

# Chapter Sixteen – Simon

## *One Year Later*

The day at the office had been hard. Clint had called in 'sick.' From the sound of his voice, Simon knew that he was laid up in bed with his wife. They were trying for another baby. As happy as he was for the two of them, Clint's absence made the workload increase. Simon hadn't realized just how much he relied on his friend.

He rolled his shoulders as he parked his car in the three-car garage. After some discussion, it was agreed that he would give up his place and move in with Lana at her mansion. It was the girls' home and bigger than his own place, anyway.

When he stepped into the house, he froze. Even though they had done a good job at stripping away everything that wasn't necessary, the place was a disaster. Toilet paper streamed everywhere, chocolatey handprints were on the walls and carpet, and the front banister that Simon had just replaced that morning was completely chewed through.

He sighed. "Lana? Evie? Elaine?"

A series of thumps down the stairs heralded the twins' approach. The girls made a flying leap off the final step and wrapped their arms around his waist.

"Daddy!" Evie shouted. "You're home!"

Simon picked her up while Elaine scrambled up to his back. "Where's Mommy?"

"She's washing the kitchen," Elaine told him with a giggle. "Evie spilled milk aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaall over!"

"At least I didn't pee in the bathtub again."

Before they could really start arguing, Lana came into the room. Her golden hair was wound into a messy bun at the back of her head and her skin had a healthy glow to it. She looked somewhat tired, but she still beamed at him and kissed him.

"How was work?"

"Crazy. Not as crazy as it was here, apparently."

Lana sighed as she looked at the mess. "I think they need to go for a run."

"Aunt Kari brought a present," Evie said. "Mommy, where is the present?"

"I've got it here." Lana handed him a box.

Simon's brow pulled as he opened the box. As he did so, the scent of cedar wafted up. Inside the box was a green-tinted soap, shaped like a wolf. Simon smiled as he picked it up. It was carved with fine detail, translucent. Clearly, a lot of time had been spent on it. Lana's sister was finally accepting him.

"Girls, I need you two to go upstairs and get ready for a run," Simon told them, letting both girls slide to the floor.

There had been something else that had been bothering him all day and he needed to ask Lana about it. He didn't want to bring it up in front of the girls, though. Now that they were four years old, they were much more observant. He waited until they had charged up the stairs, now arguing about where they were going. He took Lana's hands in his.

"Sorry I wasn't able to call. It was crazy today. How was your appointment?" His heart thudded against his chest, waiting for the answer. He had hardly been able to get to the bathroom as they were so slammed with work. He had been tempted to hole up in his office to call her, but, unfortunately, there were just too many patients waiting for him.

Lana stretched to her toes and pressed another kiss to his mouth. "It was good. There's no sign of cancer. One year down. Everything is really good. White blood cell counts, muscle tone, recovery, everything."

Simon wrapped his arms around her and swung her in a circle. A laugh bubbled up in Lana's throat, making him grin even wider. Her green eyes flared in delight and he couldn't stop himself from kissing her again. Lana lifted her legs around his waist. He grasped her hips, backing her against the wall, and kissed a little harder while keeping an ear out for any sound of the girls coming back down the stairs.

When the first thumps sounded, he set her back down. Her cheeks were flushed and lips were swollen. He wanted to lift her over his shoulders and run to their room, but there was no time for it right now. He never thought that he would ever find love again after Katie, but here he was. A beautiful woman who loved him and two darling girls full of life and energy. What more could he ask for?

"Elaine won't put on her hat," Evie shouted down from upstairs. "Not even if it rains!"

Simon glanced outside at the bright, sunny day.

"She doesn't have to, sweetie," Lana called. She shared a look with Simon that had him laughing. The twins could be quite particular at times. "You should probably take off your suit jacket so you can be ready when they come back down."

Given how impatient their little girls got when things weren't done *exactly* when they expected, Simon had to agree. They were going to have to learn how to handle such situations, of course, but today wasn't a day where he wanted to argue with them about anything. It was too important, too special. He smiled nervously at Lana as he pulled off his jacket.

