

Claimed By The Rival Alpha c 31-40

Kael

I paced outside the infirmary like a caged beast. The corridor was quiet except for the hurried footsteps of healers moving in and out of the room where Selena had been taken.

Every time the door opened, the scent of wolfsbane drifted into the hallway and made my wolf growl viciously inside me.

I hated that scent. I hated what it meant. I hated that she was lying in there because I had failed to protect her.

For the hundredth time, I stopped pacing and stared at the closed door. There was no news yet from the healer.

It has been silent for a long while... The kind of silence that slowly drove a man insane.

My fists clenched as the image of that Velmorian Alpha plunging a blade into Selena's body replayed in my mind over and over again.

The sound of my own scream followed it. The panic, the helplessness, and the too much blood she had lost.

A familiar presence approached from behind. "Alpha Kael."

I ignored Beta Bastien as my eyes remained fixed on the infirmary door. I was almost at the point of going crazy.

"Alpha Kael," he repeated more firmly.

"What?" I had almost yelled at him but had to refrain myself from asking a bit calmer.

His gaze swept across the corridor. Only then did I notice the servants gathered farther down the hallway.

The guards too, they were all watching, whispering and observing.

Beta Bastien lowered his voice. "They've been staring and watching you for a long time now."

I said nothing as he continued. "They're wondering why their Alpha has been standing outside the infirmary for nearly an hour because of a servant girl."

My jaw tightened. "Let them wonder. I obviously don't give a fuck about what they think."

"That is exactly what they are doing and this can't continue, Alpha Kael. The people can't find out she's your mate or that she's Alpha William's daughter. You have to stop pacing and leave this place."

My wolf wanted to stay and was even ready to tear down the infirmary door and sit beside Selena until she woke up.

But Beta Bastien was right. The more attention I attracted, the greater the risk. And if anyone discovered who Selena truly was... Everything would definitely fall apart.

Not only for me but for her because her life would be exposed to more risks.

Slowly, I forced myself to step away from the door as every step felt wrong.

Beta Bastien studied me carefully before saying, "You look very terrible."

"I feel worse." I couldn't help but pour it out. I'm not someone to let my emotions show but right now, I really can't help it.

For a moment, neither of us spoke, then Beta Bastien asked quietly, "What do you plan to do with the two remaining Alpha sons?"

The question extinguished every other emotion inside me that only rage remained.

I turned and muttered the only word I could. "Find out for yourself." With this, I headed for the dungeon.

The two surviving assassins were chained to opposite walls with their clothes stained with blood and Bruises covered their faces.

Yet both of them still managed to smirk when I entered and I hated them instantly. I hated them because they were still breathing and still had the effrontery to smirk at me. All I wanted was to wipe that smirk out of their faces.

The first assassin Alpha laughed. "Your little prisoner is still alive?"

Something inside me snapped as I crossed the room in three strides and my fist slammed into his face.

A sickening crack echoed through the dungeon as Blood exploded from his nose.

The second assassin Alpha started laughing and I turned on him, pulled my dagger from its sheath and made a deep cut open across his shoulder.

His laughter stopped and it was replaced by a loud scream instead.

Good. I wanted him to scream and not laugh like a maniac.

For several minutes, the dungeon echoed with impacts, growls, curses and pain as neither of the assassin Alphas was left untouched. I made sure to deal with both of them equally.

Then Beta Bastien grabbed my arm. "Enough, Alpha Kael."

I jerked his hand away from mine. "They stabbed her! They broke into my castle! They deserve worse than whatever I've done to them."

Beta Bastien stepped closer. "If you kill them, we lose our chance to learn anything."

I glared at him without saying anything.

"And if we execute the sons of three powerful Velmorian Alphas, we might find ourselves in the middle of a war."

I barked out a humorless laugh. "A war?" My eyes shifted toward the prisoners. "They already started one when they sent their sons into my castle as assassins."

Neither of the assassins responded.

I finally forced myself to calm down while breathing slowly and trying to think.

I crouched in front of the first Alpha. "Tell me something, How did you know she was here?"

"You attacked my castle and you failed because I hid her identity quite well."

My patience evaporated and I grabbed his jaw. "How did you know she's here?"

The Alpha merely smiled and that smile made me want to rip his throat out.

Before I could do something reckless, Beta Bastien spoke. "The scout."

I looked over. "What scout?"

"The one that returned from Nightbane." He said and for a second, I forgot what he was talking about.

Then I remembered the spy I had sent weeks ago and Beta Bastien had also informed me at my office earlier before the chaos.

Beta Bastien continued. "I informed you earlier that he arrived not long ago."

I stood up and said, "You should handle it."

Beta Bastien frowned. "Handle what?"

"The scout." I said and turned back toward the prisoners.

I wasn't finished with them. I'm not even close to being finished.

Hours later, they finally broke. The torture had stripped away most of their arrogance.

The first Alpha hung limply in his chains while The second could barely keep his eyes open.

I stood before them as they were covered in blood, looking exhausted and dangerously angry.

"Talk." I demanded again because I needed to know the truth.

The first Alpha laughed weakly. "You really want to know?"

I didn't say anything as I waited for him to continue.

"It was her! Your little princess."

My stomach tightens as I try to understand what he means.

The second Alpha chuckled painfully. "She came to us on her own free will."

The first Alpha smiled and said again, "She's a curious little thing."

Memories surfaced instantly with Selena sneaking around, ignoring instructions, asking questions and Investigating things herself.

The first Alpha continued. "Our fathers showed us paintings of her and we knew exactly what she looked like."

The second Alpha nodded. "When she visited our cell, we recognized her almost immediately."

Damn it! "Then what?" I almost screamed.

"We patiently waited trying to search for her by moving through the servant quarters. We checked room after room."

Their smiles widened. "And eventually found her."

I closed my eyes briefly. Of course she would do that. Of course she would walk directly into danger because she wanted to know everything!

The first Alpha laughed. "Your little princess prisoner doesn't respect your boundaries."

I nearly lunged for him but a voice interrupted me. "Alpha Kael." Beta Bastien called and I turned to discover he had returned.

Apparently finished dealing with the scout.

"What is it?" I asked with a deep frown plastered on my face.

Beta Bastien stepped forward. "The scout said—" His voice faded as something suddenly felt very wrong.

I stared blankly at him with different thoughts running through my mind.

My thoughts locked together then everything clicked. I had never told Beta Bastien about the mission.

The real scout had no reason to announce himself to castle guards due to my instructions to him.

No has no reason to announce himself to Beta Bastien, and definitely no reason for Beta Bastien to know he had arrived.

My eyes widened. "Beta Bastien."

He stopped speaking. "What Alpha?"

My wolf surged violently. "Where is he?" I demanded in a hurry.

"Who?"

"The scout!!!"

Beta Bastien frowned. "He's in Chamberlain's office." I was already moving out of the dungeon in a hurry.

I sprinted through the castle as different Guards jumped aside and servants flattened themselves against walls until the chamberlain's office came into view.

I burst through the door and found it empty. The scout wasn't there anymore.

Beta Bastien arrived seconds later and his expression darkened immediately. "He was here."

"He was never a scout. That's not the scout I sent out!"

Then realization crossed Bastien's face. "Damn."

I turned sharply. "The person you allowed inside this castle is an imposter."

Immediately, orders began flying as I pointed at nearby guards. "Double the security around the infirmary."

They ran off and I pointed at another group. "Quietly search every corridor, room and passage in this castle. No one leaves!"

They hurried away and within minutes, the castle was moving.

Beta Bastien returned after carrying out the first set of orders.

"What do you think his mission is?"

I folded my arms as several possibilities came to mind. "There are three possibilities that I can think of right now."

"What are they?" Beta Bastien asked.

"First, he came to confirm whether Selena is truly here. The second, he perhaps intends to kidnap her." That possibility alone made my wolf growl.

"And the third, " I looked toward the dark corridor ahead. "He came to steal pack secrets and carry them back to Alpha William."

Beta Bastien's expression hardened.

Neither option was acceptable so I turned toward Beta Bastien.

"Either way, no one enters." My gaze swept over the castle. "And no one leaves until he is discovered."

Claimed By The Rival Alpha

Selena.

The first thing I felt was pain.

Not the sharp kind that came and went, but a heavy, throbbing ache that settled deep inside my skull, making it feel like someone had struck my head against stone repeatedly.

My eyelids felt heavy as I forced them open, and for a moment, I didn't recognize the ceiling above me.

It wasn't my chamber. The air was different too. It smelled of herbs, and something bitter that immediately made my nose wrinkle.

I tried to move, but my body protested. Every muscle felt exhausted, and my throat was dry.

"She's awake." The unfamiliar voice startled me.

I turned my head slightly and saw two women standing beside the bed. They were dressed in healer robes, their faces calm but their eyes filled with concern.

"Where am I?" My voice came out weaker than I expected.

One of the healers stepped closer. "You are in the infirmary. Do not try to move too quickly."

The infirmary. The moment she said it, pieces of my memory began crashing back.

My eyes widened as I suddenly pushed myself up. "Sally."

The healer immediately placed a hand on my shoulder, stopping me from sitting fully. "You need to remain still."

"Where is Sally?" I asked, ignoring the pain.

They exchanged a glance, and that alone made my stomach twist. "What happened to her?" I demanded.

"She is being treated," the other healer finally answered. "Please calm down. The Alpha is handling everything."

The Alpha Kael. The mention of his name—though they didn't say it—made my chest tighten.

I closed my eyes and tried to remember everything. I remembered waking up and I remembered seeing him.

