

Lita's Love for the Alpha

Auctions

The formal dining room left little to the imagination when it came to Maxim's wealth. Greco-Roman style pillars lined the walls with large landscape paintings of vineyards and biblical renditions of Judas and John the Baptist. Across the ceiling was a replica Lita recognized from the Sistine Chapel. For a moment, she couldn't comprehend anything else other than the ceiling's beauty. It made a statement, demanded appreciation and observation. And some part of her hated to compliment anything of his.

When she finally tore her eyes away from the striking artwork, Lita saw the floor. Calcutta marble with gold veining laid in such perfection she almost couldn't see the edges. The lines of grout must have been paper thin because it felt like one continuous slab of flooring.

The table sat in the center of the room and was long enough to seat thirty two people, fifteen on each side and two heads, though one of the heads was empty. From the empty end of the table, one could clearly see the raised dais in the front of the room. Two giant chandeliers hung over the table and they were classically lit by faux candlelight. At the moment, the table was bare of food but the place settings were elaborate with crystal and gold trimmed goblets. Jugs of water sat alongside floral presentations of sprawling reds and blacks and green in wide set clear glass vases.

The whole room screamed money. Opulence. Influence. No, it was decadance. A festering beauty bred of too much money. Too much influence. And nothing of substance beneath it.

Whatever she'd thought of Maxim at their first dinner together, was nothing compared to the size and grandeur of this room, Lita realized. He was beyond wealthy. And she now knew one of the many ways he made his fortune was by selling women. Human trafficking of some sort. Cole had mentioned it before. But now she knew some of what it meant. The slaves they kept were temporary, probably in some sort of rotation before they were auctioned. Just like she was set to be. But the ultimate purpose of the auctions were unclear.

Ren walked her across the empty room to take a seat on the right of the head and she tried to ignore the sound of her sandals clacking along the marble. No one else had arrived yet, not even Maxim, and Ren used the opportunity to squeeze a reassuring hand on her shoulder. "Don't do anything stupid" his hand said "please". And though she nodded briefly, Lita knew she couldn't make that promise. And Neither could Nyx.

A moment later a chime sounded and the doors opened as smartly dressed men in business suits meandered to the table. Ren disappeared like vapor. One minute he was there, the next she was alone. The men cast curious glances her way, all with wolfish smiles on their faces. She was, no doubt, expected to put on a show for them. Perhaps present herself in the best light. But fuck that. Lita snorted and sneered in their faces as they took seats around the table. And yet none of them seemed shocked or offended. They all continued to talk and sip their cocktails as if she was amusing them.

"What the hell kind of auction is this?" Nyx growled.

"I'm assuming the kind where they expect a little fight..."

"That's disgusting. And now I'm pretty sure I'm going to bite someone."

"And I'm pretty sure I wouldn't stop you."

Another chime sounded and the door near the middle of the room opened. Maxim emerged with a careful smile on his face, a whiskey in his hand, and one of the most annoyingly perfect black suits Lita had ever seen. She could already imagine Nyx running her claws through it, reducing it to ribbons, and that calmed her nerves enough to hold his gaze as he rounded the table.

As he took a seat at the head of the table, servers began to move about the room, depositing hefty trays and bowls of food onto the table. He watched it all with precise intensity, looking at the other men, looking at the serving staff, casting amused glances at Lita herself. And on the last chime the room was emptied of serving staff as the room went quiet.

"Welcome, gentlemen!" Maxim raised his glass in toast as the men followed his lead, equally careful smiles on their faces, "It is my pleasure to bring you another fine auction this evening. I hope you all have come prepared to thrill us with your bottomless bank accounts and bloodlust." He snapped his fingers and Ren appeared alongside another man from a smaller door, "Bring in the first course."

Bloodlust? First course? There was already piles and piles of food on the table. What more could be brought? With a head nod, the man beside Ren disappeared and emerged with... a woman... no several women... all bound with rope. All gagged and wild eyed as they were forced onto a raised dais at the front of the room. Lita's stomach dropped, twisted, curdled as she looked at their trembling and the men's responding wolfish grins. Before she could even think about it, she'd pushed up out of her chair when a strong hand came down on her forearm.

Maxim didn't even shift his position in his seat as he held her there, forcing her back into her seat with the sheer strength of his grip.

"What the f-" She cut herself off when she saw the flash of his red eyes in warning. Looking around, she saw other red and blue flashes around the table as they eyed the women. She was among strong Alphas and Betas. Far stronger than the ones she'd fought in the pits, she rightly assumed. "Just wait. We'll wait for an opening..." Nyx coaxed as Lita slid herself back into her seat. Maxim's eyes were full of venom as he used his other hand to scoop salad onto her plate. Then he used the same hand to pour her a glass of wine, placing it gently before her as he leveled a stare and let go of her, "Behave."

The sound reverberated through her skull, commanding her to listen, willing her body to fold. She defied it.

"You know that doesn't work on me," she hissed quietly, pushing the glass away.

"Yes, I know," he dismissed, "But it doesn't mean I can't enjoy the discomfort on your face when I do it."

"Why do you have the pits?" Lita asked suddenly, aware that she was just as likely to get an answer as to get a fist to the face, "I thought you hated that Cole fights. Though I'll admit when I first met you I could have sworn you were proud of him."

"I have no problem with the fighting. He's a strong Alpha. What more could a father hope for? I have a problem with ignoring his birthright," Maxim snarled fiercely, "It's his inclination to make that his *job*, to train lowly common wolves and humans. To make those worthless things his *pack*! It's beneath him and his pedigree. That's I have a problem with." The way he spat the word pack had Lita nearly jumping out of her skin. The man was petrifying in how quickly he could turn the smallest thing into a threat.

