

King of the Underworld

Chapter Three

Sephie

After my short interlude outside, I returned to work and tried my best to act like nothing happened. Anthony had apparently been chastised while I was away because he kept his hands to himself. This was new. Did Mr. Lord King Boss Adrik threaten him after I first went outside? Anthony had never stopped his juvenile antics before tonight.

I think I like Mr. Lord King Boss Adrik.

Most of the men had finished with their meals but were still deep in discussions. The room was tense, to say the least. I was busy picking up empty plates and taking them back to the kitchen. I recruited Max to help me pick up plates, so I wouldn't have to make so many trips. Just as he was about to enter the room, one of the bodyguards stopped him.

“Excuse me, sir. Only the lovely lady is allowed in the room,” he said with his giant hand on Max's shoulder. Max wasn't a small guy either. He obviously worked out regularly and was well over six foot tall, but he looked small next to that absolute unit of a bodyguard.

I looked back at Max and smiled. “It's okay, Max. I'll get them. Thank you for offering to help.”

I let out a sigh as I walked into the room. I glanced in Adrik's direction, only to notice his blue eyes staring at me once again. I quickly tucked a loose strand of hair behind my ear and made myself busy.

After depositing another round of dirty dishes in the kitchen sinks, I walked out the kitchen door on my way back to the meeting room. In the back hallway, between the kitchen and the back room, I was met by none other than Anthony. He was coming out of the restroom, completely drunk, and acting like he might fall at any moment. I tried to hurry past him, but he caught my arm and pulled me back to stand right in front of him.

"Please let go of my arm. I have work to do," I said, trying to pull away from him. His vice-like grip on my arm only got tighter. Did bourbon give him some kind of superhuman strength? Seriously. How was his grip so strong?

"C'mon, you know you'd much rather go into the bathroom with me for a quickie," he said as he leaned in to try to kiss me, pushing me up against the wall so I couldn't easily get away from him. Ugh, his breath was horrendous and smelled like he'd drunk the entire bar that night. Truthfully, he'd probably had half of it, at least. I turned my head to avoid his lips, which only served to piss him off. He said something in Italian, which I didn't understand because of his slurring, but he grabbed my other arm, again with his vice-like grip. He stepped even closer to me, as if that was possible. I could feel his entire body pressed against mine. I could even feel that he was getting aroused at standing so close to me.

He didn't say anything for a moment. He just scanned up and down my body, his breath getting quicker, his pupils dilating. He released one arm and reached up to my face. With the back of his hand, he lightly grazed my cheek. I turned my head, trying once again to get away from him. He sighed.

“Do you know who I am? Do you know how many girls would love to be in your position right now?”

“Then why don't you go find one of them. I'll gladly tag her in,” I said.

“You have a smart mouth. I've always heard that redheads were firecrackers. Maybe someone needs to teach you a lesson.”

“No thanks. School really wasn't my thing. I probably won't pay attention if you try to teach me anything.” I was hoping to make him frustrated enough that he would move, and I could escape his grasp. Even if he lost a little focus, I was preparing to deck him and then I was going to make a break for it. I thought about screaming but didn't want to cause a scene. The entire back room was armed with enough firepower that they could level the entire block if it came to it, so making a scene wasn't my finest idea. I was also hoping someone would come out of the kitchen, but most of the staff had already left for the night, as it was a slow night in the front of the restaurant. Max was still at the bar, and he likely wouldn't hear me anyway. I had to figure out how to get out of this mess on my own.

“There's that smart mouth again,” he said as he ran his hand up my arm and slowly wrapped it around my neck. “Do you know what I do to women that don't know when to shut up?” he asked

as his grip slowly tightened around my neck. My entire body tensed, and my eyes went wide. I knew what was about to happen.

I felt my air being slowly cut off. *Well, shi.** I definitely didn't expect this to happen tonight. With my one free arm, I tried hitting him, but he had pressed his body against mine so tightly that I couldn't get any kind of leverage on him, so my fist was practically useless.

“That’s it. I like it when they struggle. I like it when they beg me to stop.”

Perhaps my smart mouth wasn't the attribute I thought it was. My mind was racing as I was trying to figure out how to get away from him when I heard the door to the back room open. Footsteps were approaching. No, multiple footsteps were approaching. One last feeble attempt to hit him and suddenly he wasn't there anymore, and I was on the ground coughing and gasping for air.

I felt a hand on my shoulder and instantly panicked. I scooted away as quickly as I could.

“Whoa, whoa, Persephone. It’s okay. I won’t hurt you. You’re safe now.”

I raised my gaze and was met with those blue eyes once again. They were darker in this light, but showing nothing but concern, as he reached out to me one more time. This time, I didn't move away. He put one arm around my shoulders, and I leaned into

his chest. I realized I was crying. He gently stroked my hair and told me everything was going to be alright.

The next thing I knew, he hooked his other arm under my legs and picked me up, carrying me back to the kitchen. It was empty when we walked in. He walked over to one of the food prep tables and sat me down on the table.

Standing in front of me, he produced a handkerchief from his pocket and handed it to me, his hands never leaving my thighs. I stared at his hands while I wiped the tears from my face and tried to compose myself.

I felt his hand, gently, under my chin. He raised my head and tilted it all the way back so he could look at my neck.

“You’re going to have a gnarly bruise tomorrow.”

“Perks of being a redhead. You can look at me hard enough and I’ll bruise.”

He chuckled softly and I let out a laugh as well. It might not be the healthiest coping mechanism, but humor made everything better for me. I’d endured some hard times and made it through because I never lost my sense of humor.

Adrik tenderly wrapped one of my loose curls around his finger, while he scanned my face, concern still in his eyes.

“Redheads have a special place in this world. Legend has it they stole the fires of He*ll and that they carry the mark of Cain.”

“It’s all true. I also steal souls, but only on the weekends. Work has been busy lately and I have a surplus of souls, with not enough storage space right now.”

A wide smile came across his face as he laughed. Good grief this man was handsome. I found myself smiling in response to his laughter and in that brief moment I had forgotten the events that led us to this moment.

“You are a unique woman, Persephone.”

“Yeah, that’s true too. Redheads are only 2% of the world’s population and of that 2%, only 2% have an eye color as unique as mine. So, basically, I’m a unicorn.”

I looked into his eyes as I was talking. His smile faded slightly and the intensity returned. He stared into my eyes long enough that I got nervous. I dropped my gaze and started fidgeting with my hands.

My body does this weird thing in response to trauma. It’s like I’m shivering, but I’m not cold. Of course, this was the moment that started up. My therapist had informed me years earlier that it was a somewhat normal trauma response. It hadn’t happened in years, so I wasn’t expecting it to start. I couldn’t get away from Adrik fast enough and he felt my legs shaking.

“Are you cold, solnishko? I can get you my jacket,” he said, his hands running up my arms to cover my bare skin.

“No, it’s...I’m fine,” I said as I hopped off the table. “I should get back to work. Thank you for helping me.” I folded my arms

under my chest and walked out of the kitchen without looking back.

The past always has a way of showing up at the most inopportune times.