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Chapter 391

Sephie

After finally exhausting ourselves that evening, we fell into a tangled mess together on the bed and fell asleep. I knew he wasn't going anywhere. I knew I wasn't going anywhere. But there was a bigger part of me than I realized that felt so much more secure now that he'd made it official.

And boy did he make it official. This ring had its own zip code. But it was absolutely perfect in every way. He'd remembered my joke about black diamonds, so the main stone was a square black diamond, large enough to be seen from space. Pretty sure, anyway. It was surrounded by five smaller rubies, as well as even smaller white diamonds. It was perfect. It was a constant reminder that he, as well as all five of the guys, would always be with 1.

Once asleep, I found myself walking down that same familiar path to that same familiar house. As soon as I looked down and noticed the path, I ran the rest of the way inside, knowing what was waiting on me.

"Dad!" I yelled as I ran through the front door. He could barely stand up from the piano before I smacked into him, wrapping my arms around him.

"Hey, peanut!" he said, his wide smile on his face.

"It's been a long time. I've missed you," I said.

"Oh, I've been around. I check in from time to time. You're not the only one with a whiteboard to keep track of outcomes," he said, a sly smile creeping across his face.

I laughed. He really was where I got most of my humor from. “What was the latest one?”

“We’re all waiting on Stephen. He’s closer than he’s ever been to figuring out his gift, but he hasn’t made the jump yet. You almost got him to do it the other day, but he’s still holding back. I have complete confidence that you’ll be able to help him figure it out soon, though. You know, before the end of the month, if you could. Help an old man out and what not...” he said, laughing.

“I’ll see what I can do. I didn’t know he was that close. I only just got him to open up about his past.”

“That’s the key, I think. He has to face his past first and then he’s ready. Same for Viktor. He has to finally come to terms with his past before he can move forward. They’re both closer than they’ve ever been, though. That’s why I’m here, actually.”

“To check on your bet pool?”

He laughed. “No. To help you hurry them along. You need them, Sephie. Things are about to get very bad. You’re going to need all the help you can get, although you did surprise everyone by bringing Vitaliy along. No one thought you’d be able to do that.

Well, I did. Because I know how special you really are. But no one else did. Even Lena was surprised you managed to bring him back from the brink. He’s been living in darkness for a very long time, peanut. But he’ll prove to be very useful for you in what’s coming.”

“What’s coming? Can you tell me? Is it Sal?”

“I’m technically not supposed to interfere. I can nudge you along, like I’ve been doing, but the future is dependent on decisions made in the present. I’m not allowed to interfere with those decisions. That’s the rules. But what I can tell you is that you will

succeed, but you have to stick together and you have to rely on each other. More than you ever have before. You've all done quite a good job at handling what life has thrown at you so far. It's going to get even more weird, but it wouldn't happen if you couldn't handle it."

"What about Viktor though? I'm worried about him. He seems the most unsure out of all of them. I think I scare him now."

"It's not you, peanut. It's his potential. That's what scares him. He sees it in you, but can't see it in himself. It'll come. You'll help him, just as you've helped the others. But you have to start believing in yourself again. You got knocked down; almost farther than I've ever seen you get knocked this time. But you got back up. When you feel your fear and panic threatening to take over, remember that. Not once have

Is just excitement, without the breath. Breathe into your fear, peanut. That's what you're missing. That's what Adrik has been trying to help

con channel your fear, the same way you've learned to channel your anger. You're going to need it. Fear and to be. Use them to your advantage.?

I was quietly contemplating what he'd just told me. "What about my eyes? Why do they have a mind of their own now?"

He chuckled. "You were right, peanut. They're your warning system. You used them correctly when Sal and Armando took you and Ivan. They're the reason Sal never came back. He ordered Armando to take care of you because he was terrified of you. He still has nightmares where he wakes up in cold sweat after seeing your face and your black eyes in that room. That's also the reason Armando was so savage with you. He was terrified of you and tried to cover it up with his anger. You almost saw through

it, but your fear was stronger than you realized when it was happening. Learn to control your fear and you're unstoppable."

"But my lung. I still can't catch my breath and then I panic."

"I know a certain acupuncturist that can help with that. Andrei was right, too. It's more to do with your anxiety about not being able to breathe than it is your lung."

"What about Ivan and Andrei? Was Adrik right? Ivan can see evil and Andrei can see good?"

"He was right. He's becoming quite astute to all of this going on. The four of you complement each other, balance each other.

Adrik can feel good and evil, just as you can. You just feel it in different ways.

Ivan can see evil, just as Andrei can see good. They

just see it in different ways. You can use this. Misha is there to tie it all

together. Stephen and Viktor will fit nicely into the puzzle

as well once they figure out their gifts. You all have a specific role to play in

what's coming. The key is Ricardo. Sal is a pawn for

Ricardo, peanut. Ricardo is worse than you could imagine and will become more so if you don't stop him. Same for Martin.

They've both made deals that have everlasting consequences."

I chewed on my bottom lip as I thought about everything he was telling me.

He smiled down at me sweetly. "It's a lot, I know. But

I'm always around. Ivan is doing a fantastic job. So are Andrei and Misha.

They're all more connected to you than I think you

realize yet. Soon Viktor and Stephen will be too. You need each other. But

right now, you need to go back. Adrik is awake and

can't leave you. I didn't look, but I know you're not exactly decent so he can't take you downstairs with him."

He tried to hide his grin, but he couldn't. "Dad!" I said, completely embarrassed.

“You’re an adult, peanut. You do adult things. But that doesn’t mean I can’t laugh about it,” he said, snickering.

I hid my face in my hand. “I can’t believe this,” I said under my breath, but I couldn’t help but laugh at the absurdity of it all.

He leaned down and kissed my forehead. “I love you, peanut. And it’s obvious to literally every being in the universe that Adrik

loves you now too,” he said, pointing to my ring. Huh, it showed up in my dream too. “Of course it did,” he said, like he was

reading my mind. “It has special meaning to you, as well as them. Think of it like your pinky swears you have with most of them.

Funny how you haven’t made a pinky swear with Stephen and Viktor yet...”

Just as I was about to say something, he disappeared and everything faded to black in front of me. I was aware of Adrik’s hand

running lightly over my back. He felt me start to stir. “Good morning, love.

Were you having a dream? You were laughing,” he

said, his wide smile on his face when I picked my head up off his chest to look at him.

“Mmm hmm. I was talking to my dad who informed me that you were trying to wake me up because you couldn’t leave me since I

was naked. Do normal people get embarrassed by their fathers in their dreams too or is that just me?”

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Sephie

“And what insight did your father have this time?” he asked, as he rolled us both over so he was laying on top of me. I could tell by his expression that my eyes were changing.

“Are they swirling?” I asked, curious. He nodded, but it was clear he was still fascinated by them. I giggled. “He said that we were right about them. They really are my warning system. He said Sal still wakes up in a cold sweat thinking about my black eyes.

