

ONE | BROCK PROPOSES

Luca

Eleven months, three weeks, and ve days ago, I found my mate, and it was the best day of my life. She walked into the dining room of our packhouse smelling like the sweetest honeysuckles, and immediately my heart was hers. But she was fragile and delicate. She'd been betrayed by a man she'd known her entire life, a man who was like a father to her and thrown into the pit of hell, for no reason.

My princess was pure and kind, and I did everything I could to be gentle and patient with her. I tried my hardest to be the mate and man she needed and deserved. But I failed.

As I looked down at the naked back of the woman I'd just slept with, I was overcome with self-loathing and disgust. I'd promised never to hurt Gabriella, but the moment I brought this woman to this cheap motel room, I broke that promise. I hated myself.

I went into the bathroom and proceeded to try and scrub away the shame that I felt, but I knew it was useless; I'd forever be ashamed, but the least I could do was wash off Rachel's scent. Gabby didn't need to smell another woman on me when I got home. She didn't need me adding insult to injury.

"Rachel, I'm heading home now, you need to wake up," I said as I pulled on my shoes and prepared to walk out the door. Twenty minutes in the shower, and I swear I could still smell her perfume seeping from my pores.

It took a few seconds of me gently shaking her shoulder, but eventually, she woke up and peered out from under her thick mass of brown hair cascading over her face to look at me. The sight just reminded me of who was at home waiting for me. My Gabby had the same dark brown hair.

"I thought we were spending the night. It's only 7:30," she stated.

"Yeah, I'm sorry, but I can't stay. I should never have been here with you in the rst place. Rach, You're sweet, and I hope I haven't led you on, but this was a mistake. A big mistake," I replied.

She sat up in the bed and thankfully had the decency to pull a pillow over her chest to cover her nakedness.

"I don't understand. We had a good time, and it's you who suggested that we come here. What's going on, Luca?"

"What's going on is I have a mate! She's at home right and thinks that I've gone out for a run. A f****g run, Rachel! What am I supposed to do when I get home and see her? What do I say?"

"A mate? But you're not marked. And you said that you weren't with anyone."

"I know all that, and I'm sorry. Look, I need to get home, will you be okay, or do you need me to take you somewhere?" I asked.

It was either my abruptness or the realization of what had happened, but her confusion smoothly transitioned to anger.

"I don't need s**** from you. And I hope she leaves your lying, cheating ass. That girl deserves so much better," Rachel replied as she jumped out of bed and began to pull her clothes on.

"Let me at least call you a Lyft or an Uber. It's too late for you to be out by yourself," I tried to reason.

"Screw your Uber! Do you know what makes this even worse? All you'd have to do is say the word, and I'd be right back in that bed with you, even though I know how it feels to be cheated on. No, I don't need you to do anything else, just stay away from me."

Rachel then ung the door to the room open and stormed out. It was pouring outside, so bad that I could barely see my truck parked twenty feet away, but she didn't care. This woman just wanted to get as far away from me as possible, and I understood.

I grabbed my keys, wallet, and phone from the table and noticed a new message; it was from Gabby.

Shit.

Hurry up and come home! I cooked!

She ended the text with an excited emoji that made my heart hurt. Gabby was a terrible cook, she could barely boil water, but she'd been trying to learn so that I wouldn't be the only one preparing our meals daily.

I knew that whatever she'd made, she'd worked hard on, and while she was slaving away, I was screwing some woman I didn't even know.

I'll be home soon. I love you.

It was all I could say, and I could barely get that out. On the way to the car, I called one of the only people I could think of for advice. My brain was a mess, and I needed someone to tell me what to do.

"What's going on, Luc?" my older brother Gio said when he picked up the call.

"Hey, are you busy? I've got a problem I need some help with," I replied.

"No, come on over, and I'll see what I can do."

"I'm not at home, so it will be a while."

"Not at home? Where else would you be at 7:30 on a Wednesday night?"

"That's the problem, I don't know what to do," I said.

Gio was quiet for a few moments before he spoke.

