

## King of the Underworld

### Chapter Seven

*Sephie*

Since I didn't have to work, I decided to turn my television on and mindlessly watch a movie. I was still quite tired from the festivities the night before, but I didn't want to go back to sleep. I consulted with my giant guardian, and we decided on an action movie. As soon as the action started, Viktor was critiquing the hero's every move. Actually, Viktor's commentary on the movie turned out to be more interesting than the movie itself.

Even though I tried hard not to, I eventually fell asleep. When I awoke, I heard hushed voices in my kitchen. I assumed it was Viktor and Andrei, so I didn't think before I said, "ok, which one of you is making me dinner?"

The talking stopped and there was silence for a moment, so I sat up on the couch and looked into the kitchen. That was definitely not Viktor standing in the kitchen and he was definitely not talking to Andrei.

"Shit," I mumbled to myself as I leapt off the couch and tried to put distance between me and the two new giant Russians in my kitchen. "Who are you? Where did Viktor and Andrei go??"

"Calm down. I'm Ivan and this is Misha. We replaced Viktor and Andrei so they could get rest."

I looked Ivan and Misha up and down. Misha was slightly taller than Ivan, but both men were just as huge as Viktor and Andrei. Ivan was bald, with a black goatee. He also had tattoos on his neck that I hadn't noticed the night before. Misha looked younger than the other three. He looked less threatening than the others, too. He had soft green eyes that gave the impression he was always smiling, even when he wasn't. They were a striking contrast to his black hair.

Misha said, "Ivan was just filling me in on information and then he was going back outside. We're sorry we woke you," he said in a rather mild Russian accent.

"No, it's okay. I didn't mean to fall asleep. Will Viktor and Andrei be back?" I asked. I felt weird missing them, but I suddenly felt a little empty knowing they weren't in my apartment.

Misha smiled gently, "Yes, Sephie. They'll be back in the morning. They needed sleep. We're working in shifts."

"So, they're really not on meth," I said scratching the back of my neck and stretching my arms over my head.

Ivan turned to me with the most intense gaze I think I'd ever seen. "WHAT?!?" he said as he started toward me. Misha grabbed his arm to prevent him from moving closer to me as I took a few more steps backward and ended up against the wall.

Misha stepped in front of Ivan, to both physically and visually block him from me. "Ivan, it's a joke. She was making a joke.

Viktor told me she makes jokes, especially when she's nervous. No one is on meth, especially not Viktor."

"I feel vulnerably diagnosed, but he's right. I was joking. I said Viktor was on meth because he couldn't have slept much before coming to my apartment before my neighbor left for work this morning."

Ivan took a deep breath. His body somewhat relaxed but his gaze was still burning holes in my soul. He turned his back to me and left my apartment.

I stayed against the wall for a few more seconds, just to make sure he didn't come back.

"Is he always such a jovial guy?"

Misha rubbed his face with his hands as he inhaled deeply. "Ivan didn't mean any harm. Ivan has very strong feelings about drug use."

"Noted."

Instead of making small talk with my new guardians, I gave up and just went to my bedroom. I was still tired, even after my nap. I figured extra sleep wasn't going to kill me.

I checked my phone. Three messages from Max, asking where I was, then giving me shit for not coming to work, and then genuinely asking if I was ok. I thought of Max like an older brother. He always gave me a hard time, but he also always made sure I was okay.

*I'm fine, Maximus. My throat is still really sore, so the thought of having to speak all night long was too much for me.*

Max: *Pics or it didn't happen, gingersnap.*

I snapped a quick selfie of my now very colorful neck and sent it to him.

Max: *Holy shit, Sephie. That looks amazing in the most painful way. I'm glad you decided to stay home. Nobody wants to look at that hot mess. You would've scared the customers away. I mean, more than you normally do.*

Ass. *Your concern for both my well-being and more so your source of income is touching.*

Max: *Lol. You know I'm just giving you shit. Seriously, that looks bad. Do you need anything? Want me to bring you some food when I get done tonight?*

*Nah, I think I'm just going to go to bed. Sleep cures everything, right?*

Max: *Alright. If you change your mind, let me know. I'll be your delivery boy any time.*

*Thanks, Max. I'll be fine though. Try to not have too much fun without me tonight!*

Max: *Yeah, you know it's not going to be fun – Kim came in to cover your shift.*

*Oh shit. I'm sorry man. I didn't know they were going to call her in. She usually only works days.*

Max: *You're going to owe me for this one.*

I locked my phone and put it on the charger. I went to the bathroom to wash my face. My neck really did look horrible. My bruise was a nice shade of purple and was so deep you could see the outline of his fingers.

*Ugh. How am I going to cover this up tomorrow at work? I'm going to have to wear a turtleneck. Long-sleeved turtleneck too.*

I lifted the sleeves of my shirt and looked at my arms, that were also a very nice shade of purple. The contrast of the color of the bruises to my porcelain white skin was striking, which just served to make the bruises that much more obvious.

I decided not to stress about it too much. With the extensive tip that Adrik gave me, I could afford to miss a couple of shifts and still be able to pay my bills.

I heard my phone chime again and went to check it, thinking it was Max again.

*How are you feeling, solnishko? -Adrik*

Wait, he has my phone number? When did that happen? Well, he knew where my apartment was, so I guess also having my phone number isn't completely out of the realm of possibility. Who am I kidding, he probably has my bank account and entire

record at this point. There is really no limit to the power these people possess.

*I'm fine, Adrik. Thank you for asking. Tired, but fine.*

Adrik: *Good. You should get rest. Put arnica on your bruises – it will help them heal faster. I'm sure by now they're quite dark.*

*You ain't joking. My entire neck is purple. I'll have to go to the store for arnica. I don't have any.*

Adrik: *I'll have some sent over. You rest. It will be there when you wake. Good night, Persephone.*

*Thanks. Good night.*

I locked my phone again and put it on my bedside table. I sat on my bed, lost in thought. Why did I suddenly have that warm feeling in my stomach again? Why was the top guy in the mafia checking on me? Why did he send his personal bodyguards to keep an eye on me? What was really going on? What happened in that meeting while I was out of the room?