

Learning to Love... Book 1: Shade |

The Demonstration

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SHADE

Caelan and I left the pack house silently. We passed the tree line without saying a word and wandered deeper into the woods.

I wanted to put as much space between us and everyone else as possible. I didn't want to accidentally amplify someone's emotions without meaning to.

My anxiety built as we continued walking.

This is a bad idea. Such a bad idea. I'm not supposed to share this side of myself for good reason. If I'm not careful, my amplification could be just as dangerous as my curse.

I worried how Caelan would feel about me after he felt the effects. I had no way of knowing what he was feeling and how it would come through once I amplified it. Any number of things could happen, and I didn't want to discount the possibility of something going wrong.

After about fifteen minutes more, we came to a stop in a clearing.

"There isn't anyone nearby," he said, giving me a wary glance. "The closest wolf is at least twelve minutes away. Is that enough distance for you to feel comfortable?"

No, but mostly because I'm not sure about showing you what I can do.

"Yeah. This should be fine," I replied.

It's now or never. I hoped thinking that would instill me with some sort of confidence. It didn't.

"All right... Well, I'm ready whenever you are, I guess."

He sounded a little apprehensive, and I couldn't blame him. He didn't really understand what was going to happen. Though, honestly, neither did I.

That was one of the things I hated the most about this ability. It was unpredictable because people were unpredictable.

"O-kay...um... Close your eyes and take a deep breath," I instructed. "Let it out slowly and try to clear your mind. It's best if you're calm so only the purest emotion comes through."

He did as I asked, closing his eyes and shaking out his limbs before rolling his shoulders to release any tension. He took a couple of deep breaths before opening them and giving me a confident nod.

I took several steps toward him, opening myself up and allowing the wave of power to flow through me. The blood in my veins rushed faster, the thrum of my nerves intensified as adrenaline coursed through my muscles. Every hair on my body stood on end.

The power pulsed out from me and radiated toward Caelan. I could feel the moment it made contact with him. The shift in his own energy was palpable, his entire body vibrating with the strength of it. I could sense he was struggling with whatever he was feeling.

I was about to ask him if he was all right, my concern growing as I watched him clench his fists. I needed to call back my ability and reconceal the power before he lost control.

But before I could act, Caelan raced toward me, closing the last bit of space between us in the blink of an eye. His hands tangled in my hair as his lips crashed down onto mine with such ferocity that he stole my breath away.

My concentration snapped in an instant, my power switching off like a light as Caelan pulled me into him.

His mouth hungrily attacked mine as though he were starving. Even after I had stopped emitting my ability, he continued to kiss me like his life depended on it. And I loved every second of it.

I'd never been kissed before, and I melted into him, my lips greedily accepting his. My hands pressed against his chiseled chest, fireworks exploding behind my eyes. My heart thumped so wildly that I was certain he could feel the beat against his skin.

When we finally parted, my lips were swollen and tingling with the aftershocks of his touch. We panted, both desperate for air as he gently rested his forehead against mine.

“I’m sorry, Shade,” he breathed.

I stared into his eyes, terrified I’d forced him to act in a way he hadn’t wanted.

“I’m not sorry that I kissed you,” he clarified. “I would do that again in a heartbeat. I’m sorry because I know you weren’t ready for it, but I couldn’t control myself any longer.”

“I promise I didn’t make you do that,” I explained. “I just amplified what you were...already...uh...feeling.”

My voice dropped as I spoke, embarrassed that I felt the need to point out that the desire he’d felt had already been there.

“I know that,” he chuckled. “I’ve wanted to do that since I first laid eyes on you. Your gift simply brought it to the surface. Trust me, I’m not complaining.”

My cheeks flushed bright red at his admission, and my gaze dropped to the grass beneath our feet.

“When it started,” I said, changing the topic. “I didn’t know I was doing it or how to control it. I was so young. It took a while for us to realize what it was. Everything would be fine one moment, then I’d wander into the room and wolves would suddenly be at each other’s throats.”

He listened quietly, placing a little space between us but keeping his hands on my waist. His touch comforted me, so I leaned into him.

“They didn’t want to admit they were angry with each other or lustng after someone who wasn’t their mate. But my ability forced them to, and they hated me for it,” I said sadly. “Once I learned to control it, my father had me use it on his warriors. I could make them fight harder.”

I became his ultimate weapon. The same thing he despised me for even before my mother’s death, is also one of the few things he found useful about me.

"My father and Sunny think I could've used it to save my mother," I sniffled, fighting back tears. "It's one of the reasons they blame me for her death. But I didn't know how to control it then. What if I had amplified the rogue by mistake? I could've made things worse for both of us."

"I think you put too much pressure on yourself, Shade," he sighed. "You were a pup when that happened. You couldn't and shouldn't have been expected to save her, abilities or not."

"What good is this stupid power if I couldn't use it to save the one person who loved me as I was," I said, a tear rolling down my cheek.

"What if you had been able to amplify her emotions and the biggest one that she felt was fear?" he countered. "It wouldn't have helped either of you. You need to stop beating yourself up over this. You were a pup. There was nothing you could have done."

I nodded. "I guess, but that's why I was happy to do my part when my father made me Sunny's bodyguard. I failed to save my mother, but I could try to save everyone else. I didn't want to be too weak to stop something horrible like that from happening again."

He cupped my cheeks, forcing me to look at him. "You've spent years atoning for sins that weren't yours to carry. Now it's time for you to start thinking about yourself. Don't worry about your father, Sunny, or Thunder Moon. What do you want for your life, Shade?"

I wanted to believe he was right. Wanted to believe that I deserved something good for once, but it was hard to let go of the guilt after all this time of being told what a burden I was.

He must've sensed my inner turmoil because he leaned in and pressed his lips softly against mine before brushing away my tears.

"You're so worried about everyone else, you don't even realize they've been manipulating you for so long. They've beaten you down, forcing you to withdraw inside of yourself so much that you've forgotten who you are. Who you wanted to be."

Then he pulled back, his mesmerizing hazel eyes locking onto mine and making my heart flutter.

“Don’t let them hold you back any longer, Shade,” he whispered. “It’s time to come out and be the beautiful butterfly you were always meant to be.”

I stood there, dumbfounded. I didn’t know what to say. He was right. I’d pushed away everything that had made me happy, everything that had made me the Shade my mother loved because I’d been led to believe there was something wrong with me.

The question was, could I ever get that person back? Could I become the Shade my mother always hoped I’d be? The one she could be proud of?

“Come on,” he bid, dropping his hand and interlacing his fingers with mine. “There’s somewhere I want to take you.”

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