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“Another fast-paced, emotion-packed story by Carrie Cotten! I was hooked from the first page and so perfectly gratified as each scene unfolded. Cotten’s stories are intricately crafted and never shy away from the Gospel message as the centerpoint. Although a perfect endnote to the Dreamwalker Series, you’ll find yourself saying “I Want More!” when you reach the epilogue.”

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Carrie drops her readers right into the action from page one and never lets up. Talk about a page turner! Andy and Will’s collective and individual arcs challenged me as a believer and left me utterly charmed. Awaken is the perfect conclusion to the Dreamwalker trilogy.

Kelly Ferguson – Book Reviewer

Awaken

A Dreamwalker Novel

By: Carrie Cotten

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ISBN: 9798422023929

DEDICATION

To all those whom God has given big dreams.

Listen when He calls and be ready to run full speed, with total abandon, towards the goal when He says “Go.”

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the authors who’ve gone before. To the nobodies and somebodies who paved the way. Thank you to my meticulous and ever patient editor, Heather. I would have never gotten past book one without you. You are the best! Thank you to Brianna for the endless (and I mean endless) support. The long hours spend listening to me agonize over plot points. Thank you to Jamie, Kelly, Allison, Sarah, Emily, Shannon for your early reading and thoughtful notes. Thank you to the readers who reach out and encourage, the friends who share and spread the word, the family who carries on with the day to day while I hide out in my writing hovel.

Thank you to my husband. My own personal Mr. Perfect. You inspire all the love stories I’ll ever write.

Thank you to my Lord. My Savior. My Jesus.

Every story I write is your story.

### PROLOGUE

O

tis stared at the printed photograph. The bright auburn hair and sky blue eyes gazing back at him struck a chord deep within, a string he’d long since severed, suddenly reconnected. It made him uncomfortable, a feeling he was not accustomed to.

“How could I have not known about this?” Still gripping the picture, he slammed his fist on the hard, slick surface of his desk.

“I’m sorry, sir. Cordova kept her activity concealed.”

“This is . . . unacceptable.” Otis smoothed the wrinkles his outburst caused on the page and let his gaze trace the lines of the young woman’s face as he considered the best course of action.

His eyes were drawn to the crystal chess set to his left. Several pieces lay on their sides, toppled by the force of his fist. Otis worked his jaw, scraping his tongue across the bumpy backs of his bottom teeth. He drew in slow, deep breaths until his ire settled. He would simply adjust his strategy. He righted the fallen pawns, chastising himself for not eliminating the incompetent Cordova years ago. He’d been too merciful. Banishing her had only caused trouble. Not only had she failed to eliminate his other disappointment, now she’d been captured and would possibly bring his whole organization down with her. All he’d worked for—all the sacrifices . . .

Not to mention, Elena Cordova could have possibly ruined the one thing he’d wanted more than anything. His eyes drifted back to the photograph. All those years spent searching. The twisted expression on the young woman’s face, the look of a person in agony, drew up a flame in his heart. Her gift was not one to be squandered on meaningless tasks; there was no guarantee it wasn’t without limits, without a finite amount of power.

This. Was. Not. The. Plan.

Otis slammed his fist again; the already hesitant man opposite him jumped, and one of the glass pieces rolled dangerously close to the desk’s edge. The man moved swiftly to catch it, clearly fearing its shattering would incur more wrath than the news he’d just delivered.

“I thought you’d be pleased. We’d been told she was dead.”

Otis glared at the thin-framed man, an expensive gray suit and bright red tie miserably failing to mask the trembling coward underneath.

“Pleased, Eagle?” Otis scoffed, disgusted by the regal code name this imbecile had managed to acquire. Buzzard would have been more accurate. “Am I pleased she’s alive—yes. Am I pleased one highly trained operative failed to bring in a single target and the other held her in secret, damaging her nearly beyond repair? No. I’m beyond outraged.”

“I won’t fail you, sir.” Eagle straightened, offering the rescued game piece as some kind of proof, putting forth a false confidence that only made Otis cringe.

He snatched the piece from Eagle, curling it tightly into his clenched fist. It was a knight, the sharp ears of the steed threatening to pierce the flesh of his palm. Otis glared. Eagle was no knight, as far as Otis was concerned; he was little more than a pawn. Loyal only because of what Otis had done for him, and what he wanted Otis to do further.

