

## Witty Wolf Chapter 11 - Tips

Tate woke to the sunlight streaming through the window. He was happy the new potion allowed him to sleep in human form. The sun glowed in Dalia's wild red hair. The sight of her face peacefully resting against the pillow was like watching an angel fly through the clouds.

His heart wept with the joy and beauty that he had before him. He had to do something for her to show her how special she was to him. He wished that he could give her the world.

He wished he could pluck the stars of the sky and fashion jewelry out of them. That was the only thing that matched the beauty of the sparkle in her eyes.

He climbed out of bed and pulled on his clothes then tiptoed into the kitchen. He checked her fridge and cabinets and began to pull out everything he would need to make a delicious breakfast.

He fixed a pot of coffee and put it on to brew before cracking eggs into a bowl. He had the bacon sizzling in a pan as he stirred the eggs and grated cheese for his scramble.

"That smells delicious," Dalia said, walking into the kitchen wrapped in a bathrobe.

Her hair was all over the place and her eyes were bleary. She smiled when she smelled the coffee. She walked toward him and lifted on her tiptoes to kiss his cheek.

"Thank you," she said, turning to the cabinets to grab a coffee cup.

She poured herself a cup and filled it with cream before settling into one of the stools at the kitchen counter. She watched him pluck the bacon from the pan and put it on a plate to cool.

He shoveled the eggs onto two plates. Toast popped out of the toaster, and he slathered it with butter and strawberry jam. He cut the toast in half and placed it on the plate. He set one in front of her and climbed into the stool beside her. Tate then shoveled eggs into his mouth.

"You can cook." She munched on bacon.

"Rebecca and Patrick Doolittle taught me how to use a modern kitchen. They were both excellent cooks. We had the most amazing meals. I miss hanging out with the Doolittle kids. We used to play Call of Duty and Mario Kart."

"Who are the Doolittles?"

“They’re a family of bear shifters that found us when we first came to Fate Island. That was before we met Luna and got the potion. They let us sleep in their woodshop, and we stayed with them until we sold our land. We each got a tidy sum from the sale. Everyone but Blake, who didn’t want to sell. That’s how I got my car and apartment.”

“Why didn’t he want to sell the land?”

“It was in our family for three generations. I understand the sentimental attachment, but there was nothing left there except a decaying hunting cabin. That’s just my family drama. What are your plans today?”

“I was going to finish my painting and maybe take a hike to get some more pictures of the spring forest. I prefer to work outdoors, but I can be a lot more efficient in the studio. Four Winds Gallery is begging for more paintings since the tourist season is coming up.”

“Is it safe for you to go out by yourself right now?”

“Would you come with me?”

“Of course.”

Dalia went to her studio to grab her photography bag while Tate packed a lunch. They put the camera bag and backpack in the backseat, and he climbed behind the wheel. He turned on the ignition. Whiney Houston’s “How Will I Know” blared through the radio. He turned it down and she looked at her.

“What kind of music do you like?” he asked. “I have a thing for 80s pop music.”

“Sounds great.” She giggled and sang along with the radio.

They wound their way up into the mountain, climbing higher and higher through the yellow cedar forest. When they stopped at the trailhead, the sky was bright and blue, the spring air was crisp and warm. He grabbed the backpack out of the backseat and Dalia slung her camera bag over her shoulder.

They were both dressed in sturdy clothes and boots for the trail. He smiled at her. Her eyes glistened in the morning sun.

“This trail has a wonderful view of the valley. It’s exactly the kind of thing that tourists love. The landscape of Fate Island is the most beautiful in the world.”

They climbed higher on the trail and stopped every once in a while for Dalia to take photographs. When they made it to the top of the hill, there was a clearing that looked down on the valley with the ocean beyond.

It was a breathtaking landscape. Tate stared at it while Dalia clicked away on her camera. He set the backpack on a picnic table and arranged their lunch. When she was done taking photographs, she sat down opposite him and bit into her turkey sandwich. He poured them both cups of lemonade and she gratefully accepted hers.

