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Chapter 431

Adrik

Sephie could feel my anger starting to rise over talk of Armando. I still didn't want her to ever have to see him again. Everyone noticed my eyes go black, which then triggered Ivan and Sephie's eyes as well. "We can find a way to make it all happen without Sephie being there. Maybe can be his battery instead of her," Andrei said, trying to keep me calm.

"That might work, actually," Ivan said. "We send everything to her, she sends it to Andrei, then Stephen uses him instead of her."

Sephie had walked to my side when she felt my anger coming on, trying to help me remain calm. "That could work," she said, chewing on her lip.

"What are you thinking, princess?" Ivan asked, silently. "You're not convinced."

"I don't know yet. Something doesn't feel right about that. It doesn't feel right about me helping Stephen either, for the record, so don't yell at me for trying to find a way to make that happen. I'm not," she responded. Ivan couldn't keep the laugh in. Everyone knew he was having another conversation with Sephie that they weren't privy to.

"She's trying to figure it out. She said something feels off about Andrei helping, but she said it also feels off if she helps. She told us not to yell at her," I said, kissing her temple.

Misha got his faraway look in his eye for a moment. He looked right at me when he came back to the present. "It needs to be

you, Boss. I don't think Sephie needs to help at all, either. You've got enough "f u ck you" power when it comes to Armando that Stephen won't need anyone else." Sephie -looked at Misha as he was talking. His wide smile stretched across his face. "Sephie agrees," he said, pointing to her.

I turned her around so I could look at her. Her purple eyes were the first thing I saw. "That settles that then," I said.

Stephen, who had been quiet for most of this conversation stood up and walked over to Sephie. "When you helped me with my sisters, I gave you all of my memories of them so you could give it back to them. Only I didn't know it was me, but whatever. I'm going to need you to do that with your memories of Armando. I don't have enough on my own to break him. I need your memories too." He looked at her seriously. "I need everything, Seph, which means you're going to have to uncover it one last time."

I could feel her starting to worry, but she was so far keeping it under control. "How did you package it up for me? And whenever I give it to you is when you're breaking Armando. You're not walking around with all of that for any longer than you have to," she said.

Stephen looked at me, raising an eyebrow. "We can do it now, if you want to. One less thing for me to worry about," I said.

He looked back to Sephie. "Think about taking everything, the memories, the Belings, even the way your body shakes in response to being alone now, and putting all of that into a container to give to me. I especially want you to concentrate on the fear you still struggle with containing. He needs to feel that. He needs to know that feeling intimately for the rest of his days." He

was watching her as he was talking. I was fairly sure her eyes were swirling, as her emotions were all over the place and

Stephen couldn't look away.

I turned her to face me, pulling her completely in front of me. Her hands immediately began to fidget with the buttons on my shirt.

"We can do it whenever you're ready, love. It doesn't have to be now," I said softly. "Ivan and the Wonder Twins can stay with you up here and then I'll be right back. Somehow I don't think it's going to take long."

Her brow furrowed. I could feel her body literally disagreeing with me. "No, give him everything outside the room. I'm telling you, he doesn't need to hold on to this very long. They can stay with me outside the room, but I at least need to go that far. Ivan can put his bubble up and cut me off from hearing anything." I glanced to Misha, who confirmed what she'd just said.

She glanced back at Stephen. "Do you want to do it now?"

"No time like the present to go fumbling through the dark," Stephen said, grinning at her. She looked at everyone else, who were all in agreement to make it happen now.

"Do you want my hatred for Giana too? I mean, I want to make sure you have enough material," Misha asked, grinning at Stephen.

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Outside the room where we kept Armando, Ivan told the guards to take a very long break, then cut the cameras off once they were gone. Sephie still felt nervous, but also determined). On the elevator down, I caught her silently talking to Andrei. They had a signal they gave each other to indicate the other should fish in their head. Once we were outside the room, she glanced at him, then looked at Stephen.

“Yoden, I’m really sorry for what I’m about to give you,” she said. She looked at

falters
me, then to Ivan. “If he there, do what you did with me the other night with Ilya. He might not, because he can handle cold much easier than I can, but just in case, you need to send him everything right away.”

She looked at Stephen, saying, “if you do falter, it’s going to come after you as last-ditch effort. Let them protect you the same way they would me. It’s going to feel like you get hit with a wall of fire, but just remember to breathe.”

She stepped away from me, taking Stephen’s hand and puling him with her. She dropped his hand and took in a deep breath.

“Give me a second,” she said, closing her eyes.

I could feel everything she was going through as she relived everything with mando. It was brief, but it was intense. All the fear, the betrayal, the heartbreak both for her and for Giana, the anger, she went through all of it trying to contain it to give it to Stephen. “I’m sorry,” she said as she grabbed his hand.

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Stephen doubled over like someone had just sucker punched him in the stomach, letting out something between a loud exhale and a groan. She didn’t

go of his hand, trying to help him stay upright. I could see tears streaming down her face as she watched him feel everything she had felt. He sucked in a sharp breath, standing up. His face was red and his eyes were somewhat wild. It almost looked like his bloodlust was coming to the surface. It took him a moment of holding onto Sephie before he finally gained some of his composure back. He looked to Misha, saying, “I’ve got plenty, dude. We’ll figure out what to do with your hatred for Giana later.”

Sephie tried to smile, but it only made more tears fall. He looked back at her putting his hand on her cheek. "Don't worry, Seph. I can handle it. You shouldn't have to anymore," he said, kissing her forehead. He glanced at me and motioned toward the room where Armando was being kept. Ivan walked to Sephie, wrapping his massive arms around her. I watched her hide her face in his chest as we closed the door behind us. Once she was out of sight, I let my anger take over. Stephen needed it to break Armando and I wanted Armando's last conscious moments to be nothing but terror as he looked at my black eyes.

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Armando's eyes got wider as he took in the sight before him. Stephen was intimidating in his own right when his bloodlust took over. Then you add in me and I'm surprised Armando didn't piss himself. I had been keeping him restrained, mostly just because I still had moments where I couldn't get the image of Sephie with her wrists tied behind her out of my head and I wanted him to know that discomfort as long as possible.

I would give him periodic breaks from it. Just when he got used to not being restrained, that's when I'd have him tied to the chair again for days on end. His memory had never been the best. I wanted to make sure he could easily remember the feeling.

Now, however, he was on a break. He was free to move away from us, but his fisir kept him firmly in place. He was frozen in the chair, his eyes shifting nervously from me to Stephen and back again. He opened his mouth to speak but nothing came out.

Stephen was staying remarkably calm, despite struggling with everything Seph had just given him. He walked closer to Armando, "Do you want to know what's about to happen?" he asked. Anytime Stephen would use psychology as a weapon, his voice got a certain tone to it. Almost like he was mocking the person, but in the most sinister way possible.

Armando kept looking between me and Stephen, which caused Stephen to glance back at me. "Oh, I know what you want to know first. You want to know why his eyes are black. Allow me to explain. You see, you made a deal with a demon. There's a

very slight chance you might not have known you did, as intelligence was never your strongest attribute, but it was ultimately because you're so weak that you couldn't fight off the evil. Either way, you have a demon that's been riding you for years."

Armando kept looking at me while Stephen was talking. His eyes were pleading with me to save him as some part of him realized what was about to happen.

Stephen continued, "now you shouldn't feel too bad about being such weak stace that a demon got in. Happens to lots of people.

Happened to Boss, as a matter of fact. The only difference is, Boss made his demon work for him. Which makes him infinitely more powerful than you'll ever be." Stephen paused to let Armando comprehend what he'd just said. "See, your soul tried to take the easy way out of life. It tried to skip ahead quite a few levels, but it did so in the most evil way possible. It meant that innocent people had to die, which can't go unpunished. That's where I come in. My job is to make sure your soul spends the rest of your very long life learning to never, ever do that again. I'm going to make sure neither one of you leave that body until that body dies from very, very old age."

As Stephen was talking, I was watching Armando watching me. I couldn't see his demon, but I knew it was there. I could feel it. I could feel when it took over and stepped forward. Armando's eyes went black as well. If it caught Stephen off-guard, he didn't show it. Armando laughed. He looked at Stephen, his expression dripping with hatred. "You're not strong enough to do that," he said. "You don't have enough power to do that to me. You have no idea who I am."

Stephen was quiet for a minute, like he was having second thoughts. He crossed his arms across his chest, looking at Armando.

