

King of the Underworld Chapter 321 - 330

Chapter 321

Chapter Three Hundred Twenty-One

Adrik

“We’ve got enough evidence for the police to lock Ricardo up for a very long time, but if the mayor is in Ricardo’s pocket, he won’t go through with it. We’re trying to work around that, if possible. It’s a good move for the people of the city to see their politicians appearing to be tough on crime. We’ve gift-wrapped the doctor that created brawn and now Ricardo for them. We’re just not sure this mayor will do anything with either, yet,” I said.

“You got the guy that created brawn?” Trino asked, surprised. “I knew you stopped their plan. I didn’t know you got the guy that created it in the first place.” He looked at Gus, like he was angry about not being fold.

“I didn’t know either. I didn’t not tell you on purpose, Jefe,” Gus said, defensively.

I chuckled. “We kept it quiet. He’s a piece of work. We didn’t want word getting around that we knew who he is and risk him running. The police have been after him for 10 years,” I said.

“Why so long?” Trino asked.

“He’s been wanted for other reasons. He’s a doctor. He does backroom procedures for cash. He’s been doing procedures against people’s will for years, but he would use a specific anesthesia combination that wiped people’s memories, so nobody could remember what he looked like,” Ivan said.

“How did you find him, then?” Trino asked, curious.

“I remembered what he looked like. His drugs didn’t work on me,” Sephie said.

“Miha. Why did you go to him?” Trino asked.

“It was not by choice. But at least I could remember what he looked like. I gave the police a sketch of him. One of Sal’s guys who’s been feeding us information when it’s convenient for him recognized him and told us he was the one behind the brawn,” she said.

“So many coincidences that they become mathematically impossible,” Trino said. He looked at Sephie very seriously. “Miha, you were always meant to be with Jefe.”

She leaned her head back so she could somewhat see me. “I know,” she said sweetly.

We continued talking about possible outcomes for dealing with Ricardo and the remaining bosses, as well as the Mexicans. We ordered food while we kept talking. Misha and Andrei ran upstairs to make Sephie’s broth and get her antibiotic. She managed to eat a few bites of my food, but that’s all she wanted. During a lull in the conversation, Misha said in Russian, “I’m surprised you’re still awake, gazelle. Are you doing okay? Me and Andrei can go upstairs with you if you need to rest.”

“I’m okay, my adorable Russian guardian. At least for a little while longer,” Sephie said, smiling at him.

“How’s Martin?” Sephie asked Trino. “Why didn’t he come with you?” It was a seemingly innocent question, but I knew that Sephie rarely asked questions for no reason. I glanced at Misha, who got his usual faraway look that meant he was looking for Martin.

“Martin has to travel, especially to the states. Especially in winter,” Trino said. He seemed slightly tense when he answered

her, where he'd been completely relaxed before.

I noticed Andrei glance at Sephie. She said quietly, in Russian, "he's lying."

Andrei nodded in agreement. Misha cleared his

throat, signaling that he'd seen something but it was over. I glanced around

the room, noticing the looks happening between

Trino's guys.

"Do you want me to pretend you're telling the truth and let it drop or do you want to tell me what happened?" Sephie asked,

inatter-of-factly.

Trino began cursing in Spanish. His guys were both amused and unsettled by

Sephie's question. One of Trino's guys made the

sign of the cross. He also 100% thinks Sephie is a witch. While he was cursing,

Sephie asked Andrei, who was next to us on the

couch, in Russian, "they're disagreeing on how to handle the Mexicans, no?"

He nodded his head in agreement.

Misha said in Russian, "he's not if Colombia. I couldn't see very clearly. I need

Sephie or Andrei to see it clearer, but he's not in

Colombia."

Sephie nodded her head, but didn't say anything further. She was waiting to

see what Trino wanted to do. When he didn't

answer, she instead asked another question. "Was Martin with you when you took over or did he come after?"

"After. I took over by myself, basically," Trino said.

She was quiet for a moment, like she was thinking of the right words to say.

"You need to be careful, Trino. Martin has been loyal

to you up until now, but this disagreement has caused a bigger divide between

you than you realize. He thinks his solution is

better, but he doesn't understand the violence needed when dealing with

certain people. It's going to get him kiffed."

I glanced at Trino's guys again. More of them were now making the sign of the cross. Yep, they're going to be scared of her from now on. Good. Trino looked shocked. "How..." he said, completely in shock. "You would only be uncomfortable talking about him if you two had a disagreement. The only thing you could disagree on that is big enough to cause this much discomfort is the Mexicans," she said, shrugging her shoulders.

"Told you," Stephen said to Trino, winking at Sephie.

"Nice save, princess," Ivan said in Russian.

"You're right. Again. He thinks we can negotiate with the Mexicans. He doesn't understand how they do business. They are not to be trusted. Ever. They understand violence, though. They've been quiet since I took over until Anthony and Lorenzo went to them," Trino said. We could hear the anger in his voice.

"The Mexicans think they have a real shot at overthrowing you. Not sure what Lorenzo told them, but given that they've already made one attempt your life, they've been emboldened by whatever it was. They're not going to give that up easily, which is why I think it will be easy for Sal to continue to stay in contact with them," Sephie said.

Viktor cursed under his breath, then said in Russian, "I think there's a connection between Ricardo and the Mexicans that I glossed over before. I need to go back and check, but I'm remembering seeing something."

I nodded, saying, still in Russian, "we'll look into it tomorrow. I don't want to drag this out any longer tonight, for Sephie's sake." I could feel her getting tired, but she was still fighting it. Her ribs were starting to ache a little more than usual, which was a sign she'd been upright for too long.

“Remind me to always stay on your good side, Miha. I want to always be on your side,” Trino said, laughing somewhat nervously.

After Trino and his guys left, the guys went to their apartments, leaving Sephie and I to go to the penthouse alone. Once we were in the bedroom, I started to help her undress. She still struggled to get her jeans on and off easily with one hand. “Trino’s guys totally think you’re a witch now,” I said, laughing, I unbuttoned my shirt so I could put it on her for the night.

She laughed. “I might’ve enjoyed that a little too much. They were all so nervous. It’s too bad they don’t normally talk around me.

I could’ve really creeped them out. Maybe I’ll scare Gus and Oscar next time,” she said, a devilish grin on her face.

“I am curious where Martin is if he’s not in Colombia. We’ll have to see what else Misha can see tomorrow,” I said, helping her into bed.

“I don’t think it’s going to be good news if he sees more,” she said quietly as she laid down on her good side.

“We’ll worry about it tomorrow. You need sleep, solnishko. You’ve been awake almost the entire day,” I said, wrapping my arms around her and pulling her as tight against me as I could.

“It was a big day,” she said, yawning. I could feel her relax as she pressed her body closer to mine. Her breathing slowed and I heard her make her cooing noises as she drifted off to sleep almost immediately.

I woke the next morning to find she was facing me, still sound asleep. That’s progress if she can lie on her bad shoulder. I took a moment to watch her sleep. I’d missed being able to see her face when I first woke in the mornings. I brushed her curls from her face and felt her start to stir. I kissed her forehead, not really caring if she woke up yet. I’d happily lie here and watch her sleep.

Twenty-one

It took her a few more minutes to finally wake up. Wi sweetly. Since she wasn't vining on her good arm, sh touch. "I've missed this," she said.

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"Not unless I move too much. I don't even remembe

I opened my eves once more. I could feel the

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to catch her breath. I cursed as I stopped

I felt her hand on my stomach and heard her say, "sorry," quietly as the worked to catch her breath

"You shouldn't be. It's not your fault you're in this condition. You can bet Armand

later, though." I sad. I could feel my arose coming

to the surface thinking about taking my frustrations out on Armando for doing this Sophie I glanced at ba eves closed again. "You

okay, solnishko?" I asked, running my fingers lightly over her cheek.

She smiled at me, but didn't open her eyes. She nodded her head, then said, "I can feel your anger very strongly. I don't want to make things worse for you than they already are."

I laughed, my anger disappearing slowly. I kissed her forehead. "You can open your eyes, love. You won't make thing

She slowly opened her eyes. They were still dark, but in the process of turning normal again. I'd ne

tapped before

I could clearly see the dark brown, almost black color fade into the background as the normal three ring of color returned. "Did you s purpose?" I asked.

"Do what on purpose?"

"I could watch them change this time. I've never seen it as it happened. It was incredible. It was like watching into day," I said, still mesmerized by her eyes.

"That sounds really complicated. I for sure didn't do that on purpose," she said, laughing,

I kissed her gently. "You're amazing."

Sorinating

Chapter 322

Chapter Three Hundred Twenty-Two

Adrik

The guys were waiting on us as usual when we came out from the bedroom. She seemed like she had more energy this morning than she'd had in weeks. I didn't have to wait on her to walk slowly down the hallway. The guys noticed she was brighter this morning, too.

"You look much better this morning, gazelle," Misha said. He smiled at her, but was clearly surprised as well.

"I feel better this morning. First time I haven't been in a fog when I wake up in a while," she said. "I might actually want real food this morning, too."

Misha looked around at everyone else. "Thank God you're all here to witness it this time. I can't handle the pressure of how to document these milestones in her life," he said.

