

Learning to Love... Book 1: Shade |

The Date

The Date

SHADE

There was a knock on my door the next morning. I opened it, expecting to see Taffy standing there. Instead, I found Alpha Caelan on the other side, holding a serving platter.

“Good morning, Alpha,” I greeted, trying to swallow my sudden nerves.

“Good morning, Shade. I brought you breakfast,” he announced as he pushed past me to set the tray on my small coffee table.

“That’s not necessary, Alpha,” I said quickly as I followed him. “I can go down to the cafeteria with the rest of the pack.”

“Nonsense,” he chuckled. “I wanted to make sure you got a good meal before our date. I’m bringing some snacks and we can always hunt if we need to, but I don’t know if we’ll have another proper meal until dinner tonight. So, breakfast.”

He said it like that explained everything, and I stood there flabbergasted, not really certain what to say. The alpha was serving me, an omega. None of my training had ever prepared me for what to do in this situation.

“Well, enjoy,” he said with a wink as he headed for the door. “I’ll be back in an hour and a half so we can head out. Will that be enough time for you to eat and get ready?”

“Uh, yeah,” I said hesitantly. “That should be fine. Thank you, Alpha.”

“Great!” he exclaimed with a bright smile. “I’ll see you then! Oh! You should probably wear something comfortable for hiking.”

He waved as he shut the door, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

Hiking?

Exactly an hour and a half later, Alpha Caelan knocked on my door again, and I opened it to find him standing there with a goofy grin. I could feel his gaze burning across my skin as he looked over my outfit.

I had gone for comfort as he suggested, donning a simple pair of jean shorts and a tank top. It wasn't really the kind of thing that you wore on a date, at least, it wasn't the kind of thing that I'd ever seen Sunny wear on one.

"Hi," he breathed, his voice carrying a strange huskiness that made my stomach flutter.

"Hello, Alpha Caelan," I offered with a respectful nod.

"Please, Shade. Just call me Caelan," he begged.

I wasn't sure how I felt about that. I'd never spoken to an alpha without using their title before. Even my own father made me refer to him by his rank.

Then again, I've never spoken to a beta without using their title before Taffy. If I could agree to do that for her and Dillon, then I guess I could honor the same request for Caelan.

"Okay," I agreed. "But only in private."

"I can live with that," he chuckled. "Are you ready for our date?"

"Uh...yes," I replied as we walked into the hall.

"You look really nice by the way."

I blushed. I hadn't expected him to comment on my looks. As far as I was concerned, I was plain, not at all like the other, very beautiful she-wolves he was surrounded by.

Do I say something back? Do I thank him or tell him he also looks nice? What's the proper protocol for a date?

"I think you're really going to like this," he continued, completely unaware of my inner turmoil. "I planned something a little different for us tonight."

"I'm sure it will be lovely," I replied respectfully.

I knew full well that even if I didn't like whatever he had in mind, I would never say anything to him about it.

When we got to the front of the pack house, there was an ATV parked outside. He walked over and picked up a helmet, handing it to me as I stared at the machine excitedly.

I've never ridden one of these before, but I've always wanted to.

"At first, I thought we could shift to get to the hiking trail," he said. "But we aren't in the same pack, so we can't mind-link. And I didn't want the entire trip to be silent. So, I thought this might be a good compromise. The helmets have two-way radios in them so we can talk."

"So, we're riding together?" I clarified.

Considering that I had been planning on trying to keep some distance between us today, riding together wasn't ideal. It would certainly make it more difficult if I had to hold on to him for balance.

"Unless you have an objection," he stated with a sheepish shrug.

It was clear that he hoped that I'd agree, and surprisingly, I found myself wanting to ride together. We would be touching, but I could control how much we touched and try to keep it minimal.

That always sends us down a path that I'm not prepared for, so the less, the better. Plus, it seems like he was really looking forward to this, and I don't want to disappoint him.

"Okay," I breathed, slipping my helmet on.

"Great!" he said, beaming as he walked over to the vehicle and mounted it. "Climb on behind me."

He held out a hand for me after securing his helmet.

I hesitated before taking it. As soon as his palm touched mine, that tingling sensation zipped through me, instantly soothing my nerves. I swung my leg over, settling in behind him as I searched for somewhere to hold onto.

"Where do I put my hands?" I muttered, forgetting there was a radio in the headset.

“You can hold on to my waist,” he encouraged, pulling my arm around him. “Like this.”

My cheeks warmed as I brought my hand around to clasp the other, encircling his waist. The omega in me was mortified that I was this close to an alpha. It seemed too intimate. On the other hand, I really liked the idea of not falling off and embarrassing myself.

“Just like that,” he praised, his voice suddenly strained. “I’m going to adjust your hold a little to a slightly better position.”

I appreciated the warning. It made it less surprising when he grabbed my hands and pulled me closer. My chest pressed firmly against his back, and my nerves skyrocketed as he turned on the machine.

Oh my Goddess. This is way too close. I didn’t realize there would be this much contact if we rode together. How can I put some space between us without offending him?

I arched my body away slightly, craning my neck back so my cheek wasn’t resting on his shoulder. We lurched forward suddenly, and I squeezed him tight, scared for a moment I might fall right off the back.

He laughed. “Take it easy. I’ve got you.”

I sighed, melting into him just a little bit. I shouldn’t be enjoying this so much. It’s wrong. He’s supposed to be someone else’s mate. Sunny’s if we do our jobs right. I can’t be this comfortable around him.

We took off, racing across the more mountainous terrain and toward a flatter part of the pack’s territory where the forest grew particularly thick. I found myself easing into him, growing more relaxed the farther we got away from the pack house, Sunny, and all of my responsibilities.

Caelan made it easier to forget as he regaled me with stories of the different areas we passed. All of them either had some significance to the pack’s history or were part of a tale from his past, often including Taffy, Dillon, and Oliver as the four of them got into some youthful shenanigans.

I found myself laughing as he finished one such story, enjoying myself immensely as we rumbled over the territory.

This is fun. It doesn't feel like he's an alpha and I'm an omega. Almost like we don't have ranks out here. It's nice. I kind of wish we never had to stop.

A short time later, Caelan cut the engine, parking beside a small trail.

I quickly hopped off as I tried to ignore the feelings that had arisen during our ride.

I'd always been taught to ignore my urges, to push them down deep and listen to my head above everything else. But desires I'd thought were dormant had flared to life as we drove, and I was struggling to get control over them again.

I stood there awkwardly, fiddling with my fingers and chewing on my lip as he joined me.

"I hope I didn't scare you," he said with a wink. "I wasn't driving too fast for you, was I?"

"No," I assured him. "I enjoyed the ride."

A little too much.

"Good," he said with a flirty grin. "I really liked having your arms wrapped around me like that. Almost made me want to skip the next part of our date entirely and just keep going."

I gulped at the heat in his eyes as he looked at me. *Does he mean...that with me? Surely, that can't be what he means. I'm nothing special. Not compared to Briggita or Sunny. He's probably just messing with me.*

"Come on," he laughed. "It's just up this way."

Next Chapter

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