

Chapter Eleven

Rafael

I lie awake long after Alex's slow languid breaths turn to light snores. My muscles feel heavy and content, but my skin itches with the urge to shift. I haven't had a decent run in days, and my wolf is restless.

Careful not to wake my sleeping beauty, I slip out of bed and go out onto the deck. It's stopped snowing. The moon has come out from behind the clouds, and there's enough light to see by. I walk down to the edge of my property, which abuts the dense aspen forest.

Finally, I let myself go. My spine bends as my bones break and reshape themselves, and I stifle a moan as my muscles and tendons rip and regrow. Fur sprouts all over my body, my vision changes, and the pads of my paws spread out in the snow.

The scent of pine and a wild musk fills my nostrils — the scent of my next kill.

My breath forms a cloud around me as I look up at the snowy trees. Out here, it's quiet. Out here, I can think.

There are no responsibilities.

No fires to put out.

No expectations.

Nothing except me and the mountain.

I take off up the hill, savoring the freedom and joy that comes from running on four legs. My ears fill with the crunch of snow under my paws, but then I hear the skitter of much smaller feet. A rabbit.

A growl rumbles up my throat, and I change direction. With the cold air in my lungs and the wind in my fur, it makes me wonder why I ever return to human form.

When I'm a wolf, things aren't so fucking complicated. I hunt. I kill. I take what I want.

In the human world, I have to blunt my animal impulses — impulses like fucking the beautiful woman asleep in my bed.

Even in wolf form, I know I shouldn't have gone there with Alex — not when the urge to claim her is so strong.

Among shifters, alphas have a reputation for being impulsive, warmongering hotheads, but I've always prided myself on staying in control. It's safer for me and my pack that way.

That's why I've built my life on structure and routine. It's to ensure that I don't slip up and endanger my company or my pack.

But with Alex, my usual coping strategies are completely useless. She brings out all the alpha qualities I detest — the ones I've worked so hard to suppress.

Somewhere along the line, I decided that I'd do anything for this woman. I'd burn down the world if she asked me.

That's why I need to end things.

The thought draws a whine from my throat, but I just push my legs harder.

If I don't break things off, I'll end up taking Alex for my mate, breeding her, and turning all my focus to her. My pack will fall apart. My company will deteriorate. Everything I've worked so hard to build will crumble.

By the time I return to the lodge, my muscles are sore, and my lungs feel raw from the cold. I know what I have to do.

I pad up onto the deck and shift, rising up on two legs and shaking off the remnants of the change. The deck is heated, so it's clear of snow, but the boards are freezing under my feet.

I take a step toward the French doors leading to my bedroom, but then I hear a strangled squeak, followed by a loud splash.

My neck stiffens as I turn toward the hot tub, where a naked Alex is clambering out of the water. Her eyes go wide when she sees me notice her, and all the blood seems to drain from her face.

"Alex —"

"Please don't hurt me," she whimpers, still crouched on the stone edge of the hot tub. Her wet skin glistens silver in the moonlight, and the steam wafting off her body gives her an ethereal quality.

"I wouldn't. Please, I can explain."

I take half a step toward her, but Alex shrinks back, covering herself with her hands. "Stay — away from me!"

The look in her eyes feels like a punch to the gut, but it's understandable. Humans are supposed to fear wolves. We're the villains in every fairytale for a reason.

“Will you just let me explain?” I ask, holding out a hand in a placating gesture that only seems to make her more hysterical.

“Explain how you just changed from a wolf to a person?” She shakes her head and straightens up, edging around me to reach the bedroom. “And don’t tell me that’s crazy. I know what I saw.”

“You’re not crazy,” I say, as calmly as I can. “I’m a shifter, Alex. That’s all.”

“That’s all?” Alex gapes at me, and a bubble of crazed laughter bursts out of her. “That’s all!”

Damn, she is so beautiful, even when she’s yelling at me. Her nipples are pebbled from the cold, and water droplets glisten all over her body. I have the sudden urge to lick every single one — making my way down to her tight little cunt.

“I’m the alpha of the Golden Gate Canyon pack,” I explain. “I was born this way. It’s just . . . who I am.”

“You’re a werewolf?”

