

Learning to Love... Book 1: Shade |

Then There Were

Then There Were Five

SHADE

I fidgeted as I waited in the long line of females, slowly stepping forward as one by one they offered their hand to the alpha. Alpha Caelan politely leaned forward and sniffed the underside of each female's wrist with that perfectly straight nose, testing his compatibility with their scent.

I stared, captivated by his perfect lips and sun-kissed skin. My heart hammered in my chest as I took another step forward, seriously thinking I might faint before I reached him.

I thought Beta Dillon was attractive, but his alpha blows him out of the water.

I had never seen a more breathtaking man in my life. Sharply chiseled features and sparkling hazel eyes made my breath catch as he bowed to each female before turning to the next. The smart navy suit he wore fit him perfectly, hugging his muscular form and highlighting every contour.

My hands shook as the girl in front of me stepped up to meet the alpha. *This is pointless. He's going to laugh in my face the moment he lays eyes on me. A wolf like that would never want anything to do with a female like me. Not if I were the last she-wolf on Earth.*

I took a deep breath, hoping to calm my nerves, which was promptly ruined when the most delicious scent I had ever inhaled filled my senses.

My Goddess. What is that? It's like fresh-brewed French vanilla coffee and natural musk. It's intoxicating.

The tension in my shoulders eased as the aroma washed over me. It was strangely comforting, like a warm embrace. I glanced around, searching the crowd for the source as the she-wolf in front of me curtsied and stepped away, leaving me to face Alpha Caelan.

The scent smacked me in the face with its intensity, but I resisted the urge to find where it was coming from. There would be time for that after the alpha dismissed me as an unsuitable mate.

I kept my gaze low as I extended my wrist, baring my neck as I curtsied.

A low growl came from the alpha, making my knees quake slightly.

Uh-oh. He's displeased. He's probably wondering how a wolf like me even got included in this. I hope he doesn't think I intended to insult him.

A rough hand abruptly grabbed my chin and lifted it. A strange electrifying sensation danced across my skin from where he touched me, igniting something within me. I struggled to keep my eyes down, the desire to look up overwhelming.

"Name?" he questioned, his deep voice sending a shiver through me.

"Sh-Shade," I stammered, feeling his heated stare on me.

"Pack?" he asked, his voice growing rougher.

"Thunder Moon Pack." I replied. "Omega."

His grip dropped, reaching for my wrist and pulling it rather harshly toward him. He lifted it to his nose and inhaled my scent deeply. After what seemed like an eternity, he turned my palm over and placed a long, slow kiss across my knuckles.

Did he take this long with the other females? I can't remember. I was too busy trying to figure out how to get out of this.

"Nice to meet you, Shade." he whispered as his lips brushed across my skin again, sending a bolt of electricity straight to my soul. "I'm Caelan."

I could hardly comprehend his words as his thumb passed over my knuckles, making me practically melt beneath his touch. I shook my head, gently trying to pull my hand back but the alpha held me firm.

"The pleasure is all mine, Alpha C-Caelan," I assured, struggling to put together a sentence.

What is wrong with me? I've never been this affected by any wolf before. Is it his alpha energy? That has to be it, right?

He chuckled as he finally released me, and I quickly retreated, looking for a corner to hide in before Sunny could turn her rage on me. Instead, Beta Taffy hooked her arm through mine and pulled me toward the drinks table.

"That went well! What did you think?" she whispered excitedly.

"Of the alpha?" I replied hesitantly. "He seems nice, but I think he might have been bothered by my presence. He seemed a little tense."

"Oh, he was bothered all right," Dillon teased with a smile as he joined us. "But I don't think it was in the way you're thinking."

He shot me a friendly wink, a mischievous gleam in his eyes as Alpha Caelan cleared his throat.

"Thank you all for coming tonight," he announced, his velvety baritone causing me to inwardly swoon.

Goddess, I have got to get a grip on myself.

"I'm pleased to announce that I've narrowed it down to five candidates," he continued.

