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Chapter 471

Sephie

I slid my arm through Viktor's as we walked around the pool. I stopped to inspect the rose bushes at the edge of the gardens as we passed, noticing the tiniest of little buds starting to appear. It was a sign of warmer days ahead, which made me quite happy to see.

"I'm going to be counting down the days to when I can stop wearing a coat outside now," I said as we continued toward the woods,

Viktor laughed quietly. "You would struggle to live in Russia during the winter," he said.

"You are not wrong there. I wouldn't have survived, I would've frozen to death. I know it. I was not cut out to be that hardy," I said.

He squeezed his arm around my hand. "I think you're more Russian than you give yourself credit for, Sephie. You've survived more than most people I know. You're harder than you think," he said, looking down at me. The look of pride on his face was unmistakable. I couldn't help but grin at him.

We walked in comfortable silence for a while, before my curiosity got the better of me. "How does Ilya like working for Vitaliy?"

A wide smile stretched across his face. "He's very happy. He gets along well with the other guys, even though they're much older than he is. Aleksei is catching up his training, which makes them both happy. Ilya is happy to learn more, Aleksei is happy to teach more. Vitaliy is happy to be rid of his little flowers."

“And once again, we saved the world,” I said, wistfully. “So how likely do you think it is that he’ll call the girl from the fundraiser last night?” I asked. I tried to sound innocent, but he knew this was likely going to make an appearance on the whiteboard.

“He’ll call. Ilya struggles to be single. I think it’s the baby in him. I’m not that way. Sasha is not that way. I think Ilya likes having someone to fuss over him,” he said.

“As long as he reciprocates,” I said. “Nobody likes a selfish dude.”

“Oh, he does. I think that was part of the problem with the last girl. The one that almost broke him. He kept giving, thinking it would fix everything. She kept taking,” he said.

“My offer still stands. I’ll happily kick her a ss,” I said,

“I don’t think you need to worry about her. You have enough to worry about without fighting Ilya’s battles for him, too. He got away from her. That’s what matters.”

I scoffed. “You’re so reasonable. It’s soooo boring.” I said as dramatically as possible, getting a belly laugh out of him.

“I think both Ilya and Sasha would agree with you on that one. I’ve always been the serious one,” he said. We came out of the woods and walked to my favorite spot by the lake.

“I can believe that. You’re the oldest and always have been. Makes sense that you’d naturally fall into the father figure role for everyone. You’re so good at it. You’ve had plenty of practice. Remind me to thank Ilya for being irresponsible when you were kids,” I said, grinning at him.

He laughed. “It probably has something to do with it. It doesn’t explain how you’re so good at taking care of all of us, though. You were an only child. Aren’t only children supposed to be spoiled and bratty?”

“I fail to see why you phrased that like a question, Papa Bear. Have you met me? Have you not seen how I refuse to use my own legs to walk as much as possible? Are you unsure of what spoiled and bratty really mean? It’s a translation problem, isn’t it?”

He reached out and pushed me over gently. “I know what it means. Maybe you are a little bratty, but I would not call you spoiled.

You’re so thoughtful is what I mean. Even when I was being an asshole, you were more concerned with how it affected the other guys than you were with how it affected you. Even though I know you’re struggling with it more than they are.”

I was quiet for a moment, trying to think of how I wanted to respond. I was surprised he actually admitted he was an asshole.

“You have more history

with them than you do me. I’m your boss’s girlfriend. They’re your brothers.

I’m also the reason things got so weird. Literally.

From the very beginning. It’s all because of me. If you need someone to be mad at, it should be me. They haven’t done anything wrong.”

He reached over and pulled my left hand out of my pocket. “You’re more than his girlfriend, Sephie,” he said. He held my hand up to look at the ring “And you’re more than that to the rest of us, too. This should be a constant reminder to you of that fact.”

I stayed quiet, looking at my ring, but still thinking about how I’d been the catalyst for their lives to change so completely.

“You’re still worried that me asking to have my demon taken away was a rejection of you in some way. It wasn’t. It’s not gone forever, either,” he said. He looked out at the lake, watching the reflection of the clouds in the water. He inhaled deeply, then continued. “I have always been the serious one. Always responsible. I’ve always made sure everyone is taken care of. It’s just

how I am. My mother used to worry about me when I was younger. She was worried I would eventually decide that I'd missed out on my childhood because I never was a normal kid. I never got into the normal troublesome situations that kids do when they're young. I took school seriously, I took the military seriously, I took my marriage seriously. This decision wasn't any different, with one exception." He looked over at me. I could see him struggling to keep it together long enough to finish his thought. "This time, I chose me. I don't want anymore responsibility. What I have already is plenty. I'm not ready to be able to take on thoughts and feelings of everyone else too. I just went about it in the most as shole way possible and for that, I'm very sorry."

I scooted over closer to him, not only because I was slightly cold sitting there, but so I could lean against him. "I know you've struggled with everything extra that's been happening for a while. It was always your choice as to what would happen. I respect that. Everyone else respects that, as well. The biggest issue is we know you're not comfortable around us. It's like a constant reminder for the rest of us that you chose a different path. I don't care that you did. You did what was right for you and I respect the choice you made. I just want you to feel comfortable around us again. I can barely contain my emotions on a good day, which means I can barely contain when my eyes change. Now you have to look at Ivan and Adrik too. I don't want to be the reason you're having PTSD flashbacks because I can't keep it together. I've already condemned the rest of them to always having to endure whatever it is I feel at any given time. I don't want you to feel uncomfortable around me, or any of us, as well."

"You haven't condemned anyone, Sephie. They love that they're so connected to you. Seriously. They talk about it all the time,"

he said, smiling Sweetly at me. “And honestly, what you did last night at the fundraiser for that girl made me realize what a complete asshole I’ve been this whole time. I was so focused on the demon that I forgot you’re still you. You’re so incredibly good that you even convinced a demon to help you be even better.” He paused, looking at me very seriously. “That’s exactly the reason why I’m not ready yet. I still focus on the bad too much. There was too much of a chance that my demon would’ve won.”

“You’re still incredibly reasonable, for the record. I think that’s a very mature decision to make. I can tell you that I don’t think it would’ve happened, but I also don’t live in your head. I support your decision. I always have. It will happen when you’re ready. Or maybe not at all. It’s always going to be your choice. In every lifetime,” I said.

“And as for the girl last night, I know what she’s going through. She just needs someone to believe her. You guys were that for me. Maybe Ilya can help her with that, too.”

He put his arm around my shoulders, pulling me closer and kissing the top of my head. “You do so much for everyone else without a second thought. I’m so sorry I doubted you.”

“You had your reasons. I just want you to feel comfortable again. For your sake, just as much as ours. Did Kostya fix you again?”

I asked.

“He did. What Stephen did helped tremendously. I was going to ask him to do it again, actually. As much as I didn’t want it to happen the first time, I do recognize how helpful it was. I don’t think it got everything the first time, though. You were right, too. I was choosing pain over all of you. I see that now,” he said, squeezing my shoulders.

“You’ve been carrying it around for so long that it’s become a part of you. It can be scary to let it go. We all knew you weren’t

really mad, for the record. You were scared. It's okay to be scared, but I want you to try and remember that you don't have to face it alone. We're all here for you and we all love you."

He didn't say anything, he just held me a little tighter, leaning his head on mine. I heard his breath catch a few times and I knew he was trying to hold back the tears. Even with as irritated with him as I'd been, I still wanted things to go back to normal between all of us. I could learn to deal with him not being as connected as the rest of the guys, as long as we could find ways to make him feel more comfortable around all of us. We needed each other.

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Sephle

Viktor and I talked for a little longer, but I eventually started to shiver so we decided to head back to the house. We'd been gone for a few hours anyway. He stood up, helping me do the same. He turned around and stood in front of me. "Get on, princess.

Can't have you walking back to the house on your own, now can we?"

