

## Epilogue

SIX MONTHS LATER

"How are you feeling, Shade? Nervous at all?" Mother Maty asked as I turned in the mirror.

"Surprisingly, no," I answered honestly. "The time feels right. I feel like I'm ready."

Tonight, under the light of the full moon, I would finally become the official luna of the Harvest Moon Pack.

"I'm very glad to hear that, dear. You are going to make a wonderful luna. I'm certain of it," she assured. "And you look beautiful!"

"Doesn't she though?" Ta y added. "Caelan is going to lose his mind when he sees you. He's been away for two weeks. His eyes are going to fall out of his head when he catches sight of you looking like this. I'll be surprised if he can keep his hands to himself long enough to get through the ceremony."

"Oh, shush," I scolded playfully.

I looked into the mirror one last time. I had to admit I felt good about myself. My makeup was simple like I usually preferred, but we had added gold highlights over my eyes and along my cheeks, giving me this ethereal kind of glow.

Ta y had styled my hair in a Dutch braid, weaving red ribbons throughout it to complement the colors of my dress.

The gown I had chosen for tonight was quite similar to the one I had worn at our second marking ceremony. But where that one had had a white bodice and black skirt, this dress had a black bodice with a dark-red skirt.

I'd finished off the look with a pair of dark strappy heels and a pendant necklace featuring a real leaf preserved in gold. It had been a gift from Mother Maty.

"Are you ready, sweetheart?" Mother Maty asked, looking over my shoulder with a smile as her reflection joined mine in the mirror.

"Yes," I replied without hesitation.

"Then I better get out there," Ta y declared, leaning in to give me a quick hug. "You're going to be great, Shade. Don't worry about a thing."

"Come on, dear," Mother Maty said, offering me her arm. "Let's hurry before Leal thinks I've changed my mind. I swear he's more excited about my retirement than I am."

As was tradition, the outgoing luna would walk the incoming luna down the aisle, signifying the transfer of power from one luna to the other.

We made our way downstairs, heading toward the same grassy side yard where I had been initially sworn in as a member of Harvest Moon. The trees that surrounded the space had been decorated with the same dark-red ribbons that had been hanging on them that night.

My smile was wide as I took in the sight before me. Just as it had been during my initiation ceremony, the aisle was lined with wolves, all eager to see their new luna assume her role. It felt so wonderful to be embraced so completely by this pack.

These amazing wolves had taken me in as their own, no questions asked. They had accepted everything about me with grace. And tonight, they honored me by coming here to welcome me again, this time as their luna and leader.

My eyes finally landed on Caelan, who stood on the stage at the far end, his father waiting stoically beside him. He'd been away on pack business, and seeing him now was like a breath of fresh air. I suddenly found myself filled with the desire to run into his arms.

He was dressed in black slacks with a dark-red button-up shirt, looking more muscular than I remembered. I saw him shift as he gazed at me, the heat in his eyes entirely inappropriate for this setting.

*He shouldn't have planned it this way. I want to rip his clothes off, not stand before our whole pack and get sworn in. I've gotta get a grip on myself. That can wait. The whole pack is here, and I know that Leal and Mother Maty have been patiently waiting for this day.*

I shivered, my grip on Mother Maty's arm tightening as I stared at my mate.

*It's just a matter of willpower. We have all the time in the world for that after.*

"Are you all right, dear?" Mother Maty asked quietly.

"Of course," I replied, giving her a tense smile as I tried to keep myself from getting too awestruck.

I thought about how far I had come as Maty and I started down the aisle.

*I was an omega such a short time ago. The pack pariah with no hope of a better life. Now everything has changed. I have a wonderful mate who cherishes and loves me. A mother in Maty, a father in Leal, a sister in Ta y, and brothers in Dillon and Oliver. And this magnificent pack filled with such wonderful wolves.*

I smiled. My future was bright where it had once seemed dark, and I actually found myself excited about whatever came next for once. I'd never felt that way before.

We ascended the stage, joining our mates as Mother Maty unlinked our arms and went to stand beside Leal. I gazed up at the man I'd come to adore as an easy smile spread across his face.

His eyes sparkled with pride, but I sensed a hint of mischief in them as they roamed appreciatively down my form. He reached out for my hand and placed a chaste kiss across my knuckles.

