

Lita's Love for the Alpha

Prisons Are By Design

Cole snapped awake suddenly, causing the pile of wood he'd been leaning against to topple over. *Shit*. He wiped his face, sitting up enough to let his groggy head settle. He spared a glance through one of the master bathroom windows and groaned. It was still dark out.

The last thing he remembered was laying the last floor tile. It had been a week. A week. That pain stabbed him deep and thorough as he fought the rising panic in his chest. Lita had been gone for a week and they still hadn't received any word from Maxim. Likely because he knew the second he reached out, Cole would rain down on him like the wrath of god. If Cole had believed in a higher power, he'd have been on his knees because even though he knew his father wouldn't kill her, his only bargaining chip, there were worse things than death. And he'd seen them first hand, under his father's thumb.

Those were the things that haunted his weeklong agony. The idea that she was being tortured, hurt... other things he'd never think of because if he did, he might lose himself to the rage. And she needed him to be ready to fight for her. He palmed his phone, swiping a finger to bring up the screen. Aside from the time, two hours past midnight, there was nothing new to see. Nothing. Still no word from the men he'd sent to search. Still nothing from Andre's scouring on the dark web. Nothing at all...

Cole eyed the floor he'd left to dry. He was still sitting outside the bathroom doorway in their new home, sitting against the fresh pile of framing wood he'd just knocked over. More panic shot through him. He shouldn't have started the house finishes because she... *No. She's going to come back and live in this house.* His whole body trembled with the force of that conviction.

After letting his wolf out at the cabin, where he'd likely killed every deer in a fifty mile vicinity, he'd come home. Or to what would be their home when he got her back. And he worked. Because it was all he could do. Wait and work and pretend the other half of his soul wasn't in hell, wasn't in pain, wasn't... Cole clenched his eyes closed and banged his fist against the raw wood. The bark of pain in his hand somehow helped temper the ragged pang of his heart.

He didn't blame his pack for the lack of leads. His fucking father had scrubbed all traces of himself so well that Cole had no idea where to start. Everything he remembered of his time in Maxim's pack had proven useless information. And it terrified him. She was at his father's mercy and the evil man knew she was Cole's weakness. Taking her left Cole broken and exposed, desperate, three things his father likely planned to exploit. So at least the odds were good Lita was still alive. But the game of it, his father's game of baiting and waiting, was taking its toll on his psyche. Midnight hadn't been able to form more than growls and snarls for the last two days and Cole feared it would only get worse.

Forcing himself to his feet, Cole stumbled to the elevator, taking it down to the first floor and through the foyer out into the rain. Heavy sheets of water colored the world gray and dark, obscuring the moonlight. He looked up into the downpour, letting the hard droplets slap him numb. It hadn't stopped raining since she left. On and off it poured for a week as if it remind him that she wasn't there. That the house was cold. That the heat in his life was missing. That he was empty.

Cole closed his eyes, trying to remember that first moment he'd seen her at the gym. Sad and thin and fragile. He'd thought she was pathetic. A bunny who had no couth by coming to stalk a dead fighter. How he wished he could get those moments back. All those incorrect assumptions. All the cold shoulders he'd given her. He wished he could undo all those stupid early decisions and claim those extra few months for himself, for them. If he had handled things differently, would she still be gone? Would she still be in danger?

Footsteps sounded to the left and he turned to find Ace holding his hand over his eyes to shield from the rain. The hard look on his face had Cole closing the space between them quickly, "You have something?"

Ace shook his head slowly, "Andre's tracking new chatter on a shipment of women going to auction. Might finally be worth pursuing but Maxim's smart. He's been laying low. Might not be him. Andre promised an update tomorrow."

Cole nodded numbly, staring but not seeing the face of one of his closest friends. When Ace didn't leave, he quirked a cold brow, an empty gesture at caring, "Is there something else?"

Ace swallowed hard, looking like he wanted to weigh his next words carefully, "We've received a correspondence..."

Cole's eyes shot towards him but Ace put up a hand, "But it's not from your father..."

And from the way he looked like he was going to be physically ill, Cole was sure he wouldn't want to know who it *was* from.

