

Chapter 78 - The Morning After

Jane

My head hurts before I even open my eyes. There's a dull throbbing in my temples, and my stomach feels completely sour. The combination makes me afraid to move, but as terrible as I feel on the inside, I feel incredible on the outside. My body is sore in all the right places, and my bare skin is cushioned on all sides by warm muscles. Ethan is wrapped around me like a big blanket and his deep, steady breaths have a hint of a purr rumbling in his chest.

I wish I could lie here forever. If it weren't for the sun blazing through the windows and searing my poor eyes, I'd even consider it. Groaning softly, I try to remember just how much I had to drink yesterday. When Ethan and I made love in the storage room I was still just tipsy, but high on the endorphins of amazing sex, we went back to the tasting room afterwards and continued drinking. Eventually we got a couple bottles of wine and booked a room at a nearby hotel, taking our two person party up to a suite with a stunning mountain view.

It seems I lost count of both the drinks, and how many times we had sex – especially since Ethan kept waking

me up in the middle of the night in the most wicked ways. His affections seeped into my dreams, filling them with deliciously naughty images until I would finally wake and realize that he was bringing my fantasies to life.

In some ways it feels like a second honeymoon – I'll never forget the ache of deprivation that built up beforehand, or the sexual frenzy that followed on our wedding night. Even though our first honeymoon went out the window with the death of Ethan's father, my chosen mate's need for intimacy at that terrible time soon sent me into heat. My eyes snap open as I think these words, the bright sun be damned.

I'd gotten so lost in the incredible feelings Ethan elicited that I'd almost forgotten the consequences of giving in to him. Heat doesn't come on as quickly for us because we aren't fated, but I'm still an Omega and being with an Alpha as dominant as Ethan is bound to trigger it before too long. Worse, I've gotten so caught up in being close to a man after so many years of celibacy that I haven't given a single thought to what comes next or how this might change things.

Suddenly unable to keep my hangover at bay any longer, I untangle myself from Ethan's arms and lurch from the bed, stumbling towards the restroom. I push the poor

open and frantically flip up the lid of the toilet, emptying the contents of my stomach into the porcelain bowl without a second to spare. "Oh Goddess," I murmur to myself, wallowing in guilt and self-pity.

My sudden movement must have roused Ethan, because a moment later I hear him behind me, and feel his warm hands pulling my hair back from my face. "Poor baby." He croons, pulling one of my hair ties from the counter and quickly tying my lock locks into a ponytail. Apparently raising a daughter on his own has taught him a few things, but the last thing I need right now is to be reminded how wonderful he is with Paisley. I need to harden myself against him before he gets under my skin. "Are you okay?" He asks gently, stroking my back in long, soothing caresses.

"I feel like I've been hit by a truck." I moan, squinting up at him, "why do you look so decent?" The truth is that he looks far better than decent, he looks powerful and masculine and like he could happily run a marathon. Why does he have to be so handsome? I lament in my head, it isn't fair for one person to have everything!

"I'm a lot bigger than you, little mate." He reminds me with a sympathetic smile. "The wine didn't hit me as hard."

Whining pitifully, I close the toilet and flush, reaching

for my toothbrush to get this disgusting taste out of my mouth. Ethan simply sidles up behind me, sliding his arms around my waist and dropping a kiss to my throat. "I'm going to run out and get you a few things. We can stay here until you're feeling better."

I don't want to feel warmly towards him, but I can't remember being more grateful to anyone. I absolutely hate being sick or feeling badly, and I don't exactly handle it well. "Can I have saltines and ginger ale?" I ask hopefully.

"You can have whatever you like, sweetheart." He promises, "and you might take a look at the room service menu too - sometimes a big greasy breakfast cures a hangover like nothing else."

I nod in agreement, holding my breath until he leaves the suite. When the door finally clicks shut behind him, I sink down against the bathroom cabinets, not stopping until my bottom connects with the floor. "What have I done?" I ask aloud. It's going to be impossible to get rid of Ethan now. He's already treating me more affectionately, and it's not exactly like he held back before.

The most important thing is to prevent this from happening again. I'm not sure how much I can backtrack, but I can certainly try to freeze us in place. If this goes

on and I fall into heat, there will be no saving me – especially because I no longer have the excuse of not being ready to be parents to convince him to use protection. In fact my only comfort about last night is knowing that I can't breed unless I enter that hazy sexual state.

I jump into the shower and clean myself up as best I can, feeling infinitely better once the hot water has done its work. I'm wrapped up in a plush robe and scanning the room service menu when Ethan returns with a bag from the pharmacy. It's only been a half hour and I don't truly feel like I've had enough time to guard myself against him – but it's better than nothing.

"Here you go," He greets me, dropping a kiss to my cheek.

"Saltines, ginger ale, anti-nausea meds, some electrolyte water, a few bananas – we'll get you feeling better in no time."

"Thank you." I say, conjuring a weak smile.

"Of course." He replies, sitting next to me on the sofa and slinging a possessive arm over my shoulders. "Did you find something to order?"

"I don't think I'm ready for real food yet." I admit, eyeing him warily. "But listen, I think we need to talk about yesterday."

To my surprise, Ethan grins. "I knew you would. I could

feel you freaking out before you even opened your eyes this morning.”

Belatedly it occurs to me that Ethan wasn't asleep at all when I woke. He always used to have a habit of watching me sleep, somehow passing it off as sweet instead of creepy. Even now I tell myself it is creepy, but my damned besotted wolf doesn't listen at all. She simply urges me to climb into Ethan's lap and have an encore round of sex, despite the fact that I feel like hot garbage. Sometimes she can be the most unhelpful creature.

“I'm not freaking out.” I argue, “I simply think it was a mistake. Our lives are too complicated to be getting involved with each other. The pups are already upset and confused, and I'm leaving in a couple of months – it's a bad idea. I mean for Goddess's sake, Ethan, I'm being investigated for your mother's murder.”

“We're going to take care of that, Janey.” Ethan assures me, “And as for the rest, I know things are complicated, but we're the one complicating them. I know I made a lot of mistakes when we were married, but I'm not the same person I was then, and neither are you. Our life doesn't have to be such a mess, if you and I work together instead of against each other, we can have what we want.”

“But this isn't what I want!” I exclaim, not sure I'm even speaking the truth. At this point I don't have the first

clue what I want – other than for my pups to be safe and happy. My wolf clearly wants Ethan, and might heart might also – but my head knows better. I learned never to make myself vulnerable to a man the hard way, and I'm determined never to makes that mistake again. I trusted Ethan once, and I paid dearly for that mistake – only a fool would make the same error again, no matter how convincing he is.

Ethan is still watching me with that knowing smile, and I wish I could wipe it right off his smug face. "Okay, if that's what you need to tell yourself, I won't argue."

"What?" I snap, not believing my own ears.

"You believe whatever you like, Jane." Ethan repeats, "I know we're meant to be together. I'm not going to give up, but I'm not going to force you to accept it before you're ready either."

"I'm not ever going to accept it because it's not true." I scowl.

"If you say so." He shrugs, pulling the room service menu out of my hands, "will it bother you if I eat without you? I'm starving."

"Are you serious?" I demand, feeling my temper rising along with my indignation.

"Yes," He answers, a mischievous glint in his eye, "you wore me out."

"No," I grit out, "I mean this act you're putting on, pretending like you're okay with me rejecting you?"

"It's not an act, Jane." Ethan promises, offering me a lethal smile. "Because I know your rejection is only temporary. You want this, and when you're ready to accept that, you will - and when you do I'll be here, waiting."



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