Not gonna lie, that makes me really happy.”

He chuckled. “Me too. It’s probably why Armando gets angry anytime your name is mentioned, as well.”

I looked at him, my fingers running lightly over his face. “My dad did say that you’re becoming quite astute to everything that’s happening,” I said, grinning at him. “He said Armando was terrified of me and that’s why he was so savage. Apparently, he’s still terrified.”

“He should be,” Adrik said, his anger slowly rising to the surface. I put my hand on the back of his neck, pulling him down to me. I didn’t want to think about all that first thing in the morning. Especially not this morning.

He buried his face in my neck, his rough facial hair rubbing lightly against my skin. “You’re right. We shouldn’t be thinking about that so early in the morning,” he said. His hand moved to my breast, squeezing it to illustrate his point.

“You’re getting better at knowing what I’m thinking without even having to search my eyes,” I said. He went to move his hand from my breast, but I caught it and put it back.

“I need to stay ahead of the guys,” he said, picking his head up and grinning at me.

“They’re about to give you a run for your money, apparently. I figured out the key to getting Stephen and Viktor to realize their gifts. That was why my dad came to me. He’s trying to hurry us along. He said we’re going to need them soon.”

“I’m not sure I like the sound of that, but I have total confidence that you’ll find the right things to say to them to get them to figure out their gifts. Just not right at this moment. First, I need to hear you scream. Then breakfast. Then maybe I’ll have you for second breakfast. We’ll see,” he said, his lips on my neck as his hand ran down my stomach to my inner thighs. He lightly ran his hands over my thigh, as he moved one of his legs in between mine, pulling my leg around his waist. I moved my hips against his, already wanting him inside me. I would never get enough of him.

“I like your plans for the morning. I approve of your plans for the morning,” I said, already breathing heavier as his lips were on my neck. I raked my nails over his back, eliciting a low groan from him. He moved on top of me, wrapping my other leg around his waist. “I don’t think I will ever tire of waking up this way. We can do this every single day for the rest of our lives and I’d be very happy about that,” he said as he rubbed the tip of his cock along my folds, teasing me. I pushed my hips into him, trying to get him to slide inside me. “I love that you’re so eager, my love,” he said, his voice husky with desire.

“I can’t help it. I can’t get enough of you,” I said, breathlessly. He enjoyed winding me up.

“I hope you never do,” he said as he slammed into me before stilling to let me adjust. I moaned loudly at the intense pleasure of

him filling me up. I moved my hips, grinding against him, loving the gentle friction. He groaned against my neck as my pussy clenched around him. His hand moved to my thigh, pulling my leg tighter around him as he bucked his hips into mine. Another moan escaped my lips, causing him to exhale. I knew he was slowly losing his control. I was happily waiting for it to happen.

I put my lips close to his ear, almost whispering, "I love when you lose control. He sat up enough that he could look me in the eyes. He searched my eyes for a moment, then I saw his sexy smirk on his face. His lips crashed into mine, claiming every inch of my mouth as his. Every inch of my body as his. Every piece of my soul as his.

The guys were making breakfast when we finally made it downstairs. They all had very sweet smiles on their faces, as they knew what had happened the night before. It was kind of adorable to see these giant men excited that their boss had officially claimed his girlfriend as his future wife.

"Come on, princess. Let's see it," Ivan said, motioning for me to show him the ring. I held it up so they could all see it, a goofy grin on my face. They all moved to surround me, getting a closer look. They'd all seen it, I was sure, but they were acting like it was the first time. I might've loved them all a little more for it. Ivan put his arm around my shoulder. "You're officially stuck with all of us now, princess," he said, smirking at me.

"I could think of much worse things in the world, Squish," I said, wrapping my arms around his waist. "I know you had a very big part in this, too. I might love you a little more for it."

"I'm just glad I don't have to hide it any longer. I've been holding onto that thing for a while now. I was getting paranoid you were

going to see it somehow or see me thinking about it and find out about it,” Ivan said.

“She saw the plans for it on my desk one day, but didn’t catch on. You were safe, but I agree. It’s becoming increasingly difficult to surprise her,” Adrik said.

“You did with this one. I had no clue. I keep trying to tell you I don’t pry. I don’t think you believe me,” I said, smacking Ivan’s arm.

“But I am going to need extra training from Bubba to be strong enough to carry this thing around all day. This arm is gonna be like twice the size of my other one.”

“Job security, spider monkey. That’s why it’s that big. That was my decision,” Andrei said, grinning at me.

I laughed, leaving Ivan to go to Andrei. I wrapped my arms around him as he picked me up off the floor. “I love you all. I hope you know that.”

“We love you; Sephie. We’re not going anywhere. Now you have a constant reminder that you’re stuck with all of us,” Stephen said.

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Chapter 393

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Sephie

I watched Stephen look at the message that just came through on his phone. His face went white. I think he might've forgotten to breathe even. Whatever news he just got was not good news.

"Yoden?" I asked quietly, trying to snap him out of it. "What's wrong?"

He was staring at his phone, but he slowly raised his gaze to look at me. His eyes were wide, not in shock. He was afraid. I

dropped what I was doing and went to him. "Stephen? What happened?

What's going on? Talk to me," I said, reaching out for his

arm. When I touched his arm, I got hit with his memories. All of them. Every dark detail he never wanted me to know. Every time

his sisters abused him and tortured him in the worst way possible, humiliating him for the sheer joy of it. I saw everything. I felt everything.

I didn't mean to. I'd never had it happen like that before. I wasn't actively searching his mind. I was trying to comfort him. I felt

tears burning my eyes as I went to move my hand from his arm, apologizing. I wasn't sure if he knew that I'd just seen everything

he never wanted me to see. He caught my hand, holding it in place, but still not yet meeting my gaze.

"They're coming to the city. I never thought they would actually come here, but they'll be here in two days. They want to see me. I

haven't seen them in years. I don't know if I can face them," he said. He still hadn't looked at me, but he wouldn't let go of me either.

I sat down next to him, putting my other hand on top of his, resting my head on his shoulder. "You don't have to see them. You

can tell them to f**k off. You don't owe them anything," I said.

He was quiet for a moment, contemplating like he always did. "I think about what I'll say to them when I'm forced to see them again. Each time I think about telling them off. Each time I think about pulling all of their demonis out and putting them on full display for everyone to see. I think about breaking their minds the same way they tried to break mine." He sighed. "And every time I can't do it. I go back to that quiet kid that was terrified of his sisters." I rested my chin on his shoulder, looking at him, fighting his memories. "I'll be with you the whole time. You don't even have to say anything. I'll happily say it for you. I'd love nothing more than to destroy them so completely they never want to see you again and they leave questioning their entire existence."

He chuckled. "I might pay to see that."

