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Sephie

I knew Adrik wanted to keep me busy. I knew he was trying to decide what to do with the families of all the bosses and I loved him for trying to protect me from that. It did, however, give me a chance to have Andrei to myself. I'd been thinking about how to help him connect with his demon and I was pretty sure I'd come up with a solution for it.. He was nervous that he'd be able to control his anger once he finally let it take over. Andrei was so calm and controlled all the time that he'd only rarely seen the extent of his anger himself. He was so in control of his anger that he always knew the exact amount to let out to get the job done. No more, no less. The idea of having to let it all out at once worried him.

"Bubba, I've been thinking." I said as I was making him help me in the kitchen. I'd told him I was going to make him shortbread that afternoon. At least he had something to look forward to after he discovered my secret plan. Poor kid was a pawn from all directions today.

"Still about red pandas or have you moved on to the quandary of why lions are called the king of the jungle when they live on the savanna and nowhere near a jungle?" he asked.

My mouth fell open. That answer was completely unexpected from Andrei. I just started laughing and couldn't stop for a few minutes. "I love you so much right now, Bubba," I said. He was laughing with me, enjoying a chance to be just the two of us. Out of all of them, Andrei appreciated one-on-one time the most. He loved that I got closer to him first in the beginning. He loved that he got put on heater duty whee Adrik wasn't around. He just liked having a few things that no one else did. It was a confidence boost for him. He was so handsome and so capable, but he still 't see it in himself all the time. He still hadn't figured out that even if we did the same things as the other guys, it was still different because it was him. He was the secret ingredient. They all were. Every experience was different when viewed through their eyes and experienced with them.

"Okay, spider monkey, what have you been thinking about? Besides endangered wild, I mean," he said, still trying to control his laughter.

"I've been thinking about how to get you to connect with your demon. I think it'll be asier for you if it's just the two of us," I said.

He cut his eyes over to me. "Boss isn't the only one that requested me to babysit today

I laughed. "No, he's not. I know why he wants to keep me occupied and I love him for trying to protect me from it. I requested extra time with you when I had the idea of how to get you to connect with your demon."

"I feel like I should be objecting more to being just a pawn, but I can't say I dislike he said, thoughtfully. I giggled.

"Okay, tell me your idea."

"You're worried about losing complete control, right?" He nodded his head in agreement. "What if you take a page from Viktor's book and do it backward?"

"Explain."

"What if I show you first how to control it, instead of waiting for it to happen and then showing you how to control it. I've felt your anger before. I know how controlled you keep it on your own, but I also know you know the exact point you can push it to before you feel that control start to falter. What if I go nuclear first, then show you how it's done?" He thought for a few moments. "That could work. Boss knows you're doing this, right?)

"No one will come running up here unless it's absolutely necessary. I talked to him last night about it. Honestly, I think you're going to do fine. I think it's more your confidence in your abilities than it is anything else. You're always the last one to believe you can do it. You're so good at instilling confidence in everyone else. That's what makes you such a great trainer. You just suck at listening to your own advice."

He chuckled, but looked at the floor. I didn't need to search to know why he felt that way. "You know your little brother isn't better looking than you, right? I mean, he's not ugly, but he's in no way better than you are in any category. You should stop comparing yourself to him. Can he kill someone with just his thumbs?"

He laughed. "No, definitely not."

"Alright then. What good is he to anyone? S*it hits the fan and he knows what angles are the best ones to get his reaction shot? How is that in any way a useful skill to have?" He smiled at me. His wide, genuine smile that let me know I'd just said the thing he's been needing to hear for years. I kept going. I can't help myself. "You've probably had to hear how handsome he is for years. I mean, he's pretty. He might be prettier than I am, now that I think about it. The thing about relying on your looks is that your looks don't last. What's he got to fall back on when he starts to age? A *hitty personality that he's developed because he's used to getting everything he wants because of his pretty face." I walked to Andrei, who was standing cross the kitchen from me. I slid my arm around his waist, leaning my head on his shoulder. "Some of us are meant to shine very brightly for a very short time. He's one of those. His light is going to go out sooner rather than later. Some of us though, have lights that might not be as bright, but are so strong that they will shine for millennia to come because of the marks wy've left on the world. Your light is changing the world so completely that generations from now will benefit. His is making it pretty for a few more years. Which would you rather have?"

He'd put his massive arm around my shoulders as I was talking. He squeezed me closer to him, kissing the top of my head. "I still don't know how you always know what to say, but please never stop. You didn't even need to look in my head to know all that."

I just held my pinky up to him. He chuckled, grabbing it quickly.

He sighed. "Alright, let's try your idea. Now that we won the bet pool with Stephen, siess it's time I got my act together."

"Okay, so I think all I need to do is go nuclear and you'll be able to see how I control. It's easiest to think of your anger like a living thing. I like to think of mine as fire, because it's always felt hot to me. Fire was the natural choice.

Sometimes it's spoke, sometimes fire. Depends on the levels needed. But when you think about it like a real thing, then you can picture it, which helps you control it. Make sense?" said, moving to face him.

"It does make sense. Hit me," he said.

I couldn't help but grin at him as I let my anger levels rise to insanely high levels. I could still feel Adrik now, even with my anger levels this high. I felt his moment of happiness once he felt my anger, knowing he knew what was happening and was it as ready for it as I was. I saw Andrei's moment of surprise when he felt my anger go off the charts. They'd only felt it this high a few times, so it was still surprising to them when it happened.

1 could feel Andrei looking in my head, watching how I controlled it. He was as good of a student as he was a teacher. After a few minutes, I knew he had the basics. enough to be able to try on his own. I also figured out why he was wary of letting his anger levels get that high.

"You'll be able to still control your demon when your anger takes over, Bubba. That's what you're really scared of, isn't it?"

He nodded. "I'm worried it's going to take over."

"Don't think of it as an adversary. You were the one that caught on that mine was trying to help me. Yours is no different. If it wasn't on board with the program, we all would have caught on to that fact by now. Don't think of yours as anything other an a friend. It wants to help you just as much as mine wants to help me."

He inhaled deeply, then started to let his anger take over. Andrei was so happy and y-going all the time that his anger felt almost subdued compared to everyone else. High levels for him would barely register for someone like Ivan. Much like Stephen, Andrei's anger was calculated. It was precise. If it made an appearance, the target was dead before they even knew Andrei was angry. He had closed his eyes to concentrate, but opened them to look at me. Instead of his cappuccino-colored eyes, they were almost black.

My smile told him he had been successful in his attempt.

Okay, maybe me jumping up and down in excitement might've been a clue too.