“It’s such a beautiful day. I couldn’t imagine better weather. The clouds on the horizon are going to be so beautiful in a painting.”

“Nothing could be as beautiful as you,” he said.

A blush rose in her cheeks, and she looked down at her sandwich.

“You say such sweet things. I’m not used to it.”

“I want to say and do and be the sweetest thing you’ve ever known.”

## **Witty Wolf Chapter 12 - Tips**

Blake wasn’t around when Tate got home. He was glad. Having Blake in his house had been distracting him from his comedy routine. He and Dalia were making so much progress in their relationship, he felt utterly inspired. The hike up the mountain had been tons of fun. He loved watching her find little moments of beauty with her camera.

She saw the world in such a fantastic light, despite everything she’d been through. The greatest inspiration of all was his mate. The way she persevered through difficulty—how she maintained her sense of herself and of life.

How she opened her heart to him even though she’d been hurt. He wanted to give her all his love and support. He wanted to build a life for them where they could both be safe and happy, pursue their dreams, and build new ones together.

He went to his room and found the notepad he used for writing jokes hidden in his bedside table. Blake would just look at him blankly whenever he tried to tell a joke, and it got under his skin. He didn’t need Blake’s negativity interfering with his process.

Soon he would perform at open mic night. He wanted to bring down the house, like Jake.

Tate began pacing the room, telling his jokes and listening to his timing. He had crossed words out and added new ones, had lightbulb moments for completely new jokes, and made himself laugh quite a few times.

When he was done with the writing and practice, he felt so good about what he’d accomplished that he wanted to share it with Dalia. He picked up his phone and noticed that he’d missed a text from her.

“I was so inspired I finished my painting.”

There was an image she had taken of the painting that had been unfinished on her easel that morning. It was now completely done. The moody oceanic landscape gave a sense of the tumultuous weather and the broody undercurrent of the tide. But at the same time, there was a lightness in it—a sense of hope and a way through adversity.

Tate wasn't sure how he saw all of that in her painting. He didn't know anything about art. But when he looked at his mate's work, he somehow knew exactly how she'd felt when she painted it. It was a strange and wonderful sensation and he savored it. He wanted to delve even more deeply into her heart.

He sent her a text back, telling her that he'd finished his comedy routine.

“When are you going to perform it?” she asked with a winking emoji.

“I hope soon. I think that I'm ready.” He let out a long breath.

“Want to share it with me?” she asked.

“Why don't you come over?”

The sun was starting to set but Blake hadn't returned. He had no idea where his younger brother had gone, but his backpack and things were all missing from the living room. Maybe he had decided to go stay with Damien and Venus.

Tate texted Dalia his address and tidied up while he waited for her to arrive. Worried about her being on the road alone at night.

“How was your drive?” he asked, taking her coat. He hung it up in the hall closet and they walked into the living room.

“It was fine.”

He wrapped his arm around her and pulled her close, caressing the skin of her cheek as their kiss deepened. He loved every bit of her, every inch, every nuance. She was beauty personified, and it melted deep into his heart. His life had changed when she came into it, and Tate never wanted to go back to how it had been before. Just as he was about to pull her even closer, his front door swung open.

“Blake? What are you doing here?” he asked with alarm.

“I'm staying here,” Blake said grumpily, trudging forward with his backpack slung over his shoulders. He collapsed onto the couch beside them, completely breaking the mood.

“Blake, this is Dalia. My mate.”

"It's nice to meet you. Congratulations. It must be amazing to be matched with one of us," Blake said sarcastically.

"Tate is amazing," Dalia said, looking up at him.

Blake rolled his eyes, and Tate grimaced. This was exactly what he had hoped to avoid.

"I thought you went to Damien's house," Tate said.

"I went for a walk and then got lunch. And then I hung out on the docks for a while."