Lita hadn't seen the sun in a week. Better still, she hadn't seen the outside since her fight at the pits. Hadn't breathed fresh air. Hadn't felt anything but metal chains and cold concrete at her back. They'd been sending the slaves in with trays of half inedible food to leave for her. When the guards brought it they'd toss it at her feet, spilling most of it on the ground and leaving behind the smell of rot for days as it grew moldy. But the slaves at least, were kind enough to place it beside her. Even if they did avoid her eyes. Even if they never answered a single one of her questions.

She'd known her display would earn her some punishment and all things considered, this was probably better than she'd imagined for herself after proving how weak Maxim's men were. At least no one had tried to take her wolf again. Though Nyx's strength was likely the sole reason for the chains and the reason none of the guards came in to touch her. She had no doubt that Chris wasn't the only disgusting pervert among them. Small mercies... *for them* Nyx growled and Lita laughed.

Do you have to be so dark all the time?

It wasn't me drowning men in those filthy pits...

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Touche, but I didn't pull the throat out of my enemies like I was devouring a steak.

Steak tastes better, I'm sure.

At that Lita couldn't help but snort. They'd never been closer than they were now. Having been through so much, having experienced pain and misery in such a short few years of life had bonded them... Lita wasn't afraid of Nyx's ferocity at all anymore. In fact, she admired her, wanted to be like her. Decisive. Strong. Fearless. She *wanted* her enemies to fear them.

And even for Nyx, it seemed like Lita had earned some stripes by fighting in the pits. Had proven that she wasn't going to be anyone's victim anymore.

You think we'll ever make it home?

 Lita asked suddenly, feeling that pang of desolation in her chest. She missed Cole. Too much to be healthy probably, but since when was anything she had healthy?

I miss Midnight too, Nyx admitted, ignoring the question altogether.

You two play like you're not bloodthirsty animals, Lita smiled, *It's cute and admittedly a little scary.*

Trust me when I say whatever monster you think I can be, he's worse, Nyx said and the vicious promise of her words had Lita feeling settled. They would make it home because even if she and Nyx couldn't find a way out, Cole would find a way in. Midnight would find a way through.

The sound of metal sliding open pulled Lita's attention to the door. She had no sense of time, no sense of day or night and so she had no reason to think it wasn't another tray being brought in. Her heart seized when she saw the expensive leather shoes walk across the wet concrete threshold and into her cell. Those shoes led to tapered, tailored pants, with large hands tucked into the pockets, and higher, a simple but quality long-sleeved button up leading to a frustratingly handsome face.

She would prefer if he looked nothing like Cole but of course, their features mirrored each other. He was the older, more distinguished half to Cole's face. And Lita hated that she found it pleasant at all but the tightness in her chest didn't care.

"You smell," Maxim stated matter-of-factly, not really taunting but perhaps setting up some power dynamic between them. Maybe to show her how much she needed to be on his good side. Little did he know, she'd rather sit in filth. She tensed, knowing that his blood had to be boiling at her display with Chris. She'd shown that outside of using weapons, they were no match for Cole's fighters or his training. Had he really thought they'd changed enough since the massacre at the tournament? Or perhaps he thought those were Cole's best fighters and that no one else would be a threat. She was sure he hadn't expected her to be so well trained.

You're spot on, Nyx growled, *His wolf wants to shred us. He can fucking try...*

"Have you enjoyed your respite?" Maxim asked dryly, acting like he wasn't on the verge of tearing her apart.

"It's been peachy. Have to say though, the company leaves a bit to be desired."

Maxim's responding smile was cruel, promising a great many things she didn't want to know. He slowly strode towards her, snatching her chin in a vice grip that was sure to leave bruises. Twisting her head left then right, he sneered, "At least you've healed enough not to bleed on my goddamned chair this time." Then he threw her head away, smacking it into the concrete before walking away.

She tried to stop the vertigo, tried to pull in the nausea that bubbled from her empty, miserable gut but she couldn't. Vomit flew out, sliding down her chest and into her soiled lap. Maxim laughed. A dark thing, sickly and poisonous before he turned, calling over his shoulder, "Have her washed--" he glanced back, pinning her to the wall with his stare, "Thoroughly. And brought to dinner."

Then he was gone. And in his place, Ren gulped twice and looked at the floor.

"You heard the boss, time to go."