

## The Alpha's Captive Matew by Taylor Caine Chapter 23

CHAPTER 23

Harper

Sandy kept me busy all day. First with the floors, then with the bathrooms, then with the linen in all the rooms, and so on and so forth.

She'd allowed me a break for lunch well after lunch time. It'd been more like mid-afternoon by then. Sandy, Melody and Beau had all eaten and put things away by then, so Sandy had told me to go down to the barn kitchen where the rest of the pack who worked the ranch ate their meals. But there'd been no food left by the time I'd gotten there and those responsible for cooking that day were already started on dinner preparations.

When I'd returned to the ranch house, Sandy had told me there was no time for me to make something, so I'd just have to wait until dinner, and if I didn't want to miss meals, then I should get my chores done faster.

Except exactly the same thing happened at dinner time. Sandy had only cooked exactly enough food for herself and the twins. By the time I finished the tasks and went down to the barn kitchen, it was to find the same, that all the food had

been eaten. One of the ladies who was cleaning the last of the

dishes had taken pity on me and given me an apple. I'd hidden it in the pocket of the oversized chunky knitted cardigan Aaron had given me that morning, thinking if I didn't conceal the single piece of fruit, Sandy would probably find a

reason to take it off me.

Tiredly, I returned to the ranch house, wondering what other tasks Sandy would cram in before she allowed me to go to bed.

And then I had to wonder where I'd be sleeping. Not in Aaron's bed again, that much was obvious.

Remembering it made me get hot all over with embarrassment.

And maybe there was something else to all that heat.

Something I stubbornly refused to think about or identify.

For the time being, Aaron was gone. Apparently, he'd taken his men and ridden out on the ranch somewhere and would be

gone all night. I was glad for the reprieve from his disgusted, infuriated looks and gruff, harsh words when he spoke to me.

I walked into the kitchen to find Sandy and Melody eating the last of what smelled like blueberry pie. My mouth watered hungrily, but I refused to react.

"I'm done with you today, girl," Sandy said dismissively. "Here. Take this and go find your brother."

She toed a plastic bag toward me on the floor and so I went to pick it up. Looked like it had clothes in it, but again, I didn't react. I didn't bother asking Sandy where Heath might be, simply left the house as quickly as I could in case she changed her mind about being finished with me for the day.

I returned to the barn and found Heath just finishing up putting fresh straw in a stall.

"Sandy told me to come find you," I said, stopping just outside the stall.

"Hey there!" Heath said, seeming happy to see me. "I'm just about done as well. Just need to put a few things away, and then we can go check out our cabin."

"Cabin?" I repeated in confusion.

Heath gave an eyeroll. "Didn't they tell you anything? Aaron said there's a cabin we can use, so we're going to be roomies.

That's pretty cool, right?"

"Oh, okay," I replied not actually sure what I thought of it.

Heath seemed nice, but he was also a stranger. And for some reason it surprised me that Aaron was giving us our own little

home. I'd kind of expected to be locked in a basement somewhere to sleep, the way things had been going here.

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I watched as Heath returned a pitchfork to a rack of tools on the wall, then leant a wheelbarrow against a wall and tidied a few other things before he seemed satisfied.

"Okay, let's go." Heath sent me a smile and together we left the barn, stepping into the darkness, guided by the lights on the neat rows of log cabins in the distance.

"How was your day?" Heath asked as our boots crunched along the cold ground.

"Fine," I replied. Actually, it'd been tiring and monotonous, but I also knew it could've been worse, so I wasn't going to complain.

Still, the idea of running away from all this teased at the edges of my mind every now and then. Unfortunately, the prospect of Heath getting punished in my place was enough to stay me for the time being.

"Not much for conversation, huh?" Heath asked, a hint of amusement in his voice.

"Sorry," I replied. "A lot has happened to me in the last few days. I still don't even know how I ended up here."

Heath paused as we reached the edge of the village, lights from a nearby cabin washing over his features.

"Look, this situation isn't ideal," he said, running a hand through his hair, the cheery, relaxed façade slipping for a

moment. "But things could be worse. Much worse. We're

omegas, Harper. Pack law says we can be bought and sold and traded and will spend our lives at the bottom of the pack, only good for popping out pups over and over. I've always trusted Noah would look after me and not let that happen. You're going to get initiated into the Crawford pack too, and while we might be living with the Holland pack to pay back a

blood debt thanks to our father, it won't be forever. One day, the debt will be paid and we'll be free to go back to Crawford

territory. The best thing you can do is accept whatever happens and try to get Noah to see you as a true sister."

"Why are you helping me?" I asked, a lump forming in my throat out of nowhere. It was so foreign having someone care about my welfare. "You don't even know me."

"I know what its like to be hated for who your father is," Heath answered. "And you've got it twice as bad because the only thing wolves hate more than Ian Crawford and what he did, is witches. You also being an omega like me just sealed the deal. My older brothers don't get what that's like. They never will. I'm totally selfish and doing this for my own gain. I just want someone else in my corner who gets it."

Heath sent me a charming smile, telling me that the whole

selfish thing was a bit of an exaggeration. Out of the two

of us, I was definitely getting more out of this new sibling relationship than he would.

"I'm really sorry you're in this position," I said, suddenly feeling

terrible for how Heath had put himself on the line for me and I had no way to pay him back.

"I'm not," Heath replied with a wink. "I think you're going to be worth it, Harper. Plus have you seen Aaron and some of the senior members of his pack? Eye candy for miles! Nothing like that back in Crawford territory."

I gave a little laugh as Aaron took my hand and led me

onward. **W**W.mOveLtoO.rM.cM

I'd noticed Aaron's broodingly handsome looks, even though I hadn't wanted to. I hadn't noticed anyone else. Hadn't really

had time or been in the frame of mind to be looking at men that way. **W**W.mOv@ltoO.rM.c.m

It wasn't like I was here to find a mate.

Who would even want to mate with the half-witch daughter of Ian Crawford anyway?

relationship. It wasn't like I could be with a human man, they'd freak out if they discovered anything about my wolf or witch

nature.

And witches had banished and hated me as a child, so it wasn't like I'd find any prospects there either.

Heath and I found the cabin we'd been assigned. It was cold inside, and flicking on the lights revealed minimal, functional

furniture, no luxuries or comforts.

"It's not bad," Heath said optimistically. "It'll be better once we get a fire going."

As Heath set about collecting wood and getting a fire going in

the hearth, I went to check out the two simple bedrooms, each featuring a bed with a few blankets strewn across them and a

simple bedside table with nothing else.

chose one of the rooms at random-they were identical anyway-and dumped out the bag of clothes I'd been given by Sandy.

They were clearly hand-me-downs collected from the pack.

I had just enough for two changes of clothes and something

to sleep in. But the clothes were all worn, many with holes

and tears. I wondered if I might be able to get a sewing kit to repair them.

Even asking for that seemed like it was going to be too much, and cause me problems.

sighed as I sat on the edge of the bed, shivering at the icy temperature inside the room.

I wanted to cry. My eyes were stinging and my throat was aching, but I forced the sensation down and away. Telling myself it could be worse.

I'd thought I was going to turn eighteen, age out of the foster system and finally be able to escape. To finally live on my own terms, even as that notion had been terrifying because I hadn't known how exactly I was going to do that.

Instead I'd ended up here, in the middle of Holland pack

territory, surrounded by the very creatures that'd haunted my nightmares as a child.

Now, somehow I just had to accept that my life was no longer my own, and never would be.

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