

Lita's Love for the Alpha

The Thing About Falling Apart...

Vomit splashed the floor, the acrid smell stinging Lita's nostrils as she tried to keep herself from breaking. *Don't show weakness, don't show weakness*, she chided herself as the old habit of hiding her feelings, reared its ugly head. Maxim was gone but with this new betrayal, Lita felt as vulnerable as she ever had.

Lita could hardly see through her tears. The betrayal shouldn't have hit her so hard. Logically, she knew that. It was hardly the worst thing that had happened to her that week. Lita had watched a monster murder an innocent woman with a bullet to the head just a few hours earlier. He'd done it just to fuck with her. That wasn't something Lita ever thought she would see and nothing she thought she would ever forget. And yet in the moment, she managed to force that pain down. So why couldn't she could do it again?

What had her life become? As if discovering her own werewolf genes hadn't been enough, the dark world of deviant werewolves was nothing like the more simplicity of Cole's pack. It had all been so much to process, Lita felt numb to the core. So, Jaz's admission shouldn't have been able to hurt. In all honesty, it shouldn't have been able to *reach* her. But it had. Lita had grown too used to being let down to feel so blindsided, so gutted. And yet... and... yet... the tears wouldn't stop. That numbness had been no match for the knee-wobbling relief of seeing her pack. Her family.

She silently cried harder. The family was falling apart right in front of her eyes.

How many times had she told herself not to cry in front of others? Time and time again, she had learned those emotions didn't help anything. Yet, here she was... a badass she-wolf... throwing up and going into shock like the weak human she'd always been. James would be so disappointed. She hated everything. She hated her own weakness.

Arms might have wrapped around her but she stiffened. Lita told herself to push the pain away, to regain control. Memories of Brian flooded her, the touch always pretending to be gentle before it was rough. But he wasn't here right? And Maxim was dead. There was no one left to put their filthy hands on her. She was surrounded by friends, by her support system, people she loved. Right? Her stomach bottomed out again. If Jaz could betray her, anyone could.

Those arms might have helped her up from her knees and over to the office couch as they held her close. Why was she such a mess? Hadn't she been doing better? Hadn't she been handling everything? How she'd endured all this time with Maxim's pack without shattering completely, Lita didn't know. But she had. And yet a betrayal of her friend had turned all that strength to dust? Somewhere in her rational mind, Lita understood that she wasn't weak for having emotions. That even the strongest of people could hurt too when it came to their loved ones. But she wasn't in a position to be rational. She wasn't in a position to be anything.

Someone might have produced a napkin and wiped her face. She snapped her head away, a growl coming on so fast she couldn't stop it. Lita felt exposed. Surrounded. Suffocated. Alone. She wanted to attack. To regain balance. To toughen her soft heart.

You're not alone, just, hurting. Nyx rumbled in the back of her head. It helped Lita, if only a little.

Lita had been betrayed before. Would probably be betrayed again before her time on earth was over. So, why the fuck did it feel like this? Like her lungs were too tight... like her heart was bleeding out? Someone might have been talking to her. She thought someone was snapping their fingers in front of her face. Lita couldn't be sure of anything though because her senses weren't right.

She only threw up once but her stomach continued to cramp, twisting in time with her heavy breathing. Everything about this was wrong.

A hand touched her shoulder carefully, the thumb rubbing small circles. Then the sensation of her limp body being pulled against a lap. The familiar smell of firewood and fall air. *Thank god*, Lita leaned further into it, put her nose to his neck, unable to resist the natural pull of her mate. She didn't know how much she needed his comfort until she had it. Something constant to center around. Nyx nuzzled the edge of her mind too, chuffing and soothing her too. The room, though, was too quiet in her ears, only the sound of blood and her heart thumping.

This was not the first time she felt deadened. But she hoped it would be the last.

Lita didn't know how long she sat there, cradled in Cole's arms. But it was long enough that she didn't hear the fight start. Didn't even know there was a fight happening until Cole pulled away from her suddenly. She slid down against the couch, her reactions still sluggish from shock. The room moved in a slow-motion haze, noise filtering down to ears slowly.