I giggled as I readily hopped on his back. "This is called enabling. I might love you a little more for it, too," I said, hugging his neck a little tighter as he walked us back to the house.

I had to admit that I felt much better after our talk. He assured me that he was feeling more comfortable around everyone already. He promised me that he would ask Stephen to help him again while we were at the house, so he didn't have to worry about so much.

"You know there's a chance that it won't be just me, Adrik, and Ivan for much longer, right?" I said as we got closer to the house.

"I know. That's partly why I want to ask Stephen to help me now. Everything seems to be speeding up. It wouldn't surprise me if

Misha, Andrei and Stephen figured out how to do it soon, too. Some part of me is happy to see it. The more we find out about

Ricardo, the worse it seems. Same for Martin. There's still that part of me that's scared of it, though. I know I shouldn't be, but I'm still struggling to not focus on the demons."

J

"You realize this is the same thing that Ivan went through when he had to go to a hospital, right? He could never see you when

you were trying to help him just like you couldn't see us when we were trying to help you." Viktor stopped walking. I had to hold on a little tighter, even. I thought he was going to drop me as his hands fell to his sides. I couldn't help the laugh that escaped.

"That irritation that you used to feel with Ivan in that situation is the same way we've all felt lately."

He craned his neck around to try and look at me. "I never would've put that together. I owe him another apology, it seems."

"Eh, I think they all understand. You show your love by making sure people you care about are taken care of. Same as me. The fact that Ivan couldn't see you in that situation made you feel somewhat rejected. Same as me. The fact that you couldn't see past my demon made me feel rejected. The fact that you had yours removed made my demon feel rejected. I was doubly irritated," I said, laughing.

"That makes so much more sense. I was never really sure why you were so irritated with me. I just knew I was an asshole and that wasn't helping."

Viktor said.

"I would've told you sooner, but somebody has been avoiding me for quite some time." I said, tightening my grip around his neck.

He laughed, apologizing yet again as we walked toward the back door.

"Don't worry. I forgive you," I said. "As long as we're good again."

"We're good again, sestrichka. Promise," he said. The back room was empty when we walked in. He stopped to put me down.

"Good," I said. Ivan walked in on his way to the kitchen.

"Princess, your goddamn prince will be happy you're back. He's cranky when he has to be away from you for very long," he said, grinning at me.

"That was my fault, Viktor said, apologetically.

“It was no one’s fault. We’re very needy lately.” I said, unable to hide the fact that I missed him just as much as he did me. “Is he upstairs?” I asked.

“Yeah, he just got done in the gym. He decided to take it out on a punching bag instead of sitting around and waiting on you two to get back.” Ivan said.

My eyes went wide in surprise. “Cranky indeed,” I said, walking quickly toward the back stairs. “Viktor now knows how we’ve been feeling. I found a way to tell him so he’d understand. He’s likely going to apologize. Be nice,” I said to Ivan, laughing as I ran up the stairs.

I could hear the shower running as I walked into the bedroom. I quickly got undressed, hoping to make it into the bathroom before he turned the water off. He turned to the door just as I walked in, his wide smile across his face as his eyes landed on mine. I practically ran into the shower, jumping into his arms.

“I missed you,” he said, pressing his lips to mine.

“So I heard. You’re cranky?” I asked, leaning back far enough that I could see him, but not wanting any unnecessary space between us.

He chuckled. “You must’ve seen Ivan.”

I nodded. “He told me you were cranky from having to be away from me,” I said, somewhat concerned that he was unhappy with me for being gone too long.

“He’s not wrong. He might’ve overexaggerated. You needed time with Viktor. But I did miss you,” he said, leaning down to kiss me once more.

I looked at him, searching his eyes for a moment. A small grin spread across my face as I found the answer to my question. "It's not you that's cranky. Your demon is still mad at Viktor. It got worse when we stayed gone so long."

He chuckled. "That seems accurate. I started out fine, but as the hours passed and you still weren't back, Ivan finally forced me to go to the gym."

I stood on my toes, pressing my body to his as I kissed him again. This time, with more passion. He wrapped his arms tightly around me, answering my passion with more of his own. It was him that needed air this time, as he broke the kiss. I leaned my head against his chest, enjoying being in his arms and warm once more.

"How did it go?"

"I think it'll be fine. I found a way to explain everything so he'd understand. He opened up about why he made the decision he did. I told him it was never about the decision and that we supported him no matter what."

"How did you explain it?"

"I told him it was exactly like how he felt when Ivan couldn't see him anytime he was in the hospital before I came along. Viktor used to get so irritated that Ivan couldn't see him, but that's exactly what he was doing. He couldn't see any of us because of our demons. He said seeing what happened last night at the fundraiser with that girl in the kitchen helped him realize just how much of an asshole he'd been," I said. I looked up to see Adrik's expression as I explained everything to him. His sly smile turned up one side of his mouth.

"I wouldn't have thought of that, but you're absolutely right. The bigger question is how comfortable does he feel around us

now?”

“That’s getting better. He said he was going to ask Stephen to help him again. He recognizes how much it helped the first time. I asked him if Kostya had fixed him again and he said he was going to ask Stephen to help him again. He’s trying. That’s all we can ask of him,” I said.

“Maybe Stephen should help him while we’re still here. That way he doesn’t have anything extra to worry about and he can focus more on letting things go,” he said, his hands gently running up and down my back

“I said the same thing. I think he’ll ask him. I think he was going to apologize to Ivan when we got back, too. I know you guys want to make him suffer a little longer, but I told Ivan to be nice,” I said, grinning at him.

He laughed. “Ivan said that very thing when you guys left earlier. I can’t say I disagreed with him, either.”

“I know. I also know it’s more your demons feeling that way than you two. It’s understandable, but Viktor told me he didn’t feel like he was ready to be able to handle his demon. He said there was still too much of a chance that the demon would’ve won. He said he has a tendency to focus too much on the negative, so it worried him. Honestly, I can’t argue with his logic. He made the decision that he felt was right for him and I agree with him. He knows himself better than any of us do,” I sighed. “It was not an easy decision for him to make, but ultimately, I think he chose wisely for where he’s at in this lifetime.”

Adrik was quiet for a few minutes. “What happens to his demon though?”

“That, I don’t know. He made the comment that it wasn’t gone for good. I’m not sure what that means. I didn’t ask for specifics

about that. I didn't want to steer the conversation in that direction," I said quietly.

He kissed my forehead. "Yours is still sad about all this. I can feel your sadness, but it's not all yours. I can tell the difference now."

"How?"

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Adrik

“It feels different,” I said, trying to think of how to describe it. “There’s always warmth to everything I feel from you, which is why it was so easy to pick up on it when it was Viktor’s sadness. It’s like the warmth you feel when you think about how much you love me. That warmth comes with everything else. But when it’s your demon, it’s like a red hot fire feeling to it. It’s feisty. It’s like a f**k you element to whatever it is you’re feeling. It’s both intimidating and adorable at the same time,” I said, getting lost watching her eyes change from amber to green.

“From now on, whenever they accuse me of being extra spicy, I’m just going to tell them it’s my demon and I have no control over it,” she said, grinning at me.

God, I love her.

Stephen and Viktor were gone when we came back downstairs, but the Wonder Twins were in the back room with Ivan. They were trying to decide on what movie to watch. Sephie had asked me to make her some coffee before we came downstairs. She was still trying to get warm from being outside in the cold for so long. She ran to Andrei while she waited for me to make the coffee.

“Bubba, I don’t understand how you’re totally fine in just a t-shirt right now, but please share that with me,” she said, curling up next to him on the couch as he threw his massive arm around her to try and help warm her up. He did enjoy having something special with her; his wide smile stretched

across his face as she settled in next to him.

“Wanna experiment?” Ivan asked me.

What did you have in mind?”

“Seeing if we can make her warm again. She did say she’d never turn down a heat boost from us,” he said, laughing.

