

Learning to Love... Book 1: Shade |

Teeny-Weeny Red Bikini

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SHADE

As I followed Caelan, I couldn't stop thinking about our kiss. It had been everything I had ever hoped for and then some. I found myself craving more. More of him.

I couldn't understand it. I'd spent so long pushing down any flicker of desire, training myself relentlessly to not feel anything because emotion was weakness. But one brush of his lips and all my carefully constructed walls came crashing down.

I wanted Caelan. I wanted him like I had never wanted anything before. My body needed his touch like my lungs needed air.

He was my mate. We were two halves of the same soul, destined for one another by the Goddess herself. And when I amplified his feelings, his prevailing emotion had been desire. Desire for me.

I tried to remind myself not to get too carried away. Yes, there had been moments late at night when I was all alone, when I'd fantasize what it might be like if we were together, but I never imagined that it might actually come true.

There were still a lot of things against us. My father, Sunny, and Dark Moon were all trying to keep us apart.

"Just a little farther," he explained.

I tightened my grip on his hand, and his smile grew wider.

"I really think you're going to like this, Shade. At least, I hope you do. It's one of my favorite spots in the world." His voice was almost giddy with excitement.

No matter what we were doing or where we were going, I was going to like it because I was with him.

“Here’s the entrance,” he said.

I peeked around him to see the mouth of a dark cave. But this wasn’t like the cavern at the Sloping Falls. This opening was much smaller, and a series of natural steps led down into the ground.

There was a bag sitting next to the entrance, and Caelan released my hand to grab it.

“I had Taffy run this up for us earlier,” he explained as he dug through it. “I was kind of hoping I’d get the chance to take you here today.”

He pulled out a pair of swim trunks and then handed it to me.

“You can go change behind the trees if you’d like a little privacy,” he offered, peeling off his T-shirt.

I stared at his bare chest, forgetting myself as my fingers gripped the bag tightly. He grinned, giving me a wink as he reached for the waistband of his shorts.

I ducked my head, my cheeks on fire as I hurried toward the tree line. *How embarrassing! I’m practically drooling over him just taking off his shirt!*

I appreciated his understanding. Even though we were mates and we’d kissed, I wasn’t sure I was ready to be totally naked around him. Honestly, I wasn’t sure who’d have more trouble controlling their desire at this point, him or me.

I carried the bag over behind a sturdy oak, pursing my lips when I saw what was inside.

Dammit Taffy. I should have known.

Inside was the red bikini that Taffy had picked out for me when we went shopping. The one that I’d never have the courage to wear on my own.

I huffed, stripping off my clothes and slipping on the teeny-tiny scraps of fabric held together by thin pieces of string. It barely covered the essentials, leaving very little to the imagination.

I might as well be naked. It's one thing to show off some skin when shifting, but this? This is flaunting it. Goddess, I hope Caelan doesn't think I'm trying to throw myself at him.

I grabbed the dress I'd been wearing and pulled it back over my head, feeling a little better as soon as I was covered.

I stepped out from behind the trees to find Caelan waiting for me in his swim trunks. I bit my lip, looking over the hard lines of his body. Somehow this man managed to get more beautiful each time I saw him.

It simply isn't fair. No one should be that good-looking.

We walked through the archway, and everything went dark for a minute. I was instantly on high alert as my eyes tried to adjust. I hated spaces like this. They were perfect for an ambush.

However, all of that changed when the tunnel suddenly opened, bathing us in a soft glow and revealing one of the most amazing places I'd ever seen.

It was a small, natural cavern with water trickling through gaps in the rock and creating an underground grotto. Someone had installed underwater lighting, the crystal-clear water shining with a bright-blue hue.

But as breathtaking as that was, the most amazing feature was the ceiling and the walls surrounding the shallow pool. The dark rock glittered, the lights shining off the minerals embedded in it, making them shimmer like tiny diamonds.

I gasped in awe of the beauty around me.

"Welcome to the Starlight Grotto," Caelan said as he gestured to the room. "We don't usually let outsiders come here. You're one of the first, but since you're going to be part of this pack, I figured it was allowed."

I stopped in my tracks. *Did he say I was going to be part of this pack?*

It hadn't occurred to me yet that as Caelan's mate, I would have to leave Thunder Moon. He outranked me, and it was customary for the lower-ranking wolf to follow their mate.

I'm going to have to leave my pack. I'm not sure how I feel about that. Sad? Relieved? It's not like they even want me around, but that pack's been my whole life.

"Come on," he called as he waded into the water, oblivious to my inner turmoil.

I stepped down onto the ledge, the water lapping over my ankles as I tried to clear my thoughts.

One step at a time.

I hesitated for a moment, knowing that I'd have to undress if I wanted to follow him.

Should I just swim in my clothes? They'll be a mess when we return to the pack house if I get them wet, and I don't really want to spark any rumors about what Caelan and I were doing out here.

Slowly, I pulled the fabric over my head, holding my breath as I revealed the deep-red bikini underneath.

A deep rumble filled the cavern, and I glanced up at Caelan just in time to see the fire that flared to life in his eyes. He was on me before I could blink, his muscular arms wrapping around my waist as he pulled me into the water toward him.

"Mine," he growled, burying his face in the crook of my neck.

His warm breath danced across my flesh, leaving goosebumps in its wake as he inhaled my scent. A shiver ran down my spine as an unexpected pleasure fluttered through my core.

He scooped me up, wrapping my legs around his waist. One hand rested on the underside of my upper thigh, supporting me as the other encircled my torso, his fingertips trailing across my skin and leaving sparks in their wake.

"I promise," he breathed, his voice growing huskier as he spoke. "I won't do anything to push you, Shade. I'll wait as long as it takes, okay? But seeing you dressed like that"—he gulped—"it's taking everything I have to control myself."

"I'm sorry," I whispered as he carried me deeper into the grotto.

“Oh no, baby. Don’t be sorry,” he groaned. “You didn’t do anything wrong. Everything about you draws me in. I’m just trying to be a gentleman. I know you need to take things slow, and I’m okay with that. It’s just challenging. Like earlier. You have no idea how much I wanted to kiss you.”

“That was my first kiss,” I replied softly, blushing and keeping my eyes on the water to avoid the surprised look I expected to see in his.

“I’m honored you saved it for me,” he whispered, brushing his cheek against mine. “To have been the only one to ever taste your sweet lips feels like winning a prize. But I promise, next time I’ll ask your permission first.”

He winked, and a thrill raced through me.

Next time. He wants there to be a next time!

I draped my arms around his neck, feeling at home with him, like this was where I was always meant to be.

“Like maybe right now?” Caelan rasped, his tone growing increasingly strained.

“What?”

“Can I kiss you now?” he whispered, resting his forehead against mine. “Please, Shade.”

I nodded, a warm feeling bursting in my chest at the slow, seductive smile that crossed his lips.

“My mate,” he breathed, bringing his mouth to mine with such ferocious desire that I felt it echo through my soul.

Next Chapter

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