

## Fierce Wolf Chapter 4 - Tips

The date was not going at all the way Heather had imagined. Thorne Winter was more intense than Batman, and his talk of witches and curses and claiming bites all really felt like red flags.

She was willing to humor the guy because he was her fated mate. Apparently. And, living in Selkie, one tended to respect shifter culture. But Heather had a three-year-old daughter to take care of. She couldn't have a questionable man in her life. No matter how drop-dead gorgeous Thorne might be, he was also not at all what Heather would consider stable husband material.

"You need to claim me to break the curse?" she asked. It was the strangest pickup line she'd ever heard.

He gritted his teeth and his eyes flashed with a violent light. She could swear she heard him growling. She did a double take and narrowed her eyes. The flags were getting redder every second.

"Well, Thorne, it's been real. But I really need to finish grading these papers." She grabbed her tray with her empty bowl and threw the papers back into her satchel.

He caught her wrist and stopped her before she stood.

"When can I see you again?" he asked, his voice rumbling.

"Let go of me," she growled.

"I've scared you. I'm sorry," he said, releasing his iron grip on her wrist.

She looked down at her pale flesh and saw he'd left a red mark. She shook her head and looked back at the gorgeous man. Good looks were not an excuse for this kind of behavior. He had several marks against him already.

"I should have waited to tell you about the Snow Queen until our second date," he said.

She let out a deep sigh and stared at him pointedly. Heather was a scientist. She didn't believe in magic or witches or curses or anything like that.

"Thorne, I'm willing to give you the benefit of the doubt, but you have to understand that all of this talk sounds crazy."

"I am a straightforward man. I say what I mean, I mean what I say, and I seldom wait to make an obvious decision."

"Well, you have to understand, I have a child. And she comes before anything else. The fact is that if you weren't a shifter, everything you just said would have been completely unacceptable. And you just grabbed me. I don't appreciate that at all."

He leaned his elbows against the table and raked his hands through his hair and then scrubbed them over his face until they covered his mouth.

"I'm sorry," he finally said, letting out a deep breath. "I don't know how to behave. I've been a wolf for seventy-five years. I want to be the man you need, and not just to break my curse. I want to love you. To protect you. And your daughter."

She would have to be extremely careful with this man, and she needed to talk to Grandma Pearl before she let things go any further. Her grandmother always gave the best advice and had her back no matter what.

"My brother's mate Luna is a witch."

"Okay."

"Luna runs New Moon Books. It's right next door to the bakery that makes this bread," he said, holding up a chunk.

"Oh," she said. "I know that store. I've been in there. But that was when the previous owner was still alive. I heard that her granddaughter took over the place. Are you telling me that she's a witch and she can do magic?" Heather asked him, thinking it completely absurd.

"Indeed," he said, not elaborating. They sat staring at each other for several long moments. "Luna made the potion that enables me to be a man. Otherwise, you would be meeting a wolf right now."

"Well, that would be interesting," she said. "Considering this is the first date I've been on since Maggie was born, I'm glad it's with a human and not an animal."

He huffed something that could possibly be interpreted as a laugh.

"So am I," he said.

"Well, Thorne, I will go speak with Luna myself. I'll check out your crazy story. And then I'll get back to you through [mate dot com](#) if I'm ready to go on a second date. How does that sound?"

"Good enough," he said, his voice tinged with violence.

Heather smiled through gritted teeth and grabbed her tray again, rising without being grabbed. She backed away and then turned towards the garbage, tossing hers away and then returning the tray to a stack.

She gave Thorne another furtive glance as she hurried out the cafeteria. He was brooding, staring out the window at the kids on the quad. Out in the crisp spring air, she took a deep breath, filling her lungs as if she'd been suffocating.

She shook her head and squeezed her eyes closed, trying to clear her mind. As she walked across the campus to her next class, she tried to put things into perspective.

Thorne Winter was obviously extremely attractive. More attractive than any man she'd ever been on a date with. More attractive than any man she'd ever even met in person. He looked like a movie star. An action flick starring some antihero.

On the negative side, that was definitely not her type. She needed someone stable, someone kind and thoughtful and loving. She needed someone who would be a good father for Maggie. And she would not settle for anything else. No way in hell. From what little she knew about Thorne, he was not that.

There had definitely been a spark between them. When she'd shaken his hand, she'd felt the electricity coursed through her body and ignite something deep inside her that had been dormant for so long she'd almost forgotten it was there.