The crowd gasped. An alpha was required to choose at least five females, though most rarely narrowed their choices down that far this early in the ritual.

A strange ache built in my chest at the notion of Alpha Caelan choosing a suitable female for his mate. I rubbed at it absentmindedly, wondering if I was coming down with something.

"If I call your name, please come forward," he stated.

"Deianira Harkan. Harvest Moon Pack."

A saucy redhead in a long white gown stepped forward, smiling at the crowd in victory.

"Briggita Allegra. Harvest Moon Pack."

A beautiful blonde in a sapphire-blue dress stepped forward, practically bouncing in excitement as she joined the redhead.

“Talulla Harlow. Harvest Moon Pack.”

A girl in a vivid-green dress with long, jet-black hair and gorgeous dark skin stepped forward, swinging her luxurious locks over her shoulder as she smirked at the other two. The blonde shifted anxiously, but the redhead didn’t even seem to notice.

I waited for the next two names, praying that Sunny’s would be one of them. She would be insufferable on the drive home if she didn’t make the first cut, and somehow, I was sure it would end up being my fault.

“Sunshine Mallory. Thunder Moon Pack,” Alpha Caelan continued.

I breathed a sigh of relief as Sunny took her place next to the other chosen females, her burnt-orange dress fluttering around her heels as she waved to the crowd like a beauty queen.

Thank the Goddess. Soon as he makes his last pick, this whole nightmare will be over. I don’t know why they even bothered to include me. An alpha would never pick an omega as his—

“Shade. Thunder Moon Pack.”

I froze, feeling faint as heads started to turn my way.

What? No. He didn’t say... I must have heard him wrong. He wouldn’t call my name. I’m an omega. I’m beneath him.

“Go on, Shade,” Taffy coaxed, bumping my shoulder with hers. “You’re the final candidate.”

“N-no... I-it can’t be... There’s been some sort of mistake,” I stammered, clenching my hands tightly to hide the tremor in them.

I can’t go up there. Sunny is supposed to be Thunder Moon’s candidate, not me. If I go up there, I’ll be a disgrace to my entire pack. My father will probably come out here personally to remind me of my place.

“Caelan called your name. You have to go,” Taffy urged, giving me a shove toward the other contestants.

Sunny’s bright smile disappeared, her expression growing darker and more menacing as I slowly walked up and took my place next to her. I could feel the rage radiating off her.

That I had even been considered a candidate had been ridiculous, but now that I was one of the final five, she would be absolutely furious.

Alpha Caelan stood behind us, raising a hand to the crowd as they cheered for their alpha and his choices for their luna. I jumped when a gentle touch brushed along my lower back, the soft tingling sensation rolling through me in waves.

He’s touching me. Why is he touching me?

I snuck a sideways glance toward my sister to see if he had done the same with Sunny, but his other hand was tucked away in the pocket of his slacks.

“You’re doing great,” he whispered in my ear, making my toes curl at the sound. “Just try to relax.”

Relax?! How the hell am I supposed to do that?!

Sunny grabbed my arm as soon as we were dismissed, dragging me out into the hallway. Her fingers dug painfully into my skin as she found a quiet alcove, pushing me into the corner and running her fingers frantically through her hair.

“I don’t believe this. What a disaster. Father is going to be furious,” she snarled. “You can’t be a candidate, let alone in the final five. To even think that the alpha would pick someone like you is absurd, and if he finds out what a freak you are or that we’re related, it could ruin my chances.”

She took a step away from me, resting her hands on her hips as she paced. I stayed quiet, knowing anything I said would just infuriate her more.

“We need to figure out a way to use this to my advantage, but how?” she mused, tapping her chin. A wicked smirk crossed her face. “I have an idea. Come with me.”

I followed obediently, trying my best to ignore the ache in my chest as Sunny plotted how to win the affections of an alpha.

Next Chapter

[Continue to the next chapter of Learning to Love... Book 1: Shade](#)