

Fatal Temptation: Between Two Alphas

novel Chapter 31

Chapter Thirty-One

This woman...she lights me up.

“Thank you, Jace.”

I’m not ready to tell her she’s my mate. She doesn’t press for a reason, and I’m glad I don’t have to make something up.

And unlocking her shackles...that was a direct violation of loyalty to my own people. It sits like a brick in my stomach, what I did.

My father didn’t give a flying fuck about this woman. She was an outsider. A witch. He didn’t trust her. He told me to tear out her throat and cast her into the flames the moment Mia’s sentence was delivered.

There was a time when I would’ve carried out such an order without batting an eye. But I’ve seen the Elders’ form of ‘justice’ and I know my Father would just as soon bury a problem rather than deal with it.

The fact remains though...I’ve betrayed my own people.

Yeah, it was to save Mia. And, yes, it was just to give Morgan a chance to escape because I couldn’t stand there and watch them burn her alive.

But no matter my justification, what I did was wrong.

I could be executed for my treason. At some point, I know, I’ll need to come clean about my actions, and I’ll have to deal with the inevitable fallout.

“Jace?” Morgan’s voice is soft. Her pretty eyes are questioning.

“Come on,” I say. “This way.”

I lead us along the trail. As we move further away from the pack, there's less scattered light. I can see fine. She stumbles a bit and I automatically take her hand.

It feels right.

I live in a moderately-sized home half a mile from the main house. All my family lives close, with my dad having moved into a smaller dwelling, no longer the Alpha.

Or at least, he had been living there until Cam fell ill.

We walk slowly and when my home comes into view, I watch her reaction.

She sucks in a breath. "What is this place?"

I've been many things in my lifetime—soldier, brother, architect, engineer.

This house is a point of pride for me. I've always had a thing for practical creation, and I've designed more than half the new homes in our pack. Though most of us work within the pack's corporation, some of us specialize in other things that help us as a whole.

I'll pursue my passion for architecture someday. In the immediate future, we have a board of investors to placate and Ashley's mess to clean up. I can play the corporate role required, I can do my part.

"This is my home," I say, realizing Morgan is waiting for my answer. "It's off the grid, big enough for when I finally have a family, and simple enough to suit my needs for now."

We walk up the steps and I open the door.

She strolls inside the modern home, spinning slowly to take in the space as I switch on the lights. She nods. "I'm surprised to find it tastefully decorated."

"You expected cardboard boxes and stumps for seats?"

She smirks. “Something like that.”

I have a highrise apartment in the city and multiple investment homes dotted along the east coast. I own a villa in Tuscany. A condo in the Cayman’s.

Someday, I’ll share those things with her.

I wish I didn’t find her so attractive, but her strawberry-blond curls frame a face I can’t stop thinking about. Her lips are so lush, I can’t look at her without staring at that mouth. She bites her lower lip when she’s uncomfortable.

Or aroused. An obvious tell.

She hums her approval and my wolf laps it up.

She feels so good against me. I’m aching for her, and she’s dragging me closer, her hands at my nape and playing with my hair. I need her. To mate, watch her grow full with my young.

I reach the buttons of her shirt, palm her breasts and squeeze.

Her nipples are hard, and she moans my name.

Her voice is soft and filled with wonder. “Jace.”

She’s the one. If I had any doubts, just having her mouth beneath mine has dispelled them. I lick my lips. I’m in love with the taste of her.

“Is it safe for us here?”

She means my pack. I rest my forehead against hers and wrap my arms around her.

She was a threat before that bit of hellfire she unleashed...

Getting them to not kill her will be a task enough, but gaining their protection?

I'll need to talk to Cameron.

My brother needs to know what's happened, what I've done, and how I feel about this woman. Actions will have to be taken. Maybe not tonight, but soon enough.

"I'm going back for those samples," I tell her. "You know that, right?"

She draws back and as she does, I see something in her eyes that makes my blood run cold.

"Jace, I can't let you do that..."

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Chapter Thirty-Two

MIA

Cameron carries me out of the circle.

His strong arms hold me close. My body presses up against his chest, my arms circle his neck.

My son walks beside us, his hand on my back. My dad carries my daughter.

It's almost two miles back to the square, and Cam never once falters.

Packmates line the trail. They pat his shoulders, welcoming him back.

Many of them offer blessings to my children. Some even extend a greeting to me.

I wasn't expecting that.

I wasn't expecting Cam to storm into that circle and declare me his mate. Or to challenge his father and the Elders.

His lips brush my forehead, he nuzzles my hair. I snuggle deeper into his arms and his rumbling praise is reward enough.

I miss this.

I miss him.

I miss us.

"Come back to the main house," he mutters.

"Not yet."

I feel the grumbling sound he makes. He isn't happy with my answer.

When we reach the square, Cam sets me on my feet.

