

# Lita's Love for the Alpha

## Check-In

At some point during the drive Lita had fallen asleep. She awoke to Brody gently nudging her off of his shoulder, "We're here." His breath tickling her cheek made Lita simply stare up at him for a moment, enjoying the human contact.

She stretched out her arms, falling further towards his lap as he caught her and pushed her back to her side of the seat. Stealing a quick glance out of the window, Lita saw they'd arrived at a large concrete building. She flashed her eyes up to the driver's seat but it was already empty. In fact the whole van was.

"Come on, Lita," Brody called, halfway out of van door, "We're going to be late for check in."

Grabbing her phone and trash, she slid out behind him, making her way into the concrete building. The grim outside turned into a five star hotel as soon as she went through the revolving door. Apparently having a misleading exterior was a staple in the wolf community. She walked along the marble floor towards the rest of the group, huddled around the front desk. Swiveling her head around to take in the sights, Lita appreciated all the beautiful details: and elegant lounge with a bar, a large ballroom staircase, gold elevators with plush carpeted interiors and gold leaf candelabras, several large chandeliers whose crystals dripped down towards the floor.

As she took in the people, she realized once more that werewolves looked just like everyone else except they were more. More beautiful, more muscular, like they'd gone through one extra stage of evolution than the rest of the world had. Lita couldn't help but stare at one broad-shouldered man surrounded by a small pack of women. As they gushed and fussed over him, Lita realized they were admirers. For a split second she imagined it was James, a star fighter among his own kind and hers. Beloved by all. He'd probably had admirers in all fifty states. Her heart warmed a little right before it ached.

"Here's your key, you're staying with Stace and Jaz," Cole pushed a small black card into her hand without asking what she was doing, "Andres and Alex are in the room to your right, Brody and Mark in the left. I'm two doors down on the right."

Lita nodded, still staring at the fighter in the lobby, somehow unable to tear her eyes away from the man she imagined was her brother. They looked nothing alike. Sounded nothing alike. But her mind had attached them and she couldn't un-see it. She imagined her brother making these long trips. Maybe even travelling across the country to compete and stun everyone he ever met.

She'd watched a few re-run videos of old fights and immediately regretted never being able go to one. Lita hadn't seen a single fight. That hurt, knowing how important it was to her brother. It wasn't her fault but it didn't make the pain any less intense. She hated her parents for taking those moments from her. James was a force of nature when he fought, primal, regal, zoned in. His was always a presence that demanded to be seen and understood. She missed that. And she missed this side of him she never knew. How it was possible to miss something she never had, Lita didn't know. But she did.

"Jesus, right in front of my face, Lita?" Cole growled, shaking his head at the preening fighter across the room, "As if you sleeping on Brody in the backseat wasn't enough." He turned to leave.

"Was James...," she grabbed Cole's arm and cleared her throat, fighting with her emotions, "Did people love him like that?"

Surprised, Cole just stared at her for a minute before his face tensed. She wasn't supposed to talk to him about James. Stace at least, could talk about him occasionally, though it hurt Lita every time. The others would mention him in passing or tell funny wolf stories about him and as much as it hurt, she liked hearing about that side of him, the one she didn't know. But Cole was like ice, he'd just harden whenever James' name was mentioned. Lita normally respected that, often feeling the same way herself, the wound too deep and ugly to touch but in this moment, he seemed like the only one who would understand.

His eyes softened, brushing a tear away from Lita's cheek. She didn't even feel it there, "Yea he was like that. Best Beta I could have asked for."

Beta? James was Cole's Beta? She hadn't expected him to continue but he did, "Everyone loved him. The other fighters, the refs, the staff. He was just that kind of guy. Hard to hate. Personality bigger than any room you put him in. Bunnies and fighters alike used to fly in from all over the country to train at our gym. Had to build extra facilities for the wolves. We bought the rest of the industrial park together, really planning to make it something special. Maybe a fighting resort."

"How could he be your Beta? Alex is," Lita couldn't make it add up.

Cole shifted uncomfortably, "Alex was always a part of the pack, every wolf has a certain bloodline that shows in the color of their eyes. Betas, blue. Alphas, red, Deltas, Green and all common wolves are yellow. But just because you have the bloodline, doesn't mean you have to be in that role. Alex was here but he was just a friend and a fighter. He and Stace helped make the pack feel like family."

"So James... helped start the gym? He was your second in command?"

"Mmhmm, there can only be one Beta at a time and James was mine. When he died, Alex volunteered to take over. He honestly kept us all afloat when I couldn't. It was too hard for me for a while... Anyway what were we originally talking about? Right, you asked if people loved James like that and the answer is, they loved him more than that. I think at one point there was an entire bleacher full of his female fans." Cole laughed. The first genuine laugh Lita ever heard from him.

"Yea I'm sure he loved that, I always remember him as a ladies man too," Lita sniffled a little.

"Yea of course they wanted him. Couldn't walk into a party without being attacked at least few times. Caused quite a fuss at the gym with all the ring bunnies. Andres and Mark were always happy to pick up the slack though, trust me. But James only ever had eyes for his mate," Cole laughed again, looking at Lita a little harder and swallowing, "Stace didn't tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

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"That she was his mate...? When he died...it's complicated, she really should be the one to tell you."

"Okay, I'll ask her," Lita ran her hand over her arm, "You don't talk about him. You try not to think about him. Every time someone brings him up you get this hard look in your eyes, like you go somewhere else."

Cole leaned in, holding her cheek with one hand, "You get the same look. You think no one sees it, but I do. How much it hurts... I can feel it, right there." He pointed a finger right over the center of her chest.

"He was like a brother to me too," he looked away, backing up to his original distance, "Like a younger brother who didn't understand certain things about wolf life. Your parents kept him pretty sheltered too, though no nearly as much as you. I suppose because he had his own wolf. In some ways, he was like an older brother too, always giving me advice on the business, helping me with plans and advertisement. I've got a lot of shit in my head from my own childhood, heavy shit, and sometimes James made it lighter."

Cole shrugged and put his hands in his pockets, "Anyway, I have to go check us all into the tournament. Elevator's over there, take it up to the sixth floor. Room number's on the key. I have to um, the bags... yea, I'll have yours sent up to you." Then he was gone, walking back out to the van. Lita wandered back to the elevators on autopilot, trying to digest all the new information.

She unlocked the hotel door with an electronic beep, slipped in and leaned against the door.

"Hey! Wondered what happened to you downstairs. Talking to Cole again, I see," Stace laughed, "I knew it was only a matter of time... Lita, seriously what's up? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Were you my brother's mate?"