"Luca, what happened? Are you alright?"

The words were like a boulder resting on my chest, and the thought of speaking them out loud made bile rise in my throat.

"Luca!"

"I cheated on Gabby," I mally said.

"We must have a bad connection because I couldn't have just heard what I think I heard. You've had some stupid moments in your life, but I know you're smarter than this. Please tell me you're smarter than this, Luc."

"I thought I was, but I don't know what happened. I was doing so good; we were doing so good. But it's been almost an entire year, Gio. How long am I supposed to wait? How long does it take for someone to be comfortable enough with their mate to sleep with them? f****k! I yelled as I punched the steering wheel.

"You're the most selsh person I've ever met, Luca, and I can't believe you'd do this and try to use Gabby's desire to hold on to her virginity a little longer as an excuse. She has the right to do whatever she wants with her body, and you not being able to control your d**k is all on you, not her. This is bullshit, and you know it."

"I know it is! Now how do I x it? Please, Gio, I don't know what to do. Can Jenna cast a spell and turn back time for me or something? She can do that, can't she?"

Gio's new bride was a powerful witch who could do anything she wanted with just a simple spell or potion. There had to be something in her arsenal to get me out of this.

"No. She can't."

"Damn! What other tricks does she have? I'll take anything."

"I think I need to clarify, Jenna could easily cast a spell and go back a few hours before you lost your mind, but she won't because I'm not going to ask her to do it. I'm not pulling my wife into your mess, what the hell is wrong with you? You know what? I'm calling Matt."

Before I could protest, Gio had already clicked over to his other line. I could have hung up, but they'd just call right back or show up at my cottage. There was no escaping my big brothers when they felt like I'd done something wrong, and in this case, I was willing to take the ass-kicking from them if it helped me gure this s**** out.

"Tell him, Luc, tell him that I'm not full of s**** and that you just cheated on your f****g mate!" Gio angrily demanded when he came back on the line.

"Hey, Matt," I said, trying to stall.

"Cut the crap, Luca. Gio's lying, right?" he asked.

"No. He's telling the truth; I cheated on Gabby."

That was all it took for the two of them to tear into me mercilessly. Having older brothers had its perks, but in times like these, I'd gladly be an only child. Disappointment, disgust, and the desire to beat me bloody was being hurled through the phone at me, but little did they know that I felt everything they did tenfold.

"Are you two going to help me out, or just make me feel like an even bigger piece of s****?" I rilly asked.

"How do you suggest we help you, Luc? Huh? What can any of us do at this point?" Gio asked.

"I don't know! How about some brotherly advice. What would you do if you were in my shoes?"

"I'd never cheat on my wife, especially when her situation was as sensitive as Gabby's. You don't deserve her, man. You deserve to be alone with just the random girls you screw and nobody else. I can't believe you."

"Alright, Gio, that's enough of that; the kid feels bad enough already. Luca, you need to go home and tell Gabby what happened tonight. And then you need to tell her why it happened. You've probably kept quiet this whole time about how you were feeling, only focusing on her, and look what happened."

Wolves are f****, it's who we are, and the fact that you kept it in your pants for an entire year was already a miracle, but you should have said something to your mate way before you got to this point. Now please don't think I'm blaming her for your stupid decision. This is all your fault, but I can see how you got on the path you did," Matt wisely said.

"What if she leaves? She's not marked; we're not forever bonded. She can reject me and leave," I stated. The thought crushed me because I knew how huge of a possibility it was.

"Then, she leaves. And for the rest of your life, you'll know that she left because of you. There's nothing you can do about that, and you'll have to accept whatever decision she makes. But you have to tell her. Cheating was one thing, but going through every day like it never happened, and lying to her face is ten times worse. You're better than that, even if right now you don't think you are."

"I can't even begin to express how disappointed I am in you. You'd grown up so much this past year, and then you slip right back into your old ways. I can't believe you," Gio mumbled.

