

Chapter 18 – By Fate I Conquer Cora Reilly

He took a deep pull from the cigarette and exhaled. “I’m a better choice than Cody,” he muttered.

My stomach coiled at the implication. The mere idea of Cody touching me made me want to throw up. Maddox, on the other hand... I wasn’t repulsed by his body, and I didn’t dislike him as much as could be expected. Not to mention that he was probably the only chance to get out of here. None of the other bikers had shown the slightest interest in my well being.

“You aren’t any kind of choice. Nobody asked me what I want.”

Maddox nodded. “I’ve got to go.”

Fear overwhelmed me and I lunged forward, grabbing on to the bars. “What if Cody comes down here to get what he wants? I doubt your uncle would care.”

Maddox tensed, but I couldn’t read his expression when he turned to me. A few blond strands fell over his baby blue eyes and the gash that looked like a peculiar dimple deepened further as he scowled. “Cody can’t do anything without my uncle’s permission.”

Was that supposed to calm me? Cody was like a starving man who’d spotted his next meal when he looked at me.

Maddox’s gaze held mine and what I saw in his was pure hunger. I shivered and pressed even closer to the bars.

“You can’t let him have me,” I whispered. I could be yours, I let my eyes say. He wanted me, had wanted me from the very first moment. I needed him on my side if I wanted to survive this. I couldn’t rely only on Dad and Matteo to save me.

A war was raging in Maddox’s eyes. Maybe he realized why I was flirting with him. He flicked away his cigarette, stomped on it before he moved very close to me, only the bars between us. The dogs let out yaps of excitement. He brought his face so close our lips were almost brushing.

“I’m not stupid,” he growled. “Don’t think you can manipulate me. I’m not like that sappy ex-fiancé.”

His furious eyes darted down to my mouth, wanting, despite everything. He suspected me and yet he couldn’t stop wanting—wanting what he shouldn’t. I didn’t look away. I exhaled, then drew in his scent, a mix of leather, smoke and sandalwood. Nothing I’d

ever appreciated but Maddox made it work. My body wondered, longed for something I'd been denied for so long.

"Who says I'm manipulating you?" Then I amended. "But even if I were trying to do it, you don't have to let me succeed. You could just use me like you think I'm using you."

"I don't have to use you. You are at our mercy, Marcella, maybe you forget. I could do with you whatever I want without any consequences whatsoever."

"You could, but that's not who you are. You want me, but you want me willing."

Maddox's knuckles turned white as his grip around the bars tightened.

"You don't know me."

"No, I don't. But I know one thing for a fact," I whispered and then brushed my lips so very lightly over his, trying to ignore how my body heated from the light contact. "You can't stop thinking about me, and after today you'll dream about my body and how it would be to touch me every waking moment and even when you sleep."

He jerked back from my lips as if they'd electrocuted him. I too had felt the zap rushing through my body at the brief kiss. "Don't play with things you can't control, Snow White. You don't know what you're getting yourself into." He turned around and left. He was probably right. Maddox was a different type of man than I was used to. He was crude and didn't have an ounce of respect for my father. He'd love to piss him off. But that was part of why I was drawn to him, despite the horrible situation. Not that my desires held any meaning. I needed to get out of here, no matter how.

Maddox kept his distance the rest of the day, and luckily no one else came by either.

My stomach rumbled again. After the recording, I'd been sure I'd never be able to eat again, I felt so sick. The last few days I'd longed for my cell phone, now I was glad it was gone. My Instagram and Messenger were probably bursting with messages because of the nude recording. I shoved the thought away and glanced to the left.

Satan paced the kennel beside mine again. She probably was hungry too. I hadn't seen anyone bringing the dogs food. I hopped off the hut, the only place in the shadow, and moved cautiously closer to the dog.

She threw me a quick look, then paced back and forth in front of the cage door again. Her water bowl was empty too. I peered toward the house. In the afternoon heat, the dog needed something to drink, even I knew that. I considered calling Maddox. Maybe he was in his room and would hear me but I couldn't bring myself to do it.

