

Awakening Following Fate by L. T. Marshall Chapter 16

“Honestly, as bad as this sounds... no. I couldn't put my finger on it, but it felt like I was holding my breath, and something inside told me it wasn't the right time. I didn't realize it was my gut telling me it was the wrong femme, I just thought I wasn't ready to be tied down. That we were young and immature, and I had so many more responsibilities. Looking back, I cared about her a lot, but I don't think I loved her. I just didn't know it until you and felt this way. With you, the need to mark you was a constant craving inside of me from the second we bonded.”

“Shame you took so long.” I sa** him, lightening the mood a little and try to ignore the pangs of green-eyed monster when my man admits to caring for another femme in that way. I'm so stupid with this but I get my cute boy frown with full on dimples and a half smile in response as he brings his face up to mine from the side, to lock eyes. It helps ease my ruffled feelings.

“Baby, the best things come to those who wait.” He smirks at my mock outrage and bops his nose on the tip of mine.

“Never heard of 'you lose, you snooze' You were almost eternally mateless, buddy.” I prod him in the arm getting a tight rib squeeze and a kiss to my nose for good measure.

“Never! I would have searched for you until the end of time. I wasn't losing you, even if it took me years to find you. That....I was certain of.” Colton turns me in his arms, so I end up pressed frontally to his s**y physique and he leans in to kiss me properly. His lips grazing mine sensually as his hands find their way under my hair and he pulls me in for a full on make out session with tongues and lots of toe-curling mouth o*****s. I always loved that Colton's kiss had the ability to turn me to putty in his hands and ignite every sensation, tingle and goosebump my skin is capable of. It's his magical way of soothing whatever mood I have brewing and clears my rain of stress and worry almost instantly.

“We should get back to doing our job” I point out when he lets me loose and rubs his nose against mine. The intimacy between us is my favorite thing in the world, a bubble of content where I can inhale everything that's him and my world feels whole. Sadly though, real life has responsibilities, duties and we are not even close to dinner yet.

“Or.... We could go upstairs and take a nap..... The energetic kind.” he winks, husky with his words and I eyeroll impulsively.

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“Honestly, if I had known your libido was this overactive, I may have rethought marking you.” I giggle when I push him off, liking the fact that he hauls me straight back to him, always so eager to keep us joined by touch. Colton never likes to stray apart for long, the need to be beside me, hold me, overwhelms him

and I guess it's the same for me. Imprinting gives you this insane need to be together every second or else it doesn't feel right. When we are close, or in the same space, we have to have contact, or it just feels wrong.

"It's not my fault. My mate has me stuck in eternal haze and I think I'm broken... or else, it's the vampy in you, all seductive and dazzling with your special gifts and you make me want to hump you five times a day."

"Hmmm" I respond drily. He makes this Vamp joke often enough. In the grimoires in the halls under the homestead we found a whole lot about vampires dazzling humans with a need to have s** with them. While under their spell the vamps could feed not only their urge for blood without humans resisting, but their sensual natures and their craving to screw everyone. Vampires are apparently as h**** as wolves and it explains why hybrids like mine exist. "You know, we have to go eat with your mom. It's the highlight of her day that we take our meals with her. And I'm not going to her rooms looking like you just mauled me... again." I attempt to extract my body from his muscular arms and get nowhere with that. He's too strong and I'm not really all that willing to be loose.

"It's a good look on you, all flushed and satisfied. Chilling like you found heaven and haven't come back down from the clouds yet. I like how you look after s**... it's my favorite view." He finally gives me some breathing space by stepping back to admire me while keeping our hands interlocked.

"I've seen myself. It's more like red faced, sweating, unattractively ruffled, and breathless! Like you chased me around the upper floor for forty-five minutes and I might pa** out at any moment. I hate your mom knowing what we have been doing. So, No! Dinner first, bed later." I need to put my foot down when it comes to this or else he would never let me leave our bed at any hour.

"God, you're bossy. You know my mom is aware that as mates, we ummm... mate. It's kind of a perk of being paired up and it's right there in the t**le." He angles for a g**** of my breast with one hand and I slap it away.

"Behave. If you start that we may never make dinner. I'm not playing!" I push him away properly, aware of how easily he always bends me to his will when it comes to s**y play and somehow always manages to coerce me upstairs for random daytime quickies. Not that I don't enjoy what he does to me, but as I feel tired most of my day because of him, it does dampen my motivation to be productive daily. I have to be more a**ertive and learn how to turn him down from time to time. My sleep pattern demands it.

