

Chapter 9 – By Fate I Conquer Cora Reilly

Dad, however, looked as if he was about ready to hunt Giovanni down. “What happened?” His words, even if they were the same as Mom’s, held a very different meaning. I could see that he was already imagining all the horrible things Giovanni might have done to upset me, and how to make him pay tenfold for his transgression. “What did he do?”

“Nothing,” I said firmly. That was the problem. I couldn’t tell Dad the exact reasons why I had broken up with Giovanni, especially because they were the reasons why Dad probably would have chosen him. They were most definitely the reasons why Dad had allowed me to date Giovanni in the first place. Dad could read people and he’d probably smelled from a mile away that Giovanni was too cowardly to ever touch me.

Dad looked at Amo as if he hoped my brother would prove my words wrong, but Amo only shrugged as if he didn’t have the slightest clue and would rather die than suffer another moment of his hangover.

Mom’s eyes softened further. “Maybe you and Giovanni can fix it?”

“No,” I said immediately. If I returned to Giovanni, that would only happen out of habit and because I hated the prospect of an uncertain future, but those weren’t good enough reasons to continue a relationship. “I just realized I don’t love him. I don’t want to settle for less than what you have.”

Mom smiled softly. “Sometimes love takes time. Your father and I weren’t in love when we married.”

“I know. You didn’t even choose to marry but it didn’t take you years to love each other. Giovanni and I have been together for more than two years, but I don’t love him, and I never have.”

Dad finally rose from the chair as well. “There must have been an event that made you realize this.”

“There wasn’t, Dad. Honestly. I’ve realized it a while ago but I didn’t want to give up too quickly, especially knowing that it might reflect badly on you and Mom if I break off the relationship and worse, our engagement. The Famiglia is still stuck in the Middle Ages in some regards.”

Mom nodded but Dad still eyed me as if he expected me to give him a more satisfying answer to his question. “I’m going to have a word with Giovanni.”

My eyes widened in alarm, and Mom warned, “Luca, that’s Marcella’s decision.”

"It is her decision but I should still talk to Giovanni and see what he has to say."

"In his defense, you mean," I added angrily. I loved my dad and his protectiveness, but sometimes it went too far.

"It's my job to make sure you don't get harmed."

I lost it. "But you are the reason why it didn't work out in the first place! So if you want to find an answer to your question then you have to look in the mirror."

"Watch your tone," Dad said firmly, then he frowned. "Now explain. I supported your relationship with Giovanni. Didn't I?" he asked, turning to Mom.

"After your initial resentments, you were in favor of the relationship, yes," Mom said neutrally.

Amo stifled a grin, but I was far from being amused.

"You were in favor of Giovanni because of how easily you could control him. He was always eager for your approval. You could be sure he'd never do anything you didn't want."

"I don't see a problem."

"Of course, you don't. But what I want should matter in a relationship and not your wishes!"

"I am who I am, Marcella. My reputation carries even beyond our circles. Few men have the bravery to disregard my wishes. That's something you'll have to accept. I'm giving you more freedoms than most girls have, far more freedoms than your mother ever had, but you'll always be bound by certain rules."

"I guess then I'll just have to find someone who has the balls to stand up to you," I gritted out.

"Language," Mom said.

I shook my head and stalked off.

"Breakfast isn't finished," Dad reminded me, but I ignored him.

I headed straight for my room and flung myself on my bed, letting out a frustrated cry. Who would have the guts to go against Dad's wishes? Giovanni and all the other Famiglia soldiers even tried to anticipate Dad's unvoiced wishes.

A man like that would never make me happy. But the normal guys I met in college were even worse. They barely glanced my way because they worried Dad would chase them Al Capone style. They didn't know any real facts about the Famiglia but even their imagination was bad enough to keep them at arms' length. If they really knew what Dad was capable of, they'd run away crying. No, I could never respect a man like that.

I stared up at the ceiling blankly. Maybe someone from another mob family. But I had absolutely no intention to move to the West Coast, nor to become a part of the Camorra. They were too crazy for my taste. And someone from the Outfit? I might as well just put a bullet in Dad's heart.