One of those men who had tried to kill me was standing inside my chamber like he belonged there.

I remembered screaming and Sally woke up trying to stop him. And then, he hurt her!

My fingers clenched against the blanket at the thought.

I remembered the sound of something hitting the floor. I remembered the fear in Marquee's voice. I remembered trying to fight, but the assassin was stronger, dragging me away like I weighed nothing.

The cold floor beneath me. The roughness of it scraped against my skin as they dragged me through the castle while they laughed.

"Do you really think your Alpha will save you?" one of them had mocked.

I remembered the sound of another laughing. "Maybe he will. After all, his little maid seems important enough."

I had hated how powerless I felt. I had fought and I had screamed but slowly, my body started giving up.

By the time they reached the throne room, I could barely feel my own limbs then Alpha Kael appeared.

The memory of him walking into that room remained clear. His face, his eyes, the anger and the fear.

I had never seen him look like that before. This was different and was personal.

Then I remembered the dagger having wolfbane on it. My breath caught as I remembered the exact moment.

The blade coming closer... the sharp pain and then blank out.

"Where is the Alpha?" I asked.

The healer suddenly became uncomfortable. "He is busy."

Busy? I almost laughed.

Alpha Kael had been the one who saved me. The one who risked everything to get to me. Yet here I was being told he was too busy.

Something was wrong. "Why are you acting like his name is forbidden?"

The healer looked away. "Focus on recovering."

I narrowed my eyes. So that was it? Alpha Kael had done something or perhaps everyone had finally started noticing what Sally noticed.

The way he protected me. The way he looked at me. The way he always seemed to appear whenever I was in danger.

Hours passed and I was given herbs to help with the pain, but my frustration only grew.

I hated lying there. I hated being treated like someone fragile.

Finally, I lost patience. "Does the Alpha know I'm awake? He would want to know."

The healer sighed. "We already informed him."

My heart jumped slightly before she continued. "But he is not coming."

I stared at her. "Why?"

She hesitated before saying, "Because you are a servant."

The words were sharper than they needed to be. I slowly turned toward her. "A servant?"

She looked almost annoyed. "You should understand your position. The Alpha has many responsibilities. Do not let your pride make you forget that."

My eyebrows lifted. "My pride?"

She crossed her arms. "Many people would be grateful for the attention you have received. But constantly demanding more will only bring trouble."

I stared at her. There was a time those words would have angered me immediately.

But now, all I could think about was how wrong she was. "Do you know why I am here?"

She remained silent as I continued. "Because someone broke into this castle and tried to kill me. Because your guards failed to stop them. Because the same Alpha you claim has no reason to care was the one who saved my life."

The healer looked away as I softened my voice. "I know what I am. I know my place. But don't mistake being a servant for being worthless."

She said nothing after that. Soon, Beta Bastian arrived. The moment he entered, I knew something was wrong.

He closed the door behind him and looked at the healers. "Leave us."

They obeyed immediately as I watched him carefully. "Where is Alpha Kael?"

His jaw tightened. "He wanted to come but he shouldn't."

I rolled my eyes. "Of course."

"Selena—"

"No." I said and looked away. I was tired of everyone deciding what I could and couldn't know.

Beta Bastian sighed. "I need answers."

I glanced at him. "About what?"

"The assassins."

I stiffened. "They're still alive?"

"Yes."

I looked surprised. "They attacked me, tried to kill me, and they're alive?"

His expression remained serious. "We need information."

I looked away. "What do you want to know?"

"What did you tell them when you visited the dungeon?"

My heart skipped. "I told them nothing."

Beta Bastian studied me. "Selena..."

"I told them nothing."

He didn't look convinced. "You were there."

"I was..." I hesitated.

Because I wanted answers. Because I thought I could handle it myself. Because apparently I had a talent for making terrible decisions.

"I was just curious but I didn't have the chance to talk to them that day because you pulled me away before I could."

Beta Bastian sighed and after a moment, he leaned back. "Fine. You are stubborn!"

"So I've been told." I said and a small flicker of amusement crossed his face before disappearing.

I looked toward the door and said. "I want to leave."

"You can't leave." He immediately disagreed.

"Why?" I try to know.

"There are things happening."

"What things?" I asked and he didn't answer.

Of course, another secret. Another situation where everyone knew something except me.
"Unbelievable."

"Selena—"

"No. I'm done." I cut him off immediately and he had to leave.

I waited until the healers were distracted and out of sight, and that's when I finally had the chance, I left the infirmary quietly.

The hallway was strangely too quiet. Usually, servants filled the castle but now there were only guards.

I moved carefully, barefoot against the cold floor. I stayed close to the wall, trying not to draw attention.

I didn't get far when a hand suddenly grabbed me and before I could react, another hand covered my mouth.

I struggled immediately but then I smelled him. Alpha Kael... and the anger disappeared.

He pulled me through a doorway, closing it behind us. I looked around and discovered it's his chamber.

I turned toward him. "Did you just kidnap me?"

His expression was unreadable. "Did you just sneak out of the infirmary?"

I folded my arms. "I was leaving."

"You were walking through a castle full of guards while injured."

"I was fine."

"You were attacked yesterday."

"And I survived."

His eyes darkened as that answer clearly annoyed him. I was about to continue arguing when I finally noticed his expression.

His eyes weren't angry. Instead, they were intense and then I noticed something else. The gown I was wearing.

The healers had given me a simple satin gown. It was thin and loose.

I noticed Alpha Kael's eyes were almost stripping the gown off my body.

The silence between us changed as the mate bond pulled. I hated how easily it affected me.

So instead of stepping away, I stepped closer to him in a sultry way. "Thank you for saving me."

His jaw tightened. "You were reckless."

I smiled faintly. "Yet you still saved me." I lifted my hand, tracing my fingers lightly over his arm and I felt his entire body tensed.

"You are capable of more than you pretend."

His breathing changed. "Move away."

I tilted my head. "Why should I move away?"

His eyes flashed as he said, "Because you know exactly what you're doing."

Maybe I did. Maybe I didn't. But for once, I didn't want to run.

"You saved me again," I whispered. "I think I should be allowed to thank you."

"That is not gratitude."

"Then what is it?" He didn't answer. Instead, he stepped closer and the space between us disappeared.

A second later, my back met the wall. Alpha Kael trapped me between his arms, his eyes glowing with restrained emotion.

"Selena." His voice was a warning but I could hear the struggle beneath it.

The same struggle I was feeling... the impossible connection we kept denying.

I looked into his eyes and instead of stepping away, I challenged him.

"I dare you to 'do it'."

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Kael.

For a moment, everything else disappeared. The castle, the threat hiding somewhere within its walls, the unanswered questions surrounding Selena.

All of it faded into the background as I stared into her eyes. It would have been so easy.

The bond between us was not subtle. It pulled at every part of me, demanding that I close the distance, that I stop fighting something that felt inevitable.

My wolf wanted one thing. Her!

The need to claim her burned beneath my skin, stronger than any command I could give myself.

Just one movement. I felt the urge to just give her a kiss and if I dare to, there would be no going back.

I knew that the moment I crossed that line, everything I had spent years building would collapse.

The order in my pack, the trust of my people, the careful distance I had maintained between myself and the daughter of my greatest rival.

Selena was not just a woman standing in front of me. She was Alpha William's daughter.

The same Alpha I had cursed the last time I saw him. The same man who had the power and influence to challenge the vampires but chose to bow instead.

A man who allowed his own daughter to become a sacrifice for a system that had oppressed our people for generations.

And yet... I was standing here, wanting her. Wanting to protect her and wanting to claim her.

The irony almost made me laugh. A part of me hated Alpha William for planning to sell her.

Most of the time, I buried that thought because it complicated everything.

Because if I admitted that I hated him for what he was doing to Selena, then I had to admit that I cared about her and caring about her was dangerous.

My mind told me to remember who she was. My wolf told me I already knew.

Maybe it wouldn't be chaos if I claimed her. Maybe it would fix everything. Maybe it would finally give me a reason to stop pretending that the bond between us did not exist.

My thoughts were interrupted when Selena suddenly slipped away from me.

The loss of her warmth was immediate and strangely disappointing.

I hated that I noticed. I hated even more that for a brief second, I felt rejected. A feeling I quickly pushed away.

She looked amused. "Did you lose your guard, Alpha?"

I stared at her while she had the audacity to smile. "You almost forgot our agreement."

I cleared my throat. "I did not forget."

Her eyebrow lifted. "You looked like you were about to."

I turned away, pretending to focus on anything else in the room. The fact that my face felt warmer irritated me.

I was an Alpha. I did not get embarrassed yet somehow, Selena had managed to make it happen twice in one day.

"You talk too much," I muttered.

She laughed softly. "And you avoid admitting when you're wrong."

I ignored that. Instead, I noticed the question forming in her eyes as she looked around my chamber.

"Why is the castle so quiet?" She suddenly asked.

I looked at her before saying. "The servants are restricted from moving around freely because of an imposter"

Her expression immediately changed. "So an imposter is still inside?"

"Possibly."

"And you don't know who?"

"We don't yet but we are searching for him."

Concern crossed her face. "Alpha Kael—"

"I will find him." The confidence in my voice made her relax slightly.

"You really think he won't get to me?" She asked while having the look of fear.

I looked directly at her. "No one gets to you." The words came out before I could stop them.

A strange silence followed and I looked away first because I suddenly felt the urge to just pin her against the wall and do crazy things to her.

