

## **King of the Underworld Chapter 231 - 240**

### **Chapter 231**

Adrik

I laughed. “That one has been happening for a while. But that shouldn’t surprise any of you. She does it to you guys too,” I said.

“Not like what she just did to you. Although, I’d be willing to bet she probably could do it to one of us if we tried it,” Misha said.

“I don’t know. It works the best with Adrik. He’s the only one I know for sure. The rest of you is usually my best guess,” Sephie said.

“Christmas isn’t that far away. What size crystal ball were you thinking you’ll need to get this side hustle off the ground?” Ivan asked, causing Sephie to grin at him.

“It does make sense that you two would be so completely in sync. I’ve never seen two people as connected as you two are. It makes sense that you two feel what the other one feels, but not even being in the same room is pretty impressive,” Stephen said. Out of all the guys, he was the most scientifically minded, especially when it came to psychology and matters of the mind. I’m sure he was constructing an experiment to carry out to prove that what he’d just seen was real.

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“Surely you’ve seen something similar in your 900 years on this earth?” Andrei asked Stephen.

“Once before,” Stephen said, completely straight-faced. We all laughed. Sephie had set out the food on the island as we were talking and laughing. She walked to me as the guys helped themselves to food, tucking herself into my side where she fit so perfectly. I looked down at her, reveling in her smile.

“This is exactly what I needed, solnishko,” I said, brushing a curl from her face. She just smiled her sweet smile and stood on her toes to kiss me. Suddenly the stress from the day was completely gone.

“So, tell us what happened with Giana,” Misha said after we had all started eating.

Viktor couldn’t hide his amusement. “You missed a good one, Misha. You would’ve been so happy, especially after you were so angry last week,” he said.

Misha looked at me, clearly still angry as he thought about Giana’s behavior last week. “I hope you made her feel terrible.”

I shrugged my shoulders. “I don’t know if she actually heard anything I said, that’s the issue. It seemed like Armando had said the same thing to her over and over and she’s still not hearing it. He was almost trying to force an apology out of her, like she was a child. I question whether she’s really heard anything that’s been said to her if she can’t even apologize on her own,” I said.

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“Thankfully, Boss didn’t accept it. Honestly, I was shocked that Armando did it,” Viktor said.

“I do feel bad for Mando. He’s in an awkward spot with this one,” I said.

“What did you say to her?” Sephie asked.

“I told her she should come and apologize on her own, first and foremost. Then I think I told her you were smarter than she was and that her insecurity with herself was no excuse to try and use a falsely perceived fault to tear you down to make herself feel better. Then I listed everything you’ve done for her since she’s been here and tried to make her feel bad for thinking the worst of you. I also might’ve thrown in a veiled threat about how angry we all were with her last week,” I said that last sentence quietly. I wasn’t sure how happy Sephie was going to be with that one. Misha, on the other hand, was ecstatic.

“Oh, please tell me you told her how angry I was last week. She can’t keep from staring at me. Like literally all the time. I hope it crushes her to know I was pi ssed,” he said.

“Not just you, Misha. I told her all of us were angry with her,” I said.

“He told her that if she hurts Sephie, she deals with us,” Viktor said.

Misha threw his fists in the air, “YES! Please tell me she was scared.”

“Serves her right,” Ivan said. “Sometimes you have to learn lessons the hard way. This is definitely one of those times for her.”

“I think Sephie was right about her leading a sheltered life up until recently. Armando made a comment about her parents fixing

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everything for her but teaching her nothing or something like that after Boss ripped her a new one,” Viktor said.

“So, her parents have been covering for her?” Sephie asked,

“That’s what he made it seem like, but I don’t know anything else about it,”

Viktor said. “This kind of has spoiled rich kid vibes,

don’t you think?”

Sephie was quiet for a moment. I could tell she was thinking about things; she chewed on her bottom lip, lost in thought. “Ok, so

who here thinks she’s going to want to go back to Italy in the next week?” she asked, a devilish grin on her face.

Four of us raised our hands. Stephen, one of the ones that didn’t raise his

hand, said, “I think she’ll try, but I think this is the

pivotal moment where Armando forces her to grow up. I don’t think he’ll let

her go back to Italy right now. Not without him and I

don’t think he’s dumb enough to think it’s a good idea to leave the city right now.”

“We’re adding this to the white board in the morning.” Andrei said.

Sephie was still lost in thought as we cleaned the kitchen up from dinner. We’d

settled into a routine where she would cook, with

the help of whoever was around to help her, but we all pitched in to clean up

after, so she didn’t have to. The guys would happily

wash dishes if it meant she cooked more. Viktor still hadn’t even advertised

that we needed a chef. At this point, I was convinced

he wasn’t going to until Sephie told him she was tired of cooking.

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We would order takeout regularly, just to give her a break. I didn't want her to feel like she had to cook. Only when she wanted.

to. We were just incredibly lucky that she wanted to cook more often than not. She was still sitting at the island in the kitchen, lost in thought, as we cleaned up and kept chatting about everything going on.

Ivan noticed her blank expression before I did. He called her name to try to get her attention, but she didn't respond. The other guys noticed she didn't respond right away too, so we all stopped. Ivan walked to her, placing his large hand on her shoulder.

"Princess?" he asked. As soon as she felt his hand on her, she looked up at him. She was almost surprised that he was standing next to her.

"Sh it. I did it again," she said. He chuckled at her as he slid his arm around her shoulders.

"Tell me what's going on, princess," he said quietly. I stood and watched this giant bear of a man that could strike fear into any person he chose to be gentle and soft with her. I had never seen him be this way until Sephie. I didn't know it was possible. He generally never liked being touched and from what little I know about his past, with good reason. She knew he needed it the most, I think. Ivan had very thick walls, but they were no match for Sephie. She knocked them down faster than I thought possible.

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## **King of the Underworld by RJ Kane**

### **Chapter 232**

Adrik

He pulled a chair up next to her, his hand still on her shoulder. He was trying to keep her here. The rest of the guys quietly went back to what they were doing, trying to give them as much privacy as they could, but I was sure they were all eavesdropping as much as possible. She sighed, looking up at him. She glanced at me as well, then back to Ivan. “I was thinking about everything that’s happened the last week or so. Mostly about the Glana thing I feel like it’s my fault, somehow. Like I should’ve been nicer to her and this wouldn’t have happened. Then I started to think about Chucky and my mind went blank and you were standing next to me,” she said.

While the guys had tried to appear busy when she started talking, they were now blatantly listening to what she was telling Ivan.

It made me smile that they were all so concerned about her.

“Your mind is going blank, Seph?” Stephen asked her.

She nodded her head. “I didn’t know I was doing it until Adrik pointed it out.”

“Does it happen often?” Andrei asked. He gave Stephen a knowing look, which surprised me.

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“She’s done it a few times since Mike. It’s been a few days since it happened last, I think. It didn’t happen at all when we were at the house, did it?” Ivan asked, looking at me.

“No, I didn’t catch her doing it at all when we were there,” I said. I looked at Stephen, asking. “do you have more insight into why she’s doing it or what we can do to help her? It seems that talking about things helps her not do it for a while.”

but it

In his usual calm, serious manner, he thought for a few minutes. While he was thinking, Andrei said, “it’s happened to me before.

After a bad concussion. Sephie’s had at least two bad concussions fairly recently. It eventually went away for me, took a while. I think her brain is still healing. It doesn’t help that she has to deal with everything else on top of it.”

Ivan looked at me, then back at Sephie. “Maybe the acupuncture will help again. It helped before. You might need it again.”

Sephie looked at me, silently asking my thoughts. She still wasn’t used to believing that she could do whatever she wanted, whenever she wanted. She still felt like she needed permission. I found it amusing, but very endearing. I smiled at her, trying to tell her that she didn’t need my permission. She looked back to Ivan. “I think I still have her card somewhere. It did help me feel better last time.”

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“I’ve got her number, I’ve been going to her for years,” Ivan said, a smirk on his face. She raised an eyebrow at him. “What? It’s not like I can feel when something is screwed up. Sometimes I need an outside opinion,” he said. Sephie laughed, leaning over, and resting her head on his shoulder.

“Did this ever happen before to you, Seph?” Stephen asked.

“I think so. I would lose time after that night in the basement with my uncle for a while after I got away from him. It mostly happened when I was alone, so I’m not sure if it’s the same thing. I’m not exactly aware when it’s happening, but I would realize that the movie was over and I had no recollection of anything that happened. Things like that,” she said.

“Any idea how long it lasted after you got away from him?” Andrel asked.

“I don’t really remember. How long was it for you?” she asked.

