Chapter 3

Avery's POV

"What the hell-" my father cursed as he stomped up the stairs. My father and stepmother burst into the room. I tried to back away as they advanced on me in the small space. Zara snatched at my arm and whirled me around so that the bite was more visible in the light. My father took a look at the bite mark, stunned. "This mark looks like it was left by a strong wolf," he muttered incredulously. "Who marked you?" When Zara and her mother heard the word ‘strong', they stared at me with stunned and dirty looks. I didn't want to answer, could barely believe it myself, but I had learned to speak when spoken to in this house. "I don't know." I whispered. "Where is he then?" His voice rose to a bellow. "Probably still by the pond in the forest, but I'm not sure...." "I bet he just ran off," Zara sneered, "I told you, a human like you would never be wanted by anyone." The first kick from my father caught me off guard. My father was quite a strong Gamma, and I immediately fell to the ground on the other side of the room. "How dare you say you know nothing after being marked!" my father bellowed. "I should've never accepted you into my family. I knew you're just destined to be a lowly whore like your mom!" The second kick descended swiftly as I yelped and curled like a worm on the ground. "This is the gratitude I get for raising you!" I teared up thinking about my mother. My mother is just a normal servant in my pack. She accidentally slept with my father while he was drunk and conceived me. My father, as the gamma of the pack, never wanted a servant like her. So he angrily announced that she'd seduced him, and she was demoted to work as an omega slave in our pack. The old Alpha, out of mercy, asked him to at least keep me and raise me in his family. I was almost never permitted to see my mother, but I remembered her kindness when I sneaked a few chances to visit. "Avery should be demoted to a slave too, just like her mom, since she is a slut who got herself marked and abandoned." Zara suggested to her father. Zara had long hated that I was Ryan's girlfriend, wanting him instead for herself. Now I suppose she had gotten what she'd wished for. "No daughter of mine will be a slave!" my father hissed. "First wolf-less, now this! I can't let you tread on my honor as the pack's Gamma anymore." I flinched away from his kicks, but had long ago learned not to run. It would only make him angrier. I could feel my back welting under his blows. Finally, he slowed down, breathing heavily. He leaned towards me, roughly gripping my jaw in his hand and stared for a long moment at the mark on my neck. Then a cunning and cruel expression crept over his face. "At the mating ball, find a man who will accept you, marked slut," my father growled. His fingers bruised my face with the force of his grip, "and if you do not, then it will be my duty to remove you from this world." He had threatened to kill me before, but this time I could see in his flat stare that he meant it. A knot of ice formed at the base of my spine. Fear and panic warred with

outrage and anger within me. I could not outrun him. I could not fight him. I had nowhere to go. And the mating ball..... Our Silvermoon Pack had a tradition of intermarriage with Nightwolf Pack. The Nightwolf Alpha must pick a wife from Silvermoon in every three generations and vice versa. This particular mating ceremony was to be held for the young and unmated Nightwolf Alpha, Gideon, to choose a wife. The rest of werewolves from both packs would participate and mingle to see if they too could find suitable matches. It should be a fun time, but everyone was nervous about it instead. Because Alpha Gideon was a cold-blooded murderer. It was said that he had wiped a dozen packs from the face of the earth, their survivors scattered and packless. In contrast, Silvermoon's Alpha was old and weakening. I didn't think anyone in a strong and cold-blooded pack like his would want me. A dormant and marked wolf. "You will leave this house for a husband, or you will leave it on a slab." my father punctuated his final statement with a backhand across my cheek that sent me reeling into the wall, and then left the room. Gideon's POV I woke from the best dream of my life to find my mate was gone. At first, I didn't worry. I had marked her, she couldn't get too far. But when I tried to reach out to her through our bond, all I got was a muted dead-end. How is that possible? My memories of the night before were so vivid. It hadn't been a dream. Mate. My wolf had said. We'd caught the delicious scent of her, drifting to me on the forest breeze. The joy I'd felt at knowing I was about to meet my mate. Nothing could have kept me from her! I had run miles through that forest to get to where she was. Then I saw her surrounded by rogue filth, and they were trying to take her from me! The frenzy that awoke in me when my wolf realized our fated mate was in danger was lethal. I had chased them away, which was better than they'd deserved. They had offered no real challenge to my wolf's dominance. I had found her. Claimed her. Mated her. The wolf-sense had overwhelmed all others. Every fiber of my being demanded I mark her properly. Make her mine, forever. I sunk my fangs into her neck when my wolf released enough pheromones to make sure she couldn't feel the pain. That mark should have been indelible. I should have been able to follow it for miles. Now the bond connection dissipated as though it had never existed, and so had her intoxicating scent. The worst thing was that we'd mated in the darkness, and I didn't even know what she looked like yet. My wolf had been pacing impatiently at the back of my mind. Restless and concerned. I searched the area for a while longer, then went home and recalled my Beta, Tegan, to my office immediately. I explained the situation and asked him to find my marked fated mate. Tegan was surprised to find out I'd marked someone last night. My Beta cleared his throat, "What will you do if you find her? This mating ball with Silvermoon is an unbreakable tradition." Knowing he was right only made his words more distasteful to my ears. "I'll just pick a woman who wants to be my Luna nominally, but I will only mark, want, and love my true mate. I will make that clear before anyone dares to volunteer." I would never honor an arranged marriage while the woman who was my fate mate remained a mystery.