

Chapter 61 - Lost II - The Royal Hybrid

Hayden's POV

We hurried past every tree, jumped every bush, and ducked under every branch in our way. The wind was slowly picking up its pace, just as we were, but with it, it carried scents that automatically made me run even faster.

They were right in our tails slowly closing the gap between us. They knew exactly what we had done the second we didn't show up for Doctor Taylor's checkup and just as I had expected, they came after us.

We had shifted not long ago in hopes that we could get an even bigger head start, but it had proved to fail. Not only could I identify both of my dad's wolves as two out of the three running behind us, and the third was even easier to recognize. It was Alpha Shane himself, which in total showed to be the three strongest wolves chasing us down and I knew that it was only a matter of time before they caught up. I had no idea whether or not they had taken any warriors with them, but I knew it was only a matter of time before we found out.

'What will we do?' I asked Gabriel who was as tense as I was, while he was running in zig-zag motions between the trees.

'I don't know. We can't outrun them for much longer.'

It was easy to feel his hesitation and even easier to sense the way he was still trying to fight off the effects of the silver. I myself was trying to block out the pain, but it wasn't the easiest thing to do when you also had to use energy on turning and running, and feeling the others right behind us only frustrated me even more, making it hard to stay focused.

'St... Sto... Stop!'

My dad's voice boomed through the mind link telling me they were closer than we had initially thought.

'Hayden!'

I closed my eyes trying to block him out, but it required an amount of energy I didn't have.

'Do you want to stop?' Gabriel asked me eying me while continuing ahead.

I debated on what to do before my pace slowly dropped.

'Either we continue and get in more trouble when they do catch up because we both know that they will, or...'

'Or we stop now and hope for the best?'

I nodded, keeping my eyes on him as I stopped abruptly. I did not want to look ahead seeing the road that could possibly lead us to Tatiana and know that this was as far as we got so instead, I kept my eyes focused on Gabriel.

I stood in front of him and watched as he casually scratched his ear just as the air shifted around us. Not even two seconds later I watched the three of them as they jumped over the bush, we had just passed, shifting in the process.

"Are you absolutely out of your mind?!" my dad scolded as he walked over to me, reaching up and pinching my ear as if I was 5.

"You could have been hurt or even worse! God dammit Hayden you are too reckless sometimes!"

I let myself loose from his grip and shifted back to my human self.

"What did you expect me to do huh?" I snapped. "She is gone for fuck's sake, and she is with him! We have no clue where they are or who else is there. If she was to be taken to Killian without us at least trying to stop it, I would never forgive myself."

"Do you think she would forgive you or herself for that matter if you ended up dying in the process because you were too damn stubborn to at least get checked out?" Alpha Shane questioned. "We were already assembling a team to go, you two included in that team. We just needed the go from the doc and even that you couldn't wait for. She might be your mate, but she is my daughter, and I will not just sit back and watch her get taken away. Not again," he sneered.

I hung my head in defeat without a word and noticed from the corner of my eye that Gabriel did the same. We knew he was right and yet we hadn't bothered thinking as he did.

"I'm sorry," Gabriel muttered, "We acted reckless, I know, but when it comes to your mate..."

"There is nothing you won't do, I am aware," Shane sighed before looking around. "As your alpha, I should send you home and leave you out of this after disobeying direct orders, but as the father of your mate, I am only thankful for your love for her, and as a mate myself I understand the need for keeping her safe."

"So, you will let us stay?" I asked, feeling hopeful.

“At the condition that you from now on do nothing but what you are told,” he stated as he stared us both down. “One mistake, one misstep that can lead to either one of you being in danger and you will be dragged back home by your tails. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, sir,” we said in unison.

My dad still looked at me with disappointment in his eyes before he turned to Shane.

“How long before the warriors will be here?”

“They will probably arrive alongside the tracking team,” he hummed before turning to my other dad who was still in his wolf form. “Ryan, I need you to go back and meet them halfway. Tell them that we are continuing to go south until we reach no man’s land where the war took place. We will wait there for the tracking team to pick up any leads and take it from there.”

Dad nodded, and looked at me with a ‘Don’t fuck up’ look before turning around and with two small huffs, took off into the depths of the forest where we had just come from.

“You know where it is right?” Alpha Shane then asked me.

“Yeah, we were training there a few times, why?” I questioned.

“Because since you two decided to dash off on your own, you get to lead us there,” he said just as casually as he could, making it sound like we were around a dinner table and I had to show him the way to the wine cellar.

“Lead you there?” Gabriel huffed.

“Yes, and then you get to lead us the rest of the way as well,” he nodded. “Seeing as you will both be alpha’s once I step down, it seems fitting to question your abilities and to test them out.”

“You think now is the perfect time for that?” my dad asked slowly from behind. “This is not just some task regarding border security-“

“This is about bringing my daughter back and ensuring the safety of our pack, I know, which is why I think now is a perfect time. They need not only to be tested in strength but also in their leadership skills, their skills to delegate tasks, and give out orders to those who were once the same level as themselves. Besides, after what they just pulled off, they need to prove themselves. A pack only survives on teamwork. There are rogues for a reason and if they would rather do whatever they please instead of what is best for all, then I need to know now rather than later. If now is not the perfect time to test it out, then it will never be.”

He gave us one more glance before shifting into his wolf followed by my father doing the same.

“Let’s go,” Gabriel said, nudging me gently in the side clearly wanting to escape the unsatisfied looks the two of them were giving us.

We shifted, and took one look at one another before we dashed off, running even further into the forest and hopefully, closer to wherever Tatiana was being kept.

We are coming for you, my love. Hang in there.

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Gabriel’s POV

We had royally fucked up by disobeying orders and in all honesty, I had not expected Shane to go around it this way. No, I had expected we would be sent straight back, taken off this mission, and not be allowed to participate in anything regarding the safe return of Tatiana...

‘She is our mate,’ Onyx huffed in my mind. ‘They wouldn’t be able to keep us apart no matter how hard they’d try, and you know it.’

I internally rolled my eyes at him despite knowing very well that he was right. If they really would have sent us back, I would have fought with everything in me to get a second chance, even beg on my crying knees if I had to and I wasn’t the only one. Despite Hayden’s usually good behavior and obedience, I had noticed a shift in him whenever it came to her. He was completely another person. Protective, stubborn, and caring in a way I hadn’t seen since we were children.

I never knew exactly what it would be like to have a mate. I had heard many stories from many people over the years about this great love that would swipe you off your feet leaving you in this floating state of heightened emotions and not once did I fully believe that it would be that powerful, and yet here I was ready to defy my Alpha face to face had this not turned out the way it did.

‘We need to get her back,’ he nearly pleaded.

Being away from her not only hurt me but him as well and this was the first time I had ever felt him being this soft and sensitive... This vulnerable...

Usually, when someone mentioned the word mate, he would huff and act like he wanted nothing of that sort in his life, and even though I knew it was all just a facade, I never once asked him about it. I didn’t know whether or not it was because I simply didn’t believe I had a mate or if it was because I didn’t believe in at all, but then she came along which only confused matters even more. I knew she had a mate already and yet I

felt this strong pull to her that I couldn't understand. Everything I had been told about mates, I felt with her, and those feelings only enhanced with every day passing by. I ignored it for as long as I could and tried to push the thoughts out of my head. Back then I had thought it was a crush of some sort, that I was only attracted to her because she stood up against me. She didn't swoon, she did falter, and she didn't just do as I told her like so many others would have. No, she all in all told me to go fuck myself and I had thought that that was the reason why I was attracted to her. Or at least I tried to convince myself of that, because what else could it have been...

It wasn't until the day where Hayden came at me outside the pack house, yelling at me that I finally completely understood what was going on. That day a part of me was screaming with joy and happiness while another part of me was howling in pain, because how could I be the one to come between two mates? That, in my opinion, could have never worked out, especially not when Hayden was involved, but as it turned out, he wasn't quite the dickhead I had painted him out to be in my mind. He knew that taking her away from me would hurt not just me but her as well, and that was the only reason he was willing to give it a shot.

Don't get me wrong, it had made me unbelievably relieved but had it come down to it, I would have done what I had told them both that day. I would have walked away and let her reject me once her second wolf had made an appearance and both me and Onyx would have accepted it.

Now, running through the forest, getting closer and closer to no man's land, I was preparing to do whatever it would take to get her back even if it meant giving my own life for it. When it came to her, I was as weak as Hayden, or maybe strong would be a more fitting word seeing as no one and nothing would be able to keep us apart or stand in our way, and if something or someone did, they wouldn't be standing for long.

We slowed down when we got out into the open field known as no man's land. Not only because this was where we had agreed to meet, but also because it was an open field, and us running out there with nothing to hide behind, made us into sitting ducks.

Scouting around not seeing anything or anyone that could potentially be a treat, I nodded at Hayden who huffed back in return before he let his heavy paws cross over the hardened ground beneath us.

Alpha Shane and Kyle were right behind us and when we got to the very middle, we all stopped and waited for the others.

Out here the ground was filled with dust and tracks from a lot of wolves passing by, making it almost impossible for a normal wolf to sniff around and track one particular scent and so the only thing we could do now was to wait for the tracking team to show up alongside Ryan.

