

Learning to Love... Book 1: Shade |

Truth and Lies

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SHADE

"Wait, I don't understand," Alpha Caelan said. "You're telling me that you're Shade Mallory, the daughter Alpha Butch claimed was dead fourteen years ago? You're Sunny's twin sister?"

"Yes," I said softly. "I don't use the name Mallory anymore, but yes. I'm the other daughter of Alpha Butch."

He took my hand. "I don't understand, Shade. Why would he tell everyone that you died with your mother when you clearly didn't? Why would he disown his own pup like that? And why would Alpha Huxley be after you now? I thought he wanted Sunny."

I pulled my hand away, leaning forward to rest my elbows on my knees. I wanted the comfort his touch brought, but I didn't deserve it. Not when I was about to go against my father's orders.

"Alpha Huxley thought Sunny was the only heir to the pack. If he mated with her, then my father would be forced to give up control to the new alpha. But if he's found out about me, he's discovered there's another way to take over Thunder Moon. To take over any pack he wants, really."

"I'm sorry, but that doesn't make sense," he replied. "Shade, you're a perfectly capable fighter and an excellent bodyguard, but I can't sense that kind of power from you. How could Huxley turn you into a weapon like that?"

"If he unlocked my curse," I admitted, my gaze darting away from him.

Among other things.

I didn't want to see the look on his face when I admitted my shameful secret. I didn't want to hear him call me a monster when he learned the truth of what I had done.

“Curse?” he questioned, placing his hand on my knee like he knew it would help calm me. “Shade, what curse?”

“I’m a cursed wolf, alpha,” I admitted. “That’s why I can’t be anyone’s mate. Cursed wolves can’t have mates.”

I sighed, twisting my fingers together. My father would be furious when he found out I told Alpha Caelan who I was and what I could do. But if Dark Moon was coming after me now, that put all the packs in harm’s way. It was my duty to make sure they knew the risk.

I can’t put anyone else in danger. I won’t lead Caelan’s pack blindly to slaughter.

“It’s known as the Wolf Born from Sorrow,” I said. “I was there when my mother was killed by that rogue. I saw everything. I was only seven at the time.”

“Shade,” he whispered, squeezing my leg as tears welled up in my eyes.

I wiped them away quickly. “I shifted for the first time that day. The horror of it all forced my wolf out to protect me. I howled and killed the rogue.”

“With what?” he replied. “I don’t understand.”

“My howl isn’t a normal howl,” I sighed. “Anyone who hears it could die. If it’s strong enough or they’re exposed to it for too long, their hearts will literally break.”

“Your wolf’s howl is deadly?” he pressed, his tone filled with concern.

I knew why. I was a potential danger to his pack, and he had allowed me into their midst without knowing the risk I posed.

“Not anymore,” I explained. “My father used his alpha tone that same day to forbid me from ever howling again.”

“So, you can’t howl?” he said in disbelief.

“Nope. I haven’t since that day.” I shrugged. “He did what he thought was best. Who knows how long it would have taken me to learn to control it or how many I might have hurt in the process. He really didn’t have another choice.”

“So...your wolf’s eyes?”

I nodded. “That’s the mark of my curse. I know it may look like I’ve gone blind, but I promise you, my wolf sees just fine.”

“That still doesn’t explain why your father would tell everyone you died,” he huffed in irritation. “Why he would disown his own pup and make her an omega.”

“I cost the pack its luna, my father his mate, and Sunny her mother that day,” I said flatly. “If the pack knew what I could do, it would have caused a panic. My father hid me away and had me sent to a training facility to become Shade the warrior so that I could repay them for what I’d taken from them.”

He rocked back on his heels, the look on his face unreadable.

Does he agree with what my father did? Would he have done things differently? Would he have kicked me out to save his pack?

“When I arrived back home, I wasn’t a Mallory anymore. Just Shade. That’s when he made me Sunny’s protector,” I continued. “It was the least I could do to protect the pack’s only heir. And it was kind of perfect. Because we look alike, I can act as a body double for her in dangerous situations.

“Does Sunny know any of this?” Alpha Caelan growled. “Does she know that you’re actually her sister?”

