



Alena Savard

Both women stared up at Nick in utter astonishment.

Kathryn slowly shook her head. “I don’t believe it.”

“I know what you mean,” Nick said. “I can hardly believe it myself.”

“Nick—did you just propose to both of us?”

The smile abruptly vanished from Nick’s face. “Of course not. That’s against the law.”

“Just checking. I wasn’t sure you knew.”

Nick frowned. “Was I not clear on that point?”

“No, Nick, somehow you managed to overlook that little detail.”

Nick flashed a sheepish grin. There was a long and icy silence before he finally said, “There’s no way to make this better, is there?”

“You could slit your throat and die,” Alena said. “That might help.”

Nick glanced back and forth between the two women before he finally raised one hand and pointed a finger at Alena. “I was asking you.”

Alena smacked her forehead with the butt of her palm. “I knew I should have brought the Rottweiler.”

Kathryn just shook her head.

Alena turned to her. “Believe me, I was hoping he was asking you.”

“It’s okay,” Kathryn said, “and it’s probably for the best. I kept telling myself he’s further along than this—but he’s not, is he?” She slowly rose from the sofa. “If you’ll excuse me, I’m sure you two have a lot to talk about.”

The instant Kathryn left the room Alena charged over to Nick and punched him hard on the shoulder.

Nick blinked. “Is that any way to treat your fiancé?”

“That’s how you treat a moron.” She reached up and snatched the thick glasses from Nick’s face.

“Hey—I need those.”

“Why? You’re just as blind with ’em as you are without ’em.”

“What are you talking about?”

“She loves you too, Nick. Can’t you see that?”

Nick looked in the direction of the door. “She never said so.”

“She’s not like that. She wanted you to figure it out for yourself. She’s not the kind to just come right out and say it.”

“You did.”

“That’s ’cause I know how dumb you are. I knew you wouldn’t get it any other way.” She slipped the glasses back on his face and looked into the huge brown orbs. “Do you have any idea how humiliating that was for her? Here’s a clue: Take my humiliation and divide it in half.”

“Sorry,” Nick said. “I didn’t plan it that way.”

“Well, that’s a relief.”

“I didn’t plan it at all, really—it just came out that way. I overheard you talking in the driveway about heading back to Virginia and I guess I sort of . . . panicked.”

Alena paused. “You panicked because you thought I was leaving?”

“I guess I did.”

“Does that mean you love me?”

“That goes without saying.”

“Love never goes without saying, Nick. If you do, you should say so.”

“Okay,” Nick said with a little shrug. “I love you.”

“That was pretty lame. Why do you love me?”

“Why?”

“Stop stalling,” she said. “You either know or you don’t.”

“Well . . . I like the way your hair falls over your eyes, for one thing. And I like the way you act tougher than you really are—it makes me want to protect you. You’re a little rough around the edges, but you always tell me the truth—I need that. Plus, dogs seem to love you, and dogs are very intuitive animals.”

Alena rolled her eyes. “Man, you are definitely a work in progress.” She nodded toward the door. “I like Kathryn, Nick. You hurt her and I don’t like to see her hurt. I want you to go talk to her.”

When Nick started to turn toward the door Alena took him by the arm and pulled him back.

“—but first I want you to propose again.”

“What?”

“You botched the first proposal. Try it again—do it right this time.”

“You want me to repeat the whole thing?”

“I got the gist of it. Just do the last part—the part about your desperate and undying love for me and how you’re only half a man without me.”

“Did I say that?”

“You would have if you had the sense you were born with.”

Nick looked into Alena’s emerald eyes. “I’ve never really understood women,” he said, “and to tell you the truth, I think I understand you less than most. I never know what you’re going to do or say next, but for some reason I like that—it makes you kind of interesting. I’m a weird person, Alena—I know that. But you’re a weird person too, so I think we deserve each other. I mean, would it really be fair for us to drive a normal person crazy? So I think you should marry me.”

Alena waited. “Was that it?”

“Do you need more?”

“Just shut up and kiss me,” she said, “and it better be good.”