"I'm not hungry anyway." he smirks, and I again slap the hand sliding out my way to get me back against him. We really do have to move or else we will be here all afternoon.

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"Well, I'm starving, in fact, and I might just pa** out from lack of nourishment if you don't let me eat first." I warn him with a raised brow and hold my hand aloft as he ignores my batting him again and goes for another b*** caress. My breasts are apparently his favorite body part next to the obvious one between my thighs.

“Okay! Fine! Jeeze, woman! I get it.... Food first, socialize with my mom, deal with the duties I have to deal with for this afternoon and then...you’re all mine. You may regret not giving me this little ten-minute tumble come bedtime though, baby face.” He grins with that delish air, tweaking my nose annoyingly, and I sigh. I know he’s right and this refusal for a session will have a knock-on effect later.

With him it’s never ten minutes, ever, so quickie is not even a term I connect to what he wants to do. Quick for Colton is more like thirty minutes. No daytime rolls upstairs means tonight he will take hours to get his fill. Not that I’m complaining, I just really need sleep at some point in my life. Lately it’s taking its toll and I’m tired all the time because he has a severe lack of needing rest it seems, while I definitely do not get enough.

“We’ll see” I yawn almost to emphasize the fact that I’m shattered beyond belief these past weeks and he frowns at me, watching me for a long second. His expression dropping from cute teen teasing his girl, to suddenly mature husband worrying that his wife really needs to lay down.

“Maybe I might let you have a night off to rest. You look kinda beat. Are you feeling okay?” he lifts the back of his palm to my head in seriousness this time and I shrug and try to brush it away with a smile.

“I’m a wolf... getting sick is cured with a turn. I’m fine, just really exhausted lately. I think with all the early morning fun, the nonstop daily grind and our late night ‘mating’, I’m not getting enough rest. After six months it’s finally taking its toll.”

Colton stares at me with a somber expression for what feels like the longest time before finally frowning and pulling me back into his arms and hugging me tight. This time it completely lacks any s**ual vibe and is just one of his tender holds.

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“You know saying No won’t hurt my feelings. I know it’s not that it’s not good, but that sometimes you don’t have as much stamina as me. Just tell me when you don’t want to, and we won’t. s** isn’t everything. I like just being beside you in bed, curling up and having you sleep in my arms. Best feeling in the world and my favorite part of every day.”. his gentle, sincere tone makes me melt and I squish myself up in his arms, hugging him tight around his chest and nuzzle in childishly.

“I don’t think there’s a wolf alive that has your stamina. I’ll be fine after food and some down time with your mom. We can go to bed early so we can have both fun and sleep, leave everything else until morning..... I love you.” I lay my ear against the steady thump of his heart and he brushes my hair down my back smoothly. Igniting that part of me that craves his security.

“I love you too, baby. So much sometimes it’s crazy. I don’t know what I would have done if I never got you back. My life would have been empty and endless. You know how much you mean to me, right? That I love more than life and I

would do anything for you. No matter what you asked of me.” His tone is lower, husker and I am overwhelmed with his sudden onslaught of gooey emotions as it washes over both of us.

“I know. I would do the same for you. You’re everything I never knew I wanted or needed and life with you these past months has changed everything that I knew and felt before. You make my world brighter, better... even with the way things are with the attacks. You give me security that we’re going to be okay. You’re the alpha we all needed, and you are the best for not just me, but everyone here. I hope you know how much they all respect and value you. How grateful they are that you took your place early and brought them out here.” I don’t tell him this enough and I feel like he needs to hear it more often. He does so much for all of us and yet never asks for anything in return.

Colton is quiet for a moment and I gaze up to find him staring straight ahead, his eyes glazed with moisture and he catches me looking at him and smiles. I can feel his emotions mingled with mine, that well of happy ache and overemotional overwhelm. He may look solid and rough, but Colton is still that sweet boy inside and he carries so many insecurities thanks to his father.

“I sometimes doubt myself. Being only nineteen and running an entire pack, a homestead, being responsible for everyone here..... I hate to admit that sometimes, I want to run and hide and be a normal teen, for like a day.” He sighs and I exhale with him. Feeling exactly how he does.

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“Soon be twenty... only a few weeks left so maybe you should reward yourself with a day off and go act like Colton pre alpha, pre mountain fight. Kick back and enjoy the last of your teens if only for a moment.” I encourage with a smile.

