

Lita's Love For The Alpha Chapter 4

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Therapy

"Miss Dillard, punctual as always, please have a seat," Susan motioned. She'd been Lita's therapist for the last month, exactly one day after Lita moved into her apartment. But ever since the first visit, she always insisted that Lita call her Susan, to show that her office was a friendly space. But it wasn't and Lita knew that, simply from the fact that Susan never called her Lita. It was always Miss Dillard.

"So, what's new on my mother's agenda?" Lita asked, dismissing any pleasantries at the door. She slumped onto the overpriced leather couch with a scowl.

"Your mother says hello, as always, and once again, I'm here to remind you she only wants what's best for you. We're here today to discuss the gym again. It's important for you to take better care of yourself. Have you found a suitable location? I have a few suggestions that your mother has approved, if you'd like."

"No thanks, Susan. I found one yesterday. Here's the receipt," Lita snipped, practically tossing the half-crumpled piece of paper into Susan's hands. The woman cleared her throat and cleaned her glasses slowly before taking up the piece of receipt paper in her hands.

"Mmm, there's no name here. It just says Athletic club on the line item. What's it called? Where is it?"

"It's pretty far, but I like the drive," Lita smiled with an attitude, "Gives me lots of time to think. And I prefer to keep the name to myself. I was told I could select my gym, and I did. It shouldn't matter where it is. Anyway, I figured the cost would satisfy mother, ensuring I've chosen a location suitable for a family of our caliber." Lita hated to speak that way. It was elitist and implied others were lesser because they were not wealthy. But it was the language both Susan and Lita's mother loved to hear. It validated that Lita was absorbing their training.

Susan nodded thoughtfully, "Yes, I suppose exclusive gyms don't need to advertise on their receipts. The word of mouth is sufficient. Yes, I think she'll be pleased with this."

Susan tucked the paper into a file folder and grabbed her notepad, "Shall we get started?"

Lita nodded.

“How is your aggression today, on a scale of 1-10?”

Eleven, Lita thought. “Two,” Lita answered aloud.

“And your anger?”

Twelve, Lita growled in her own head. “One,” she sighed, tired of answering the same litany of questions every day.

“How many pills are you taking a day?” Susan pointed her nose down at this one, trying to scrutinize Lita’s answer.

“Two, same as always,” Lita shrugged, knowing it was closer to five or six at this point.

“And your sleep? Have you been having nightmares?”

“Not as many. I’ve been getting about four or five hours of sleep, but after the gym yesterday, I got six.”

“Lovely, lovely. And the best part is it’ll do wonders for your complexion and hair, which have become rather... lackluster.”

Lita had never had a therapist before James died, but she didn’t think Susan was doing it correctly. She wasn’t encouraging or affirmative. She constantly took little jabs, and sometimes it felt like Lita was listening to her mother in the flesh, with all the elitism and prejudice. But in the end, Lita would happily sit there every day until school started if it meant she could have some freedom. After that, she’d only have to go weekly to maintain her freedom as long as her grades stayed up. And if all of it meant she’d be able to go to a school on the other side of the country from her parents, she was willing to do anything. Joining the gym and the possibility of getting out from Brian’s thumb were bonuses she couldn’t pass up.

“How about your appetite? You look like you haven’t been eating again...” Susan made a clicking sound with her tongue and Lita cringed. It was probably the single most irritating sound in the world, and it was dismissive.

“I ate an entire garden salad with avocado last night after the gym,” Lita assured, knowing full well she had only picked at it for an hour and then drank a bottle of Gatorade. But it was better if Susan didn’t know that part.

In all fairness, Lita had been famished until Brian showed up, demanding they have dinner together. When she sat down to take the first bite, her appetite died, like it always did after he reminded her how little time she had left.

“Wonderful!” Susan smiled, “I assume I have Brian to thank for your meal? It must be nice, living with such a handsome young man, and at a prime age for marriage, too.” Was she referring to Lita’s 18 years or Brian’s 23? Neither seemed prime for anything of the sort.