“Deal,” I said. I could feel Ivan’s anger rising, so I matched his and we both hit her with a wave of anger. I expected her to be

surprised by it, but she just giggled. It was Andrei and Misha that were surprised. Andrei, especially. He was immediately worried

I was mad she was sitting next to him.

She caught on to what was happening almost instantly, “Don’t worry, Bubba.

They’re trying to experiment to see if they can warm

me up again. You’re not in trouble,” she said, wrapping his arm around her shoulders tighter. He visibly relaxed.

“I love how extreme levels of anger just make you giggle now, gazelle. It’s enough to cripple anyone else, but you just think it tickles,” Misha said, laughing.

Sephie laughed, her smile brightening the room. “It wasn’t even that high.

They both held back,” she said. She looked at Ivan,

then me, saying, “it did work though. I feel much warmer now.” She was still smiling, her cheeks now rosy pink.

I made her coffee just the way she liked it and went to sit on one of the

couches. Sephie hugged Andrei’s arm saying, “I love you,

Bubba, but I gotta go now.” She hopped up and quickly moved beside me, curling up beside me. I had to admit to feeling

incredibly happy that she decided to move.

“How long have Viktor and Stephen been gone?” I asked, leaning over to kiss her temple as I pulled her even closer to me. I still

felt like I didn’t want to be any farther from her than absolutely necessary. She clearly felt the same as she got up and put herself

in my lap, leaning back against me. She wrapped my arms around her, crossing her legs in between mine. I could feel her

satisfaction once she'd arranged herself just the way she wanted.

"Only like ten minutes when you guys came back downstairs," Ivan said.

"Did he say anything to you, Squish?" Sephie asked quietly.

"He did. He said the way you explained everything made him finally understand it from our point of view. It's one of your best

traits, princess. You always know what to say," Ivan said, winking at Sephie.

I could tell she grinned at him when I saw his face soften. Andrei looked at Sephie, silently asking how she'd explained

everything to Viktor. I could see both him and Misha concentrating on what she was telling them, trying to be quiet in case they

came back out.

"You're so smart, gazelle. I never would've put that together," Misha said.

"Don't underestimate yourself, my adorable Russian guardian. I only thought of it because of something he said to me first.

You're very wise. Don't think I've forgotten that you nailed why our demons were quiet last night," she said. He grinned at her.

"Now, enough talking. Somebody decide on a movie already."

I laughed quietly, squeezing her a little lighter. I could feel how much lighter she was since her talk with Viktor. It was infectious,

Our talk in the shower helped my demon calm down as well. I was much less irritated about the whole situation, which was a

huge relief. I could feel the relief from the three guys as well at knowing that Viktor was finally coming around to feeling

comfortable with everyone once again.

The movie had barely started and Stephen and Viktor walked back in. It was obvious how much better Viktor looked this time

after Stephen helped him. Not just because he was a willing participant this time, either.

They both found places on the couches and settled in with everyone else to enjoy a few hours of being able to completely relax.

Halfway through the movie, Sephie moved to stretch out in between me and Ivan. Her head was in my lap, her feet in his. I knew she wasn't going to stay awake until the end of the movie. It took maybe ten minutes and she was sound asleep in between us.

He glanced at her after she'd fallen asleep, laughing at her. "Guess she's warm enough again," he said silently.

"I think your experiment worked. It's good info to have, given that she gets cold so easily," I responded. He nodded in agreement, focusing on the movie once more. ~

I tried to focus on the movie, but I found my mind wandering to everything else. I was anxious to talk to Dario again, worried that I'd missed something the first time. I was also starting to get impatient with the situation with the mayor and the police commissioner. It definitely helped to speak to the mayor, as well as the DA, last night, but I wanted that situation over with. As much for the people of the city as for me.

They deserved to have people in office that were working for them, not against them.

It might've been somewhat selfish of me, but I preferred the people of the city to be well taken care of. They left my organization alone that way. When the people were happy, when there was order in the city, everyone thrived. Business owners gave back to the community. People ignored more of the illegal side of things. That side would always be there, whether I was in charge or not. People would always turn to outside means to escape whatever it was they were avoiding facing. I just wanted to make sure it was regulated.

All the dealers in the city had standards, especially those that were working for Trino. His dealers helped bring the standards up for the rest of the city's dealers. It was a business, after all. The longer you kept your customers alive, the more money you could make off of them. The drugs that Trino would send were pure, meaning less side effects. His dealers would only sell in small amounts, to keep overdoses from becoming too common. Other dealers caught on to how much more money his dealers were making and changed their own rules.

Sometimes, the love of money could be used for the benefit of the people. I knew if Sal and Ricardo were to take over, those rules would go out the window. They didn't care about the people. One look at Sal's area of the city would tell you that. His area used to be booming. Now it was all but abandoned. The entire city would turn into that if I didn't stop them.

Sephie stirred slightly, breaking me free from my thoughts. She didn't open her eyes, but I heard her voice in my head. "You're all over the place. What are you thinking about?"

I smiled at her, feeling guilty that I had disturbed her sleep. "Nothing important. You somehow manage to always break me free from my thoughts, even when you're sleeping."

She found my hand, lacing her fingers through mine. She still hadn't opened her eyes. "You have a lot more on your mind than I do at any given point. I don't want you to be stressed."

I picked her hand up, kissing the back of it. "I love you, Sephie. More than I ever thought possible."

She finally opened her eyes, revealing their deepest depth of the ocean blue. She smiled sweetly at me. "I love you, Adrik."

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Chapter 474

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Adrik

I caught myself standing close to Sephie while she worked on making dinner, with Misha's help, just watching everyone relax and enjoy a few moments of peace. Before Sephie, I rarely came to the house. Now, I find myself wanting to come here more and more. It's become a sanctuary for us. A place where everyone could just relax and unplug from everything going on in the city.

Sephie caught me observing, with a small smile on my lips. Her smile stretched across her face, "We should make it a point to come here more often. Even just for a night. We all need it," she said silently. "I agree. You do have good ideas. Don't listen to what Iwan says about you," I said, trying not to laugh. She didn't fall for it. She knows Ivan just as well as I do. Maybe better, at this point.

I heard her laughing in her head. "7 might've believed that if you picked anyone but Squish. He's a very close second to you in how much he loves me." She glanced at him, sweetly smiling at the memory she was obviously thinking about. "We've come so far from me thinking he wanted to kill me in my sleep the first few days I knew you guys."

I laughed. "He never wanted to kill you, solnishko, "I told her, shaking my head.

"I disagree. I think he totally thought I was the next Vanessa for at least the first day and a half," she responded.

"Would you like to wager?"

“Don’t ask stupid questions,” she said, cutting her eyes at me while she washed a dish in the sink. She waited for a lull in the conversation between everyone else, then looked at Ivan. “Squish, we need you to settle a dispute.”

He chuckled. “What about?” he asked.

She put her hands on her hips, looking at him like this was a very serious matter. “Did you or did you not want to kill me in my sleep for at least the first day and a half that you knew me?”

They all laughed. Ivan thought about his answer for a few moments, then said, “okay, so how technical is this dispute? Because I wouldn’t have waited until you were sleeping if it came to that,” he said, grinning at her. His cheeks were slightly red as he was somewhat worried his answer was going to piss either her or me off.

She crossed her arms across her chest, looking at me triumphantly. “Told you!” she said, matter-of-factly.

“To be fair, it only lasted for that first day and a half. Once you stitched me up in your kitchen, my murderous urges subsided,” he said, grinning at her. “And not just because you’re handy to have around I walked toward her, unable to hide my smile. She really did know him better than I did at this point. It did not surprise me in the slightest. She was still proud of herself for winning our little wager as I pulled her to me. “We can discuss what I won later,” she said, wrapping her arms around my waist and resting her head against my chest.

“I like where this is going,” I told her.

“What brought this up?” Ivan asked.

