

## The Alpha's Captive Matew by Taylor Caine Chapter 25

CHAPTER 25

Harper

The following morning, it became apparent that Sandy was doing everything she could to circumvent Aaron's order that I be fed properly. Of course, she blamed it on me, that I'd slept

too late and had chores I needed to complete before I could

eat. But of course, she'd said, I could have breakfast once I

was done with them.

By the time I got through her list, I didn't even bother checking

to see if she'd left any food from the breakfast she'd enjoyed

with her twins. I went straight to the barn kitchen, where once

again, there was basically nothing left.

This time the same cook who'd given me the apple-Laura-

handed over a crumpled muffin.

"It got a bit mushed coming out of the tin," she said apologetically. "Usually, I'd throw it in the scraps for the

compost or animal feed, but- Anyway, sorry there's nothing

else. You need to get here earlier if you want an actual meal."

I just thanked her and went on my way, not bothering to explain that I was sure Sandy was conspiring to punish me in a new and inventive way, one that could make her look totally

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innocent if I complained to Aaron. She'd just insist it was my own fault for being lazy and slow and not finishing my chores fast enough.

At least Laura had helped me. Even spoken to me. Any other wolf I'd come across had avoided looking directly at me and

scurried away, shielding their children like they thought I was

going to curse them or something.

Seemed like everyone already knew who I was, and just as I suspected, they hated me for it. The day dragged by, and despite trying to time my chores so I could make lunch at the barn, Sandy found me right when I knew they were starting to serve food and made me go with her to help with things she obviously either didn't need help with, or didn't really need to

be done in that moment.

By this time I was ravenous. I'd only had an apple and half a crushed muffin in the last twenty-four hours. At least when I'd been in the foster homes, I'd been able to sneak a bit of food when my guardians weren't paying attention. I'd been able to keep myself from actually starving, even if I went a bit hungry

a lot of the time.

When Sandy eventually told me I could go down to the barn for lunch, I left the house, but I didn't bother going to the kitchen there, I knew the food would be well and truly finished and they'd be starting dinner preparations, just like yesterday.

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Instead, I went into the stables where I found Heath working. He looked happy to be tending the horses-the ones that hadn't been taken by Aaron and the others who'd gone off

somewhere on the ranch.

As I walked in, I felt a wave of dizziness sweep over me, and

stumbled a little.

"Whoa, Harper!" Heath was suddenly there, catching me before I could fall. "Are you okay?"

He helped me over to sit on a nearby bale of straw.

"Just a bit dizzy," I murmured, waiting for my head to stop spinning.

"You look pale and tired," Heath said, a note of concern in his voice. "Did you sleep okay last night?"

I hadn't slept well at all, actually. There hadn't been enough blankets on my bed to fully keep out the chill, and pangs of hunger had woken me often.

"I'm fine," I insisted, even though my words wavered.

Heath snorted in disbelief. "That was so convincing. Wanna try again?" He shifted to crouch down in front of me. "Seriously, what's going on?"

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I studied his features. He had the same green eyes and

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honey-blond hair that I did, and I suddenly wondered what  $\hat{W}^{\otimes 4} \otimes w \cdot \text{No} \cdot \text{v} \cdot \text{Lw} \cdot \text{Or} \cdot \text{M} \cdot \text{C} \cdot \text{Om}$

our father had looked like. Had we inherited our shared looks  $\text{W} \cdot \text{w} \cdot \text{w} \cdot \text{N} \cdot (\text{o}) \cdot \text{V} \cdot \text{e} \cdot \text{L} \cdot \text{W} \cdot \text{O} \cdot \text{R} \cdot \text{M} \cdot \text{C} \cdot \text{O} \cdot \text{M}$

from him?

Could I trust Heath? He seemed to really care for me, and I was so tired of feeling desperately lonely.

"I-I haven't really eaten since breakfast yesterday morning," I

admitted in a small voice.

"What?" Heath said, features creasing in confusion. "Why the hell not?"  $\text{W} \cdot (\text{w}) \cdot \text{W} \cdot \text{M} \cdot \text{O} \cdot \text{V} \cdot \text{e} \cdot (\text{i}) \cdot \text{w} \cdot (\text{o}) \cdot \text{r} \cdot \text{M} \cdot \text{C} \cdot \text{O} \cdot \text{M}$

"Sandy-" I broke off after the accusation automatically slipped out. I couldn't prove she was getting in the way of me eating on purpose. "She just gives me a lot of work to do, and every time I'm done, they've already finished serving food in

the barn kitchen."

At this, Heath's expression darkened. "That conniving old cow

"Please," I said, reaching out to grab his hand. "Don't say anything to Aaron. Sandy will just say it's my fault because I'm not working hard enough. Maybe she's right and it's just a coincidence. I'll try harder this afternoon to finish in time for dinner. I don't need to give Aaron another reason to hate me."

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Heath looked torn, but eventually he nodded. "Okay, I won't

say anything today. But Harper, if this keeps up, something needs to be said. Otherwise, you'll end up sick."

"I'll take care of it," I rushed to promise, not wanting to be a burden on Heath. "Don't worry."

The clatter of hooves reached us then, and before Heath or

I could move or say anything, Aaron and his men returned,

riding their horses right up to the doorway of the stables.

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Aaron's gaze immediately zeroed in on where I was seated on the straw bale, Heath kneeling next to me.

Aaron swung one powerful leg over the horse and jumped down, tossing his reins to one of the other guys. He strode straight over to us, looking aggravated.

"Both of you are meant to be working," he said, stopping a few steps away. "Is this what you've spent the past day doing since I left? Just sitting around chatting?"

"Aaron-" Heath started, sounding almost as pissed off as he surged to his feet.

"Alpha," Aaron corrected, a growl sharpening his words. "I won't keep reminding you, Heath."

"Alpha," Heath conceded, though if anything, he looked even

angrier. "Harper."

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I reached up and grabbed his hand. When he glanced down

at me, I shook my head, reminding him that I didn't want Aaron to know how I was messing up.

With a breath to steady myself, and hoping I didn't

immediately get dizzy again, I got to my feet. "Sorry, Alpha, I'll get back to work."

I didn't wait for anyone to say anything, but started walking

away.

"What were you going to say about Harper?" Aaron demanded of Heath.

I glanced back over my shoulder to see Heath staring after me with worry.

"Nothing, Alpha," Heath eventually muttered, before striding over to help unsaddle and brush down the horses.

I breathed a sigh of relief and made my way back up to the house.

I had no idea what to do about my situation. I couldn't run, not without risking Heath.

But it was clear I couldn't stay here. Sandy would keep finding

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that she might ever hurt me and molecole an a

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not to come up with a presove me And

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