

King of the Underworld Chapter 441 - 450

Chapter 441

Adrik

"You caught your breath right away. That's definite progress," I said.

"It's getting easier each time. I was starting to have issues with catching my breath at the end, but I didn't panic about it this time."

I wrapped my arms around her tighter. She held her arms on top of mine, leaning her head against my shoulder. She looked happy. Lighter. Everything that had happened lately seemed to be leaving and her light was brighter again.

I had expected Vitaliy to get tired of watching Misha and Ilya, but he stayed the entire time. They were well-matched. Ilya was fast, like Misha. They were similar in height and build. It made for a good match. As it ended, Vitaliy looked at me. "Viktor's brother. What are his plans? Is he done with his service?"

I understood what Sephie had been planning at that moment. I nodded my head. "Yeah, he's out. I'm not sure what his plans are though. I don't think he has any yet. I think he's trying to figure that out. Viktor was talking about giving him a job."

"He knows everything about all of you?" he asked.

I nodded. "Most everything, I think."

"He's okay with it?"

"Yeah, he even did some research to find out what it was that was hanging on to him when he first got here that jumped to Sephie that first night," I said.

Vitaliy looked impressed. He glanced back across the gym toward Ilya, then to his little flowers. He walked away, calling Aleksei to him. They walked away from everyone, deep in discussion.

I turned Sephie to face me, her wide smile across her face. "You set that up, didn't you?"

"Ilya wants a job, much like what Viktor has. Vitaliy needs replacements for his little flowers. Ilya could replace both of them for the moment and they'd still be fine. But we both know it'll go better if it's Vitaliy's idea versus Ilya asking him for a job. So I

might've suggested this happen," she said, grinning at me. Her eyes were sparkling in the bright lights of the gym.

"Your idea to put him in with Misha too?" I asked. She nodded. "How did you know they'd make a good match?"

"They're built the same. Misha is the fastest, next to Ivan who shouldn't count because he's superhuman."

I just looked at her in wonderment. "Perfect in every way," I said quietly, leaning down to kiss her.

That night at dinner, Vitaliy looked at Ilya during a lull in the conversation. a, what are your plans now that you're done with your service?" he asked.

I looked to Sephie, who was smiling at me.

"I'm looking for a job, sir. Something similar to what Viktor has, if I can find it Ilya said.

Vitaliy said, "I can give you a job. I need another guy who has actual training. You clearly have training."

"Really?" he said, excited. He quickly cleared his throat, then said, "that would be great, sir."

"We'll talk more," Vitaliy said, waving his hand in front of him. "But you'll come work for me. You can stay close to Viktor for a while. I've decided to stay for a bit longer now that I have a house here again."

"Thank you, sir." Ilya said. He looked to Sephie, smiling widely at her. She winked at him.

"How's it going furnishing your house, Vitaliy?" she asked.

"I might hate shopping as much as you do, slatkaya. I hired someone to do it for me," he said, his sly grin evident.

"Smart man," she said.

While everyone else was talking, I made sure Ivan would stay in the penthouse after everyone else left. "Sephie had a conversation with Kostya last night. She knows why Viktor feels different to all of us now. If you can, stay when everyone else leaves. Or else come back. She wants to tell the other three too, but not when Viktor is around. She's worried about singling him out."

"Yeah, I would really like to know why I feel irritated around him now."

"You're going to love it," I said, laughing.

Ivan came up with an excuse to pull me aside while everyone else was leaving to make it look like he'd forgotten to tell me

something important. Vitaliy and Aleksei both went to their rooms for the night, so it was just the breeze of us in the penthouse.

Ivan looked at Sephie expectantly. "Kostya came to you?" he asked.

"Yeah. Kind of creepy, not gonna lie. I mean, he's adorable, but I was not expecting to turn around and have a little boy standing in front of me. Also? Hét like four curse words fly out of my mouth, then promptly felt like a heathen for cursing in front of a child. I apologized to his parents before- figured out who he was," she said.

Ivan and I both laughed. "That tracks," we both said.

"What did he tell you about why Viktor is different?" Ivan asked.

"When the Wonder Twins found out that you and Adrik could also control you demons, Misha said you guys just unlocked a new life goal for him. Andrei and Stephen both readily agreed. They essentially strengthened our corection because they made the choice to learn how to do what we do. They're going to be able to walk between Heaven and Hell eventually."

Ivan took a deep breath. "Let me guess. Viktor wants no part of that," he said.

"Exactly. He asked to have his demon removed because he wants no part of Hell. He's still unnerved by our demons. When he was in that Syrian prison, the guy that would torture him was completely consumed by his demot. Viktor caught glimpses. Now, he's essentially having PTSD when he sees ours. He wants nothing to do with it," she said."

"He never told anyone," Ivan said.

"Yeah. Are you surprised?" she said. We could both feel her irritation growing. She noticed it too. She grinned at Ivan. "That irritation we all feel? Yeah, that's not really us. It's our demons. They all feel like they're being rejected by Viktor and it makes them itchy."

"Shut up."

"No, it's true. You feel sympathy for yours, too. Don't even try to lie about it said.

Ivan laughed. "Yeah, 100%. Poor thing. That's actually kind of sweet."

"Right? It's very endearing. They knew what happened before any of us did and they've all been restless because of it. He's over there terrified of them and they're p issy because he doesn't want to come over and play," she said, laughing.

"But it's this way for the Wonder Twins and Stephen too. How?" he asked.

"The only thing I can think of is that their connection to their demons is already growing stronger since they made the choice. The connection that the three of us have is made stronger because of our demons. None of us will ever have the same connection with Viktor as a result, but Kostya thinks that Viktor prefers it that way, I have to agree. He said Viktor has so much on his mind on a normal day anyway that the extra baggage from me would be too much. He said the little bit he's already gotten from me is somewhat overwhelming for him."

"Can you make it less for him?" Ivan asked.

"Have you met me?" she said.

"Fair, totally fair. How can we help him cope with feeling you then?" he asked.

"That's going to take time, Kostya said. But," she saill, grinning at him.

"Stephen gets to help him get over the time in prison."

"How? Are we going to get the guy that tortured Viktor?" he asked.

"Nope. No need. Well, maybe there's a need. Doesn't sound like he's a very no man, now that I think about it. Anyway, back to Yoden. He's leveling up. He's going to be able to get rid of Misha's hatred for Giana and Viktor's tinje in prison and everything that went with it. If he can feel more comfortable around our demons, I think it will be easier for all of us," she said

"How is Stephen leveling up? Doesn't he need to give it back to the person where it originated from?" Ivan asked.

"I asked the same thing. Kostya said that Stephen spent so much time trying to figure out how to transmute his own pain that now he'll be able to do it for other people. That's partly why he's been so freaking happy since he bro Armando. He knows he helped me feel better and it's made him ecstatic," she said. I could see the tears welling up in her eyes. "How f ucking adorable is that?" she asked, wiping the tears from her eyes. I glanced at Ivan, who actually looked like he was fighting tears back too.

"This whole time, we thought he was a serial killer. Turns out that kid is a f ucking saint." Ivan said.

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 442

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Adrik

Sephie was awake before me for once the next morning. I could feel her fingen lightly tracing circles on my hack as she tried to

slowly wake me up. I pulled her even closer, burying my face in her neck. She laughed quietly as she moved her leg over my hips, pressing her body completely against mine.

"Let's stay like this the whole day," I said.

"Are you extra tired? Did you get zapped?" she asked. I could hear the concern in her voice, but I could also feel it.

"No. I just need a break." I pulled back so I could look at her, finally opening my eyes. Her eyes were swirling, but they landed on blue as she looked at me. "Let's go to the house this afternoon. I don't have that many meetings. I might cancel them all."

"You'll hear no arguments from me. I think we could all use some time there. What about Ilya though?" she asked.

