

# Awakening Following Fate by L. T. Marshall

## Chapter 13

"I'm afraid. She's mentally unstable, she's always been fragile and my dad's part in it all, the betrayal, the moral destruction; she's not okay. Her Alpha turned out to be a monster she always followed loyally, her world came crashing down and the safety of our people became lowest on the pecking order. She cries all the time. It's like her mate is dead but she got to live, if that makes sense. Colton's leaving didn't just cause a hole in the pack, it changed everything, and those left behind, they're prisoners of misery." It's a gush of words and she looks shocked at herself for opening up to me. Swallowing back with a confused and almost dazed expression but I nod in understanding. I know Luna's have this power over their people and I never really understood it when Sierra was ours. Only now looking back I see that Sierra had this too, that a Luna has a way of lowering walls, making you trust and respect her, by merely being close to you. They are the literal embodiment of pack mother and any who needs her feel compelled to confide in her.

I motion for her to walk with me along the tree line as sentinels appear to walk to grounds and I feel this conversation is not done with. Despite wishing she would go away; I can't just let this end this way. I want privacy from prying eyes because I know the second a guard sees us together then Colton will be out here like a shot thinking the worst.

Carmen obediently follows me as I turn and gesture to the shaded overhang of the narrow path which leads far along the side and behind the house. This is just inside the rune border here and the closest to the invisible wall as you can get.

"We can have her taken to the medbay if you truly feel her mental state is worrisome. We can monitor, help. We have human medicines, an understanding of mental health, and a very good staff down there who wouldn't leave her alone. Maybe she needs time and safety and the kind of peaceful life we are building here. The village has some community groups and maybe being back am\*\*\* old friends....." I try to reason as I decipher the pits of angst and anxiety swirling around Carmen now we are shoulder to shoulder, and moving at a slow stroll under the outstretched branches. Her mom's state seems to be where all her focus is, and not of anything from before. It makes me relax knowing she has no obvious ulterior motives. Her whole aura and ambience tells me her heart and mind is right where her mom is right now.

"I don't know if it will help, or if she'll agree. My mom has always been so dependent on security and the balance of her life. No rocking the boat, no sudden changes. My dad has never known how to handle her so he avoids her best he can. It's always been me and her..... I'm her rock." Carmen's distress grows and more tears roll down her face, making her angrily wipe them harder as though she's embarra\*\*ed by her own weakness and the genuine fear that she doesn't know how to help her.

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I have a sea of contradictory emotions and feelings running through me and I try to separate Carmen from the past, and the girl beside me in the here and now. I'm not ready to lay my old feelings to rest, to let go of hurt and anger and jealousy. I don't know how I would handle seeing her approach Colton like this, or if I would be able to swallow it down, but I know one thing for certain, right now, I just want to help. This cursed need in me to make sure my pack, every last one of them, is cared for. Even her.

"Do you want me to get Sierra to come see her in your rooms? Maybe she could help. She can heal certain things, instill calm with a touch. Maybe seeing her....." it's an absent minded suggestion as my brain strays onto things I don't really want to think about and I flinch at her sudden exuberant response.

"Oh my god! Sierra! Yes!!! Yes, yes, yes.... she was one of her closest friends. She mourned her for so many years and I don't think she believes that the rumors are true, that she's really here. Please, I'll do anything if she can see her, or help.... I love my mom, she's all I have now." She croaks the last sentence, her eyes misty with emotion, turning to me energetically and grips my hand. It's impulsive and without thought and she seems oblivious to my sudden stiff response as she turns to me full of new life and energy. The aura of pleading, desperate need, so strong it catches me off guard and for a second, I'm ashamed of my hatred for this girl.

Carmen has never really been a femme that blended in with the Santo pack; even I knew that all those years. Knowing Colton's memories of her now too, seeing she was a loner, brought in because of her father's ties to Juan and put in his upper circle, down to his position. She stuck with Colton and his friends, lived in his shadow, and didn't really seem to have any true friends beyond what she thought she had in the sub pack.

Her abrasive, spoiled girl behavior, her outward hostility, superiority, b\*\*\*\*y glares, all added to her being a girl I know we all avoided like the plague. Not just my kind at the orphanage, but most femmes in the entire valley. It was common knowledge that everyone hated Carmen and she didn't seem to give a rat's a\*\* about it. When she dated Colton, she was with him constantly and acted like she didn't care about other wolves in the pack, let alone making friends beyond her mate. She was so up her own a\*\*; sure, she was the future Luna, that she pretty much didn't bother to make any kind of bonds with anyone.

