

Lita's Love for the Alpha

Some Grudges Don't Die (Conclusion)

Showcases were nothing like competitions. Or perhaps it was the inherent differences between people on the east coast and west coast. But the place felt stuffy. Luxurious but uptight. Lita briskly moved out of the way of two women who were barreling toward the outdoor pool of the Ritzy hotel, each with a glass of champagne in their hands. Ace laughed as he saddled the bags up beside her. It wasn't the glamour of the hotel that told her showcases were different, it was the sheer number of people. How many were werewolves, she couldn't readily tell, but in the lobby where they stood, Lita counted at least a hundred other people.

So much for starting small as her first outing as an official Luna. She shook her head.

The competition hotel had been nice too. And the penthouse bar was wonderful. But none of it felt pretentious like things did here. Maybe she was just being pissy after the flight, stuck in the middle because Cole had to have the aisle seat for safety. And Stace pouted about needing the window seat. It had been a miserable few hours. But maybe it was also because this was a homecoming of sorts. Her parents—all of them—were in the city somewhere. Even Brian was here somewhere. That knowledge unsettled her a bit. But then she touched her brand and felt all the love flow through her.

She watched Cole use his shoulder to work two gawkers out of the way at the front desk so he could pick up the room keys. Watching the Alpha energy pour off of him always got her excited and she stifled the flush growing inside of her. She hoped one day soon, there'd be something else growing inside her but they had all the time in the world. She could wait.

Watching the way he brushed off the glances of pretty bystanders had her unable to hide a smile. He was hers just as she was his. Eyeing the pool through luxurious glass doors, Lita counted at least another hundred people. She'd thought the competition had been packed. But if they weren't even in the conference room yet, she could only imagine how many bodies would be crammed together.

Thankfully, Cole assured her they had special seating as one of the main showcase guests.

"Got the keys," Cole growled irritably, "Let's the get the hell out of here before I murder someone."

Ace shoved his shoulder, "Be fucking nice. You certainly aren't going to win any new pack memberships through your good looks and charm."

Lita hadn't meant to laugh but Cole's wry expression made her burst out in a high-pitched sound that could only be described as a Hyena.

"Best to send me ahead to smooth talk the guests tonight, pal. Wouldn't want you biting anyone's head off."

"Keep talking shit I'll think you're trying to challenge me as Alpha of this pack," Cole bared his teeth but Lita caught the playful gleam in his eyes. They'd already discussed Ace's future plans. He had no desire to run his own pack, taking up full time fighting instead, as Cole decided to step out of the ring permanently. She felt a silent joy at that too. For Cole, for Ace, and for Jaz too. Whatever had happened between Ace and Jaz had him in a much better mood. Even though she hadn't come along for the showcase, Ace was still far closer to being his usual cocky self than the depressed asshole he had been.

"Now why the hell would I take on all the pack work when I could just be the face of the brand?" Ace's feral smile had Cole barking a laugh as he turned away. Cole grumbled something about Alpha-holes but he was already walking away toward the elevators.

"Wait the hell up, Cole, damn these bags aren't going to carry themselves," Ace called after him. The others had finally finished unloaded the bags and Stace draped her heavy arm over Lita's shoulders.

"Glad to see Alpha's still in high spirits," she rolled her eyes. "What are you wearing to the light fight tonight?"

Lita shrugged, "Haven't thought about it. Something for the weather. I've been dying for the cold weather to break so I'm at least going to show some skin. If I didn't pack anything good, I'll just hit a mall."

"Hey—" Alex called over, Brody and Mark saddling up beside him, each with duffel bags in their hands, "You better not buy anything else while we're here Lita. These bags are heavy enough as it is!"

"Stop crying!" Stace teased, sticking out her tongue, "And we're in public... it's Luna to *you*."

"Yea! Gymhead," Lita smirked, propping her hand on her hip. The old nickname settled warmly in her chest. It felt familiar. Out at a fight with her family. Her pack. Lita took a deep breath, "Come on, I'm starving and I want to get a nap in before I kill it on the dancefloor tonight."

"You're not wearing anything on the list!" Cole yelled from in front of them. By the list, he meant the list of outfits that most often got him into fights. She snickered with Stace, knowing good and well she'd be wearing exactly that.

"Are you sure he's not forty?" Stace said under her breath with a smile, "He grumbles like it."

"Shut it before he hears you," Lita tucked into the elevator beside Cole, making room for the others. Andres scowled from outside the doors, a bellhop cart full of bags at his back. "Oh don't worry about me!" he drawled sarcastically, "I'll get the next one."

Alex and Brody guffawed as the door closed.