“You know all I would do all day is keep you shackled to the bed, so maybe not...” He grins down at me and kisses me on top of my head when I giggle at him.

“You’re hopeless.”

“For you I am!” he hits me with cheesy words and a wink and I eyeroll. So quick to go back to being that s** mad boy that I can’t get enough of.

“And then you ruin the romance vibes with the worst chat up lines. Come on, Alpha Santo, we have your mom waiting for dinner most likely. Get that look off your face or she will know exactly where your mind is at.”

“She’s my mom, she knows where my mind is at all the time, so there’s no point trying to hide it. She birthed an alpha boy. She knows what that entails.” He chuckles and I shove him in the abs. Sighing at his one-track mind and shove him backwards to get him moving. Colton relents and slides his arm around my shoulders instead, hauling me into an embrace to walk beside me and kisses me on the head as we move for the door.

"Do you never think that your mom longs for another child. To make up for all those lost years of your childhood?" I nudge him as we walk, making our way out into the main hall and head for the stairway.

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"I wish my mom could de-mate from my dad and find someone else to start over, have another, maybe more than one, but we both know that's not a possibility. The mate bond can't be broken without death.... If it could, I would have done it for her already. Let her pick another and have those years back." He guides me up the steps, watching his speed so as not to trip me and I squeeze my arm around his waist a little.

"Given the circ**stances maybe allowing her to find another and break a little rule wouldn't be such an awful thing, right?" I ask warily, knowing that despite the rules being set in stone for all wolves, alphas can sometimes make exceptions and sway the people a little in times of need. Say if Sierra had a lover and a stand in mate, despite being bonded to someone else. No one would judge her for replacing that a**hole Juan after what he did to her.

Colton sighs and glances down at my face, his serious expression taking over, and he shakes his head.

"Even if I could justify her having a lover, a non-mate to pup with, to live with she would never agree. My mom has always lived by the laws and her bond to my dad would always stand in her way. I've thought about it. Hell, I see the way she looks at Radar whenever he shows face, and with every part of my soul, I would happily let him romance her. Radar has been a father figure to me since he came back from the wars, but he too is strait laced and would never cross that line, so it's not even worth pondering. He can't even look her in the eye because she was once his Luna. It's a nice thought, but completely hopeless and it will never happen on either side of that pairing." His deflation taints my hope but doesn't fully extinguish it. One I have something brewing in my mind, it's hard to let it go.

"Maybe not as lovers, not as mates.... maybe as a companion. You could reinstate him as a guard, to shadow his Rema. She needs someone to spend her time with and Radar is besotted with her. He always has been. Maybe with forced proximity, something could blossom." The cogs in my head turn but Colton drops his brows to frown at me with a sweet look of 'no'

"He's too shy around her. He freezes up, trips over his words and anytime she does speak to him he comes out with harsh abrasive responses that makes it sound like he doesn't like her at all." Colton sighs and ruffles my hair with a frown. "I get what you're saying, I do. I don't disagree, it's just, those two are hopeless and as companions I think they would stand silently at each side of a room, avoiding eye contact and making painful stilted statements and never really relax. Radar sees his Luna, even still, and he can't ever lower his respectful boundaries. Mom sees a shy guard who once risked his life to save hers. Some wolves are never meant to be more." I huff with a loud breath, but he continues pulling me along.

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"You have no sense of romance" I point out with deflation, knowing what he's saying is true, but isn't it worth a try.

"Are you telling me I should try harder, that I'm not romancing you enough?" his deadpan and way too serious tight tone makes me glance up, instantly shocked he would get that from our conversation and realize he's smirking at me. Being an a** and winding me up.

"Shut up. You sweep me off my feet a million times a day."

"Yeah, something I know I'm good at, right?" he ducks and swoops his arm under my leg and hoists me up princess style while I give out a startled yelp at his lightning-fast maneuver. My heart lurching into my throat with the speed in which he just hauled me up.

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"This is not what I meant!" I giggle and wrap my arms around his neck to snuggle in, liking this new height and position as I get to trace that s**y jaw and gaze at the most beautiful profile of a male I have ever known. Colton smiles and scales the stairs faster, getting us up to the landing and next three flights in super quick time.

Sierra resides on the far end of the building in her own rooms and we put her somewhere quiet and cozy where she could watch over the village from her own balcony every day. We didn't want her to feel alone up here so we made sure she has around the clock presence in the form of waiting femmes who tend to her every need.