Looking at her now, feeling her pain from her own depths, I wonder what it is that made her this way. Why she closed off from anyone except Colton.... I know even the sub pack never really bonded to her like they have me and dutifully endured her presence for him. I can't imagine what losing him must have felt like if he truly was the only person she thought of as her friend and security, and then lost the subs around her which were probably the closest to a real pack she had.

She isn't as tough or as cold as she makes out and I can feel her fear, her insecurity, her worry over her mom, and her complete lack of bold now I'm touching her hand to hand. I squeeze it tightly and try to numb down the intense feelings I am absorbing from her and she suddenly yanks her hand away, realizing what she's doing by holding on to me. There's a moment of heightened blush on her face as she reels back and pulls herself stiff and cold. A gust of icy cold as her heart clamps shut and her emotions are bit down hard in an effort to conceal all

form me. Like an internal fire door being slammed shut to keep the fire at bay. The armor sweeping back up and the haughty exterior comes back into play. It's almost so effortless and speedy that a blink would have made me miss it.

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"I can arrange for Sierra to come sit with her, send up some food and give them time alone. She maybe isn't Luna anymore, but as Rema she still cares for the people and plays a hand in making this home a haven of calm." I ignore the change in her and don't draw attention to the fact she's wiping her hand to remove the feel of my warm touch on her. My brain is firing ahead to a solution for her mom.

I'm sure a little gentle coaxing will have Sierra leave her rooms for a while, especially if like Carmen said, this was one of her friends from the past. We don't have many of those here. Most remember her only as Luna, her friends were all kept behind by mates or lost in the war.

"I'm sorry I ever doubted you as Luna.... as worthy. For everything I said or did. He broke me. I was in pain. It was juvenile and I'm over it." She states coldly, icily harsh in her tone as though overcompensating for the weakness she showed me moments before. In that flash the old b\*\*\*\*y looking, aloof and haughty Carmen stands in place of the lost and vulnerable soul of seconds before, trivializing her love of my mate once upon a time ago, but this time I see through it.

A broken hearted, lonely girl, who lost someone she loved, was left to fend alone in a home she no longer recognized and still harbors a world of agony deep inside. As much as I look back and feel like she once deserved my anger, I don't think she does anymore. Carmen's adrift, with no anchor anymore. Her home is gone, her mate went to another, her father's a betrayer of all she knew and her mother.... slowly slipping away from her as the days pa\*\* by. There's only devastation and fear hiding behind cold b\*\*\*\*, and I wonder what she has gone through in the last few months under Juan's rule to lose the last ounces of soft she used to allow herself to show at times. I wonder what else our people out there are going through right now too, while here we live in a bubble of general safety and happy.

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"The past has pa\*\*ed. Let's focus on the now and the future and making your mom well." I utter quietly, but with determination. A need in me to offer her some sort of hope now that I can feel her mood has returned to distant and closed off. It's like there's no light in this girl at all and she has become so accustomed to dwelling in the dark that her very warmth has ebbed into nothingness the second she reels it back to her damp cave with her.

"It's been so long since I felt like we had any kind of real leader, or Luna.... I forgot what it feels like to have someone share the load and make you feel that

everything might be okay." She stares at her feet, a tiny flinch of her jawline and eyebrow and seems to unfocus for a second as a tiny hint of color warms the apples of her cheeks at her own words, and then it's gone just as quickly. A hint of something, maybe gratitude, maybe real genuine hope, then bam, she closed it back down and swallowed her carelessness once more.

For the first time I think I see what maybe Colton did all these years and why he tried to stay with her before there was us. Knowing him and how he likes to see the best in people, and his hero complex. I see it now. The scared little girl in the midst of the hard-outer shell and the signals she gives off so subtly you almost miss them if you are not looking for them. It's in glimpses when she forgets to pull her mask up, the tiny wrinkles in her armor, the careless words, or the unintended moments of genuine touch. It makes you want to help her, bring her into the warmth and remove the shackles she has put around herself to keep people out.

The b\*\*\*\* isn't who she is. The tantrums, the behaviors, the arrogant outer persona, they're all a mask to shield this right here. More like her mom than I think he knows and maybe it's not so unbelievable that her mother is a weaker wolf with no ability to fend for herself. Maybe that's exactly why Carmen learned to be this kind of way after watching her mother get pushed around for her own flaws.