"Come, Father," Jacelyn says. "Mommy needs to rest."

She takes his one hand, and Aaron takes the other. They walk him toward the main pack house, Cam's whole entourage, my father, his, the Elders, trailing behind like a parade.

I stand there, watching. The events of the last few hours feel surreal.

"How about a shower?" Christian offers.

Liam makes a show of sniffing the air. "You need one."

Christian nudges my shoulder. "Come on. The worst is behind us, Mia. You're home. Cam's awake. Life's looking up."

Is it though? I can't escape the terrible sense of dread that the worst is yet to come...

We head toward one of the bunkhouses. They're for pack use.

I take that shower. Liam brings me a huge tray of food and I eat.

Someone brings over some of my old clothes. I'm surprised my dad kept them. I thought for sure, everything I'd owned would've been tossed away when Ashley mated Cam.

Seeing Cameron for the first time after so many years, it was like the time apart melted away. He's bigger and his hair's a little longer, but not much else has changed.

He's still tall and imposing. His eyes still shine with that unnatural shade of green, glowing with an intensity that can make me feel like I'm the only woman in the world.

And when he came between me and his father, challenging his own pack and calling me his mate...

I'd be lying if I said it didn't give me some of those old feels.

Nala purrs appreciatively.

No girl. We can't go back.

He's married, remember?

Albeit to a woman who lied and cheated her way into the life I should have had.

Alone in this temporary room, I drop onto the bed and give in to the tears I've bottled up since arriving here.

I want my children.

I want the peace I once had in a new life, in another place.

And a part of me wants Cameron again.

My little girl marvels at the fur on my hands and my claws.

"Daddy, these things had to happen," Aaron says, while playing with a toy car.

I'm being educated by kindergarteners.

I chuckle at the ridiculousness of it all.

And then I sober.

They may be children, but these kids are perceptive. I need to mask my moods.

I turn over my palms so she can see my claws. Her tiny fingers trace the sharp nails without fear of hurting her. My wolf is as much in love as I am. Conn purrs beneath my skin. The boy is playing and making sounds as he zooms the toy car over pillows from the couch.

We're sitting in my living room, just the three of us, while my father and Sean confer with the Elders.

There is no denying that my children are touched by our Goddess. They radiate old souls, and such peace and solace, that many of our pack have been by in the past few hours to offer blessings and to personally welcome my kids.

My eyes well with pride, and I have to wipe the happy tears from my cheeks. I'm so in love with these two already, and we just met.

They have me as surely as Merilee.

Thinking of my little baby brings heaviness to my chest. Merilee has been frail and sick her entire life. Her mother's treachery is to blame, but I don't even care about that anymore. I just want her to get well.

"Yes, Daddy," Aaron says as he continues to make his car go. "Merilee will get well."

A chill runs up my spine. I did not project my thoughts.

I am an Alpha. NO one, not even my own kin should be able to read my thoughts. Not unless I want them to.

Aaron smiles. "Tell him, Jacelyn."

There is silence weighted with the feel of wolfen conversation. My children are a pack within themselves and converse in twin-speak. Their eyes flutter and their little faces are so expressive.

But these skills shouldn't manifest for many years. Wolves don't have their first shifts until well into their teens. As Alpha, my blood bond would let me direct my thoughts to them, but it shouldn't flow the opposite way or even between them.

I wait, so proud, for Jacelyn to talk. But what she says... chills me to the bone:

"Our sister will heal... but many will die so that she may live."

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Chapter Thirty-Three

MIA

Michail comes to collect me. "Cameron wants to see you. I think he's given you all the alone time he can spare. It's either you go to him, or he'll be coming to you." He shrugs. "I suggest you head up to the main house. I imagine you'll want to put the kids to bed."

"Yes. Thanks." I appreciate the warning.

I follow Michail outside. These rows of bunkhouses here aren't used often. They're more for the young adults that are just starting out on their own. I didn't mind the cramped space or the old fixtures in the shower. I welcomed the time by myself to get my feelings and thoughts in order.

I grew up in the main house, and I'd been exiled before I had a chance to move out. But I'd been to parties down here in Bunk Row, and like many

of the places here in Healmsworth Pack lands that I took for granted while growing up, seeing them now brings back so many memories.

We pass the chapel and training buildings, the butcher and stock rooms, the market co-op with its giant baskets of produce and fruits. I grab an apple as we pass and take a bite.

Michail laughs warmly. As a kid, I never passed the place without snagging something to munch on.

“Some things never change,” he tells me.

“And some things do. I’m not the same girl you remember.”

He grins. “That’s for damn sure. You’re pretty bad ass these days, Mia.”

I’m an emotional wreck. But I appreciate that he sees me differently. I’m not sure the rest of the pack can or ever will.

We enter the main hall of Cameron’s house.

It’s a massive place.

Meeting rooms and gathering halls, a recreational wing, and even a collection of decked out suites for visiting guests. So much looks the same, yet everything is different.