"I will happily do it," I said, my anger oozing out. I didn't have my contacts in, so he saw my eyes go dark when he glanced at me.

"Huh. I didn't think I'd miss seeing your eyes change, but I kinda miss your demon eyes. That's such weird thing to say, now that I say it out loud."

I smiled at him, chewing on my bottom lip. I was trying to calm down so the other guys wouldn't come rushing in. I wanted a few more minutes alone with Stephen.

*Yoden, I don't want to fr eak you out, but when I touched your arm, I got a full view into your head. I didn't mean to. I wasn't trying to, it just happened. I saw everything," I said, tentatively.

"I know you did. I wanted you to. It's easier than me having to tell you. I've found having to say the words is harder than anything," he said. "I wasn' sure it would work, but clearly it did.

My heart just broke for him. He'd been carrying this around with him for so long with no one to talk to about it. His sisters were

truly well, “de parents know?” I asked quietly,
Talthfully

“I have thought about that, as wel. It makes me wonder if that’s why I ended up in the career path I’m in. Maybe I would’ve been an accountant otherwise,” he said, finally looking at me. A sly grin on his face. “An accountant that murders numbers,” I said, unable to contain my laughter at my corny joke. He laughed quietly, but he was still struggling to get a handle on his emotions.

“What do they want while they’re here? Like do you just have to suffer through dinner with them? What’s the plan and how can we make this the most uncomfortable visit to the city they’ve ever had?” I asked.

“They’ll want to spend time with me while they’re here, I’m sure. I don’t think I’ll get by with just a dinner.”

“I’ll be there every time you have to see them,” I said. He looked at me, somewhat surprised, which made me laugh. “Don’t be surprised. There’s no way I’m letting you face them on your own. Pinky swear, even.”

His look of surprise only grew on his face, “What’s that?”

I grinned. “You’re in for a treat, Yoden. The pinky swear is the holiest of holy swears there is. All the gods, goddesses, demigods, and holy men were polled on what the holiest swear is and 7 out of 10 agree that the pinky swear is where it’s at. The other three were promptly thrown into the pits of He ll for disagreeing, but that’s neither here nor there.”

He finally laughed. “Okay, so how does one go about making this holiest of holy swears?”

I put my pinky out in front of him. “Give me your pinky,” I said. I hooked my pinky around his once he put it out in front of him. “I

pinky swear that you will never have to face the demons of your past, present, and future alone ever again.”

He smiled as he looked at our pinkies, still hooked together. “And I pinky swear you’ll never have to face your demons alone ever again too.”

I grinned at him, loving that he indulged me, but also knowing this was the first step to getting him to realize his full potential. I

leaned my head over to his shoulder once more. “You’re my favorite. Don’t tell the others.”

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Chapter 394

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Adrik

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I had talked Sephie into taking a bath. She was stressed, but she wouldn't tell me why in front of the other guys. I'd felt her anger briefly that afternoon, but she wouldn't come clean on why that happened either. I knew she'd tell me once we were alone. Or I could fish it out of her head. The more I practiced, the better I got at reading her. There wasn't much she could get by me now.

“Do you want to talk about what's bothering you, love?” I asked after she'd been quiet for a few minutes. She was enjoying my hands on her body. I could feel her relax more the longer we stayed in the hot water.

She sighed. “I know Stephen's past now. I had my suspicions after I got him to open up to me the other day, but he somehow managed to share all his memories with me when I touched his arm today. I saw everything. What's worse is I felt everything he felt while it was happening. I don't know how I managed to get through it without breaking down or why I haven't broken down since,” she said. I heard her snifle once, but she continued. “He's so insanely private that I don't want to tell you too much out of respect for him, but it's bad. His sisters are evil. I legit asked if I could kill them today. Like, for real. I'd do it and not think twice about it.”

I could feel her anger starting to rise. It felt different than her normal anger. It almost felt more like mine. There was more chaos to her anger than usual.

“How did he share all his memories with you?” I asked. This seemed like it was different from how Sephie usually got information from people.

“I have no idea. He was frozen in terror because he’d just gotten a message that his sisters are coming to the city in two days.

He’s terrified to see them. I went to comfort him and I saw everything. It went from him not wanting me in his head at all to him sharing literally every detail with me. He said he was trying to share it with me. That it’s easier than having to tell me what happened.”

“What do his sisters want when they come here? He knows he doesn’t have to see them, right?” I asked. I’d never once heard Stephen talk about his sisters. I didn’t even know he had sisters until Sephie told me.

“I told him the same thing, but I just have this feeling like he needs to see them. I think on some level he does too, but he’s understandably scared. I told him I’d be with him the entire time. He shouldn’t face them alone. I’d also love a reason to punch them, sooooo I’m hoping that happens,” she said. I could hear the smile in her voice when she said it.

“We will all be with him. If they’re as bad as you say they are, then we’ll all help him face them. I can throw them out of the city and make sure they never return as well. I can give shot on sight orders,” I offered. She giggled, wrapping my arms around her.

“I’m serious. I can feel your anger. It’s different with this. It feels more like mine, which means you’re having trouble controlling it.

That never happens. I don’t need details to know this very serious and that you’re feeling very protective of him.”

She sighed, hugging my arms that were tight around her. “I love you.”

I leaned down, kissing her neck. "I love you, solnishko. And I love that you love my men as much as you do, too. It's very endearing that you're as protective of them as you are. You have no idea how adorable you are," I said, not able to hide my smile as she giggled again, her body finally relaxing.

Sephie asked me to call Ivan to the penthouse before everyone else came up for breakfast. "I know he'll be up. He's a complete psycho that wakes up at the ungodly hour of 4 like every day. I want to talk to him alone before everyone else comes up. I think he can help with Stephen's situation."

I sent a quick text to Ivan the night before, making sure he was in the kitchen before everyone else. Vitaliy and Aleksel were usually the last to come out, so we didn't need to worry about them. He looked somewhat concerned when we came out of the bedroom, wondering why he'd been summoned. His face softened when Sephie smiled at him as she walked to him, "Good morning, Squish," she said, as he wrapped his arms around her engulfing her completely as he hugged her.

"Princess, Wanna tell me why I've been summoned?" he asked, a small grin on his face.

She stopped back from him, already chewing on her bottom lip. We both felt her mood shift quickly. "Uh oh. That's not good.

What's going on?" he

now clearly worried. We could both feel her anger coming on once more.

"So, it was slightly different, but Stephen shared all of his memories with me yesterday. I know everything. I felt everything." She

paused, clearly trying to maintain control of herself, "His sisters are completely evil. I don't want to say much more than that, as

he's so in sanely private. The issue that his sisters are coming to the city.

They'll be here tomorrow. He's terrified to see them. I

told him he won't have to face them alone and I know a of you will agree with that. I think he needs to face them. I keep getting the feeling that it's what's holding him back. I really need your help to bring out their demons for everyone to see. It's probably going to be ho rrific, but I think we need to help him face them. Can you..."

