

## Book 2 Dark Wolf Chapter 1 - Tips

0 8 minutes read

Damian Winter stared at the snow falling over the dark forest beyond Patrick Doolittle's property. The bear shifter and his family had been kind to Damian and his brothers, allowing them to sleep in their large, insulated workshop for four months now.

Damian's body screamed with pain, and he gritted his teeth. Part of him accepted the pain and the torment as inevitable repayment for his long, cursed life.

Seventy-five years ago, he and his brothers had made a tragic mistake. They'd stolen a snow flower from the Snow Queen to save their mother's life. In the end, their mother had died anyway, and the six of them had spent decades roaming the forest in wolf form, only able to shift into men on the day of the full moon.

Damian could sense deep down inside that they had broken the laws of nature. Whether it had been due to a curse or their own tragic mistake in angering a witch, it didn't matter.

He had been 24 years old when the curse hit them, but he knew he should have died long ago. He would be a hundred years old this year. Few humans or shifters lived that long.

His older brother Rex, the alpha of their family pack, warned him against his dark, brooding thoughts, but the growls and the threatening glances could not remove his knowledge that they should all be dead.

Since Rex had found his mate—a fledgling witch named Luna Linwood—Damian had begun to feel a glimmer of hope. Luna's grandmother had seen it all. She had anticipated their arrival and prepared a potion to cure them.

However, although the potion allowed he and his brothers to remain in their human form, the side effect was this gut-churning pain and constant internal torment.

When Luna had first brought it to them several weeks ago, he had only been able to stand the pain for a short time before shifting back into his wolf form where the pain and torment subsided.

Since then, Luna had been working diligently on new iterations of the potion, and each time the symptoms were less, and the potion was more potent. Damian had slowly been spending more time in his human form, reading books in the Doolittles' warm family room by the fire and learning everything he could about this strange new time that he found himself in.

After seventy-five years of roaming the backcountry of Alaska as a wolf, coming to the little port town of Selkie, on Fate Island, had been a shock to him. So much had changed over the last seventy-five years.

The most startling change had been that shifters had revealed themselves to the human world. There was even a human/shifter dating app where shifters could find their fated mates, and many had. It was how Rex had found Luna and how Rebecca and Patrick Doolittle had originally found each other.

Damian stood by the back patio furniture, where he'd been staring into the darkness of the forest, and brushed the snow out of his hair. His brothers were inside, but he had wanted to be alone. He had been in his own dark torment, living as a beast, for so long that coming out of it was harder than he could articulate.

Rex had gone to live with his mate in town, leaving the rest of the brothers with their hosts, but he knew that soon they would all have to leave. All guests wore out their welcomes eventually, even with the kindest of hosts.

He went inside and found his brothers sitting around the kitchen island. The Doolittles' teenage children were all at school. Rebecca was at her law practice in town, and Patrick was working in the woodshop.

"It's about time you joined us," said his older brother Thorne, giving him a dark look.

"We shouldn't be having this meeting without Rex," Blake said.

"We need to sell. That's the only answer," Thorne snapped back.

"We can save the land," said Blake. "It's our birthright."

"Why would you ever want to go back there?" Tate asked him. "There's nothing there for us. Just miles and miles of snow and ice and nothingness. If I ever have to go back to that land, I will drop dead of boredom."

"That's one way to end things," Damian said.

"We can't make this decision without Rex."

"What decision?" said a deep voice from the front door. Damian turned to see his oldest brother walking into the Doolittles' front room.

"Now that we are all here," Felix said, "we can come to a unanimous decision."

"A unanimous decision about what?" Rex asked, taking a seat in the stool at the kitchen island with the rest of his brothers.

“To sell the ranch,” Felix said, handing Rex a stack of papers.

“I’ve been going over the details with Rebecca and a friend of hers who is a real estate agent. They are sure that they can get us a million and a half for the property.” Damian sputtered at the figure.

“A million and a half?” Tate asked, his voice choking.

“That’s not enough to sell off our family’s legacy,” Blake said.

“We all understand how you feel about our family’s home, Blake,” Rex started, “but there’s nothing left for us there. Fate Island is our new home. And with the sale of the property, we can all start over with our own homes.”

“Are you sure you don’t just want the money to invest in your mate’s business?” Blake shot back.

Rex laughed heartily and threw back his head.

