

## Lita's Love for the Alpha

### The Things in Between (cont'd)

Lita shook her head. She didn't want to say. "Well, whatever it was, it hurt you enough to snap me out of sleep," he smoothed her hair, pulling her tightly against him, "I hate to feel your pain. It's like glass under my skin."

"Wake you? Wha--?"

"We're linked now, if you're hurting, I'm hurting. It's easier for me because I've been in tune with my wolf for longer but you can feel my emotions too. Look," he pulled their fingers entwined, "Focus on me. On my breathing. On trying to reach out to me, not with your hands but with your mind. The first time it's like... searching for something familiar. Let your wolf help guide you."

Lita focused for a moment, letting her nerves settle into the action. Her wolf nudged at her, pressed her nose against her. Slowly, she felt a foreign sensation permeating into her mind like smoke. Warm. Sure of itself. Clear. Cole. It was familiar, not like a scent exactly, but like a sensation that could only be his. Like the feel of his hands but in her mind. She knew him instinctually by contact and this was another form of it.

"Does every wolf have this with their mate?" her body felt overwhelmed with sensation. Like his essence was pouring into her, distorting her sadness and guilt like color diluting in water until she relaxed. She relaxed because he was relaxed and Lita chose to let that emotion overrule hers.

"Yea, but not every wolf gets a mate, Lita. It's not rare but it's not rampant either."

"It's like destiny? Or magic? Or--? I don't know, help me out here," she sniffled.

"It's not like we've got it all figured out either, babe. Just like humans, there are plenty of things about ourselves we don't entirely understand. But it's not magic and it's not fate or some other abstract idea."

He huffed, trying to find the right words to explain, "It's like... chemistry? Proximity? Right time, right place, right people... like a mix of pheromones and the right timing. We haven't pinned down the exact trigger for it but it's certainly a mix of everything I just said all at once in one perfect, coincidence."

"And it can happen with a human? Because, I mean, if my wolf was suppressed, I don't know how it would have bonded to yours."

"It's not necessarily a bond made between wolves. It's also a bond between the human side. If that bond is strong, yea, it can happen with a human. It even happens across bloodlines. Like Alphas and Betas. But again, some people choose to ignore it and mark someone else. Someone they've chosen for themselves, not someone they're drawn to. I was drawn to you the second I smelled you and then like a switch, our bond was just... activated."

"That day at the gym I thought I was imagining it. The sensation was so foreign and painful because you were closed off, emotionally empty when I tried to tap into you. I could only get glimpses of what you were feeling. Like that day in the parking lot. And even then, the pull was there but not overwhelming. Not like when I kissed you. That snapped everything into place and I couldn't go back. As much as I tried to fight it, the bond pulled me to you in equal measure."

"I felt nothing but heat every time I was around you. Like my body was burning from the inside. I still do," Lita reached her hand to bring his across her bare stomach, "That sends a heat wave through my body, like a fever. I can't stop it and I don't want to, not now. I feel lucky to have you."

"We are lucky," he kissed her neck, a small peck on her shoulder and back up to her cheek, "There are others who never get the bond at all. It's finicky like that. It's not some special thing gifted to us by the gods, it's a very real, tangible bond we share with another soul. A soul that's our compliment. And in a world with 7 billion people, the odds of finding that complimentary soul is like a needle in a haystack. Hell, even if a person had a 100 soul mates, the odds would be terrible."

"But I thought you only get one?"

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"We don't really know how many a person \*could\* potentially have wandering around out there but once the bond is sealed and marked, it's the only one. Everything else falls away. That connection can't be repeated again." Lita's heart ached for Stace.

"You love me," she whispered, calibrating her mind to accept what she could feel over the connection, then even softer she whispered, "It was James. I dreamt of the crash... I dream of it a lot. I killed him. It wasn't-I didn't... and Erica. I just-- I don't even know... I feel like a monster. I feel like destroy people's lives, Cole."

"I love you, Lita. You don't have to be okay right now. There's nothing I can say that's going to change how you feel inside. I know that. I can tell you it's not your fault. That you didn't kill your brother, it was an accident. I can tell you that if Erica wasn't dead, you would be and I'm glad every single day that you're here instead. I can tell you that the guilt isn't real, it's just your emotions trying to process everything. But it won't make a difference in your heart."

"We'll take every day as it comes and eventually it'll get easier. At least, that's how it was for me when I left my original pack. I'm here with you though. You have me, lean on me when you need to. The memories are hard. Harder than anything else really. Especially because of how they make you feel but the whole pack is here with you. You're not alone."

"Why didn't he heal, Cole?" Lita shivered, "I was there, you know. I saw him and his eyes. Lifeless, limp, cold. If wolves heal why didn't he?"

Cole ran his nose along her spine, breathing in her scent to keep himself calm. She was already so hurt and vulnerable, he needed to tread lightly, "We heal. But as I said, we can't replace something that's lost and we can't survive...major trauma. An injury or two, maybe even a few at a time, yes. But the injuries I saw on the report, it's too much at once. Too many broken things to heal, Lita. I'm sorry but we aren't invincible and we aren't immortal. Just stronger."

"He turned at the last second. It should have been me."

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"What?"

"It should have been my side that hit the tree. We were moving too fast downhill to stop, the brake was jammed to the floorboard but it made no difference. We were going to crash on my side, the tree large and looming like a monster. But at the last second he jerked the wheel and took the hit himself. I should have died. And somehow knowing that makes it all feel worse." She was crying without realizing it until Cole turned her and pulled her body into his chest. He pressed her close to him, putting her ear just over his heart.

"You've really never let it out have you?" he murmured into her ear, "It's not healthy Lita, you have to grieve."

"I don't think I know how. I've been suppressing and bottling every negative feeling I've ever had for years. I don't even... I mean my parents didn't cry when he died. They didn't hold a vigil or a funeral. In fact, they were pissed at me for the entire time I healed because I wasn't supposed to be out with him. I had been banned from ever speaking to him again when he left."

"It's like he stopped existing to them the second he left for California. No photos, no memories. They never said his name and every time I'd mention him they'd get this look like I'd committed a sin. They never showed me how to feel anything. And honestly, I think it's the way they made him disappear from our lives that keeps him so ingrained in my head. I never want to forget him. I just want to remember the happy moments instead... but I can't."

"I've felt that way before too. Aside from all the bad shit my dad has done to me, there were good memories too. Fishing together. My first hunt after I shifted. We used to run together early in the morning, just two wolves who were bonded by blood despite what the human man did. Those moments used to be so vivid. I loved him in those memories. I mean, maybe I still do somewhere. But it's deep, deep down in me, somewhere I haven't seen in a long time. As soon as I left I pushed them down. I tried to will myself to forget them, until eventually they were gone. I can't see those good moments when I close my eyes. Now all I have are the bad ones."

There was nothing left to say. Both of them were so exhausted from the emotions rolling back and forth over their connection. Cole held her until her breathing evened out and then he finally let himself sleep.