She made it to her class and the students began to file in and take their seats before the lecture. As she spoke about water cycles and aquatic plants, she was unacceptably distracted by the memory of Thorne Winter's piercing blue eyes.

At the end of class when one of the students asked a simple question, she was momentarily stumped, standing in front of a bunch of freshmen with an open mouth. A couple of girls giggled in the back, snapping her out of her stupor. She answered the question, heat rising in her cheeks. There was nothing worse than being mocked by 18-year-olds.

When she dismissed the class, she sat down at the table and took out the papers for her next class, reading through the last of them. She could barely concentrate, so she took her papers back to her office and grabbed a cup of coffee from the department lounge.

After chugging down her entire thermos, she was completely buzzed. Her mind was still running a million miles a minute. Most of her thoughts were dominated by Thorne. She rubbed her temples and groaned. She hadn't been this distracted since she'd met Maggie's father.

Finally, she got down to business and finished grading her papers. The rest of the day went by in a blur, as if she was running on autopilot. After her last class, she called Pearl and told her she'd be a few minutes late picking up Maggie.

"That's absolutely fine dear, but what's wrong? You sound distressed."

"I'll talk to you about it when I get there, Gran. It's been a very strange day and I need your advice. But I need to stop and visit someone first to get some perspective."

"I'll be here. I'm always here for you, Heather. Don't ever forget it."

"I know you are, Gran. Thank you for everything."

"Don't even mention it, sweetheart. All that matters to me is you and Maggie and making sure that you're happy and healthy."

She got off the phone with her grandmother, more grateful than ever that she had someone she could count on for support and advice.

She climbed in her car and drove across town to New Moon Books. When she parked and stepped onto the sidewalk, she could smell the scent of pastries wafting out of River's Bakery next door.

She was definitely going to stop by after speaking with Luna. Hopefully, the woman was there. She could have called, but she felt that a question like this was best asked in person.

She slipped through the front door of New Moon Books to the tinkling sound of a bell. The bookshop was larger on the inside than it seemed on the outside, with rows of books and tables of trinkets and shelves lined with potions and New Age paraphernalia.

Heather had never been the kind of person to believe in any of these things, but she did enjoy reading a good thriller now and then. New Moon carried plenty of the newest bestsellers in every genre. She perused the offerings on the front table and picked up a book by her favorite author before turning to the counter to find a curvy, pretty blonde woman with bright blue eyes smiling at her.

"You're Thorne's mate," the woman said.

Heather's mouth dropped and so did the book, right onto the floor. It made a loud crash and they both jumped. Heather bent down to pick it up and set it on the counter in front of her.

"How did you know?"

Luna tapped her temple and said, "I'm psychic." She winked and smiled. "I also heard about it from his brother. The Doolittles still have access to his mate dot com profile on their home computer. They set the profiles up for the brothers because of the curse."

"So it's true," Heather said, her knees starting to shake.

"Honey, I think you need to sit down."

Luna locked the front door of the bookshop and took Heather by the elbow, gently guiding her to a seating area at the back of the store.

"Are you really a witch?" Heather asked, thinking that everyone had suddenly gone insane.

"I am."

"What does that mean?"

"I have very strong intuition. I am something of a medium, although the only spirit I speak with is my grandmother, and I'm an instinctive alchemist."

"So you can't do fire spells or anything like that?" Heather said, testing the woman.

"No, I can't. But there are witches who can," Luna said, smiling.

"Well." Heather shook her head.

"This is all a bit much to take in, isn't it? It was for me when I first got here. To discover that I had inherited the shop, that my grandmother was a witch, and that I was supposed to carry on her work. I thought I was going insane. But everything worked out, and now I have my hunky husband Rex, this beautiful shop, and so many wonderful new friends. The Doolittles are absolutely amazing people, and they helped the Winter brothers through a very, very challenging time."

All Heather could do was nod her head and smile. She felt like she had just walked into an insane asylum or had fallen down the well into Wonderland.

"You don't believe anything I'm saying, do you?" Luna said.

"How could you tell?"

"You look like you just smelled a fart. And my grandmother is telling me that you're going to need time. Thorn is tough one, I have to admit. I know him."

"Okay," Heather said, shrugging her shoulders. "What am I supposed to do now?"

"You came here for a reason, right? You wanted to know if his story was true?"