I guess I'd have to stay single indefinitely.

A soft knock sounded, and Mom came in. "Can I talk to you?"

I nodded and sat up. I didn't want to mope around on the bed like a five-year-old. Mom perched on the mattress beside me and gave me an understanding smile. She was always understanding. I supposed she'd learned that behavior in her marriage with Dad.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes," I said. I wasn't sad about losing Giovanni, not really. "I'm just sad I didn't end things sooner."

Mom tilted her head. "Is there anything you want to tell me that you couldn't say in front of your dad?"

I laughed. "Giovanni didn't do anything so I don't have to protect him. Dad would probably give him accolades for being such a perfect gentleman."

Mom bit her lip, obviously fighting amusement.

"Go ahead, laugh. I feel like a laughingstock anyway," I muttered. "Is it so wrong to want it all? Love, passion, and someone that Dad likes... or at least tolerates?"

"Maybe things would improve after your wedding."

I shook my head. "Giovanni will always try to please Dad with everything he does."

"I suppose that's true."

"You were so lucky that you got Dad. He is the one everyone fears. He'd never try to please anyone. He takes what he wants."

"I didn't see it that way at first. I was terrified of your father. Love and passion required some work on both parts."

"No matter how hard I try I can't imagine you being scared of Dad. You are like yin and yang, you complement each other."

"Someday, you'll find that special someone."

"Where?"

"Where you least expect it."

Gunnar and I waited in the van, smoke filling the inside. Since we'd left the clubhouse, I had smoked pretty much non-stop. Today was the day. I had to admit I was nervous like a virgin before her cherry got popped. We'd been trailing Marcella for weeks now, waiting for the perfect moment to abduct her.

Unfortunately, the safety measures Vitiello had put in place for her were almost impenetrable. Earl was losing patience, but a risky maneuver would only alert Vitiello and not get us anywhere. Maybe this was our only chance. I wouldn't mess up.

"Maybe she left through another door," Gunnar said. His shoulder-length gray hair had fallen almost completely out of his ponytail because of his constant fretting. I'd never seen him so nervous.

"Nah," I said. "The cars are still here. Let me check the area."

I hopped out of the van and squashed my cigarette under my boot before I strolled along the pavement. I felt naked without my cut, but wearing anything that linked me to Tartarus would have been stupid and pretty much suicide. Even in civilian clothes, the risk of being spotted by one of Marcella's bodyguards was still high, but I could feel it in my blood that today was the day.

Eventually, I spotted the spoiled princess. She talked to an older man in loafers and a mustard-yellow suit coat, probably a professor. I hadn't even finished high school so I didn't have much experience with these things but he looked like someone who spent too much time with his nose in books.

Her bodyguards kept a respectful distance but were still too close for us to grab her. We had enough ammo and guns to conquer the entire college, but we wanted to keep things as low-key as possible. We didn't want the police on our backs. Having Vitiello and the Famiglia lighting fire under our asses was more than enough. Not to mention that Vitiello paid half the cops, so they'd probably hand us right over to him and then we'd be pulp.

I trailed Marcella at a safe distance on campus. I'd even grabbed a couple of books in the library to look my part. She studied business and marketing or pretended to do so. I bet her daddy bought her degree for her. Not that she needed a college education, she'd marry that sappy fiancé and become a trophy wife like all the mob women.

I hadn't seen Marcella and her boy toy together in over a week, which was unusual, but today he trailed her again like a lost puppy. He didn't know much about women if he couldn't see how annoyed she was by his simpering begging. But his whining eventually worked and she followed him to his car for a conversation. Of course, the posh boy had a fancy Mercedes Cabriolet. The Famiglia just swam in money.

She ordered her bodyguards away and they stayed back at the stairs to the main building.

I straightened and grabbed my phone to send Gunnar a text. Keeping an eye on Marcella and her boy toy, I jogged over to the old van and got into the passenger seat where I dropped the books on the floorboard. Slowly, Gunnar steered the car toward the parking lot where Marcella and her fiancé seemed caught in an argument in front of his sleek car.

