

## The Alpha's Captive Matew by Taylor Caine Chapter 21

CHAPTER 21

Harper

I sat at the counter, my stomach pinching with hunger as Aaron, Sandy, Melody and Beau ate their breakfast. It was something I'd grown well used to the past few years, sitting hungry, practically starving while others ate their fill.

"I'm going back to Ellisville to see Maryanne today," Aaron told Sandy. "I didn't get a chance to discuss matters with her yesterday."

Sandy murmured an agreement between bites of food.

"I want you to set up Harper and Heath in that two bedroom cabin we've got empty at the moment," Aaron continued. "Heath's things will be arriving at some point today, but you'll need to collect some clothes for Harper from other pack members, just whatever they can spare, nothing fancy. Harper needs to start learning the way things work around here. But no more chaining her up, Sandy."

"I can't watch her every moment," Sandy said evenly, a complaint, but one she was trying to sound reasonable about. "What am I supposed to do if she tries to run?"

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"You'll watch Harper during the day when she's working,"

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Aaron said, glancing at me as if to make sure I was listening. "And Heath will be responsible for her after hours. Harper won't run, because if she does, Heath will be punished in her place."

My breath caught in my throat.

Aaron had cornered me in every way possible. Maybe he'd told Sandy not to use chains, but he'd effectively restrained me all the same. I couldn't leave knowing my older brother would be punished, even if I barely knew anything about

Heath.

But I knew enough to say he'd didn't deserve to be hurt for me

running. Heath had dealt himself into the bargain with Aaron.

over the blood debt, saying he didn't want me to be alone.

Heath seemed really nice and kind and obviously wanted to

be a real brother to me.

Maybe I didn't care about whatever punishment Aaron could inflict on me for disobedience, but I wouldn't be responsible

for him doing the same to Heath, who deserved it even less

than I did.

Sandy seemed satisfied enough with this plan as the four

of them finished their breakfast. There were a few pieces of bacon in the pan, but all the eggs had been eaten. I wasn't sure what they did with food scraps around here, but if I could

sneak them out of the trash or something later, at least I'd get to have something this morning.

certainly wouldn't be the first time I'd fished leftover food *www.NovelWorld.Com*

out of the garbage because I was just that hungry and desperate. *www.NovelWorld.Com*

Aaron started to walk past me to leave the kitchen, but paused right next to me, seeming to track where I had my attention on the bacon in the pan.

I cursed at myself for being so transparent.

His brow lowered as his gaze ran over me, leaving me shivering. With dread or something else, I couldn't really tell.

"You're too skinny," he all but growled. "You need to make sure

you eat three meals a day if you're going to survive working

on this ranch. But you wait until everyone else has eaten

first, and you never eat in the dining room with the family. If you're not eating here in the kitchen between chores, you can

eat with the others out in the barn. But make sure you eat

properly, Harper. I won't have you wasting away, getting too weak or sick to do your tasks."

I nodded quickly, my stomach cramping in anticipation of actually getting something to eat. I couldn't even remember the last time I'd gotten to eat bacon.

"You can finish what's in the pan," Aaron said, nodding toward

share. We're pretty self-sufficient here, but things can get

stretched a little thin in the winter. I won't stand for anyone being greedy, especially those lowest in the pack hierarchy."

"I understand," I said quickly, hating how grateful I felt for knowing he was going to make sure I was fed and that I wouldn't ever have to go hungry while I was stuck here.

"I understand, Alpha," he said pointedly.

I lowered my head, feeling my cheeks warm at the fact I was already messing up simple things like the correct way to address him. I had so much to learn about pack life.

"Yes, Alpha," I said in almost a whisper.

"I'll be back later today, Sandy," Aaron said, the turn of his

attention dismissing me.

I slid off the stool and hurried over to put some bread in the toaster and scrape what was left of the bacon out of the pan, for some reason feeling like if I didn't eat it now, it would get taken away and I'd go hungry after all.

I didn't pay attention to whatever short conversation happened between Sandy and Aaron, too busy concentrating

I had just taken a bite out of it when someone snatched the plate from me.

I looked up to see Sandy glaring at me. She pointedly walked

over and threw the toast I'd just made into a bucket of

compost scraps.

I thickly swallowed the one bite I'd gotten.

Aaron was gone and the trio left in the kitchen-Sandy,

Melody and Beau-were looking at me with disgust and

loathing.

"You need to earn the food you eat around here," Sandy said.

"If you complete your chores to a satisfactory manner, then

you can eat."

That wasn't what Aaron had said, but it seemed Sandy

somehow had Aaron twisted around her finger, and I knew arguing would only get me in more trouble. And I was still too intimidated by Aaron to even think about complaining to him

about Sandy's treatment of me.

He probably wouldn't care anyway.

Sandy went to the mud room off the side of the kitchen,

returning with a mop and bucket.

"Start with the floors. And I better not find them looking streaky when you're finished."

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I clenched my jaw against anger as I took the mop and bucket. Sandy was quickly becoming the person I loathed here the most. Worse even than some of the foster parents I'd

been placed with.

But I was smart enough to realize that if I resisted her, she could make things here even harder and more miserable than they already would be. And now I had Heath to consider as

well. What if she started treating him badly for the things I did

wrong?

I'd always wanted family, longed for brothers or sisters.

Now I'd found some, and within a few hours I was already

back to wishing I was alone in this world.

I'd never dreamed that family could be used so horribly

against me.

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