

Chapter Thirteen – Lana

Kari let out another unhappy sigh as Lana packed potato salad into the picnic basket. She wanted to tell her sister to stop being so dramatic and just say what was on her mind, but she knew that wasn't going to happen. Kari wasn't the type of person to state outright that she thought somebody was being stupid. She just let her actions say it for her. Another sigh and Lana bit back a swear. *Honestly*.

"Stop worrying," she said instead of what she really wanted to say. She gave Kari a smile to show it was okay. "I was the one who wanted to go on this picnic with the girls and Simon. You don't have to stand there sighing like he tricked me or something."

"I'm not sure that he didn't."

Lana smothered a spike of irritation. "Kari, I'm going to be starting chemo in two days. I just want to have one day where I don't have to think about it at all."

"And seeing a *doctor* is going to help?"

Lana glared at her.

Kari held up her hands in surrender. "Okay. Okay, I get it. I just think that this is a mistake. It wasn't long ago that you didn't want anything to do with him, and now you're going on a date and bringing your children along for the ride."

"It's *not* a date," Lana reminded her. "It's a picnic."

There was a slight pull in her chest when she lifted in a pitcher of orange juice. She winced. With the shifter tissue, she was healing faster than expected, but these twinges still happened. There was a large red scar where they had cut into her to get the tumor out, but Lana saw it more as a sign of victory. The surgery was a success and there had been no complication. She ran a hand through her short hair – she had had it cut, and the excess was being turned into a wig, just as she wanted.

"A picnic is a date," Kari said.

"Not this one. I want my daughters to know their father."

Kari's eyes narrowed. "More like you want to know their father. In the biblical sense."

Heat rushed to Lana's face, staining her fair skin red. "Kari!"

"It's the truth, isn't it?"

Lana turned to her and put her hands on her hips. She had just about had it with her sister's passive-aggressive disapproval. She had already made her decision and she was going to stick with it no matter how much Kari tried to convince her otherwise. Her sister only felt this way because of how Lana had reacted right after finding out Simon was the twins' father. Something she regretted terribly. She had done everything wrong and it was coming back to bite her already. At least Simon had forgiven her for her cruel remarks

"Yes, I want to get to know him better, but not in the biblical sense. I've already slept with him. I think I know him pretty well that way." Lana took a deep breath, trying to stay calm. "He's the father of my children, and even if I don't *need* a man around, that doesn't mean that I don't *want* one. The girls love him already and they deserve the chance to get to know their father and their heritage."

Kari opened her mouth.

"As for me," Lana continued, not letting her speak, "Yeah. Okay, I am holding onto some feelings for him. But he has been with me every step of the way and he'll continue to be by my side. I want to get to know more about him *as a person*. I want to know what makes him laugh and what makes him cry. He has been nothing but good and kind to me. We've already decided that we're not having sex again until we've dated for at least three months."

Kari choked. She started coughing, eyes wide.

Lana smirked for a moment before she shook her head. "Honestly, though. This is my business. I know you're worried about me, but I've got a handle on it."

"I'm just concerned. Sex? He's so old!"

"We've *already* had sex."

"That was just a one-time thing, though."

Lana repressed the urge to roll her eyes. "What about the guy you were seeing before you met Robert? What was his name . . . Vincent? He was at least twice as old as you were."

"And if you remember, Mom and Dad didn't approve of him and I broke it off and then met Robert and we're living happily ever after."

"I've never felt this way before about a guy. Ever."

Kari shrugged. "Hormones."

"Maybe part of it." Lana resumed packing the basket. "But with Simon it's different. He and I just click, in more ways than one. I really like him, Kari, and I can't see my life without him. Maybe that will change after this cancer scare is over, but I doubt it. We're taking things slow, anyway. This is for the girls to get to know their father more than anything else. I don't want to cut him out of their lives."

Kari continued to look unimpressed. But before she could make any further comments, Simon came into the room, Evie clinging to one of his legs and Elaine on his back. He nodded in greeting at Kari before focusing on Lana.

"The car seats are installed. What do I need to do in here?"

Lana put the last of the food in the basket. "It's all ready. Let's go."

"Make sure you're back in time for that thing," Kari said immediately. "You wouldn't want to miss it."

Lana repressed the urge to roll her eyes again. She gave her sister a hug and then turned to see Simon picking up the basket. She would protest, but he didn't let her carry anything when he was around even though she was healing. It was nice since the muscles still pulled and could end up being painful.