I thought for a moment. I'd actually forgotten about him. If he was going to work for Vitaliy, it wasn't the worst thing in the world for him to know about the house, but I still didn't like the idea of him knowing just yet. "I'll give Viktor the weekend off completely. He can spend more time with Ilya before he starts working for Vitaliy. Viktor will protest, since he hates taking time off and I'll suggest we go to the house so he won't worry about us all weekend."

"I learned how to plan things out from watching you," she said, grinning at me. "And I learned how to love you more than humanly possible from watching you." I said, kissing her. I could feel her warmth spreading through my body as I buried my face in her neck again.

"Time away will be good for all of us, I think. It'll give me a chance to catch the other three up on my conversation with Kostya.

Maybe Stephen can experiment with helping Misha this weekend, too. He's been trying to let go of his hatred for Giana, but it's still there. It still comes back now and then when he least expects it," she said. I laughed. "I still find it surprising that he got so angry with her. I didn't know that kid had it in him, but he clearly loves you.

There's no doubt about that. They all do."

I felt her mood shift and pulled back from her so I could see her once more.

Her eyes were swirling, but they were mostly amber and white, surprisingly. She saw the look on my face and explained. "I sometimes worry at their connection with me is keeping them cut off from living their lives. We all joked about it in Italy, but I can clearly see now that I've made it exceptionally difficult for them to find a girlfriend. Stephen might have an easier time, but only slightly. I don't want to keep them from making their own

lives.”

“I don’t think you are, solnishko. They know that once I’m done for the day, they’re free to go. It’s always been that way. It will always be that way. If they wanted to find girlfriends right now, they could. They’re choosing to spend more time with you because you give them what they need right now. They wouldn’t be able to have the same conversations with a girlfriend that they have with you. At least not right away. What’s happening to all of us is strange and not everyone is going to be able to handle it. They need to be more secure in themselves and what they can do before they’re going to have a chance at finding a relationship that lasts. None of them are interested in just finding a woman to sleep with. They see what we have and they all want the same. They know it’s going to be worth the wait.”

She sighed, her eyes once again landing on the deepest depth of the ocean blue. Her fingers ran lightly through my facial hair as she smiled sweetly at me, “Sometimes I wonder what the hell I did to deserve you,” she said.

“I wonder the same thing every single day,” I said, burying my face in her neck once more. She wrapped her arms around me, holding onto me tightly as she let me have a few more minutes in bed with her before starting the day

The guys were waiting on us when we came out of the bedroom. Viktor was diere with Ilya, as well as Vitaliy and Aleksei I

wasted no time setting my plan in motion. “Viktor, why don’t you take the weekend and spend it with fyd before he starts work.

You guys slept through his first week here. At least you’ll have a couple more days to catch up,” I said.

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Viktor started to protest, but Vitaly surprised me by interjecting. "You can help me find more security for my house, if you really want to work. But after that, you should spend time with your brother."

Viktor still looked unsure. He asked me, "you guys will be okay?"

Sophie smiled sweetly at him. "We can go away for the weekend. We'll be fine and you won't have to worry about us, Papa Bear."

His entire demeanor melted as she smiled at him. He wasn't going to argue any further.

"It's settled then," Vitaly said, matter-of-factly.

"Were you trying to keep Viktor away or you just don't want Ilya at the house?" I asked me as everyone started conversing.

"Iya. It wouldn't be the worst thing in the world for him to know about it, but not yet. I really need a break. Sophie does too, even though she's pushing through like the boss she is. She needs time to tell the other three about Kostya, too."

"We could all use the break. Except Stephen. He's still on cloud 9." Ivan said, laughing.

"You were right last night. That kid is a saint. I'm happy to see it. Nobody deserves it more than he does."

Ivan nodded his head discreetly in agreement and we both returned to the normal conversation going on around us. Stephen was asking Sephie to come up with a new name for Armando for when we took him to a nursing home.

"Richard. That way you can call him d ick the entire time and no one will know you're saying it with a lowercase 'd,'" she said flatly. The guys all laughed.

Dickie had a drug problem that caused him to have a massive stroke and now he's catatonic," Stephen said, his smile that was showing itself more frequently lately across his face.

"That's perfect," Sephie said, grinning at him.

I decided to keep my meetings that day, rather than reschedule them. I asked Sephie if she could come to the last one, which always surprised her. "Who is it?" she asked.

"You'll see," I said. I enjoyed tormenting her maybe a little too much sometimes.

She walked into my office with the Wonder Twins just before the meeting started. Stephen walked in right behind them. She turned to see who it was and her face immediately lit up. "Vinny!" she said as she walked quickly to him. He brought his wife, Anna, with him as well. "And Anna!" she said, hugging both of them. Neal walked in shortly after, a look of amusement on face.

"I'm so happy to see both of you!" Sephie said, as they walked in, each taking a seat.

"Bella, it's always good to see you," Vinny said. He shook my hand before sitting down. "You too, sir," he said, taking a seat.

Sephie walked around my desk, stopping to kiss me quickly, then hopped on the cabinet behind my desk. Anna's salon had been repaired and was reopened, as were all the other businesses in that part of town. Since Niko and Vito were still in Italy with Sal, all of the underbosses had backed off of enforcing the increased taxes. They had all heard what happened to Anthony, Lorenzo, and Massimo. They all knew that no one had seen Armando or Dario in months. They were scared..

I looked to Neal, asking if he'd brought the paperwork. We had one restaurant owner in the new building project back out for

personal reasons, so we had one space empty. I decided to offer it to Vinny at a discounted price so he could expand and open a second location, should he choose to. Neal got up and set down everything in front of Vinny.

Vinny started to look at everything, curious as to why I'd asked him here. Ne explained the building project to him. As he did, Sephie silently asked, "you're offering the vacant spot to Vinny so he can open a second location, arent you? I just turned slightly so I could see her, but didn't respond, "Just when I think I can't love you anymore than I already do..."

Neal explained about the empty space and then offered it to Vinny, should he want to expand to a second location, Vinny looked shocked, as did

Anna.

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"There's no pressure, Vinny. It's only if you want to expand to a second location. I'm offering the space to you first before I make it known there's a space available," I said.

Vinny looked at Anna, then back to me. "We've been talking about a second location for years, sir. We just could never find the right spot. This spot is perfect. I can keep that place afloat just on the people in that build he sail.

"Smart man, Vinny. You'd be surprised how not obvious that is to some people" Sephie said sarcastically. Neal looked at her, unable to keep his laughter in.

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Chapter 443

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Adrik

Vinny looked through the paperwork. Anna leaned over, also glancing at the paperwork in front of them. They talked quietly to each other, discussing options.

"You can take it home and think about it, Vinny. I don't need an answer today. I said, trying to take some of the perceived pressure off of them. "Everything you need is there. Feel free to call Neal or myself if you have questions."

Vinny still looked too stunned to speak, but they both stood up. "i would appreciate just a little time to make sure this works for us," he said. "But you'll have your answer by Monday, at the latest."

"That's fine, Vinny, I know you have a lot going on. Take all the time you need. It's yours until you decide you don't want it," I said, standing with them. Sephie jumped off the cabinet and came to stand next to me.

Vinny looked at her, smiling at her. "Somehow I think you had something to do with this, bella."

"Nope. This was all him. He might've thought about it because my stomach is a long-term relationship with you, but really that's on you. You did this to yourself, Vinny," she said. She'd put her contacts in before coming to the meeting, but I knew her eyes were green.

Vinny and Anna both laughed at her statement. They both thanked me and hugged Sephie once again before Stephen escorted them back downstairs. Neal stayed for a few more minutes, catching me up on other business. I noticed Sephie walk to Misha and Andrei, asking them both their thoughts on what Vinny would do. They quietly discussed everything while Neal and I talked about other matters.

I caught myself thinking back to the conversation we'd had that morning, where she was concerned she was keeping them from living their own lives. I watched as they readily discussed things with her that I knew for a fact they wouldn't be able to discuss with anyone else. She gave them a space to be completely authentic. She just didn't realize how important that was yet. She didn't know they'd do whatever it took to keep it.

