

King of the Underworld Chapter 261 - 270

Chapter 261

Sephie

“Are we taking the long route again, my adorable Russian guardian?” I asked Misha as we got ready for our morning run.

“I’m down if you’re down. It’s colder this morning than I thought it was going to be, so I don’t know how long you want to stay outside. I don’t want to be the reason you stay cold the rest of the day,” he said. “As it happens, running warms me up,” I said, grinning at him. “But I love you for thinking about that. I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but I hate being cold.”

“I might’ve noticed. I’m very observant,” he said, sarcastically.

As we set off on our run, my mind was still replaying the conversation with Adrik from the night before. I couldn’t shake the feeling that I’d missed something about Armando and now we were in trouble. Even though I felt like I’d missed something, I still couldn’t see what it was I’d missed. I was still having trouble believing that Armando could be playing both sides. He’d seemed

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so upfront and honest about everything from the beginning.

The great thing about running with Misha is that he enjoyed the silence. I'd tried running with Max a few times and he always tried to talk to me while we ran. I hated it. I liked to be left alone to my thoughts. It was a great way to work through problems in my head. Or not. Sometimes I didn't think about anything and just enjoyed the break. Either way, Misha was there, silently ensuring I was safe.

It took us almost two hours to go the long route. Misha used to struggle to make it all the way, but he looked like he could keep going this morning. Once we slowed to a walk, we usually talked about anything and everything on our way back to the house. I enjoyed my alone time with each of them and I think they enjoyed it with me as well.

"I needed that," he said.

"I did too. I think we've all been extra stressed lately. Have you been having trouble sleeping?" I asked. It was a random thought that just popped into my head, which I had learned was usually an indication that the other person was thinking it, but didn't necessarily want to say it.

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He laughed. “Yeah. I haven’t said anything to anybody yet, but it’s been happening for a bit. Since Giana accused you, I think.”

“You’re still mad at her, aren’t you?” I asked. While it was adorable and heartwarming that he had gotten so angry at her accusation, I was starting to get concerned at his inability to let it go.

“Yeah. I don’t think I’ve ever been so angry at a chick for something she didn’t even do to me,” he said.

I stopped walking. We were both still catching our breath. “Misha, you have to let it go. Not for her, but for you. It’s one of the

hardest things to do, but trusting that she’ll get her own Karma will make you feel much better.” He looked at me, then looked at

the ground, like he knew I was right, but he still didn’t want to let go. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed this one, my adorable

Russian guardian, but Karma tends to come down harshly on those that want to harm me,” I added, quietly. “You just have to be

patient.” He raised his gaze, a sly smile stretching across his face. He put his arm around my shoulders as we continued our

walk back to the house.

“I should listen to my own advice. I’m having the same problem, just with Armando,” I said.

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“I can’t figure out what the deal is with him either,” Misha said. “I want to like him, but he said a few things when we first got to his house in Italy that I didn’t like.”

“Like what?” I asked. He’d never talked about this, so I was clueless as to what he was referring to.

“That first night, when it took you and Boss a little longer to come to dinner. We all knew it was because you could barely walk and told him as much. He made a rude comment about your sex life with Boss being the reason you couldn’t walk.”

I stopped walking again. “What did he say exactly? Do you remember?”

“Not exactly. It was something like if you were his girlfriend, you wouldn’t be able to walk much anytime. He said it quietly and I think only me and Ivan heard it. The other guys were standing far enough away that they missed it.”

“Shit. Sometimes I hate being right,” I said. Misha looked at me, confused, but also a little concerned. “Have you heard him say anything else that was weird like that?”

“That was the worst one, but then there was that really awkward toast he made to you. I didn’t think he knew you well enough to talk about you like that,” Misha said.

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I smiled at him. “I just said the same thing to Adrik last night. That didn’t sit well with me, but it was covered up by the things that you guys said about me. Armando doesn’t know me well enough. He might wish he did, but he doesn’t.” When I had stopped walking, Misha removed his aim from my shoulders so he could look down at me while we talked. I grabbed his wrist and put his arm back around my shoulders to continue walking once again to the house. “Armando used to stay after the other bosses had left and he would help me clean up. I always thought he was trying to set me up with his son. He would ask me questions about my personal life, trying to find out if I was single, blah blah blah. I never told him anything of importance and I never really thought anything of it. I was just happy to have some help. When Adrik and I were talking about this last night, he pointed it out that he wasn’t asking for his son. He was asking for him,” I said. I looked up to see Misha’s reaction. His face scrunched up much like mine had the night before, I couldn’t help but laugh. “I had the same reaction. But if you take that into consideration and you also take into account that the other bosses had put Armando into somewhat of a leadership role while you guys were

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gone trying to get Viktor hack, it gives Armando a motive to be playing both sides right now. Adrik came back and basically in one night took back the city and took me away from Armando. Not that there was EVER a chance of that happening. For the record. I felt like that needed to be said out loud. Because gross.”

