

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 317

Chapter Three Hundred Seventeen

Sephle

I looked at Misha and Andrei when everyone else left to go “talk” to Armando. “We are not allowed to do anything weird that will cause them to come running back upstairs this time.”

While they both laughed at me, Misha asked, “do you not like it when Boss comes out of nowhere to save you?”

“No, I do. I very much do. But I feel bad for always interrupting his schedule,” I said. We were in the kitchen, as Andrei had talked me into more broth. It was actually working. I managed to eat most of the first bowl he gave me when they first got back from the meeting with the journalist and I only slept for a short period that afternoon.

“You know you’re more important than his schedule, spider monkey. He’s told us all exactly that. Multiple times,” Andrei said, setting down another small bowl of broth in front of me.

“I know, but it still doesn’t mean I should constantly interrupt him. This needs salt,” I said, taking a small sip.

Misha’s handsome smile stretched across his face. “That means your appetite is waking up, gazelle.” He grabbed the salt and handed it to me.

“I thought it meant this was bland,” I said, grinning at him.

“What did Boss say about Andrei’s newly discovered ability?” Misha asked, curiously.

“He mostly wanted to know how long I’ve been able to do it. He seemed more amused that I outed Sephie than anything.” Andrei said, still giving me an apologetic look.

I laughed softly. “Don’t apologize, Andrei. It makes him angry that I try to keep it from him when I don’t feel well. He’s still mad at me for keeping it hidden after Misha and I were attacked. Same for the ball. I clearly need help in that area.”

“Ivan lectured him on being mad at you for that, you know,” Misha said.

“He did?”

“Yeah, it was after you got home from the hospital. When he could feel your pain. He was happy that you wouldn’t be able to hide it from him anymore. We could hear it in his voice when he made a comment about you always trying to hide it. Ivan told him it wasn’t your fault,” Misha said.

“It’s not? Pretty sure I’m the one that’s constantly trying to hide it. I know I’m doing it. I just don’t know how to stop,” I said, pushing the now empty bowl away from me.

Andrei picked up the bowl to wash it. He said, “you really don’t know, spider monkey?” I shook my head no.

“No, it’s just something I feel like I have to do. No idea why. And no idea how to stop it.”

“It’s a trauma response, gazelle. You’ve learned that you’re better off not asking for help when you need it because the few times you did got you hurt worse. You might not be aware you’re doing it, but there’s some part of you that’s still trying to protect you, especially when you’re hurt. It’s why you get extra argumentative with us when we try to do stuff for you and why you try to hide it from Boss when you’re hurt. You’re still scared you’re going to get hurt worse,” Misha said.

I thought for a moment, chewing on my bottom lip. “Ivan really said all that?” I asked. They both nodded their heads. I took in a slow, almost deep breath. “He’s been hanging around Stephen. Obviously,” I said, grinning at them.

“He’s right though,” Andrei said, drying his hands on the kitchen towel. He threw the towel back on the counter and walked around the island to stand next to me. Flis giant arm slid around my shoulders. “It might still take you a while to fully believe it, but you’re safe with us. No matter what. You’ll always be safe with us,” he said. I leaned my head onto his shoulder, taking another almost deep breath. “I know that. I really do. And I love you all for it. I don’t know why I can’t stop trying to pretend I’m okay when I’m clearly not,” I said.

“You don’t have to figure it out, gazelle. I kinda like when you’re extra spicy and cranky,” Misha said. Andrei helped me up so we could move to the couches. He laughed at Misha, but said quietly, “I think we all do. You’re extra hilarious when you’re cranky.”

Adrik was clearly surprised when he walked back into the penthouse and I was still awake, laughing with Misha and Andrei about something ridiculous that we’d come up with. He walked to me, kneeling down in front of me, his face immediately softening when he looked at me. “You’re still awake,” he said, almost like he couldn’t believe it.

“I’m pretty sure Andrei spiked the broth with caffeine,” I said, smiling at him.

He looked at Andrei. “You got her to eat more?” Andrei nodded his head: “She ate all of it this time,” Andrei said.

“Downside, they had to help me up like 12 times so I could pee, but otherwise, I think it’s helping.” I said, laughing quietly. “And just in time, too. I might murder him if the doctor tells me I have to go back to the hospital tomorrow.”

“Nobody wants that, princess,” Ivan said.

Andrei looked at his watch. “It’s been a couple of hours since she ate the last bowl and it’s time for her antibiotic. Think you could manage some more, spider monkey?”

“As long as I can put salt in it. It tastes so much better that way,” I said. Andrei stood up to go to the kitchen while Adrik helped me up from the couch. “How did it go with Armando? Was he happy to see you?” I asked, grinning at Adrik.

Before he answered, he pulled me to him and pressed his lips to mine. “I’m so happy you’re still awake, solnishko,” he said quietly so only I could

hear.

“I think he was happy that he could finally see out of both of his eyes again, Ivan said. “I might’ve ensured that happiness was short-lived.” He had a devious grin on his face as he looked at me.

“Squish. Everyone knows you don’t punch like a weak girl. You didn’t have to prove it,” I said, laughing at him.

“Was he any kind of helpful about Ricardo?” Misha asked.

“Only after Stephen made him want to cry,” Viktor said, also with a devious grin on his face. I looked at Stephen, my mouth open in shock. He just shrugged his shoulders. “He had it coming. It’s not my fault he hasn’t dealt with his childhood.”

I caught Adrik’s eye as he helped me sit at the kitchen island yet again. I could see the “I told you” running through his mind.

“What did you find out?” Andrei asked, sliding another bowl of broth in front of me, along with my antibiotic, and a glass of water.

“It seems that Ricardo thinks of himself as an equal to Boss. It looks like he’s the real reason for the coup, not Sal. Ricardo has never been able to gain as much power and favor as Boss has in the city and it drives him crazy. He’s been trying to simply outdo Boss in business for years, but has never been able to come close. That’s when he started trying to get politicians and police in his pocket,” Ivan said.

“Outdo you how?” I asked, sipping the warm broth. I had to admit, I was starting to really like it. It didn’t make me nauseous and my stomach was finally happy after so many days of not eating.

“Apparently, he’s been in competition with me for years. I had no idea. Armando said that Ricardo took it personally every time he would try to make a move in a business deal and either I was there first or I had an even bigger project in the works. It’s not my fault he’s shit at business,” Adrik said, shrugging his shoulders. He had a sly smirk on his face, which told me he was clearly enjoying this new piece of information.

“Your greatness will always irritate those who aren’t willing to work as hard as you do,” I said. “Did Armando know how Ricardo got the other bosses to go against you?”

“No, but we didn’t ask that question either. I think that question is best put to Dario,” Stephen said.

“Maybe I’ll be better enough that you can talk to him tomorrow,” I said, pushing the empty bowl away from me. Misha grabbed it to wash it this time.

“One day at a time, love. We’ll see how you are after you see the doctor tomorrow,” Adrik said, kissing my temple.