For the first time since she'd been hurt, she laughed without grabbing her ribs. I could feel the dull ache that was constantly present there, but no sharp pains this time. It was a nice change.

"Let's make a deal," she said, turning to me. I raised my eyebrow at her, wondering what she had in mind. "If I can eat real food for breakfast, then we can try Andrei's idea of Misha using both of us to find Sal, as well as Martin. I want to know what those two are doing," she said.

"Deal," I said. I also wanted to know what those two were doing. If Martin was trying to make a deal with the Mexicans behind Trino's back, that could put Trino in even more danger. The smile that she gave me when I agreed made my heart stop.

"How did you know that Trino and Martin were disagreeing on what to do with the Mexicans, princess?" Ivan asked.

“It just popped in my head. That’s how it works for me. Trino was thinking about it, probably trying to decide if he should bring it up or not. Given his reaction, I think he’d decided to not bring it up,” she said. “His guys think she’s a witch now, too,” I said, laughing.

Andrei laughed. “I noticed several of them made the sign of the cross. At least we don’t have to worry about them around her now. They won’t want to be around her.”

“Did you have the same thing pop in your head, Andrei?” Stephen asked. “I know you knew Trino was lying when he made excuses for Martin not being here.”

Andrei nodded his head. “I didn’t get as many details as Sephie, though. I knew they’d had an argument, but that was all I could tell. She filled in way more details and Misha confirmed when he said Martin wasn’t in Colombia.”

“It does make me nervous if he’s not in Colombia. I wanted to ask Trino if he knew where Martin was, but he clearly didn’t want to talk about it,” I said.

“We can find out more after breakfast,” Sephie said, grinning at me. Andrei got up to make her the usual bowl of broth, since that seemed to be helping the most right now.

Viktor had been busy on his computer since we walked into the kitchen, likely trying to find the connection between Ricardo and the Mexicans he’d mentioned the night before. His phone beeped, indicating food was waiting for us. He started to get up, but Stephen put his hand on his shoulder. “I’ll get it. You keep working. I’d like some real answers today,” he said as he got up to get food.

After Sephie managed to eat half her breakfast, plus the entire bowl of broth, she got up on her own from the kitchen island. She

motioned for Andrei and Misha to come with her. She glanced over her shoulder, asking the rest of us, “Sal first or Martin first?”

We looked at each other, then answered, “Martin first.”

She giggled. “Good. That’s what I wanted, too.” She’d stopped in the open area between the kitchen and the living room,

grabbing Misha’s hand with her one free hand. “Somehow I think this will work even better once I have two hands again, but we’ll

see how it goes this time,” she said. Andrei extended his hand to Misha as well. Misha got his usual faraway look in his eyes as

he searched for Martin. After just a minute, Andrei and Sephie were clearly watching something that the rest of us couldn’t see.

“Got him,” Misha said quietly. They watched for a few moments, then Misha’s broad smile stretched across his face. “You got

sound, gazelle,” he said as she laughed quietly. They continued watching, the looks on their faces turning very serious. After a

few minutes, the movie was apparently over.

Misha was smiling ear-to-ear as he said, “that was the clearest one yet, gazelle. I’ve never had sound before.”

She looked at Andrei. “It was Bubba. He’s the power boost we needed.”

Andrei was trying not to be too surprised at what had happened, but he was still coming to terms with it.

Misha looked to us, saying. “Martin is with the Mexicans. We could hear them, but since none of us speak Spanish, I have no

clue what they were saying. It looked like they were negotiating, though.

Then somebody hit the fast forward button.” He paused,

running his hand through his hair. “This is not going to end well for Martin.”

“They’re going to use him as revenge for killing Anthony and Lorenzo. He’ll be displayed in a very public way so Trino can’t

mistake the message.” Andrei said.

Sephie was quietly chewing on her bottom lip, contemplating what they'd just seen. She looked to me. "I think we can stop it, but it would have to come from Trino, which means he's going to know what we can do." She glanced at Ivan after looking at me.

"I don't like the idea of him knowing, but if they kill Martin like you say, it's going to start another war. Guaranteed," Ivan said.

I pulled my phone from my pocket, dialing Trino's number. He picked up on the first ring. "Jefe, you're calling early," he said. We could hear the surprise in his voice.

"Trino, you need to come to the penthouse. Your guys can wait downstairs. It's important," I said.

"I'll be there in 10 minutes," Trino said and hung up.

Viktor, who had still been searching on his computer this whole time, finally found what he was looking for. "Found the link between Ricardo and the Mexicans. It's a deal from years ago, when Vitaliy was still in charge. Major development deal in Mexico. He also has a multi-million-dollar house there. Ricardo is the link between the Mexicans and Lorenzo."

Sephie turned to look at Misha and Andrei. She grabbed Misha's hand again, saying, "let's find Sal before Trino gets here. I should be able to know what they're saying this time, if he's with Ricardo like I think he's going to be."

They went through the process again to find Sal this time. It went faster this time, but they watched for longer. Misha and Andrei both looked to Sephie when the movie only they could see stopped. She was chewing on her bottom lip again. She looked up at them, then to me. "He's using the Mexicans as his army. Since we took out half the bosses already, he needs manpower. This wasn't about going around Trino, on the bosses' end. That came from the Mexicans. Ricardo needs manpower. He promised to

support them in taking out Trino if they helped him take you out,” she said.

“Sal is angry about Lorenzo and wants vengeance.

Never mentioned Anthony, though. That was weird.”

“Sal is with Ricardo now?” Ivan asked.

Misha nodded his head. “They’re definitely in Italy, but I’m not sure exactly where,” he said.

Andrei walked to Viktor. “Something looked familiar. I’ve seen it in pictures before, but I don’t know what it’s called,” he said.

Viktor pushed his computer toward Andrei so he could try and find their location. It only took a few minutes and he had found

where they were. “They’re in Amalfi.” He looked to Misha. “You were close yesterday. It’s really close to Naples.”

Viktor’s phone rang, indicating that Trino was downstairs. “Be right back,” he said as he walked out. Sephie walked to me,

tucking herself into my side. I could feel her nerves beginning to get bad. I pulled her to me, saying quietly, “I love you. More than

anything, but a little more each day.” She sighed and rested her head against my chest. “How much did that zap you?” I asked.

“I feel it, but it wasn’t like the first time. Andrei definitely helped take most of it. It didn’t zap him at all the first time he did it. He must have superpowers,” she said, laughing.

“Andrei still holds back, gazelle. That’s why it’s not quite as clear with him.

You don’t hold back,” Misha said. “I figured out the difference this time.”

Ivan tghed. “Sephir doesn’t know what that means.”

Chapter 323

Chapter Three Hundred Twenty-Three

Adrik

“Squish is right. I did not know holding back was an option,” she said.

Viktor walked in with Trino, who looked quite nervous. “Jefe, what’s going on?” he asked.

Before I could answer, Sephie said, “Trino, Martin is going to be killed. I can explain how I know, but I think you already have an idea of how I know. I’ve seen it. It’s going to be very violent and it’s going to be a very public declaration of war.”

Trino cursed in Spanish. “I told him that negotiations were pointless.”

“He’s there now, Trino. Have you talked to him since you’ve been in the city?” I asked.

“No, Jefe. I told him when I left to stay in Colombia since he wouldn’t come with me.”

“He didn’t listen. He’s in Mexico. You’re the only one that would be able to convince him to get out of there before they kill him.

He still has a chance to escape, but not for long. He has to leave now,” Sephie said. She had an urgent edge to her voice that

Trino heard. He looked at her thoughtfully for a moment, then pulled his phone from his pocket. We listened to his conversation with Martin, but no one could understand it. It got heated, then ended with Trino clearly pleading with Martin. He took a moment to collect himself once the call ended, then looked to Sephie.

“Miha, you have the gift. My grandmother did too. I thought you might because you know too much,” he said, smiling at her. “You were right. He’s in Mexico. I told him what would happen if he stayed. I don’t know if he’s going to listen to me. He’s very stubborn.”

I glanced at Misha who was checking on the potential outcomes. He ran his hand up and down his arm to rub out the goosebumps. Sephie noticed, too. “He’ll listen,” she said. Trino sighed, clearly stressed about the entire situation.

“Even if he gets out, they’re still likely to declare war,” Ivan said. “Ricardo is using them as an army to try and overthrow Boss.

You’re their reward for helping Ricardo.”

I recognized one or two of the curse words that came out of Trino’s mouth, since Sephie had clued me in on what they meant.

She tried not to laugh, but she was always so amused at Trino’s tirades.

“Don’t worry. If it comes to that, we’ll help you stop it. We’re looking for ways to prevent it, though,” I said. Trino simply nodded his head.

He looked at Sephie, a sly smile evident on one side of his mouth. “My guys are all scared of you now, Miha. They’re going to struggle to be in the same room as you after they hear about this.”

While I hadn’t thought much about it the night before, I suddenly had a strong feeling of unease when it came to Trino’s guys being around Sephie.