“I think It lasted around six months for me, but it was a nasty concussion,” he said.

How did you get it?” she asked.

“Car accident. My buddy was a little too drunk. He swerved to avoid an animal in the road, lost control and hit a tree. I got thrown through the windshield,” he said.

I glanced at Sephie, who’s eyes were wide in shock. I never knew about this story, either. “When did this happen?” I asked.

“Just after high school. I was a sh it in school. Always did what I wasn’t supposed to do. My friend was worse. It was good

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though. The accident was the wake up call I needed,” Andrei said,

“What happened to your friend?” Misha asked.

“He walked away from the accident. You know how they always say the drunk people survive the accidents? It was true in this

case. He had a couple of bumps and scrapes, but they had to life-flight me to the hospital. They thought I was going to die. I

haven’t touched alcohol since that accident. I don’t think my friend can say the same. Last I heard, he was spiraling out of

control. He couldn’t deal with the guilt,” Andrei said.

I felt Sephie’s eyes on me. I knew she was connecting something, but wasn’t sure what just yet. She looked to Ivan with the

same look on her face before she looked back to Andrei. “Bubba, were you unconscious when you were in the hospital for the

first however long?”

He nodded. “I think I was out for four days.”

That’s what she was connecting. I caught Ivan’s eye as he realized where she was going with this as well.

“Do you have any memories of when you were out?” she asked. There was a flash of immediate recognition on his face, but he

looked like he was uncomfortable talking about it. She quietly got up and went to him. “You don’t have to talk about it, Bubba. But

I have a feeling I know exactly what you remember,” she said as she put his giant arm around her shoulders so she could hold

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onto his waist. He looked down at her, curious. “Was it like swimming in the nothing? Like you could see your own body but nothing else?” she asked.

Andrei’s eyes went wide. “How did you know that? Did you just do that mind reading thing to me? Get out of my head!” he said as he put his hand over her eyes.

She laughed, taking his hand from her eyes. “No, Bubba. It happened to me too. When I was on the plane, that’s what was happening. Adrik’s voice pulled me out of my nightmare and pulled me there. His voice is eventually what helped me find my way out.”

“That’s what happened when I was at the hospital. Sephie’s voice pulled me there out of my nightmare where I’m trying to kill the doctor that experimented on me when I was a kid,” Ivan said.

“That’s what happened when I was a kid the first time someone tried to get to my father through me. My father’s voice is what pulled me out of it,” I said.

Sephie laughed softly at the shocked expression on Andrei’s face. She then looked to Misha, Stephen, and Viktor. “Have you three had similar experiences too?”

They all had equally shocked expressions on their faces, but they just nodded their heads. Sephie smiled, looking at me. “That’s why we’re all here together. We’ve always been connected.”

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## **King of the Underworld by RJ Kane**

### **Chapter 233**

Sephie

“I just never thought the darkness is what would connect us,” I said, mostly to myself. I had walked back to sit next to Ivan, so he heard me. My mind was racing trying to understand what we’d just discovered. I knew we were all connected in some way, but I didn’t expect it to be the same, somewhat otherworldly experience.

“Doesn’t that happen to everyone?” Misha asked. He was clearly still surprised at finding out we’d all been in the same “place” within our heads when seriously injured. For some reason, we all looked at Stephen. If anyone had the answer to that question, it had to be him.

He looked surprised at everyone looking at him. “I have a lot of answers to a lot of questions, but that question is not one of the ones I have an answer to. I’ve never heard of this many people essentially sharing an experience. In all my 900 years,” he said. I had no idea how he managed to keep a straight face all the time, but I found myself admiring him for it. It was impressive.

We were all quiet for a few minutes, everyone’s mind racing, trying to comprehend our conversation. Andrei leaned onto his

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elbows on the counter. He was staring at his hands. “We’re all evil, aren’t we?” he asked.

I think he meant it as a joke, but I could also hear the legitimate worry in his voice. “Bubbá...” I said.

-Ivan interrupted me before I could say any more. “I don’t know about the rest of you, but I enjoy it when I’m in the darkness

It’s difficult to leave it sometimes. I’m arguably the most evil out of all of us, so you might be on to something there, Andrei.”

I hooked my arm through his and leaned my head against his shoulder. “I don’t think any of us are evil. And I think you enjoy the darkness because you know nothing can hurt you there. You’ve found peace in your darkness, both literally and figuratively. You

and Adrik both. You’re both fine with the fact that you might be a little evil.

You understand that people can be both. Most people

are both. The world is both. The point of life is to find the balance between the two.” Ivan squeezed my arm that was still hooked

through his. “Mine was necessary to remind me of something important,” I said. I was finally starting to understand why things

had happened the way they had. “You all know how much I hate being cold. My darkness is cold. Like bone-chilling cold. At first,

I couldn’t see anything at all, not even my own body. I started to hear Adrik’s voice and I could faintly see the outline of my body,

but nothing beyond it. That’s also when I started to hear my uncle’s voice.

Every time I would hear his voice, it would get darker.

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When I would hear Adrik, the opposite. It would get lighter. Eventually, it started to get warmer too. You all heard my fight with my uncle. Once I finally kicked him out of my head, I could see. I needed that reminder that my light comes from me. Adrik was the spark to make me remember.” I glanced over at Adrik. I’d never explained what had happened when I was stuck in the nightmare loop to him before now. I don’t think he realized how much of an effect he had on me when I was trapped in my own mind.

“That’s similar to how it happened for me when I was in the hospital. Every time I’m in the hospital, I see the same doctor’s face that used to delight in torturing me when I was a kid. I’m trying to kill him when I fight whoever is in front of me. It doesn’t matter who the person is, I can’t see them. I can only see the doctor,” Ivan said.

“But you see Sephie. She’s the only one you don’t fight,” Viktor said. Ivan looked down at me. We knew why he could see me when he couldn’t see anybody else. I could see it clearly on his face that he didn’t want to share that information with everyone, just as I didn’t want to share it either.

“The only thing we can figure out is their shared hatred of doctors. Like Sephie said, their demons recognize each other, if you will,” Adrik said. I glanced at him, thankful for stepping in so we didn’t need to elaborate. I glanced around to see if the rest of the guys were looking at us. When I was satisfied they weren’t, I signed a “thank you” to Adrik.

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“Bubba, how did you get out of your darkness after your accident?” I asked.

“I don’t know. I just woke up. I don’t remember specifics about it. I remember being in it and only able to see my body, but I don’t have memories of any sounds. I just woke up in the hospital a few days later. It took me a little bit to remember what had happened after I woke up,” Andrei said.

“That’s how it was for me, too,” Viktor said. “I have a memory of being in it, but nothing further.”

“And you just woke up out of yours, too?” I asked. He nodded.

“Same for me,” Misha said.

“Me too,” Stephen said.

“Interesting,” I said. I remembered my dad telling me that Ivan could walk between worlds and that I could too. It felt like it had something to do with the difference between our experiences and the other guys’ experiences, but I wasn’t sure how. I was sure, however, that it was one more way we were all connected. It wasn’t by chance that they all found each other, and by chance that they found me.

The next afternoon, I was in Adrik’s office while he finished up work. I had a book, stretched out on the couch. I could see Adrik peek at me now and then while he was working. He loved it when his schedule was clear and I would come to his office while he worked, just so he could be near me. I had to admit to loving it as well. I always worried I was going to distract insisted that I was

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the best distraction there was, whether I was there or not. He admitted to his mind wandering more when I wasn't there and he couldn't see me.

Andy stuck his head in the office door, knocking on the door frame lightly. We both looked toward the door. "Do you have minutes, Boss?" Adrik nodded his head, then glanced at me as Andy walked into the office. Adrik was surprised to see him which meant he was unsure of what was about to come out of Andy's mouth. I understood his look and quietly got up from couch, taking my usual spot behind Adrik's desk so I could see Andy as he talked to Adrik.

the office

Adrik stayed quiet, as usual, Andy sat across from Adrik's desk. He looked a little nervous, but the last time he had been intense for him. "I was hoping to discuss something with you, sir. I'm not 100% sure on it yet, but I've also run in somewhat of a dead end on it now. I think it's important enough that you know."

I was now curious what he was going to tell us. I could feel Adrik's anger start to rise. He hated surprises. Andy glanced at Adrik, then to me. He took a deep breath and continued, "I overheard Mike on the phone a few times. Once the night they got me out, once after I was moved here. I don't know for sure who he was talking to, but he used a code that I've heard Anthony use for years."