He put his hand up, stopping her. "Say no more. You never have to ask me if I'm willing to make bi tchy girls uncomfortable. That answer is always going to be a yes," he said.

She smiled at him, but it was short-lived. "These are more than just bitchy girls, Squish. I'm thinking what happened with Battista's associate at the hotel might happen again. As much as I don't want you to go through that again, I think it'll be what Stephen needs to see happen to give him the strength to cut them out of his life for good."

"If I know there's a chance it'll happen, I can at least be prepared. The surprise at the hotel didn't help," he said.

"You know I'll be there for you, but I'm also very worried about Stephen. He went wh ite when he got their message yesterday.

He couldn't speak for a few minutes."

"If you keep your anger the way it feels right now, it'll cancel out everything else. It feels different," Ivan said.

I looked at him, agreeing. "It feels more chaotic, right? Like it feels like mine does, not hers."

He nodded his head. "Yeah, this is a new level. Even more so than what she feels with Sal. I said it feels like she'll burn the world to get to Sal, but this feels even worse than that."

"Like I want to rip their souls out and deliver them to He ll myself," Sephie said quietly, her eyes completely black.

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Chapter 395

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Adrik

Sephie's anger levels stayed at a smoldering level throughout the day. Andrei and Misha felt the difference, both asking me about it instead of asking her.

"Boss, is Sephie okay? She feels different and not necessarily in a good way," Andrei asked when he and Misha walked into my office. Sephie had taken Stephen upstairs to help her, before any of the others could offer. She also asked me to keep them as busy as possible so she could have a little extra time with Stephen.

"Close the door," I said.

Misha closed it, now concerned. "What's going on, Boss?"

"Sephie found out about Stephen's past. I don't know details but it has to do with his sisters, who will be here tomorrow. Her anger is justifiable, but it's different than it normally feels. It has me worried, to be honest. Her anger feels like mine. It's very chaotic, which means she's struggling to control it," I said.

"Does he have to see his sisters when they're here? I mean, if it's that bad, why not just tell them to f**k off?" Misha asked.

"I said the same thing. So did she, but she also feels like Stephen needs to confront them. She feels like this is what's holding him back from realizing what his gift is," I said.

"What does he need from us?" Andrei asked.

"He's not going anywhere near his sisters without all of us with him. I think we're going to have to keep an eye on her to keep her from snapping his sisters' necks. She already asked him if she could kill them and she wasn't joking. Other than that, I think we

let it play it out. Between Ivan and Sephie, those girls don't stand a chance. I think Stephen might need to see his sisters for who they really are for once, instead of the monsters he remembers from his childhood."

Misha clapped his hands, rubbing them together. "I love a good unraveling." That night, Stephen told everyone that his sisters were coming. He didn't go into details, but he made it obvious that he was not in any way excited to see them.

"Don't worry, man. We're going with you. Or are they coming here?" Andrei asked.

"Noooo. They aren't coming anywhere close to here. There's no way in hell I would tell them where I live," Stephen said. I had to admit to being slightly relieved about that. "I'm supposed to meet them for dinner tomorrow night. Surprisingly, they're staying at Battista's hotel."

I knew how I could help. Sephie caught my mood shift and glanced at me, searching for her answer to her silent question. She didn't say anything, but she added her own plans on top of it. We silently had a conversation that no one else in the room was aware of and I loved every second of it.

Later, once we were alone, I made sure I read her correctly. "I just want to make sure I'm correct. You caught my idea about the hotel?"

"I did. Battista seems to be very willing to help us out, but mostly because he thinks there's something special about you and I that can be useful to him

for that, then we

"You're okay with him seeing your eyes?"

okay with acaring the ever-loving shi t out of Stephen's sisters. If Battista helps us out and seeing my eyes is the payment for with it. Vitally can see too. He doesn't know about them yet either," she said. She was chewing on her bottom lip, the are you thinking about?"

"I wish there was a way to push everything I felt when he shared his memories with me onto them. I don't usually get emotions with memories like that, but it was very clear that I was experiencing it as he did, feelings and all, I want them to feel what he felt. I want them to know that pain. I want. it to haunt them the same way it has him. They're the ones that need to carry that burden, not him."

"I agree with you, but I don't know how to make that happen. Nor do I want you to hurt yourself by trying to make something happen that shouldn't. happen. You could push your anger to Andrei and Misha, but you're also connected to them. You don't have that connection with Stephen's sisters, so I don't know that it would work the same with them."

"I know. That's what I can't figure out. Doesn't mean I still can't wish for it to happen, though."

I pulled her to me, kissing her gently. "I have no doubt you will figure out how to make them suffer as much as possible while in your presence." I had a small grin on my face, as I was loving the thought of being able to witness it, "Let me call Battista before it gets too late, love. Don't stress about this too much. Otherwise we'll have Ivan and the Wonder Twins back up here because they're worried you're going to burn the building down."

She cut her eyes at me, a sly smile curling up one side of her plump lips. "Call. Battista. I won't burn anything down in the meantime," she said. God, I

love her.

Battista answered promptly when I called him. I told him as few details as I could while still explaining the situation to him. He was understandably hesitant, so I sweetened the deal for him. “You think there’s something special about Sephie and I, don’t you?” I asked. I heard him inhale. Then silence. “You’ll be able to answer that question if you make this happen.”

“The restaurant is yours,” he said. “I look forward to seeing you tomorrow.” The next morning, I told Vitaliy what was happening. “There’s more to Sephie that you still don’t know about. She plans on using it on Stephen’s sisters tonight, but we needed Battista’s restaurant to give us a somewhat private venue to make it happen. His sisters aren’t coming here to the building. We told Battista he’d be able to answer his questions about us if he makes it happen.

He agreed. You’ll also get a show if you join us,” I said.

“What more can she do?” Vitaliy asked.

“You’ll see,” I said, a smirk on my face.

He scoffed. “Now Battista is going to want to stay here longer. He drags me to so many lunches,” he said, rolling his eyes.

I chuckled. “You’ve already stayed much longer than you’d planned anyway. What’s a little longer?”

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 396

396

Sephie

Stephen had been nervous most of the day. I couldn't say I blamed him, either.

When it finally came time to leave for the hotel,

he looked like he might back out. "What if I tell them I'm sick?" he asked.

"You can tell them you're sick. You don't have to see them this time, but

you're also just pushing off the inevitable. They're going

to keep coming back every few years. You'll keep having this same reaction

every few years, too. Or, you can go tonight, let us

back you up, and see that your sisters are not as scary as you remember," I

said. "And maybe get some enjoyment out of me

punching them. I don't know. We'll see what happens."

He laughed. "Okay, okay. I'll go." He slid his arm around my shoulders. "Thank

you," he said, quiet enough that only I could hear.

