

Chapter 19 – By Fate I Conquer Cora Reilly

It was close to midnight when Cody and Gray led the surviving dogs back to the kennels while Earl shot the ones that were too badly injured. Marcella sat up when Satan limped into the kennel and rolled up on the ground. Cody said something to her that made her face twist with disgust.

I straightened, ready to rush down there and ram my boot into Cody's ass. He was pissing me off more every day and unlike Denver, he seemed content to ignore my warnings. His interest in Marcella was getting out of hand. Finally, he walked off in the direction where Earl always shot the dogs, probably to watch eagerly. Marcella said something to Gray and he shrugged.

I narrowed my eyes, wondering what they were talking about. She said more and Gray nodded then he headed to the shed with the dog food and grabbed a handful. I tensed when he handed it to Marcella through the bars, but she simply took it without trying anything. Gray headed back up to the clubhouse, looking pale.

"What did she want?"

"Dog food for Satan."

"And?"

"That's it. She asked me if I was okay because I looked sick," he said, rubbing the back of his head in embarrassment.

"Tell Earl you don't want to watch."

"I did, but he doesn't care. Today was really bad." He shook his head as if he didn't want to think, much less talk about it.

"I need to drink myself into a stupor," he muttered and disappeared inside.

I resisted the urge to go to the kennels for a few minutes but then the draw was too strong. Marcella looked up when a twig broke under my boot. She knelt beside the bars and tossed food at Satan who ate it but was obviously too exhausted to stand and go closer.

"It's barbaric," she seethed. "She's bleeding. There's a tear in her ear and muzzle."

"If those are her only injuries, the other dog's probably dead," I said. Satan was Earl's favorite for a reason. She was big for a female, and since she had a litter, which Earl took from her right after birth, she was a vicious fighter within the ring.

“She shouldn’t be forced to fight against other dogs.”

I watched her, not saying anything. The moonlight made her skin glow and her hair shone like petroleum, but what really made her gorgeous in that moment was the caring expression she had for the dog. She slanted me a look, tossed the remaining food toward Satan, and cleaned her palms on her pants before she got up. She approached me with a look that made my f*cking stomach flip. She grabbed the bars and peered up at me. “People who enjoy dog fights usually enjoy torturing humans too. I don’t trust Cody and Earl. Do you?”

I laughed. “They are not my enemies.”

“Cody sure is.”

I shrugged. “I can handle Cody.” I didn’t trust Cody, and I trusted Earl to some extent.

“He’s not going to stop coming to the kennels. He’s drawn to me. He can’t stand being rejected. Eventually, he’ll take what he wants, Maddox.”

I knew she was right, but I couldn’t let her make us out to be allies. We weren’t. She was the captive and the daughter of my worst enemy.

She leaned even closer, her voice low. “Do you really want to come down here one day and find out he forced himself on me? Do you want that on your conscience?” I gritted my teeth. “Could you really live with yourself if Cody took what you deny yourself?”

I jerked back, my pulse racing. Her words seemed to sink into me and fester.

“Don’t—” I warned but didn’t even know how to finish the sentence. I whirled around and stalked back to the clubhouse.

Marcella Vitiello was trying to lead me around by the balls to save herself, and I had half a mind to let her try. I risked another glance over my shoulder back at the kennels as I headed toward the clubhouse. She was still pressed up to the bars, watching me. Her hair was a mess and her clothes had seen better days but she looked as if it was exactly meant to be like that, as if she were staging some fancy post-apocalyptic Vogue photo shoot.

I gritted my teeth and tore my eyes away. It became harder to ignore her, to forget her. My dreams were completely out of my control by now and after what I’d seen today, things would certainly not improve. But my cock was the least of my problems. Cody’s horniness was the real f*cking problem. Seeing her naked would give him a ton of new fantasies he was going to follow up on at some point. I couldn’t let that happen.

The reasons for my need to protect Marcella were f*cking irrelevant. All that mattered was to get her out of danger. Her father would pay for his sins—not his daughter.

