

## **King of the Underworld Chapter 311 - 320**

### **Chapter 311**

#### **Chapter Three Hundred Eleven**

Sephie

The journalist laughed. “Valid point. I knew you’d be trustworthy. You’re the only one, other than me, that’s searched for the information on these two men in years. I met with one other guy years ago, but I never heard from him again. This was before I’d discovered who Ricardo really was, even. This is dangerous. They’re dangerous men, dealing in a very dangerous world. There are countless stories about the savagery of Lorenzo overseas. Ricardo keeps a lower profile, but he can’t be much better. He’s been deep in business with Lorenzo for at least three decades.”

“I would venture to guess they’re cut from the same cloth,” Chen said, thoughtfully. He picked up the stack of papers. “Is this

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everything? Do you have more? Henry is a good man, he'll want everything. He'll also want to know how the hell I got myself into this. I'm gonna have to listen to a lecture from my father," he said, shaking his head.

The journalist laughed again. "I'd appreciate you keeping me anonymous for now."

"Consider it done. I'll get this to Henry right away," Chen said. The journalist stood up, offering his hand to Chen, who also stood at the same time. They parted ways without another word.

We had one of the security guys from the building, who was a normal human size, pick Chen up down the block in a should the journalist be watching him. He did. He walked a short distance from the café and waited until he saw Chen get in the taxi, then continued on to his apartment.

"You're a natural at this, Chen," I said once we were all back at the building. I gave him a quick high-five.

"The fact that I had a sniper over my shoulder made it surprisingly easy to talk to a stranger. Can I borrow him for my next blind date?" he asked.

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“I’m not entirely sure you’re grasping the concept of dating,” I said, squinting my eyes at him.

“Presumptuous coming from someone who’s out of the dating pool. It’s anarchy out there, my girl,” he said, laughing.

“The French isn’t working the way it used to?” Misha asked.

Chen laughed loudly. “She told you about that, huh?”

“They’ve heard every conversation we’ve ever had, Chen,” I said. I watched as the lightbulb came on in his head.

“That’s how they always know when someone shows up at the apartment. Oh my God, I can’t believe I didn’t put that one together before right now,” he said.

“See? You’re not just a pretty face,” I said, laughing.

Adrik, who had been laughing at our conversation, extended his hand to Chen. “Thank you for doing this, Chen. Can you come by the office again this week? I have a couple of projects I’m in need of a contractor for. Sephie tells me you have your license.”

Chen’s eyes were the size of saucers as he shook Adrik’s hand. “Yes, sir. Let me know when to be here. I have a small crew, but we do excellent work.”

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\*Til take a look at my schedule and have Viktor call you to set it up.” Adrik said as we all got on the elevator to go back upstairs.

We stopped at the lobby to let Chen off, then continued to the penthouse.

Adrik caught me smiling at him on the way up. He raised his eyebrow at me, saying, “he strikes me as the type to try to refuse

money for what he just did for us. Instead of having that awkward conversation, he can do some work on one of my projects and

I’ll pay him handsomely for it. He won’t argue then, because his crew is also involved.” I felt the warmth slowly spread over my

body as I looked at him. I didn’t say anything. I just stood on my toes and pressed my lips to his.

Once we were in the penthouse, Ivan and Viktor started to look over everything the journalist had given to Chen. They were quiet

for a few minutes. Viktor finally looked up. “I’ll give this guy credit, he does have good instincts. From someone on the outside, it

would look like Ricardo is toward the top of the business. He just doesn’t know there’s

another level above him.”

Ivan looked at Adrik. “What are your plans for Ricardo?”

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“I haven’t decided, honestly. He’s never moved against me directly, so I’m struggling with justifying killing him outright. However,

I’m not going to just leave him alone and hope for the best,” he said.

“Let’s say we did take this to Henry. It’s coming up an election year, right?

Politicians love to appear tough on crime. We hand

them Ricardo, gift-wrapped, they get to pat themselves on the backs and tell everyone how good of a job they’re doing, while no

one is paying attention to us,” Ivan said.

“They get the doctor and Ricardo all in the same year. That’s gotta be worth at least two terms for the mayor and the

commissioner,” Stephen said.

“I really feel like we’re single-handedly bringing the city together here, boys,”

I said.

Adrik

I woke up the next morning before Sephie, which was becoming the norm. I

wrapped my arm around her tighter so she wouldn’t

move too fast, kissing her neck gently. She moaned quietly as she started to

wake up. I felt her move her good arm on top of

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mine that was holding her. “What does it say about me that I’m kind of loving you holding me down all the time now?” she said,

still fighting to wake up. She coughed quietly, holding her ribs.

“I’ll keep that in mind, love,” I said as I wrapped both arms tighter around her, pulling her back to me as close as possible. She

surprised me by rolling onto her back without too much effort. She laughed quietly at the look of

surprise on my face, only to cough once more. This was a new development that I was beginning to worry about.

“I like to see you,” she said, smiling her sweet smile.

“You’re making progress. I think the doctor will be pleased this afternoon,” I said, leaning down to kiss her.

“I’d like it to go faster,” she said. “There are still things I can’t do that I would very much like to do.” She cut her eyes over at me,

chewing on her bottom lip. “And by that I mean you. I’d very much like to do you.”

I caught myself just staring at her in wonderment. She always managed to make me laugh, no matter the situation,

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and she always managed to make me love her even more, no matter what she did. "It's only been two weeks, love. Let's not talk about how they've been the longest two weeks of my life," I said, grinning at her.

"You and me both," she said. "It would be so much easier if it weren't for my ribs. Those things are a major setback."

"It seems like the pain is less the past couple of days though?" I was still able to feel her pain clearly. While it was still very much present, it was more in the background the last couple of days.

She nodded her head. "You've helped." Her sweet smile once again threatening to stop my heart, as she reached over with her good hand to place her palm against my cheek. I'd been trying to take her pain and turn it into something more pleasurable for her more often. She was starting to get cranky, and rightfully so, because her body hurt so much. The acupuncture helped tremendously, but she was still getting frustrated that she was constantly in pain. Her brain wouldn't give her a break from it. It's exhausting to be in constant pain. She was starting to sleep even more than usual, to the point that she was only awake for a

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couple of hours each day. Even that made her cranky because she felt useless. Her appetite was completely gone, like it was after the attack on her and Misha, which meant she was losing weight again. Even with daily acupuncture, she was a mess.

The words of the acupuncturist were always in my head. “She needs you. She needs Ivan. And she needs the other four waiting outside.” I readily admit it took me too long to figure out what to do, but it seemed like the last few days had finally given her some slight relief. She was showing signs of feeling more herself again, but she still had a long way to

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“It took me too long to figure out what to do, but I’m glad it seems like it’s helping,” I said.

“It’s helping. That’s the important part.”

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## Chapter 312

### Chapter Three Hundred Twelve

#### Adrik

The guys were waiting on us when we walked into the kitchen. They'd been stressed because Sephie had seemingly taken a turn for the worse over the last week, on top of everything else. She never took it out on any of us, but it still affected everyone to see her so cranky. And they were starting to miss her because she basically did nothing but sleep.

"Good morning, princess," Ivan said as she walked into the kitchen. She was in front of me, so I couldn't see her face, but I knew by the look on Ivan's face that she was smiling at him.

"Super Squish," she said as she walked to him. She looked around, noticing Stephen wasn't in the kitchen. "He's downstairs getting breakfast. He'll be right back," Ivan said before she could even ask. They'd banned her from trying to cook until she had the use of both arms. That was one reason why we think she took a turn for the worse. She was trying to do too much and

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suffered because of it. She wasn't happy with the ban, but she finally relented. After every single one of us scolded her for arguing with us.

"How did you sleep, gazelle?" Misha asked as she made the rounds in the kitchen.

"Like I was dead," she said, laughing. Andrei handed her a cup of coffee, saying, "this will help bring you back to life."

Stephen walked back into the penthouse, clearly happy that she was awake.

"How's your appetite this morning. Seph?" he asked. "I got you French toast this time. Maybe a sugar high is what you need," he said, grinning at her.

"That'll keep me awake for 10 extra minutes today," she said sarcastically. She still hugged him and thanked him for remembering she loved French toast.

She picked at her breakfast, eating some of it, which was progress from the previous few days. She saved the rest of it for later, in case she got hungry again. Really, she was saving it for one of the guys. They would always eat her leftovers at some point.

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“When do you meet with the police commissioner?” she asked, chasing around a bite of toast on her plate but not actually eating it.

“Tomorrow. I was waiting to see what Sal did before I met with him. He knows, loosely, what’s happening, but I need to fill him in on everything,” I said.

“Who had Sal running on the whiteboard and who had him staying?” she asked, smiling.

Sal had stayed in his house for days after Trino delivered Anthony and Lorenzo to him. Trino had his guys watching Sal the whole time. They could see him inside the house. Like Stephen said, if it wasn’t Sal, it would’ve been @artbreaking. He was definitely in mourning. We were waiting to see what he was going to do next. Trino had offered to take care of Sal. “I’m still pissed he would try to go around me and make a deal with the Mexicans. I’ll be happy to take care of him for you,” he said.

“Be my guest, Trino,” I had told him. One less thing I would have to worry about. We had guys watching Niko and Vito as well.

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Both paid visits to Sal while he was shut in his house. Both were shown Trino's special delivery. Both were now afraid for their own lives.

