

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 348

Sephte

Adrik and I took over one of the couches on the plane. We hadn't slept very much the night before, but neither one of us could fully take the blame. I think I woke him up just as many times as he woke me up. I laid down in between him and the back of the couch once we were in the air while he used his coat as a blanket for me. It was also cover so he could slide his hands under my shirt and down my pants, wanting no barrier between his hands and my body. We really couldn't get enough of each other.

Fortunately, the flight was long enough that we both got a nap in so we were both feeling better once we landed. Only now we were both nervous for me to meet Adrik's father. He was nervous because his father could be a very gruff man and he was worried he would say something that would offend me. I was worried that his father would find some reason to not like me. We were both acting like children worrying over nothing, but neither one of us could stop.

Vitaliy's men were waiting for us at the small air strip when we landed. We still had a short drive to get to Vitaliy's ranch once we left the airport. The guys knew a couple of Vitaliy's men that came to get us, but a couple were new. One man walked up to Adrik, as soon as we were off the plane. He was much older than Adrik, as well as all the guys, but he still looked lethal despite his age. He wasn't nearly as tall as Adrik, but he was built like a house. I caught myself wondering how difficult it was for him to walk through doorways when he was so wide. He had grey, almost white hair and his clean-shaven face clearly showed a few scars.

Adrik smiled when he saw the man. "Aleksei. It's good to see you again, my friend," he said as he opened his arms for Aleksei. They embraced each other, talking quietly, and laughing like old friends. Adrik stepped away from him and held his hand out to me. I stepped closer to Adrik as he put his arm around my waist and held me against him. I caught Aleksei's surprise when he saw Adrik do so.

"Sephie, this is Aleksei. He's been working for my father as long as I've been alive. Aleksei, this is Sephie," he said. It was evident that it was somewhat of a surprise that I was there, but Aleksei was a gentleman and didn't make a big deal out of it. I extended my hand to him, telling him it was nice to meet him and trying to give him my warmest smile. I could see the tough exterior crack slightly when I smiled at him.

"Sephie is a very unusual name," he said as he was carefully studying me.

"Aleksei probably isn't that common around here either. Should we fascinate the locals later?" I asked. I thought Viktor had the best loud laugh I'd ever heard, but Aleksei's laugh was a very close second. His laugh shook his body. He looked at Adrik, saying in Russian, "I've never known you to bring a woman around your father. Smart choice to wait until you found this one. He's going to love her." Adrik smiled at me, knowing that I would want to respond.

"If that's all it takes for him to love me, you gentlemen need to get out more," I replied. When he heard me speak Russian, his eyes went wide. Ivani had walked up beside us during this exchange, laughing at Aleksei's response to me knowing Russian.

"You'll come to understand very quickly that she's one of a kind," Ivan said, grinning down at me.

The exchange with Aleksei at the airport helped to calm my nerves a little more. Apparently, it completely disarmed him as well. He talked almost the entire way to the ranch. He asked questions about the city, but he asked questions about people and places in the city. He didn't want to know about the bosses and the larger problem. It was obvious that he missed specific things about the city, as well as specific people. He asked about a specific restaurant that I had never heard about and said he desperately missed this one particular dish he used to order there. Ivan, who was in the front seat beside Aleksei, asked him what the dish was. When Aleksei answered, I already knew Ivan's plan to endear me to them even more.

I said to Ivan quietly, "okay, but don't come complaining to me when they start visiting too much." Aleksei was still talking so he didn't hear me. Ivan had to cough to keep from laughing.

Adrik pulled me closer, whispering in my ear, "you don't have to do anything while we're down here, love."

"I know I don't, but I want them to like me," I said.

"You don't have to do anything more than be yourself and that will happen," he said, kissing my temple.

Vitaliy's ranch was secluded. I would've missed the driveway, as it didn't look like an entrance to anything from the main road. As we drove along the driveway, there were steep mountains in the distance. Plant life was lush, making everything so green that it almost hurt your eyes. Compared to the hibernation of everything back home for the winter, Panama was bursting with life. Adrik caught my look of wonderment as I took in the landscape. "I see now why your father likes to migrate in the winter," I said.