Maybe she was spoiled and had led a good life thanks to his rotten character, but that didn't warrant a punishment, and I was certainly the last person who should judge a person's blood money.

Pacing the porch, I smoked two cigarettes before a plan formed in my mind. It was risky on so many levels but the only other thing I could come up with was letting Marcella go and hell would freeze over before that happened. She was our ticket to Vitiello's demise.

I put out my cigarette in the overflowing ashtray and went up to my room, determined to talk to Earl in the morning. After dog fights, he wasn't in a state to discuss anything with him. I perched on the windowsill. Marcella's words repeated in my head. What if he takes what you deny yourself?

F*ck. I would spend the night watching over the kennels again.

After a quick power nap in the morning, I went in search of Earl, but didn't get a chance to talk to him because he sent me out to collect money from one of our dealers. Luckily Cody wasn't around, so I didn't have to be worried for Marcella. I'd just have to hurry the f*ck up.

When I came home late in the afternoon, Cody's bike was already parked in front of the house. I dismounted my Harley quickly and jogged up the path until I spotted the kennels. Marcella sat next to the bars and was talking to Satan from the looks of it. The dog was stretched out beside her, only the bars between them.

Reassured, I went inside. Following the sounds of bullets hitting cans, I headed through the backdoor and found my uncle in his favorite rocking chair, shooting at cans on tree stumps. His cut with the stitched words President of the Tartarus MC hung over the backrest. As usual, my chest swelled seeing it. One day I would wear that cut, would lead our club. For a long time, I hadn't considered it an option, had been certain Gray would follow in his father's footsteps, but three years ago Earl had told me that I and not Gray would be the future prez of Tartarus. I had been more than a little surprised, and Gray had been devastated, but Earl was a stubborn asshole and wouldn't change his mind once he'd come to a decision.

Earl glanced over his shoulder then he kept shooting at the cans. "Don't stand behind my f*cking back, it's giving me a f*cking itch."

I sank down in the rocking chair beside his but firmly planted my feet on the ground to stop it from moving. I hated the monotone back and forth. I preferred to make progress. The feeling of bridging hundreds of miles on my bike, that was the kind of motion I liked. Well, there was one back and forth motion I didn't mind...

"Spill. You're f*cking with my aim."

"Have you made more plans with the girl you haven't told me about?" I asked.

Earl's face pinched angrily. "If I have, you'll find out when I see fit, boy."

I nodded grudgingly. "I thought this was our plan, our chance to get revenge on my dad's murderer. I thought we were in this together, but now you're doing your own thing."

Earl sighed and leaned back in his chair, the gun balancing on his thigh. "You'll get your revenge, don't you worry. We need to use the Vitiello brat as long as we have her, really drive her father to the brink, see that Italian asshole crumple bit by bit."

I braced my elbows on my knees. "You got it," I said then smiled twistedly. "That's why I want her in my bed."

Cody, who had stepped outside without me noticing, let out a disbelieving laugh. "Right."

But I ignored him and just continued, "Nobody has more reason to get revenge than me."

Earl regarded me curiously and lit his cigarette. "Why the change of heart? Didn't you say she's just bargain, and we shouldn't hurt her. Now you want to drag her into your bed?"

I had absolutely no business protecting her. Her father had killed my father brutally before my eyes, but I couldn't allow Cody to get his hands on her. "Not dragging anyone," I said with a grin. "Girl's been flirting with me like crazy, probably trying to get on my good side. I suppose she's used to getting what she wants by using her tits and cunt."

"I bet she is. She's got great tits and a pretty cunt as far as I could see so she's got plenty to work with."

I lit my own cigarette, allowing my grin to become dirty. "If she wants to influence me with her pretty cunt, who am I to deny her? Especially when it'll piss Vitiello off."

Cody's face became more and more frustrated. "Be careful not to fall into her trap. I bet she's led more than one man around by his dick."

Earl still watched me. His poker face was one I'd learned to be wary of.