

# Lita's Love for the Alpha

## Offense Taken

“Jesus, Erica,” Alex grumbled his disapproval, “That’s how you talk to a total stranger? You just learned her name and you’re already judging her?” His eyebrows shot up as he pursed his lips.

That was the second time today that Alex had stood up for her. Lita was two seconds away from asking which clone this was because he hadn’t even called her psycho bunny or sticks yet today.

“I’m not judging her, \*Beta.\*” Erica snapped. Lita had never heard the title used with disdain before. Maybe Erica’s attitude wasn’t specifically directed to Lita. Maybe she thought \*everyone\* who wasn’t an Alpha was beneath her.

“It’s just a question, Alex, who pissed in your drink?” The two bickered at the end of the table, with Cole looking annoyed and uncomfortable between them.

“Erica,” Cole said softly, “I told you about being disrespectful with titles. You need to work on that.”

Lita almost laughed at the sudden rush of anger. He handled Erica with such care, treating her as if she were delicate. Was this the same Cole that basically told Lita she was a worthless piece of crap for being human? And that it was ridiculous to think he’d accept their bond? He’d been completely heartless about it.

Erica assured the table that it was only a question, and yet it felt like an insult. The same way what Cole had said felt like an insult. The symmetry stabbed Lita’s chest with precision.

\*No,\* Lita thought to herself, she wasn’t fucking any of the men, but she was Cole’s mate. For a moment, she thought about being petty. About blurting that fact across the table and starting a problem. But that wasn’t a stranger’s business, was it? And what if he had already told Erica? Then it would only embarrass Lita.

“I didn’t think it was a \*shameful\* activity,” Erica said, still arguing with Alex. “How was I supposed to know it wasn’t common conversation? You know those two talk about it like they’re going out for dinner.” Erica tossed her hand in Stace and Jaz’s direction. “And I was trying not to ask why she looks like she was dragged under a moving car, Alex. I was trying to pick a happier topic.”

Lita stiffened, remembering how bad she truly looked. The way the bank manager stared at her and asked if she needed help. The way pedestrians had avoided her and cut her strange looks. Lita’s hands shook. Brian had done the shameful thing, and yet she was walking around with the proof. Lita was walking around like a pariah. How was that fair?

Andres leaned over, “Don’t take it personally, she rubbed us all the wrong way at one point or another. She’s kind of... difficult to read at first...”

“She’s kind of a bitch...” Lita said truthfully, rolling her fork through the sauce until it mixed with the salad.

He laughed lightly, “That too. But she must have something good that Alpha sees in her. He’s a good judge of character.”

Lita doubted that very much. She couldn’t stand people that looked down on others, probably because she was always the one being looked down on. Lita certainly knew enough about those types growing up. How many times had she been picked on for dressing out of season or not putting enough effort into her appearance? Even when she’d started dating Brian, they all said he was slumming it with her, which only sent Lita further into his arms.

It wasn’t like they hadn’t known she was rich, they had. They knew her parents were important and ran in the elite circles. Hell, their parents often spent time in the same circles. But it hadn’t mattered. There was something about Lita they didn’t like, something that made her an \*other\*. That was a hard insecurity to break and here she was, in some basic clothes, covered in bruises and a fragile emotional state. Lita really couldn’t have felt more inadequate if she tried.

“She just doesn’t like bunnies,” Brody leaned down to her ear, picking up where Andres left off. “It’s like a complex or something. She thinks they might tempt Alpha, you know? And if she knew you were his mate... she’d probably be trying to murder you in your sleep. You should take it as a compliment.” He smiled.

“Why do you say that?”

“Have you seen yourself? When you’re not covered in bruises, of course,” His face got darker when he said that, like he was replaying all her cuts, itemizing every place she hurt. Lita grew hot under his stare, feeling as if she was being seen for who she was for once. Not who she was supposed to be or what she was supposed to do.

“You were rough at first, I’ll give you that,” he laughed so genuinely it made Lita join him, “But then you know, you didn’t look rough anymore.”

“Brody, if I didn’t know better, I’d say you were calling me pretty...” Lita smirked, completely oblivious to whatever was happening on the other side of the table.

“It’s Lita’s choice if she answers, moon above! Why don’t you go run a circuit, if you know what I mean, grumpy,” Erica scolded, “Maybe Jaz will help you out. Or Lita, if she \*is\* a bunny, after all?”

If she was insulting the idea of ring bunnies, then she was also insulting Stace and Jaz. Lita looked over at them. Jaz rolled her eyes and drank from a beer. Stace glared at Erica, her jaw tight enough that Lita wondered if she might swing.

