

Witty Wolf Chapter 3 - Tips

"I'm staying here," Blake said, pushing his way through Tate's front door.

Tate whirled around, watching his younger brother drop his bags on the floor.

"Well, hello, Tate, it's nice to see you. How have you been?" Tate said mockingly.

"I can't stay with the Doolittles anymore," Blake said.

"We shouldn't be staying with them anyway. You have the money to get your own place now. You should've moved out weeks ago."

"I'm not using that money. I didn't want to sell the land."

"So instead, you're going to sleep on my couch?" Tate asked.

Annoyance rose in his blood. Tate wasn't in the mood for his little brother's pity party.

"Why don't you stay with Felix?" Tate asked.

His older brother had already purchased himself a four-bedroom house in the hills and was starting a software development company. Felix was a fast learner, and he knew what he wanted out of life faster than any of them.

Tate was still figuring out what he wanted, and he didn't want Blake's moodiness interfering with his comedy research.

"It was Felix's idea to sell the property," Blake growled, spreading his sleeping bag on Tate's couch.

Tate stared at his brother, crossing his arms over his chest. This was going to put a damper on his plans for the evening.

"Why don't you stay with Damien and Venus?" Tate asked. "They have a huge house."

They'd purchased a Victorian mansion just outside of town.

"They spend all their time mating." Blake groaned and collapsed on the couch. "I can't deal with it anymore."

"What about Heather and Thorne?" Tate asked.

"You think that Heather wants a strange man staying in the house with her daughter?" Blake asked.

“You’re not a strange man. You’re Thorne’s brother.”

Blake was strange. He had been determined to stay on the land and defeat the Snow Queen even though they’d tried and failed multiple times. On one occasion, Damien had almost died. It was a lost cause, and there was nothing left on that land for anyone.

“What about Rex and Luna?” Tate asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I’m not staying with Rex,” Blake said darkly.

Tate knew that Rex would just tell Blake to shape up and deal with this life. He had \$300,000 in a bank account waiting for him. He shouldn’t be couch surfing in his brothers’ living rooms.

“So that leaves you,” Blake said, closing his eyes.

Tate sat down in his armchair and stared at the back of his brother’s head. Tate had planned an Eddie Murphy marathon, and he didn’t want Blake messing it up. He would spend his time moaning about how the brothers had ganged up on him and ruin the movies.

“Look, I’m busy right now,” Blake said.

“What are you doing, watching another movie?”

The opening credits of the film were paused on the big screen TV. Tate had popped a bag of popcorn. The smell of the salt and butter wafted through the air, making his mouth water. It only made him want to get rid of his little brother even more quickly.

“Yes, as a matter of fact, I’m studying comedy.” Not that Blake would know anything about having a good time.

“Comedy? Why?”

“I’m working on a set for open mic night at the pub.”

“What a waste of time,” Blake said, lying back down on the couch.

Tate clenched his fists and growled. His little brother was getting on his nerves. Blake needed to leave so Tate could enjoy Coming to America in peace.

Tate could relate to the main character. He had come to a new world, too. The preview looked hilarious. Blake was totally interrupting his flow.

Tate picked up the bowl of popcorn and shoved a handful in his mouth, chomping loudly.

“Don’t let me stop you,” Blake said.

Tate stared at the screen then at Blake. His little brother was obviously crying out for help.

“You need a purpose in life, Blake. There was nothing left for us on the land. Buy a new place on Fate Island. You can build your own house with your own two hands. You should start tonight.”

Blake sat up on the couch and stared at his brother. “It’s not just any land. It’s our land. I can’t believe how the rest of you could just let go and forget about the place where we spent a century of our lives. Where our father and grandfather before him lived and loved and died.”

“It’s surprisingly easy,” Tate said, taking another bite of popcorn. “I’d much rather eat popcorn and watch Eddie Murphy.”

He un-paused the film and sat back in his recliner, popping the footrest as the opening credits moved into the first scene. Blake growled and collapsed back onto the couch like an adolescent.

Tate rolled his eyes and was glad his brother was at least quiet through the film. He had a notepad on the table beside him where he jotted down takeaways from the film.

Blake snickered at a particularly hilarious joke. Tate raised his eyebrows and smiled, but he didn’t say anything about it. Blake would probably deny it anyway. He was so committed to being angry and morose. He wouldn’t let a shred of light into his life.

