

Chapter Ten – Simon

Three Days Later

Simon sipped at the pure vodka in his glass, wishing that it would get him drunk faster. Shifter metabolism made it difficult to drown his sorrows in alcohol, even with the high-grade stuff. He slumped at the bar, trying to pull his mind in any direction other than Lana.

The anger and fear on her face when he told her that he was the anonymous donor that fathered her children came back to his mind and he flinched. He hadn't really been expecting any specific reaction, but that was something he *hadn't* expected. She was so angry at him for telling her. And the fear . . . Why was she afraid? The only thing he could think of was that she was afraid that he was going to try to take her children away from her. But he would never do that. If only he had been able to make that clear to her . . .

He snorted as he drained his glass and gestured at the bartender for more. He should have just waited until *after* the surgery to check that file. It wasn't like there had been any urgency to know who the person was. Then at least he'd know that the tumor was out of her body, and it would just be her recovery that he would have to hand over to someone else.

Besides which, if she wasn't so stressed, she wouldn't have said the things she said.

Simon sighed as he stared into the clear liquid. The truth of the matter was that he missed her. Terribly. Every day since he had been forced to hand her care over to another doctor, he checked his patients list, searching for her name before he remembered what had happened. He missed her bright smile and sweet disposition. Several times he had almost called her, turning the phone off right before he hit the final number, just wanting to hear her voice. But it was too soon. She needed space to figure out how she felt before he tried to talk to her about this again. Ideally, she would call him. He didn't know how much longer he could hold out.

The doctor glanced up as a woman slid onto the stool next to his. For a second, his heart leaped. She had alabaster skin and blonde hair that cascaded down her shoulders. When she turned to smile at him, he realized he was staring. Even as disappointment hit him, he smiled back.

She looked a little like Lana. Blonde hair, pale skin. Similar age and build. But she wasn't Lana. Still pretty, though. Big blue eyes, full, kissable lips. She ordered a drink and then leaned her elbow on the bar while her gaze drifted slowly down his

body. He knew the look well and was glad he was wearing a business-casual outfit. It was a pretty affluent bar, and from the pantsuit she wore, she wasn't looking to slum it.

"Hey," she said. "My name's Rachel."

"Simon," he replied, focusing on the curve of her lips. "*Dr. Simon Wolfe.*"

Her eyes lit up. "A doctor?"

Simon nodded. The smile came to his lips easily, but the normal thrill of the hunt he felt when he met an interested woman just wasn't there. Maybe it was because she looked so much like Lana, but even when he cast his gaze over her exposed cleavage and her hand rested on his thigh, he felt nothing for her. He withdrew and frowned into his drink.

"Something wrong, doc?" she pressed.

"Just work. Stressful things going on." He looked back at her and forced another smile.

Lana didn't want anything to do with him. Even if she had been speaking out of fear and anger, there wasn't anything between them. They had had a one-night stand. He had been too focused on work lately. That must be the problem. He finished his drink and tossed a few bills on the table.

"Oh, I'm sorry."

Simon let his gaze drift down her figure. She was very pretty. "I just need a little de-stressing."

The woman giggled. "What were you thinking?"

"There's a hotel just down the street. Bottle of wine, beautiful woman. I just haven't decided who to pick."

She giggled again. "What about her?"

Simon glanced at the woman she pointed at. "She came in with a boyfriend. Big, scary looking guy."

Rachel pointed at another woman.

"Too short."

"Her?"

"A brunette . . . I do like brunettes, but I was thinking blonde."

She giggled again and pointed at the hardness of her nipple poking through the thin fabric of her shirt. Was she even wearing a bra? "What about her?"

Simon focused on her body. Slender, but with just the right amount of curves. Looking for a fun time. No ring, no scent of a man on her. He pulled out his wallet again and handed money for her drink to the bartender, then offered his arm to the young woman. She latched onto him immediately. All the way to the hotel she giggled and flirted. His mouth and body went along with it, though his mind was elsewhere.

When they got to the hotel, he pushed her against the door and kissed her hard. She responded by immediately ripping the buttons off of his shirt, snarling as she kissed him back. His hands moved to her breasts automatically, kneading the soft flesh. As he closed his eyes, he remembered being with Lana in *their* hotel room. The soft sound of her moans, her body lush against his.

For the first time, his body responded. Heat swirled in his core, tightening. He moaned as he pressed the woman against the door, swallowing her moans with his mouth.

He remembered Lana sitting on the floor in the middle of the giant mess, crying, looking at him as though she was utterly lost and he was someone who could show her the way. He remembered their time at the cultural hall, laughing as they chased her two girls around. The way Evie told him that she wished that Lana had a husband, and Elaine saying that one day a prince would come to marry her.

