

Calling Him Back

I jolted awake with a gasp, chest heaving as I looked around frantically. I was lying in a hospital bed surrounded by metal instruments. Wires were stuck to me all over, and machines beeped along with the chaotic rhythm of my heart.

"Goddess! Shade!" Ta y cried, leaping up from a chair in the corner. "You scared the hell out of me! Are you okay?"

"Where am I?" I asked as my head swung back and forth, trying desperately to make sense of my surroundings.

How did I get here? Last thing I remember is collapsing in front of Dark Moon's pack house with Caelan's arms wrapped around me.

"You're in the pack hospital," Ta y replied softly as she hurried to my side. "Our warriors brought you and Caelan back as quickly as they could. You've both been unconscious for several hours."

Caelan. I need to find him now. My mother made it clear that I needed to get back to him as soon as possible.

"Where is he?" I demanded as I started to rise.

"He's in the next room, Shade," Ta y answered, gently pushing me back down. "Rest. The pack doctors are keeping an eye on him."

"No. You don't understand. I need to get to him now. Help me get this stupid IV," I begged, motioning toward the devices connected to me.

I grabbed one of the stickers on my chest and tore it away, sending the alarms on the machines into a frenzy. I ripped more of them off and was reaching for the IV in my arm when Ta y grabbed my hand.

"Shade! Stop!" she ordered, her brow pinched in worry. "You're not thinking straight. You just suffered a traumatic event. Let me get Dr. Eirny. Have her check you over and make sure everything is all right. Then I promise I'll take you to Caelan."

"I *need* to get to Caelan now, Ta y. He won't wake until he knows I'm there. You have to trust me," I begged. "If I don't hurry, he could cross over the veil."

"What does that mean?" she asked nervously.

"He could die, Ta y."

I watched as Ta y's expression morphed from concern to determination. I knew I could count on her. As a beta of the pack, she would never let her alpha down.

"Okay, but we have to hurry before—"

The door burst open as Dr. Eirny rushed in. Her glasses hung off her nose as if she'd barely had a moment to set them on her face. Her discerning gaze dropped to where Ta y and I both gripped the IV tube.

"What are you doing?!" she exclaimed, rushing over. "You aren't trying to remove that, are you?!"

"Dr. Eirny, I can't explain now," I hurried. "But I have to get to Caelan. He won't heal unless I'm by his side."

I didn't care if I sounded insane. Caelan was all that mattered. Nothing else was important.

Dr. Eirny eyed me warily. "How did you know he wasn't healing?"

"I just do," I replied. "Now, will you help me get this thing out of my arm?"

She straightened her glasses, peering at me over the frames skeptically before reluctantly relenting.

"Fine. Maybe your presence is the answer," she sighed. "Ever since we stabilized Alpha Caelan, he's shown no further signs of improvement. His body should have healed by now, but it seems to have stalled. But you don't need to take out your IV. It's portable."

She rolled the stand away from the bed so that I could stand.

"Oh," I said softly, swinging my legs over the edge. "Thank you."

"Come on. I'll take you to the alpha's room," Dr. Eirny said as Ta y helped me out of bed.

Every part of me hurt and my legs shook as I tried to get to my feet, so I leaned heavily against Ta y as we shuffled to the next room.

Dr. Eirny swung open the door, and the sight before me nearly broke my heart in two. Caelan lay peacefully in the hospital bed, the gentle beeping of the machines the only sound.

A strangled sob slipped out from between my lips. "Oh, Caelan."

Dillon had been on a chair next to him, watching his alpha carefully, but he quickly jumped to his feet and rushed to help Ta y guide me into the seat.

I took a deep breath, my gaze sweeping over my mate's form.

He looked better than I remembered, the most severe of his wounds having healed in the time we were unconscious together on the battlefield, but it hadn't been enough. Dark bruises and angry red scratches still covered him.

I did this to him. I didn't give him a chance to get away. I'm the reason he was out there in the first place, hurting Huxley. If I hadn't fallen for Sunny's trap, Caelan wouldn't be in this state.