Heather nodded. She was so tongue-tied and muddled that she hadn't even asked the question she needed to ask. Somehow Luna just knew what she was thinking.

As a scientist, she had to be objective. Maybe Luna was just good at reading body language. And it was kind of logical that she would have those questions if they were all running with the same crazy story. Still, Luna seemed like a rational person, and she somehow believed that she was a witch herself.

"Magic is real, Heather. I'm sorry that I have to be the one to tell you that, but it's something that you're going to have to learn to accept if you're going to be mated with a Winter."

"Well, I'm not sure about that yet. Thorne grabbed my wrist. And that's not really the kind of behavior that I find acceptable."

"He is a handful. He is brash and angry. But he's also been cursed to live as a wolf for seventy-five years. I completely agree that grabbing you was unacceptable behavior, but I think maybe you could help him learn to relax."

"It's not my responsibility to teach him how to act," Heather said. "Besides, I have a child. How can I let someone like that around her?"

"Just give it time, Heather. You don't need to make any decisions yet." Luna patted her hand gently and gave her such a compassionate look that it made Heather instantly like her.

"Well thank you for corroborating his story. I really appreciate it."

"If you ever need anything else, just give me a call or come by. Next time, you have to meet my mate, Rex. He's absolutely yummy." Luna giggled and Heather stood from the armchair.

Luna seemed like a happy woman but being delusional could do that to you. She still had no proof that this whole magic thing was real, but she was willing to suspend her disbelief until she had enough evidence to make her final judgment.

## **Fierce Wolf Chapter 5 - Tips**

Thorne's sinner wolf screamed in frustration and rage. He stormed out to his truck and slammed his fist against the steering wheel. He had destroyed the date. What had possessed him to tell her about the Snow Queen? It had all just tumbled out of his mouth unbidden, and now he was stuck with the results of his own lack of tact. He should have waited, told her about it after they'd gotten to know each other better.

He slammed the steering wheel again and let out a frustrated roar. He couldn't sit in the parking lot a second longer. He pressed the ignition and pulled out of his parking spot.

He drove back across the bridge in a daze. He couldn't go home, he couldn't go back to the Doolittles', he couldn't go anywhere. He found himself driving up into the mountains through the winding narrow roads into the forest.

His inner wolf was screaming to come out. He patted his pocket where he kept a vial of potion. He had taken a dose just before the date and knew he should be fine for several more hours. Part of him wanted to allow the curse to take over, to pull him under and make him into the beast he'd been longer than he'd been a man.

He had no idea how to be the man that Heather needed. She was a mother with a little child. Thorne had been around the Doolittles' teenage children, but they were shifters, and their understanding of the shifter world was far different than Heather's. She was a human and a scientist; the most skeptical of all. How could fate have put them together? They seemed like a terrible match.

His temper was roiling like a raging sea in a storm. He parked his truck at a trailhead and burst out of the car. He knew that Heather was his. He wanted her more than anything he'd ever desired. He craved her like a drug. The anger that his need triggered inside him made him roar.

He ripped out of his clothes and sank to the ground in wolf form. He charged into the forest, needing to taste blood on his lips. He could smell the scent of prey on the air. Taste it on his tongue. It had been too long since he'd hunted. It was the only thing that soothed his inner beast.

He picked up his pace, charging off the trail and into the trees. Into the deep, dense forest where humans feared to tread. This was his domain. He had been an animal for so long he barely knew what it meant to be a man. Perhaps this was the place where he could find true freedom. He would live forever as a wolf if he just let Heather go. She would grow older, find another, and she would die while he remained a cursed animal howling in the darkness.

Perhaps it was better for everyone. He hated this feeling of need. And the look of fear and doubt in her eyes made him howl with anger. He didn't want to be that man. He didn't want to be who she thought he was. Too dangerous to be taken home to her child.

Maybe he was. Maybe he owed it to all of them to stay away.



He picked up the scent of an Alaskan hare and he lowered his head, giving chase. The rabbit darted through the underbrush, making for its hole. Thorne charged, overtaking the small gray beast.

He lunged at the hare and snapped its neck. Blood poured over his tongue and down his throat. He ripped the skin from the meat and gorged on its flesh, eating every morsel of muscle, sinew and organs. He bathed in the blood, smearing it on his face. His human consciousness was so deep behind the mind of the animal that he could not control his instinctive behavior.

Once the fierce wolf had eaten his fill, the mind of the man suddenly pushed its way into the animal's consciousness, prompting him to return to his truck.