Sephie shrugged her shoulders. “You can tell them I don’t pry, but they’re not going to listen. But make sure they understand what will happen to them if they think burning the witch is a thing that should be brought back. Feel free to embellish as much as you want on that one,” she said very seriously. I tensed at the thought, my anger unexpectantly rising to the surface. I knew she felt it as she took a step toward Trino. “Your guys or not, I will end them if they ever so much as think about coming after me because of this.”

I knew by the look on Trino’s face that her eyes were dark. He was completely shocked, as well as afraid. She was using it to her advantage. Just for emphasis, all the guys stood up and surrounded her as she stepped back to me, I felt Ivan’s protective bubble around us as he told Trino that it was best to stay with us, rather than against us. I felt Sephie’s hand on top of mine as I

slid it around her waist, pulling her back against me.

Trino's eyes were wide. He put his hands up, like he was worried something would happen. "No worries. That will never be a problem. I'll take care of it myself if one of them even thinks of doing anything to harm you," he said.

Sephie reached up and touched Ivan's back, who was standing in front of her. I felt the bubble disappear as he turned to look at her. His face softened immediately when he looked at her so I knew she was smiling at him. He stepped out of the way so she could see Trino once more.

"I give you my word, it will not be a problem, Miha," Trino said. Sephie simply nodded her head.

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room as you after they hear about this," Trine said.

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The words, I felt Adrik's anger feeding into mine. I knew my eyes were going dark, if they weren't

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much as you want on that one,” I said As already, but I didn’t care. wanded
Tring to If they ever so much as Think about

When Trinn saw my eyes, he had energeti taken a step back. His feet never
moved, but he shrunk back from me. I took a step
toward him, just to drive my point home, as I spoke The didn’t say a word,
they just moved urround me and Adnk. Tring was
roughly my height, so they all towered over him. They food advantage of this
and Cranked up the intimidation actor as high as it
would go. I could feel Adrik’s anger feeding into mine, even though he was
behind me. 11

was giving Trino. He would’ve been ready to rip Trine apart if I said the word
at that moment. Any of them would have

Ivan stepped in front of me, putting his body in between me and Trin. I felt
his protective bubble go up around me, which also fed
into my anger. I could hear Ivan tell Trino, “It’s best if you’re with us, rather
than against us.” could vaguely hear Trine’s response,

but it was difficult to understand his words with Ivan’s bubble of protection
around me, I stepped back against Adrik, his hand on

my waist. I put my hand on top of his, hoping to calm us both down slig

I noticed that when I moved, the guys moved as well. They didn’t need to see
the, but they knew exactly where I was. When I

took a step back against Adrik, Ivan closed the distance between us, staying
directly in front of me. I smiled, knowing he took his

job very seriously. His anger was also feeding mine reached out and put my
hand on his back, trying him as well, He turned to

look at me and I felt his bubble slowly disappear. He saw
me etniling at him and his face immodiately softened.

“Message received,” I said quietly to all of them in Russian. They all relaxed,
but didn’t move.

“I give you my word, it will not be a problem, Milia,” Trino said, I simply nodded. Whatever had given me the idea in the first place was in the background now. I want to know if Misha or Andrei got anything from that.

Trine stayed in the penthouse for a few minutes longer, but eventually took his leave. He promised to keep us updated on whether Martin took his advice and left Mexico or not.

Once he was gone, I looked to Adrik, smiling. He raised his eyebrow, then kissed me gently. “It was different again,” he said. He looked to Ivan, asking, “can you feel her anger yet?”

“I did that time. It was unreal. I’ve only been that angry a handful of times and it’s always resulted in someone else dying,” he said.

I laughed. “I could feel both of you. You were both feeding into my anger, which is why I think it was so strong. But I can tell the difference.”

“How so?” Ivan asked.

I thought for a moment, trying to figure out how to explain what I felt. “It’s like two different functions, I think.” I paused suddenly hit me. I looked at Ivan, “you’re the shield.” Then I looked at Adrik, “and you’re the sword.”

Adrik smiled at me. “I think I understand, but explain.” trying to find the words. It

“Your anger is beside me, looking for direction, if you will. Like all I would’ve had to do is point at Trino and you would’ve ripped him apart. But your anger is a part of me, moving through me. An extension. Just like mine is a part of you. Ivan’s is different. It’s broader and it’s focused outward. Away from me. His fire burns just as hot, but it’s directed away from me, where yours is not.

His anger feels like a barrier in front of me. Your anger is always with me. A part of me,” I said,

“I caught a glimpse of your eyes, princess. They’re still getting darker when it happens. I’m surprised Trino didn’t piss himself,”

Ivan said.

“I saw them change this morning,” Adrik said. “She was looking at me as they changed back to normal. I’ve never seen anything so amazing.” He turned me so he could look in my eyes. He was still completely mesmerized. I reached up and kissed him gently.

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“Did you get anything when Trino told me his guys were scared of me now asked Andrei and Misha

“I got a quick hit of nausea, gazelle I don’t know about which one, or ones, but it wasn’t good. I’m glad you said something, because I was going to it you didn’t. It’s definitely not Tino, but one of his guys is going to have a problem with this,” Misha said.

“Same as last night for me, spider monkey. You get more details than I do, but) knew the potential for there to be a problem is there,” Andrei said

“I think you scared Trino enough that he’ll either keep this to himself or he’ll keep his guys away from you from now on,” Stephen said. “I’ve never seen him so shocked as when you threatened him. That’s going to haunt him for a while.”

“Good. That was the point,” I said, grinning. “Who’s hungry?”

They all laughed. “It’s good to have you back, sestrichka,” Viktor said, shaking his head.

Chapter 324

Chapter Three Hundred Twenty-Four

Sephle

Adrik, Ivan, Viktor, and Stephen paid another visit to Armando that evening. I'd needed a short nap after the morning's festivities, but I was managing to stay awake for much longer. And my appetite was coming back slowly. I could snack periodically throughout the day without too much trouble, which was giving me more energy finally.

Misha and Andrei were both happy to stay with me in the penthouse while the others went downstairs to torture Armando.

"How do I get more details, spider monkey?" Andrei asked while they were heating up yet more broth for me.

I thought for a minute. "I'm honestly not sure how to answer that, Bubba. I haven't always had all the details I get now come so easily. The more I practice, the more details I get. I think time is the answer. The more you use it, the clearer everything will be.

Same as Misha. The more he uses his gift, the clearer it gets. I think there will come a time when he won't need anyone else as a battery, too. I think he'll be able to do it on his own just as well as he can with us," I said.

"Really? You think so?" Misha asked. He was clearly surprised at the thought of not needing anyone to see his visions.

"I do. It doesn't make sense that you would always need me or Andrei to make it work. You didn't need me in the beginning. I just made it different. Once you master it, you should be able to do it on your own. Which I think you're getting closer to, if you could tell the difference between me and Bubba this morning." I said.

"Yeah, that reminds me, how did you know the difference?" Andrei asked.

"And how did you know I was holding back? I didn't

even know I was holding back.”

“With Sephie, it feels like she’s showing me how to do it, even though she has no idea how it works. There’s still this calm direction from her when she helps me, but I can tell that she’s jumped in with both feet. With you, Andrei, you really have no idea what’s going on still, you’re just along for the ride. But you’re hoping you don’t die in the process,” Misha said, laughing.

“That sounds accurate,” Andrei said. He was laughing as well, not really knowing what else to say.

“This is all a little weird, if we’re being honest. It’s a lot to take in,” I said.

“Was it hard for you, spider monkey? You didn’t have anybody when you discovered you could do this, did you?” Andrei asked.

“It wasn’t hard. I did think there was something wrong with me, not gonna lie. But I’ve shown it more to you guys than I ever did to anyone else. Even my mom. Little bits here and there with her before she died, but I mostly kept to myself. It was only just starting when she was still alive. It’s gotten much stronger as I get older. Then I met you guys and I feel like I skipped ahead like ten levels. I’ve been more open with it this year than I ever have before. You can ask Adrik, too, I was petrified he would think I was crazy at first,” I said.

Misha laughed. “We saw it. When you would tell him things about the bosses, you were timid about it. But you were always right.”

“Apparently, it was all meant to happen the way it did. You guys seeing it in me helped you see it in yourselves. There’s something special about Viktor and Stephen too, but they’re still scared by it,” I said.

“Should we make bets on what it is with those two?” Andrei asked.

“Um, yeah. Of course we should,” I said, laughing.

“Before Andrei found out he was like you, I would’ve said Stephen’s superpower was his sense of humor that nobody knew existed until you came along, gazelle,” Misha said.

“Right? How funny is that dude? And how the hell does he keep a straight face literally every single time?” I asked. “And Viktor is still the father figure of the group. He just goes about his day silently making sure we’re all taken care of and have everything we need. He’s kind of the best, really.”

We were being silly in the kitchen while I had yet another snack when Adrik and the rest of the guys got back from downstairs.

Adrik immediately

walked to me, leaning down to kiss me. “I’m happy you’re still awake, solnishko,” he said, his handsome smile stretching across his face.

“How was Armando? Have you offered to let him jump off the roof again? Is he ready to take you up on the offer this time?” I asked. I grabbed Adrik’s hand with my one free hand, inspecting his knuckles. He laughed softly and kissed my temple. “I’m so relieved you’re finally feeling better,” he said.

