

Excerpt from Tempting Eternity - The Crucible Series Book Nine
Bonus Content from Fated Fortunes – The Crucible Series Book Seven
by Angela Colsin

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As one of the first vampires created by the original five thousand years ago, time has taken it's toll on

Mathias, weathering him until nothing seems like a surprise anymore. Yet even he isn't prepared for a chance encounter with a fae who proves to have a lover's blood link.

For a vampire, such a connection is a fevered, hopeless fantasy. None have blood as sweetly enticing as the fae, but they'd never survive the turning, making it imperative to resist Isadora's charms, otherwise put her very life at risk.

Yet distancing himself from the beguiling fae isn't so easy.

Nearly killed by one of her own sisters, the last thing Isadora expects to hear is that a vampire saved her life while she was vulnerable—no being poses more of a lethal threat to the fae. Even more troubling is knowing she'll have to seek his help to have any hope of saving her fae sisters from the control of a powerful witch.

But though the ancient vampire should be feared, Isadora finds Mathias compelling, pricking her innate curiosity in a way she's never experienced. Ignoring such intrigue is impossible, and the more she learns, the more quickly her feelings turn into heavy attraction, tempting her to do the impossible—spend eternity with a vampire.



BONUS CONTENT: EPILOGUE FROM FATED FORTUNES



*Dra'Kai Estate
Atlanta, Georgia*

It was amazing how far Terran technology had progressed during the past half century alone.

After spending roughly seventy years in a forced hibernation, Mathias woke to a world that seemed strange— which was no surprise. He'd willingly hibernated a number of times over the course of his long life, and it always took time to adjust to the changes once he woke.

Still, his latest hibernation hadn't lasted that long— seventy years was a drop in the bucket to a five-thousand-year old vampire such as himself— making the adaptation easier to handle. So he hadn't spent long surveying the streets of Atlanta and the numerous technological improvements the people now enjoyed.

Instead, he'd returned to Terra for a more personal reason, and proceeded to the Dra'Kai Estate not far outside of the city in order to visit an old friend— Dalris Vök Dra'Kai.

Mathias hadn't spoken with the draconian since the 1940s, and soon found that, unlike the rest of the world, his home hadn't changed much with time— not on the outside,

anyway. The grounds were as perfectly kept as they'd always been, with various spotlights shining up at each tree lining the long driveway to the front doors.

There, Mathias' body solidified from the form of mist he'd taken for faster travel, and he straightened his tie before reaching out to ring the bell.

Only moments later, a mortal butler answered, inquiring on a British accent, "May I help you?"

"Yes, I'm Mathias. I've come to see Dalris Dra'Kai."

Without hesitation, the older man nodded in recognition. "Yes, you've been expected. However, I'm afraid he's away on urgent business, and his departure is indefinite."

"I see," Mathias started. "Should I reschedule?"

"You may, or if you prefer, his sister, Victoria, is currently managing his affairs in his absence, and she's available."

Hearing this, Mathias took the latter option. He didn't know Victoria quite as well as Dalris, but was better acquainted with her than his other siblings— and she would have just as much information on the upcoming Vampire Order of Nightfall as Dalris did.

Still, he wondered where the draconian might've gone, and once the butler invited him in and offered to take his jacket, he inquired, "Do you have any idea what Dalris' urgent business concerned?"

Handing his jacket over, the man draped it across an arm and replied, "I wasn't privy to the full story, I'm afraid. We were simply informed to expect a new lady of the household to accompany him when he returns."

"Truly?" Mathias asked, surprised. Had Dalris actually— and finally— located his mate? Considering how old he was, Mathias could admit to some curiosity over the matter, though he didn't ask the butler, allowing the human to depart and alert Victoria of his presence if only because she could explain things more easily.

In the meantime, he waited in the foyer, looking around with the thoughts in mind.

As a vampire, Mathias would never find such a partner. Instead of forming a bond with someone automatically, his kind established relationships through blood links, and those could be avoided if one was careful with their associations— which he *always* opted to do.

As it stood, Mathias had a single vampire child— his daughter, Maddox— and he'd worried enough for her safety to last ten lifetimes. So he definitely didn't need the complication of worrying for a lover who could be used against him.

Yet, in some strange way, the thought that Dalris had located an eternal mate evoked a sense of jealousy. Mathias didn't regret his decision to distance himself from any mortal with the potential of becoming an eternal lover, yet he'd wondered what it might be like to have such intimate companionship if only because it was something he'd never *truly*

experienced in his long lifetime.