I quickly wiped away the tear that had begun to slip down my cheek before reaching forward and grabbing one of his hands. I clutched it between mine, willing him to feel the electric sparks of our bond flowing through him at my touch.

"Caelan, it's Shade. I need you to come back to me," I begged, clearing my throat as emotion tried to choke my words. "I know I was called away for a little while and you wanted to wait for me, but I'm back now."

"Called away?" Ta y whispered, her brow furrowed in confusion.

I ignored her, staring at my mate's breathtaking face. "Please, Caelan, come back to me. You're my mate. Your place is here with me. I can't lose you." The tears flowed freely now despite my efforts to hold them back. "Please, Caelan. I need you."

I let a small amount of my amplification ability flow into him, holding my breath as I watched desperately for any sign of improvement.

Please, Goddess. Please let my mate come back to me.

Several tense minutes followed, the gentle beeping of the machines the only sound in the room.

"I don't believe it," Dr. Eirny gasped as she glanced at the numbers on one of the screens.

"What?! What is it?" I demanded, a slight panic in my voice.

"It's working," she said in awe, turning to Caelan and checking him over as his scratches gradually healed before our eyes. "His vitals are normalizing!"

"Come on, Caelan. Come back to me, my love. Please," I urged, squeezing his hand tightly.

I continued to whisper encouraging words to him as several more minutes of intense waiting passed. Anything to convince him to return to me.

"Caelan, please. I love you," I whispered, pressing my cheek to our clasped palms.

His eyes fluttered open as he gasped. The machines went wild, furiously beeping as his gaze darted around the room. When his sight landed on me, I saw instant relief wash over his face.

"Shade," he breathed, his voice rough.

He reached out with his free hand, cupping my cheek as I leaned into his touch.

A soft sigh escaped my lips. *He came back to me.*

Without warning, he yanked me forward, crushing my body against his. I sank into him as he held me tightly. My ear pressed against his chest as I listened to the steady, soothing rhythm of his heartbeat.

Caelan was safe, and I was finally home again in his arms.

Dr. Eirny stayed just long enough to ensure Caelan and I were all right. Once she was certain we were recovering, she left us to our privacy.

Dillon and Ta y excused themselves shortly after, going to relieve Luna Maty and Alpha Leal from the cleanup in the ballroom. Apparently, my loss of control over my abilities had left things in shambles.

I'll have to apologize to her. I know she worked really hard on all of that.

I lay on Caelan's chest, content to listen to the sound of his heart and the rise and fall of his breath all night. We'd come too close to losing each other.

"I'm sorry," I finally managed, struggling not to cry again. "I'm sorry that I hurt you. I never meant for —"

"You have nothing to apologize for, baby," he interrupted, squeezing me tighter. "You aren't at fault for anything that happened tonight. Dark Moon carries all the blame for this." He paused to sigh and shake his head in disbelief. "Well, them and your sister. But Huxley is dead, and we're both alive."

He pressed a kiss to the top of my head. "That's all I can ask for."

"When I got there, you were so covered in blood," I whispered. "I was so scared. I knew I had to do something, or I'd lose you forever. But I'm sorry that I howled when you were so close. I should've thought that through, but I wasn't thinking about anything past stopping Huxley."

"I'm fine," he assured me. "My body has healed. I'm a bit tired, but otherwise, I don't feel any worse than I do after sparring with Dillon. I'm glad that you stepped in. I wanted to kill Huxley myself, but it's more fitting that you got to do it. He's been tormenting you for much longer than he's been a threat to me."

We sat quietly for a few moments. I kept replaying the events of the night in my head. Fortunately, everything had turned out fine, but our story could've had a very tragic end.

I knew he said he was okay, but I couldn't help the worry that plagued me. My howl could kill, and he had been exposed to the full power of it for much longer and at a greater intensity than anyone else ever had.

The fact that he was alive was nothing short of a miracle. I sent a silent prayer of thanks up to the Moon Goddess for allowing us both to survive.

Maybe my mom was right. Maybe it is a gift.