Misha laughed. “I don’t think anyone is worried about you leaving Boss anytime soon, gazelle. It’s obvious to anyone who sees you two with each other that you belong together.”

As we walked up the steps toward the back door, Ivan was walking by toward the kitchen. He stopped and opened the door for us. “Once you guys get cleaned up, Boss wants everyone in his office,” he said. “This sounds serious,” I said.

“We had a conversation about Armando while we were in the gym,” Ivan said.

“We had a conversation about Armando while we were walking back to the house,” Misha said.

“Which reminds me, why didn’t you tell me about the gross comment he made about me when we first got to Italy?” I asked Ivan as I smacked his shoulder.

He laughed, but tried to look apologetic. “I didn’t tell Boss what he said yet. I don’t know if I should tell Boss what he said. He

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might want to kill him immediately.” Ivan pulled me toward him, hugging me to him. “And I didn’t tell you, princess, because you were already handling all you could handle at the time. You didn’t need to worry about pervy old men on top of everything else.”

I sighed, resting my head against his sizeable chest. “I hate that I can’t argue with you sometimes.” I felt his chest vibrate as he laughed at me. “Go get cleaned up, princess. Boss is going to need you to keep him from getting all murderly once he finds out what was said,” Ivan said pushing me toward the back stairs.

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King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 262

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Two

Sephie

I walked through the bedroom into Adrik's office to find him at his desk. He was engrossed in the papers in front of him, so he didn't notice me. I stopped at the doorway. We'd been able to feel each other enough lately that I wanted to experiment with it, just to see what would happen.

He had a hatred of shirts when we were at the house that I happened to love. I stood in the doorway, watching him contemplate whatever he was thinking about, my own thoughts turning to just how much I loved him. I felt the warmth start to spread through my body that was present anytime I thought about him and I pushed it to him, seeing if he would notice,

He inhaled sharply, then immediately looked up to find me. He noticed. I was still leaning against the doorway, a small smile on my lips while I experimented. As soon as he looked at me, the warmth grew to an intense desire for him, which I also pushed toward him. His sexy smirk told me he could feel it, loud and clear.

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He stood up, closing the distance between us quickly. “Why do you pick right now to do this to me?” he asked. One arm went around my waist, as he pulled me with him. He closed his office door behind him as he walked us quickly to the bathroom. I couldn’t help but giggle. “I don’t like time constraints with you,” he said, his voice husky. “But I do like any chance I have to see you naked.”

“We’ve already established that I’m terrible at denying you,” I said as I pulled my shirt over my head.

He cursed under his breath as I continued to shed my clothes. He walked to the shower, turning it on for me. “How was your run, love?” he asked as he jumped onto the bathroom counter to watch me.

“Good. We both needed it, I think,” I said, stepping into the shower.

“Yeah? How so?”

“Misha’s still mad at Giana and I’m mad at Armando. We needed the stress relief,” I said.

“It surprises me how angry Misha got with Giana. He’s normally such a happy guy, but he’s clearly still angry with her. He’s very protective of you, solnishko,” a sly smile creeping across his face. “Are you still angry with Armando because of what we talked about last night or is there something more?”

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I sighed, but didn't answer right away. Instead, I put my face under the water. When I finally turned to look at him, he said, "there's more, isn't there? Did Misha tell you about his inappropriate comments in Italy?" I nodded my head. "How bad was it?" he asked. I could tell he was trying not to get too upset. "It doesn't make me like him any more at the moment. I'm sure there have been worse things said Hit me before, but it does make the theory that he was thinking he had a chance with me seem more plausible," I said. I turned the water off and was met by Adrik who had a towel for me once I stepped out of the shower. He wrapped the towel around me, saying, "new technique to keep my anger in check. All bad news must be delivered while you're na ked from now on." "That's going to make it awkward in a meeting, but okay. If you insist," I laughed. The guys were waiting in his office when we walked in. Ivan looked at me curiously, wondering if I'd told him exactly what Armando said. I shook my head no. "Co ward," he said, laughing at me. I readily agreed with him. Adrik had a hold of my hand and pulled me toward one of the couches. He sat down and then pulled me into his lap, so I could

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leon back against him. It seemed to be one of his favorite ways to have me near him. I wasn't going to argue as he kept me
WASTIL.

