

Dark Wolf Chapter 3 - Tips

“What’s that?” the makeup artist asked.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” Venus said, flipping the screen back to cute cat videos.

She couldn’t sign up until she had some privacy back in her room at the hotel. The crew was staying in Selkie for a few more days and would be doing shoots with other types of shifters. After her shoot with a mountain lion, the started to dim, and the crew announced that they were done for the day.

Venus got a ride back to the hotel with the rest of the models in a large van, and they piled out into the parking lot with their parkas and massive shoulder bags. The other girls were still laughing and giggling about the grizzly shifter.

The mountain lion had been a woman, who was short and curvy in her human form. Someone very unlikely to walk the runways of the fashion capitals of the world. But she’d been warm and kind and beautiful in her own way and Venus had enjoyed posing with the woman in her mountain lion form.

Her pelt had been soft and warm, and she’d thought they’d taken some of the best shots she’d seen in a long time.

Venus had her own room on the second floor of the hotel while the other girls were sharing a suite. She knew there was some jealousy from the other models, but Venus was a big name. She could book with almost any designer, and she would probably have that cachet for a few more years at least.

But she knew by the time she hit thirty, the bookings would start to dry up and her life as a model would disappear. She might be able to do some commercials or sponsorships, but the cover of Vogue and the fashion week shows would be a thing of the past.

She knew she should be grateful that she was living the dream, but was it really even her dream? Venus wasn’t even sure what she wanted out of life. She’d been learning photography for herself over the last few years, learning how to light and shoot herself for her Instagram feed, but more than pictures of herself, she liked to take photographs of the world around her.

She could get into that flow state space when looking through the lens of the camera and trying to feel what the moment was telling her.

She groaned and lay back on the queen-size bed. It was a comfortable, decent room. Not the lap of luxury like a five-star hotel back in New York, but the heater worked and there was a coffee pot and tea.

Her stomach rumbled and she thought about ordering food delivery. What she wouldn't give for a hamburger and fries with all the toppings. Then her self-disciplined mind asked her if there was a gym in the hotel and wondered where she would work out in the morning. She grumbled to herself, and her phone pinged with a text message. Venus picked up the phone and read the text from her mother.

"How was the shoot?"

Venus sighed, not wanting to respond. She'd barely been able to keep her mom from tagging along with her. Even though she was a full-grown adult who should have control of her own life and career, her mother was still her manager and still very much a stage mom.

She'd gone on this assignment to get away from her, more than anything. If there was one thing her mother hated more than anything, it was the cold and small towns.

Her mom had accused her of trying to get away from her more than once, and although Venus denied it up and down, that had been one of the primary reasons she'd taken this tour of Alaska.

She was about to respond when she got another text asking her what she'd eaten today. Venus growled and almost threw her phone across the room. Her stomach grumbled so she stood and started a pot of coffee in the tiny little pot. It would at least tide her over until dinner when she could eat some rabbit food and water.

There were girls that she knew ate whatever they wanted, but usually it would come up later. Venus wasn't interested in destroying her teeth or esophagus, so the only way to maintain her size-two figure was by monitoring everything she ate and working out like a fiend at every moment possible.

Part of her longed for when her short career would finally be over, when she could enjoy food and finally feel full, but she wasn't sure that was even possible at this point.

She paced the room, waiting for the coffee to brew, and then poured herself a cup of black liquid with nothing in it. She sipped her coffee and then picked up her phone again, ignoring her mother's texts.

She couldn't stop thinking about shifters and their families, and the curvy mountain lion who had seemed so happy. The woman had just found her mate and was on cloud nine, constantly talking about him in their life together. Unlike the grizzly, Cynthia, the lion shifter, was a Selkie local. She had regaled Venus with stories of what a lovely life she lived in the small town.

Venus wanted what Cynthia had: a loving mate, a happy family, and the ability to eat chocolate cake whenever she wanted without feeling guilty.

She tapped on the icon for mate dot com and her heart raced as the app opened. She gulped and began to fill out the questionnaire with its strange questions, and then filled out her profile.

