

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 263

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Three

Sephie

Adrik had stood up from his desk and pulled me up from my chair to go outside for a bit before the sun went down. We both needed a break, but I had the idea about Ricardo and wanted to ask before I forgot. “Come, we’ll resume this later,” Adrik said as he pulled me from his office. We stopped at the closet so I could grab a jacket, then continued downstairs. He held my hand in his, his fingers laced through mine.

As soon as we were outside and mostly alone, I felt the stress melt away. I took a deep breath, inhaling the fresh air. “I needed this break,” I said.

“Me too. You’re the best excuse for getting me out of the office,” he said. “Especially now that I can feel what you’re feeling more. I know when you’re getting stressed. I can ignore my own stress, but I’m incapable of ignoring yours. I want to make it stop as soon as I feel it.”

I moved closer to him, my other arm holding on to his arm as we walked hand-in-hand. “I do love that you’re so protective of me. It might seem over the top to someone else, but I completely lost the feeling of safety when I lived with my uncle. Even after I got away from him, I never really got it back. That feeling of constantly being on edge, constantly looking over my shoulder, or waiting for the next attack to happen never went away until I met you.” He let go of my hand so he could put his arm around me. He stopped, pulling me closer to him. “It’s kind of silly when I think about it. I know I can survive things most people wouldn’t, because I’ve done it. I’m still here. But the hypervigilance gets exhausting after a while. You’ve brought peace back to my life and now I never want to be without it again,” I said.

He inhaled sharply. “Sephie, I never want you to worry. About anything. You’re a very big reason that I made the decision to get rid of the other bosses. I don’t want to have to constantly worry about one of them trying to hurt you to get to me. I want you and Misha to be able to run through the city again without worrying you’re going to be attacked. I want to be able to walk to Vinny’s to get you your favorite sandwich in the middle of the day without worrying someone is going to try and grab you. I want you to always know that you’re completely safe with me. And if I’m not with you, I want you to know you’re completely safe with whichever one of the guys is with you.”

“Or three,” I said, laughing.

“Or three. Safety in numbers, solnishko,” he said, laughing with me.

I wrapped my arms around his waist, resting my head on his chest. His arms held me tight against him, causing me to feel deliciously warm throughout my entire body. “I love you, Adrik,” I sighed.

“I love you, Sephie. More than anything,” he said, kissing the top of my head.

After we left the office, the guys moved everything downstairs. They were spread out on the couches when Adrik and I came back as the sun was setting. I had a feeling they did it so they could be closer to the kitchen. They’d all grown to love me cooking for them, especially now that I was trying to make more traditional Russian dishes, but it felt like they enjoyed helping just as much as they enjoyed eating. I never had to wash a dish when they were around and they were always willing to jump in and help. It gave us a chance to talk about things, just the seven of us. It was a strange dynamic, our weird little family, but it was one that I adored.

“I have more for you to translate, sestrichka,” Viktor said as we walked in. “Your idea that Ricardo is the missing link between the other bosses and Armando seems to be a good one, but I need you to translate to know for sure.”

I scanned the articles that he’d found while Adrik and I were gone as I walked to the kitchen. They all got up and followed me, sitting around the large kitchen Island so they’d be ready to help and we could all still discuss the day’s topic of choice. “It looks like Armando has deals with Niko and Vito as well. The only names I’m not seeing are Darlo and Massimo, as far as the

bosses go.” I clicked to the next article, scanning it briefly. “And there’s Lorenzo,” I said, looking up at Adrik. “So, Armando has deals of varying sizes with everyone. Except maybe Dario and Massimo, but that could be because we just haven’t found them yet.” Adrik did not look happy.

“So, it looks like the theory that he’s playing both sides is a solid one,” Ivan said. “Now the question is how much has he told the other bosses about our plans.”

“This makes me worry about Trino, too. He has all of them down there against just him and Martin,” I said.

“I need to have another conversation with Trino,” Adrik said as he walked to me. He put his hands on my hips as he stood behind me. “But after dinner. I’m starving,” he said as he leaned down to kiss my cheek.

“Say no more. I can fix that,” I said as I pulled his arms around me tighter.

“This might be one of many reasons why I love you so much,” he said, kissing my neck.

As the guys were cleaning up after dinner, Adrik called Trino. He put him on speaker so we could all hear the conversation. I had hopped on the counter, so he was standing in between my legs, but with his back toward me, so everyone could hear.

“Jefe, que pasa?” Trino picked up on the first ring. “I’m beginning to get used to these frequent calls. It makes me feel loved, if I’m being honest.”

Adrik chuckled. “You might change your mind after you hear what I’m about to tell you.”

“Are you going to tell me that Armando has turned against you and now he’s coming down here to meet with me also?” he asked. His tone was jovial, like that was the most outlandish scenario he could think of.

“Well, you’re half right,” Adrik said. There was silence on the other end of the phone for a moment.

“For real, Jefe? He’s turned against you?” While Trino had been joking, he was now very serious. His voice had an edge of anger to it.

“We don’t know for sure yet, but the more we uncover, the more it looks like he’s been playing both sides. He’s made deals with three of the other bosses. Dario and Massimo are the only two he apparently hasn’t made deals with. But because he’s definitely made deals with Salvadori, Niko, Vito, and even Lorenzo, I’m not sure how much information he’s given to them about our plans. I want you to be careful, Trino,” Adrik said. “You’re free to do whatever you feel is necessary when it comes to the bosses that are still down there.”

Trino thought for a moment. “If Armando is giving information to Anthony and Lorenzo, that would make them the world’s best actors. I didn’t think they had that in them. I could be wrong, but they’ve always come across as, well, idiots.”

“Well, you’re right about Anthony, at least,” I said. “He’s definitely an idiot, but he does have a certain level of cunning to him. I think it’s from Lorenzo more than anyone. He’s the only one I’ve never seen in person. He’s the one that was mentoring Anthony on his side gig into human trafficking. If there’s an evil mastermind among those two, it has to be him. Anthony can barely spell his name on a good day.”

“Miha, have I mentioned how much I love your inability to mince words?” Trino said, laughing.

“My father banished Lorenzo years ago. There’s a reason he banished him instead of handing down another punishment. I think Sephie is right. He’s the brains behind Sal and Anthony’s plans. I just don’t know where Armando fits into their plans and I don’t know how much information he’s given them about what we’re planning. I know you take your security seriously, but extra careful with all of them down there. You can send them back at any point, too. We’ll take care of all of them Adrik