Sophie giggled against my chest. “He was being cheeky. He told me I had good ideas and that I shouldn’t listen to what you say about me,” she said. “I told him I might’ve believed him if he’d picked anyone but you. Then I thought back to how far we’ve

come,” she said, wistfully as she looked at him longingly.

He grinned at her. “I definitely did not make it easy on you, but I’m very glad you’re as stubborn as you are.”

“I don’t know, Squish. I saw how you acted around Tori and Vanessa both. I think you actually did make it easy on me,” Sephie said, turning around so she could see him, but still leaning back against me. She took both of my arms and pulled them across her stomach as she talked to Ivan.

“She’s not wrong there,” Misha said. “There was literally only one time you tried to intimidate her and even that was half-assed compared to what you normally do.”

“When was this?” I asked.

“The first night we watched her. She had fallen asleep on the couch, so she didn’t know that me and Ivan switched places with Viktor and Andrei. She was expecting them when she woke up, so she made a sarcastic comment before she saw us. She was scared of both of us initially, but then more sarcasm came out of her mouth. Ivan tried to intimidate her because she made a joke about Viktor being on meth. She was scared, but the sarcasm didn’t stop. I saw him trying to hide his smile when he left the apartment,” Misha said, laughing at Ivan.

“See? You totally took it easy on me. Clearly, my soul wasn’t the only one that recognized this relationship,” she said.

“Maybe a little.” Ivan said.

Sephie pulled my arms around her tighter. “Not as quick as this one, but you were a fairly close second,” she said. I could hear the smile in her voice, as well as feel her joy at this conversation.

We ended up talking and laughing through dinner, then for a few hours after dinner. It was nice to talk about other things. We

made bets on whether Ilya would call Jessica and how that potential relationship would work out. We also made bets on whether Vitaliy would try to recruit Viktor's other brother at some point, given that he was so happy with Ilya.

"How is Trino coming with finding a new security team?" Sephie asked.

Viktor chuckled. "He wanted to do it himself, so it's going quite slowly. He's trying to recruit from his dealers, but none of them have adequate training. That's not going to end well."

"Is he seeing the error of his ways yet?" she asked.

"Maybe. Chen said he had heard that Trino was thinking about coming back to me for help since he was struggling. He's kept Gus and Oscar with him the whole time he's been in the city. Everything's been quiet enough that I haven't worried too much, but now with the possibility of Niko and Vito coming back, he needs a security team. A real security team," Viktor said.

"What about Chris and Keith?" she asked, looking between Viktor and Ivan.

"I talked to both of them about it already. They're interested. They both speak enough Spanish that they could get by to begin with. But then Trino told me he wanted to find his own people, so that was the end of that," Viktor said, still amused by the situation.

Sephie frowned, trying to think of a solution. Misha had been working on being more subtle when he tried to find outcomes, so no one noticed him searching for the solution. "It's okay, gazelle. He's going to come back to Viktor, like Chen said. He'll take Chris and Keith, too. Chris is going to move his mom to Colombia, even. Once everything is settled, of course. That movie got fast-forwarded quite a bit, apparently," he said.

"Well, at least we know things will eventually settle," she said, smiling at him.

“There is the larger question of how much we tell him about everything going on,” Ivan said.

I groaned quietly. “I’ve been thinking about this as well. As much as I don’t really want to tell him everything, I think we need to tell him everything. His new guys too. We need to vet them before he hires them. Chris and Keith included. They don’t know even a fraction of what’s been happening.”

Sephie looked to Misha, silently asking him to confirm what I’d just said.

Misha nodded, rubbing his arms after he’d checked. He grinned when he looked at her, then pointed to me. She turned to look at me, her purple eyes telling me everything I needed to know.

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 475

King of the Linderworld

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Adrik

Once we finally made it upstairs, I was exhausted. I didn't even need to tell Sephie I was exhausted. She felt it. She didn't waste the opportunity to tease me about it, though.

"You definitely got new level zapped. Fighting it never ends well, either. I know this from experience," she said, her sweet smile across her face. She walked back to me, unbuttoning my shirt for me. "Is this from being able to feel all of them the same way you do? That doesn't seem like it should've zapped me," I said as I watched her undressing

She chewed on her lip, her mind trying to come up with solutions, "I don't know. Maybe there's more and we just don't know it yet?"

I put my hands on either side of her face, gently pulling her to me. I kissed her softly, wanting so much more, but I had zero energy. She smiled against my lips as she pushed my jeans off my hips. She pulled back, pointing to the bed. "Go to bed," she said sternly.

I gladly climbed into bed, waiting for her to turn off the lights. She climbed in next to me, after stealing my shirt to wear. She laid across my chest in her favorite spot. I might've lasted 30 seconds before I was out completely.

I found myself completely awake in my own darkness. Haven't been here in years. I rarely remembered my dreams, if I even had them. I assumed I had them, but because I never remembered them, I couldn't be totally sure. I looked around, trying to see if I

could see anything, other than my own body. I could still feel Sephie, just as strongly as I always did. I knew she was still happily sleeping on my chest.

Gradually, the darkness gave way to a path ahead of me that led to a small house. I'd never seen the house before, but I decided to explore anyway. When I opened the front door, I could hear someone playing the piano. I recognized the song as one of Sephie's songs she regularly played.

I walked further into the house, trying to be quiet so as not to disturb whoever it was playing the piano. After a short hallway, there was a large room where I saw a man playing the piano. I looked around the room, trying to find clues as to who he was or why he'd be in my dreams. I also wanted to know why he'd be playing one of Sephie's songs. I was so busy looking around, I didn't notice when the song ended.

"I can play her song because I'm the one that gave her the melody," he said, as he stood up from the piano. He turned to face me, a pleasant expression on his face. There was something familiar about him, but I didn't feel like I'd ever seen him before. He watched me, watching him for a few moments. Finally, a smile stretched across his face. That's when I knew,

"You're Sephie's father," I said. He nodded. "She has your smile."

"That might be all she has from me, but I find it's one of my favorite things about her," he said.

"Mine too."

He chuckled. "We had extra angels on standby when you two first met because your heart threatened to stop every time you saw her smile. Did she ever tell you?"

I laughed. "No, not about the extra angels. She did tell me she knew my heart threatened to stop each time."

“She found out that little detail early on in your journey. She was still worried you would think she was bonkers if she revealed too much. I don’t know why she would think that about you. You’ve handled everything like a champ. Better than anyone expected.

Seriously. You cost quite a few of us a substantial bit of money in the beginning when you didn’t freak out about things we were sure you were going to freak out about,” he said.

I couldn’t help but laugh again. “Clearly her smile is not all she has from you.” He grinned. “I can’t really take credit for her love of the wager. She discovered it well after I was gone. But it does seem to run in the family.” He paused for a moment, contemplating how to proceed. I knew if he’d brought me here, there was something important he needed to say.

I decided to go first. “I have to thank you for all the times you’ve helped us. You’ve proven to be a very valuable resource for us through all of this and I’m very happy that Sephie has you.”

“You’re not the only one that’s grateful. It’s because of you that she has the right people around her now. I owe you thanks for that, too. Between you and Ivan, I really have nothing to worry about. I mean, I still do. Fathers gotta lather, you know. But you two will always make sure she’s protected and safe. The others too, but you and Ivan have very special roles in her life,” he said.

“Is there something new happening to me? Is that why I’m so tired right now?” I asked.

He inhaled deeply. “You’ve felt your connection get stronger with everyone lately, but especially with Sephie?” I nodded. “And you’ve also felt your demon getting restless, so to speak? Especially when Sephie was gone with Viktor earlier?” I nodded again.

“Your demon is growing stronger, which means you’re growing stronger. You’ve demonstrated you have complete control of it.”

He paused again, looking at me like he was somewhat nervous to tell me the rest.

“Why does that make you nervous?”