"Hello, my love," he offered with a grin.

"Hello," I replied sweetly. "I've missed you."

"And I've missed you more than you will ever know," he admitted with a sigh. "Are you ready to become my luna?"

"Absolutely," I asserted with a firm nod.

"Great," he murmured, leaning down to kiss me on the cheek. "Let's get this over with so I can get you alone," he whispered in my ear.

I shook my head at him, unable to stop the blissful smile that crossed my lips as he turned to face the crowd.

"Today, we gather under the light of the full moon and with the blessing of the Goddess to name our new luna," he announced. "Harvest Moon has had many amazing lunas since our founding, and I have no doubt that she will continue to carry on this legacy."

The gathered wolves clapped and cheered in agreement before quieting down. Caelan faced me again, looking directly into my eyes.

"Please state your name for all the pack members present as well as the Goddess above," he said.

"Shade Kendrick, zeta, Harvest Moon Pack," I replied.

"And you have come to us of your own free will to take on the role of luna? Swearing yourself in fealty to Harvest Moon as its leader and the equal of their alpha?"

"I have."

"Do you, Shade Kendrick, swear to uphold the office of luna with respect for all pack members? Do you promise to be a symbol of wisdom and courage for others to follow? Will you swear to only use your influence for good, always acting within the best interest of the pack?"

"I do," I affirmed without hesitation.

"Do you, Shade Kendrick, promise to always uphold the laws of the wolves, acting in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the Goddess of the moon herself and abiding by her will in all things?"

"I do."

"Please hold out your right hand," he bade, holding out his own.

I placed my hand in his as he pulled out the same dagger that had been used for my pack initiation.

He leaned in, his soft lips pressing against mine as the tip of the blade bit into my skin. I sighed, melting into his kiss, completely distracted from the pain.

He moved back, motioning for his mother to step forward as he made a similar cut across her right palm. Mother Maty and I joined hands, allowing our blood to mingle and symbolizing the transfer of power and responsibility from the old luna to the new.

"I, Shade Kendrick, swear to do all that I can to honor the title of luna and strive to live up to your inspiring example," I promised.

"I would expect nothing less," Mother Maty agreed with a bright smile and a twinkle in her eye.

She placed her free hand on the back of my head, pulling me in until our foreheads touched. This symbolized the passage of one luna's wisdom to the other. We remained that way for several moments, our eyes closed as we allowed the energy to flow between us.

The luna was the beating heart of the pack. If she was ineffective, then the pack would be as well.

"Your heart is pure, and the honor of passing my title to you is all mine," Mother Maty announced loudly for all to hear as she pulled away and released my hand.

She bowed her head to me in a sign of great respect. I was abbergasted for a moment, but I gathered myself enough to return the action with my own, causing her to chuckle.

Caelan gently took my hand, holding it carefully as he turned us both to face the pack.

"Harvest Moon, I present to you, Shade Kendrick, your new luna!" he announced proudly.

The entire pack bowed in unison before rising and releasing a celebratory howl.

"Long live Alpha Caelan and Luna Shade!" they chanted as they cheered.

I laughed, waving with my free hand as Caelan pulled me close. He wrapped his arm around my waist, a massive smile on his face as he stared at me like I'd hung the moon.

It still made butterflies flutter in my stomach and my heart beat loudly in my chest when he looked at me like that.

*All these months later, he still has this effect on me.*

"Maybe now we can get started on those pups," he whispered playfully as his hand dropped to my stomach.

I glanced out to the crowd, catching sight of a heavily pregnant Ta y.

"I think that could be arranged," I agreed, giggling as his eyes went wide. "It would be nice for Ta y's pup to have a couple of little friends to play with."

"Really?" he questioned, struggling to hold back his excitement.

"Really," I affirmed. "I'm ready, Caelan. I'm ready for this next adventure with you."

He squeezed me tighter, pressing his lips to mine in a passionate kiss. Someone whooped, and I suspected it was Oliver.

"I love you, Shade," he purred as he pulled back and rubbed the tip of his nose against mine.

"I love you too, Caelan," I whispered, my heart so full it might burst. "I love you so much."

End of Book 1