The people in those three areas of the city were still unhappy and threatening to revolt against the bosses. Even with being terrified for their own lives, they were still trying to collect the new taxes they'd imposed on their people. Massimo's underbosses were still trying to collect taxes in his area. The only quiet areas belonged to Dario and Armando.

Trino was proving to be invaluable to me during this entire situation. I had not expected him to come through the way he was.

During one of the short windows when she was awake, I'd talked to Sephie about it.

"I'm not that surprised that he's proving to be as helpful as he is," she said. I looked at her skeptically. "He knows you trust actions more than words. Because he's very similar to you. You're going to need to return the favor when it comes to the Mexicans when this is over with in the city."

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I could feel her worry starting to build, but she was trying to smile through it.

“You shouldn’t worry, love. Trino took care of them

by himself last time. If we help him, it will be even faster,” I said.

She tried to take as deep a breath as she could. “I know. I still worry. I can’t help it.” I could feel her frustration as I pulled her as close to me as possible. We were both missing the ability for me to hold her tightly

That afternoon, Sephie had her two-week check-up with Dr. Williams. He wanted to take another x-ray of her lung, just to make sure everything was still functioning properly. We all went to the hospital with her.

“How’s your breathing?” he asked.

“Still not what I’d like it to be, but it’s okay,” she said.

“Is it mostly your ribs? Are you feeling like you’re not getting enough air?”

“Both, I think? I can’t take a deep breath because of my ribs, so it feels like there’s not enough air all the time,” she said.

“Hmmm. Let’s get you x-rayed. I want to see what’s going on in there.”

He had to take her arm out of the sling to be able to see all of her lung. It was painful for her, but not like it was before she left the

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hospital. I stood to the side and tried to help her with the pain as much as I could. It worked better when I could touch her. She didn't have tears in her eyes this time when I walked back to the table she was lying on. I strapped her arm back in the sling and helped her sit up so we could put my oversize sweatshirt back on her. At least she'd been staying warmer with the clothes we got her through all this.

Dr. Williams told us to wait in the exam room while he looked at her x-rays. He had a concerned look on his face when he walked back into the room.

"Have you been feeling fatigue lately, Sephie?" he asked, sitting on a stool in front of her.

"She's done nothing but sleep the past few days. She's only been awake a few hours each day," Ivan said. "Literally everything wears her out."

"She's also lost her appetite again like she did before when she took pain meds," Misha said.

"She was starting to breathe better after the first days of being at home, but now she's struggling to breathe again like she did

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when she was still in the hospital,” Andrei said.

Dr. Williams looked to Sephie for confirmation of what they’d all just said.

She simply nodded her head in agreement. “Any sharp pains in your chest?” he asked as he put a stethoscope on and listened to her breathing.

“Just my ribs.”

“What about a rapid heart rate?” She shook her head no. He wheeled himself to the cabinet on the opposite side of the room, grabbing a needle and syringe. “You’ve got fluid building up in your lung again. I’m thinking you’re in the beginning stages of pneumonia, but I want to run a blood test to make sure it’s pneumonia.” He looked at me, then to each of the guys. “Have you heard her wheezing again when she breathes?”

“No wheezing. She’s coughing again occasionally, though. Usually when she tries to talk too much,” Andrei said.

“It’s becoming more frequent,” I said.

Dr. Williams took blood from Sephie’s right arm, then stood up. “I’m going to put a rush on this so we’ll know for sure whether this

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is pneumonia. I can send her home with antibiotics, but that's not going to make her stomach any happier. If the antibiotics don't begin to resolve it, she's going to need to be admitted again," he said as he stepped out of the room.

She had tears in her eyes when I looked down at her. "I don't want to go back to the hospital," she said quietly. I pulled her to me, so her head was resting on my shoulder as I wiped away the tears. She closed her eyes, leaning on me. "I'm so tired of this," she said so quietly that I almost didn't hear her.

The guys were quiet, not knowing what to say, but clearly worried about her. Sephie sat quietly beside me, with her head on my shoulder until the doctor returned. I thought she might've fallen asleep, but she heard him come in the room and lifted her head from my shoulder.

"The good news is it's pneumonia. That's also the bad news. I'm going to send you home with antibiotics for now, but I want to see you again in seven days to make sure it's not getting worse. If you start to have trouble breathing at any point, you need to

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come straight here. Your lung is still healing and this could cause it to collapse again.” He looked at all of us, saying, “if you hear her start wheezing again, or she has any sharp pains in her chest, her pulse starts racing, she starts turning blue, or has shortness of breath, bring her here.” We all nodded. “The antibiotics will be easier to handle if you can eat something when you take them. Yogurt is usually a good choice, if you can’t manage anything else,” he said, looking back to Sephie. She nodded her head. “On the bright side, your bones look like they’re healing well. How’s your shoulder feel?”

“It’s not as painful when I take it out of the sling now. It still hurts, just less,” she said.

“That will continue to get better. Your ribs look good, but they always take the longest to heal because they’re constantly being moved.” He looked at Ivan. “Seven days, bring her back. Don’t miss a dose between now and then. We hopefully caught this early enough that it won’t progress into something worse that means she has to come back here. Let her rest as much as she needs, but stay diligent about her antibiotic.”

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“We’ll take care of her,” Ivan said. The doctor stood up to leave the room. I helped Sephie stand up, then reached down and picked her up. I could feel her exhaustion. She didn’t protest, she just wrapped her good arm around my shoulders and rested her head against my shoulder and neck as we left the hospital.

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## Chapter 313

### Chapter Three Hundred Thirteen

#### Adrik

She was asleep before we made it back to the penthouse. Once we walked in the door, I walked to one of the couches with her.

She didn't even wake up when I pulled her from the backseat. Viktor read the prescription on the antibiotics. "It says she needs to take this every 8 hours until she's out of pills," he said, taking out two pills from the bottle.

"At least we know she'll be awake three times a day now," Misha said as he was looking through the refrigerator. He grabbed a carton of yogurt and a spoon and walked them over to me. Andrei had gotten a glass and was filling it with water for her.

She was still sound asleep in my arms. "Sephie, love, you need to wake up," I said, brushing my hand across her cheek. She started to eventually stir, then opened her eyes. She looked momentarily confused before saying, "I fell asleep again, huh?"

"You were out almost before we left the hospital, princess," Ivan said, softly.

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“You need to take your first dose of antibiotic, gazelle. Then you can go back to sleep if you want to,” Misha said, grinning at her.

She made the move to sit up slowly. I helped her, but she was getting stronger on her own. “I wouldn’t exactly say that I want to go back to sleep, but that seems to be all I can manage right now,” she said, taking the pills from Viktor and the glass of water from Andrei.

“Here’s yogurt so the antibiotics don’t upset your stomach. You don’t need anymore reasons to not eat right now,” Misha said, handing her the carton. She turned up her nose at the yogurt, which made Misha sit on the coffee table in front of her. “Don’t make me do the airplane trick to get you to eat this. Because I will. He was trying to look at her sternly, but he couldn’t keep his smile hidden. He ended up laughing, which made her laugh. “Come on, just a few bites and then I’ll go away,” he said.

She groaned quietly, but ate a few bites before handing it back to Misha, who finished it. We all looked at him as he ate the rest

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of it. “What? Who doesn’t love yogurt? It’s cherry flavor too. This is the best kind.”

I pulled her back against me once more. “Do you want to go lie down in bed, love? Or stay out here with all of us?”

She thought for a moment. “I don’t want to be alone but I don’t want to keep you trapped on the couch with me either. You guys are gonna have to come up with babysitting shifts. Rotate duties,” she said, smiling.

I couldn’t help but laugh. We’d already discussed that on the ride back from the hospital. She leaned her head back to try and look at me. “Let me guess, you already discussed that option?”

“Maybe,” I said, grinning down at her.

She pulled my arms around her tighter. I immediately felt her mood shift and knew she was going to apologize for keeping me away from work for the last two weeks. “Don’t think about apologizing, Sephie.”

“I like it much better when you guys don’t scold me so much,” she said. I could hear her smiling, so I knew she was teasing.

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“Then maybe don’t apologize so much for stuff you shouldn’t apologize for,” Andrei said from the kitchen. I did not expect that from him and couldn’t contain my laughter. Thankfully, neither could Sephie. “I’m regretting that pinky swear right about now,” she said quietly so only I could hear.

“He’s not wrong, love. And you know he’s not wrong,” I said with my lips against her ear, brushing my facial hair against her cheek and neck.

“That’s why it hurts right here,” she said dramatically, pointing to her chest, right over her heart.

The following afternoon, I had a meeting with the police commissioner. Sephie and I had discussed her being there for the meeting before she went back to the doctor and found out she had pneumonia. I wanted her to stay in the penthouse, but she was trying to convince me that she could still make it.

“I slept the entire night and half the day already. I can manage to stay awake for at least an hour while you meet with him. You said you wanted me there to make sure he wasn’t hiding anything. I can still do that. I don’t even have to talk,” she said.

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Ivan looked between her and I. “Boss, as much as I hate to agree with her right now, I think she’s right. If we’re going to try to pin everything on Ricardo, we need to make sure that Henry is with us. It’s probably going to mean that she’ll sleep until tomorrow, but we kind of need her for this meeting.”

“That’s why Squish is my favorite,” she said, crossing her one useful arm across her chest for emphasis.