Instead of commenting, she shifted her attention. "Your father's painting."

I frowned. "What about it?"

She studied me. "You loved him?"

The question was simple but the answer wasn't. "I can't really say that."

Her eyes narrowed. "Then why keep his painting?"

I remained silent because explaining it was difficult. Because it sounded foolish. Because the truth was something I rarely admitted.

"It was painted after a rebellion." Selena waited as I continued. "The man who painted it was the son of a rebel werewolf. My father conquered his pack."

I looked at the painting. "He made him use his own blood to create the paint."

Horror filled her face. "That is cruel."

I looked at her. "You sound surprised."

"Because it is."

A small smile touched my lips. "You expected my father to be kind?"

"Not really." She looked back toward the painting. "I just didn't expect something so horrible."

I shrugged. "My father was not a gentle man."

The silence returned then she asked the question I expected. "Why don't you have a painting of your mother?"

I looked at her. "My mother was different." A small smile appeared on my face. "She was charming. Loving. Everything my father wasn't."

"Then why keep his painting and not hers?" She suddenly asked and that question stopped me.

I had asked myself the same thing countless times. "I don't know." It was the truth.

I walked closer to the painting. "When I look at him before making an important decision, I remember everything he told me I would never become."

Selena listened carefully. "And?"

"And I remember that I proved him wrong."

Her expression softened. "That is actually..." She paused. "Strangely charming."

I looked at her. "Charming?"

She shrugged. "In a strange way."

I shook my head. Only Selena could describe something connected to my father's cruelty as charming.

Then she suddenly changed the subject. "The imposter."

I looked at her. "What about him?"

"If you want to catch him, you need to stop searching."

I frowned. "Explain what you mean."

She walked around the room as she spoke. "If he knows you are aware of him, he will hide."

I quietly listened. "But if everyone continues acting normally, he will think he has succeeded."

Her eyes met mine. "And he will become careless."

Unfortunately, she was right but I couldn't just give in so I crossed my arms and asked. "And allow him to move freely around my castle?"

"Your guards will be watching." I went silent without saying anything.

"Am I wrong?" She asked.

No she wasn't but I won't admit it.

I immediately mindlinked Beta Bastien. 'Allow the servants to return to their duties.'

There was a pause then his confused response came. 'Are you sure?'

'Yes.' I said and ended the connection.

Selena smiled slightly. "You obviously listened to me."

"Do not get used to it." I said, almost rolling my eyes.

She laughed and the sound was unexpectedly pleasant. Then she looked down at herself. "I need clothes to change."

I looked at her as the infirmary gown was not suitable. Especially not when my wolf was already struggling.

I opened my wardrobe and removed one of my robes.

She looked amused. "You are giving me your clothes?"

"It is temporary."

She reluctantly put it on. The robe was oversized on her, falling around her body and somehow that made it worse because it actually looks good on her.

My wolf reacted immediately and I forced myself to look away.

"Are you alright?" She asked, staring into my face.

"I am fine."

She smiled. "You don't look fine."

I ignored her. Instead, I poured two cups of ale. "Tell me about yourself."

She looked surprised. "Why?"

"Because I know very little about you."

She accepted the cup. "Before that..." She hesitated. "My roommate Sally, I need to know that she's alright."

I immediately mindlinked the head healer. A few moments later, I answered after getting a reply. "She is currently sleeping. She will recover."

Relief crossed Selena's face. Only then did she relax.

We sat at my desk. For the first time, there was no argument between us.

She told me about her childhood. About her mother dying during childbirth. About growing up with her father but when she spoke about Alpha William, her voice changed.

She became quieter. I could feel the distance between them. The disappointment and the fact that the vampire situation had destroyed something between them.

I listened then she asked. "What do you think about it?"

"About what?"

"The vampire's oppression." She said and I already knew what she meant.

I looked down as the truth was simple. I hated it more than she knew. I wanted freedom for our people. For all of them, but I couldn't tell her that.

Not when I knew what hope could do. Hope could make people reckless. Hope could make someone like Selena believe she could change centuries of cruelty alone.

So I gave her the answer I thought would keep her grounded. "It is the way things have always been."

Her face changed as I continued. "If we were stronger than them, would we not have done the same?"

The silence that followed was heavy. I knew she was disappointed in me. I could feel it and strangely, that bothered me.

Before I could say anything else, I received a mindlink from Beta Bastien.

'Alpha Kael.' His voice was urgent. 'The real scout has arrived.'

I straightened before asking. 'What happened?'

A pause then his voice lowered. 'He is injured.'

My grip tightened around the cup as I asked, 'How badly?'

'He keeps repeating one word.' Beta Bastien says.

I stood up immediately as I asked, "What word?"

Beta Bastien's voice came through almost immediately. "Vampire!"

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Kael

The warriors' infirmary near my quarters had never felt this suffocating before.

I stood beside the scout's bed, watching the rise and fall of his chest while the healers moved around him quietly. The man was alive, but barely.

His body carried the marks of whatever he had encountered during his mission, and the single word he had repeated before losing consciousness continued to echo in my mind.

Vampire. I have heard many things in my lifetime.

I had heard threats from rival Alphas, desperate pleas from weaker packs, and whispers of war spreading across the realm.

But that one word unsettled me more than anything else because it connected everything.

The assassins, Selena's disappearance, the sudden interest of the Velmorian Alphas and now vampires is being mentioned by the scout.

"What else did he say?" I asked, wanting to know if there's anything I needed to be prepared for than this.

Beta Bastian stood beside me, his eyes fixed on the scout. "He didn't mention anything else aside from that. So there's nothing."

I looked at him with a creased brow. "Nothing at all?"

He shook his head. "When he arrived at the gates, he was already injured. The guards tried questioning him, but the only thing he kept muttering was that word."

My jaw tightened as I mentioned the word before he could. "Vampire."

"Yes." He said and I turned back to the scout watching as the healers had managed to stabilize him, but until he woke up, we were left with pieces of information that created more questions than answers.

I need him to wake up and let me know what he meant by Vampires and that way, I'll be able to prepare instead of getting caught off guard.

"Has anyone else been informed about this?" I asked.

"Not yet."

"Good." I muttered and looked at the healers.

"His presence here remains confidential. No one outside this room needs to know he returned." I ordered and they immediately bowed.

"Yes, Alpha." He said simultaneously and after they moved away, I faced Beta Bastian.

"The imposter is still missing." I said with a frown plastered on my face.

His expression darkened as he muttered. "Yes."

That alone was unacceptable. Someone had entered my castle. Someone had deceived my guards. Someone had gotten close enough to Selena to attack her and I still didn't know who they were.

My hands tightened into fists. "I hate the fact that motherfucker is still roaming around my castle freely. The thought alone hicks me so much."

Beta Bastian looked at me. "We would definitely get hold of him sooner or later."

"Yes, we will but it's not funny." I said with a scoff.

Beta Bastian hesitated then suddenly asked. "Where is Selena?"

I paused for a moment before answering. "She's in my chamber."

His eyebrows lifted slightly in shock. "She's in your chamber?"

"Yes, I know she would be safer in my chamber than she is in the maid chambers."

Beta Bastian was silent for a moment then he let out a loud sigh. "Alpha Kael."

I already knew that tone. I've known Beta Bastien for far too long to know when he wasn't in support of something I did or said. "What?" I reluctantly answered him.

"Is that really a good idea?" He asked, staring intently at me that it almost felt like he was the Alpha instead of myself.

Beta Bastian looked away briefly before continuing. "You know what happens if the bond takes over."

My jaw tightened. "I know."

"You won't want to hide her anymore from everyone in the castle."

I didn't answer because he was right. The mate bond was already becoming harder to ignore.

Every time I was near Selena, every time I saw her, every time I heard her voice, it became harder to remember that she was the daughter of the man I hated.

I finally looked at him and with a shrug, I answered. "She is protected there in my chamber."

"That isn't what I'm asking." Beta Bastien suddenly said and the silence between us stretched.

Beta Bastian stepped closer to me and continued in a low voice so others won't hear, "You're keeping your mate alone in your chamber."

My expression hardened as I was fed up of being lectured. "Nothing will happen so stop saying such words. Also, I can control myself around her so drop it."

He studied me for a moment and reluctantly said. "I hope so."

I ignored the meaning behind his words because I knew. I knew exactly what he was warning me about.

The mate bond was the one thing I had spent days trying to control. The one thing that became harder every time Selena looked at me still, I won't have to let it out to Beta Bastien. It's my own secret.

I walked away before he could say anything else.

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When I returned to my chamber, I found Selena exactly where I had left her.

She was sitting quietly, but the moment she saw me, her expression changed. "You're back."

Her voice was softer than I expected but I ignored the reaction it caused in me because I needed to focus. "You need to return to your chamber."

Her eyebrows immediately pulled together. "Why are you saying this?"

"You should just leave and return to the maid chamber."

She stared at me. "Why are you doing this?"

"Because it is safer there." I said making sure I didn't meet her eyes. I didn't want to be mesmerized by the mate bond.

Her expression changed from confusion to irritation. "I'm already in your chamber because you said it was safer."

"And now I'm telling you to leave." The sudden coldness in my voice surprised even me.

Her eyes narrowed. "Alpha Kael..."

I looked away because the longer I stayed near her, the harder it became. "You need to trust me and just leave."

She looked like she wanted to argue.

"I don't understand what changed." She suddenly said and I almost rolled my eyes.

Nothing changed. Everything changed but I couldn't explain that. "I assure you that you will be protected at the maid chambers. No harm will come to you."