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I stood up and grabbed Adrik's phone from his desk, calling Viktor. I let it ring, then ended the call. They were all in the office within seconds. Andy went pale when they all walked in. "Don't worry, Andy. I just want them to hear this as well. Tell the what you just told us." He looked at the guys, who were still standing, and repeated what he'd just told us. He was still nervous, but he was trying to keep himself composed.

"What's the code?" Ivan asked.

"It's one word. Anthony got it from an old movie when he was younger and he's been obsessed with it ever since. He always wanted to be the stereotypical gangster you see in movies. He has all his guys call him sicario' when they talk to him," Andy said.

I felt like I'd been punched in the stomach. I stumbled backward toward the cabinet to catch myself. I was immediately back in the ring with Mike, right before I kicked him the last time.

"Do you want to adjust your opinion of me yet?"

"Fu ck you, wh ore."

Then that last word he said to me. The one I almost didn't hear. "Sicario." My mind was racing. Why would he say that? Why would he basically be telling me he was working for Anthony? Why would Andy be telling us this now? Why not earlier? Was Andy also working for Anthony? I felt my anger rising to the surface as I tried to make sense of who we could trust and who we couldn't.

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I didn't hear Adrik get up from his chair. I was snapped back to reality when I felt his arm around my waist. I looked up at him. He was clearly concerned. "Are you okay? What's going on? Talk to me." I glanced quickly at Andy, who was still nervous, but appeared to be concerned as well. The guys were all still standing, but they'd moved to surround Andy.

I responded in Russian. I wasn't sure we could trust Andy at this point, and it was making me angry. "That's the last word he said to me in the ring. I doubt any of you heard it. I almost didn't hear it because he was having trouble talking and he mumbled it. I didn't think anything of it at the time. I thought he was calling me a hitman." "Why would he call you a hitman, gazelle?" Misha asked, still in Russian. "That's what that word means, my adorable Russian guardian. I didn't think anything of it then. But why would Andy be telling us this now? Why not earlier? Why does he sit on this information before telling us?" I asked. Adrik's anger was also starting to rise to the surface, but he was running his hand over my back, trying to keep himself calm.

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Ivan, who was also clearly angry, looked to Andy, asking in English, "why are you just telling us this now?" He might've had a threatening edge to his voice that may have made Andy clench a little

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## **King of the Underworld by RJ Kane**

### **Chapter 234**

Sephie

“I was trying to catch Mike talking to Anthony again so I could confirm it, but I haven’t seen him around for a few days. I know Armando was gone over the weekend, so I figured he was with them, but I haven’t seen Mike since they got back. I’m worried he went back to Anthony. And if I’m being honest, you guys always seem like you want to kill me anytime I give you information,”

Andy said, running his hand through his hair.

“And yet, you’re still alive. It’s like magic, really.” I said, crossing my arms across my chest. “Don’t be a pussy, Andy. You’ve been in this world long enough, for fuck’s sake. They saved your ass, gave you a safe place to live, and everything you need. If they wanted to kill you, you would’ve been dead a long time ago. Cut the bullshit.”

Adrik cleared his throat quietly beside me and I knew it was because he was trying not to laugh. I felt his hand slip under my shirt, his thumb tracing circles on the bare skin of my back.

Andy looked to me, surprised at my words. He thought for a moment. Ivan was losing patience and said, “you realize if she’s losing patience with you that mine was gone before I even walked into the office. It’s in your best interest that you start talking.”

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Andy started to say something, then stopped himself. He took a deep breath, then said. “I was trying to work it into a job here.

Either with your security or Armando’s. I knew if I could catch Mike working for Anthony, it would look good for me and you’d be more willing to trust me, so I waited to try and get hard proof, But then I haven’t seen him for a few days, so I got worried.”

I looked at Viktor to gauge his reaction. The look on his face said he was not the least bit interested in hiring Andy at this moment. He said, in Russian, “he’s not working for us. I can talk to Armando and see if he wants him.”

“Only after all this is over. Not before,” Adrik said. Viktor nodded his head in agreement. Adrik glanced down at me, like he was asking my opinion on it as well.

“I don’t trust him. It was shaky at best before this, but this would’ve been good information to have weeks ago,” I said.

Adrik looked at Andy. In English, he said, “next time you have information that directly affects us, you tell us right away. We’ll consider the job after all this is over. Until then, nothing changes,” I could feel Adrik’s anger, but I could also feel that he was trying to contain it. It was almost like I could feel him struggling against it. Each time it happened, I could feel more than the time before. It felt almost like I could feel what he was feeling in his body and it was mirrored in mine.

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Andy nodded and took his leave quickly. As we watched him walk out of the office, I turned toward Adrik, putting my hands on his chest. I could feel his anger fade away as he looked at me. I felt the calm return as he wrapped his arms around my waist. I

smiled up at him. “That was different,” I said.

He leaned down and kissed me quickly. “We’ll talk about it later,” he said, winking at me. He pulled me with him to his chair.

Viktor had followed Andy to the door, closing it behind him as he left. Andy had his own guards assigned to make sure he didn’t leave the building without permission, so there was no need to follow him any farther. Everyone moved to find a place to sit.

Adrik pulled me into his lap as he sat back at his desk.

We all sat in silence for a few minutes, trying to wrap our heads around this new bit of information. I was frustrated with how difficult it was becoming to know who we could trust and who we couldn’t trust through all this.

“Do you think this means that Keith and Chris are in question as well?” I asked.

“It’s worth having a very serious conversation with both of them to find out,” Ivan said.

“Call one of them up here. I want to get to the bottom of this right away, but I want to talk to them separately,” Adrik said. While he had a moment of calm, I could feel his anger rising again. I could also feel that he wasn’t fighting it this time. He wanted to be

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angry to talk to Chris and Keith.

If I'd learned anything since being with Adrik, it was that anger was a very useful emotion once you learned to control it.

Especially if you needed to intimidate someone into telling you the truth. I smiled to myself. While I usually tried to keep him calm, I found myself enjoying being able to feel his anger because I knew it was needed.

We heard a knock on Adrik's office door. Viktor opened the door, letting Keith into the office. He walked in, somewhat curious as to what was going on, but he seemed quite calm. "What's going on?" he asked as he sat across from Adrik's desk.

"We need to know everything you know about Mike," Ivan said. He was still clearly angry, which caught Keith off guard.

"Yeah, man. Can I ask why? Seems kind of like a moot point now," Keith said.

"Did I ask for your opinion?" Ivan asked, a clear edge to his voice, Keith looked quickly to Stephen. It was obvious that he was confused by what was happening. "I'll tell you anything you want to know, but I kind of need a direction here. Why are you asking about him? Like what are you looking for?"

While the guys were all quickly becoming angrier because it felt like Keith was trying to avoid the question, I could see that he was being honest and was trying to figure out how to appease them. "Let's start with when he left the police force in the small

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town you guys grew up in. Did he leave before or after you left the town?" I asked.

"He left before I did. He was gone for a couple years before I decided to leave. Honestly, we lost touch until we both showed up for this job. I didn't really like him when we worked together before, so I wasn't exactly jumping at the chance to catch up with him," he said. He looked at Stephen again, this time it was obvious that he was unsure how much he could say.

"He didn't know you're gay?" I asked. Keith turned back to me, his eyes wide. Stephen chuckled. "They know, Keith."

"Oh. Okay. Well, no. He didn't know. He was not as observant as you." He cleared his throat. "Clearly."

The guys couldn't help but laugh quietly. I'm sure they would've given him a hard time if this conversation was a little more light hearted

"Did he ever say anything about what he'd been doing in the couple years between him leaving and getting this job?" I asked.

"Not much. He said he'd worked security here and there. Mostly odd jobs. He tried to get onto the police force in the city, but he failed the psych test," Keith said. "He never really went into details, but I also never really asked. I almost didn't take this job.

because of him, if I'm being honest. It was so much better after he left," he said.

"Why did you leave then?" Misha asked.

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“Basically, the same reason that Mike left. It was such a small town that there was no room for advancement. I’d pretty much topped out early on in my career. There, uh, also wasn’t much of a dating scene in town. I knew Mike had initially moved to the city, but like I said, we lost touch, so I never dreamed I would meet him at the first job I applied to after moving here,” Keith said.

“How long were you here before you applied for this job?” I asked.

“A week. This was the first job I applied for, too. I’m pretty sure I got lucky, but this conversation is making me wonder, not gonna lie,” he said.

“You’re doing fine, Keith. Just relax,” I said. He gave me a tight smile, but did not relax.

“After you two started, did you ever notice him making calls that he wouldn’t tell you about or did he ever disappear with no explanation? Did you notice anything weird?” Viktor asked.