We got to the house early enough that Sephie wanted to take a walk first thing. She loved being able to go outside without fear of anything. It made me feel somewhat guilty that we hadn't been to the house in a while..

"Don't feel guilty," she said, lacing her fingers through mine as we walked toward the woods. "We're here now. That's what matters."

We walked in silence, enjoying the last bit of daylight. I could feel the stress melting away as we walked. I smiled to myself, thinking about how Sephie really was magic in her own way. She always knew just what I needed.

She felt the pull in my chest and glanced up at me. She smiled her sweet smile that spark in her eyes that was reserved only for me. "I can say the same for you, you know," she said as we headed back toward the house.

I stopped her before we got all the way out of the woods, pulling her against me. I loved the way the fading daylight made her hair look. There were at least ten different shades of red and orange in the last rays of sunlight. It made her hair look like it really was on fire. Her eyes were normal, which was becoming a rarity, but I found myself loving it just as much as when they changed.

Those were the eyes that I fell in love with. Those were the eyes that first looked at my soul and loved every piece of me.

I smiled at her, turning away from her. "Get on. We both know you don't walk back to the house," I said. I heard her giggle as she jumped on my back. She wrapped her arms around my neck and shoulders as I bounced her higher and walked us back to the house. I could feel her happiness the entire way.

The guys were all in the back room when we got back. She ditched her coat and went to the kitchen to start dinner. We all happily followed her. Viktor still felt somewhat guilty about taking the weekend off, even though it was my idea, so he made sure there were plenty of groceries at the house when we arrived.

She started pulling things out of the refrigerator as the guys all moved to the chairs around the kitchen island. I caught her glancing at all of them.

She had come up with a new signal for Andrei, since I caught their last one. wasn't going to tell her I'd caught this one as well.

She found the answer to her silent question, a small smile on her face.

She stopped what she was doing, looking at all of them. "You're all wondering why Viktor irritates you now, aren't you?"

There was an audible exhale from all of them. "YES," they all groaned.

"We've been trying to figure it out. We also think Ivan knows something he's not telling us," Misha said. He was clearly frustrated with not being able to solve the puzzle.

Sephie giggled. "Ivan does know something. He found out last night, but he's being nice to me and letting me tell you," she said, winking at Ivan.

"Why didn't we find out last night?" Misha asked. He was somewhat indignant about the matter, which made it even funnier.

"Because I didn't want Viktor to be around when I told you. It's easier to ask one of you to stay behind than it is for me to ask

Viktor to go away so we can obviously talk about him," she said.

"That's why we're here, isn't it?" Stephen asked.

I nodded. "Well, not the only reason. I needed a break. She needed a way to tell you guys what happened without Viktor around.

She's worried about singling him out. She doesn't want him to feel left out of anything," I said.

"What happened, spider monkey? What do you know?" Andrei asked..

"Kostya came to me. Same way my dad and his mom come to me. Just slightly creepier because I wasn't expecting a kid," she said as they all laughed at her still obvious discomfort. She explained why they all felt different around Viktor now.

"But we don't control our demons the same way you three do," Andrei said.

"Not yet, you don't. But you made the choice to learn how to. By doing so, I think your connection is already stronger. Your

connections to me are stronger, as well as Adrik now. If it's not already, it will be to Ivan soon, too. The connections between the

three of us are stronger because of our demons. It should be that way with you three soon. As such, we'll never have the same

kind of connection with Viktor," she said. "But that's okay, too. He has good reason to be afraid of our demons. It's just going to

take his soul little longer to get to the point that we're at. He's still very much all in with what's going on. He's not going

anywhere." She looked at Stephen, her wide smile stretching across her face, as she added, "and Yoden gets to help him deal

with his trauma so that he's more comfortable around us."

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Chapter 444

444

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Sephie

"What? How?" Stephen asked when I told him

I laughed. I said, "I asked the same

get to help Viktor with hi

"Are we going to get the guy that tortured him?"

"No. Adrik told you that you were going to level up. He wasn't lying." I said.

arm across his shoulders. "You spent so much of your

life trying to figure out other people do it. You can break a person, but you can also help people

smiled at his obvious confusion. I walked to Stephen's side, sliding my

Transmute your pain that now you're going to be able to help things that are slowly killing them."

Stephen was quiet for a few moments. He looked at Adrik and very seriously,

"this was not the level up I was expecting, but I'll

take it. Demon crushing is still on the table. Just putting that out there."

"That's the reason you've been so happy after breaking Armando, Stephen.

Well thought it was because you got high off Boss's

supply, if you will. But you've been happy because you know you helped

Sephie feel better," Ivan said.

"Ivan's right. He also said last night that this whole time we've all thought you were a serial killer, but it turns out you're a saint.

Honestly, I could not agree more," Adrik said.

I had tears in my eyes. I wasn't expecting them to tell him what they said, but

was happy they did. I could see the emotions flash

across his face as he took in everything they'd just said. He looked up at me,

still somewhat bedded. "It's true?" he asked

quietly.

"It's true. You took all the bad and turned it into something good. You should

be able to do it on a smaller scale soon, too. You

have arguably the most badass gift out of all of us and somehow you keep

making it better. I don't know if the world can handle

demon crushing," I said.

I watched as his smile stretched across his face, making his entire demeanor

brighter. We could all see how much stronger his

light was. His entire childhood, he'd had to endure his sisters telling him he

was anything but good and having to endure their

horrific torture regularly. Now, we were telling him that not only was he ultimately saving souls, but also helping others deal with their trauma in ways that they wouldn't be able to otherwise. He stood up, pulling me into his vampiric vice-grip of a hug.

As his grip on me loosened, he turned toward Misha. "Guess we're going to have that conversation about what to do with your hatred toward Giana after all," he said.

I laughed. Adrik looked at Misha, smiling. "I still can't believe you got so angry with her. I didn't know you had it in you," he said.

"Honestly? I didn't either. I don't quite understand why what she did made me so angry, but it did," Misha said. He thought for a moment, then looked back up at all of us. "Yeah, still does."

"Usually when you have that strong of a reaction toward someone, it's because they're showing you something you don't like about yourself. It's the same reason Viktor is uncomfortable around our demons. He's not comfortable around his own and ours serve as a reminder of that. It's why he asked for his to be removed. Same thing for you, my adorable Russian guardian. There's some part of the way Giana acted that you see in yourself and you don't like it," I said. "Let Stephen help you with it, but don't stop trying to figure out why it made you angry to begin with so you can learn from it.. Stephen is not here to be your trash compactor," I said, trying to look at him sternly.

Misha flashed his handsome smile at me. "I would never take advantage of such an opportunity," he said, innocently. He managed to get the entire sentence out before he laughed, then added, "yeah, that's a total lie. You're going to have to set firm boundaries with me, Stephen."

"Noted," Stephen said, laughing with him.

Adrik looked between Andrei and Misha. He asked, "are you two able to communicate with each other now?" They both looked at each other, like they'd been caught doing something they shouldn't have been doing. It made Adrik laugh. "You're not in trouble for it. I've just noticed a few silent conversations where you seem like you make a decision without saying anything. I'm curious," he said.

"I don't think it works the same as you and Sephie or you and Ivan. It's more like snapshots we can send each other. It just started," Andrei said. He looked at me, silently asking if he could tell everyone that he and I figured out a way to communicate

with each other. I smiled at him, nodding my head. "It's similar to how Sephie and I communicate. We show each other what we want the other one to see when we look in each other's heads. It's

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kind of the same with Misha, but since he doesn't really look in my head, I have to send it to him differently."

"I know you and Sephie figured out a way to communicate. I caught your signals to each other," Adrik said, winking at me. "But since you two are the same, it makes sense. I'm impressed that you figured out a way to communicate with Misha."

Andrei looked slightly relieved, his handsome smile stretching across his face.

Misha added, "it's getting easier the more we practice at it. I haven't figured out yet how it would work with Stephen, but there's gotta be a way with him, too. Everything got stronger when Stephen broke Armando."