She stared at me for a moment before finally standing. I could see the disappointment in her face and I hated that I caused it.

I felt the urge to stop her but I had no choice but to let her go.

When she left, my wolf immediately protested. Why did you send her away?

I ignored it because keeping her close was dangerous.

Not because I didn't want her there because I did and I might truthfully end up marking her as mine which was a dangerous step to take.

A short while later, I received the mindlink that the scout is awake.

I immediately headed back to the infirmary and The moment I entered, the now conscious scout tried to sit up.

"Don't move," I quickly ordered and he lowered himself again.

His face was pale, but his eyes were clear. "What happened?" I asked.

He swallowed. "Alpha..."

"You can talk to me. What happened?" I question impatiently.

He looked at Beta Bastian, then back at me. "I reached Nightbane territory."

"And what happened?"

"I was leaving when I saw them."

"Who did you see?" I was almost running out of patience. I hated being left in suspense.

His answer came quietly. "I saw the Vampires."

My expression changed as I quickly said. "Explain well."

"They were at the border gates."

Beta Bastian stepped closer. "Vampires inside Nightbane territory?"

The scout nodded as he continued. "They were fighting with Nightbane warriors."

I felt my stomach tighten. "Why?"

The scout hesitated. "They were obviously looking for something."

I already knew. "They are searching for the Alpha Williams daughter, right?"

His eyes widened slightly. "Yes." The room became silent. "They kept mentioning Alpha William's daughter."

My fists clenched.

"They said she was a special demand and they even had to kill Alpha William Beta as a warning for him to get them his daughter."

My memory flashed to Selena telling me her father had promised her to vampires since birth which means, she really did mean a lot to them.

The answer had been in front of me.

Immediately, an alarm sounded and everyone turned.

A guard rushed inside. "Alpha!"

I faced him quickly. "What?"

"The imposter has been discovered near the maids' quarters."

"Capture him quickly ."I didn't wait as I made the order. "Do not allow him to hurt anyone."

The guard bowed and moved as I followed but before I reached my chamber, a mindlink came.

"Alpha, We lost him."

My blood ran cold. "What do you mean?"

"He escaped."

My wolf roared as I changed direction immediately heading to the maids' quarters.

I knew I was risking everything by showing up there. I knew people would notice but I didn't care. Not when Selena was involved.

When I reached the quarters, servants scattered immediately.

No one spoke as I pushed through the crowd and straight to Selena's room.

The door was open so I stepped inside and the room was empty.

Selena wasn't there.

Claimed By The Rival Alpha

Alpha William

I stood outside Tobias' chamber, unable to bring myself to walk inside.

The guards lining the hallway lowered their heads as I passed, none of them daring to speak. They knew what had happened. Everyone in the castle knew.

The air itself felt heavy with grief.

From behind the closed doors came the sound of my Beta's family breaking apart.

His wife's cries and his daughter's screams. Inside that room was a family mourning the loss of a husband and a father.

The kind of pain that no words could properly describe. The kind of pain that no warrior, no matter how strong, could fight against.

And for the first time in a long time, I found myself standing outside a room, uncertain of what I was supposed to do.

I was Alpha. I had led battles. I had made decisions that determined the lives of hundreds. I had watched warriors die in front of me and remained standing because that was what an Alpha did.

But this... This felt different because Tobias wasn't just my Beta. He was my friend.

My mind drifted back years ago, back to when we were younger, before the responsibilities, before the title, before the weight of ruling a pack changed everything.

We were barely in our late teens when the rogue war happened.

A group of ruthless rogues had moved from territory to territory, destroying packs and leaving nothing but blood behind them. They were stronger than most expected, organized in a way that frightened even experienced warriors.

When they came for our pack, many believed we wouldn't survive. I was young. Way too young.

I had confidence, but confidence was not the same as wisdom. Tobias was the one who stood beside me.

His family had provided warriors, supplies, and strategies that helped turn the battle in our favor.

Without him, without his family, I knew the outcome would have been different.

After that war, I gained more than victory. I gained a brother and I made Tobias my Beta because he had earned it.

Not because of his family, not because of politics but because he was loyal. Because he was someone I trusted with my life and for years, he proved me right.

Even when my decisions became unpopular, even when the pack questioned my choices, even when whispers spread about my relationship with the vampires and the rules they forced upon us.

Tobias never once turned against me. He never questioned my decisions. He never tried to take my position. He never gathered people behind my back to rebel against me or harm me in any way.

He simply stood beside me and now... A vampire had taken his life.

Not in battle, not because he betrayed anyone and not because he threatened them.

He died because High Acolyte Varek wanted to pass out punishment on me because my failure to deliver Selena had become an inconvenience to them.

They wanted to make a scene that would remind me of the consequences of not bringing my daughter to them as promised.

My fingers curled into fists as the doors opened suddenly and Rosalind stepped out.

Her face was swollen from crying, her hair messy, her entire body carrying the weight of losing the man she loved.

For a moment, I saw only Tobias' wife. The woman who had stood beside him for years but the moment she saw me, her expression changed.

Pain turned into anger and hatred. "You!!!" Her voice was barely above a whisper, but the accusation behind it was clear.

I looked at her. "Rosalind..."

"Don't." She shook her head. "Do not say my name or my husband's name out of that mouth of yours."

My jaw tightened. "I know this is difficult. I'm just here to sympathize with your family."

She let out a broken, bitter sound of laughter. "Difficult?"

Her eyes filled with tears again. "You stand there and call this difficult?"

She pointed toward the room where the husband laid on the floor. "My husband is dead."

Silence filled the hallway as she continued. "He was your friend."

The words struck harder than I wanted them to. "And he trusted you."

I looked away. "I know that."

"No, you don't." Her voice rose. "If you knew, he would still be alive and not dead."

The guards shifted nervously as she kept yelling at me and pouring her frustration. I could feel their attention but I ignored them.

"Watch your words, Rosalind."

She stared at me. "Why should I?" Her voice trembled. "Because you're Alpha?"

She stepped closer. "Because everyone has to bow their heads and pretend you're always right?"

Something inside me snapped and before I could stop myself, my claws extended and my hand wrapped around her throat.

The hallway became so silent that even the guards looked shocked.

I leaned closer to her "Be careful how you speak to me." My voice was low. "I have lost enough today and I'm still your Alpha!!!"

Rosalind looked at me without fear. Instead, there was only anger. "Then take my life too."

My eyes narrowed more in anger as she continued. "You already took my husband." Her tears fell. "So finish it."

For a moment, I saw Tobias. His smile and his loyalty then his voice telling me I was wrong whenever I needed to hear it.

My grip tightened more when she screamed into my face again. "Do your worst Willam! You lost a Beta. I lost my husband. "

Rosalind coughed as I released her then I flung her roughly into the ground and her daughter Isadora rushed out of the house with a swollen face.

"Please let my mother go. She's in pain already from losing my dad."

"You think killing me will fix anything?" Rosalind looked away. "No." Her voice cracked. "Nothing fixes this."

I turned and walked away in disgust. I couldn't stand there anymore.

—

My office was quiet as I sat behind my desk, staring at nothing.

High Acolyte Varek's words echoed in my mind. He had given us warning before hurting my Beta.

He had given us one moon to retrieve my daughter or suffer the consequences.

He did not care about my excuses. He did not care that Selena had disappeared.

To him, I was a failure. I had tried explaining. I told him Selena had been stolen from me and that someone had taken her away before I could deliver her but vampires did not care about explanations.

They cared about results and because I failed, Tobias paid the price.

My hands tightened.

I had bowed. I had promised because that was how things worked.

The vampire system existed for a reason. Some people called it oppression, others called it cruelty but I saw it in a different light.

Power needed control. Without rules, without someone stronger maintaining order, what would happen? Werewolves were powerful, dangerous and driven by instinct.

If nothing controlled us, we would destroy ourselves. We would become nothing but beasts and that was why the vampires had their place.

That was why their laws existed. At least, that was what I reminded myself because accepting anything else meant admitting that maybe everything I had sacrificed had been for nothing.

A knock interrupted my thoughts. "Enter."

Garrick, the warriors captain, walked inside and bowed. "Alpha."

I looked at him. "Explain what happened at the border."

His expression tightened as he started. "The vampires entered our territory without permission and they refused to leave."

"So your warriors attacked?" I asked. His silence answered enough and my anger grew. "Do you understand what you have caused?"

"Alpha, they were threatening—"

I moved speedily from my seat as my claws cut across his face before he could finish.

He fell back, blood running down his cheek. "You allowed a conflict with vampires."

Garrick lowered his head. "I apologize, Alpha."

"No." My voice hardened. "An apology does not fix weakness."

His eyes lowered. "You will execute three warriors as a warning to the other warriors."

I stared at him. "The pack needs to remember the consequences of acting without thinking."

He swallowed. "Yes, Alpha."

"Also prepare a group of scouts to go search for my daughter."

"Okay, Alpha." He bowed and made his way out.

Later, I remained alone and the silence was unbearable. My eyes moved toward the painting on the wall.

A younger version of myself stared back and beside me was Selena, my daughter.

Before everything changed. Before expectations. Before the vampires and Before I convinced myself that sacrificing her was necessary.

I walked closer to the picture, for a moment... A small voice inside me questioned everything.

Was I truly protecting her? Or was I sending her into danger?

The thought disturbed me because deep down, I knew Selena was not just a payment. She was my child.

But I pushed the thought away. The vampire way was the only way and It had to be.

Without it, everything would fall apart. The werewolf race would lose control and we would become savages.

