinging a dismissive hand in Sorcha’s direction. “She’s only recently regained any control over her empathy, and it’s tenuous at best. After ten years in the Sanctuary, she can still barely stand to be touched. I can feel her tolerance for the emotions in this room wearing thin, and she’s been here less than an hour. Her weakness aside, you can’t mean to send her out into the human world with a Warder. He’s as dangerous as the Vorati demons.”

“Enough,” Garran boomed into Steven’s diatribe. “Steven, shut it. You may be one of our strongest empaths and Sorcha’s mentor, but you have no official place in this meeting. Sorcha is an adult. She is capable of assessing her own strengths. If she believes she can do this, I’m willing to take a chance on her.”

Steven drew an affronted breath. Ignoring him, Iris picked up where Garran had left off. “As far as the Warder is

concerned—”

Before she could go on, Kiernan interrupted. “My name is Kiernan.” He restrained the smirk that wanted to break free. Iris didn’t look like she had much of a sense of humor. As if she’d heard his thought, she aimed a regal nod in his direction.

“As far as Kiernan is concerned,” she went on. “He hasn’t proven to be dangerous to any Shadow. At great personal risk, he helped Conner save his bonded mate and followed them into exile. Now he’s willing to put himself in danger once again to rescue our females from one of his own. In truth, if I thought we could do this ourselves, I’d leave him behind. But the girls are being held by a Warder. In the center of a Warder-dominated city. We have few Shadows in Charlotte, and fewer contacts. He has a way in. He can get Sorcha closer than we can. We would be foolish not to take the help he’s

offering.”

Iris tilted her head to the side, examining Steven more closely, as if seeing something new in a man Kiernan suspected she'd known for more than a few decades.

“I don't like what I've seen this morning regarding your attitude toward Sorcha. Perhaps this is exactly what she needs. You're her mentor, Steven. Your place is to guide and support. Not to doubt and punish. Regardless of the outcome of her trip to Charlotte, she'll be removed from your oversight when she returns.”

“If she returns,” Garran said.

“Yes, if she returns,” Iris agreed. “She knows the risks.”

In answer, Steven whirled and stormed out of the room. As the door slammed behind him, Kiernan heard the echo of his voice saying “Talk some sense into her” before he was cut off. With Steven gone, Sorcha relaxed and returned to her

seat.

The rest of the meeting passed quickly. Kiernan and Sorcha planned to leave the following day. Later that afternoon, they'd discuss strategy, then meet with Iris and Garran one last time before their departure.

As the others rose to leave, Kiernan turned to Conner. "I want to talk to Sorcha for a minute. Are you going to be around in a while?"

"Sure," Conner said, sliding his arm across Hannah's shoulders. She leaned into him, her long red-gold hair spilling over Conner's arm. "I think we'll go for a walk, then head back to our rooms for some rest after lunch. Hannah needs a nap."

"I'm pregnant, not sick," Hannah said, poking Conner in the leg. Conner grinned at her and kissed the top of her head.

"Humor me," Conner said.

Kiernan remembered Conner's despair when he thought he'd lost Hannah. Their bond connected them, but it was clearly fueled by the love they shared.

“Is this when I get to say ‘I told you so’?” Kiernan asked. He'd thrown the two of them together in the beginning, encouraging his far too serious friend to loosen up and have some fun. Little did he know he'd start a chain of events that would lead them to a Shadow Sanctuary. It was all worth it just to see Conner's easy smile.

Hannah tipped her face back to meet Conner's eyes. “What does he mean—he told you so? What did he tell you?” she asked, teasing Conner.

Conner looked away, scowling in Kiernan's direction. Kiernan couldn't help giving Conner a little shit before he took off.

“I told him to take advantage of the romantic cabin and



hook up with the hot Shadow while he had you all to himself,” Kiernan said.

Hannah giggled, her clear voice tumbling out like joyful bells. Kiernan didn't know her well. Most of what he did know he'd learned through Conner's drunken confessions after he'd left Hannah. But everything Kiernan saw assured him that Hannah was the perfect match for his friend.

Giving Conner a light slap on the shoulder, Kiernan headed for the door. He heard raised voices filtering in from down the hall. One of them sounded like Sorcha's. He wanted to make sure Steven wasn't hassling her again. The Shadow came off as an asshole. Kiernan didn't want him anywhere near Sorcha. They were going to be partners for the next few weeks. That made Sorcha his.

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# **Shadow's Pleasure**

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