When it came to mates, there was no one I knew who had to ght or work harder to nd theirs, so I understood why he was so upset with me. But I never in my life thought I'd be sitting here, feeling like this. I was lost, and all I wanted to do was nd my way home again.

"Where are you?" Matt nally asked.

"At a motel in the city. I'm about thirty minutes from home," I replied.

"Get on the road and get home. And after you talk to Gabby, go and sleep at the packhouse, give her space to process and think of her next steps. Do not smother her; she has to gure out what she wants to do on her own. Understand?"

"I don't know if I can tell her. I don't want to see the look of disappointment on her face," I said.

"You don't want to? Gabby doesn't want a mate who sleeps around behind her back, but that's exactly what she's got. Why should you get to take the easy way out? Tell her!" Gio demanded.

"Tell her, Luca. You probably don't believe it, but you'll feel better once you get it off your chest. And you may be a lot of things, but you're not a liar. Show Gabby the respect she deserves and tell her the truth," Matt said.

"I'm kicking your ass the next time I see you, Luc, just be prepared."

"No, you're not, Gio, so stop being an ass. He fessed up to you as soon as it happened; give him some credit for that at least. This crap you're doing right now is only making things worse, and it's going to make Luca never conde in you again. Is that what you want?" Matt asked.

"Don't turn this on me; I haven't done anything but be honest."

"Brutally honest. Dial the brutally back and remember that this is our little brother. We love him, just a little bit," Matt joked.

"I'd hope it's more than a little bit; I'm going to need all the love I can get once I do this. But I'm heading to the house now, so I'll talk to you later, Matt, and see you later, Gio. And please don't tell mom and dad; I'll do that myself when I'm ready," I stated.

"I'll keep quiet, but call me rst thing tomorrow morning. You screwed up, but you can x this. I know Gabby loves you, so it's going to be the way you own up to the mistake now that will make all the difference in her decision to forgive you or not."

"Thanks, Matt. That's the kind of advice I was hoping to get from you, Gio. You're becoming a real d**k in your old age," I stated as I hung up the call.

The sky seemed to be just as angry with me as my brothers as it threw oceans of water at my windshield on the drive home. Maybe I'd skid off the road and get amnesia. If I didn't remember cheating, I wouldn't be lying to Gabby if I never told her. But fate wasn't giving me an easy way out, and a little after 8:00, I walked into the home I shared with the love of my life.

I could smell that she'd been cooking and that she'd burned some garlic when she happily ran out of the kitchen, wearing a huge smile. Her thick brown hair was pulled up into a messy bun at the top of her head, and it left her long slender neck beautifully exposed. For almost a year now, I'd wanted nothing more than to see my mark on her soft and sweet skin, but that was never going to happen once I said what I needed to say.

"Come sit down; I made lasagna. And it's your mom's recipe!"

I slowly walked towards the kitchen, but Gabby stopped me midway. "Wait! Change rst, you're soaked, and I just mopped the oors. Then come sit." She then spun around and ran back into the kitchen.

I thanked the heavens for the short reprieve, and as I went to our room to change, I tried to think of the best way to break this woman's heart. What would I say? What would I do?

A few minutes later, I was sitting at the dining room table, when Gabby placed a bowl of what looked more like baked ails in front of me. I just stared down at it, unmoving, as my brain ran a million miles per hour.

"So I didn't think I was advanced enough to make my pasta from scratch, and we didn't have any lasagna noodles in the pantry, but we had these. I did make the sauce from scratch, though, just like Giana does it," she said after she took her seat next to me.

When I didn't lift my fork and continued to stare down into the bowl, Gabby placed her hand on mine, drawing my eyes up to hers.

"I promise it's good; I tasted it, and followed every single step of the recipe. Just try it." When she smiled, my heart broke, and the words fell from my mouth.

"I slept with someone."

I could see the struggle as Gabby was at war with the promises I'd made and the words she'd just heard me utter.

"What? What did you say?"

"I didn't go for a run. I went into the city and met a girl at Starbucks; I slept with her," I stated.

Gabby snatched her hand back as if she'd just touched re, then pushed from the table and stood to her feet.

