

Learning to Love... Book 1: Shade |

Luna's Quarters

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SHADE

"Um...I-I don't know if I'm ready for that," I admitted, hiding my face in my hands.

Caelan laughed, prying my fingers away. "Baby, it's no big deal. We'll wait. I'm not in a rush. I just want to be with you."

I smiled. *How did I get so lucky?*

"Come on," he said, picking me up again. "It's been an exhausting day. Let's get you to bed."

He carried me out into the hall even though I told him repeatedly that I could walk on my own.

He probably still needs to touch me. Luna Maty said it would take him a while to calm down.

I stiffened when he continued up the steps past the second floor.

"Uh, I-I don't know if I should be up here," I muttered nervously, slipping back into old habits.

"Yes, you should," he stated matter-of-factly. "You're the future luna, and this is where lunas stay. Plus, I need you close. It's the only way I'll stay calm."

"I'm not sure I'm ready to share a room, Alpha," I admitted honestly.

"I wasn't going to move you into my room...yet," he teased. "And just call me Caelan, please. We're about to introduce you as my mate to the entire pack. It's awkward for you to be referring to me by my title."

"But...we aren't fully mated yet," I countered. "You technically still outrank me."

"It doesn't matter," he huffed. "You're my mate, and mates don't refer to each other by their titles. Do you want me to call you Luna Shade?"

"No. Please don't call me luna," I said quietly.

He chuckled. "Okay then, it's settled. If you call me *alpha* again, even in public, then I'll call you *luna* right back."

"Fine," I agreed.

He opened the door to my new room, the luna's quarters, and I gasped as we stepped inside.

A glittering crystal chandelier dripped from the ceiling, and the fireplace was twice the size of the one in my last room with a couch and a much larger coffee table placed before it. There was a massive white rolltop desk next to the door that led to the bathroom, and art hung on every wall.

The bed was bigger than the one downstairs as well, with thick white velvet curtains draped across the frame rather than the sheer cloth of my guest room. A grand vanity sat near the enormous closet, complete with a three-sided, full-length dressing mirror.

This is a room fit for a princess. I feel like an imposter.

"This was my mother's room, but she and my father moved out to a private cottage after his retirement, so it's been unused for a while. I had it readied for you. Your clothing is already in the closet," he explained as he set me gently down on the bed.

"Thank you," I mumbled, not wanting to appear ungrateful. "But...um, I don't know if I should stay here. This is...very luxurious for someone of my station," I tried to explain as I took in the opulence of my surroundings. "And it's your mother's space."

"Would you prefer to stay in my room?" he suggested.

I blushed immediately.

"Personally, I'd prefer to have you with me, but I figured you'd be more comfortable if you had your own room," he remarked. "But I need you close by. So, either you stay here, or you sleep in my room."

“I’ll stay here,” I squeaked, my cheeks burning.

I wasn’t sure I could hold myself back if we shared a bed.

“Good. My mother already said you should feel free to make changes as you see fit. She said to consider it a gift for the future luna.”

“A gift?”

“Yes. She wants you to feel at home here. Even when we share the alpha’s quarters, this will always be your private space. If you ever need a quiet place to read or if you just need some space from me for a while,” he muttered as if the thought bothered him. “This room will always be at your disposal.”

“Thank you,” I whispered.

He put a hand under my chin, tilting it up so I was looking in his eyes. “Get some sleep, Shade,” he said in a low voice. “I’m right across the hall. Don’t hesitate to come get me if you need anything in the night, okay?”

He pressed his lips to mine in a slow, sweet kiss before pulling away.

“Goddess,” he groaned. “I’d better go before I lose control. Good night, Shade”

“Good night, Caelan,” I whispered as I watched him walk away.

I flopped back on the bed as he shut the door, letting out a sigh and thinking I should probably flip the lock.

It’s not that I don’t trust him. It’s that I don’t trust myself not to crawl into bed with him in the middle of the night.

“Caelan filed the paperwork to have you officially transferred to Harvest Moon this morning,” Taffy said over breakfast the next day. “Aren’t you excited?! You’re finally going to be one of us!”

“I am, but I’m also a little nervous,” I admitted.

“What’s there to be nervous about?” she said with a shrug. “You’re going to be luna and the pack is going to love you just like I do.”

“I don’t know. Maybe it’s just the idea of having to start over,” I replied. “It’s a whole new pack, a whole new rank, a whole new life. I grew up on the outskirts looking in, and now I’m going to be in charge. It’s a lot to take in.”

“You’re going to do great,” she offered with a smile. “And don’t forget, you’ve always got me.”

“I know. I’m just worried that I won’t make a very good luna. Caelan thinks I’ll do great, but I’m not so sure. And there are things about me that might make the pack uncomfortable.”

“You mean your curse?” she asked.

I sighed. I hadn’t told Taffy about my ability.

“There’s something about me you don’t know,” I explained. “Something besides the curse.”

I told her about my amplification and how it had led to my pack fearing me before I learned how to properly control it.

“That is the coolest thing I’ve ever heard!” she exclaimed. “You’re like some kind of superhero!”

I snorted. “Kind of a lame superpower, don’t you think?”