Keith thought for a moment. “A couple of hushed phone calls. Or like he would end the call very quickly if he saw me. I never noticed him disappear, but once Armando was done for the day, I didn’t keep track of Mike. I was usually looking forward to getting a break from him by the end of the day, so I didn’t pay attention to what he was doing or not doing.”

“Do you remember when those phone calls happened?” Viktor asked.

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“Not precisely, no,” Keith said. “Can I ask why this is important now? I mean, he’s not really an issue now, right?”

The guys looked to me before saying anything further. I said, in Russian, “I don’t think he’s lying. I don’t think he knows anything.

I think he likely stayed away from him as much as possible. If Mike had that much of an issue with me, I can only imagine how ho

rific he would’ve been toward Keith if he found out. He’s nervous because we’re all here grilling

im, but I

don’t feel like he’s hiding anything.”

While we were talking with Keith, I knew Adrik had been staring him down. It was a very effective strategy for him, as he could be

extremely intimidating when he wanted to be. I saw Keith catch his gaze once or twice and immediately regret it. Once I told

them that he was telling the truth, I felt Adrik relax slightly. His anger level lowering, but only slightly.

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## **King of the Underworld by RJ Kane**

### **Chapter 235**

Sephle

“We have reason to believe that Mike was working for Anthony,” Adrik said.

“We needed to make sure he’s the only one.”

Keith looked stunned. He looked at the floor for a moment. “Now it makes sense.”

“What makes sense?” Ivan asked. Where he had started to calm down, he was now right back to the anger level he was at when Keith walked in.

“A couple of things, actually. I was with Mike when we went in to get Andy.

There was clear recognition between those two when

Andy first saw us. I admit I don’t have extensive experience with those types of situations, but I did enough work with informants

that I recognize the look when you know someone but you’re trying to act like you don’t know someone. Andy had seen Mike

before, but I’m sure Mike gave him a look when he said the code word you gave us,” he said.

Adrik, who had also started to relax, was no longer relaxed. I could feel his anger, which was feeding into my anger. I stood,

knowing he would want to pace. “He’s a dead man,” Adrik said quietly, but dripping with anger, as he stood up.

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Keith's eyes went wide once again. "Tell us what else makes sense, Keith," I said, giving him a tight smile. The scene in front of him did not help him to calm down. I'm sure my anger was written all over my face, as Adrik paced behind me like a raged animal just waiting for his chance to escape.

He looked too stunned to speak for a moment. His mouth was open, but his brain had clicked off as he just stared at Adrik.

"KEITH," Stephen said, firmly enough that it snapped him back to reality.

"Right. Uh, when we went to get the documents from Armando's house. When we got back and Mike said that no one was watching us or following us? Yeah, he was lying. I don't think Armando caught it, but both Chris and I noticed we were being followed. Mike was basically in charge and I knew how he was about being questioned, so I didn't say anything. I should've said something." He looked up, his eyes even wider than before. "It was a mistake. It will never happen again," he pleaded. He was in genuine fear for his life at this point.

"Anything else? Now would be the ideal time to come clean with everything, Keith," I said.

He swallowed hard, but shook his head no. "That's everything I can remember. Just those two instances. I didn't notice anybody when we went to pick Andy up and bring him here and I haven't noticed anything since. Why wouldn't they be following us now that Mike is gone?" he asked.

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It dawned on me the same time it dawned on Ivan. He caught my eye and we both said “Andy” at the same time. They didn’t need to follow anyone when they had someone on the inside. I felt my level of anger rise higher than I’d ever felt it. I vouched for that son of a bi tch. I gave him the okay. I ran interference for him when the guys wanted to pummel him on multiple occasions.

He tried to ki ll Ivan. That mo therfucker.

I felt Adrik’s arm slide around my waist. He leaned down so his lips were next to my ear. “Take a breath, solnishko. We need to be smart about this. I want to talk to Chris first before we deal with Andy.” I looked up at him, somewhat surprised that he was the one calming me down. I immediately recognized the lust in his eyes when he looked down at me. I shu t my eyes, trying to get control of myself and to keep him from thinking about ripping my clothes off. When I opened them, I looked at him again. I raised my eyebrow slightly, silently asking if my eyes were normal again. He just smirked at me and kissed my temple. “Normal again,” he said quietly.

Adrik looked to Viktor. “Call Chris. Put him in a room until we’re done with Chris.”

Viktor walked Keith out of the office. A few minutes later, he returned with Chris, who was already so nervous he could barely keep it together.

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“Tell us what happened the night you guys went to get Andy,” Ivan said in his very authoritative tone.

“Keith probably knows more than I do. I wasn’t with him and Mike when they actually went in to get Andy. I stayed outside, in the hall, to make sure no one surprised us. I didn’t hear anything, other than Mike tell Andy the code word you guys gave us, then they came back out. You guys know what happened on the way out of the building, right?” he asked.

“What about what happened the night you went to Armando’s house to get the documents?” Viktor asked. Even he sounded angry.

“Oh sh it. Well, Mike lied to you guys, for one. I don’t know why. I think he was trying to save face, but we were followed. He told you guys we weren’t,” he said.

“Did you notice anything weird with Mike other than that instance?” I asked. I was trying to keep my cool, but I was certain I was failing miserably at it, as Adrik pulled me closer to him. I felt his hand slide under my shirt, his thumb on my skin.

“Honestly, I tried to stay away from him as much as possible. He was a di ck.”

“And you didn’t feel it was important to tell us that he lied to us?” I asked, maybe a little louder than I meant

“Please don’t hurt me. He made it clear that he was in charge. He also made it clear that he could fire me and Keith at will. I

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need this job, even though it might cost me my life in like two minutes,” he said.

Adrik flexed his arm around my waist, causing me to look at him. He wanted to know my opinion of Chris before he said

anything. “I don’t think he’s lying, but I also vouched for that piece of sh it Andy, too, so I don’t know how much you want to trust me right now,” I responded in Russian.

Adrik clicked his tongue at me, but said nothing. He turned to Chris, saying, “Mike was working for Anthony. If we find out you or Keith are also working for anyone else, you’ll meet the same fate as Mike. Only it won’t be so quick.” He looked at Chris with every ounce of hatred he could muster.

“I’m not working for anyone else, I swear. Look, I really need this job. I wouldn’t do anything to jeopardize it. My m om, she’s sick. This job is paying her medical bills. She raised me and my sister on her own, working 2-3 jobs. She means the world to me.

There’s no way I would put her or being able to take care of her in danger,” Chris said. His emotions were right on the surface when he talked about his mother, making me want to believe him, but I was so frustrated with myself for believing Andy that I wasn’t sure I should believe Chris.

I closed my eyes, pinching the bridge of my nose. My head was starting to pound. I heard Adrik tell Viktor quietly to put Chris in a

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room as well. I opened my eyes and looked at Adrik, who was clearly concerned about me. When his eyes met mine, he looked surprised. “Blink, love,” he whispered, his sexy smirk on his face. “Sh it, sorry,” I said, closing my eyes once more. I took a deep breath, trying to calm down. I was almost afraid to open my eyes again. When I did, I looked quickly to Adrik, who smiled at me. “Normal again,” he said, kissing my forehead. He stepped in front of me, glancing at the guys. “Apologies, but I need to do this,” he said to them as he wrapped his arm tightly around my waist. He pulled me against him firmly, his lips finding mine forcefully. His anger quickly turned to passion as he kissed me deeply. I felt my knees go weak. I wrapped my arms around his neck, pressing my body to his even tighter. Just when I felt my lungs objecting to the lack of air, he stopped the kiss, his forehead pressed to mine as he regained control. He pressed his lips to mine gently once more then pulled me to one of the couches to sit. Usually, kissing me like that would calm him down, but I felt like he did that for me this time. It was effective. I found myself wanting more, no longer so angry I was having trouble seeing. “I picked the worst person to be wrong about, it seems,” I said, as I felt Adrik’s arms slide around me. “We don’t know for sure you were wrong yet, spider monkey. He could still be telling us the truth, just maybe not the whole truth. That seems to be what he does,” Andrei said.

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“Not telling us that he knew Mike before was a big fu cking omission,” I said.

“Just like not telling us that Sal was the one behind  
brawn all along was a big fu cking omission.”

“Maybe he’s trying to play both sides,” Ivan said. “Essentially, that’s what he’s  
always done. He worked for Sal, but fed you  
information. The big question is whether he’s feeding Sal information while  
he’s here.”

“We took his phone. He has no way of contacting anyone outside the building.  
The guards that are assigned to him are always  
with him and have reported nothing. I’m going to speak to every single one of  
them, however,” Viktor said. He was just as  
frustrated as I was with this situation. He felt like it was his responsibility to  
keep us safe and this was a potential breech of his  
airtight defenses. Viktor usually stayed calm and we rarely saw him angry, but  
he was angry over this one. He felt directly  
responsible for missing that Mike had worked for Anthony.