'We could find her on our own,' Onyx huffed. 'She is our mate after all. We don't need them.'

'I am sure we could do it,' I ensured him. 'But if we want to find her as fast as we possibly can, we need them and we need to admit as well that we need them. We don't have the same skills as they do.'

I hadn't expected him to answer as I knew what kind of a control freak he was. Still, unexpectedly after a minute of silence, his voice rang in my head in the sassiest and most bragging tone I had ever heard making me drag in a deep breath in order to stop myself from snorting out loud.

'Well, what they have in their noses, we have elsewhere.'

At least his self-esteem was the same as it always had been.

'The tracking team should be here any minute now,' Hayden informed me, still scouting the horizon.

'One step closer,' I sighed.

'If we are lucky,' he said hesitantly making my eyes flick to him in annoyance. 'All I am saying is that we have no idea what Chad will possibly do with her or how far they have gotten already seeing as they got a pretty big head start,' he explained slowly trying to ease my displeasure from his previous statement.

'We will find her,' I breathed and turned to look at the edge of the woods just in time to see Ryan appearing with the tracking team just in his heels.

I tried to push away all the negative thoughts I knew were forming in my mind.

I hadn't always been a pessimist. When I was a kid I was as positive as Hayden was. I always saw the best, not only in every given situation I was put in but also in every person I crossed in my life.

But over the years that had changed. Not that I didn't understand why, because I did. I used to have it all. Parents, friends, laughter, and love within the four walls I was born in and all too soon that was gone. A part of me felt like I had taken it for granted back then, that that was why I lost everything so fast and that I didn't deserve it now because of it, but while that thought kept nagging me in the back of my head, I also knew that this was my chance at getting it back. My chance at being happy and there was no way I would let that slip away so easily. Not without a fight.

I was a kid back then lacking fighting skills and knowledge, but now... Now I was ready and prepared to do whatever it would take. I would be better, and she was the reason why. They all were. My family... Now that I finally had gotten a taste of what my life

could be like, there was no way I was going to let it go and just go back to the way things were. Not that it ever would.

If I lost her... If we lost her, nothing would ever again be the same. It simply couldn't be.

'Hayden, we should...' I was cut off by my own howl that unexpectedly erupted from my throat.

Everything blurred in front of me, my legs, that before carried my entire weight with no problems, began shaking and the ground seemed to come closer every time my eyes closed and opened.

And the pain... The shooting pain that spread across my chest like someone was clawing my insides out, feeling like they tore every muscle and nerve within my body while hot water was being poured over me sent me over the edge and I felt my knees buckle underneath me just before my head met with the dusty and cold ground.

My eyes which couldn't focus properly, searched for Hayden among the others desperate to see him, but he wasn't standing there with them.

No, he was on the ground too, his howls echoing through the air mixing with mine, making the unmistakable sound of loss.

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Hayden's POV

We hadn't even... We hadn't started yet and now... Now it was over.

It happened so fast that I didn't want to believe it. But how could I ignore what was right in front of me? How could I argue with something that not only happened to me but to Gabriel as well and then in front of so many? I couldn't deny it. It happened and it was over.

Just as fast as it had begun, it was over.

Done.

Just like that.

"Hayden?"

My dad's voice was gentle as if he was trying not to push me too much, but just talking to him hurt.

Talking to anyone hurt.

“Hayden? You need to eat,” he pleaded but I ignored it as I had been for the past two days.

I didn't feel like eating, hell I didn't even feel like being alive. If I had to count the number of times, I had considered clawing my own heart out of my chest just to make this pain go away, I would run out of fingers to count on.

But I knew I couldn't.

I was all he had left now and no matter how much I wanted to make the hurt stop, I wouldn't want to inflict more hurt on him than he already had.

I was all he had and now he was all I had.

“We need to do something Lia,” I heard him whisper.

Our Luna was here?

“They can't continue like this. They will end up starving themselves to death,” he continued.

They? Gabriel wasn't eating either?

Despite me being numb from the other pain, it somehow hurt me more knowing he was in the same poor state as I was. I wanted him to eat. I wanted him to be better.

“Sweetie... They just lost their mate,” she said her voice cracking.

Mate... What a funny word. Just one word, four letters... The same with love. Love... Such a funny little word with endless meanings. Love for a family member, love for an object or even a place, and then the endless love for that one person. That one person that can either truly heal you or leave you in ruins, ruins so catastrophic that they can never ever be rebuilt or healed.

“I am aware of that, but she was your daughter, and you-“

“I am still standing because I am the Luna of this pack and you know as well as I do that the bond, we had with her is nothing and will never be nothing compared to the mate bond they had,” she sighed. “You know that just as I do. It doesn't mean I'm not hurting over the loss of my daughter but.. Imagine if this was Ryan,” she mumbled, and I could hear my dad suck in a breath. “Exactly. That momentarily pain you just felt just thinking about it, that is what he is feeling now constantly. It is not something you get over so easily and as you know he might never...”

“He could die if he continues,” he said slowly, his voice trembling. “He could-“

“He could yes but he won’t,” she assured him.

I wanted to thank her for saying that. I wanted to tell her that she was right, but my mouth wouldn’t move just like my body wouldn’t.

Was I even breathing? Was my chest rising and falling with every breath? It had to, right? Since I still felt the pain, I had to be breathing, right?

“How do you know?”

“Because he and Gabriel might have shared a mate, but in some way, they were mates too and this pain he is in, is the same as Gabriel is in. He knows that if he follows Tatiana...” she trailed off at the mentioning of her daughter’s name.

“He will inflict more pain on Gabriel,” he sighed understanding.

“Yeah.”

Gabriel... She was right. He was my mate too. I had to get to him.

“Hayden where are you-“

“Let him be,” Luna Talia said quickly. “I think talking about Gabriel might have triggered something.”

I didn’t even register that I was moving until I felt the cold and soft blow of wind on my face as I was passing the window my dad had opened earlier. I looked down slightly and saw how my legs moved; how one was put in front of the other with every step I took. I couldn’t feel them and yet they moved.

I watched as my hand reached for the door handle and twisted it. I felt the shift in the air as I stepped into the hallway. I felt the many stares that came from whoever was standing out there, but I didn’t care.

I didn’t care...

I barely even noticed Zaya walking up to me and if she hadn’t been speaking to me I wouldn’t have stopped.

“Hayden, you shouldn’t be out walking around,” she cooed in the softest voice I had ever heard her speak in. “You should be in bed.”

I couldn’t answer her.

Once again, I tried to get my mouth to form the words, I had in my mind but I simply couldn't. Instead, I just shook my head, or at least I think I did before I continued walking at a slow pace to the room, I knew he was in.

I could feel Zaya's eyes on my back and I knew both the Luna and my dad were walking behind me ready to interfere if anything terrible would happen, not that I believed anything worse could happen after this.

I opened the door slowly and listened to the sound of the hinges creaking as I did. I didn't know what to prepare for but I was prepared to see him look like anything but himself.

My eyes first followed the floor until they met with his bed sheets that hung over the edge only half an inch away from touching the ground.

My eyes then followed the floorboards, intensely following the line between them before they finally caught a glimpse of his dark hair that was being ruffled up by the gush of wind.

He was sitting in front of the open window, his arms hugging his knees as close to his chest as possible, probably trying to squeeze out the pain as I had been myself. My heart which I thought couldn't possibly hurt more than it already did, clenched at the sight of him and I felt myself choke back a sob.

I with slow movements moved closer to him, trying to embrace myself for when he would finally look my way, but he didn't.

He didn't even give away whether he had heard me or not, he didn't as much as flinch and even when I was right beside him, kneeling down to be able to see his face, he kept staring ahead out into nothing.

His breathing was shallow, sometimes with breaths so far away from one another that I questioned if he was even breathing at all, but then when the slow steady breath came, I relaxed.

I glanced at him one last time, to see how his glass-like eyes stared out of the window at the same spot and only blinked every once in a while.

Did I look just as bad?

A part of me wanted to hug him, to just embrace him, but I couldn't. My body wouldn't do it no matter how strong the urge was and besides... If I didn't wish to be touched, I doubted he did.

I instead rested my palm on the ground behind me before I lowered myself completely onto the floor, trying to find a spot of my own to stare at. I folded my legs and rested my arms on my thighs, my palms barely an inch from each other.

There was no awkwardness in the silence. No, it was peaceful, calm, and understanding... Despite the silence and lack of acknowledgment, a lot of unspoken words were being shared between us. He knew what I was going through just as I knew what went through his mind. A lot of thoughts, a lot of questions, and at the same time, absolutely nothing.

I had tried to hold it in, I had tried not to show it, but I couldn't stop that one rogue tear that had escaped my eye and now at its own pace, made its way down my cheek.

It was only then he showed me that he knew I was there. I felt the warmth of his cheek first and rather unexpectedly as it rested on my shoulder, and then with every gush of wind that came from the open window, that very same spot on my shoulder became cold. It didn't take me long to realize that he was crying too, wetting the before dry and warm fabric of my shirt.

He was crying the same tears as I was.

The tears of lost love.

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Killian's POV

I had just gotten the news.

The day we had all waited for was finally here. It had taken a bit of a turn but considering it carefully, it had only turned out for the better.