I had to admit that I also agreed with Ivan, but I hated the thought of putting Sephie through the meeting when I knew she didn’t feel well. She had taken a turn for the worse because she was trying to do too much too soon. I was worried this would set her back even further.

“He’s coming here, right?” she asked.

“Yeah, nobody liked the idea of Boss going to the police precinct,” Viktor said.

“I can’t argue with that either. Then I just have to go downstairs for like an hour. Two at most. Then right back up here to pass.

out again for days on end. At least let me have a change of scenery for the two hours I’m awake right now,” she said.

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I sighed. “You tell me if you start to feel tired or worse, got it?” I looked at her as sternly as possible, which wasn’t much.

“I promise,” she said. “I’ll just give Ivan the signal. He can carry me back up here without you having to stop your meeting.” She paused for a moment, grinning. “Just as long as you promise me you’ll make up some fantastical excuse as to why I had to leave. I will also accept something nonsensical, like “no one can escape their destiny.””

“That makes me want to take you out of the middle of the meeting whether you need to leave or not, princess,” Ivan said, laughing.

“Do antibiotics usually work this fast? Because it seems like you’re feeling a little better already, Seph,” Stephen said.

“I’m not sure, but whatever keeps me from having to go back to the hospital, I’m all for,” she said.

Before we went down to my office for the meeting with the police commissioner, I had a few moments alone with Sephie while I helped her change into something other than my sweatshirt and a pair of leggings.

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“I hope nothing is riding on me looking extra professional today,” she said, grinning at me as I cut the sleeve off one of her long-sleeve shirts so she could wear it.

“I would really worry about the state of the world if it was,” I said, smirking at her. As much as I hated to admit it, I was happy she was going to be in the meeting with me. I was still worried about her, but I couldn’t deny that I valued her opinion of Henry. I’d always had a good relationship with him, but after everything that had happened, I was questioning every single working relationship I had. I wouldn’t trust anyone that didn’t get the okay from Sophie first.

“How long have you known Henry?” she asked as I helped her pull on a pair of jeans. She was getting much better at putting her leggings on, but the jeans were tighter and proving to be difficult for her with only one arm and broken ribs.

“He’s been commissioner for almost four years now. The mayor appointed him when he was elected. They’re basically both running for re-election. If the mayor is re-elected, then Henry stays in. His position isn’t guaranteed if a new mayor is elected,”

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I said.

“So, this deal with Ricardo would look good for the mayor and would help him get elected for a second term?”

“That’s what we’re hoping they’ll think. There are some people in the city that know about me and can recognize me, but there are many that have no idea I exist. They just know that things are not good in their area and want a solution. If the mayor can package this up as a sweeping reform on crime, the people will gladly vote him in for a second term,” I said, helping her with her shirt as well. I gathered her hair up and lifted it off her neck so I could kiss the back of her neck. “Are you sure you’re going to be warm enough in just this?”

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## Chapter 314

### Chapter Three Hundred Fourteen

#### Adrik

She handed me her sling so I could help her strap her arm back in. I'm trying to be cold on purpose. It'll help keep me awake," she said, grinning at me. I clicked my tongue at her, to which she responded by making her eyes go dark.

I cursed under my breath. "That is not playing fair," I said as I pulled her as tight against me as I could. I leaned down and kissed her passionately, trying to make her knees go weak. My tongue didn't give her the choice to deny me entry into her mouth. Not that she would have anyway. Even though I was trying to make her knees go weak, I was still fighting against my desire to completely devour her. When I felt her falter, I deepened the kiss for a moment more until she moaned not so quietly against my lips.

She stepped back from me, a little more out of breath than I thought she would be. "You win," she said, still trying to catch her

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breath. It took her longer to catch her breath than it should have, which worried me. "I'm okay," she said in between breaths.

"Just let me sit for a second." I helped her to the edge of the bed, kneeling in front of her. She didn't let go of my arm while she worked to catch her breath.

"I'm sorry, solnishko. I didn't mean for this to happen. What can I do?"

She grinned at me. "I started it." She looked down at my worried expression, her smile widening. "I'm okay. I promise. It's just difficult to catch my breath right now," she said, her palm resting against my cheek. "Doesn't mean I didn't enjoy the hell out of that though."

I cursed under my breath again, standing in front of her. "Can you walk? I can carry you downstairs. I think I should carry you after I almost made you pass out," I said, pulling her up in front of me. I didn't wait for her to argue, I just bent down and scooped her up. "I'll be happy when you can eat again. You're getting skinny again. You're going to be all sharp soon," I said as I walked us down the hallway.

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The guys were all somewhat concerned when I carried her out of the bedroom. “It’s okay. I might’ve gotten carried away and almost made her pass out. The least I can do is carry her while she catches her breath,” I said, somewhat sheepishly. I heard several chuckles behind us while we walked to the door. Sephie hid her face against my neck so she wouldn’t have to see them grinning at me.

The police commissioner was prompt, walking into my office exactly on time. “Henry,” I said, as I stood to shake his hand. Viktor, who had escorted him up, stayed by the door after he closed it. The rest of the guys were already in the office. Henry looked to all of them, nodding. He spotted Sephie behind me. She was already on the cabinet behind my desk. “You must be Sephie. I’ve heard quite a bit about you,” he said, smiling warmly at her. She slowly started to get off the cabinet. Ivan saw her and went to help her stand up. She walked over slowly, extending her hand to Henry. “I don’t know what you’ve heard, but hopefully it’s not all bad.”

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“Quite the contrary. Vinny’s happens to be one of my favorite places for lunch. Both he and his wife can’t say enough good things about you. Or him, for that matter,” he said, gesturing toward me. She smiled widely at the mention of Vinny and Anna. “They’re wonderful people. My stomach is in a long-term relationship with his sandwich shop.”

Henry laughed. I motioned for him to sit while I helped Sephie back up on the cabinet behind my desk. I tried to move a chair there for her, but she said she preferred to sit on the cabinet. She said most people forgot she was back there, so she could watch them without them being completely aware she was doing so.

“So, tell me, what’s this important that we actually needed to meet in person?” Henry asked.

“I know you’re aware of some of what’s been happening, but you need to know the full story. I also have somewhat of a solution for the situation that I think you and the mayor will be happy with,” I said.

“I know about the brawn situation and the doctor finally being captured, both of which I’m grateful to you for taking care of. I’ve

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been hearing rumors of some of the bosses raising taxes in their areas of the city. Does it have to do with that?”

I nodded. “It’s larger than that. The bosses made a move to overthrow me.

Lorenzo has been looking for a way back to the city.

The attempted coup was his way back. Salvadori was behind most of it, although every single boss is guilty of going along with it.”

“Which means what for the other bosses? That can’t be sitting well with you.”

“It’s not. It means I’m getting rid of all of them. Lorenzo is already taken care of. Armando, Dario, and Massimo are too. The other three will be shortly.”

Henry thought for a moment. “Are you replacing them, then?”

“Not exactly. I don’t need them. I’ve never needed them.”

Henry’s jaw tensed as he considered what this meant for the city. I heard Sephie say quietly in Russian, “he thinks that’s too much power for one person. He’s worried you’ll become a tyrant.”

“There’s another player behind the bosses as well. I have enough evidence that makes it look like he’s the one that’s been

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running the city for years so that he can easily be tried and jailed, making it appear as though you and the mayor are being extremely tough on crime. Once the other bosses are taken care of, the increased taxes they've imposed go away. I've never been a fan of high taxes. The people know that. I would much rather they keep their money and invest it back in their community. That will become the norm once I take care of the bosses. I continue to run the city behind the scenes as I've been doing for the past ten years. Crime returns to the lower rates. Everything goes back to the way it was a couple years ago before the bosses started to get greedy. I have plenty of money. I don't see a reason to needlessly raise taxes on hard-working people. That won't change."

"This other player who is it?"

"Ricardo De Luca."

"No shi t?" Henry said, clearly shocked.

"You know him?"

"He's been slipping out of our grasp for years now. He was instrumental in setting up a pipeline for Lorenzo's human trafficking

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before your father banished him. He resurfaced years later as a supposed legitimate businessman. One of my detectives has been watching his deals with Armando in the city. We could never get him on anything substantial, so there was never a reason to look further into his finances, etc.," he said.

"Until now," Ivan said. He stood up and handed Henry the stack of papers that the journalist had given Chen.

"Where did you get this?" Henry asked, looking through the pages. "Holy shit. This is what we've been wanting to find."

"The source wishes to remain anonymous. I will say, however, that he's a very thorough source. You'll find everything you need there to make an arrest," I said.

Henry continued to look through the papers, but eventually stopped. He looked up to me. "I need to talk to the mayor, of course. I can't make this decision on my own. Although, it's going to be difficult for him to ignore Ricardo once he sees this.

You've always been great at working with us instead of against us. The people of the city are happy that you stopped the brawn

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operation. The media had a field day with that one. Those who know you, love you. Those who don't know you, loved the peace you brought when you took over."

"None of that will change," I said.

He stood up, which meant I stood up as well. He still looked thoughtful. Ivan moved to help Sephie stand up so she could stand beside me. She asked quietly, "the mayor is getting money from the other bosses, isn't he?"

Henry's jaw dropped. "How...?"

"Lucky guess. You genuinely want to work with us, but you're nervous about something. It's not anything on our end. We just giftwrapped a guaranteed re-election for the mayor, which would mean another appointment for you.