I closed my eyes. I only had one hope that High Acolyte Varek would branch to Blackbourne pack before returning home.

At least then, I would have less to deal with when it came to Alpha Kael.

A knock sounded and I turned around as a scout stood at the doorway. "Alpha, the scouting group is ready." He bowed. "They await your order."

I looked once more at the painting then I faced him.

"Find my daughter or die trying."

Claimed By The Rival Alpha

Serene's Pov

I pace around the hallway, anger twisting me on the insides. I stayed at the front of her room all through the night and I heard everything that was going on.

I wanted to mock her, tease her, make her see reasons why I am the queen of this pack but Lucian lost control.

Ever since I was here, this has never happened. I couldn't explain exactly why it happened. My mind links it to the mysterious curse I've always been hearing was inflicted on him but he has never tried to leave the palace.

I tried to ask Damien, Rowan and Kai. They all turned me down telling me that Lucian was going to be fine and needed rest. I stood in front of the door to assess him myself.

Whenever they decide to open this door and come out, I will scan him with my eyes. Only then would I be able to put my heart at peace.

And as for that stupid omega wolf that cannot even transfer, today is the day I end her. I have had more than enough of her interceding in my plans.

They were all supposed to go smoothly, they were all going smoothly, not until she came along. I have to end her. She is not important. They can always buy any other breeder in any other place.

"Serene." Kai calls out my name. Locking the door immediately he steps out. He locks the door so fast, I can't even peek at what's happening.

"Kai, what's going on? That scream was really eerie. Is he going to be alright? What's going on with him?" I soften my gaze so I can deceive him.

"He's fine and he's going to be alright. Nothing is going on with him. You can go to bed and have a good rest. You've been up all night. He asked me to come and pass this message to you." He shields the bolt of the door with his shoulders almost like he's aware of what I'm trying to do.

"Ok. Just in case you guys are having trouble with finding a doctor. I have one I can let you guys use." Since they were not going to let me find out through them what exactly is going on. I am going to find out through someone else.

"He's fine." His jaw tightens and his eyes become even darker.

I know this is a sign not to push my luck and I simply leave. Now that they were all gathered in one room and that Mira of a girl has no guards. This would be the best time to end her. Before she begins her Luna training and succeeds in my place.

I stroll gently to her place, the desire for revenge heavy on my heart. I really wanted to give her a gruesome painful torturous death but the brothers were around. I need to end her before they raise an alarm or something.

I twist her doorknob and for some reason, it's shut. That is so unlike her. I release my hands from the doorknob. I lift my legs to smash the door when I remember this should be as quiet as possible.

"Knock. Knock." I knock on her door gently like any of the brothers would.

"Who?" Her voice is cracked like she has been crying all night. It serves her right. If I was not about to kill her, I would have reminded her to stay in her place with this lesson.

I grit my teeth in silence. There's no way I would take my sweet angelic voice to reply to that omega wolf.

"Knock. Knock." I knock again after I stand there in silence.

"Lucian, Rowan, Kai and Damien. I don't know if it's one of you or all of you but since the training has been canceled for today, just let me stay here and wallow in silence please."

I dig my feet into the ground. I have to kill her before the training. After all, what if she succeeds in enchanting the rest of the members of the pack. Then I will have no place in this clan again. I can't let it happen. I have to end it now.

"Please open the door. I want to have a woman-to -woman talk with you." After racking my brain on how to get her to open this door. This is the only thing I can come up with.

"Serene?"

"Yes Mira, it's me. Can we talk please?" My insides twist in agony when I say please to her, such a worthless wolf.

"Uhm okay."

I hear her feet shuffle and she finally clicks the door open.

"Can I?" I try to step in.

"What do you want, Serene?" She stands between the doors just like Kai did earlier.

"I just want to have a heartfelt conversation. You do not have to be guarded around me. I know I have wronged you severally, I have harassed beyond words can ever mention but I have given this a deep thought and I am here to talk to you." I stare at my feet so she does not notice the hatred in my eyes.

"Sorry, why exactly are you giving it a deep thought now of the times you have known me, Serene. Shouldn't it have been the first thing you did? Why now?" She tries to stare behind me to see if anyone is at my back.

"The brothers did not send me to come talk to you Mira. I know you will find it hard to believe but that's really the truth. Can I come in now?"

"No Serene. Since it's just a conversation, we can have it anywhere including the place you are standing right now. You don't have to come into my room."

"I have given you too much respect for one day alone. You now seem to have forgotten your place." I push her and I get inside. I lock the door immediately because I am going to end it today.

—

"Did you think for any reason that at any day in time, I will stoop so low to your level that I, Queen Serene with the capacity to balance the four Alphas would condescend down to the level of a human like me. Today is the day you die, even your useless mates would not be able to save you from me and my plans today." She bolts the door and she turns back.

"I, I; I didn't do anything to you Serene. Let me go." I move backward fully aware there is no escape at all in this room.

"Oh, you didn't? Who has me fighting for attention with the same men that you used to love and dote on me? You! Who has all of my plans changing and crashing every fucking time? You! Who took away the men that warmed my bed and hugged me in their arms? You, this bloody weak pathetic omega! You! You took everything, every fucking thing, I will not keep allowing you to ruin my agenda. You have to die, I'm sorry, ha! I'm not." She throws her hands and her claws extend.

"I know you have never had the beauty of seeing a woman's claws. All thanks to your late mom. I'm sure she killed herself because she could not stand a daughter like you. If I had a child like you, I would not just commit suicide. I will make sure to sell my intestines to the rogue wolves!" She drags her claws on the wall, staining my room.

"Do not involve my late mother into this Serene. This is all your fault! If you had given them pups, I would not be here with the same set of people I should be plotting to kill. I wouldn't have lost my

first night to four men in one day! You blame me like I am the only mistake. You gave me this space. If you didn't, I wouldn't be here! Accept responsibility and let things be." I am seething with rage.

Never for once, have I despised not being able to transform, gradually but slowly, I got accustomed to it but today, I wished I could transform, I would plunge my claws deep into her throat.

"You dare! To refute my words, petty omega." She stares at her claws and walks to me.

"Maybe, just maybe I should keep you alive but with a little scar, one big enough for the brothers to question if they still love you. What do you think?" My heart beats faster in my chest. What is she up to? The devilish look in my eyes tells me she is not up to any good.

"I'm giving you the chance to talk bastard!" She grabs me with her hands. I struggle to breathe, I slap her hand severally trying to get a hold of myself. I close my eyes, fold my feet and I kick her with everything in me.

"You dare to rebel, little pup? It seems you do not understand. Your Alphas are not coming to save you, they will never be. By the time they are here, you would have long been dead. That I would make sure of and do not even dare to exclaim. If you try to do anything funny, I will end your life in one swift go." She slashed her claws against my clothes. They rip apart in one wipe.

"Amazed, aren't you? You should be. That is why I am the queen and you are nothing but just a breeder. They can always get another breeder after I kill you. Thousands of female werewolves would be willing to throw themselves at them in your replacement, don't you think?" She pokes me with her claws.

"Let me go." Tears mixed with snot flow into my mouth. I should never have never been pulled into this.

"I will only let you go on one condition. Weak human. I will let you live if you promise to evacuate this clan, this kingdom. I have no idea how you intend to leave and how you are going to cope. To be sincere, it's really not my problem. The only thing is you have to leave." She sits on my bed and she rips it apart.

"I, I have nowhere to go." I lower my head in shame. If my mother was alive, I would have definitely known people in the human world. But I never got to see her.

"Is that so? I have a place to send you then? It's quite accommodating. It has housed countless numbers of souls from time and its memorial." She stands up from my ripped bed. Hatred evident in her eyes.

"Since you have decided not to leave me alone. There is only one option, I have to send you to a place where your activities and pictures would only remain." She pulls me by my hair, pain shoots up to my brain.

"Serene!" Hot tears sting my eyes and they roll down. If only my father did not sell me to this horrible family, I would never be a part of this.

"Are you ready to leave now Mira or are you going to wait till I send you to the land of no return. I do not mind accomplishing that for you as well." She pulls my hair even tighter.

"I already told you before, I have nowhere else to go. Not even my clan would accept me themselves. Please just let me be."

"You are really unfortunate and pathetic. Not to worry, I will send you to your mother and put an end to your misery." She finally lets go of my hair.

"It's time you die!" She grabs my neck and lifts me up, this time with even more force than before. I do not bother struggling trying to breathe. She overpowers me, there's no use. That kick won't work again. I visualize my clan and father.

"I'm sorry."

I close my eyes and I resign to my fate.

"Serene!"

Claimed By The Rival Alpha

Selena

The battlement was higher than I had expected. Standing there, with the cold wind brushing against my face, I could see almost everything.

The entire Blackbourne castle compound stretched beneath me like a world of its own. The tall stone walls surrounded the castle like a protective barrier, guards moved around the grounds in organized patterns, and beyond the walls was the city that belonged to Alpha Kael's pack.

It was enormous.

I had heard about powerful packs before. I had heard servants whisper about the strength of Blackbourne, about how Alpha Kael was one of the youngest Alphas to gain such influence, but seeing it from above was different.

This was not just a castle... It was a kingdom.

I stood near the edge of the wall, looking down at the castle grounds and the city beyond it.

From that height, everything looked smaller. The people, the buildings and even the problems that had been chasing me for weeks.

For a moment, I could almost pretend I wasn't Selena Vale. I could pretend I was just someone looking at a beautiful view.

But then reality always found its way back.

