

Lita's Love for the Alpha

Are you Okay?

The tears were making it hard to see straight, but eventually Lita found her way into a parking space at the gym. She turned the key to the off position and sat there, letting the radio flick off, completely still for about a minute, before she suddenly screamed into her steering wheel. In the silence, she couldn't keep it together or pretend that she wasn't breaking. Hot tears streamed down her face as she let herself cry for a minute. What the hell was she even doing? Brian would never let her go. He'd rather see her dead than truly happy, Lita was convinced. And her parents—Lita couldn't think of any people who spent less time in her corner.

A light rap came across her window, and it startled her into the roof of the car. Her head thumped, bouncing against the fabric lining. She clutched herself, cursing in agony for a second or two before she sniffled, wiped her face as best as she could, and opened the door.

"Are you okay?" a deep, rumbling voice asked. God, of all the people to witness her breakdown, why did it have to be Cole? What the hell was he even doing out here?

"Yea," she sniffled quickly and forced a smile, "It's just my period. Ah, hormones, ya know? I'm fine now, though."

He cocked his head to the side, sniffed once, and looked at her as if he knew she was lying. What the hell was that? That small whiff he took did something to him because suddenly he was closer, leaning slightly into the space of the driver's seat.

"What's wrong?" he asked, sounding genuinely concerned, "Why are you avoiding me?" What was this guy? Hot and cold? Why would he ask her such a loaded fucking question?

"What are you even doing out here?" she asked, avoiding his questions with her own.

"Had to get something out of my car," he threw a thumb backwards at the car parked next to hers. *For fuck's sake, Lita!* She berated herself. Of all the places to park. She silently studied the make and model of the mid-class car so she'd never make the same mistake again.

"Oh, okay Well, byeeeee," she said suddenly, jumping out of the car so quickly he had to lean back so as not to head butt her. Then her door was closed, and she was halfway to the front door before he could even process what happened. He watched her raise her arm as if to wave and—her car beeped twice, flashing white light across the dark parking lot as the alarm kicked in place. What the hell was wrong with her? He wasn't planning on breaking into it. Though, glancing at his motionless body, still standing in a dark hoodie and sweatpants, exactly where she'd left him, he might have understood her confusion.

Cole cursed, leaning back against his trunk for a moment as he scrubbed his face. He'd come outside to his car to calm down after his wolf had a meltdown. Stace insisted she was taking over Lita's training and kept telling the others she was a bunny-in-training all evening. The thought of his pack members even sniffing at Lita made Cole's blood boil. Made his wolf howl and claw at his skull.

Reject her. Reject. Her. It had been on a loop in his head for hours.

He should've been happy he would be rid of Lita soon. He wouldn't feel feral every time he smelled Alex on her, and he wouldn't need to put himself in a dangerous position with whatever was going on in her personal life. But dammit, despite it all, he'd been looking forward to seeing her. Their earlier class had only made his wolf worse, nearly inconsolable with the need to be close to her. To nuzzle her and taste...

What were the odds he'd be a TA for her class? A freshman in three hundred level statistics? Cole pinched his nose and rubbed his under eyes. The breeze in that classroom had wrapped her scent around his neck and squeezed.

Some packs worshipped the mate bond. Humans would call it a soul mate, only they couldn't tell when someone was theirs just from sight or scent. Wolves could. Though some ignored it completely, opting to make their own choices. Some wolves made matches for organic love. And some wolves made matches for power or influence. Marriage was a human concept, but they were all so ingrained in human society, it didn't matter. Wolves who were not mates married all the time, made lives and started families. Widowed or Matelost wolves could be physical again when they were ready. They could even have relationships. The bond didn't sever the human. It wasn't all they were.

All wounds, even those that cut as deep as the mate bond, healed with enough time.

Mates were common enough, but he didn't personally know of a single case between a wolf and a human. Cole couldn't even imagine how much harder it would be for a wolf to happen across a mate when the odds were seven billion to one. And then there was Lita. His wolf's hackles rose.

Midnight didn't give a damn if their mate was human. He felt the pull on a molecular level, on a spiritual level, and he *wanted* to solidify that. But Cole knew the mate bond wasn't some drug that overrode his brain. It couldn't make him do something he didn't want to do. It wouldn't supersede natural instincts or self-preservation. No matter what Midnight wanted, he couldn't just *take* her, wouldn't do it either, but even if he did, no mate bond in the world would offset the lack of consent. Beneath the chemical, primal pull, wolves were still in sync with their humans. Humans with fully developed frontal lobes, who still had to choose their fates and their actions.

Cole inhaled sharply. And he was choosing to reject his mate—had been dead set on doing it that night until he saw her cry.

It was just his luck that she'd pull into the parking spot beside him. Cole had watched her carefully turn off the car and pull out the key. Then she just sat there, staring at nothing, until the most gut-wrenching cry ripped from her and she started crying. He hadn't been prepared for how quickly his wolf would react, ready to tear the door off the car so he could get to her. So, he could stop whatever hurt her. His wolf wanted to rip it to shreds.

Cole wondered why she lied about being her period. He had smelled no blood, so what made her so upset and why the hell did he still care about it after the fact?