The grand hall is filled with wolves hanging out. They watch tv or eat or play pool. I see a card game going near the bar.

They quiet as I go by but then the conversation picks up again.

I head down the hall to the main wing where Cam resides. It no longer feels like his father’s place, though I can smell the older wolf’s scent, which still clings to the floor and walls like a fine mist.

I knock before entering Cam’s bedroom. It’s a huge suite with a fireplace, entertainment area and balcony.

Cam looks pale, but his smile is wide and he laughs at something Jacelyn says.

My little peanut is so sweet and caring.

“Mommy!” Jacelyn turns and waves at me. “Storytime?”

“Storytime!” Aaron insists.

I sense him before he joins me, but my father is a hard one to ignore. His presence as pack beta resonates. Even though I’m no longer a part of the Healmsworth pack, I can’t deny my connection to my dad.

As much as I might want to.

“Ah, excuse me, Alpha, Mia. Would it be okay if I put the young ones to bed?”

When Cam glances at me, I feel little ripples of energy dancing along my skin. I’m too aware of this man.

Before I can reply, the kids are rushing to my dad. “Pop-pop! Story!”

“Okay,” I say. “It looks like you’re tucking the twins in tonight.” Every mother learns to pick her battles. And though I would’ve preferred to be the one to do it, because I needed to be close to them, their happiness comes first.

My father smiles wide. “Who wants a Pop-pop ride to bed?”

Aaron pats my arm as he passes and jumps into his grandfather’s arms.

Jacelyn runs over to me for a quick hug and kiss, before she pulls away, and holds up her arms for him. My Dad scoops her up.

And in a blink, my children are gone.

It’s just me and Cam.

And Eric, my wolf reminds me, grinning.

She likes hearing him in our minds. But then, Nala is ornery like that. She's a strong, prime wolf. The attention of two Alphas appeals to her animal side, where only the strongest would be able to claim her.

I clear my throat. "Where is my dad taking the kids?"

Cam stands, his expression guarded though his gaze rakes me from head to toe. "To your old room."

"Oh."

"I kept it for you."

I snort. "Yeah, right."

He frowns. "I... I'm struggling here, Mia. It's like a veil has been lifted off my eyes after too many years."

I feel that to my bones, the weary, soul-deep exhaustion.

Cam is a victim too, I remind myself. He had been tricked and manipulated, and for an Alpha...to be used in such a way... that must weigh very heavily on his shoulders.

He comes close, his hands reaching out to touch mine, and a shuddering breath escapes him when he finally does.

"I still can't believe you're real," he whispers.

I blink back tears.

His hands squeeze mine, and the connection between us... it's there.

And the next.

I suck a breath as his knuckles graze the top of my breasts.

He makes a rumbling sound. He goes slowly enough that I can stop him at any time. But he doesn't ask permission to undress me. There is something very hot about the way he takes what he wants.

When he reaches the last button, he draws the shirt off my shoulders and with one flick of his fingers he unsnaps my bra too.

My skin is pale in the moonlight. My nipples are hard and dark, and with each breath I feel them tighten further beneath his gaze.

He doesn't touch me.

Just looks his full.

His eyes are full gold, his own chest heaving with the effort it takes to restrain himself.

It turns me on.

And his scent...

It's familiar and feral and so so strong.

His big hands hit the top of my jeans. His fingers smooth along my stomach and it gives me shivers.

He smirks then, likely smelling how hot I am for him, knowing how much I want him.

Then he's undoing my jeans, drawing down the zipper, and taking my panties down with them.

I step out of my clothes and let him look.

We'd make love more often in the day than at night, and whether he was commanding me to touch myself or just positioning me ten different ways to see us from every angle, Cam always liked to watch.

I feel myself blushing, but there's such hunger in his eyes that it pushes away any shyness I might feel.

"You're so fucking beautiful, Mia."

He runs the back of his hands over my breasts. They're bigger. The nipples too. My hips are wider. I've healed and look mostly the same, but having twins did alter my body.

He palms my hips. "My babies look good on you."

The way he holds me, it sends heat coursing through my veins.

I want this man. So much.

I shouldn't. But I do.

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Chapter Thirty-Four

Cam pulls his shirt over his head. His pants and shoes are discarded quickly too.

Then it's my turn to look.

Muscles ripple. Cam's always been strong. His shoulders are twice the width of mine. He's lost weight since I saw him last, and rather than make him look ill, it just brings out the definition of his muscles more. His height and build seem larger somehow.

His abs ripple. Biceps flex.

Every inch of this man calls to me.

He's so hard and it takes all the discipline I have not to reach out and grab his—

His lips catch mine.

Then I'm tumbling. No, jumping into a passion that is as fierce as it is familiar.

His tongue traces mine.

My pulse races, my blood rushes, and my body comes alive in ways that I haven't felt in so so long.

