

Faint Heart Never Won Fair Lady  
By Scribblesinink

"Heather?" For a long moment, Jake thought he must be dreaming. Or perhaps the stress and grief of the last few weeks had finally caught up with him. He blinked, fully expecting to find the vision of her gone when he opened his eyes again. But she was still there, hovering in the doorway, and glancing curiously around the sheriff's office. "Heather!"

Jake forgot all about the hitman from New Bern, or the way his palms were stinging from where he'd scraped them when tackling the guy on Main Street. Ignoring the major and his soldiers, he dashed across the office to wrap Heather up in his arms even as she was still turning toward him at the sound of her name.

"Oh my God..." His voice caught in his throat. She felt so good in his arms, warm and soft and *alive*! He inhaled deeply, drawing in her scent—soap and shampoo and woman—before he reluctantly pulled back enough to be able to scan her face. She was looking back at him, her expression a little stunned. Did she think he wouldn't...?

*"Don't worry, Jake. It'll just be a few days."* He repeated the words back at her, laughing and shaking his head at the same time. She smiled back, a little shyly at first, and he so longed to kiss her. Kiss her, and never let go. But—. He had a sudden memory of their farewell at the gas station, all those weeks ago: the way Ted had hugged her and looked at her, and how in New Bern it had seemed like they were....

He shoved the thought away. There'd be time enough for that later. For now, she was here, and breathing, and looking up at him with faint amusement in her eyes.

"How are you?" He realized he was still holding her face between his hands, her fingers warm on his wrists, and he let go of her, moving his hands to rest on her arms, not quite ready to stop touching her and assuring himself she was real. "Are you okay?"

Heather nodded. "Yeah. I'm good." She turned away from him slightly so she could survey the rest of the room. "Major Beck was nice enough to let me hitch a ride back here on his convoy, so I...." Her voice trailed off mid-sentence, and a shiver ran through her frame.

Jake followed her gaze. His eyes narrowed as he discovered she was staring straight at the New Bern gunman. Did she recognize him? Raising his head a bit, Jake saw her reaction hadn't gone unmissed by the major, either, and he was looking back at them with interest .

"You alright?" Jake drew Heather's attention back to himself. Something shifted in her eyes, before she nodded.

"I'm fine." She pulled in a breath, and repeated, "I'm fine."

Jake wasn't quite sure he believed her—she looked more spooked than he'd ever seen her, even during all the uncertainty and confusion in the first weeks after the bombs went off—but he was willing to let it go for now. This was neither the time, nor the place. He couldn't help wonder what she'd been through in New Bern, though, to make her look like that. Again, he

asked himself: why on Earth hadn't he gone to New Bern and brought her back when she hadn't returned with the first turbine?

Because he'd been afraid; Jake could answer his own question easily enough. Afraid to learn she didn't want him any more, after the way he'd treated her before they went to Black Jack. Afraid he'd find her in the arms of Ted Lewis. And then Eric had told him she was dead....

*You're an idiot, Jake Green.*

He shook himself back to the present, realizing Heather was talking to him again. Something about needing to register...?

"Oh, right, yeah." He steered her over to the counter and hovered at her shoulder while she filled out the form one of the soldiers gave her.

Only half-paying attention to their conversation—about whether her house was still okay and the break-ins they'd had; reassuring her Eric was fine—Jake's mind was busy, still trying to come to grips with Heather being alive, and figuring out how to move forward. It would've been simple once, like on that morning on Main Street when she'd kissed him, except he'd been the fool who'd missed the chance. And now, everything was so much more complicated.

There was Em to consider: she obviously expected to pick up with Jake where they'd left off six years ago. The way she'd tried to kiss him, right before something about the gunman had drawn Jake's attention, had made that very clear. Jake didn't think he'd encouraged her, but he certainly hadn't done much to disabuse her of the notion, either.

Not to mention Ted in New Bern, and that maybe Heather's feelings had changed altogether. Just 'cause she kissed Jake once didn't mean....

But one thing had become very clear to Jake after he'd been captured at Black Jack and Heather had bought his freedom with a lot of nerve and a few pounds of salt. The long months of missing her had only confirmed it: he liked her. Liked her a hell of a lot. And he wanted—needed—to tell her that. If it turned out she was no longer interested, then.... His mind shied away from the possibility, focusing instead on the here and now.

Heather had finished with the form, and was ready to go home. Jake insisted on going with her, even though she said she'd be okay getting in, that she still had her keys. He wasn't about to let her out of his sight if he could help it. Certainly not with gunmen bent on revenge making it all the way to Main Street without being detected. Especially since he hadn't missed the dirty look the guy had given her in the sheriff's office. The thought of Heather still being in danger made his heart grow tight in his chest.