"Have you started to feel Ivan the same way you felt Adrik after that happened?" I asked.

"Not as much. Boss is stronger. Not as strong as you, but he's a close second now. Maybe it has to do with anger. Maybe Ivan needs to go nuclear and then it'll be stronger for him, too," Misha said.

"Or maybe we feel Boss more strongly because your connection to him is stronger and it comes through from you, spider monkey," Andrei said.

"Both theories make sense, honestly. I have no idea what it actually is. I like it though," I said, grinning at all of them.

"Do you think Viktor is going to feel left out that he doesn't have as strong of connection to the rest of us?" Misha asked.

I sighed. "Kostya told me he prefers it that way and I have to agree with him. Viktor has so much on his mind at any given point that having to deal with the hot mess that is me feels very overwhelming to him. Kostya even said that the little bit he has felt from me has almost been too much for him." I stopped what I was doing, looking at Adrik first, then at the other four. I think it's harder to take because everything is so strong between us and we all enjoy it. We just want Viktor to be a part of that."

Adrik walked up behind me, wrapping his arms around my waist. "Viktor is a big boy. He made his choice and we need to respect that. Kostya told Sephie that he's still all in, so until he does something to make me question that, I'm operating as if he's all in."

He has a very specific gift. If he doesn't want to be a part of the rest of it, then he doesn't need to be. I think between the rest of us, we can make any situation work."

"If his connection to Sephie isn't as strong, he might not be of any help in other situations anyway," Ivan said. "That might be by design, now that I think about it."

I chewed on my bottom lip, trying to find more answers when I didn't really know the questions. "I feel like I want to protect Viktor from everything weird happening now. Like now I'm not sure he can handle it," I said.

"I think that will get better once I figure out how to help him with his trauma. When you have unresolved trauma, any little thing suddenly becomes a very big thing. If he's still struggling that much with his time in prison, then he's not able to handle anything else. He got rid of the grief, which clouded everything, but it also uncovered other stuff he hasn't dealt with," Stephen said.

I smiled at Stephen. "You're so wise, Stephen. I'm glad you finally decided to show everyone."

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Sephie

Stephen surprised both Misha and I by asking if he could go with us for a run the next morning. "I figure I need to take advantage of it now while you're still keeping it short and slower so I can ease myself into it. I know Boss doesn't like the idea of just Misha running with you when we're at the penthouse, but he might eventually warm up to the idea of both of us going with you. I just need to get better at it."

"That, my favorite enabler, might be one of the more thoughtful things anyone has done for me lately," I said.

The three of us set out for a short run. Misha, who used to dread going the long route at the house, was now slightly disappointed that we were taking the short route. I could feel his sullen mood before we left the house. "Don't worry, my adorable Russian guardian. My lung is getting better really quickly. We'll be able to go the long route again soon," I said, hooking my arm through his as we walked around the pool and past the gardens.

"I never thought I would be disappointed with the short route, but here we are" he said, laughing at himself.

Stephen was able to keep up without much trouble the entire time. It wasn't as easy for him as it was for Misha, but Misha had also started out much in the same spot as Stephen was in now too. As we slowed to a walk, Stephen said, "I'm probably going to regret that tomorrow."

I was still working to catch my breath, but managed to say, "you'll be fine, Stephen. You kept up the whole way." Misha looked down at me, suddenly alarmed that I hadn't caught my breath yet. I smiled at him, but stopped walking to try to make it easier.

"I'm okay. I'm not panicking," I assured them. I just needed a minute of not moving.

Misha glanced at Stephen, clearly worried. Misha hadn't seen me not be able to catch my breath before. He was used to me running for hours and barely breaking a sweat. I could feel his worry turning to panic with each second that I struggled to control my breathing. "You're not helping," I said, in between breaths.

"I can't help it, gazelle. I've never seen you like this. I don't know what to do and I don't like it," Misha said. "I think I should carry

you back to the house,” he said. “Boss is going to kill me if you come back broken.”

“He makes a solid argument there, Seph. It’s easier for you to catch your breath if you’re not moving. It’ll also help him feel less panicked, which will help you feel less panicked. I can see the white swirling in your eyes, but I think it’s from Misha, not you,”

Stephen said.

“How?” I asked, as Misha squatted down in front of me so I could hop on his back.

“Everything from you always has heat behind it. Your fear and panic slightly less than other emotions, but it’s still warm. Much warmer than I am. This isn’t warm enough to be from you. You said he runs cooler like I do, so it must be from him,” Stephen said as we continued walking to the house.

“You’re getting better, Yoden,” I said.

He flashed me a grin. “I’ve been thinking about what you told me last night, po. I have ideas,” he said.

I squeezed Misha’s neck a little tighter, asking if he was ready to be a guinea pig. He turned his head so he could see me out of the corner of his eye. “I just have one question. Do I get pancakes later if I say yes?”

We were still laughing when we got to the house. Adrik was concerned when he saw Misha carrying me back. I knew it wasn’t worth me trying to keep it from him. “I did struggle to catch my breath. I think we might’ve went a little too far this time. Misha helped me out by carrying me back,” I said as Misha deposited me on the kitchen counter. Ivan had walked in right after us, mirroring Adrik’s concern when he saw Misha carrying me.

“I think you’ve done too much this week, princess. You might be overdoing it,” Ivan said.

“I agree. You’re still at risk for pneumonia again,” Adrik said, handing me a glass of water.

Misha was still somewhat worried and mostly shocked. “I haven’t seen her not be able to catch her breath before. That was alarming.”

“Did you panic?” Adrik asked. “I didn’t feel anything.”

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“She didn’t, but Misha did.” Stephen said. “She stayed calm while she worked to catch her breath, but he made her eyes swirl

with white because she could feel his panic.”

Adrik looked at me, surprised. “That’s three times now that your eyes have changed in response to someone else and not you.”

“You’re looking at me like I have an answer as to why that is,” I said, trying not to laugh at him.

*Sephie feels everything so much more intensely than the rest of us, it makes sense that her eyes would be more responsive to everything around her as she becomes more responsive to everything around her,” Stephen said.

“Yeah, what he said,” I said, grinning at Adrik. He clicked his tongue as he stepped in front of me, standing between my legs, his hands on my thighs.

“What happened when you felt his panic?” Adrik asked.

“I told him he wasn’t helping.”

“It didn’t make yours worse?” he asked.

“My panic didn’t make an appearance at all. I think it might have if Misha had continued to panic. I could feel that coming on, but once he started carrying me, he calmed down,” I said.

Adrik looked at me thoughtfully. “Good. You’re learning to control it,” he said as he pulled me to the edge of the counter quickly. It made me wrap my legs around him to keep from feeling like I was going to fall. He wrapped one arm around my waist, picking me up off the counter, and walked out of the kitchen with me..

“Okay, bye!” I called out to the guys as we left. We could hear them laughing as we went up the stairs.

It took until Sunday afternoon before Stephen felt ready to try to help Misha with his anger toward Giana. “I might’ve been overanalyzing everything. Try not to be surprised,” Stephen said after they came back.

“And?” I asked, looking between him and Misha. Misha looked even happier than normal.

“I think it worked. I don’t feel anything when I think about Giana now and I couldn’t be happier about that,” Misha said, laughing.

“Was it easy?” I asked Stephen. He had said he felt like he didn’t need anyone help this time for this one. He really had been thinking about it since finding out he’d be able to do it. I was sure he had a complete standard operating procedure written out in his head on what needed to happen.

“Yeah, much easier than breaking a person. I don’t know how much Viktor is carrying around, but I might be able to do it on my

own with him too. Misha was easy. It really was just his anger for Giana and nothing else,” Steplan said.

“That’s because he’s too adorable to be bothered by anything else,” I said, grinning at Misha.