He draws back on a gasp, his hands tangled in my hair. His eyes are wild and full gold.

"Goddamn I've missed you." His voice is low and gravelly.

He kisses me hard. Then his hands are all over my skin, touching, squeezing, plunging. He's learning my body all over again.

When he touches my core, I melt into his hand.

He rumbles his pleasure, his head dipping to my nipples, his mouth tracing, teeth tugging, while his fingers do incredible things to me down below.

He hasn't forgotten a thing.

No, if anything, it's better than before.

Better than in those dreams.

He's real and here. And my body contracts around his fingers as I explode so fast, I can barely stand up. Even as he's pumping me through that orgasm, I'm already asking for "More."

"Yes, Mia. Always."

Cam didn't just give me pleasure in the past, he killed me with it. Wringing out more passion than I thought I could possibly endure.

We drop to the ground.

I grab him, stroke him. I revel in how he gasps and the way his balls tighten up like he's already seconds from coming too.

He grabs my hand.

“No.” I run my thumb over the top of him and savor the hiss of his breath.

He smiles against my mouth.

It’s that grin that stops me.

Because it’s sweet and true, and as filled with love now as it was back when I made love to him for the first time.

But we can’t go back to that. Can we?

I draw back. It takes only a second, but I watch as his eyes close and his features fall.

He gathers me close. “I’m sorry, Mia...for everything.”

I tense.

But he is our mate. I insist.

I know he is. I know it in my heart.

She barks once, as if to say, ‘duh.’

But that moment... the one where our wolves would connect and cement our mate bond...that moment never came.

He reaches for my hand. “We have time, Mia.”

Do we? I’m not so sure.

“Why don’t we run?”

Is he thinking what I am? That maybe our wolves will finally figure out the rest. Because if they don’t, then all of this talk is meaningless.

We either are mates.

Or we aren’t.

And I've already proven to myself that I'm capable of connecting with someone else.

I want to tell Cam that. To just get the truth out there and in the open, but it seems cruel. We've only just reconnected, and for him, he's been manipulated these last few years.

I can't imagine what that must be like...to not wholly be in control of oneself.

He kisses me once more, and when he draws back, he holds my face. "Listen to me, whatever happens now with Conn and Nala...it's fine."

"But Cam—" It's not fine. I see that now.

He's named me his mate, and in the next few minutes we will shift and run, and I'll know if he's mine. Or not...

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Chapter Thirty-Four

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“But Cam—” It’s not fine. I see that now.

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Chapter Thirty-Six

“Splendid!” Eric says, not the least bit perturbed, or even surprised. “Shall we save everyone the trouble and head back to the main house then?”

He takes my hand and kisses the top of it.

Cam growls. “Get your fucking hands off her.”

Eric smirks but lets my hand go.

“Sadly,” Eric goes on, “I’m not just here for you, Mia. There’s a certain she-wolf who owes me answers and I intend to get them.”

“Ashley? She’s in a coma.”

“For now,” Eric allows. He jerks his head toward one of the wolves waiting in the woods. This beast blends into the darkness with eyes so gold, it’s all you see. “I told you I was sending my own doctor. She’ll get to the bottom of this.”

Eric tilts his head and studies me. “Are you fully recovered?”

I’ve shifted several times so far, and I still have abrasions and injuries. “No. I’m much better than I was, but...”

“Dr. Glass will see you too then.”

Howls echo from all around us. Cam’s pack is here. In full force.

This could be an absolute bloodbath.

Cameron wants to fight.

His clawed hands flex and curl.

He hates that this wolf is on his land. He hates that I’m tied to Eric in any way.

Above all, he hates that he is vulnerable.

From outside—and within his own pack.

I want to tell him to think of our kids, that we need to choose peace. But he staged this too. He prepared for war.

And I have no idea if this will be where two great Alphas collide and die.

I glance between them.

Torn between two Alphas.

“Don’t do this,” I say softly. I’m not sure which of them I’m speaking to.
“Please.”

Neither male appreciates my defense of the other.

I remember Cam’s hell-raising days, when he had many lovers and often more than one female would leave his room after a night of partying. But that was before I shifted for the first time.

From the moment I was of age...there was only me.

I don’t know Eric. Not really.

But he is possessive and all-consuming, and if I were to let myself fall into this man, he would own me completely.

Eric holds his hand out to Cameron. “We have bigger problems, you and I, right now. And a common enemy.” He winks at me. “How about we table our good taste in women for the moment and do what is needed for the betterment of our packs?”

“We have you surrounded,” Cam says. “What’s to stop me from tearing you apart right now, and taking everything you own?”

Eric smirks. “You could try.” His eyes flash. He’s a warrior, born to battle and he will not back down. “But the losses will be severe. For both our packs. And given your many months convalescing in bed, do you really think you’re ready to take on me?”

