

Learning to Love... Book 1: Shade |

Running with Wolves

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SHADE

“All right everyone!” Alpha Caelan called once all the wolves had gathered out front. “Make sure anything you want to bring is in something you can easily carry. Go ahead and shift whenever you’re ready, and let’s have a nice run! See you all at the falls!”

I glanced around as everyone else started to strip, tossing their clothes to the ground as they prepared to shift into their wolf forms. I stood there, unsure of how I should handle my current predicament, when my gaze wandered across a very naked Alpha Caelan.

I tried to look away. I really did, but my eyes weren’t receiving any of the signals from my brain, which was trying to tell them we should definitely not be staring at the alpha’s very firm backside.

He turned to face the crowd, and I suddenly found myself hungrily taking in his muscular form. I tried not to drool over the sight of him as my gaze fell below his waist.

Whoa.

My cheeks burned as I abruptly remembered my manners and looked away.

Goddess, what is wrong with me?! What if he had caught me ogling him like that?

I glanced up, noticing the cocky little smirk on his lips. I ducked my head, knowing my face was as red as a tomato.

Oh my Goddess, I’m so embarrassed. He definitely saw me checking out his...um...physique.

“Shade,” an all too familiar voice hissed.

I turned away from the alpha, welcoming the distraction.

“Yes, miss?” I replied as Sunny came up beside me.

“You need to stay at the back of the pack,” she instructed as she looked around to make sure no one was listening. “Don’t worry about keeping pace with me. We can’t afford to let anyone see your wolf’s eyes, understood? Don’t forget that our alpha doesn’t want anyone to know about your affliction.”

“Of course, miss,” I confirmed. “I’ll bring up the rear.”

It’s a good strategic position anyway. I can protect the group’s back while Alpha Caelan takes the lead.

“Don’t screw this up for me,” she warned. “If Caelan rejects me because he knows you’re a freak, I’ll make your life hell.”

It already is.

I forced a smile and nodded.

“I’m serious, Shade,” she growled under her breath. “Don’t—”

“Sunny,” Taffy interrupted, her own furious glare pinned on my sister. “Are you having trouble with your shifting?”

“No,” Sunny scoffed. “I’m not a pup.”

“Well, then you should probably get to it. Wouldn’t want to hold up the rest of the group, would you?” Taffy shot back.

I tried not to let the surprise show on my face. No one spoke to Sunny that way.

Her jaw clenched as she stared at Taffy, a defiant fire burning in her gaze. But she didn’t say anything back. Instead, she turned on her heel and stomped away.

“You should be a bit more careful talking to her like that,” I cautioned as I watched Sunny begin her shift. “Don’t forget that she *is* an alpha’s daughter.”

“She may be an alpha’s daughter in Thunder Moon, but here she’s just some spoiled pack princess who thinks she deserves to be luna because her daddy told her so,” Taffy growled. “Remember what I told you this morning. You’re both final candidates. You’re on equal footing here.”

"I remember," I assured her.

"Good. Now hurry. We'll be leaving any second, and you don't want to fall behind."

She turned and walked away, making her way to the side of a dirty-blond wolf that I assumed must be Beta Dillon.

I took a deep breath. *If I keep to the back of the pack and keep my head low, I can do this without anyone getting a good look at my eyes.*

I stripped off the oversized shirt I wore and quickly shifted. I couldn't be sure, but it felt like someone was watching me the whole time.

I shook out my shaggy, silver-gray fur and scooped up my bag before joining the rest.

Alpha Caelan raised his head and let out a soft howl before he started for the trees, and just like that, we were off.

I kept my gaze low but remained mindful of Sunny's position in the group. She was doing everything in her power to move toward the front, probably eager to get as close to the alpha as she could.

I was oddly annoyed about that, but I couldn't understand why. I'd never been jealous of Sunny around other males before. Why would I suddenly start feeling that way now?

I remained in the back of the group, which I didn't mind at first, but it slowly grew more frustrating as several of the less-athletic wolves began to slow down. I was forced to drop behind them.

I sighed. It felt more like an easy jog than a run, which was disappointing. I didn't get to use my full speed as often as I wanted to, always having to keep the pace that Sunny set.

Truth be told, she wasn't much of a runner, so I'd been looking forward to the chance to really stretch my legs.

However, it seemed I might get the opportunity after all as a large chocolate-brown-and-khaki wolf swooped in out of nowhere and began urging me to run faster.

I knew who it was in an instant. I'd just seen his large, muscular form leading the group a moment ago.

It was Alpha Caelan.

He nuzzled the side of my neck, yipping playfully at me as he jumped around. I cocked my head at him, not sure what he was trying to tell me. We weren't in the same pack, so we didn't share a mind-link.

Why is he acting like this? He looks like a pup that's trying to play. Wait, is that what's happening? Why would he choose me?

He nipped lightly at my heels, encouraging me to race. I barked back, circling him before taking off through the trees at top speed.

I've never raced for fun before! I've only ever run like this in training or as a form of punishment. This is so much better! I wonder how fast he can go.

I pushed myself to my limit, forcing the alpha to chase me. I knew that he could probably catch me if he tried, but he stayed behind, happily darting through the trees and jumping over boulders as he raced after me.

For the first time in a long time, I was actually enjoying myself. I was having so much fun that I completely forgot about my responsibility to protect Sunny, leaving her and the rest of the group far behind.

We reached the waterfalls long before everyone else, both of us skidding to a stop just before the riverbank.

I dropped my bag, panting hard as I turned toward Alpha Caelan. That was the kind of run I had been hoping for.

He wore a wolfy grin, his tongue hanging out the side of his mouth as his chest heaved. I couldn't help but mirror it with my own smile. Forgetting myself for a moment, I glanced up.

Suddenly, that wonderful scent, the one that I hadn't been able to stop thinking about since the night of the welcome party, filled my senses.

French vanilla coffee with just a hint of masculine musk.

I stared at him in complete shock. There wasn't a doubt in my mind about who it belonged to now.

It was Alpha Caelan's scent.

He stepped forward, and I trembled, an electric hum in my veins as he neared. Everything about him called out to my wolf's instincts. I wanted, no I needed, to look him in the eyes, but I fought the desire.

This is crazy. He's not the first male that I've ever spent time with. I shook myself, my heart hammering for a second reason as I finally glanced away. Though admittedly, he's the most attractive one by far. Why am I reacting to him like this?

I didn't have a chance to ponder on it for long as everyone else finally caught up. Their presence washed over us like a bucket of ice water, dousing whatever heat had been brewing in an instant.

I ducked away, taking the opportunity to find a private place to shift. I pulled on my bathing suit and cover up as I chastised myself for letting down my guard.

He's an alpha. I can't allow myself to behave like that around him. I'm here to help Sunny. I can't forget my orders.

I started back, stopping short as I realized my mistake. I had looked at him. Not directly, but he had definitely seen my eyes. They were impossible to miss.

Oh Goddess! What have I done?

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