I sighed, hopeful that Viktor would get even more relief from the trauma of his past and that it would help him to feel more comfortable around all of us. I wanted all of us to feel comfortable around him as well. I didn’t want to constantly feel irritated when I was around him and I knew the guys didn’t either. One more step in whatever this was that was happening to all of u

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Stephen

We'd found a nursing home several hours away from the city to take Armando in. It was nice. It had all the amenities that he was never going to use, but we felt like his money would be put to good use there. I left the penthouse early one morning to deliver him to his new forever home

It was a strange drive to the nursing home. Armando was in the backseat, completely awake, but he never uttered a sound.

Since I had broken him, he hadn't slept. I guess he hadn't needed to. He just sits in the same position all day, staring blankly in front of him. The guards that were on him would make him lie down at night, but they said he'd just lie there, staring at the ceiling all night long.

He would eat, but he needed help to do so. He'd lost weight already since we had him. Most of his muscle was gone by the time

I broke him. He looked like a shell of his former self. I would catch myself delighting in that fact often.

Should I feel guilty about being happy that this is how his life turned out? Maybe.

Did I feel guilty about being happy that this is how his life turned out?

Not one bit.

That's the beauty of Karma. He brought this on himself. He got a much better end to his life than his buddies Anthony and

Lorenzo. I was slightly disappointed and somewhat worried that their souls were going to be returning at some point. I thought about that often.

I wondered how long it took souls to come back in a new body. Would I still be around when Anthony and Lorenzo came back?

Would I get a second chance to break them in their next life? Chances are, they were going to make the same mistakes over again. They'd be just as evil in the next life as they were in this one. Maybe I'd be able to find them and break the cycle.

On those days where I caught myself contemplating whether I should feel guilty about Armando's fate, I tried to remind myself

that I really was breaking the cycle. Evil spread. Like a network. One less individual in the network. Get rid of enough individuals

in the network and it weakens the entire thing. Anthony, Lorenzo, and Massimo were the beginning of weakening the network.

Armando was a bigger blow to the network. The remaining four didn't stand a chance.

I kept glancing at Armando in the backseat as we got closer to the nursing home. His expression never changed. He never gave any indication that he was aware of anything going on around him. I wondered if this was how my sisters were now. I hadn't spoken to my parents since my mother called me after my sisters returned home.

I was sure my youngest sister would have been moved back to live with my parents. I was willing to bet good money that my middle sister's husband would divorce her. I'd never met this one, but I'm sure he wouldn't want to take care of a catatonic wife for the rest of her life. My oldest sister could talk, but my mother said she barely did. I would often wonder if her condition worsened after she got home. Maybe they were all three with my parents.

Maybe I felt slightly guilty about burdening my parents with that. But at the same time, I'd tried to tell my mother what was happening. She never listened. She never believed me. They loved my sisters more than me. Even my father. My sisters could get anything they wanted. It was the opposite for me.

That's partly why I left home as early as I did. I'd lied about my age so I could join the military early. I just wanted to be away from that house, from my sisters. The military is where I discovered my accuracy in marksmanship. I was always the best shot. It didn't matter who was at the gun range with me, I hit the mark every single time. I got fast tracked to sn*per school before I even finished my basic training.

For a kid who rarely spoke, becoming a sn*per was like a dream come true. I was already observant, so studying my targets was second nature. I could be patient and wait however long it took until I found the right opportunity. And not a single person ever saw me. It was ideal.

Boss had heard about me and came to me to see if I was looking for a job after I got out of the military. Viktor still had contacts in the military, one of whom was my commanding officer. He knew Viktor had a sweet deal with Boss, even without knowing the

details. There were lots of military guys that wanted to get into private security after they got out. Boss explained his situation, gave me his card, and told me to call him when I got out.

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I didn't want to go back home, so the day after I got out of the military, I gave him a call. He flew me to the city, told me to give him a month to see if it would work out on both sides, and I haven't been home since.

The other guys were welcoming from the start. They didn't care that I was quiet. They let me keep to myself as much as I wanted. I showed up to work each day. That's what they cared about. I was more comfortable with them by the time Sephie came into our lives, but it's really because of her that I'm as close to them as I am now.)

Everything changed when she came into the picture. In the best way possible. I tried to keep her at arm's length for as long as possible. She recognized that I was the loner type. She didn't care either. I kept waiting for her to turn mean and sa*istic, like my sisters, but it never happened. Instead, she would hype me up anytime I said anything around her. She wanted to hear my opinion. She laughed at my jokes. She made me feel like I was part of the group, for the first time in my life.

I wasn't sure if she knew how much she meant to me, but she brought me back from the brink of destruction. It was a daily battle to keep the anger and the pure rage from taking over. I was so close to giving in and just becoming the monster that my sisters tried to create. But then we all met Sephie and we learned about what she'd had to endure in her short life. I saw how bright her light still shined, despite everything that had happened to her.

If she could do it, why couldn't I?

I'm not sure she would ever know the role she played in my life, but I knew I would do everything in my power to make sure she was always safe and she was always protected. No matter what.

I glanced back at Armando, who was still blankly staring ahead, as we pulled into the driveway of the nursing home. "We're here, di**k."

I was going to have to watch myself and make sure I didn't say his new name with that tone in front of anyone inside.....

I was greeted by an administrator, as well as a nurse when we pulled up. They were expecting di*k. We had called and given his fake back story already. It was tragic, really. His dear wife, whom he loved with all his heart, died tragically in a freak accident while on vacation a few years ago. She was such a bubbly personality and he just adored listening to her tell stories and talk endlessly about every little detail of her life. After she passed, he couldn't stand the silence. He turned to drugs to try and fill the void and it caused him to have a massive stroke. The doctors said the damage was extensive and he would never recover. He'd remain in a waking coma for the rest of his life. They had his room all set up for him, with his new roomie just dying to meet him. She'd been so lonely without anyone to talk to that she'd been telling the nurses all week how excited she was to get someone to talk to. I met her. She was a dear woman. Talked my ear off for twenty minutes. while they got paperwork for me to sign. It was going to be the absolute best end to Armando's life that any of us could've conceived. Before I left, I leaned down to Armando's ear whispering, "next time, if someone tells you to jump off the roof, you should do so." I can't be sure, but I think he flinched.

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Sephle

Vitaliy had finally furnished his new house, which was Armando's old house, and had been there for a week. He invited all of us over for dinner the day that Stephen took Armando to the nursing home, as a hit of a celebration, Like we were going to say no to that...

Battista had come back to the city the day before, so he joined us for dinner. He had information on Ricardo and the other three bosses for us, as well as more information on the police commissioner. He was proving to be quite the asset for us.

I'd never been to Vitaliy's house when it was still Armando's house, so this was a bit of an adventure for me. I did make sure to tell him to check all the windows on the first floor before he moved in, just in case. You can never be too careful.

Vitaliy greeted us warmly when we arrived, his smile that showed up quite often now spreading across his face when we walked in. "Sladkaya, I'm happy to see you," he said, opening his arms for me.

"I've missed you, old man," I said, hugging him. I turned to Battista, who had been standing next to Vitaliy. "Battista, it's good to see you again, as well." He took my hand, flipping it over to kiss the back of it, like normal.

"Sephie, it's always a pleasure," he said. He had a devious glint to his eye that made me think he wanted something.

"Out with it, Battista. Who do you need help with?" I asked.

He looked at Vitaliy, who was laughing. He didn't say anything, but he reached into his pocket, pulling out a money clip that was holding a w*d of hundred dollar bills. He counted off five and handed them to Vitaliy, folding the rest back up and putting them back in his pocket. He turned back to me, smiling. "Another business associate I'm unsure about. They'll be here in five days," he said.

"Another woman?" I asked. Adrik was behind me as I greeted Vitaliy and Battista both, but he had pulled me against him when he heard Battista needed me for something.

