

Awakening Following Fate by L. T. Marshall Chapter 8

I stroll down the stairs of the main sweeping staircase after I am done eating with Sierra, feeling heavy with everything we talked about. It's almost noon and the house is eerily quiet, but noises of the busy village outside are filtering through on the now open windows on the light breeze. It's still raining, but it has promise of a brighter day again and the schoolhouse is getting its first proper use today, now it's almost complete. No more children in the great hall at all from now on and I squint that way as male wolves begin streaming out of the double doors at the far end of the hall as I step the last tread.

It's where Colton has convened the sentinels from patrol, his best packs, and they have been discussing everything to do with continuing to maintain our peaceful and safe existence. Supply runs, financials, as we still have to bear the weight of our pack, even with severance from the main Santo millions. Luckily Colton had his own inheritance and his own trust fund that Juan couldn't touch and with some of our adopted packs from the mountain, they too brought in funds to help keep us afloat for a very long time. We have investments and share in the human world and we seem to be ticking over nicely, despite the loss of Colton's rightful wealth. Wolves don't need the things humans do to survive, but it's easier to feed and clothe a pack than it is to hunt, forage, and live like wild animals.

I yawn and stretch out as I make my way past the flood of departing Lychens, receiving the lowered nods and mumbles of 'Luna' in passing. Showing their respect and I smile and wait until the passage is clear enough for me to proceed. I will eventually get used to this change in how I'm treated but it still sits kind of funny in my stomach. I'm getting better at taking hold of my role and accepting it now, but always forever will be that unworthy girl with her doubts circling in my stomach. The awkwardness at the respect shown my way is still strange.

I push into the now partially empty great hall, with its multitudes of military straight seats, all facing the front podium where our sub pack are lounging around in various positions. On seats, on the floor, and Colton is sat on the edge of the podium with his legs hanging free, looking like a teen boy hanging out at lunch break in high school. They're huddle close enough that I can tell they're summarizing their meeting and discussing something further. I wander closer and pick up on their lowered tones easily.

"We limit supply runs to daylight hours, mid-day, only. We have to be alert more than before as we don't know what they are capable of." Colton carries on, glancing my way with a quick smile to acknowledge me and it's clear they are talking about the presence of the witch or witches in the woods.

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"Does daylight really help?" I ask with a smile as I hop up next to him on the ledge and he instinctively slides his arm around my shoulders and kisses me on the temple.

"No, but it means they aren't any straying vamps and we might hold our own against witches with a little more effect." He smiles and shoulder nudges me with that cheeky gorgeous smile of his and I wrinkle my nose back at him. Always melting at his briefest of expressions and I sigh at how lovestruck I still am for this boy.

"Good Morning, Hemara." Meadow cuts in, pulling my attention to the only other wolf in the pack that I love spending all my time with equally. Her usual t**le of sister warms my heart, as does her loving smile, and I beam her way with my obvious affection for her.

"Good morning. So, what was so important that you had to kidnap my breakfast partner from me this fine day?" I lean into Colton's neck, nuzzling snugly under his chin as I watch the uneasy shift in my pack. The instant change in tension and atmosphere as Cesar and Jesus both glance to Colton with a subtle flicker of apprehension. My stomach plummets, my chest tightens, and my sus***ion is instantly piqued.

What is it? I link Colton immediately, feeling his own rise in stress levels and knowing this is something I NEED to be told. He hesitates slightly, that raise in his heartbeat has me all wide eyes and I sit stiffly to eyeball him from my lower position.

"We had new incoming before dawn. Runaways from the mountain. We put them in the guest wing in a room for now, but they brought some news about how things are over there, and we don't quite know what to believe." Colton stares over my head at Meadow and I catch the communication glance. Something neither is wanting to say out loud, but they are both so obvious it's painful.

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"Is it bad? What is it?" I blurt out, instantly anxious, nerves rising into panic and Colton tightens his arm around me, leaning in to nuzzle against my temple.

"It's Carmen..... She arrived here with her mom this morning, minus their father" he pauses waiting for my reaction and I tense all over. My heart lurches into my stomach and my heartbeat seems to thump through my brain as my throat runs dry.

It's not like I have anything to worry about when it comes to Carmen, it's just I hate her, and our history isn't great. She's his ex-lover, ex almost mate, and I almost lost him to her, thinking he marked her months ago. I know I shouldn't feel anything, but it's complicated with our history and my green-eyed side piques. Jealousy consuming me almost in a nanosecond as my body is engulfed in heat and anger. Carmen is a prize b**** and in no way a person I will ever like.

"Send her to go find somewhere else to hide. She chose to stay and now what, we're conveniently here when it goes to s***.!" I attempt to pull away, hackles rising but Colton holds me tight and doesn't relent. Keeping me la**oed in his embrace and persistent with his hug so I can't get away from him. He knows how to handle me when I flare up and he doesn't let go or shift in any way to give me a

slight chance of dodging his grip. He knows I may self-combust if I am let loose to pace and rant.

"I did think about it, trust me, I did. She's not the main issue and I can't throw her mom out. She never did anything wrong.... Lorey, it's not about her. My dad has the mountain in chaos, the people are suffering" Colton tries to soothe but I b*** in angrily.

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"What about her dad? Isn't he Juan's second in command? Won't he come looking for her and put our people in danger!" I huff impatiently, grinding out words from clenched teeth, knowing I am being stupid over this, but it wasn't exactly what I was expecting to walk into. She just killed the rest of my mood in one fell swoop.

"She said that's the reason they left. The wolves have somehow gained access to our memory shares and are pa**ing them through the mountain. All of it.... what he did to your family, my mom, everything. They are starting to see him for what he really is, and Tawna couldn't stay by the side of a mate who betrayed the people and supported an alpha who murders his own. They are here for our protection, not our judgement." Colton's stern tone, just a step away from his alpha gift and I glare at him with a threatening dare to even use that on me. He frowns at me and seems to recoil his commandeering vibe a little, knowing only full well I will erupt if he tries to control me.

"Juan is losing control; the mountain is weak and that leaves the rest of our people weaker. He's so focused on trying to keep the ones that are left, he's ignoring the threat of the Vamps. Their attacks are as frequent as ours and they've lost many from his carelessness." Meadow pipes in sorrowfully, pulling my heated rage towards her genuine angst-ridden expression and it completely sobers my mood. Her care for those people mirrors my own instinct as Luna to want to help them. The thought of the wolves trusting him to keep them safe and yet dying at his hand's tugs at my stomach and heart and cools my jealous pang almost immediately. As Luna of my people, their care and protection is my goal in life, and it pains me to think of the vulnerable left behind who are afraid every second. I know what living as a possession under Juan's rule was like.