“He’s definitely regretting not listening to you, Seph. I think he’s cried himself to sleep more often than not lately,” Stephen said.

While his expression didn’t give away much, there was a definite air of satisfaction present.

“Why do I feel like you’re the reason for his tears?” I asked Stephen.

He cleared his throat. “I do the reading, Seph. Not the other way around,” he said, trying to look at me sternly. I couldn’t help but laugh at him.

“You’re just worried I’m going to learn your secret for your insane mastery of your facial expressions,” I said. His smile stretched

across his face. "It's one of my best tricks," he said, grinning at me. "I could not agree more," I said.

"Did you learn anything useful or did you just take your frustrations out on him tonight?" Misha asked.

"He confirmed the link between Ricardo and the Mexicans. He also said it was Lorenzo's idea to go to them," Viktor said.

"He was planning on using them instead of any of the bosses' men. He knew there would be mass casualties so he was going to sacrifice the Mexicans first. He promised to help them overthrow Trino, but even Armando doubted that would've actually happened. Lorenzo knew there likely wouldn't have been enough of them left," Adrik said.

"Not surprising. However, it means the Mexicans are not going to stop coming for Trino until Sal and Ricardo are stopped and maybe not even then. We might not be able to wait on Henry to figure his life the f**k out," I said, finishing up my latest snack.

When I looked up, they were all looking at me, completely amused. "What?" I asked.

"Extra spicy Sephie might be my favorite version," Misha said, laughing.

It took four more days before Trino got any more information about Martin. He finally called Adrik in the afternoon, once he'd heard the fate of Martin. Misha, Andrei, and I all felt fairly certain that he would make it out, but we also never checked on him again. We were all relieved to hear for sure that he'd made it out and was safely back in Colombia.

Trino stopped by the building that evening. Gus, Oscar, and one of his normal security guys were with him, but the rest of his men chose to stay in the lobby. "Was that your choice or theirs?" Ivan asked when Trino walked into the office, mostly unaccompanied.

“It was definitely theirs,” Oscar said, trying not to laugh. “They’re some of the baddest motherf**kers in Colombia, but they’re scared of a girl.”

“For good reason,” Trino’s security guy said quietly. It was the first time I’d ever heard him speak.

“And yet, here you are,” I said. My tone wasn’t threatening. Yet. But I was serious enough that he got tense when I addressed him. “Did the rest of them put you up to coming up here or are you just so curious that you can’t help yourself?” He looked at me, somewhat surprised. He wasn’t sure what to say. Trino stayed quiet as well. “I saved the life of your boss’s right-hand man. I’ve saved your life before as well, you just don’t know it. A little gratitude would serve you well if you’d like to keep the baddest motherf**ker title,” I said, walking to the couch to sit beside Andrei. He held his

to sit arm out, helping me sit, then wrapped it around my shoulders so I could curl up next to him.

He leaned down and said, “extra spicy Sephie is my favorite version too.” Gus looked at Trino, then looked at me. “I see now why he likes you so much,” he said.

Adrik cleared his throat, clearly done with where the conversation was headed. “Where is Martin now?” he asked.

“He’s back in Colombia, under heavily armed guards, just in case. He said he almost didn’t make it out. Instead of just leaving like I told him to, he tried to have a conversation with them. They caught on that he knew something was off and tried to keep him from leaving. He barely managed to get out, but he’s safe now.” Trino looked at me, a look of sincerity on his face. “Miha, he would’ve been killed if not for you. I suspected he would go to Mexico, but I never actually thought he was du mb enough to do it.

I thought he was smarter than that. You saved his life.”

“It was a group effort,” I said, catching Misha’s eye. I felt Andrei squeeze my shoulders a little tighter. “I’d happily do it again. Just

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security guys that clearly can’t handle the fact that I’m different away from me.

Mishan laughed, asking in Russian, “can extra spicy gazelle stay forever? She’s definitely my favorite.”

Chapter 325

Chapter Three Hundred Twenty-Five

Sephie

“The Mexicans still haven’t figured out that Lorenzo was going to sacrifice them to overthrow Boss, basically. Do you have any spies within their ranks? Can you get word to any of them that was the plan? We can cause a little division between them and Ricardo,” Ivan said.

“Si, I can get word to them. That’s how Martin made it out. Two of the guys that are loyal to me created a diversion so Martin could escape. They’re high enough in ranks that they’ll be able to get word to the right people,” Trino said.

“There needs to be a little friction between them and Ricardo. Since Ricardo is obsessed with being better than me, I’d like for him to understand that’s not possible before he dies,” Adrik said. He was sitting at his desk, across the office from where I was on the couch with Andrei. I could feel his anger, but it was at a controllable level. His patience was wearing thin and his frustration with me being hurt was beginning to become a problem.

“I learned how to be extra spicy from watching him,” I said to Andrei in Russian, so only he could hear. I was hoping he’d be able to contain his laughter. He made a valiant effort, but still inevitably laughed loud enough that everyone heard him. Adrik raised his eyebrow at me, wanting to know what had happened. I kept my mouth shut and just smiled at him, hoping it wouldn’t irritate him more.

“I’m considering going back to Colombia soon, Jefe. I don’t like being away for too long, as I’m sure you understand. There is also the matter of Massimo that still needs to be addressed,” Trino said.

“I won’t keep you here, Trino. You’re always welcome, but I would want to be in Colombia if I were you. We’ll keep an eye on Sal.

I expect them to return. Keep me informed on the Mexicans. I’ll do the same for Sal and the other two bosses,” Adrik said.

They continued to talk for a few minutes before Trino left with the three guys brave enough to be in the same room as me. Once they were gone and Viktor had returned, Adrik looked at me and Andrei.

“Now, do you want to tell me what you two were laughing about?” He tried to say it sternly, but I could tell it was an act.

I giggled. “They’ve been saying that they like the extra spicy version of me, so when you said what you said about Ricardo, I told Bubba that I learned it from watching you.”

I could feel the pull in my chest that meant he was thinking about how much he loved me. His smirk evident on his face, he just pointed to me, then pointed to his desk. Andrei helped me off the couch so I could go to him. He pushed his chair back so I could sit in his lap, his arms wrapped tightly around me. He leaned down, his lips next to my ear, whispering, “it’s getting more and more difficult to fight my desire for you, solnishko. Especially when you’re bratty. It makes me want to f**k it out of you.” As soon as he got the words out, I felt his intense desire for me. He knew I always struggled to control myself when I felt it and now we were in front of everyone so I had no choice but to contain myself.

I laughed quietly, trying to maintain control. “You’re a little bit evil,” I said quietly so only he could hear. I pushed my hips back into him discreetly, causing his breath to hitch just slightly.

“So are you,” he said, his arms holding me tightly.

“I feel like we should celebrate your last dose of antibiotic, gazelle,” Misha said, his wide, handsome smile across his face. Me

and the Wonder Twins were once again in the kitchen making me snacks while the rest of the guys were downstairs with Armando.

“I am glad it kept me from having to go back to the hospital, but I am more glad that I won’t have to take it any more after this one. I’m hoping my appetite actually goes back to normal now. And that I can do more than, well, nothing,” I said.

“We’re all looking forward to that, spider monkey. The gym is more fun when you’re there,” Andrei said.

“Well, you didn’t tell me that. I could’ve been your cheerleader this whole time, but you guys have been going while I was sleeping. You only have yourselves to blame for that poor life choice,” I said, grinning at them both.

“Do you know how much trouble we’d be in if we got you to go to the gym with us and it made you sleep for a day and a half again?” Misha asked.

I laughed. “That’s fair. Is this how he was before he met me?” I asked. Adrik had been almost cranky lately. He refused to even attempt s*x with me because he was worried I wouldn’t be able to catch my breath. Really, he was worried he wouldn’t be able to hold back. Honestly, I was also worried. Not being able to catch my breath after he kissed me a few times had scared me. I didn’t want to tell him, as I didn’t want him to think he couldn’t
ine
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should talk to him about it, sphlet anskey,” Andrei said I was too busy laughing with Misha to notice that Andrei had stopped paying attention because he was fishing around my head.

“I now understand Stephen’s aversion to being read,” I said. Misha looked at mi, confused.

“Talk to who about what he asked.

“Talk to Bows. He’s cranky because she’s still hunt, so there’s been no, uh, extracurricular activities lately. But she got scared a few times when he kissed her and she couldn’t catch her breath after. She won’t tell him, though, Andrei said.

Misu looked at me seriously. “You should talk to him about it. It will help him be a little more patient while you heal a little more.

You’re acting more like yourself lately, but we don’t know what your lung feels like. Neither does he. Just because it’s not hurting you doesn’t mean it’s completely healed. And you heard the doctor, it’s easy to get pneumonia again until your lung completely heals. None of us want you to have to go back to the hospital”

“I don’t want him to feel like he can’t touch me,” I said. “Knowing him, he will,”

“He won’t,” Andrei said. “Knowing that you’re still struggling to catch your breath, and especially that it scared you, will help him keep that side of him under control, if you will. The last thing he wants to do is hurt you.”

