

## Fierce Wolf Chapter 3 - Tips

“Congratulations, we’ve found your fated mate.”

Thorne looked at the message on his phone, his eyes widening further with each beat of his frantic heart. He stabbed the phone with his index finger, opening the app.

In two seconds, he was looking at Heather Thomas’s face smiling against the backdrop of a sunny day at a sandy beach, her curly blonde hair blowing in a soft breeze. He was in complete awe of her beauty and perfection. He had to sit down on the couch to prevent himself from collapsing.

He was dumbstruck for a moment, unable to comprehend what he should do. Finally, he tapped on the button that said “Message Now” at the top of the app, and a message screen loaded.

His fingers hovered over the screen—he had no idea what to say. He assumed Heather would know that they’d been matched the minute she joined the website.

He wanted to tell her everything. How much he needed her to save his life. He sucked his tongue and gritted his teeth. He couldn’t tell her that. She would not react well to a man so desperate for her attention.

Thorne let out a deep breath. He had no idea what to do or what to say. Seventy-five years ago, he’d been something of a ladies’ man—if that had even been possible in the tiny wilderness town where they’d lived.

He had made out with several women and had even made love to a few of the more adventurous young women in his area, but he had no idea how to court a modern woman. Especially one who could turn out to be his mate. The bond between mates could never be broken. It was more than a lifelong commitment—it was a soul commitment. And Thorne knew that it was a lot to ask anyone.

Anger rose in his chest, and he shot to his feet, tossing the phone on the couch. He hated this feeling of dependence and impotence. He had to make her his. Not just to break the curse, but because he could already feel the pull of the mate bond drawing him towards her.

But if she rejected him, what then? Not only would he be fated to live for eternity under the Snow Queen’s curse, he would also never have his true love.

Thorne could have lived without a mate up until that moment; he hadn’t really cared much about it. Just seeing her beautiful face, intelligent eyes, and innocent soul had provoked something deep inside him. Something that made him yearn for her touch, to hear her gently call his name while he made love to her endlessly.

He paced his apartment, growling at himself and at the demands of his inner wolf who insisted he claimed the woman right now. Her profile said she was a professor at the local university. He could drive over there to find her classroom or office and take her then and there.

But he knew even if it broke the curse, not only would he go to jail, but he would never gain her love. He had never wanted a woman's love before seeing her face, and he knew he wanted that more than he'd ever wanted anything in his life. It made him feel weak and dependent. It was a feeling he couldn't stand.

He heard his cellphone ping with a new notification from across the room. He walked over and read the message. All it said was "Hi."

He ground his teeth and growled. He wished he had some idea of what to say. He didn't think the lines he'd used on the drunken women in the tiny backwoods bars would work on the Marine Biology professor. So he responded the only way he could.

"Hi," he typed in reply.

That seemed a moronic communication and it made him even angrier than he had been before. But at least the door was open. He saw the little dots moving across the screen. He knew that meant she was typing out a reply.

"So we are fated mates. That's weird."

"You don't know the half of it," he said before thinking. Why did everything he said sound so stupid?

"Maybe we should meet," she said.

His heart leapt with happiness. He couldn't believe that this woman was already having such a profound effect on his emotions. How could he live this way? How could he let anyone have so much control over him?

"How about now?" he typed.

The faster it moved, the better. He needed to know if she would accept him and love him and take his claiming bite, though he knew that going slower was the better way to form a long-lasting relationship. The anxiety rolling through him was unbearable. He would do anything to make it stop.

"I have class right now, but we can meet for lunch?"

"Where?" he replied.

"I work at the University of Alaska in Selkie. Isn't it crazy that we both live here? LOL. If you can come over at noon to the cafeteria we can hang out for a little while before my next class."

"Sounds like a plan," he said.

He wished that he could manage to say something that didn't sound completely stupid, but at least she had agreed to meet him. That was the best he could hope for.

He could barely sit still waiting for 12 o'clock. He spent most of the morning pacing back and forth in his living room. An hour before the date he showered and dressed and tried to calm down.

But nothing seemed to help. He was unbelievably stressed and that just made him angrier and angrier as the moments passed. When it was time to go, he charged down to his car and climbed behind the wheel without a thought in his brain.

Thorne drove across the island and parked in the university lot near the cafeteria. He switched off the engine and gritted his teeth while gripping the wheel. He took several deep breaths, trying to calm down, but the wolf inside him snarled and nipped at the backs of his eyes.

He wanted to leave, to turn tail and run away. The momentary desire to return to his family's land—to his wolf form, to live forever alone in the forest, flashed before his mind. No one would ever have control over him again. Except, then, the Snow Queen would win. She would retain ultimate control.