"Well, at least you got out," Tate said.

"What are you two doing besides making out? You're not going to end up like Damien and Venus, are you?"

"We were just celebrating our creative wins," Tate said. "I finished my routine and Dalia finished her painting."

"I came over so Tate would perform it for me." Dalia grinned.

"Right," Tate said, glancing at his brother.

"You don't want me to hear your comedy routine?" Blake asked. "Is it that bad?"

"I think it's really good," Tate said defensively.

"Why don't we order a pizza and chat before Tate practices his routine for us?" Dalia suggested.

"Good idea," Tate said, grabbing his phone to order a pizza. His heart raced with apprehension. Before Blake showed up, he had been on cloud nine. Now he was agitated and confused.

He called the pizza restaurant and ordered several large pies with all the toppings, dessert, and sodas.

"Isn't it amazing that we can just order food to come to our door?" Tate said, as he tracked the driver on his app. The order was almost there.

"If you like that sort of thing," Blake said, crossing his arms.

"Well, you don't have to have any," Tate said.

He opened the door for the delivery driver, he took the pizzas. Tate placed the boxes on the table and opened everything up. Blake walked over and gathered several slices on his paper plate.

"I thought you didn't want any," Tate said with a laugh.

"I never said that."

Tate sat down with Dalia on the couch. Blake sat in the armchair, shoving pizza in his mouth.

"Such a short time ago we had no idea pizza delivery even existed. We had to hunt for every meal we ate, or we would starved."

"I know the point you're trying to prove right now, Tate, and you can just save it."

Tate's stomach turned. He was so tired of Blake's negativity. He wanted to enjoy his new life and his time with his mate. He knew he shouldn't antagonize Blake, but he was tired of his mopey behavior.

"Who doesn't like to eat?" Tate said, finishing up his pizza.

He didn't feel any more relaxed than before. He wanted to tell his brother to go take a hike. But after a hundred years together, his sense of loyalty outweighed his annoyance. Instead, Tate stood up in front of the TV and cleared his throat.

"Okay, wait till the end to tell me what parts you liked and didn't."

"Absolutely. I'm so excited." Dalia set down her plate and gave him her full attention.

He glanced over at Blake and saw him roll his eyes. This was not going to be an easy audience, despite his lovely mate being there. They were so close to making their commitment to each other, and Tate didn't want anything to get in the way of that.

He started with his routine, getting a laugh out of Dalia when he came to the punchline of his opener. Blake made a grunting sound, which Tate decided to take as a laugh.

He smiled to himself and then went into the bulk of his routine. His theme was shifter life and finding a fated mate. He knew it was a niche topic, but the people of Selkie were predominantly shifters.

Dalia laughed all through his routine. Blake laughed at this final joke and Tate was elated that he'd made his bitter, gloomy brother laugh out loud.

"That was wonderful," Dalia said, before he even asked.

“What was your favorite part?” he asked, hoping to gain insight into making it better.

“I loved the intro. And the jokes about shifter dating were spot on.” She giggled. He’d made a joke about human women’s exes, which was based on her challenges with Hank.

“I’m glad you were okay with that. I was worried it might offend you.”

“No. I think it was good.” She took another bite of pizza.

Tate felt like Dalia was growing stronger as they spent more time together. Not that she needed him to be strong—she’d already done so much on her own. He was so glad she trusted him after everything she’d been through. He hoped that he deserved it.

“What was your favorite part, Blake?” Tate asked reluctantly.

“The end.”

Tate screwed up his lips, but then smiled. “So you liked the last joke the best. Fair. What was your least favorite part, Dalia?”

“Hm. I didn’t like it when you talked bad about yourself. But that doesn’t mean it wasn’t funny.”

“Note taken,” he said, giving her a big smile. “Blake?”

Blake sighed. “I don’t know how you can make jokes about mating when we’re in the middle of a war with an evil witch.”