He was no prince. But he *was* their father.

"What's wrong?" the woman asked, her hands on his abs, a frown on her face.

Simon sighed as he pulled away. "I think . . . I think I'm in love."

Her eyes creased together.

"It was great meeting you," Simon said as he stepped away from her and started to tidy his appearance. "Feel free to use the room, it's already paid for."

She looked put out as he opened the door and hurried down the hallway, but he felt light as a feather. A grin spread across his face. Three days of moping was enough. Too much, in fact. Yes, everything had been unexpected and it was strange to think that he had two young daughters. That didn't mean that he should just disappear, though. He needed to make sure that Lana understood what he wanted and what he meant when he said he wanted to get to know her better.

For the moment, romance was off the table. As much as he wanted romance, it would just get in the way. He needed to get to know her as a friend. If things developed further, then he would be over the moon. If it didn't, he still needed to be there beside her as she went through this. He needed to be a father to his children. Lana needed a friend. He was going to be that friend.

He arrived at Lana's house quickly. Kari answered the door with narrowed eyes. So Lana had told her. It didn't matter. He tried to look contrite as he greeted her.

"Is Lana home?"

"No," Kari said. "And she doesn't want—"

"It's okay." Lana stepped around the door. She wouldn't meet his eyes but came out of the house and closed the door behind her. Her arms wrapped around her middle, making her look vulnerable. "What do you want?"

"I want to talk to you. Please."

Lana glanced at the window where Kari's silhouette was still standing. With a sigh, she gestured towards the sidewalk. They started walking and Simon wondered how he was supposed to say what he came to say. Just being close to her like this made him think that his whole 'be friends' thing was too optimistic. He wanted to bury his face in her hair and breathe in her scent, carry her to bed and—

"What did you want to talk about?"

With difficulty, Simon pulled himself back to the moment. He stuffed his hands into his pockets and considered the situation. "First I wanted to clarify a few things. I'm sorry if I'm being presumptuous, but I just want to make sure you know that I don't have any intention of taking your girls away from you. I am not going for any custody battles or anything like that. You're a great mother and I know you love them."

Her shoulders stiffened then relaxed. "I did wonder if . . . I know you weren't saying that. It was just – everything was happening all at once and I was scared."

Simon nodded. "I know. I'm sorry. I should not have looked at that file until after the surgery."

"I've got another one scheduled for two weeks. As long as nothing happens."

Two weeks. It wasn't very long. He let out a relieved, shaky sigh. "I'm glad. You'll be fine."

Lana glanced at him again. Her green eyes were jaded, uncertain. His heart sunk a little, yet he tried to remain optimistic. She was walking with him, after all. Speaking with him. That counted for something.

"I, uh . . . " He took a deep breath. "I want to be in their lives. I want to be in *your* life."

"Simon—"

"I know that this is all very confusing and scary, but just hear me out. It doesn't have to be romantic. In fact, it might be better if we tried to stay away from those types of feelings. But I haven't stopped thinking about you. I want to be your friend even if nothing else is possible."

Pain flashed across Lana's face and she wrapped her arms tighter. She was silent for a long time. So long that Simon's hands started to sweat. She was trying to think of a gentle way to let him down.

"Lana." He grasped her elbow, stopping her. "Please. I don't have to be their father. You can just tell them that I'm a friend. I'll give you child support. Anything you want. Just let me be in your lives."

"I don't need child support." Her voice came out weak and soft. "I'm rich. And I'm good with money, so it's not like it's going anywhere. I hear what you're saying, Simon, but it wouldn't work. Can you honestly say that you would be satisfied with only being a friend? Not a father, not . . . anything else. In our lives but only on the fringes?"

Simon opened his mouth to say yes, but the lie got stuck in his throat.

Lana's shoulders slumped. "I didn't think so."

"We don't have to have a romantic relationship."

"That's what we said when you were my doctor. Look at how well that went."

"We didn't do anything—"

"Nothing sexual, but we still crossed boundaries. You know we did."

Simon sighed but nodded.

"I couldn't get you out of my mind, and every time I see you, it's like . . . it's like I'm seeing the sun for the first time. You're right about one thing, though. It's better if we stay away from those types of feelings." Her arms remained firmly around her middle and tears began to leak from her eyes. "I can't do this. Between cancer

and looking after my girls, I don't have the strength. I'm sorry. There can be nothing between us."

Simon stayed where he was as she turned and walked away. He felt like he had been stabbed in the heart. He had finally learned how to move on from Katie . . . How was he meant to move on from Lana?