“As I’ve told my mother already countless times, we do not live together. We are on a break until May. We live in the same building. That’s all. It was her arrangement, not mine.”

“Yes, well... good things take time to blossom, Miss Dillard, sometimes we all need a little push here and there. And with proximity, it’s only a matter of time.”

Lita looked at the clock, “As much as I enjoy our chats, looks like time is up. Same time tomorrow?”

A week later

Lita collapsed under a swell of air. Or rather, the lack of air. Her lungs didn’t seem capable of pulling in enough oxygen to sustain her. She was so out of shape, it was sad. The two minutes she’d spent running a slow cool down felt like ages and Gymhead, Alex, was no help in that department, smiling like an infuriating idiot as she suffocated from the inside. She pushed harder against her exhaustion, nearly ready to pass out.

“Water break, psycho fan?” She glared at him, but she kept going. Her legs felt like jelly, ready to slip off her body at any moment. She was stumbling with each step. In another moment or two, she would probably hit the moving band of the treadmill and embarrass herself completely. Maybe she’d be lucky enough to knock herself out so she wouldn’t have to hear Alex’s barking laugh again. Then she considered the marks that falling might leave behind and how Brian might react to them. She stumbled again, this time out of fear instead of exhaustion, grabbing the stabilizing bars for support.

“You’re going to fall if you don’t stop,” he teased, but beneath that he seemed impressed, if not a bit concerned. Lita stumbled once more before he pressed the button to force stop the machine. After a twenty-minute cardio warm-up, a forty-five minute weightlifting regimen in which he claimed you don’t stop, you switch muscle groups, a fifteen-minute water break that ended with the protein bar Alex tossed her, and a back breaking series of exercises designed to teach her body control, Lita was well past the breaking point. She’d stopped feeling her legs thirty minutes ago. It was a miracle the cool down hadn’t killed her. Still, that fire in her chest burned with indignation.

“Shut up. Gymhead,” Lita managed between strangled breaths, “But. Thanks.”

She still couldn’t understand what kind of personal training this was. Was he spending the last week trying to train her or kill her? She hobbled over to the water fountain and

gulped, spilling most of it down onto her oversized hoodie. With how much sweat had already soaked in, she could hardly tell the difference. It was as if her entire body were devoid of all its water at the end of every training session. She couldn't even be bothered to care if she smelled. Had Alex warned her about wearing layers? Yes. But he didn't understand why she couldn't take them off.

At some point, Lita expected to be placed with other women, the so-called ring bunnies, but it hadn't happened yet. Instead, Alex spent the last week punishing her body. He probably remembered it differently, but the way her muscles tightened and ached, punishment was the only comparison. Underneath all the pain, though, Lita felt so relieved she could cry.

It was enough relief that she pretended not to see Alex and the others snickering about her during the break. Plus, Lita had improved like crazy, mostly because whenever she was about to pass out, Alex stuffed a protein bar in her face. She always left exhausted, which helped her sleep and over the last week, it even helped her gain a small appetite as long as she could avoid Brian when dinner time came. Something about exercising was working to pull her out of her own head, she just wasn't sure if it was the training or the fact that during training, she wasn't thinking about all the things in her life that gave her anxiety.

"Alright. Let's call it a day. I have to lead a real workout now," Alex grumbled as he walked away. "Fifteen-minute, full body stretch before you leave, wannabe."

"Wait!" Lita called after him, ignoring another of many rude nicknames he'd given her. "I want to stay and watch." Her foot slipped as she tried to get his attention and she tumbled into him. Thankfully, he opened his arms to help brace her, but she found her face against his chest, only separated from his skin by a thin tank. His muscles were warm and as she pushed away to right herself, she missed it. Why did she miss something so simple as a hug? Even as messy and uncomfortable as that one had been. She didn't really miss the hug. She missed James. And feeling safe. No part of her was afraid of Alex. He was an asshole, sure, but he didn't have that same fire in his eyes that Brian often had. A hard edge like a blade, constantly looking for something to wound.

