

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

### **Harvest Moon Initiation**

Taffy escorted me down to the field where the ceremony would be held.

Red ribbons had been draped throughout the trees, giving the impression of the fall leaves which wouldn't turn for another few months. But autumn was when Harvest Moon had been founded, so they mimicked the look to honor that tradition.

She left me at the head of a long aisle, walking around to join the others on the small platform on the other side. Pack members who had come out to welcome me as one of their own lined the entire walkway.

Caelan stood at the end, waiting for me with his parents behind him and Taffy, Dillon, and Oliver at his side. All were wearing huge smiles as I approached.

Caelan offered me a small kiss on the forehead as he took my hand before he switched into his alpha mode.

"Please state your name and pack affiliation for those in attendance," he requested, his voice firm.

"Oh...um...Shade of the Thunder Moon Pack. Omega," I replied, feeling a little sheepish with all the eyes watching us.

"Shade Mallory," he continued, pausing as I flinched at the mention of my last name. "Shade, you're here tonight under the glowing light of the Goddess of the Moon, willingly seeking membership within the ranks of the Harvest Moon Pack?"

"Yes," I responded.

"You understand that by doing so, you are committing yourself in loyalty to all the members of Harvest Moon and submitting yourself to my authority as your alpha from this moment forward."

"Yes, sir," I confirmed with a nod, feeling a bit more confident.

“You are prepared to relinquish all ties to the Thunder Moon Pack as a member of their ranks and accept all responsibilities of joining Harvest Moon?”

“Yes.”

With that final confirmation, Caelan revealed the sacred dagger that had been used by his pack since its founding and sliced open his right palm.

“Please offer me your dominant hand,” he instructed.

I didn’t hesitate as I held it out, knowing full well what he intended to do. He grabbed hold of my hand and held the tip of the dagger to my flesh. He hesitated only for a moment, his eyes flicking to mine in silent apology before he sliced into my skin.

I winced slightly but didn’t make a sound. I’d had worse wounds than this.

We interlocked our cut palms, allowing the blood of the Harvest Moon Pack to flow within me. As my blood mixed with his, it mingled with the strength of all the former leaders that had come together to make up his DNA.

“Welcome, Shade Mallory. Harvest Moon Pack. Zeta,” he announced with pride.

I was surprised to hear him change my ranking, particularly to one as high as a zeta. Zetas were the highest ranking of the warrior wolves, and it meant a lot to earn such a title.

I smiled. *I thought I would be sad to not be affiliated with Thunder Moon anymore, but it feels as though a weight has been lifted off my chest. It feels good.*

I was no longer shackled by my past. No longer held by the expectations of a father that despised me. I could simply be myself, and for the first time in my life, my future seemed brighter.

Suddenly, the pack mind-link snapped into place, and their cheers rang through the air and my mind as they celebrated their newest member.

I turned, looking out over all the wolves of my new pack as they smiled, clapped, and whooped just for me. I could feel a single tear travel across my cheek. I was finally home.

Caelan grabbed my hand and linked it through his arm as we left the stage, inviting the whole pack to join us in a celebratory feast.

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Caelan led us to the head table as soon as we entered the dining hall. Unlike the other tables around the room, this one was long and rectangular instead of round. He guided me toward the two places directly in the center, facing the great dining room.

He pulled out my chair, and I took a seat with only a moment's hesitation. This was where the luna sat, and by placing me here, he was stating his intention toward me loud and clear. He took his own seat beside me and quickly interlaced his fingers with mine again.

"Try not to worry, baby," he encouraged, bringing the back of my hand to his lips and leaving a soft kiss. "You're perfect. I know you don't see it, but I do, and they will too. Trust me."

I took a deep breath and did my best to stay calm. *Taffy is right. The pack loves and trusts Caelan. Perhaps they will trust his choice for their future luna as well.*

Servants delivered our meals while the rest of the wolves gathered around the buffet with their own plates.

It felt awkward being served when no one else was, but as forward-thinking as Harvest Moon was, they were still a pack deeply steeped in certain traditions, like serving the highest-ranking wolves at formal events.

Caelan waited patiently while everyone filled their plates and found a table. Once everyone was seated, they turned toward him as was expected. The alpha wasn't always present for pack meals, but when he was, he always had to take the first bite before anyone else could eat.

Caelan turned, gesturing toward my plate. I knew what he wanted, picking up my fork and twirling a bit of pasta on the tines before slipping it between my lips.

The air in the room changed instantly, the pack's curiosity buzzing as they watched me chew.

Caelan had officially announced me as his mate by allowing me to take the first bite.

He smiled as he ate some of his own meal, not bothering to explain himself.

The pack eventually turned back to their own plates, murmuring as they enjoyed their dinners. I could hear the questions being whispered all around me.

They wanted to know what was happening, but for reasons I couldn't understand, Caelan was waiting to make his proclamation.

I forced down the rest of my dinner, my nerves building as I listened to the wolves around me speculate.

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As we neared the end of our meal, Caelan suddenly stood and cleared his throat, commanding everyone's attention again. They quickly put down their utensils and turned to face him, eager to hear what he had to say after so much buildup.

"My loyal wolves of Harvest Moon," Caelan called. "You've joined us on an auspicious occasion. For tonight, we are not only welcoming a new member to our ranks, but we are also welcoming my mate. Not a chosen one as you all expected, but my true mate, fated to me by the Goddess herself. Your future luna, Shade Mallory."

He encouraged me to stand beside him.

I reluctantly rose from my seat, trying to hide the nervous tremor in my hands. I didn't want them to see that. A luna wasn't scared in front of her pack.

I looked out over the crowd as I clutched Caelan's hand. If I was going to do this, I needed his strength beside me as if it were my own.

They watched me in silence, and I gulped.

*Are they disappointed? Excited? Reluctant? Relieved?*

The entire room suddenly exploded into cheers. Some wolves jumped out of their chairs with enthusiasm while others whistled or clapped. But every single person was celebrating this announcement with joy.

I could feel my heart about to burst at the seams as I stared in awe at them all. It had never felt so full.

Caelan pulled me against him and planted a kiss on my cheek.

“I told you there was nothing to worry about. I love you and my pack will too,” he whispered in my ear before raising our clasped hands to the cheering crowd.

My face went blank, completely and utterly shocked at his words.

*Caelan just told me he loved me.*

Next Chapter

Continue to the next chapter of Learning to Love... Book 1: Shade