He walked right in front of him, bending down so he was eye-level to him, saying, “why do you think I brought him too, dumbass?”

When Armando realized the full meaning of what Stephen had just said, he tried to quickly get away from Stephen. Stephen anticipated it and caught Armando by the throat, throwing him back down in the chair. “Did I say you could leave?” he asked, his anger now clearly visible. Armando coughed a few times, trying to weigh his options.

Stephen stepped back from Armando. He glanced quickly at me, then looked back at Armando. “Just as a courtesy, I’m going to give you something to keep you in your seat before we get started,” he said. I knew he was asking for my anger. I was more than happy to provide it.

Sophie had explained how she pushed her anger to Andrei and Misha when they fought Vitaliy’s guys. She was right. It was more difficult to send to anyone other than her. My anger was a complete raging inferno but I saw Stephen’s sly grin turn up one side of his mouth when he felt it.

I watched as Armando’s eyes changed back to normal and a look of horror came over his face. He was seeing something I couldn’t see. I wasn’t sure if Stephen could see it or not, but much like Stephen’s sisters, Armando was frozen in place. His hands gripped the arms of the chair he was in, like he was on the edge of a cliff trying to save himself. His knuckles turned white.

Every muscle in his body tensed as he was trying to not see what was being shown to him.

Stephen took a deep breath, looking back to me once more. “That was just the warm-up. Keep it coming. It’s clearly working,” he said.

I cranked up the inferno as high as it would go and concentrated on pushing it all to Stephen. I always wondered if there was a limit to my anger. Would I ever hit the end of it? Would it run out? Judging by what I was feeling at the moment, that answer was very clearly no. The more I concentrated on keeping my anger as high as possible, the more it responded and the hotter it burned.

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Stephen turned back to Armando. One last time, we saw his eyes go black as his demon tried to think of a way out, but his body wasn't responding to its demands. There was already a clear disconnect between Armando's soul and his body. The demon was powerless. Stephen hit him with more memories from Sephie and Armando let out a blood-curdling scream. It was the last sound he made.

As Stephen gave everything back to Armando that he'd done to Sephie, I could clearly see the light behind his eyes go out.

There was nobody home any longer.

Stephen turned back to me after a few moments. "It's done," he said, almost like he was surprised it had worked.

Surprisingly, my anger dissipated easily. Almost instantly, even. Stephen caught my look of surprise and laughed. "I'm as surprised as you that all that went away so quickly," he said. "You've never been so angry before. I could've broken ten Armando's and you still would've had plenty leftover."

"Yeah, that was different," I said. "What about you? You good? You gave it all to him? Nothing leftover?"

He looked at me, with wide eyes. He stepped closer so he could talk quietly. Before he spoke he tapped his temple, like he was asking if anyone else was listening in. "Just us," I said.

“Boss, I don’t know how she’s been walking around with all of that. She gave me everything from the attack on her and Misha, to the ball, to the first kidnapping attempt, and then everything from the second. Just the pain alone from when she was hurt was enough to break him, not to mention everything she felt on top of that. Much like your anger, I could’ve broken ten Armando’s and still had leftover. He’s never getting away from all of that for the rest of his days,” he said, somewhat satisfied, I put my hand on his shoulder, pushing him toward the door. “You did good, kid. I’m proud of you.”

As he opened the door, he said, “you know, I’m proud of me too. I can finally use my hatred for people to do some good in this world.”

Sephie, who still had her face hidden in Ivan’s chest heard him and giggled. She didn’t turn around immediately and now that my anger had dissipated, I could feel her emotional turmoil. Ivan kept his arms around her, lightly rubbing her back with his thumbs/

“How did it go?” Andrei asked.

“Not as violently as I was expecting. His demon underestimated me, so there wasn’t as much fighting back as I was hoping for, which is slightly disappointing,” Stephen said.

Sephie sighed and went to turn around, which made Ivan loosen his grip on her. She still looked troubled, but she was curious.

“It worked to use Adrik?” she asked..

“Yeah, he’s all the battery I would ever need. Dude’s got fire for days,” he said. As he answered her, I was hit with her warmth.

Her smile stretched across her face and she walked quickly to me.

“It was harder to send it to him versus you at first, but it worked. It got easier the longer I did it,” I said, kissing her temple.

“He also turned it off immediately when we were done. Not gonna lie, I was worried about that in the moment. I’ve never seen him so angry and be able to turn it off like that,” Stephen said.

Sephie wrapped her arms around my waist. “You’re finally learning how useful of a tool it is,” she said as she hid her face in my shoulder.

I looked at Ivan, asking. “she didn’t hear anything?” He shook his head no at the same time that she did. “Come. Let us be gone from this place,” I said, pulling Sephie with me.

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Adrik

Sephie stayed quiet the rest of the evening, but she felt happy. I caught Stepbe away from everyone else while Misha was distracting Sephie. “When you gave everything to your sisters, what did it do to you?” I asked.

“I was crazy tired that next day, but otherwise felt much better. She’ll feel better soon. I’ve known that she feels things intensely for a long time, but knowing it and feeling just how intensely she feels things are two very different things. She’s probably going to need to sleep most of the day tomorrow,” he said.

“What about you? Are you extra tired after doing that again?”

He thought for a moment. “No, actually I feel really good. I think it’s leftover from your fuck you boost,” he said, laughing quietly.

“Good. That also means you’re getting better at handling the extra. It’s a good sign. Likely means you’re going to level up soon.”

He thought for a moment. “I have no idea how my gift would level up. Do I to choose? Can I literally rip the demon out of the person and crush it next time? I’d sign up for that.”

I looked at him, trying not to laugh at where his mind went. “This break from time with him. It’s really increased your creativity. I have contacts at customs

lad has been good for you. I think you were spending a little too much might delay him a little longer.”

Stephen was normally very understated. He would laugh, but he was always gulet about it. It was a rare occasion when we could get him to laugh foudly, especially in a group setting. He laughed so loudly that everyone else stopped talking and looked at him,

completely surprised that he'd done

50.

Sephie's wide smile stretched across her face. I knew she'd fished in my head to find out what made him laugh. For a moment, she looked brighter. I was hopeful after some extra rest she could continue to look brighter.

That night, once we were alone, I asked her about her and Andrei's method of talking to each other. "Me and Ivan aren't the only ones you can talk to without actually speaking," I said, grinning at her.

She cut her eyes over at me. "How did you know?"

"I saw your signal to each other. You're very discreet. I don't think anyone else has caught on," I said. "What did you need to tell him?"

"I asked him to keep an eye on Stephen. I was worried about his confidence. I wasn't sure how strong Armando's demon would be and I wasn't sure if you'd be able to feel if he started to hesitate about his abilities. I was trying to cover all the bases," she said, climbing into bed while she waited for me.

I turned off the light and grabbed the remote for the blinds, closing them part way before climbing in beside her. "I don't know if it will always remain so, but his confidence was definitely not an issue this time. We saw the demon step forward. It grossly underestimated Stephen," I said. I opened my arms for her to lie across my chest. She sighed and snuggled in as close to me as possible. I knew it wouldn't take her long to fall asleep. "How are you, solnishko? You've been quieter than usual."

"I'm really tired, but I think I'm okay. Kinda feels like what I would imagine hangover feels like," she said.

I laughed. "You've never had a hangover?" I asked, surprised.

“I’ve never had alcohol,” she said quietly. “I saw the worst of it and the supposed good side of it didn’t seem worth it to me.”

I held her a little tighter. “You’re not missing anything at all. I love you a little more because of it.”

Her soft laugh was the last thing I heard before she quickly fell asleep.

I woke quite late the next morning. Sephie was still in her favorite spot across my chest, sound asleep. She was mumbling

quietly, but her fingers were

playing lightly on my chest. She felt like she was still happily steeping. I ran my hands through her hair, which still cwierd her to

make bey DANAY cooing noises and snuggle in to me closer.

I watched her sleep for a little longer, then finally decided to get up. It was close to noon, which never happened for me. Maybe I

used a little more energy than I thought last night.

“Boss, you two okay? Did you get capped again?” I heard Ivan asking after I had been up for a few minutes.

“Apparently so. She’s still sleeping. Stephen said it made him really tired after he broke his sisters, so he expected Sephte to

sleep later today,” I told him. I walked back to the bed to check to see if she was shaking yet and she wasn’t for the first time

since her and Ivan were taken, she was sleeping on bet own without shaking.

“I think he fixed her shaking problem. I got out of bed a few minutes ago and it hasn’t started yet.”