The statement isn’t made as a taunt. It’s a statement of fact. One I’m sure Cam is well aware of too.

“I had the pleasure of entertaining your brother and it would be nice for you to return the favor. Breakfast, perhaps?”

The sun is cresting over the horizon, turning the sky a bright, bright blue.

“On one condition,” Cameron says.

Eric arches a brow. “Go on.”

“Your spies... Take them out of here when you leave. Now that I’m awake, I can—and will—seek them out. And I will have no mercy.”

The threat hangs heavy... Cameron will kill them for their treachery.

“Of course,” Eric says easily.

They don’t shake on it.

The two Alphas just turn and walk side by side.

When Cameron retracts to his full human form, his height is dead level for Eric’s.

I follow behind them.

Naked. Alone. Unsure.

I don’t miss the nasty look Cam’s dad gives me.

Jace and Michail and my father settle in next.

Eric is surrounded by his sister, several huge wolves, and the female I assume is the doctor. She wears a lab coat and conducts herself with calmness.

“How did you clear our borders?” Jace asks.

“We airdropped in,” Corinne says.

Jace’s eyes are flickering. He’s no doubt communicating with our patrols. This is a small force assembled right now, but who’s to say if the whole of Eric’s vast pack isn’t planning a second, similar air raid?

“We’re here in a diplomatic capacity,” Corinne says. “More’s the pity.”

Eric clears his throat.

Corinne goes silent.

Pitchers of coffee are brought out. Assorted pastries and cookies. Fruits and croissants. I can smell the bacon frying and the eggs cooking in the kitchen.

There is something a bit surreal about how civilized all of this is. These two Alphas are an inch away from killing each other, yet they'll sit together and share a meal?

Then again, maybe this is a good sign. Like there might be peace possible between them.

Everyone is silent as they eat.

Cameron loads up my plate.

Eric watches me closely. "Please eat," he says when I just stare at my dish. "You're not...well."

Cameron bristles that another male should be remarking on how I look or showing concern for me.

Cam, I remind him. You're mated and married to someone else.

By deception, Mia!

Eric watches the byplay between us. He can't hear our shared thoughts, I don't think. But he can tell we are conversing.

"She's safer with me, you know," Eric says quietly.

It is the wrong thing to say.

In one tense moment, Cam lunges across the table and grabs Eric by the throat.

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Chapter Thirty-Seven

“NO!” I scream. “Stop!”

The two Alphas tumble to the floor.

I leap over the table. “Clear this hall! Now!!!” I glance at Cameron’s dad, daring him to contradict me.

He growls, but says, “You heard her. Everybody out.” He jerks his hand toward the food that’s being carted out of the kitchen. “Set up tables in the square!”

The servants spin around and head back through the revolving doors.

I squat beside Eric and Cameron. They’re locked in a chokehold. “This isn’t good for either of your packs. Please. Please let’s not do this.”

Eric comes to his senses first. He holds up his hands. It must hurt like hell, because Cam has not loosened his grip.

With the flick of his wrist, Eric orders his people to file out of the hall.

“Cameron!” I scream. He glares at me, that I should defend another man.

But it isn’t about choosing one over the other. It is about the survival of our respective packs, and right now, we have too many enemies to squander our energies fighting each other.

Cam lets go and begrudgingly each Alpha stands back up.

There’s food on the floor, all over Eric’s clothes.

He dusts at his shirt and pants. “Maybe I should just get naked too.”

Cam’s growl is deadly.

Eric laughs.

“Look, all of this starts and ends with Ashley, right?” I keep my focus on Cameron because I’m worried what my face might show if I look at Eric.

Because part of me...is really happy he’s here.

This wolf defended me, protected me, and when push came to shove, he let me go, because my safety was more important than keeping me underfoot.

“Let’s go see her and get to the bottom of this. I know you both want answers. Maybe your doctor can get them.”

“Wait here,” Cam tells Eric. “Mia, come with me.”

Eric makes a show of picking up a spilled coffee cup and pouring himself another. He calmly sits – at the head of the table this time. Then he holds up his mug in a smug toast as if to say, ‘go ahead, I’ll be waiting right here.’

I follow Cam out of the hall and toward his rooms. He doesn’t say anything as he’s ripping a shirt from his closet and dragging it on. Next, he goes to his armoire and grabs jeans and he jerks those on angrily too.

“Everything about that guy makes me murderous. You know that, right?”

I cross my arms. “I do think I know a little something about feeling murderous, yes. You can imagine how I would’ve felt when not an hour after we’d made love you professed Ashley your mate, married her and declared her Luna--all without a single word, apology or explanation to me.”

He shoves a hand through his hair.

“These are old arguments now, Cam. What’s done is done. Let’s not replay the past. It does neither of us any good.”

“Do you want him?” Cam asks flatout.

I suck a breath. I’m not sure how to respond.

