

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 35

Chapter Thirty-Five

Sephie

We walked in to find Ivan and Misha in the kitchen with Tori and Andrei. Misha was telling Tori stories about Andrei while she finished up dinner. She looked mostly relaxed, especially given that Ivan was in his usual quiet, murderous mood. I walked up behind him and wrapped my arms around his shoulders. I whispered “murderous aura” in his ear.

“Humph,” was all he said.

“That reminds me, Grumpletiltskin. I need to change your bandage later,” I said grabbing a glass from the cabinet. I filled it with water, drank half, and then gave the rest to Adrik. He finished the rest of it and refilled it.

Viktor came into the kitchen, soon followed by Stephen. Misha was still having fun telling stories on Andrei, so he recruited Viktor for more embellishment. Poor Andrei. It was like having four older brothers. Tori seemed to thoroughly enjoy it. She seemed much more at ease with all of them than I had seen her previously. I leaned against the cabinet, smiling.

I felt Adrik’s hand on my back. He kissed my temple. “What are you smiling about, solnishko?” he whispered, lightly rubbing his nose on my ear. I felt the goosebumps spread over my body.

I turned to look at him. “I’m enjoying watching everyone relax. You guys were very uptight the first time I saw you. It’s nice to see this side of everyone.”

He pressed his mouth close to my ear again, so that his rough facial hair brushed against my cheek. “It’s because of you, you know.”

I leaned my face against his as he gently rubbed his rough cheek against mine. My lips curled into a slight smile, thinking back to his hands on me. I felt my cheeks flush. I rested my head on his shoulder, as I felt his hand slip under my shirt. His thumb lightly tracing circles on my back again. My back was toward the wall, so there was no chance anyone would see anything. I sighed, turning my head to watch everyone in the kitchen as they all continued to chat.

The last three days had been anything but normal, but I found myself feeling happy. Really, truly happy for the first time in a very long time. Maybe I wasn’t cut out for normal.

After dinner, all the guys pitched in to help clean up the dishes. Andrei and Tori snuck away outside to go for a walk before the sun set completely. Adrik and Viktor were having a seemingly serious conversation in the corner of the kitchen. They were speaking Russian, which meant I wouldn’t be able to understand even if I wanted to.

I was wiping down the counters as Ivan was finishing drying the last of the dishes. “So, you want to tell me why you’re so grumpy again?”

“I’m not grumpy.”

“You’re definitely grumpy.”

“I am no...I held my hand up to him so he couldn’t finish his sentence.

“Did you just think about punching me for arguing with you?”

“Maybe.”

I crossed my arms across my chest. “I rest my case, your honor.”

He grumbled something under his breath and went to the back room to sit on the end of the couch. I followed. I draped myself over his shoulders, like dead weight on his back.

“Princess. What are you doing?” he said, starting to get even more annoyed.

“I’m your emotional support sloth. I’m staying here until you feel better,” I said, still laying over his back like a wet towel.

He stood up, to try to get rid of me, but I managed to hold on and stay on his back, staying as limp and awkward as I could. He just stood by the couch, with his arms crossed. Misha walked in the room, “what the f u c k is going on here?”

“Oh, hi. I’m Grumpletiltskin’s emotional support sloth. I’m just gonna hang out here until he feels better. Should be any minute now. I can feel it,” I said starting to laugh at the absurdity of my antics.

Once I started to laugh, Ivan started to crack. He craned his neck to look at me. I saw him fighting a smile Misha was laughing and Viktor and Adrik had walked into the room to see what was going on. They both laughed at the ridiculous scene in front of them. That was all it took. Ivan couldn’t hold it in any longer. He started laughing.

I jumped off his back and threw my hands up in victory. “Emotional support sloth for the win!”

Ivan just shook his head. He surprised me by turning around and hugging me to him. He held me tightly, in that way that someone who is fighting internal battles does when they find an anchor to cling to in their stormy sea. I hugged him back as he whispered “thank you” in my ear. I just squeezed him tighter.

“I still need to change your bandage,” I said, pulling away to look at his face. He nodded, as he let me go. If I didn’t know better, I would say his eyes were a little misty.

Viktor said, “we have bandages. I’ll get them for you,” as he walked out of the room.

Adrik walked up and pulled me away slightly. “I’m going to my office. I’m still looking for an answer that I can’t seem to find.

Come get me when you’re done,” he said as he kissed my lips.

“I won’t be long,” I said.

“Good. There is that matter we still must discuss,” he said. He winked at me as he walked away. I could feel the heat between my legs return at the thought of it.

Ivan stood in front of me, shirtless, standing completely still as I carefully peeled his old bandage off. I was becoming convinced he was completely impervious to pain, as he never even flinched at the adhesive peeling back from his skin.

I worked in silence, checking that his stitches were still holding. Once I was satisfied that no infection was starting to set in and everything was healing like it was supposed to, I placed a new bandage over the wound. As I taped the new bandage to his skin, I said, “you know the trick about fighting demons?” I didn’t wait for him to respond. “The trick is to stop fighting them and make friends with them. Then they have no power over you.”

I noticed his jaw clench, but he didn’t say a word. He looked down at the floor, his shoulders slightly slumped.