

## Witty Wolf Chapter 5 - Tips

A vision of loveliness stood before him. Dalia. Like a flower. A beautiful name for a beautiful woman. He had to pinch himself to make sure that he wasn't dreaming.

"It's so good to meet you," he said in a low voice.

She blushed and looked down at the menu. She was so fragile and feminine. He wanted to hold her and protect her.

"I almost didn't come." She laughed.

"I can imagine this is strange for a human," he said.

What if she decided she didn't want a mate after all? He had to stay positive. Dalia was his mate, and they would be together. He knew he could make her happy. It was fate.

"Your profile said you're an artist?"

"I paint landscapes."

"I love art," he said.

He had seen a part of one of her paintings in the picture of her on mate dotcom, and he imagined she was a genius.

"Oh? Who are your favorite artists?"

"Let's see." Tate rubbed his chin. "The thing is, I don't really know a lot about art." He laughed. "I grew up in the backcountry. It's a long story."

Dalia popped a piece of French bread and her mouth, and her eyes grew wide.

"Why don't you tell me about it?" she said, inspecting him more closely.

Tate took a drink of water. He wasn't sure how much he wanted to tell her about his life on their first date. He knew what had happened to Thorne. Heather had thought he was insane when he told her about the curse.

"My brothers and I grew up on a homestead in central Alaska. We just moved to Fate Island a few months ago. I'm just getting my bearings with cellphones and the Internet."

"You didn't have them on your homestead?"

"My parents were very old-fashioned. We lived there until we came to Fate Island. Where are you from?" he asked. "Are you originally from Selkie?"

“I grew up in Los Angeles.”

“That’s a long way from Selkie, Alaska,” he said with a laugh. “What made you decide to come to this little corner of the world?”

“My aunt lived here. We used to visit her in the summertime, and I always loved it. Five years ago, I inherited her house. After art school, it was the perfect place for me to go. I never really fit in in LA. I’m much more of a small-town girl. Not that my parents would agree.”

“Do your parents want you to come home?”

“They remind me on every possible occasion.”

The waiter set their first course down in front of them. Tate had ordered the clam chowder and Dalia had ordered a salad. She took a bite of the cherry tomato and washed it down with a sip of water.

“That must be hard for you,” he said.

“I try not to let it get to me. I love it here. I love painting wild Alaskan landscapes. I couldn’t ask for a happier existence.”

“I’m learning standup comedy.”

“Who is your favorite comedian?”

“I’ve been studying the greats. Right now, I’m focused on Eddie Murphy. He’s hilarious.”

“I’d love to hear some of your jokes.”

Tate bit his lip. He wasn’t ready to share his routines with anyone. He wanted to impress her, and he couldn’t imagine bombing in front of his mate on their first date.

“I’m working on something. I hope to perform at an open mic night at the pub.”

“I’d love to see that,” she said.

Tate had finished his first glass of wine before the first course arrived. Dalia seemed more relaxed too. The date was getting off to a good start.

“What made you decide to join mate dot com after living in Selkie for five years?”

He hoped it wasn’t too personal of a question. Her face fell and bloomed red.

“You don’t need to answer that,” he said, trying to save face.

“I needed to move on after my last relationship.”

He wanted to learn more, but he didn’t want to press her. He could tell she was being guarded. It was just the first date, after all. He didn’t want to tell her about the curse, and she didn’t want to tell him about her last relationship.

“I wasn’t expecting to be matched so quickly. But here I am. Learning to live again.” She laughed and the sound was bright and tinkling. It filled his heart with happiness.

“I want to get to know you, and I want you to know me.”

“We’ll take things one step at a time,” she said.

Tate was losing ground. If she had been hurt recently, she wouldn’t want to rush into a relationship. She needed to know he was safe. Someone had hurt her, and he would not add to that pain.

When the dessert course arrived, their conversation turned to lighter topics, and they discussed several comedy movies they both enjoyed. By the time they’d finished their chocolate soufflés, they were both laughing and smiling.

His inner wolf paced inside his mind. Tate knew how to keep his wolf calm. He didn’t let it control his life. His wolf had always been easy-going.

“Would you like to take a walk along the docks?” he asked her when they’d finished their meal. She agreed.

Outside, the night was warm, and the air was clear. A full moon was rose over the waters of the harbor. She had worn a long wool coat over her short dress, and heels on her delicate feet.

They walked together side-by-side, and he offered her his arm. She wrapped hers through his elbow. The feeling of her touch sent jolts of electricity up his spine. It felt so good to be close to her. Their entire life together unfolded before him. What a beautiful thing to be with your mate!

He had never expected it to be so warm and fuzzy, like a comfortable sweater or your favorite pair of shoes. They fit together like a hand in a glove, and he never wanted to let this feeling go.

They walked along the docks and watched the boats dancing in the moonlight.

“This has been a nice,” Dalia said. Her voice was sultry as she gazed up at him through her long lashes. The moonlight sparkled in her eyes.

"It's been the best date I've ever been on," he said with a laugh. "It's the only date I've ever been on."

She laughed.

"I want to kiss you," he said, taking her hand.

"I want the same thing," she said.

Tate sucked in a breath, hesitating. She looked at him with such openness that he knew the time was right. He leaned in and lightly brushed his lips over hers. She wrapped her arms around his neck, and he pulled her more closely against him.

Her lips parted and his tongue slipped into her mouth. She moaned with desire. Need flooded him. He had to claim her. His inner wolf howled, and his instincts took over. He pulled her tight against him and kissed her with ferocious need. Dalia melted into him, accepting his kisses. But she pushed herself back and turned away from him.

"I'm sorry. Was that too much?"

"It's okay. I'm just not ready."

"I understand."

"I wanted you to kiss me. It was a good kiss." She took his hand again. "But I think it's time for me to go home."

He walked her back to her car and watched her drive away into the night. He felt hot and prickly all over, as if his fur was going to burst out of his skin.

He'd met his mate, he'd kissed her, he'd tasted her lips.

The scent of her was still all around him. He couldn't imagine going back to his apartment with Blake. That was the last thing he wanted to do. His wolf needed to come out and get wild.

He jumped in his truck and headed up the mountain into the forest. He stopped at a trailhead and burst out of the car, ripping off his clothes. He had to diffuse the energy that had coiled in his spine like a snake ready to strike.

He snapped into wolf form, his large paws falling onto the ground. He darted into the forest, rushing between the trees, growling and baying into the night.

He needed his mate—he needed to claim her. If he didn't, he would lose his mind. His wolf only wanted what he wanted: to sink his teeth into his mate's neck as he drove deep inside her tender core.

He ran and ran until he was exhausted. He collapsed, panting and spent on the forest floor. The moon was high in the sky, and he was wracked by this overwhelming passion. The world could burn in one fiery instant, and the only thought in his mind would be her.