

Lita's Love for the Alpha

Show Them Who's Boss

breakdown and though Cole had sat with her through it all, Lita knew he needed to finish his Alpha duties. She also knew he wouldn't leave until she told him to. Or until she went with him.

"You don't have to come, but..." Cole sat back on the floor, dragging his knees up to his elbows, "I plan to assimilate most of Maxim's pack so... I just think they should see you as their Luna. In the position of power you deserve. Not the prisoner they've seen you as so far."

It made sense. Lita knew that. Leaders were expected to put their personal problems aside for the betterment of the community. She should be able to put her big girl panties on and do her duty. Be strong for her pack. But she didn't think she could face a mirror, let alone a field full of faces who most likely saw her as the reason for their new reality. Some would hate her for it. Others, maybe not. Lita, however, didn't think it was realistic that everyone had hated it here. There had to be at least some wolves, those who were higher up in the pack hierarchy, that would never see her as their Luna. And with all the hateful indoctrination... it might not even be because of anything she could control.

She looked at the subtle tan to her skin, a sign of her heritage that she'd never lose no matter how many days she spent in a cell.

"How many are you going to take with us?"

"Ideally, I want to take everyone. Try to give them all a pack to be proud of. A better life than servitude and breeding for the women at the very least."

He sighed, running his hand through his hair, "Maybe that's just the spiteful part of me that wants to ruin everything my father ever worked towards. But realistically?" Cole rolled his neck. "I know most of them won't be able to accept the way our pack operates. Especially with how much hate has been crammed down their throats. But, anyone who can swear loyalty to you, can stay."

He didn't say anyone who would swear to him, the Alpha of the pack, but to Lita. Because he understood why many wouldn't and he wanted to weed those wolves out. He wanted her to be comfortable. A safe home not just for Lita but for Stace and Alex who were Dominican. And Andres, who was from pain. He probably even thought of Jaz, whose fate still remained to be seen. Their pack was diverse in more ways than one and he didn't want to bring hate into it. Every time she thought she couldn't love Cole more...

"I wish I could be more helpful. I can't imagine what this is like for you. I wish I wasn't—" Her bottom lip trembled. How much pressure had Cole been under? To find her, to fight alongside another pack when his own wasn't suited to combat, to come here and kill his own father. And he was still making hard decisions. Yet when she should have been able to support him, he was there coddling her instead. For a terrible moment, Lita felt like a burden.

"Hey," Cole pushed her chin up, "You are the strongest person I know, yea? Literally. Don't ever sell yourself short. Between your family, your shiththead ex, losing your brother, finding out you're a wolf and we're mates only for me to fuck it all up every chance I got... then on top of that, all this shit with my father. No one else could handle it, Lita." His voice went so soft over her name she felt like crying.

Lita didn't have the words to show him how much his words meant. Cole's faith in her seemed endless.

"I can handle the pressure, okay? That's what Alphas do." He pressed a kiss to her forehead, "And if you can't walk out there and give Maxim's pack hell, make them grovel at your feet, then that's okay. If you can't take on Luna responsibilities yet in our pack, that's okay too. If Nyx can't help during shifts and training, then I think Midnight is wolf enough to cover for you." He smirked. Such a gentle gesture that Lita almost cried all over again, leaning forward to wrap her arms around his neck.

"You'll make a perfect Luna for the pack." He took a breath.

"But, I just have to say this. I've been thinking about it every day since our fight. I hated thinking I might never get the chance to apologize. I was so stupid. I don't even know what came over me. Call it bad Alpha instincts or a character flaw but I didn't mean to imply you were my property. You know that right?"

His hands pulled her closer, his eyes pained and cautious. There was something so intense about knowing he only showed this gentle side to her. Cole was such a hardheaded ass about a lot. A *caring*, hardheaded ass, but he only ever let his insecurities show with her. It was freeing in a way. It gave her permission to express herself fully.

And for a long moment, she just pulled back and looked at him. How had a man who grew up under the thumb of a monster turn out this perfect for her? Kind and understanding. Thoughtful and brave. She'd never felt lucky before. If anything she always felt cursed but with Cole, her whole life had changed overnight.

Lita leaned in to give him a quick kiss, "I was being sensitive. It was a stupid argument Cole. You don't have to apologize."

"I want to apologize. I promised myself I'd stop being an asshole and I failed. I just meant..."

"I know what you meant," Lita laughed, sound stiff and unnatural in the wake of everything that had happened. Cole pressed his forehead to hers, close enough to her mouth to be distracting. "You're mine too. I don't think I could let you go even if I wanted to. I was reading too much into it at the time. And then later, the girls convinced me to make you jealous at the bar. It was all so stupid, looking back on it. I wish I could go back and have make-up sex instead."

Cole huffed, eyes flashing, "I'm really not above showing you exactly how much I missed you on the floor of Maxim's office, baby. Let's keep the sex talk to a minimum right now."

"No, no, no," Lita laughed again, the lightness finally coming back to her voice, "I remember you promising I'd scream so loud I'd never be able to face the pack again."

Cole growled softly, nipping at her lips, "Ignore me. I'm an idiot."

"Come on Alpha," she shook her head playfully, standing, "Let's go show them who's boss."