“That’s impressive. That hasn’t happened since she and I were grobbed.

Although Andrel’s going to be really disappointed. I

think he looked forward to extra naps.”

“We’ll see if it sticks before we tell him,” I said, laughing. “Has anyone seen Vikrur yet?”

“Yeah, he’s awake now. He and Ilya came upstairs not too long ago. When you tap didn’t wake up, we moved back downstairs.

Let us know when the princess wakes up. Viktor wants to see her,” he said. “Will do. I half expect her to wake up soon just because she can tell he’s awake now.”

I climbed back in bed with her, pulling her back on my chest. She moaned softly and I felt her start to stir. I ran my hand over her scarred back, letting my fingers trace along her scars. She’d told me that her scars were mostly numb because of the extensive damage, but when I traced my fingers along them, she could feel it. She said she liked it when I did it, as it made her back feel more like normal because she could actually feel something

“Good morning,” she said, her voice hoarse from sleep. She didn’t pick her head up to look at me. I could feel she was still tired.

“How do you feel? You’re still tired,” I asked. I felt her nod her head against my chest.

“You’re the one that did everything and I’m the one that’s exhausted. It doesn’t make sense,” she said, pressing her body, closer to mine.

“You still had to unpack everything for Stephen, which meant you had to go through it again. Even if it was brief, you still had to do it. But I do think it might’ve fixed you not being able to sleep by yourself. I was out of bed for several minutes and you never started shaking,” I told her.

“Really?” she asked. She finally picked her head up to look at me. She was definitely still tired.

“Yeah, I was just as surprised as you,” I said, grinning at her still sleepy eyes. I moved her hair out of her face as she rested her chin on my chest. My fingers traced lightly over her face, which caused her to close her eyes. She had a small smile on her face as she enjoyed my touch.

She was quiet for long enough that I was beginning to wonder if she fell back sleep again, but she asked, “has anybody seen Viktor yet?”

“Yeah, Ivan said he’s awake now. He and Ilya showed up a little while ago, but they moved back downstairs when we didn’t wake up.”

She sighed. “Guess I should get up then.” I could feel her reluctance to move and couldn’t keep from laughing at her. “You don’t have to, solnishko. You’re clearly still tired.”

“I am still tired. But I want to check on Yoden. And I would like to not feel awkward about Viktor again, so I need to get that out of the way, even though I’m happy to just keep avoiding it for a while longer,” she said. She sounded almost irritated when she brought up Viktor, which had never happened before.

“You can avoid him for as long as you like. You’ve never once been irritated with any of them, but you’re clearly irritated with him.”

She sighed again. “I know. I shouldn’t be though. I think being irritated with hon is easier than admitting I’m hurt he spent so much energy avoiding me,” she said. She’d closed her eyes again, but it didn’t stop the tears from escaping down her cheeks.

My breath caught as I felt her sadness. It was at least her sadness this time and it wasn’t nearly as oppressive as what she’d felt from him, but I found it made me angry that she was feeling it. She felt the shift in my mood and opened her eyes. They switched from amber to black as soon as she looked

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at me. She searched my eyes, a small smile on her face. “I know it’s not Viktor’s fault, but I do love that you’re even willing to kick his ass for me.”

“Not just me. They’re all willing to kick his a ss over losing his temper with you. I don’t envy the position he’s in right now. It’s going to take some time for him to make it up to everyone.”

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Chapter 434

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Sephie

“Where are you guys? I asked Ivan once Adrik and I were amongst the living once more.

“We’re all in my apartment, princess. How are you? Still tired. I can feel you’re still tired,” he responded.

“Yeah, I told Adrik last night I knew what a hangover was like, this was probably it. How’s Viktor?”

“He’s a lot better. He wants to see you. He knows he has making up to do. Are you guys up now? Want us to come up?”

“No, I want a change of scenery for once. At least until it’s time for dinner. How’s Stephen? He’s okay to you? He feels f ucking fantastic to me, if I’m being honest.”

I heard Ivan laughing. “He is f ucking fantastic, princess. I don’t know if he’s still ugh off Boss’s anger or what, but he’s the happiest I’ve ever seen him. It’s really good to see. That kid deserves it.”

“Yeah, he does. Okay, be down in a minute. Now that I’m assured Stephen will be able to make me laugh, in only the way that he can, I’m more willing to face Viktor.”

“Don’t worry, princess. He knows he hurt you. He’ll try to make it right, but I cant say I would be disappointed if you ripped him a new one in front of everyone for being an as shole.”

I giggled. “You’ve been spending too much time with Stephen. Stop enabling me.

We didn’t have to knock on Ivan’s door. Just as I was about to, Misha opened the door, his handsome wide smile across his face.

His smile grew larger when he saw the surprise on my face.

“Something happened. We’re still trying to figure out what happened, but we could feel both of you when you got off the elevator.

We all knew you were coming,” he said as he closed the door behind us.

“You can feel him too?” I asked, glancing back at Adrik.

“Yeah, much like we can feel you now, but he’s quieter. For me at least,” Misha said.

I glanced at Andrei to see if the same was true for him. He agreed with Misha.

I think because I’m like you, I’ve always picked up on everyone a little more than the rest of us. It’s stronger for me now, just because I think I’ve been noticing it longer. But it’s stronger for everyone, not just Boss.”

Stephen said, “since I’m still in my pancake paradox infancy, I still can’t detect the subtle nuance, but I do feel like I might’ve gotten high off the supply, if you will. Like, I was seriously considering asking Misha if he wanted to go for a run this morning because I feel f ucking fantastic. Boss, if you feel like this every day, I’m going to need some of your secrets. Do you juice Keto?

Are you doing yoga and not telling anyone else? Meditation in the mornings? Are you the real vampire among us and we just never noticed? Blood bags or live donors? I’m gonna need specifics.”

I looked at Ivan, who very clearly had a “told you” look on his face. Adrik laughed quietly as he pulled me back against him.

I grinned at Stephen, saying, “can we just all agree to always refer to everything weird that’s happening to us as the pancake paradox from now on? There will be legends created about us as a result. In the future, children will no longer be forced to learn calculus in school. Instead, they’ll learn about the pancake paradox and what happens when souls get ejected from bodies. The red panda population will thrive. Earth will be at peace.”

“What if that’s the key to peace all along? Red pandas,” Misha said, thoughtfully.

“Right now, red pandas are pancake-less and look at the state of the world,” foldrei said,

“Don’t worry. I’ve got a plan for mass production. We’re going to be just fine” Stephen said, chuckling. Once the laughter mostly died down from our ridiculous conversation, I finally looked at Viktor. “How are you, Papa Bear? You

look better. Do you feel

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better?”

Adrik held me tighter against him. I could also feel the pull in my chest that meant he was thinking about how much he loved me.

I knew he was trying to help me deal with the situation.

“I do, sestrichka. I feel much better. I actually didn’t realize how heavy everything that I was carrying around was becoming until it was gone. I feel bad that you had to carry it around with you,” he said, looking apologetic.

“Like everything. I think it was for a reason. It helped us figure out how to get whatever was following Ilya off him for good,” I said.

I glanced at Ilya, asking. “you’re still good? It hasn’t come back?”

He smiled warmly at me. He really did seem like a very sweet boy. He was handsome, like Viktor, but with a splash of boyish charm and innocence. While Viktor had very dark hair and darker features, Ilya’s hair was more of arty blonde. His eyes were a lighter brown than Viktor’s normally dark brown. He was Viktor-lite. “It hasn’t come back. I have an idea of what it was, though,” he said.

“You do?” I asked. All the guys looked at him, now curious as well.

“Yeah. Since Vitya was sleeping, I had nothing to do so I started researching spent a little time in Japan when I was in the military. They have demons that are specific to suicide – Shinigami. These demons follow you around and keep whispering to you until you finally lose hope and commit suicide,” Ilya said. He glanced at Viktor, almost like he was nervous, but he continued.

“It’s common for them to affect entire family lines. Once they’re on one member of the family, they hop to other members of the same family

“I could believe that. Viktor’s oppressive sadness was probably the warm-up. They might’ve tried to get to him already, but he was too strong, so they jumped to you,” I said, chewing on my lip. “Or do you think the chick you were with is what gave it to you?” I asked Ilya.

“No idea. This is all very new to me,” he said.

“It doesn’t explain why Ivan couldn’t see it, either,” Stephen said.

Ivan had gotten up and grabbed his computer when Ilya first started talking. He was quietly reading through whatever he’d found.

