

Flu

By C. Jade Wyton

Olivia has the flu and has been bed-bound for several days. Which, on its own sucks enough— But to be stuck alone with SHESHALAN is just unbearable!

Contains brief mentions of sex.

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‘Am I dying, Sheshalan?’

The question came out as more of a croak than a sentence, and it was followed by a loud, chesty coughing fit as the burning feeling in Olivia’s throat scratched at her gag reflex.

‘You’ll be fine,’ Sheshalan said, flatly, as she finished polishing the end of the thermometer and stepped to Olivia’s side. ‘Alright. Open your mouth.’

‘Hm!’ stubbornly, the girl clamped her mouth shut.

‘Open your mouth,’ Sheshalan repeated. ‘Or it’s going in the other end.’

Olivia, ears pressing back and fur standing on end, did as she was told.

‘Thank you,’ Sheshalan sighed, a hint of sarcasm in her voice. She put the thermometer in Olivia’s mouth, shoving it uncomfortably under her tongue.

‘Keep that there.’

‘Hmp....’

‘Don’t you ‘hmp’ me!’

‘Hmp!’

‘Ugh!’ Sheshalan stomped a hoof and turned away, grabbing for her medical bag and pulling out several strange-looking powders and throwing them in her mortar. She ground them up in a huff, shaking her head and muttering to herself. *‘This is what I get, isn’t it? Ugh.... Just... trying to help! Couldn’t... stupid Farren.... Letting her out... middle of winter... idiot of a man....’*

Olivia rolled her eyes as Sheshalan continued mumbling under her breath, and uncomfortably chewed at the thermometer between her teeth.

At least the old goat wasn’t lecturing her again....

She’d heard enough of it.

About how she “should have known better than to go outside with a storm on the way!” and how she “was always so irresponsible” and was “to stay in bed until the end of the week”!

*Ugh.*

Olivia was tired of it.

It had been three days of her being sick. And two days of her being left *alone* with Sheshalan, as the rest of the Dawn Runners had needed to head to the next town to continue hunting their bounty.

‘Am I dying, Sheshalan?’

‘No, Olivia. And stop chewing the thermometer!’

Olivia thought she might have preferred if she *was* dying.

At least she’d get away from Sheshalan, then....

‘Can I get up, yet?’ she whined, her voice rasping in her throat like sandpaper before she took in a loud wet sniff and snorted back the mucus that was trying to escape out her nose. ‘I want to see Daimon.’

‘Well, that’s too bad,’ Sheshalan told her, putting down her things and standing so she could head back to the girl. ‘You’re too sick to travel and we can’t afford to skip this job. He’ll be back tomorrow.’

Olivia grumbled as the thermometer was removed from her mouth, and she blew a loud raspberry at Sheshalan (though it ended in a coughing fit).

‘Hmp,’ Sheshalan watched Olivia hack up a lump of phlegm into a tissue with a cool, unimpressed expression.

‘Eugh,’ Olivia grumbled, discarding the dirty tissue into the bin beside her bed. ‘I *hate* this!’

‘Well. I’ve told you to stop sneaking out at night,’ Sheshalan said, simply. ‘I warned you that you’d catch something, didn’t I?’

Olivia turned up her nose, causing Sheshalan to sigh heavily.

‘Liv. You know that I don’t *enjoy* seeing you sick like this, right?’ Sheshalan said, her brow furrowing. ‘I care about you. I want you to be healthy.’

Olivia blew another raspberry, and broke into another coughing fit.

‘You think you’d learn to stop doing that,’ Sheshalan tutted.

An overdramatic, childish cry escaped from the teenager as she slammed down her arms and turned her nose to the roof. ‘I’m going to *die*! I’m *dying*! I’m actually *dying*! This isn’t a cold! It’s *death*!’

‘It’s the *flu*, what do you expect?’

Olivia answered the question with a loud, high-pitch shout of frustration and another coughing fit.

Sheshalan shook her head at that, and went back to her mortar and pestle. ‘I’m making us some tea,’ she explained, retrieving a small, gas-powered kettle. ‘It will help soothe your throat.’