“Damnit, Mia, the fact that you have to even think about it, is answer enough!”

He’s so angry. So... hurt.

He shrugs. “I thought about it.” He tilts his head. “You used to scream my name and not give a damn about who might hear. What’s the matter, you don’t want that other Alpha knowing that I’ve had my hands on you, my hands... in you?”

I swallow hard.

He walks toward me and I find myself backing up until I hit the wall. “Scared of me, Mia?”

No. But something in the way he stalks me...it’s predatory.

He tilts my chin back, forcefully.

He leans in and drags his teeth down my neck. “What’s to stop me from marking you right now? Hmm?”

I shudder and I’m pretty sure my panties are wet.

He bites at the straining column where my neck meets my shoulder, testing my flesh. A touch more pressure and he’ll break the skin.

I’m breathless.

“Hmm,” he hums again. His mouth moves until it’s against my ear. “It’s inevitable,” he whispers. “You and I. There is no world in which you aren’t mine. There is no man who will replace me. I will be your mate, Mia. Get used to it.”

He bites down once more on my neck as if in warning.

Then he walks back out of the room.

I’d be a fool to think that Cameron is caring or guided by love.

He's an Alpha.

And he is ruthless.

Fatal Temptation: Between Two Alphas novel Chapter 38

Chapter Thirty-Eight

I check in with my kids. Claire has them and she's got some elaborate castle with dragons and dolls and a whole slew of small toys spread across the floor.

It's the kind of messy fun that's wonderful while it's happening, but then brutally painful when you step on some small piece or toy that got left out.

"Aren't you supposed to be with Cam?" Her eyes flutter like she's talking to him. "Tell me you didn't leave him alone with MacPhearson. Damn it—

"Auntie Claire!" this from Jaceylyn.

"Darn, darn it, sweetie." She looks to the ceiling. "I'll start a swear jar."

I want to laugh. These kids are changing the dynamic for all of us. Claire is always composed, always assertive. Seeing her fumbling her words around my kids is a small bit of joy. But what she said... she's right.

"You two, be good for your Auntie, okay?"

"Yes, momma!" Aaron yells. My daughter nods. "Okay, mommy."

It will have to do.

The twins are great kids, so I'm not too worried, but they can be a handful and they are very inquisitive. They have a way of getting into things they shouldn't.

“Mia!” Claire shoves me back out the door. “Are you nuts!? Go!”

I rush down the hall, panic rising in my chest.

It’s been less than a minute since Cam left his room. I don’t think he’d start up with Eric again. Would he?

I hustle down the stairs and through the long hallways.

They aren’t in the main hall.

Shit.

I don’t hear any yelling or fighting, but I don’t see them, either.

I rush outside.

The square is set up like it’s a festival. Long tables and benches along the open space, with Cam’s pack and Eric’s sitting and eating.

It would look idyllic, maybe even cozy if not for the growls and posturing, the many wolves lining the square with guns at the ready.

“Don’t even think about fighting!” I shout. I can smell both Cam and Eric and it’s clear they’ve cut across the square to the medical wing. No surprise. “BOTH of your Alphas will want blood if you let a fight erupt out here.”

“You’re no fun, Riorsen,” Corinne yells.

It’s met with some laughter—from both packs.

I salute her and hurry across to the hospital section.

When I push through the double doors, I see Dr. Lee is conversing with Dr. Glass. She listens attentively, her dark eyes focused on Ashley. She accepts the charts that Dr. Lee hands over.

She flips through the pages. “This timeline correlates with the initial cyber attack, Alpha.” She’s addressing Eric. Then she glances at Cameron.

“Her brother... I’m told he connected with Ashley right before her demise.”

“That’s right.” Cam rubs his chest.

“Did he give her anything or do anything?” Dr. Glass asks.

She sighs. “If nudity is your concern, I’ll remind you I already saw you naked not an hour ago in the forest.”

I’m blushing. I can feel it.

“I don’t understand what you can want with me?” I glance between this doctor and the Alphas. “I don’t have any connection with Ashley. I never did.”

Dr. Glass taps a finger to her lip. “Of that I’m not so sure. Your health has been impacted by their,” she gestures to Cam and Ashley, “demise. And you were able to join with Alpha Cameron when he was in the space between life and death.”

“How can you know that?”

Her expression is blank. She gives nothing away.

I glance at Cam and then at Eric. They offer no help.

It’s clear they expect me to do what this doctor wants me to do.

No. Just no.

I wait and wait. But no one moves or says anything for an uncomfortably long span of time.

“Fine!” I throw up my hands. I’m angry and sad that...what? They think I’m connected to Ashley’s duplicity in some way? This doesn’t even make sense. “Whatever.”

I kick off my shoes and Eric smirks when one of them bounces off his shin.