He looked up at me first, then to Stephen. “Actually, it does.”

“Explain please,” I said. “But don’t worry about the flavor of syrup for the pancakes. We’ll decide that later.”

He looked at me, trying not to smile, and just shook his head. “From the extensive two-minute search I just completed and what

Ilya just said, these demons whisper to people, meaning they’re not fully attached to the people. not sure they’re trying to take

over, even. It just seems like they’re very specific to suicide. So far, I’m only able to see demons when they’re actively trying to

get in or when they already have gotten in. That’s why I couldn’t see this one.”

He looked at Andrei, asking, “what did it feel like to you? Is it the first one you’ve felt like that?”

“It was cold, mostly, but quiet. Until Stephen spoke and then it got scared,” Andrei said. “It’s one of the first times that I’ve noticed a demon, so I don’t have a ton to compare it to. The lady that Battista brought with him she felt different. More similar to you three.”

I knew my eyes had turned black, because I could see Ivan’s switch immediately. I didn’t need to look to know that Adrik’s had done the same. My anger made an unexpected appearance at Andrei comparing me, in any way, that woman.

He looked at me, realizing what had happened. “I don’t mean you’re like her, spider monkey,” he said, trying not to laugh. “She felt hot. Same as you three. Anytime your demons come forward, it’s always associated with anger. There’s heat and fire there.

What was on Ilya was the opposite. Quiet, but very cold. Now put your demon eyes away before Ilya has to change his puts.”

Ilya cursed under his breath. “How does that not scare the s hit out of you,” He said quietly, to no one in particular.

“Oh, don’t worry. As long as it wasn’t you that p issed them off, you have nothing to worry about,” Stephen said. “Although, now that I think about it, I might retract my request for red to be the next color your eyes come up with m not entirely convinced I’d be able to handle that. It’s disturbing enough on Vlad.”

Ilya cursed a little louder this time, looking at Viktor with wide eyes, which used all of us to laugh. Viktor said quietly, “it’s a joke.

Sephie said. Stephen was a vampire because he’s so much colder than the rest of us. They both ran with it. Vitaliy still hasn’t figured out we’re talking about Vlad Tepes, so don’t ruin it.” Ilya was visibly relieved.

“I love how we just had a serious conversation about Japanese suicide demons like it was a normal brunch discussion, but the possibility of red eyes was a step too far,” Stephen said, laughing.

“Ilya’s only seen the black. He hasn’t seen them change otherwise. It’s a little difficult to fathom,” I said, trying to stick up for Ilya who really had no clue of the high strangeness that was our little family.

“They do other things?” Ilya asked, now curious.

Sephte

“Yeah, dude. Go over there. She’ll show you,” Misha said.

Ilya looked at him like he was sure it was a trap. He looked at Viktor, who laughed his deep belly laugh. “He’s not trying to trap you. Her eyes change 1 colors depending on the emotion she’s feeling. Go look. It’s pretty fascinating, he said.

Ilya still looked uncertain, but he got up and walked closer to me. Adrik was still behind me, but I could see Ivan. His eyes were still black, which meant mine were too. I closed my eyes, thinking of how much I loved Adrik. When I opened my eyes, Ilya was standing in front of me. I looked at him with my blue eyes. He looked relieved that they weren’t black again.

“Blue means she’s thinking about how much she loves me,” Adrik said.

“You didn’t even look at her. How do you know her eyes are blue right now?” ya asked.

“I can feel everything she feels,” Adrik said.

“That’s why he was so quick to react when I first touched you. He felt what it did to me right away. He doesn’t usually try to make people’s lives flash before their eyes so quickly,” I said.

“Green means she’s being a sarcastic s hit,” Adrik said, lovingly, I grinned at ya’s surprised expression.

“You don’t have to show him the other ones, gazelle,” Misha said. He looked at Ilya, saying, “they turn amber when she’s sad

and white when she's scared. All of us feel what she feels and those two are very strong and I'd just rather not right now."

"They turn white?" Ilya asked.

"Yeah, if you think her demon eyes are scary, then you're not ready to see that" Stephen said.

Ilya looked between Adrik and Ivan. "Can your eyes also do the same, then?"

"Yeah, that reminds me. How can yours turn black but not change like hers de" Viktor asked.

"Are you ready for this, Viktor? Because I'm not sure you're ready for this. But at least you're already sitting down," Stephen said.

He looked very seriously at Viktor. "They control their demons."

Viktor's brow furrowed as he tried to understand what Stephen had just told him. "Your black eyes are your demons?" he asked.

I nodded. "I told Ivan not very long after I met you all that the best way to defeat your demons was to make friends with them.

They have no power over you that way. At the time, I was just trying to help him cope. I didn't know I was being serious. I

would've told you the same thing if you hadn't spent so much time avoiding me," I said, crossing my arms across my chest. I

could feel Viktor flinch from the blow. It came out a little harsher than I was intending, but I was still very irritated with him.

"I know, sestrichka. I knew you were going to make me deal with everything and I didn't think I was ready," Viktor said.

"If it makes you feel any better, me and Sasha have been trying to get him to deal with it for years as well. He wouldn't listen to us either," Ilya said.

"He wasn't actively avoiding you, though. He's been actively avoiding me for weeks, if not months," I said.

Viktor stood up, walking to me. "I was actively avoiding you and I am very sorry, Sephie," he said, opening his arms to me. I

glared at him for a moment, not moving, but finally gave in and went to him. He wrapped his arms around me, picking me up off the floor. He whispered so only I could hear, "I know you're not mad. I know you're hurt. I can feel you're hurt. It will never happen again." He held me for a few minutes. I could feel his turmoil. I knew he was sorry.

I finally sighed. "I know why you did it. It doesn't mean I have to like it, but understand."

1/3

King of the Undel world

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 435

435

Sephie

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1/3

435

He laughed softly as he put me down again. I felt Adrik's arm around my waist, pulling me back against him. I could tell he was looking at Viktor over the top of my head. "Have you decided, Viktor? In or out?" he asked.

"All in, Boss. Sephie was right. I needed to fix myself first. I couldn't have handled everything otherwise. They told me what happened with Armando last night. The guards that are on him said he just sits there, completely zoned out. If they make him move, he can move on his own, but only if they guide him. I think we should find somewhere to send him. Then none of us ever have to see him again," he said,

"Give him a fake identity. No one will ever find him or know what happened to him," I said to Adrik,

I felt him squeeze me just a little tighter. "Work on getting him set up with a new identity. I want his name, all of his names, erased from history."

Adrik said.

"Can I pretend to be his brother when we take him? Not gonna lie, that would give me so much satisfaction to drop his ass off at a nursing home, knowing he'll never leave," Stephen said.

Adrik and I both laughed. "I think that should definitely happen," I said.

Does anyone know if there's anything he particularly hates?" Ivan asked.

“Women who don’t know when to keep their mouths shut. He was not a fan of that,” I said, cringing at the memory. Adrik

wrapped both arms around me, leaning down to press his cheek to mine.

Stephen’s face lit up. “YES! We’ll have him put in a room with the chattiest woman there.”

“Do we still have his safes?” I asked Ivan.

“We do still have his safes. We should open those before we send him away,” Ivan said.

“You should do that now because I suddenly really want to know what’s in them,” I said. “I’ll start dinner. You guys go find that answer.”

Adrik chose to come upstairs with me instead of finding the answer to what was in Armando’s safes. Once we were alone; he pulled me in front of him, looking thoughtfully at me. “Some better now?” he asked.

“Better. I’m still slightly irritated, but better,” I said.

He chuckled. “You’re extra cute when you’re irritated.” His sexy smirk on his face, he leaned down and pressed his lips to mine..

“I shouldn’t be irritated still. There’s a very big discrepancy in how connected I am with the other guys versus Viktor now. It’s like a constant reminder that I can’t get away from,” I said.

“I can order him to spend time with you,” Adrik said, playing with the curls around my face.

“I don’t know if that will make it better though. It should fix itself, but in the meantime, I’m going to be irritated about it,” I said, pursing my lips together.

Adrik laughed. “Extra cute.”

Vitaliy walked in the penthouse, without Aleksei. He was just as surprised that it was only me and Adrik as we were that it was only him.

“Where’s Alyosha?” I asked.

He had a sly grin on his face. “At his favorite restaurant. Turns out his favorite waitress still works there,” he said.

“That dog,” I said, laughing.