I cringe. “Wolf shifter, technically. There are other types of shifters in the world — not just humans who can turn into wolves.”

“And you had to shift because it’s a full moon?” Alex gulps, glancing up at the bright silver moon.

“No,” I scoff. “It’s not like the movies. The full moon doesn’t compel me to shift. I just . . . needed to.”

“You needed to?”

“It’s been a couple days,” I explain. “I get . . . irritable if I go too long.”

“You get irritable,” Alex repeats, raising her eyebrows. She swallows. “Have you ever . . . turned someone?”

“No,” I bark, choking on a laugh. “We can’t ‘turn’ a human by biting them. All of us were born this way.”

Alex blinks as that information sinks in. “So, it’s like a genetic condition.”

“Yes.”

She sucks in a breath. “Are Elena and your mom —”

“No.” I shake my head. “My mother is human, and so is Elena. Jake, on the other hand . . . well, he’s like me.”

Alex's eyebrows shoot up, and I worry she might actually flee. For some reason, the idea that there's another shifter in the house seems to be too much for her.

"Does Elena know?"

"Yes," I sigh. "Elena is his mate."

"His mate?" Now she's looking at me as though I'm crazy.

"Every shifter has a fated mate," I explain. "At least, that's what they say. The bond between mates is . . . undeniable. Mates are bonded on a soul level."

"What does that even mean?"

I shake my head, searching for the right words. I've never really bought into the whole fated-mates thing, but suddenly, I understand.

"Meeting your mate is like . . . like meeting someone you've known your entire life," I say in a rush. "You see them, and you just know. You know you have to have them — even if it costs you everything."

My shoulders sag as I catch my breath, my heart thundering as the realization hits me.

It's the reason I felt such an instant attraction to Alex — the reason I dragged her to Aspen.

It's the reason I broke every rule in the book and why it kills me to think about ending things.

Alex's voice yanks me out of my reverie, and suddenly, it's like I'm seeing clearly for the very first time. "And what about you?" she asks quietly. "Do you have a mate?"

I drag in a breath and take a cautious step toward her. Alex backs up until her butt hits the door, and I spread my palms against the glass, effectively caging her in.

This close, I can count each dark lash framing those warm-brown eyes. I can feel her breath on my lips, and I long to capture that pouty lower lip between my teeth and bite.

"Yes," I whisper, dropping my gaze to her chest and tracking a rogue water droplet as it slides between her breasts.

Alex lets out a huff of air, and I can scent her disappointment.

I flick my gaze up to meet her eyes, and I know there's no point resisting. "You're my mate, Alex. My fated mate. That's why I've behaved so . . . irrationally. Ever since you walked into my office, I knew I had to have you." I sigh. "My wolf, he . . . wants to claim you."

Alex's eyes grow so wide that, for a moment, I wonder if I've said too much. Learning I'm a shifter would be enough to take in, but to drop the mate bomb on her . . .

“Claim me?”

“Yes.” I grimace. “Shifters, we . . . we claim our mates with a mating bite.”

Alex frowns, clearly bothered by something I said. “But . . . you don’t even know me.”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Yes, it does.” She shakes her head. “You wouldn’t want me if you knew me.”

“You don’t understand.” I touch my chest, trying to find the right words. “You’re a part of me, Alex. Whether you accept the mating bond or not, you will always be a part of me. There’s literally nothing you could ever do to sever the bond between us.”

Alex’s brows knit together, and I know that her rational human mind can’t comprehend that kind of unconditional love. Hell, I didn’t understand it before Alex walked into my life. But now I know there’s nothing I wouldn’t do for this woman — nothing I wouldn’t do to make her mine.

Throwing caution to the wind, I lean closer, breathing in her chocolate and caramel scent. “I’m one of the richest men in the world, Alex. I own four houses and my own private island. I can get any car I want — toys that haven’t even hit the market yet. I can get endangered species prepared by the best chefs on the planet. I can have anything I want — anything in the world. But all I want is you.”

Alex just stares at me. I’m sure she would run if I didn’t have her boxed in.

But then she surprises me by rising up on tiptoe and pressing her soft lips against mine. I’m so taken aback that for a moment, I freeze, letting her kiss me senseless.