"There's no fucking way Jaz is going in a cell," Ace yelled at Andres taking a threatening step forward. "That's bullshit and you know it!"

"She's a traitor man. Unless you want to leave her behind?" The pause was the only thought Ace would give it. "She can't stay in the pack. I don't care who she's *fucking*."

Ace's eyes turned ruby, teeth dropping down to match the snarl, "Watch it, Delta."

Andres' hand fisted, wrist twitching as he took a calming breath, "The point still stands, Ace. Tantrum or not."

"First of all, we don't even have fucking cells back at the compound. We're not that kind of pack and I don't think Cole is signing off on having some created for your little torture fantasy!"

Andres opened his mouth to reply and Ace quickly cut him off.

"Second of all, she's a survivor! Like Lita." He pointed at Lita who had taken a precarious seat on the edge of the office couch. Her head was clearing bit by bit so she still struggled to keep her attention on the fight. Cole stood in the center of the room, broadening his shoulders to take a more commanding position. Everyone could see the verbal fight had the potential to turn physical at any minute and Cole's body language said *calm the fuck down.*

"She's like Cole," Ace insisted, "Like me. Like Lita. Like all of us, really! Running from a past she didn't choose. She's not a villain for doing what she had to in order to survive. Don't make her out to be something she's not!"

"She did choose, though!" Alex insisted, cutting in. Lita didn't like the malicious spark in his eyes. "You heard her. She spied on Cole for years! We can't just look the other way on that! You really mean to tell me you're fine thinking she might have fucked you for information?"

Ace clenched his jaw and turned away. Pale-faced and withdrawn, Lita might not have understood everything, but she knew that comment was meant to hurt.

Alex didn't understand. He liked Jaz. Accepted her as part of the pack. He would protect and defend her as such. But he didn't love Jaz. Not like Lita. And now that she saw the pain etched on Ace's face, she knew he loved her too. They all needed a breather. Needed to take a break before anyone said anything else they would regret.

She didn't even get her mouth to move before they started arguing again. Jaz glanced helplessly between the two, her face desperate and wet. She looked at Lita. *Dammit*, Lita couldn't help that she wanted to defend her friend. And she felt torn between her own feelings of betrayal and her desire to help Jaz.

"She deserves a second chance," Ace said in a low voice, "To fix this."

"How can you say that after what she did?" Alex replied, "She betrayed us all. Including you. Unless you're saying she whispered the truth to you during post-sex pillow talk? And you just failed to fill the rest of us in?" Jaz flinched and Ace lunged for Alex, the two falling sideways against the office desk.

"Don't talk about her like that!"

Alex spat out blood, reared back, and headbutted Ace. They rolled and punched, sending debris everywhere. They managed to separate and get to their feet but that didn't cut the fight short. "Are we faulting people for surviving their fucked up situations now?" Ace yelled, throwing a punch to Alex's stomach then dodging one to the nose. "Last time I checked, Maxim wasn't someone anyone said *no* to."

It was Lita's turn to flinch. "Enough!" Cole yelled. "Jaz comes home with us under supervision for now. No cells. No punishment until we discuss everything. Drop it now."

He didn't use his full Alpha tone but the reverberation of his anger was almost palpable. It was a warning that he would, if he had to. "Separate, NOW! The main priority was getting Lita—your Luna— back safely. So let's finish the job and get her home. Everything else can wait."

Andres stepped forward to push the two men apart, nodding for them to take opposite corners.

Several sets of boots sounded from the hallway, then a voice Lita knew. "How much longer until we can get out of here, Cole? Round up your damn pack and decide on the others already!"

Rafi pushed the doors open, freezing on sight at the chaos he walked into. There was no way to hide the haphazard scene. Ideally, pack issues were supposed to stay out of the public eye. Anything else was a sign of weakness but Rafi wasn't technically part of the public. So Cole suppressed the urge to attack him even if he did walk in the room like he was more than a fucking Beta. Ordering Cole to do anything like he wasn't one misstep away from the fight he wanted.

