

Chapter 13 – By Fate I Conquer Cora Reilly

I tilted my head curiously. “And where would you have kept me?”

“We have a basement.”

“Sounds splendid.” I held out the towel.

He shook his head, watching me in a way that felt too personal. “Keep it.”

I nodded then made a beeline around the pee puddle and climbed back on the hut.

“I’ll have someone clean this up in the morning, or maybe afternoon, depending on when everyone’s sober.” He had the barest accent, one that didn’t belong here and one I couldn’t place but was definitely southern.

“You realize my father would have it easy if he attacked you now.”

“He would, but your old man doesn’t have the slightest clue where you are. We only recently moved into this clubhouse.”

“Where are we?” I asked casually.

Maddox watched me closely and slowly a smile formed on his lips, dimpling his right cheek. “For some reason I think it might be a mistake to tell you too much.”

“Maddox!” a high-pitched female voice called out.

Maddox sighed, looking up to a window where a naked woman waved.

“Your girlfriend is waiting for you to keep her entertained,” I muttered.

“Not my girlfriend, but I should go,” he said. He grabbed the guy on the ground and dragged him away.

Once he was out of sight and earshot, I released a shuddering breath. Tears pressed against my eyeballs. I wasn’t strong enough to hold them back.

Sitting in the dark, listening to the grunts and howls and barks of the dogs around me, silent tears trailed down my cheeks. It wasn’t cold but I couldn’t stop shaking. I’d always known Dad’s business was dangerous but it had only been a distant danger despite the bodyguards following my every step. They were dead now. Either the bikers had killed them, or Dad had done so the moment he found out they’d allowed me to be kidnapped. I didn’t blame them. Giovanni had annoyed me so much until I’d ordered them away to have a private conversation with him and get him off my back. Dad wouldn’t see it that

way. He'd blame my bodyguards in his rage and I wasn't there to tell him otherwise and take the blame.

I wiped the tears away eventually and stared off into the darkness blankly, listening to the occasional yowling of the bikers as they got more drunk. The huge dog in the left kennel began pacing, ears perking. It scratched at the ground then curled up. Despite my fear of the dogs, I felt sorry for them for spending their life locked in a small cage.

How long would I spend here? Maybe Dad and Matteo were already on their way to save me. I prayed that was the case. I didn't want to find out what those bikers had in mind for me. Maddox might have saved me from being peed on, and pretended I was going to be treated decently, but so far everything pointed in another direction.

My beauty had been a weapon all my life, something to intimidate others without guns and violence, but now it was a liability. I'd been in my early teens when I'd realized the look in many men's eyes, and I'd soon learned to twist it to my advantage, but now...

After I'd allowed myself one good cry, I promised myself to be strong in order to get out of this alive. Dad would do everything to save me but I needed to make sure he and Matteo didn't get themselves killed while they did. I had to figure out a way to make it easier for him, or maybe even escape. These bikers weren't the brightest candles on the cake. I had to find a way to trick them so I could run away.

My eyelids soon became heavy but I forced them open until they burned fiercely. The dogs snored in the kennels beside mine, probably dreaming of having me as their next meal.

A figure moved out of the house long after the party had settled down.

I recognized Maddox as he leaned against the porch, backlit by window lights. He was the tallest of all bikers. Occasionally the tip of his cigarette glowed up. Even without seeing his eyes, I could tell he was watching me. It was a tingling sensation. One I'd felt in the club where I'd first seen him.

Maddox White.

I knew who he was. Dad never shared the darker parts of his life with me or Mom, as if we couldn't handle them because we were female. Mom didn't want to know, and I had never really made an effort to find out more, because it seemed futile. It would have only piqued my interest further and made me resent the fact that I could never be part of the business even more. Yet, I'd heard the story of the bikers in New Jersey that my father had eradicated single-handedly. I made sure to keep my eyes and ears open at all times, and this massacre was still a popular topic among Made Men on social events. Since most men tried to be exceedingly entertaining around me to impress me, stories like that always reached my ears.

I took a deep breath and pressed against the rough wall. My fingers hurt from clutching my high heel. Maddox was the son of one of the bikers who'd been killed. He must really hate Dad, so I trusted his friendliness even less. So far, I hadn't tried to think about their revenge plan. It would have only made me more nervous but having a clear overview of what might happen next could mean the difference between escaping here alive or in a coffin.

My pulse quickened at the realization of how close to death I was. All my life a possible threat to my safety had dangled over my head like a Damocles sword, but it had always been abstract, never something palpable I could grasp. Now Dad's worries had manifested into reality and my annoyance for his insistence to keep me heavily guarded at all times seemed childish and naïve. Maybe it would have been good to prepare me in a similar way like he had Amo, really show me the dangers of our world. Now I was confronted with them with little preparation.

These men wanted my father, but to get him, they would certainly not shy back from hurting me. I'd never suffered a scar in my life. I prayed for the strength to remain dignified even if faced with torture. I wanted to do my family proud. These bikers wanted to sully the name Vitiello, but I'd do my best to thwart them. I had to trust that I had more of my father in me than he ever wanted for me.

I didn't have any weapons, but one. Amo always said my looks were lethal. I had to hope I could prove him right.

Despite the bone-deep tiredness tugging at my brain, I couldn't fall asleep, even long after my club brothers had succumbed to their alcohol-induced slumber. Eventually I gave up trying and spent the night on the porch, watching Marcella's hunched shadow on the hut, sensing that she, too, kept her eyes on me. The occasional owl hoot or a raccoon fight broke the peaceful silence. Only a small part of the reason for my watch was to make sure none of my uncle's men lay a hand on our captive, especially after Denver acted like a fucking animal and pissed in Marcella's cage. The other reason was I wanted to find out more about Marcella Vitiello, and through her, about her father. The name Vitiello had haunted my life for so long, it seemed stupid to let the opportunity pass to find out more about the family.

When the first hazy sun rays peeked over the treetops, I flipped my cigarette into the ashtray and pushed away from the porch and headed toward the kennels. Deep down, I knew I should stay the fuck away from Snow White. For one, I called her Snow White and second, I couldn't stop thinking about her.

She sat atop the dog hut with her legs pulled against her chest and her chin resting on her folded arms atop her knees. Her eyes were glassy and red. She must have cried. It had been too dark for me to see. The thought of her tears made me uncomfortable. Marcella wasn't the person I wanted to lock in a cage and put through hell. She was only the bait for a much bigger prey.

Her high heel rested on the hut beside her. The bucket was pushed into the corner as far from her as possible. But even if she had a will of steel, her body's needs must have won out through the night. The hut's wood was darker where Denver's piss had hit it.

When she spotted me, she straightened and sat crossed-legged, her back ramrod-straight. Her blouse was wrinkled and her pants covered in dirt, but she still managed to look like this was exactly how it was meant to be. Shit. That girl still managed to look blasé and like a goddamn society girl in a fucking kennel.

The dogs whined and jumped up at the cages, eager for food. But that was Gray's job, not mine. I suspected he was nursing a hangover from our party last night. I'd send one of the prospects over to clean everything later.

I stopped in front of the cages, regarding the girl inside for a few minutes without a word. Unfortunately, Marcella simply stared back at me, hiding her discomfort, if she felt any. "Your eyes are red. Did you cry?"

"My eyes are red because I fought sleep all night. I won't close my eyes with so many disgusting animals around." She paused for emphasis. "Not to mention the dogs."

I smiled. "Your insults pearl right off me." She slid off the hut with elegant ballet dancer feet, making sure to stay away from the piss spots, and grabbed her shoe. I had to stifle my amusement over her insistence to keep that shoe close.