Sierra is already at the table by the balcony doors when we stroll in, overlooking the forest side of the homestead, into the dense darkness that is framed by the distant mountains. So many memories of being out there alone every time I see the view from up here that it fully silences my previous train of thought and Colton drops me on my feet as we come to sit with her. Knowing our topic is over as Sierra wouldn't be too pleased knowing we were talking about matchmaking her.

"Hey, Mom, What's for dinner." Colton reverts to boy whenever in the presence of his mom and slides around beside her, leaning in to kiss her on the temple before pulling out a chair for me. He nestles me on her side then he sits by me, so he faces her.

"The kitchen has made Steak Diane with all the tr*****s. Hope you're hungry." She smiles softly, that face beaming with maternal love for her two teens. I know she isn't my mom but sometimes I feel like she loves me as though she is and I'm rather partial to her too.

"Famished." I smile softly and pat her on the hand, our usual gesture of affection which has become the norm. Sierra smiles brightly and we all settle in.

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"I went and seen Tawna as you asked today, it was emotional" Sierra brings my eye to hers, a faraway look and a glaze of moisture as she says it and I focus intently on the waves of sadness she starts to expel. Sometime sit's a curse to feel others this way and while I'm tired, I have no energy for it.

"How did it go?" Colton cuts in, sensing her somber mood at the mention of the woman's name. He must be picking it up from my emotions, given we share.

"It was nice to see her again but.... Tawna is broken, her heart is in pain and she kept talking as though she had to pay some sort of retribution for her mate's part in the past. I don't know. She made very little sense, and, in the end, I had Dr Miago come up and give her some sedatives and pills to help ease her distress. Carmen says she has been this way since the memories made it to the mountain." Sierra moves to place her napkin on her lap and we both do the same, being very civilized at mealtimes nowadays. Having a mom figure has improved our table manners anyway.

"Do you think she will improve in time? With care and maybe some talking therapy with Anya." I ask as food servers enter the room quickly and begin laying out starter dishes in front of us. Some simple melon and ham preceding our main and it all looks and smells amazing so much so that my mouth waters instantly with ravenous hunger. We fall quiet as they set about the task of filling our water gla**es and placing salad on the table before receding quickly.

Anya is the Shamans mate, and she is what most consider the ther***** of the pack. She has way of talking things out and helping straighten thoughts and feelings. I always suspected she has a mild ability to manipulate emotions short term but as she only uses it for good, I have never thought to ask her about it.

"I think she feels responsible for not swaying her mate from his path years ago. And now, she doesn't know how to be the force in his life a mate is meant to be." Sierra is unusually low in mood, her whole vibe deflated, and I can tell that she's summarizing what must have been a painful visit between her and Tawna.

"Doesn't she understand that a mate can only influence gently and not dictate someone's choices... she did nothing wrong, especially as she didn't know." I add with a sigh. Feeling for Tawna and her state of unhappiness. Knowing that at the end of the day, mates are not held responsible for their partners choices in life. We all have the proof sitting right here with us. Sierra and Juan couldn't be anymore different on the scale of opposites if they tried and she had zero sway over him.

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"Tawna was always such a gentle and easy going, almost submissive type. She needed a mate who handled her gently and nurtured her loving heart. What she

got was a cold-hearted brute who neglected her and locked her in that house, never to be part of his life or decisions. He's no better than Juan and I pointed this out to her. I never had any control of Juan's actions and she never had control of his. She needs to be stronger for Carmen, for without her the girl is alone. Carmen is the only thing I think which is keeping her going." Sierra pulls at her plate and then discards it quickly as though she's lost her appetite and Colton catches it with that observant eye. Her tone was tight and even I can sense an emotion she's trying to shield.

"There's something you're not saying." He points out and Sierra flickers to look at the table almost guilty. She sighs heavily and rests her palms flat on the table as though bracing herself and locks an eye on me this time. She pauses to think, sighs slowly and then smiles somewhat sadly.

"I sensed.... or ...we have something called moment of sight. That's when a touch, or conversation, or even a strong emotion, gives us a flicker of a moment. Almost like a blink that you don't quite catch but it instills a strong feeling that you can't shake. Almost like a premonition in a way." She explains to me and I catch Colton nodding at my side. I know he has experienced it as he told me so before.