She added a few photos from her Instagram and cringed at the sight of them. She knew that shifters didn't care about things like Instagram likes or body fat percentage. But this was who she was, and it was all that she had to show for herself. She knew her life may be an empty façade, but maybe if she was lucky, she could find someone to discover who she really was; someone who could truly love her.

She held her breath as her matches loaded and let it out when they populated the screen. The first match on her screen was an 82% match. The 100% match would be her fated mate. As she scrolled down, the matches' percentage grew higher. 87%, 90%, 92%, 95%.

She held her breath as she scrolled to the bottom, and there was the 100% match. Her eyes flashed as she looked at the young man on the screen. Blue eyes and long blonde hair framed a handsome face.

His username was Dark Wolf. There was something haunted in his eyes. Her heart ran like a scared rabbit racing to its hole, and she had to look away. She couldn't help but think she had just made a terrible mistake. What would her mother think? She was supposed to be back in New York in a couple of weeks back on the fashion show circuit. She had a shoot with Harper's Bazaar next month.

A shifter mate would change everything.

She slowly looked back at her phone, her instinct overpowering her fear. She needed to know everything about this man, about Dark Wolf and the pain behind his beautiful eyes.

There wasn't much in his profile. He was twenty-six years old, and he lived with some friends. He liked reading and hunting. She gulped and tried to calm her breathing. Before she knew what was happening, a message popped up on the screen.

"Hello," it said. "It's me."

She covered her mouth and gasped, her eyes widening. She shook her head and her eyes started to tear up. Another text from her mom popped up on the screen.

"You're sticking to your diet, right?"

Venus growled and flicked away her mother's text.

"It's me," she typed back, not knowing what else to say. Her screen name had been Catwalk Girl, but she wanted him to know her real name.

"I'm Venus. What's your name?"

"Damian. It's nice to meet you, Venus. I've been waiting a long time. Longer than you can imagine."

"Is that why you're a Dark Wolf?" she asked, laughing in spite of herself.

"You'll find out when you get to know me. If you want to get to know me, that is."

"That's why I signed up to the site. To see if I had a fated mate."

"You found me," he said. "I hope you don't regret it."

She set down the phone, her heart racing. She hadn't expected her mate to have this kind of attitude. That wasn't what the romantic shifter films had made it seem like. It was always perfect in those stories.

But she knew enough about the reality of shifters' lives to believe that meeting Damian was part of her destiny. She couldn't back out now, even if she wanted to.

"I'm in Selkie, Alaska. Where are you?"

"I am in Selkie too," he replied after several long moments.

"No, you're kidding," she typed with a laugh.

"You know what they say about fate."

"I can't believe you're really in Selkie."

"I live here with the Doolittles. I've been helping out my family until we can sell our property in central Alaska."

"Maybe you can tell me all about it over dinner?" she asked. She decided she would try to push things along since he wasn't asking her out on a date.

"I'd like that. How about tonight?"

"There's a seafood place in town that looks good. The Captain's Grotto."

"My brother took his mate there. He said it was good. I'll make us a reservation for eight."

"I'll meet you then," she said. She set down her phone and started pacing the room. It was six o'clock and she still had plenty of time to get ready. She hadn't been on a date in so long she could barely remember the last time.

A lot of the other girls in her industry liked to party and accept the attentions of men who wanted to spoil them with gifts because of their beauty. Even if Venus's mother hadn't forbidden that kind of behavior, Venus wouldn't have wanted to do it anyway.

It was all so exhausting and meaningless. And that was something Venus didn't need any more of in her life. She wanted something real, something true, something she could count on. And she hoped Damian, the Dark Wolf, could be it.

She looked at his picture again. Something about those eyes scared her. The darkness inside him was brooding and boiling. But, at the same time, she sensed that it was exactly what was meant for her to heal.

In most cases, she would hate that. Women weren't responsible for men's problems or for making them better people. But the truth was, Venus needed the same thing from him. She wished on the stars rising outside her window that the two of them could find each other and heal the darkness inside both of them.