

## Chapter 12 – By Fate I Conquer Cora Reilly

She nodded, as if she was filing away the information for later use.

I lit another cigarette and tipped an imaginary hat before I strode over to the clubhouse. “Enjoy the fresh air.”

She didn't say anything but I could almost feel her furious eyes on my neck.

Inside the clubhouse, the party was in full swing. Word about the success of the mission had spread quickly.

Everyone wanted to clap my shoulder and congratulate me on my success. I only shook my head with a grin. Earl came toward me and handed me a Budweiser. “Why aren't you celebrating?”

“It's too soon,” I shouted into his ear. “We've won a battle but not the war.”

“It's an important battle, son. Let our men celebrate and give them the feeling we're close to winning the fucking war.”

I nodded, then took a swig from the beer before I allowed Cherry, one of the newer club girls, to rub herself against me in a very explicit dance. My mind was elsewhere. I couldn't stop thinking about the girl locked in the kennel outside. She had been a figment of my imagination for so long that having her this close was a shock to my system.

The moment I'd finished the beer, Gray shoved a bottle of moonshine into my hand. I took a small sip then put it down on the bar.

I preferred to stay sober with Marcella in our hands. I wouldn't underestimate Luca Vitiello. The man was a homicidal maniac with an army of loyal soldiers at his hands, and he was deadly protective of his family. Kidnapping his daughter could be the nail in all of our coffins if we didn't play this right. Earl should have postponed the celebrations, even if our brothers wouldn't have liked it. Alcohol and pussy could wait until Vitiello was dead.

Cherry pressed up to me. “You look bored. Let's go up to your room. I know how to entertain you.”

I let her pull me up the stairs and into my small room. The only piece of furniture was a bed and an armchair that I used to throw my clothes over.

She shoved me on the bed and began to strip. I'd always been satisfied with the girls in the club, but now I couldn't stop comparing them to Marcella fucking Vitiello. And fuck

me, Snow White played in a league of her own. Cherry dropped her bra but that wasn't why my cock erected a tent in my jeans. An image of cold blue eyes, black hair, and plump red lips lingered in my head.

I needed to stop fantasizing about Snow White, especially now that she was in reach.

I watched Maddox disappear inside the shabby farm building, a confident swagger to his gait. His biker buddies probably hailed him like a king after he kidnapped me. I moved toward the cage, trying to ignore the disapproving snarling of the dog in the cage beside mine, and my quickening pulse in response. It must have rained not too long ago because the stench of wet fur and pee made my stomach churn violently. The humidity and lingering heat only made things worse. I tried not to think of all the things my bare feet came into contact with on the dirty ground. I climbed on the hut, wincing as splinters from the rough wood speared my palms, and pressed against the rough stone of the back wall. It was growing dark around me, only making my situation seem more desperate. Out of habit, I reached into my back pocket for my phone, but of course they'd disposed of it.

Dad had always warned me about the dangers of our life, but neither he nor I had ever thought it would really come to this. That I'd actually be kidnapped.

I shuddered. It still seemed like a nightmare.

I didn't know what time it was. I must have lost my watch like one of my shoes in my struggle, but hours must have passed since I'd been kidnapped. The idea that I had been passed out for hours perhaps sent an icy shiver down my back, wondering what these animals had done in the meantime.

By now, Dad would know. I wondered if he'd told Mom yet. He preferred to keep certain dark topics from her and me, but we weren't stupid and knew more than he thought. Still, I wished there was a way to keep this news from Mom. She'd break down if she found out. Mom had never been built for this world.

And Amo? He'd probably do something absolutely stupid, even more stupid than his usual actions. I smiled, but soon tears filled my eyes. I blinked fast to push them back. I wouldn't cry. Instead, I stared stubbornly ahead into the forest that surrounded the area, listening for sounds of a nearby road or human life. But apart from the occasional bird saying farewell to the sinking sun and the rustling of trees, I didn't catch anything—except for the ruckus from the clubhouse.