“Where are your men?” he asked Adrik.

“We have two safes from Armando’s house that require his retinal scan and fingerprint to get into. They’ve gone to open them before we send him home,” he said.

1

“Where is Armando’s house?” Vitaliy asked. I could already see the wheels thing in his head. I was fairly certain I could see what he was going to ask next. Adrik told him where the house was. Vitaliy asked, “and it’s just empty now? No one is there?”

“It’s completely empty. Martin cleaned him out. Why? Do you want it?” Adrik asked

Vitaliy nodded. “You two need your house back. You’ve been very gracious to let me stay here this long. I’ve decided to stay in the city a little longer 1

don’t want to be a trouble.”

“You’re no trouble, old man,” I said. “You’re only allowed to take Armando’s house if you promise that you and Alyosha will come for dinner regularly.”

He smiled widely at me. “I could never refuse such an offer.”

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Chapter 436

436

Sephie

Armando had kept one safe completely filled with cash. The other also had cash in it, but had even more files. He kept detailed files on everyone. Disturbingly detailed files.

Ivan put down one file in front of Adrik when they came back upstairs.

“There’s hundreds more files just like that one in that safe,” he said.

Adrik flipped through the file, his jaw clenching as he turned each page. I could feel him trying to keep his anger in check with each page he turned. My curiosity got the best of me. I walked to his side, looking at the information. It was a file on me. There were pictures of me outside the restaurant I used to work at, outside my apartment, taking Ms. Jackson to the grocery store. He had all the details of my life before I met Adrik.

It didn’t make sense. Adrik got frustrated and closed the file. I stepped to the side and looked at it once more. “It looks like he hired a private investigator to find out what he could on me. No idea why he would need to know anything about me, but here we are.” I kept flipping through the information. “There’s nothing in here about me before I started working at the restaurant. If they were trying to find something they could blackmail me or control me with, they didn’t look hard enough. I can’t think of another reason why they would need that information.” We all stood in silence for a few moments, trying to come up with reasons.

It was Vitaliy that broke the silence. “You said he wanted to sell you when they took you?” I nodded. “He was seeing how easy it

would be to make you disappear. It's what they commonly do, especially for girls they think they can get substantial money for.

They take the girls with no families. No one comes looking. He must've been planning to sell you for a lot longer than anste realized."

"Yep, I'm gonna need a minute," I said, walking quickly to the nearest bathroom. I could feel the bile rising in my throat as my need to vomit grew stronger. I emptied the contents of my stomach into the toilet, groaning after several minutes of retching.

Adrik's warm hand was on my back. "You're okay, solnishko," he said, handing me a towel after I washed my mouth out and splashed water on my face. He kept his arms around me, standing behind me. My emotions were completely out of control.

"That means that if you hadn't come to the meeting that night, I would've been kidnapped and sold," I said, realizing the full gravity of the situation. I thought my stomach was empty. It was not. I leaned over the toilet, once again ridding my stomach of all of its contents. This time, when I stood up and looked at Adrik, I could see the look of surprise that meant my eyes had done something unexpected.

"You don't feel scared right now," he said, looking at my eyes. He looked closer, inhaling sharply. He said, "they're not the normal white anymore. This one is different." He pointed to the mirror to get me to look. "What were you thinking about? Only that they could've gotten to you if I hadn't been at that meeting?" he asked as I looked at my eyes in the mirror.

He was right. It was different. Before, anytime they went white, there was still a hint of blue around my pupils and the outside of my iris. This time, the areas that were blue were now closer to black, making the white stand out even more.

I looked at Adrik, who was behind me, in the mirror. “It wasn’t just what would’ve happened if you hadn’t come to that meeting. It was also about how much I wanted to make Sal pay for even considering he could do that to me.”

Adrik smirked at me, taking my hand. “Keep thinking about that for a minute here,” he said, leading me back to the kitchen. The guys were confused at Adrik’s expression when we came back out. “New color. Look,” he said, pulling me in front of him so the guys could see.

“Whoa. That’s slightly easier to take than the normal white though,” Misha said.

“What were you thinking about to make this one happen, spider monkey?” Andrei asked.

Adrik chuckled. “Revenge.”

The guys couldn’t hide their smiles when Adrik told them. Misha looked at me, his wide smile across his face. “Gazelle, I keep thinking I couldn’t possibly love you any more and you prove me wrong each time. I love you so much right now,” he said, wrapping his arms around me and picking me up in a bear hug. I couldn’t help but laugh.

As he set me down, I said, “if you guys hadn’t shown up to that meeting, I would’ve been kidnapped and sold. I’m gonna make Sal pay for thinking he could do that to me.”

1/3

Vitaliy laughed. “You were made for my son, sladkaya. You couldn’t be any more perfect. Truly.”

“Who else does Armando have files on? Who wants to bet that Sal has the same thing in his house? Has anybody checked that place since he left?” I asked.

“Nobody went to his house. He still has his security there. We all know Armarido never took his security seriously,” Viktor said.

“How could he? He was too busy spending money on private investigators to follow me around,” I said, my anger clearly coming out, causing everyone to laugh.

“See, Ilya? The black eyes aren’t always intimidating. Sometimes they make her extra funny, Stephen said. Ilya laughed quietly, still not completely convinced there was nothing to worry about.

“We didn’t take the time to look through all the files. Yours was near the top Ivan said.

“At least I won’t have to fund his time in the home. He can fund himself. The cash that’s in those safes should be plenty to cover the expenses. We can find him a very chatty roommate to keep him company,” Adrik said.

“I think Vitaliy should take pictures at his house and send them to him. Give him something to look at,” I said. “Do you like Naples, Vitaliy? He has another house there. Lots of artwork in that one, too. Unless a certain someone has taken it all by now, in which case, good for her.”

“You’re taking Armando’s house, Vitaliy?” Ivan asked.

“Da. I’ve decided to stay in the city a little longer. I need a place. You guys make it too easy for my men. They’re all getting soft staying here,” he said.

“If you need someone to help you furnish it, take Sephie. She LOVES shopping Misha said, laughing.

“Do not listen to him, Vitaliy. He for some reason hates me right now,” I said, glaring at Misha.

Vitaliy laughed. “Don’t worry, sladkaya. I know you better than you might think,” he said, winking at me.

The following morning, we were all in the gym. Stephen still felt insanely good. He walked up to both me and Misha as everyone was finishing up. asking. "I know you guys haven't run in the city since you two were attacked, but what if we both go with her?"

Misha looked at me. "Do you think your lung is up to trying that now? We can go really short the first time."

"Yes, please go really short. I know I'm going to regret bringing this up." Stephen said.

I thought for a minute. Ivan and Adrik had both been listening to the conversation. I wasn't going if they weren't okay with it. "If I take both of them, do you two feel okay with me going?" I asked both Adrik and Ivan.

They were both quiet for a moment, contemplating. Viktor had also been watching and listening. He walked up with Ilya, after having a quick conversation with him. "Take Ilya, too. He likes to run. He can keep up."

I looked back at Adrik and Ivan. They both conceded. "Keep it short and stay close to the building. I'm more worried about your lung than I am anything else," Adrik told me.

"I know. Me too," I responded.

I looked at Stephen and Ilya. "I feel like you guys are going to grow to hate me if this becomes a regular thing, but let's go."

Adrik caught Misha before we left, quietly telling him to keep an eye on my breathing. "She hasn't done it in a while, but she starts to panic if she can't catch her breath. Get her back here immediately if that happens," he said,

"Don't worry, Boss. I'm only letting her go around the block this time," Misha said. He jogged toward the elevator to catch up to the rest of us.

“You’re very bossy. But I love you for it,” I told Adrik before we left. I could feel him trying not to worry about me as the doors to the elevator closed.

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 437

437

Aepthle

Misha Inobed at me as steenk ne var formandydealing with Roies, ham, and
Ander If anmuthing

auto piting sinnend the Ninek the time

I laughed. "I'm not dealing with them elfter I don't want in fark this up tik
gang te sedie when call me giselle short we're dies.

Threext Gazelle Ever I said printing to myself.

We set off around the binck, with Miche nn nne eldest me, Stephon on the
chin, and Bya behind at Miña war still dightly paranoid

afisat commarma being able to get to us. He mustard in like un report, but I
could feel his week, the war albeavis mess of kle

zoomoonidings, her aven jogged around the block

Both Bys and Stephen were quiet at se ran. Stephen kept pin

worried about dialing on. The were back at the bolding it undere

twenty minutes. Once we slowed to a walk, Micho put his arm around my
shaq iders, cheeking on

day." ↑ said, in Rizorians.