‘I don’t *want* your stupid tea!’ Olivia whined. ‘I want Daimon!’

‘Well that’s too bad,’ Sheshalan said, flatly, as she put the kettle on. ‘Daimon’s not here.’

‘Why do you *hate* me?!’ Olivia cried.

‘Oh, stop being dramatic!’

‘You *hate* me!’

‘No I don’t.’

‘Yes you do!’ Olivia whined. ‘You hate me! You’re always mean to me!’

‘Olivia. I *don’t* hate you,’ Sheshalan was at Olivia’s side, now, adjusting the girl’s pillows. ‘I just...’ she hesitated, clicking her tongue and sighing. ‘I have trouble with these things.’

‘*What* things?’

Sheshalan looked queasy. ‘Friendship. Family. Love. The thought of those things makes me.... Well. You’ve seen how I behave.’

‘Crazy?’ Olivia offered.

‘A little,’ Sheshalan replied. ‘I lost my family during the war and it’s... it’s not really something you ever really recover from. Sometimes I feel like...’ she hesitated again.

Olivia saw the hurt look in the goatling’s eyes and bit her tongue; waiting

patiently for her to continue.

‘Sometimes I worry that they’re looking down on me, and that they feel like I’ve replaced them,’ she said.

Olivia felt her ears press back and she gazed down at her feet, hidden under her thick blanket, and gave a low grunt of acknowledgement.

*She knew the feeling, of being replaced....*

‘That’s why I pray so much,’ Sheshalan continued. ‘It makes me feel closer to them. And it gives me hope that things will end up okay.’

‘I don’t have any hope,’ Olivia rasped. ‘Everything’s bad for me. It always has been, and it always will be. Forever!’

‘Don’t be silly,’ Sheshalan grumbled, her ear flicking back as the kettle stopped boiling. ‘You have your whole life ahead of you!’

Olivia snorted as the woman left her side to make their tea. She watched, pouting in silence, as Sheshalan brought the two cups over and set them on the bedside table to steep.

‘And you can’t tell me that it’s the same for you now as it was six years ago,’ Sheshalan said, seriously. ‘That things aren’t even a *little* bit better, now— Is being with the Dawn Runners *really* as bad as when you lived with the Letter Park Gang?’

For a long moment, Olivia was quiet.

Then she sighed, and looked back to her feet.

‘No,’ she admitted.

‘No?’ Sheshalan echoed.

‘No,’ Olivia repeated, sounding utterly miserable that she wasn’t able to be utterly miserable. ‘It’s not so bad with you. I *guess*.’

‘Ah! There we go,’ Sheshalan bleated, a smug-but-playful grin finding her face. ‘What do you like about us?’

Olivia let out a heavy sigh and shrugged. ‘I dunno.’

‘Come on. Let’s count our blessings,’ Sheshalan pressed. ‘What’s something you have that makes you happy?’

‘Uh...’ Olivia thought on it for a long, long moment— Then she blushed. ‘Daimon’s pretty neat.’

‘Is he?’

‘Yeah...’ Olivia rubbed her cheek, trying to make her fur lay flat again. Then, another coughing fit shook her; so bad her eyes started watering and Sheshalan had to help her wipe her nose so she could breathe again. ‘Ugh.... Sheshalan, be honest with me.... Am I dying?’

‘No, Liv. You just have the flu.’

‘It *feels* like I’m dying,’ Olivia wheezed. ‘Are you lying to me?’

‘No, Olivia,’ Sheshalan held out a one of the sweet-smelling cups she’d made. ‘Here. Drink. It will help.’

Olivia didn’t want to drink the tea, but as Sheshalan thrust it at her and the steam floated up and helped clear her nose, she felt herself lifting it up to her lips take a sip.

‘How’s it taste?’

‘Awful,’ Olivia lied; not doing a very good job of hiding how much she actually enjoyed the taste as she took another, much larger sip. ‘It tastes like crap!’

Sheshalan didn't look convinced, and gave Olivia a shit-eating grin as she sipped her own drink.

The tea soothed the hot, dry burning feeling in Olivia's throat and for a moment she let herself relax; slacking her shoulders and leaning back against the bed's headboard with a sigh.

