

King of the Underworld

Chapter Eight

Sephie

I fell asleep some time later. It was not a restful sleep, as I felt trapped in panic-laden dreams. In one dream, I relived the events of the night before. I struggled against Anthony, to try and get away from him, feeling once again the air leaving my lungs, feeling like my life was slowly slipping away. I couldn't talk in my dream. I kept looking toward the back room of the restaurant, but no one was coming. There was only darkness. Silence. The darkness even consumed Anthony in front of me so that it was just me, not able to breathe or move. I don't know where I got the strength, or air, to do it, but I screamed. I screamed as loud as I possibly could.

As soon as I woke up and realized it was a dream, my bedroom door was thrown open. Two men came rushing in and toward my bed. I screamed again, still not fully awake and aware of what was happening. One man came toward me, the other checked the rest of my room.

A vaguely familiar scent filled my nose, as I felt a warm touch on my arms and the bed dip beside me.

“Shhhh...you were having a nightmare. You're safe. I won't let anything happen to you ever again,” Adrik said as he wrapped his arms around me and pulled me to him.

“Adrik?”

“Yes, solnishko. You’re okay. You had a nightmare, but it wasn’t real. You’re okay now.”

I couldn’t stop the flood of emotions that came out as I leaned into his broad chest. I buried my face in his chest and cried.

“Let it out. You’ve had a big couple of days, but you’re okay now. I promise,” he said. He ran his hand slowly up and down my back, trying to calm my raw nerves from the nightmare. “Do you want to tell me about it?”

I took a deep breath in and wiped my face. I leaned back, with my eyes still closed, trying to find the courage to go through it one more time. He reached up with his thumb and gently wiped a few stray tears from my eyes as he waited for my answer. I opened my eyes and found his deep blue eyes, filled with concern, focused intently on me. I just stared into his eyes for a few moments, not able to speak. Why did I feel like I’ve known him for longer than 24 hours? Why did I feel safe in his arms?

When I didn’t answer, he gave me a smile and gently brushed my hair out of my face. “You’re even beautiful when you cry,” he said.

I blushed and looked down at my hands. I felt his hand under my chin, lifting my gaze back up to meet his. “Don’t hide your beautiful eyes from me, solnishko. I could stare into your unique eyes all day and all night and never get tired of the view.”

At this point, I knew my face was turning a nice shade of red. I didn't know how to respond, so I said the first thing that came to mind. "Wait, how did you get here?"

He chuckled. "I brought you arnica. For your neck. I was discussing a matter with Ivan and Misha when we heard you scream. We thought you were in trouble or being kidnapped."

"Why would anyone want to kidnap me?"

He cocked his head to the side and smiled slyly at me. "I could think of a few reasons."

I clearly didn't fully comprehend his answer. "I'm nobody. There's no reason to kidnap me."

"You're not nobody, Persephone. And unfortunately, you've been marked by a powerful mafia boss's son as an enemy. A petulant child of a son, but still the son of a powerful man. He won't stop until he has his revenge for the disrespect he feels you caused him."

"He thinks I disrespected him?? HE TRIED TO KILL ME!!"

"I know this. All the other bosses know this. Even his father knows this, but Anthony doesn't take having his ass handed to him in public very well. No matter how deserved it was. His ego was wounded."

I just stared at him as he spoke, trying not to think about how handsome he was, how gentle his touch felt, or how pragmatic his explanation of my impending doom was. "This is why you

sent your bodyguards to stay with me? What about you? Aren't you in danger without them?"

He chuckled and shook his head. "I just told you that someone wants revenge on you, and you're worried about my safety?"

"Well, yeah."

"I'm well-protected, solnishko. I have other bodyguards, but Viktor, Andrei, Ivan, and Misha are my best, which is why I assigned them to you. I have complete trust in them."

"How long will they be here? When can I go back to work?"

"I'm not sure that's a good idea yet. We can't find Anthony yet. He disappeared after the meeting last night and no one seems to know where he went. We need to find him first before I feel confident about you going back to work." He saw my eyebrows furrow and added, "don't worry, solnishko. Your bills are covered."

"What? No. I can't ask you to do that."

"You didn't. I offered. Now accept my offer," he said giving me his gorgeous smile.

I got lost in his eyes. They were even more beautiful when he was smiling. While they could be cold and lifeless when he was in boss mode, when he smiled at me, they practically sparkled in the dim light of my bedroom. I found myself smiling in response to seeing the joy in his eyes. It made me want to see that joy every day.

“Fine. But I don’t have to like it,” I said, crossing my arms across my chest like a little kid, pouting.

He laughed again and this time, leaned in and kissed my forehead. My whole body felt warm at his touch, but when his lips pressed to my forehead, it was a new level of warmth. I was somewhat stunned at the gesture, but still found myself wanting more.

I grabbed his hand and held it between both of mine. “Thank you.”

“Of course, solnishko. You should get some rest again.”

“Yeah, so about that, I’m gonna forego the whole nightmare thing for a while. I won’t be able to sleep again for a while.”

“Then, come. We will put some arnica on your purple neck,” he said as he grabbed my hand and stood up. He pulled me up before I could stop him.

“Oh... wait...” I said as I stood up, revealing that I was only wearing a large t-shirt and no pants.

He slowly looked down my body, as I tried to pull my t-shirt as low as it would go. His eyes got darker. I noticed his jaw clench slightly and he made a fist with his hand that was not holding mine. His gaze returned to my face, and he leaned in to kiss my forehead saying, “apologies. I’ll meet you in the kitchen.”