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Grumbling like a teenage boy, Cole managed to get himself to his feet and take her hand. He gave her a once over and tugged her through the doors. At the end of the long hallway, Cole saw the others were locked in a tense conversation. Lita wondered where Jaz was but she didn't have the guts to ask. Not yet. She'd only just managed to pull herself together.

"Rafi?" Cole asked Alex as they neared the group.

"Outside with the others. Well past ready to go, if his attitude is anything to go on." Alex turned to Lita, taking in her mangled appearance before turning back to Cole, "We good?"

Cole nodded and gave Alex a dark look. Lita knew they were exchanging more words between the link but before she could ask him, Cole was pulling her through the main entryway toward the door. He paused just before he opened it, long enough that all the familiarity and ease drained from his face. She didn't recognize the dark, broody Cole that took his place.

Well, that wasn't entirely true. She had seen that face often in the beginning. Her first day at the gym. The few arguments they had. The night he decked Ace for kissing her. Every time he stepped in the ring. Maybe that's what this was for him, stepping in the ring with his father's ghost. Lita had never considered he might be as worried to face the pack as she was.

However he was feeling, he pulled her out the door behind him anyway. The others followed.

Outside, she once again focused on the gathered faces of the pack on their knees. How many would actually make a vow to her? The more disgusted eyes she met, the more she was sure there wouldn't be many. Those eyes flitted from her to Stace. Then they found Rafi and swiveled over to Alex and a few other pack members.

Her gut tightened again but Lita reminded herself that their hate was not her problem. She couldn't help everyone and she couldn't fix everyone else's problems either. But damn she wished the women would come. The ones who had been kept in the basement at the very least. Servants and glorified slaves... she hoped they would jump at the new opportunity.

"Now's the time to tell me if any of these people hurt you," Cole growled into Lita's ear, pulling her up alongside him so they could walk together. It was another purposeful display of her authority in his pack. He was showing everyone they were equals. That might have won him some more brownie points, if not for how distracted Lita became at his warm breath on her neck. His low voice sent heat up her spine. Inappropriate timing or not, when he took charge, her body reacted all on its own. If he noticed, he didn't show it, continuing his thought. "I'd rather just kill those ones and move on. No reason to waste the request. Anyone who touched you dies."

He glared at her to prove the point.

"So bloodthirsty," Lita rolled her eyes. "The only one who meant me any harm is already dead." Her voice dripped with venom, remembering seeing Chris' surprised face as she dealt the killing bite. Fuck that guy. She hoped he was happy in hell alongside Maxim and Carlisle.

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"Alright let's make this quick!" Cole clapped his hands, yelling to the gathered crowd that remained on their knees. "Stand!"

She so rarely saw him truly embody his true authority but at that moment, shoulders spread and voice booming across the clearing, she saw him as a pure Alpha male. She could still remember that dark, aggressive look from her first day at the gym and a pleasant thrum went through her.

Lita fought the urge to catch her father's eyes even as they burned into her profile when she stood next to him. He wasn't actually her father... in any sense of the word really. Her familiar well of sadness ached again but she pushed it down. She needed to stay present.

"I am not in the habit of repeating myself so I'll say this one fucking time. If you cannot let go of my father's teachings about race and social systems, stand up now and move to the right. This queen—" Cole pointed Lita out with a dark, loving look that made her heart race, "—is our Luna. If you cannot serve her, move-to-the-fucking-right and be quick about it." A handful of wolves shot up. All men. All wearing the familiar tactical gear of Maxim's guards. Malice was a living thing, Lita realized because she felt their scowls down to her bones. One looked right at her and mouthed *filthy blood.*

Cole had cleared the distance and grabbed the man by the throat in a breath. A well-placed punch to the ribs had the man gasping and groaning on the ground.

"Disrespect my Luna, you disrespect me," Cole's voice went impossibly cold, "I am not my father. But I assure you, I am more creative." None of the other men said a word as they went from glaring at Lita to glaring at the ground. She was just happy none of the women moved.

"Now that we've sorted the trash," Cole moved to step over the groaning man's body, subtly letting his boot kick the same ribs. "First things first. If you have any fighting experience, move to the left." He waited while several dozen men moved where he instructed.

"We are primarily a fighting pack. We spar and train regularly. We compete at all weigh classes and in all divisions of MMA and boxing. Survival training and self-defense will now be added to the regimen. Anyone with a predetermined skill set is an asset. Brody—take their names and skill levels." He nodded confirmation.

"Next, anyone with experience cooking, cleaning, or maintenance stand here." Cole pointed in front of him. Several people moved and Brody took their names as well.

"Alright," Cole boomed again, "Last order of business: if you are injured or have a pressing need—*sorry*, I should have specified, anyone not in the pile of trash to the right—feel free to see the doctors on hand before we leave. We are leaving within the hour."

Lita caught eyes with Ren just as Cole was finishing his speech. She barely hid her wobble of relief that he hadn't died. And that he was standing in the leftmost group. He was making a vow to *her*. Outside of Maxim, he was still choosing to be honorable. That had something sharp opening in her chest.

With those parting words, Cole turned, took Lita's hand to pull her in for a casual, but deep kiss, and led her to the SUV they'd be taking home.