Tiva was surprised. "You can speal Russian, too? You're American?" he asked,
al most like he had gotten it wrong.

I glanced behind me, laughing at his surprised expression. "You're Russian
and yet you speak English * 1 said, grinning at him.

He laughed "Fair enough," he said.

They escorted me to the penthouse, before going back to their own
apartments. Adrik was visibly relieved when I walked in
smiling. "How did The asked.

"It was good. I think my lùng might be finally back to normal. I didn't strupde
to catch my breath at all," I said, I could see where

his mind immediately went when he learned I didn't struggle to catch my breath. "You shouldn't be too surprised. It's been getting better with you," I said, pushing my warmth to him.

He wrapped his arms around my waist, pulling me with him toward the bedroom. "Would you like to test that, Solnishko?" he asked, as he closed the door behind us.

"Don't ask stupid questions," I said, pulling my shirt off and throwing it further into the bedroom.

He laughed, his excitement clearly on his face. He grabbed my hips, picking me up and wrapping my legs around his waist. His wide smile stretched across his face as he walked us toward the shower. "If I haven't told you lately I love you. More than I ever thought possible," he said. He set me down on the sink as he turned the water in the shower on.

He pulled his shirt off as he walked back to me, smirking at the obvious last he could see in my eyes as I watched him take his shirt off. It didn't seem to matter how many times I saw him without his shirt on, it was still the sexiest sight I'd ever seen.

He ran his hands up my thighs, grabbing my hips. He picked me up off the counter, standing me in front of him. "Stephen could keep up with okay?" he asked as he pushed my leggings down my thighs. "Yeah, he didn't have any problems. Iya either. We took it easy. Neither happened." I said, holding on to his shoulder as I stepped out of my clothes.

He smiled as he stood up. "It wouldn't have been pretty" he said, packing me against the shower, unable to take his eyes away from me.

"Are they doing something different again?" I asked. "I wanted to deal with you, Thani, and Saudia: 1. sinisilung may lings about his waist. Cough, max the walked as a la

“No, I just really love it when they turn blue,” he said, pressing his lips to my cheek. I tell the gold me they showed that meant that was thinking about Tam much he loved me

I smiled against his lips. “I think they turn blue more than anything else. Praha, mali waweytining you do mukça me less you a little more. Even when you obsess over me jogging around the block with only Misha and Stephen.”

He sighed heavily, not realizing I was just teasing him. “Sephie, once everything...” I cut him off, my lips preventing him from saying anything else. I knew he was worried about me because he didn’t want anything to happen to me again. I loved him for it.

I also knew that once the other bosses were taken care of, it wouldn’t be an issue any longer. I needed him to know that I loved him for it. I wrapped myself around him even tighter and deepened the kiss. He pushed me against the wall of the shower, his kiss just as desperate as mine. With the wall and his body pressed against mine supporting most of me, his hands were free. He pulled back to look at me, putting both hands on my face. “I love you, Sephie. I can’t stand the thought of anything happening to you ever again.” I could feel his fear over the thought of something happening to me. I saw the look of confusion as he looked at me.

“White?” I asked. He nodded. “It’s your fear, love. I can feel it strongly. Almost as strong as your anger, which is why you can change them.”

He just stared at my eyes for a moment, then I felt the familiar pull in my chest that meant he was thinking about how much he loved me. I adored his look of satisfaction that appeared when my eyes changed to blue. “I know I said that black to purple might

be my favorite transition, but that one is a very close second,” he said. His hands were still on either side of my face, his thumbs lightly rubbing my cheeks. He pressed his lips to mine, softly kissing me. I moaned softly. His gentle kisses always managed to make me melt. I ran my hands through his hair, pressing my hips into his. It was all the encouragement he needed. I felt him slowly slide inside me, loving the feeling of fullness that came with it every single time. I leaned my head back against the shower wall, exhaling loudly as I reveled in the feeling. He laughed softly as his lips found my neck. “I will never get tired of your reaction to me. It’s almost more than I can handle every single time,” he said, his lips and tongue moving down my neck. “Me too,” I said breathlessly. I grinned at him as he pushed himself into me harder, eliciting a moan from me. His handsome smile stretched across his face as he pushed himself into me even harder, causing me to moan even louder. I knew how much he loved teasing me. I wrapped my arms around his shoulders, my lips finding his. My body was nothing but pleasure as he kept his rhythm slow, his kiss gentle. With each thrust, with each touch, with each kiss, the fire in my body was building. My breaths were heavy as he kept slowly pushing me toward the edge. Just as I started to get close, he backed off, making me wait. I made a noise halfway between a whimper and a moan when he backed off, causing him to laugh softly as he kissed my neck. “Trust me, solnishko,” he said, his lips against my neck. He pushed into me harder, pushing me closer to the edge once more. This time was even more intense. I squeezed my legs around his waist, grabbing his shoulders. I could feel my pussy throbbing around his cock. I moaned, pushing my hips into him

harder. He backed off once more, but this time, he grabbed a fistful of hair and kissed me deeply, which helped me with some of my extreme frustration that was also building.

He chuckled, as he could feel it too. "I promise it's worth it," he said against my lips. I groaned into his mouth. Once again, he pushed into me, even harder this time. I was so close. "Please," I pleaded with him, breathlessly, trying to get him not to back off this time. His lips found mine once more." He increased his rhythm, pushing into me hard and fast. My orgasm was almost immediate. It was so intense that my entire body felt like it was on fire. I loved the feeling and pushed it to him. As soon as it felt like I was coming down, he pushed me back over the edge.

I could do nothing but try and hang on to him as he pushed my body to even greater limits of pleasure. Finally, he found his own release. He pressed his body against mine as he caught his breath. He stepped back enough that I could unwrap my legs from his waist, standing in front of him as I worked to catch my breath. He watched me closely, still worried that I would panic. It was easier this time.

"No white," he said, pulling us both under the water.

I smiled up at him. "Told you it was getting easier. I think there was something to seeing your eyes go black last time it happened.

I think it helped me more than I realized."

He looked at me thoughtfully, his finger lightly tracing the details of my face.

He placed his hand on the back of my neck, kissing me gently. "I will never send you away for any reason again. I'll always be there to protect you. Always," he said.

My breath hitched at his words. I saw the look that meant something was happening with my eyes. I didn't even care. I just

needed him to know that I loved him. I pressed my body to his, my lips to his, pushing my warmth to him. “I love you, Adrik. More than anything,” I said, resting my head on his chest as he held me tightly.

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Chapter 438

438

Stubic

Since either Ilya or Viktor slept for the majority of Ilya's first week here, Stephen took over master of schedule duties to give Viktor a break. Stephen said he needed a way to burn off his extra energy he was still enjoying since he'd broken Armando anyway. Ivan and the Wonder Twins had things they needed to take care of that afternoon, which meant I was stuck with Viktor.

O more like he was stuck with me.

Iva, to his credit, was very curious about everything and asked questions most of the afternoon. He wanted to know how long I'd been able to do the things I could do, how it happened, if I'd told anyone else before, he wanted to know everything. I didn't mind. It helped me feel more comfortable with Viktor and eased my irritation with him.

Orsor Ilya had satisfied his curiosity about me, it was my turn. "Okay, Ilya, now's your chance to dish on your older brother. How was he when you were kids? Was he a jerk? Bossy? Who's the perfect brother? Who's the troublemaker?" I asked, grinning at Viktor.

Viktor looked at Iva. They both had smiles as they looked to me. "Sasha," they said, laughing.

"You're only saying that because that poor guy isn't here to defend himself," said, laughing with them.

"No, it's true, sestrichka. Sasha was always the hellion," Viktor said.

"It's because he's short," Ilya said, still laughing.

"He's short? No way. You're both giants. It clearly runs in your family," I said

“It skipped him. He’s still not over it.” Viktor said, his deep laugh filling the room. I had to admit that I’d missed hearing his laugh.

He caught me looking at him thoughtfully.

“You’re lighter when you laugh now. You both are, actually. It’s good to see,” I said. I got up and went to the kitchen. I didn’t say anything to either of them, I just started pulling out things I would need to make Stephen his favorite cookies.

They both eventually followed me to the kitchen. “What are your plans now, ya? You’re done with your service, no?” I asked, mostly to keep them from asking me what I was doing.

