

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

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Sephie

After helping her put away the rest of her groceries, I closed her apartment door behind me. I was lost in thought as I turned to find Adrik waiting, just like he had promised. He was standing just past the breezeway, smoking, and on the phone. When he saw me, he put out his cigarette and extended his arm to me. I walked over to him, allowing him to wrap his arm around my waist. Still on the phone, he kissed the top of my head as I rested my head against his

shoulder.

I felt his body tense and suddenly his words had a deadly tone to them. I couldn't understand what he was saying, but I knew it wasn't good. He was normally soft-spoken, but he raised his voice while talking to the person on the other end. All while he gently twirled my curls in his free hand. I had to chuckle at the absurdity of this man probably threatening someone's life while playing with my hair like he wasn't threatening someone's life.

He abruptly ended the call and looked down at me.

"I'm sorry, solnishko. Business," he sighed as he put his phone away.

I smiled at him, and his body immediately relaxed. "No need to apologize. It wasn't my life you were threatening just then."

His breath caught. He pulled me so I was standing in front of him and held me close. His eyes scanned my face and my hair for several moments. I thought back to what Ms. Jackson had just told me as his looks softened the longer we stood like that. I smiled at him. I liked seeing his face soften,

"I will never tire of your beautiful smile," he said as he brushed my hair back from face, placing it behind my shoulders. "Nor your amazing hair." His hands ran down my back, giving me goosebumps. He looked deeply into my eyes as he held me securely against him. "You look extra beautiful today."

"It's all the eye candy I'm surrounded by. It's beauty by default," I laughed.

"Your neighbor is a very interesting woman," his thumbs rubbing my lower back as he held me close.

"Oh, you have no idea."

He cocked his head slightly and looked at me inquisitively. I laughed again, "you'll have to ask her. It's not my story to tell."

He chuckled, "whatever it is, I'm grateful that it allows me to see your smile."

I felt my cheeks flush, but instead of looking down like usual, I stood on my toes and kissed his cheek in a moment of unbridled bravery.

"I owe Ms. Jackson a thank you, clearly," he said, wrapping his arms around me.

"I owe you a thank you for taking Ms. Jackson to the store today. I know it was not part of your plan for the day but thank you."

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"Of course. I want to make sure you are safe. Always. Now come, we should leave," he broke the embrace and took my hand, leading me up the stairs to my apartment. "You should grab a few things. I don't know how long you'll be gone."

Adrik left me to gather a few things while he went to speak with Viktor in the living room. I could hear their hushed voices as I stood in the middle of my bedroom, trying to decide what to do. I was feeling very conflicted. On one hand, I felt completely safe with a man who was basically a stranger, and also the king of the underworld. On the other hand, was I really going to allow him to take me away from my life? I knew it wasn't much, but I had worked hard to build my little life I was living. I went from having absolutely nothing when I left my old life to being able to take care of myself all on my own. I didn't have many friends, but the ones I did have, I cherished. If I left now, would I ever see them again? Would I ever be able to make my own decisions again? Was he taking me somewhere to lock me in the proverbial ivory tower, never to be seen again?

I thought back to Ms. Jackson's words from earlier. "It's for your safety and I agree. The man they're looking for is not a good man". I shook my head, trying to make sense of everything that was happening. "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."

Ugh, why does my life always have to be so difficult? I exhaled and went to my closet to grab a bag. Just a few things. Just a few days. Then I can come back. They'll find Anthony and I'll be able to come back. It'll be fine. I can do this.

As I was zipping my bag closed, Adrik came to my bedroom. His genuine concern showing on his face. "You okay, solnishko?" He closed the distance between us, and I felt myself relax when his arms wrapped around me once again.

I sighed, "yeah, I think so. It's just for a few days, right?"

"I hope." He put his hands on either side of my face and looked deeply in my eyes. "I want to keep you safe. I'm only taking you away from here to keep you safe." He noticed the tears forming in my eyes. "Shhh. It will be okay. I promise," he gently pressed his lips to mine.

We both heard a knock on my open bedroom door. Viktor, taking up the entire doorway, said urgently, "boss, we must

1. go. Now."

Without any hesitation, he grabbed my hand and started walking toward the door. "Grab her bag." His grip on my hand was tight, his shoulders visibly tense. When we got to the kitchen, I noticed they had closed all my blinds and Misha already had his gun drawn. "How close?" Adrik asked.

"Five miles out, but our spotter said four vehicles. We don't know how many routes they're taking." Misha handed Adrik two bulletproof vests. Adrik turned to me and said, "arms up. I need to put this on you." I raised my arms, as he slid the vest over my head and arms. He reached back and swept my hair back, out of the vest. He secured the sides of the vest and kissed my forehead before putting his own vest on.

Adrik nodded and went to the door of my apartment. When he opened the door, Andrei was there with a rifle in his hands and a tactical vest on, looking like he was ready to kill any and everyone that got in his way. My eyes went wide, taking in the change from happy giant Andrei to GI Andrei. "Shit just got real, ya'll," I said to nobody in particular. Adrik didn't respond, he simply pulled me against his side, wrapping his arm tightly around my body. "We're getting out of here, but you keep your head down, and no matter what, you stay by my side."

I nodded.

"Time?" Adrik asked as he started down the stairs, following Misha. Viktor was behind us, while Andrei covered the

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parking lot from the landing.

"Three minutes," Misha replied.

We rushed to the waiting vehicles. Adrik opened the back door of the second one, hurrying me inside. I jumped in, sliding over to make room for him. Viktor threw my bag in the first vehicle and jumped in the front seat. Ivan was driving the vehicle we were in. Stephen driving the other. Misha was in the back seat of the first vehicle and just as I was about to inquire about Andrei, he jumped in the front seat of our vehicle.