“He’s still working through you being taken. Guys like to show that we’re in love with physical intimacy. He just wants to show you that he loves you is all. If he knows that you’re still struggling even with him kissing you, it’ll be easier for him to wait,” Misha said.

“How did you two get to be so handsome and so wise?” I said, smiling at both of them.

“Stop trying to change the subject, spider monkey. I’ll tell him if you don’t,” Andrei said, grinning at me.

“I ha te you.” Just for fun, I made my eyes go dark. Now that I’d been playing with it more, I could tell when it happened more

easily. It would still surprise me, like during my last check-up, but I was becoming aware of when it happened and more importantly, I could control it when it happened. I' had to admit that I was having more fun with it than I probably should. I knew the guys weren't intimidated by it, but Trino definitely was. I probably liked that a little too much.

"You love me and you know you do. Your demon eyes don't scare me," Andrei said, laughing.

"Who knew one of the side effects of antibiotics was extra spicy attitude?" Misha said.

Chapter 326

Chapter Three Hundred Twenty-Six

Sephie

Adrik and the other three guys walked back into the penthouse from their almost nightly visit with Armando. I could see the stress melt off of Adrik as soon as he saw I was still awake and smiling at him.

“And how is dearest Armando tonight?” I asked, standing up almost at a normal pace from the kitchen island. Adrik was by my side immediately, his arms around my waist.

“He might be learning firsthand how painful broken ribs are. I tried to explain it to him, but since I really have no point of reference, I decided to show him,” Ivan said. Misha just laughed and gave him a high five.

“Squish. What does it say about me that I adore this side of you?” I said, laughing.

“It says that you’re absolutely perfect, solnishko,” Adrik said, leaning down to kiss me gently. His s*xy smirk was evident on his face.

“Meant for this shi t, gazelle,” Misha said.

“Did he have any nuggets of information tonight?” Andrei asked.

“He might have, had we given him a chance to speak,” Stephen said.

“Apparently, Trino’s guys not being okay with Sephie made us all slightly irritable.”

I looked at Stephen, surprised. “Should I not have told Trino about Martin?”

Adrik pulled me back against him, his arms around my waist. He gently pressed his cheek against my neck.

“No, I think you did the right thing. Seph. We were talking about it on the way up. We were all somewhat surprised by our anger

about the situation. It's not just you that they have an issue with. They just don't know about Misha and Andrei's parts in it, but you did what you did when they took you and Ivan and you took all of it so they'd be protected. It's not fair," Stephen said. I could see he was frustrated with the situation.

"I didn't want them to know about Misha and Andrei. That's too much of a risk," I said,

"We know. And we agree. But it still doesn't make the situation any more right," Ivan said.

"The good news is that we don't have to see them very much once they go home," I said. "But I won't deny how adorable I think you all are for being pissed off about this right now."

"We haven't gotten you healed from the last time something happened before another threat showed up. It's enough to make anybody angry," Viktor said.

I stood, leaning against Adrik, looking at all the guys. Viktor, Ivan, and Stephen were clearly frustrated with Trino's guys. Misha and Andrei were a mix of frustrated with a splash of worry. I could feel Adrik's anger at the thought of Trino's guys even entertaining the thought of harming me. But more than that, more than the feelings of anger I was getting from all of them, I felt their love. They were fully prepared to destroy Trino's entire security team, ally or not, if it came to that. To make sure I was safe.

"Seph, why the tears?" Stephen asked, concerned. I was still smiling at them, but I was overcome with emotion, which usually meant tears would flow freely.

"They're happy tears, I promise. I know I've told you how safe you all make me feel, but I can feel it so clearly right now from

every single one of you. You're all ready to annihilate Trino's entire security force if it comes to it. I know a couple of you want to do it just to make a point, even if they don't try anything." I said, laughing. I caught Stephen and Ivan both nodding their heads like they agreed with that line of thinking: "I can feel how angry you all are, but more than that, I can feel how much you love me."

"We can't imagine life without you in it, princess," Ivan said, winking at me. "My God, it would be so boring," Misha said as dramatically as possible, to help lighten the mood. I couldn't help but laugh as I wiped the tears away.

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Adrik turned me to face him, helping me to dry the tears. He looked at me, very seriously, saying, "you've given us something we never thought possible. You've shown us all how much better we should be. And most importantly, you've brought your own magic into our lives. Our world was very dark before you, solnishko. You've reminded us that the darkest shadows come from the brightest light. And I, for one, will do everything in my power to make sure you're always able to shine as brightly as possible. I feel fairly confident in saying every single one of them will too."

Adrik

Once Sephie and I were alone in the bedroom, she still looked thoughtful as I helped her get out of her clothes and into my thirt for the night. "You still have something on your mind, love." I said, putting my shirt on her. She chewed on her bottom lip. I could feel her nervousness, which was unusual for her. "What is it?" I asked, putting my fingers under her chin gently and lifting her face so she would look at me.

"I know how frustrated and cranky you are because we can't have s*x," she said.

I laughed. "I am, yes, but I can handle it until you're better."

She took as deep a breath as she was able to. "It's not just that. I'm just as frustrated and that's probably why Misha and Andrei keep telling me I'm extra spicy, but..." She paused like she wasn't sure what to say. Her good hand started to fidget with anything within reach.

"But what, love?"

"It...it scared me when I couldn't catch my breath after we kissed," she said. She looked at me like she was unsure if I was going to be upset with her for telling me.

"Sephie..." I said, pulling her to me. I just wrapped my arms around her and held her for a few minutes. I sighed. "You've been acting like you felt better. I can't feel anything from your lung, so I wrongly assumed it was better than it is. I went too fast and I'm sorry," I said.

"I am feeling better. I just can't breathe like I should be able to yet and you're very good at taking my breath away," she said. I could hear her smiling when she said it, even though she had her face buried in my chest.

I put my hand on the back of her neck, pulling her face away from my chest so I could look in her eyes. "I'm happy you told me, solnishko. I don't want to hurt you and I don't want you to end up back in the hospital. I will do a better job of controlling myself until you're ready," I said, leaning down to kiss her gently.

"You're not mad?" she asked. She was almost confused by my reaction, which made her even more adorable than usual.

"How could I be mad that you told me that or that you're still healing?" I asked, trying not to laugh at her doe eyes. She chewed on her bottom lip. not sure how to answer. "I will never be mad that you come to me with something that's bothering you, Sephie."

This is how relationships work. We're a team."

"You're not going to swear off touching me until I'm better?"

"I will if that's what you want, but that's definitely going to make me extremely cranky. I'm going to go through the entire stockpile of punching bags we have here," I said, playing with her curls.

"I don't want that. I definitely don't want that," she said. "I just thought I would have to convince you that those extreme measures weren't needed."

I couldn't help but laugh at her. "We both know how terrible I am at keeping my hands off you. I'd rather not have to try to get better at that. I think you benefit from me touching you more than you realize, too. But I can definitely make sure you don't lose your breath again until your lung is all the way healed." She looked up at me, still unsure. It had been quite a while since she'd needed to search my eyes, but she needed to tonight. I let her. I'd almost missed it. I'd grown to adore the sweet smile of satisfaction that she got when she didn't find what she was always worried she would see. "You're getting much better much faster now that you can eat a little more. And now that you're done with your antibiotics, that process should speed up. We won't have to wait that much longer," I said. I felt the strong pull in my chest as she was satisfied with her search and smiled sweetly at me. I leaned down and kissed her gently once more. "Now get in bed. You need sleep so you get better faster," I said, grinning at her.

The next morning, I woke up to find her facing me again. For the first time in weeks, she was awake before I was. She was quietly watching me sleep, waiting for me to wake up. Her fingers lightly tracing circles over my back. I could feel her warmth

before I even opened my eyes.

“You’re awake,” I said, opening my eyes to see her gorgeous smile. “That’s the first time you’ve been awake before me in weeks.

Have you been awake long?”

“No, just a few minutes, but it was a nice few minutes. Although I have grown to love you holding me down when you wake me up though,” she said, biting her bottom lip.

“I’ll hold you down whenever you like,” I said, my mind immediately jumping to all the possibilities of how I could take advantage of that. I leaned over and kissed her gently. She rolled onto her back, stretching her good arm over her head, all her joints popping like normal.

“I want to see how painful it is if I leave the sling off for a bit today. I think my shoulder is more sore from not moving than it is because of being dislocated now,” she said.

“That’s a good sign. If you feel like you want to start moving it, then it’s healing from being torn when it was dislocated, I just don’t know about the extra weight from your cast.”

“Yeah, remind me to have a conversation with the doctor about rationing his cast materials next time. I don’t know much about setting broken bones, but using all the cast supplies seems excessive. This thing weighs as much as I do.”

I laughed. “It might weigh more than you do since you haven’t been eating much.” I poked her hip bone, which was more prominent than it had been since she got hurt before and after the ball.

“You’re all sharp again. I don’t even get to enjoy throwing you around more easily.”

“0/10. Do not recommend,” she said, trying to be serious, which made me laugh more. I rolled over so I was above her. Before I

could say anything, she reached up and pressed her palm against my cheek. “I love you, Adrik. More than I ever thought possible.”