“New Moon Books is in the black. Louisa Pleasant ran a tight ship and Luna is an excellent manager. We are not having any financial problems, if that’s what you think.”

“We should just be done with it,” Thorne said. “I never want to go back to that cursed place.”

“We should go back. We should bring an army and we should kill her,” Blake said.

“Suppose we gather all the shifters that we have made friends with in Selkie and bring them back to confront the Snow Queen. What if our friends die in the battle, or one of your brothers?” Rex asked Blake. “Would it be worth it?”

Blake looked away, not answering the question. Damian didn’t care. He didn’t care if they went back, or they stayed. The deep, dark emptiness inside him after all these years spent in beast form could not be filled.

Once a month they all shifted and became men, and that one day had been the worst day every time. Because as the years stretched on, it was the day that he realized more and more that he should already be dead. He had been such a young man in the beginning and had barely aged since. It was against nature’s laws. He did not want to live like this anymore.

“I don’t care if we sell it, but I don’t want to go back,” Damian said.

“All in favor of selling the property, raise your hand and say aye,” Rex said. The alpha wolf raised his hand and said “Aye,” followed by all the other brothers except Blake and Damian.

With a sigh, Damian followed suit. A final confrontation with the Snow Queen ending in everyone's death sounded like the appropriate end for this tragedy. But looking at Rex's smiling face, the scent of his mate clinging to his skin, Damian felt a glimmer of hope deep down that he hadn't realized was still there.

"Blake?" Rex asked with a rumbling voice. "It's time."

Blake stood from the bench and walked outside. The door slammed on his silence and Rex sighed heavily.

"We have a majority," Thorne said. "There's no sense in wasting any more time on this."

"You're right, Thorne. But Blake has a right to say his piece."

"The realtor is ready to list the property. Photographs have already been taken. All the information about boundaries and square acres have been uploaded to the real estate sites. All that's left is to go online and sign the papers," Felix said.

Rex sat back on the bench and crossed his arms. Damian could tell it was a difficult decision for the alpha to make. A decision that Damian was glad he wouldn't have to make.

"We list the property," Rex said with a hint of sorrow in his voice. "Blake will come around."

"Just wait till he gets his share," Tate said. "Then none of this 'legacy' crap will make any difference anymore."

"Blake has different values than you, Tate, and selling the land will hurt him. We have to respect that we're going against his wishes and there will be a reaction."

"Whatever. Coming to Selkie was the best decision we ever made. I can only imagine how much better it will be when we have all our own money and we can buy our own videogame consoles," Tate said. Thorne scoffed at his fun-loving brother and Tate snapped his teeth playfully.

"I want my own truck," Thorne said. "And a home for my mate."

"Good. All good things. Splitting the money six ways will still leave quite a bit for each of us. It is a sacrifice to sell, but a sacrifice that must be made," Rex said heavily. "I need to get back to the shop. Luna needs my help."

Rex stood from his bench and started toward the door. He gripped the door handle and then turned, eyeing his youngest brother. "Try to resist brooding too much, Damian. Your face might get stuck like that."

Damian felt his lips curl over his descending fangs and the wolf brighten his eyes. Rex chuckled and then left the Doolittles' house.

"He's right, you know," Tate said. "It wouldn't kill you to smile."

"I think that would be a reason for him to smile," Thorne said. Damian wordlessly stood and left his mocking older brothers in the kitchen. He grabbed the book he'd been reading from the coffee table in the family room and slid into the comfortable armchair near the fire.

He wished he could be alone, away from their mocking words, but he and his brothers were bonded beyond any normal pack or family. They'd spent every day of their lives together for decades roaming the woods, hunting in a pack, ripping the flesh from their kills with their teeth. It had created a deep mental bond that was present even in human form.

The rage of the cursed wolf inside him rose in his mind, howling a bloodthirsty yell and shattering his peace. He gripped his temples and groaned, dropping the book. He took several deep breaths and pulled the little amber vial of potion from his pocket. He drank several drops and then leaned back on the chair, panting and sweating.

The potion was getting stronger with each iteration, but it still wasn't perfect, and it still wasn't a solution. The only thing that would save him from this curse was to find his fated mate.

The brothers had all signed up for mate.com, a shifter dating app that had matched Rex with Luna. He checked it every day on the Doolittles' computer, but despite his growing hope and the tiny sliver of light in the darkness of his mind, he still hadn't been matched.