

## Learning to Love... Book 1: Shade |

### There Is No Place Like Home

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CAELAN

I couldn't have been prouder of Shade as Alpha Butch stared at her in complete shock. I don't think that he ever expected her to speak to him that way, too busy being his perfect little soldier. Watching her stand up to him and finally come into her own made the whole trip worth it.

Part of me had hoped for her sake that he would apologize after she'd gotten everything off her chest, but I guess he just didn't have it in him to admit he was in the wrong.

I smiled brightly at her, my parents looking equally pleased with the future luna. I raised our clasped hands and placed a kiss across her knuckles. My mother gave me a firm nod as she and my father rose from their seats.

"I think we're done here," I declared. "Thank you for the meal. The food was good. The company significantly less so."

"Caelan, wait!" Sunny demanded with a panic-stricken face as she reached out and grasped my wrist tightly. "What does this mean for us?"

"It's Alpha Caelan," I reprimanded as I yanked my arm free. "It's disrespectful to be so familiar with a higher-ranked wolf. I assumed you knew that since Thunder Moon is so concerned with pack hierarchy. And there is no us. There never has been. You are officially dismissed from the choosing."

"You can't do that!" she cried.

"Actually, I can," I stated flatly. "A luna should be kind, caring, and selfless. Qualities you do not possess, therefore I don't believe you would be a good choice for a leader in my pack."

She stared at me in disbelief.

"What belongings you left behind at Harvest Moon will be sent to you via courier," I added, offering my arm to Shade.

“Daddy!” she demanded, stomping her foot like a toddler that didn’t get their way. “You have to stop this! Make him change his mind! I’m supposed to be his luna!”

“Alpha Caelan, I must ask you to reconsider,” Butch begged. “Sunny will make an excellent luna. She’s been training for this her entire life. We need this alliance. Without it, Dark Moon will tear us apart. Alpha Huxley won’t stop until he’s gained control of our pack.”

Of course, that was all that he cared about. Even after everything that happened tonight, his only concern was how it would affect him. I was starting to doubt that he’d heard a word that Shade had said.

I shook my head, shocked by this man’s commitment to his hatred for his own flesh and blood. He was too wrapped up in what this meant for himself and Sunny to care about the daughter that he’d just cast aside.

*If he took his head out of his ass for a minute, he would’ve noticed the way I’ve been acting toward her. His daughter will be my mate. Just not the one he had hoped.*

“Our alliance still stands,” I assured him, though my tone clearly indicated that I wasn’t happy about it. “Harvest Moon will still aid Thunder Moon, but this is only because I am taking your daughter for my luna.”

“B-but you said you were dismissing her,” he sputtered.

“Shade is still your daughter, whether you acknowledge her or not,” I growled. “I will honor our alliance for her sake. Thunder Moon will have the protection it needs because of her.”

“Shade?!” he questioned, his face twisting in disbelief. “You want to mate with Shade?!”

“Very much so,” I confirmed with a confident nod.

“Shade?!” Sunny screeched. “You’re picking that mangy freak over me?! I’d make ten times the luna that she would. She hasn’t even had any training. She’ll be useless to you. All that she’s good for is fighting, and without me, she’s basically worthless.”

A menacing growl tore past my lips. I hated hearing anyone talk about Shade like that, especially the sister that should have stood by her side, not looked down her nose at her.

“Sunny, I swear to the Goddess, if you don’t shut your mouth, I’ll find someone to shut it for you,” I warned, glaring at her. “I won’t tolerate this behavior toward my mate. Shade will be my luna, which means she’ll outrank you. You will show her the respect she deserves.”

“B-but...I...,” she stammered, her mouth gaping open like a fish.

“Shade is my fated mate. I’ve known it since the welcome dinner,” I asserted, pulling Shade against me. “I wouldn’t take another for any reason. Especially not one who would treat her own sister with such disdain.”

Shade’s body molded against mine like two pieces of a puzzle fitting seamlessly together. I leaned in, taking a whiff of her scent to soothe my nerves.

“This can’t be happening!” Sunny shrieked, throwing her hands up in a full-blown tantrum. “I knew you would find a way to ruin this for me, Shade. Just like you always ruin everything. You knew I wanted Caelan! That I deserved this! But you had to take him from me just like you took Mom!”

“ENOUGH!” a deep voice boomed, causing everyone to freeze.

I turned to face my father, who had used his commanding influence to take control of the situation. He was a man of few words, but when he spoke, people listened.

“Sunshine, you will cease behaving like some rabid rogue right now. Butch, I’m very disappointed in what you’ve become.” He glanced at me. “Caelan, if Shade has agreed to be your mate, then I suggest that you gather her belongings, and we get the hell out of here.”

Sunny whimpered, immediately running to her father for support, but Alpha Butch didn’t open his arms to her as he had before. He glared at her, his disappointment written all over his face.

Sunny had failed the one mission he had entrusted her with. For once, she would feel what it was like to be in Shade’s place.

I followed Shade to collect her things, everything she owned fitting in a pair of suitcases.

“Shade,” I murmured. “I’m sorry that things went this way. I was hoping for something different for your sake. I know this is your home, and it’s going to be hard to leave—”

“This hasn’t been my home in a long time, Caelan,” she interrupted. “My home is with you. I think it always has been.”

I smiled in relief, my chest swelling to hear her say those words. “Well then, let’s go home.”

We walked hand in hand out of Thunder Moon’s pack house, each carrying one of her bags as my parents followed behind us. We didn’t bother to look back when Alpha Butch called out or when Sunny started to wail at the top of her lungs.

I called for my warriors to return to the vehicles, and we piled in quickly. I got Shade settled before going to my mother’s door and gathering the two items I’d asked her to grab as we left.

I was about to climb into my seat when Alpha Butch came stumbling through the front door.

“Please, Alpha Caelan,” he pleaded.

“Alpha Butch, I don’t believe that we have anything more to say to one another,” I replied coolly. “If Dark Moon attacks, you may get in touch with my betas. Otherwise, I don’t expect to hear from you ever again.”

And with those final words, I slammed the door in his face and shut him out of our lives.

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I sighed in relief as we crossed the border. This whole mess with Thunder Moon and the damn choosing ritual was finally over. I could finally claim Shade as my mate and make her my luna.

I smiled at her, squeezing her hand as I pulled her closer to me.

“Shade, you were so brave tonight, standing up to your father like that,” I praised as I ran my thumb across the back of her knuckles. “I’m sorry that it didn’t fix anything, but I’m glad you got the chance to tell him how you really felt.”

“I’m glad too,” she admitted. “It was a long time coming. I’m just so grateful that I had you there with me. If it wasn’t for your support, I’m not sure I would’ve had the guts.”

“You’re braver than you give yourself credit for,” I replied. “And I managed to get you a little something to celebrate.”

“What could you have possibly gotten me so quickly?” she laughed.

I revealed two of the crystal wine glasses from the table. “I don’t know why these are important to you, but I could tell that they meant something the moment you saw them.”

“How did you...,” she muttered, her voice trailing off as she gently took the glasses from my hands, gazing at them with a misty-eyed reverence.

“I had my mother swipe them when things got heated,” I answered with a shrug. “I’m just sorry we couldn’t get more of them.”

“Oh, Caelan. This means more to me than you could ever imagine,” she sniffled, placing them carefully to the side before wrapping her arms around me. “Thank you. Thank you for everything.”

I breathed in her scent, my heart fuller than it had ever been as I held her.

*This. This right here makes it all worth it. Let Dark Moon try to take her. I’ll fight every last one of them just to keep this feeling mine forever.*

Next Chapter

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