I had planned to have her by my side and use her power to ensure the victory over the royal pack, and also to watch the faces of my enemies when they realized that their own daughter, the one they had been searching for all this time, would be a part of their downfall, their demise, and end of their bloodline, and just before they would both close their eyes and take their last breath, I would force them to watch as I stripped her from her powers and therefor also her life.

But then she escaped my grip and along with that ruined everything I had spent so many years working for. She knew of me, of my pack and what we had done and it wouldn't be long before the entire Royal pack had learned of my plans and would come knocking on my door.

Or so I thought.

The Royal pack did indeed learn of my mischief and with the information they had been given from her, they began preparing just as we did even though the chance of winning slimmed down the second we lost access to her powers.

However, fate would finally shine its light on me after my family and I had been living in the shadows for so long. The news of her death shocked me at first but seeing as she was no longer on my side and that her powers were the only ones strong enough to possibly stop me, her being dead and 6 feet under seemed like a good alternative. Probably what should have been done from the beginning but back then I was too caught up in finding a way to steal that power from her once the royals had fallen and because of that, I nearly destroyed everything at my own hand.

“So, we launch the attack?”

I spun around and looked at my beta who had brought me the news his daughter had sent. I had had my doubts about her from the very beginning and for me to let her go with Cassie or Tatiana or whatever name she was using these days, had seemed like a gamble, but it was a gamble I was willing to take and as it turned out, it had paid off. The small seed I had planted in her mind when she was younger had set its roots and that meant that no matter how far away from home Kathleen was or how much anyone tried to convince her otherwise, her loyalty would be to me and only me. Not that they would know that of course. She was an excellent actor, and she had a way with words that made everything she said sound convincing and utterly truthful.

“No, not yet. They are in distress now but still on high alert. We need them to be even more vulnerable before we even decide on closing in on them,” I mumbled.

“So, what is the plan then Killian? We have waited for 18 years already and now you want us to wait even longer. My daughter is still there caught behind enemy lines, waiting for us to go into action so she can finally return home.”

“Only a few days,” I snapped at him. “After her funeral, the healing process will begin. Not just the healing process of their hearts, but of their pack as well. After all, they lost both of their future leaders,” I chuckled, enjoying the thought of that low-life bastard being in pain.

Shane had it coming. He always had. The fact that it turned out to be his very own daughter who was born into the legend back then was only a bonus, and snatching her away from him was only a tiny taste of the pain and misery to come, and now it was time for him to get the entire fucking meal served. Karma was indeed a bitch and I would stuff it all the way down his throat if I had to. The only thing he had left to live for now that his little daughter was dead, was his Luna and his precious pack and I would make sure that both of those things would belong to me very soon.

“What about the mates? She had two of them, no?” he questioned. “Won't they serve as future leaders?”

“She did, but as far as your daughter told me, they had yet to complete the mating bond with her which means that they won’t be seen fit as rulers. Trust me when I say this, the Royal pack is royally screwed, and with that comes uncertainty which will become a weakness and that is what we need before we proceed,” I explained as I took a step closer to him. “You have a lot of questions all of a sudden. Are you just incredibly dumb or do you suddenly question my abilities to do this?” I asked in a low tone, my eyes narrowing as I awaited his reaction.

I could tell just by looking at him that he wanted to say something, but as he looked into my eyes and saw the anger slowly building up, he quickly averted and looked straight at the floor.

“That’s what I thought,” I huffed and waved my hand. “You are dismissed.”

I had waited so many years for this plan to take place, and there was no way in hell that I would let anything jeopardize it. Especially not uncertainty from my own pack. I was their alpha and if this behavior continued I would have to remind them of that, make an example out of it and I would start with my own beta if necessary.

He was still. Almost too still. It made me wonder if he was even breathing and a part of me hoped he wasn’t.

“Father?” I whispered as I entered the dark room the maid had guided me to.

His hand slowly lifted from his side, waving me over. As the light of the moon reached through the curtains and lit up his face, I noticed how incredibly pale he was. It couldn’t be long now.

“The moment I have prepared you for is now,” he wheezed out, fighting the small amount of air he had in his lungs. “Now is the time when you will fully understand what it means to be lonely.”

I still hated him for that. He wanted me to be strong, to not have anything to hold me back and he even on his deathbed had made sure of that.

“I know you will never forgive me for what I have done but you must believe me when I tell you that it is for the best. Being an alpha makes you a born leader and the only one who is irreplaceable. It is because of that, of utmost importance that he has no weaknesses. Everyone beneath you, that be your mate or your own mother and father, will only be emotional disturbances that can end up leading you to ruin,” he coughed fighting to take in a breath.

“So, you say father,” I sneered, looking away from him as I tried to get the image of my screaming mother out of my head.

“Don’t get snarky with me now Killian,” he threatened, making me glance at him.

But even though he gave me the look that throughout my entire childhood would make me hide underneath my bed shaking violently with fear, I stood my ground, feeling my anger build up even more.

I was no longer that little scared boy and he was no longer in shape to give me a beating like usual.

“You know,” I chuckled darkly as I took another step closer to his bed. “You may have made sure that I will be alone forever, that I will never experience any love or feel any hope, but you have also created the monster that lives off of the exact opposite emotions,” I said before bending in over the bed, hovering over him like a vulture waiting for its pray to die. “You said no emotional disturbances right? That was why you killed my mother in front of me, wasn’t it? Because she didn’t agree with your way of doing things? And that was why you made me kill my own mate? Because you thought she would end up being as disobeying as my mother?” I sneered and listened as his heart sped up. “But you forget one thing, father...” I spat the word out with so much venom in my voice that I made him suck in a breath.

He knew where this was going.

Good.

“You said mate, mother, and father, and guess what,” I grinned. “One is still here.”

Before he could utter another word, I wrapped my hands around his neck and squeezed hard enough to cut off his air supply, but not hard enough to break his neck. He wanted me to suffer? Fine, then he could suffer with me. If my life shouldn’t be filled with peace, then neither should his death.

His hands clawed at mine, in a desperate attempt to get me to let go.

But I didn’t.

Not before he did.

As my father had taught me from a young age; alpha's are born leaders and the only ones who can never truly be replaced. Everyone beneath him is simply just for show and easily disposable.

He was the one reason I never dared to ever love again. Why I never dared to hope for another mate and in order to crumble that hope for good, I found myself a rebound to marry, one who like me didn't have a mate and one who wanted the same as I did.

Power.

But I will never share my power. Not with her, not with anyone and that is the one secret I have kept for myself and also the one that made me realize the truth of my father's words. I learned what being lonely felt like... And I liked it.

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Tatiana's POV

I woke up with a mouth as dry as the desert itself. The tingling sensation I had felt for the past few days was finally starting to fade a little and the pain of a knife twisting in my gut had finally disappeared. When Chad first told me about his plan, I was skeptical, to say the least.

I gawked at him so intensely that it felt like my eyeballs would pop out at any second and yet all I saw on his face was the same serious, yet calm expression he had since he told me what he had in mind.

"You can't possibly be serious," I exclaimed almost tripping over my own tongue.

"I am," he nodded confirming that he was indeed not joking. "This is the best way, Tatiana."

"But-"

"The only way," he added, interrupting me before I could even figure out what to say.

"No, I refuse to do this to them Chad. I just lost my brother, and that pain is still lingering in me every single day... Another loss like that?" I tried to calm myself by breathing before continuing. "This won't just be hurting them," I said trying to choke the sob bubbling in my throat before it could be heard. "It will hurt my mom and dad too. No... It will kill them."

"It might hurt, yes, kill them? No, but it will work," he assured me not looking the slightest bit bothered.

"Have you ever lost someone Chad?" I asked, my voice filling with venom. "Have you ever truly loved someone only for them to be taken away from you? Only for you to be trying your damn best to either save them or find another way to keep them alive, only to fail miserably and watch them fade away right in front of you?"

"I am guessing you are speaking about your brother here, aren't you?" he asked, his back turned to me so I couldn't see his face, but the annoyance in his voice was clear.

"Fuck you Chad," I spat. "I was there you know," I gulped. "I saw him die, I felt him take his very last breath as he leaned his dying body on my shoulder, and then just like that,

just like he was living just a second ago, just as fast he was gone. Do you have any idea how much that pains a person?"

"No, not a clue," he hummed.

"Well, let me tell you this then, it hurts like hell and now you want me to fake my own death and let not only my parents, but my mates as well feel that pain once again? I can't believe you."

I never understood Chad. Not when we were kids and definitely not now. He said he had a plan, but this is not a plan... This would be torture and not for me, but for them.

"They won't get to say goodbye as I did with Lucas. They will just be left in the unknown..." I trailed off closing my eyes shut as I tried to force the images of my grieving family out of my mind but they wouldn't budge. The sight of them standing in front of yet another coffin... It was just too much.

He turned to me slowly after I stopped talking, and looked me dead in the eye before sighing.

"I know, but at least they will get to say hello again," he pointed out. "This won't be a goodbye; this will be what saves you all. They just... They won't know that," he shrugged and it was then I noticed something about him.

He didn't seem like he knew how to act... How to show his emotions to another being than himself.

I held my tongue, restraining myself from bursting out the many spiteful words that had come to my mind, and instead took a deep breath. I had it rough being Killian's fake daughter, so I could only imagine how Chad must have had it being his own blood and only true heir.