"We're all here for you, Yoden. Vlad would be here too, but he got caught up at

customs. I keep telling him to make different

shipping arrangements for himself but he never listens."

He laughed again. "He is very stubborn," he said, as he shook his head.

We purposely arrived early so that we would already be at the restaurant when

his sisters arrived. They were noticeably shocked

that we were the only ones in the restaurant. We were waiting for them at the

front of the restaurant, to make it easier for us to

be closer to Stephen when he had to see them. To them, it looked like we were

all enjoying a drink before dinner. In reality, we

were all sipping on water, waiting for their unraveling, as Misha put it.

"Is the restaurant open?" one of his sisters asked. I didn't know their names.

Much like Vitaliy's men, I didn't want to know their

names.

“No, we had it closed,” Stephen said.

“Why?” she asked.

“To make it easier.”

“Easier for what?”

“For me to be here. For him to be here. And for him to be here,” Adrik said, pointing to Vitaliy and Battista. While Adrik was capable of coming across as friendly, he was not putting one ounce of effort into it with these three. He had his intimidation factor up as high as it would go when he addressed her.

“Oh,” was all she said. The other two sisters stayed quiet, but I could already feel their displeasure at being spoken to that way.

Clearly, they had no idea who Adrik was.

When they walked in, Ivan had glanced at them. I watched him as he watched them. I saw the look of surprise flash across his face as he looked at one of them in particular, I had a feeling I knew what he saw and I also had a feeling that was the middle sister that he was looking at. I caught his eye, raising my eyebrow at him. He discreetly pointed out the one he saw something on and shook his head no discreetly. He was in much better control this time than he was when we met Battista’s associate, but I still pushed a little of my anger to him for good measure. I was trying to keep it to low levels for now, as I left my contacts at home. I didn’t want my eyes changing just yet. Ivan was getting so sensitive to my moods that he still felt it. He gave me a sly wink in appreciation.

Stephen introduced everyone quickly, but I still didn’t pay attention to their names. I would never care to know their names. I only cared that this was the only time I ever had to see them.

As we sat down, his sisters seemed pleasant enough, but I could easily tell it was all an act. I caught Andrel’s eyes go wide a few

times at he some of their thoughts as well. Rude didn't even begin to describe what they were thinking. One of them, I'm gues

disrespectful in her thoughts about literally every single one of the guys. Her mind was so far in the gutter as soon

Anny. I would say her panties were wet as soon as she saw so many men, but she wasn't wearing

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But they all wore fake smiles and had fake manners at the beginning of dinner.

I was sure it wouldn't last. Once the initial

awkwardness wore off, we all started talking and laughing like normal. Vitaliy knew enough of what was going on that he asked

plenty of questions to keep the conversation going, as did Battista. I could tell that Battista was catching my eyes changing just

enough that he thought he might be noticing something, but he wasn't sure.

We kept the conversation light, so they hadn't gone

dark, but I was sure they'd switched from blue to green to normal a few times.

We were also speaking English, so Battista could understand the conversation.

I caught the sisters conversing among

themselves a few times in Russian, but I wasn't close enough that I could understand them. We finally told a story that involved

Stephen's greatness. He really had saved everyone's asses, but I might've fawned over him and maybe embellished just a bit.

The guys knew what was happening. They all backed me up. It was exactly what was needed.

I saw the middle sister get quiet, her face turned sour. I watched Ivan as he looked at her. It was plainly on his face that he wasn't seeing her face any longer. I very quietly pointed it out to Stephen, who could also plainly see it on Ivan's face that something had changed with her. She said something quietly to the youngest sister, but loud enough that the rest of us heard her speaking. She said it in Russian, thinking I wouldn't be able to understand her.

I kindly asked her in English to repeat herself. She did. In Russian. She said she knew I was lying because there was no way Stephen could ever do anything right. I caught Stephen shrinking back beside me. I knew he was reliving her insults as a kid. I kept my fake smile plastered on my face, as I asked her in Russian to please tell me of her accomplishments that were better than saving everyone's lives.

I could feel the excitement of the rest of the guys as they knew what was about to happen. It almost made me laugh. I had to admit that I was looking forward to it, as well.

Her face fell slightly, when she learned I could speak Russian, but she doubled down. "I don't need to tell you anything. Silence is better than lies."

This bitch.

I was working hard to keep my eyes from changing. It wasn't time yet. Not yet.

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Chapter 397

397

Sephie

“So, let me see if I have this straight,” I said, in English once again, so Battista could understand. “You think that there’s no possible way your brother could’ve accomplished even half of what we’ve been talking about tonight?” She stayed silent, but she didn’t object. “Well, that stands to reason then, that you think this because you feel superior to him in some way. If you feel superior to him, then it must mean you have accomplishments that overshadow his, yet you can’t seem to come up with a single one to wow us with. Yet, I’m the one that’s lying?”

There were a few coughs and laughs from the guys, who were trying to hold it in, but just couldn’t. She looked around at them, realizing they were laughing at her. She started to squirm slightly in her seat. I might’ve enjoyed that.

“Please, tell me. How long have you had the job you’re at now? And what is it you do?” I asked, trying to appear curious and not seething. She was starting to get angry, but she wasn’t at the level I needed her to be at yet.

When she stayed silent, I poked her harder. “And what of your husband? What is he? Number four? Is that right? What happened to the first three?” I asked, crossing my arms across my chest, enjoying watching her get angrier and angrier.

The youngest sister tried to come to the defense of her older sister, but it was weak. I focused on her. “Do you really want to play this game, little girl? Do we need to talk about why you haven’t married yet or better yet, why you have to keep moving to larger

cities to escape your reputation?" That shut her up and even got a trickle out of the oldest sister "Oh, don't think you're immune from my charms, either," I said, addressing the oldest sister. "Those two are bad, but you're no better Arguably worse, I'd say
"The oldest sister looked at me, wide-eyed, then looked at Stephen. She knew in that moment that he'd told me everything. The other two hadn't caught on yet, but the oldest sister knew. I watched the color drain from her face.

The middle sister had been string in her own anger during all of this. She finally exploded. She slammed her hand down on the table, causing the youngest sister to jump in fright "Enough! You can't speak to me that way. You're obviously too stupid to see how much of an imbecile my brother is and you're making up lies to try and make him seem more important than he is

I glanced briefly at the guys during her little outburst. Every single one of them had their hackles up. I could feel Adrik's anger, as well. I knew my eyes were about to go dark. I just hoped they went black I wanted her scared.

