

Witty Wolf Chapter 4 - Tips

Dalia stared at her phone, the image of Witty Wolf filling the screen. She placed her palm on her forehead, her lips parted and her eyes wide. It felt like a dream.

A message popped up on her screen and she nearly dropped her phone.

“Hi. It’s me. My name’s Tate. I am so happy to meet you.”

Dalia held her trembling fingers over the screen, not sure how to reply. Her heart raced in her throat. She hadn’t expected to be matched with someone so quickly. It was all so very unexpected and sudden.

Garfield meowed and rubbed up against her ankle from the kitchen floor. She shook her head and tapped on the reply button. The text messenger came up on her screen and she stared at the empty line where her words should go.

She didn’t know what to say to him. After her relationship with Hank, she just didn’t trust herself anymore. She hadn’t seen the red flags. She wouldn’t ever let that happen to her again.

She turned off the phone and left it on the kitchen counter. She poured the last of her tea into the sink and went out to the back porch. The sun was starting to tip towards the horizon and a cool wind was blowing up from the sea.

She shivered and wrapped her arms around herself. She wanted to call her mother in California, but after everything that had happened with Hank, she didn’t know if she could deal with her mother’s constant questioning of her life choices.

Her parents had wanted her to stay in LA. They couldn’t understand why she wanted to be in Alaska. To them, she was throwing her life away. When she’d been dating Hank, they had told her she should come home. He was not the kind of man they wanted her to end up with—too blue collar and too rough around the edges.

None of those things that had mattered to Dalia, but when things had finally fallen apart, all she’d gotten from her parents was “I told you so.” She couldn’t ask them for advice.

She thought about calling Marsha at the gallery. It had been Marsha’s idea to join mate dotcom. She knew that Marsha would tell to go for it.

Dalia let out a long, ragged sigh and shivered. She went back inside and picked up Garfield, rubbing him on the back as he purred and nuzzled into her neck.

“What should I do?” she asked him.

He meowed and licked her face. She set him back on the ground and picked up her phone again. Tate's message was still there. He hadn't texted again. She began to type.

"It's nice to meet you too, Tate. Where are you from?" she asked.

She'd seen his photographs but hadn't read his bio. She'd been too overwhelmed by the sight of him and the sudden appearance of his text.

"I'm in Selkie, Alaska, on Fate Island."

"Wow," she said aloud.

She shook her head. This certainly was turning out to be fated. What were the odds that they were in the same town? Her mind raced with a million thoughts. Maybe this app just matched people who were in the same area and called that fate?

No, she knew enough about shifters to know it had to work. It had a clever algorithm working behind the scenes to create wonderful relationships. Now she had the opportunity to have one of them herself.

"I'd love to meet you," his next text said.

Dalia bit her lip. Was she ready to meet him? Was she ready to be involved with the man that would want to be in a committed relationship with her for the rest of her life?

She had no idea how long it would take her to be ready. She just knew that she wasn't now. But maybe she would be. Maybe Tate would help her heal her heart.

Her first instinct was to not trust anyone. She had to protect herself, her home, and her heart from ever being treated that way again. She'd let herself sign up for this dating site, and she'd been matched with Tate.

It would be wrong to blow him off. She was his fated mate. She owed it to herself and to him to see if there was anything to it. What if there wasn't? What if she met him and she instantly didn't like him? What would she do then?

She did not want to end up with another Hank stalking her all around Selkie, making her life impossible. She had committed to staying in Alaska—this was her home—but Hank had made her question if she could even stay here.

If she ended up with another rotten man, she'd never be able to get over it. She would have to leave Selkie. Sell her aunt's house and return to Southern California. It would end her.

She still hadn't healed. Now a new man was coming into her life, bringing potential dangers with him. She didn't want to be alone forever. She wanted to fill her home with

laughter and children. She wanted the warm affection of a healthy relationship. Could Tate be that person?

"I'd like to meet you too," she finally replied.

She watched the little bubbles on the screen, biting her lip in anticipation.

"I'd love to take you out to dinner tonight," he said.

Dalia gasped and shook her head. Was she ready to meet him already? If she didn't open herself up to love again, it would mean that Hank had won.

"Okay. Let's meet," she typed.

She regretted it as soon as she sent it. All she could do nowadays was second-guess herself.

His reply was almost instant. "I'm so excited. I'll get reservations at the Captain's Grotto. I'll be right back."

Dalia paced her house. She could still ghost him. But she didn't have it in her to do that. Her body flushed with anxiety and her heart fluttered in her chest. She had to be positive and believe that things could work out for her.

She stopped pacing and dialed Marsha. She needed someone else's opinion.

"I did what you said and joined mate dot com," Dalia said.

"The men on that site are dreamy, aren't they?"

"They are," she said, nibbling on her lower lip.

"You were matched, weren't you?" Marsha said ecstatically.

"His name is Tate, and he lives in Selkie."

"No way," Marsha said. "You are so lucky. I've been on that site for ages and no bite."

"I'm sorry," Dalia said, tapping her foot.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm going to have to be. He asked me out tonight and I said yes."

Marsha squealed on the other end of the line and Dalia held the phone away from her ear.

"I'm having second thoughts. I just don't trust my instincts after everything with Hank. You would tell me if you thought he was a bad guy, right?"

"I would have with Hank too, but you got so isolated."

"It happened so gradually; I didn't notice."

"I will be good for you to move on. Not every man is like Hank. And besides, every woman wants a shifter mate. If I could get one, I'd hold on for dear life," Marsha said.

Dalia giggled and thanked her friend. As soon as she got off the phone, a new text message popped up on her app.

"Reservations at seven!" Tate's message said. "I'll meet you there."

"See you then."

Now she had to get ready for a fancy night out with a stranger. She had no idea what to wear. Hank had never taken her to anything as nice as the Captain's Grotto.

If Tate wanted to treat her to a fancy meal, then she was going to let him. She had to believe that he could be a good guy. She started felt excitement rising in her belly. What if he was the one? What if this could be everything she'd ever dreamed of?

She didn't want to get ahead of herself. She had to take things slowly, one step at a time. She had to pace herself with Tate, no matter how much she wanted to rush forward. She had to know that he was going to treat her well for the long run, not just for a few months.

She went to her closet and began rustling through all her things. She didn't know if she owned anything appropriate for a fancy night on the town. But then she found a little black dress that she had worn to gallery openings back in LA. It would work for a nice restaurant.

She took a quick shower to wash the sea air out of her hair and then went about getting ready for the evening. Tate's reservation was in an hour.

When she finished putting on her lipstick, she looked at herself in the mirror. She'd piled her hair into a loose bun on the top of her head. Her curls ran in ringlets down her back and around her ears. She looked soft and pretty, and she wondered if she should put up more of a shield.

She drove into town with numb hands and her heart in her throat. She'd never been so nervous on a first date before. This could be the first day of a new wonderful life or the biggest mistake she'd ever made.

The spring sun had set when she climbed out of her car in the parking lot of the Captain's Grotto. Her legs were shaky, and her hands were still numb, but she walked confidently up the stairs into the restaurant. The host grabbed a menu and invited her to follow him towards Tate's table.

As soon as their eyes met, he stood and watched her walking. He reached out and she let his gentle grip to enfold her hand. It was warm and welcoming. They grasped each other for a beat longer than customary, looking into each other's eyes.

Her heart fluttered like a butterfly. He was so handsome, so strong and tall. She could smell his cologne and it filled her senses.

"It's nice to meet you. My name is Dalia Stevens." With that, she let Tate into her life.