Nor did he expect to.

So there was no reason to consider such matters further, and he endeavored to push the topic from his mind— which wasn't actually necessary.

Still waiting in the foyer, a surprisingly delectable scent unexpectedly caught his full attention— blood, and not just any blood.

Fae blood.

Mathias suppressed a groan at the tantalizing aroma, forcing his fangs into submission rather than freeing them. Of all immortal races, fae were by far the most tempting to vampires— even one as old as himself had trouble with impulse control when they were around.

Such thoughts had him reluctant to give into the urge to learn where the scent was coming from. Yet he wasn't mindless, and after five millenniums' worth of practice at self restraint, his control was much better than most.

Besides, the luscious scent was growing stronger, and turning his head right, he realized this fae was right around the corner. So he stepped to the entryway of the corridor between the stairs and canted his head to catch a brief glimpse of not one, but two fae now entering what he recalled was Dalris' private gallery, completely unaware of his presence.

Though fae could sense life, the dead evaded their perception, putting them at high risk from vampires— particularly when most didn't care to practice self control. Indeed, the ease with which his kind could sneak up on a fae meant more of them had died at their hands than any other immortal.

But he had no interest in hunting a meal, nor did he want to startle the immortal women. He was merely curious— encountering any fae was a rare event— and allowed his body to shift into vapor before entering the gallery to find them standing near a tall display case.

Inside it was a long, bladed staff made of gold with a number of sparkling jewels encrusted in the hilt, and while the women seemed rather drawn to the item, Mathias barely paid it any attention.

Instead, his gaze was rapt to the brunette, her long, chestnut hair shimmering as if made of silk. The dull points of her ears jutted through it, and though he couldn't see her face, something about her was ... *intriguing*.

But the form of mist usually dulled the senses, making it hard to tell why. Additionally, he couldn't discern what *type* of fae she might be with her back turned, though her friend had to be a storm fae if her white-streaked black hair was any indication.

Still, and regardless of her type, he watched while quietly drifting above as the brunette gave her sister a nod, then reached to her belt and unsheathed a dagger.

Curiously, she turned the tip of the blade to the display case, then pried it into the lock on the door and, with a quick jolt, broke it open.

As a result, the lock flew across the room, and a sudden flash of light knocked the brunette unconscious— apparently, the magical wards Dalris had placed upon his valuables were still active.

But their actions raised a number of questions that went beyond *why* they were breaking into the case. In fact, judging by the storm fae's response, the women knew Dalris had warded his belongings with magic because she took over once the brunette was down.

Opening the door, she grasped the staff inside and removed it, then turned to face the fallen fae. In the process, Mathias noticed something else peculiar— her eyes were purely white. There were no irises or pupils to speak of, which wasn't a natural state for any fae as far as he knew.

But more importantly, she next leaned down to take the brunette's dagger in hand, and made her murderous intentions clear by raising it to stab her sister.

Whatever her reasons, every instinct Mathias possessed urged him to stop the storm fae, and he moved without pause for thought.

Still in mist, he rushed down toward the female and solidified at the last second, ramming into her with immeasurable strength. The blow obviously surprised her as well because she let a startled scream— but that wasn't her *only* reaction.

A deafening clap of thunder sounded immediately following their landing, and the sound was accompanied by a bright burst of lightning surging from her body. The blast rammed into Mathias with enough strength to send him flying across the room, toppling a display case before hitting the floor on the opposing side.

Still able to feel the shock of electricity, he worked his way back up with a low grunt just in time to see the storm fae escaping through the door at the back of the gallery, staff in hand.

But his attention was soon drawn by Victoria, who'd just walked in and almost immediately exclaimed, "Shit, Isadora!"

Isadora? That must've been the brunette's name, and Mathias quickly glanced right just as Victoria blocked his line of sight by kneeling at the fae's side— though not before he noticed the dagger jutting from her lower chest.

Apparently, he'd only changed the trajectory of the blade instead of preventing Isadora from being stabbed at all, and quickly joined them, kneeling on the fae's opposing side.

"What happened, Mathias? Who did this?"

Under normal circumstances, he would've answered without pause, but the moment he knelt next to Isadora, his attention was fully compromised by the blood seeping from her torso.

Yet it wasn't a matter of desiring to feed on it that had him so enthralled. Instead, he was detecting a *blood link*— and unlike younger vampires, Mathias didn't have to drink the blood to detect what type of link it was.