Battista shook his head no. "Not a woman this time. This guy has been influential in Europe for years, but there's something

about him that many people don't like. Only, no one knows why. Vitaliy has met him before, but it's been years. He didn't feel anything off about him then, but the feeling has persisted. You," he said, then paused to look at Adrik and the guys before continuing, "all of you, offer a much more detailed picture. When Ricardo goes down, I have a feeling he's only the first domino. I would like to have those who are connected to me completely vetted before that happens."

"She doesn't go anywhere without all of us," Adrik said, pulling me tighter against him.

"Nor would I want her to. I value all of your insights. I still don't know the specifics of how you're all connected, but I know you are. If this associate can pass this test, then I won't need to worry about them," Battista said.

"Let us know when and where, then," Adrik said.

The conversation turned to small talk. I asked Vitaliy for a tour of the house, since I'd never been there. He gladly obliged, taking my hand and sliding it through his arm as he walked me around the house. I could tell it made the guys slightly itchy to let me go with him alone, but they did.

"How's Ilya working out?" I asked once we were alone.

He exhaled loudly. "Much better than the little flowers. I didn't realize how much I'd come to despise them until they were gone.

He told me his training was not where it should be, but he's quite good already. It won't take any time to catch him up. Most importantly, he wishes to be caught up." He looked down at me, a sly grin on his face. "You inspired him, slatkaya," he said.

"Shut up. When?"

"He saw you with Ivan. He remembers Ivan from when he was younger. He said he wished to be able to hold his own against Ivan as well as you did the other day."

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I laughed. "Ivan still takes it very easy on me, Vitaliy. He shouldn't be that impressed."

He clicked his tongue. "I've seen Ivan fight plenty of times. You made him work. You're very fast."

"Not as fast as I was. I'm still trying to get it back, but it's coming."

"Keep training like you did the other day and Ivan won't have to hold back at all with you," he said, patting my hand as we continued our house tour.

Once we were back with everyone else, Battista filled us in on what he'd found out about Ricardo and the other three bosses.

"We don't know exactly when yet, but Niko and Vito, are planning on returning to the city. We don't even know exactly why they're returning to the city, but we think it's because the underbosses have stopped collecting the taxes in their absence.

They're running short of cash," Battista said.

"The underbosses have been keeping very low profiles," Ivan said. "They heard what happened to Anthony, Lorenzo, and Massimo. They're scared."

"They also know no one has seen Armando or Dario in months. The rumors abound about what happened to those two," Stephen said.

"You have them both, no?" Battista asked. Adrik simply nodded his head, which kept the rest of us from saying anything further.

"We have eyes on all of them, so when Niko and Vito leave, we'll be able to notify you. I'm not sure if you want to pick them up at the airport or let them come back to the city," Battista said.

Adrik was quiet for a moment, which meant he was weighing his options. "If we let them come back to the city, it might lull them into a false sense of security. We can also see just how loyal those underbosses are going to be. My guess is not that loyal, given that they've all taken a vacation while the bosses have been away. Might be fun to crush them a little bit before we grab them," Ivan said.

"What are your plans for them? Same as Armando?" Vitaliy asked.

I could feel Adrik's anger, just under the surface, as he thought about what to do with Niko and Vito. Battista didn't know about his eyes changing or Ivan's eyes changing yet. Tonight might be the night he found out.

He looked to me, asking for my thoughts. Instead of saying anything, I just thought about Stephen breaking Niko and Vito the same way he did. Armando. I saw the look on Adrik's face that meant my eyes had changed to purple. It was half enchantment, half disappointment. He looked back at his father, nodding his head once.

"Where are you at with the mayor? That could help determine your plan for Niko and Vito," Battista asked.

"He's currently looking through most of what we have on Ricardo. We kept back some of it until we know for sure he's willing to

move on it. We told him we have Dr. Moretti. He was going to meet with his DA to see what they could actually charge him with. Since no one but Sephie can remember him, it's difficult to charge him there. There's also no evidence that he's the one that created brawn, past what Sal's security guy told us. I'm not turning him over if he's going to walk free," Adrik said.

"We checked out the DA. He's also good. At least for now. If there's a way to charge him, he'd be willing to do so." Battista thought for a minute more, adding, "perhaps we can help them find evidence that will hold up in court. Has anyone been to Sal's house since he left

"No. He's still got security there, the last time we checked. But I can't say I wouldn't like to go take a look to see what we could find," Viktor said.

"How much security? Can you guys get past it?" Battista asked. "I only ask because I know Ricardo likes to keep records. If Sal has been working with him, then he will also like to keep records. What we're looking for could very well be in his house."

"I'll have a team check it out in the morning," Viktor said. "Depending on how many guys he has on the house, we might be able to get in and get out without anyone knowing."

Misha clapped his hands together. "I love breaking and entering."
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Sephle

Three days after we met with Battista, we were all on our way to break into Sal's house in the middle of the night. He did have security on his house, but it was minimal. Our guys watching the house said the night shift would usually fall asleep, if they showed up at all, so it should be an easy endeavor to slip into the house undetected. We were only interested in his files and his office happened to be all the way at the end of the house, which made it easy for us.

We decided everyone should go, to make it easier to look through all the files in a shorter amount of time. We weren't exactly sure how many files we were going to be looking at. Because Adrik had promised me that he was never sending me away from him again, it meant I was going to break the law with the rest of them. I couldn't say I was disappointed about being included in this little adventure. Any chance I could get to stick it to Sal would make me very happy.

I had strict orders to stay with Adrik or Ivan at all times. Like I would argue with that.

We left the vehicles down the block from his house and went the rest of the way on foot. The team that had scouted the house ahead of time told us where the security was supposed to be. We found them inside the house, watching TV. They clearly took their jobs very seriously.

Adrik was the one that snuck in the house, silently walking right by the security team on the couch, and unlocked the window to the office for the rest of us to come in. The security team never suspected a thing. We ran to the end of the house, two at a time, until we were all in the office. Stephen kept an eye on the hallway, Viktor kept an eye on the window, the rest of us quickly looked through files for anything we could find that would tie Dr. Moretti to the creation of brawn and/or Sal.

As I was looking through files, I felt Stephen get tense. Before he could say anything, I told Ivan and Adrik silently, "Stephen noticed something in the hallway." Ivan was next to him immediately. Stephen signaled what he'd heard, then the two of them

disappeared. We heard the faintest sounds of a quick commotion, then nothing. Then Stephen and Ivan appeared in the office once more.

"We need to hurry. They'll eventually wonder where their buddy is and come looking for him. There's a bedroom down the hall.

We put him in the bed, hoping to buy us some time. He's going to be sleeping for a while anyway." Ivan said to me and Adrik. I

looked at Andrei, tapping my temple. I relayed the message to him, so he could relay the message to Misha. We all continued looking without a word spoken.

"Got it," Adrik said. He kept flipping through the file in his hands. "Battista was right. Sal kept detailed records. This is everything on Dr. Moretti. This should be enough to put him away."

I caught Andrei's eye, telling him we found what we needed. We quickly exited out the window, two at a time, and left Adrik to close and lock the window behind us and once again walk right past the security team on the couch. We waited for Adrik to join us and we were back at the vehicles. The entire process took just over an hour.

On the way back to the penthouse, Adrik said silently, "having you as the go-between for Andrei, Misha, and Stephen was very helpful. We've never not had to talk to each other before." He put his arm around me, pulling me to him. "And you caught on that Stephen knew something right away. That could've been much uglier." He looked at me, his s*xxy smirk on his face. "You're quite handy to have around. I think I'll keep you."

Viktor let Chen know that we had new information for the mayor once we were back at the penthouse. He knew to stop by in the morning to get it before going to the mayor's house to get his crew started for the day.

"I think we should find a way to meet with the DA. Or at least get Andrei and Ivan to watch him and see if they can see anything on him," Stephen said.

I agree. I was thinking about that on the way back," Viktor said. "I don't know how easy it would be to meet with the DA though."

"Maybe he needs his house renovated too," I said, grinning.

"I think it would be a good idea to meet with the mayor in person, as well, before we give him everything. What we have so far is

promising, but I would feel better seeing him in person and having Sephie be able to see him speak,” Adrik said.