“I haven’t decided. I’m done, so now it’s time to figure out what I want to be when I grow up,” he said, his warm smile across his face.

“What would be the dream setup?” I asked.

He glanced at Viktor, then back to me. “Something similar to what Viktor has, think. My training isn’t up to his standards, but it’s similar. I can catch up quickly.”

40

I looked at Viktor. “Let him replace one of the little flowers. Hell, he could replace both of them and it would still be better. Vitaliy is planning on staying in the city now for a bit, especially since he’s taking Armando’s house. ya will still be close. Alyosha can catch his training up, too.”

Viktor looked to Ilya to gauge his interest in the idea. “That’s a good idea, sestrichka.”

“You have to make it Vitaliy’s idea though. He’s already looking for replacements for the little flowers, but they’ve left a sour taste in his mouth, so to speak. Let him see Ilya training with us. It will start the relationship off better if Vitaliy feels like he’s choosing

you versus you asking him for a job,” I said. “He didn’t work out this morning, so he will in the morning. Best to let him see Ilya

before he moves.” I studied Ilya for a minute, then looked back at Viktor.

“He’s faster than you are, so either let him spar with Misha or me. It’ll make him look even better,” I said, winking at Ilya.

“How did you know he was faster?” Viktor asked.

“He’s leaner like Misha. Misha is faster than you, Stephen, and Andrei. Ivan is deceptively fast for as big as he is, but he’s also a special circumstance so he doesn’t necessarily count,” I said.

1/2

3

“Apparently “x settled * Vann eđć, smiling

As Vikler must! Tha continued talking. ↑ muddenly had a thenight pop couldn’t help mireet! I did xay Dhoring a lull in their head !

Hy wasn’t going to like me bringing it up, but I ersation, I asked Viktor.

“Rostra is coming to almost every night now, isn’t he?*

it feels like

and I talking night now,

Viktor looked surprised for a moment, but then he smiled. “He is. It’s still

“He only came necasionally before becau He’s been waiting” I said

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“How did you know? Viktor poked, surpri

“Wana pre in my head hurt.

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Viktor was thinking about something else, but he won unsure wherigen ke gharba vers reason 1 dar keled to keep my mouth chit

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† continued on with his little project while the two of them talked to each other went to hug him so happy to see you. † muide &

oulword 19 cm (met

qualities, percess. Please mass stop, "ha respondlat de ka gat mu

What are you working on he asked, looking at Dec bond of cookie dough

i grinned at him. "litephens is still enjoying the extra energi be get,

1 friend on my hands and

mour) chur") said to him oljemi te

"You're a birde bé + primoss. I fully support dis," he said. The askord Vålco + queue and ww, "h it just the awkwardness? You'w a

line all over the pins d'y why I can un harm

Har was protondling for Ijotions for his answer, he asked

"Mostly, yes. I feel like there's a connection somewhere that I'm missing

Vinne et teen difeson than the meat of one and I don't

know why, but it's keeping mmc tritated."

"He hoch different to me too, perm as s. It's not just you. Same for The Mooke Teko. My webbed about 1 salles

"It was at the point in the conversation where Ivan would respond to Vilkos, de oft

only been listening to Valdom that entire time and not talking to me as well 917364648? ||150

1129 ka what Wiüinor haat pour sand, like he'd -

"That was hacking impressive."1 said when Mäckor started talking again. I

could hear him laugh in his head, but he Tack | went

back to working on Stephen's cookies, smiling to himself.

man even hustled at a smile on his

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 439

439

Sephie

I fell asleep quickly that night, across Adol's chest. I found myself in my dadiless I fully expected saw my dad appear before me, but it never did. Instead, it just continued to get brighter. I glanced around, trying to first

"Holy sh it. Creepier than anything else I've ever seen here," I said. He giggled. Sh it. Da mmit! Apparently, I'm incapable of not cursing in front of you. Tell si

When I fun

fade and the path to the house where i always ept there was nothing around ine. The light to was a small boy in front of me.

chich made me realize that Ed post cursed in front of a child "Caparent I'm very sorry?" I said.

He giggled again, walking closer to me. "Do you know who I am he asked.

I studied him for a few moments. There was a familiarity to him, but I knew hit me. "Kastva? Lasked.

never seen him before. I chewed on my bottom lip, then it suddenly

His boyish grin spread across his face. He nodded. "This is the form that Viklikes best, so I use it the most. I wasn't sure how much you'd looked in his head. I didn't want to confuse you."

"I haven't looked in his head at all, Kostya. I don't do that. Why does nobody elieve me about that?"

He giggled again. "Because we would all take advantage of being able to read people's thoughts, so we can't possibly fathom that you wouldn't want

to.”

“It’s not all burritos and sunshine, kid. There’s lots of things I wish I’d never en,” I said. I looked at him, curious. “Why are you here?”

“You feel a difference with Viktor that you don’t with the rest of them,” he sa. He waited for me to agree with his statement before he continued. “The others are like you, Adrik, and Ivan now. They’ll eventually be able to wk between Heaven and Hell. They’ll learn how to make their demons work for them.”

He didn’t need to finish and I knew. “Viktor wants no part of that,” I said. Kostya smiled. “Your dad said you were smart. You’re right. He had a choice and he chose to stay away from Hell. As such, his connection to you will never be as strong as the others. Same for them. They’ll never be as connected to him as they are to each other.”

“Does it mean he really wants to leave?” I asked.

“No, he told you he was all in and he is. But the demons scare him. Viktor’s sol isn’t as old as yours, you have to remember. It doesn’t have as much experience.” He paused, taking a deep breath. “It’s also why you’re irritated sand can’t figure out why. It’s not you, it’s your demon that’s irritated.”

I laughed. “My demon’s feelings are hurt? Why do I find that endearing?”

“Your demon hasn’t always been a demon, Sephie. It started out as a soul, just like you. Because you’ve made friends with it and you’re using it for good, you’re helping it repair the damage done by the evil it gave in to. You’re giving it a better existence than it could ever have if it continued to give in to evil. It’s hurt. It feels like Viktor is rejecting it. Your connection is onger with Adrik and

Ivan because of your demons. Your connection with Misha, Andrei, and Stephen is becoming stronger because they want to protect their own demons. Viktor asked for his demon to be taken away. Your demons all know this, without you knowing this.”

“Is he still scared of me?”

“He can separate the two. He’s not scared of you, but the demons still unnerve him. They always have, it you remember. He’s always had the hardest time with your eyes changing, even before you knew it was your demon stepping forward,” he said.

“How do I help him not be scared?”

“It will take time. I’ve been helping him as much as I can. You were right. I have been coming to him every night, trying to help him accept everything. There’s a small part of him that doesn’t trust your demons still.”

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I thought for a minute. “Does it have to do with his time in the Syrian prison?” He giggled again. “He said you were smart. He didn’t say you were this smart does. The man who would torture Viktor was completely consumed by a demon. Viktor saw glimpses. When your eyes change, he can’t help but remember that time. He knows it’s not the same, but he still struggles to remember that,” he said.

“How do I help him get over that?”

“You can’t,” he said and I immediately felt my hopes come crashing down.

“Bet Stephen can. Adrik told him that he was going to level up soon. That’s true. Stephen will be able to take Misha’s hatred for Giana and get rid of it. Hell also be able to take everything Viktor still carries from his time in prison and get rid of it.”

“How? Doesn’t he need to give it back to the people that gave it to Misha and Viktor?”

“Not once he levels up. He spent so much time trying to find ways to transmute the pain from his childhood that he’s going to be able to do it for other people. He knows the struggle of not being able to get rid of something that feels like it’s killing you slowly. He’s going to be able to help others with that. That’s partly why he’s so happy now. He knows, without knowing, that he helped you to feel better and it’s made him ecstatic.”

I felt the tears welling up in my eyes as I thought about everything Stephen had gone through. For him to still want to help people after all that said everything anyone would need to know about what kind of person he is. I loved him a little more for it.

“How do we get over feeling irritated around Viktor?” I asked.

Once again, his boyish giggle filled the space. “You need to love your demon a little extra until they’re convinced Viktor isn’t rejecting them.”

“Okay, I understand why you laughed at that. This is not a conversation I ever thought I’d be having. Will Viktor feel left out, though? Because his connection isn’t as strong as the others?”

“I don’t think so. I think he prefers it. It’s less he has to think about or feel. He has so much on his mind already that even just the little bit he’s gotten from you feels very overwhelming to him.”

