TWO | IT'S COMPLICATED

Gabby

“Do you want to talk about it, or do you want to sit here and wallow? I’m down for either option,” Jenna sweetly said. As the new wife of my mates older brother, we’d gotten close over the past few months, and I’d grown to see her as a sister.

“I think I’ll wallow for a little while longer. Otherwise, I’ll cut that man's d**k off and shove it up his ass,” I angrily replied.

“Damn. Wow, okay. This isn’t good, Gabby, we both know it. You don’t have to talk to Luca right now, but you will have to talk to him eventually. You’re destined mates; you can’t just break up and think that he’s out of your life for good.”

“Maybe not for good, but right now, I can’t deal with him, Jen. Especially with that damn curse, he’ll just smile, and all will be forgiven. That’s not fair to me, and I’m not letting Luca get away with this. He hurt me and has to feel the consequences for doing that,” I stated.

“Okay. I understand and agree with all of that. But you need some kind of plan. You’re going to see Luca around the territory, and you live together too. How do you expect to avoid him indefinitely?”

“I’m sure no one expected me to keep my virginity for more than five minutes after we met, but I managed that pretty well. Not well enough, I guess.”

When Luca and I first met, he was honest about his past and told me about all the women he had slept with. It upset me to know that all of my mates “firsts” had been given to someone else when I’d been saving all of mine for only him. But I moved past it and accepted that he had a life before me and didn’t share the same beliefs. It didn’t make Luca a bad person; it made him, him.

But even after finding each other, I couldn’t let go of that part of me that I fought so hard to protect and save. That part of me that Marisol sacrificed herself to save.

Marisol was my best friend since childhood and meant the world to me. She wasn’t perfect by a long shot, but she knew all of my secrets, and I knew hers. We could tell each other the truth, without sugarcoating, and without judgment.

And when we were thrown into the worst environment and situation imaginable, she did everything that she could to ensure that the one thing that mattered most to me, giving my virginity to my mate, wasn't taken away.

But she was taken away from her son and me unfairly, and it still hurts to think about. So much so that I felt like losing my virginity would be a slap in the face to Marisol's memory. The last thing my best friend ever did for me was to protect my virtue; to give it away just seemed so disrespectful to everything she'd gone through.

And Luca had said that he understood. He soothed me and wiped my tears after the nightmares. He made sure our home was peaceful and calm, and he did everything in his power to make me smile when all I wanted to do was cry. Luca was my Superman, saving me again and again and again, only to let me fall in the worst way possible.

"Are you thinking of breaking things off completely?"

"Honestly? Yes, I am. Has Gio ever done something so hurtful that it cleared out that lustful haze that his beautiful smile and gorgeous face so easily pulled you into, letting you see the world clearly for the first time in forever?" I asked.

"Maybe once or twice, but I know it wasn't done maliciously. He's never purposely set out to hurt me, even if he was hurting," Jenna replied.

"I don't know if the intent has much bearing on the result in my case. Especially when everyone knows that cheating on your partner is the ultimate betrayal. How am I supposed to come back from that and trust him again?"

"I don't know. The guy I dated before Gio stepped out on me because I wouldn't sleep with him, oddly enough, and I never spoke to him again. But he was just some guy I chose because I thought he was cute. He wasn't the man the moon goddess chose for me, so walking away from him and you walking away from Gio isn't quite the same."

"Maybe he was only supposed to be my mate for a short season of my life. Maybe we were only meant to help each other grow and then move on. Sometimes, mates reject each other; then, a second chance comes along, letting you know that the first paring wasn't meant to be forever."

"This breaks my heart, Gabby. I know what you're saying is true, but it's so sad to think of you and Luca not being together. Why don't you take some time to yourself and really think things over before you make a decision? Alexi rejected Alaia, and afterward, everyone almost died! I want to avoid the near-death experiences if possible," Jenna joked, making me giggle.

“So would I.”

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At lunch, I sat at my dining room table and stared out the window while life for our pack went on without me.

I missed Luca so much, and I wanted so badly for him to come back home so that we could fix this. But he was doing what I’d asked, and he was staying away, and it killed me.

I picked my phone up and hovered my finger over Luca’s number when I got a message from a number I’d never seen before.

Hello, Darlin’.

Darlin’? Who in the world still called people darlin’? This person had to be some old man who’d finally learned to text but messaged the wrong number.

I think you have the wrong number. I replied.

I hope not. It’s taken me weeks to get it. Is this Gabby?

Maybe. Who are you?

I’m just a secret admirer who’d like to get to know you better.

Unless you have a name, there won’t be too much getting to know me going on.

If I tell you, do you promise to keep talking to me?

No.

My, my, my. I thought you were a sweet spring rose, but you’re just the prickly thorns.

“Sweet spring rose? Where have I heard that before?” I thought aloud. I chewed on my thumb and wracked my brain, trying to recall a memory that was doing its best to stay hidden forever. Then a pair of neon green eyes flashed in my mind, and I knew.

Is this Blaze?!

Yes, ma’am, and I’m happy to see you remember me.

You’re a hard man to forget. Why have you been trying to get in contact with me? Did you need something?

I just wanted some of your time, sweetheart. That’s all.

This conversation felt a lot like flirting, and I didn’t know if I was 100% comfortable with it. I remember how he looked at me the last time we saw each other, and it wasn’t in a “let’s be friends” sort of way.

