

# Lita's Love for the Alpha

## November

\*One month later...\*

Time didn't fly. It was slow, and it was tortuous. Lita healed quickly, to the surprise of everyone, but her mind took longer than her body. Dr. Morgan had kept a close eye on her, checking in every few days. And even though he gave her a green light to return to normal activity, Lita hadn't gone back to any gym sessions.

Was she avoiding Cole? After the disastrous dinner with Erica, of course she was, but only partially, because it was mainly her mind that kept her locked up tight. Lita had lost her parents and her terrorizer in the same day—the two most concrete parts of her life. She should have been ecstatic, she should have enjoyed her freedom, instead, she felt crushing insecurity. What would happen now that she'd lost everything she ever knew? It was exactly what she'd wanted and yet she hadn't prepared for that dream to actually come true. Her options were limitless, and she was finally free, so why did she feel more trapped than ever?

During the day, when she was avoiding the gym and refusing to leave the female dorms, Lita did her schoolwork. She studied and completed her assignments. Thankfully, the instructors had accepted the letter from Dr. Morgan that claimed she was on medical leave for the rest of the semester due to a traumatic injury. Her professors had sent their well wishes and provided her with an emailed list of assignments to complete online.

If only they knew how much she relied on those tasks to stay sane. Otherwise, Lita would obsess over everything else. \*Werewolves. Mates. James.\* Her mother sending scathing texts about where all Lita's money had gone. Or leaving voicemails full of her Alpha tone, demanding Lita come home immediately. Diane didn't seem to realize that she was ensuring Lita stayed exactly where she was.

There was no real reason to leave anyway. None of the men minded that she was living in the dorms, and she could care less if it bothered Cole; he deserved to be miserable for a long while. Lita always transferred her split of the grocery money for the bi-weekly shopping trips and Stace always offered to pick up extra feminine care products when she went out.

Lita \*wanted\* to leave. She really did. She wanted to start living this new life she'd bought herself and yet... fear of the unknown consumed her.

In what Stace called a minor setback, Lita had gone back to wearing her favorite oversized clothes, hiding herself physically in the same way she was hiding mentally. Lita knew it wasn't the best sign of her emotional health, but at least she was eating at every meal. Even if those meals happened in her room alone, far away from that dining room table and that impossible Alpha. Not that he cared to ask how she was doing either way.

And the others seemed to be content with her appetite. When she stumbled upon them in the packhouse kitchen, Mark and Andres had both commented on her fuller cheeks and brighter complexion. Lita's dark hair was another matter altogether, hanging long and unkempt around her face, the burgundy ends looking dull and lifeless. She couldn't find the energy to care. At least she was hanging with Stace and Jaz, who slept over most of the week, but good company could only go so far when it came to healing.

Lita's phone chimed, the sudden sound making her jump. It happened every night. For the first time though, Lita slid the notification to silent without checking it, and she supposed that was progress. She looked at the clock, blinking as she read the time. Midnight. Twelve-oh-one. Twelve-oh-two.

The phone buzzed long enough to tell her it was a phone call, and then two quick buzzes told her whoever it was left a voicemail as well. She closed her eyes, snuggling herself deeper into bed. The soft sheets and fluffy comforter helped soothe some of the anxiety. Her thoughts turned to the comfortable room.

If there was one thing she could say about the compound, it was that nothing on the inside ever matched the outside. The female dorms, for instance, were situated across from the packhouse where the men slept, and to hear Stace tell it, living with the men was a fate worse than death. So, after James died, she'd commandeered the building across the street and Cole was forced to relent. On the outside, it was covered in mossy growth and rusty water stains from the few calcified rebar poles Lita could see under the crumbled facing. But inside, the building was dry and warm. On the main floor, the living area was even cozier than the packhouse, with plush furniture and fuzzy rugs. Stace hung thick curtains that blocked the sun and Lita felt safe.

On the second floor, there were a number of rooms but only three had been renovated: Stace's, the one Jaz used when she stayed over, and a guest room that had become Lita's room. The phone buzzed again, a rapid succession of sounds that told her someone was sending text after text.

Lita thought back to the first time it had happened and the swell of emotions that ran through her. Slowly, those feelings were tempering, and she relished the strength she felt each time she went through the messages. Pain never hurt the same way twice, and she was thankful for that.

Her eyes eased open as she reached for the phone. When she checked the clock, Lita saw she'd made it thirty minutes before giving in. And yet, like a terrible car crash, she couldn't look away. She couldn't stop herself from checking because she had to know what he wanted to say.

The texts from Brian had started a few days after Cole spirited her away—Jeez, it was strange to think that asshole was the same man that refused to leave her in a bad situation. The man she saw in her bathroom doorway, the one who looked liable to murder someone, the one who treated her like something to cherish, and the one that sat at the head of that dinner table with Erica—couldn't have been more opposite if he tried.

Lita shook those thoughts away. It wouldn't do her any good trying to understand why men were always trying to hurt her. A better use of her time was to grow claws and hurt them back.

She dragged the little device back to her, letting the screen light the room. Devoid of all location and tracking information since she came to Cole's pack grounds—thanks to Mark, who turned out to be a tech whiz—Lita could use her phone as she normally would. And for some reason that Stace, Jaz and even Lita herself couldn't understand no matter how many times they talked it out, she wouldn't block Brian's number. She just wasn't ready yet. It felt like there must have been stages of acceptance and Lita wasn't confident enough in herself to pull the plug.

