

# Chapter Fifteen – Lana

After taking him to the hospital where the bullets were removed, Lana drove Simon back to his house and phoned Kari to tell her what had happened. Her sister was horrified, but Lana reassured her and told her she was going to stay with Simon just in case there was a complication. The doctor assured her that he was already well on his way to healing, but that didn't ease her worries. After he fell asleep, she finally allowed herself to think about what he said.

*I love you.*

It had been a long time since she had had somebody say that to her. Before the twins were born. Never in a situation like this.

She wasn't sure what she was supposed to do now. Simon loved her. Her heart beat faster and warmth spread through her limbs as she thought about it, but she shied away from the feelings. Kari's warning came back to her. There had been a lot going on, a lot of emotions to contend with. What if this wasn't the permanent type of love, just something born of needing stability and being afraid?

Lana turned away from where Simon slept soundly, tears rolling down her cheeks. She wanted to tell him she loved him too. Wanted it more than almost anything.

She sniffed and Simon rolled over. Pressing a hand to her mouth to keep quiet, Lana slipped out of the room. In the kitchen, she poured herself some apple juice and pressed the cool glass against her forehead.

"Hey." His gravelly voice made her jump. He yawned as he came into the kitchen, though his expression quickly became concerned. He crossed the space between them and gripped her free hand in his. "What's wrong?"

"You love me."

Simon's brows knit. "Is that a bad thing?"

Lana shook her head. "It's just . . ."

"Oh." Understanding crossed his face and he released her. "You don't love me. That's fine, I won't—"

"No." She shook her head hard, hating that he would think that. "That's not it at all. I do love you. I love you, Simon Wolfe. That's the problem."

The confusion deepened, and tears started to stream down her face. She didn't know if she could verbalize what she was feeling. She didn't want to hurt him. She didn't want to get hurt. But he was worth the risk. She wanted to take a chance on him, on herself, but she had to think about the girls. If she and Simon gave this a try and it fell apart, where would it leave them? She set the juice down and hid her face in her hands, trying to work through her confusing emotions.

Simon wrapped his arms around her, kissed her forehead, and drew her to the sofa. He just held her there as she cried softly.

"Tell me what's wrong," he whispered.

"What if it doesn't work out? What if I stop being in love with you? What if my cancer comes back and next time it kills me? I'm just afraid."

Simon's gaze softened. He stroked his hand over her short, silky hair and let out a sigh that vibrated into her. "I know. It's a scary thing, Lana, trusting someone with your heart."

"And what if *you* get hurt? What if . . ." she trailed off.

"If I get hurt? I won't go back to what I was, if that is what you're afraid of. No matter what, I am never going down that rabbit hole again. Not if we break up, not if the cancer returns. Never. But Lana, the chances of either of those things happening are remote. Especially your cancer coming back. Trust me, please."

Lana's tears increased as she heard the sincerity in his voice. Relief washed through her as she realized that was exactly what she was afraid of, more than anything. Doing something that would make him go back to what he had been before.

"Don't cry. Please." Simon wiped her tears away with the pad of his thumb.

"I don't know why I am such a mess," she mumbled. "Even though this ball of anxiety and fear in my chest has unknotted, I can't stop crying."

She laughed, half at herself and half because she was so relieved by Simon's reassurances. There was something strong binding her and Simon together. Something that had moved past lust to actual true love. That wasn't something that would just disappear.

"If the cancer comes back and I die—"

"That won't happen."

Lana pressed her fingers to his lips. "I know that it's unlikely. Nearly zero chance. Okay, let's go with another scenario. I'm in a car crash. I get caught in another robbery and you're not there. I choke on a chicken bone. Anything. I need to know that you are going to be okay without me."

Simon kissed each fingertip individually. "I love you and I love Evie and Elaine. If, God forbid, anything happened to you or them . . . I would not spiral downward again. I promise."

Lana sniffed, trying to dry her tears.

"I want to be in your life, Lana. I want to be in the girls' lives as their father. If you need time to think about it, I can wait."

Her tears were still coming. Lana wanted to tell him she didn't need time, but the words got stuck in her throat. She couldn't think of what else to do, so she raised herself to his lips and kissed him hard.

