Chapter 1

Avery's POV
I had agreed to sleep with my boyfriend Ryan for the first time tonight, on our first Mating Day.
When I flung the door to his room open, I saw him looking all sexy and naked like I imagined.
But with another woman on top of him.
My younger half sister, Zara.
"What the-" I froze in his doorway.
Zara was straddling Ryan, facing me. When she spotted me, she smirked and moaned, dipping her head to nip at Ryan's neck.
"Oh yes. Just like that!" she said, breathing in his ear. Ryan grunted and lifted her up to roll over on top of her.
My stomach flipped. I felt like I was going to throw up.
Then Ryan noticed me and froze. "Avery," he breathed.
Guilt flushed across his face, but his hands didn't leave Zara's hips. The room was silent for a moment.
"Zara and I just found out we were fated mates," Ryan's words hammered into my heart.
Fated Mate.
On Mating Days, werewolves over 19 could smell and recognize their fated mates.
The attraction between fated mates is irresistible. They can trigger each other into heat just from smelling each other at a distance. Once fated mates find each other, they will mate and mark each other, forming a resilient bond of intertwined attraction that lasts their whole lives.
The only way to resist a fated mate was to mark a chosen mate before you met your fated one. That's what Ryan and I wanted to do tonight on our first Mating Day.
I knew I would never get a fated mate because my wolf seemed dormant. When everyone started to shift into their wolf form and communicate with their wolf, I got nothing.
I could feel my wolf there back in my mind, though. No one believed what I said, so it became a joke amongst my bullies, especially from my sister Zara's little group.
"Wolfless freak."
"Pathetic human liar."
They would say these words to my face, believing that I was too weak to fight back without a wolf within.
And yet, I was with Ryan, the Alpha heir. He did his best to protect me; we both believed we were meant to be together.
So tonight, on Mating Day, Ryan and I planned to mate and mark each other, so he could protect me forever.

He had been the only light in my life.
But now he was taken by Zara.
How could Moon Goddess treat me like this?
"You choose Zara? Knowing she has been my bully for so long?" A sob was lodged in my throat, but I refused to let it out.
I hated that my voice shook as I stared into his eyes. The eyes of the man whom I'd thought was the love of my life. The man I was going to give myself to, tonight. I'd even worn secret lingerie under my coat to mark the special occasion.
Now Ryan looked like he wanted to apologize. A flash of regret crossed his handsome face.
Zara snaked one arm around his neck and yanked him closer to her, smirking at me from the bed.
Ryan clenched his jaw, "Fated mates make each other stronger, Avery."
"So I was nothing to you?" The sob tore loose.
"Ave--" Ryan's face softened, and he started to rise away from Zara, reaching one hand towards me.
Zara reached up and intertwined her fingers with his, stopping his gesture. Her eyes gleamed at me from under her dark lashes.
"Ryan, Mating Day is the best time to have the strongest Alpha heir with your fated one..." She arched her naked body up into him.
Ryan swallowed, leaning back down to nuzzle at Zara's neck.
I could see the yellow flash of wolf in his eyes. When he looked back up at me, the man I had known was gone. Only coldness remained.
"Get lost now, human," Ryan's wolf growled past me.
Tears streamed down my face. I suppressed my sobs as I ran out and darted down the hidden trails into the old forest.
Where could I go?
There was only one spot I knew was safe, the place I always turned to when I needed to heal myself.
A quiet little pond hidden in the woods.
The water shimmered faintly under the moonlight. I settled at the edge, knees pulled to my chest, letting the cool moss beneath me soften the weight I carried.
I could hear the rasp of my breathing, thick with the tears in my throat.
Slowly, the sounds of the night filtered in. The breeze in the trees, and the rustling of leaves across the ground.
Then I heard a different, most sinister sound. The distant howl of wolves.
Of course. Tonight was the Full Mating Moon. The rogue hordes of unruly, unmated wolves would be more agitated on this night.
While it was unlikely anyone would find me here, it also wasn't safe. I needed to get back to the pack town.
I wiped my tears on my sleeve and was about to rise to my feet to head back when I smelled something, delicious and intoxicating.
A ripple of heat rushed through my body from the base of my spine to my fingertips.
Desire slammed into my body, washing over me and leaving me breathless.
What was this?
I breathed deeply again. I needed more of whatever that was. My body craved it with every nerve and fiber.

While I was lost in the hazy, distracting sensation, I suddenly realized that this might be...the mating heat?
How is that possible? I thought my wolf was dormant.
No matter what it is, I need to go home now.
There was danger nearby, and I had no mate - not even a chosen one anymore - to share this heat with.
I shook my head, trying to clear the dizzying sensation. I managed to rise to my feet and started to make my way home, but the intoxicating smell kept coming towards me and getting stronger, as if it was coming from someone running towards me.
Was this what was triggering me into heat?
"Lads, look what we've found," a low voice suddenly spoke from the tree-line. "A female wolf in heat."
I whirled to face the man who stepped into the clearing. He was tall and lean. His face bore the stubble of a few days unshaven.
More strangers stepped from the trees. They wore rough denim and leather. Knives and nets hung from their belts.
They smelled sweaty, almost blocking the delightful smell from earlier.
They must be Rogues! I realized with horror.
"Looking for something, pretty?" a flash of teeth in the dark beneath dark, shadowed pits for eyes.
"No, I was just leaving," I could hear my voice shaking.
"Why leave? If you're looking for a mate-" the man inhaled a shuddering breath, sniffing the air pointedly, "and it certainly smells like you are... then I'm sure we have several young bucks who would be willing to help, right lads?"
Murmured approval rose. They were fanning out behind me now, cutting off my escape.
"G-Get away from m-me," I tried to growl. "I don't w-want you!"
Another man laughed. "Looks like we got ourselves a feisty one, lads."
The man lunged forward. I felt his fingers snatch at the hem of my coat, yanking me backwards towards him.
Tears started to well in my eyes as he grabbed at me.
"LEAVE HER ALONE!"
A voice cracked through the air like thunder. That intoxicating scent that had triggered my heat immediately enveloped me.