“No. You won’t. Because I’m going to tell you exactly what to do. Sit.” Otis slapped the knight back into place on the frosted chess board, the sharp clap of glass surfaces meeting echoing off the cold walls of his office. He reached behind and pulled his own chair up to the desk, then searched through the remaining stack of surveillance photos.

His employee hesitantly scooted forward in the sleek metal and leather chair that cost three times as much as his suit and perfectly coordinated with the rest of Otis’s office, silently asking permission before resting his elbow on the desk.

“Where was this taken?” Otis flashed another photograph from the pile.

“Outside of The Agency’s medical entrance.”

“Who is the other man? The dark-haired one with a beard?” His finger tapped the face in question. In the image, the woman was being wheeled on a gurney into the facility. On one side of her was a man Otis recognized as her husband, and on the other, the man he’d asked about. The way his hand rested on hers . . . it was intimate, caring. This was someone who knew her well.

“The caretaker of the church where the Carters currently reside,” Eagle replied. “No one of consequence, as far as I know.”

“What is his name?” Otis picked up the photo and swiveled in his chair to hold it at an angle so the last remaining rays of setting sun that poured through floor-to-ceiling windows illuminated the paper.

“Er . . .” Eagle leaned back, fumbling with the papers in a folder that rested on his lap. “That information is not in the file.”

“Of course.” He shouldn’t be surprised at the complete ineptness of the entire situation.

“Do you want me to find out more about him? Is he important?”

Otis tapped the tip of his finger on the surface of the desk before turning back to face Eagle. As he righted the remainder of the toppled chess pieces, his eyes lingered on the elegantly sculpted round edges of the queen’s crown, but he picked up the king instead, bouncing the small piece in his palm.

“Possibly.” Otis dropped the photo onto the desk, pushing a thin finger on the likeness of his real interest.

Eagle bent his head and shot Otis a questioning glance. “The boy scout?”

“This.” He looked up, making sure Eagle was paying attention, then placed the king directly on the photograph, over Agent Will Carter’s chest. “This is your in. Do exactly what I tell you, and we will have both of them on our side.”

A flash of greedy excitement passed across Eagle’s face and he leaned even closer to Otis, a smirk of equally balanced fear and admiration curling across his lips. “Now this, I have to see.”

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### CHAPTER 1

### Will

“B

reathe, Andy!” I cradled her face between my hands, skin ashen and slick with sweat. Her lips turned from purple to blue. “Matt. Do something.”

My straining muscles were useless. Whatever tore through her body jerked her free from my grasp and drew her up to the ceiling from the middle, as if she were attached by a string.

I flew backwards, landing hard on the tile floor. It should have hurt, but the only thing I could feel was my shattered heart pumping shards of glass through resistant veins. Matt leapt over me, catching her before she followed me down, the three of us a tangle of limbs, blankets, and cords. He shouted orders at someone. I couldn’t tear my eyes away to see who.

I could only watch as she twisted and writhed.

All the training—the books and tactical knowledge that filled my brain—was futile. It was nothing. I was nothing. There was nothing.

Just the horror of her screams and the emptiness of my hands.

An army in white descended, fastening straps around her flailing wrists and ankles. She fought, screaming, begging me to help her.

I launched myself off the floor and tried to put myself between them and my wife.

“Will, stop.”

A singular condemning phrase pulsed in my mind, reminding me over and over and over again *I wasn’t there.*

When Elena Cordova used my wife as her own personal dreamwalking mercenary, *I wasn’t there*. When Marco Dominguez dragged her through the filthy halls of an underground lab and nearly broke her arm, *I wasn’t there*. When Elena laid down the final ultimatum—kill or be killed—*I wasn’t there*.

A roar filled the room, fierce and threatening. It sent the attackers flying backwards. Heaving breaths and a raw throat were evidence I was the culprit.

I was here now, and although I had nothing but my body to give, I would shed my very last drop of blood, exhale my last breath, before I’d let anyone harm her again. My muscles tensed against the pressure of a hand on my shoulder. I spun, lashing out in defense, fist connecting with flesh. A curtain of red fell over my vision, smothering the ability to reason. There were only Andy’s cries and every promise I’d ever made to her.

Somewhere outside the rage, the sharp sting of a needle registered before I was forced against my will into a prison of blackness. Those words tumbling down into the dark with me.