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Nothing was better to drive bodyguards away than an embarrassing fight between love birds. Her bodyguards pretended not to pay attention to the fight, obviously embarrassed by the scene. Well-trained dogs, all of them. I slid my silver knuckleduster on in case Marcella's fiancé put up more of a fight than he looked.

"Closer," I said to Gunnar who steered the car toward Marcella.

She looked furious. Cheeks flushed, looking absolutely striking against her porcelain skin.

"Fucking Snow White," I muttered. The Marcella from my dreams had a remarkable similarity to the angry Marcella of the present, only that her flushed cheeks had a very different reason then.

Gunnar gave me a curious look but I ignored him. Marcella shoved her fiancé's shoulder and turned on her heel, so her hair hit him smack in the face. After a gob-smacked expression, he grabbed her arm and her bodyguards were all eyes now. We only had one chance. Soon they'd be swarming around the princess again and we'd have no chance to get near her. I shoved the door open before Gunnar had come to a stop and jumped out of the car.

I stormed toward Marcella with complete tunnel vision. Her eyes hit me and her face transformed from confusion to realization then shock. Those plump lips parted for a cry. Her bodyguards began running, pulling their guns.

Gunnar jumped out of the car, raised his pump gun and fired. The sound transformed the peaceful campus into a hellhole. Screams sounded and people scattered, running for their lives.

Their panic was to our advantage. They stumbled into Marcella's bodyguards who tried to reach us, slowing them down. I reached Marcella and her fiancé. He grabbed his gun, but I was faster and slammed my fist with the knuckleduster into his face. Blood shot out of his nose and mouth and he toppled to the ground. I didn't have time to off him, not with all hell breaking loose.

It was only a matter of minutes before dozens of Famiglia soldiers would enter the scene to protect their princess. I knew what would happen if they got their hands on me. They'd deliver me to Vitiello and what he'd done to my father would look like kid's play in comparison to what he'd do to me for attacking his precious offspring. Not going to happen.

Nothing mattered as I finally grabbed Marcella's arm and jerked her toward me. Her wide, shocked blue eyes hit me like a sledgehammer. Her eyes locked on mine, not afraid, only surprised. The blue of her irises were accentuated by a darker outer ring. The momentum had thrust her against my chest. A cloud of her exotic perfume, something subtly sweet but also spicy, hit me. She was even shorter than I'd thought. Even with high heels, she only reached my nose. Before she could react, I pressed the chloroform-drenched tissue over her mouth.

Her eyelids drooped and she sagged against me. I hoisted her over my shoulder and ran toward the van. Gunnar was still firing at the bodyguards who didn't have a choice but to seek cover, even if their fear of Vitiello's wrath made them reckless. I put Marcella down on the loading area of the van before I closed the door and slid into the passenger seat. After a signal from me, Gunnar jumped in and hit the gas.

"I got one of them."

He held out the pump gun and I took it in case I'd have to deal with pursuers. Soon the campus disappeared in the distance and Gunnar steered the car into a parking garage where we switched cars for the first time. The new van with the laundry logo belonged to a family member of one of the old ladies. I doubted Earl had told them what we'd use it for. He didn't care if Vitiello got their hands on them, as long as our plan worked out. Unimportant collateral damage.

Marcella didn't stir when I carried her from one car to the other.

After thirty more minutes, when I was fairly sure that we weren't being followed, I set the pump gun down onto the floorboard. Snow White was slowly coming to, groaning and moaning in a way that reminded me of last night's dream. I twisted around in the seat to watch her. The dose I'd hit her with hadn't been very potent. Her black lashes fluttered against her pale skin.

I'd been almost one-hundred percent sure that her photos had been photoshopped heavily, but now from close up, I realized Marcella Vitiello was every bit as immaculately gorgeous as her Instagram and press photos had suggested. I had to resist the urge to

move even closer, to touch her and find out if her skin felt as smooth as it looked. The short moment I'd grabbed her had been over in a flash and I hadn't had time to pay attention.

Her eyelids shot up and she looked at me, piercing and unafraid. I froze, stunned by the intensity of her gaze, by the way it grabbed hold of me and wouldn't let go. Luckily, the moment was over quickly. Her eyes rolled back and closed, and I stifled a sigh of relief to be freed of her penetrating stare. Fuck.