"It will hurt them," I pointed out.

"I know it will, it will hurt you too for the first few days but trust me when I tell you that it will be for the better."

He stuck his hand into a small pocket inside the duffle bag he was holding and pulled out a small glass container. He handed it to me and pointed at it while speaking.

"What you see there is a mixture of potions and magic," he explained.

"Where did you get this?" I asked as I twirled the vial, containing a shimmering blue substance, in my hands.

“I met a witch once, a good one,” he clarified before I could even ask. “She was helping women or more precisely battered women escape from their possessive and abusive mates. She came up with this potion that could fake their death to such a degree that even their mates would believe they had died even without seeing the body. Because of the mate bond, it would also go in and block every scent they had remembered that involved their mate so it would make tracking them down impossible.”

“That sounds...” I was too stunned to continue.

I had no idea that such a thing even existed and yet here it was in my very own hand.

“Impressive right?”

“Yeah,” I breathed. “How did you get your hands on one? After all you aren’t a battered woman,” I sniggered before being able to stop myself.

“Good to see you still have the same crappy humor,” he snorted. “And she has a friend who is special in other ways. She was a seer and she had-“

“Foreseen that you would come?”

“Yes and no,” he chuckled. “She had seen what the world would look like if Killian were to succeed. She also saw images of you and of me so when I appeared...”

“They gave it to you without questioning?” I asked, my eyebrow raised.

“Pretty much,” he shrugged. “All they asked were if you were happy with the mates you had.”

“Which I am,” I nodded.

“Which,” he said in a mocking tone. “Is why I said that too and why they made this.”

He held up yet another glass container but this one was filled with a green substance that reminded me way too much of a musty swamp.

“And that is?”

“The way to reverse it,” he said so casually that I nearly didn’t get what it meant.

“Wait,” I exclaimed and grabbed his arm. “You are telling me that this won’t be permanent? That I can have them back once all of this is over?”

“Yes, so... Bottoms up, princess,” he snickered and nodded towards my hand.

“This better work,” I sighed before I downed the grainy blue substance that the little vial contained.

“It will,” he assured me. “I promise.”

And then it began. The pain, the burning, the, what seemed to be never-ending, screams erupting from my mouth as I lay on the ground twisting in pain.

After feeling firsthand what magic like this could feel like, I made a mental note to never piss off Zaya.

“How are you feeling?” Chad asked as he came into the room with a tray, filled to the brim with food and other goodies, in his hands.

After I had taken the medicine, as I liked to call it, he had moved us to a small inn to make sure that I would be okay and thank the moon goddess for that. I couldn’t imagine going through all of that and all I had to lie down on would be the cold and wet concrete.

“I am feeling much better,” I yawned and stretched out.

“Good, because from what I have been hearing around town, things are about to get heated,” he sighed as he put the tray down on the bed and walked over to the window, pulling the curtain slightly to the side to see out and when he turned back around, his face looked grim. “It’s about to begin.”

Chapter 66 - Lost II - The Royal Hybrid

Gabriel’s POV

It had been a week. A week of nothing but pain and despair, spent trying to learn how to deal with what now was our life. Everything was harder than it had ever been. Such simple things as breathing had shown to be difficult. Every breath I took felt like someone was putting burning charcoal down my throat. Eating was not something we could most of the time and being force fed was not something I took joy in either, and when it came to sleeping... Well, sleep was no longer a word I knew the meaning of.

I’ve always been told that grief has different stages and shows differently with each person going through it, but I had already been through it once before. I knew what was coming and how to react in order to stay strong for those around me, or so I thought. This was different from what I had tried before and not just a little. It was a lot. Losing my parents had left me stronger and more guarded which I at that time had thought was a good thing. I didn’t remember much about how I went through it besides the fact that I drifted away from Hayden and detached myself from people, which I was now slowly doing again. However, this time there was a slight difference. This time I avoided most people besides him.

He and I had grown closer than we had ever been before, even as kids, and the only reason to that was because no one really understood what we were going through besides each other.

Had someone told me a year ago that Hayden would turn out to be my rock and be the only reason why I was somehow still alive, I wouldn't have believed them and yet here we were.

I was placed in front of the window most days. I didn't know what exactly I was waiting for or why I was staring at the horizon all day. Maybe I was hoping that this had all been a mistake, that it had been nothing more than a terrible dream. That if I stared out there long enough, I would get to see her come running over the hill, her bright eyes shining in the sun, her wavy hair flowing free in the same wind that would also color her cheeks the perfect shade of pink, while her arms were wide open for us to run into.

But as the days went by, reality was slowly starting to sink in. She wouldn't come and this was not a nightmare I could wake up from. She was truly gone and those bright eyes... The way her hair would fall down her neck and shoulders... The way it felt to have her arms around me... It was nothing more than a memory for me to keep, a sweet dream that I could only pray to dream whenever I began sleeping again.

I walked into Hayden's room to check on him, expecting him to be where I left him last, but he was nowhere near the window nor was he on the bed where he would usually lay and stare into space.

"Hayden?" I called out and felt a chill run through my body when all I was met with was silence.

I didn't stay to wonder where he had gone, no, I turned on my heels and began making my way down the hall. There was only one other place he felt at peace these days besides his own room. My room.

I slowly twisted the doorknob as I wasn't sure whether he was sleeping or not, but when I walked in, I was met with the exact same thing. An empty room and a silence so heavy I could hear my own heartbeat.

I was about to mindlink him when I heard shuffling from the room across the hall. My palms got clammy; my throat closed up and I felt the sweat beginning to take form on my forehead as I turned my head to look at the door everyone had kept closed for the past week; the room everyone had avoided with every inch of their body.

I stood in front of it for what felt like an eternity when I felt a hand on my shoulder.

"What is going on?" Kyle asked me with concern in his voice.

"I think your son is in there," I whispered, barely audible as I continued to stare at the doorhandle that burned my hand just by thinking of grabbing it.

"Are you sure?" he asked, just as another crashing sound could be heard in there.

Without thinking further about it my hand grabbed the handle and twisted it. Both Kyle and I burst into the room and was met with papers that were scattered all over the floor and a flushed-looking Hayden in the middle of the room looking frantic.

"What is going on?" I asked him, nearing him slowly.

He didn't answer me, he just looked up, his eyes bigger than I had ever seen them before and his mouth was wide open as if he wanted to say something but couldn't.

"Hayden?!"

I edged closer to him, reaching for his arm, but he brushed past me before I could even blink.

"Hayden!" I called, not daring to move.

My eyes darted to Kyle, who looked like he didn't know what to say and when we heard a door slam shut only to see him rush past us shortly after, darting towards the stairs, my body finally moved.

"Hayden, wait!" I called out before running after him. "I got this!" I yelled back at Kyle, who was about to join me.

I bolted down the stairs, almost tripping over myself, and headed for the front door that he had just vanished out of, but he was so much faster than I was, so when I finally reached it and stepped out on the front porch, he was nowhere to be seen.

My eyes ran over the grassy area out front, stopping at every tree and bush to see if he had decided to stop somewhere, but he hadn't, and it wasn't until a gush of wind hit me in the face that I understood why he was so far gone already.

He had shifted.

I dragged my hand through my hair and before I could think further of it, I shook my head and jumped down the stairs before shifting mid-run.

Whatever was going on with him, was not something I wanted him to go through alone.

'Hayden!'

I ran as fast as I could while following his scent. I had no idea where he was headed, but one thing was for sure, he was leaving pack land. Did he have some kind of meltdown while I wasn't there? Did something trigger him?

'Hayden! Wait!'

But he didn't. If he did anything at all, it was picking up more speed. When I reached the end of the forest, I couldn't help but notice the way he had been forcing himself through the bushes. Some of his fur was stuck to the small branches, the thorns most likely ripping it from him while he ran through them. I jumped over them, ignoring the faint scent of blood, and continued running. I needed to catch up with him before he would end up hurting himself even more or worse, someone else.

In the distance, just as I came out to the open field, I could see the silhouette of him as he jumped over a fallen tree. I forced myself to pick up the pace, my heart beating so fast I thought it would cave in at any second and then... Then he stopped.

I slowed down as I approached him, as I didn't know what was going on. I didn't want him to take off again, but I couldn't stay this far away either, especially not when he didn't want to answer me.

'I'm coming over,' I warned him as I began jogging over there.

When I neared him, I slowed down even more before I began circling around him to be face to face with him.

He looked like he had frozen in place. His eyes were fixed on the horizon in front of us, his mouth was open just enough for him to breathe through it and his nostrils were flaring as if he was trying to pick up a scent. I looked at him all over, trying to see if he was hurt. He had after all been running right through the thorn bushes surrounding the forest, but not a scratch was to be seen.

I let out a breath and shook my head as I grew even more thankful for our sped-up healing process.

'Hayden,' I tried again. 'It's me, Gabriel.'

He didn't even acknowledge that I was there, he just continued staring into absolutely nothing. I tried to follow his gaze while I snuck my snout into the air and took a big whiff in order to get a hint of what he was looking for, but I came up with nothing but the smell of him and our pack land in the distance. There was no one anywhere near us nor had there been anyone here for some time.