He was doubly glad he'd insisted on coming when he caught the look on her face after she'd stepped into the house and taken a good look around. The burglars had left a bit of a mess in their search of food, and although his mom and Em had tidied up after, Heather still looked uncomfortable. "Are you okay?" Jake followed her into the kitchen, which was gloomy from where the broken window had been boarded up with a sheet of plywood.

"I'm fine." She cleared her throat, picking up some object or other from the counter and turning it over in her hands. "Just... things aren't quite how I left them."

Jake gave an amused snort—that was an understatement if he ever heard one—before he grew serious again. Despite everything, one thing had stayed the same: his feelings for her hadn't changed. "Heather...?"

Heather put the gadget back on the counter and turned toward him, meeting his eyes. Heart suddenly hammering against his ribs, Jake continued. "There's something.... What happened before you left...."

Dammit, he'd rehearsed this speech so often during the months she was gone. Right now, he couldn't seem to remember a single word of it. And maybe this wasn't the right moment, anyway, but the last time he'd thought that, she'd gone away, and it had seemed he'd never be able to tell her how he felt. So he wasn't about to let opportunity slip through his fingers again.

"Oh, that." She gave a nervous chuckle. "That... that was an act." Color rose in her cheeks. "You know that, right?"

Jake scanned her features, trying to read her expression, and she shifted her gaze away.

"Wasn't for me," he whispered.

His quiet admission made Heather turn back to look at him. There was something in her face he couldn't quite place. "Wasn't an act for me," he repeated, more loudly. He hesitated, before reaching out to enfold her hands in his, praying she wouldn't pull away. When she didn't, he found the courage to go on. "Heather, I've been an idiot." She quirked an eyebrow. "Avoiding you after you kissed me? That was stupid. I was...." He shrugged. "Afraid, I guess. To screw up, to hurt you."

She uttered a soft snort at that, and he gave her a wry grin. "Yeah, I know." Glancing down at their hands, hers looking so small and delicate in his bigger ones, he collected his thoughts for a moment, remembering his fear for her when he thought the slavers had caught her too, and the sheer relief when he discovered they hadn't. And the way it had felt when she'd looked him over, pretending to want to buy him for her own pleasure.... God, he hoped it hadn't all been an act...!

"Anyway," he gave her hands a little squeeze, "after Black Jack, after, you know.... I realized something." He lifted his head, seeking her gaze again, taking another deep breath. "Heather, I like you. A lot." He paused, replaying the words in his head. "No, that's wrong. I'm in love with you." He chuckled wryly. "Probably have been since we met on that bus. I've just been too dumb to realize it."

She was staring back at him, not speaking. Suddenly horrified, Jake let go of her hands, stepping back. "I'm sorry." He dropped his head. "I shouldn't have dumped this on you like this. I've no right, after everything that's happened...." He glanced up at her from under his lashes. "I understand if," he shrugged one shoulder, "if you've moved on." He'd only have himself to blame, wouldn't he? "You and Ted—."

"Jake." Heather spoke quietly, but Jake snapped his mouth shut, not trying to finish the sentence. "It's—Ted and I are friends, nothing more."

"Oh." Hope flared through him and he tilted his head a little further upward. "But...?"

She shook her head. "No buts. I'm just a little.... I didn't think...." She caught his eye. "Are you sure?"

"God, yes." Jake didn't hesitate. He held her gaze, trying to convey the truth with his eyes as much as his words. "I may be slow, but I've had plenty of time to think about this. And when I thought you were dead, and I'd never get the chance to tell you—" The sheer memory made his voice catch, and he coughed to clear his throat. "Yes, I'm sure. I love you."

Heather didn't respond right away. But the way her face lit up slowly, cautiously, should tell him everything he needed to know, shouldn't it? Yet, he didn't quite dare let himself believe it. Could he be that lucky, after the way he'd treated her? "Heather?"

"Maybe," her voice was a little shaky, and she gave another of those chuckles, "maybe you should kiss me, then?"

Jake grinned, the weight he'd carried since Black Jack falling away, and closed the distance between them with a single stride. "Yes, ma'am."

There remained so much they needed to deal with: losing Dad, rebuilding the town, whatever had happened to her in New Bern. But as long as she still wanted him, as long as she felt the same way about him as he did about her, Jake didn't care much about the rest.

**Disclaimer:** this story is a transformative work based on the Junction Entertainment/Fixed Mark Productions/CBS Paramount Television series *Jericho*. It was written for entertainment only; the author does not profit from it nor was any infringement of copyright intended. Please do not redistribute without author attribution.