

Chapter Nine – Lana

The surgery was canceled. She was already heading up to the operating room and Kari had gone home when Lana got the news. When she was being wheeled out of the elevator (because, for some reason, they didn't want her walking, even though she had no reason to be weak – yet), Clint came out of nowhere and told her that the surgery had been canceled. She was sent back to her room and waited for answers that weren't forthcoming.

Had something happened? Was there an emergency, something that required the room, equipment, and staff that would have been dedicated to her procedure? Where was Simon to explain why she couldn't have her surgery now? Had he been in an accident? She had heard nothing about the surgery being rescheduled; all of a sudden, just canceled.

Had something happened to him?

Lana fought to keep herself calm. There had to be a logical explanation. Someone would tell her what was happening soon. She paced in the room, trying every five minutes to call Kari to tell her what happened. She didn't answer.

"I'm fine," she said in her voicemail after what felt like the hundredth try. "It's just the surgery – it's on hold. I'm sure everything is okay, though. Just wanted to let you know."

She hung up. It wasn't surprising, Kari's lack of response. Kari didn't usually carry her cell phone with her everywhere, and she had probably taken the kids to the park or something. Knowing that didn't help Lana feel any better, though. Not when she was so alone with this great big question mark hanging over her. She wrung her hands, fighting the alternating urges to cry or run out to the nurses and demand to know what was going on.

Almost half an hour later, there was a knock on the door. Lana answered it to see Simon on the other side. Her questions died in her throat when she saw how grim-faced he was. She shrunk back, certain he had horrible news for her.

Maybe the cancer was more advanced than they thought. Maybe surgery wouldn't do any good.

"Can I come in?" he asked softly.

Words choked her, so Lana just nodded mutely. She twisted her hands as he stepped in and closed the door behind himself.

"Lana, I—"

Her heart hammered and a bitter taste filled her mouth. "What's wrong?"

Simon sighed and ran a hand through his salt-and-pepper hair. He looked torn, an expression she wasn't used to seeing on him. Usually, he was so decisive and calm. He rarely showed any indication that his unflappable attitude could be ruffled. And yet, it was clear something was agitating him. From his hair standing on end to the intermittent tremors running through his hands, everything about him screamed that something had shaken him.

"Tell me what's going on," she demanded, her voice pitching in fear. "What happened?"

"I found out who your girls' father is."

It took a moment for Lana to fully absorb what he was saying. There was no horrible accident. No unexpected results in her latest tests. Her fear gave way to unexpected anger. Her hands tightened into small fists at her sides and she shook her head.

"I don't want to know that. It's completely irrelevant."

"Lana—"

"Why did you cancel my surgery over *that*?"

He flinched.

"It's not important who their father is. All I wanted was a medical history so I would know what to look out for in my girls. I don't want to know who he is." She put her fists on her hips and her mouth drew into a thin white line. "This is certainly not worth canceling my surgery over."

"I understand that you're upset—"

"*Upset*? I was worried sick! I thought something terrible had happened! I thought the cancer was worse or that *you* had been hurt. I've been here worrying myself to death over – what? Information that I don't even want to know?"

Simon rubbed his temples. It was that more than anything else that made Lana fall silent. She wanted to keep berating him for frightening her like that, but she could

see it was going to do no good, so she threw her hair over her shoulder and frowned.

"Well?" she demanded.

"I can no longer be your surgeon," Simon said, his voice even as always despite the shaking of his hands. "I'm the donor. I'm your children's father."

"What?"

Lana's arms dropped from her side. They hung loosely as her eyes widened. For a moment she was tempted to laugh. It was so absurd . . . Simon, the father of her children? That was far too much of a coincidence. He was just trying to distract her from her lack of surgery. It had to be. There was no way that he could be the anonymous donor.

And yet, on closer inspection, Lana could see how it would be true. The twins had her blonde hair, but their eyes . . . the same chocolate shade as the eyes looking at her now. The shape of Evie's nose was the same as Simon's. Elaine's ears. Both of their mouths bowed like his. There were similarities. But that had to be coincidence, didn't it?

Her breathing came in quick gasps as she stared at him. He stared back, his expression somewhere between uncertain and dreading. Maybe he was their father, but that didn't mean anything. He chose to be anonymous for a reason. She never pushed finding out who the father was for a reason. They were *her* girls, not his.

"Breathe," Simon told her, coming closer.

She was beginning to feel dizzy and followed his instructions to take deep breaths with some difficulty. She still felt dazed, though, and sat on the bed, her head spinning.