Then, as her cup was nearing empty, she found herself scratching at the handle absently and thinking to herself.

'Hm...' Olivia hummed.

'Liv?' Sheshalan looked up from her own cup. 'You okay?'

'I'm thinking.'

'Yeah?'

'Mm...' Olivia bit her lip, then, and looked up at the satyr. 'Sheshalan? I think I need some advice.'

'From *me*?'

'Well, I can't ask Farren,' Olivia admitted. 'He'd go *crazy* if I asked him this!'

Sheshalan's brow furrowed. 'Uh-huh....'

'So you can't tell him I'm asking you this,' Olivia pressed. 'Okay?'

'Mhm.... Why not?'

'Cos it's about sex.'

Sheshalan choked on her drink. Just for a moment, before she put it down and folded her hands and asked carefully; 'What... about sex?'

'Daimon wants to have it,' Olivia mumbled, not meeting Sheshalan's eye.

'*Mhm.*'

'So.... What do I do?'

'What do you mean, "what do you do?"' Sheshalan scoffed. 'Do you not know how sex works?'

'I *do*, it's just...' Olivia trailed off, looking sheepish as she brought her knees up and rubbed her feet together.

Sheshalan's gaze softened as the girl hesitated. 'Liv?'

'I... don't want to have sex yet.'

'Then tell him that,' Sheshalan said simply. 'He's a good boy. He'll respect your boundaries.'

'Yeah but.... Won't it be letting him down if I say no?'

'Olivia—' Sheshalan let out a long, heavy sigh. 'That boy loves you. A lot. And if I'm being honest, I think he would be happy with anything— Just give him a hunk of roast beef and he'll completely forget about sex.'

The comment made Olivia snicker, and then cough. 'I think I wanna wait a while, though,' she admitted as she caught her breath. 'At least a few more years. Is that too long to ask him to wait?'

'I think it's completely reasonable,' Sheshalan told her. 'It's your choice. But you're still young. And you might change your mind about these things—probably several times— so don't feel bad if you do,' Sheshalan's hand found the girl's shoulder. 'Just make sure you keep the poor boy in the loop.'

Olivia nodded, and loudly sniffed back a hunk of snot.

'*Blow* your nose, Olivia,' Sheshalan scolded, thrusting the box of tissues into the girl's hands. 'Your body's trying to clear out the virus, don't suck it back in!'

'Hmp!' Olivia gave an annoyed grunt, but still did as she was told. 'And you're

*right* back to *yelling* at me!’

Sheshalan stomped a hoof and rolled her eyes. ‘I’m *trying* to make sure you get better—’ she cut off and raised a hand. ‘No. No. I’m *not* fighting with you again. Not right now. You need to *rest!*’

‘Ugh!’ Olivia gave a loud, furious grunt and rolled her eyes back. Then, after a moment of quiet between the two girls, she mumbled. ‘Sheshalan?’

‘Yes?’

‘Can you get me my book? The one from my bag?’

‘Of course.’

Sheshalan retrieved the book for Olivia, who didn’t thank her as she took it.

She opened the book, scanning the page, but found her eyes were so tired and her head was so light that she could barely take in a single word.

And it must have been clear that she was struggling, because Sheshalan gave a snort and was suddenly at her side again.

‘Here. Give it to me,’ the goatling huffed, snatching the book from the girl before hefting herself into the bed. ‘Move over. Make room.’

‘Hey! Get your *fat ass* out of my bed!’

‘No,’ Sheshalan grumbled, settling down next to the girl and opening the book. ‘I’m going to read to you.’

‘Pfft, yeah, like I’d want *that!*’

‘I mean, I *can* put the book down if you’re going to give me attitude,’ said Sheshalan. ‘But wouldn’t you prefer me to read it to you, than you sit here bored?’

Slowly, Olivia pushed down her ears. ‘*Yeah,*’ she admitted, though she didn’t sound happy about it. ‘*I guess....*’

Sheshalan gave a victorious chuckle and opened the book. ‘Well, then, let’s see.... Ah! Here we go. Chapter twelve!’

—END—

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