

Chapter Seven – Lana

Heat swirled in her as his hand inched over her skin. Lana groaned with desire and a hint of trepidation. They needed to be quick before Kari came back. She needed to tell his hands to stop before they reached her breasts. But she didn't want to on either count. Her legs circled his hips, pulling him closer. They ground against each other through their clothes and her core tightened, a knot twisting in on itself. A cry burst from her throat, something desperate, clinging to this moment. Simon's mouth moved to her neck and she pulled him closer, her eyes fluttering shut.

And suddenly he pulled back. He braced himself on either side of her as he stared down at her, panting, a faint flush in his cheeks. A shaky breath blew warm air into her face, and he pulled away entirely. Lana bit back a whimper as he forced space between them. She straightened her clothing, biting back the desire to throw herself into his arms again.

He shook his head and pinched the bridge of his nose. "I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry."

He got to his feet and Lana scrambled after him. She grabbed his hand as he started for the door, not wanting to be alone. After everything that had happened, she wanted someone who wouldn't judge her or try to get her up and moving on by cleaning up. Kari never let her just sit in the moment, and it felt like she needed that right now.

"Please stay," she burst out, knowing she shouldn't be begging but unable to stop herself.

Simon gently removed his hand from hers and shook his head. "No. I shouldn't have even come."

"Simon—" Lana cut herself off and pulled in a deep, shuddering breath.

Ever since the twins had come along, people had been telling her that she needed a man in her life. Well, it looked like she had started to believe it herself. She stepped back with difficulty, nodding. He was right, after all. He shouldn't have come. There were professional boundaries for a reason, and they had broken enough of them. She didn't want him to end up losing his job over her.

He hesitated in the doorway, looking back at her. He opened his mouth and her heart leaped, hoping against hope for something she could cling to, but he only closed it again and turned away. Lana's heart fell so rapidly that she gasped. She

leaned against the door, taking a deep breath. It was for the best. Maybe, after this was all over, she could start dating or something. But only after this was done.

Her heart felt like it was all stretched out as she gazed at the mess of her house. So, she had a lot of this to look forward to until the girls were fully bonded with their Wolf side? Just the thought made her want to collapse and start crying again.

"I'll figure something out," she told herself as she started to clean up. "I just need to breathe. Just breathe."

She had cleaned the worst of the mess by the time Kari brought the children back. Evie's eyes drooped and Elaine's mouth was turned down in the pout that meant she was tired but didn't want to admit it.

"Come here." Lana held out her arms and they walked readily into her embrace. She kissed them both. "I'm sorry for yelling before. Next time I'll try to be better."

Evie snuggled deeper against her. "Sorry for peeing on the stairs."

Elaine giggled.

Lana gave them the last squeeze. "Go upstairs and get ready for your nap. I'll be up shortly."

Kari gave her a sympathetic look as they trudged upstairs. Her sister embraced her, but she wasn't as comforting as Simon had been. Probably just her imagination, but still.

"How are you?"

"Tired. I think I've cleaned up the worst of it. But we need to pack up everything that we don't want to be broken. I . . . researched." She wasn't going to admit that Simon had been there moments before. "And this is something they're just going to have to outgrow. Thank God we have a big backyard. From now on, instead of trying to get them to shift back, we can just send them outside until they burn off their energy."

Kari looked unconvinced but shrugged. "I hope that works."

Lana looked at the damage left in the house and nodded. She hoped it would work too.

It was the day of her surgery.

Lana rubbed her arms, trying to dispel the goosebumps. She mentally reviewed what was going to happen. She was going to go to the hospital, get checked in, and then wait in her private room until it was time for the surgery itself. At that point . . . well, it would be in Simon's hands. They had discussed the options extensively and he had agreed that cutting out the tumor was the best course of action.

Her breasts felt very heavy, like they were rebelling against her choice to have them invaded. She tried to shove aside her nerves. She had given the girls kisses and they had promised to be good for Kari and her husband. She hated leaving them, but the sooner she got her medical problems taken care of, the sooner she could get back to concentrating on them.

Beside her, Kari gave her a tight smile. "It's going to be okay."

"I know," Lana said, but her voice was stiff. She was as nervous about seeing Simon again as everything else. They'd had one appointment where everything was set up. That was it. He had been stiff and formal, and she didn't know how he'd react now. It didn't matter what their past was. She needed her doctor to be comforting.

The hospital was huge and intimidating. Lana's stomach churned so violently that she was afraid she might throw up. Not that there was much in her besides stomach acid. She checked in quickly and was taken to the private room she had reserved. There, she set out the few personal belongings she had brought and changed into the hospital gown provided.

Kari sat and talked with her for a little longer before Simon came in. He smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes. Her nerves increased.

"Miss Flores. Punctual as usual. And you must be Karen."

"Kari." She gave him an eyeful, a frown crossing her brow.

Lana winced. With everything that had happened, she had forgotten to tell her sister that her doctor was the guy she'd gone to a hotel with on the night of the benefit ball. They shook hands and Simon explained the procedure for Kari's benefit. After they removed the tumor, he would be injecting shifter tissue into her chest muscles and breast tissue. That would hopefully make a blockade against tumors growing back in the same place.

"Can I speak with the doctor privately?" she blurted, interrupting Simon mid-sentence.

Both he and Kari looked surprised, but Kari nodded and slipped out of the room. Lana pulled in a deep breath, meeting his eyes. Simon looked calm and collected, but there was a nervous air to the way he held himself.

"I feel like I should apologize," she said awkwardly. "I shouldn't have called you that night, or asked you to stay when . . ." She cleared her throat. "What I mean is, you're right. There need to be boundaries here, and I haven't behaved like a patient should."

His shoulders relaxed. Simon let out a deep sigh. "I haven't been acting strictly as a doctor, either. If you need to apologize, so do I. From now on, we'll both make sure to keep our distance."

Lana nodded. "Yeah."

"Good." He smiled, and Lana's insides flip-flopped. So much for boundaries. She sucked in a deep breath and shoved those thoughts aside. Boundaries meant not acting on such emotions. "Now, do you have any more questions about the surgery?"

She shook her head.

"Good. I'll just get my nurse in here to make sure everything is ready. Have you had anything to drink or eat?"

"No."

Simon nodded. "Then there are just a few more things that we need to make sure are ready and then we'll get that nasty tumor all taken care of."

He patted her on the shoulder, but it was a distant touch. She knew that it didn't mean anything. She tried to tell herself that it didn't mean anything either way, but she couldn't help but feel just a little disappointed. Simon left the room and Kari came back in. She gave her sister a skewering glance as she sat down.

"So . . . are you sleeping with him?"

Lana's face turned bright red. "No. Only once – before I was his patient. Nothing has happened since."

Kari's face clearly showed she didn't believe it. "Uh-huh. That's why you look so guilty. And wasn't he at that shifter hall place when I picked you up the other day?"

"He's a shifter," Lana muttered. "What's the big deal? Honestly. So I went with him to a hotel after the party. We met once again and he turned out to be my doctor."

"And you didn't tell me."

Lana mustered up her best dirty look. "Considering everything that's going on, I didn't think it was important. I was embarrassed, okay? You know that I've never done anything like that before. I didn't want you to make a big deal out of it. It's been very professional between us otherwise," she added.

Kari silently plumped the pillow behind her head. "Okay. If you say that's the way it is."

"It is," Lana said firmly. Her heart sunk as she realized that was the way it had to be. "He's my doctor and nothing more."