

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 352

“Adrik

She'd reached the point now that she could do very light sparring with him, which made her happy. Her upper body was still weaker than normal and with her ribs still causing her pain, they concentrated on her legs. She was more powerful there anyway. As the rest of us were finishing up, she and Andrei were off to the side practicing drills. Since she had to go slow, he was working on her form and making it perfect.

My father and Aleksei walked into the gym, noticing Sephie and Andrei immediately. They nodded to us, but were watching her. Andrei gave her a break while they discussed something and he adjusted her form slightly. When she tried again, we could see the lightbulb moment she had. She practiced a few more times, then they had another sheat discussion. I could tell she was trying to talk him into letting her go faster. He would roll his eyes at her, disagreeing with whatever she was saying, but she kept at it until he finally relented. We all saw him tell her sternly, “one time.” He held up one finger to make sure she understood. She grinned, clapping her hands. He gave her instructions, she nodded her head, then he gave her the okay to begin.

After the ball, when she'd injured her hip, she lost some strength in her legs. It took her a while, but she gained it all back. This time, she lost strength in her upper body, but her legs were as strong as ever. Having to slow down and only being able to work on details was actually making her stronger and faster. Andrei was expecting each kick she delivered, but he still had to work to stay ahead of her to keep her from kicking him and not the pads.

My father had walked over to me while he watched her. “That's how she trains when she's hurt?” he asked.

I laughed, nodding my head. “We had her fight one of Armando's security guys who had a problem with her having any kind of authority over him. We just wanted to knock him down a few pegs. She killed him,” I said, glancing at him. His eyes went wide. “Turns out he was working for Salvadori's son, too. He was a plant. She knows things before anyone else most of the time.” I was curious to see how my father would react to hearing me say that out loud. After talking to Sephie about him the night before, I was feeling less nervous around him.

Ivan had walked closer, hearing our conversation. “When they tried to kidnap her the first time, she killed more guys than the rest of us did. She saved my life that day,” Ivan said. “It's one of the reasons Salvadori hates her so much. She has a tendency to kill his guys. Frequently.” He laughed at the thought of Sal being pissed.

I watched as Vitaliy casually put his hand on Ivan's shoulder as he responded. I could see the brief look of surprise when he touched him. I knew what he was doing. I think Ivan did too, as he saw it as well. “They all are. We just don't know how Viktor and Stephen are yet. You don't need to check,” I said, laughing at Vitaliy's surprise that I had caught on to what he was doing. Sephie and Andrei had finished and were walking back toward us. She walked right to me, tucking herself into my side, smiling warmly at Vitaliy. She immediately caught on that something had just happened. She looked at me, searching my eyes. She laughed, looking at Vitaliy.

“You thought I was lying, didn't you?” she asked, clearly amused at his guilty expression. He cursed under his breath. “We have much to discuss later, old man,” she said, pulling me toward the door. We heard the guys' laughter as they followed us out of the gym.

A few hours later, Sephie, Vitaliy, and I went for a walk. She managed to talk everyone else into not following us this time, although it was more difficult than she thought it would be. She ended up having to compromise, promising that we would stay within sight. It made me smile to see how protective they were of her in new situations. Aleksei noticed too, asking me quietly, “are they always this protective of your girlfriends?”

“Never. She's the only one. I didn't ask them to be this way, either. Not after the first day. They worry about her almost as much as I do,” I said.

He was quiet for a moment. “I used to worry about your mother much the same way. That speaks to Sephie's character.”

“Give her time, Aleksei. She'll have you wrapped around her finger too,” I said. Sephie was done with her negotiations and on her way to me. Aleksei smiled at her, telling her Vitaliy would be out in a minute. Her heart-stopping smile stretched across her face.

“I don't think she needs that much time,” he said before turning to leave.

Vitaliy walked outside shortly after, his hardened expression softening when he saw Sephie. I'd seen my father's rough features soften very few times in my life, but it was obvious when he looked at her that he was completely defenseless against her. I was fairly certain that he would do anything she

asked of him.

She grabbed my hand, walking toward Vitaliy. “I'd very much like to walk with an old man, if you're up for it,” she said.

He smiled down at her. “How could I refuse?” he asked, offering her his arm. She slid her arm through his, while still keeping a hold of my hand with her other arm.

“So happy I have two functioning arms right now,” she said, grinning up at me.

Once we walked far enough away from the house that we wouldn't be overhead, she elbowed him in the ribs lightly. “I can't believe you thought I was lying to you about the guys being like me and Adrik. Rude,” she said, trying not to laugh. Even though she had her contacts in, I knew her eyes were solid green right now, which made me smile to myself. I watched my father actually blush as she chastised him.

“Forgive me, sladkaya. It's been so long that I have convinced myself it was all a fairy tale. I haven't found anyone like Adrik until you. And I've known Ivan for years. He wasn't like you when I knew him before. He's changed,” he said.

“How did you know I was different?” Sephie asked him.

He walked in silence for a few steps. We could see him considering how to explain it. “It's like a judgment system, if you will. When I touch someone, I can tell certain things about them,” he said.

“Whether they're good or bad, you mean?” she asked.

“Yes, on a basic level. Most people are both, as I'm sure you know, but some are ruled by good and some are ruled by evil. I can tell the difference. Salvadori, for example, is ruled completely by evil. With you and Adrik, and now Ivan, it's completely different. There's an electricity there, almost. It feels like I can feel your power, if that makes sense,” he said.

“You should touch Misha and Andrei later. You'll feel it with both of them, too. Viktor and Stephen also have something, we just don't know what it is yet. They're both timid about realizing it,” I said,

“Are they all like you, then?” he asked me.

“No, not even a little. We all complement each other though,” I said.

“How?”

“Misha started with being able to predict outcomes. Like a gut instinct. It's now evolved into him being able to see things as they happen or before they happen. Sephie helped him with that. Andrei is like her,” I said.

“Like you how, sladkaya?” he asked her.

“I have a knack for reading people's minds. Andrei just discovered he can do it too. He's still a little insecure about it, but he's getting better,” she said, smiling at him.

Vitaliy walked a few more steps, mulling over what we'd just told him. “Ivan feels very similar to you two. What does he do?”

Sephie chuckled. “That one is a little harder to explain, but he's my protector.”

“He's her shield,” I said. “I never told you, but Ivan is built different. He feels no pain. I could shoot him point blank and he wouldn't feel it. It's that ability that saved her life the first time they tried to kidnap her. It almost killed him, but she killed the guys coming after them so he could get them to safety before he collapsed. She also has a special ability to calm him. Ivan has a horrific past when it comes to doctors. He gets stuck in his memories anytime he goes to the hospital. It usually takes the rest of us to hold him down so that he doesn't hurt anyone or himself and we're having to fight him with everything we have, but she can do it on her own just by touching him and whispering to him. Viktor's still jealous of it,” I said, laughing.

“Ivan was experimented on as a kid, wasn't he? His inability to feel pain was a highly sought-after trait in Russia years ago,” he said.

“You know about the facility?” Sephie asked, clearly surprised.