I put my palms down on the table, as I slowly stood up. I was looking down when I stood up, so she couldn't see my eyes yet, nor could anyone else. kept my palms on the table, so I could lean over, getting even closer to her

"I can speak to a piece of shit like you however I go damn please. And if you ever take that tone with me again, you will regret it for the rest of your very short life." My voice was loud enough everyone could hear, but it was controlled. I sounded as calm as possible, but my tone was daring her to yell at me again. I could see the fear in her eyes as she looked at me, but she couldn't look away. While my anger was at an insane level, I was also concentrating on everything I felt when Stephen shared his

memories with me. I used it as fuel for my fire, but I also desperately wanted to find a way to push it to her. I wanted her to break right in front of me. “You have the audacity to think that your brother would even want to see you, for one. Then you come here, insult me not once, but twice, and you insult him in front of his real family, who coincidentally can end you and make it appear like you never existed. I think it’s clear that you’re the im becile here.”

I paused, wanting to see if she could come up with a response. She hadn’t looked away from my eyes. It was like she was frozen in place, unable to speak, unable to move. The youngest sister once again tried to stick up for her sister. “You’re not his real family. We’re his real family,” she said.

I laughed. I turned from the middle sister, focusing all my anger on the youngest. She was nervous when I first stood up. Now, she was terrified. “You really think he wants to claim a fil thy piece of trash like you? You realize you don’t get extra points for having all the sexually transmitted diseases, right? I almost feel sorry for you. You’re so lost in trying to prove your worth to your bi tch of a sister that you lost yourself somewhere along the way, Instead of having the strength to stand up to her, you turned into her and you ha te yourself for it. I don’t blame you there. I ha te you too.”

She was now frozen in place as well, but she was making noises. Like she was crying. Or whining. Or both.

The oldest sister looked at Stephen. She was now angry as well. I stood up, crossing my arms acro Stephen, then to me. “I don’t know what he’s told you, but it’s all lies,” she half-yelled.

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She looked at

gently

his shoulder

thing. He

been consumed by her demon since she was a baby. You probably had something to do with that too, as I'm guessing you were very jealous of her when she was born." I pointed to the youngest sister who was clearly struggling internally, but unable to move. "She's an idiot that just wants to be loved. She might've turned out to be a very sweet girl, but you made sure she'll never amount to anything." I finally stared at her, my anger only slightly subsiding. "But you. You're the worst of them. You let unspeakable things happen. Not because you didn't care. Not because you didn't know it was happening. No, you knew all along. You wanted it to happen. You thought if your siblings could f**k each other up enough, you'd turn out to be the brightest and your parents would love you the most. You're pathetic and quite frankly, I don't want to look at you any further."

Adrik stood up, standing behind me. I felt his hand on my waist. He looked down at Stephen, who looked grateful, then back to the oldest sister. "You've seen Stephen for the last time. You've also come to this city for the last time. Take your sisters. You have 24 hours to leave this city. If any of you are seen in this city again, you'll be shot on sight. This is my city. Stephen is my family. I protect my family." I could feel his anger feeding into mine and I knew he was looking at her with every ounce of intimidation he had in him. She looked terrified.

She looked at Stephen, like he was going to argue. He stared at her for long enough that I wasn't sure he was going to answer.

Finally, he said, "oh, I'm sorry. You're expecting me to step in here? Nah. I'm good. I'll let you learn what it feels like to fend for yourself."

Ivan looked at his watch, then to the oldest sister, as the other two were still stuck in their own minds. I saw a brief flash of surprise on his face, but he quickly masked it. "You better get a move on. The clock is ticking. That 24 hours is gonna go by real fast." He pointed to the other two. "And it looks like your travel companions have some special needs that are going to need to be addressed."

She looked at her sisters, pulling both of them out of their chairs. They readily stood up and went with her, but neither spoke and neither looked like they had a clue what was happening. I caught Andrei's eye when they walked past him. The look on his face told me he had snooped. Maybe it did work...

Adrik

I could feel Sephie's emotions were everywhere all at once as she was trying to goad Stephen's sisters into an outburst. I know she was still trying to figure out a way to push all the pain and hurt she got from Stephen to his sisters. I also knew that Ivan, Misha, and Andrei were feeling much the same as I was. I wasn't sure if it would work to push our anger to her, but we tried it.

She was so adept at controlling her anger. It was like it had the opposite effect on her as it did everyone else. It calmed her. She could almost think clearer when her anger levels were extremely high, especially when she had to deal with her fear and panic.

Both of those emotions were coming up for her when she thought about what she felt from Stephen. If we could help her keep her anger high and controlled, then she could concentrate on figuring out a way to push everything to his sisters, effectively breaking them.

It was a brilliant plan. We just weren't exactly sure on how to make it happen or if it would work going into this dinner.

Judging by the state that two of the sisters were in when they left, I'd say it worked. I'd even go so far as to say it worked better than we dreamed possible. There was much to discuss later.

Battista was stunned, as was Vitaliy. He hadn't seen Sephie's eyes until now.

When she looked at me after Stephen's sisters left, they were still black. I kissed her forehead. "Take a breath, love. It's over now," I said, keeping my lips against her forehead. She leaned against me, closing her eyes for a moment. When she opened them again, they were the deepest depth of the ocean

blue.

“I know what you did. Thank you,” she said as she smiled sweetly at me. I leaned down and pressed my lips to hers, pulling her chair out so she could sit back down. As she did, she leaned over to Stephen. “How you doin? You okay? Was it too much? I might’ve gotten a little carried away there,” she said, trying to make him laugh.

He turned to look at her, speaking quietly, but I could still hear him. “It was perfect, Seph. I think I know what you did, but we’ll talk later. My m om is gonna be so pi ssed,” he said, shaking his head. He caught my arm as I was pushing in Sephie’s chair.

“Thank you,” he said.

“Anything for family, Stephen.”

We finished dinner, with Battista and Vitaliy asking plenty of questions. As usual, Sephie kept the focus on her when Battista was around. He suspected there was something different about me still, but I was hoping he didn’t have any idea about the guys. I wasn’t sure I wanted him to know about them just yet either. He also didn’t realize that we were all as connected as we were now. I felt protective of that.

Once we were back in the penthouse, the guys were eager to discuss what really happened. As soon as we walked in, Sephie pulled Stephen to her and hugged him. He held onto her so tightly that I was a little worried she’d be able to breathe. She stayed there, helping him calm his storms.

When he finally loosened his grip on her, she looked at all the guys. “I know what you all did tonight. It worked,” she said, her sweet smile on her face as she looked at each of them.

“We weren’t sure if it would work or not, but we figured you’d need help. You’ve felt different the last couple of days. Like you

were struggling to contain it all,” Misha said.

“You guys can feel the difference in my anger now too?” she asked.

Misha nodded his head emphatically. “Yeah, this one was way different. Not like you at all. We even asked Boss if you were okay because we were scared of asking you,” he said. He looked a little embarrassed at the admission.

“Oh, my adorable Russian guardian, it’s never directed at you,” she said, walking to him.