“What about Chris and Keith?” I asked. “I think they’re both telling the truth,  
but now I’m not sure I trust myself, so I don’t know if  
you guys should trust me.”

–

“As far as I can tell, they’re telling us the truth now,” Misha said. “If Andy  
recognized Mike, that means they’d seen each other  
before. Not necessarily that they’d worked together before. And we were  
expecting them to be followed when they went to

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Armando's house that night. I thought it was weird that they weren't. It might not be as bad as we think it is."

I hoped Misha was right. Not just for us, but for the people of the city. We were trying to do this quietly, with as little fallout as possible. I didn't want to reach the point where chaos was necessary.

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## **King of the Underworld by RJ Kane**

### **Chapter 236**

Adrik

While the information we'd just discovered was important, I was having trouble keeping my mind from thinking about Sephie and how much I could feel her anger feed into mine. But also, how much control she had over hers, compared to me. My anger always felt like a ticking time bomb, just under the surface. I would have to struggle to keep it contained when it reached a certain point. I had learned over the years to keep it just under that point, so I could use it to my advantage when I needed to intimidate someone. Sephie, however, could raise and lower her anger at will. I'd seen her get so angry that her eyes went dark a few times since I noticed it in the ring with Mike that day. But the few times it happened before, she was visibly angry. Tonight, she looked and felt like she was calming down, but when she opened her eyes after Chris left the office, they were as clear as I'd ever seen them. It surprised me. It was like her anger was cloaked. She didn't look like she was about to lose control, but her eyes told a different story. While we waited on Keith, I let my anger rise to the point where I knew it was still easily controlled. I needed it to intimidate Keith

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into telling us everything. Before, Sephie would feel me get angry and would try to help keep me calm. I'd learned that it actually helped me increase the level of anger since I knew I had her to help mitigate it. But tonight, she didn't try to keep me calm when she felt it. I could feel her anger feeding mine, but also controlling mine. I was at a level that it would have been difficult to control previously when Keith walked into the office, but with Sephie by my side, I felt a mastery of it that I'd never felt before. We're going to need to discuss this later.

I squeezed Sephie just a little tighter in my lap, as she was worried that she'd made a huge mistake. I knew she was going to worry over this for a while. "I don't think Chris and Keith are a problem either. I will admit to wanting to just kill Andy and be done with it, but he seems to provide valuable information periodically, so I'm torn on wasting that resource. Maybe we should restrict his movements in the building until this is over, just to be safe. Either keep him in his apartment or keep him in room," I said.

"Room" was a nice way of saying holding cell. It was my own psychological trick I played on people.

"I will say that Keith has talked extensively about his hatred for Mike since he's been gone. I've heard a few stories about when they worked together before moving here and they weren't pleasant stories. There is clear hatred there," Stephen said. "And

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Chris has talked to Keith about his mom being sick. I might've checked that one out already. It's legit."

We all looked to Stephen, somewhat surprised that he'd checked Chris's story already. "What? I have trust issues," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

"Okay, so Keith and Chris check out, which actually makes life easier. That means less work for us with Armando's security and it also means I don't have to look at Giana as much, which makes me happy. I vote for putting Andy in a room. He can still get messages outside the building with access to windows. If he is getting messages outside," Ivan said.

One of Ivan's strongest traits was being able to think like the enemy. He could put himself in their shoes, think like them, and be able to predict what they would do next. It was a useful skill to have.

"Agreed. Have him moved right away. Chris and Keith can go back to their apartments," I said. Viktor stood up to take care of the arrangements, his phone in hand as he left the office.

Keith stopped by the office on his way by. He looked visibly relieved. "Um, sir, in the interest of full transparency, there is one more thing." He noticed the look on my face and immediately put his hands up in defense in front of him. "No, no. Not about Andy or Mike. This one is about Giana." Chris walked up beside him as he was talking.

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“What about her?” Misha said. He was still harboring extreme anger toward her, so it didn’t take much to set him off when her name was mentioned right now.

“She does feel bad about what happened and she wants to apologize, but she thinks you all are really Intimidating. We overheard her talking to Armando at his house this past weekend, Keith said. Misha cursed under his breath while Sephie just laughed. “Keith, I appreciate you trying to help her out and put in a good word for her, but she needs to learn how to be an adult and realize that we’re not intimidating. She’s just Intimidated. If she would grow a pair, she might get some respect, but having the men in her life speak for her is not going to gain her any favors. Not with me and I feel fairly confident in saying not with any of these guys either,” she said. “Definitely not with me,” Misha said. He looked disgusted to even be talking about this.

“I basically told her as much last night,  
1. She knows what needs to happen to get back in our good graces. She will either choose to do it or she can continue to live in the Hell she’s created for herself,” I said. My tone was short, in hopes that it would end the conversation. I was growing tired of any extra drama that affected Sephie.

“She will eventually realize that she’s made this into an even bigger issue by acting the way she has,” Ivan said. “She’s the only one that can correct it.”

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“You’ll do her a bigger favor by telling her that than you will by trying to smooth things over for her,” Andrei said. “She’s chosen to learn this lesson the hard way, so get out of her way and let her learn it.” Even Andrei’s tone was short. We were all stressed and this topic seemed ridiculous and trivial comparatively, Keith simply nodded his head and turned to leave. Chris, who was still visibly nervous, followed quickly behind him. Sephie waited until she heard the elevator doors close, then groaned. “Is it just me or is this Giana thing the stupidest thing ever now? How is she playing the victim card in this?” She looked at Ivan, who was grinning at her. “Make it stop.” She paused for a moment, then added, “wait, no. I didn’t mean that in the permanent way. Just make her stop being stupid. Don’t make her stop forever more.” She couldn’t help but laugh at the absurdity of it all, which helped the rest of us relax slightly. I pulled her back against me. I moved her hair off her shoulder, rubbing my facial hair against her neck lightly. I felt her body relax as she took a deep breath. She hugged my arms tighter around her, whispering, “thank you.”

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## **King of the Underworld by RJ Kane**

### **Chapter 237**

Adrik

Later that night, Sephie and I were finally alone in the penthouse. I didn't wait for her to demand my shirt. I took it off as soon as I closed the door behind us. I pulled her to me, pulling her shirt off and throwing it on the floor so I could put my shirt on her. She had a sly grin on her face as she watched me button up my shirt after putting it on her. "You're getting better at reading my mind," she said.

"Maybe. Or maybe there's something to seeing you in just my shirt that helps me relax," I said as I unbuttoned her pants, sliding them over her hips.

"Well, seeing you relax helps me relax, so who am I to deny you?" she asked. She had a mischievous grin on her face.

"Could you deny me even if you tried, my love?" I asked, picking her up and walking toward one of the couches.

She giggled. It was exactly what I needed to hear. "Okay, so I've proven to fail miserably at that pretty much every time I've tried."

"It's the same reason I don't even try," I said, setting her down. I smiled down at her, taking her hand and pulling her into my lap

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as I sat down. She was still laughing when she straddled my lap. “I needed to hear your laugh, solnishko.”

She leaned in and pressed her lips to mine gently. “I needed to laugh,” she said. “I’m glad we got to go to the house this past weekend. I find myself wanting to go back. Each day seems to bring some new drama that makes me want to punch something.”

“You and me both,” I said, resuming my eternal battle with the curls around her face. This was one battle I would never tire of losing. She was quiet for a moment, so I decided to bring up what I’d felt in the office. “I think we should talk about what happened in the office. It was definitely different this time.” I said, my fingers lightly running down the side of her face and neck.

She closed her eyes, leaning into my touch.

“I could feel you struggling against your anger when Andy was in the office. Like you were trying to contain it,” she said without opening her eyes. “But then you relaxed like always when I put my hands on you after Andy left.” She opened her eyes and looked at me. “It felt different for me when we were waiting on Keith to come to the office. I could feel your anger, but I could also feel that you had it contained and that you were doing it on purpose. Your anger has never scared me or intimidated me or anything like that because I know it’s not directed at me, but I found myself kind of liking being able to feel it while we waited on Keith.” She had a sly smile creep across her lips as she admitted to liking it.

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“I’ve always struggled to contain my anger, solnishko. There’s a certain level I can let it get to where I can easily contain it, but still intimidate the hell out of anyone who needs it. I’ve learned that I can increase that level dramatically when you’re with me, because you help me keep it contained, if you will. But when we were waiting on Keith, I knew that you knew what I was doing. It was at the highest level it’s ever been at when he walked into the office without me beating someone to death. And I have no idea how you made that happen,” I said, smirking at her curious expression as I told her what I had felt.