“Much like Viktor, I want no part of H ell. My wings are whit e as snow for a reason. It’s an unavoidable side effect of getting news delivered this way. Not to worry, I can manage,” he said, giving me a weak smile. “Adrik, when Stephen joked about his gift leveling up, he was really telling you what you’d be able to do.”

“Ripping the demon out and crushing it?” I asked, completely surprised.

“Well, not crushing it. But because your particular demon is as powerful as it is and because you are who you are, you now have the ability to condemn souls, both human and demon straight to H ell. You can take both from a body and send them to H ell.”

“What happens to the soul then?”

“It spends eternity in H ell. You’re the only one that can grant it reprieve once you condemn them.”

“That doesn’t sound like something I’m going to use very often,” I said.

He smiled at me, his shoulders visibly relaxing. “This is exactly why you were granted the power.”

“What do you mean?”

“Your new gift is not something to be taken lightly and it’s only meant to be used in very extreme cases. Namely, Ricardo and Martin. Those two have made such powerful deals with their demons that Stephen’s gift would be completely ineffective on them.

He could break them, but the soul is eternally bound to that demon. Even after coming back, it’s going to be forced to live out the same life over and over. You’re what can break that cycle. Send the demon back to H ell, along with their souls and those souls

never get the chance to come back.”

“There’s no chance at redemption for them?” I asked, suddenly not sure I wanted the responsibility of condemning someone’s soul to an eternity of suffering.

“It’s a heavy decision, Adrik. You’re right to be wary of it. You have to remember that both souls made their own choices. They knew the consequences. They might not have known the full extent of those consequences, but they knew there would be consequences nonetheless. You are what will keep future generations safe from those two demons. Think of it that way. It’s easier to digest.”

I was quiet for a few moments, thinking about what he’d just told me. “How will this affect Sephie?”

“Yes!” he said quietly. He quickly looked back at me, trying to look serious once again. “Sorry. I knew you would ask that,” he said, grinning at me. “Because you and she are so connected, your strength will also become her strength. However, you’re the only one that can condemn souls and deliver them to Hell. But she’s going to see an increase in her power just as you will. Her demon will also grow stronger. Ivan will get a boost from her, but not as much as what she’ll get from you. The other three will become connected to their demons quickly, once you realize your full power. They’ve already drawn considerable power from both you and Sephie. You’re what unlocked Stephen’s extra gifts. That’s when it became apparent you could handle this responsibility. Nobody expected you to go full nuclear and then just turn it off like a switch that quickly. Especially not when it came to Armando.”

“I have Sephie to thank for that. She showed me how to control it,” I said.

His smile lit up his face, much in the same way that Sephie’s would light up a room. It was evident that he was proud of her.

“What about Viktor? How is he going to handle all of us being so connected to our demons?”

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Chapter 476

King of the Underworld

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Adrik

“Yes! I’m on fire!” he said quietly again, making me laugh. I was happy to make him some money, or whatever they were betting with, while we talked. “Viktor will come around. You’ll see. Kostya talks to him nightly. This last time that Stephen helped him worked much better than the first time. He’s going to need it one more time, but then he should be good. Sephie helped him understand how his actions have come across to everyone else. He feels much better about everything, which means he’ll be much more comfortable around everyone very soon.”

“What happened to his demon?” I asked, curious, He sighed. “He doesn’t know this, so let’s keep this between us, shall we?” I nodded in agreement. “When he asked for it to be taken away, the only choices that Kostya had were to send it back to H ell, where it may or may not ever get the chance to escape again. Or it could go to a sort of purgatory, if you will. Purgatory in the traditional, religious sense, isn’t a real place, but there is a sort of in between Earth and H ell. Kostya sent Viktor’s demon there. If Viktor ever reaches the point that he’s ready to join the rest of you, then it’ll be your jobs to fetch his demon from that purgatory.”

“It has to be that demon? Are demons like assigned to people?”

“Yes and no. For Viktor, it has to be that demon. You guys aren’t dealing with just any demons. There’s a hierarchy of demons.

Every single one of you has a very old, very powerful demon with you. It had to be so. You’ve had the same demon over many

lifetimes. This is the one that finally saw you each taming the demon. There have been other lifetimes where that was not necessarily the case for all of you. It had to be all of you.”

“If it had to be all of us, then how is it still working without Viktor’s demon?”

“Kostya. He’s a new addition to this lifetime. He’s so grateful to Viktor for helping him to clear his Karma that he’s filling the gap left by the absence of Viktor’s demon.”

I suddenly felt worried about Viktor’s demon. “Is it safe wherever it is? Can it be harmed?”

“Because it’s so powerful, it can take care of itself. It’s not a cake walk where it is, but Kostya keeps an eye on it. Viktor is fearful that he could tame the demon, which is why he asked for it to be taken away. Kostya is trying to help him have the confidence to be able to handle it, but it might not happen in this lifetime. His demon isn’t in so much danger that it can’t last a while. We help out when we can, but it’s really quite scrappy. It’s doing fine. So far.”

I still couldn’t help but worry about it, which sounded very strange to say. He chuckled at me. “Again, this is why you’ve been granted this power, Adrik. All this time, you’ve been worried that Sephie would love you less because of your demon. You’ve completely missed the part where your light is so strong that even your demon prefers to leave the shadows now. You’re worried for the safety of a demon just to be clear what we’re talking about here.” He looked at me thoughtfully for a moment, then asked, “you’re all feeling the same way about your demons that you feel about each other now, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, I am. I know Sephie is for sure, too. I’m almost positive Ivan is as well. I can feel the difference between Sephie’s demon and her now. Her demon got mad at me the other day too. It was like she was doubly mad at me.”

He laughed. “I don’t envy you in that situation. Even as a child, she had an impressive temper. We rarely saw it, but she moved the Heavens when it appeared.”

“That sounds right,” I said, smiling at the thought of tiny Sephie throwing a tantrum.

“The three of you are a shining example of the subtleties of good and evil. You can use good for evil and you can use evil for good. At the end of the day, it’s about the choices you make and what you choose to give your energy to. You’ve all seen unspeakable horrors in your short lives, but the darker your shadow, the brighter your light. You can’t have one without the other.

You three, and eventually six, are the balance between good and evil.” He took a step closer to me, placing his hand on my shoulder. “In order for this to work, I’m going to have to zap you, so to speak. You’re going to worry Sephie because you’re not going to wake up for a few more hours. She’s already been trying to wake you for half an hour or so. She can feel that you’re happy, so she’s not freaking out. But she will when this happens because she’s going to see it. I can get word to Kostya and Viktor will tell her that everything will be fine.”

I looked at him, somewhat worried. He laughed. “Don’t worry. It won’t hurt,” he said. As soon as he got the words out, all I could see was blinding light around me. I could still feel his hand on my shoulder, but I couldn’t see him. I couldn’t see the room we were in. I couldn’t see the piano.

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 477

King of the Underworld

477

Sephie

I woke up before Adrik the next morning. We had planned on getting up and working out this morning, so I was somewhat surprised that he didn't wake up when I started to stir. Even the few times he'd wanted to stay in bed longer, he was always awake for at least a few minutes once he felt me stir. Guess he really did get new level zapped.

I decided to let him sleep a little longer, thinking he definitely needed it. I laid my head back on his chest, lazily tracing random patterns across his chest and stomach. I could feel him like normal; he felt quite happy. There was a moment or two of worry, but it was short-lived.

I started to worry when I felt his emotions start to increase. I suddenly felt massive waves of every emotion hit me, one right after the other. I sat up to look at him. When I did, he looked like Viktor was touching him. He was completely lit up. I could clearly see his aura, like I was looking through Andrei's eyes. It was plain as day. It was so bright, it illuminated the entire room, forcing me to shield my eyes from the brightness.

