

Chapter Four – Simon

"Hurry!" the brunette hissed at him as headlights pulled up the driveway.

Simon languidly yawned, then opened a window that wasn't visible from the garage. "Relax, sweetheart. I came naked; I'll leave without a trace. If you're so worried about your husband finding you here—"

The brunette – her name escaped him at the moment, but she was something like Candy or Cindy – shoved him out the window. She slammed it shut. Moments later, Simon heard shower water running. He chuckled to himself as he sat naked behind a hedge of bushy bleeding heart flowers. Normally, he didn't like to get shoved out windows and, despite his reputation, he normally avoided married women. It just so happened that Cherry's husband was a member of a rival clinic, and Simon knew for a fact that he had three mistresses on the side. He was just helping to even the score.

He shifted when he heard the shower turn off, loping off into the night. His mottled black and brown fur gave him ample camouflage in the darkness, although when he passed a few houses, dogs started barking. Sheila had been quite adventurous that night. He grinned to himself as he headed home, but the grin faded from his face soon enough.

Sharon – that was her name – had just been a distraction. One that he had been needing ever since he came into his office and found Lana Flores: his patient. His stomach knotted as he thought of that beautiful young woman having such a horrible disease. He had amazing results with his patients so far, but she was so *young*.

It explained why she hadn't wanted him seeing her breasts when they had sex, though. Even though her file indicated that it was a deep tumor, meaning there were only slight dimples in the breast itself, she clearly didn't want to be reminded of it when they were just going to have some fun together.

He was always able to put patients from his mind when he got off work. He was compassionate, yes, but he never got emotionally attached. Just like with his lovers – although he actually remembered the patients' names. But, for some reason, he couldn't stop thinking about Lana.

He shook his head as he got home, trying to throw her from his thoughts. The lights inside his place were on and his ears twitched forward. Getting closer, he saw Clint's car in the driveway. His nurse was probably the only person he

considered a friend and had given him his keys for emergencies. So what was he doing here?

Grinding his teeth, Simon trotted behind the garage and slipped through the doggy-door he'd built in for himself. Once in the garage, he dressed quickly and unlocked the house. If Clint was just going to let himself into the house whenever he felt like it, then Simon would take that key back. He found the nurse in the living room, two open pizza boxes on the coffee table, the credits for a movie playing on the widescreen television.

Simon winced. *Right*. They were supposed to have a movie night. Lana had filled his thoughts so much that he had completely forgotten about his friend.

"Movie's done," Clint said shortly. "Spoiler, the hero dies saving the world, but the girl has his baby and names it after him."

Simon sat on the couch and grabbed a slice of pizza. "I forgot."

"I can smell that." Clint leaned over and sniffed. Damn him for having the most sensitive nose in the pack. "That's Jennifer Blossom, isn't it?"

"Naw, it's Shauna, right?" Simon frowned. "Or Cheryl. Jennifer?"

Clint rolled his eyes. "You really disgust me sometimes, you know that? It's bad enough that you go around sleeping with dozens of women, but would it kill you to remember their names?"

"Hey, her husband's just as bad. They're only married for the money. It's no wonder why divorce rates are so high when these humans keep marrying people they don't even like."

"Stop acting like you're completely blameless," Clint snapped. "If you had any—" He cut himself off and stood. He paced away and stared out the window for a moment. "It's like I don't even know you anymore, Simon. We were best friends all our lives, and then you hired me and I thought it would be like old times. But you're completely different."

Simon scowled. He didn't need a lecture. "And you're a stick in the mud."

"I'm *worried*."

Simon scoffed. "Worried about what? That I'm enjoying my life?"

Clint turned back to him. His face was hard, much unlike the normally open, friendly expression that he wore. "Worried about these self-destructive habits that you have. Ever since Katie—"

"Don't talk to me about Katie," Simon snarled, the hairs on the back of his neck standing up.

"Ever since she died, you've been distant, arrogant, and cruel," Clint pressed on. His hands were clenched at his sides, and Simon knew that he wasn't going to let it go that easily. "You decided to be a doctor so you could help people. You wanted to make their lives better."

Simon pointed at the doctorate on his wall. "That piece of paper means that I *am* making lives better. I'm giving families more time with their loved one. I am making serious headway against a terrible disease."