“What about when I got mad when Keith was in the office? You had to calm me down instead of the other way around,” she asked.

“That’s where it gets interesting. You knew how angry I was because you got up so I could pace before I said anything, but as soon as I felt you lose control, mine vanished and all I could think about was you. But I felt you lose control. That’s the weird part.

We’ve been saying for months now that you have a switch that flips when you get angry. We can see it happen on your face when Andrei or Misha says something to get you angry when you’re training. We can also see it switch back off after. But I felt it tonight before I saw it happen.” I continued my battle with the curls around her face. She looked lost in thought, chewing on her bottom lip.

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“A switch flipping is probably the best way to describe it. That’s pretty much what it’s always felt like. I’m getting better at being able to control it when it happens, but I was so angry tonight that I didn’t realize it had flipped until I felt your hand on me. I was surprised you were having to calm me down.”

“Your eyes went dark again, too. Darker than I’ve ever seen them,” I said. She smiled at the clear look of lust that I’m sure was evident on my face as I thought about it.

“I will admit to being angrier about being wrong about Andy than I have been about anything in a long time. But I don’t know about my eyes changing colors. That one still escapes me. I don’t know when that’s happening or why it happens. The second time it happened, I thought I was calming down but you told me to blink again. I was almost scared to open my eyes again,” she said, laughing.

“I thought you were calming down too. I didn’t feel your anger at all when it happened. It was like your anger was in stealth mode. Still fully present but completely under the surface. That’s why I kissed you. That always helps me make my anger completely dissipate, so I tried it with you, hoping it would work with you too.”

“It worked.” She grinned at me. “I was left wanting more instead of thinking about wanting to break Andy’s face.”

“Good. At least I know I have a kill switch,” I said, laughing.

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“This is going to make my street cred go through the roof.” She had pressed her body to mine, her head on my shoulder, laughing.

She sat up again, looking at me, her eyes still laughing. “You really feel like you have more control when I’m with you?”

“Absolutely. My anger has always felt like barely contained chaos. But when you’re with me, it’s more like controlled chaos. It’s there, but I don’t have to struggle as hard against it to make sure it stays contained.” She was chewing on her bottom lip again.

her mind was clearly racing. “Even Viktor has noticed it. Out of all of them, he knows my bloodlust the best. He’s seen me completely out of control more than any of the other guys. He noticed the first time you stopped it with just a look.”

Her eyebrows furrowed. “But what if it’s a bad thing that I’m stopping it? I mean, even I’m losing patience with this whole situation. It might be over with already if I hadn’t stopped it.”

I was surprised that she admitted she was losing patience with everything going on. I knew she was stressed. We all were. But I didn’t realize she was to the same point I was already. It was my turn to get lost in my thoughts for a moment. I felt her fingers lightly running over my facial hair, but she stayed quiet. It was one of the many things I loved about her. She was just as comfortable in silence as she was talking.

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I was I had been worried this entire time that I would somehow lose her because of my bloodlust. If she saw that side of me, terrified she wouldn't want to be with me any longer. I'd been trying to keep that side of me as quiet as possible. But with each day, with each new piece of this puzzle, it was getting harder and harder to keep that side of me quiet.

I felt her fingers under my chin, lifting it so I would look at her. She was smiling sweetly at me. She leaned down, pressing her lips gently to mine. "I will never not want to be with you, Adrik."

I felt a huge wave of relief. I smiled at her, putting my hands on either side of her face, kissing her once more. "I don't know why it surprises me when you read my mind at this point," I said. "You're going to make it very difficult to surprise you."

-“Wait until I get that crystal ball. You're all toast!” she said, laughing. All the stress of the day seemed to melt away as we laughed together on the couch. I still wasn't sure how she could do it, but I knew I was completely addicted to her magic

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## **King of the Underworld by RJ Kane**

### **Chapter 238**

Adrik

Sephie was still getting dressed the next morning when I called the guys to the penthouse. She was moving a little slower than I was, which was completely my fault. I might've kept her awake and incredibly active for most of the night last night. She didn't want to wake up this morning. I was somewhat surprised that she didn't stay asleep, but she woke as soon as I did this morning.

Being able to feel what she's feeling was making our s ex life phenomenal. I was completely addicted to the feeling now. She had told me that she's been feeling it for a while. It got much stronger for her once I stopped holding back, but it took me longer to tap into her. She's said all along that I've been able to read her mind when it comes to s ex, which is true. She rarely has to give me directions and she still always seems to be lost in the euphoria. Now, however, it seems like she can bring me into that euphoria. I've felt things I didn't even know were possible and I'm completely addicted. I'm an addict for her.

"Who wants breakfast?" Sephie asked as she walked into the kitchen, her smile making the room brighter. Even though she wa

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tired, she looked bright this morning. She had an extra glow about her that made her look even more beautiful. She caught me open-mouthed staring at her when she walked into the kitchen. Her cheeks flushed as she walked to me, a devilish grin on her face. She had long ago gotten over being shy about kissing me in front of the guys, but she still only did it occasionally. I didn't mind. I liked having parts of her that were completely reserved for me. She surprised me by kissing me deeply, then continuing on to the refrigerator, her devilish grin still evident on her face. It took all of my self-control not to follow her to continue that kiss.

She took a quick inventory of the refrigerator, her back to us now. She turned around, looking between me and Viktor, asking

“how much time do we have before you're all needed downstairs?”

“His first meeting isn't until 11, sestrichka,” Viktor said.

Her smile returned. “Raise your hand if you want syrniki for breakfast.” All of our hands shot up. Syrniki was a type of pancake that was popular in Russia for breakfast. We'd all grown up eating them for breakfast, but it was difficult to find outside of Russia.

She laughed as she started pulling the ingredients out of the refrigerator and setting them on the counter.

“When did you learn to make symniki, spider monkey?” Andrei asked.

She giggled. “Today. Right now. You're all my test subjects.” Her beautiful smile stretched across her face. She pulled a book

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from one of the cabinets. “I found an old cookbook at the house and I figured you guys might be okay with being test subjects for my foray into making Russian dishes.”

“Just when I thought I couldn’t love you any more than I already do, here we are,” Misha said.

“I’m going to have to add cooking classes to the list of things to teach your future girlfriends and Stephen’s future boyfriend,” she said, laughing.

The guys all looked at each other, then looked back to Sephie. “YES!” they all said in unison.

While Sephie worked on making breakfast, we all pitched in where we could and helped as we talked about the latest information. Sephie remained quiet through most of the conversation, but she was actively listening to us while she focused on breakfast. I was still worried about her zoning out, so I found myself keeping a closer eye on her than normal. I caught Ivan doing the same, as he had also noticed she was quieter than normal.

I made her coffee just the way she liked it and walked to her side. The guys were deep in discussion about Andy, so I had a chance to quietly make sure she was good. I handed her the cup of coffee, my eyebrow raised. “You’re okay, solnishko? You’re quieter than normal.”

Her gorgeous smile stretched across her face. “I’m trying to make sure I don’t fu ck this up,” she said pointing to the bowl of

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batter in front of her. I laughed, leaning down to kiss her forehead. Ivan had caught the exchange as well and visibly relaxed when he heard her answer, She stood on her toes to kiss me quickly. “You and Ivan can relax,” she said winking at me. Both Ivan and I looked at her, surprised. She hadn’t seen Ivan, as he was behind her. “I can feel him watching me,” she said quiet enough that only I could hear. She giggled at my surprised expression. “You never cease to amaze me,” I said, kissing her forehead one more time. The penthouse quickly filled with the aroma of the syrniki frying, causing all of our stomachs to growl in appreciation. Our mouths were watering in anticipation. Sephie turned around with the first batch and saw the looks of hunger on our faces. “I’m suddenly painfully aware that I should’ve made more,” she said as she set them down in front of us. While we had been talkative while she was cooking, we were now completely silent as we all ate. She continued to cook the rest of the syrniki, but our silence had made her nervous. “Is the silence good or you’re all trying to find a way to politely tell me they suck?” she asked as she set more pancakes down in front of us. Not a word was spoken, but we all grabbed more pancakes from the plate. She laughed. “Taking that as a good sign.” “Seph, these might be better than my m om’s. Let’s keep that between us though. She’ll smack me,” Stephen said as he took another bite of pancake.

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As we finished up cleaning the kitchen after quite possibly the best breakfast ever, Misha's phone beeped. He pulled it from his pocket, looking at it, then looking at Sephie. "Ms. Jackson asked if you're free to come to her apartment this morning?" he asked.

