

Omega's Instinct

by Ivy Marlowe

She suppressed her biology for seven years. It took him seven minutes.

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Content note: This story contains Omegaverse biological dynamics (Alpha/Omega/heat cycles) as speculative fiction. All characters are adults.

Ren had managed her heats with clinical precision for eleven years. Suppressants, scheduled leave, a rented isolation suite in the medical district that had no scent markers and was booked quarterly. She had turned her biology into a logistics problem and she was good at it.

What she had not managed was the suppressant failure.

She found out at 2 PM on a Thursday, when the pharmacy flagged an interaction between the new prescription she'd started for an unrelated issue and the suppressant she'd been on for three years. By 3 PM she was aware that the next four days were going to be different. By 4 PM she had called her building's medical line, established that the isolation suite was occupied, and was sitting in her office trying to think through the problem.

The problem, in biochemical terms: an Omega in heat without either suppressants or a bonded partner had two options — a medical management facility (full, as of her call) or an unbonded Alpha willing to assist, which was the option that every advice column and medical textbook described as clinically effective and which Ren had never in eleven years needed to consider.

Her office partner knocked and came in without waiting, because Kael Dorne had never waited for permission in the three years they'd shared the space. He stopped inside the doorway.

She watched him register the room's changed scent. His expression went through three different things in about a second.

"Ren," he said.

"I know," she said.

"Your suppressants—"

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"Failed. There's an interaction. The suites are full." She said it flat and factual because facts were manageable. "I'm working through the options."

He stood very still in the doorway in the way of an Alpha who was doing the significant work of not responding to a set of biological signals. She was aware of this. She was also, she was noticing, more aware of *him* than she usually was, which was information she was currently filing and not acting on.

"What are the options," he said.

"Medical facility waitlist — they said possibly tomorrow morning. Management suite elsewhere in the city. Or."

"Or," he said.

"The third option," she said. "Which requires consent from both parties and I'm telling you because—" She stopped. Started over. "I'm telling you because you're here and I trust you and I want this conversation now, while I can still have it clearly."

Kael came into the room properly and closed the door. He sat down across from her desk. He was Alpha — she'd known this from the start, it was part of the professional disclosure they'd done when the shared office was arranged — and he was the kind of Alpha who managed it like she managed her biology, which was to say competently and without drama.

"I'll listen," he said, and his voice was very steady.

She said what she had to say directly, which was: that the third option was medically and practically sound; that it would require physical intimacy she had never associated with their professional relationship; that she was asking with full awareness that he could say no, and should say no if there was any ambiguity; and that she was telling him while she was still in the early stage because in two hours she would not be able to have this conversation with clarity.

He listened to all of it.

"You trust me," he said.

"Yes."

"Since when."

She thought about it. "The Mirren project," she said. "Fourteen months ago. You caught my error in the third report and told me before you told anyone else."

Something moved in his expression. "I've trusted you longer."

"Since when," she said, which was the question she hadn't expected to ask.

"The first week," he said. "You disagreed with the department head in the meeting and you were right and you knew it and you waited for the correct moment to say so." He looked at her steadily. "Ren. I'm going to ask you something and I need you to answer it as clearly as you can right now."

"Yes."

"Is this only about the biological situation. Or is there something else."

She looked at him. Three years of shared offices and the Mirren project and fourteen months of trust and the fact that she was aware of him in a way that she had, she could acknowledge, been managing for some time.

"I don't know how to separate them right now," she said honestly. "I think there is something else. I think there has been something else for a while. I can't tell you how much of what I'm feeling is clear."

"The something else," he said, "has been true for me for fourteen months also." He held her gaze. "That's not a pressure. That's information, for whatever it's worth."

"It's worth something," she said.

Another long look.

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"Yes," he said. "To the third option. Not because of the biology. Because of the fourteen months."

He was careful with her — more careful than the biological situation required, which meant he was being careful with *her*, which was the specific difference. He asked before every step. He listened to what she needed in the way of someone genuinely tracking her, not managing a situation.

She let herself not manage it. This was harder than anything else and turned out to be what was needed.

What she had associated with the heat for eleven years was clinical and solitary and something to be endured. This was none of those things. Kael paid attention with the steadiness that was the quality of everything about him — the report, the meetings, the three years of office-sharing — applied here, to her, with the same unhurried focus.

She said his name. It came out differently than it did in meetings. He made a sound when she said it that was not his professional register at all, and she held that sound in the new vocabulary she was assembling.

What the biology required was specific and he met it without reservation, which was both a medical fact and something considerably larger, and she stopped separating those two things because they were the same thing. Her body and her choice and fourteen months of trust and the way he said her name.

Afterwards, the worst of the heat was quiet. Not gone — it would cycle again — but quiet, for now.

"The isolation suite," she said, to the ceiling.

"Opens at 9 AM tomorrow," he said. "If you want it."

She was quiet for a moment. "I don't need it."

He turned his head to look at her.

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"If you want to," she said carefully. "To stay. Through the cycle. I'm not asking because of the biology."

"I know," he said. "That's why I'm saying yes."

She turned her head. He was looking at her with the same expression he'd had in the doorway — the three-stage one — except that it had resolved now to something simple and clear.

"The Mirren project," she said.

"Yes."

"You told me before you told anyone else."

"I told you," he said, "because you're the person whose opinion I wanted. That's been true for fourteen months."

Outside, the city. The medical district. The waitlist she wouldn't need. Inside, something that had been managing itself carefully for three years and had just, at last, been managed the right way.

"Next week," she said. "When this is over."

"Yes."

"I'd like to have a conversation that isn't biology."

"I'd like that too," he said. "I have a list."

She laughed. "So do I."

He held her. Outside, the city did its business. Inside, two people who had trusted each other for fourteen months and hadn't known what to do with it until today.

Now they knew.