She tastes so good that all I want to do is lock myself in my room with this woman and spend the next week making love to her. My hands cup her cold cheeks, pulling her closer. Alex’s arm winds around my neck until we’re pressed together, flesh to flesh.

Hoisting my beautiful mate into my arms, I yank the door open and carry her inside. The warm air licks my skin, making it tingle all over. A few embers are still smoldering in the grate, casting a warm glow over the room.

I lay Alex on the bed with utmost care, kissing her slowly and tenderly. After our frenzied lovemaking in the kitchen, I need a chance to savor her.

I kiss a trail from her temple to her collarbone, pausing at the tender spot along her neck as I make my way south. Running the tip of my nose over the swell of her breast, I inhale her sweet feminine scent and the tang of arousal coating my airways.

I lick a slow circle around her delicate pink nipple, delighting in the way Alex responds to my touch. My hands follow the path my mouth takes, tweaking that little bud until she trembles.

I continue to lick and kiss my way down her belly, finally reaching the apex of her thighs. Alex is completely bare down there, giving me unfettered access to her silky folds.

Her inner thighs are already sticky with arousal, and when I spread her out on the bed, a fresh bead of cream drips out of her. I part her lips to lap up her nectar, and Alex sighs into the pillows.

Slowly, I slip two fingers inside her and gently stroke her inner walls. Her pussy squeezes my fingers when I hit her sweet spot, and I press a kiss to the swollen nub between her folds as I continue to tease and caress her.

Alex's moans grow louder as I work my tongue under the hood of her clit. My fingers are coated in her juices, and my cock is a hard bar between my legs.

My mate is close.

“Rafael . . .”

“Not yet, kitten,” I murmur, raising my head just enough to meet her needy gaze. “I want you to come all over my cock.”

I lower my head back down to continue my exploration, and Alex whimpers as I capture her clit between my teeth. She is so fucking wet for me that it makes my whole body ache with desire. I need to be inside her sweet little cunt.

Just when I'm certain she can't take much more teasing, I withdraw my fingers and glide up her body to plant a wet kiss on her mouth. Alex kisses me back, tasting her own juices, and hooks a leg around my thigh.

She rolls forward until she's on top, straddling me with a self-satisfied smirk.

From this angle, I can see every inch of her gorgeous little body. Soft stomach. Pale breasts. The hint of her flushed crease.

Alex positions herself directly over my shaft, gliding her wet pussy along my length. She moans and reaches up to squeeze her puckered nipples, and the sight is so fucking hot, I almost blow my load.

I could lie here all day and watch Alex pleasure herself, but the urge to be inside her is too strong.

Growling with need, I grip her hips and roll onto my side, flipping her around until her ass is nestled against me. Alex throws a leg back over my thigh to give me better access, and I position myself at her entrance.

“I-I’m on the pill,” she confesses, her words barely a whisper.

“Not anymore,” I growl, shuddering as the tip of my cock meets her velvety folds. “I’m going to fill you with my cum every day until you have my pup in your belly.”

Alex whimpers, and I thrust inside her. Her walls clench around my cock like a vise, and my eyes roll back in my head. I groan and reach around to play with her tits, pinching her nipple until she squeals.

Our bodies start to move together, and my balls draw up close to my body. My cock is throbbing for release, but I want to hear my mate scream my name when I fill her with my seed.

Reaching between her legs, I find that swollen bundle of nerves. Alex shivers at my touch, grinding her ass into me harder as her body chases the friction.

I pull out slowly and ram back in, hitting the very end of her.

“Rafael!” she gasps.

“Come for me, kitten. Come all over my cock.”

My name rips from her throat as she obeys, digging her nails into my arm. Her pussy squeezes me as she tips over the edge, and her back arches against me.

I suck in a hiss between my teeth, pumping into her harder. Faster.

Alex whimpers as I go deeper, but she takes every inch of me.

Stars explode behind my eyelids as I fill her with my cum. I continue to pump in and out with an almost manic desperation, giving Alex every drop of my seed and hoping it finds its home in her womb.

Soon the heavy sounds of our breathing fade to peaceful sighs. We lie there until I feel my cum trickling out, spilling over Alex’s thighs and soaking into the sheets.

I tug the blankets over us and pull my mate closer, listening to the crackle of the fire.