Chapter 327

Chapter Three Hundred Twenty-Seven

Adrik

Trino stopped by the building two days later. He was leaving for Colombia and wanted to say goodbye before leaving. His guys stayed in the lobby once again, which put everyone slightly on edge.

“Miha, you look better each time I see you,” he said walking to give her a hug.

“Maybe I’ll have the use of both arms the next time I see you,” she said.

“You and Jefe must come to Colombia once this is all over with. Have you ever been to Colombia?” She shook her head no.

“Well, then, you must come. I’ll be your tour guide. It’s a beautiful country, Miha. You’ll love it there.”

“I’m not moving there, Trino,” she said, flatly. He laughed, shaking his head.

“How’s Martin?” I asked.

“He’s fine. He got a little roughed up when he escaped, but it’s nothing he can’t handle. He has no one to blame but himself for it anyway, so I’m somewhat glad he didn’t escape unharmed. We’re going to have a very long talk when I get back,” he said, thoughtfully.

“Good. He was likely coming from a good place, but he also clearly doesn’t have the experience you do when it comes to dealing with certain people,” I said. I somewhat expected Sephie to chime in, but she stayed quiet. I glanced quickly at Andrei, to see his eyes somewhat glazed over. While Sephie could pick up on things about people without anyone noticing, Andrei was still obvious about it. I knew there was more to be revealed about this situation, but if Sephie didn’t say anything before Trino left, I wasn’t going to either and Andrei decided to keep his mouth shut as well. We talked for a few more minutes. Trino promised to send video of Massimo when he finally threw him off a cliff. I wanted him to

keep me informed of what was going on with the Mexicans. It still worried me that they were working with Ricardo. More so for Trino's safety than anything. They wanted Trino gone and they were bold with Ricardo behind them. It was a volatile situation.

Even more than the situation with the other bosses and

Once Trino left the penthouse, I looked at Andrei, then to Sephie. "What do you two know?" I asked.

Andrei looked at me, surprised. "How do you know we know something?" he asked.

"Much like Misha, you get a certain look on your face when you're getting something. I can't see it with Sephie, but given that she stayed quiet, it likely means there was something she didn't want to say," I said.

Andrei laughed. "I'm going to have to work on that," he said.

"Not me. I don't care," Misha said, grinning.

Sephie looked at Andrei. "I want to know what you got first, Bubba."

"When Boss said that Martin was likely coming from a good place. That's not right. There's something deeper to why Martin went to the Mexicans," Andrei said.

"Something deeper like there's going to be a split between those two in the future?" I asked.

Andrei thought for a moment, then looked to Sephie like he was asking for help. "You don't need my help, Bubba. You're doing just fine on your own. You can ask for clarity. I do all the time. When something comes in, ask a silent question, and wait for the answer. It'll come," she said.

He inhaled deeply, thinking more on the situation. He started to say something, then stopped himself and thought for a moment longer. Finally, he said, "it depends on how Trino handles this when he gets back. Martin isn't happy with him, but I can't figure

out why. That's why he went to the Mexicans. It has the potential to be bad, but it's going to be bad for Martin, I think."

I looked to Sephie, who was smiling at Andrei. "See, you're getting more details. It'll get easier each time," she said. She then

looked at me, saying,

"it's not dissimilar to what's going on here. Martin is drunk on thoughts of grandeur, if you will. He's getting it in his head that he can run things better than Trino can. The situation with the Mexicans probably scared him, but depending on how Tring handles this, he'll either remember his place on his own or he'll be so angry with Trino that he'll go back to the Mexicans out of spite. Or he'll try to split from Trino and create his own empire, Only one of those options is going to result in him living much longer."

I sighed. I appreciated her keeping her mouth shut on this one. I didn't necessarily want to get in the middle of this, I would support Trino, whatever happened, but he needed to handle this or it would never really be resolved.

"It's always the people who seek power the most fervently who can't handle it," Stephen said.

"Because they're the ones looking for fulfillment outside of themselves. Something is missing from their soul and instead of seeking the answer to what's missing and why, they seek a band-aid to cover up their pain. People will commit unspeakable horrors trying to escape having to face their own shadow," Sephie said. I walked to her, pulling her to me. I could feel her body starting to shake slightly as she leaned against me. Instead of continuing on with this conversation, she changed the subject by asking me to help her take her arm out of her sling. "I'm tired of my arm being strapped down all day long," she said.

"Your shoulder doesn't hurt you as much now?" Andrei asked.

She shook her head no. "It's still sore, but I think it's sore from not moving at this point."

"That's likely. It's a good sign if you're feeling like you want to move it, but you should still go slow. Your shoulder was completely out of socket, which meant there was a lot of soft tissue damage. You can easily re-tear something," he said.

"Nobody wants that. I just don't want to be strapped down for like 20 minutes," she said.

"As soon as you can go longer periods without it in the sling, we can do some physical therapy to help you strengthen your shoulder again. You don't have much longer and the cast comes off too," Andrei said. It was evident on his face that he was looking forward to being able to get her back in the gym to train once more. He took his job as her trainer very seriously. He was quite good at it. I knew she would be back in shape quickly.

"Just as long as her lung is healed. Her shoulder and arm are healing faster than her lung," I said. Andrei looked to Sephie and smiled at her, like he knew something. She nodded her head, then pulled my arm around her, leaning back against me once more.

Chapter 328

Chapter Three Hundred Twenty-Right

Adik

taber that night, once we were alone again, I asked Sephie about her and Andre's silent exchange that morning. She laughed, telling me she was starting to understand Stephen's aversions to being read.

"Bubba picked up on the getting scared by not being able to catch my breath. He and Misha winced me to tell you I didn't want to at first because I the ou'd be worried about touching me at all and I didn't want that. They gave me the male perspective, which was helpful"

"Tm glad they convinced you to tell me. Although I don't know how I feel about Andrel's ability to read you. It seems to be working best on you right now," I said, helping her into bed.

"I don't think it will always be that way. He's getting his confidence from ne right now. Once he's more confident, it'll get better with everyone, but he'll also have to learn how to turn it off. Like with Stephen, I know insanely private, so I tend to turn it off with him. Only little things here and there with him."

I thought for a moment. "He is much more private than even Ivan is now that you say that."

She sighed. "Ivan is private because he just doesn't want to drudge up the past. It's over and done with and he doesn't want to have to relive it by telling someone about it. But he's also handling it. Like, it doesn't bother him day to day. When big stuff happens, it comes back, but he's learning new ways to cope and it's helping him overall." She waited for me to lie down, then she rolled over to face me. "Stephen, though. He has something in his past that's just as dark and traumatic as Ivan, except he's

not dealing with it. Something happened to him as a kid and he's kept that part of his life locked up tight. It's partly why he turns so sadistic and violent when he gets pushed past his limit. It's one of the universe's little jokes on us, When you ignore something, instead of it going away, it gets stronger. By shutting that part of his life away, he's basically been feeding the monster inside him. It's grown. He's going to have to deal with it at some point or the monster will consume him. For now, he can control it and we only see glimpses of it when he's angry, which rarely happens. But if he doesn't make friends with his beast, the beast will take over."

I inhaled, thinking back to what the acupuncturist had told me about Ivan, Sephie, and me. "The acupuncturist told me that you, me, and Ivan were older than the rest of them. Misha is in the middle. He's older than the other guys, but not as old as us.

Knowing Stephen, he signed up for the hardest lessons first." She giggled, nodding her head in agreement.

"Andrei's the youngest," she said. "She told me the same thing. She said nobody expected Andrei to figure out he was like me in this lifetime, but he did. I think that's also partly why he's more attached to me right now. He might've scared himself."

"Did she say anything about Stephen? She told me they all have gifts and we're supposed to help them discover them."

Sephie looked at me, curious. "When did she tell you that?"

"The first time she worked on you after you and Ivan were taken. You were talking with Ivan and she came to me to tell me all this. She told me you and Ivan couldn't hear us. It was like we had left the room, but when she stepped away from me, you saw me again and I could hear you talking to Ivan."

She smiled. "That's a handy trick," she said, thoughtfully. "What else did she tell you?"

"That you needed the most help with your pain, just as I needed the most help with my anger. She said your soul was showing me where you needed help by allowing me to feel your pain. And that you still don't feel completely safe being totally vulnerable when you're hurt."

She sighed. "I know I'm doing it, but I don't know how to stop trying to hide my pain from you."

"You don't have to now that I can feel it. Although I'm still not sure why I couldn't feel anything from your lung. But I can feel what your shoulder feels like and what your ribs feel like."

"You didn't feel anything from my lung because there's nothing to feel. I only felt pain when I was in the hospital from my lung."

"You're not missing anything," she said, smiling sweetly at me. She had a quiet way of instilling confidence in every one of us.

Even me.

"I did miss that it scared you, though," I said. "You're still able to hide that one from me, but luckily, I have backup now. What you can hide from me, you won't be able to hide from Andrei." She giggled, burying her face in my chest.

"I'm in deep sh it now," she said, still laughing.

