

Lita's Love For The Alpha Chapter 6

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Nightmares & Dreams

Lita's body tensed as she pushed up from the murky deep. Stumbling forward, she could hardly keep her head above water. Her feet found a rocky edge, and she lunged, curling her toes into the nasty slime that was once dirt. The first step was the hardest, her muscles screaming against the motion. Lita groaned, forcing herself forward. She was barefoot and wading through swampy water towards shore. Why wasn't she on land? The trek felt endless, water impossibly thick and freezing as it soaked her legs. What was that fucking smell? Burning gasoline? She coughed, tossing an arm up as her stomach turned. Lita wretched up the swap water, foul-smelling liquid splattering down her thin shirt. She'd managed to walk until the swell of wet was only to her knees, but the vomit didn't stop spurting from everywhere. Why was there water in her stomach? She tried to make sense of it as she fought off the feeling of vertigo.

Lita made herself crawl out of the slimy depths and onto the scruffy embankment. Everything in her body stung and ached. There was a heavy, radiating pain in her shoulder blade, two bleeding scrapes down her calves, hot smooth liquid pooling on one side of her face, and sharp, tingling cuts across her back.

She couldn't stop to inspect her wounds. There was something she needed to do. Something... She crawled and dragged herself up the embankment toward the broken car she glimpsed over the dense brush, ignoring every sharp agony she felt cut through her. Sticks dug into her ribs, stones scraped at her knees. As she crested the edge, Lita could see what remained of the car. The windshield was shattered, front end crumpling like a piece of notebook paper around an enormous tree trunk. The once-beautiful muscle car looked unrecognizable. Blood-smeared down the passenger side of the hood towards the swamp. Hers.

Despite the shaking of her hands, Lita didn't look closer to see the bits of skin she must have left behind. Her back would have been shredded, but there wasn't room to think about it. She could just make out the smoke from the highway at the top of the steep hill and that the twisted metal arms that had once been the guardrail were angled out towards the trees. All she could hear was the hiss of the engine and the blood in her ears.

Lita ground herself against the stinging dirt and leaves until she reached the driver's side. She desperately needed to find her older brother. There was an invisible tether between them and the second that car went barreling into the tree, she felt that tether

snap. Her body went through the air and there was nothing to pull her back to him. What did it mean? Lita didn't want to know. And somehow that pain was worse than all her other injuries combined.

When the oncoming car had spun out of control, crossing the divider and hitting them, she had no time to react. Unbuckled and halfway out of the jean jacket she'd been wearing when they flew through the guardrail and over the edge, Lita flew, too. She only had time to feel herself in the air and hear the glass break before she'd felt the sharp slap of swamp water pushing air out of her lungs. Then she died.

Only she didn't.

She dragged herself around the driver's side door, which she pulled desperately until it popped open. Lita looked and nearly passed out when the lifeless eyes of her brother stared back at her. Draped over the steering wheel at a horrific bend that seemed to snap his back in half, James' blood trickled over the front display. His arm extended toward the passenger side. Reaching to grab her? To push her to safety?

Lita fell backwards onto the sharp twigs and rocks, scooting herself on injured hands away from the car. She couldn't see him like that.

If he'd twisted that arm in between his chest and the steering wheel... if he hadn't taken that full impact... maybe... She couldn't breathe. Or think. Lita's skin cooled, heat rushing out of her with each wild beat of her heart. That wasn't her brother. James was indestructible. Strong. He couldn't die. He couldn't stare at her like that, like he was gone, taking her heart with him.

Lita snapped awake two hours before her seven o'clock alarm again, drenched in sweat and shaking. Her mind always took a moment to come back around after a nightmare. Each shaky inhale assured her she was okay. But it was a lie. Her bother was dead, nothing was okay.

The gym workouts had been helping exhaust her every day, which kept the nightmares at bay most of the time but didn't banish them altogether. Sweat seeped through her into the bedsheets as she rolled herself out and onto the floor in the dark chill of early morning. She took a moment to gather her senses and calm her nerves before stripping the sweaty sheets and heading for a shower.

The hot water surrounded her in thick steam as she lathered the soap into the now healed scars across her back and shoulders. Thankfully, the scrapes on her calves had healed, but she was still self-conscious about her back, so she never exposed it. The memories were too painful for her.

As she worked the soap against herself, she had to admit how toned her body felt. The month spent at the gym was doing wonders. She had developed a slightly better appetite from necessity alone because her body needed the fuel. And all the

weightlifting had worked some shape back into her body, especially between her waist and hips. Even her complexion and hair looked brighter.