"You also go through women like paper napkins. You use them and then throw them away like they're nothing. God forbid that they start developing feelings because then you have to make sure they know they're not worth your time." Clint's eyes were glowing, the tell-tale sign that he was on the verge of shifting and lunging at him. "You don't care who you hurt and what marriages you break up."

Simon snorted and turned his back. They'd been over this before, and he was done talking about it. Bringing up Katie was crossing a line, and Simon wasn't about to let Clint manipulate him into feeling guilty for things he shouldn't have to feel guilty about. When they were teenagers Clint was just as bad at chasing skirts, but now that he was mated and had kids, he was in a position to look down at the men who continued that time-honored tradition?

"Have you even visited her grave since the funeral?" Clint's voice was soft, but it woke fury in Simon anyway.

"This is none of your business!"

"Katie told me she was worried about how you'd react to her death. She wanted me to look out for you."

Simon clenched his fists to avoid swinging at Clint. Right now, he didn't feel much like a friend, a fellow pack mate, or even an employee. The guard hairs on Simon's arms stood on end. He narrowed his eyes, his muscles trembling. An open, raw pain sliced through his chest. What right did Clint have to come into his home and put him through this sort of pain?

"Get out," Simon growled, claws forming at the ends of his fingers, canines sharpening in his mouth. "Get *out*!"

Clint stared at him for a moment before grabbing his coat. He moved slowly, so slowly that Simon was tempted to just grab him and toss him out on his ass. His fists shook with fury and his whole body was rigid. If he moved, he might just

snap. He tracked Clint's movements as he left the room. As soon as the other Wolf was gone, something inside him eased.

Simon stomped into the kitchen and pulled a vodka from storage. He quickly made himself a martini, his hands shaking as he did so.

There was nothing wrong with what he did. Other people did it all the time and Clint didn't go hounding them about their actions. Hell, Clint had quite a reputation as they grew up. It wasn't like he was some sort of sinless saint. The girls he had been with could probably tell a few stories. So why was it different for Simon?

He gulped his martini down and made another one. A tremor moved up his arm, and he growled, flexing his fist. Phantom pain flashed through his knuckles. When Katie had gotten sick, he had beat the wall so many times he almost lost his position at the hospital. Her death had nearly ruined him in more ways than one. He had found a way to live without her. Why couldn't Clint just leave it be?

Katie had been human. Dark curls, dark eyes, and a smile like sunshine. He met her when they were both in elementary school, and from that moment, he knew she was his mate. It took a bit of convincing over the years. During high school, he had started to doubt it himself and played the field a little, but he always circled back to her.

And now she was gone.

As he sat drinking his second martini more slowly this time, Lana suddenly intruded into his thoughts. Her mischievous green eyes and bubblegum lips. The knot in the pit of his stomach eased a little and he closed his eyes. Her naked body appeared in his mind's eye and he smiled. A tightness built in his loins as he remembered that night in the hotel: tearing her clothes off, how meek and submissive she had been towards him.

The desire to call her and ask if he could come over had him reaching for his phone before he could stop himself. His hand froze inches above the phone.

He knew her too well. There was always distance between himself and his lovers. A bit of mystery. They weren't fully realized persons, only fantasies that he could escape into. They didn't have children. They didn't have deadly diseases. They weren't patients.

Besides that, he was her doctor. That automatically made any further sexual relationship impossible between them. He was her doctor and it simply wasn't appropriate.

That didn't stop his desire to call her. It burned into his palm like the cellphone was seeping radiation into him. He pulled his hand back. It wasn't right.

Her laugh sounded in his ears, so audible that he had to check to make sure he was alone. He was, of course, but that didn't comfort him. Simon let out a deep sigh. It didn't hurt to fantasize a little bit, did it? Wonder about what she was doing right now.

Had she enjoyed their night together as much as he did? What other lovers did she have? A swell of jealousy rose in him just thinking about that, but he pushed it aside. Only for another swell of pain to rise. His mind flashed to Katie, and a raw wound opened in his chest again. He grabbed his phone and dialed a number. He hadn't seen one of his former nurses – Maria? Mandy? – for quite some time.

"Hey," he greeted her when she answered. "What are you doing tonight?"