

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 14

Chapter Fourteen

Sephie

Ms. Jackson was in the backseat with me and Adrik. Viktor was driving while Andrei was in the passenger seat. We were following the other SUV with Ivan, Misha, and Stephen. You would've thought it was Ms. Jackson's birthday, she was so excited.

"I haven't been this close to this many fine-looking gentlemen since I was in my 20s," she whispered to me. "I knew you were special, girl, but what did you do to deserve this many handsome men at your beck and call?"

I laughed. "I don't think they're exactly at my beck and call, Ms. Jackson."

Adrik cleared his throat, beside me. I looked at him in shock. He smiled at me. "Whatever you need, solnishko. You say the word."

"Did you just call her solnishko?" Ms. Jackson asked, leaning forward so she could see Adrik.

"Da. You know Russian?"

"Enough," she sat back. She hooked her arm through mine and patted my hand. "Yep. Special, special girl," she said quietly. I glanced at her face. She had the look of someone who was reliving her past, so I decided against asking any further questions. I felt Adrik take my other hand and lace his fingers through mine. He gently squeezed my hand.

I closed my eyes, enjoying the moment of peace I felt whenever Adrik was around. I hadn't known him for very long,

but I felt things I'd never felt whenever he was around. I tried not to think about it too much. It was unconventional, to say the least. It felt like he quieted my storms. Like he was holding my hand as I was fumbling through the

darkness, keeping me steady. All I knew is that I didn't want it to end just yet.

I felt the SUV stop and heard Viktor put it in park. Ms. Jackson made a move to open her door, but Andrei stopped her

"Not yet, Ms. Jackson. Give us moment."

"Honey, I'll give you as long as you want, as long as I can look at you while you're doing whatever it is you're about to do."

Viktor caught my eye in the rear-view mirror. He was trying so hard not to laugh. Poor Andrei's face was as red as my hair. He could not get out of the vehicle fast enough.

"Lord, I hate for him to leave, but I love to watch him go."

I was laughing uncontrollably beside her. Even Adrik was laughing.

"Bingo might be in Andrei's future, as well as Ivan's," Adrik said, trying to catch his breath.

"I could think of other activities that would be a whole lot more fun than Bingo," Ms. Jackson mumbled, loud enough that only I could hear.

"Ms. Jackson, I never knew you had this side to you!"

"Well, child, you never had this much eye candy around you before."

"Point well made"

After just a few minutes, Andrei opened Ms. Jackson's door and offered her his hand. "Oh! And a gentleman to boot! Your mama must be so proud."

I didn't even have to see his face to know that he was blushing. Adrik opened his door. Stepping out, he turned and offered his hand to me. I smiled and took his hand as he helped me out of the vehicle. Once I was standing, he pulled me close and planted a very quick kiss on my lips. I looked at him, wide-eyed. He just winked at me and walked toward

the store, with me in tow.

We got Ms. Jackson's shopping completed quickly. Andrei followed her around dutifully. Viktor was roaming the store, while Ivan, Misha, and Stephen kept an eye on the parking lot. Adrik would only let go of my hand if necessary. Otherwise, he seemed happy enough to simply follow me around while I helped my neighbor stock up for the week.

When we got back to Ms. Jackson's apartment, she looked at Andrei and Adrik and asked, "gentlemen, would it be possible for me to have a moment alone with Miss Sephie?"

They both nodded. Adrik looked at me and said, "we'll be right outside."

As soon as the door closed, Ms. Jackson took each of my hands in hers and looked up at me. "Child, do you know that man is in love with you?"

"What? No. We just met. Literally. Like two days ago."

"No, dear. Can you not see the way he looks at you?"

"Well, I mean, yeah, but it doesn't mean he's in love with me."

"He calls you solnishko."

"They all call me different Russian words. I have no idea what any of them mean. They could be calling me a bitch for all I know."

She scoffed. "Hardly. Russian men are not known for terms of endearment, so the fact that he's calling you his 'little sun' only days after meeting you means he's head over heels for you. What else does he call you?"

"Little sun? I don't get it," I said shaking my head.

"It's one of like five terms of endearment for a significant other in Russian. They're not a sentimental people. What else?"

"I think he called me malishka once."

"I rest my case. He's smitten. What do the other men call you?"

"Well, just Viktor and Andrei. Misha and Ivan aren't as chatty, although Ivan did call me a princess, when I stitched him up this morning. Viktor and Andrei have both called me sestrichka a couple of times."

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"Lord, they're all in love with you."

"No way, Ms. Jackson. You're being silly. What does it mean? And how do you know Russian??"

"It's a pet name for a little sister, but again, only reserved for very special women," she said. "And as for me knowing Russian, well, I spent time there during the Cold War." She sighed, and added very matter-of-factly, "I was spying on the Russians while they thought I was feeding them information on the Americans."

"What?? How have you never told me you were such a badass before??" I gasped, "is that how you know how to stitch people up? Did I really learn how to do that from a legit spy? You told me you were a nurse!"

She laughed. "Well, I was technically a nurse too. After I came back, I went into nursing. Being a spy is hard on a girl." She sighed. Again, lost in her memories. "That was a long time ago, honey. But you need to know that you are the light to that man's dark. You are living up to your namesake, dear child," she said as she reached up and patted my cheek.

"I don't think I understand."

"Adrik. It means dark. When he calls you solnishko, he's telling you that you are the light in his dark world."

I sighed. "I don't...I don't know what to say."

She smiled at me. "You don't have to say anything, dear. You just have to continue to be yourself. How long have I been telling you now that you're a special girl? You never believed me, but it doesn't make it any less true. My wish for

you is that you'll let that man show you how special you are."

"Ms. Jackson..." I felt the tears welling up in my eyes.

"Hush, child. You deserve every bit of the kingdom that man can give you. Just promise me you'll keep the eye candy around for me to appreciate."

"I promise I'll make the Bingo escort happen."

She threw her head back and laughed. "Are you sure you want to be responsible for the sheer number of heart attacks

you will cause with those kinds of shenanigans? You know ol' Edith has a pacemaker. She can't handle that kind of excitement."

"That's fair." I chuckled as I leaned down to give her a hug. She might've been old, but her frame gave the impression that she was lean and strong in her prime. And she could still give the best hugs. Ms. Jackson was quick to befriend

me when I first moved into the apartment. I think she knew I was nothing more than a lost little girl and I'll forever be grateful that she took pity on me and helped me find myself.

"Now. You go to him. I know you're going away for a little bit. I heard them talking when they thought I couldn't understand them. It's for your safety and I agree. The man they're looking for is not a good man and if he's the one who gave you that masterpiece on your neck, then they need to find him before I do."

"I'll come back to check on you. I'll have to take you back to the store next week, too."

"Don't you worry about me, child. I may be old, but I'm still resourceful. You stay safe and you let those men protect you. I know you like to argue, but you listen to them when it counts, you hear me. I can see it on the face of every single one of them. They love you and will die trying to protect you, so you let them."

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I chuckled, "well, maybe not Ivan. He looks at me like he's trying to burn holes through my soul."

"You don't know Russian men, honey. That bear of a man would do anything you asked, especially after you stitched him up. He's putty in your hands. You just can't put up with his shit."

"Well, I can't say I believe you on that one. I'm still heavily under the impression that he would rather murder me himself."

"Give it time. You'll see I'm right. Your mother blessed you with the name of a queen. It's time you stepped into that role."