

## Dark Wolf Chapter 2 - Tips

Venus Jacobson stepped off the cruise ship and squinted at the bright afternoon light. It had been snowing in Selkie, Alaska all morning, and she had refused to get out of her warm bed until absolutely necessary. The crew for her photoshoot had left hours ago, but as the star talent, she could be the last to arrive.

She zipped her parka up to her neck and pulled the fur-lined hood over her head. There was a ride waiting for her at the docks, and she slid into the passenger seat of the rented vehicle driven by one of the film crew.

As he drove through the little town, Venus couldn't help but find it charming and cute. The old-fashioned downtown was lined with quaint little shops that were reminiscent of a time long past before big-box stores took over everything.

Still, Selkie, Alaska was a long way from the runways of Paris, New York and Milan. She had chosen to take this assignment instead of another year of making the rounds. She wanted to do a different kind of work, more artistic and fulfilling, despite what her mother said it would do to damage her career.

Venus had been a runway model since she was thirteen years old and had grown to a height of five foot eleven by the time she was fifteen. Her graceful, slender body and high cheekbones were highly prized by the fashion industry, but even more than the photographers and casting agents, her mother had seen it as a payday. At twenty-four years old now, Venus was a veteran supermodel, and she was having a serious case of burnout.

She was good at her job, and she used to enjoy it. Posing for the camera, wearing beautiful clothes, rocking the most fabulous runways in the world. But the life had gone out of it, and she could sense that she was beginning to age out of the industry.

She had hundreds of thousands of followers on Instagram, a swanky apartment in New York and a closet full of designer clothes, but Venus was beginning to believe she wanted something else out of life, something different than what her Instagram followers wanted to see from her.

The photography assistant pulled up at the shoot that was taking place in a grizzly bear sanctuary. Venus had had animals photoshopped into her images many times, but she'd never posed with an actual bear.

She slipped out of the rental, her snow boots crunching on the fresh snow, and walked into the changing tents that were set up for her and the other models. Even in the warmest place in the state, Alaska was still cold.

She walked into the dressing tents and found the crew ready and prepared for her to get her into clothes and hair. She was the biggest name and highest paid model on the assignments, and the other girls looked at her with a mixture of contempt and respect.

As the clothing assistant pulled her clothing off the rack and instructed her on what she would be doing, Venus tried to get her mind into the game. Something about the little town of Selkie and its quaint little shops and families walking the streets had done something to her.

Alaska might have been colder than a witch's tit, but she couldn't deny that the backcountry lifestyle had its own appeal. So far from the busy streets of New York City and the glamor of Paris and Milan. Deep down inside, this was what she'd been longing for.

Venus had grown up with a single mother who was the epitome of a stage mom. She'd been doing dance since she could walk, beauty pageants from the time she could talk, and modeling almost as long. When she'd gotten her first contract with a big agency, her mom had acted like it was her own achievement.

The fashion industry was cutthroat, but Venus's mother was the most intense and the one who pushed her more than anyone else. When she was young, she had just accepted that that's the way things were.

She'd believed that every child had a relationship with her mother like that. But later she came to understand that most children had the love and unconditional support of their parents that wasn't contingent on how well they smiled or their ability to pose in challenging situations.

Venus pulled on the faux-fur jacket that complemented her dark skin and eyes. Her dark hair was cropped short—she'd had it cut in an act of rebellion against her mother who'd forced her to straighten her hair since she was a little girl.

Venus had decided she wanted a natural look and didn't care if producers didn't book her. She was tired of living by other people's demands. If she couldn't be herself, be who she wanted to be, then what was the point?

When she was decked out head to toe in luscious fake furs, her hair and makeup complete, she was led out to the shoot by the photo assistant.

"As you know, the grizzly you'll be posing with is a shifter, not an actual animal. You will be completely safe. So don't worry that he'll bite your head off."

Venus looked at the massive brown beast standing in front of the rocks and trees on their makeshift sets and her heart skipped a beat. It was hard to get her body to listen since her fight or flight response had instinctively kicked in.

She stopped in her tracks for a beat before lifting her chin, remembering a decade of professional training. She took a deep breath and walked toward her mark. The grizzly met her eyes and nodded respectfully, and Venus could see the human mind working behind the animal's gaze. She let out a deep breath and smiled.

