

## Chapter Five – Lana

The sound of whimpering woke Lana. The room was utterly dark, but there was a shuffling at the foot of her bed indicating movement. A soft scraping on the carpet and another whimper. It sounded like an animal. A dog? The covers tugged to one side, and then a soft weight on her feet. Adrenaline shot through Lana's body. With one hand, she grabbed the baseball bat she kept by the side of the bed, and with the other, she turned on the lamp beside her bed.

She uttered a short cry, jumping out of bed. There were two wolves in her bed. Or rather, wolf pups. The two furry bundles yipped and tumbled back over the bed, onto the other side. Lana stared, jaw hanging slack. Her hands gripped the bat, held up in preparation. How had two puppies gotten into her bedroom? She checked the window. Closed. The door was closed as well.

The two wolves started to howl plaintively. Lana edged around the bed, keeping the baseball bat on hand in case the mother was somewhere around as well. The sound of the howling changed, and by the time she rounded the bed, it had turned into the sobbing wails of two little girls.

Elaine and Evie sat on the floor, their golden hair braided as Lana always did for bedtime, faces scrunched up and red as they cried. Lana gasped. She managed to push aside her shock long enough to gather her twins onto the bed and start soothing them.

"Mama scared me," Evie sobbed.

"I'm sorry." Lana kissed her forehead. "I'm sorry, baby. I didn't recognize you. I've never seen you as puppies before."

Her stomach twisted as the girls still sobbed. Shifters. Her daughters were shifters. Which meant that the anonymous donor that was their father was a shifter. Wasn't that something the hospital could have told her? She understood not giving her his full file since he wanted to be anonymous, but this was something that had a huge impact on both her and her daughters . . .

Kari came to knock on the door a few moments later, asking about the noise, but Lana didn't tell her what she had just discovered. She didn't know how to handle it herself yet. After her step-sister left and the girls fell back asleep, Lana slipped out of her bed and grabbed her cell phone. She padded into the bathroom and called Dr. Wolfe. He was a shifter. He'd be able to help her with this.

It was only after he answered that she realized what a stupid thing it was for her to do. For starters, there was no reason why he should be at his office – why *was* he at his office at this time of night? – and he didn't want to become involved in her personal life. He was her doctor. Nothing else.

"Hi," she said awkwardly. "This is Lana Flores."

"Miss Flores." The doctor's voice was pleased but confused. "What can I do for you?"

"Uh . . ." She wanted to hide her face in her hands as the silence stretched on, but, considering that he couldn't see her, it would only make the silence linger longer. "Um . . . it's about . . . Well, it's not about my medical condition. It's personal."

A pause. "Go on."

Was it her imagination, or did he sound even more pleased? It must be her imagination.

Fumbling with her words, Lana explained what had just happened with her girls. When she finished, Dr. Wolfe was silent. Lana swallowed hard. "I'm sorry for calling you. I just sort of panicked. I didn't know their father was a shifter, so I wasn't expecting this. I thought about you because you're a shifter, too. I thought you might be able to direct me to some sort of . . . I don't know – shifter group for children?"

As she finished, she realized that it was a lie. She wasn't looking for information about shifters. She had wanted to hear his voice and have him reassure her that everything was going to be fine. Her girls being shifters was unexpected, but as long as she didn't bar them from their heritage, it would be fine, wouldn't it? But she knew very little about shifters and their culture.

"I don't know about anything geared to children myself," he said slowly, "but I'll tell you what. You can bring your girls and meet me at the shifter cultural hall tomorrow. I have appointments all morning, but I'm free after three."

Relief washed over her. Lana closed her eyes, fighting back the desire to thank him over and over again. She wasn't going to fall into becoming some hysterical, sobbing woman every time she felt any little emotion. It was bad enough that she had called him in the middle of the night.

"Thank you," she said, just once. "I'm sorry to disturb you so late."

"It wasn't a disturbance," Dr. Wolfe replied kindly. "I couldn't sleep, so I decided to get more work done. I'll see you tomorrow."

He hung up and Lana let out a sigh. *Tomorrow*. She went back to bed and her two girls crowded in next to her. The fact that they had been wolves mere moments before still stunned her, but she relaxed as she pulled them closer. They were still her girls, and it was just that she had to learn more about them. She smiled as she stroked their soft hair. Tomorrow, she would begin to plan on how to handle this unexpected development in her life.

And Dr. Wolfe would be there to help her along.

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The shifter cultural hall was smaller than Lana had expected. From the outside, it looked vaguely like a large church: white stone exterior, stained glass windows, large wood double doors. It was attached to a large, well-maintained yard that was lovely to look at. Dozens of trees grew throughout the yard, and children ran among their shadows.

Inside, a bouncy castle was set up. Streamers hung from the ceiling and helium balloons were everywhere. It appeared that they had come upon some sort of birthday party. Lana held her girls' hands, chewing her cheek as she looked around. She couldn't tell if any of the others in the buildings were non-shifters like herself, but she couldn't help but feel like she was on unstable ground. What if she did something to offend them?