*I wasn’t there.*

When my eyes shot open, I found myself draped unceremoniously over the sides of a hospital bed with a splitting headache and mouth so dry, I thought it was stuffed with cotton. Jacob leaned against the doorframe, staring down the hallway with arms folded, his back to me. I’d only known Andy’s uncle for three years, but he’d always been fit and healthy, a necessity of his job as caretaker of the building and grounds at Christ Church. But his broad shoulders slumped inward, and normally clean-cut salt and pepper hair jutted in unruly tufts. He dragged in a deep breath and combed his fingers through his black beard, gray creeping in around the edges.

An overwhelming suspicion that I’d done something impulsive and irresponsible settled like a rock in my stomach, but I could conjure no memory to confirm it. I was still fully dressed in the jeans and navy blue t-shirt Jacob had brought from our home in the basement of the church, but someone had removed my shoes. I bent to put them back on.

“Are you done with whatever that was?” Jacob’s tone held a bite.

“What did I do?” Not that I really wanted to know.

“Not much, except scare five nurses half to death and give Matt a black eye before he put you down with a sedative.” There was no humor in his explanation.

A wave of guilt forced my head low. “I don’t know what came over me.”

“I do.” His tone softened. I glanced up, catching his blue eyes, the same color as Andy’s. “You love your wife.”

He pushed himself off the wall and settled into a chair near the door. “This is impossible. Sitting here, helpless—it’s the hardest thing I’ve ever done aside from burying my sister . . . and my mom, but I can’t keep it together for the both of us. I’m gonna need your help, Will.” His voice faltered and my throat tightened, cowardly eyes retreating to my untied laces. “I don’t have anyone left.”

The wave swelled, its salty force stinging the back of my throat, nearly drowning me in shame. A weak nod was the only response I could muster to his vulnerable plea.

The sister he buried was Maggie, Andy’s mother. She and Andy’s father, Jonathan, had been killed in a deliberate car crash caused by the very person who was responsible for Andy’s current condition.

If anyone had an excuse to explode, it was Jacob. Yet he remained a solid statue of strength. I couldn’t raise my eyes. My gaze imprisoned by the loose shoestring wrapped around my fingers, waiting to be bound up. We’d chased the promise of freedom for so long, only to be unraveled once again. Would this ever end?

Two days later, my ability to emulate Jacob’s quiet strength had all but run out. My knees ached from where I’d been crouched against the wall outside Andy’s room, hands clamped hard over my ears.

“Will!” Each cry of my name on her lips another laceration in my already shredded heart. “Will!”

“Will.” Jacob’s hand was on my shoulder. “Son, you have to go.”

“No. I promised I wouldn’t leave her. I promised I’d be there.” My voice broke as she screamed again. I shot up, ignoring the painful resistance in my muscles, and aimed for the door that did little to squelch the sound. “They’re killing her.”

“You know they aren’t.” He held me back as I stormed forward to rescue my wife. I could have easily overpowered him, yet he pushed against me anyway. Somewhere inside, I knew he was right, because I let him. Jacob was calm, but his eyes were as red as mine felt.

“Jacob”—my voice so hoarse, I hardly recognized it as my own—“it’s been hours this time.”

“I know.” He hung his head. “Come with me.”

I resisted, the promise anchoring my feet to the floor. I only wanted to protect her. It’s all I’d ever wanted—what I was born to do. But she was wild and she was fierce. She’d gone into the darkest places, faced demons I only ever imagined in my worst nightmares. All in an attempt to rescue. How do you protect a beast like that?

Andy screamed again, and I pressed clenched fists to the sides of my skull, my breaths heavy and desperate. *I wasn’t there.*

“Just to the chapel.” I followed the direction of his hand to an arc of colored light spilling out from an open door. “You’ll still be here.”

The noise from her room stopped. She must have finally passed out, so I nodded and followed him into the small room, hands shoved deep in my pockets in an attempt to keep them from tearing the door off its hinges and carrying her out of this place.

We knelt together at the altar, and Jacob prayed through broken words, pausing occasionally to collect his emotions. I squeezed my eyes shut and my head fell into my hands. I let Jacob’s words speak for me, too broken to even form a thought. I knew God would hear his pleas and understand the urgency of our hearts. The Holy Spirit—God Himself, in spirit form, a gracious gift left to believers after Jesus ascended—would intercede for us with utterances and groanings, which was all I had to offer.