"Oh, sure. I can go see her for a bit. I haven't seen her since last week, now that I think about it," she said.

"At least one of you go with her. Preferably two," I said as I pulled her to me. Her smile threatened to stop my heart. She said quietly, "you're feeling extra protective."

"I can't help it. You don't know what you do to me," I said, holding her tightly against me.

"Oh, I know exactly what I do to you," she said, laughing.

Misha and Andrei interrupted our exchange by announcing they would both go with her to Ms. Jackson's apartment. Those two were always ready for an adventure when it came to Sephie.

"Good. Stop by the office when you're done. My afternoon isn't that busy," I said, kissing her lips. I couldn't help myself and I deepened the kiss. I felt her knees go weak, so I held her tighter against me, which only served to make her kiss me more passionately.

"Kiss me like that and I'd stop by even if your afternoon was busy," she said, her cheeks flushed.

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“Why does it kind of feel like watching your parents make out now?” Andrei asked to nobody in particular, causing all of us to laugh.

Sephie grinned up at me, but pointed in Andrei’s direction. “Nobody said you had to watch, Bubba,” she said, trying to keep a straight face. It caused another round of laughter from everyone.

We all got on the elevator together, still laughing and joking, generally in a great mood after such a fantastic morning just the seven of us. I pulled Sephie in for another kiss before I stepped off the elevator. She quickly said, “close your eyes, Bubba,” before leaning in to kiss me. It was not the kiss I was hoping for, simply because I was laughing too hard. God, I love her.

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## **King of the Underworld by RJ Kane**

### **Chapter 239**

Sephie

Andrei, Misha, and I were still laughing at each other when we walked up to Ms. Jackson's door. I half-expected her to hear us coming down the hallway, but I still had to knock. She opened the door, just as excited as always that I'd brought eye candy for her.

"Oh my, you brought me two today. You really do love me, child," she said as I hugged her. She stepped back to let us into her apartment. That's when I noticed Giana sitting at her kitchen table. One glance at Ms. Jackson told me that Giana had put her up to this. Misha cursed under his breath beside me. This should be fun. I felt both Misha and Andrei put their hands on the small of my back, like they were ready for Giana to attack me. I could barely keep from laughing at that thought. I knew they were just being protective. They really were quite good at their jobs. They looked down at me, both had questioning looks on their faces. "We don't have to stay, gazelle," Misha said in Russian.

Ms. Jackson looked at Misha, answering in Russian, "at least give her a chance. She's trying to make things right, at least give

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her a chance to do so.” She crossed her arms across her chest and gave him a stern look that dared him to argue with her.

He cursed under his breath, but didn’t argue. I did notice that both Andrei and Misha stayed closer to me than they normally

would have in Ms. Jackson’s apartment. I smiled to myself knowing they felt so protective of me in such a minor situation. We

walked further into her apartment. Both guys stepped in front of me, partially shielding me from Giana. I wasn’t quite sure if they

thought she was going to come at me or if they were worried I was going to have a go at her. It could go either way, really.

We walked to the kitchen table, but I didn’t make a move to sit. I was happy to hear her out, but I also wasn’t going to go out of

my way to be nice to her. I’d already tried that route and it got me here. Giana looked up at both Andrei and Misha. I couldn’t see

their faces, but I was sure it was obvious they were angry. Giana asked, “do they both need to be here?”

I laughed. “You’ve been around long enough, Giana. You know I don’t go anywhere without them,” I said, flatly.

She took a deep breath, then surprised me by speaking Italian so they couldn’t understand. Ms. Jackson, who didn’t know I

could understand Italian, looked to me then back at Giana then back to me. Misha had to tell her quietly that I could understand

Italian.

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“Sephie, I do want to apologize to you. I unfairly judged you. You had so much knowledge about that drug and what it does to the people who take it that I thought you were an addict. You don’t understand. In my family, addicts are the scum of the earth. I

automatically assumed you were one and thought the worst of you instead of finding out the truth,” she said,

I answered her in English. I wasn’t going to make this easy on her. “Are you asking me for the truth now? Or are you just sorry that you got caught judging me unfairly?” I could feel my anger starting to rise. Her apology was weak and she was still not taking ownership of her actions. “Or are you sorry that having Armando, then Keith, and now Ms. Jackson try to apologize for you isn’t working in your favor?”

“I want to know the truth,” she said quietly, in Italian.

“You better be sure about that, because the truth won’t make you feel any better about this situation,” I said. The guys both recognized the edge to my voice and tensed. Giana didn’t say anything, she just nodded her head.

“The truth is that I was forced to live with my uncle after my mom died suddenly. He was the addict, not me. I learned about the effects of that drug to survive his repeated beatings. I learned how to wait it out long enough that the drug would make him pass out so I could lock myself in my room, hoping desperately that I would survive the night. I know all about the signs to look for

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when someone is on that drug because it literally meant life and death for me. I learned how to avoid him until he natted zoo hot it didn't slu ve work and he would estch me when I cama hama dalharina s fresh bustina – It'e alen the raston T don't show my body to just anyone. My back is covered in scars because of the effects of that drug. Yet, you assume it's because I was the addict and instead of owning your mistake, you pretend you're the victim in this situation, blaming your family for your false judgment. You assume that I'm prudish or ultra religious because I don't want people to see my scars so they can judge me unfairly the same way you have. You see, I've dealt with people like you since I was a teenager. Those who find out the truth still find ways to look at me differently, but it's not because of me. This isn't on me, Giana. This is all on you and why you feel the need to try and tear me down to make yourself feel better, because that's exactly what you're doing. You just haven't realized that there's nothing bad you can say to me that hasn't already been said. You're allowed to think whatever you need to about me to make yourself feel better, but do not, under any circumstances, expect me to continue to be nice or friendly toward you until you can own your actions and apologize like a fu cking adult, without the help of anyone else.”

Her eyes were wide as I talked. Misha had quietly reached down and grabbed my hand as I was talking. He knew I was angry.

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but he also knew I never wanted to have this conversation in the first place.

Giana was too stunned to talk when I finished.

Andrei looked at her, saying, “that’s not even half of what she’s been through in her life. She’s survived things that I’m not sure I

could’ve survived. She’s also been nothing but nice to you since you’ve been here. She’s the reason you and Mando are

together now and this is how you choose to think of her? I hope you feel bad about this, Giana, I really, truly do. Because while

Sephie is too nice to tell you how much you’ve hurt her over this, I don’t give a fu ck. You hurt her again and I can promise you,

we won’t be able to hold back next time.”

There was an urgent knock at Ms. Jackson’s door that interrupted our conversation. Misha and Andrei looked at each other,

surprised. Andrei moved to the door, while Misha put himself between the door and me. Andrei looked through the peep ho le,

then back to us, a small smile on his face. He opened the door to reveal a worried Adrik at the door. He walked into the

apartment immediately, searching for me. Misha had stepped aside once

Andrei started to open the door, so Adrik found me

almost immediately. He was by my side in seconds.

I couldn’t help the smile that crept across my face. “You felt me get angry, didn’t you?” I asked, in Russian. He nodded, pulling

me to him. He looked at Giana at the table, a new look of worry on her face since he arrived. He looked back to me, saying,

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“well, at least I know why you were angry now. I did not expect her to be here.”

“We didn’t either,” Misha said. I could still hear the anger in his voice too.

Adrik glanced at both of them, then to Ms. Jackson who was also stunned at what she’d just witnessed. He looked back at me,

then finally to Giana. “We’re done here,” he said in English as he pulled me with him toward the door. Andrei, who was still

standing close to the door, opened it for us, following behind us and Misha. As the elevator doors closed, Adrik said, “close your eyes, Andrei.” His lips crashed into mine as he pressed me against the wall

of the elevator. We could hear both of them laughing at us, but I didn’t care. This time, I didn’t realize how angry I was until he

kissed me and I felt it subside. The doors dinged, signaling our arrival to his office floor. He broke the kiss, catching his breath.

Andrei and Misha both stepped off the elevator to give us a moment.

“Shi t,” I said. He looked at me, a curious look on his face. “I didn’t know I was that angry until you kissed me,” I said, quietly.

He grinned at me. “Your control is impressive, solnishka. It also explains why your eyes are now normal again,” he said, kissing

my forehead. “Come, you can keep me company while we wait for my 11 o’clock meeting that, luckily, was late today.” He

grabbed my hand, pulling me toward his office.