"I found out just before the surgery was scheduled," he said. "I was so shocked . . . but you can understand why I can't be your surgeon anymore, right? Look at my hands!"

He lifted them, revealing their continued shaking.

"What's happening to you?"

Simon sighed. "There's a reason doctors aren't allowed to operate on their loved ones."

Loved ones. Lana shook her head. "No, I understand. You can't . . . you can't be my doctor anymore."

She didn't want a man in her life, not in the way that Kari kept pushing her for.

Kari.

Lana groaned. The situation was already complicated enough and she had barely been able to convince her sister that nothing was happening between her and Simon when they were just doctor and patient. Add the fact that he was the twins' father to the mix . . . Kari was never going to believe any of it. If Lana didn't have insider knowledge, *she* wouldn't have believed it.

"I will get you another surgeon," Simon continued. "I know several who are very good. I'll make sure one of them accepts you."

"Thank you," she whispered. "And in the meantime . . . what?"

Simon swallowed, looking even more nervous, if that were possible. "Well . . . That's where things get a little tricky. It won't take long for your surgery to be rescheduled. But once I'm not your doctor, I would like to get to know you better . . . especially considering our new relationship."

The words made Lana stiffen. This was happening so quickly . . . "What do you mean, *relationship*?"

"I mean that we share children."

No, they were her children. *Hers*. He had no right to them. What if he decided, like so many others had, that since she was single it meant she couldn't give her girls the proper attention they needed? Since she was sick, it meant she was an unfit mother? Logically, she knew that he wouldn't, but the fears were still there.

"I know that it's sudden and strange," he continued. "But I want to be part of their lives. I want to be part of your life."

Part of her wanted to shoot him down at once, but she kept her mouth shut. He wasn't saying anything threatening, and she needed to be able to think about this. She needed him to leave so she could think it through.

"I understand if you want to go slow, but—"

"No," she whispered.

Simon ignored her. "They're my children, too, and I think it would be a good idea if I started spending time with them. Maybe we could work out something that I could take them on weekends or something—"

"No."

He trailed off, staring at her, then nodded again. "Right. Of course. Then maybe family activities. All four of us together. Picnics, or—"

"No," Lana said, even more firmly.

"Lana—"

"No." She shook her head, digging her fingers into the bed beneath her. "No, I don't need you. The girls don't need you. We're doing just fine without a man coming in and disrupting everything. I'm already sick. It'll just mean more change if you start sniffing around. You were anonymous – that means you have no right to them."

"Lana, I'm not trying to suggest that I take them away from you. I would never do that."

But it felt like everything was crashing down on her and Lana couldn't think straight anymore. The fear from before the surgery and the fear from the surgery's cancellation had already worked her into a state, and it was all too much. She pressed her hands to her temples, feeling small and childish as she shook her head. She had wanted someone to lean on, yes, but not someone who would come in and irreparably change her life. It was too much, and she nearly started crying, even as Simon reached for her.

"Don't touch me," she shouted. "Did you know? Is that why you slept with me at that party? Why you took me on as a patient?"

Simon didn't respond.

"You were just wanting them all this time, weren't you?" Lana cried, well aware that her accusations were stupid to the extreme but unable to stop herself from lashing out. She felt like a child having a temper tantrum with all of the emotions welling in her body. She wanted to stop but didn't know how else to release them. "You just saw me as a broodmare – someone who had already had your kids so you wanted more, didn't you? Am I pregnant? Is that the reason you stopped the surgery? Because it would be dangerous for the baby?"

"Lana, stop. I know that you're upset, but why would you be pregnant?"

She wrapped her arms around her middle. "You didn't wear a condom. That night you took me to the hotel, you didn't put on a condom. I was going to tell you to put one on, but then you were already inside of me and I didn't want to stop it."

Simon shook his head. "You're not pregnant. I wasn't trying to trick you, Lana. I honestly didn't know. If I had, I never would have let all of this go this far."

Lana sucked in a deep breath, trying to calm herself. What he said made sense. It was logical. She needed to stop being irrational and just accept what he was saying. She took in another deep breath.

"I know it's a shock," Simon continued. "It was a shock to me, too, learning I was a father."

It was the wrong thing to say. Lana stiffened. "No. You're *not* a father."

A flash of pain crossed his face, but it soon smoothed out. "Okay. You should call your sister. Go home to your children. I know this is a lot to process."

Lana opened her mouth, wanting to say something – but the words got stuck in her throat as he left the room. She collapsed onto the bed and began to sob.