"And you had this with her?" I ask, as Colton stills and watches her steadily. He falls quiet as he ponders it and the glances passing between mother and son make me uneasy. Sometimes they do still have this silent way of communicating that I guess is borne from being mother and child.

"I had the strong overwhelming sense that Tawna wishes harm upon herself to remove Enzo from Juan's side. Maybe she thinks without his Beta it will weaken his stance on the mountain." She looks away to the window and that flicker of pain makes it drive home that she is certain of this.

"You're talking suicide? Wolves don't do that.... It's impossible for us to do harm to ourselves that results in death. Our wolf form kicks in and heals us instinctively, without our permission. It's not exactly easy to find a way that a wolf can't save." Colton leans in, seems none of us can eat when this is the topic and I frown heavily, my stomach churning with the topic.

I've never heard of a wolf taking their own life, ever. It's unheard of as we can heal from most things naturally with a turn, even mental health. Tawna is rare if depression is overtaking her and not healing, and I wonder if she is pure wolf at all. The Shaman has been studying the grimoires under the house and he has mentioned that half breeds can sometimes cause flaws in the wolf DNA. Maybe Tawna isn't as pure as her mate thought. Another spew of secrets that the Santo bloodline has hidden for generations.

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"Maybe it's just a wish that she won't ever carry through. Can't possibly attempt. She loves her daughter; I doubt she will leave her that way. There's no way in hell

she can get hold of anything in the homestead that would aid her in taking her life. We can recover from most anything." Colton seems to be trying to convince himself that this is an unfounded worry and that it will pass in time as Tawna gets help.

"It takes an iron will not to turn wolf when your body is dying. Tawna is not that strong and I doubt she could overpower the survival instinct. We should put her in med bay for a few days, have Anya visit daily and let the doctor decide on the best way to help her through long term. She's depressed and we should handle her carefully and with love and tender care." Sierra interjects and it again drags my mind to the possibility of Tawna not being pure. Wolves don't get depressed.

"We should bring Carmen into the sub packs communal and let them talk it out with her too, bring her back into the fold. They were her pack once and she needs more than just her mom again if she's to find the strength to help her heal. If we have more wolves on board helping Carmen support her mom and pulling her through this dark mindset then who knows, it may help them both. Carmen will waiver if she alone bears the burden." I suggest with a logical brain, pushing my weird messy feelings about that girl aside as my Luna heart takes over and Colton blanches at me in disbelief

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"You want to let Carmen back in the sub pack? Do you need to lay down for a bit, baby?" He leans out and feels my head and I push it away with an eyeroll. Dramatic much.

"She's one of our people and she never really left the subs... she wasn't disengaged or tossed out. They all just left the mountain without her. She's alone and she needs her family. I can put the past to bed, and she says she wants to. Meadow will be better with her now that she no longer has ties to you and I think when I explain some of this to Meds, she'll agree. We look after our own and like her or not... Carmen is one of ours. She needs the emotional back up right now."

In my heart I know this is how it needs to be. As Luna I need to put the needs of my people over my own grudges. Carmen may not ever become my best friend, but as long as she is willing to respect my position as Luna, then I can live with her am*** us. I don't need to compete for the affection of my pack, my best friend, or my mate. I have them all on my own and she failed even with two years of being beside them. Carmen is just a femme in my pack now, nothing else. As long as I keep that in the forefront then I'm sure eventually my jealousy over her past with Colton will fade away.

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"Maybe not having that attitude because she thought she was heading for Luna status will warm her to the pack finally. She always treated them like she was above them, because of me, maybe not anymore. It might make enough of a difference to how she gets with them again." Colton points out and leans in fast to throw a kiss on my lips. A little 'I'm proud of you' with that cute boy smile that makes me melt. I can feel his happy surprise coming off in waves and affecting

my own inner doubts, pushing a warm gooey feeling to relax my muscles and ease my tension.

“She needs the support. Maybe it will help her better deal with Tawna and get her past this. I think Tawna needs to learn to live without her mate and I can help her with that, be her support and mentor.” Sierra smiles weakly and I can’t help but feel the heart aching slice of pain I always get when she talks of being alone this way. Wolves are meant to mate up, it’s part of our purpose and we are never meant to be alone. She can try and hide it behind smiles as much as she likes but I can always feel her truth. Sierra lives with a broken heart every second of every day.

“Okay, with that decided, how about you two tell me how your day was. I need some mood lifting after mine. How are the new building works going? How was the school’s first day in their new home?”