

# Lita's Love for the Alpha

## Bonus Chapter- Honoring the Dead

“I can already see that you disapprove,” Ace fought to keep his laugh suppressed but Lita saw it. He held up his hands in mock surrender. “Standard packs don’t involve themselves at the overarching level of the council. We certainly don’t. Cole just wants a place he can be proud of where we keep fighting our focus, not politics. Asher may not do certain things in his pack but the humans in our pack are told anything they want to know. You know that.”

Lita relaxed her shoulders. She did know that and Jaz was proof. She was as close to the inner circle of the pack leadership as Stace and no one gave a damn about whether she had a wolf.

She thought back to the pack she’d unintentionally grown up in. Lita hadn’t even realized this world \*had\* politics. But it made sense. Everything about the werewolf world ran in line with the human one. Why wouldn’t there be some sort of social hierarchy? How long had they been building this type of society? How long had they been developing the guidelines she was still oblivious to?

If the theme of the room was any measure, the werewolf bloodline stretched pretty far back. But it could just as easily be for show. Lita had seen her share of wealthy humans claiming a historic bloodline for clout whether it was true or not.

Lita had never asked these questions. Had never thought of the history behind her own genetics. Much like humans, she assumed it was a situation no one understood. Science certainly didn’t have any clear answers they could\* prove\*. Only speculation and theories. Were werewolves one such miracle as humanity or some kind of mutation that occurred in human genes? When Lita thought about it, she realized she’d never asked anyone any questions. But when would she have had the time? There were always so many more pressing issues. She’d been trying to assimilate as fast as she could but things like politics and rank hadn’t even crossed her mind.

“Ace?” Lita asked, rounding his body to stand near the wall so she could touch the cool metal.

“Hmm?” Ace backed up until he could lean against the same metal pattern on the wall.

“Were there wolves back in ancient times? I don’t know why but I’ve always just assumed this is something modern. Something recent. But it sounds stupid now that I say it aloud.”

“To be honest, I don’t know much about our history. Maxim’s schooling only allowed for creationism. I know less than most in regard to our actual history.”

“Well, what does creationism say about our origins?” Lita wondered. She knew that in human schools, creationism centered around God and believing old religious texts for how life came about.

“Substitute a moon goddess for God and you’ve basically got the ins and outs of how we came to be. Something about a curse that made us turn on the full moon, and you’ve got the gist. Of course, we evolved out of that moon habit. Either that or it was never real to begin with. Who the hell knows? And whether that was a few hundred years ago or a few thousand, your guess is as good as mine. I wasn’t close enough to my family to ask anyone anyway.” He snapped up as if he’d just remembered something. “Come on, there’s something you should see—if it’s still there.”

Ace walked out into the center of the room with the same confident air he had when he fought and Lita followed, forcing her own shoulders high. Unlike the series of rings that she had seen spread out at the tournament, this showcase only had one ring. A simple square made of painted lines on the concrete. It fit the primal aesthetic to the letter, especially bracketed by loose velvet ropes that were intertwined with vines like an ancient VIP area. Poised in the center of the room, the ring commanded attention, and overhead, a metal cage had been suspended giving it all an ominous atmosphere. Lita found herself anxious and excited for the showcase to start. She had a feeling it wouldn’t be anything like a normal fight.

Slowly, they weaved between the curious faces and Lita forced herself to stay calm. She didn’t know these people and they didn’t know her. Lita told herself she didn’t recognize any faces. A jolt of awareness hit her as she glimpsed a trimmed beard. Another hit as she caught sight of a familiar jumpsuit and heels in her peripheral. The glint of a bracelet she’d seen before, made her skin sweat. \*No\*, she wouldn’t let herself obsess. She didn’t know anyone here. She made herself believe it. This was just idle curiosity from them. And really, they were probably staring at Ace, not her.

The nerves were manifesting things that weren’t real. She just had to ignore it. Lita kept repeating those affirmations as Ace took her to a sidewall and stopped.

Maybe the whole world stopped.

