

Chapter Eight – Simon

Why was he so nervous?

Simon rested his elbows on his desk, his eyes closed and his breathing steady. Lana's trusting expression kept flitting before his eyelids, and it made his stomach churn. The risks of the surgery were low. Everything was ready and this was the best chance for Lana's future. So why wouldn't the butterflies in his stomach leave? He hated that tremors of doubt kept shooting down his spine. Maybe it would be best if somebody else performed the surgery. He could still oversee the procedure. It would be fine to do it that way.

Unbidden, the scent of his late wife curled into his nostrils. At least, her final scent. That unpleasant, sickly odor. The sight of her lying in bed, shaved bald, tubes and machines hooked up into her, came to his mind. She had suffered; that was clear. The night she left him, she held his hand and told him he had to let her go. He knew what she meant, even if he had tried to deny it to himself.

"Find another girl," she had whispered. "Someone kind and sweet, who will bring out the best in you."

A lump rose in his throat. Katie had been human, wholly and completely, and they had discovered her cancer too late. No treatments would work. She slipped away from him a little at a time, and then she was gone. He had decided right then to do everything he could to ensure that cancer would be eliminated in his lifetime.

Lana was nothing like Katie. Katie was a brunette, tall and robust. Lana was a petite blonde. Katie always spoke her mind, Lana was meek and submissive. So why did he keep thinking of Katie whenever he was around Lana?

He opened his eyes and raised his hands. They were completely steady. Not a tremor in them. No phantom pains. Maybe he was nervous, but that didn't show. There was no reason for someone else to do this surgery. After all, he was her doctor.

Clint poked his head through the door. "Miss Flores's room is almost ready. Time for you to start scrubbing in."

"Right." Simon stood. "Make sure that Miss Flores is ready to go."

Clint nodded, then stepped in and closed the door. "Simon, I need to apologize."

There were several things that Simon thought that he might be referring to, but he nodded silently. He had been acting like an asshole towards his friend, too.

"I'm sorry that I jumped to conclusions about your relationship with Miss Flores. It was irresponsible of me, and . . . well, I judged the worst of you. So I'm sorry."

Simon nodded. "I didn't know she was scheduled to come in for an appointment when I slept with her. I didn't take her on because I slept with her. She has two young children. I was already looking for stage one patients anyway. I didn't have personal reasons for accepting her as a patient."

Clint gave him a tight-lipped smile. "I know that now. You would never operate on someone you're involved with. I was just concerned because you were showing a great deal of interest in her . . . a great deal of *care*. You don't usually get emotionally attached to your lovers."

"Please." Simon snorted. "I don't even remember their names. I care far more about my patients than I do about my lovers."

"You don't usually get involved in their personal lives, either."

"Well, I don't care that much." For the first time in a long time, the statement disgusted him. A frown fell over his face and he swallowed hard. "Clint . . . I think that you and I need to go out for drinks sometime. We need to have a serious talk – not about work. And no leaving you with the bill while I go chase skirts. I promise."

"Wow," Clint said, an impish grin creating dimples in the corners of his mouth. "That's the first adult thing I've heard you say in, oh . . . twenty years."

"Are you *trying* to get fired?"

Clint laughed. Simon grinned. It was good to have playful banter back with his best friend. Too often they were stiff and formal, talking about work or arguing about Simon's lifestyle. Having his friend back was a huge burden off his shoulders. And maybe there was something to what Clint had been telling him all this time. Maybe he needed to stop drowning his grief in sex with women he'd never see again or weren't available for a serious relationship. He could actually take responsibility for his life.

"Maybe you can come over for dinner tomorrow," Clint offered. "Belle and the kids would be thrilled to see you."

"Not afraid I'll seduce Belle?"

Clint rolled his eyes. "Jealousy isn't a color I wear."

"Well, we'll see. If not tomorrow, sometime this week." Simon turned back to his desk. "There are just a couple more things I have to do, then I'll come up and scrub in."

Clint nodded and left, and Simon turned to his computer. A notification for a new email popped up in the corner. Opening it, he saw that it was the files he had requested for Lana. The files about who the anonymous donor who had fathered her children was. He checked the clock. There was time to take a quick look at it.

He opened the document of paper files scanned into PDF format. It looked pretty standard at first until he got to the signature. Once his eyes landed on it, he froze. It was *his* signature. Blinking, he zoomed in. Yeah, that was definitely his signature. He looked over the information again. It was him. It was all him.

He'd donated to the sperm bank while he was in university to pay off bills. He'd continued doing it until all his student debts were paid off – five years ago. His palms began to sweat and his hands trembled.

He always knew that there was the possibility that he had children out there. But to know for certain that he *did* have two children – twin three-year-old girls – and knowing their mother . . . It made his head spin. His stomach clenched, and he unplugged the computer. His heart pounded as he ignored all the greetings he received as he fled the hospital.

Driving his car helped him to distract his mind, but after he nearly drove through a red light, he realized that this wasn't the best state of mind to be driving in.

His phone started to ring. Simon took a deep breath, found a place to park, and answered. It was Clint, sounding equal parts annoyed and worried.

"Simon, where are you? Miss Flores is being prepared for surgery. Someone saw you running out of the hospital. What is it?"

How could he tell Clint about this after the talk they had just had? His hands went cold. He had children with a woman he had slept with. He was always so careful not to get his lovers pregnant, but Lana had had his children.

Before we met, he tried to tell himself, but it didn't help. He'd have to tell Clint something, though . . .

"Cancel the surgery," he said, voice hoarse. "Something unexpected has come up."

"Are you okay?"

Simon almost laughed at the question, but it would only make more questions pop up. He inhaled deeply, trying to calm himself, and forced his voice to be steady.

"Yeah. I'm okay." He was going to have to tell Clint sometime, but not now. "We'll talk later. Over drinks."

Pure vodka. It was the only thing that could actually make a shifter drunk.

After he hung up, he leaned his head against the steering wheel, wondering what to do. Did Lana want to know who her anonymous donor was? Or did she just want to know medical facts? Now that he knew that they shared children together, did he dare still be her doctor? Or should he step back and let somebody else take over? They'd already gone so far for her to start over . . . Maybe he could get someone else to do the surgery and take over her care . . . Or was he going to be too emotionally involved now?

Katie had wanted children.

Simon had, too, but he thought it was too early. They needed to be more financially stable. He needed to get through med school. It wasn't the right time. They had just been married. If he had known he'd lose her to cancer in two years . . . Maybe he would have changed his mind. Maybe he would have agreed to have children because Katie wanted them so badly. Or maybe he wouldn't have. Pregnancy hormones would have made the cancer worse.

Now he had children. Two of them – daughters of a beautiful young woman almost half his age. He hadn't thought about the age gap before, since it was just a one-time thing, and then she was his patient. But she was so *young*. What had he been thinking?

And yet, there was something. The idea of being a part of his children's lives; getting closer to their mother. His heart warmed, and a tightness filled him as he thought of sleeping with Lana in his arms every night. No more running around from woman to woman, holding them at arm's length.

Would she even want that?

A heavy sigh echoed from his throat as he started the car again. This had to be dealt with, but it wasn't just his decision to make. He headed back to the hospital, stomach knotting. When he arrived again, he went straight to Lana's room.