I have a mate.

I know you do, and I’m not necessarily trying to get in the way of that. Could I take you out for lunch? Just between friends, and I’ll be a perfect gentleman.

I had a mate, but I didn’t have a boyfriend, and I was free to do whatever I wanted. And maybe spending some time away from the pack and home would help me decide what I wanted to do about the mess I was in. And I knew that Blaze had the trust of the pack and wouldn’t hurt me, so what the hell?

Are you here in Oregon?

No, but I can be whenever you want me to be. Just tell me when and where.

I wasn’t an eye for an eye type of person and knew that if Luca found out what was happening, he’d be upset. But I had no intention of sleeping with Blaze; this was just two people who had a less than desirable experience together sharing a meal. There wasn’t anything wrong with that.

I sent him the address for my favorite diner in town and told him to meet me at 1:30 tomorrow afternoon. Jenna had told me that her conversations with the female dragon Fiona were eye-opening; hopefully, a nice long chat with Blaze would be the same way for me.

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When I arrived at the restaurant, Blaze was already sitting in a sunny corner wearing dark sunglasses and a big smile. He was still massive, just a bit smaller than Tyson, but he didn't look at terrifying as the last time I'd seen him.

“You look beautiful, Ms. Gabby. And you've still got the prettiest eyes I've ever seen,” he stood up and said.

“Thank you. You look different, not at all like I remembered you,” I replied. He slightly lowered his glasses, showing the bright green orbs behind them, making me smile.

“Those are exactly how I remember. They scared the life out of me the first time I saw them; now, I think they're pretty cool and very unique. Did you have your tattoos removed?”

“Kinda. I removed them myself, so I could blend in a little more than I did. A six-foot eight-inch man with head to toe tattoos and neon eyes tends to draw a lot of attention, and I'd rather lay low right now.”

“That's probably smart.” He leaned down and gently kissed my cheek then waited for me to sit before he took his seat across from me. This guy was one of the most dangerous people I knew, but I felt completely comfortable around him. It was strange and refreshing at the same time.

“So, would you like to tell me why you're sad?” he asked after the waitress had taken our order.

“Sad? What makes you say that?”

“You do, darlin'. Those eyes of yours tell an entire story, and it's not a happy one. Believe it or not, I'm a good listener, and I'm pretty good at giving advice too, so lay it on me.”

“My mate Luca and I broke up. We're having major problems, and it's painful, confusing, and stressful.”

“That boy walked out on you? You can’t be serious.”

“No, I broke things off, and he’s devastated, but so am I. It’s not the best situation; it’s complicated.”

“He broke your trust, didn’t he? Nothing hurts a woman more than breakin’ her trust; that’s a guaranteed one-way ticket out of her life forever.”

“He did.”

“And this was recent? The wounds still fresh?”

“It happened Wednesday night. We haven’t spoken since.”

“Well, I see that talking about this upsets you, so we can let it go for now. But answer one thing for yourself. Has Luca ever done what he did before, and do you think he’ll ever do it again? From what I know about him, he’s a good guy who just hasn’t fully figured out how to live life as an adult.

He’s going to make mistakes, he’s a man, and it’s what we do; the good Lord didn’t bless us with the brains he gave you ladies. But if he has the potential to make you happier than anyone else ever could, don’t walk away just yet. Life can’t always be sunshine and lollipops, sometimes you’ve got to take a little doom and gloom too.”

“I’ll keep that in mind, but let’s talk about something more sunshiny. How are your eggs?” I leaned forward and whispered. I knew that the existence of Blaze’s eggs was kept as quiet as possible to protect them, but I was so curious to hear how they were doing.

“My little ones are good. Still wrapped up tight in their shells, but we’re hoping to set them free shortly,” he replied.

“We? Do you mean you and Fiona?” I asked. This was lunch between friends, but if he had a mate waiting for him at home while he was out with me, I was going to scream.

“Yes, Fiona and I. It took some convincing, but she finally saw the benefit in both of us raising our babies together, and we decided to wait just a little while longer.”

“Are you two together?”

“Oh, no. She’s one of my oldest friends, and we have slept together in the past, but we’re too much alike to survive a relationship together. One of us would be dead within the month,” he joked.

“So if it’s not Fiona, has one of the Blue Moon shewolves caught your eye? I’ve heard that you’ve got a real following back at the main campus.”

Blaze let out a hearty laugh and shook his head.

“I wouldn’t say I have a following, but I’m a magnetic type of guy, so I understand the interest.”

“The interest? Don’t downplay the allure that is Blaze. You may not have a family curse, but I’m sure you can get women to do just about anything you want them to do. You got me to have lunch with you, and you very easily convinced the waitress to customize your burger when that woman is notorious for telling customers that substitutions are not allowed.”

“You just gotta learn how to ask nicely, that’s all.”

“You enjoy it, don’t you?”

“Well, sure, I do. Everyone wants to feel like they’re desired in some way, and all of us have a little vanity deep down inside. At this point in my life, though, the attention and popularity pale compared to the thought of settling down and starting my family. That’s what I want.”

I nodded my head and let out a small sigh. So there was only one philandering jerk in my world at the moment, that was good to know.

“Don’t worry, darlin’. Everything will find a way to work out. It always does.”