Carmen is fragile in her own way, yet at the same time so much stronger than I gave her credit for, in a completely different way. She's more capable than Tawna, less likely to break into a thousand pieces the way her mom seems to, but it's there alright. The vulnerability. The sadness. She needs a strong mate to give her what she lacks, she needs security, and devotion, loyalty, to find her self-worth and someone who will love her and bring her peace the way Colton has for me. She needs a family that she leans on, instead of them leaning on her and making her the one to shield and protect.

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Maybe it's guilt, maybe it's that now I see her in a new light, I truly feel sorry for my part in her unhappiness. The fates disregarded her, cast her aside, and Colton could no longer stomach to look her way when she betrayed his bond. Which I guess, now I even understand why she did what she did to him when he bonded to someone else. I can't even imagine what that did to her mentally and emotionally when all she had to rely on was him.

I took her place, in his heart, his bed, and the pack, and she was left on the cold mountain, alone. To weather the storm and figure out how to save her mom. She watched everyone slip away and her life was turned upside down while she held together the pieces of the wreckage she was left with. Maybe she has more reason to hate me than I ever had for her. Yet standing here, I don't even find a trace of it anymore. It's like her emotions have died and all that's left is a need to keep her single lifeline safe or else she has nothing at all to go on for. Her mom.

"You're home now. We'll figure this out... as a pack." I try a brighter smile that conveys 'it's okay, we got this' and push down every other thought and feeling inside.

Carmen's eyes mist over, and she turns away swallowing hard, and clears her throat, giving off some strong uncomfortable vibes. Unable to produce words she nods her head and wipes her cheek with the back of her hand in an almost childlike gesture so I don't see the breaking of another single tear rolling down her face and yet I feel her shame and disappointment in herself for letting me see her weak. She just never stops fighting.

"Go sit with your mom and I'll go see Sierra. I'll send tea and cake up to your quarters and we can take it from there." I ignore her behavior and feel somewhat relieved when she moves to walk away from me. Obviously had enough of my company and makes a break for it thus relieving me of her emotions as she gives me space. I'm sort of glad as this interaction has left me kind of screwed up and confused about my own feelings and exactly how and what to do with Carmen now being here. I need some head space to process all of this.

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I hope to god Sierra has a way to help her, maybe soothe and heal Tawna to better accept the past and move forward in a new life with us. I mean a femme whose own mate put her in a coma for eight years to keep her silent might be better at understanding the betrayal and hopelessness she feels. Maybe it will be good for them both.

And I need to go find my mate and talk this out with him, because I am sure as hell feeling weirded out that the girl I told him I didn't want here this morning, is now on my list of top priorities for the day, and I have no idea how that even happened. I still have no clue how I will react when I finally see them together once more in any kind of interaction.

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"Hey beautiful, how was your morning?" Colton slides up behind me and wraps his arms around my shoulder, kissing me on the back of the head before nuzzling in close and calming all my anxious energy with one touch. My grounding force that enables me to set my worries free and I almost melt into a warm puddle of soft limbs. It's in these reunion moments I realize how badly I miss him all day when we aren't together.

"Interesting. Carmen sought me out, long story, but I sent your mom to go visit with Tawna a while. She's not doing so good and we thought it might help. I haven't had much else to do today except eat, wander the village, be lavished with a ton of gifts I get every time they see me and felt the need to have a nap. I'm so tired today and I have no idea why." I curl my arms over his and sink back, nestling my head in the crook of his throat and sigh heavily, closing my eyes as I submerge into my own personal heavenly space. Colton's familiar seductive masculine scent and hot body temperature overpowers my skin and air and further pushes that feeling of being coc\*\*\*ed in paradise.

"Stress, maybe. Carmen, huh... and yet she still lives? Maybe you're sick" He jests, pulling a hand up to cover my forehead in mock testing that I have a fever and I elbow jab him in the abs lightly.

"Ha, ha! I felt sorry for her.... She seems different." I state blankly, so not ready to open the can of worms known as my emotions after my encounter with her earlier. I am not one hundred percent certain I even know how I feel about her being here at all.

"I wouldn't know. I've avoided her like the plague since they arrived. I've been busy and I just don't know how to navigate that mess. I'm being a coward." He exhales against my temple and impulsively slides one of his hands over my breast for a quick g\*\*\*\* and then heads for my waist to snuggle in tight. My body tingles at his touch and it ignites that never fading libido that exists between us.

