

CLAIMED BY THE RIVAL ALPHA

Chapter 6

Kael"Where is my daughter?"

Alpha William's voice carried across the border clearing with controlled authority, but I still caught the anger simmering beneath it.

Interesting. So the mighty Alpha of Nightbane could lose things after all.

I folded my arms calmly. "You rode all the way here because you misplaced your daughter?"

Several Nightbane warriors growled immediately while William's jaw ticked. "I know she's here."

"Is she?" I asked in a bewildered tone.

His eyes narrowed dangerously. "Do not test my patience, boy."

Boy? I almost smiled at that.

Most Alphas in the realm feared William enough to lower their heads whenever he spoke. Years ago, perhaps I might have done the same but not anymore.

"If your daughter was truly in Blackbourne," I said lazily, "I imagine you would have stormed the gates already instead of asking questions."

His stare hardened further. "I want to search your territory."

"No." The refusal came instantly.

One of the Nightbane warriors stepped forward aggressively, but William lifted a hand slightly, stopping him.

"You deny me access?" he asked coldly.

"You have no clearance."

"This concerns my daughter."

"This concerns pack laws." I shrugged lightly. "Get permission from the Council."

The silence that followed felt sharp enough to cut through skin.

William knew I was right. No Alpha could search another pack territory without council approval unless war had been formally declared and he was not foolish enough to start open conflict over suspicion alone.

His gaze remained fixed on me for several long seconds before he unexpectedly changed the subject. "How many packages did you send east this year?"

The disgust inside me rose instantly. Packages? That was what they called the women now.

Not daughters, not wolves they are now PACKAGES!

I tilted my head slightly. "Certainly not as many as you." Several warriors stiffened at my tone. "You've become quite profitable as the vampires' lackey."

William laughed suddenly but the sound lacked warmth. "You speak boldly for someone surrounded by enemies."

"I speak truthfully."

His expression darkened. "Watch your mouth."

"Or what?" I asked flatly. "Will you report me to your vampire masters?"

The air around us turned deadly. Nightbane warriors snarled openly now, their wolves reacting to the insult but I didn't care.

I was tired of pretending men like William deserved respect simply because they wore crowns and titles. He was weak. All of them were.

"You know what your problem is?" I continued before anyone could stop me. "People think you're powerful because Nightbane is rich and feared."

William stared at me coldly.

"But true power?" I stepped closer. "A truly powerful Alpha would have united the realm against the vampires years ago."

His jaw tightened. "You think rebellion is simple."

"No," I replied sharply. "I think you're a coward."

Several of his warriors moved immediately after that while William's eyes darkened with dangerous fury. "Young fool," he growled. "You speak of war because you've never seen it."

"And you kneel because you have."

The insult landed exactly where intended and William lunged at me instantly. He was Fast. Far faster than most Alphas his age but I expected it.

I blocked his strike immediately and shoved him backward before he could land another hit.

Nightbane warriors snarled violently around us. Several stepped forward ready to attack.

Blackbourne warriors behind me immediately reached for their weapons too as the clearing exploded with tension but neither side moved first.

William straightened slowly, breathing hard through his nose while fury burned openly in his eyes now.

Interesting. The mention of rebellion truly struck a nerve.

I lowered my hands calmly. "Finished?"

For one dangerous moment, I genuinely thought he might order an attack anyway.

Instead, he forced himself back under control. "Your arrogance will destroy you one day," he said coldly.

"Perhaps." Then I turned away from him. Fear never touched me, not even with dozens of enemy warriors surrounding me.

I had spent years preparing for war already. What frightened me more was the realization that Selena belonged to him.

I had nearly reached the edge of the clearing when William spoke again. "My daughter is very precious to me."

I paused slightly but did not turn around.

"And the moment I discover she is endangered inside anyone's territory," he continued darkly, "Council laws will become irrelevant."

That was a threat. Direct and clear but I said nothing as I continued walking back toward Blackbourne lines.

Bastien met me immediately once I crossed back into our territory. "You pushed him hard."

"He needed pushing."

"He nearly attacked you."

"He did attack me."

Bastien sighed heavily while Nightbane warriors began retreating behind us.

"You believe Selena is truly important to him?" Bastien asked while I watched William mount his horse in the distance.

"Yes," I answered eventually. "That was real anger."

It was personal anger. The kind men struggled to hide when family was involved.

