

Chapter 89 Heat

Jane

This can't be happening. I can't be going into heat – not now!

"No I'm not!" I tell Ethan frantically, denying what he can obviously see and smell. He's hovering much too close, driving my wolf over the edge and sending waves of panic through my body. He starts to reach for me, but I back away, flinching.

"Don't, stay back!" I urge, thrusting my palm towards him defiantly. "I'm not going into heat, this is just... period cramps!" I declare stubbornly, "you don't want to be around me when I'm like this."

"Janey, you're being ridiculous – it's perfectly natural." Ethan sighs, dropping his outstretched hands nonetheless. "And you're in pain, you should let me help."

"No, you're the last person I want right now." I lie, even as my wolf begs me to let him take away the spasms of agony clutching my insides. I'm not sure how long he can be around my scent before he goes into rut, but I know from experience that once he does, any chance I have at resisting him will disappear. "I need to get out of here!"

"And go where?" Ethan growls, his own wolf flashing in his eyes. "To Eric?"

"No!" I exclaim, my stomach churning at the idea of the other man putting his hands on me. My wolf doesn't like that idea at all. "To Linda. I need to be around another woman, not rutting alphas."

"Alright then, I'll take you," He offers, looking as though he's having to forcibly hold himself back from pouncing on me.

"That's okay." I answer shakily, "you stay here with the pups, I'll catch a taxi."

"Jane you can't go out around other shifters, any alpha you meet will go crazy for your scent and most of them don't have my strength." He reminds me – as if I could forget.

"I'll be okay." I assure him, "just take care of my babies."

"Just promise me you won't go near Eric." He demands.

"We're getting married, Ethan." I state firmly, "this isn't the first... he won't..." I can't seem to get the words out, as if lying to my chosen mate is too much of a betrayal in this vulnerable moment. "I promise." I finally whisper, feeling as though I want to crawl under a rock and die.

"Good," He declares, "just wait two minutes, I'll call a car for you – one with a female driver."

A few minutes later I'm speeding away towards Linda's apartment, curled up in a ball on the back seat and trying to focus on anything but the pain assailing my body. Linda meets me at the curb outside her building, helping me from the vehicle and guiding me into the house while I remain bent double. When we get upstairs she lays me out on the couch, going to prepare a hot water bottle while I whine and feel sorry for myself.

"I thought the supplements you take to change your scent were supposed to protect you from this?" She wonders aloud, calling out from the kitchen. "I mean your omega side seems almost completely dormant."

"Apparently even modern medicine isn't any match for Ethan's pheromones." I gripe, throwing my arm over my eyes to clock out the lights.

"What are you going to do?" She asks, "This isn't going to go away on its own, Janey."

"I know that." I groan, "but if I sleep with Ethan again, he'll take it as a sign to keep fighting for me." Not to mention that my wolf doesn't want anyone else. She only wants Ethan, which means that I can't even scratch this itch with another Alpha if I wanted to.

"I mean let's be fair." Linda urges, "he's not going to give up whether you're in heat or not." She announces, bringing the red, rubber balloon full of soothing water to

me and laying it on my lower belly.

"Don't remind me." I whimper, feeling only somewhat comforted by the bottle's heat. "We had the worst fight, Linda. He's making me doubt everything I thought I knew." Of course I couldn't admit this to him – he'd be smug and self righteous about it, but I know Linda will never judge.

"Like what?" She asks, lifting my feet to sit next to me on the sofa, then settling them in her lap.

Struggling to produce full sentences while my body tries to kill me from the inside out, I gradually explain our fight, including Ethan's accusations against Eric, and my own hard headed response. "Do you think I'm making a mistake trusting Eric?" I ask. "I mean, he's proven himself to me over and over again, he's never done anything but be a good friend to me... while Ethan –"

"Ethan thought he was doing the right thing." Linda interjects, "I mean he was horribly – horribly – wrong but you have to know he never set out to hurt you Jane." She continues, rubbing my feet. "Why are you questioning Eric?"

"Ethan really seems to think he's up to no good." I explain, "but that's hardly a surprise, he'd be suspicious of any man sniffing around me."

"Maybe so." Linda agrees, "but I've never known him to be unfair. Even at his worst, he was always trying to be

fair to everyone involved."

"And Eric?" I press.

"Eric is crazy about you." Linda declares, unable to look me in the eyes. "When you walk in the room you are the only person he sees. And he wants to protect you, he wants to help you. Men do stupid things when they think the she wolves they care about are in trouble."

Not for the first time, I begin to wonder if my friend isn't attracted to Eric. "You like him, don't you?" I ask hesitantly. "I mean, like him, like him."

"Don't be ridiculous," She scoffs, "He doesn't even know I exist."

"That isn't what I asked." I state softly.

"No, but it's what matters." Linda argues, "it doesn't matter how I feel about him when he only wants you."

"It matters to me." I say, starting to reach for her hand but instead curling in on myself with a fresh wail of pain as a particularly sharp stab hits my womb. "You're... my best... friend." I gasp. "If I'd known I never would have considered his offer."

"And I didn't want to get in your way in case you liked him." She admits.

"I don't." I decide firmly. "Not like that." My heat decided it even if my mind wasn't convinced. I might like the

idea of being with someone safe, but if the idea of being with him physically makes me feel ill then there's nothing left to debate. "And I don't think he really wants me – I think he's fallen for his idea of me."

"Either way I think you should ask him about what Ethan told you." She suggests, "just to see how he acts when you do. It can tell you a lot."

"What if Ethan is right? What if I've been letting Eric manipulate me?" I whisper, silently admiring my friend's grace and wishing I could help her somehow. She not only put me above her own feelings, but she clearly feels deeply enough for Eric that she's willing to accept his faults alongside his virtues, not assuming his innocence, but not condemning him either.

"Then it's better that you know." Linda reasons, "sooner rather than later."

"I'm really scared." I confess, my voice so soft I can barely hear it. "I thought Ethan broke my heart so badly I wouldn't ever be vulnerable to him again. I didn't think he could hurt me anymore... but he can... and I don't want to go through that pain again. It almost killed me the first time."

"I hate to break it to you babe, but you're already in pain." Linda says smoothly, patting my feet just as another spasm grips my insides. "So you can be in this pain alone,

or you can be brave and give Ethan a second chance.”

“But what if it goes wrong again, what if he tries to steal the pups from me, or lock me away?” I worry.

“Then you know I’ll be there to help set you free.” Linda offers, “but I truly don’t think it will come to that, Jane. And more importantly – this isn’t like you. You might be an omega, but you’ve always had the spirit of an alpha she wolf. Lying around crying and hiding from the world because you got burned once, years ago – is something a coward does, not my friend.”

“Yeah,” I breathe, remembering how different things used to be. “It was a lot easier to be fearless before I lost my freedom and dignity... not to mention before I had pups. Honestly Linda, they make you so soft.”

“I don’t know why parents say that.” Linda replies, sounding wistful. “That kind of love is a superpower – ordinary Moms lift cars off of their babies; normal parents pull off miracles to protect their kids every day. You weren’t soft before you had them – you just lost your confidence, and you aren’t soft now.”

“You may have a point.” I agree.

“Of course I do.” Linda quips, “You know I’m always right.”

“I think I need to go home.” I murmur, even before a fresh wave of agony, more potent than any that has

come before, assails me. It's so overwhelming I can barely get out my next words. "I need Ethan – now."



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