The only reason that would

come into question is if he's getting money from the other bosses. If his loyalties lie with them, he's going to want to come after us rather than Ricardo. You're caught in the middle and you're wondering which side to choose," she said.

Henry sat back down, still stunned that she knew what she knew. "No one knows about the mayor for sure. He's done a great job

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of keeping it very discreet, but there was a hefty amount of money pumped into his campaign from a non-existent corporation.

Since he took office, he's had unexplainable influxes of cash several times.

The problem is, we can never prove anything."

"Who's running against him in this election? Maybe this information needs to go to that person instead," Ivan said.

"I think that candidate is even worse than the current mayor," Henry said.

"What about you?" Sephie asked.

Henry looked up at her, not understanding what she meant. "What about me?"

"You run for mayor. You expose the current mayor and the other candidate in your campaign. We get rid of the other bosses. The city thrives. Seems simple to me," she said.

She made a great point. Henry was well-liked, both among the police as well as the people of the city. He'd started great programs during his time as commissioner.

"But I...I wouldn't know the first thing about being a mayor," he said.

"And you really think the current mayor did? They're called advisors for a reason, Henry," she said, smiling at him.

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## Chapter 315

### Chapter Three Hundred Fifteen

#### Sephe

I did manage to make it through the entire meeting with Henry, even though it lasted well past two hours. However, it did mean that I slept for a full 24 hours after it was over. I was only awake long enough to take my antibiotic and then I'd pass out once more.

Because of my brilliant idea during the meeting with Henry, the guys were now working around the clock to find information linking the current mayor to any of the other bosses or Ricardo, Ivan was going through the information given to us from the journalist again to see if he could find any connection between Ricardo and the mavo

Henry had agreed to give us a little time to see what we could find before taking the information to the mayor. He was considering a run for mayor; it depended on the information we could find. Henry was a mostly good person, but his title took

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priority over almost everything else. While it's a valid argument that he could do more as police commissioner than he would be able to as a regular citizen, he was still willing to sit on information that would put away a very evil person just to ensure he kept his position for four more years. At some point, remaining in the grey area will come back to haunt you. We, however, knew that even if he sat on the information we provided, Ricardo would still get everything he deserved. Just not publicly.

The guys really did work out a shift schedule for babysitting me while I slept off having to be awake for more than 20 minutes.

They tried to leave me alone, but I started mumbling and shaking after a few minutes, so that option was out the window.

"It wasn't so bad, spider monkey. It was nice to have a guaranteed nap every few hours," Andrei said after I finally woke up and they were filling me in on everything I'd missed.

"How did Stephen's undead body temperature not wake me up?" I asked, completely surprised.

It almost did the first time. I used an electric blanket the second time. It fooled you," he said, grinning at me.

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“This is the kind of important knowledge that one collects from centuries on this planet,” I said.

“You at least look slightly better, princess,” Ivan said.

“I do feel better. I think the antibiotic is working. I don’t feel like death. I still can’t breathe as well as I’d like to, but it’s not as bad either,” I said.

“What about your appetite

Misha asked..

I thought for a minute. I didn’t have the idea of food, but it wasn’t exciting either. “Still undecided, but I don’t have the idea anymore.”

“Baby steps,” Misha said, grinning at me.

“Your ribs and shoulder aren’t as painful, at least. We moved you several times and you never woke up,” Viktor said. “That’s progress.”

“You did?”

Adrik smiled at “I moved you to the bed at night, then back out here during the day. We had to move you slightly each time the guys would switch. You slept through it all.”

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“Did you give me any superprofen when you gave me the antibiotic?”

They all shook their heads no. “We never actually thought about that,” Viktor said.

I laughed. “I’m not complaining. I’m just surprised I didn’t feel that.

Apparently, I was dead to the world.”

Misha walked over to me, with another carton of yogurt. “It’s not time yet for your antibiotic, but you haven’t eaten anything in almost two days. You need to eat something, gazelle. Whether you want to or not.”

“You’re not the boss of me,” i said as I took the spoon from him and took a bite, trying not to laugh. “What did you guys find on the mayor while I was out?”

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ivan sighed. “We’ve found a few connections to some of Ricardo’s business associates, but nothing that tie them directly. We also can’t find anything from any of the other bosses yet.”

“Let’s ask the journalist,” I said, in between bites, still under the very watchful eye of Misha. I couldn’t tell if he was watching me

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to make sure I ate or watching to see when I'd give him the rest.

We recruited Chen once more to have a conversation with the journalist. This time about the mayor and whether he knew

anything about any ties to Ricardo or any of the other bosses. Chen was noticeably more relaxed this time when I called to ask him if he would be willing to meet with the journalist.

"Yeah, I'll totally do that. It might be concerning how much I enjoyed lying to that dude's face," he said, laughing.

"We just unlocked a new life goal for you, didn't we?" I asked, trying to hold in my laughter so it wouldn't make me cough.

We set up a meeting at the same café for the following afternoon. Adrik was once again concerned it would be too much for me.

"I only just got you back from the last meeting. Now you're going to sleep for an entire day again," he said that night when we were alone. I felt his mood shift when he said it. He was legitimately sad at the thought of me sleeping for an entire day again if I went to the meeting.

"I can feel your sadness," I said, almost surprised by it.

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“I’ve missed you,” he said, without hesitation. I hadn’t thought about how difficult this had been on him. Not only was he still working through me and Ivan being taken, but he also had to deal with me not being able to do much on my own since coming home and having the extra worry of trying to take care of me when he knew exactly how much pain I was in all the time.

I thought for a moment as he helped me undress so I could put his shirt on for the night. “What if we sent Keith and Chris instead? I was only needed for the Italian possibility, but he knows Chen doesn’t speak Italian, so it won’t be an issue this time.

Viktor and Ivan can feed him all the information about the mayor to tell the journalist.”

Adrik stood in front of me, his s\*xxy smirk on his face as he buttoned up his shirt. “You’re not going to argue about going?” he asked as he leaned down to press his lips gently to mine.

“I mean, I can if you want me to. But I know how difficult this has all been for you. There’s a very good possibility that going along would make me sleep for another day, or longer. Doesn’t seem worth it, really,” I said, pulling his arm around my waist with my

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one functioning arm. “And to be honest, I’m very tired of doing nothing but sleeping.”

“We’ll ask Misha what he thinks about it tomorrow,” he said as he gently pushed me back toward the bed.

“I think you should ask Andrei, too,” I said as he helped me into bed. He raised his eyebrow at me, wanting more of an explanation. “It was Andrei that stopped Max from dying. Misha wasn’t kidding when he said he never would’ve thought to look for Tori or Max if Andrei hadn’t brought it up. I wouldn’t have either. I hadn’t thought about Max in weeks.” I paused to take a few breaths, as talking too much was causing me to cough more lately. “The acupuncturist told me he was like me, too. I want to see what he can do.”

“Andrei’s like you? How? Like his observation skills?”

“Those are the beginning. She said he’ll soon figure out that he knows things before they happen. Like my ability to pret Trino’s methods for revenge. Andrei should be able to do that too. Or something similar.”

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“He has been much more observant lately. He’s been right every single time, too.”

“I told him that. He’s still insecure about it. He doesn’t trust himself completely yet,” I said. I was lying on my good side, like normal, with Adrik behind me, his arms around me as tightly as possible. It took exactly two more minutes and I was sound asleep again.

“Is Andrei getting breakfast this morning?” Adrik asked as we walked into the kitchen the next morning. Ivan nodded his head, as he pulled me to him to hug me good morning.

“Good morning, princess,” he said, kissing the top of my head.

“Squish,” I said, hiding my face in his chest. “Why do I not want to wake up when all I’ve done is sleep for the last week?”

His laughter made his chest vibrate, which made my nose itch. “You need it, princess. You’ve had a lot to deal with lately. It also doesn’t help that you won’t eat very much. Your body is tired from trying to heal and you won’t give it any fuel,” he said, his giant arms holding me gently.

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“But food makes me nauseous, I want to eat. Believe me, I do. But every time I do I feel like I’m going to puke afterward.

Sometimes the nausea happens when I think about eating.” I said. “It’s not fair.”

Andrei walked back in with breakfast. “What’s not fair?” he asked.

“That I can’t eat right now because it all makes me nauseous,” I said, grumpily,

“What about drinking? Does that make you nauseous?” Andrei asked.

“Not that I’ve noticed.”

Andrei looked to Viktor. “We should stop and get her bone broth while we’re out today. Or we can make her some. My

grandmother used to make it. She showed me how. It’ll be easy for her to drink, but it should help the lack of food for the last week or so and might kickstart her appetite again.”

Adrik caught my eye, a small smile on his face. “Andrei, what are your thoughts about Sephie and I staying here today? I’m worried it will be too much for her if she goes and she’ll end up sleeping for an entire day again.”

“You should ask Misha that question,” Andrei said.

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“But I’m asking you,” Adrik said, somewhat firmly so Andrei would know not to brush him off a second time. I was watching Andrei, but I caught Misha’s eye. He knew what we were up to, giving me a quick wink. Andrei was almost flustered at trying to figure out how to answer the question.

“Don’t overthink it, Andrei, or you’re going to get in your own way. What does your gut tell you?” Misha said. I walked quietly over to Andrei and grabbed his hand. It worked for Misha, maybe it will work for Bubba.

He took a deep breath when I grabbed his hand and thought for a minute. He looked at Adrik and said, “she should stay here.