Instead, he could smell it, and the rich crimson seeping from Isadora's chest was screaming a single word loud and clear.

Lover.

He could barely process the thought. *A fae lover?* How could that be possible? She was

—
“Mathias!”

Finally shaken from his stupor, Mathias looked up and realized two things, the first being that Victoria had asked him a question.

Second? Fae lover or not, this woman could quickly die without aide. *Not if I have anything to do with it.*

Ignoring the impulsively protective thought, he asked, “What type of fae is she?”

“She's a green fae, why?”

Damn. Mathias had hoped she'd be a moon fae if only because it was night, meaning all he'd need to do was take her outside and allow the moonlight to heal her.

Instead, he'd have to carry her into nature and hope she could take care of herself.

But regardless, he swiftly gathered Isadora into his arms with the words, “I'll get her outside to heal. So track us and I'll tell you everything.”

At that, his body turned to vapor as he quickly carried the unconscious fae through the nearest open window, hoping the entire way that a trek into the woods would do the trick.

Otherwise, she wouldn't survive.

TEMPTING ETERNITY PREVIEW:



Some Time Later ...

“You keep telling me to expect the worst from you, but in the past two days, you've saved my life three times. *Why?*”

Mathias thoughtfully held her gaze, though he didn't seem to put much thought into his answer in retorting, “Technically, I only saved your life once.”

“I'm not being technical, but fine. I'll chalk the second two times up to you simply wanting me to hold my end of our bargain. Even still, what about the first? You could've taken my blood, but you didn't.”

The vampire exhaled a breath, allowing his hand to fall back to his side as if realizing

they weren't returning to the Spire as soon as he wanted, and his expression grew annoyed.

“Why do you keep asking me that? What could I possibly say that you'd believe?”

Isadora hated to admit it, but he had a point. If he said he'd only helped her because it was the right thing to do, she would've questioned his sincerity.

Or at least, she would've two days ago.

Now, things didn't seem quite so cut and dry. There was certainly more to this vampire than met the eye, prompting her to state, “I don't know what to believe, Mathias. I just find it hard to imagine a vampire who wouldn't even *sample* the blood of an unconscious fae, especially when she's *already* bleeding.”

Mathias groaned, looking away as if considering some serious issue. But though he took a moment this time to formulate an answer, he wasted none giving it— and she didn't know what hit her.

Without warning, the vampire quickly reached out and grasped her wrist, then tugged her in until their bodies were pressed together. A shiver swept through her in response which only grew when he locked her in place and pinned her gaze with those intense, silver eyes.

Being this close to him, they seemed luminous, even as he stated darkly, “Then perhaps it wouldn't be so hard to imagine how much I regret not taking your blood when I had the chance, or how tempted I am to correct my misguided decision.”

With that said, he leaned in closer, the tip of his nose nearly brushing hers in adding, “So forgive me if I'd rather not discuss topics related to drinking that saccharine nectar you call blood, but I find you irresistible in more ways than one, little fae, and disciplined as I may be, I'm not without limits.”

Isadora found herself staring into his eyes, frozen in place— but again, it wasn't fear that held her so motionless.

It was uncertainty.

How was she supposed to react to that? Push him away? Demand he let go? His statements were a clear reminder of their location outside the Spire, after all. She was no longer under the protection of the sanctuary's peace pact, and the fact that she'd forgotten was a perfect example of her lack of fear.

Instead of cowering, she was prodding this ancient vampire with issues that might tempt him to cause her harm, and despite the dangers doing so, found herself even more curious now over his answer.

“What do you mean I'm irresistible in more ways than one?”

As if the question was completely unexpected, Mathias stared down at her uncertainly. Perhaps he'd believed she would struggle to get away from him— after all his warnings about the danger he posed to her life, it wasn't hard to imagine he'd only grabbed her and

said those things to prove it.

Whatever the case, his gaze dipped to her mouth, his lips parting wordlessly, and she had no idea why. There was something in his expression she couldn't quite place, a look that almost gave the impression of wanting to kiss and ... *Wait.*

Isadora's eyes widened as realization dawned. *He wants to kiss me! Maybe ... **more** than that?*

Having no personal experience with such physical desires made it difficult to know if her assumption was completely accurate. She couldn't sense him from the start, let alone determine the state of his body and whether he was actually aroused, which compounded her doubt.

Yet she wondered, and quickly realized that whether he wanted to kiss her or not, she wasn't indifferent to, or even repulsed by the idea in the slightest.

Quite the opposite, in fact.