"You're the biggest, scariest model I've ever worked with," she said with a laugh.

The grizzly made a sound that Venus wanted to believe was a chuckle. For all she knew, it was a threat. She took her cues from the photographer and assistants as the shutter began to flash and the lights moved. She worked with the grizzly, making love to the camera, and giving everything she had to the scene.

"Gorgeous. Perfect. Beautiful," the photographer shouted as she did her work.

She went into something like an altered state when she reached the flow that happened for all creative people. This was when she remembered how much she loved being a model. When things were different, sexy, interesting. The grizzly shifter made her heart race despite knowing that it wasn't a dangerous beast that could take her head off in one bite.

After an hour of posing and a costume change, Venus was excused for break. She went back to the dressing tents and slipped into a robe and then found the refreshments and coffee. She grabbed a paper cup of coffee and some fruit and salad.

Despite being almost six feet tall, she had to keep her figure slim for the runway. She wished she could just eat an entire chocolate cake sometimes, but she had been disciplined from the time she was a little girl to accept being hungry.

A dark-haired man with amber eyes wearing a thick robe and fur-lined boots sat in one of the folding chairs across from her. He smiled at her and his eyes glinted. She suddenly realized that the man was the shifter she just been posing with for the last hour.

"So, do you only work in grizzly form?" she asked, taking a sip of coffee.

"I have headshots for human and animal forms," he said with a wink.

Some of the other models giggled as they watched him while grabbing their own refreshments.

The grizzly shifter was handsome, she had to admit. She didn't know a lot about shifters other than they were usually incredibly good-looking. She had a feeling she'd worked with more than a few during her time as a model, since shifters were often the epitome of human beauty.

The grizzly shifter stood and left the tent, leaving Venus and the other female models behind.

“I wonder if he has a mate,” one of them said, an eighteen-year-old named Becca McPhee from some small town in the Midwest. She had just started her career and was too naïve for words.

“You gotta catch them before they’re mated,” said Sarah Lynnwood. She was two years older than Venus and a thousand times more jaded, if that was possible.

“I swear I’m gonna sign up for mate dot com. The shifter models are to die for,” Becca said.

Venus bit her lip and looked down at her black coffee. She thought about shifters and the things she’d heard about them. Shifter men were supposed to be the most loyal men on Earth, practically worshiping their fated mates until the day they died. Nothing that good could be true.

Her own father had been the absolute opposite. He’d been a gambler and a scoundrel, having left her mother pregnant and alone. She hadn’t seen him since her first big show in New York almost a decade ago when he’d come to try to scam money from her and her mother. Her mother was greedier than her father and didn’t let the man have a dime.

It was Venus’s money, despite the fact that her mom treated it like it was her own. But she wouldn’t have given her dad any, anyway. All through her childhood she’d wished that someday he’d come back and take her away from all the work and stress and worry that her mother put her through in search of fame through her daughter. But that was the opposite of what happened. He had just come back to get a piece of the pie that was Venus Jacobson.

She threw her plate and cup into the recycling bin and started to change into her next costume, but she couldn’t stop thinking about mate dot com and shifter mates.

She found herself staring into the mirror as she sat in hair and makeup getting a curly red wig affixed to her skull. She imagined what it would be like to live in a place like Selkie—in this cute little old-fashioned town with a cute old-fashioned man and a cute old-fashioned family. She bit her lip so hard it almost bled. The makeup artist admonished her for leaving a mark and reapplied her lipstick.

“I’m sorry,” Venus said in a low voice.

“What has you so deep in thought?” the makeup artist asked offhandedly.

“I was thinking about shifters.”

"Who's not?" the woman said in a low purr.

Everyone on set was used to being around extremely attractive people, but something about the grizzly shifter was getting all the women's p\*nties damp. Maybe he was doing the same thing to Venus. But she didn't want a temporary dirty hookup with a man who would go on to find the love of his life.

She wanted someone to want her just the way she was, forever. Someone who would love her and protect her and take care of her. Someone who didn't care if she put on two pounds or indulged in chocolate cake. She wanted a family and a home and a place to rest.

She wanted to only have to model on her own terms, or never again if that was what she chose.

She pulled her cell phone out of her pocket and downloaded mate dot com.