

Lita's Love for the Alpha

Marks And Their Owners

It was all so clear in the lines of his face, the creases of his eye, the small tick of a muscle in his jaw. That he had seen...

"Get aw-" Lita started to back away, pushing herself against the metal of the tub. She was already trying to find a weapon or an advantage. Obviously she was exhausted and bruised but she wasn't going to be raped. Over her dead body.

"Relax," Ren said, cutting her off, "It's not... That's not--" Ren signed, leaning back to ruffle his hands through his hair, "Who marked you?"

"What?" She floundered. That mark was hard to notice. And the place it sat was deeply intimate. For Ren to have seen it... she shuddered. Perhaps he had been a gentleman up to this point but to have glimpsed the underside of her breast meant he had taken a full tour of her body, had looked his fill.

"Who marked you Lita? I saw it. The half moon on your ribcage. Is he still alive?"

"Of course he's still alive!" she yelled as the water sloshed away from her and came back, unsure why even the mention of Cole being harmed was sending her into a frenzy. Because she knew better. He was fine and he was searching for her. He was going to get her out of here. She studied Ren. Was this a ploy? Some tactic Maxim thought up? Some emotional warfare meant to weaken her defenses? Her resolve?

"Fuck," Ren blew out a breath, reaching over for a cloth and dunking it into the warm bath water. Lita instinctually shifted her legs away from his arm but he seemed not to even notice.

"Why did you ask me that, Ren?" Lita lowered her voice, squinting. He didn't answer, only lathered the cloth and looked off into the distance.

"Ren?!" she barked and his eyes found hers, a little cloudy but aware, "Why did you ask me that?"

"Who pissed off Maxim? You or your mate?" She hated when people evaded questions with another question. It made her want to refuse to answer. Made her want to say fuck you and look for a weapon.

"Because for me, it was her. She offended-" Ren gulped, a muscle in his eye twitching, "Anyway. That's how I ended up here in the first place. A bargain in exchange for my mate's life."

A beat of silence and then, "Of course... that didn't stop her from leaving here with a deserter first chance she got. Heard she had pups a few years back."

He turned to Lita, "We're not allowed to have mates here, you know? Everything is just... clinical. A job. A duty. Everything we're told to do is for the preservation of the line." Lita would have been hard pressed to miss the roll of his eyes or the subtle shake of his head. Was he saying he didn't subscribe to Maxim's beliefs? That he didn't like it here?

"And if you happen to find a mate here... it wouldn't matter. She would still be subject to breeding, you know?" Lita felt sick, felt like the tub she was in took on a whole new meaning, like she would rather claw out her own eyes than *breed.*

Ren reached for her and she stiffened, throwing her fists up in half-hearted defense. But he only held out the washcloth for her to take.

"Only if you need help, Lita," he said quietly, "I'm sure there's much of yourself you can reach on your own."

She took it, unsure of what to do with all the whiplash his behavior was causing. One minute he was eye-fucking her, the next he was asking about mates, then he was dissenting from Maxim and now he was back to being a decent guy. For a moment, she didn't move but when he turned around to put his back to the tub, she started washing her shoulders.

"Been mated long?"

"No, not really," Lita answered truthfully, not really seeing the point in lying, "Only a few months."

"Mine wasn't very long before it all fell apart either. I still remember it though. I still miss feeling any kind of connection that strong."

She looked at the back of his head, "To answer your question, it was both. Both of us are on Maxim's bad side." She didn't think she should mention Cole by name. Lita ran the cloth under her arms hard enough to rub the skin raw but that sour onion smell had all but made her sick a few times over the week.

"And let me guess, you're the collateral to use against your mate?"

Lita snorted and began to wash her stomach.

"Look I don't know what the situation is. But I'll help you any way that I can, okay?" Ren's voice was barely above a whisper.

"Why?" Lita grumbled, "You told me you're only out to save your own neck. And that nothing you do is out of the kindness of your heart. So what's changed? Why should I believe you?"