We changed cars two more times before we reached our new clubhouse out in the woods northeast of Morristown. My heart rate began to slow when we drove through the wire-netting fence gates. I'd half expected Vitiello and his soldiers to launch an attack on us. By now, Marcella was wiggling, still out of it, but growing increasingly more alert. This time I didn't make the mistake of looking at her again.

Earl waited on the porch of the old farmhouse, arms crossed. He'd received my message about our successful abduction. I jumped out of the van with a thumbs up in Earl's direction and opened the door of the loading area. Marcella sat up, supporting herself with one arm. She tossed her head back to glare at me when I towered over her.

"Time to move into your temporary home, Miss Vitiello."

I bent down to pick her up but she scurried backward. "Don't touch me with your dirty hands."

She aimed a kick at my crotch, but I grabbed her ankle before she could do real damage and jerked her in my direction. She didn't have any fight experience, so I had no trouble hoisting her out of the transporter. My attempt to set her down on the ground so she could walk by herself was thwarted when she aimed another kick at my shin.

"Fuck it, bitch."

Her indignant blue eyes hit me. Nobody had probably ever called her bitch before, and it wasn't usually a term I threw around, but she really pissed me off.

"Walk or I'll carry you over my shoulder so my brothers can see your perky ass."

She stiffened which gave me the chance to actually put her down on her feet and grab her arm to drag her along. Marcella struggled against my hold but I only tightened my fingers around her upper arm, snarling.

"Stop it."

She flinched before her mouth set in a thin, stubborn line, but at least she finally followed me without a fight.

Earl came down the three steps of the porch and met us halfway.

"Nobody followed you?" Earl asked, scanning Marcella from head to toe.

She shuddered. I wasn't sure if it was because of Earl or because she finally knew who we were. Unlike Gunnar and me, Earl wore his cut with the big Tartarus MC script on the back and smaller on the front.

"Nobody, don't worry. We were careful," I said. I moved toward the house but Earl raised his hand to stop me.

"The kennels," Earl ordered with a sharp nod in the direction of the line of cages down the slope from the house.

I hesitated, my brows pulling together.

Earl's eyes sharpened in warning. "Show the whore her rightful place."

Marcella tensed, but when I started dragging her toward the kennels, fight returned to her body. Eventually, I had enough and hoisted her up on my shoulder as I'd promised. She was a lightweight but what she lacked in weight, she made up with lightheadedness and bite. She tried to scratch my neck and arms, every inch of skin that wasn't covered by clothes.

"You're going to regret this! My father will kill you."

Bearing the sting of her nails stoically, I muttered, "I'm sure he'd love to dismember me, but I won't give him a chance."

Barking welcomed us as we reached the kennels. They were one of the new additions to the property. Earl never went anywhere without a few of his fight dogs.

"Oh God," Marcella whispered. Maybe she thought I hadn't heard her. It certainly hadn't been meant for my ears, but for the first time, I sensed her fear and felt it in the tremor of her body.

It was strange, but I didn't feel any satisfaction at her distress.

I carried her into the only vacant kennel despite her struggling. Rottweilers filled the other cages, beasts that my uncle had turned into vicious fighting machines that only obeyed him, and sometimes me. Their barks and snarls rose in volume at the sight of a stranger.

I dropped her unceremoniously on her feet then turned and threw the cage door shut. The dogs sandwiching her kennel jumped against the bars, snarling and spit flying, as their vicious eyes fixated on Marcella, eager to tear into her. Earl earned good money

with dog fights but rumor had it that he'd disposed of traitors that way in the past too, but that had been before my time.

Marcella flinched and backed against the wall of the dog kennel, clutching one of her expensive-looking black high heels. Earl watched everything with a satisfied smile before he strolled over to me. For some reason, seeing her in a cage gave me the same uncomfortable sensation I'd experienced whenever I'd seen a tiger in the zoo. She didn't belong in there, but this wasn't about my unreasonable feelings but about revenge. Her discomfort would be short-lived and nothing in comparison to the hell I'd lived after her father had butchered mine.

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