'Can you smell it?' he suddenly asked.

'Smell what?' I asked, looking him dead in the eye searching for something, anything, that would give up what he was talking about.

'She's alive.'

I didn't know what to expect, but that was not it. I kept staring at him, waiting for him to elaborate, but he didn't. He only continued to stare out into nothing and for a second I wasn't even sure I had heard what he had said. It had to be a mistake. Right?

'She is alive,' he repeated after some time, and now I was sure I had heard him correctly.

My body began to shake as I felt the familiar squeeze around my heart. The hurt... The pain... It was slowly creeping its way back in trying to gather its claws around me again. I couldn't listen to this... I couldn't be here for this. Not now. I looked at him one last time before I walked around him and, with slow yet steady steps, began walking back.

I ignored everything around me. I ignored the way the wind had picked up its pace and was now wild and uncontrollable. I ignored the way my legs began shaking even more at the mere thought of what it would be like if she actually was alive and... I ignored him.

"Did you hear what I said?" he yelled after me so loudly that I for a second, was so confused about how I could hear him outside of my head, that I turned around.

He had shifted back and was now standing naked only a few meters away. His eyes were glossy but, for once, they weren't dead. They were filled to the brim with hope and determination. Something I couldn't afford to feel.

"Gabriel!" he shouted, his voice sounding more strained. "Don't just walk away from me."

I wanted to scream at him to shut up, to just go home and stay there, but instead I continued to walk. I wanted to run, but my feet wouldn't listen. Why wouldn't they listen...

"Gabriel!"

And suddenly, I was pulled back down to earth and thrown back into reality as his hand shoved me in the side. I growled at him loudly, but he didn't even as much as flinch.

"I know you heard me. I know it sounds crazy but it is true! I can feel it!" he continued, his voice pleading me. "You can't just ignore me! You can't just walk away!"

And that was the last straw. Before I knew it, I had shifted back, my hand was firmly holding onto his wrist before shoving him away from me.

"You want to talk about ignoring someone, huh? How about the fact that you ignored me and then just took off!" I screamed. "You ran this far away from home only to tell me what exactly? Your hopes and dreams? She is gone, Hayden! She is dead!"

"She is not."

He looked down at the ground, his left hand soothing his right wrist that I had just been holding. I had no idea of what game he was playing, but I didn't want to be a part of it.

"She is!" I stated as firmly as I could before I turned on my heels and continued to walk.

I wasn't sure of who I was trying to convince more. Him or myself.

"I know you don't believe me, hell I wouldn't even believe me, but... I can't explain it, I can't tell you why, but I can... I can sense her..."

"Yeah? Then why can't I?" I asked, looking back at him. "I am her mate too and you want to know what I can feel? Nothing. I feel nothing, not even emptiness, because even emptiness would leave some sort of feeling inside of me, something I could be clinging to!" I yelled while waving my arms in the air. "She is gone, and she is not coming back and the sooner you understand that..." I looked him in the eyes, the eyes that now looked dull and sad. "The better it will be," I finished and turned to leave.

"Please," he begged, his voice cracking. "Please trust me on this. I can't explain it to you, and I don't know why you can't sense her, but please, trust me. She might have been the one who bound us together in the first place, but now I am your mate too. Trust me like you would her."

"I... I don't know if I can," I choked out. "I can't... I can't do this again."

"Please," he begged, his voice getting louder as he got closer. "Please Gabe..."

I threw my head back and closed my eyes. I could feel him standing right behind me, feel his hot and unsteady breath on my neck and before I could change my mind, I whispered the words that not only he needed to hear, but also the words that in the end could either give me hope or be a part of my undoing.

"Okay, I trust you."

Chapter 67 - Lost II - The Royal Hybrid

Gabriel's POV

I pulled my suit out from the closet and hung it over the chair by the desk,

"I don't understand Hayden," I admitted, shaking my head slightly while straightening out the fabric. "You made such a big deal out of her being alive only yesterday and now you want me to sit through her funeral tomorrow and not speak a word about it?"

"I know it makes no sense," he gushed as he paced back and forth, gathering papers in his hands. "But everything will."

"You need to at least try and explain this to me," I sighed. "It's not that I don't want to believe you-" I quickly added, "-but..."

He stopped pacing around, took a quick glance at me, and nodded before fumbling with the papers he had already collected in his hands.

"I have spent most of my waking hours thinking everything over," he began as he started to scatter out the papers on the floor. "And as you know, there's been a lot of them, but that is not the point. The point is that there is something not adding up. As you already know I met her right after she ran away from her old pack. I found her in that cave all panicked, in distress, but do you know who just randomly showed up not very long after that?"

I looked at him and tried to desperately understand where he was going with this, but it was hard. I could see it in his eyes. The way they begged me to understand, to agree with him, and for some reason, I felt a part of myself begging for that same thing. To believe him.

"Kathleen," he exclaimed after a moment of silence on my part. "She said she had followed her scent there, but one of the things that had caught me off guard back then, was the fact that I hadn't noticed her being in that cave before I saw her with my own eyes."

"I don't follow," I grimaced.

"Gabe... There was no scent to follow. I don't know why it didn't strike me before now, but... There was no damn scent."

"What do you mean there was no scent?" I asked. "I've only known it to be something you could do through magic."

"And Tatiana has magic! I asked around a bit and, apparently, that was also why she was so hard to track down after she was kidnapped in the first place. They made her mask her own scent back then too."

"Wouldn't she know if she did something like that?"

"I don't think she was aware that she continued to do it or even how to do it," he shrugged and laid out another piece of paper with scribbles on it. "This is a timeline I

have made and this,” he said as he leaned back and pulled a huge paper out from under the bed. “This is a map I have drawn.”

“A map of what?”

“From where she was held captive all those years and to where I found her. Gabe, even if I was wrong about the entire masking her scent thing, there would be no way for Kathleen to track her down this far after so many hours.”

And then it clicked in my head.

“If she couldn’t track her down, that means she would have to know where she was heading in the first place, which means...”

“She knew that Tatiana didn’t belong there. She knew where she would go because she knew her wolf would guide her there,” he said, his voice cracking. “Someone told her Gabe. She didn’t find her by accident or luck as I did...”

“She knew...” I muttered. “She was sent to find her and most likely by Killian!” I half yelled as I jumped up from the floor.

“You have to keep it down!” he whisper-yelled. “We can’t risk anyone knowing this!”

“What do you mean?” I hissed. “She should be held accountable for what she has done!”

“And she will!” he assured me.

He put his hand on my chest and took a deep breath. I wanted to shake him off, I even tried to a few times, but he just continued to do so until I eventually did the same.

“This doesn’t explain why you think she is alive though,” I sighed and pinched the bridge of my nose. “After all, her masking her scent wouldn’t work on the mate bond.”

“I couldn’t figure out where Chad’s part in all of this fit in. After all, what would he get out of it when all he was, was the son of a beta?”

“I am guessing that you have an answer to that question too?” I stated with a raised brow.

“I did some digging in the library,” he smirked and went to the desk drawer.

“The library? When did you do that? You never left this room or mine, for that matter.”

“I have my ways,” he shrugged, his back still turned to me.

He flipped a few papers around in the drawer before pulling out an old-looking book.

"This will explain it all," he said as he turned to me and held the book up in the air.

It was a dark, dusty brown color with gold edges. The front was decorated with golden leaves and a gold clasp keeping the book closed. The book itself had no headline and from what I could see there was no author's name either, but one thing it did have was a small engraving of a necklace and a ring. The royal pieces of jewelry.

"This is the book of all born or at least that is what I call it since it doesn't officially have a name. You see, when I first had my suspicions, I knew I had to check it out. I couldn't just let it go like I initially had wanted to do. I also knew that Chad had to be something other than a beta's son and it turned out I was right. Every alpha ever born or alpha to be, will have his name in this book, and guess who is standing right next to Killian."

"Chad," I nodded and walked over to see the page he had found.

"Exactly," he mumbled, shaking his head. "Chad and Kathleen are not siblings. She is the beta's daughter, yes, but he... He is Killian's son. His own blood and an alpha to be."

"This is so fucked up," I sighed as I dragged a hand over my face. "Okay, so Chad is an Alpha to be, Kathleen is not who she gives out to be and Killian is still the bad guy, but I still don't see what that has to do with Tatiana being alive."

"That is the part I can't fully explain, but we know there was a reason that Killian wanted Tatiana in the first place, right? Seeing as she escaped, whatever he had planned went down the drain."

"You think that he needed her powers for something?"

"No, we already knew that, but when he suddenly didn't have her, why not still go through with his plans?"

I stood there for a moment thinking of what he was saying. It made sense, but then again, it felt as if we were missing a whole bunch of information to piece this together. He was right though. Why go after her again with the intention of killing her if he needed her powers? That wouldn't make sense or benefit him unless...

"Her magic could stop him," I whispered. "What if he didn't actually need her magic? What if he just needed her to be on his side to keep her in check so she couldn't fight him?"

"That was my thought too," he agreed and closed the book. "If you think about it, everything she has ever told us about Chad was bad but what if he did all of that because he had to? Back out there, when we first captured Chad, he told her about her

mating situation – a thing she needed to know in order to bond with her other wolf and also-“

“- to get access to all of her power,” I muttered, finally understanding where he was taking this. “You think he was secretly helping her without raising suspicion towards Kathleen?”