We pulled up to an expansive house. It reminded me of Trino's island house. There was only one floor, but the house seemingly went on forever. "I'm definitely getting lost later," I mumbled to myself as we stood outside while the guys grabbed our bags from the vehicles. Andrei had walked up beside me, so he heard me. "You and me both," he said, taking in the house.

Aleksei showed us to our rooms, then waited to take us further into the house to Vitaliy. We walked through a few rooms, finally reaching the back of the house. I could see Trino sitting at a table with an older man, who I assumed to be Vitaliy. His hair was still mostly dark like Adrik's, but he also had prominent grey throughout. He was clean shaven. Even sitting, I could tell he was a much larger man than Trino. Trino nodded in our direction, which caused Vitaliy to look toward us. The resemblance between him and Adrik was very strong, but Adrik had a softness to his expression that Vitaliy lacked. Vitaliy was hardened. It was the first thing I noticed about him. It was likely the first thing he wanted you to notice about him.

When Vitaliy looked in our direction, I felt Adrik stiffen beside me. His posture was always good, but he made sure it was perfect. It made me want to stand up a little straighter too. Vitaliy and Trino both stood up and walked toward us. Vitaliy was tall, but not as tall as Adrik. He opened his arms for Adrik as we got closer. "My son," he said. Although I know he meant it warmly, it was anything but. I caught myself wondering if he was capable of it. Adrik embraced his father. The embrace he shared with Aleksei was more genuine than what I was witnessing between him and his father.

When Adrik stepped away from me, the guys instinctively stepped closer, almost surrounding me. I was used to them being protective of me, but I was confused as to why they would be so now. Adrik spoke to his father briefly, thanking him for getting Trino. I caught Trino's eye as they talked, knowing Trino wouldn't be able to understand what they were saying, since they were speaking Russian. I raised an eyebrow at him, wanting to know how he was holding up. He placed his hand over his heart and bowed his head. I nodded to him when he looked back up at me.

Vitaliy's attention shifted to me, asking Adrik who I was. I was starting to understand that Adrik hadn't told his father I would be with them. Adrik, who very rarely got nervous, looked at me, then back to his father. He said in English, "this is Sephie. My future wife." He extended his hand to me, the guys made room for me to walk to him. I was a little shocked that he had called me his future wife, but tried to play it cool. We'd talked about it before. He'd just never actually called me that before. I knew I wasn't going anywhere and I knew he wasn't going anywhere, but it felt different to put

a label on it.

Adrik slid his arm around my waist, pulling me into his side. Much like Aleksei, I could see the surprise on Vitaliy's face as he witnessed Adrik's affection toward me. I extended my hand to Vitaliy, saying, "nice to meet you, sir." As soon as my hand made contact with his, his eyes went wide. He cursed under his breath, looking between me and Adrik. He quickly gained control, but it was obvious to me and Adrik that something had just happened. I didn't know what though.

Vitaliy, in an effort to distract from his reaction, said in English, "Sephie is quite an unusual name. Is it short for something?"

I nodded my head. "Persephone." Once more, his eyes went wide and the surprise on his face was evident for everyone to see. He stood, silent, for a moment, then he looked to me once more. He extended his hand to me once again, saying in Russian, "he's been waiting for you for a long time."

"I know. I was waiting for him, too," I said. Vitaliy's face was shocked when I responded in Russian, but we all watched as a very sly smile spread across his face. I heard the collective gasp from the guys behind me. I'm guessing this is the first time this man has smiled in public.

Vitaliy still had a hold of my hand as he looked at me, smiling. His face was still as hardened as ever, but he was obviously pleased. He pulled me toward him, pulling my arm through his. "Come, walk with an old man," he said as he turned away from everyone. The guys all started to follow, but he put his hand up, almost barking at them. "She's safe with me. You stay." He stopped, looking right at Adrik. "You too. We can't talk about you if you tag along," he said matter-of-factly. I could feel Adrik's anger at his father giving him an order, but he was also worried about me being apart from

him.