I reached out and timidly put my hand on him, trying to wake him. I wasn't sure what was happening, but something was definitely happening. He started to return to normal, the light around him fading gradually. He still wasn't responding to me trying to wake him up. Not even in the slightest. I tried talking out loud to him. I tried talking telepathically to him. I tried to look inside his head, but I could see nothing. I could still feel him. He still

felt happy, at least.

“Princess? Everything okay?” I heard Ivan ask. He must’ve felt everything that just happened through me.

“I don’t know. Can you come up here?”

“Be right there,” he responded.

He walked into the room not a minute later, a worried look on his face. “I can’t get him to wake up. Did you feel what just happened?” I asked.

“Yeah, it felt like you were all over the place. It’s why I checked on you.”

“That wasn’t me. That was him.”

“That’s never happened before,” he said.

“He also lit up like Viktor and Kostya were fixing him. Only brighter. It lit up the entire room. Now I can’t get him to respond at all. I can’t see anything when I look in his head either. It’s just black.”

“Can you feel him?”

“Yeah. He still feels happy, at least. He feels like he does when he’s sleeping,” I said.

Ivan thought for a few minutes. “I bet something happened. Like his mom came to him or Kostya or maybe even your dad. He might still be talking to them, which is why we can’t wake him up. The few times you can’t be woken up, when you’re not hurt, it’s been because you were talking to one of them.”

I was still worried, but his explanation made sense. It was just very unlike Adrik to not be able to wake up at all. “Maybe. What if it’s not, though? What if something is really wrong? I’d be able to tell, right?” He laughed. “You’d be able to tell if something was really wrong, princess. You’d be the first to know.”

We both heard a soft knock on the bedroom door. “You can come in, Bubba,” I said.

Andrei peeked around the door, still unsure he should come all the way in the room. I smiled at him. "It's okay, Bubba. Really.

You can come in," I said.

"Viktor told me to tell you that Boss is fine. Kostya said he needs a few more hours of sleep and that he'll explain when he wakes up," Andrei said.

"Is Kostya the one that's been talking to him?" Ivan asked.

"I don't know. He didn't say anything else other than Boss was fine and you shouldn't worry," he said, looking at me.

"Easier said than done," I said, chewing on my lip. "Now I understand why it freaks all of you out so much when this happens to me. I don't like it."

"At least he's asleep and not sitting up at the end of the bed with his eyes wide open and going apeshit," Ivan said, grinning at me.

"That's fair. That's totally fair. This is much easier to deal with. I will concede that, 100%," I said.

"Have you tried looking in his head? Is he dreaming?" Andrei asked.

"I tried. All I can see is black," I said.

"But can you feel him? Is that why you freaked out earlier?" he asked.

"That wasn't me. That was him. I can still feel him like normal. I just can't see anything right now. He feels happy, at least. He's just never not responded before," I said.

"That was him?" Andrei asked, surprised.

"Yeah. He lit up like Viktor and Kostya were fixing him, too. But brighter. I'm surprised you guys didn't see it from downstairs. It was so bright."

"Maybe it is Kostya that's talking to him, then?" Andrei said, trying to come up with plausible explanations.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Apparently, he'll explain when he wakes up. I should tell Misha that our run likely isn't going to happen now. I don't want to leave him," I said, putting my hand on Adrik's stomach. "Maybe he'll torture Stephen anyway. You've successfully passed the torch of torture onto him now," Ivan said.

I laughed. "I'm going to have to apologize to Stephen for that one. Maybe... Nah. I'm not really that sorry."

They both left shortly after, telling me to call them if I needed anything and they would be downstairs if something were to happen. Ivan offered to bring me breakfast, but I told him I was likely going to go back to sleep. I suddenly felt very tired. I was pretty sure it was from Adrik. Whatever had happened to him was zapping him and I could feel it too.

When I woke for the second time, I felt Adrik's fingers lightly running through my hair and over my back. I snuggled into him more, mostly out of habit, before remembering what had happened that morning. I sat up, looking at him to see if he really was awake. His handsome smile stretched across his face, making me forget everything but him.

"I'm sorry I worried you, solnishko. I needed some extra sleep," he said, placing his hand against my cheek.

"What happened? You were glowing at one point, so don't even try to tell me that nothing happened." I said, holding his hand against my face to keep it there.

He chuckled. "I saw your father," he said. "I did get new level zapped. I literally got zapped this time. I assume that's when you saw the glowing."

"Um, was it a good zap? Are you in trouble zap? Why am I nervous that you were talking to my dad without me there?"

He pulled me on top of him, sitting up more so he could see me better. “Not in trouble. Your dad is a very nice man. You have his smile,” he said, his finger running lightly over my cheek and down my neck. “He is kind of great. What did he tell you?” “It seems that Stephen called my new level instead of his,” he said, smirking at me.

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Chapter 478

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Sephie

“You can crush souls now?” I asked, barely above a whisper. I know my eyes were as wide as they could possibly go.

He laughed. “Not crush them literally, no. But I can condemn them to H ell now.”

“I’m sorry, what?”

“Don’t worry, it was difficult for me to comprehend as well. Your dad told me that my demon is getting more powerful, which means so am I. When I helped Stephen break Armando and I went full nuclear but was able to just switch it off, apparently that proved that I could handle more. I’m still in complete control of my demon. There are going to be times when even Stephen will be ineffectual, like with Ricardo and Martin. Their deals really are eternal, apparently. Even if Stephen breaks them, those souls still belong to those two demons. They would come back and still make the same mistakes each time because they’re always going to be tied to their demons. The opposite of us, I guess. Instead of that happening, I break the cycle by sending them all back to H ell.”

“What happens then? They stay there forever?” I asked. I could feel the goosebumps coming up over my entire body. I saw the look on Adrik’s face that meant my eyes had changed. I was guessing purple, but I was too curious about what he was telling me to ask.

“Your dad said I’m the only one that can grant them reprieve once I’ve condemned them to H ell. I’m still not sure what that

means,” up to twirl one of my curls around his fingers.

he said, reaching

“It means you really are the King of the Underworld,” I said, watching his reaction. I knew I had goosebumps, but I could actually feel his spreading over his body when I said it. He was completely focused on my eyes, though.

“Sephie, say that again,” he said as he watched my eyes.

I repeated the phrase, then asked, “why? What are they doing?”

“They were purple as I was telling you everything, but when you said I really was the King of the Underworld, they started to change to a new color. It didn’t last very long, but I swear it was red,” he said. I giggled. “Shu t up.”

“No, it’s true. It happened when you said it the second time, too.”

“Stephen is going to be so happy,” I said, hiding my face in his shoulder. I was just happy he was awake and responsive again. I sighed. “I understand why it fre aks you out so much when you can’t wake me up now.”

He chuckled. “Yeah, it’s not ideal. I understand why it needs to happen, but I never like it when it happens. How much did you get rapped when I got zapped?”

“I don’t know. I called Ivan up here when it first happened. The glowing part kind of fr eaked me out. I could also feel your emotions, one by one, incredibly strongly. They all did too, Ivan thought it was me, so he checked on me and that’s when I asked him to come up here because I still couldn’t get you to respond. I tried looking in your head, but all I saw was black. It worried me.”

He wrapped his arms around me, holding me tightly. “I’m sorry I worried you. Your dad said you’d be able to see whatever it was

he did to me.”

“It was like Viktor was touching you. But a thousand times brighter. It lit up the entire room. That was after your emotions went crazy. Ivan said you likely were talking to someone. We thought your mom or Kostya. Then Bubba came upstairs and said Kostya had told Viktor you were fine. They offered to bring me breakfast, but I was suddenly really tired, so I just went back to sleep with you.”

His hands were roaming lightly over my body as we talked. “I’m glad you got extra sleep. You’re going to get benefit from this too. Your dad said because we’re so connected, your demon is going to grow stronger with mine. Ivan will get a boost through you, but you’ll get the most. The other three are also going to become connected to their demons very quickly,” he said. He felt me stiffen as I worried about Viktor. “Don’t worry, I asked about Viktor. He’ll be able to handle it. He needs Stephen to help him one more time and then he’ll be good.”