Thorne walked slowly, not wanting to leave the forest and the domain he understood. The new world that had arisen during his years of confinement made no sense to him. It made no sense to the man, and even less to the wolf. He understood the deep snow in winter, the taste of blood from a kill, the arctic winds from the north and the flashing northern lights in the clear night sky.

They had awoken as if from a dream into this new world full of new ways and technology he barely understood. Everything was different, from the clothing to the food to the vehicles. The music was loud and discordant, women wore skimpy clothes, and the world had become full of panic and disharmony. Was this even a place he wanted to be? He didn't know.

When he shifted back into his human form and pulled on his clothes, he knew that Heather was worth all this torment. He couldn't help it even if he wanted to. His every thought, every action, every word for the rest of his life would always be to serve her. To give her exactly what she needed.

And if he truly believed she'd be better off without him, he would do that. He still didn't know for sure if that was the case. He had to fight for her. He had to fight himself and his own instincts, his own rage and disappointment. He had to get it all under control so that she would accept him.

But what would he do if she didn't? If he did all that work, made all those sacrifices, twisted himself inside out to be a better man and she still didn't accept him? What then?

It was unbearable to think, unbearable to feel so out of control, so vulnerable to another person. He had no idea how he would react if he tried everything he could, and she still rejected him. He might go mad. He might tear down the entire town and set it ablaze.

He looked at himself in the rearview mirror. He knew he was capable of such violence. It was the violence of an angry, cursed wolf and a monster. She needed him to be tame. Tame for a human, let alone an animal like him. He had to tame himself to claim her, and there was no guarantee that she would let him even then.



He gripped the steering wheel until his knuckles went white. What choice did he have? Run away like a coward with his tail between his legs? He would never do that. And if she still didn't accept him, he would be a man of honor like his father and his alpha older brother Rex.

He would walk away. Without violence and anger and bloodshed. He would leave her in peace and protect her from himself. He would return to his ancestral land and try one more time to kill the Snow Queen. Even though he knew that any attempt to seek revenge against her would mean his death. She was the most powerful witch alive and more dangerous than any dragon.

When he turned on the car, his phone rang, and he saw the caller was Rex. He answered, his voice a hoarse grumble.

"Heather came by the shop," Rex told him.

"I hoped she would," he said, his voice clearing.

"She's very skeptical, Thorne. You had better play your cards right, or you could lose her."

"I know. It's all I can think about. You don't need to remind me."

"She has a young child. Fate only knows why she was matched with you."

"Thank you for your vote of confidence, brother."

"You're a good man, Thorne, even though you can be a thorn in my side."

"Your humor hasn't improved in seventy-five years," Thorne growled through gritted teeth.

"Luna thinks I'm hilarious," Rex said.

"She has to think you're funny. She's your mate."

"And Heather is your mate. If you play your cards right, you will have your happily ever after. But you have to get that temper under control."

"I know. I will tame myself."

"Why does it sound like you think that's an insult?"

"Because it is," Thorne barked.

"You want pups of your own. Don't pretend you don't. We all do. We've been waiting for almost a century to find our mates. Now you've found yours. This is your chance to have the life you wanted before the curse. The life you've been waiting for all these years. It's right in front of you. All you have to do is stop being an a.ssh0le."

"Fvck you, Rex," Thorne said, clicking off the phone.

He tossed it on the floor of the passenger seat and pulled out of the parking lot. He didn't need his brother to tell him what he already knew. And he certainly didn't need to be called an a.ssh0le.

Thorne had a temper, yes, but he hadn't always been that way. He'd liked hunting and fishing and driving into the village for beer, but the years as an animal had changed him. They had twisted his desires and his mind until all he saw was bl00d and anger and death.

Now the fates had seen fit to force him into a ready-made domestic life with a skeptical, high-achieving modern woman and her tiny child. It was a recipe for disaster. He was not fit for such things, and she could never accept him as he was. Nothing in her would ever understand or forgive any indiscretion. And he had no idea how to calm the inner violence that raged in his heart.

When he made it back to his apartment, he swung open the door of his fridge and pulled out a six-pack of beer. He sat down on the couch and tuned into the sports channel on his newly connected cable. They were playing hockey, and he let out a long sigh of relaxation as he watched the two teams get into a monstrous pileup of fists and elbows and rage. He sipped his beer and chuckled. Maybe he should take up hockey.