“I do, yes, and I also believe that is why he took her. We haven’t seen her body; we only felt our bond break and with the magic so many have access to, these days, like, for example, the spell he used to escape with her... It wouldn’t surprise me if there was a spell that would be able to hide her.”

“One thing is to hide her though... But to be able to cloak her even from her mate bond? That would be nearly impossible, wouldn’t it?” I questioned and watched as his face twisted into a look of uncertainty. “But maybe...”

“Maybe what?”

“The only way to truly know that is to ask Zaya. If someone were to know about hidden magic or rare spells, it would be her, right?”

“We can’t ask her and you know it,” he stated.

“If we tell her why, then maybe she could help us, Hayden... I know you don’t want to let people know in case the wrong people get to hear about it but, also, you don’t want to give others hope... Right?”

“You think she will understand that?”

“I think she will, but more than that too... It wouldn’t surprise me if she had already done some research herself.”

Zaya was never the one to slack around. I had heard stories about everything that had gone down before I was born; how she risked her life warning Talia about Tyson and how she from her jail cell performed magic she had stored within herself over the years. Even when being bound down she pushed her limits. I doubted this would be any different and I had a feeling that if Hayden could put this together, then so could she.

“Fine, let’s go see her but Gabe, if this goes wrong...”

“It won’t. Now it is your turn to trust me,” I winked.

Chapter 68 - Lost II - The Royal Hybrid

Hayden’s POV

We headed to Zaya's tower only to find it empty. Not only wasn't she there, but her shelves were cleared out and her grimoire, which had always been on the small stand in the middle of the room, was also gone.

"What happened here?" Gabriel muttered to himself.

"I have no idea," I whispered and looked around. "Did she leave or something?"

"No, I don't think so," he said. "I saw her not long ago, so if that is the case, she must have left recently," he sighed. "I don't think she would though. Not with Tatiana's funeral happening tomorrow."

"I-"

"I didn't leave," a voice echoed, startling us both as we stared into the empty room in front of us.

Within the blink of an eye, a light fog appeared and within it, things began shuffling around. The empty shelves were once again filled, the grimoire was back to where it had always been, and in front of it was Zaya standing with a small smile on her face.

"How did you..." I gaped. "You were just-"

"Gone I know," she interrupted. "It is a small spell I have developed after recent events."

"I'm not sure I would call this spell a small one," Gabriel huffed. "You made everything vanish, including yourself."

"I did yes," she nodded. "My powers... My stuff... It has been used for evil one too many times. I did consider leaving, but I couldn't possibly do that with a good conscience considering this is where I am meant to be. It is my duty to stay here and, besides, this is my family. So instead, I made myself a safety net or more like my own personal security system," she shrugged as if it was nothing.

"I'm impressed," I admitted. "Never knew that such a thing was possible."

"We never knew disappearing into the thin air was possible either," Gabriel pointed out, earning himself a glare from Zaya. "Sorry, I didn't mean to-"

"I know what you meant," she stated, raising her hand. "I take no offense. After all, it is the truth. I developed spells and potions in secret that were used against me in the end. Had I not kept it a secret then maybe..." she trailed off and I watched as the guilt presented itself all over Gabriel's face. "Anyway, why did you come here? You don't usually climb those stairs just for a simple visit."

"Well," Gabriel began, and looked at me.

I had no idea how to begin this and I could tell that he didn't either. After all, how did you tell someone that you had a feeling that a dead person was alive without sounding absolutely insane?

"Well?" she repeated, waiting patiently.

"We think, well I think," I rambled.

"We think Tatiana might be alive," Gabriel blurted out. "Before you say that we sound crazy or that it isn't possible, then please just hear us out because we have some—"

"It doesn't sound insane actually," she muttered and turned her back to us.

She began flipping around in the grimoire as she spoke.

"I had the same feeling. Well, this wasn't exactly a feeling, it was more like a suspicion, but before I continue, I would like to know how you two have come to this conclusion."

"See," Gabriel exclaimed. "I told you!"

"Yeah, yeah, I know," I sighed, having to admit my defeat.

"Guys," she demanded, glaring at us over her shoulder.

"Sorry," we both mumbled.

"It was actually Hayden who first felt it," he said and nodded at me, encouraging me to take over, and so I did. I told her everything I had written down, and every little suspicion I had had since Tatiana disappeared, and when I got to the part about Kathleen tracking down Tatiana, Zaya stopped in her tracks and turned around.

"You think she has something to do with it?" she asked, her brows raised.

"I do," I nodded. "I promise you, there was no way she could have tracked her all that way from Killian's pack. I was even surprised to find Tati in that cave, and I was right there. I'm telling you, there was no scent."

"So the only way for her to know where Tatiana was back then, was because she knew where she was headed, yeah?"

"Yes, that is my thought exactly."

"If what you too are saying turns out to be the truth, then we have bigger problems than we had first thought."

"What do you mean?"

"If Killian didn't keep Tatiana because he needed her power but because her power was the only way to stop him..." she shook her head and took a deep breath. "Once he learns about her death or disappearance, which I suspect he already knows, he will come, and we will have no way to stop him. And to make matters worse, as far as we know, he could already be on his way here."

"Then what do we do?" Gabriel asked. "Do we put up scouts along the borders?"

"No," she said, shaking her head. "We need to tell the Luna and Alpha about this and fast."

"And what about our suspicions regarding Tatiana?" I questioned. "Do we tell them that too?"

I watched as her brows furrowed and her lips turned into a thin line.

"You don't want them to know, do you?" Gabriel asked in a low voice, and she shook her head.

"As far as they know, she is dead, and it needs to continue to stay that way. Not only could it jeopardize everything if Killian was to know that there was even the slightest possibility of her still being alive, but also, if we are wrong about this, we will give them hope that they do not need. Not now, and especially not if we are wrong."

"It would be like losing her twice," I mumbled.

"Exactly."

"So what is your plan then?"

"We are gonna go now, talk to the Luna and Alpha, and let them know about our suspicions regarding Killian and Kathleen. We don't say anything else but that and we need to make sure that Kathleen is far away from the sacred hall so she doesn't hear."

"Can't you just cast a spell?"

"No, it would be too risky. If she were to walk in, she would either be engulfed by the magic, or she would be able to sense it. When it comes to magic... It can be unpredictable, to say the least, so I won't take that chance. Actually, I don't think either of us should take any chances, so when we leave here, we don't rush. We act normally and we go our separate ways. We can't have people chatting in the corners, so you will have to meet me there. I will wait for you."

And with that, she headed for the door not speaking another word.

"What about everything in here?" I asked.

“What about it?” she shrugged as she opened the door.

I looked back to point at the book but as I did, I noticed how everything again was gone and how the grey fog crept back to its corners in the now empty room.

“Damn,” Gabriel shuttered next to me. “I still can’t believe it.”

“Me neither,” I admitted and nodded towards the door. “Let’s go.”

The silence was deafening. Alpha Shane looked completely drained, yet his face had filled with anger for every word that had come out of our mouths and our Luna was so still that it was hard to tell if she was even breathing.

“So,” he grumbled, pinching the bridge of his nose. “You are telling me that Killian might be on his way here now?”

“I’m afraid so,” Zaya nodded. “I mean we knew there was a possibility of this happening after Tatiana first returned, but now, it doesn't just seem like a possibility anymore.”

“And that Kathleen-” he spoke her name with such venom and disgust that I involuntarily took a step back. “-Has been the spy all along?”

“Yes, at least that is how it seems.”

“Seems or is?” he growled.

“Shane,” Talia said slowly as she put her hand on his arm, trying to calm him down.

“Don’t take it out on them. If they are right, we have the chance to fight back, to at least try and defend the pack.”

“But how do you expect us to do that, Talia?” he sighed. “If it is true that Tatiana’s powers were the only thing that could stop him...”

“I can see your worries, I can feel them, but we have been here once before Shane, and against someone bigger and greater than Killian. You need to remember that and also, you need to remember that Tatiana wasn’t the only one with magic.”

“You can’t,” he exclaimed at the same time as Zaya.

“With all due respect,” Zaya continued, taking a step forward. “We have talked about this before Luna. After birthing the twins, your body weakened and your connection to-“

“I know,” she interrupted and stood up. “But if I can somehow contact the moon goddess again, then she could help. She did it once before.”

“No,” Shane stated. “I won’t allow it. You could be killed.”

“We could all be killed if nothing is done, Shane,” she said, shaking her head. “I am not afraid of dying. Both of my children have met with death and if my sacrifice ensures the survival of our pack, then that is something I am willing to do.”

“I can’t lose you too,” he whispered.

This was the first time I had ever seen him this weak; this defeated. He always, even after the death of Lucas, even after Tatiana, had kept his head high and strong for the people, but now another man was standing in front of me. Now all that could be seen was a man who had lost so much already and now feared to lose what he had left. His mate, his pack, his family. And I couldn’t blame him.

Luna Talia walked over to him, put her hands on each side of his face, and rested her forehead on his chest.

“Let me at least try,” she begged. “For us, for our family, for Lucas and Tatiana.”

And that was all that was needed in order to settle it.