The door of the house opened and I called, "Hey, the dogs need water and food!" Then I realized it was Cody. I snapped my mouth shut but he already headed my way with a wide grin.

I stepped back from the bars, wanting as much distance between us as possible.

"What do you want, princess?"

I swallowed my revulsion and pride. "The dogs weren't fed today and Satan doesn't have any water."

"The dogs are more vicious when they are hungry. There's a dog fight tonight, so they need to be sharp."

I grimaced. "I doubt they can fight if they die of thirst."

Cody leaned against the bars, letting his eyes travel along my body in a very disgusting way. "What do I get in return for giving them water?"

I scoffed. "Not what you want."

His face hardened. He picked up the hose they used to fill the bowls but instead of pointing it there, he brandished the end at me. My eyes widened a second before cold water hit my chest. I stumbled back but there was nowhere I could seek cover, unless I crawled into the dog hut, which I'd never do. The dogs barked excitedly. I turned around so the water hit my back. Eventually Cody turned the water off. I was completely drenched. Looking over my shoulder, I saw Cody grinning maliciously.

"There's your water. You sure you don't want to give me a little something so I fill the dogs' bowls?"

I scowled, and he tossed the hose away before he walked off. My kennel was completely wet but the water slid down the slight slope toward the cage doors and didn't reach the other cages. Satan got on her belly and tried to squeeze her muzzle under the gap between the bars and the ground to lick water up but she didn't succeed. I picked up my bowl, which was filled with water, but the thing didn't fit through the bars. Satan watched me closely. I didn't have any experience with dogs, so I couldn't tell if she was friendly or waiting for a chance to eat me.

My pity for the beast won out even as my pulse quickened. I scooped up water in my hands and carefully moved them through the bars. After a moment of hesitation, Satan approached me. I tensed when she opened her muzzle but only her tongue darted out and she began to drink eagerly. I repeated the process several times until she seemed satisfied.

"What are you doing?" Maddox asked, startling me so much, I bruised my wrists when I jerked them back through the bars. Satan let out a sharp bark at the quick movement.

"Giving her water."

Maddox scanned my drenched clothes. "And why are you wet?"

"Cody hosed me down instead of giving the dogs water when I asked him to fill their bowls."

Maddox's expression flickered with fury. "Asshole," he muttered, then he frowned. "Why do you even care if the dogs have water or not?"

"They're locked inside a cage without a fault of their own, just like me."

Maddox shook his head with a strange smile as he picked up the hose and filled all the bowls with water. By now, it was getting dark.

"Is it true that the dogs have to starve so they fight more viciously tonight?"

"Yeah," Maddox said. "Earl's orders."

"It's wrong. Dog fights are disgusting. I feel pity for them."

"I don't like the fights either, but the prez makes the decisions and we all follow them even if we hate them."

I was surprised by his honesty and I could see in his face that he hadn't meant to reveal as much. "Were you against kidnapping me?"

Maddox shook his head with a strange smile. "Do you need a blanket or towel?"

"No, it's warm enough."

He tipped an imaginary hat before he headed back to the clubhouse where he perched on the banister and lit up a cigarette. I had a feeling he'd watch me as long as he could forgo sleep.

Soon Denver, who hadn't dared come near me again, and Gunnar picked up several dogs, among them Satan, and led them away. Deep in the woods, lights were set up but I couldn't make out any details. Yet, when the first snarls and later yelps and whines echoed through the area, I closed my eyes and held my hands over my ears.

The dog fights were absolutely unnecessary, especially because tonight we didn't even have any visitors who could bet on the outcome. This was solely for Earl's and the club's entertainment. When I was a kid, Earl had forced me to watch the dogs tear each

other apart but by now I was old enough to stay away. Gray wasn't as lucky. Earl still thought he needed to harden the boy by making him watch this sadistic spectacle.

I tried to ignore the sound of the fighting and watched Marcella instead. She was sunken into herself, cupping her ears with her palms. She'd surprised me today. I wouldn't have thought she cared for anything but herself. Seeing her help Satan by risking her fingers had done something to me I couldn't quite explain.