

# Lita's Love for the Alpha

## Stretching Bonds Thin

Ace threw the office chair against the wall with enough force to crack the plaster covering the concrete.

"Cut that the fuck out!" Cole boomed, "She still hasn't spoken to me about Jaz. What do you want me to do, \*make\* her? After all she's been through...? She's hardly talking to me at all as it is. I'm not going to push the whole your-friend-who-betrayed-your-trust wants to know if she can get let out of her cage... You're the one that's runs drills with her, why don't \*you\* ask her?"

"She doesn't talk to me much during training either," Ace rubbed at his temples, "I don't feel good about bringing it up. And I'm usually trying to work off my own shit." He cleared his throat, "But Jaz can't stay locked up in the cabin forever. I know she has all her basic needs met and she's being monitored by Andres' men. But it's not right to isolate someone indefinitely like that. Can't you force the issue? The others have all agreed that they can forgive her but of course, it only matters how you two feel." Cole ignored the bitter twinge to that last statement. Ace was in a precarious situation. As another blooded Alpha, he could easily start his own pack. But he was floundering. Cole wasn't even sure Ace wanted to. He'd never shown any desire to lead. But Jaz... and what they decided to do with her could be enough of a catalyst for him.

Cole glared at his friend, bending over to pick up the shards of the chair from the floor, "The next time I can, I'll try to talk to her, okay? Listen, since we're on the subject... how are you handling everything?"

"Don't start with the psychobabble bullshit man," Ace snapped. "I hear we've already got enough of that going around. I'm fine. I've been betrayed before and I'm sure I'll be betrayed again. It's not like we're mates or something." Ace's tone couldn't have sounded more defensive if he tried. He probably should talk to someone but Cole had no idea how to broach that subject with another man. A werewolf Alpha male at that. He gritted his teeth. Cole knew what the real issue was because he'd gone through it himself.

"Uh-huh," Cole deadpanned, "And you realized you were in love with her before or after all that not-giving-a-shit?"

Ace's mouth parted in shock for one whole second before a flurry of curses came out. "She's just— I don't... just fucking drop the whole topic okay? Forget I said shit."

"Dude, you brought it the hell up. I just figured I'd ask while I could... Jeez you're sensitive."

"Fuck you. Your balls are so blue they're making us all cringe. You don't think everyone can see you skulking around after Lita? Fix that before you take on other people's problems."

Cole knew his friend was lashing out. But the fury licking up his spine didn't care. "That's a low fucking blow. Pissed or not, watch how the fuck you talk about your Luna. Our relationship is absolutely none of your fucking business. She's traumatized and scared. You don't even know half the shit you just brought up without thinking!" Cole had risen to his full height without even thinking about it. He'd squared his shoulders for a fight.

Ace scrubbed his jaw, "Look, I'm sorry. It's just... I don't know man, \*fuck\*. Let's just table this shit. Talking about Jaz gets my head messed up, okay?"

That was as close to a satisfactory explanation as Cole was going to get. "Fine by me, asshole." Cole tossed the scraps of wood into the trashcan and headed back out into the main gym. Lita passed him, giving him an easy wave as she stripped out of her boxing gear. He pretended not to see the dark circles under her eyes as he smiled, forcing all his love and warmth to the surface for her. As he swiveled his head to take in the full gym, he couldn't help the pride that arrested him.

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How many years had he hoped for a full gym? Hell, now it was so full they were building more housing and Maxim's money meant they didn't need to accept external memberships anymore. No one was allowed on the premises outside of wolves and trusted humans. He had enough men for a constant guard rotation on the border and with the extra finances, he'd gotten a new arsenal of weapons added to Andres' security center. His Delta hadn't stopped planning since they returned, hell-bent on being prepared for any future conflicts.

It felt like overnight his pack had gone from a band of misfit fighters and their ring bunnies to an actual pack with families and children. An actual home. A community that had the potential to really thrive. Hell, even had Alex working on a new community center with a playground. \*A playground!\* He laughed to himself. There were kids here who would never know what he had known growing up. It was a delicate kind of happiness.

He beamed as Lita went to talk to some of the females. They were from Maxim's pack but they weren't the enslaved females. Those ones he'd hardly seen heads or tails of unless it was at the dining hall. And even then, they never spoke. Never made eye contact. He wondered often if taking them along had been a mistake. If they didn't want to be here, he wouldn't force them. That's something his father would have done and every day Cole spent above ground, was a day he would be the opposite of his father. He'd gotten reports of the women training with Lita in the gym so, maybe they were heading in the right direction. And his Luna had already offered Elise a full time position here. He smirked. Lita didn't even know how amazing she was.

The women making idle conversation with his Luna were the breeders, as his father would have so crassly called them. Shewolves of suitable blood for offspring. Some had already had a few pups that were currently old enough to do chores. Some had pups still hanging on their hips at the machines. Some were swaddled on their backs. Again, Cole felt pride fill his chest. Lita smiled as a little girl pulled her braid and two small boys ran under her legs, playing tag.

Cole wasn't a crier, but damn it almost brought a tear to his eye. They were traumatized as well, he figured, but they hadn't been treated as badly as the others and they seemed happy at least. Eager to be a part of everything. Within a few days here, they had begun to show up for mass training and runs. Some of the fighters he'd taken on before Lita's abduction, made no qualms about scoping out the new options. This was how it was supposed to be, he thought. Organic.

He wondered how many wolves would make a pairing after this run. Speaking of runs, Cole glanced at the clock. \*Shit.\* They needed to let their wolves out before it got too late or the kitchen staff would have a fit. Late dinner was cold dinner.

"Everyone!" he boomed, using his Alpha tone to get their attention. He would never abuse it the way his father had. The way Lita's mother had. "Pack run in thirty minutes! Anyone who decides to partake will adhere to standard procedures! Since it's Friday, pups are welcome to join. It will be an easy course run, alright? Thirty minutes!"

"Yes Alpha Tollison," the pack rumbled in unison. Damn, was he ever going to get used to hearing his father's name? He had never considered himself Alpha Tollison. It was too traumatic considering how he grew up. Every time he heard that name, something bad followed. It was never said out of respect, but out of fear. He was Cole. A scrapper. A fighter. Alpha of a ragtag band of fellow scrappers that somehow made it work. An Alpha that could barely make ends meet without the purse they won from fights but wouldn't trade that to go back to his father's blood money. Now he was the only Alpha Tollison, badass up-and-coming Alpha of an unnamed Westcoast pack, the top runner for the showcase fight next week.

\*Fuck\*, speaking of the showcase... he still hadn't told Lita. He'd missed the last one so he really didn't want to miss this one but, if she asked him to, he would. And he wouldn't bitch about it. He nodded sharply in agreement with himself. He'd do whatever she needed.

Cole caught the glint in Lita's eyes as the pack burst into activity to get ready for the run. She'd given him heated stares ever since they got back but when they were alone, her expression shuttered. And as a man, Cole didn't think he would ever complain about a woman being quiet... but Lita was more shut down now than she'd ever been. And if her daily nightmares weren't tearing him up inside, he didn't know what was. If she didn't feel safe with him anymore...

\*Damn it all\*, he didn't know what he would do. He could deny himself pleasure for as long as it took but if she never trusted him again... that was no way to live. No kind of relationship he could stomach. When he focused on Lita again, he found that she'd already left. Cole's heart ached. He sighed, if only Ace knew how right he was. Cole could do a lot of things but fixing his relationship might be something he couldn't manage.

Tucking his aching heart away, Cole forced his shoulders straight. He motioned to the few packmembers that looked as if they needed to speak with him, giving them his full attention for the next thirty minutes.