“We just need to be careful on who sees that happening. We don’t want Henry to catch on that we’re working with the mayor,”

Ivan said.

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“Well, apparently he’s not that quick since he didn’t notice that two of his police chiefs were meeting with the mayor in the same place where they met with him not two days prior,” I said. “We could meet with the mayor at the hotel and apparently no one but Mr. Turner would notice:

Adrik chuckled. “You’re not wrong, solnishko. I’ll see if Neal can come up with a reason that we should meet with the mayor.

“There’s that giant fundraiser for the hospital coming up in a few weeks. You usually don’t go, but maybe you should go this time.

The mayor will be there, as will the DA. As will Henry,” Viktor said.

Adrik could feel my moment of panic as I thought about going to another black tie affair. I managed to get it mostly under control

before he made across the room to me. I sighed. “If any one of you so much as walks too far away from me while we’re there, I

swear on all things holy, I will kill you,” I said, pinching the bridge of my nose.

The

stayed silent. They could feel my turmoil. They still struggled with guilt from the last time. I felt Adrik’s arms around me as he

pulled me gently to him. He ran his hand through my hair, saying, “we don’t have to go, love. I hate those functions anyway. We

can find another way to meet with the mayor. I don’t want to put you through that.”

I took a deep breath. “It’s really the easiest option. It might also be the fastest option. No one will think twice about you having a

conversation with the mayor if you’re there,” I said, chewing on my lip. “Aren’t you the biggest donor to the hospital anyway?

They’ll be happy you’re there. The mayor should thank you for being there, which is all the more reason for you to have a

conversation with him.” I looked up at him. “I’ll be okay. You and Ivan need contacts though.”

Misha and Stephen both scoffed. “Why do you always have to ruin all the fun, gazelle?” Misha asked.

King of the Linderworld

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 449

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Sephie

We arrived at the hotel where Mr. Turner worked to meet with Battista and his associates, once again like modern-day royalty.

Vitaliy was with us, as were all his guys, minus the little flowers. I watched Ilya as he was working. He fit in perfectly with Vitaliy's other guys. He was considerably younger than the rest of them, but he knew exactly what to do, exactly when to do it. They worked together like they'd been a team for years, rather than weeks. I caught his eye as we were walking up to the front door of the hotel, he smiled broadly at me, then went right back to boss mode. It made me happy to see him happy. His light had stayed just as bright as it was since Stephen scared off the darkness hanging around him.

Vitaliy's other guys were almost happier to be rid of the little flowers than Vitaliy was. It meant they could come to dinner with him again. Apparently the way to all of these men's hearts was through their stomachs.

As we approached the door to the hotel, we were greeted by Mr. Turner, who was just as happy as always to see us. I stepped away from Adrik, to give Mr. Turner a hug before we continued inside. Battista was waiting on us in the empty restaurant, like usual. He was standing with three men this time. I couldn't help but feel relief when I saw there was no woman with them. While the guys were usually very serious while they were working. I heard them all laugh quietly when they felt my relief at seeing Battista standing with only men.

"Not gonna lie, princess, I might've enjoyed watching you embarrass that woman the last time a little too much," Ivan said silently.

Before I could answer him, Adrik responded, "Let it play out, Ivan. We both know she's equal opportunity. If this guy deserves it, it'll be just as glorious as the woman." He looked down at me, smirking, as we continued the rest of the way to Battista.

"This is the first time I've regretted being able to hear both of your thoughts," I said. I could hear both of them laughing in my head, but outwardly, they looked as serious as ever. They were really getting good at this.

I caught Andrei's eye as Battista was making the introductions with Vitaliy. He let me see what he saw when he looked at the men with Battista. I felt Misha's nausea coming on, but I couldn't tell which one it was from right away. I just knew it was one of them that was making Misha nauseous.

"Ivan? Anything?" I asked.

"Definitely. Short guy on the end. I saw it as we walked up. It's stepped back, though," he said.

"Same guy

Andrei pointed out. Misha confirms it, too."

Stephen and I had discussed our options before we came to the hotel. If there was a situation like we had with Ilya, where the demon wasn't necessarily attached, we would signal to him to speak to see if he could scare it away. If the demon was already attached, it was going to be slightly more complicated. We would wait to reveal who he was until a little later. Since we didn't have much experience, we were hoping to gain some knowledge on how they would react to us.

Battista motioned for Adrik to meet his associates. He didn't let go of me as he went to greet them. The first two men were fine when he shook their hands. The last man, the one that everyone had pointed out, made Adrik feel nauseous when he shook his hand. Because he was still touching me, I could feel what he felt.

Ivan's bubble went up around me as I went through the line, shaking everyone's hands as well. I wasn't worried about our eyes changing since we now all had contacts in, but this time was different. I knew our eyes were black, even without seeing them. It felt similar to the agitation we felt around Viktor, but stronger. Our demons were itchy.

Battista took my hand, flipping it over to kiss the back of it, as he always did. As he looked up, he raised an eyebrow, silently asking if there was anything to be worried about as everyone else moved toward the table. I nodded once, discreetly. He looked almost excited as we walked to the table.

The business associates of Battista had come to the city under the guise of investing in various projects throughout the city.

None of these projects were real, but Adrik, Vitaliy, and Battista discussed them as if they were. I stayed quiet, watching everyone as they talked with each other. I felt nothing bad from two associates, but I could tell the third one was watching us just

as carefully as we were watching him.

Andrei caught my eye, telling me that the guy was focused on me, Adrik, and Ivan. "He knows there's something different about you three, but he can't figure out what."

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"Ivan told me his demon stepped back when we first got here. Can you feel it?" I asked.

"Yeah, it's the same as that woman before. Not cold, I mean. But it's there, whether it's in control or not. It's definitely there."

"I'm so impressed that you can feel that now, Bubba," I said, winking at him when no one was looking. "How's Misha? Tell him to stop looking at the guy. I can feel his nausea when he does."

Andrei coughed once to keep from laughing, then I saw him have a silent conversation with Misha. Misha caught my eye, grinning at me. Stephen was quiet, as was Viktor. Since we hadn't figured out a way to communicate with Stephen yet, he was mostly on his own, but he could still feel what I felt. I was certain he had felt both Misha's nausea, as well as Adrik's when it came to the one business associate we'd singled out. He was staying quiet, for now. Doing what he did best. Watching. Waiting.

The conversation shifted from business to more benign subjects. The three men were from different areas in western Europe. In an effort to keep the conversation going. I asked questions about where they were from, capitalizing on the dumb woman stereotype. They indulged me, happy to answer my questions.

"Are your demons getting itchy?" Ivan asked.

"The whole time we've been here," Adrik answered.

"He's focused on the three of us. He knows there's something different about us, but he doesn't know what yet. What can you see, Ivan?" I asked.

Instead of describing what he saw when he looked at the man, he pushed a snapshot to both me and Adrik. We could see the man, but we could also see the demon, just behind his face. Like a demonic shadow.

"That was impressive," Adrik said.

"Show off." I said, trying not to laugh.

"What are we going to do with him?" Ivan asked. It was a good question.

Battista had told us he simply wanted to know if there

was a reason to be wary of this man. We had plenty of reasons to be wary of him. I ended up asking Vitaliy, in Russian, if any of these men spoke Italian. He shook his head no, then looked at everyone like I had just reminded him of a funny story related to the topic they were all discussing. As he finished up his pretend story, I looked at Battista, asking him in Italian how far he wanted us to take this.

Without s*ipping a beat, he answered me quickly in Italian and then followed Vitaliy's lead, making up a reason for me to be speaking Italian to him. None of them were any the wiser.

"He said he wants him exposed; however we need to make that happen. He said the other two know enough that they won't freak out," I told Ivan and Adrik.

"We need to ditch the contacts, then," Ivan said.

"Agreed," Adrik responded.

