

## Cursed Wolf Chapter 12 - Tips

Rex howled into the fading light of day, his limbs cracking and breaking as he shifted. He'd barely slept the night before, having run the forest under the waxing moon until he fell to his knees from exhaustion.

The man stood, steaming and naked in the pale blue dusk. He clenched his fists, his chest heaving as he growled. He was a man again. His brothers would be shifted now too. The others had fallen off from his run and returned to the farm.

Only Rex had remained, pounding out his frustration and need in the forest night. He'd slept all through the day, then, awoken only by his shift.

It happened like this each full moon. The shift came upon the animal without will and the man reemerged into the world again for twenty-four hours.

His one thought was of her. Luna. The female. His mate. He growled, his lips peeling back over flat teeth. His cock stiffened in the cold air. The smell of her body would never leave him. He could smell her now.

This night they would meet as man and woman. The wolf, ever present in his mind, would take the backseat for once. Rex started back toward the farm, his bare feet crunching on a light dusting of snow over frozen loam.

The walk was long, and he regretted his endless run the night before. By the time he made it back to the Doolittles' property, it was well past dusk. The moon rose over the hills and forest, casting its bright glow on the land.

Rex opened the door to the shop where his brothers had been sleeping and stepped inside. The large woodshop was empty. His brothers must have gone inside to enjoy Patrick and Rebecca's hospitality.

He grabbed the clothing that had been left for him and slipped them over his bare flesh. When he walked through the back door of the house, he heard the sound of music and laughter from the den.

He went to the downstairs bathroom and locked the door. He wanted to be clean and presentable tonight.

The Doolittles had helped them with their clothing and grooming since arriving. Patrick had cut everyone's hair and Rebecca bought them all clothes.

The bear family had been more than kind to him and his brothers, and he owed them a debt of gratitude.

His human mind had been whirling since he'd shifted. Trying to get his rational processes moving again after so long had proved more challenging year after year.

Tonight, he had to show up for himself and for her.

He climbed into the shower and washed himself with soap and sweet-smelling hair products. When he stepped from the bath, he toweled off and stepped into the clean set of clothes for his date.

Luna. Such a fitting name for the woman who would break this curse. The moon ruled their lives. And the moon would save him.

If he could believe the Snow Queen, that is. Perhaps she'd lied about how to break the curse. But even if the curse was never broken, he had the opportunity to meet his mate, to know her, if even for one night.

It would take a million years to court a woman with only one night a month.

Claim her, the wolf growled within him.

He could never claim a human mate without courting her first. He couldn't imagine what kind of life they would have together if he did. The inner wolf growled low in the depths of his mind.

His beast and his body were quite sure what should happen tonight, but Rex was still in control. He'd worked hard all these years to discipline himself so that he could lead his brothers. If he hadn't, none of them would have survived.

He looked at himself in the mirror, barely recognizing what looked back at him. In every clear pond, in every pane of glass, he saw a wolf. The man staring at him now was like a stranger.

He scrubbed his hand over his face and then dabbed on some of the cologne Patrick had lent him for tonight. Rebecca had assured him it was "alluring."

He wanted this to be a good date. The clock on the wall had read six pm. He was meant to meet her at seven.

He hurried into the main house and found two of his brothers and the teens in the den playing video games. Felix and Tate had been quite taken with video games.

Damian and Blake were both reading books in the living room, and Thorne was nowhere to be found.

Patrick and Rebecca were cooking in the family's large kitchen. They looked up and smiled in greeting when he walked into the room.

"How are you feeling?" Rebecca asked.

Rex rubbed at the knots in his stomach and tried to relax. "Well enough."

"You look good," Rebecca said with honest appraisal.

"S\*xxy as hell," Patrick said, with a wink.

"Thanks." Rex rubbed the back of his neck. "I hope she can see past how I behaved yesterday."

"Of course she will," Rebecca said. "She's your one true mate. She's going to love you."

"I think she already does." Patrick laughed and slid a pile of chopped basil into the pasta sauce on the stove.

Rex let out a long breath. "I suppose I should be going now."

"Here are the keys," Patrick said, handing a set to Rex. "I trust you to get it back safely."

Patrick had agreed to lend him his truck. Rex hadn't driven a car in decades. The family's vehicle had stopped running in 1958 when they could no longer maintain it.

"I vow to return your truck in perfect condition," Rex said.

"You have a good time tonight, Rex. Don't worry too much. Luna is a lovely woman and the granddaughter of a very powerful witch. She is a very good match for you."