Chapter 69 - Lost II - The Royal Hybrid

Hayden’s POV

Everyone around me wore black for the occasion and everyone had the same grim look on their faces. Another funeral, another young life lost. Or at least that was what people thought.

I knew I had put hope into Gabriel the day I told him about my suspicions, but to me, it wasn’t just a suspicion, it was the truth. I knew she was alive somewhere; I just knew it. She had to be.

I met Gabriel’s eyes in the crowd as we walked toward one another. We hadn’t spoken much after the meeting with our Luna and alpha yesterday as we had all agreed to go forward with the funeral. Shane said that if Killian was to come, he would come no matter what we were up to, and he wanted to put his daughter to rest so that was what we were going to do.

The border patrols had been doubled and the hidden safety rooms for the women and children had been secured and prepped. Zaya was even talking about making a potion that could ensure their safe escape should everything go sideways and, from what I knew, she had been up all night trying to make it. At least it looked like it. She had dark circles under her eyes and her skin looked even more pale than usual. Not that it came as a surprise.

Our Luna looked the exact same, not that anyone would blame her. After all, after today, she would have buried both of her children within a short period of time. No one

would wish that for anyone, not even for their worst enemy. As far as I had heard, there was no greater pain than to outlive your child.

“Are you ready?” Gabriel asked as he approached me.

“As ready as I can be,” I muttered and scouted through the crowd, looking for one particular face.

And there it was.

Kathleen.

Now that I knew who she really was, I wanted to rip her apart. I had to hand it to her though. She was good at lying and faking. If I didn't know the truth I would be convinced she was devastated, but now that I did, I wanted nothing more than to tell her to get lost and take those fake tears with her.

“Don't look at her like that,” Gabriel growled into my ear.

“What?” I hissed, still not taking my eyes off her.

“You are not exactly trying to hide your disgust and the ‘I want to kill her’ energy you are giving is not exactly lowkey either.”

“Sorry,” I grumbled and turned my face. “I didn't know that I was being that obvious.”

“Obvious? Hayden, if it wasn't because people were focusing on the damn coffin right in front of them, everyone here would have noticed it.”

“What is even up with that,” I huffed.

“With what?”

“The coffin,” I breathed. “It is not like she is in there anyway, so why even bother getting one.”

“Because they need some sort of closure,” he spoke softly. “There might not be a body, but burying a coffin, empty or not, will bring some sort of satisfaction to their grief.”

“I guess you are right. It all just seems...”

“Weird? Like a lie? A scam?”

“Pretty much,” I chuckled dryly. “If we could only have told them.”

“I know, but you know why we can’t, and trust me, once all of this is over, I will go with you to find her, wherever she may be.”

“Even when you don’t know with certainty that she is alive?”

“I trust you,” he said and nudged me in my side. “You feel like she is, you are certain and that is enough for me.”

“Thank you,” I smiled, this time a genuine one. “We should probably find our seats, shouldn’t we?”

“Probably, yes.”

We walked between the chairs that once again had been set up on our green area and, just like last time, it hurt taking each step closer to where the coffin was. Which I found odd, seeing as I knew what I knew, but despite it, the heavy feeling in my chest only grew. It felt as if a balloon had been blown up too much and was ready to burst inside of me. The pressure was intense, not in a painful way, but in a way that felt a bit like when you get butterflies in your stomach and then again not. It was not something I could describe because, to be honest, it was unlike anything I had ever felt before. I eyed Gabriel only to find an uncomfortable look plastered all over his face. It wasn’t the look of grief or sadness, no, it was the look that screamed ‘I don’t like this’. Did he feel the pressing sensation as well? Was something about to happen?

As we continued to walk toward the front row, I searched the crowd ahead of me looking for Zaya and when I found her, as she appeared from behind the empty coffin, she was already looking at me. Something told me that whatever this was, she either knew about it or had something to do with it.

“Can everybody please find a seat, so we can begin?” She spoke out loud.

Talia and Shane came up to us, followed by both of my dads. They both gave me a quick hug before taking a seat. The Luna and Alpha went up to stand next to Zaya and once everyone else had taken a seat as well, it began.

“We have gathered here today to send yet another young soul on their last journey of life,” Zaya said in a steady voice before she gestured to Luna Talia to continue.

“Tatiana was taken from here when she was little but that didn’t stop her from touching all of our hearts when she returned. Despite her short time here, she managed to gain love, trust, and respect from everyone here. She even got to experience what love was like, and not just to one, but to two mates. She was a kindhearted person, a person who knew right from wrong, and in her efforts to find her place here she also showed us what true strength was like,” she gulped, and I could see how a stray tear ran down her cheek. “Tatiana was my daughter, our daughter, and even now when she is gone, she will forever still be with us.”

She took a deep breath and looked over at Alpha Shane, who quickly took her hand and nodded.

“No parent should ever outlive their kids. It is a grave pain that is beyond explaining to someone who has never been in that position, but it is also a pain I would never wish on my worst enemy. But despite the pain we have felt, not just us, but everyone she touched with her presence, we have good memories too, and with that, we have something we can take with us further in life. She won’t be forgotten, nor will she ever be replaced. She belonged to this pack just like the pack belonged to her, and without her here we now have another empty gap to fill. So it is with a heavy heart that I ask all of you to fill that empty space with love, memories, and honor.”

She took a step down, her eyes running over the coffin at the same time as her hand gently caressed it, and with that Alpha Shane took the stand.

“I don’t know if there is any more for me to say that my mate hasn’t already said, except for the fact that I have loved her since the day I laid my eyes on her for the first time and that that will never change. I know she is with Lucas now and I can only hope that he has welcomed her with open arms.”

He made a stiff nod, cleared his throat, and then said the words I dreaded the most.

“I think I will give the last words to Hayden and Gabriel, who not only lost their best friend but also their mate.”

My dad gave me a gentle nudge in my side and, with a small smile, nodded encouraging. Gabriel, who was sitting on my right, gave my hand a quick squeeze before he stood up. He adjusted his blazer and held out his hand for me to take. Normally we wouldn’t show our affection out in public, but this time was different. This time it would be seen as two people who had lost a loved one, comforting each other and nothing more. I took his hand and let him guide me up to the podium where our Luna and Alpha had stood only seconds ago, but the closer I got to the coffin, the more my heart ached, and I had to remind myself that she wasn’t in there; that she was alive.

I tore my eyes away from the shiny white oak tree and turned around to face the crowd that now was quieter than ever.

“I don’t know much about giving speeches,” I admitted. “It is not something I had ever thought I would, especially not in a situation like this. As many of you already know, I fell apart when the horrifying truth came out. That she was gone...” I took a second to think of what I was going to say. After all, I had to show my grief despite me not having any at the moment.

“The day I met Tatiana, I felt it right away. I had heard about it from others, and even read about it in books, but I had never expected that I would feel it myself and when I did, I learned that no matter how hard you try to explain how a mate bond feels, you will

never truly be able to explain the exact feeling. It will always be so much more, something that can never be described. She was not only beautiful on the outside, no, she was beautiful on the inside as well, and the second she first smiled at me and let me feel the warmth that radiated from her heart, I knew that I indeed had been blessed by the moon goddess. And I wasn't the only one," I said, and pulled Gabriel a bit closer to me. "Gabriel here has always been one of my best friends, but as you all know, I had a bit of a hard time dealing with the fact that I wasn't her only mate; that I now had to share my ray of sunshine with someone else. But despite everything that went down back then, he soon showed himself to be the rock in my life. We might have been bonded through her, but after her death, we stuck together, and had it not been for him I surely wouldn't be standing here now and that is another thing I have to thank her for. She reconnected us, and gave us another chance to reconcile and be for each other what we always had been. She gave us a chance of saving each other, a chance not many people get after losing their mate."

I could feel Gabriel shuffling a bit next to me and when I turned my head to look at him, I could see his lip quivering.

"She was and will forever be my whole heart, our whole heart, and so I want all of us to use everything she gave us, from love to smiles, to happy memories... I want us to use that to ensure that her memory will stay alive."

With that, I took a step back and pushed Gabriel forward. I knew he was a man of few words, but I also knew that he had something on his mind. He looked back at me and, as the only thing I could do, I offered him a smile.

"I don't have much to say. Everyone who knows me knows that I'm not good with... Feelings. I never have been and yet when it came to her my feelings were on full display. I won't try to make those feelings appear now because I most likely can't. However, what I can do is admit to not only myself, but to everyone here, that I have never loved anyone as I love her. I won't stand here and say it as if it belongs in the past, because I honestly don't ever think I'll stop loving her. She had a special place not only in my heart but in all of our hearts and I know that with that, she will live on and our love for her will continue. A mating bond is infinite and so will my affection and love for her be," he said as he looked down and not so discreetly dried his cheek on his shoulder. "I want to thank everyone for coming here. Not just to mourn her death, but to celebrate her life. So, thank you for that," he croaked out before stepping back, so he was once again by my side.

We turned around, hand in hand, and walked over to her coffin. The white shiny oak tree it was made of was colder than I had expected it to be. From afar it looked almost soft, yet now when my skin was touching it, it felt cold and hard just like I imagined death would feel like.

Zaya was once again talking, but I had zoned out, trying to focus on what would be next.