It was almost two weeks later and Trino finally sent the video of Massimo's overly dramatic death. He really did light him on fire, but as it turns out, he didn't have to push him off the cliff Massimo pipped on his own, trying to get away from the flames that engulfed him. I shared the video with the guys, but Sephie skipped watching it. She could hear it while everyone else watched and she said that was enough for her. Her memory was so good that I understood why she didn't want to have that seared into

her fave images

I called Trino later that evening to ask about Martin and to give him an update on tal and Picando We'd had people in Italy watching them for us. Niko and Vito were still with them They were definitely planning, we host weren't entirely sure of their plans.

"How's Martin, Trino" I asked after we had laughed about Massimo. He sighed heavily. "I thought we were okay when I first got back. He was nervous about almost not making it out of Mexico. I thought it was going to be enough, but he's back to thinking there's another way of dealing with them. He's been questioning my business practices as well."

"Trino. I know you already know this, but he needs to remember his place. He's either going to go back to the Mexicans and get himself killed or he'll try to split from you and run his own business. Both of those options are not going to end well for him. If he tries to split and he comes to me, he'll meet the same fate as Anthony and Lorenzo."

"I know, Jefe. I'm trying to get him to use some common sense, but he's not thinking right now," Trino said. "My guys are oddly sympathetic toward him, as well."

Sophie had walked up beside me, tucking herself into my side while I talked to Trino. The call was on speaker so she could hear as well. "I've put you in a very tough spot right now. Trino, and I apologize for that. You need to be careful how much you say in front of your men. If you tell Martin he's going to die if he chooses to leave you, your men will turn against you once that happens. I did not peg them as being ultra-religious, but they clearly are. They're obviously fine with lighting someone on fire and

throwing them off a cliff, but knowing what will happen in the future is a clear line in the sand for them. I don't understand it, but that's where they're at. They'll likely go through extensive mental gymnastics to blame it all on me, but you'll be guilty by association. That's where I see this going," she said. "I didn't even tell them everything about you saving Martin," Trino said quietly.

"It doesn't matter. They saw enough that they know. Or they think they know. But take it as a blessing. If this was enough to cause their loyalties to waver, they were never loyal to you in the first place, Trino," she said.

We could hear Trino cursing in Spanish on the other end. "You're absolutely right, Miha. It seems I have some housekeeping to do."

After I hung up with Trino, Ivan looked at Sephie, his sly smile across his face. "Princess, you really were made for this shit."

"Called it," Misha said, pointing at Sephie.

"Stephen was also right. I know how people react to things they don't understand. Even without knowing things I'm not supposed to know, I could've called this one," she said.

Chapter 329

Chapter Three Hundred Twenty-Nine

Adrik

The day we were all waiting for was finally here. It had been long enough that Sephie was finally getting her cast off. She'd been making steady progress with her shoulder and was able to move her arm as much as the cast would allow. Her ribs were getting better as well and only caused a dull ache most of the time. She said she felt like she was starting to be able to breathe better finally, too. We were all looking forward to this trip to the hospital for once. "One more x-ray before the cast comes off, Sephie. I want to take another look at your lung, as well. How has your breathing been since you finished the antibiotics?" Dr. Williams asked.

"It's getting better. My ribs don't hurt as much anymore so it's easier to take deeper breaths," she said.

"Good. We should be able to get the cast off today and send you on your way," he said.

The x-ray wasn't a problem at all for her this time. She hadn't even worn the sling to the hospital. Most days, she left it off for almost the entire day. Andrei had been helping her do little exercises to help strengthen her shoulder again. Occasionally, she would wear the sling after a session with him because her shoulder would be extra sore. But she usually only wore it for a few hours and then it would come off again.

Dr. Williams walked back into the exam room with power tools. "So, the good news is that the cast can come off," he said, walking toward Sephie. Ivan instinctively took a step closer to her when he saw the electric saw in his hands. She leaned into me, her eyes wide.

“Um, what’s the bad news, doc?” she asked. I could feel her starting to get nervous.

“I have to use this to take the cast off,” he said, holding up the saw. She immediately looked at me, her fear evident, as Dr.

Williams went about setting up the saw.

“You’ve never had a cast removed before, solnishko?” I asked her in Russian.

“I’ve never had a cast before,” she replied.

“Did not expect that,” Ivan said.

“It’ll be okay, spider monkey. He just uses the saw to cut through the outer plaster layer. The rest will slide off your arm,” Andrei

said, trying to calm

her nerves.

“Keep your eyes closed, love. It’ll be over quickly,” I said, running my hand up and down her back to try and keep her calm. I

wanted her to keep her eyes closed just in case her eyes decided to go dark, too. So far, it seemed like the doctor had missed

that phenomenon and I wanted to keep it that

way.

She shut her eyes tight, hiding her face in my shoulder while she lifted her arm to give the doctor access. I glanced up at Ivan,

who was trying not to laugh at her. We had all assumed she’d broken bones before, especially given her history. It was

completely unexpected that she would be terrified to get the cast off, but I could easily feel her terror growing as the doctor

started to saw the cast off. It looked like Ivan cold too, as he clearly bristled once the saw turned on. His face went deadly

serious as he watched the doctor like a hawk.

Thankfully, it was over after just a few minutes and the doctor pulled the last of the cast off her arm gently. She sighed, but didn’t

move her face from my shoulder immediately. I could still feel her fear, but it was slowly lessening. I grabbed her left hand for the first time in weeks, my thumb tracing circles on the back of her hand. That was finally enough to get her to look up. Her fear disappeared quickly and I felt her warmth spread over my entire body as she felt her hand in mine for the first time. She looked up at me, her sweet smile across her face.

Dr. Williams turned around from putting the saw aside and said, "it's going to be sore for a few days while you remember how to use it, but your bone healed quite well. Your ribs are looking better as well, but they're still going to need a little more time to heal completely, so nothing too strenuous for a couple more weeks. Your lung looks nice and clear as well, so I shouldn't need to see you again as long as that stays the same." He nodded to everyone in the room and walked toward the door.

"Thanks, doc," Ivan said. Once the doctor had left the room, he looked at Sephie, smiling. He opened his arms to her, saying, "come here, princess, I've been waiting for this." She stood up and wrapped both arms around him, laughing. "I see now why you told me so often that my one-armed hugs socked. They really do su ck," he said, holding her tightly.

"Let us be gone from this place," she said, stepping back from Ivan. She held her hand out to me, as I stood up.

"We should celebrate," Misha said.

"Vinny's for lunch? Stephen asked as we were leaving the hospital. We still attracted attention walking through the hospital, despite Sephie not looking like she'd just survived death. The guys knew she was still sensitive about it and didn't particularly

care for the unwanted attention. They just silently moved in closer around us so it was harder for anyone to see her. I'm sure the Russian didn't help people to not stare, either.

"Can we actually go there?" Sephie asked.

Viktor looked at her, smiling the sweet smile that was reserved only for her.

"Of course, sestrichka. We can go wherever you like," he said. Her smile that made the world a brighter place stretched across her face.

"I haven't been anywhere in so long. This is going to be awesome," she said."

I caught Misha's eye when she mentioned not being able to go anywhere. I knew he was about to order me to go to the house.

"After lunch, we should go to the house for the rest of the week," I said, grinning at Misha, who looked surprised that I had caught on. And maybe slightly disappointed that he wouldn't be able to give me an order this time.

"Really?" she asked as she climbed into the backseat. She rarely needed help with anything anymore. While I was happy that it meant she felt better, I was finding myself a little disappointed that she didn't need my help so much. I'd become accustomed to helping her and I found myself really loving that she let me.

"Really," I said, sliding into the backseat beside her. I reached over and pulled her tight against me. She was practically in my lap, enjoying the fact that there was no cast in the way anymore.

"Best day ever," she said, using both arms to pull my arms around her once again.

Unbeknownst to Sephie, when I had the guys pick up warmer clothes for her, I had them get double of everything. Since we had to cut the sleeve off most of her shirts, she was going to need new ones once the cast came off. The complete shirts were sent

to the house, waiting for her cast to come off. She was still wearing my sweatshirt, but she was missing a sleeve underneath.

When we got to the house, I pulled her with me to the bedroom. Once we were alone, I pulled my sweatshirt off her. "I like where this is going," she said, grinning at me. Her lung was getting better, but I had decided to let her tell me when she was ready. I'd scared her once and I was not planning on scaring her again. I pulled her one-sleeved shirt off and walked to the closet to get her a new one.

"Where did that come from?" she asked when she saw the new shirt in my hand.

"I had them get extras. I knew we'd have to cut the sleeve off of some of them, but I also knew you'd need complete shirts once the cast came off," I said.

"You think of everything," she said quietly. She took the shirt from me and put it on. "Look, I can dress myself!" she said laughing.

She noticed the disappointment I was feeling at her not needing my help as much. She pulled me to her, her eyes searching mine to find the reason for my shifting mood. Her sweet smile on her face, she said, "I will always need you." She wrapped both arms around my neck, then said, "I want to try something."

"Want to try what?" I asked, pulling her tight against me. It felt so nice to be able to feel her body against mine once again. "As long as it doesn't involve you any farther away than this, I'm in," I said, smirking at her.