I drag my shirt over my head and my pants down my legs. I stand there. In front of two doctors, two Alphas, and a comatose woman whom I'd really like to wake up—just so I can knock her unconscious all over again.

“The bra and panties too,” Dr. Glass says.

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Chapter Thirty-Nine

My hands shake as I unclasp my bra. I fumble with the straps and I know my face is bright red when I finally shove my panties down. I step out of them and stand there.

Cam's eyes are gold. Eric's eyes are gold.

“Lift your hair please,” Dr. Glass says.

She walks around me, examining me from all angles.

This isn't a purely clinical analysis... at least not for Cam and Eric. Their scents carry to me, both men wanting me, and I can't help that my body responds to it—which of course, they can scent too.

And so can the doctors.

Dr. Lee covers his mouth, no doubt to mask his amusement.

Dr. Glass reveals nothing. Her skin is smooth and lineless. As she steps closer to me, I expect her scent to be astringent, or maybe I'm just projecting that for how cold she is, but she actually smells like wildflowers and summertime.

The Alphas stare at me.

Cam's breathing is heavy. Eric opens and closes his hands, his muscles rippling along his forearms.

Their gazes rake over me, as intimate as a caress. My breasts grow heavy. My thighs weaken. My nipples tighten as they watch.

I'm naked. And on display.

My every reaction is a visible feast for their senses.

And though vulnerable, there is something powerful about this too.

They want to touch me.

So when the doctor does, it makes me jump.

"This," she taps my back. "What is this?"

The faint ring of that white fur circle shows as a brown blotch in my human form. Not this again. "It's nothing, just some mark that appeared a few years ago," I tell her.

Like the thicker ass and thighs, and my once straight hair that now has some curl to it.

"Shift," she commands me. "Now."

I look at Cameron. He shrugs.

Eric shoves his hands in his pockets. "Probably a good idea," he says. Like me shifting will help him keep his hands off me.

I call to Nala.

She's happy to comply. My back arches and bows as my true form emerges. It doesn't take long.

I sit back on my haunches, like a good little wolf. The thought annoys me.

Nala stretches and preens.

She likes the attention.

Nala processes everything with different sensory capabilities. The scents are so much richer, layers of pheromones and desire, adrenaline and rage.

The coffee and bits of fruit that spilled on Eric when Cam tumbled him over the table.

The detergent on Cam's clothes which is the same from our childhood.

Clean sweat and desire.

Dr. Glass probes my shoulder, studying that patch of light fur. She glances sharply at Eric. "Did you know about this?"

The implication is clear. He should've seen it.

Cameron growls.

I growl too.

Eric took care of me. He defended me and helped care for me when my wounds wouldn't heal.

"She's moon-marked," Dr. Glass says.

The three men in the room share a look, but it doesn't seem like any one of them knows what that means. I've never heard that expression before.

She crosses to the drawers and cabinets at the corner of the room, pulling them open and rifling through until she finds a syringe.

Then she goes to Ashley's bedside, slaps the luna's arm a few times and inserts the needle. It's not the nicest blood draw I've ever seen, and for certain, this doctor's bedside manner could use improving.

When I see the full vial of dark red blood, she turns back to me.

Nala snarls. Neither I nor my wolf, like where this is going.

“You’re a Seer. The traits are passed in the matriarchal lines, manifesting after childbirth.”

What now?

“Her mother is dead,” Cam says.

“What does that matter?” she replies. “The gift is from the Goddess and passed down in the genes.”

I scoot back when she approaches me with the needle. I bare my teeth.

Finally the doctor shows a hint of emotion. Her eyes light up and her mouth curves on one side. “It’s just a little pinprick. You’ve had worse from these two brutes, I’m sure,” she teases.

From too clinical to too personal, in warp speed.

My wolf head swings from side to side. No. I snarl again lest she think I’m consenting to this.

I’m not.

I growl louder, as if to say, get that fucking thing away from me.

“What will happen to her?” Cam asks. He’s not okay with this. I know he wants to intercede, but he hasn’t yet... which also angers me.

“She is linked to you. And you to Ashley. Ashley’s blood will complete the bridge...and Mia will see.”

“No,” Cam says.

“See what, exactly?” Eric glances between my wolf and the doctor.

There is no path. Just the light collapsing around me until I’m consumed by darkness once more.

Cam and Eric are screaming but they’re too late...

When I open my eyes, I’m human. But I’m in that place.

That other realm.

It's not the familiar setting of the lake or the woods of our packlands where I came with Cameron. This landscape is completely different. It's a place I've never been before.

Mountains loom in the distance. Covered with snow at their peaks and hillsides so densely covered with forests, it's like a green blanket swaddled around the snowcaps.

The land is bright, alive with blooming flowers and knee-high grasses and a trickling stream. It's pretty. The sun shines above.

But when I glance over my shoulder, the darkness is there, like a storm on the horizon, looming.

"Did you come here to finish me?" It's Ashley.