“They weren’t normal when you got to me?” I asked as we walked to his office. He shook his head no. “I want to ask Andrei and Misha if they noticed it.” We

walked into his empty office. He stuck his head

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outside the door, calling for Andrei and Misha. They both walked in and took a seat. “Did either of you notice anything different about Sephie’s eyes when she was down there?”

Andrei said, “Net, I was staring down Glana the whole time, to be honest. I was standing close enough to Sephie that I could feel her, so I didn’t need to look at her.”

Adrik nodded once, then looked to Misha. “I glanced at her when she was listening to Giana’s initial apology. They looked darker, but I thought it was just because of the lighting in Ms. Jackson’s kitchen. I knew she was angry though, so I grabbed her hand to try and help calm her down while she told Giana more than she ever wanted to.”

I could feel myself getting upset and I heard the elevator ding, likely bringing Adrik’s meeting with it. “Let’s talk about this. later.”

They all looked at me with concern on their faces. “Please?” I said, smiling to try and let them know I was okay.

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## **King of the Underworld by RJ Kane**

### **Chapter 240**

Sephie

Just as his late meeting walked into the office, he looked at Andrei and Misha and said, in Russian, “take her upstairs. Stay with her. I’ll be up after this meeting is over. Get Ivan on your way up.” He pulled me to him for a quick kiss. “I love you, solnishko. I’ll be up as fast as I can,” he said, nodding to Andrei, who was standing behind me now. I felt Andrei put his hand on my back, guiding me toward the door. Once we were outside his office and out of sight of the meeting, Andrei stopped me. He stepped in front of me and turned away from me. He squatted down, opening his arms for me to jump on his back. I giggled, hopping on his back.

“You’re my favorite, Bubba,” I said. I hugged his neck tightly as we walked to the elevator. When the doors opened, Ivan was in the elevator. Misha had texted him from the office.

“You guys want to tell me what happened? I’m guessing something happened if you’re back this early from Ms. Jackson’s apartment,” Ivan said.

I sighed, trying to make sure I didn’t get angry again. I didn’t want to interrupt Adrik’s meeting and have him rush up to the

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penthouse because he was worried about me. Thankfully, Misha answered for me. “Giana was waiting for her when she got to Ms. Jackson’s apartment.”

I could see Ivan’s anger rise as he cursed in Russian. “Does she not know she’s an adult now?”

“Clearly she does not,” Andrei said. I could still hear the edge to his voice. I hugged his neck a little tighter. He squeezed my legs in response.

“We do have to be careful with how much we talk about this or Adrik is going to come rushing upstairs because he knows I’m mad,” I said, trying to keep my smile under control. Ivan’s mouth fell open, which caused Andrei and Misha to laugh.

“He came to Ms. Jackson’s apartment. He knew she was angry from his office. I’m honestly proud of him for not breaking the door down, but he walked in, basically grabbed Sephie and walked out. You should’ve seen the look on Giana’s face when he showed up,” Misha said, now completely amused by the situation.

As we walked into the penthouse, Ivan asked, “so he can now feel when you’re angry even when you’re not in the same room just like you can feel he’s angry?”

“Yeah. And what’s weird this time is that I didn’t know I was that angry when I was talking to Giana. I mean, I certainly wasn’t happy with her, but he said my eyes went dark, which they only do when I’m like nuclear level angry. Except I didn’t feel like I

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was that angry.” I looked sideways at Andrei as he placed me on the kitchen counter. “That’s also why he told you to close your eyes in the elevator. That makes it go away for both of us. I’m really sorry for that, by the way. Nobody wants to watch us make out.”

“Spider monkey, don’t apologize for that. I was teasing you this morning. It’s clear as day you two can’t keep your hands off each other. I’m not standing in the way of that,” Andrei said, laughing.

“Your eyes go dark?” Ivan asked, clearly curious.

“I saw it this time, but I thought it was the lighting in Ms. Jackson’s apartment,” Misha said. “They go from three colors to just One.”

“Which one?” Ivan asked.

“Brown, I think. But not the normal golden brown that’s there all the time. Like really dark brown,” Misha said.

Ivan looked to me, clearly curious about this bit of information. I just shrugged my shoulders. “I clearly don’t know anything about it. Not like I can see them. Adrik said he noticed it that day with Mike. He’s seen it a couple times since then. That night in his office when Andy told us Mike was working for Anthony. It happened a few times that night, actually. He tells me to blink and I can usually make it go away.” I looked at Ivan, not able to hide my smile. “Maybe my demons are taking over now. This is my villain origin story.” Ivan grinned at me, shaking his head as he laughed.

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Ivan looked to Andrei. “You’ve never noticed it when you’ve sparred with her?”

“No. We can all see the switch flip when she gets angry, but if her eyes have changed, I haven’t noticed them. But I usually don’t have a lot of chances to gaze thoughtfully into her eyes,” he said, grinning at me.

“I’ve never noticed her eyes changing when we’ve been training either,” Misha said.

“I think it’s different. You guys can make me angry, but it’s still you and I know it’s still you. We train, yes, but I don’t really want to hurt either one of you. Like, you guys pick at surface level stuff to get me angry. When I’ve gotten so angry that my eyes changed, it’s much deeper wounds those people are poking at, I said, looking at the floor. I could feel myself getting upset again, so I tried to distract myself by staring at my feet dangling over the side of the kitchen counter.

“Princess...” Ivan said as he moved next to me.

“Yep, still here. Just trying to not be upset right now,” I said, trying to smile through the pain. Ivan didn’t say anything further, but he hopped onto the counter next to me. I felt his substantial arm slide gently around my shoulders and pull me toward him. I leaned my head on his shoulder. I took a deep breath and exhaled loudly.

“Like, it’s not just me, right? I’m not being

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unreasonable here? Please tell me if I am. I'll admit I was an asshole right now just to make this stupidity stop."

"I think you nailed it with everything you said to her, spider monkey. I'm proud of you," Andrei said.

I smiled at him. "Um, can we talk about how ridiculously cute you were when you threatened her life though? Because that's a thing." Ivan laughed, causing me to look at him. "It happened." I pointed at Andrei. "Adorable."

We were still laughing and trying to find more things to laugh at to keep me from getting upset when Adrik, Viktor, and Stephen walked in. Adrik still had a worried look on his face, but relaxed slightly when he saw us laughing. Ivan jumped off the counter so Adrik could have access to me. "I'm okay," I said, as he stepped between my legs, his hands on my thighs.

He searched my eyes for a minute, then clicked his tongue. "Li ar."

I chuckled. "I'm mostly okay," I said, smiling at him.

"Tell me what happened," he said. He was looking at Misha and Andrei when he said it.

"Giana was waiting for us when we got to Ms. Jackson's apartment. I don't know how much Ms. Jackson knows about what happened, but Giana definitely put her up to calling us down there. I told Sephie we didn't have to stay, but I got reprimanded by Ms. Jackson," Misha said, sheepishly.

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“Giana tried to get rid of me and Misha too. Sephie just laughed at her. Why does everyone want to get rid of us, spider monkey?

It hurts my feelings,” Andrei said, his handsome smile stretching across his face.

“What did she say to you when she was speaking Italian?” Misha asked.

I scoffed. “She said she owed me an apology, that because I knew so much about brawn, she just assumed I was an addict, then she told me I didn’t understand and that in her family, addicts are the scum of the earth and she assumed I was one before finding out the truth.”

They all looked at me, somewhat stunned. “I’m even more impressed with the restraint you showed when you responded to her, then,” Andrei said.

“That’s quite possibly the weakest apology I’ve ever heard,” Viktor said.

“Was it her first time? Feels like her first time,” Stephen said.

“This explains why she wanted everyone else to apologize for her. She sucks at it,” Ivan said.

I couldn’t help but laugh at their responses. “Are you guys saying this just because it’s me and you all love me and want to protect me? You can tell me if I’m being the bitch here.”

“Noooo, Seph. That’s a terrible apology. She’s deflecting all responsibility on to her family, who has nothing to do with this. She’s old enough that she should be able to think for herself at this point in her life and make her own decisions about people. Blaming

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them is la zy. Quite frankly, I'm offended by her lack of imagination," Stephen said.

"What was your response?" Ivan asked, looking at me. I took a deep breath again, trying not to get upset by having to retell it.

Misha answered for me. "In normal Sephie fashion, she verbally annihilated her. She asked if Giana was asking for the truth now.

She even made Giana say yes twice before she told her about her uncle and how he was the reason she had so much.

knowledge about brawn. It went downhill for Giana from there."

I could feel Adrik's anger starting to rise, which wasn't helping mine stay quiet. I put my hands on his chest. "It's okay. Andrei threatened her life after I got done. That's when you showed up and rescued me," I said, grinning at him.

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