Which meant one thing, Selena mattered more than I originally assumed and that made her dangerous. Not exactly to me but to him.

As Nightbane forces finally disappeared beyond the trees, I remained standing at the border deep in thought.

William would not stop searching. A man like him would never leave loose ends behind, especially not when vampires were involved.

If Selena truly disappeared before she was meant to be delivered east... Then pressure would already be building around him.

"He'll try other methods," I muttered.

Bastien crossed his arms. "Such as?"

"Assassins."

His expression sharpened immediately. "You think he'd infiltrate Blackbourne?"

"He doesn't need an army if he can quietly remove the problem."

And Selena was now the problem.

I mentally began restructuring security immediately. Additional patrols, inner gate checks and Counter-assassins hidden among servants and guards.

If William sent anyone into Blackbourne, I wanted them found before they reached her.

My wolf stirred restlessly at the thought of danger near Selena. Such an Annoying creature.

Just then, a warrior sprinted toward us from the watchtower. "My Alpha!"

I turned sharply. "What is it?"

"There's movement approaching the northern border."

Bastien frowned. "Nightbane again?"

"No, my lord." The warrior swallowed nervously. "Wolves."

Something about his tone made my instincts sharpen immediately. "How many?"

"Hundreds." Bastien cursed quietly as we moved toward the wall instantly.

The moment I climbed the stairs overlooking the northern approach, I saw them. A dark mass moving rapidly through the forest.

Too many wolves but something was wrong with them. Their movements lacked discipline and structure. It immediately dawned on me that they were Feral wolves.

My expression darkened instantly. "Shit."

Bastien stared in disbelief beside me. "How are there this many?"

Feral wolves were werewolves completely consumed by their wolf sides after remaining transformed too long. Mindless. Violent. Beyond saving.

Usually they wandered in small numbers. Not hundreds. Never hundreds and according to the border warriors—

"They weren't there a minute ago," one guard said nervously.

I immediately understood. "Alpha William Vale!!!"

The bastard dropped them near our territory while leaving. This must be his parting gift.

Perhaps he hoped they would weaken Blackbourne enough to keep me distracted or perhaps he simply wanted to remind me how dangerous he could be.

Either way, he underestimated me.

The wolves charged closer rapidly now, snarling and snapping at each other in blind bloodlust.

Warriors all around the wall began reaching for bows and weapons. "Prepare the archers!" one shouted.

"No," I ordered calmly, making confusion spread instantly.

Bastien looked toward me sharply. "Alpha?"

"Open the gates." Several warriors froze.

One even looked horrified. "My Alpha—"

"You heard me."

Bastien studied me carefully for several seconds then understanding slowly flickered across his face.

"The new weapon?" he asked to be sure.

"Has it been tested?"

"Yes," he answered immediately. "Three successful trials."

Good.

I looked toward the lower grounds. "Prepare the squad." The warriors moved quickly despite their confusion.

Meanwhile, the massive feral horde rushed closer and closer toward the fortress entrance. Mindless creatures driven only by instinct and bloodlust.

Below us, Blackbourne warriors opened the gates exactly as ordered.

Panic spread among some of the younger soldiers watching from the walls. "They'll flood the courtyard!"

"We should attack now!"

But I ignored them all. Instead, I watched carefully as Bastien positioned a selected squad just inside the opened gates.

Each warrior carried one of the newly crafted weapons. Long polearms reinforced with retractable steel hooks and chain anchors.

Experimental and brutal. It was designed specifically for controlling large aggressive targets.

"Form the barricade!" Bastien ordered.

The warriors moved into position immediately, creating two angled defensive lines inside the entrance.

It's an inverted barricade. A kill box.

Most watching soldiers still looked confused but I already saw the outcome clearly. The feral wolves would rush through the open gates thinking they found easy prey.

Then momentum and numbers would trap them inside the narrow corridor formed by the barricades.

There was no escape, no maneuvering room, no advantage and best of all—Minimal Blackbourne casualties.

Bastien climbed back onto the wall beside me while the final preparations finished below.

"Either this works brilliantly," he muttered, "or we all die horribly."

"It'll work."

"You sound very confident."

"I am."

Below us, the squad tightened formation as the weapons gleamed beneath gray daylight while nervous warriors braced themselves.

Then the feral wolves reached the gates and charged inside like a flood unleashed.