"You're quiet." I turned at the sound of Alpha Kael's voice.

He stood beside me, his dark clothes blending with the stone walls, his expression unreadable as usual. Somehow, even when he was doing nothing, he carried the presence of someone who was always in control.

He exudes the aura of a true Alpha. I almost found myself staring intently at him but I had to tear my eyes away before disgracing myself.

"I'm just looking," I admitted after getting hold of my emotions.

His eyes followed mine toward the city. "Blackbourne is bigger than most packs," he said as though knowing my thoughts.

I looked at him before asking, "Most?"

A small smirk tugged at his lips. "There are still packs older than mine. Packs with more history."

I looked back at the view. "It still feels impossible that someone could just walk into this place."

The moment I said it, his expression changed slightly. He knew exactly what I was talking about.

"The imposter!" He said through gritted teeth.

I sighed as I started speaking. "He got into the servants' quarters."

Alpha Kael's jaw tightened as I continued. "He took a cloak I cherish."

I looked down at my hands before adding, "My father's cloak."

The words felt heavier than they should have. I still remembered the moment clearly.

I had woken up from the nightmare, confused and terrified, only to find someone standing over me. At first, I thought it was one of the assassins returning. I thought I was going to be dragged away.

But the imposter wasn't there to take me. He was there for something else.

"He looked at me," I whispered. "He asked if I was Selena Vale."

Alpha Kael's eyes immediately snapped to mine. "Did you give him an answer?"

I shook my head. "No. I didn't have to give him any confirmation." My fingers curled around the edge of my dress. "He already knew who I was."

The thought made my stomach twist as I continued. "He didn't try to fight me. He didn't try to carry me away or make any noise. All he did was just take the cloak and leave."

Alpha Kael remained silent.

"I think he only wanted proof," I continued. "Proof that I was here in your castle."

The fear I had been trying to ignore finally surfaced. "If my father knows..."

Alpha Kael looked at me. "He might know that."

I swallowed. "You don't understand. If Alpha William finds out I'm here..."

I stopped as I didn't need to finish.

Alpha Kael understood my fear. "He won't get to you." His voice was calm. Way too calm for his personality.

Like he was stating a fact.

I looked at him before asking, "How can you be so sure? My father can be so unpredictable and could attack when we least expect it."

"Because I won't allow it. I won't allow him to lay his hands on you."

The confidence in his words almost irritated me. "Alpha Kael, this isn't some simple disagreement between packs."

"I know."

"My father will definitely come if he knows I'm here."

"I know." Alpha Kael said with so much confidence that I almost rolled my eyes.

"And what if he comes with an army?"

His expression hardened. "Then he should come with as many troops as he wishes."

My breath caught. "You'd really fight him?"

He didn't answer immediately. Instead, he stared at me then quietly said, "I sent trackers after the imposter. Before he gets to your father, he will be caught "

"And if they don't find him?" I couldn't help but ask.

For the first time, I saw hesitation appear on his face. It was small and barely noticeable but I saw it.

"If they don't," he said slowly, "I will prepare for whatever war that is coming."

My heart stopped. "For me?" I asked.

His eyes met mine and the silence between us stretched. Then he answered. "Yes."

Something about hearing it from him made my chest tighten. Not because I wanted war. Not because I wanted anyone risking their lives.

But because Alpha Kael, the same man who constantly reminded me that I was just a servant in his pack, was willing to stand against an entire pack because of me.

He turned away first. "Come."

I followed him back inside without another word.

—

When I returned to my chamber, Marquee almost knocked me over with the force of her hug.
"You're alive!"

I laughed softly despite myself. "Marquee..."

"I thought something happened again." She pulled away, examining me. "You keep disappearing and somehow returning with more trouble."

I opened my mouth to respond but before I could, the door opened and Sally walked in with a healer behind her.

My expression changed immediately. Sally looked better than before, but she was still pale.

"You're awake," she muttered.

I stared at her. "You were injured because of me."

She rolled her eyes. "Don't start."

The healer moved toward her. "She still needs treatment."

I watched as Sally sat down as the healer examined her wounds, and I frowned.

"How long will she take to heal?"

The healer looked at me. "She has no wolf."

I froze for a second, and forgot to hide my reaction. No wolf? But I quickly looked away so as not to look suspicious.

"That's why her wounds are healing slower," the healer explained.

Sally sighed. "Don't look at me like that."

I looked back at her. "Like what?"

"Like I'm some fragile thing."

Despite everything, I smiled. "You almost died protecting me."

"And I regret it." She said and I raised a brow as she pointed at me. "If you had died, I would have been furious."

"Why would you be furious?"

"Yes. Because then I would have risked my life for nothing." Sally said, rolling her eyes.

Marquee laughed. "You two argue like old friends."

Sally ignored her and continued. "I'm serious, Selena. You need to stop throwing yourself into danger."

I looked away. "I know."

"No, you don't." Her voice softened. "You don't understand how many people could get hurt because of you."

The words stayed with me because she was right but I also knew I didn't ask for any of this.

A few hours later, we sat together drinking tea then Sally looked at me. "The man who attacked me...He was looking for you."

I forced confusion onto my face. "Why?"

"That's what I want to know." She says.

I shrugged. "Maybe someone in the castle hates me."

Sally narrowed her eyes stating she didn't believe me but she didn't push.

Marquee, however, immediately returned to her usual worrying. "What about your revolution group?"

I sighed. "I'm going on with it."

"And I'm still part of it." Sally says with a nod. "When I heal."

I smiled slightly then a servant suddenly arrived. "Selena... This is for you."

She handed me a small pouch. "It's from the headmistress."

My eyebrows lifted on realizing it's my payment after I opened it to find coins but underneath them was a folded piece of paper.

I stylishly unfolded it inside the pouch without bringing it out. "Don't tell the headmistress."

My heart immediately knew who it was. It was sent by Alpha Kael.

Marquee and Sally both noticed my expression.

"What is it? Why is the headmistress paying you after saying she won't?" Marquee asked.

I quickly covered the pouch. "I also don't know why." I said but my mind was already racing with an idea.

The servants all received payments and every pouch passed through somewhere before reaching them.

A place where a message could easily be hidden. A way to spread our words without anyone noticing.

"Sally." I called and she looked at me.

"What?" She asked with a creased brow.

"I think I know how we spread the message." Before I could explain fully, a knock came.

The same couple I had spoken to days ago stood outside. They looked nervous as they said, "We want to join your revolution."

My eyes widened in surprise. "You're serious?"

The man nodded. "Yes, we thought about what you said."

Hope flickered inside me but before I could respond, Sally spoke first.

"Are either of you connected to the headmistress?"

The couple exchanged a look then the man slowly answered.

"My younger brother works with her."

Claimed By The Rival Alpha

Selena

For the entire week, every time I looked at the small pile of folded letters hidden beneath my mattress, my heart raced between excitement and fear.

It was finally happening. Not just an idea, not just words spoken in frustration about changing the world.

It's the beginning. A real beginning.

Although the gathering had not even happened yet, I already felt like something had shifted. Like the first stone of a massive wall had finally been pushed into place.

Of course, getting to this point has not been easy. Every day had been filled with planning, whispering, and carefully watching every person around us.

One wrong move, one careless word... One person noticed something they weren't supposed to notice, and everything would collapse before it even started.

That was why I had spent the past week making sure every single detail was planned.

I had to because there was no room for mistakes.

Now, standing in line outside the headmistress' office with Sally, Marquee, Niamh, and Ryuiji, I could feel the tension between us.

It took the whole of the previous weeks to convince Ryuiji's brother Ren, who works with the headmistress, to help us put in the papers I had prepared into the coin pouches of each servant without the headmistress finding out.

I directed everything; how the letters should be, when they should be placed inside the pouches that morning and even the mechanism of the secrecy so the whole mission wouldn't be caught by unwanted eyes.

I had fears but despite the fear, I couldn't bring myself to stop.

Not after everything I had seen. Not after knowing how many people in this castle lived believing they had no choice but to accept the world as it was.

The vampires had taken away more than freedom. They had taken away hope and that was what I wanted to return.

The servants around us were too many, and even though most of them were busy collecting their coin pouches, I had learned that danger didn't always come from obvious places.

Sometimes it came from the person standing right beside you.

I looked ahead as the headmistress' office doors remained open and servants entered one after another to receive their payments.

No one knew that hidden inside some of those pouches were letters. Letters carrying a message.

A message that could either become the beginning of something powerful... Or the reason we all ended up punished.

The past week has been exhausting. After Ryuiji had introduced us to his brother, Ren, I had spent days explaining my plan to him.

At first, he was hesitant. Anyone with common sense would be because helping us meant risking everything.

His position, his safety and possibly even his life.

"You understand what you're asking me to do, right?" Ren had asked me when we first spoke.

We were hidden away in a quiet corner where no one could overhear us. "I do."

"You're asking me to go against the headmistress."

"Yes."

He studied me carefully. "You're not afraid?"

I almost laughed. Of course I was. I was terrified but fear had already controlled enough of my life.

"I am." That seemed to surprise him. "But I'm more afraid of doing nothing."

Ren had been quiet after that and eventually, he agreed. From then on, we worked carefully.

"Selena." I turned to find Sally was watching me.

"You're doing that thing again." She said and I was taken aback.

"What thing?" I asked, confused as I didn't even understand what she was saying.

"Thinking so hard your face looks like you're fighting someone."

I almost smiled. "I'm making sure everything goes right."

Sally sighed. "You know, sometimes I wonder if you ever relax."

