

Chapter Seventeen

Rafael

Three weeks later...

It's the weekend before Christmas, and for the first time since I was a kid, I'm actually looking forward to it. The new SUV I bought for Alex is parked outside the chalet, which means my mate is waiting for me inside.

Pulling up behind it, I climb out and let myself in the front door. All the lights are on downstairs, and I smell . . . Chinese food. The spicy garlic and ginger notes mix with the scent that I know so well, and my wolf perks up.

I circle the downstairs, hunting for my mate. Alex has been working as a freelance reporter since she lost her job at The Beacon. The freedom and independence seem to suit her, but it means I've barely seen Alex all week. We both promised to take the entire week of Christmas off to spend some much-needed time together.

There's another reason I'm eager to see her. I have a ring that's been burning a hole in my pocket for a week and a half, and I'm desperate to get our evening started.

I have the whole night already planned. Drinks at The Snow Lodge. Dinner at Plato's, after which we'll take our own private gondola ride up the mountain for dessert under the stars. That's where I'll propose. I had to bribe a few of the resort workers, but it was worth it to have the beauty and majesty of the mountain to ourselves.

Thinking Alex must still be getting ready, I head for the stairs just as my mate appears at the top. Her delicious chocolate-and-caramel scent hits me full force, but there's something different about it — a sweet, slightly salty musk that I'm not used to.

"Hey, kitten," I say, grinning at the sight of her.

My smile falters when I catch a glimpse of her face. Her eyes are all red and puffy, and her cheeks are streaked with tears. She's decidedly not dressed for dinner at Plato's. She's wearing one of my sweatsuits, and her hair is pulled into a messy bun. And yet, to me, she's still the most beautiful woman in the world.

"What's wrong?" I ask, my gut clenching with worry as I analyze her scent.

Is she sick? We shifters are immune to most illness and borderline indestructible, but my mate is a fragile human.

“W-we need to talk.”

At those four words, my concern morphs into panic, and I practically trip up the stairs to reach my mate. “What is it?”

“It’s . . . I . . .” Alex trails off, her eyes shining with unshed tears as she stares up at the ceiling. “I’m pregnant.”

“What?”

Pregnant.

My mate — pregnant with my pup?

Half a dozen thoughts fire off in my head.

Alex is pregnant. She’s carrying my pup. That’s why she smells so different.

This is the best news I’ve ever heard in my life. So why does she seem so upset?

“You’re pregnant?” I murmur.

Alex nods, fishing a rumpled tissue out of her pocket and blowing her nose with a sound like a foghorn. “I’m sorry. I know this isn’t what we planned —”

“Isn’t what —” I break off, shaking my head. “Why are you sorry? Kitten, this is the best news you could have given me.”

Alex blinks, her little red nose wrinkling adorably. “Really?”

“Yes!” I let out a bark of shocked laughter, running my fingers through my hair. Alex looks relieved. “I mean, I think it’s great. But how do you feel?”

“I-I’m not sure,” she stammers. “I only just found out. I-I was a few days late, so I took a test, and . . .” She pulls a watery smile. “It’s just . . . wow.”

“Wow,” I agree.

Honestly, I shouldn’t be surprised. I’ve been having my way with Alex for the last three weeks and not using any protection. I told her to go off the pill in the throes of passion, but I wasn’t sure she actually had.

“I’m so happy,” I tell her. “You have no idea.”

“Are you sure?” she asks. “You’re not just saying that? Because we only just started dating, and we’re still getting to know one another —”

I silence her with a kiss. She tastes like chocolate and Chinese food, which is a surprisingly appealing combination on Alex.

We sink down onto the top step in a tangle of limbs, Alex’s scent all around me. In this moment, I want to kiss her and fuck her and claim her all over again, but I also want to be sensitive to whatever she’s going through.

Learning she’s going to be a mother — that we’re going to have a baby — must have been quite the shock.

I pull back, searching her tear-streaked face. “How are you really?”

“I’m good,” she whispers, tears filling her eyes as she nods. “I want this baby . . . as long as you’re okay with speeding up our plan.”

I grip her face — needing her to understand. “Absolutely,” I growl, pushing a few stray hairs behind her ear. “Alex, you’re my mate. A family with you is all I ever wanted.” I crack a tender smile. “And I know you’re going to make an amazing mother.”

At those words, Alex’s face crumples in a fresh sob. “You really think so?” she sniffles.

“Yes.” I grip her harder, wishing I could somehow show her exactly how much I love and adore her.

Then I remember the ring in my pocket, and my heart does a funny little skip.

I had the whole proposal planned down to the dessert, but this feels right. I don’t think there will ever be a better time than the moment Alex made me the happiest man alive.

Kneeling on the step below her, I reach into my pocket and pull out the ring. It’s a simple princess cut on a rose-gold band — simple and gorgeous, like my mate. I wanted to buy her the biggest diamond I could find, but I knew she wouldn’t want anything ostentatious.

Alex goes very still when she sees the ring, her eyes widening when she realizes.

“Alex Larson, I loved you the moment I saw you, and my love for you has grown every day since. Will you make me the happiest man alive twice in one evening and be my wife?”

There’s a long moment of stunned silence. Then a little whimper of surprise escapes her, and she shakes her head as fresh tears well up in her eyes.

Another jolt of horror slams into my stomach, and for a second, I think I might be sick.

What was I thinking? It's too soon. She just found out she's going to be a mother, and I dumped this on her, too.

But then Alex bobs her head, happy tears spilling down her cheeks. "Yes! Of course I'll marry you."

Relief surges through me as Alex catapults herself into my chest, wrapping her arms around my neck. She's still crying when she pulls back, and it takes me a moment to slide the ring onto her trembling finger.

Cupping her small hand in my own, I bring it to my lips and plant a kiss on top of it. I can't believe this amazing female is my mate and that my pup is growing in her belly. Now she's going to be my wife.

Before Alex walked into my office, I was the man who had everything — and nothing that mattered. Now I have the only thing I ever needed and the one thing I never knew I wanted: the love of my beautiful mate.