

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 260

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty

Adrik

Misha and Sephie left for a run the next morning while the rest of us went to the gym. Where Misha had dreaded having to run with Sephie in the beginning, he now looked forward to it. After the attack on them, they rarely went for a run in the city anymore. They would use the treadmills in the gym, but they both said they hated it. When we were at the house, though, they would be gone for sometimes two hours. Sephie had told me that Misha was now wanting to take the long route each time they went for a run. It made her happy to not feel like she was killing him any longer.

I discussed what Sephie and I had talked about the night before with the other four guys while we were in the gym. "It should surprise no one that Sephie made a great observation last night." The guys all stopped and turned toward me to hear what she'd come up with this time. I laughed at their curious, but not surprised in the least expressions. "We were talking about Armando and how well he and the other bosses knew Sephic before she met me. She said Armando was the only one that would ever talk to her like a person, but she always got the feeling he was trying to set her up with one of his sons, because he would mention he had a son her age frequently."

"Yeah, I don't think it was for his son. I think it was for him," Ivan said.

"Sephie ended up saying the same thing last night, but I'm curious to hear how you came to that conclusion," I said. Ivan never ceased to amaze me with his observation skills. They were almost as good as Sephie's.

"I caught him looking at her a few times, but I don't think I would've noticed had he not made a few comments about her when we were at his house in Italy. He doesn't really know her, so they seemed very out of context. They came across as mostly harmless at the time and they would've been, had he known her better, but she told me that none of the bosses knew much, if anything about her. Including Armando. It just felt wrong, so I started paying attention. It's calmed down somewhat since he and Giana got together, but much like her inability to not stare at Misha, he's incapable of not staring at Sephie when he thinks no one is watching."

I thought about his words for a minute. What Sephie had said last night was starting to make more sense. "That makes the rest of what she said last night seem more plausible," I said.

"What else has she known all along that none of us caught on to until she pointed it out?" Andrei asked.

I chuckled. "I wouldn't say she's known all along. She's just seeing Armando in a bit of a different light with everything going on and remembering things in the past that seemed benign at the time that didn't age well. She told me that the other bosses were starting to put Armando into a bit of a leadership role among them before I came back. She said Armando would help settle disputes and would get them all to agree, She's also said all along that she never even knew of my existence until that night at the restaurant. She said she never heard the other bosses mention my name. Not once."

"That's why she calls you the Lord King Boss," Viktor said, laughing. "She didn't know who you were or what to call you when she found out you were coming to the meeting."

"It's authoritative," I said, causing more laughter from everyone. I think they enjoyed the lighter side that Sephie had brought out in all of us, but especially me. I hardly ever joked about anything before Sephie, but now we could find the lighter side of just about anything. It was a welcome change.

"So, you think Armando is playing both sides to see which side will win? That way, If you lose, he can still keep favor with the other bosses?" Ivan asked.

"It's entirely possible. Given that he didn't come clean about his argument with his associate after the meeting on Monday, I'm rethinking his loyalties. You all know how well I take betrayal of any kind," I said. "Sephie said last night, just to play Devil's advocate, that Mando might've gotten it in his head that he could run the city while I was gone. If you add in that he might

have been feeling Sephie out for himself instead of the story about his son like he said and her point was that I basically came back and in one night took it all away from him. He might be playing both sides out of spite."

"Sephie didn't give him any hope that he had a chance with her before she met you, did she?" Stephen asked. I could tell he was perplexed over Armando's behavior, if this really was true.

"No. She said that thought was gross. Given the convulsions she has thinking about it, I believe her. She said he used to stay 1 after occasionally and would help her clean up after the other bosses had left. He would ask her questions about her life, like he was trying to find more information out about her. She said she never told him anything important and that she didn't like the idea of him knowing things about her. We know how private she can be. I doubt he got anything useful out of her," I said,

"In all my 900 years, I'll never understand people getting upset about losing things that don't even belong to them in the first place," Stephen said.

"You and me hoth. It's still just a working theory about Armando, but it seems to be making more sense, the more I think about it. We should hopefully be able to get some answers if Keith and Chris can record his meetings. He's never taken his security seriously. I'm hoping that remains the case and they're able to record him easily," I said. "But, for now, I want Armando left out of everything."

"We might be able to test his allegiance, Give him false information and see what he does with it," Ivan said.

"I agree. We just need to be careful and time that right. We don't want to scare him into hiding too soon if he finds out we're on to him," Viktor said.

"Agreed. We definitely need to time everything just right. I'm not doing anything without Misha and Sephie," I said. I remembered something Ivan had said the night before, while Sephie was still cooking dinner and we were all standing in the kitchen together. "You know who originally suggested that I do away with the other bosses?" I asked, looking at Ivan. He shook his head no. "Armando."

"That kind of an idea comes up in conversation because you've already been thinking about it," Ivan said, his hand running over his goatee.

Viktor did some digging on who the man was that we overheard arguing with Armando late morning. He had to rely on Sephie for translation, as many of the articles were in Italian, but he managed to find a few that were in English since he spent part of the year in the city. She was curled up next to him on the couch, so he could search for information and she could translate what he'd found.

"It appears he and Armando are related, but distantly. They've been business partners since Armando was much younger, however. I've found quite a few business deals going back decades," Viktor said, "I can't find any indication that he's involved in the illegal side of Armando's business. At least not directly. It doesn't make sense that he would be urging him to switch sides if he's not involved."

"Do the other bosses make business deals with each other like you and Armando?" Sephie asked me. As soon as she said it, a lightbulb went off in Viktor's head and he started down an entirely new rabbit hole, digging for more information.

"Minor stuff, mostly. The other bosses tend to rely heavily on the illegal side of things. They have a few legitimate businesses set up, mostly mattress stores, but they're mostly a front and a way to launder money. They don't make very much money off of those businesses. Their wealth comes from the illegal side almost exclusively. Armando is the only boss other than me that invests in legitimate ventures," I said.

"Maybe that's why they're getting greedy. I would think there's a finite number of addicts in the city. That's a fixed income supply." She was still reading an article that Viktor had given her to translate while she talked out loud. "Plus, a significant portion of your customer base dies every year. If you're an idiot like Sal and push brawn on your customer base, then you're going to lose more customers than you gain." She looked up at me, a smirk on her face. "I don't even know anything about

business and I know that's a terrible model for trying to stay wealthy."

"You do make a good point though, love," I said. "It would explain why they're getting greedy. The commissioner instituted a drug prevention program for at-risk youth last year. He talked to me before he started it. Most of the addicts in the city are adults, so taking the younger people out of the supply chain, if you will, shouldn't have made a significant difference. Maybe it was more successful than the other bosses expected. I would expect nothing less than for them to not see that coming."

"Commissioner 1, Bosses 0," Sephie said, going back to translating for Viktor.