I let out the breath I was holding, making him laugh softly. I was quiet, thinking about everything he’d just told me. “I think we should stay one more night, then. Dario can wait until tomorrow, I think. We can ask Misha to be sure, but I think staying here another night is best,” I said.

“I will not argue with you on that one. I wouldn’t mind another night here either. If we go back, I’m going to feel the need to go to my office and I don’t want to just yet. I do, however, want to send someone for Vinny’s. I’m starving,” he said as he flipped me onto my back. I could hear his stomach grumbling as he did it.

“It’s like you love me or something.” I said, laughing.

He was smiling at me, but he stopped to think about something and his face turned serious for a moment. “I do love you. I

always have. But as it turns out, my demon loves you as well,” he said, unable to stop the sly grin that was appearing on his face.

“Shut up.”

“No, he does. He very much does. I’ve never felt anything so clearly from him before.”

I laughed. “As it turns out, I love him too.” I could feel the happiness exuding from him when I said that, which made me laugh louder, “I just made him extra happy, didn’t I?”

“Yeah, like 12 year old boy who just saw a boob for the first time happy,” he said as he sat up to pull me up. I pulled my shirt up, flashing him my boobs, just for fun.

“So much happiness he’s not going to be able to take it!” I said, laughing. He stood up, pulling me off the bed with him. His handsome smile was stretched across his face as we laughed together. “I love hearing your laugh. He does too. You’re much lighter lately. It’s infectious.

“I could say the same for you, you know. I think as everything gets even weirder, you, me, and Ivan have become anchors for the other three. There’s a quiet calm to you now, where before you always felt like your anger was always present just under the surface, threatening to burn anything in your way. That’s still there, but it’s quieter and more in control. It’s scarier, if I’m being honest,” I said.

He stopped walking to the closet and turned back toward me, surprise on his face. “It scares you?” he asked. The surprise on his face was quickly replaced with concern.

I put my hand on his cheek, loving his constant concern for me. “No, love. I don’t think it’s possible for you to scare me. I meant it’s scarier for anyone else outside of our little weird family. You make people nervous on a good day, but it’s to a new level now.

Even Neal has noticed it. He's tried to hide it, but he has to constantly remind himself that he hasn't done anything to incur your wrath every time he talks to you now."

He was thoughtful for a minute. "I don't even feel bad about that."

I laughed loudly. "You shouldn't. You don't need to change a thing, either.

People aren't necessarily scared of you; they're scared

you can see something in them that they don't want you to see. Even without knowing what's happening, you've learned to shine

your light on their darkest places. People don't like that."

"I learned it from watching you," he said, leaning down and pressing his lips to mine. I reached up and pulled him closer to me.

How is it possible to love this man so much?

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 479

King of the Underworld

479

Adrik

I caught Sephie observing me as we got dressed to go downstairs. I could tell she was noticing new things, but she wasn't sharing yet. Or she was talking to one of the guys and keeping me out of the conversation. It could go either way.

"Are you talking to someone else?" I asked before we left the bedroom.

She giggled. "No. You were right. I'm watching you. You feel different."

"Different how?" I stopped her from leaving so I could hear her answer first before we shared everything with the guys.

She inhaled, thinking of how to word it. "Before, you were always hot. Like me. Even more so than me, I think. It's one of my favorite things about you, if I'm being honest. Now, you feel hot and cold..."

"At the same time?" I finished for her. She grinned at me.

"You can feel it too?"

"I did when your dad zapped me. Normally, my anger is always present. It's always hot, to varying degrees, like you said. But when your dad zapped me, everything got turned up. My fire was a raging inferno, but it felt cold at the same time. But the kind of cold that will burn you," I said.

She chewed on her bottom lip, her eyebrows scrunched as she thought about what she was feeling and what I'd just said. She looked up at me, eyes changing to purple as I watched. "You're the balance between good and evil now."

"Did you look in my head for that answer?" I asked.

She looked confused. "No. It just popped in my head. Were you thinking it just now?"

her

“No, but that’s what your dad said to me. You, me, and Ivan. Eventually the Wonder Twins and Stephen, too. We’re all the balance between good and evil.”

“Side note, we need to come up with a new nickname for the three of them. It feels awkward to always say ‘and Stephen,” she said, grinning at me.

I pulled her to me forcefully, making her squeal. “I just love you,” I said, laughing along with her as I gave her a quick kiss. I went to open the bedroom door and she used the opportunity to jump on my back to hitch a ride downstairs. Honestly, I couldn’t think of anything I would’ve loved more in that moment.

Ivan was the first one we saw when we came downstairs. He was in the kitchen, looking for something for lunch. “Have somebody get Vinny’s for everyone, if you guys haven’t eaten,” I said. “I’m starving.”

“On it,” Ivan said, pulling out his phone. He typed a quick message, then put his phone back in his pocket. “It’ll be her shortly,” he said. “Do I have to wait until the food arrives to hear what happened to you?” Sephie giggled and hugged me tighter. “I think you should make him wait,” she said.

“Why do you hate me now, princess?” he said, clutching his heart.

“You didn’t let me finish! I think he should make you wait until the rest of the guys are here,” she said, innocently. He looked at her skeptically, knowing full well that is not what she meant when she first said it, which made her laugh again. “You love me, Squish. Don’t even try to lie.”

I deposited her on the counter, grabbing a glass from one of the cabinets. I filled it with water, drank half, then handed the rest to her. She finished it, handing me the empty glass along with her sweet smile. Ivan was watching our exchange with a devious grin on his face. "You two are extra di sgusting right now. And by di sgusting, I mean f**king adorable."

Sephie looked at me, trying to be serious. "Squish feels left out!" she announced. She opened her arms toward him, but did not make a move to leave her spot on the counter. "Come here, Squish. Bring it in. Come on. You know you want to," she said, trying so hard to not laugh, but failing miserably at it. Her laughter is what brought the rest of the guys to the kitchen.

Ivan heard them coming and walked to Sephie quickly, wrapping his substantial arms around her. "Gotta get in here before everyone else shows up." he said, laughing along with her.

"You're my favorite," she said in a very loud whisper as everyone else walked in the kitchen. She knew she would cause objections from everyone else. She might've enjoyed that part.

"Why is it that Boss is the one that got zapped and likely has a new level unlocked, but you look like it was you?" Misha asked, looking at Sephie clowning with Ivan when they walked in.

"It's new level by osmosis. It's this new thing we're trying out. I don't know how it's going to work with the red pandas though.

Pancakes and water don't mix," she said.

"I thought you said you ha ted school and never paid attention?" Stephen asked in his usual thoughtful way. "You have impressive range."

She laughed. "I said I ha ted school and never paid attention. I didn't say I wasn't still a straight A student.

"Touché," Misha said as he walked to the fridge to look for something to eat.

“Don’t bother, my adorable Russian guardian. Vinny’s is on the way,” she told him,

“I love you so much right now,” Misha said.

“Don’t love me. Love him. It was his idea,” she said, pointing to me.

Misha turned to look at me, then very seriously said, “I love you so much right now.”

“Awww. See Ivan? We’re not the only ones that are disgusting right now. It’s spreading,” she said.

“Gross,” Ivan said, smiling at her. “Now that everyone is here, I want to know what happened.”

“You’re very impatient,” she said, still enjoying teasing him. She looked at him for a minute, much the same way she was looking at me earlier before we came downstairs. She grinned at him. “It’s not you that’s impatient right now. Your demon is all itchy.”

He looked at her, clearly surprised. “Is that what this is?” He looked at me, saying, “now I understand why you needed to go to the gym yesterday.”

I looked at Ivan, noticing what Sephie was seeing. “Yeah, she’s right. I think your demon might already know what happened. It’s excited.”