Night fell and the bird song died away. The howls from the biker party increased in volume and were joined by the sound of breaking glass on occasion. Exhaustion, more emotional than psychological but just as potent, took hold of me. Yet, I wouldn't fall asleep until my body couldn't take anymore. Not with these animals—dogs and bikers alike—so close.

Pebbles crunched. I tensed and sat up as a man in his twenties stumbled in my direction. He was drunk and couldn't even walk straight but had his gaze fixed on me. He collided with the bars then clung to them, his forehead pressing into the gap as if he wanted to squeeze through the metal. My eyes darted to the door, which was locked, but what if he had the keys?

He gave me a wide grin. "There she is." He sounded as if he was trying to be a snake, dragging the s grotesquely. "Pretty princess." He undressed me with greedy, hooded eyes.

My hands shook even worse and so I clung to my knees. His eyes darted to the cage door. I prayed he didn't have the keys. Maybe he was drunk enough so I could overwhelm him and get away, but maybe he wasn't, and he was definitely stronger than me. He stumbled toward the door, and rattled it, lightly at first, then harder. I breathed a sigh of relief when his angry shaking at the door didn't do anything.

"Pity. Maybe later," he said with a stupid cackle. Then he began to unbuckle his belt. It took him two tries to get the fly down, and I jerked my head away in disgust. Was he going to jack off right in front of me?

But soon the sound of liquid hitting the the side of the hut inside the cage echoed through the silence. A few warm drops hit my hands and I let out a disgusted scream, pressing even closer to the wall. "You animal!"

Steps rang out. "Denver, you asshole!" Maddox roared and shoved the other man's chest so hard he just toppled over and laughed drunkenly, then fell silent.

Maddox was in his baggy jeans, but without a shirt, and his boot laces dragged over the ground. In the soft glow from the porch, I could see that he had several tattoos on his chest, one of them, over his sternum, a skull spitting fire. The shadows accentuated the ridges of his muscled stomach right down to the V of his hips.

"Fuck," Maddox growled and kicked an unmoving Denver whose head lolled to the side. "The asshole passed out and pissed all over himself." He turned to me, eyes crinkling. "Are you all right?"

"What do you care? You locked me in a dog cage." My voice had become nasal as I fought tears. I held my hand away from me, wondering how I could get rid of the pee. My stomach lurched just thinking about it.

"I don't," he said coldly and turned to go. "Good night."

"He peed against the cage and I got some of it on my hands," I rushed to say, hating the desperate note to my voice. I was never desperate, at least not in front of strangers.

"Stupid asshole," Maddox growled in the direction of his biker buddy, who definitely didn't hear him before he said to me, "I'll get you a towel."

He turned and stalked up the pebbled way leading to the clubhouse.

I eyed the passed-out man on the ground but he didn't stir. A couple of minutes later, Maddox returned with a towel. He held it out to me through the bars. I hopped off the hut, making sure not to land in the pee, and grabbed the towel. It was cold and wet. I smelled it, not trusting anyone around here, but I only caught the barest hint of detergent.

"It's water and soap, or did you expect me to give you a towel with more piss?" Maddox said. He actually sounded offended. What right did he have to be offended? Was he the one in the kennel?

I wiped my hands, muttering. "How should I know? That guy wanted to pee on me, and you probably think that's what I deserve for being my father's daughter."

Dad evoked hatred in many people, and by merely sharing his blood, I reaped the same emotions. Dad's power had protected me from the force of people's viciousness, their fear always greater than their dislike. Now I was left unprotected.

"No. Just because you're a captive doesn't mean you should be treated like dirt. I want your father, not you."

I kept rubbing my hand with the towel, but the stink of pee from the kennel floor clogged my nose, so I still felt dirty. "So a dog cage is your version of not treating me like dirt?"

"That was a club decision."