

King of the Underworld

Chapter Four

Sephie

When I walked back into the meeting room, it was completely empty. Everyone had vanished. I can't say I was disappointed by this development. I busied myself with gathering up the empty glasses and the few plates I hadn't managed to clear already to take them to the kitchen. I hear Max whistling as he's walking down the hallway toward the back room.

"Hey, why did everyone leave in such a hurry?" he asked as he walked in and started to help me clear the tables.

"No idea," I said. I kept my gaze down, as I was once again on the verge of tears, trying desperately to keep them in so I wouldn't cry in front of Max. I hated crying in front of people.

"That was weird. I saw two of those giant bodyguards that came in last take a very drunk guy out front and beat the living shit out of him, then walk back inside like nothing happened."

I dropped the glass in my hand and looked at Max, wide-eyed.

"They did what??"

"Yeah, it was comical. And somewhat sad. But mostly comical. I think it was one of the guys you said was always an asshole to you, so I may or may not have cheered as the bodyguards came back in the restaurant."

“Max, you have to be careful. You know who these people are.”

“I know, I know, but I was cheering for the Karma that guy was clearly receiving. Hey, wait a minute – what the hell happened to your arms?? And your neck??”

“This was the reason for the Karma.”

“Holy shit, Sephie! Are you okay? What happened? Why didn’t you come get me?”

“I’m fine. That guy is always handsy, but he took it to a new level tonight. I might’ve provoked him slightly and made things worse, so he choked me.”

“No, no, no. Don’t you do that. Don’t you take any of the blame on yourself. That guy is a dick and he had every blow to the face he got tonight coming for putting his hands on you.”

“Yeah. I guess you’re right. I just want to close up so I can go home. I’m really tired.”

“Why don’t you just go? I’ll close everything up.”

“You know I’m not going to leave you here by yourself, Max. You might be a big, strong guy, but that’s still a jerk move. Everyone else is gone already.”

“You’re so stubborn you’d argue with the devil himself.”

“True story.”

Max just shook his head and laughed as he grabbed the last glass off the table and headed to the kitchen.

We quickly got everything cleaned up, put away, and ready for tomorrow's lunch shift. We'd both been working at the restaurant for a few years now, so we had a routine down and worked together seamlessly. It always took us less time than everyone else to get our list of chores done in the restaurant before closing. We usually laughed and picked at each other during the whole process, so time passed quickly.

We walked out of the back door around 1 am. I stood and waited while he locked the back door, then we walked to our cars together. I was so busy looking at the still cloudy sky that I hadn't noticed the black SUV parked between Max's car and my car. I stopped dead in my tracks.

Max hadn't noticed it yet, as he was looking at his phone. Probably texting whatever girl he was planning on hooking up with that night. He walked a few steps ahead of me, then noticed I was no longer beside him.

"Hey.... wha...." he said as he turned to find me frozen in place, a look of horror on my face as I was hoping the person in that SUV was not who I thought it was. Max looked at my face and then spun around to see the SUV parked between our cars.

"Ohhhhh shit," he said as he took a couple of steps back toward me. Without looking, he pushed me directly behind him as he watched the back door open.

I couldn't see over Max's shoulder and I was too scared to peek around him.

“What do you want?” Max yelled. I could feel him trying to be brave for me, but I could also feel how every muscle in his back was tense and rock hard.

“Please, don’t be scared. I only wish to pay Persephone for her excellent service tonight,” a deep and very calm voice said, his Russian accent evident. I recognized that voice. I peeked around Max’s shoulder and sure enough, Mr. Lord King Boss Adrik was walking slowly toward us.

I put my hand on Max’s back and said, “it’s okay, Max. He helped when...you know, Karma. It was his bodyguards.” Max visibly relaxed and inhaled deeply.

“Oh, thank God, I’m not gonna die tonight,” he said under his breath.

I giggled and reached up and kissed his cheek. “Thank you.”

“You know I got you, gingersnap.”

I walked toward my car and Adrik, who was watching me intently.

“Have you been waiting this whole time? You could’ve just come back into the restaurant. Or dropped it off tomorrow.”

“I had business to take care of. We drove back by and your cars were still here, so we waited. It wasn’t long,” he said as he handed me a fat stack of cash.

“Wha...noooo. This is too much. I can’t accept this,” I said, trying to hand the stack of hundred-dollar bills back to him.

“Please. You earned it,” he said as he once again gently grabbed my chin and tilted my head back so he could see my now darker bruise on my neck.

I could hear him curse under his breath but didn’t quite catch what he said as he inspected my bruise.

“It’s okay, really. I’m fine. I’ve had worse, honestly.”

His eyebrows furrowed into a frown as he scanned my face, once more tucking a loose curl behind my ear. Without realizing it, I leaned into his touch. My eyes closed and I took a deep breath. Just like when we were in the kitchen, I had a moment of complete peace. He placed his palm against my cheek, his thumb lightly caressing my face. I relished in the feeling, in the quiet, in the warmth that I felt in my entire body any time he touched me.

“Are you okay to drive home, solnishko?” His question broke me from my trance, and I momentarily forgot where I was.

“What? Oh. Yes. Yes, I’m fine. Sorry,” I said, quickly looking down at my bag to dig my keys out.

“No need to apologize. I think you need more of that in your life,” he said with that sexy smirk back on his face. If he only knew how correct he actually was...