She wears a simple white dress. Her hair is swept up in a ponytail and she looks younger, softer, almost innocent.

"I don't want to be here at all," I reply honestly.

She sighs.

"You need to wake up," I tell her.

"For what? More war?" She sits beside the creek and plucks at the long strands of grass.

Part of me pities her. She's alone. Dying.

Separated from her child.

"You have a daughter, who's sick—"

"Don't you dare speak of my daughter!"

She lunges at me with more strength than I expected and I catch her before she can gouge my eyes.

We roll and scrape for purchase. I manage to pin her down and I'm through being nice. "What's to stop me from killing you, Ashley? You destroyed my life!"

She cranes her head to try and bite my wrist and I jerk back. I refuse to play her games; I'm done being a victim.

"An eye for an eye, Mia."

What? What is that supposed to mean?

I roll away from her and she stands slowly. She moves to the edge of the water and stares out, but there are only the mountains in the distance and the darkness behind us.

This place...whatever it is, there is no escape.

A chill traipses up my spine.

I don't want to be here. I don't want this woman's blood in my veins.

What's worse... I don't know how to get back.

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Chapter Forty

"How do we get out of here, Ashley?"

With Cameron, I would just wake up, but now, with her blood, I'm panicked.

She ignores my question. "It's your fault anyway," she tells me. She waves her hand. "All of this."

She grabs a stone and tosses it into the water. "One little action can cause so many ripples..."

Okay, clearly a metaphor. "I'm pretty literal, Ashley, so why don't we save us both the aggravation. Tell me why we're here."

"Cameron devotes nearly all of his attention to his own pack so I'm going to assume when it comes to other packs and their politics that you're fairly useless."

That's insulting. But whatever. "Like I said... I'm here. You can talk in riddles or we can just lay out all our cards and figure out a way to co-exist."

She scoffs. "How would that work? Are you going to share your beloved Alpha with me?!"

Part of me wants to say, 'which Alpha?'

Oddly, the thought of 'sharing' would've made me blind with rage once upon a time. But I've since learned that love is...complicated.

"I wouldn't begrudge you or your daughter, Ashley. If that's what you're thinking. Cam wants you to get better." Deep down I know that. He resents the lies, and the heartache, but he doesn't hate this woman. "You've been married to Cam for years now, surely you know him."

A tear tracks down her face. "He'll never forgive me for this."

No, he probably wouldn't. But he hadn't rejected her outright. Which would've been one way to sever the bond between them. If he truly hated her, he could've done that the moment he awakened.

Maybe he hadn't for fear of my condition, or maybe he didn't want to have to look his daughter in the eyes one day and admit that he had killed her mother. I don't know.

"I'm sure you have your reasons," I say.

"Please don't placate me or patronize me. She did that." The vehemence in her voice makes my blood run cold.

She skips another stone and it skids across the surface before sinking. There's a metaphor in that too, I think. Like we're here in this world...until we're gone.

Hmm.

"My parents invited her—which makes it all the worse, you know. We invited that evil bitch right into our home. I blame my father... he never got over her."

"Oh?"

She points to the mountain. "Our lands ranged from Denali down to British Columbia. Our pack was strong. Cultured. Our ties to the land were steeped in conservation and our roles as protectors. Then he came."

"Who?"

"Come now, you know who... his stench is on you."

I don't think she means Cameron. "Eric?"

"We knew he was ambitious. We knew he wanted to unify every pack within his reach—and that's the problem...he keeps expanding his reach."

I can see where this is going.

"We could've bested him. My brother is fierce. Powerful enough to rival your two precious Alphas. But we were told not to fight. We were told to make peace." Ashley's eyes are dead when they swing to me. Defeated in a way that feels almost soulless.

Her nasty look tells me she doesn't want my pity.

I try to piece together the timeline. Her pack was set up by some Seer—and instead of the wedding Ashley anticipated, Eric usurped her lands and everything her pack owned.

Was it any wonder she wanted revenge?

And in seeking revenge she sought out a coven for the spell that let her bewitch Cam and gain access to his pack's power and money. She funneled those resources back to her brother somehow, and they attacked Eric.

"Oooh, I can see the wheels turning in that little head of yours," she taunts me. "Have you figured it all out then?"

Some of it, maybe. "What was the price, for the coven to cast the spell?"

She shudders. "I had to give a gift I didn't even know was coming... my ability to see."

We're back to riddles again.

"That's the irony, you realize," she tells me. "That I should inherit the same abilities of the woman whose cursed visions led to all of this..." She casts her hand out, encompassing this space and the darkness and death looming in the distance.

"Mia," she chides. "Did you think it was just your bond to Cameron that allowed you to find me?" She purses her lips. Her smile is mean. "From one formerly moon-kissed girl to another..."

"W-what do you mean?"

"Come now, you look just like her..."

"Who?"

"Our mother."