“Eh. War? Witch? What?”

“The Snow Queen is on our land. And we just left it. We left her to do whatever she wants.”

“That subject didn’t seem to make for very relatable comedy,” Tate said, smirking.

“I’m so done with this,” Blake said, springing to his feet. He grabbed his jacket and backpack and started for the door. “I’m going to Damien’s house.”

## Witty Wolf Chapter 13 - Tips

“Sorry about that,” Tate said, sitting next to Dalia.

“It’s okay.” She wished there was something she could do to help. “He has his own issues. He has to get over them in his own time.”

“Yeah, but he keeps making it my issue too. I hate to admit it, but I’m glad he left.”

“It’s fine to admit that,” Dalia said, reaching out to take his hand.

“But he’s my brother. I’ve spent the last hundred years with my brothers. We are bonded to the core. But in this new world, I’m just getting tired of his whining.”

“I know.” She stroked his hand. “You have the right to your own space. You shouldn’t be ashamed of that.”

“He’s gone now. The problem has taken care of itself.”

He laughed and she fell into the comforting humor in his eyes. She loved being in his world. He cared so deeply about others. But he also wanted to lighten the mood and make people laugh. She loved his energy, and how he saw the world. It was a relief to be around someone who could lift her spirits.

Dalia hadn’t always been so introverted. She’d been outgoing and popular in the art scene in LA. And even while living in Selkie, she’d never missed an opportunity to be part of a social event or to join a group related to one of her many passions.

It wasn’t until she got into a relationship with Hank that things had started to change. He had monopolized her mind and her time. Even when he was gone, she still couldn’t stop thinking about him and the things that he said. Every time she had wanted to ask him about his cheating or his lack of help with finances, he would turn the conversation around on her.

He had made it out like she was being selfish and controlling, and she hated the idea of being those things. It was the complete opposite of how she saw herself. It always seemed to stop her in her tracks.

Tate was right there in front of her. He was a man who was wide open, totally willing to share his heart. He wore it on his sleeve with childlike abandon.

That didn’t make him weak. It made him strong. It meant that he could love her how she needed to be loved. With tenderness and understanding. He could lift her out of her melancholy and bring her back into the light of day.

“You’ve been more than generous with Blake,” Dalia said, remembering how hard it had been to get Hank to leave her house when she wanted him gone.

“Now he’s Damien’s problem. Those two have a much larger house with guest bedrooms. He’s better off there.”



"It's hard to give up on people you care about, even when they're being horrible." Dalia laughed.

"Yeah," he said, squeezing her hands.

"But that just means we're loving people."

He pulled her closer, and she laid her head against his chest. He stroked her hair as she listened to his heartbeat.

"It's hard to trust your own heart when you've been hurt," she said.

"You're brave," he whispered into her hair. "I admire you so much. Being able to open your heart again after everything you've been through is heroic. I want you to know I understand that."

"It's nothing like what you've been through." She felt almost dumb for comparing them.

"We suffered. That's true. But I had my brothers. They had my back no matter what. We were a pack. We counted on each other through thick and thin; through the bonds of blood and brotherhood."

"I could have tried harder to reach out, to talk to someone about it, but I felt so ashamed. I didn't know what was happening. I had no idea I was becoming so isolated."

"You deserve the world, Dalia. You deserve to taste every morsel of goodness this planet has to offer. You are a beautiful light in the darkness. You bring such loveliness into existence with your art. I can see it in the way you look at the landscape. You see beauty that others don't. You give birth to it and share it through yourself. It's awe-inspiring."

"Oh Tate," she said, pressing her lips to his.

He filled the longing in her heart with such an overflow of love. It felt like it would burst. She'd never been so full. It was as if he saw her to the very depths of her. Something she never believed anyone else would ever see. Let alone find worthy of love. It made her want to cry.

Tears slid down her cheeks as he kissed her. It was like they could fall into each other and live in bliss forever.