"Ah, just like old times," Mark sighed with gusto. He could be worse than Ace at times. "So, Luna, are you going to visit anyone while we're in town?"

Lita had been thinking the same thing herself. Would she? "Honestly, I wasn't sure at first. But there's no one here I need to see." She smiled at him, "I'm spending time with my family, anything else is just background noise."

The elevator dinged as if on cue and the expanse of the penthouse suite came into view.

Brody whistled.

Lita turned to Cole, interlacing their fingers as he pulled her along, "You certainly didn't spare any expense this time."

"It's the least I can do for my Luna. Your first official outing... and I know coming back to the city must be hard. So, I wanted you to do it in style." Kissing her forehead and nudged her toward the master bedroom, "Go take a long, hot bath, I'll get everything unpacked."

She swatted his butt as she headed toward the bedroom door, "Don't take too long, I might get lonely." That sweet sight had his heart thudding.

"Wouldn't dream of it!" he called behind her. Watching Lita walk away, Cole wondered how angry she would be if he took too long. As soon as the door shut, Alex was at his hip. "Am I running interference?"

Cole sighed, then gave him a knowing look. They'd talked this over extensively for the last few days after the Luna ceremony. He already knew what Cole was itching to do. Stace looked up from the couch to give him a hard smile. *Vicious*. That's how everyone seemed once they found out Cole's plans. All more than happy to help him do this.

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Lita was hell-bent on healing herself. He loved that for her. If Cole could have his way, he would make it so she never felt pain again. Hell, he would go back and remove any pain she'd already experienced. Unfortunately, he couldn't do that. Instead, he would try his best to fill her life with pure joy. But "letting go" for Lita meant forgiveness without retribution. And as much as Cole wanted to be that man—the one who could be above such things—there were things he couldn't forgive. Ever. Not when they involved her. Not when they were obstacles he had to contend against when it came to opening her up.

He couldn't ignore that. A better man would have honored his Luna's sentiments. Elise certainly would have cautioned him from this path. While he took her council occasionally, on certain things she would never understand. Cole could only be as good as he wanted to be and in this, he wanted to be ruthless.

The elevator dinged again and Andres stepped free with a loud curse. He lugged the cart behind him, "You're all bastards. Bastards who definitely overpacked!" His tired sigh died out as he studied the room. Everyone had gone quiet and dark, eyes trained solely on Cole.

He spotted Cole, noticed his expression, and pulled out his phone, "Fuck, Alpha, right now?"

Cole nodded, "We've got a few hours before she's going to expect me back. But let's not push the timeframe. Now or never."

Andres swiped around on his phone screen, "Got the address yesterday, verified it again today with a picture from a few hours ago." Cole took his own phone out of his pocket and waited for the text to appear. It slid onto his screen and he immediately hit the directions. He could get there in less than twenty minutes.

"Got it," he smiled and for old time's sake, Cole didn't mind the violence he let show.

The key jingling in the lock was the only warning Cole had before the front door swung open. He subtly tucked his nose down, ignoring the fresh sweep of piss from the hallway. The derelict apartment building had absolutely no positive attributes, except cheap rent. "Oh, how the mighty have fallen", he thought to himself, tracking the movement of the newcomer. His jaw ticked as he listened to the heavy booted footsteps. They were uneven steps as if the man was drunk. The door swung closed with the kick of that same foot. A stumble and curse.

Tucked in the corner of what he assumed was the living room, Cole had an ideal position to see without being seen. Looking around, he took a small joy in how little the man had. Cole worried the exile had been an illusion. Plenty of wolves with connections ended up living lives that were just as privileged outside of pack life as they did inside it. But not him. The place reeked of cigarettes and stale drinks.

Cole tightened his fists and relaxed them again. The apartment was cluttered and tiny but still, during his waiting time, Cole had taken the time to snoop. He'd found more than one rambling letter addressed to Lita. The dark pleading of a ruined man. A man that ruined himself, no less. Now Cole was here to ruin him further and fuck if he felt a single ounce of guilt. Running a hand slowly along his jaw, Cole tried not to think of the indecent pictures he'd found. The bottomless rage that had roared through him at the thought of someone like that looking at any part of his Luna. Cole had almost lost himself right then but he managed to rein it in.

The nerve of that piece of shit... to keep Lita's personal photos on display in his shithole of an apartment. Like he hadn't misused every single bit of trust she had ever given him. Cole had already shredded and disposed of them if only to remove that extra layer of his sick obsession. He'd destroyed the letters too. And the scraps of paper with her old phone number scribbled on them.