Her lung is slowly getting better, but she still feels like total shi t, despite what she’s telling us.”

Adrik raised his eyebrow, looking straight at me. His wide smile slowly crept across his face as he knew I was likely regretting telling him to ask Andrei’s thoughts on whether I should go or stay. I wasn’t expecting Andrei to completely out me like that. I just laughed. There wasn’t much else I could do. He was right. Everyone knew he was right.

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Adrik walked to me, pulling me gently to him. He was still trying not to laugh, but he was clearly amused at what had just happened. “Looks like you’re staying here with me, solnishko,” he said, as he kissed my temple. “Maybe more often than you’d like.” He finally laughed as I poked him in his ribs.

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## Chapter 316

### Chapter Three Hundred Sixteen

#### Sephle

Adrik asked Andrei to stay behind while everyone else went with Chen. He knew I'd want more time alone with Andrei, but I think

Adrik was also curious to see what Andrei's newly discovered gift was about as well, especially given that he so easily read me that morning.

For the first time since I'd come into their lives, I saw Andrei nervous about staying behind with me. "Bubba, don't be nervous," I said, trying not to laugh at him. He was still sitting at the kitchen island, so I walked slowly to him, sliding my arm around his shoulders. He grabbed my wrist, bolding onto my arm. He gave me a sideways glance. He's definitely nervous.

Adrik might've been enjoying his nervousness. He was standing on the other side of the kitchen, arms crossed over his chest.

He watched me try to calm Andrei down, finally saying, "how long have you been noticing these things?"

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“Not long. Really since the night we saved Max. Tori popped into my head the day or two before that night and I couldn’t get her out of my head. I’ve not thought about her since the day she got fired, really. I mean, we saw her that one day when Glana wanted to go shopping. Well, Misha saw her. I didn’t see her. Mentions of her here and there after that, but other than that, I never thought about her. It was weird that I thought of her and couldn’t get her out of my head,” he said.

“Did you feel like something was wrong when you thought about her?” Adrik asked.

“Yeah. It wasn’t the same as Misha’s impending doom, but something didn’t feel right. Same as when Sephie grabbed my hand today when I was thinking about her going to the meeting with the journalist.”

What about the rest? About her lung healing and her still feeling like shi t?”

“That just popped into my head. I said it before I really thought much about it, Andrei said. He glanced at me, apologetically.

“Don’t be sorry, Bubba. You’re right. I do feel like shi t still,” I said, smiling at him. “But that’s the way it works for me. I’ve learned

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that when something pops into my head like that, it's usually because the other person is thinking it but doesn't want to say it.

That's how it seems like I can read your mind all the time. It's only different with Adrik," I said.

"How is it different with him?" Andrei asked.

"With the rest of you, it's usually something you need brought to light, if you will. It's an issue that you need help dealing with. But if you're not thinking about it or struggling with it, I don't necessarily pick up on it. I might be able to if I made an effort, but I don't like to pry. With Adrik, it's everything. I just have to look at him for a few seconds and I know what he's thinking. Like when he gave Giana shit over accusing me of being on drugs. It wasn't the same as when I see things with Misha, but I got a recap of what happened. Enough to know what went on," I said. "He's able to do it to me more now, too. It seems like the more time passes, the more connected we are."

"She's still much better at it than I am, clearly. Since I believed her when she said she was starting to feel better," Adrik said. He squinted his eyes at me like he was still somewhat irritated with me.

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“It wasn’t a complete lie. I do feel some better. I just still feel like shi t overall. But slightly better shi t,” I said.

“Viktor said he was going to get you bone broth. That should help. Not eating isn’t helping you out right now,” Andrei said.

“I’ll consider a feeding tube if that doesn’t work. She’s going to get all sharp and pointy again. I’m very delicate,” Adrik said, grinning at me.

“I’m ruining all of Bubba’s hard work training me. He’s going to have to start completely over with me by the time I get out of this cast and my ribs heal enough that I can do anything strenuous.”

“That’s what I like to call ‘job security,’” Andrei said.

The other guys got back a few hours later from Chen’s latest meeting with the journalist. I felt Adrik hold me tighter before he lightly brushed his fingertips over my cheek to wake me up. “Wake up, solnishko. They’re back and it’s time for your antibiotic,” he said quietly.

“Shocking. I fell asleep again,” I said, sarcastically. Adrik helped me up from the couch.

“How did it go?” Adrik asked as we walked slowly to the kitchen.

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“Chen really is quite good at pretending to be someone else,” Stephen said. “I don’t know why he thinks dating is hard.”

“The thought of boobies makes most men incapable of forming complete thoughts. Women instinctively know this, so they put them on display. It’s downhill from there, really,” I said.

“That seems legit,” Stephen said.

“The journalist didn’t have much information on the mayor, but he said he was going to look into him to see what he could find.

He was under the impression that the mayor was clean, but he also said he hadn’t looked into him much. Since he was the one that appointed Henry, he assumed the mayor would also be upstanding.” Ivan said.

“He might’ve been when he was first elected. Or might’ve been trying harder to be. If he took campaign money from one of the bosses, it would’ve been hard to get away from that,” Adrik said.

“Would he know he took money from one of the bosses?” I asked, my half-empty glass of water in my hand. Adrik walked to me, grabbed the glass, finished it, then refilled it for me.

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“It’s possible he didn’t know. Henry said it came from a non-existent corporation. On paper, it would’ve looked like a large donation from a company,” Viktor said.

“That’s how they get politicians in their pockets, princess,” Ivan said. “They make it look legit at first, then once they’ve already accepted the money, they reveal where the money actually came from. They’ve already accepted it, so it already looks bad.

Then the bosses have their guy.”

“Rude,” I said.

“But effective,” Viktor said.

Misha and Andrei had been busy warming up bone broth while the rest of us talked. Misha ordered me to sit while Andrei put a small bowl of broth in front of me. “It might still be too hot, so be careful,” he said, as he set the bowl in front of me.

I looked at it for a minute, which made Misha say, “I will airplane it. Don’t tempt me.”

“You’re still not the boss of me,” I said, picking up the spoon.

“The bigger question is which one of the bosses has the mayor in his pocket. Or if it really is Ricardo,” Stephen said.

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“It’s interesting that Ricardo seems to have so much influence without being well-known and without being a boss himself,”

Andrei said. He and Misha both were basically standing over me to make sure that I ate at least part of the bowl of broth. Nothing like feeling like a child to stimulate your appetite.

“Not everyone is interested in recognition,” Adrik said, a small smirk on his face. “But I find it interesting that the other bosses allowed him to have this much influence.”

“Do you think it was because of his ties to Lorenzo?” I asked, diligently taking sips of the broth so the Wonder Twins wouldn’t yell at me.

“Possibly. I think it’s worth seeing what we can get out of Armando about it. Dario might know something as well, but I don’t want to talk to him without Sephie,” Adrik said. “Did the journalist give any indication of when he’d have more information?”

“He seemed to think he’d be able to find something quickly if there was something to be found, but it could’ve been his ego talking,” Ivan said. “He’s supposed to let us know when he finds something.”

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“We’ll see what we can get out of Armando tonight. It’s been a few days since I’ve been down there. He might miss me,” Adrik said.

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## Chapter 317

### Chapter Three Hundred Seventeen

#### Sephle

I looked at Misha and Andrei when everyone else left to go “talk” to Armando. “We are not allowed to do anything weird that will cause them to come running back upstairs this time.”

While they both laughed at me, Misha asked, “do you not like it when Boss comes out of nowhere to save you?”

“No, I do. I very much do. But I feel bad for always interrupting his schedule,”

I said. We were in the kitchen, as Andrei had talked

me into more broth. It was actually working. I managed to eat most of the first bowl he gave me when they first got back from the

meeting with the journalist and I only slept for a short period that afternoon.

“You know you’re more important than his schedule, spider monkey. He’s told us all exactly that. Multiple times,” Andrei said,

setting down another small bowl of broth in front of me.

“I know, but it still doesn’t mean I should constantly interrupt him. This needs salt,” I said, taking a small sip.

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Misha's handsome smile stretched across his face. "That means your appetite is waking up, gazelle." He grabbed the salt and handed it to me.

"I thought it meant this was bland," I said, grinning at him.

"What did Boss say about Andrei's newly discovered ability?" Misha asked, curiously.

"He mostly wanted to know how long I've been able to do it. He seemed more amused that I outed Sephie than anything." Andrei said, still giving me an apologetic look.

I laughed softly. "Don't apologize, Andrei. It makes him angry that I try to keep it from him when I don't feel well. He's still mad at me for keeping it hidden after Misha and I were attacked. Same for the ball. I clearly need help in that area."

"Ivan lectured him on being mad at you for that, you know," Misha said.

"He did?"

"Yeah, it was after you got home from the hospital. When he could feel your pain. He was happy that you wouldn't be able to hide it from him anymore. We could hear it in his voice when he made a comment about you always trying to hide it. Ivan told him it

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wasn't your fault," Misha said.

"It's not? Pretty sure I'm the one that's constantly trying to hide it. I know I'm doing it. I just don't know how to stop," I said, pushing the now empty bowl away from me.

Andrei picked up the bowl to wash it. He said, "you really don't know, spider monkey?" I shook my head no.

"No, it's just something I feel like I have to do. No idea why. And no idea how to stop it."