Thorne finally let out a deep breath, climbed out of the car, and walked across the windy parking lot and up the concrete path towards the cafeteria. He stepped inside the glass and chrome building with massive windows that looked out onto the day. The roof rose sixteen feet and there were several skylights that beamed light down into the plant filled room.

The place had a very relaxed feel and there were students sitting on the chairs eating lunch while others were reading their books and drinking coffee. He fought the desire to leave, or to rush towards her and place his teeth on her jugular without her consent. Both options were completely unacceptable, but the better option filled him with more fear than he had ever experienced.

He walked slowly into the room, picking up the scents of the various meals from the students' trays. He didn't see her anywhere. They hadn't agreed on a place to meet, other than the cafeteria itself.

Thorne looked up and found Heather walking out of the food court holding a tray. She had a leather satchel slung over her shoulder and her shoulder-length curly hair was pinned back at the sides.

Their eyes met across the room, and he could smell her scent over every other aroma in the place. It overwhelmed him, consumed him, and he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that she was his.

Her lips slowly curved into a smile, and he could see the hesitation in her eyes before she squared her shoulders and started toward him.

“Hi,” she said, beaming up at him. He could smell her desire, mingling with anxiety. It was such a heady combination that he could barely reply. “I’m Heather. Heather Thomas.” She balanced her tray in one hand while she reached out to him with the other. He took her outstretched hand in his and shook it slowly, feeling her soft skin against his own rough flesh.

“I’m Thorn Winter. It’s nice to meet you,” he said.

On contact, he felt electric jolts surge through his arm and into his heart. He knew then he could never harm this woman. He would protect her with his life. She was everything to him, now and forever.

“They have an excellent clam chowder today, and the bread always comes from this amazing little bakery downtown.”

“Sounds good,” he said in a stumbling voice.

“I’m going to sit down over there.” She pointed to a table by the window that looked out onto the quad.

There were students playing hacky sack in the cool spring air outside. He nodded once, trying to train his expression to be light and friendly, but he knew it probably came across as a grimace.

She chuckled lightly and started towards her chosen table. He felt stuck in place for several beats before pulling his feet out of the mental quicksand and started into the food court.

He picked up a tray and walked along the buffet line, past several refrigerators. He chose the clam chowder and a hunk of French bread with some bottled tea and paid for his meal at the register. He had to admit that the food smelled good, but his stomach was so tied in knots that he wasn’t sure he could eat.

Thorne walked over to Heather’s table and sat across from her. She had a book open and a stack of papers in front of her that she was marking with a red pen.

“Do you enjoy being a professor?” he asked.

"I love my students, and teaching is wonderful, but to be honest, I'd planned to do field research before I got pregnant with Maggie."

"You have a child?" he asked, a full spoon of clam chowder hanging in the air above his bowl. He placed the spoon back in the soup and stared into her lovely hazel eyes.

"I talked about it in my bio on mate dot com," she said flatly. "Didn't you read it?" Her eyes twinkled with both indignation and mirth. He hated to think he had disappointed her. It made his skin crawl.

"No. I just saw your picture and I knew. I need to read your bio."

"You saw me on TV last night?" she asked with a smirk. "I received a very interesting message this morning. The admin intern thought it was very r0mantic."

"Romantic..." he said in a low rumbling voice.

"You do know what that is, right?" she said, tearing apart her bread and dipping it in the clam chowder.

"Yes," he said finally, scooping chowder in his mouth.

"What's your story, Thorne Winter? You barely filled out your bio, while I went through the trouble of fully filling out mine—which you didn't bother to read."

"I was cursed seventy-five years ago by the Snow Queen."

"Interesting," she said, pursing her lips and scrunching her eyebrows.

He realized that was probably the wrong answer, but Thorne was not one for beating around the bush.

"She was an evil witch who lived in a palace in the mountains above my family's land. When our mother took ill, we tried to take the snow flower that bloomed in her ice garden once a year. The legend said it granted youth and health to anyone who consumed it. But we were unable to save our mother. My brothers and I were all cursed to remain as wolves forever."

"You aren't a wolf right now," she said, taking a big bite of clam chowder.

"We could only be human one night a month on the full moon."

"Like a reverse werewolf," she said, her eyes widening and her smile broadening.

Thorne got the impression that she found him quite humorous. Thorne Winter had never been accused of being funny.

"I suppose so."

"But it's not a full moon now," she said, breaking off another piece of French bread and popping it in her mouth.

"We met a witch named Luna. She had a potion that could reverse the curse as long as we take it. But the only way to break it permanently is to claim our fated mates."

Heather began to choke on her bread and took a long sip of water. She coughed and sputtered and wiped her mouth with a napkin.

"So that would be me, right?" she asked with a hoarse laugh.

"Precisely."