

CLAIMED BY THE RIVAL ALPHA

Chapter 2

Selenal dropped the horse's reins and ran.

The ledger remained clutched tightly against my chest as branches scratched my skin and wet leaves slapped against my face. My boots sank into mud while my lungs burned painfully from fear and exhaustion.

Behind me, the rogues growled. The sound alone nearly made my legs give out.

"Catch her!" Their voices echoed through the dark forest, wild and vicious. Panic surged harder inside me.

Every wolf cub in the Nightbane Pack began survival training at sixteen. I used to hate waking before sunrise to run through forests while warriors barked instructions at us.

Now, those lessons were the only reason I was still alive.

"Don't run in a straight line."

"Use the trees."

"Listen before moving."

"Trust your instincts."

I forced myself to weave through the forest despite my terror. I ducked beneath low branches, jumped over thick roots, and pushed through dense shrubs while rain poured endlessly around me.

But the rogues were faster and they knew the forest better than I did.

A growl suddenly came from my left. I gasped and immediately changed direction.

Another snarl sounded ahead of me making my heart slammed violently against my ribs. They were surrounding me.

"No..." I whispered shakily.

One appeared briefly between the trees before vanishing again. Another laughed somewhere behind me. They were toying with me.

Fear clouded my thoughts as I stumbled deeper into the forest, struggling to understand where to go anymore. Every direction looked the same now.

The dark trees, the rain and the shadows. I couldn't tell where they were coming from.

Then suddenly— Pain exploded through my head. I cried out as something hard slammed against my forehead.

A thick branch. The impact sent me crashing onto the muddy ground instantly.

For a few seconds, the world spun violently around me. Dizziness overwhelmed me as rain hit my face relentlessly.

"No...No, get up—"I tried pushing myself upward, but movement surrounded me before I could recover.

The rogues had caught up.

Four of them stepped out slowly from the darkness, circling me like starving animals. Their clothes were ripped and filthy, their eyes glowing unnaturally in the night.

One licked blood from his teeth as another grinned at me and pure terror gripped my chest.

"Well," one of them sneered, "look what we found."

"A pretty little wolf."

"And alone too."

I crawled backward weakly while clutching the ledger tighter. "Please..." My voice shook badly. "Stay away from me."

They laughed.

One of them crouched slightly, inhaling deeply. "She smells rich."

"Probably pack born."

"Maybe we should keep her for a while before killing her."

My stomach twisted violently as I looked around desperately for an escape, but they had fully surrounded me now.

There was nowhere to run.

One of them suddenly lunged forward—

"Stop." The command cut through the forest sharply as everything froze.

The rogues turned immediately toward the source of the voice.

A man sat atop a black horse several feet away, partially hidden by the rain and darkness. Two other mounted men stood behind him silently.

I couldn't see his face clearly at first, only the broad shape of him beneath a dark cloak.

The rogue nearest me scoffed. "Mind your business."

The man on the horse remained completely still. "She's under my protection now," he said calmly.

The rogues burst into laughter. "There are only three of you," one mocked. "And four of us."

Another snarled. "Ride away before we rip your throats out too."

The two men behind the stranger rested their hands on their weapons, but neither moved.

Rain poured heavily between them all. Then the stranger finally climbed down from his horse.

My breath caught slightly seeing he was extremely tall, broad shouldered and looked calm.

Something about him felt dangerous in a way the rogues didn't.

One of the rogues cracked his neck mockingly. "You really want to die for a girl?"

The man said nothing. Instead, he slowly unsheathed a long dagger from beneath his cloak. Silver glinted sharply beneath the storm.

Then everything happened too fast.

One rogue charged first and the stranger moved before I could even fully register it. A sharp slash then blood sprayed across the rain and the rogue collapsed instantly.

My eyes widened in shock.

The remaining rogues snarled furiously before three of them shifted violently into massive wolves.

I froze in horror as the three wolves lunged together— But the man met them head on.

His movements were terrifyingly precise. Really Fast, controlled and deadly.

One wolf snapped toward his throat, but he drove the dagger straight into its neck before twisting aside from another attack.