Simon jumped, startled, but soon laughed into the kiss and wrapped his arms around her. He pulled her tight against his body and Lana moaned. Despite the turbulent emotional situation they had just come from, heat began to swirl through her body. Her core ached and she pulled at his clothes. Her chest heaved, wanting to be close to him, needing him more than she needed to breathe. Her eyes fluttered shut as her pulse quickened. Simon deepened the kiss with a moan, his hands moving down to cup her ass.

"Lana," he breathed into her mouth. "Tell me you want me."

She drew back slightly, cheeks flushed, eyes bright. "I want you . . . Sire."

Simon's eyes widened. He laughed and shook his head. "No, not this time. I want this to be gentle and sweet, more love than lust."

Lana nodded her understanding but still frowned. "We will have times when it's pure animal lust, right? Because I liked that."

His pupils dilated. She felt his lust increase through their clothes and giggled. Her scent swirled around them as the doctor lowered his head to kiss the deep crease of cleavage shown by her dress.

"Plenty of times," he promised. "Now, let's get you out of those ruined clothes."

Lana fell back into him, working off his clothing while he tore off her own. They were already ripped and blood-stained, so she didn't care. His hands became gentle. Lips pressed against her pulse, fingers nimbly unclasping her bra. Lana's breath hitched, but she didn't protest as her breasts fell free of their confines. Simon's

fingertips traced the red scar. Then, he pressed a kiss to it. Lana's fingers ran through his hair.

"It's ugly," she blurted out.

"It shows how strong you are."

His mouth drifted down. Lana shivered as it fastened around her nipple, one hand moving between her thighs. Zings of pleasure shot through her. They swirled in the pit of her stomach and spread out through her arms and legs. Her back bowed, a moan vibrated from her throat. Simon moved to the other breast and she moaned again, her grip tightening in his hair. She hadn't thought anything could be better than the wild way he took her that first time, but the skill and gentleness he used as he focused in on his target had her rethinking that. A quick gasp and she bucked her hips, trying to increase contact.

Simon moved back to her mouth with a searing kiss that had her whimpering. Lana clung to him tighter, not wanting him to ever let her go. His breath was hot against her face as he kissed her again and again. Lana's hands moved on instinct, removing the last bits of clothing separating them. She wrapped her legs around his waist when he pulled back. He tested her readiness, then rested his forehead against hers.

"I love you," he whispered. "I want you."

"You have me," she promised. "I'm here."

He kissed her again, this time so soft she almost missed it. He entered her, making the pleasure knot tighter in her core. She clung to him, crying out, then grew still as he paused, seated deep inside. Another kiss and he started moving. His motion was slow, steady, his gaze on hers, their breathing in and out as one. Lana held him tightly, her body trembling. She matched his movements, crying out as they came together, again and again, thoughts disappearing into feeling.

He was so handsome. So beautiful. She searched his face, memorizing every feature, the warmth of love swelling in her heart. She felt like it would have to burst if their love continued to increase. Simon smiled and kissed her again.

"I love you."

The joy in his voice undid her. Her heart thudded and heat spread out to her limbs as the knot inside her came undone. Pleasure flooded her body and she clung to Simon as her body thrashed this way and that.

"I love you, too," she groaned.

Simon kissed her repeatedly everywhere and finally ended with one long, deep kiss on her mouth. He rested for a moment with her hands sliding through the sweat on his back before he rolled off her. The chilly air made her shiver and Lana curled back up against him. His hand rested lightly on her back.

"Do you think maybe I'm too old for you?"

Lana raised a brow, surprised. "Too old?"

"Well, I am much older than you."

"I don't care about that." She splayed her hand over his chest. "I'm glad you're here with me. I love you."

He buried his face in her hair and breathed deeply. "I'm glad. You are the best thing to happen to me since Katie . . . I only hope that I end up as good for you as you are for me."

Lana almost sighed. She didn't know how to tell him how good for her he really was. It was more than stability. He made her feel things – hope for things she had always insisted she didn't need. But not needing wasn't the same as not wanting . . . Now how to tell him that?

"Are you having second thoughts about me?"

Simon jumped. "You? No. I love you, Lana. I want what is best for you. I want —"

"I want you. Doesn't that tell you something?" She arched a brow at him, waiting for a response.

Simon thought a moment, then laughed and kissed her. "You have a point. Who am I to deny you what you want?"

"Who indeed," Lana purred as she brought her leg up over his hips. "Now I am the queen."