Somewhere in the shower, her thoughts turned to mister-tall-dark-and-handsome, who she knew now was the owner of Alpha's, the Alpha himself, though she didn't yet know his name. She didn't have the nerve to ask. Lita found it to be an unusual nickname, but she guessed the fight club must've operated much like a pack. Either that or Alpha considered himself the pinnacle of maleness, an Alpha in every sense of the word. Lita snorted even though her body agreed with the assessment. Perhaps it was a bit of both.

She couldn't stop herself from thinking about him in her quiet moments. His eyes as they stared down into hers, his bare chest pressing her against a wall, his hand exploring all the untouched parts of herself. The fantasies were yet another complication she didn't need.

What happened to no more emotional connections? She scolded herself. Ever since she'd heard that husky voice and smelled his rich scent, Lita had tried her best to avoid him at every turn. But in the evenings, it was impossible. And with school starting, she didn't have a choice about what time she trained. So, she kept her eyes on Alex, or the task at hand, not even bothering to interact with the other gym goers. Honestly, that seemed to be a mutual agreement, as they seemed to avoid whatever part of the gym she was using. Either way, she'd successfully gone an entire month with only two moments spent in his company.

But she couldn't do it forever. Today was her first day of classes and that would keep her working out right until closing time. She imagined him surprising her in the locker room, pushing her backwards into the showers, the dull heat of his hardness against her. She shook her head sharply and switched the water to cold, hoping to tamp down her arousal. No one was here to see her succumb to those fantasies, but they were dangerous. Attachments were dangerous. What was it about him that affected her so much?

Choosing an outfit proved as difficult as a good night's sleep. Her body once again favored much of the wardrobe she'd abandoned after she started dating Brian, but she wasn't sure she should embrace it yet. He still lived down the hall and saw her regularly. She honestly shuddered to think of his jealousy. Those memories were so vivid for her, she threw the idea of dressing up right out of her mind.

She flicked through her hangers and decided on a cream-colored three-quarter sleeved shirt that settled nicely over her figure and had a slight scoop to show a hint of cleavage. She tugged at the hem a little, happy that it was still loose enough to feel comfortable. Lita threw on some light wash skinny jeans and a pair of cream-colored sneakers before standing back to take in her appearance. Cute but not sexy. Feminine but not attention-seeking. It was a nice, safe play for her first day of classes.

Her clothes fit nicely again, and she couldn't help but smile. It had been so long since she looked like anything other than skin and bones. She let her hair free and left her face bare. For once, she looked at her reflection and didn't cringe or shy away. She felt... almost... good? Until the thought of Brian on campus made her queasy again.

Lita grabbed a breakfast bar from the fresh box she'd gotten from the gym, her large purse and car keys before heading out to the garage. She'd only made it to the ground floor before she heard her name.

"Lita?" Brian called after her. She turned on a dime, nearly knocking them both over as he reached for her arm, "Wow... I... wow," was all he could manage, and Lita cocked a brow at him. "You look..." She had always liked him like this, enamored and sweet. It reminded her of their beginning. Of how things used to be before she knew the truth. She wished this was the only side of him she saw.

"Hey," she managed, taking a step back.

"Want to ride together this morning?" he asked, his eyes looking her over. "The gym's really helping, babe. I'm proud of you."

She couldn't help but cringe, shaking the expression away before he noticed. Her physical features were the root of too much of their relationship. Her hair color. Her bra size. Her clothes. The type and application of her makeup. He was noticing her physically again, and it made her want to change.

She forced all those chaotic emotions away. "I kind of want to get used to campus. I'm gonna walk around and you'll hate to wait for me." She paused, gauging his reaction. When it seemed he didn't care, she continued. "Talk later, Bri? I have class in a few hours, and I still have to go get my books," she flashed a small smile and climbed into her SUV. Brian only nodded, smiling vaguely as he studied her silhouette.

The fancy SUV wasn't completely out of place on campus, but Lita still felt awkward climbing out of something that screamed privilege so loudly, especially for a freshman. But she parked, grabbed the Starbucks iced coffee she'd gotten on the way, and headed for the bookstore. It took her a solid fifteen minutes just to figure out the directions on the campus map. But eventually, she found the large double doors.