Lana bent down and picked something up from the floor. "What's this?"

Simon looked at what she held, and his hand immediately went to his pocket. It was empty. He reached for the nondescript box, but Lana opened it before he could stop her. Her eyes widened and she dropped it. Simon caught it before it could fall again. The diamond ring nestled inside had hardly shifted. He smiled sheepishly as Lana pressed both of her hands to her mouth and looked up at him with a stunned, awed expression.

"I was going to get the girls to help me ask you when we got home from the cemetery," he said, ducking his head. "You weren't supposed to find out like this. I had everything planned, I wanted to involve the girls and—"

"You're going to propose?"

Simon gave her another smile. "Yeah. But since you've already seen the ring, it's not going to be a surprise like I planned. I'm sorry, Lana. I wanted it to be a special story that we could tell everybody about—"

She caught his face and kissed him deeply. Her tongue swept across his lips, causing him to groan. Simon gripped her hips and pulled her closer as fire built in his core. He loved the effect she had on him. It was something that he would never tire of. His arms snaked around her waist as he pulled her closer, grinding himself briefly against her. With a gasp, she pulled away. Her head turned towards the stairs.

"Sorry," she said. "I thought I heard the girls."

Simon slanted his lips across hers again. "Speaking of which . . . what do you say we just plop them in front of the TV for an hour so we can go upstairs?"

A pink flush rose in Lana's cheeks. She swatted his arm. "You brat."

"If you don't want to—"

"You know very well that I want nothing more." She let out a heavy sigh. "Ugh. I wish we could. But I have a house to clean and you were taking the girls for a run. They need to burn off energy, I can only imagine what sort of mischief they'd get into in an hour."

Simon glanced around. "The house isn't *that* bad. If you want to come with us, I'll help you clean up when we get back."

Lana kissed him again. "That's sweet. But in case you've forgotten, I don't have four legs. I can't run like you. Besides, you planned this for you and the girls. I've already visited Katie's grave. I think it's time you tell the girls about her, and I think it would mean more if it were coming from you."

Simon's stomach knotted again. He had been putting this off for a while, not entirely certain how to explain to children so young about his first wife. They didn't really understand death, not the way he and Lana did. Mostly, he was afraid of scaring them. He didn't want his girls to be afraid that their mother would die too.

*Thump, thump, thump.*

"We're ready," Evie called. "Let's go!"

Lana kissed him lightly once more. Elaine giggled, while Evie pulled a face. Both girls were wearing swimsuits, which were the only garment that would somewhat fit both of their forms without being ruined. They raced around, howling with their heads thrown back. Simon quickly ran up the stairs to change into something more appropriate himself. By the time they were done, they were Wolves. Simon shifted halfway down the stairs, and Lana opened the door to let out the whirlwind.

"Be back before supper," she called to them.

Simon turned back and nodded to acknowledge her, then raced off again. The girls ran tight against him, nearly tripping him more than once until they were away from the street and into the park that they normally ran through. He barked at them when he broke away from their normal track. Evie turned to follow him at once, but Elaine needed a second, sharper bark to bring her back to his direction.

As they neared the cemetery, the knots tightened. All the same, a well of gratitude rose in him. He had lost Katie, but she had given him such joy. Now he had Lana. He had Evie and Elaine. He never thought he'd find a mate again, but he did, and he had a family as well.

They made it to the cemetery within an hour. Both twins were panting by then and had stopped their roughhousing. He'd have to call Lana to come pick them up. The

girls would sleep well that night, though. Simon smiled as he shifted once more and led them towards the place where Katie lay to rest.

"Where are we going, Daddy?" Elaine asked. "My feet are hurting."

"Mine, too," Evie whined.

Simon smiled at them. "We're right here." He crouched beside Katie's headstone. "Before I met your mother, I was married to a woman named Katie. She was beautiful and kind, like your mother. I fell in love . . . "

Both girls crowded in next to him. Evie rested her head against him, her eyes sober. Elaine chewed on her thumb as he told them about Katie – and the story of how he and Lana had been brought together all those years later.

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THE END