

Learning to Love... Book 1: Shade |

Border Troubles

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CAELAN

I hurried to the southern border with Oliver by my side, trusting my betas would keep the group safe. Shade had glanced my way once, shifting quickly and sticking close to Sunny as they slipped through the trees. I hated watching her leave, but I knew she was safer at the pack house.

Damn Dark Moon. Why did they have to trespass on our lands today of all days?

Several of the packs in the area had trouble with Dark Moon. They simply couldn't be trusted. Alpha Huxley was ruthless and ambitious. He wanted control of every pack he could get his hands on, and he wasn't afraid to use force to get his way.

But they normally had enough sense to leave us alone. Harvest Moon was a very large, well-run pack, which usually discouraged anyone like Alpha Huxley from messing with us.

I can't imagine what he could be thinking. He could bring every warrior he had, and we'd still outnumber him a dozen to one.

In the end, their reason didn't really matter. They had trespassed onto my territory, and they would pay for challenging my authority.

When Oliver and I arrived, we found two of our warriors squaring off against several of the Dark Moon scouts. I immediately jumped on the one closest to me, pinning him to the ground and grabbing the scruff of his neck with my teeth.

He flailed beneath me, trying to shake me off, but I held fast. Oliver barreled into another while the warriors cornered the rest.

I huffed. Huxley can't even train his wolves to fight properly. How did he become an alpha in the first place?

The wolf I held snarled at me, and I shook my head, biting down just enough to remind him who was in charge. He stilled as the others bared their necks in submission.

I shifted, holding the wolf down with my hand instead of my teeth.

“What’s the meaning of this?” I demanded, my voice carrying the authority of my rank. “Why is Dark Moon on our lands?”

They were still in their wolf forms, snarling and snapping at us to show they weren’t planning on cooperating. I squeezed the throat of the wolf beneath me.

“I am the alpha of Harvest Moon. Crossing into my territory without permission is an insult to my pack and my rank. You will shift and explain yourselves now or die. Understood?”

They still refused.

I growled, deciding to do something I didn’t normally like to do unless it was absolutely necessary.

“SHIFT!” I ordered, using my alpha tone to make them obey me.

They were forced into their human forms. Unfortunately, even my guards and poor Oliver had to follow my command. I glared at the wolf I held.

“Why are you here?” I snarled.

“Alpha Huxley’s orders,” the youngest of the group finally admitted. “You have something that belongs to him, and we’re here to get it back.”

“That’s ridiculous!” I scoffed. “We don’t have anything of his.”

“Lies,” the one I had pinned spat. “The Mallory girl... Alpha Butch’s daughter. Our alpha has placed his claim on her. Butch thought he could hide her by sending her here, but Alpha Huxley knows better. Hand her over now, and we’ll spare your pack. Don’t, and you’ll all die.”

“I don’t like being threatened,” I snarled, releasing him and shoving him toward his packmates. “She is my guest and under my protection. You tell your alpha if he comes anywhere near her or my pack, I’ll rip out his throat myself.”

“You’re making a mistake Alpha Caelan,” he wheezed, rubbing his neck. “Our alpha won’t stop until he makes her his mate. And once he does, even a pack as large as yours won’t be able to stop us.”

I watched them run off, an uneasy feeling in my stomach as they shifted and slipped over the border into their own territory.

What do they know that we don’t? I’ve read over Sunny’s file several times. She doesn’t have that kind of power.

I doubled the border patrols as soon as I reached the pack house. We couldn’t risk that Dark Moon wouldn’t try something like this again.

I pulled on a pair of shorts and a shirt as I went to find Shade. She was Sunny’s personal guard. Surely, if Sunny had some hidden ability, Shade would know about it. Besides, she would definitely want to know about the threat to her charge.

I knocked on the door of her room.

She immediately answered. “Alpha Caelan, what brings you here?”

I pushed my way inside without waiting for an invitation. I glanced around, noticing a set of blueprints spread out across her coffee table. I cocked my eyebrow in question as I turned back toward her.

“I asked Beta Dillon for copies of the pack house’s blueprints,” she replied without apology. “I need to assess all the entrances and exits in case I have to get Sunny away from here in a hurry.”

“Dark Moon will never infiltrate the pack house,” I assured her. “It’s too deep in our territory. We would be able to stop them before they even got close.”

“They made it into Thunder Moon’s pack house,” she countered, walking over toward the floorplan. “Into the alpha’s office.”

I stared at her in shock. *How did they make it past Alpha Butch’s defenses? Someone should have spotted them well before they reached the pack house. Maybe Thunder Moon isn’t as well run as we were led to believe.*

“Did they hurt anyone or take anything?” I asked.

“Luckily, no one was harmed,” she said, staring down at the papers. “But I’m told they took some of the alpha’s personal files.”

“What files?”

She shrugged. “The alpha didn’t say, but I would assume it was something related to Sunny. She’s the one they’re after.” She let out a frustrated sigh. “Though, I can’t for the life of me understand why they’d do this. Alpha Huxley already knows everything about her.”

I crossed the room to stand beside her. “Is there anything special about Sunny that they might want?” I pressed. “The scouts we encountered seemed to think she has some power Alpha Huxley can use. Is that maybe why he’s put a claim on her? Why he wants her for his mate?”

She shook her head. “No. Other than being the alpha’s daughter, Sunny is just a normal wolf. She doesn’t have a gift or any particular power that would make Huxley want her so badly. And he’s been after her for years. Why risk Harvest Moon’s wrath coming after her here?”

None of this adds up. If there isn’t anything remarkable about Sunny, then why were those scouts after her? Shade’s right. They could have just waited until she was sent home. She’d be a much easier target back in Thunder Moon.

Suddenly, my mind flashed back to the conversation I’d had with my mother after that disastrous dinner. Something she’d said stuck with me. Something about Alpha Butch’s deceased daughter.

“Are you sure it was Sunny’s file they stole?” I asked, a cold feeling settling in the pit of my stomach. “Could it have been someone else’s?”

“Like who?” Shade asked. “There aren’t any wolves at Thunder Moon that would be that desirable to Alpha Huxley. Sunny is the alpha’s daughter. She’s his best chance at taking over the pack.”

“I don’t know,” I shrugged. “But they said they wanted Alpha Butch’s daughter. They didn’t say which one.”

She gulped, visibly paling as I stepped closer. It was clear that she hadn’t expected me to know anything about Sunny’s twin.

“Are there any files about Shade Mallory, the daughter he lost?” I asked. “The one who shares your name?”

“W-why...uh...” She cleared her throat. “Why would they be after Shade Mallory? She died years ago. Wh-what did they say exactly?”

My eyes darted across her face. The mention of Shade Mallory had spooked her, though I had no idea why. According to what we knew, Shade Mallory had died in a rogue attack when she was seven. Why would that scare this Shade?

“They said Alpha Huxley wants to mate with Alpha Butch’s daughter,” I stated. “And once he does, Dark Moon will be so powerful that even Harvest Moon wouldn’t be able to stop them.”

She dropped into her chair, her eyes wide as she stared at me in disbelief.

I crouched beside her, putting a hand on her arm. “Shade! What is it?”

“They aren’t after Sunny,” she whispered, her voice trembling.

I gave her a confused look. “If it’s not Sunny they want, then who are they looking for?”

She pursed her lips, glancing down at her hands resting in her lap. “Me.”

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