

Fierce Wolf Chapter 2 - Tips

"It's time to wake up, sweet girl," Heather Thomas said, kissing her three-year-old daughter Margaret's forehead.

The child stirred from her sleep and her eyes fluttered open. Heather looked down at her, full of love and hope for the future.

She was so grateful every day for her child, despite how hard it had been as a single mom to finish her doctorate and to start her job as a professor at the university in Selkie.

She helped Margaret dress, pulling a knit sweater over the little girl's kinky blonde curls.

"I have a present for Grandma," Maggie said, pulling a scribbled drawing off her art table.

"You can give it to her this morning," Heather said, helping her daughter pull on her snow boots.

She laced up the child's shoes and carried her into the kitchen where she sat her on a booster seat at the table. Heather had scrambled eggs and bacon for breakfast, sitting with her child in the early morning light. Heather had purchased a modest home outside of town near the water with the help of her grandmother. If not for Gran, she would never have been able to make it all work.

She had found out she was pregnant with Maggie the last year of her doctorate degree. It had been a drunken one-night stand with a guest lecturer in Anchorage.

When she had told Maggie's professor father about what had happened, he'd immediately suggested she take care of it—and by "take care of it," he'd meant terminate the pregnancy.

Heather had always believed in a woman's right to choose and, faced with the choice, she'd decided to keep her child. Giving her dissertation and defending her thesis had been an extra challenge with morning sickness and swollen ankles, but she had received her doctorate before Maggie was born in the spring.

But after the baby arrived, everything changed. It became a thousand times harder even with her part-time job as a research assistant, and it became clear there was no way she would be able to make things work.

She'd applied for a job in Selkie to be next to her grandmother, and thanks to fate or the universe or God or whatever you wanted to call it, she'd gotten the job.

She'd always visited Selkie as a child with her parents. Her mom had grown up on the island and then had moved to Juneau for a job, where she'd met Heather's father. But

after both of her parents died in a shipwreck, her grandmother was the only person left in her life.

She watched Maggie shovel scrambled eggs into her mouth while humming her favorite tune from a children's TV show. The light from the window glowed in her blonde curls and glinted in her hazel eyes.

Everyone who saw them together said that Maggie was the spitting image of her mom. And it was probably true. Maggie's father had been a handsome, highly intelligent man, but she was glad she wasn't reminded of him every time she looked at her baby. She glanced at her watch and took the empty plates to the sink.

"Time to go," she said to her little girl as she helped her down from the booster chair.

"I have to get my picture," she said, running back to her bedroom.

Maggie returned with the drawing of fish and octopus in her hand with a gleaming smile. Heather bent down and wiped a crumb of toast off her daughter's cheek and smiled.

"She's going to love it," she said, hugging her baby.

The feeling of her child in her arms sent a wave of love through her chest. It was the best feeling in the world. Despite all her accomplishments, Maggie was her greatest one.

She helped her daughter into her coat, and they walked outside to her four-wheel-drive Subaru where she buckled Maggie into her car seat and got behind the wheel.

Her grandmother lived down the street and watched Maggie three days a week while Heather was in class. The other days, Maggie was at the college's daycare/preschool, which Heather thought was a good balance for her child.

Her grandmother took Maggie on picnics and to the beach and they baked cookies and meatballs together, but in the preschool, she got to play with other children, learn her ABCs and get prepared for school. With the help and support she was getting in Selkie, Heather thought she was really making this whole single mom thing work.

She pulled into her grandmother's driveway and parked the car. A moment later, they were knocking on the door and her grandmother opened it with a big smile.

"Look what I drew you, Grandma," Maggie said with infectious enthusiasm.

Heather's grandmother Pearl knelt down despite her age and accepted Maggie's gift.

"This is beautiful, darling. I think it's your best one yet. We'll put it on the refrigerator."

The three of them walked into her grandmother's home, where she'd lived since her own children were small. Pearl had been one of the biggest inspirations in Heather's career. She had been a marine biologist herself, and the walls of her house were lined with paintings of ocean landscapes and marine life. In the kitchen, Pearl put the drawing in a place of honor on the fridge with a magnet.

"Thanks, Grandma," Heather said, giving Pearl a kiss on the cheek. "I'll be back at five tonight."

"We're going to have a wonderful day, aren't we sweetheart?" Pearl said, taking Maggie's hand.

"Can we go to the beach today?" Maggie asked, bouncing up and down, her curls bouncing with her.

"You're wearing the right shoes for it," Pearl said, winking at her.

Heather smiled, knowing that her little girl was in good hands. Back out in her car, she pulled onto the street and listened to the radio playing an old song from her childhood. It filled her with nostalgia and warmed her heart. Everything in her life was just about perfect. Except for one thing.

Heather hadn't been on a date since the instance with the guest lecturer. She'd been too busy and really hadn't had the desire. But more and more every day, she was beginning to wonder if she would ever find love again.

She'd had a boyfriend in high school who she'd really believed was the one, but they'd gone to different colleges and grown apart. He'd married another girl right out of undergrad.