Lita wasn’t sure. She hardly felt Ace wrap a protective arm around her shoulders as she took a step closer to the wall. Her hands reached out instinctively, touching a half-faded picture of James. She touched another, this one of him winning some kind of trophy. It hurt—enough to force a shuddered breath out of her. She couldn’t breathe \*because\* it hurt so freshly that she wondered if a year had really passed. That goofy dimple, those warm eyes that held equal parts mischief and humor.

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How long had it been since she’d seen a real picture of him, not the one of the whole pack in front of the gym? Her chest vibrated and squeezed as Nyx whimpered and lay down on her paws. Ace hugged her tighter. Lita went stiff. Grief was strange and personal. She didn’t want to be in a room full of people she didn’t know. She didn’t want them to see her falter.

“It’s okay, no one’s looking, Lita,” Ace assured her as if he knew how uncomfortable she was. “These are all people’s personal tokens of James. It’s a way for people to honor him. It’ll probably be taken down soon since it’s been a year...but Stace mentioned that you don’t have anything of his. That...your parents got rid of everything. I just thought maybe—”

His voice trailed off. Or maybe she stopped hearing him. Lita couldn’t even respond, her mind too full of James’ face. But her body relaxed, accepting that Ace would watch her back. She zoned in on one photo taken of James while he was entering the ring—All raw power and focus. She’d never seen him so terrifying or determined. Except for the night he’d died. The thought was a knife re-opening her stitches. It felt like she was bleeding.

“I miss him—” her voice broke, even in a whisper, “—so fucking much.” Ace hummed and rubbed her arm. She blinked away the water, pulling away from Ace to step closer to the wall. James was so happy in the ring. So happy at the gym. He’d truly been in his element. And she’d never gotten to see him there. The loss of it all weighed her down, made her feel guilty for finding happiness and a place in his old home.

She was getting to enjoy the life that he’d made for himself. It was all wrong. All wrong because her bother was missing it. She couldn’t ignore the anger that grew in her chest. The guilt that turned darker.

“Did you know him well too?” Lita heard herself ask through the fog of her pain. Something wet slid between her lips. The taste told her they were tears. They had a brief conversation about James before he’d been more of a comfort than an equal participant in the conversation.

“Not as well as Cole, no.” Ace said, his voice a reassuring rumble through her back. “But he was good people. A real jokester. Work hard, party \*harder\* kind of guy but everybody had nothing but good things to say about him. I went off on the fighting circuit for most of that last year. He was gone before I saw him again.”

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Her body went hot then cold. She hadn’t seen James much that last year either. God how she wished she could undo ever seeing him again if it would mean he’d still be here taking these pictures, making those dreams of his come true. She felt clammy, feverish with the raging emotions she couldn’t handle. He would never get to see her grow past Brian. Or their parents.

He would never know that he’d saved her.

Thinking back on their final conversation, Lita couldn’t help but think he knew something. If not about her being suppressed, then he’d at least seen that she needed to escape the city—their parents—as badly as he did.

She blindly wiped at the water on her face, trying to sniffle quietly until she could pull herself together.

“I’ll grab you some tissues, okay?” Ace said, his voice drifting away from her. “Don’t move, I’ll be right back.”

Lita nodded, still transfixed on the wall. If all these people could honor her brother, why couldn’t his own parents? There was something twisting in her gut at the thought, at the confirmation that she’d never have been able to forgive them for taking that from her. James had been her first true pack. Not their parents. Not Alpha Asher’s pack or the people she’d met through her life. Not Brian or his peers. No, her first home had always been her brother.

Nyx huffed her agreement. Even suppressed, her body knew that she belonged with him. That he was true north. She reached a hand out again to touch his face. The pain sliced deeper, some truer acknowledgment that she was finally getting to say goodbye to him.

It was yet another thing that she’d been denied. Her parents had him buried before she’d healed enough to leave the hospital. Waking up to know her brother was not only dead but gone, was brutal. Leaving behind the kind of emptiness that consumed everything.

“Well if it isn’t Lita. I heard through the grapevine that you’re no longer a wolfless pup,” a male voice sneered beside her. She knew it immediately, already picturing that trimmed beard and those sharp eyes. She’d tried to pretend that she hadn’t recognized him. But she had. She hated that voice as much as the man it was attached to. “Come sniffing for a new master? Or have you already found one?”