"The hell is wrong with you?" Alex snapped, pushing her off of him with gentle arms. He waited until she seemed steady before he let go. "You got two left feet or what? And why do you want to watch other people work out?" His eyes flicked to her wrists for a moment, but they were covered. It was as if he was constantly checking for those bruises she'd accidentally shown. Lita shifted nervously, straightening her back.

"Look... I know what you have me doing isn't real training. I know I couldn't possibly keep up with real training, yet. I get that. So, can I watch you guys train? You know, so I can see what's in my future?"

He laughed quickly and shrugged, "Doll, you ain't never gonna be able to keep up with one of these workouts so this ain't your future, beat it, this is the exclusive time reserve as you can see. Gym's closed, psycho bunny."

Lita shoved her irritation aside, forcing herself to glare at the gym and not Alex. She looked around and found that the gym was nearly empty. There were two large men sparring in the ring with one looking on from the ropes, talking to them in a way that implied it wasn't exactly nice, and there were two women stretching against the back wall. All the casual gym goers and women from the earlier kickboxing class were gone, leaving Lita alone. Someone flicked a switch somewhere, and the fluorescents changed to neon, filling the room with color. It only made her want to stay even more.

Alex continued towards the back room, "Circuits in ten, assholes! Sticks, hit the mat and stretch. Now."

"Sticks?"

"Yea," Alex laughed over his shoulder. "God, I hoped you would ask. He turned back and pointed at her legs. Those are sticks. Stretch and go home."

"Asshole," Lita hissed under her breath, but she did as he said, lowering herself to the mats to stretch. Her body screamed at her, rebelling against the sensation of working her muscles loose. She rolled her hamstrings over the muscle roller. Whimpering, Lita went through each stretch Alex has shown her and then she cracked her back over the appropriate block. Not once, but twice, nearly crying at the sudden relief. Alex complaining about her posture during the exercises had come back to bite her.

Finally finished the torturous movements, Lita stood and gathered her belongings, ignoring the sensation of eyes on her back.

"Psycho fan," a deep, resonating voice announced his presence and Lita felt the involuntary shudder ripple through her at the sound, "Bad posture will kill you with Alex. Every time."

"I hadn't noticed," she snapped, dryly, refusing to turn around. She heard the deep inhale and then a grumbling laugh. Lita rolled her eyes, annoyed that he was voicing something she already realized.

"You and my Beta seem... close," he said and there was something in his tone she couldn't place. What was it with these people and weird names? She'd even heard someone nicknamed Delta earlier and stifled a laugh. Then she thought of Alex's nicknames for her and decided it wasn't all that strange.

No one needed to tell her mister-tall-dark-and-handsome was behind her. Alpha. She snuck a tiny peek behind her to be greeted with a wonderfully bare torso, inches from her face, all glistening white skin and tan nipples. Inconveniently, his body wiped away

her confusion over the strange titles, pushing it behind the flush over her skin. Heat radiated off of him and she struggled not to make any embarrassing sounds of surprise as she took in a physique that only sweat could enhance. Her eyes followed the hard ridges of muscle up towards his broad shoulders and dark brown eyes. His left eyelid twitched, his brows bunching over a pinched mouth. He smelled so familiar... like firewood and fall air. Like damp leaves and the trees after a storm. The scent did things to her, sending pulses through her body that she refused to examine.

Snatching her bag's zipper closed, Lita tossed it over her shoulder and nearly dashed out the front door. Only once she had safely strapped herself in behind the steering wheel of her SUV, did she finally release the groan she held in. Lita rested her head against the wheel, blasting the music. This tingling under her skin was a complication. A complication she couldn't afford.