“I know it’s not, but I also didn’t want to make you talk about something you didn’t want to,” he said, as he slung his arm over her shoulders.

She looked to Ivan. “You saw something different about one of them, didn’t you?” she asked.

“Uh, yeah. Not human different. It was just as clear as Battista’s associate. Did you see it this time, princess?” Ivan asked.

“No. I think the only reason I saw it last time is because you were touching me. I think I need to be touching you in order to borrow it,” she said. “I did, however, look in all their heads. Totally regret that as now I won’t be able to forget what I saw.”

“Did you look after you broke them?” Andrei asked.

“No? What do you mean?”

“When they went frozen in place. You literally broke their minds. I don’t know how, but you figured out a way to give them everything you got from Stephen, plus some. They couldn’t handle it. The youngest one, especially. She might not recover. The middle one is questionable on recovery,” Andrei said.

“The oldest sister changed after you called her out. I saw it when she grabbed the other two to leave,” Ivan said. “She did a good

job of hiding it when I first saw her, but it was also clear on her when they went to leave that her demon is running the show.”

“You didn’t break her mind the same way you did the other two, but she was just as disturbed when she left,” Andrei said. He

looked slightly nervous. as he looked from Sephie to Stephen. He quietly added, “she was replaying scenes from childhood when she left, only Sephie managed to make her feel what Stephen felt.”

“You’re sure? It really worked?” Sephie asked, completely surprised.

Andrei nodded. “She might’ve looked like she was holding it together on the outside, but she was a hot mess in her head. She’s

stronger than the other two. I think that’s the only reason she didn’t break,”

Stephen calmly looked at Sephie. “This is literally everything I’ve dreamed of happening. How did you know?”

Sephie shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know. I’m not completely convinced I did anything yet. It was different when you let me

see in your head. I don’t usually feel what other people feel when I look in their heads like that. Like, I’m looking for hard data,

not emotions. But with you, I felt everything. I still don’t know how I didn’t break down from it,” she said.

“Because I asked you to hold it for me and give it to them,” Stephen said.

“You did?”

He nodded his head. “You were the only one that would’ve been able to do it.

That’s why I showed you everything. That’s also

why you likely missed the part about me asking you to hold it until you saw them. It’s a lot. I’m kind of a je rk for doing it,”

Stephen said.

Sephie laughed. “You’re not a je rk for unlocking a new level on me, Yoden. I didn’t know I’d be able to do that. I don’t know how

you did, but I’m glad for it. And you feel better because of it, too. I can see it.

You’re lighter now. You’ve been carrying that

around, by yourself, for too long. They're the ones that need to be burdened with that. Not you."

Misha got his faraway look in his eye for a few moments. He grinned. "They're gonna be carrying it around for a very long time."

"It's also a testament to how incredibly strong you are, Stephen," she said, walking back to him. With her arm around his waist, she added, "you've been carrying all of that by yourself for your entire life and it's made you stronger. They had it for 30 seconds and it broke them. Don't forget that."

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Chapter 399

399

Adrik

Sephie was right. Stephen did look lighter. He was always the quiet one. His brain never shut off though. He was constantly

analyzing everything and everyone around him. We finally saw him relax.

Really, truly relax. He wasn't on guard. He wasn't

waiting for something to happen. He was just present. And happy.

Vitaliy had remained at the restaurant with Battista while we left. When he got back to the penthouse, we were all still discussing

what had happened, but the conversation was turning more light-hearted. The guys were telling Sephie how effective her demon eyes were to the normal person.

"I'm pretty impressed they didn't piss themselves, spider monkey. Your eyes were as black as I've ever seen them. And you just sprung it on them. Your eyes were normal, then you looked down as you stood up and holy shit, they were black, Andrei said, laughing.

"Not gonna lie, I've kind of missed them," Ivan said.

Stephen snapped his fingers, pointing at Ivan. "Same."

Vitaliy walked in with Aleksei. We could tell he was eager to ask more questions. Mostly, he wanted to know how she had such control over her eyes.

"I kind of don't. I've been wearing contacts around you since I met you. My eyes have a mind of their own and change without me knowing sometimes. I got contacts so I wouldn't scare you," she said.

"Change to black on their own?" Vitaliy asked.

"No, the black is the one that I can control the most," she said. She closed her eyes briefly. When she opened them, they were

just as black as they had been at the restaurant. I couldn't help but laugh at Vitaliy's shocked expression when he saw them. I

walked to her, wrapping my arm around her waist.

"That's not even the scariest one, Vitaliy. But it is very effective," I said. She locked up at me and I watched the black fade into the background as the blue took over. I smiled at her, pointing back toward my father. She looked at him and I explained that blue meant she loved me. He stood up to get a closer look.

"Your eyes normally have that blue color, but where are the other two colors?" he asked.

"That's how it started. The brown took over the other two and turned dark. Then the other two colors started taking over for different emotions. The only one that's completely different is when she's scared," I said. "It's the only emotion she struggles to contain."

Vitaliy was clearly impressed. "Battista was completely in awe. He wouldn't shut up after you left, honestly." He looked slightly amused, but also slightly perturbed. "He'll do anything you need him to do from now on. He just asks that you help him with your unique set of skills when he needs them."

I could feel Sephie's slight bit of worry. "How often is he going to need them?" Vitaliy chuckled. "He won't take advantage. He's a very capable businessman in his own right, but he occasionally runs into people he needs help with. That woman being one of them. He said he has more information on the mayor, as well. He would like to meet again tomorrow. Only at his house this time."

"Why his house? Why not the zoo?" Sephie asked, trying to hide her smile.

Vitaliy laughed. "It's going to be a very interesting discussion, slatkaya. It's not meant for everyone to hear."

We arrived at Battista's house the following afternoon. We were all somewhat on edge, as we didn't know quite what i house instead of the restaurant, but Vitya assured us it would be fine. He still only brought Aleksel with him, just as he Stephen's sisters, which I found odd.

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before with

We were shown to a large study. The woman who showed us to the room informed us Battista had gotten a phone call right before we arrived. He was finishing up and would be in shortly, We were all quiet as we waited on him.

He walked in, obviously rushed, a few minutes later. "My apologies. Unexpected phone call, but it pertains to what I'm about to tell you, so I needed to take it," Battista said, getting right to business. He looked at me and Sephie, then to Vitaliy, who had a bit of an unreadable smirk on his face. "You still haven't said a word to them about any of it, have you?" Battista asked Vitaliy.

Vitaliy grunted. "No, I haven't. You explain it better anyway. You know more than I do."

I immediately felt Sephie stiffen, as well as saw each one of the guys sit up a little straighter. We did not like surprises.

Battista noticed the shift in mood in the room. He waved his hand flippantly in front of him. "No one is in danger. At least not yet.