He groaned. There was something insanely cruel about having a mate who couldn't feel the bond as he could. Who couldn't feel the inconvenient heat up his spine whenever she was near. Or know he lost all his good sense every time he scented her, and each time the air moved. No, his very human mate couldn't even appreciate the hell his body and wolf were putting him through, that "she" was putting him through.

Despite how ridiculous it all felt, how unfair and frustrating, Cole still stood up and followed her into the gym. Maybe he deserved this extra punishment for his desire to reject that had been moon blessed.

"Lita... Jaz... Jaz... Lita," Stace introduced them quickly, "Lita's our newest enthusiast!"

Lita had wiped her face enough by the time she got inside that no one could tell she'd been crying. Or if they could, no one said anything. Stace gave her a once-over that said she noticed Lita's puffy eyes, and then, instead of drawing attention to it, Stace just waved her closer.

Jaz smiled. Lita smiled back, beyond grateful that no one was going to bring it up. "Hey, it's nice to meet you," Lita said to Jaz, a medium-tone black woman with a curly ponytail that said she probably had a twelve-step hair process. Would it be too soon to ask what she used to get that shine? Lita fingered her own drab ends that frizzed instead of curled. They were still a faded burgundy color she'd dyed her hair the year before and they were bone dry. She'd find time to ask later. She didn't want to offend anybody.

"Ditto! It's been a while since we had another gal pal," Jaz winked, "And you're really pretty, too! I love pretty best friends. Don't worry about your hair, I've got some cream in my bag you can have. Gimme your phone."

Once again, Lita must have been as easy to read as an open book, so she thrust her phone in Jaz's hand without hesitation. Jaz bounced between her feet as she typed, making Lita notice those thin purple tennis matched Jaz's lavender nylon shorts and purple compressions. Not to mention a dark purple sports bra. She definitely liked that color. Scratching at the tattoo on her wrist, Lita convinced herself she didn't have to be self-conscious. Jaz wasn't as muscular as Stace, but she was lean. Lita had seen Jaz in several of the kickboxing classes and the training gave her sculpted obliques with toned thighs. Her abs only had four little knots, but she had corded muscles wrapped around her abs, defining her slim stomach clearly. Jaz had a completely solid bottom half with thick, powerful thighs and full calves, but she was trimmed enough to have a really great shape.

Lita bit her lip and looked back at Stace, who wore a yellow racerback tank that gaped under her arms and sherbet sweatpants. Stace had a well-defined six pack and almost no sculpting around her stomach except the centerline that naturally cinched in like a corset. She had round, full shoulder blades and a thicker neck, but her bust size balanced it all out. Her wide ribcage was set over narrowing hips that flexed as she bent to the left and then the right. If Jaz was pear-shaped, Stace was closer to an hourglass. Lita swallowed roughly. And compared to them both, she was a stick figure. Even after a month of work.

"There, I put myself in as Jaz because I hate my government name and we'll leave it at that. Send me a pic of your hair products when you get home. I guarantee you've got at least a handful of things that need to go if you want to ditch all that frizz," Jaz interrupted her self-deprecating thoughts.

"Are you a mind reader?" Lita whispered, shaking her head.

"Let Mark tell it, and the answer is hell yea," she chuckled, swaying her hips in emphasis. "But he's gotten a few guesses right himself."

Lita blushed, turning back to look over the room. The gym was practically empty aside from a handful of men at the weights and the three women. A moment later, Cole pushed through the front door, but he headed straight for the office, not sparing her a single glance.

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"So, what's your poison, Lita?" Jaz asked, breaking her focus. "Do you want weight training, cardio, or fight mechanics?"

"Alex ruined cardio for me, so, uh, whichever one teaches me how to fight..."

"Fight mechanics it is," Stace rolled her eyes as she motioned over to the flat mats in the back. "Most bunnies at least *pretend* to know the basics of fighting, babe. Even if you don't want to compete in the MMA circuit like me or kickbox like Jaz, you should at least learn the difference between fight mechanics and cardio." With a barely contained laugh, she snapped her fingers. "And lose the 3xl jacket for this. What is this, an early 2000s music video?"

Lita dropped her gym bag on a nearby bench and popped one of her pills, knowing that sometimes pain made her emotions spiral. And after her breakdown not ten minutes earlier, she didn't want to risk making a scene if a fist hit her face. She stripped out of her oversized hoodie and stood centered on the mats in one of the new sets Stace picked out, a forest green neoprene long-sleeve with matching leggings.

"Yes, bitch," Stace and Jaz both said in unison, appraising her figure in the new clothes. "I was two seconds away from asking if we wasted our time in that store," Stace muttered. "I know I didn't take you to the work out section for my health."

Jaz smacked her friend's shoulder, "Give me a break. I know damn well you didn't come out empty-handed either because you've never met a shopping bag you couldn't fill."

Stace pretended to be offended, turning away to head for the equipment.

Lita looked down at herself. Wearing the correct bra size had immediately brought her girls out to their full potential, though that paired with the tightness of all the fabric she wore had Lita feeling a little too top heavy. Did she look like a bobble head with all this bust and no muscle?