“You can see it now too?” Andrei asked.

“Not in the way you might think. I can tell the difference between Sephie and her demon. It’s becoming clearer for Ivan now too.

It’s very clear with mine. He apparently has his own thoughts and feelings,” I said, unable to hide my smile as I looked at Sephie.

She giggled as I walked to her, standing in between her legs while still facing everyone else. She slid her arms and legs around me, resting her chin on my shoulder.

“Have you had a conversation with it yet?” Misha asked, curious,

“No. I don’t know if that will happen or not, but I can feel what he feels now, I don’t know if it’s the same for him or not,” I said.

“Is this the new level?” Stephen asked.

I could feel Sephie shaking her head no. “Nope. You are especially going to love the new level, Yoden. But don’t be jealous. I’m

still impressed you gave us the clue first. That’s normally my job,” she said.

Stephen’s mind was racing, trying to piece together what she’d just told him.

His eyes went wide once he landed on the answer.

“Seriously?” he asked,

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completely astonished.

“Well, no. Not exactly like you said. No crushing is involved,” I said, trying to see if everyone else could figure it out as well.

“Disappointing.” Stephen said.

“Okay, you’re going to have to enlighten the rest of us because we have no clue what you’re talking about,” Misha said.

“I can remove souls and demons and condemn them to Hell,” I said, matter-of-factly.

“No longer disappointing.” Stephen said quietly, a look of awe on his face.

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 480

King of the Underworld

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Adrik

“You can do what now?” Ivan asked, completely dumbfounded.

“There will be times when even Stephen will be ineffectual. Like with Ricardo and Martin. The two of them made deals that are eternal, meaning even if Stephen breaks them in this lifetime, their souls will still belong to the demons in the next lifetime. I’m what will break that cycle,” I said. Sephie tightened her hold on me.

“Everybody gather round for what I’m about to say, because apparently my eyes are choosing a new color but it’s fleeting right now,” she said. They all looked at her like she was playing a joke on them.

“No, she’s really serious. It’s happened twice, but they don’t stay like that for very long.” I said.

They all moved closer so they could see her eyes clearly as she said, “he really is the King of the Underworld now,”

I watched as everyone’s eyes went wide and their mouths fell open. They stood in stunned silence for a few moments, before Stephen finally composed himself enough to say, “you know, I never considered that this might create new issues with Vlad. He might think Seph is a kindred spirit now that she can do this. This might cause jealousy issues.”

Finally, everyone relaxed and laughed. Andrei looked again at Sephie, then looked at me. “I think they’ve decided on the color though, Boss.” He pointed to her. “They’re still red.”

I quickly turned to look at her, surprised they hadn’t changed again already, “I wonder why it was so quick to change earlier but now they’re staying red.”

“Because it’s not me doing it this time. I didn’t realize it before, but I do now,” Sephie said.

“Really? What about the black though?” I asked. If it was Sephie’s demon switching her eyes to red, then did that take the place of the black now? I watched as her eyes slowly changed from red to black. Okay, new favorite transition. “Huh. What’s the difference if it’s your demon doing both then?”

She was quiet for a moment, then she looked at me and said, “the black is a warning to everyone else of who I am. The red is homage to you.”

“Shut up.”

“No, it’s true,” she said. “Wait, I can prove it. Bubba, come here.” She stood up from her spot on the counter and made Andrei stand next to me so we could both see her. “Full disclosure, I’m using Andrei because he’s so darn good at looking in my head,”

she said as she positioned us the way she wanted us. “Okay, you watch,” she said to me. Then she looked at Andrei and said,

“you watch too, but I want you to look in my head while I’m doing this so you know what I’m thinking about for each one.” She

was looking only at Andrei as she switched her eyes to each color that we knew of. She’d even mastered switching them to white

without losing control, but we still all felt her panic when she did switch them to white. She went from normal, to blue, to

green, to amber, to both versions of white, to black, to purple all while looking at Andrei.

Then she looked only at me while she told Andrei, “keep looking in my head while I do this so you can verify that I’m thinking the same thoughts.” She ran through every color once again, but this time, her eyes turned red at the last. She smiled at me, then

looked at Andrei. "I was thinking the exact same thoughts each time, wasn't it?"

"Yeah," he looked at me. "She thought the same sentence that she said earlier, about you really being the King of the Underworld when she was looking at me, but they never switched to red when she was only looking at me."

"See? Special for you," she said, her wide smile stretching across her face.

"Okay, I vote for special colors for all of us then, Green is mine. I think we can all agree I enjoy spicy Sephie the most. You guys can fight over the other colors," Misha said, trying to stir up shit.

"Misha, you're my favorite," Sephie said, laughing.

Ivan had been quietly contemplating the news. He asked, "so this isn't something you're going to be using often, is it?"

I chuckled. "I said the same thing. No, it's not. It's basically the fail-safe, if you will. Those that Viktor can't fix, Stephen will take care of. There will be a very select few that Stephen won't be able to take care of. That's when I'll use it."

"What happens to the souls that you condemn to Hell?" Misha asked.

"They stay there, along with the demons. Sephie's dad told me I was the only one that could grant them reprieve once I'd condemned them. I'm still not entirely sure what that means, but I'm guessing they have to go through me to get out of Hell," I said.

"Yeah, that's a heavy responsibility," Viktor said.

"Exactly why I'm not planning on using it very often," I said.

"Is this why you feel different?" Andrei asked.

"You noticed it too?" Sephie asked Andrei. He nodded his head. "What does it feel like to you?" she asked him. "I'm curious if it's the same as me."

“He usually feels hot, like you. Also like Ivan. You three are always hot. It’s still there, but now there’s like ice there too, somehow, I don’t understand how that could be, but that’s the only way I know to explain it,” Andrei said.

“Yeah, that’s the same for me, too,” Sephie said. “It’s doesn’t make sense, but I don’t know how to describe it either.”

“Both Sephie’s dad and Sephie said it’s the balance between good and evil,” I said. I had leaned against the counter where Sephie had previously been sitting and pulled her back against me. She was still facing everyone else as we continued talking Andrei looked at her, smiling.

“Sephie agrees,” he said. I turned her around enough I could see her deep purple eyes. I smiled at

her, kissing her quickly. “Even Sephie feels a little different now, too. Did something happen to her too?” Andrei asked. He was studying Sephie as he asked the question, much like she was studying me earlier.

“It’s because of him, I think,” she said.

“She’s right. Because she’s so connected to me, she’s gaining power too. She’s going to give Ivan a boost too. You three will soon become connected with your demons, much like we have because of this, too,” I said.

“What about Viktor?” Ivan asked me and Sephie.

“I asked the same thing. He’s going to need Stephen’s help one more time and then he should be fine with everything. Yesterday helped tremendously. Kostya has been helping him every night as well,” I told him.

He nodded discreetly. Stephen was the one who brought it up to the rest of the group, asking Viktor, “how do you feel after yesterday? Better this time? Do you think you need it again? I don’t want you to be fr eaked out if we all suddenly show up with

black eyes one day.”

Viktor chuckled. “Yeah, I think one more time. Just to be safe.”

“I told you Stephen already knows most of what we’re talking about before we tell him, “I told Sephie. She pulled my arms around her even tighter.

“I think we should stay here for another night. Dario can wait until tomorrow. I think it’s more important we have one more night where we don’t need to worry about anything extra,” Sephie announced. Stephen raised his eyebrow looking at Viktor, “After lunch then?” Viktor agreed with that plan.

“Then it’s settled,” Sephie said. She turned in my arms to face me, her eyes were deep blue. I could feel her warmth spreading through my body.

“I must be extra special to get two colors all to myself,” I said to her, pushing her curls back from her face.

“You are extra special. Don’t let it go to your head,” she replied, grinning at me.

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” I said, pressing my lips to hers.

I could feel her relax into me as I held her tightly, enjoying the quiet moment with her.

God, I love her.