“No! It’s a true gift from the Goddess. She must favor you,” Taffy marveled.

“I doubt that,” I huffed. “If the Goddess favors me, then she has a funny way of showing it. Her so-called ‘gift’ only made my life more difficult and led to my curse.”

“All great heroes must struggle, Shade.” she shrugged. “You’ve been watching those superhero movies with Caelan. It’s basically a requirement. There is no great reward without great adversity. Oh my Goddess!” she gasped. “Maybe Caelan is your reward! Aww! So cute!”

“I’m no hero, Taffy,” I replied, shaking my head. “I haven’t done any good for anyone.”

“News flash, Shade,” she replied matter-of-factly. “You’ve protected Thunder Moon and saved Sunny from being kidnapped a bunch of times. That’s exactly what a hero does.”

“That was my duty.”

“That’s what a superhero would say,” she remarked with a wave of her hand. “Do you think they want to drop everything to go fight crime all the time? They do it because they feel it’s their responsibility. It’s their duty to help. They can’t stand by while people are in danger. Like it or not, Shade, you’re the hero of this story.”

I tilted my head thoughtfully. I’d never really considered it in that light before. Everyone at Thunder Moon had made it seem as though I were a burden, but what would they have done without me? How would they have survived if I hadn’t been there to save them?

I had stepped in to protect those who shunned me, and I’d never asked for as much as a thank you in return because I thought I owed it to them. But the truth was, even if I hadn’t believed that, I wouldn’t have stayed on the sidelines and allowed bad things to happen. That wasn’t who I was.

“That’s exactly why you’ll make a great luna,” she continued. “You’re willing to sacrifice when others aren’t. You do what needs to be done despite how it affects you.”

“I guess I never thought of it like that,” I admitted.

“Well, if you do ever decide to become a full-on superhero, I get to be your sidekick,” she added enthusiastically, punching and kicking the air for emphasis.

I laughed, feeling light as she brainstormed names for our dynamic duo.

I’m so lucky to call her my friend.

“Come in,” I called when there was a knock at the door.

Zelda entered, curtsying. “Hello, Luna. The alpha has requested your presence.”

“Please just call me Shade, Zelda,” I asked, uncomfortable with hearing the title. “I thought he was busy all day.”

I followed her as she led me out toward the gardens.

“I thought we were going to Caelan’s office?” I muttered.

“The alpha requested that you meet him outside,” she replied cryptically.

The old gazebo by the entrance to the pack gardens was up ahead. It was white, but the paint had begun chipping away, giving it a rustic appearance that I appreciated.

Caelan had mentioned painting it, but I told him I liked it just as it was. It wasn’t perfect, but that was what made it beautiful.

Twinkling lights had been strung across its beams, casting the whole thing in a romantic glow. Caelan stood inside next to a small round table with two place settings. My mother’s crystal wine glasses glittered against the flickering flames of the candlelit centerpiece.

I walked toward him, my mouth agape as Zelda quietly excused herself.

“What’s all this?” I asked in pleasant surprise.

“I haven’t been able to see you today,” he said as I joined him. “Things were more hectic than I anticipated, but I thought we could have dinner together.”

“This is amazing, Caelan, but you didn’t have to go through so much trouble,” I said as he pulled out a chair for me.

I sat, smiling as he revealed a delicious salmon dish with a side of roasted vegetables. It smelled fantastic

“It wasn’t any trouble,” he assured, taking his seat and pouring me a glass of wine. “I wanted to do something special. We haven’t had a proper date since the choosing ended.”

“Well, it’s very sweet.” I smiled brightly.

We made small talk as we ate, but I could tell that something was weighing on his mind.

A luna is supposed to be an alpha’s equal. She helps to run the pack by his side, which means if there is something bothering him, then I should share the burden.

I set aside my fork, reaching over to take his hand. “What’s going on, Caelan?” I asked. “I can tell that something’s bothering you. Tell me.”

He sighed. “It’s nothing really. Sunny’s been calling and begging me to reconsider my choice. Even though I told her that you’re my fated mate, she’s refusing to let it go.”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” I replied. “You’re probably the first person to have ever told her no before. She doesn’t know how to handle the rejection.” I paused. “What about my father? Any word from him?”

“Yes,” he huffed. “But he’s more concerned about Thunder Moon falling into the hands of Dark Moon. He doesn’t seem to trust we’ll honor our alliance unless I’m mated to Sunny.”

That worried me. My father could be paranoid sometimes, but if he was this concerned then perhaps, he knew something we didn’t.

There are a lot of innocent wolves at Thunder Moon that I don’t want to suffer if Dark Moon tries anything.

Caelan squeezed my hand. “Don’t worry. I’ve already mobilized extra patrols along Dark Moon’s borders to keep an eye on their movements. So far nothing has been reported, but I have warriors standing by, just in case.”

“Thank you,” I sighed.

“I know you care about what happens to Thunder Moon,” he said. “I promise I’ll do everything I can to help keep them safe.”

Suddenly, Caelan stilled, staring off into the distance. I knew he was receiving a mind-link from someone in the pack, so I waited quietly. His smile dropped, his grip on my hand tightening.

“What happened?” I asked when he glanced at me.

“A challenge has been issued.”

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