"It does not," she said, standing on her toes to kiss me. The kiss started gently, almost timidly. I knew she was testing her lung capacity, so I let her dictate how deeply she kissed me. She pressed her body into mine, tightening her hold on my neck, as she

increased the passion in her kiss. Her tongue exploring, making it more difficult for me to control myself. I could hear her breathing, but she didn't stop. I ran my hands over her back, down to her ass. Like she read my mind, she jumped and wrapped her legs around my waist.

She was making it incredibly difficult to control myself. I leaned my head back, stopping the kiss. I wanted to see how well she was breathing. She was out of breath, but she said, "I'm okay." I looked at her skeptically. She laughed at me, squeezing me with her legs. "It's better this time," she said. "I'm out of breath, but it feels like I can catch my breath easier."

I put my hand on the back of her neck, pulling her to me once more, I kissed her passionately, but quickly. "I think we should still take it slow. As much as I hate to say those words out loud..." I said.

She laughed, unwrapping her legs from my waist. "I don't disagree. But at least now I know I won't hyperventilate when you kiss me like that. I've missed that," she said. She turned so her back was to me. She pulled my arms around her waist, leaning back against me. "I can't wait to go to bed tonight. I can finally lay across your chest again," she said. It was such an innocent thing to say, but I felt my breath hitch at the thought of it. God, I've missed her.

Chapter 330

Chapter Three Hundred Thirty

Sephie

“How much work do you have today? Can we go for a walk or do you want me to drag one of the guys with me instead?” I asked

Adrik as we were walking down the stairs.

“I will go with you, but you need a jacket,” he said, stopping me from walking down another step. He pulled me back toward the bedroom once more to get the jacket that I hadn’t thought about.

“I like where this is going, too,” I said, grinning at him. I heard him curse under his breath as we walked back up the stairs.

“You are not making this easy on me,” he said, shaking his head.

Once downstairs, I realized that it’d been so long since we were at the house that there likely wasn’t very much food there. “Can

I send someone to get groceries?” I asked Adrik as we walked into the kitchen.

“You can do whatever you like, solnishko,” he said, following me to the kitchen island.

“What about me cooking? Am I still banned from that? You guys said I was banned until I had use of both arms again.” I held up my left arm. “I can use it again, so the ban should be lifted, right?”

He smiled at me. “Only if you let us help you,” he said.

“Deal.” I said, right as Stephen walked into the kitchen.

“What kind of deals are being made?” he asked.

“I can cook now as long as I let you guys help me,” I announced.

“Oh, Viktor is going to be so happy. VIKTOR!” he yelled at the top of his lungs, which made me jump and laugh at the same time.

All of the guys came rushing toward the kitchen like something was definitely wrong. Ivan and Andrei had their guns drawn, even. Stephen was standing there quietly waiting on them.

“What’s wrong? What happened??” they all asked urgently once they saw Adrik and I in the kitchen as well.

“Sephie can cook again,” Stephen said, his sly smile stretching across his face. Viktor’s deep belly laugh filled the kitchen as he walked over to me and picked me up in a bear hug. “This really is the best day ever,” he said, spinning me around once.

“We have to help her, since she’s still not 100%, but somehow I don’t think anyone will mind,” Stephen said.

“I’ll do everything. Whatever it takes,” Misha said. I couldn’t stop smiling at how happy they were about this new development. I

made a quick grocery list, handing it to Viktor. I knew this was one task he would happily take care of. Adrik announced that we

were going for a walk and would be back shortly. Once we were outside and alone, he was still laughing at Viktor’s reaction. “He

really does love it love it when you cook for us,” he said, shaking his head.

“Because it’s his language,” I said, grabbing Adrik’s hand as we walked.

“What do you mean?”

“Viktor goes around quietly making sure we all have everything we need, that your schedule is always taken care of, that the

building is secure, the vehicles are taken care of, food is ordered, he does everything. It’s how he shows his love. Me cooking for

you guys is that for him. It’s the way I show my love for all of you, but it’s his language. He understands it, without anyone having

to say the words. The other guys love it too, just as you do, but for Viktor, it’s silent recognition of everything he does for us

returned back to him,” I said.

“He does make sure everything and everyone is always taken care of. He’s so good at it that sometimes I forget he does it all,”

Adrik said.

I smiled at his somewhat worried expression. "I don't think you should feel bad about that. That's what he wants. He wants it all to appear effortless and mostly it is, because he's set the systems in place for it to be effortless."

Adrik cut his eyes over at me. "I think Trino is right. You know too much," he said, grinning at me.

"I can keep going." I said, my own grin stretching across my face.

"Please do. Your insights are always fascinating."

"It's also a replacement for the what ifs he's been plagued with ever since his wife and child were killed. He spends more time than he'll ever admit thinking about what could have been and the almost life he lived. In the beginning, it was painful to think about. Now, he's healed enough that it's more curiosity to think about what might have been. Coming home at the end of the day to a home-cooked meal helps him complete his vision for that almost life."

"Has he talked to you about this, solnishko?" Adrik asked.

"Nope. I didn't know about his wife and child until that night that they all found out I can't have kids. That's the only time he's mentioned her around me. I haven't asked either. I really do try not to pry in anyone's head, but I've picked up on a few times when he's been thinking about her. I pieced together the rest."

Adrik walked a few moments in silence. He was thoughtful about what I'd just told him. "Is he still bothered by it?" he asked.

"Not that I can tell. There's some understandable sadness there. I think that's why I pick up on it, but I don't feel like he's still struggling with feel more like he tries not to think about it too much. I'm guessing he struggled with it when it first happened?"

Adrik nodded his head. "Yeah, I don't think you've ever seen Viktor get truly angry, but he almost lost his grip on sanity for a while

there. He was consumed by revenge, which as you know eventually led to his landing himself in the Syrian prison. Honestly, it was a suicide mission for him. He didn't expect to live through it. We'd tried to talk him out of it. We thought we had talked him out of it, but he left in the middle of the night without a word to the rest of us. Ivan was pissed. It almost ruined their friendship completely. They had a few heated arguments after we got Viktor out," he said.

"Really?" I asked. Viktor and Ivan seemed very close. I couldn't imagine them ever fighting each other.

Adrik nodded. "Ivan knew that Viktor was trying to get himself killed. Like drug use, Ivan has very strong opinions on suicide.

Very strong. He told Viktor if he ever thought about doing anything like that again to let him know. Ivan would put a bullet in his head for him instead of putting everyone else's life in danger."

"Savage. But also, partly true."

"Ivan's never been in love, though. He doesn't understand the hell that Viktor was in after having lost his wife and his unborn

child. He's gotten closer to understanding it since you came into our lives.

Ivan had a conversation with me about it shortly after

we got back from Italy. He said he owed Viktor an apology because he was starting to understand how he felt after his wife was

killed. He said what happened on the plane over, when you didn't recognize him and then when you were in your nightmare and

kept yelling for me, then him, gave him a glimpse someone you love."

"I had no idea I had that much of a negative effect on him during all that," I said.

what it was like to lose

"Not just him. All of them. Even Stephen. I think it was the first time they all realized how much you mean to them and the first

time they'd had to come to terms with the possibility of losing you. You were in so much pain that you probably didn't notice, but during the first few days when you were asleep more than not, they each went through hell. They would come in to check on you when you were asleep in just your shirt, on top of me. They all saw how badly you were hurt, but they couldn't do anything about it. This time was just as difficult for them, but they were able to help you much more. They were happy to move you, to let you sleep on them, to make food for you. It all helped them process the pain of thinking we'd lost you. I saw how much they doted on you. It helped them get through this time much easier than after the ball." He had stopped walking and was standing in front of me, his hands in the usual battle with my curls.

"That's why you're so sad that I'm able to do more stuff on my own again," I said. It all made sense now. He placed his warm palm against my cheek. his thumb rubbing lightly back and forth. He had a small smile on his lips as he looked in my eyes, like he was lost in them. "I will always need you.

Adrik," I said, firmly. His s*xxy smirk that I adored appeared on his face as he leaned down and kissed me gently, his palm still on my cheek. I smiled against his lips. "You regularly take my breath away with your kiss, but sometimes the sweet ones can completely turn my insides to go," I said, shaking off the goosebumps he had caused.

"Noted," he said, laughing at my antics.

"Let's go back. I'm getting cold," I said. He grabbed my hand and turned to walk back to the house "Nope," I said, stopping him.

He turned to look at me, confused. "I'm the go ddamn princess. I don't walk back to the house." I walked behind him, jumping on

his hark. He bounced me higher and kept a tight hold of my legs as he walked us back toward the house, clearly amused with me. I pushed my warmth to him as we walked, knowing he would know I was thinking about how much I loved him.

“Did you walk too far, spider monkey” Andrei asked when he say I hitched a ride back.

“Nope. She’s the go ddamn princess. She doesn’t walk back to the house,” Adrik said, laughing.

“Solid line of thinking, gazelle. You don’t want to waste too much energy and not be able to cook later. I fully support this decision,” Misha said, grinning at me.

“See? Misha gets it,” I said, pointing at him as Adrik walked us by the couches. He walked to the kitchen, setting me down on the counter while made coffee.

“This will help you warm up.” he said, eventually handing me a warm cup of coffee.

“And make sure I have enough energy to cook,” I said, grinning at him.

“I support this!” Misha yelled from the other room.