Taking a deep breath, she strode in. Evie looked around studiously while Elaine's gaze latched onto the woman dressed like a fairy princess. It was three o'clock sharp, and she saw Dr. Wolfe was already there. If she thought he was attractive in his doctor's outfit, he was even sexier when he wore tight jeans and a black t-shirt that stretched over his generous muscles. Why was it that he was more attractive every time she saw him?

Relief washed over Lana, though she instantly scolded herself for it. She really needed to put a stop to the teenage fluttering her heart did when she saw him. They had had a one-night stand. Period. There was nothing more, and she certainly didn't have the time or emotional resilience to start up an affair with her doctor while she was undergoing cancer treatments and learning as much as she could about shifter culture for her girls.

*He could teach you about shifter culture*, a voice in the back of her mind said. She shoved it away.

"Dr. Wolfe," she greeted when they got closer.

He smiled, tight-lipped, at her. "Please. It's Simon here. I can't be a doctor all the time."

"Simon," Lana said, refusing to acknowledge the way her heart fluttered. Again. She turned towards the party, trying to look calm.

Evie tugged her hand. "Mommy, can we go play?"

"Yes. Just make sure you share."

Her girls raced off, clasping each other's hands. They went straight to the bouncy castle. Lana couldn't help but giggle a little. Elaine tried to climb in wearing her shoes, but Evie pulled her back and pointed to all the footwear lying around. Elaine huffed. Evie rolled her eyes and untied her sister's shoes. They were so similar but so different.

"So, you didn't know until yesterday they were shifters," Simon said, glancing at her. "Sounds like a story there."

Lana repressed a sigh. "It is. Three years ago, my sister and her husband were having a difficult time conceiving. They tried a lot of different things, but nothing worked. Eventually, Kari came to me. We agreed that we'd use artificial insemination so that I would have a baby and they'd raise it. Well, there was a mix-up at the hospital, and I ended up pregnant . . . but not with the right . . . sample."

She glanced around, her cheeks warming. She couldn't actually say 'semen' or 'sperm' with all these children around.

"A hospital mix-up." Simon shook his head, looking disgusted. "And then your sister didn't want them anymore?"

"No. That's not it at all. Kari and Robert were going to take them anyway. They wanted children so badly. But when I had my first ultrasound and I heard their heartbeats . . ." A smile spread across Lana's face. "I couldn't bear to think of them not being *my* children. It wasn't an easy choice for me or for Kari. I think that if she didn't end up pregnant herself, it would have been absolutely devastating for both of us no matter what we decided."

"And you didn't know that the donor was a shifter?"

Lana shook her head. "It was anonymous."

"I see." His face pulled into a thoughtful frown. "You know, as a doctor I have certain . . . pull. I could look into this for you. I might be able to find out a little more information about it all. It'll be good to have more history about the donor, anyway. I understand finding this out can be a bit of a shock."

"You're telling me. I put two little girls to bed, and I woke with two little wolves trying to snuggle me. It scared the life out of me. And it didn't do them any good, either. I scared them pretty bad."

Simon touched her hand but withdrew quickly. "I can imagine. But whatever else you're feeling, there is one thing you have to be very thankful for."

Lana rose a brow quizzically.

"Shifters can't get cancer. You don't have to worry about your girls ever going through what you're going through."

She hadn't even thought about that. The air left her lungs in a rush of relief. She actually laughed, tears coming to her eyes. Her girls were shifters. They would never get sick. They'd be hardier than human children. Everything was going to be just fine. She grinned broadly at Simon.

"Thank you."

Simon smiled back, but it was short lived. A shadow crossed his face as he glanced past her, then shook his head and mumbled something under his breath. Lana turned and was surprised to see the nurse from the clinic coming straight for them.

"Simon," he greeted him when he got nearer, suspicion twisting his features. "Miss Flores."

"Clint." Simon smiled. "Seems like Miss Flores here is a mother to two little shifters."

Lana nodded. She wasn't sure if Simon was going to pretend like they just happened to bump into each other, but she decided to play it safe and act like that was the only thing that happened. "I'm sorry, I don't remember your name."

"Clint Webb. Which ones are yours?"

Lana pointed. Evie was chatting with a brown-haired boy while Elaine fondled the fairy princess's shiny satin skirt.

"I haven't seen you around here before."

"I just recently found out that my girls were shifters," Lana explained. "It's our first time here. And what about you? Are you a shifter?"

Clint nodded.

"I try to employ as many shifters as I can," Simon said. "Clint here is also a friend."

Lana fidgeted. There was a certain piercing gaze that Clint was giving her that she didn't like at all. She tried to ignore him, playing with her hair in an effort to shield her face from him. It was a relief when he excused himself. The only trouble was, Simon left with him. Leaving Lana alone again.

It was even more awkward to be there by herself than when Clint stared accusingly at her. She wrapped her arms around her waist and watched the girls play. She wished that Simon had stayed with her. She didn't feel nearly so out of water when he was by her.

She repressed a sigh. These feelings had to go. She wasn't going to start pining away for a man, any man . . . no matter how sexy he was.