The implication left her speechlessly wide eyed with only one thought coming to mind. *It **can't** be ... !*

Mathias' plan was backfiring, and it was questionable how much more he could take.

In Sutrelle, Isadora had enough gumption to offer a slap in response to his aggression, making it seem likely that she'd struggle now. So he'd grabbed her in the hopes of proving once and for all that her curiosity was dangerous.

That *he* was dangerous.

But she didn't struggle, not even to demand he release her. Of course, her heart was now racing, yet the fae was staring up with slightly parted lips, her beautiful, ocean blue eyes wide, almost as if in ... *awe.*

The expression made it hard to believe the source of her elevated pulse was fear, but if not, why was she gazing at him so reverently?

It was doubtful his closeness was the cause, and even if it was, he couldn't be having nearly as profound an impact on her as she was on him— the way her body felt pressed to his was too perfect to describe, leaving him aching for a taste of much more than her blood.

It was impossible not to imagine how soft her lips might be against his own, or the way she might respond, saying she invited such attention. Would she clutch him tighter? Moan into his mouth for more?

The thoughts overwhelmed him so completely that he very nearly forgot his intentions of using words to explain just how irresistible she was in favor of showing it with a hard kiss.

“How did you get up here?”

The unexpected demand came from the bar area, and Mathias was so wound up

fighting his urges that he immediately released Isadora and turned around with every intention of snapping at the person speaking for their intrusion, if not attacking them outright. Yet he stopped short in spying a human male wearing a gray jumpsuit at the door – a custodian if his large cart of cleaning supplies was any indication.

The sight served as a reminder of their location at a closed poolside bar on a hotel rooftop, and the custodian was obviously confused– until he saw Isadora.

That's when his expression softened a great deal, allowing the fae to answer, "Don't worry, we'll be gone soon. So would you mind leaving us alone for just a few minutes?"

After a moment of staring at her, the human finally nodded in agreement. "Sure, I'm due for a break anyway," he replied, offering Isadora a smile before turning to go back inside, leaving his cart behind.

As the door shut, Mathias couldn't help thinking the interruption was actually well timed. If a single moment more had passed, he would've made a huge mistake, unwilling to cement Isadora's seeming lack of mistrust, or even anger her and lengthen the time it would take to return to the Spire.

Still, her ability to charm mortals into doing as she asked wasn't entirely convenient considering it would be better if they left right away rather than spend more time alone, prompting him to turn around and ask curiously, "How do you influence humans so easily? Does it take a conscious effort?"

"No," she returned with a shrug. "We just have a natural influence over life, and humans are highly susceptible, particularly when they don't know what we are."

With that said, she waved a hand at him and asked in a change of subject, "So uh ... tell me something. Before that man interrupted, were you about to ... bite me?"

Following her question, the fae briefly looked down at her shoes, and when her gaze returned, a blush lit her cheeks in adding, "Because you weren't staring at my neck ..."

No, I wasn't, he thought, trying to keep his eyes from traveling back to her lips now and rekindling the urge to kiss her all over again.

Still, her question offered the chance to chide, "You believed I was about to bite you, but you didn't struggle?"

"I wasn't sure!" she countered. "That's why I'm asking. So were you?"

Growling in frustration, he retorted, "I told you to assume I'm *always* planning on it, and yes, I'd thought about it then, too. I also wanted to kiss you."

A bewildered look overcame her, voice taking on a scandalous edge in asking, "You *did*?"

Mathias nearly scoffed, reminding himself that Isadora was an unmated fae who wasn't likely to comprehend the allure of such physical activities, or even fully understand where they led. So she'd naturally sound shocked by the news, and he decided not to mince words

in responding.

“Of course I did. When I say you're irresistible in more ways than one, I mean your blood isn't the *only* thing I'd like to taste, fae.”

Still staring with widened eyes, she took a step back, asking, “Really?”

“Yes, really.”

His answer had her taking another step, unwitting of the direction in which she moved. But Mathias was fully aware, and attempted to warn her.

“Isadora, you're about to— ”

“Then you think I'm— *ah!*”

Her sharp yelp was accompanied by a splash of water— as she'd backed away in disbelief, the fae's foot hit the edge of the pool, causing her to stumble in.

Though it would've been easy to move swiftly enough to prevent the mishap, he was too curious to see if she was truly so distracted she'd actually fall— and now that she had, he wasn't certain what to think.

Walking over to crouch at the edge, a sense of guilt assailed him, though the sensation quickly dissipated once her head breached the surface.