A second wolf crashed into him, only for the man to grab its fur and slam it brutally against a tree. The crack echoed loudly while I stared in complete shock.

The final wolf tried attacking from behind but the stranger spun instantly and buried the dagger deep into its chest.

The beast let out a horrific cry before collapsing into the mud.

Silence followed as only rain remained. I could barely breathe. The man stood motionless among the bodies, rain dripping from his dark hair and blade.

One of the mounted men finally spoke. "Should we search the area?"

"No," the stranger replied calmly. "Burn the bodies." The other two immediately dismounted to obey.

Still shaken, I slowly pushed myself upright. My head throbbed painfully from hitting the branch earlier.

The stranger turned toward me fully now. For the first time, I saw his face clearly. Sharp features, dark eyes and cold expression.

He looked young, but there was something heavy in his gaze. Something hardened.

I swallowed nervously. "T-thank you," I whispered.

He studied me silently for a moment. Then his eyes shifted briefly toward the ledger in my hands. "Which pack are you from?"

My stomach tightened. "Nightbane."

His expression instantly changed. The coldness deepened and without another word, he turned toward his horse, making fear shoot through me immediately.

"Wait!" He ignored me completely.

Desperation clawed at my chest as I stumbled after him. "Please, I need help."

He mounted his horse smoothly. "I don't shelter Nightbane wolves."

Confusion flashed through me before realization quickly followed.

'Blackbourne. The rivalry.' Even I knew the tension between both packs despite Father never openly discussing it around me.

The stranger looked down at me coldly. "Go home."

Panic surged violently inside me. "I can't!"

He gathered the reins anyway.

My mind scrambled desperately for something to say. Then suddenly— "I'm Alpha William's daughter."

The words left my mouth quickly. I thought maybe that would change something. Maybe he would want to use me against Father somehow.

Instead, his expression remained unreadable. "Then your pack should be searching for you already," he said flatly.

Rain soaked through my cloak entirely now. "I'm not going back there."

He looked unimpressed. "That isn't my problem." Then he turned his horse away.

My chest tightened painfully. If he left me here, I would die. The rogues weren't the only danger in the forest and if Father's warriors found me... Or worse—
The vampires.

Tears mixed with rain on my cheeks as I followed after him desperately.
"Please!"

The horse stopped and the stranger didn't turn around immediately.

My breathing shook violently. "My father..." My voice cracked. "He wants to sell me."

Silence met my words and finally, he looked down at me.

I forced myself to continue despite the humiliation and fear choking me. "I overheard him speaking with his Beta tonight." My fingers tightened around the ledger. "They're selling she-wolves to vampires."

The man's gaze sharpened slightly and I continued shakily. "Girls from different packs. They've been doing it for years."

The two other men had stopped moving now. All three of them watched me carefully.

"My father promised me to a vampire lord," I whispered brokenly. "Tomorrow night."

Rain dripped from my hair into my eyes. "I didn't know," I said weakly. "I swear I didn't know."

The stranger stared at me for several long seconds. Something unreadable flickered across his face. Disbelief perhaps or anger.

"I stole the ledger from his office," I added quickly, holding it up slightly. "Everything is written inside."

One of the men beside him cursed quietly under his breath.

The stranger remained silent. Then finally— "Come here."

I blinked in surprise and before I could react properly, he leaned down suddenly, grabbed my arm firmly, and lifted me onto his horse in front of him.

I gasped softly at the sudden movement while his arm settled around me to grip the reins.

"Ride ahead," he ordered the others and they obeyed immediately. Then the horse began moving through the forest once more.

I sat stiffly against him at first, still trembling from fear and exhaustion. Rain continued pouring around us while thunder rumbled overhead.

But after several moments, I became painfully aware of something else. The warmth of his body's heat surrounded me completely beneath the cold rain.

And suddenly—Something strange rushed through me. A sharp wave of connection slammed into my chest so strongly that I sucked in a breath.

My heartbeat stumbled violently and I felt the stranger stiffened behind me too. The air between us shifted instantly.

Confused, I turned my head slightly and at the exact same moment, he looked down at me and our eyes locked.

Then the realization hit us both immediately.

Mate.