Some toxic part of herself needed to know that he was sorry and suffering, or at least claimed to be. She needed to sit in the emotions he made her feel. She needed to feel the pain so it would hurt one iota less next time. There was something cleansing about reading his late-night texts.

And some toxic part of her needed to hurt him back.

The rage was as consuming as the clarity she gained after she shot a response text off. But not only that, in her secret heart, she knew she also craved his attention. She always had. His desire, whether real or imagined, made her feel important and wanted, and he'd used it like a lure. Something to draw her in until she'd never be able to leave.

She read the message:

\*I love you. I've said it a thousand times, I'll say it a thousand more. I miss you. I want you in every way a man can want a woman. I know I hurt you, but I've changed. Not all of my behavior was in my control, baby. I wouldn't never want to drive you away. I wish you would just give me the chance to right my wrongs. Just one more time. I'll never stop trying.\*

And like always, Lita felt red taking over, a wash of anger and disgust that seemed to need an outlet. Rage coursed through her body in waves. She was angry with him for hurting her, for manipulating her, for not knowing where the line between consent and rape was. And yet, knowing all that, \*feeling\* all that, the small part of Lita that looked up to him, relied on him, loved him, ached for her to find forgiveness in her heart. That small piece of her wanted to feel normal again, even if that normal wasn't necessarily good for her. She had explained away her pain time and time again. Made a million excuses for how she'd probably asked for him to take it too far. How many times had she taken on the shame for his actions?

Her breathing turned shallow. He was a wolf. As insane and ridiculous as that knowledge was, she couldn't ignore what the others had said. An Alpha. A political hopeful looking to nose his way into the upper echelon of the pack. And he and his father had used her parents to secure that for himself. Something about being a pawn in a political game made Lita want to cry. It was like none of them had ever viewed her as a person.

She shook the thoughts from her mind, knowing nothing good ever came from those spirals. Lita thumbed the screen and typed instead, trying to find the words that would shred his pride since she didn't think he had much of a heart.

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\*I hate you. I've never had the chance to say it a thousand times, but I'll say it a thousand more. I never want to see you again. I never want to hear from you again. I despise you in every way a woman can hate her rapist and abuser. I know you hurt me because some part of you enjoyed it, and I don't care if you think you've changed. I'm done taking the blame for you and I'm done letting you gaslight me. From the bottom of my heart, I hope your dick falls off and you get an incurable disease. I hope every miserable thing happens to you and only you.\*

She smiled a feral smile as she hit send, sitting up on the side of the bed. It felt good to be cruel to him and she didn't care what that said about her.

Having been without her meds, Lita had to get creative in dealing with her emotions. They flared constantly and sometimes that meant, expressing them just so they'd pass. Dr. Morgan said the meds were probably keeping her underweight and exhausted on top of suppressing her emotions. When Lita asked why her mother would want to keep her sick, Dr. Morgan had gone quiet, and she hadn't waited for an answer. She wasn't waiting for one from Brian either, silencing the phone.

Getting out of bed, she threw on her baggy workout clothes and laced her shoes, heading for the gym like she always did when those texts came through. At this hour, she was safe to use the facility without running the risk of seeing Cole.

Lita passed Stace's room which was quiet and Jaz's, which was not. She cringed as she tried not to hear the low, small sounds between her and whoever was in the bed too. Lita was used to it by now and the longer she went without getting any herself, the more she warmed to the idea of letting herself have fun. Why be ashamed of doing the exact same thing the men were doing? And if Lita was being honest with herself, it had been a long time since she felt anything close to climax during sex. Downstairs, she walked past the rest of the common rooms, which were quiet and tiptoed out of the female dorms into the night. No one was ever up for her nighttime workouts and it was better that way, so she could calm herself down and enjoy the peace.

The night air whipped through her heavy hoodie as she started her series of laps around the compound. Nothing but the sound of her breathing and the song on her headphones ran through her mind. She ran harder and faster with each lap, pushing herself beyond what felt comfortable until she felt the sting of working her muscles hard. She found herself somewhat addicted to the feeling.

After an hour of that, when she felt her legs turning to jelly, she stopped at the gym itself, hands on her knees, panting to catch her breath. For the following hour she worked the bags, practicing some of the beginner moves Stace had showed her, and Lita imagined a montage of Brian and Cole's faces. Lita panted, collapsing to her knees for a rest. She still felt lost. A month after everything had happened and yet she didn't feel any closer to closure.

She sighed, downing some water before she did some core exercises, finishing her whole body workout with weight lifting. Lita was exhausted after every midnight session, wicking away sweat from her forehead. She left through the back door, blaring her music in her ears all the way back to the dorm bathroom.

Lita worked at her tense muscles under the hot water until she relaxed. Lately she'd been feeling more on edge like there was something under the surface just dying to get out, something building the tension inside her chest. So she leaned against the shower wall until her body was so relaxed she was almost asleep. Then Lita forced herself to get dressed and head back to her room.

In bed once more and finally ready to sleep, Lita grabbed her phone and scrolled back through the messages from Brian. She was going to block him soon, just not tonight. For a small moment, she allowed herself to imagine her past in reverse. As if instead of coming apart, all those bad moments came together. James came out of the crash. Brian was actually who he appeared to be. Her mother kissed her forehead and said she was proud. And then just as fast, the memories played themselves forward and her whole life shattered before her again. Wiping the tears away, Lita closed her eyes for another restless night of sleep.