

## Loving Feelings

A FEW DAYS LATER

When the pack spies reported back, they noted that everything at Thunder Moon seemed to be operating normally, even though they hadn't seen my father or sister during any of their observations.

Caelan assured me that didn't necessarily mean anything. They could be hiding in the pack house, finally having come to terms with the fact that he and I were mates, but I couldn't shake the feeling that something was off.

Alpha Huxley's appearance felt too ominous to be a coincidence, and his claim that my father had sent him gave me an unsettling feeling. I couldn't imagine my father suddenly just deciding to give up like that.

But I did my best to let it go, focusing instead on luna training and preparations for our marking ceremony. The event would be held on the next full moon, and the pack buzzed with anticipation as they rushed to ensure everything was ready in time.

Though I felt a little overwhelmed, the truth was that I was ready to officially be Caelan's mate.

I was ready to commit to him, to commit to us. We'd taken on Sunny, my father, and the entire Dark Moon Pack in defense of our love. I didn't want anyone else to try and keep us apart.

"What are you doing, love?" Caelan questioned as he entered his room.

I'd started spending more time in it after our night together. My wolf felt restless when we were apart, and at least in here, I was surrounded by the scent of him.

I sighed, laying down the packet of information Luna Maty had given me during our session today.

"Just looking over some stuff your mother gave me. Did you know that the luna oversees all the educational resources for every pup in the pack?" I groaned. "From daycare to graduation."

I rubbed my eyes, sitting back on the pillows as he sat on the corner of the mattress.

"How am I ever going to learn all this?" I muttered. "I'm a warrior, not a leader. I don't know anything about running a pack."

"Hey," Caelan cooed, grabbing my hand encouragingly. "Don't stress yourself out. You can do this. The luna stuff will come with time. I promise."

"But your father...the pack," I huffed, instantly feeling my tension melt away beneath his touch. "I don't want to let them down."

"They can wait," he countered with a shrug. "None of us are going to push you, baby. Plus, I think my mother really enjoys the excuse to spend time with you. She always did say she wanted a daughter."

I chuckled, smiling at him. "It's just so much to remember."

"Well, don't forget you have Ta y. She's your beta. She can help with any tasks you can't handle. And once Oliver meets his mate, he'll become your gamma, so you'll have another set of hands," he replied. "And I'm here too. You're not alone in this, Shade. We're all with you."

I gazed into his eyes, emotion overwhelming me as I realized the truth in his words. I wasn't alone anymore. I had friends, a new family, and Caelan. He would always be there to catch me.

"I love you," I murmured, squeezing his hand tight.

He stared at me in surprise for a second before suddenly pulling me into his lap. My legs straddled his waist as his lips crashed into mine in a searing kiss. I clutched his shoulders, trying to bring him impossibly closer as I opened for him and our tongues danced against one another.

"I love you too, Shade. More than you'll ever know," he breathed when we finally broke apart.

I ran my fingers through his hair lovingly. "I'm sorry it took me so long to say it."

"Baby, you have nothing to apologize for," he assured. "You could've taken years, and I'd have happily waited."

"And that's why I love you," I whispered.

He leaned in, his lips hovering over mine as a bright smile appeared on his face.

"Say it again," he murmured.

I giggled. "Caelan, I love you."

He kissed me swiftly, his chest rumbling in delight. "It's even better when you add my name."

He rubbed the tip of his nose gently against mine before releasing his hold on me, but I stayed, not ready to separate just yet.

"Shade," he groaned. "You need to get off my lap before I lose control, baby."

My eyes danced as I thought about the memories we'd made here just a few nights ago. *The touches. The moans. Our hearts beating in sync as we kissed.*

I wriggled in his lap, a thrill going through me as his eyelids fluttered.

"Shade," he mumbled. "I'm trying so hard to be good here."

"But what if I don't want to be good?" I teased, trailing my hand down his chest toward his belt.

"Baby," he warned with a playful growl. "I thought we agreed to wait."

"We did, and we are," I remarked as I undid the buckle and unzipped his jeans. "That doesn't mean we can't do other things."

"Other things?" he asked with a grin. "Like what?"

I slipped my hand between us, sliding it beneath the waistband of his briefs to cup him. He moaned, instantly hardening under my touch.

Seeing the pleasure on his face made me feel empowered, like some sultry vixen. I smiled, standing to pull his pants off before dropping to my knees in front of him.

He hissed, his breath slipping out between clenched teeth as I wrapped my fingers around his shaft. It was smooth and velvety in my grasp as I slowly started to stroke him.

His head fell back as he arched his hips toward me. "That feels incredible, baby."

I leaned closer, relishing in the look of surprise that crossed his face as my tongue darted out, tentatively licking the tip. His fingers curled into the comforter, a strained groan slipping past his lips as I took him into my mouth.

"Oh Goddess, Shade," he moaned, his hands darting into my hair.

He guided me along his shaft, my head bobbing as I tried to take him deeper with every stroke. I ran my tongue along the underside of it, an excited thrill running through me as his body trembled beneath my hands.

"Baby, I'm so close," he grunted, his gorgeous eyes half-lidded as he watched me.

I hummed around him, and that was all it took to send him over the edge.

"Shade!" he cried, thrusting gently as he came.

I took it all, relishing in the knowledge that this version of him was mine and mine alone. I would be the only one who would ever see him in this state of utter bliss from this day forward. I would be the only one to bring him this pleasure.

He lay back, pulling me up and wrapping his arms around me. I could feel his heart beating frantically beneath my palm as he ran a hand softly through my hair.

"That was amazing," he breathed.

"Really?" I asked. "You aren't just saying that?"

"Baby, that was incredible," he chuckled. "Easily the best experience of my life."

I smiled, snuggling into him as we lay there in comfortable silence.

I knew that he'd been with other she-wolves before me, and though it didn't bother me, I was concerned about not meeting his expectations. What if I wasn't any good? I didn't want him to be disappointed when we actually went all the way.

"What was your first time like?" I asked softly, running a finger along his arm.

He shifted nervously. "Uncomfortable."

"The question or your first time?" I pressed, giggling at the sudden awkwardness in his demeanor.

"Both," he finally replied.

"I was just curious," I admitted. "You don't have to answer if you don't want to."

He sighed, shaking his head and weaving our fingers together as he rested them on his chest.

"It's just awkward to talk about with you," he answered. "They say you'll regret it if you don't wait for your mate, but when you're young and have all these hormones raging, you convince yourself it's still special when you find your mate. But they're right. I wish I had waited for you."

"I don't hold it against you," I said softly.

"You don't?"

"Of course not," I replied. "I didn't have much of a choice in waiting. No one at Thunder Moon ever had any interest in me, but who knows what might have happened if I hadn't been such an outcast, I was only asking because our first time will be the marking ceremony, and I don't know what to expect."

He lay there for a moment, digesting my words. I could almost see the wheels turning in his mind.

"It was...it was awkward," he said carefully. "We were both virgins and didn't have a clue what we were doing. I mean, you think you know how things should go, but it's never like what you imagine it to be when you're young." He rubbed the back of his neck. "We broke up two days later because we were both so embarrassed."

"Then maybe it's a good thing we aren't both virgins," I remarked thoughtfully, causing him to laugh.

"Yeah, perhaps you're right," he chuckled. "It won't be that way with us. I promise. I'll do everything I can to make this the memorable, romantic moment you deserve."

He kissed the top of my head, hugging me tightly before he jumped out of bed. I rose up on my elbow and watched the top of my head, hugging me tightly before he held a hand out to me.

"Come on," he said, helping me up and pulling me toward the door. "I know just how to help you get rid of some of that stress."