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"Stop avoiding her. She's one of the pack! .... She's not a threat. I won't get mad at you for interacting with her because I know it has to happen sooner or later. I don't think her focus lies with us anymore anyway, and she seems lost somehow. I got the impression that you and I are way low on her list of things to f\*\*\* up." Sometimes I can't fault my mate's loyalty, and I know the only reason he's avoiding her is in case it upsets me. He's transparent as gla\*\* sometimes.

I trust him, trust our bond and I know he harbors no kind of romantic feelings for her anymore so really, logically, I shouldn't have any kind of jealousy over her. She needs an alpha who cares, she needs to feel she belongs with these people and if Colton showing her a little kindness does that, then I am okay with it, I guess. I mean, I may feel weird at first but I'm sure as it happens more frequently I might normalize it and no longer care. I don't doubt where his heart lies; he's shown me for the last six months how much he loves me, and I have absolutely nothing to worry about in terms of his ex being on scene again. He's mine, he always will be. Our bond is the strongest thing in this world. Just look at Sierra.... even when you don't want it, it still doesn't die.

"Well, you've certainly let it sink in since this morning, haven't you? I won't avoid her; I just think it's better to not spend too much time around her. It's only been a few months and I don't want you feeling insecure or her getting any kind of wrong signals." Colton nuzzles my neck expertly and my knees weaken with his attentions as he surrounds me with s\*\*y affection in a bid to make the topic less tense.

"What's her story anyway. I always took her for spoiled and conceited, but I don't know... she seems so vulnerable now. It's like I am seeing a different girl and I wonder if maybe it was always there, and I never noticed it before." I push my b\*\*\* into his groin to let him know his kisses down my neck are good, better than, and he slides my dress across my shoulder a little to access more skin, tracing his lips over my nape and across the skin gently. He sets me on fire, and I close my eyes and have to fight the moan deep in my throat as I surrender to tingles and goosebumps all over.

"Carmen has always been hard to read and figure out.... An enigma in a way. Her dad mated up for opportunity and not love which I guess started the whole mess of her family. Her mom isn't exactly one of the strongest of femmes, or capable, but her bloodline is one of the oldest and the pairing put him in my father's sights. Marco wanted a son, Tawna gave him a girl, and they have been a fractured dysfunctional family since. I know from things my father has said that he doesn't put any effort into his own family; he feels they weigh him down and make him look bad."

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"Hmmm" I half answer, too focused on his breath trailing by my ear and my hair stands on end as he grazes his lip over the lobe.

"Carmen doesn't really gel with others because of who her dad is; she was always just this kid in the shadows who tried so hard to be seen and accepted, but the pack avoided. Everyone knows he's my dad's beta so there was a fear of getting near her and I guess over the years she developed this tough hard outer shell like she didn't really care. That she was better than everyone and she looked down on all of us. The attitude, the stropy behavior, all of it to hide the fact she really hasn't got anyone, but she's not really a bad person, not when you get to know her more. She's lonely and insecure and she keeps everyone at arm's length." Colton carries on, both with his words and his gentle assault on my senses, his hands skimming my waist and abdomen and he manages to somehow hug me even closer.

"She needs a friend, maybe? Someone to get through and really see her?" I try to stay on topic but he's making it hard.

"I dated her for two years and I didn't ever get past the mask, but I guess I was the closest other than her mom. I saw glimpses but no one gets in, I doubt they ever will."

What he says makes my heart ache and instantly sobers my sizzling hormones as I think about the reality of her existence. I was like her once. Alone, keeping people out, and looking back, it was that saddest part of my life.

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"I feel bad the way it went, how it ended and that I hurt her and walked away from it all. I think being your dad's biggest disappointment in life has to have left its mark and I never gave a second thought to walking off with my new pack and leaving her behind. My focus was on you, I didn't think what her staying would be like. I guess I didn't think that without me and the subs, she was back to being alone." Colton's tone matches my newly found internal heaviness and he stops his slow tease and just hugs me tightly instead. His arms coming around my lower rib cage and his face is snuggled against my neck and shoulder.

"Did you ever think about marking her? Two years is a long time to be paired up without marking." I ask curiously, not because I want to torture myself or anything, but I always wondered what held him back and thinking about it now, I want to know. It's normal in a pairing for the male to make the move and ask to

mate up, femmes don't tend to do it or have a say until they are asked. Such is the old-world nature of our pairings. A world where men still rule, and females submit. He obviously cared about her, but yet he never made a move to mate with her properly.