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She thought back to when Erica said now \*Jaz has a friend\* as if it weren’t possible for humans to integrate with wolves. At least, that’s what it felt she implied. It rubbed Lita the wrong way and reminded her of Cole wanting to reject her solely because she was human. It was prejudiced and wrong. It’s not like she was waiting for him to marry her or something, she barely knew the man but being told she wasn’t worthy based on something she had no control over made her angry.

What was their deal? Was Erica imagining herself better than humans because she was stronger? Prettier? Richer, maybe? Lita couldn’t understand being so disrespectful to a person she’d never met.

“Erica, how many times have we talked about your tone?” Cole asked, drinking from his own beer. He looked uncomfortable, but not angry. Perhaps it was par for the course with her, and he accepted it. Lita found it odd that he would want to be with someone like that, but she shrugged it off. She didn’t know him any better than he knew her.

“Was it? Lita, you weren’t offended at all, were you?” Again, her voice sounded off. The words were fine, but the tone was fucking spiteful, a little too sharp, a little too high-pitched. Lita inhaled a fiery breath, the skin around her eyes tightening with rage.

“Nope,” Lita smiled smugly, popping a bite of food into her mouth. Her muscles felt tight, irritating her bruised rib. She wasn’t sure it was jealousy, but it was definitely something. She didn’t like Erica at all, “No offense taken. I can tell just from looking at you you’re just really conservative. I know just what that’s like.”

Lita knew everyone at the table would understand, except Erica, that what she said wasn’t a compliment.

Erica smiled, patting Cole’s hand in reassurance that she hadn’t done anything wrong. Lita looked her over. Pale skin, blond hair pulled up into a flawless ponytail, baby pink tennis dress when no one was playing tennis, flawless smile, sparkling blue eyes. Again, she felt insecure. Brody had just called her pretty and yet, one look at Erica’s perfection made her feel unwanted all over again. Though as Lita compared the couple, they looked like opposites with Cole’s casual t-shirt and sweats, messy dark hair and five o’clock shadow.

“See? It’s fi—”

“Definitely more of a barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen type,” Lita cut her off, nodding as if coming to some silent conclusion.

“Ohhhh burn,” Alex teased quietly. Then, as if he really took a moment to visualize what Lita said, he choked and laughed out loud, coughing over a bite of spaghetti. “Oh, shit. That was actually fucking funny, sticks.”

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She heard Brody stifle a laugh into a weird snort, “Lita, what the fuck? I thought you were nonconfrontational?”

“She started it,” Lita whispered back. “And who told you I was nonconfrontational? They lied.”

He coughed over another laugh, reaching for his water.

“Excuse me? I—” Erica started, but Lita was already ready, unsure of where all this confidence had come from. Maybe she was finally free to channel her anger into something beneficial.

“Oh no, Erica, you weren’t offended at all, were you?” Lita looked at her plate, desperately keeping herself from smirking. Then she met Erica’s eyes with all the feigned innocence she could muster. Instead of lashing back out, Erica played it cool, smiling back at Lita. It was a brittle smile, too tight, too quick.

Erica was probably closer to Cole’s age than Lita was, she realized. Though she didn’t know exactly how old he was, she knew he wasn’t nineteen. Maybe he wanted someone more mature. That could make sense, but then again, she was extremely immature for insulting a stranger and pretending not to know she did it. There was something in Lita that saw all those perfect fucking girls in school who hated her guts for absolutely no reason and who felt they needed to rub her nose in it every chance they got. She definitely found everything about that woman offensive, and that made her want to offend Erica in the same way.

“No. Not at all.”

Jaz kicked Andres under the table, who yelped and glared at Lita. Lita pretended not to see it, cutting her eyes as Erica continued, “So you are a bunny, though, right?”

Gripping her fork, Lita dragged her hands under the table. With everyone staring at her, waiting for an answer, she had exactly no time to figure out what she was supposed to say. Lita couldn’t tell by the way she asked the question if Erica knew about her and Cole. And she couldn’t tell which answer would cause her more trouble in the end.

Was she just trying to rile Lita up? Was she trying to test Cole? She ran through all the options in her head until it hurt, then looked up to Erica and flashed a smile, “Mhmm, new to the whole thing, actually.”

It was the best she could do. It wasn’t exactly a yes, but it certainly wasn’t a no because at the end of the day, she really didn’t know what she was doing in the pack. Everything had happened too fast. She and Cole weren’t anything she could put into words, and she didn’t have a proper role among them. She wasn’t a fighter, not really, and she didn’t know how to explain herself to Erica without explaining everything. She gripped her fork harder under the table.

“Oh okay, that’s cool, I guess. Not my scene, as I’m sure you can tell.” She ran her hand over Cole’s. “But I don’t knock anybody who’s into it, of course. I get why Stacey does it, but you know you and Jasmine have options...”