Rex nodded, thanked them, and then walked out the door. He didn't stop to tell his brothers he was going. They were engrossed in games and books, and he didn't need their questions or comments right now.

He climbed into Patrick's red two-door pickup and pressed the keyless start. The world had become so strange and technologically advanced, he sometimes felt like he was living on an alien planet.

The trip into town gave him time to settle himself and his inner beast. He had to make this work. Not just to break the curse, or to find his true mate, but to be the man he believed himself to be.

If he couldn't hold onto the highest ideals of his humanity, what was the point in breaking the curse at all?

He saw a florist on the corner as he drove through the bustling port town. He pulled into the parking lot and went inside. The place was full of the scent of flowers, cases full of gifts, and a lovely chocolate counter.

Rex smiled, looking at the bouquets. He'd never seen such an array of blooms. He knew ladies liked flowers. Most men liked them too—what's not to like?—but he'd learned as a young man that flowers had a special language in courtship.

"Hello," said the woman behind the counter. She looked at him over the animal print horn-rimmed glasses she wore. Her platinum blonde hair was pinned into wide curls in a style that reminded him of his own time.

"Hi. I'm going on a first date tonight. What do you suggest?"

"Ooo. Exciting. Let's see, what should we get for the lucky lady?" She came out from behind the counter and rubbed her chin, considering the bouquets. "You can never go wrong with roses. I'd suggest yellow or pink on a first date. Then again, maybe you want to send a more casual message?"

"I'm very serious about her."

"Well then, you might want to go with red roses. But they sometimes come off as too much for a first date."

"Pink," he said, lifting the bouquet out of the water basket.

"Good choice." She smiled and took the blooms. "Should we add something else to liven them up? Baby's breath, a few lilies."

"Make it pretty and sweet. She's both of those things."

"Ah... Lucky girl," the woman said as she went about putting together a lovely bouquet for him.

What she prepared for him held an array of soft colors and textures with a sweet soft scent he hoped Luna would enjoy.

"And a dozen of your finest chocolates," he said, looking up from the blooms.

When he was finished in the florist, he felt more confident. Rex was an alpha wolf of his pack, with a supernaturally long life. He'd lived and killed as a wolf for decades. He was not prone to a lack of confidence. But tonight, when faced with finding the love of his mate, his nerves were getting the better of him.

He had so little time. Not enough time. He had to be the man he believed himself to be. Good, patient, kind. The things his parents had raised him to be. The things that made him human.

On the way to Luna's shop, he settled his wolf for the thousandth time. He parked outside the shop and went to the door. She stepped out onto the street just as he was approaching, carrying the flowers and chocolates.

"Oh, wow," she breathed. "Come in."

She opened the door for him, and he stepped past her. The scent of her body was thick around him. His wolf howled and scratched, screaming for his mate. His c0ck twitched and Rex gulped, walking into the bookstore.

He got a hold of himself and turned to face her. She was radiant. Her big blue eyes stared up at him with wonder and awe. Her shoulder-length blonde hair was brushed back from her face and fastened with a silver comb.

"I hope you will accept these gifts," he said, first handing her the bouquet.

"Rex, this is so lovely. How did you know pink roses are my favorite?" She laughed.

"Fate," he said as she inhaled the delicate scent.

"Thank you."

"And these chocolates." He handed her the heart-shaped box.

"You are so sweet. I've never had a guy bring me flowers and chocolates on a date before. You really come from a different time." She giggled and then, to his utter shock, she reached up on her tiptoes and k!ssed his cheek.

Rex was stunned silent and still for a moment. His body turned to stone, including his manh00d. And he had to force himself to relax before he embarrassed himself and her.

"I'll get these some water," she said, trotting to the back of the shop.

She returned a moment later with the flowers in a vase that she placed on the counter. "I'll take them upstairs later. I'm ready if you are, after I try one of these chocolates."

She peeled open the box and popped one in her mouth. She gr0aned, rolling her eyes. "Divine. You have to try one." She lifted the little chocolate square toward his mouth. Rex's eyes widened. She was going to feed it to him.

He opened his mouth and she dropped it inside. His inner wolf was in a frenzy. He breathed slow and steady to stay in control. His lips closed around the chocolate, his tongue just barely brushing over her fingertip as it escaped his mouth.

The chocolate burst over his tongue. He groaned too. And not just because of the delicious sweet flavor of the candy. He could taste her.

"We should go," he said in a low voice. "I made reservations."