By the time the ending credits rolled, Tate was full of popcorn and happiness. Blake was leaning heavily on his palm. Just looking at him made Tate depressed.

“I could use some lunch,” Tate said. “You want to go to River’s bakery and get one of those croissant sandwiches?”

He was hoping that they might run into Rex at the bookshop next door, and he would talk some sense into his little brother.

“Not really,” Blake said with a long side.

“Well, I’m hungry, and I’m not leaving you here by yourself.”

He wanted his brother to get some sunshine and see some people. Tate parked his truck in front of River’s Bakery and climbed out. He waved at Rex through the bookshop window with a big grin. Luna walked towards the counter and waved too.

When Rex saw Blake stumble out of the truck, his happy expression changed. Tate shrugged, gripping his younger brother's shoulder and guiding him into the bakery.

Inside, the owner and master baker River was at the till. She was a beautiful raven shifter with long brown hair and hazel eyes.

"Greetings Winters," River said, standing at the counter. "What can I get you today?"

"We'll have two ham and Swiss croissant sandwiches with that mustard you make." Tate's mouth watered. "A side of fruit salad and two custard tarts for dessert."

"And for Blake?" Raven asked with a laugh.

Tate laughed and shook his head.

"That'll do it for both of us," Tate said, slapping his younger brother on the back.

"Coming right up.

Blake and Tate slid a table by the window. Blake hunched over, resting his chin in his hands. Tate glanced out the window view of the park across the street. Spring was awakening more each. This was the first spring in seventy-five years that Tate would be a human and not an animal.

River approached the table and set their orders down in front of them. He immediately took a big bite of the croissant sandwich. That was something that you didn't get in the wilderness.

"Thank you, River. Your food is the best."

"Have you had any luck on mate.com?" River asked hopefully.

Tate shook his head."

"Not yet. But I haven't lost hope."

"How about you?" he asked her.

She sighed, her shoulders slumping. "No luck for me either. I've been on mate.com for ten years, and I still haven't found the one. I'm beginning to think that I don't have one."

"Nonsense. Everyone has a fated mate," Tate said.

"I hope you're right." Another group of patrons came into the café, and River helped them with their orders.

“Finding my mate is the only reason I’m still here,” Blake said.

“Something to look forward to.”

Tate grinned and took another bite of sandwich. He speared the strawberries and blueberries with a fork and slid them into his mouth. Blake was barely eating his food and Tate narrowed his eyes at his brother.

“I miss the flavor of caribou,” he said.

“You can get caribou at the grocery store. Fry it up in the pan. Delicious.” Tate made a chef’s kiss gesture with his fingers and Blake rolled his eyes.

“I want to taste the blood on my tongue and feel the animal’s body quivering between my teeth. I want it raw and alive.”

Tate raised an eyebrow. He didn’t hate hunting, but he didn’t love it. He was perfectly happy to have Raven’s staff make him a sandwich. And he loved strawberries.

“There’s plenty of deer in the park on Fate Island. If you want, you could go kill one of them. Spend the night in wolf form. Eat the whole carcass in one sitting. Roll in its blood. Just like old times.” Tate took a sip of water, laughing to himself.

“It’s not the same,” Blake said.

Tate shook his head at his little brother. He couldn’t understand his brother’s attachment to being an animal. His phone buzzed in his pocket, pulled it out, and looked at the screen.

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

Tate choked on his water and dropped his phone on the table. Blake looked up at him and asked him if he was all right. Tate covered his mouth with a napkin and tried to clear his lungs of water, his eyes wide and his heart pounding. He picked up his phone and turned it to his brother.

“Your fated mate?” Blake asked, excitement in his voice.

Tate finally got control of his breathing and tapped on the notification to open up the mate.com app. It went right to her profile.

Landscape Lover was stunning. Curly red hair that she kept pinned behind her ears. Almond-shaped green eyes that almost seemed too big for her face. Delicate full lips and cheekbones.

His throat was raspy as he tried to breathe. He flipped through the two images of her. One looked like a professional headshot, and another of her painting a landscape somewhere overlooking the ocean. He looked more closely at the photograph and realized he knew that view. It was of Selkie Harbor.

“She lives in Selkie,” he said. “She’s right here. She’s been here all along.”