"It's a trauma response, gazelle. You've learned that you're better off not asking for help when you need it because the few times you did got you hurt worse. You might not be aware you're doing it, but there's some part of you that's still trying to protect you, especially when you're hurt. It's why you get extra argumentative with us when we try to do stuff for you and why you try to hide it from Boss when you're hurt. You're still scared you're going to get hurt worse," Misha said.

I thought for a moment, chewing on my bottom lip. "Ivan really said all that?" I asked. They both nodded their heads. I took in a

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slow, almost deep breath. “He’s been hanging around Stephen. Obviously,” I said, grinning at them.

“He’s right though,” Andrei said, drying his hands on the kitchen towel. He threw the towel back on the counter and walked around the island to stand next to me. Flis giant arm slid around my shoulders. “It might still take you a while to fully believe it, but you’re safe with us. No matter what. You’ll always be safe with us,” he said. I leaned my head onto his shoulder, taking another almost deep breath. “I know that. I really do. And I love you all for it. I don’t know why I can’t stop trying to pretend I’m okay when I’m clearly not,” I said.

“You don’t have to figure it out, gazelle. I kinda like when you’re extra spicy and cranky,” Misha said. Andrei helped me up so we could move to the couches. He laughed at Misha, but said quietly, “I think we all do. You’re extra hilarious when you’re cranky.”

Adrik was clearly surprised when he walked back into the penthouse and I was still awake, laughing with Misha and Andrei about something ridiculous that we’d come up with. He walked to me, kneeling down in front of me, his face immediately softening

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when he looked at me. “You’re still awake,” he said, almost like he couldn’t believe it.

“I’m pretty sure Andrei spiked the broth with caffeine,” I said, smiling at him.

He looked at Andrei. “You got her to eat more?” Andrei nodded his head:

“She ate all of it this time,” Andrei said.

“Downside, they had to help me up like 12 times so I could pee, but otherwise, I think it’s helping.” I said, laughing quietly. “And just in time, too. I might murder him if the doctor tells me I have to go back to the hospital tomorrow.”

“Nobody wants that, princess,” Ivan said.

Andrei looked at his watch. “It’s been a couple of hours since she ate the last bowl and it’s time for her antibiotic. Think you could manage some more, spider monkey?”

“As long as I can put salt in it. It tastes so much better that way,” I said.

Andrei stood up to go to the kitchen while Adrik helped me up from the couch. “How did it go with Armando? Was he happy to see you?” I asked, grinning at Adrik.

Before he answered, he pulled me to him and pressed his lips to mine. “I’m so happy you’re still awake, solnishko,” he said

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quietly so only I could hear.

“I think he was happy that he could finally see out of both of his eyes again, Ivan said. “I might’ve ensured that happiness was short-lived.” He had a devious grin on his face as he looked at me.

“Squish. Everyone knows you don’t punch like a weak girl. You didn’t have to prove it,” I said, laughing at him.

“Was he any kind of helpful about Ricardo?” Misha asked.

“Only after Stephen made him want to cry,” Viktor said, also with a devious grin on his face. I looked at Stephen, my mouth open in shock. He just shrugged his shoulders. “He had it coming. It’s not my fault he hasn’t dealt with his childhood.”

I caught Adrik’s eye as he helped me sit at the kitchen island yet again. I could see the “I told you” running through his mind.

“What did you find out?” Andrei asked, sliding another bowl of broth in front of me, along with my antibiotic, and a glass of water.

“It seems that Ricardo thinks of himself as an equal to Boss. It looks like he’s the real reason for the coup, not Sal. Ricardo has

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never been able to gain as much power and favor as Boss has in the city and it drives him crazy. He's been trying to simply outdo Boss in business for years, but has never been able to come close. That's when he started trying to get politicians and police in his pocket," Ivan said.

"Outdo you how?" I asked, sipping the warm broth. I had to admit, I was starting to really like it. It didn't make me nauseous and my stomach was finally happy after so many days of not eating.

"Apparently, he's been in competition with me for years. I had no idea.

Armando said that Ricardo took it personally every time he would try to make a move in a business deal and either I was there first or I had an even bigger project in the works. It's not my fault he's shit at business," Adrik said, shrugging his shoulders. He had a sly smirk on his face, which told me he was clearly enjoying this new piece of information.

"Your greatness will always irritate those who aren't willing to work as hard as you do," I said. "Did Armando know how Ricardo got the other bosses to go against you?"

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“No, but we didn’t ask that question either. I think that question is best put to Dario,” Stephen said.

“Maybe I’ll be better enough that you can talk to him tomorrow,” I said, pushing the empty bowl away from me. Misha grabbed it to wash it this time.

“One day at a time, love. We’ll see how you are after you see the doctor tomorrow,” Adrik said, kissing my temple.

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## Chapter 318

### Chapter Three Hundred Eighteen

#### Sephle

“We can just call the doctor. We don’t have to go all the way back to the hospital,” I said, knowing full well I was not going to get out of having to go back to the doctor this morning. “Andrei can call him. He’ll tell him my lung is doing better.” I had a mischievous smile on my face, trying to see how they’d react to me being bratty about going to the hospital.

“You do feel better this morning, spider monkey. That’s not a lie for once,” he said, grinning at me.

“See? No need to go to the hospital. Dr. Bubba told me I was okay,” I said. Adrik smiled at me, instead of being frustrated like I thought he was going to be. “You’re still going, but it makes me happy that you’re feeling better, solnishko. Yesterday was the first day you were awake for more than two hours in over a week.”

“It was a big day. Andrei’s a genius,” I said, laughing when his cheeks flushed.

“No arguments from me,” Adrik said. “I’m happy he found something that helped. I was beginning to have abandonment issues.”

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He smiled widely at me, causing the warmth to spread over my entire body.

“We all were,” Ivan said.

The trip to the doctor was much easier this time. Not only was I starting to be able to breathe better, finally, but my shoulder was starting to hurt less when it had to be taken out of the sling. The x-ray wasn’t nearly as painful this time.

“I have good news this time around,” Dr. Williams said as he walked into the exam room. “Your lung looks much clearer this time.”

“She’s finally feeling better, but it took until yesterday for her to start to really make improvements,” Ivan said. “Yesterday was the first day she was awake for more than a few hours.”

“How’s your appetite now?” Dr. Williams asked.

“Still not as good as it should be, but she’s been able to keep bone broth down the last two days,” Andrei said.

“That’s a good option. Unfortunately, I want you to continue the antibiotics for another 7 days, which isn’t going to help your stomach. Yogurt helps, broth is great, basically whatever you can stomach, but you need to eat. I can clearly see that you’ve lost

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weight since the last time I saw you,” the doctor said. He had a chastising tone to his words.

I sighed. “I know. Trust me, I’d rather eat.”

“It’s not her fault. She has a very sensitive stomach,” Andrei said, protectively.

“I can write you a prescription for an appetite stimulant,” Dr. Williams said.

“No thank you. It’ll probably just make me more nauseous. I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but things tend to react the opposite of how they’re supposed to with me. I’d rather not,” I said.

Dr. Williams chuckled. “You need food to help your body heal. At this point, a candy bar is going to be beneficial for you. Eat,” he said, looking at me sternly.

Adrik could feel my anger at being chastised by the doctor. I realize he was concerned for my well-being, but he clearly wasn’t understanding that I wanted to eat, but couldn’t and I wasn’t in the mood to be lectured by him. Adrik reached across my lap, almost like he was trying to push me behind him. He said quietly, in Russian, “look at the floor.” He then looked to the doctor, curtly saying in English, “we’ll make sure she eats. Is there anything else?”

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“As long as she continues to make improvements, I won’t need to see her for four more weeks. Her shoulder will continue to make improvements, but keep it in the sling as much as possible. If there’s an issue with breathing again, come back right away.

Once you’ve had pneumonia, it’s easy to get it a second time, especially when your lung has collapsed once. Take any issues with your breathing very seriously and come back here as soon as you notice something is off,” Dr. Williams said as he stood to leave the room.

Once he closed the door behind him, Adrik looked at me, immediately smiling when he looked at my eyes. “I knew it,” he said, his expression a mix of Just and amusement at my dark eyes.

“Like I want to not be able to eat for days at a time. I’ll take it from you guys because I love you all, but he can f\*\*k right off with his lecture on my need to eat. I f\*\*king know, doctor,” I said, pronouncing the “doctor” as sarcastically as possible.

Adrik looked at me for a few moments, his smile still prominent on his face.

Then he looked at Andrei. “You really are a genius.

She’s feeling much

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better.”

I motioned for Ivan to help me up. “I am feeling better and I want to be gone from this place,” I announced. “Who’s carrying me out of here so we can leave faster?”

I felt Adrik’s arms around me as he picked me up. He looked in my eyes, telling me, “keep your eyes closed until we get to the vehicles. We don’t need any delays.”

“Happily,” I said, as I buried my head in his shoulder and neck until I felt him slide me onto the backseat of the SUV. I opened my eyes as he got in beside me. He was still clearly amused at my attitude with the doctor. He leaned over and kissed me passionately, but stopped much too soon for my liking. I groaned quietly, in frustration.

“I don’t want to risk you not being able to catch your breath again,” he said quietly.

“I know. I still don’t like it, but I know,”

“Soon, love. Soon. Maybe not soon enough, but soon,” he said.

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Adrik's phone rang on the way back to the penthouse. He pulled it out of his pocket. "Trino," he said, answering it. Because we were in the SUV, he didn't put it on speaker, so I could only hear one side of the conversation.