"I do."

She looked at me with a creased brow. "When do you relax?"

I opened my mouth then closed it and she smirked. "Exactly."

Marquee looked between us nervously. "Can you both stop joking around? This isn't the time for jokes."

Sally looked at her. "You're nervous."

"No, I'm not."

"You've said that three times to me." Sally argued with a small smirk playing on her lips.

Marquee looked away before saying, "I just think we should be careful."

"We are careful," I assured her but I understood her fear because I had it too.

One by one, the servants collected their pouches then finally, it was our turn.

I kept my expression calm as I received mine and the others also received theirs before we all walked back to our chamber without speaking much.

Only when the door closed behind us did everyone release their tension.

"We did it," Marquee whispered, still looking nervous.

Sally immediately shook her head. "We shouldn't celebrate yet."

I almost rolled my eyes as I placed my pouch on the table. "We need to check."

Everyone opened theirs and my heart beat faster as I pulled out the folded letter.

It was there... Exactly where it should be.

Everyone found the letters inside theirs then Sally opened hers and found nothing.

Her brows pulled together. "Mine is empty."

I looked at her. "I know it's empty."

"You didn't put one in mine?" Sally asked with a frown.

"I didn't."

Her expression changed. "Why would you do that?"

"Because I wanted to test it first." I explained. "If something goes wrong, I need to know what caused it before we put more out."

Sally nodded slowly before saying. "That's actually smart."

Marquee suddenly looked horrified. "Wait. What if someone finds theirs?" Her voice became more anxious. "What if they tell the headmistress?"

I looked at her as I called out, "Marquee..."

"No, think about it. What if someone knows it's Selena who put in these papers? What if they ask questions? What if they know?"

Sally rolled her eyes. "Here we go again."

Marquee looked offended. "I'm just being realistic."

"You're just panicking."

"I'm trying to keep us alive!" The room became tense.

I stepped between them. "Enough."

They both quieted and I looked at Marquee. "You helped write those letters."

She looked down. "I know I did."

"You believed in this and that's why you helped."

"I was just stupid."

"No." She looked at me. "You weren't stupid."

I softened my voice. "You were brave."

Marquee didn't answer as I continued. "And if something happens, I'll handle it and take the blame."

Sally immediately looked up. "No."

"I mean—"

"No." Her voice was firm. "You're not doing this alone."

I looked at her, for someone who acted cold, she cared more than she admitted.

She crossed her arms. "Now we wait till later."

—

By dusk, I approached the guard whose shift would cover the middle floor of the castle during the night.

He looked slightly surprised when he saw me. "Selena"

I smiled as I went closer to him. "Remember our arrangement?"

His expression changed, indicating he indeed remembered. I pulled out one of the five silver coins Alpha Kael had given me.

For a moment, I stared at it. I still didn't know why he had to give them to me but right now, it was useful.

I handed one of the silver coins to him. "Your payment."

He looked at the coin. "You're serious about this?"

"Yes." I said. He hesitated, then accepted it.

"The hall will be empty."

"Until the second night shift?" I asked to be sure.

"Yes." He said.

I nodded before saying, "Thank you."

When I returned to my chamber, Sally was already waiting as she quickly asked, "Did he agree?"

"He agreed." I said with a wide smile while Marquee sat nervously on her bed.

I paced around the room, repeating the speech I planned to give.

Not because I wanted to sound impressive. It's because these people needed to believe. They needed to understand.

A disagreement suddenly broke out. "You're acting like this is nothing," Marquee said to Sally.

Sally looked at her. "And you're acting like we're already dead."

"You're heartless." Marquee said and Sally scoffed.

"And you're always scared of everything." Sally retorted back.

"Cold-hearted bitch." Marquee fired back and the words made the room freeze.

I stepped forward immediately. "Enough you two."

They both looked at me. "We cannot destroy ourselves before we even begin."

Before anyone replied, a knock suddenly sounded on the door.

The door opened to reveal the informant boy standing there. "Three people are currently in the hall."

Sally immediately stood. "Let's go."

"No." I quickly said.

She looked at me. "Why?"

"Three people aren't enough." I turned to the boy. "Come back when there are fifteen of them."

He nodded and left.

Time passed, then the door opened again. This time, the boy looked surprised. "They are Eighteen now."

My eyes widened. "That fast?"

He nodded and I looked at Sally. "You should go first to give them calm and anticipation."

Sally understood and left while I prepared to follow but Marquee stopped me. "Selena."

I looked back to find her eyes were filled with fear.

"Things like this..." She swallowed. "People like us... servants... lowborn..." Her voice lowered. "We aren't meant to do things like this. Things like this are meant for Alphas and conquerors."

I stared at her and deep inside, I knew she was wrong because I wasn't lowborn.

I walked away and when I reached the main hall, I saw a small group was waiting for me.

Then suddenly... We heard the echo of slow and steady footsteps approaching.

Everyone became silent and from the edge of the stairs... Alpha Kael's face appeared.

Claimed By The Rival Alpha

Selena

I froze for a moment, as my mind completely stopped working.

Not because I didn't know what to say, but because I hadn't expected to see him standing there.

Alpha Kael stood at the top of the stairs looking down at all of us.

The moment our eyes met, everything else around me seemed to fade. The whispers from the servants disappeared. The nervous shuffling of feet disappeared. Even the pounding of my own heart became the only sound I could hear.

The mate bond pulled at me instantly, that invisible force that always seemed determined to remind me of his presence no matter how much I tried to ignore it.

I hated that it affected me. I hated that even after everything, after all the reasons I had to keep my distance, one look from him could make me forget how to breathe.

But I forced myself to look away as this was not the time.

Not when nearly twenty servants were standing around me, waiting for answers. Not when my entire plan could collapse within seconds.

A servant beside me suddenly stepped forward. "Alpha," he said quickly, bowing his head. "We were... we were only preparing something."

Alpha Kael's expression didn't change as he asked. "Preparing what?"

The servant swallowed. "We are planning a surprise."

"For who?" Alpha Kael asked with his brow creased together.

The hesitation of the servant was obvious before he muttered. "The headmaid, Her birthday is tomorrow morning and we just want to plan something small for her."

A terrible excuse. A desperate one but it was the only one we had. The only one that probably came to the servant's mind at that moment.

Alpha Kael stared at him then his gaze moved across the room slowly and carefully until it landed on me And he stayed there.

My stomach tightened at the look that I was getting from him. The look was so intense that I almost cowered in fear.

'Does he know something?' I didn't know how much he knew, but the way he looked at me told me he wasn't convinced with the lie the servant told.

For several seconds, no one moved. No one dared to breathe too loudly.

Then, without saying a word, Alpha Kael turned around and walked away.

The moment he disappeared from sight, the tension broke. A few servants immediately started whispering.

"We should leave."

"Coming here was obviously a huge mistake."

"The Alpha knows what is going on here."

"We are going to get punished for this revolutionary nonsense."

I looked at them and I decided to put a stop to the negative words.

"Don't say such words." I said and they stopped talking to listen to me. "We are not leaving."

A few looked at me like I was insane. "The Alpha just saw us."

"And he walked away." I said, trying to make a point.

"That doesn't mean anything." The servant scoffed, obviously not having my words.

"It means we still have a chance." I said and they exchanged uncertain looks.

I stepped forward to introduce myself to everyone. "My name is Selena. I am the person who gathered you all here."

Their expressions changed. Some looked surprised while some looked suspicious.

"I am the one who wants to start this." I looked around at them. "A revolution against the blood suckers."

The word itself seemed to make some of them uncomfortable.

"I know what you're thinking," I continued. "You think this is impossible. You think people like us cannot change anything."

No one answered but I continued anyway. "But you came here after receiving those letters."

That made them share glances with themselves.

"You came because some part of you believes things can be different than they currently are."

A servant crossed his arms before speaking. "And what exactly is your plan?"

The tone wasn't respectful, It wasn't rude either but It was doubtful. More like they didn't believe anything could come out of this.

"The main point is, I want to fight against the vampires."

A few scoffed as one asked, "With what?"

"Fight Against creatures who have controlled us for centuries?" Another said.

"You think letters and meetings will change that?" Another added.

I looked at them and asked, "Then why are you here?"

The room fell silent as I stepped closer. "No, seriously. Why?"

Nobody answered as I continued. "Why did you risk coming here tonight?"

The silence stretched until finally, one servant spoke. "My mate was taken."

Everyone turned to him as his voice became quieter. "She was sold to the vampires a year ago."

His hands clenched. "I thought I was just unlucky. I lost someone I loved."

He swallowed. "Then I had just discovered she was my mate."

The pain in his voice was obvious. "I lost my mate because of them."

Another servant looked down. "My brother was taken too."

Then another. "My parents."

"My sister."

"My friend." One by one, their stories came out.

The room that had been filled with doubt became filled with grief.

Everyone had something. Everyone had lost someone.

I listened until I finally raised my hand. "Stop." They looked at me. "Everyone here has a reason for showing up here."

I looked at Sally and she immediately understood. She brought out the pieces of parchment we had prepared.

"Write it down." The servants looked confused. "Your stories."

I took one parchment. "Write everything."

A servant frowned and asked "Why are we writing it out?"

"Because these stories are going to remind us why we are doing this." I looked at them. "Every day, we will read them."

I placed the parchment down. "We will remember what was taken from us."

Some looked uncomfortable as one servant shook his head. "Selena... some memories are painful."

"I know It's not easy." My voice softened. "But neither is living with fear."