Cole blew a frustrated breath to calm himself before he got too hot-headed. If Rafi wanted someone to kick his ass, he'd have ask his daughter. She deserved first swing at least for everything she had gone through. Not only was he the only father Lita had ever known but he was also acting as a good-faith ambassador for the Imperium pack—richest pack of the Northeast, hence the pretentious-ass Latin name. There were so many packs across the globe, no one would ever keep track of them all. But Imperium had the full weight of New York City's money behind it's name. That made it well known.

The last thing Cole wanted was to start a conflict with another pack, especially one with those kinds of resources, so whatever Rafi had done to hurt Lita, whatever he was complicit in, Cole had to let it go for the time being. That meant letting the personal disrespect go too even though it left a bad taste in his mouth. Lita could hash that out with her father later. At least he had at least come to help. Though Cole couldn't help but wonder why the Alpha of such a prestigious pack would lend his help... and his Beta.

Cole tried not to be suspicious of help, though. Maybe Rafi was just that convincing. Without the pack members he brought with him, Cole didn't think they would have been able to pull the rescue off so easily. All in all, his gratitude was the main reason why he didn't have Rafi by the throat for interrupting a private Alpha matter. Who gave a fuck that Rafi was twice Cole's age? Probably saw Cole as a kid who didn't know shit about running a pack. *Shit*, Cole needed to stop thinking like that or he was going to punch first and apologize later. They'd barely avoided the conflict with that pack when he saved Lita the first time.

He swallowed his tongue and forced a diplomatic face as he turned to face Lita's father.

"Tell your men to begin packing up. We've cleared out everything we're taking and we're coming to deal with the rest of Maxim's pack now."

Rafi hadn't looked at Cole, still staring at Lita's despondent expression, "Are you okay, baby girl?"

Lita shivered and it made Cole tense. She looked like she'd just swallowed broken glass. She couldn't do this. Not right now. She could not fucking handle having this conversation so soon after Jaz's confession. Cole was there in an instant, kneeling to face her as he tried to soothe her shaking.

"LATER," Cole growled harshly over his shoulder, giving Rafi every sign to leave the room or face the consequences. "My mate needs time. You're... welcome to act as a liaison between our pack and your Alpha's for the time being. You can... temporarily stay at our pack until Lita tells you to leave." That shouldn't have been so difficult for Cole to say. Packs co-hosted all the time. And yet, Cole wanted to spit the taste out of his mouth. He didn't like the man.

Rafi hesitated, eyed the gentle interaction between Cole and Lita before he nodded and turned away. "I'll let Alpha Asher know."

Lita let out a shaky breath as the owners of the other footsteps entered the room behind Rafi's retreating form. Stace, Brody, and Mark filed through the doorway, took one look at the scene, and said in unison, "Well someone better talk."

Someone did start talking but Lita zoned back out.

Despite all the training she had done to get stronger, Maxim had still won. She'd been sitting at that table full of Alphas with absolutely no idea what she would have done to free herself if her pack hadn't arrived. And Jaz had been human... had seen her father killed... Lita wasn't sure what she would have done in such a situation. She wasn't sure what she should do about any of this information.

Baby? Cole's voice sliced through her painfully jumbled thoughts. She looked up at him. *I love you. You're going to be okay, yea? I've got you*. His warm hands and sincere eyes helped. *I love you*, he repeated.

Lita nodded, tears gushing out in full force. *I... I...* She couldn't say... the words were... she just couldn't get them out... not even over the link.

Baby, you can let your guard down. It's okay. You can—I know what he was like, okay? I know what living in his pack was like. You don't have to put on a brave face for me. Ever.

I—I'm— a choked sound escaped her throat, a whimper. The walls were too close. The air too thick.

"Out," Cole whispered aloud, "Everybody out." Lita hardly heard the sound of the door clicking closed before she collapsed into his arms and wept.