I leaned over, whispering to Adrik, "would you gentlemen like to escort me to the restroom?" He stood up, extending his hand to me. He looked at Ivan, who stood up with us as well. He excused us, walking toward the back of the restaurant. I gave Andrei a quick update as we were leaving.

They surprised me by coming into the women's bathroom with me. I couldn't help but laugh at them. "This is some weird porn fantasy right here," I said, walking to the sink so I could take my contacts out. Ivan groaned when he took his out. "I understand why your eyes have been so itchy, princess. I do not want to wear these things any longer than I absolutely have to."

"You do get used to them," I said. "But I still don't like wearing them for extended periods."

We all looked at each other, our eyes turning black immediately. We couldn't keep from laughing at each other.

"I think we unlocked a new level. I've never noticed my demon get this itchy before when we've been around another demon. I don't know what that means," Adrik said. "It kind of worries me."

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I thought for a minute, trying to get a sense of what was going on. "I don't think we're the ones that should be worried about it. I think they're trying

to help us more as each new thing happens. It feels like mine is trying to tell me something.” I said.

“New level for sure,” Ivan said, grinning at me. “So, what’s the plan for this dude?”

King of the Underworld

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 450

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Sephie

"From what you've seen, he's pretty much consumed by the demon, right?" I asked Ivan.

"Yeah. When they're like the face behind the face, that's when they're running the show," Ivan said,

I looked at Adrik. He had the same thought I did. "There's only one solution, then," he said.

"Stephen," we all said at the same time.

"He's going to be so happy," I said, laughing as we left the bathroom.

When we got back to the table, the conversation was still flowing. Everyone noticed as we came back, but we didn't interrupt

anything. As we sat down, I told both Ivan and Adrik to either close their eyes or look down. I turned toward Stephen, who was

sitting beside me, and flashed him my demon eyes. He knew that meant his services were going to be needed shortly.

We'd discussed Stephen's gift before coming to the hotel. Before, we had personal experiences to use as fuel for him to break

the person. This person was a complete stranger, so we weren't sure how that would work. It was Misha that came up with the idea for how to make it work.

"Once the decision is made, I can look back through the person's life and pick out times when they've done evil things. You and

Andrei can look through their head and do the same. I can send everything I have to Andrei, he can send it to you, you give it to

Stephen. Boss can give him "f*ck you" juice like before while Ivan makes sure you're protected," Misha had said the night before as we were discussing it.

I gave the green light to both Misha and Andrei to start collecting information.

They'd both been working on being more subtle

with their gifts. It was harder to tell when they were using them now. The glazed-over look was much less noticeable.

As the three of us looked into this man's life, none of us were prepared for what we found. Adrik and Ivan both felt my extreme

nausea, which was compounded with both Misha and Andrei's nausea as they saw what I saw.

"What's happening, love? You feel terrible," Adrik asked.

"I'm going to need to wash my brain after this. This man is beyond disgusting." I told them. "You might not need to help Stephen. This one is going to hit very close to home for him. It's going to send him into a rage."

The man had a very long history of taking advantage of little boys in the worst way possible. We collected enough of his memories that Stephen would have plenty to use. I told Andrei and Misha to stop, mostly because I couldn't handle the nausea any longer.

"I need to warn Stephen," I said. "But we need to find a way to provoke him so everyone can see."

While they tried to come up with a strategy to provoke the man, I leaned over to Stephen. I was very careful not to touch him yet.

I whispered in his ear, in Russian, "Yoden, I need to warn you. This one is going to be difficult for you because of what he's done.

It hits very close to home for you. If you want to sit this one out, we can find another way."

Before I could stop him, he grabbed my hand. He managed to control himself as he took everything we'd gotten from that guy's life. It only took a few seconds. He looked at me, saying, "there's absolutely no way in Hell I would sit this one out."

Andrei caught my eye, after he'd watched Stephen take everything from me.

His face clearly showed concern for Stephen. He pushed his thoughts to me, telling me he'd figured out another piece to the puzzle. He suddenly realized that Viktor was here to help us as much as he was to help others. He could help us fix ourselves after we'd had to witness the evil this man had done over his lifetime. None of us wanted this hanging onto us any longer than absolutely necessary.

I told Andrei he was a f*cking genius.

"Stephen is ready, whenever we are. I'm not sure he's going to need help, but I think you should be ready, Just in case. I can feel him smoldering beside me right now. He's usually very cold, but he feels like you do normally right now," I told Adrik.

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"I can feel him through you. I know that feeling from him. He'll handle this one on his own," Adrik said.

Once again, I spoke to Battista in Italian, telling him we needed a way to provoke this man to anger so we could expose him. He

nodded, expertly shifting the conversation exactly in the direction we needed. Since Lorenzo had been killed, many of his human trafficking networks throughout Europe had been exposed. There were a few very high profile people that had been caught having connections to Lorenzo, meaning they were partaking in the particular services that Lorenzo was providing. Battista must've had his suspicions about this man before today, as I couldn't see him bringing this subject up otherwise.

The man started to get uncomfortable as we all discussed the matter. He started to sweat when Battista had asked if he'd known one of the people that was currently in police custody for being connected to Lorenzo. Nothing had been outright proven yet, but speculation as to this person's guilt was running rampant throughout Europe. The man before us decided that coming to the defense of an accused human trafficker and pedophile was his best option. It was exactly what we needed.

The conversation got heated on his end, but he wasn't angry per se. He was scared. Scared of the same fate. Scared of being exposed.

I felt my anger rise to the surface and I finally let it happen, not caring one bit that my eyes were now black. Adrik and Ivan's eyes were also now black. We watched him squirm in his seat once he saw it. Ivan shared what he could see with me and Adrik. The demon was clearly agitated. I glanced at Stephen, who finally spoke.

"I mean no disrespect, sir, but people are generally only accused of such heinous acts when they've actually participated in such heinous acts," he said. I'd never heard Stephen take that tone with anyone before. It was like he was mocking him. In the most menacing way possible. If I didn't know Stephen already, it would've sent chills down my spine.

Ivan was still sharing what he could see as Stephen revealed himself. We watched this man lose complete control. His demon was now angry and took over, switching his eyes to black as well. The man tried to get up, but Stephen stood up quickly.

Stephen was across the table from him, but it looked like Stephen had grabbed him and shoved him back into his seat, without Stephen touching him. He didn't move after that. His body was completely paralyzed, but Stephen had only barely begun break him. He could still talk; he could still see.

Stephen was slipping ahead to advanced levels of control already.

The demon started trying to talk his way out of it, making sick excuses, promising power, promising whatever we wanted.

Surprisingly, Stephen let him talk for a few minutes. He glanced at Battista and his associates. Battista didn't look quite as shocked as his other two associates. He'd definitely had his suspicions before today about this man.

Finally, Stephen had enough. I felt his anger level go through the roof as we watched the man's light behind his eyes go out. He finally stopped talking as Stephen gave everything back to him that he'd done to his victims. All the pain, all the trauma, all the suffering he'd caused was now given back to him all at once, effectively breaking his psyche.

Adrik's anger was definitely not needed in this instance. Stephen had plenty of his own this time. Once he was finished, his anger disappeared and he went back to feeling his normal, colder than any human should be self. He sat back down and took a sip of water like this was a normal f*cking Tuesday.

"Vlad is going to be so impressed with your portfolio, Yoden," I said quietly to him, in Russian.

He laughed quietly.

I looked at Battista and his associates, who were still somewhat shocked at what they'd just witnessed. "You all heard him tell you everything you needed to know about him in his own words. He was consumed by his demon. He has been for a very long time. He did very bad things to very innocent people and now he'll be made to suffer for that for the rest of his body's life."

"He's going to stay like that until he dies?" one of Battista's associates asked. I nodded my head, explaining what we'd done.

Battista turned to the man, saying, "this is why we're all so willing to help them get Ricardo De Luca. Do you understand now?

And more importantly, are you willing to help?"

It became clear in that moment why Battista had set this up today. It wasn't for his benefit, but for ours.

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