I felt Adrik tense beside me, so I knew whatever Trino had to tell him likely wasn't good news. "When did it happen?" he asked.

He worked until his hand was under the sweatshirt and thermal shirt I was wearing and his fingers were running lightly over my bare skin, trying to keep himself calm. "And your guys have no idea where he was headed? Have you checked the private airport?" He paused to hear Trino's answer, then added, "okay, we'll do it. Most of the people at that airport are my guys anyway.

If that's how he left, they'll know something."

Adrik was silent for a few moments, listening to Trino. I could hear that Trino was angry, but I couldn't understand what he was saying. "No, don't worry, Trino. We actually expected this. Sephie called it when you delivered Anthony and Lorenzo. She'll be happy to hear she's won the bet pool," he said. Sal's finally decided to run. I could hear Trino talking again, then Adrik said, "We'll

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go check out the airport. Come to the building this evening  
There's even more to this."

The conversation ended soon after. As Adrik was putting his phone back in his pocket, Ivan said from the front seat, "so Sal decided it was best to run?"

"Trino said he must've had tunnels under his house, because his guys haven't seen anyone leave in two days. It felt off, Trino sent a team in to the house. There's been no movement or any signs of anything in the house for a couple days. They were all gone. They're currently looking for how they got out of the house. Since we don't know when they left, he could be anywhere by now, but my guess is he took a plane out of here," Adrik said.

"Do we know where Ricardo is right now?" I asked

"Since we got Armando, he hasn't been seen in the city. We didn't have anyone on him, because we didn't know to have anyone on him, so the short answer is no. We don't know where he is," Viktor said.

"I would bet all my earnings from Sal's bet pool that he's going wherever Ricardo is," I said.

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Adrik laughed. “Don’t say that in front of Trino. I did not peg him as having a thing for women who like to gamble.”

“He is a complicated man,” I said.

The guys dropped me, Adrik, and Misha off at the building while they went to the private airport to see what they could find out.

Once upstairs, Misha and I both looked at each other. “Do you think we can find him?” he asked.

“It’s worth a try,” I said.

Adrik clicked his tongue. “How much does it zap her when she does that?” he asked Misha.

Misha looked at me, pondering his answer. “It really zapped her the first time, but since then, I don’t think it’s been a problem, but it’s hard to tell because she’s been so si ck otherwise.”

They both looked to me. “Don’t look at me. I don’t even know what day it is, much less what makes me tired. Existing makes me tired lately. I mean, it’s a lot of work to be this f\*\*king awesome, granted. But still.”

They both laughed at me. Adrik looked to Misha again. “Do you need her for it to work or can you use someone else?”

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“It works best with her, but it worked with you when we were looking for her and Ivan. It might work with someone else the same way, too. It’s just clearest with her,” Misha said.

“Let’s wait until they get back from the airport. You can try it with me again or Andrei. If we don’t make it clear enough, then use Sephie. I’d like to not zap her very small supply of energy right now,” Adrik said.

“I can help with that too,” Misha said, getting a bowl from the cabinet so he could make me another bowl of broth.

“Do we have any eggs?” I asked. They both turned to look at me, clearly shocked. “I’m as shocked as you, trust me,” I said, laughing at their response to my question.

“How many do you want?” Adrik asked.

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves here. One is plenty for now.”

“Instead of broth or in addition to broth?” Misha asked, pausing the heating process.

“In addition to,” I said.

Misha looked at Adrik. “I feel like the other four should be here to witness this. Should we call them? Video it? What do we do

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here? We can't make her wait until they get back. The hunger might pass.

This is so stressful," he said, his hand running through his hair. I couldn't do anything but sit and laugh at him.

"Misha, you're my favorite. Don't tell the others."

"Oh, I'm telling them. That's the first thing I'ma tell them when they get back," he said, grinning at me.

King of the Underworld

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## Chapter 319

### Chapter Three Hundred Nineteen

#### Sephle

Misha and Adrik were in the process of making me yet more broth and another egg when the other four guys walked back into the penthouse. The shock was evident on their faces, even more so once Misha informed them it was the second time in an hour that I'd eaten.

"Misha wanted to call you guys when I asked for solid food earlier," I said, still laughing at him.

"Would've been worth it," Viktor said. "We've all been worried about you, sestrichka."

"I know. Don't blame me. It's my stomach. She has a mind of her own. She's wild. Untamed."

"What did you find at the airport?" Adrik asked, sliding a plate with one more egg on it in front of me.

"Sal left a day and a half ago. It was the middle of the night when he left, so either Trino was right and he had tunnels, or his guys fell asleep and missed him leaving." Viktor said.

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“Do we know where he went?” Misha asked.

“They didn’t log a flight path until they were already in the air,” Ivan said.

Adrik looked at Andrei. “We’re trying to save the small amount of energy that Sephie has right now. We want to see if you or I can help Misha find Sal, without him having to use her.”

“Does helping Misha zap your energy, spider monkey?” Andrei asked.

“Honestly, I don’t know. It’s hard to tell what’s what right now. I didn’t think so, but the night we found Tori and Max was right before I started sleeping for days at a time again, so I don’t know. Could be my lung, could be helping Misha,” I said.

Andrei looked at me for a minute, like he was completely lost in thought. “It was your lung, but I can see if it works with me. It’s good to have options,” he said, smiling his handsome smile at me. “What do I have to do?” he asked Misha.

“Just concentrate on Sal,” I said. “Misha does the rest.”

“Like think of his face?” Andrei asked. I nodded my head.

“If it works the same for you as it does for me, you’ll be able to see what Misha sees like it’s in front of you,” I said.

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Andrei nodded his head, then extended his hand to Misha. It took a few minutes, but we could see Misha squeeze Andrei's hand tighter, which always meant he was seeing something. Andrei's eyes went wide, but he wasn't looking at anything we could see.

We knew they'd found him. We were just waiting to see where they found him.

They watched the movie that only they could see for several minutes before it stopped. "That was weird," Andrei said once they joined us back in our reality.

"Was it like a movie?" I asked.

"It was just like when you help me, gazelle," Misha said.

"That's because Bubba is like me," I said, grinning at Andrei.

"Like you how? Like his rapidly improving observation skills?" Viktor asked.

"Those, yes. But he'll be able to know things before they happen like me soon too. That's why Adrik asked him about me staying

behind when you guys went to meet the journalist with Chen," I said.

"That's how he knew you felt like shi t still," Stephen said. "I was wondering if that was a lucky guess or not."

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“It just popped in my head and I said it before I really thought about it, but she said that’s how she reads our minds all the time, Andrei said.

Stephen laughed loudly, which was somewhat out of character for him. We all looked to him, somewhat puzzled. “I’m just glad I already told you guys I was gay because I would’ve never slept another minute knowing that both Andrei and Sephie can do this. I would’ve had to find another job. I would’ve been a wreck.”

“I love that the vampire among us is worried about mind reading. Isn’t that how you get your victims to willingly comply?” I asked, laughing.

“Oh, I’m totally fine with it when I’m the one doing the reading. I prefer not to be read. 900 years, Seph. There’s plenty I’m not proud of in here,” he said, tapping his temple.

“900 years of making you awesomely hilarious and smart as f\*\*k. I fail to see the issue here,” I said. It was hard to catch Stephen off guard, but I managed to do it. His mouth fell open. He didn’t know how to respond. He just walked to me, putting his arm around my shoulders, and kissing my

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cheek.

“You’re just the best, Seph,” he said, quietly.

“So, where is Sal?” Adrik asked Misha..

“He’s in Italy. I can’t be completely sure, but it looked like he was not too far from Armando’s place in Naples. But I haven’t been to Italy very much, so everything might look the same to me, I don’t know,” Misha said.

“It farrows it down slightly,” Viktor said.

“You guys can try again later and see if you can narrow it down further,” I said, winking at Andrei who still looked surprised it had worked.

“What if Misha uses both of us?” Andrei asked. “You seem to give him the most clarity, spider monkey. Maybe you can still give him that, but it won’t zap your energy if he uses me too.”

“Maybe,” Adrik said, firmly. “Let’s see how she gets through the day. I don’t want her to go right back to sleeping the entire day.”

“The bigger question is how are we going to tell Trino that we know where he is?” Ivan asked. “I mean, Trino’s been cool with the

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very little glimpses he's gotten into Sephie's weirdness, but I'm not sure I like the idea of him knowing everything."

Andrei once again got a look like he was thinking about something else and not at all paying attention to our conversation. "He already knows. It's partly why he's so enamored with Sephie."

"He does?" Ivan asked.

I laughed. "I suspected he did, too, but never thought much about it and never tried to clarify," I said.

"Santeria is common in Colombia. It wouldn't be a stretch for him to believe Sephie has special powers," Andrei said.

I couldn't help but giggle. "I want to make him think I'm a voodoo priestess now. Does anybody have a snake I can borrow? I'll give it back once he leaves."

They all laughed at me; the relief clear on their faces that I was starting to feel better. Ivan looked at Andrei, saying, "you really are a genius. She feels much better."

I smiled widely at Ivan. It made me happy to see them help Andrei be more confident in his newfound abilities. "As for your

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earlier question, Squish, I don't think it's much of a stretch that Sal would run to Italy. It's probably a very safe bet that Ricardo is there as well. They're likely trying to plan. What about Niko and Vito? Where are they?" I asked.