“Yes,” I said. “My father never hid the truth from her. The Elders of Thunder Moon always knew my real identity as well, but the rest of the pack were ready to believe that my name and appearance were just a coincidence.”

“That’s ridiculous,” he scoffed. “So, let me get this straight. Your father rejected you as a pup and forced you to train as a warrior. Your twin sister treats you like a servant and isn’t shy about hitting you if you make a mistake. And everyone at Thunder Moon is just okay with this?”

He stared at me in shock as I nodded. He looked away in disgust before turning back toward me.

“Did you even want to be a warrior?” he asked.

"Not really," I admitted. "I don't care much for violence, but I owe them. I have to do what is necessary to make up for what I did. What I am."

I stood. He stared up at me, his hand still resting on my leg.

"I'm the reason my mother is dead. It's my duty to serve my family and my pack to atone for that. I'm sure you would have done the same if you had been in my father's position. A cursed wolf is a detriment to an alpha's position and his pack. His first responsibility is always to them."

"Shade," he sighed, straightening and wrapping his arms around me.

I stiffened but quickly relaxed into the comfort and security of his touch.

"You're not the reason your mother died," he said, hugging me tightly. "You were just a pup. The rogue killed her, not you. Only a weak alpha would ever think that his position would be threatened because his pup was cursed. Your father is a coward."

I smiled, leaning into him. *Why does it feel so good to know he doesn't agree with my father?*

He pulled back a bit but didn't let me go. "And as for Dark Moon, we'll figure out a way to stop them. I won't let Alpha Huxley get his paws on you. You're not a weapon, Shade. You're special. It's time everyone, including you, started to realize that."

"So, you're going to let me stay?" I asked hopefully. "You aren't going to send me away now that you know I'm cursed?"

"Shade, you can stay here forever if you want to." He placed his hand beneath my chin and tilted it up, trying to make me meet his gaze, but I resisted.

I couldn't look him in the eye. He was still an alpha after all. I knew my place.

"I was serious about what I said in the cave before Oliver came in," he continued. "Shade, you're my—"

"Shade! Is it true?! Did Dark Moon cross the border?!" Sunny shrieked as she burst into the room. "They were after me, weren't they?! You have to... Oh! Sorry, I didn't realize you were here, Alpha Caelan."

I shifted nervously, wishing Alpha Caelan would let me go as Sunny took in the scene before her, rage burning in her eyes. I pushed away from him gently, trying to put a little distance between us.

Sunny glared at me, her nostrils flaring.

Damn, it's too late. The damage has been done.

Her face morphed into a sweet smile as she turned her attention toward Alpha Caelan.

"I'm happy to see you again, Caelan," she cooed as she approached, her voice dripping like honey. "I never got to thank you for the lovely time we had earlier by the waterfall. I was sad we didn't get more actually."

She reached out to touch him, but he quickly stepped away. He cleared his throat and mumbled something about how nice the weather had been today before bowing to me.

"I appreciated your insight on the issue with Dark Moon, Shade. I may consult you more on the matter later. Ladies," he said awkwardly before he hurried from the room.

I felt a pang of disappointment. *What had he been about to tell me?*

"Getting cozy with the alpha? Explain yourself now, Shade," Sunny demanded, crossing her arms over her chest.

"It was nothing," I insisted even though I knew it was a lie. "He wanted to apologize that our time was cut short. He didn't want to seem rude. Then we talked about Dark Moon and the threats against you."

"Uh-huh," she replied skeptically. "You two were awfully close for a strategies discussion."

"I was worried about being able to protect you properly in an unfamiliar territory. He was just doing his job as alpha by trying to calm my fears," I replied, the lies rolling off my tongue smoothly. "He promised they would do whatever they could to help."

I had never lied to Sunny before, but I was surprised at how easily it came to me now.

“Hear me loud and clear, Shade,” she warned, flashing her teeth as she pointed furiously at me. “Alpha Caelan is mine. No one else’s, understood?! I’ll destroy anyone who gets in my way...even you.”

She turned on her heel and stormed out, leaving me with her parting words.

I sighed as I closed the door. *Would she really do it? Would my own sister go against me for a chance at becoming Caelan’s luna?*

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