But this conversation might be difficult to believe," he said. He looked at me, as he started to explain. "You're aware your father has very powerful contacts around the world?" he asked. I nodded. He inhaled deeply, contemplating how to phrase what he was

about to say. "They're more powerful than you might think. Some of them are fighting wars that normal people know nothing about. There are dark forces that are vying for the destruction of humanity. There's a small group of us that are fighting against that. We have a few people, with gifts like your father, who are helping, but I've never met so many gifted people in one place until Vitaliy brought you to me." He looked at all the guys. "I'm aware that you all have gifts as well, but I don't know specifics. I know she's trying to keep the focus on her to protect you all, but I saw the subtle signs that you're helping her."

"What do you want from us?" I asked. I didn't have a bad feeling about this, but I still pulled Sephie closer to me after hearing what Battista said.

"It's not what we want from you. It's more what we'd like to give you. We want to help. You don't realize how dangerous Ricardo De Luca is. Or the Colombian," he snapped his fingers, like he couldn't remember a name.

"Martin," Sephie said. Battista pointed to her, silently grateful for the assist.

"They've both made deals with everlasting consequences, haven't they?" she asked.

Battista looked at her, wide-eyed. "You know?"

"Not everything. Just that those two are the keys to all of this that's going on."

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Chapter 400

400

Sephie

Battista took a deep breath. "There are unseen forces in the world, influencing humanity. Think of it like a game, if you will. Your job, in each lifetime, is to figure out how best to defeat the evil forces that prey upon humans. Much like the young women last night. Again, I don't know details, but I'm fairly certain they're being controlled by outside forces." He was looking at me as he was talking. I saw his eyes go wide, which likely meant my eyes had turned dark. He put his hands up in front of him, like he was trying to calm me. "I'm in no way defending them or their actions. It's only to illustrate my point. People sometimes unconsciously agree to accepting these unseen forces. They give them control because they're too weak to do it themselves.

Once you've accepted evil, it's very difficult to get rid of, unless you're a very special person. Those women were not, for the record." He looked from me to the rest of the guys. "You gentlemen, and lady, however, are."

"How do you know this?" Adrik asked.

"Because we've been waiting for you. The powerful people I'm connected to and your father is connected to..." he paused for a moment, trying to choose his words carefully. "We're from very old family lines that have been keeping an eye on humanity for a very long time. We try to stay out of most of it, only stepping in when necessary. But we're watching everything. We've known about Ricardo for years. He made his deal very early in his life. Martin did too, but he's so much younger that his deal was only recently made."

“What kind of deal?” Adrik asked. I could feel him starting to get uneasy about the subject. I grabbed his hand, my fingers playing lightly with his. “And what do everlasting consequences mean?”

Battista looked at me, a coy smile on his face. “I’d still like to know how you knew about that, but that’s a conversation for another time.” He took a breath, once again contemplating how to say what needed to be said. “Some people try to game the game, if you will. Rather than working to better themselves or learning the lessons they need to learn, and signed up to learn, for the record, they find demons that are willing to make deals. It sounds great to the person, but the consequences are, well, horrific.”

“Like selling your soul? Is that what you mean? I thought that was just a phrase people said,” Misha said.

“It is, but it’s also a real thing. Like I said, there are unseen forces at work in this world that most people know nothing about. The ones that do either realize the danger they pose, or are greedy and want to try and use them to their benefit. That never works out well,” Battista said.

Adrik chuckled, his hold on me tightening briefly, I didn’t need to search his eyes to know where his mind went. “Ricardo got a raw deal, then. If he was promised greatness, his demon oversold and underdelivered.”

Battista laughed. “You’re not wrong, but you’re also not considering exactly who you are, either.”

“And that is...?” Adrik asked.

“Not only the King of the Underworld in this city, but the world by the time you’re done,” Battista said.

I felt the goosebumps rise over my entire body. I glanced quickly at Misha, who was having the same reaction. I looked over at

Adrik, who looked as surprised as I was, but there was also the familiar look that meant my eyes had done something new, as well.

Battista continued. "You've surrounded yourself with the people needed to make it happen. Every single player in this that has stayed loyal to you, will serve you in making this happen."

"Um, that's one person. Basically one person has stayed loyal to Boss," Ivan said, sarcastically.

"Yes, but he's an integral piece of the puzzle. Trino holds more power than you realize. The people in the entirety of South America love him for bringing peace. Just as the people of the city love you for bringing peace. He was smart when he rose to power. Get the people to back you, keep their favor, and you'll forever remain in power," Battista said.

Adrik was quiet for a few moments. "We're still working on how to fix the chaos in the city. I don't know the first thing about the rest of the world," he said.

"You don't need to. The rest of the world is watching you. Once you fix the city and fix Trino's problem, they'll come to you.

There will always be

for the underworld and what goes on there. People need bad just as much as they need good. What sets you and Trino apart,

however, is that you

control the amount of bad. You have rules to what you'll allow and what you won't and your rules are always for the benefit of the people, not the

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other bosses."

"What is Ricardo planning? Do you know?" I asked.

Battista sighed. "We're not completely sure. We're still working on gathering as much information on him as we can, but both he and Martin caught the attention of very powerful demons. They're old. They're careful. They know this is their one chance at establishing any kind of power in this world. and they're patient enough to not f**k that up." I saw the surprise on his face once again that meant my eyes were likely dark.

"Don't be worried. It happens when I get angry," I said, flippantly. "Think of them like a warning system. As long as you're not the cause of the anger, you have nothing to worry about."

He smiled, but didn't look away. "I have a feeling they're more than just a warning system."

"What do you mean?" Adrik asked. I could feel that he was feeling overly protective of me.

"When someone invites evil in, the evil takes over. It runs the show. The person's soul is basically pushed to the background, if not ejected completely. Like I said before, it's very difficult to rid yourself of evil once invited in. Most people are incapable and will gradually devolve into worse and worse humans. Again, like those young women. You, however, have flipped the tables, so to speak," Battista said, a sly smile on his face.

"How so?" I asked.

"Everyone has some evil in them. You can't have a purely good existence in this world. Just like you can't have a purely bad one, either. There's going to be both. In fact, there needs to be both. The issue becomes when the evil gets out of balance. That's what they wait for. They wait for people to shift just enough to their evil side that they can find a way in. It happens in any manner of ways. Sometimes they whisper to you, trying to get you to do evil things, they try to get you hooked on drugs so you'll be more

suggestible. If you're strong, then they try to break you to give you a reason to shift the scales in their favor. They want you angry. They want you hateful. If they can't subtly do it, they give you a reason to hate the world. I'm guessing that every single one of you has been given plenty of reasons to hate the world, but you've chosen not to," Battista said. Once again, I felt the goosebumps rise over my entire body. "With you, my dear, your eyes changing to black shows very clearly that your demons work for you. It's virtually unheard of. I have no idea how you've managed to do it, but it's not only a warning of your emotions, it's a warning to other demons that you own them."