Viktor pulled his phone out of his pocket, stepping away to find that answer as well. When he stepped away, I said, "it wouldn't surprise me if they also ran. They're probably still trying to come up with a plan to make this coup happen anyway. I almost want to let them. If Lorenzo was the logistical brains behind this, whatever these morons come up with should be hilarious."

Viktor walked back to the kitchen, with a stressed look on his face. Ivan grinned at me, then asked, "Niko and Vito ran too, didn't they? Viktor just nodded his head, looking surprised. "Sephie called it when you stepped away to check on them." Viktor's wide smile stretched across his face as he walked to me, putting his arm around my shoulders, and kissing the top of my head. "It's good to have you back, sestrichka," he said.

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King of the Underworld Chapter 320

Chapter Three Hundred Twenty

Sephte

That evening, once everyone in the office had gone home for the day, Trino and his guys stopped by. Gus and Oscar were with him, but Chen was absent this time. “He’s working on a contractor job. He said it was really important and he wants it to be perfect, so he couldn’t get away when we told him we were coming here tonight,” Gus said when I asked where he was, I smiled, knowing it was one of Adrik’s projects that he was working on.

“Miha, you look much better this time,” Trino said when he walked into Adhik’s office. “How are you feeling?”

“Better. It’s still too slow, but better,” I said. I’d still been coughing occasionally when I talked. The cough sounded horrible, even though I was feeling better.

Trino cursed in Spanish when he heard my cough. “She got pneumonia after she got home from the hospital. The

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doctor said it's common after your lung collapses," Ivan said as he helped me onto the cabinet behind Adrik's desk.

"Dios mio, Miha. How are you still functioning?" he asked.

I laughed. "Ask them. I haven't been lately. I've done nothing but sleep for like an entire week."

Trino looked at Adrik, who nodded his head in confirmation. "Armando has had to suffer greatly because I've been bored without her," he said, his sly smirk on his face.

"I fully support this, Jefe," Trino said.

"What did you find at Sal's house?" Adrik asked.

Trino took a deep breath and blew it out loudly. He was clearly frustrated.

"We found a tunnel underneath his house. That's how they got out without my guys seeing anything, which is advantageous for my guys. I was ready to kill them if they'd fallen asleep and missed Sal leaving."

"We just don't know exactly when they left. They could be anywhere by now," Gus said.

"They're not anywhere. They're in Italy," I said.

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“And they left in the middle of the night a day and a half ago,” Ivan said.

“Along with Niko and Vito at some point, as well,” Viktor added.

“How do you know they’re in Italy, Miha?” Trino asked skeptically.

“It’s the most obvious choice. There’s a very high likelihood that’s where Ricardo is as well. Sal is likely running to him for direction now that Lorenzo is dead. Niko and Vito are simply running after their master as well,” I said. Trino looked at me thoughtfully, but didn’t say anything. I caught Andrei’s eye. He was trying not to smile.

“Who’s Ricardo?” Gus asked.

“We think he’s really the one that’s behind this coup. He’s been working with Lorenzo for years, but he also has a relationship with the other bosses as well. He’s the one that’s been pulling Armando’s strings behind the scenes. Likely since he was still an underboss. He’s been using a fake name this entire time. It was likely Ricardo that instructed him on what name to use to keep from raising suspicion with the other bosses, as well as my father,” Adrik said.

Oscar laughed quietly. “Italians are so dramatic,” he said quietly.

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“You are not wrong, Oscar,” I said.

“What are you thinking, Jefe? Are you going after them?” Trino asked.

Adrik thought for a few moments before answering. I knew he was torn about his answer, because of me. Were I not in the condition I was currently in, he would be much more willing to follow them to Italy and to end this all as quickly as possible. But given that travel likely wouldn't agree with me very well right now, he was hesitant to follow them.

“They can come to me. I'm not going anywhere with Sephie in this condition,” he said, firmly.

“Do you think they'll be back?” Oscar asked.

“I do. Ricardo is apparently obsessed with me,” Adrik said, smirking.

“Armando said Ricardo has been trying to overtake me for years, from both sides of the business.”

“Your greatness irritates those not on your level, Jefe,” Trino said. All the guys looked at me. Even Adrik turned his chair so he could see me out of the corner of his eye. Trino noticed, giving me a questioning look.

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“I said almost the exact same thing earlier, Trino. Great minds think alike,” I said smiling at him. I motioned for Ivan to help me off the cabinet. I walked to Adrik, wanting to sit on his lap. Instead of staying at his desk, he stood up, pulling me to one of the couches. He helped me sit in his lap and lean back against him; my legs crossed in between his.

Adrik put his lips close to my ear, asking quietly in Russian, “are you tired, solnishko? Do you need to go back upstairs?”

“No, I’m okay. I was cold,” I said, pulling his arm around me tighter. I could feel the low vibration of his quiet laugh as he brushed my cheek lightly with his facial hair.

“How is the situation with the Mexicans, Trino?” Ivan asked.

“They got word of what happened to Anthony and Lorenzo, so they’ve been quiet so far. They still remember what I did when I took over in Colombia, Trino said.

“I wouldn’t put it past Sal and Ricardo to keep in contact with them. They’re going to need help to make this happen, if that’s what they’re still trying to do,” I said, leaning my head back against Adrik’s shoulder.

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Trino looked at me thoughtfully for a moment. He started to ask a question, then stopped himself, then decided to ask it anyway.

“Miha, how do you always know what you know? You’ve been with Jefe for such a short time and yet you know this business better than men who’ve grown up in it. You’re a very smart woman, don’t get me wrong, but I’ve literally never met anyone who knows the things you know after such a short time.”

I felt Adrik hold me a little tighter as we all contemplated how to answer Trino. It was Stephen that spoke first. “Sephie has a very unique ability to understand human psychology. Because of it, she can predict what people will do in certain situations.”

Trino shook his head, like he wanted to believe Stephen, but he wasn’t sure he did. “It’s something else, for sure,” he said. “Is this why Armando took you? Surely he knows how unique you are.”

I scoffed. “That’s a complicated answer, Trino.”

“How so?”

I could feel my anger starting to rise at the thought of Armando thinking he ever had a chance with me, but I tried to keep it under

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control, while making sure my eyes stayed normal. I took as deep a breath as I could. “When the bosses would meet at the restaurant I used to work at, Armando would stay after sometimes and help me clean up. He would ask me questions about my life, but I always got the impression that he was trying to set me up with his son, who is close to my age. According to Dario, that was not the case at all. Apparently, both Armando and Sal had been eyeing me when Ghost came back. Dario thought they were going to get into a fight over me, but then I met Ghost and that option was taken off the table. I think it’s why Sal was going to sell me off to the highest bidder when they took me. He’s still pissed. Armando, too.”

Ivan, who was sitting across from me and Adrik, said quickly in Russian, “blink, princess.”

“Shit,” I said, under my breath, closing my eyes for a second. I managed to cough to hopefully distract anyone who might’ve seen them. I opened them, looking to Ivan first. He nodded discreetly and winked at me.

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“Sephie thinks they’d put Armando into a bit of a leadership role while I was away. I think he and Sal had started to think they could run the city, either together or separately. The night I met Sephie was the night they recruited all the bosses to try to overthrow me. We’re still trying to find out how much of a role Ricardo has been playing this entire time. He seems to have more influence than he should for someone who isn’t a boss,” Adrik said.

“We think he might have the mayor in his pocket as well,” Ivan said.

Trino made a gesture like he was spitting. “Politicians. They’re all the same. They can all be bought for the right price.”

#### King of the Underworld-Sephie and Max

In my life as a waitress, I, Sephie - an ordinary person - endured the icy glares and insults of customers while trying to earn a living. I believed that this would be my fate forever. However, one fateful day, the King of the Underworld appeared before me and rescued me from the clutches of the most powerful Mafia boss's son. With his deep blue eyes fixed on mine, he spoke softly:

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"Sephie... short for Persephone... Queen of the Underworld. At last, I have found you." Confused by his words, I stammered out a question, "P..pardon? What does that mean?" But he simply smiled at me and brushed my hair away from my face with gentle fingers: "You are safe now." Sephie, named for the Queen of the Underworld, Persephone, she's quickly finding out how she's destined to fulfill her namesake's role. Adrik is the King of the Underworld, the boss of all bosses in the city he runs. She was a seemingly normal girl, with a normal job until it all changed one night when he walked through the front door and her life changed abruptly. Now, she finds herself on the wrong side of powerful men, but under the protection of the most powerful among them.

Sephie

I hear my wh\*te noise app cut off on my phone and my alarm slowly getting louder. I wait for the chiming bells to stop before I roll over and hit the screen. With a deep breath, I muster the energy to get out of bed and drag myself to the shower.

Sephie

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There is a steady stream of food to the back room throughout the night and the alcohol flows freely. I've gotten four smacks to my a\*s in the first hour. All the boss's eldest sons are there. Lucky me.

Sephie

After my short interlude outside, I returned to work and tried my best to act like nothing happened. Anthony had apparently been chastised while I was away because he kept his hands to himself...

Sephie

When I walked back into the meeting room, it was completely empty. Everyone had vanished. I can't say I was disappointed by this development. I busied myself with gathering up the empty glasses and...

Sephie

I woke the next morning, well before my alarm went off, feeling like my throat was on fire. I stretched and immediately regretted it, as my entire body felt like I had been run over by a very large vehicle..

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