They went out to his car, a sensible sedan that the girls loved to ride in, and put everything into place. Once they were all ready, they pulled out. Lana sighed happily as she relaxed into the passenger seat. The sun shone bright and clear in the blue sky while they sped out of the city for their picnic. It would be good to get away from the noise and crowds for a few hours. They lived in a calmer neighborhood, but that only meant that the neighbors were always looking for something to talk about. That meant sticking their noses in any bit of juicy gossip that came their way.

"Have you had any pain?" Simon asked as he drove. "Drainage? Swelling?"

Lana wrinkled her nose. "You're doing it again."

"Doing what?"

"Interrogating me about my recovery. I'll tell you what I told you yesterday; no pain bad enough that I've had to take anything. No drainage. No swelling. I'm fine."

Simon laughed softly and shot her a sheepish look. "Sorry. It's hard for me to switch out of doctor mode. I just worry."

Lana nodded. It was understandable. He was a doctor, and he had lost someone he loved to cancer. Just like she had. She glanced in the mirror to see the girls playing quietly with their toys, and she relaxed a little more. They weren't paying attention to the conversation at all.

"So, let's talk about something else," she said.

"Well . . . your sister doesn't like me."

"No, she doesn't. Not yet, at least." Lana shook her head. "She thinks that you're the big bad wolf and I'm just a naive, vulnerable girl. It's just her being overprotective. She gets like this sometimes. The more time we spend together, the more she'll realize I'm not being taken advantage of. She might even make you a specialized soap."

"Soap?"

"She makes soap."

"Oh."

"She'll come around," Lana assured him. "We just have to ride it out."

Simon nodded, his eyes on the road. "Right. Because this isn't even about you and me. It's so I get to know the girls more. So you can decide if you'll tell them."

"Tell us what?" Evie piped up from the backseat. "That you're our daddy?"

Both Lana and Simon jumped. She twisted in her seat, staring back at her daughter. "Who told you that?"

"Peter. He heard Auntie Kari and Uncle Robert talking about it," Evie replied matter-of-factly.

"Oh." Lana shook her head. "Apparently we need to watch what we say more."

Evie smirked. "Yup! Because I'm the smartest. Where are we going? I need to pee."

As soon as they got to the park, settling next to a large sparkling lake with a gentle breeze forming soft waves on the water, the girls started running around in circles. They hooted and hollered. Lana recognized the signs. She was just able to get their

clothes off of them before they shifted and tore off, Lana shaking her head and calling after them to stay away from the water. She had brought new clothing just in case this happened but was glad that they weren't going to ruin more with their hijinks.

"Anything in the picnic basket that needs to be eaten right away?" Simon asked her.

She shook her head.

"Good."

He carried the basket to a picnic table, then trotted over to the bathroom while Lana climbed down the gently sloping hill to the lake where the girls raced up and down, just staying out of the water's edge. Evie ran over to her and jumped up on her knees, yipping in her tattle-tale tone. Elaine's paws were wet.

"Stay out of the water," she reminded both of them. "Elaine, listen to me. Stay out of the water."

Elaine stood in the wave line, her tail wagging. When the waves came in, she jumped out of their way before rushing back in. She grabbed a piece of driftwood and dragged it up the beach. Evie jumped after her, grabbing the other side of the stick. They started a tug-of-war, growling playfully at each other as they turned in circles on the beach.

A deep bark from the picnic table made her look up. Her hand flew to her chest, eyes widening. Her first instinct was to scream, but she swallowed it down quickly. She had never seen Simon in his Wolf form before. He was magnificent, twice as large as any dog she had ever seen. His fur was mottled black and brown and the way he stood with his chest out and head high made him look even more powerful.

He looked at Lana and winked. She giggled.

The girls tore up the beach at him, yipping and calling. When they got closer, he stamped at the ground and ran in circles. They chased him, tails wagging so fast they looked like they were vibrating. Lana laughed as she climbed back to the picnic basket and sat down, watching them. When Simon grabbed a stick, both girls grabbed the other end and pulled hard. He let his feet slip as if they were pulling him, and Lana had to laugh again.

It was good to see the twins so happy, enjoying their father's presence. Whatever apprehensions she had about everything melted away. It was good. It was right. Her girls deserved to have their father in their lives and Simon deserved to have his daughters as well. She started setting out the food.

She still didn't want to rush into this, but that didn't mean she didn't want it. She and Simon would have to sit down and have a serious conversation. A smile crossed her lips. And after the conversation, maybe they could break their no-sex rule . . . just once.