Not that Heather had had any claim to him. They'd lost touch even over social media. But in the back of her mind, she'd always felt like maybe he was the one that got away. Heather sighed as she waited at the stoplight to turn onto the bridge across the water to the island university.

She had a full life, a beautiful daughter, her loving grandmother and her dream job at a wonderful school, but she had to admit to herself that something was missing. Not only did Heather want to have more children—Maggie was such a blessing that it was impossible not to—but she also wanted to give her love to a man who could give that love back.

She wanted a family. Her own parents had been so in love with each other up until the very end. They'd been taking their thirtieth anniversary vacation on a yacht when it was hit with a terrible storm in the night.

Despite both of them being experienced sailors, the boat ran into a reef and started taking on water. There must have been a gas leak, because the ship exploded before they were able to get into the lifeboats.

Heather pushed away her dark thoughts. She only wanted to remember her parents for the love that they shared and the lessons they had instilled in her. She'd been an only child, and they had raised her to always follow her heart.

She'd never been spoiled the way many only children can be, but she'd been loved, and she'd been helped to succeed in all the things that mattered. She could play piano with the best of them and had received her PhD two years sooner than most of her cohorts.

They had given her the best start in life, and that was the way she wanted to remember them, not for their tragic death.

She pulled into the staff parking lot at the university and hurried up to the biology department. She had office hours this afternoon and wanted to check her appointments before she started her first class.

As she was walking through the staff room, one of the interns looked up at her and cleared her throat.

"Professor Thomas," the girl said.

The intern's name was Brenda Myers. A freshman biology student who was in her Intro to Marine Biology class. She worked as an admin through work study. She did tasks like answer phones, take messages, and general office work.

"What is it, Brenda?"

"I got the strangest message from public access TV this morning. Were you on last night?"

"I was interviewed for the fishing report last week. I didn't know it aired last night."

"Well, apparently they got a very strange message for you."

"A strange message for me? Was it some kind of anti-clam lunatic?"

"Is that a thing?" Brenda asked, raising an eyebrow.

"There are a lot of mollusk haters out there," Heather said with a straight face. Brenda stared at her, trying to comprehend whether the professor was pulling her leg.

"It's not a thing, Brenda. I'm just kidding," Heather said stifling a laugh. "So, what was his message?"

“Apparently, a man named Thorne Winter needs you to join mate.com because you’re his fated mate,” Brenda said, handing her the Post-It note with the message on it. Heather looked down at the yellow sticky note. She bit her lip and narrowed her eyes.

“Whaaa?” she said, scratching her chin.

“You have to know what mate.com is, living in Selkie,” Brenda said.

“It’s like a shifter dating site, isn’t it?”

“That’s exactly what it is. Maybe this guy saw you on TV, and he just knew that you were the one.”

Brenda’s eyes grew wide like a lovesick puppy, and Heather suddenly felt extremely uncomfortable.

“That is unexpected,” she said.

“Are you going to sign up?” Brenda asked, clasping her hands together besides her cheek.

“Maybe?” Heather said, gripping her leather satchel. “Thanks for the message, Brenda.”

She turned on her heel, walked down the hall to her office, unlocked the door, and slid behind her desk. She let out a breath she didn’t realize she was holding and rested her elbows on the desk.

“Mate.com?” she said out loud.

Heather leaned back in her chair and crossed her arms. She had just been thinking about how much she wanted a man in her life. And a man had come looking for her.

Not a man. A shifter.

Heather had known several shifters growing up and had met many more since moving to Selkie.

Selkie was a town full of shifters. The head of the biology department was a dolphin shifter. You couldn’t go five feet without running into a shifter in this town, and that made for a pretty stable world.

Shifters were dedicated to family and community. They took care of their properties and paid their taxes. They were involved in the school and cared deeply about their children.

Any woman would be lucky to have a shifter husband. But it had never occurred to her to join mate.com. She wasn't a member of any dating sites. The truth was, she was afraid to start dating again.

She wanted someone in her life, but she also needed to protect Maggie. It was hard to imagine bringing someone new into Maggie's life. He would have to be a good, hard-working, honest man that she could trust.

Most shifters were exactly that. She took a deep breath and let it out before she jiggled the mouse on her computer and typed in her security code. A few moments later, she was on the site, answering the questionnaire.

When she was finished with her profile, her matches started to load on the screen. She held her breath as she scrolled down the page past photo after photo of the most gorgeous men she'd ever seen.

She stopped. What if she found a mate and he was across the country or the world? There was no way that she was going to move away from her perfect life with Maggie, her grandmother Pearl, and her job.

She squeezed her eyes closed and covered her mouth. When she opened her eyes again, she decided there was no harm in just looking. She continued scrolling down the page—92%, 95%, 97%. She bit her lip and scrolled again. And there it was. 100%. Her eyes widened and her mouth dropped. Fierce Wolf was his profile name, and he was absolutely breathtaking.