Cole had killed before as a boy. Maxim was the kind of man to ensure his son had the kind of nerves needed for the lifestyle. Killing Maxim and several nameless wolves he'd encountered at Maxim's compound had been his first re-entry into the world of such dark things. He wasn't a killer by nature and he certainly would never want to do it again. But for the man in front of him, exceptions could always be made and he might even go so far as to be happy about it.

Brian's drunken stumble had Cole wanting very much to wring his neck. Pissed at whatever the hell he was pissed at, Brian kicked a dining room chair into a nearby wall. The violent clatter had Cole remembering when he first found Lita covered in bruises. The blood he'd seen dried on her floor in the shape of her delicate, malnourished body. Had his mind going back to the doctor's list of her injuries. *No*. He couldn't let that go. He watched Brian head into the kitchen, then he slowly stood.

"Knock, Knock," Cole called out to the abuser. He didn't recognize his own voice and that gave him immense satisfaction. He wanted the bastard worried.

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"What the fu—" Brian froze in the doorway, looking like he'd aged a decade. His eyes were sunken, his skin yellowed and oily in the cheap fluorescent lighting. *Some Alpha*, Cole gloated.

"Brushing the hell are you doing here? Came to rub it in my face?" Brian stumbled again, unsteady on his feet. Cole took a deep breath, brushing his sweaty palms against his pants if only to rub himself from acting out his violent thoughts. "Happy relationship with my sloppy seconds?"

"Not at all." The answer was on both accounts. Taking a few casual steps forward, Cole felt ice freezing over his blood.

"Then what're ya here for? That piece of pussy send you as a knight and shining armor? Wanna make sure my life is a dumpster fire? Congrats, it is!"

Cole ignored him, and the white-hot rage that flowed down his spine. Referring to his mate that way... It was taking an exorbitant amount of restraint to keep him from gutting that man. Would it really be so bad to fight a murder charge? In the empty packlands of Maxim's compound murder was one thing. But here in the bustling city, it would be hard to get away with. Werewolf law wasn't an argument that would stick especially if no one knew it existed. Dragging out one of the upright seats at the dining room table, Cole forced himself to say, "You should probably sit. You look liable to fall over at any minute."

"Fuck you, don't give me goddamn orders like you're some hot shit Alpha now." Brian tried to spit on him, but again with a stumble, he ended up halfway draped over the dining room table, spittle smacking against his own face.

"I thought you should know Lita has decided to forgive and forget," Cole's deadened tone belied the volcanic rage he felt just under the surface. These walls were paper thin so he had to be careful. No losing control. Yet. Not until he had broken Brian's ability to scream. Men like him always screamed when it really came down to it.

"Oh, how nice of her," Brian snorted, lowering himself into a chair after all. "She fucked me. Then fucked my whole life. Be careful of that one. I can tell you that innocent shit is just an act. Take my word for it. Though... she's probably a little less innocent now, huh?"

Cole saw red, standing suddenly. "I saw this going a different way, but looks like it's not in the cards for you. She decided to forgive and forget. Unfortunately for you, Brian—" Cole didn't miss the way he flinched at the calm voice—"I have decided the exact opposite."

"W-what? W-wait, man—" Brian didn't get to finish the rest of his sentence before Cole had already reached across the table to do the very thing he'd once done to Lita. The sound of a fist snapping bone filled the apartment, then another. Then the muffled, wet sounds of everything that came after.

A few hours later, Cole stepped out into the bustling city street. He'd stripped out of his blood-smeared jacket and tossed it in the dumpster behind the building. He breathed in the chaotic scent of gasoline and people, then blew the tense breath out.

He had not killed Brian and that in itself deserved some kind of award. Cole weaved into the flow of walking traffic, headed to the SUV he'd be driving that matter. He rubbed at the bruises on his Luna. Soon to be his wife. Cole had already decided that he wanted her in every way that mattered. The hotel at the his Luna's honor. He was going to buy a ring while he was in the city. Thinking of her bright eyes as he proposed, had Cole leaving the dark mental space he'd just occupied.

Scooting out of the path of a small child headed for the ice cream shop, Cole couldn't help but chuckle, "it's alright", to the boy's father who couldn't stop apologizing for the hasty boy.. Cole beamed, someday that would be his life, chasing a kid around. Happy as fuck to do it, too. He didn't think men like Maxim were ever capable of that kind of love. Men like Brian weren't either. Two different cuts of the same cloth. One too hard to let any softness in. One so soft he had to make himself feel harder.

Cole reached in his pocket to unlock the door, slipping into the calm interior. He took a breath and let his brain settle with images of Lita scolding him for being late. Then he put the SUV in drive and headed home. He could always go home, no matter where he was. Because his home was a person. *Always.*

~The End~