"Please let me explain," I said.

"Explain? Do you want to explain? Okay, I'm all ears, make this makes sense to me," Gabby calmly said.

"I love you, so much, and I didn't mean--"

"You didn't mean to do it? Did you mean to talk to the woman? Did you mean to lit with her, go off into a dark corner with her? Sick your d**k in her? What part of it didn't you mean, Luca, because I don't understand?"

"That's not how it happened, and I didn't mean to hurt you. I was screwed up in the head, and I had a selsh moment where all I cared about was me. It's been a year, Gabs, do you know how hard this has been on me?"

"So it's my fault? I did this to us?"

"No, Princess, that's not what I'm saying. You know the dumb kid I was before I met you, and I turned it all around so that I could make you happy. I've done everything to make you happy, baby, and I've ignored my feelings."

"I asked you, Luca! I asked if you were okay with the state of the relationship, and you said you were! You never told me that you were suffering."

"What was I supposed to say? Oh, hey Princess, I know you're still a little messed up from everything that went down last year, but I'm horny as f****, and I need you to take care of it for me." There was no way for me to tell you that that would have ended well for me!" I shouted.

"Get out."

"No, we're still taking Gabs."

"We're done taking. Get out of my house; I can't look at you. I don't want to see or speak to you anymore." Alarm bells began going off, and something inside me told me that things were about to get a lot worse. I needed to give her space.

"I'll go to the packhouse for the night and be back tomorrow."

"Don't come back. Ever. You're no longer mine, and I'm no longer yours. I'm not staying in a relationship with a man who would rather cheat than communicate like an adult; life is too short."

"Gabby, please say you're not rejecting me," I begged. I had to place my hands on the table to steady myself as I awaited her answer.

"I don't know what I'm doing. But I know I want you out of this house. Now."

She then picked up the bowls from the table and threw them in the garbage before she leaned over the sink and broke down. I had to go to her; I had to hold her and make this better. I couldn't leave like this. I walked closer, but when I got within a few feet, she angrily spun around and screamed.

"Get out! Don't touch me, don't look at me, don't even think about me! Leave."

"Please, Princess. I know I screwed up, and you have every right to be upset, but don't leave me hanging like this. If you're rejecting me, just tell me now, put me out of my misery."

"You deserve the misery, Luca, and I'm not about to do you any favors. I just had my heart ripped from my chest, and now you expect me to cater to you and your feelings? f****k that!"

Gabby then walked out of the back door and disappeared into the night. My rst instinct was to follow, but I knew that as long as she stayed on our territory, she'd be safe, so I let her go.

I went to our bedroom and threw some things in a bag, grabbed my toothbrush, then made the walk over to the packhouse where Gio was sitting on the porch waiting for me. He had his newborn son with him and was feeding him a bottle while burning a hole through me with his eyes.

"Don't look at me like that. I've already gotten it from Rachel, and now Gabby. I don't need it from you too," I said.

"Rachel? Was that her name? Did she not appreciate being your side chick?"

"I'm going to sleep, man. I can't take any more of this."

"You'll sleep when I say you can sleep, Luc. Sit the hell down."

"What? What else is there to say?" I dropped to the porch stairs and asked.

"I love you, Luca, and I'll always be on your side. Even with this, I understand your moment of weakness, but I'd be lying if I said it didn't disappoint me. How did the talk go?"

"Terrible. She broke up with me and threw me out. She can't look at me, barely wanted to talk to me, and probably wanted to set me on re. Gabby hates me, Gio."

"She doesn't hate you, she's just hurt, and she needs time to process. She didn't reject you, right? That's a good thing. Gabby can break up with you all she wants, but until she rejects you, you are still bound to each other. That means you have a chance to x this and win your mate back."

"Gabriella is the best thing to ever happen to me, and I know that she's made me a better person. Why did I do this?" I asked.

"You're not perfect, and like anyone else, you made a mistake. But if I know anything, it's that if anyone can bounce back from this, it's you."