Students were milling about inside, and Lita read the signs, following the arrows until she found what she was looking for, textbooks. The long line stopped alongside the binders and supplies, so she picked out her necessities as she waited. Everything was so bright and new, and she couldn't help but feel excited about her first day. This was the beginning of a fresh start for her. She was living one of James' dreams for her. He's always wanted her to finish school so she could take care of him in his old age and he hadn't cared that they were only a few years apart. She gulped away the stinging in her chest and smiled at the memory. Before she knew it, Lita stood at the front of the line.

“Hiya there! Class list?” An older college-aged woman asked. Her name tag read Stace, and she looked vaguely familiar. Lita handed over the paper she’d printed from home, studying the woman’s kind face as if it would tell her where she’d seen it before.

“Damn girl, what year are you? I’m in two of these classes and I’m a junior. You a transfer?”

“Oh,” Lita hesitated, “no I’m a freshman but I’m pretty good at math and English so they gave me a special waver. Is it weird?” Lita hated being unsure of herself, but this was such a new environment for her, far from the privileged private schools she knew. This was the real world, with real people that didn’t know her parents or her bank account zeros. She didn’t want to get any of the bonding part wrong.

“What the fact that you’re good at math and English? Aside from being a unicorn, puhleasee! You’re a genius, embrace it, I definitely would. The rest of us certainly flaunt our strengths.” She nudged up a broad, muscular shoulder blade. Stace looked at Lita for longer than necessary, and then shook her head. “I’ll be right back with your books.”

She returned a few minutes later with a stack that seemed impossibly tall and Lita’s face paled, “Thank god I’ve been working out...” she mumbled to herself.

“Ha! That’s where I know you! Alpha’s right? I knew I recognized you, but I couldn’t place your face. I’m Alex’s sister, Stacey. But you can call me Stace,” she smiled broadly, waving as if they hadn’t already been talking. “I’ve been meaning to talk to you, but Alex is such a grump, and he monopolizes all your time. He said you’re not there to train for real, is that true?” Stace asked, “I mean no judgment if it’s true, I just want to know what I’m working with, ya know.” She grinned and winked.

Lita couldn’t sense an undercurrent of negativity, so she exhaled and said, “Yea, I’ve been wondering when I’d get to meet any other women. I was starting to think I was a pariah.”

“Oh please! You? No way, I swear—” Stace bristled before switching to Spanish without blinking. Lita barked out an unexpected laugh as she listened to Stace call Alex every name in the book. Stace rolled her eyes and huffed, muttering more insults.

“How’d you know I speak Spanish?” Lita asked between laughs.

“I didn’t,” Stace admitted with a guilty smirk. “Alex just pisses me off so bad sometimes that I forget to translate.” They both snorted. Stace looked over Lita’s features in a new light. “Mixed with what? Dominican or something?”

“Nothing Hispanic, as far as I know. Blame five years of Spanish class and bingeing telenovelas. White on my mom’s side.” Lita corrected, “And something on my dad’s

side. Maybe islands or middle eastern, but he doesn't know for sure and neither do I. He's adopted."

Stace nodded, "I can see it a little now. A hint of something extra under all that pale." James had always looked like Rafi, brown and lean, hardly getting any features from their mother. But Lita looked just like Diane and had absolutely nothing from Rafi except her black hair and that something extra no one could put their finger on.

"Yea, but I spent the entire summer indoors. And I never tan so I don't know. Your guess is as good as mine." Lita joked.

"And if Alex gets his way, you won't have any free time to be outside in the fall, either."

"Yea, I can imagine. I call him an asshole in my head every time he says the words core circuits in that stupid gruff voice." Lita rolled her eyes. "I knew he wasn't white, but I couldn't put my finger on anything specific and I hate to assume."

"Yea, no one ever knows what we are. Puerto Rican on both sides. Got it honest. It's probably the dye job that confuses people," Stace shrugged, pointing to her pale blonde hair. "People just think I have a fake tan."

"Same. But everyone who knows my dad knows me. Saves a lot of misconceptions. We'll have to sit back and compare notes sometime," Lita smiled.

"No worries, we'll talk more in—" Stace leaned over to look at Lita's schedule again—"advanced statistics."

Someone cleared their throat behind Lita, as if to say the ladies needed to wrap up their conversation. Lita grabbed her books and headed back off towards the checkout counter for her basket of school supplies.

"Sit near the back, okay? I'm usually like five minutes late to every class," Stace called after her, waving goodbye. "It's not my fault coffee is halfway across campus."