"Because I know what it is to have a mate, even if she was a shitty one. Even if I couldn't keep her. And you don't seem to be like she was. You don't like to be touched. You don't get undressed in front of any of us unless you have to. At first, I thought it was because you were afraid. But then I saw you in the pits and I know that wasn't it. You can fend for yourself. And then I saw your mark and it all made sense... So it must be because of your mate. And I--"

"I can respect that. He was probably even the one who taught you to fight and you're lucky. Because it saved your life that day. I may not be much, but believe me when I say I respect the mate bond. And I will help you get back to him."

"If you're such a great person, then why do you even know I'm mated? That's not a common place for one to look when they have good intentions, Ren."

"I know... and I'm sorry. It was a moment of weakness. I thought maybe something was *wrong* with you... and maybe that's why you never wanted to be seen..." he cringed, "I know that sounds bad but I never said I was perfect, only that I would help you if I could. Do you want that or not?"

Lita shook her head. This was a trap. Obviously it was a trap. But... what did Maxim have to gain from making her say she wanted help escaping? Of course she did. That wasn't some secret. He likely had known that from the first moment. It only left one other option... Ren was telling the truth. He was actually offering her help.

"Okay," she whispered, setting the cloth on the tub ledge, "I want your help... and I can't reach my back or toes by myself." Ren silently nodded and that was it. A strange, little truce. After he washed the parts she couldn't reach, he abruptly stood.

"He's expecting you in--" Ren looked down at his watch, "Thirty minutes. You're going to need your strength to escape. I know you've been starved so just stay put for a few minutes, I'll be right back."

When he returned, he had a small paper sack with fruit and a sandwich, "The kitchen makes these for us when we're on duty. Here, you can have mine."

"You're giving me your lunch?"

"Don't worry," he rolled his eyes, "I'll survive missing one meal." As she unwrapped the sandwich and took a hearty bite of the turkey and cheese, he knelt down next to the tub, pulling out a vial from his pocket. "This is from the doc. She knows what I'm planning to do and she wants to help. It'll help your wolf and your stamina."

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Lita eyed it with as much trust as if he had handed her a grenade with the pin pulled. How many people here were actually not loyal to Maxim? At first glance everyone seemed solid but here she was receiving help from two wolves already. How many were secretly trying to escape? How many wanted to be free?

"You might not trust me but trust that if I intended to hurt you, I would've found an easier way to do it... maybe I'd have left you to fight alone in the pits? Or maybe I wouldn't be feeding you right now?"

"Fine," Lita uncorked it and drank. The sensation was like cough syrup settling in her gut. And then there was heat. In her veins, in her chest. Nyx jumped up and pranced, *Damn, I feel like I could run a marathon!*

I'll take that as a good sign that we weren't poisoned then? Lita laughed, finishing off the sandwich and apple as Nyx ran around in her head.

"You're going to have to pretend you're still weak when you're at dinner, okay? Play the part and I'll have a plan on how to get you out of here when I come to escort you back to your cell." Ren draped a dress over the tub as he turned to give her privacy.

"Why the hell do I need a dress Ren? As a matter of a fact why the hell was I given a bubble bath and not a hose down? What's about to happen at this dinner?"

Ren sighed, "All I know is... Maxim is having an auction. A *property* auction if you catch my drift and you're the hot ticket item... I don't know what type of high level your mate is... or what he did to get under Maxim's skin but I caught the tail end of a conversation about drawing your mate out using the auction." Lita thought she might actually shift right then and there. He had balls of steel if he thought she was going to willingly be sold off like fucking cattle. Or if he thought he could manipulate Cole. If he did come, he'd be coming to rip off Maxim's head.

"Can you get dressed on your own?" he asked. And as she stood, Lita found that surprisingly, she could. She felt as if she'd had a shot of adrenaline. All her aches and pains were gone and so was her weakness. Whatever he'd given her really had helped heal her. And even if she couldn't manage to escape later that night, she wouldn't be forced into doing anything she didn't want to. She was strong enough to fight back again. And god help anybody who tested that.

"I'm ready," she said, stepping into the jeweled sandals, "Don't want to keep the boss waiting."

"Why do I get the impression you're not planning to behave?" Ren asked dryly, looking her over with mild irritation.

"Who me? I would never purposely fuck up Maxim's whole auction because I think he's disgusting piece of shit..."

"Fuck me," Ren mumbled, leading her out of the room, "You're going to get us both killed."

"Maybe just you," she smirked, following.