Jaz once again read her mind and interrupted, "I love that color on you. It really brings out the lighter brown in your eyes."

"And what did I say, until you get some more meat on you, tighter will always look better than loose!" Stace cut in from a few steps away.

"Now that you're not hiding under a bear-sized hoodie, you look slim-thick, not scrawny. Scrawny looks bad no matter what you wear, babe, but you can dress slim-thick up, easy. Especially with an impressive pair of tits." Stace made a juggling motion with her hands and Lita cackled, tears welling as she tried to get control of herself.

"She didn't lie," Jaz agreed. "We've each got our own assets."

"The three musketeers of bunnies?" Lita offered, her breathing finally calming down.

"Or the three stooges on account of how freaking funny I am," Jaz corrected. Lita died laughing all over again.

"Please never say that again," Stace begged, putting on her serious face. "Ok Lita, you're going to learn to fight against the punching bag. Wouldn't want you to get knocked out on your first day of real training, right?"

Stace and Jaz slid over two large punching bags that hung from the ceiling and Jaz immediately got to work on her kicking technique with the one in front of her. While Stace positioned the other one in front of Lita. As they got set up, the overhead lights flicked off, dimming the room with ambient light. And a colorful array of neon lights flickered on around the room. For the second time, Lita really loved the atmosphere of the gym at night. With all the lights everything felt exciting, and since she'd never been to a club, she enjoyed the experience that much more. As if on cue, someone cut on the music overhead, the bass making Lita's pulse jump in excitement.

"Plant your feet here. Exactly as they motioned and left there." Stace insisted on the club-like ambience the lights created as if it were totally normal. Lita moved. Right as Stace motioned. "Good. Square your shoulders like this. Bend this knee. Mhmmm, perfect. And you're going to make a fist like this... not like that. You'll break your damn thumb like that. Okay good, yea, like that."

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After a few minutes, Stace found Lita's position suitable enough to learn her first motions.

"Okay. This is a fighting stance. A basic fighting stance. Now throw a punch."

Lita struck out at the bag, which had no reaction at all to being struck by her. She caught Jaz's stifled laugh out of the corner of her eye. Damn, she really was a weakling.

"Jesus. Terrible. Never been in a fight before at all, huh? Keep tension here," Stace placed a hand on her stomach and wiggled the skin, "Abs tight, tighter, good. And hold your arm firm, not loosey goosey like that. Looks like a noodle hitting a wall. See, watch me... Tension in the gut and throw a controlled strike like you're punching through the target." Stace pulled back and landed a powerful hit on the bag, which pitched away from them before creaking a swing back to meet them once more. Lita's mouth fell open and Jaz mumbled something about showing off.

Stace mimicked the motions a few more times so Lita could see the proper execution before telling Lita to try again. "And remember to follow through with the motion, okay? Don't just stop when you hit the bag. That way, you'll keep the most power in your punch as you connect."

Lita continued to practice. And as her right arm felt as if it would snap off, Stace had her switch to the left until she stood with two noodles at her sides.

"That really wasn't as terrible as I thought it would be—"

"Wait until tomorrow. You can't feel your muscles right now," Jaz groaned. "Just wait for it."

Stace interrupted Lita excitedly, "Oh great, look, the fellas are all finished their workout too, let's go introduce her, Jaz. What do you think? Wanna take bets on who's gonna bite first?"

"Mark—" they said in unison over a burst of giggles and shoves. That man was a gift to a woman's vagina, Jaz assured her.

Trying and failing to come up with any reasonable way to get out of meeting everyone, Lita steadied herself and followed behind the ladies towards the weight training area. Lita needed something to do with her hands. Why the hell was she a ball of nerves? She just kept hearing that husky voice in her damn ear, *Are you okay?* She was letting him get under her skin. Thankfully, as she glanced around Jaz's shoulders, she could see he wasn't with the others. She internally thanked whatever gods were listening.

"Hey fellas!" Stace exclaimed with an easy wave. The men were in various states of stretching and cleaning up the area. Lita was trying to place faces with names as she they all seemed to drop whatever they were doing and give the women their attention. Lita stood behind Jaz and the men hadn't seemed to catch wind of her yet. *Do something with your fucking hands!* Lita begged herself, suddenly aware that she was standing with her hands awkwardly pressed together over her stomach. If anyone saw her, it would look like she needed to go to the bathroom.

Lita quickly reached up to undo the messy bun sitting on top of her head as the others made simple conversation.

"So... everyone meet our newest bunny... Lita!" Stace squealed as she and Jaz sharply parted ways to allow the men full view of Lita just as her wavy black hair tumbled down over her shoulders. She couldn't help but realize they were all as muscular and attractive as the online photos had made them seem. And they were all staring at her with wide eyes. She waved in a nervous and jerky motion that drew every wide eye.

"Hi," she said in a small voice, dread pooling low in her gut. Why were they looking at her like she had something on her face? And then two of the men shared a secret look before turning back to Lita. The third man looked squeamish, like he might throw up, and Lita tried to pretend it didn't make her feel like shit.

"So, we finally get to meet the infamous psycho bunny?" one of them said before bursting into a loud laugh.