I looked at each of them. "We have two choices. We either face the pain and use it to fight." I paused before continuing. "Or we hide it until it destroys us from the inside."

Nobody spoke, then slowly, they began writing. Even Sally.

I watched her quietly as she wrote her own story. The same girl who claimed she trusted no one. The same girl who always acted like nothing affected her.

Her hand trembled slightly but she kept writing.

When everyone finished, they looked at me. "So what do we do first?"

I shook my head. "Nothing yet."

That surprised them. "What?"

"We wait." A few looked disappointed.

I understood they wanted action, they wanted revenge but revenge without a plan would only create more graves.

"We need to remember who we are fighting." My voice became serious. "The vampires have existed for centuries."

I looked around. "They have defeated powerful packs. They have survived every rebellion that came before us."

"They have power." I paused. "And we need strategy to win them in a fight."

I explained what we needed. A base, Communication, Information and a way to move without being noticed.

The servants began offering ideas. Some were good. Some had problems.

"What if we meet outside the castle?" They started making suggestions.

"Too risky."

"What if we send messages through the guards?"

"Too suspicious."

"What about using the market?"

"Too many eyes." One by one, the excitement began fading.

Some servants started looking afraid then random noises came from the stairs.

The servants glanced toward the sound and a few immediately left out of fright.

Eventually, only eight remained. I looked at them, it wasn't many but it was something.

We continued with more ideas. The kitchen workers had the best idea.

"When food is sent around," one servant suggested, "we can hide information with the meals."

I nodded. "And the payment pouches too."

Everyone understood it the same way we had started.

"As for the base... we should use the old storeroom."

Sally looked at me. "The one in the servant wing?"

I nodded. It's the same room where I had caught Niamh and Ryuiji weeks ago making out.

Nobody questioned it. After I assured them that we would gather more information, more people, and create something stronger, they finally left.

Sally stayed behind with me before speaking. "Then why didn't we have our meeting there first?"

I looked at her. "Because not everyone who came tonight can be trusted yet. We had to filter out the ones who weren't interested before using the storeroom."

She nodded. "That's smart."

Then she sighed. "I'll go to the market this week to restock the kitchen. I know someone who might help us find a place outside the castle."

I smiled slightly. "Thank you."

After Sally left, I stayed behind alone.

I looked around the empty hall. A week ago, this would have been impossible. But now... I had started something.

And for the first time in a long time, I didn't regret anything.

I lifted my head and froze. Alpha Kael was standing so close to me that my face brushed against his chest.

Before I could move, he stepped closer and his eyes were unreadable.

"I know you were lying." He said and my heartbeat increased.

"Wh..a..t do you mean?" I stuttered a bit.

"The gathering." His voice lowered. "I know it wasn't a surprise for the headmaid."

My breath caught.

Then his hand moved, he grabbed my throat and his eyes darkened.

"What do you think happens to people who lie to me?"

Claimed By The Rival Alpha

Kael.

Sleep had become so impossible and frustrating for me to have. My wolf rut session is almost driving me insane.

I had spent the last hour staring at the ceiling of my chamber, trying to force my mind into silence, but my wolf refused to cooperate. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw her.

Selena!!!

The way she looked at me when she challenged me. The way she stood in front of people far more powerful than her and still spoke as though she carried the weight of an entire kingdom on her shoulders.

It was infuriating, It was dangerous and it was becoming impossible to ignore.

My wolf had been restless for hours, pacing inside me, pushing against every wall of control I had built. The bond between us had always been there, but lately it felt like it was becoming something alive. Something that wanted to make decisions before my mind could even catch up.

I dragged a hand over my face and sat up. "This is ridiculous," I muttered.

My wolf only responded with a wave of frustration. I knew exactly what it wanted. My wolf wanted her and the thought alone irritated me.

I had spent years building discipline, learning control, putting my duties above every personal desire. I was the Alpha of Blackbourne. Every decision I made affected thousands of lives.

Yet somehow, one woman had managed to disrupt the balance I had spent years maintaining.

And the worst part was that she was the one person I could never allow myself to want.

Selena Vale! The daughter of Alpha William. My enemy's daughter.

The daughter of the man who had willingly accepted the vampire's rule instead of fighting against it.

The same man I had cursed the last time I saw him. I hated what he represented.

He represented Weakness disguised as obedience. Fear disguised as survival and yet Selena was nothing like him.

That was the part that confused me the most. She carried his blood, but not his beliefs.

She questioned everything, she challenged everything and even me.

I stood from my bed, unable to remain still any longer. Perhaps a walk would clear my head. Perhaps exhaustion would finally silence the rut of my wolf.

Without thinking too much about it, I left my chamber and moved through the quiet halls of the castle.

The entire place was asleep.

Guards stood at their posts, servants rested in their quarters, and the only sound was the faint echo of my footsteps against the stone floors.

But somehow, my feet carried me toward the servants' quarters.

I stopped before I reached them because I saw movement in the main hall.

The exact place where Selena had been gathering servants.

My eyes narrowed as even from a distance, I could recognize her. She was standing among them, speaking quietly.

For a moment, I simply watched. There was something about seeing her there that made my chest tighten.

She looked like she belonged anywhere she decided to stand. Not like a prisoner, not like a servant but like someone who could change things.

My wolf pulled toward her instantly. I hated it. I turned away before I could make a mistake.

I returned to my chamber again but even there, I could not escape her.

Every thought led back to her. Every breath seemed to carry her scent and eventually, I stopped fighting.

And when I finally moved again, I already knew where I was going. I was going to see her.

The moment I appeared before her, her expression changed. It was mixed with Surprise, Confusion and something else I refused to name.

My anger from earlier returned. She had lied to me, she had walked into danger and she had gathered people inside my castle and lied into my face.

Part of me wanted to demand answers. Part of me wanted to remind her that she could not continue putting herself at risk.

But another part of me, the part connected to my wolf, only wanted to be near her, only wanted to claim her and make her mine.

I reached for her, stopping her movement and her eyes widened slightly. "Alpha Kael..."

Hearing my name from her lips only made things worse. I should have stepped away. I should have remembered our agreement but the bond between us was pulling harder than ever.

I wrapped my hand around her neck before lowering my voice and whispering into her ear. "You lied to me earlier."

Her expression shifted. "I didn't—"

"You did." I said through gritted teeth and silence settled between us.

She looked away briefly, then back at me and somehow, even when she was caught, she still looked stubborn.

I ignored her look and lowered my lips towards hers, I had the urge to claim her lips and kiss her roughly but instead, I found myself sniffing her neck... licking her skin as she trembled at my touch.

I lifted her off her feet abruptly, pinned her against the nearby pillar then I held her both hands above her head as I planted kisses all over her neck and down to her collarbone.

Selena kept trembling as my lips made contact with her skin.

"Wh..a..t are you doing to me...?" Her voice quivered as she asked.

Almost immediately, I could smell her arousal. My heat wanted him to kiss her and fuck her right there but I held myself back.

All I could do was bring myself to caress her bare skin and continue to kiss and lap at her skin.

Selena soon began to moan and held me to her body as I rained pleasure upon her.

"Ohhuh please... Kael..." she continued moaning and it sounded like music to my ears.

I abruptly stopped and lifted her to my head level against the pillar, making her legs straddle my shoulders.

"I'm going to teach you a lesson you'll never forget in a hurry." I declared as I aimed to raise her tunic but she suddenly stopped me.

I found apprehension in her eyes and it immediately clicked to me that she was a virgin.

"Gosh, I'm so stupid!" I apprehended myself by remembering she's just 18 years old. What was I expecting?

I didn't waste time in putting her down and she seemed unhappy and didn't want me to leave her but at the same time, she looked hesitant to let me do what i wanted to do with her.

"What happened to our deal not to culminate our mate bond?" She suddenly asked me but in a weak tone.

I sighed painfully before speaking, "My wolf rut could over power my own judgement and I'd be forced to do crazy things to you."

Her grip still didn't leave me until I planted a kiss on her cheek then I eventually forced myself to step back from her.

"You need to sleep." I muttered. Still, I hated myself at that moment but couldn't bring myself to start what I might not be able to finish.

Her brows furrowed but I forced myself to ignore it as I turned away before I could lose control.

Leaving her there was harder than it should have been. My wolf hated every step away from her but I had no choice.

Because if I stayed, I did not know if I would be strong enough to remember everything I was fighting for.

When I returned to my chamber, I sat in silence as the memory of her expression stayed with me.

I kept thinking of how soft Selena's skin was and the sound of her moans... I wanted more but with the effect she was having on me; it's best I avoid her as much as possible.

It was the only way to keep my promise but my wolf was still restless. It was still burning with too much energy.

I needed to release it so I left the castle. The forest welcomed me with cold air and silence.

The moment I shifted, my wolf took over and I ran faster and further into the thick forest, until the sounds of the castle disappeared completely.

The moon hung above me, casting light through the trees as I moved through the darkness.

For the first time in hours, my mind became quiet but only for a moment because when exhaustion finally forced me back into my human form, I lay in the forest clearing staring at the sky while a new dangerous thought entered my mind.

"What if the vampires that paid Alpha William a visit had believed his words? What if they believed Selena was here?"

"What if they were no longer waiting for Alpha William to deliver her? What if they decided to come and take her themselves?"

My eyes hardened as the thought alone filled me with anger. I pushed myself up slightly, staring into the darkness around me.

I had been preparing for enemies inside my borders but perhaps I needed to prepare for enemies coming from beyond them.

"I have to prepare for their potential invasion!"