"So the pits were always here?"

Maxim sighed in aggravation, as if he were deciding whether to actually dignify her questions with a response. Ultimately he decided to humor her, "The pits are new. Let's say they're something I added after that unfortunate run-in at the last tournament. I have to give it to Cole, his fighters were ruthless. Did he tell you most of my men died? I was lucky to get out alive and I'm certainly wolf enough to say it. There's no shame in nearly being bested by my own son. I raised him well. Raised him to be merciless."

He took a drink, "The pits are a cutthroat place to weed out the weakness in my men. I hadn't realized we had a weakness until we came to kill you. It's almost comical that you were nearly killed by the thing you inspired, isn't it?"

"Well if you want an opinion on that, you'll have to bring Chris back from the dead and ask." She savored his loaded silence.

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Lita's eyes tracked back to the women. And the man beside Ren who was leading the silent auction. Men around the table used their glasses to denote a bid as they warred for the winning number. She listened closely to hear the amount... three thousand... four... ten thousand. For one woman? Her stomach tightened and dropped.

Men like this didn't want for anything. They likely had money to burn and no reason not to burn it but they weren't stupid. If the woman was worth ten thousand to these men who likely valued nothing short of money and power... what was the value she offered them? Certainly not a wife. And there was far cheaper pussy to be had in their own packs, she was sure. So what...

"Have you figured it out yet?" Maxim whispered entirely too close to her ear. Enough to make her snap her neck away and give herself whiplash. She rubbed the pressure point gently and glared.

"No, I don't think you have... little pup. Or you'd be trying harder to save them."

"Save them? What the fuck does that-"

"Sold!" The auctioneer congratulated, bringing the woman forward as a prize to be claimed. Her whole body a wreck of shaking and tears. Lita almost emptied the sandwich she'd eaten all over the table. The winning Alpha pushed away from the table like a prized fighter, walking in measured, smooth steps until he was but an arm's reach away.

"It's an honor," he said, "To be the first winner this evening, gentlemen." He grabbed her roughly and led her through a doorway as the auctioning continued.

"Is she to be the final course this evening?" The man beside Lita asked Maxim, his eyes like icicles as they licked at her exposed skin, "Because she is quite the dessert."

"Indeed, Carlisle. I take it you approve?"

"You assume correctly," he continued, "Your racial *convictions*, shall we say, simply means more for the rest of us. And I can assure you... we appreciate it."

Maxim tsked and took a drink, as if the thought of doing anything with a wolf of her bloodline was disgusting. Lita wanted to snap her teeth at him, wanted to pull her claws out of his chest. But she had to be patient. Play the part of the weak, little wolf. Pretend to be broken until she saw an opening, an advantage she could exploit. She had begun to sweat. Not only from the attention of their conversation but from the attention she garnered in the room. Her eyes kept flicking back to the door where the woman had disappeared. What happened back there? Was she alright?

"Eat," Carlisle suggested, pointing his fork to her salad, "I hear you haven't eaten for a week and I prefer my women to have their strength."

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"I could give a flying fuck what you want from your women. Pig. You can shove this salad straight up your-" Lita screamed out as a sharp, shooting pain burned through her leg. All activity stopped as everyone snapped their eyes to the head of the table. Maxim had hardly moved at all and yet Lita had a six inch gold steak knife sticking out of her thigh. She gasped, feeling every inch of her body razor into the sensation.

"Manners, my dear," Maxim cooed in the sweetest, iciest voice, "Make the lady. Do behave. Or you'll test my patience." Lita couldn't think straight, not with the agony in her veins or Nyx's howling in her ears.

Carlisle clicked his tongue, "I'm certainly capable of handling a flustered pup, Maxim. And I'll ask you to refrain from damaging my property!" Property... they kept talking about her like she was a thing.

"She's still mine until a winning bid," Maxim yanked the knife from her leg, blood splattering the front of her dress, "And besides, it's just a flesh wound. I'll take the hit in price for the satisfaction of watching her bleed." Lita felt like her head was spinning, felt like her stomach was rising up her throat. The aching, throbbing pain radiated up her leg and she fought every urge she had to grab it. She couldn't give Maxim the satisfaction.

Carlisle grunted, "Yes well her reactions are quite enjoyable, I'll give you that. I would have expected her to cry but no--" he leaned in checking her face, "Dry as a bone. Quite a dessert indeed. Much better quality than the first course. They're all already blubbering and they haven't even seen anything yet."

Lita forced out a shaky breath, straightened her spine, picked up her plate and slowly, so terribly slowly, dumped the entire contents into Maxim's lap, "I'll take the hit for the satisfaction of watching you seethe."

Just as Maxim was about to get out of his seat and unless the violence in his eyes, a man came through a service door, taking a knee beside Maxim's chair in urgency.

"What is it, Tuck?" Maxim gritted his teeth, gripping the arms of his chair in a vice.

"A breach sir, southern and western sectors. Wolves."

Maxim's eyes brightened, "Wolves? Is he with them?"

"It appears so, sir. No response from either sectors. No one has direct eyes on them but the reports we got before radio silence, confirm it. Your son is with them."

"Excellent. Implement our plans, Tuck. Bring him to me. Alive."

"Yes, sir. Right away," Tuck bowed and went back through the service door. Lita replayed the words again and again in her mind. "Your son is with them." Cole.