

## King of the Underworld

### Chapter Five

*Sephie*

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

“Well, that sucked,” I said out loud to myself. Instantly regretting my decision to speak, I started coughing uncontrollably.

I got myself to stop coughing and got out of bed.

*No more outside thoughts, Sephie. Just inside thoughts.*

My phone started ringing as I was walking out of the bathroom. I looked at the caller ID. It was Mr. Turner from across the hall. I immediately answered the call.

“Hey Mr. Turner, is everything alright?” I said in a half-whisper, hoping I didn’t cause another coughing attack.

“Good morning, Miss Sephie. Listen, I don’t want to alarm you, but there was a very large man standing outside your door this morning when I left for work. I asked him what his business was there and he said he’d been assigned to guard you, but he wouldn’t tell me anything else.”

“Well, that’s weird,” I said, biting my lower lip. I tried to think why anyone would be “assigned” to me. Reflexively, my hand went to my neck. “Mr. Turner, was this man the size of a house, with black hair, crew cut and a beard?”

He chuckled and said, “that’s a fitting description of him, yes. You know him?”

“I think I might have an idea. It’s okay, Mr. Turner. He’s one of the good ones. At least I think so.”

“Ok, Miss Sephie, if you say so. If you need anything, you call me right away. I got my old buddy’s son, on the force, on speed dial. I’ll have him to your place in no time if you need him.”

“Thank you, Mr. Turner. I really appreciate it, but I hopefully won’t need that. I promise I’ll call you if it’s not who I think it is.”

We said our goodbyes and I walked to my balcony door. I peeked outside and noticed the black SUV parked in the parking lot below, a few parking spaces from my car once again. The windows were tinted so dark that I could only see a giant hand resting on the steering wheel. As quietly as I could, I walked to the front door and looked through the peep hole. I couldn’t see all of him, but you can’t mistake a physique like that. It was one of the bodyguards that had delivered Anthony’s karma the night before.

I opened the door. He turned around as I said, “good morning, sir. Can I get you a coffee?”

He smiled warmly. “Good morning, Miss Sephie. Thank you, but I’m fine.”

“Don’t be a martyr. You can’t have slept much if you’ve been here since Mr. Turner from across the hall left. Wait, are you on meth? You’re on meth, aren’t you? Is that how you’re awake right now? Don’t lie to me. You might be four times as big as me, but I know kung fu.”

That got a belly laugh out of him.

“No, ma’am. Not on meth. I still have all my teeth – see?” he said in his thick Russian accent, showing me his teeth as proof of his abstinence from meth.

“Touché. But you’ve still gotta be tired. C’mon. You basically saved my life last night. The least I can do is make you a cup of coffee.”

His warm smile stretched across his face once more and he ran his hand through his buzzed hair. “Sure, Miss Sephie. That would be great,” he said.

“Does your pal in the parking lot want one too? You know, while I’m at it, can I get your names? For the coffee order, of course.”

He chuckled and said, “I’m Viktor. The guy in the parking lot is Andrei.”

“How very Russian of you both. Please, Viktor, come inside while I make the coffee. It’s weird to have you standing outside

my door. I already give my neighbors enough gossip as it is without a gigantic Russian statue outside my door.”

Another belly laugh from Viktor made me smile as well. He looked like he could kill you with his mind, but I could tell that Viktor had a heart of gold. He walked into my apartment, slightly nervous, but scanning the room like the dutiful guardian he is.

I busied myself in the kitchen, first pulling my wild, previously slept in hair into a bun on top of my head, then I set about making coffee.

“Are you hungry, Viktor? I can make breakfast too. I don’t even know what time it is right now, but it’s always bacon time in this house. Can Andrei come inside too, or do I need to make his to go?”

“No, please, Miss Sephie, that is not necessary.”

“Um, hello. Saved my life. Least I can do. We’ve been over this, Viktor. Don’t argue with me. You won’t win.”

He laughed, shaking his head. He just said one word, “ryzhiy.”

I raised an eyebrow at him, waiting for a translation.

He chuckled. “Redhead,” he responded.

“Damn skippy. Now how do you take your coffee? With the crushed-up bones of your enemies? Or without?”

This time, he slapped the counter he laughed so hard. He threw his head back and cackled.

“You are a funny woman, Miss Sephie.”

“It’s a gift.”

I set a coffee cup in front of him, along with milk and sugar, so he could make it the way he wanted.

“Are you going to call Andrei to come up here too? Or do I have to make you follow me out to the parking lot to deliver his coffee?”

“I will call him.”

“Smart man, Viktor. Smart man,” I said as I winked at him and set about getting the pans needed to cook breakfast.

In seemingly no time at all, there was a knock on my front door. Viktor immediately stood up from the bar at the kitchen counter where he was sitting. His hand instinctively going to his gun at his hip. He held his other hand up to me, indicating that I should stay where I was and to be quiet. For a moment, I struggled to breathe, wondering if it was someone other than Andrei at my door.

Viktor looked through the peep hole and opened the door, visibly relaxing as the door opened to reveal his equally sized cohort.

“Hi, Andrei,” I said from the kitchen, as he walked into my apartment.

“Good morning, Miss Sephie. Thank you for your hospitality,” he said in an even thicker Russian accent than the one Viktor had.

“It’s nothing. It’s the least I could do. You guys were so kind to me last night,” I said as they both took a seat at the kitchen bar. I set a coffee cup down in front of Andrei and noticed that both of them seemed to be...blushing? Of course, I doubled down.

“Max told me what you did to Anthony last night.” I reached out and grabbed one of Viktor’s hands and one of Andrei’s hands, giving them both a squeeze. “Thank you.”

They both turned as red as my hair. I smiled at both of them and quickly turned around so I wouldn’t laugh at how flushed their cheeks were. You’d think they’d never been touched by a girl before.