

Learning to Love... Book 1: Shade |

When the Dam Breaks When the Dam Breaks

SHADE

I stared at my father in disbelief.

He's still determined to perpetuate this lie even when he's confronted with the truth. What does he hope to accomplish by denying it? They obviously know.

"Just stop it, Butch!" Luna Maty snapped. "We know the truth. I suspected it the moment I saw her. I can't believe you thought you were going to get away with this. She's your daughter too!"

"I can't believe you told them, you ungrateful mutt!" he charged, pointing an accusatory finger in my direction. "After all I've done for you, this is how you repay me?! You rat me out the second you get an ounce of freedom."

"Alpha, I—"

"She didn't have to tell anyone," Luna Maty interjected. "Did you really think the whole world would simply believe that you found another she-wolf who looks exactly like Sunny to act as her bodyguard? Or that she conveniently had the same name as your deceased daughter?"

"You have no idea what you're talking about," my father growled.

"Yes, I do!" she exclaimed, banging her fist on the table hard enough to rattle the glasses.

I reached out to catch mine before it fell, surprised by her burst of anger.

"Brona was my friend!" she continued. "She would be furious with what you've done! She would've wanted you to give both girls a good life in her absence. She never would've approved of you turning your back on Shade for things that were completely out of her control."

"What would you have me do, huh?! Cherish the pup that murdered my wife?!" my father bellowed. "It's bad enough she was a freak before Brona's

death! She turned into some kind of monster after the attack! She had to be controlled.”

“You ought to be ashamed!” Luna Maty contested. “Brona loved both girls equally. You’re a disgrace to her memory! Shade is just as much a piece of your mate as Sunny is! She should’ve been loved for who she is, not turned into some tool for you to use when and how it suited you!”

“I did what I had to do!” he shouted. “I protected my pack! I punished the wolf responsible for the death of my mate! And in doing so, I ensured that nothing happened to the daughter who was worth saving!”

I gaped at him, knowing that I should be numb to his words, but they hurt. Each cut me deeper than any injury I’d ever gotten while trying to protect him and his pack.

“I’m an alpha!” he roared, getting to his feet. “I made a hard choice. It wasn’t like anyone else stepped up. If you had wanted her so bad, Maty, you could’ve come and gotten her. But you didn’t. I kept her fed, clothed, and sheltered. I gave her a purpose. A way to atone for what she did.”

“Don’t even start with me,” Luna Maty scoffed. “You told us she was dead. What reason did I have to question you? Had I known she was alive, I would’ve come and gotten her without hesitation! And she has nothing to atone for! She was seven years old, Butch! Seven!”

I glanced around the table. Sunny was watching this all unfold with wide eyes while Alpha Leal looked on, his brow only slightly raised in surprise. Caelan glared at my father, content to give his mother a chance to unload her frustrations on the alpha of Thunder Moon.

“You know as well as I do that Brona would’ve never blamed Shade if the tables had been turned. If it had been you out there. She would’ve nurtured and loved both her children and accepted what happened for what it was. A terrible accident,” Luna Maty concluded.

“Yeah, well Brona isn’t here,” my father snarled, scowling at me. “Because of her. That thing is no daughter of mine. Shade Mallory died fourteen years ago with my mate.”

“You sicken me,” Luna Maty spat.

"I will not be spoken to like this in my own home!" my father roared. "I thought Harvest Moon had more values than to side with a freak of nature like her."

"I would caution you not to speak to my mate so rudely," Alpha Leal said, his usually even tone warming slightly. "You are the one in the wrong here, Butch."

"You're a disgrace as an alpha and a father," Caelan interjected, unable to hold back any longer.

He was shaking as he rose to his feet and faced my father.

I could tell by the fire burning in his gaze that it was taking every ounce of control he had to keep from tearing my father's throat out. I laid my hand on his arm, trying to calm him. I worried what might happen if his fragile grasp on his wolf were to break.

I could feel him instantly begin to relax as I stood, reveling in the way my presence affected him.

I grabbed his hand and wove our fingers together, his touch empowering me while mine soothed him.

I suddenly felt bolder than I'd ever felt in my entire life.

Enough is enough. I've been devastated by my father's rejection one too many times. I won't allow him to hurt me any longer. He doesn't deserve that power.

"My whole life, you've made me feel like I was nothing," I began as I stared him down the same disdainful way he'd done to me so many times before. "Even when Mom was still alive, you called me a freak and treated me like an outcast. And now when everyone knows the truth, you would still rather reject me than admit who I am to you."

My father looked like he was about to say something, but I didn't give him a chance. Nothing he could have said would've made me forgive him.

"You sent me to that awful training center to be turned into a weapon because that's what you needed," I replied, my voice straining as I tried to keep my emotions from spilling over. "I never wanted to fight, but you promised that if I did, one day I'd be forgiven, but that was another lie, wasn't it?"

Caelan squeezed my hand, giving me strength through our bond.

"You claim you had to protect everyone from me," I continued. "But I've never put anyone in this pack in danger. I have, however, put myself at risk so many times, trying to protect them, trying to protect you and Sunny. And for what? To be told I don't exist. That I don't matter."

He didn't look away. Didn't bother to look ashamed for what he did. He just glared at me as I went on.

"I've finally realized that what happened to Mom wasn't my fault. I was only a pup. A scared and confused pup who went through something horrible, something she had no control over, and was punished for it. Not comforted. Punished. You may have lost your mate, but I lost my entire family that day."

"But—" he started.

"I'm not done," I said firmly. "You lied to me my entire life, saying that I couldn't be trusted, that I'd never have a mate because the Goddess doesn't bless wolves like me. But you were wrong."

I looked at Caelan and smiled before turning back toward my father.

"Caelan and Luna Maty are right. You should be ashamed of yourself. You're no alpha. You're a coward, and I want nothing to do with you any longer."

"You have a duty to this pack, Shade," he growled. "You will remember your place and protect your sister like you've sworn to do."

I raised my chin. "I know that the file that Dark Moon stole was mine. They aren't after Sunny anymore. They're after me."

His face fell as he realized the truth in my words.

"So, congratulations, Father," I added, feeling proud that I had finally said what I'd always needed to say. "You got everything you ever wanted. Your princess is safe, and I'm not going to be your problem anymore. I'm done with this pack, and I'm done being your doormat."

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