With her chestnut hair covering most of her face, a loud squeal of laughter sounded before the fae cried, “Holy crap, it's *cold!*”

The joyful exclamation had him smiling right along with her, though he didn't realize it until she swiped her hair out of her eyes and looked up with a soft gasp.

“Oh! You have a wonderful smile!”

If possible, his smile grew even bigger. “Do I then?”

She offered a definitive nod, starting the task of paddling toward the edge where he was crouched to lift up a hand and request, “Help me out.”

Without qualm, he reached down to grasp her palm, ready to pull her from the water the moment their fingers clasped. Yet a mischievous light glinting in her sapphire eyes served as a warning, and at the last moment, he braced instead.

Surely enough, the fae tugged on his hand, obviously trying to pull him into the water with her. But her strength was outmatched, and without budging, a smirk curled his lips just as her own pursed in defeat.

“You don't really think I'm going to *fall* for that, do you?”

A brief moment of silence passed before Isadora gasped, then erupted in abrupt laughter that nearly had her sinking below the water's surface again.

If not for her grip on his hand, she probably would've.

Instead, her back hit the wall of the pool beneath him as she gasped for breath, retorting, “*Fine!*” followed by slinging an arm up to splash him in the face.

Swiftly, Mathias transformed most of his body into mist, allowing the water to pass

through without getting wet. The only part of his anatomy that remained solid was his hand clasping hers— and Isadora seemed impressed.

“Hey! I didn't know vampires could transform certain parts of their body!”

Quickly reforming, he reached down for her other hand and easily tugged her up out of the water while answering, “They can't. It's not a skill vampires in this world are taught. To the best of my knowledge, only Maddox and I know how, though she may be helping Stephan to learn.”

Settling the fae on her feet and releasing her hands, it was difficult not to stare at the way the dark material of her tank top clung to her breasts as she twisted her hair to wring the water out. The wet clothe outlined their shape perfectly, which wasn't large, but they were high set and ample for their size.

From there, his eyes trailed over the rest of her curves to find not a single point on her body that was unpleasant to behold— specifically in wet clothing. Though short in stature, her legs seemed long with round hips, her overall build best described as lithe, and as she lifted the hem of her top to twist, a single oddity captured his attention.

Isadora didn't have a navel.

Allowing her shirt to fall back into place, Mathias nearly pointed it out as she walked over to one of the lounge chairs to grab a rolled up towel laid out for the hotel guests. But she beat him to the punch with a question of her own.

“Maddox is your daughter, right?”

Forgetting the topic of her absent navel for the time being, he answered, “Yes.”

Peering at him curiously, Isadora inquired, “How does that work? I mean ... do vampires view all the people they've turned as children?”

He checked a frown, unsure this was a topic he wanted to discuss for numerous reasons. Still, he decided to give a brief summary on an annoyed tone that might deter her from asking more questions.

“It depends on the blood bond. Some are like children, some are siblings.”

At first, it seemed his ploy had worked as the fae was too busy patting herself down with the towel to ask questions. Yet she soon inquired, “Do you know which they'll be before they're turned?”

Releasing an inaudible sigh, he answered, “There's a link in the blood that tells us.”

“Really?” Removing her soaked tennis shoes, she stood straight and walked over barefoot, asking, “Then is Maddox your only child?”

“Yes.”

The answer seemed to surprise the fae as she next inquired skeptically, “You've only turned one person in five thousand years?”

“No.”

“Oh, then you've had others but ... oh!”

Gasping as if she'd just put two and two together, the fae quickly rushed out, “I'm sorry, I didn't mean to- ”

“Don't worry about it,” he interrupted, glad to let the topic go while lifting a hand in offering. “Let's just return to the Spire before Maddox and Stephan start to worry.”

With a nod, she finally accepted his hand, allowing him to transport them back to the sanctuary- and he undertook the trip in confusion.

With only a few exceptions, their conversation on the hotel rooftop had been rather pleasant. Of course, he'd been distracted by her beauty and scent, but the desire to take her blood wasn't as overwhelming as expected, making it seem possible to remain in casual company with the fae after all.

But was that a blessing, or a curse?

He'd wondered before if the temptation Isadora presented wasn't solely based on blood, and their interactions so far seemed to confirm it. Had they kissed by the pool, deep down, he knew it would've sated him well enough to make other desires more bearable, at least temporarily.

The notion made it seem as if sampling her blood without killing her could actually be possible- and that was the one thing he couldn't allow himself to believe.

COMING SOON ...