Within minutes, people came up in lines, giving us their condolences and covering the coffin with roses. When everyone was done, there was no white to be seen, only red.

Chapter 70 - Lost II - The Royal Hybrid

Hayden's POV

It was weird. No matter how I tried to look at it, it was weird, and it felt uncomfortable just being near it. Her headstone had been delivered shortly after her coffin had been lowered into the ground and now, several hours later, here I was.

"It doesn't even look real, does it?" Gabriel muttered from behind me, making me jump in surprise.

"When did you get here?" I questioned.

"You would think that for a wolf you would be able to hear me coming from miles away," he chuckled. "What is on your mind?"

"Everything," I breathed. "My mind is clouded with so many thoughts that I can't seem to tell the difference between them."

"I know what you mean," he said as he came to stand next to me. "But just remember that it hopefully will change soon."

"You know we can't talk about that here or anywhere for that matter," I hushed. "The freaking trees have ears."

"I know, sorry."

"It looks unreal, doesn't it?" I mumbled under my breath.

"What? The headstone?"

"Yeah..." I trailed off as I walked over to it.

I crouched down so the inscription with her name was at eye height and then I let my fingers slowly run over it feeling every curve within the letters.

"She would love it though," he breathed as he lowered himself to the ground. "It is very simple looking and yet very flashing."

I looked at it to see what he meant, and I didn't have to look long to see it. The stone was white with a subtle sparkle in it and the engravings were colored over with a matte black color, making it stand out even more. I couldn't help but wonder if that was to somehow capture her fur to immortalize it. It truly was beautiful. Simple yet outstanding.

"I can't wait to see it in the sunlight," I whispered. "I think when the sun's rays hit it just right it will shine as bright as she did."

"I think you are right and wrong at the same time," he sighed and leaned back on his elbows. "Nothing will ever be able to shine as bright as she did."

"Yeah, you are right about that," I smiled. "How could I ever believe anything could."

"I don't know," he chuckled lightly before lying down completely. "Look how bright the stars shine right now," he said and pointed to the now very dark sky.

I scooted back a bit and laid down next to him. He wasn't wrong. The sky was clear of skies, so the stars had a clear path to let their shine through.

"Do you think she can see them too?" I asked in a wondering tone.

"I do," he mumbled.

I knew he wanted to say more, but I also knew that he was right. We had to be careful with what we were saying. We could never fully be sure that we were alone because if there was one thing I knew, it was that she was watching us every chance she got, and it wouldn't surprise me if she was somehow watching us now too. As if on cue, I heard the grass shuffle beneath a pair of feet that made their way to us.

"Sorry," her soft voice spoke. "I didn't know anyone would be here now."

I tilted my head back just enough to see Kathleen stepping out of the shadows. She looked so innocent standing there with a small frown on her face. If the frown was because she was acting to be sad or if she was displeased with us being here, I had no idea.

"It is okay," Gabriel breathed as he sat up. "You are welcome to join us if you want."

I was surprised and very impressed by the calmness in his voice. I wasn't sure I could mask my disgust as well as he could, so instead of even trying, I turned my attention back to the sky.

"Are you sure?" she questioned, and I could hear the uncertainty in her voice.

I noticed how Gabriel heard the same as he lifted his brow before turning his head to her.

"Yeah, why wouldn't I be sure?"

"I don't know, I just... I don't want to intrude if you are having a moment," she said and shifted the weight on her feet.

“Well, moment or not, you were her best friend, right? You meant just as much to her as we did, so you have every right to be here.”

I heard the secret message in his words, and I couldn't help but wonder how she didn't pick up on that. He didn't have any venom in his voice, but even when he tried his best, he couldn't hide every emotion he had in him and when she didn't answer at first, I held my breath, fearing that she had noticed it too.

But when she sat down next to me, I realized that she hadn't, and I could once again breathe.

“It is so weird,” she mumbled. “Her not being here anymore,” she clarified.

“Yeah, it is,” he agreed.

“It felt as if it was yesterday that I was sitting next to her talking to her about you two and now...” she trailed off. “I wish I could have done something to prevent it.”

And then I could no longer keep my mouth shut.

“I'm sure that if anyone could, it would have been you,” I huffed and immediately felt Gabriel's eyes burn into the side of my head.

“I think what he means is that you kept her safe for all those years,” Gabriel quickly added. “We didn't and, since we didn't know exactly what we were up against like you did, then you had more of a chance to make sure that she would know the danger she was in.”

I bit my tongue knowing that Gabriel might just have saved us from my very big mistake.

“I'm sorry,” I sighed, trying to sound sincere. “I didn't mean it like that at all, I just...”

“You are grieving,” she interrupted. “I don't take it to heart, but you are right though. I knew what Chad was like and I knew what Killian would be willing to do, or so I thought... I didn't know that he would go to this length.”

“It is not your fault. You aren't in control of other people's decisions or actions,” Gabriel spoke. “We know that you did what you could with the cards that you were dealt. I am sure that she knows it too.”

I looked at Gabriel, whose face was as hard as stone, and then my eyes went to Kathleen, who looked smug. Out of all the things she could look like she looked smug and it didn't take a genius to figure out why. She thought she had tricked us, that we had no idea how she actually felt. But we did. She felt victorious and yet again I found myself having to bite my tongue in order to not explode and for once, I was actually

happy that Syx was hiding because if he had been alert and on his toes, I wouldn't have been able to stop him from shifting and taking over.

"I did try my best," she sighed. "That is why I helped her escape in the first place."

"Only to capture me again later on, isn't that right, Kathleen?" a familiar voice spoke from behind the headstone. I got to my feet faster than I had ever moved before and right there... Right there behind the white stone shining ever so slightly in the moonlight, Tatiana walked up.

Gabriel, who had just gotten up, looked surprised and like he was about to throw up, and I... I was holding my breath, scared that this was yet another illusion.

"Ta-Tatiana," Kathleen stuttered. "How..."

"Go on," she said, her voice so calm that it chilled me to the bone. "Apologize."

Tatiana's POV

I was listening to them talk about me. How they were grieving and trying to deal with it. Even though they were occasionally laughing, I could hear the pain in their voices.

I knew they were hurting, and I was hurting too, but I didn't know how much. Had it not been, because this was the only option we had; I would never have done this to them.

"They will be okay, you know," Chad whispered from behind me.

"They might be okay, but do you think they will ever forgive me?"

"Forgive you? Tatiana, you are their mate. They think you are dead, so for you to just come back to life? That is the one thing every mate hopes for."

"Is that your way of saying yes?" I questioned.

"Yes, it is. I believe they will forgive you," he sighed. "Maybe not right away, but they will eventually just be happy that you are alive and back with them."

"Goddess, I hope you are right," I muttered and listened closely.

"I can't wait to see it in the sunlight," Hayden whispered. "I think when the sun's rays hit it just right it will shine as bright as she did."

"I think you are right and wrong at the same time," I heard Gabriel sigh. "Nothing will ever be able to shine as bright as she did."

"They do really seem to miss you," Chad whispered, sounding pained.

“Are you going all sappy on me now?” I teased.

“No, I just... I never really had that, you know,” he shrugged.

I looked at his face and saw nothing but the truth. Over the past few weeks, I had gotten to know Chad pretty well, and despite everything that had happened in the past, he really wasn't such a bad guy. He still wasn't my favorite person in the world, but he had saved me and, by doing so, he had also saved my pack and, for that, I would forever be thankful.

“I am sure you will get to feel love someday too,” I ensured him as I rested my hand on his arm and watched him nod.

“She is here.”

“It's time then,” I sighed.

“Will you still not let me go with you?”

“No, this is something I must do alone. However, if something happens, you need to cut in. You have to make sure that she doesn't escape us,” I told him.

“I will,” he nodded.

“I'm serious Chad,” I stated, my tone harder than intended. “I'm counting on you here.”

“And I will not let you down,” he assured me. “Not again. Besides, why would I go through all the trouble of saving you only to let you fail?”

“You are right,” I breathed.

I knew I had to trust him with this too. But now that we were so close to actually pull this off, I couldn't help but have some doubts.

“And you are sure they won't sense me coming?” I questioned as I got up.

“Yes, you are still cloaked, so they won't be able to see, hear, smell, or sense you before you make yourself known.”

“Good, here goes nothing.”

Not only was I nervous about exposing myself, but I was also excited. I would finally be able to go home. I would finally get to see them again, to be in their arms and feel their warmth. That was the hardest part about all of this. I missed them so much that I multiple times had to pick myself up and stop myself from breaking down completely. It truly had been excruciating for me to not be around them and I had a feeling that they

had felt the exact same thing except for the fact that they thought I was dead, while I knew that they were very much alive.

“I did try my best,” I heard her sigh as I was only a few feet away. “That is why I helped her escape in the first place.”

“Only to capture me again later on, isn’t that right, Kathleen?” I asked, trying my best to sound indifferent.

Within a second, Hayden’s face popped up from behind the headstone; my headstone. He was gaping at me, not blinking even once, as if he was scared that if he did, I would disappear again. Not long after, Kathleen was staring at me with pure fear in her eyes and next to her, Gabriel was standing looking ever so pale.

“Ta-Tatiana,” she stuttered. “How...”

“Go on,” I spoke calmly. “Apologize.”