“Can I make it less for just him? I don’t want to overwhelm him. He doesn’t need another reason to avoid me,” I said.

Kostya surprised me by walking to me, grabbing my hand. “He still loves you, Sophie. He loves you very much. It’s going to take his soul longer to get to the point the rest of you are at. That’s all it is. You can stop worrying about him leaving.” I tried to blink

back the tears, but I couldn't keep them in. Kostya grabbed my other hand. As he did, everything got brighter for a moment and suddenly I felt better. Lighter.

"You just fixed me, didn't you?"

He nodded, smiling sweetly up at me. "You had to endure abandonment to get you here, but you don't ever have to worry about that again." He raised my left hand, looking at my ring. "You still don't know the significance of this, but they will always be with you and they will always protect you."

"Let me guess, you're not allowed to tell me either, are you?"

"Not that one, Sephie. You have to figure it out for yourself. But I'm sure you can connect the dots. You always do," he said, winking at me.

I knelt down, so I was eye-level with him. "In another life, Viktor is very proud of the man you're going to grow up to be," I said.

His face lit up as his smile beamed at me. It was the last thing I saw as everything faded back to black and I could once again only see my body. I could feel Adrik's hand lightly running up and down my back as he talked softly to me, trying to wake me up.

He felt me stir and pulled me closer.

"Good morning, solnishko. Were you dreaming? You were all over the place for a few minutes there," he said as I picked my head up to test my chin on his chest.

I smiled at him. "Kostya," I said, laughing at his shocked expression.

"What? How?"

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"Same as my dad and your mom. Just a different location. Not gonna lie, it was creepy as f uck to turn around and see a little kid

in front of me. Was not expecting that,” I said.

Adrik’s eyes went wide. “Kids are scary. I completely agree. What did he need to tell you?

“I know why Viktor feels different to us now.”

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 440

440

Adrik

“Why?” I asked Sephie, completely captivated by her out of control hair that was everywhere all at once,

“When Misha said we unlocked a new life goal for him and both Andrei and Stephen agreed, they strengthened the connection.

They’ll eventually be like us. They’ll be able to walk between Heaven and Hell,” she said.

7

I inhaled. “Viktor wants no part of that,” I said.

She nodded her head, saying, “our demons still freak him the f uck out.” She grimmed at me, as she got up, straddling me. “Are you ready for this next part, because it might actually be my favorite,” she said, giggling.

I sat up a little more, my hands running over her thighs. “I can’t wait,” I said, niling at her amusement.

“The irritation we all feel around Viktor now isn’t us. It’s our demons. They’re hurt because they feel like he rejected them when he asked for his demon to be taken away,” she said. “I can’t help it. I might love my demon a little more for that. Poor thing.

That’s a hard pill to swallow.”

I had to admit to feeling a pang of sympathy for my demon as well. “He asked or his to be taken away? How does that work?” I asked.

“I assume Kostya did it, but I didn’t think to ask for specifics. I had too many her questions for him,” she said, as she placed her hands on my chest. She looked down at her ring, which she never took off. I might’ve loved that about her. She looked back up

at me, saying, “both my dad and Kostya have said this ring has more significance than I realize and I can’t figure out what they mean by that.”

“Did they say anything else about it? Or just that it’s significant?”

“My dad said it was significant. Kostya said I didn’t understand yet, but that and the guys would always be with me and would always protect me as he was looking at it. I asked him if he could tell me and he said no, but he said I would connect the dots.”

I laughed. “He meant that literally, solnishko. Connect the five rubies.”

She looked at her ring, trying to still figure out what I meant. She looked at me, still completely confused. I took her hand and drew the outline of a pentagram on the back of her hand. “Five points equal a pentagram, solnishk It’s an ancient symbol of protection. That’s why the big diamond is square. It was the only way to arrange the rubies so they would form the pentagram the way I wanted it. I wanted one ruby to always be on top of the others. For Ivan. The big diamond is both of us, because you are my heart. The rubies are always protecting you,” I said, as I pointed it out on her ring. When I looked at her, her mouth was open in shock.

“You...how...” She closed her mouth, trying to formulate a complete thought ried not to, but I laughed at her. She was so

adorable when she was confused. By the looks of her, she should’ve felt like she was all over the place, but all I felt from her was her warmth. Her eyes were the deepest depth of the ocean blue as well.

I smiled at her. “Ivan gave me the color scheme. I sketched out a few options. One day during a meeting, I found myself doodling with the sketch of this design and happened on the pentagram. Like many symbols, it’s been thought of as good and bad, but

that's kind of perfect. We're both, too. I didn't expect that you would never take it off, but it makes me happy that you always have it on. It's one more small way I can feel like you're protected."

"I can't believe you put this much thought into it," she said. She had tears falling down her cheeks, but her eyes were still blue. I looked at her, confused at the tears. "Nobody has ever put this much thought into something for me before," she said. She wrapped her arms around my neck, holding onto me for dear life and pushing all her warmth to me. I held her just as tightly. I would never want to let her go.

We were all in the gym that morning. Vitaliy and all of his men were there as well. He was still trying to find a replacement for the two guys he hated. It was proving more difficult than he would've liked. I think it made him hate Dose guys a little more with each passing day

Sephie had talked Andrei into letting her train harder now that her lung was better. She'd been slowly increasing the intensity.

She was probably back to 90% now, which I was sure was 100% more than Vitaliy's little flowers.

1/3

She was door thy to get as the boy with bm harten hat same withing bot har hem while short to lost je wat migrend for

TERHINDA 36 atan muda kar poseght Phra so get her sand word, die man gàng do se tady / war atually belong brent is sorry
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Nolly's pant's mes all want wide what they sale har stay ins the ting with pm
They all inter foun's lughtition. They work at scared
of tum mgartaly afar saming him gar with me. They quickly decided tur te was phlity to ise training her our gunting with fun, and
the quiete, ha interest. I laughed, warning they & Pa Burk

se you” he said to the loden wovely bakes allows when te tekenf him so th
“If je wera anytone else, I’d be oftended, but I do aggraria
ism you” she said the oil sorted him in his doulder when to
grinning at kits. “But starte nor is such as you planned” die suid
I was setically counting down in my head for how long it took Vitality’s men
totala notiex. I was rigin. Jeni aveonds of fun and
leghia beginning
and they quickly saw they’d been wrong. Pe was not noining hed the way they
thought he was going do
The seemingly endless monks of diete, andurve training had made her
technique next to pedieet, but it had made her as much
mringer. She stil as fast as the normally was, but nobody for outside our group
would’w knows that..
Two minutes in and I saw hat grit at her. He had underestimated her when
they first started. She was going him more of a run for
his money than he thought she would. He was actually having to work a little.
I felt my heart wall watching her hold her own with
him
was so adept at anticipating your ned move that the managed to land a few
kicks on fram. If he could feel pain, he might teen
some mom Because she knew that he wouldn’t feel it, she didn’t hold back
one bit. I was bery happy to see it.
Vitally walked up beside me. “I said it before, but that wonta was made for
you. She is perfect
y possible way,” he said, completely ave studi
“I think that at least 100 times each day,” I said, not taking my eyes off ban
and Sephie.
“She’s back to normal now?” be sled
isn’t everything she’s got. She’s maybe 905% now.”

Vitaly cursed quietly. "Does she want a job? Can I hire her?" he asked, a mischievous grin sliding across his face.

I laughert. "No chance, old man."

Sephie was starting to reach the end of her endurance. Her face was red and her breathing was heavy. I could feel her getting tired. This was the she'd done in months. She still looked strong. It was her cardio that couldn't keep up. Her lung was going to remain the weak link for a little longer

han saw it too. He ended the match by surprising her. He rushed her and the her over his shoulder. "No fair!" she yelled, smacking his back.

He laughed, setting her down. "You're breathing heavier than I'd like, princess. That's enough for today," he said. I expected her to argue with him, but she just grinned at him and threw her arms around his neck. He caught my eye. "She's happy she made me sweet he told me. I just laughed.

They climbed out of the ring while Misha and Ilya climbed in. I raised my eyebrow watching those two cūn surprise. She glanced at Vitaly, saying, "you should watch this one, too. Misha is almost as fast as han"

"You're planning something, aren't you?" I asked her as I watched Misha and liga's match start.

"Yep."

the ring together. Sephie saw my

"Are you gonna tel

"Nope," she said. I could hear her laughing, but she looked like the was watching Misha and Ilya. I laughed quietly, moving her in front of me, pulling her back against