“I think it's time we stop all this nonsense for good. We have good intel on the brawn operations, so we know how to hit them. I want to do away with all the bosses, as well. Armando included. I haven't decided how exactly I'm going to run the entire city by myself, but I'll figure that out later. But I'm done dealing with these children,” Adrik said. As he said it out loud, I felt the goosebumps rise over my entire body once again. I glanced at Misha quickly, curious how he would react as well. I saw his upper body shudder slightly. I squeezed Adrik's arms around me, knowing this was what needed to happen.

“I love a good planning session in the morning,” Ivan said.

We spent the next few hours planning and talking about every possible scenario we could think of. We talked through Armando still being loyal, Armando not being loyal, and everything in between. I spent most of the rest of the morning and into the afternoon listening to the guys talk about how they were going to hit the brawn operations. I was curious how everything was

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going to work, but I was also worried where I fit into those plans. I'd gotten so used to never being alone. At least one of the guys was always with me. Now, I was faced with the very real possibility of having to be alone while they took care of the brawn operations. My mind was so focused on that and the sudden fear of being alone that I didn't notice my legs start to shake until Adrik pulled me closer to him. "Solnishko, what's wrong? I can feel your fear, my love. What's going on?" he whispered in my ear. I was so lost in my thoughts that it jarred me back to reality. I heard him laugh quietly as I glanced around the room. The guys were talking amongst themselves and not paying attention to us. "Talk to me," Adrik said as he leaned down and kissed my neck gently. I shifted in his lap so I could more easily see him. As soon as I looked at him, I saw the concern grow on his face. He searched my eyes for a moment, then a small smile spread across his face. "You won't be alone, love. I haven't figured out the details yet, but I know for sure you won't be alone," he said as he kissed me gently. "You're getting better at that," I said quietly. My fingers moved to the collar of his shirt, then to his neck. He closed his eyes

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briefly, enjoying my touch. When he opened them again, his deep blue eyes were sincere. “This one was easy. I have the same fear. In case you hadn’t noticed, I’m afraid to leave you alone,” he said. I felt the pull in my chest that he feels as I smiled at him. I rested my forehead against his as the relief washed over my body.

“Sestrichka, can you translate this for me?” Viktor asked, handing me his computer. The conversation had shifted from planning to gathering more information on Armando and his associate that I’d overheard him arguing with. Viktor was trying to find as much information on his associate as possible, but that meant much of the information was in Italian.

“Of course, Papa Bear,” I said as I moved next to him on the couch. I scanned over yet another article, trying to find the valid information in it. We’d spent much of the afternoon looking for information on Armando. Viktor was now also looking to see if he’d made deals with any of the other bosses. “This one is about a housing project outside Naples. Um, looks like possible vacation rentals, as well as residential. Mando seems to keep the same investors around him. Giana’s father is on this one.” I kept reading and came across a new name. “Oh, well, that’s interesting,” I said. I looked up from the computer to find everyone

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waiting for me to finish. “It seems Salvadori is branching out into Italian real estate.”

There was a collective groan, along with quiet cursing as they all tried to contain their anger at finding out Armando had made at least one deal with Salvadori.

“If they’ve made one deal, there’s a good chance there’s more,” Viktor said. I handed his computer back to him.

“If anyone can find more deals, it’s you, Papa Bear.”

Stephen’s phone beeped, then beeped again, then beeped again. He looked at the incoming messages. “It’s Keith. He’s sent over what he was able to get today at Armando’s house,” he said. He got up to hand me his phone, along with a pair of earphones. “Here, these might help you hear the conversation better,” he said. “You know, since your human hearing is inferior to mine.”

“This is why you’re my favorite senior citizen,” I said as I moved to the table so I could write more easily.,

I went through all the recordings, listening to each one multiple times to make sure I was hearing everything correctly. I listed all the projects that Armando spoke about on the recordings and gave the highlights about what was said to Adrik. He knew

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about all the projects. None of the conversation that was recorded raised any red flags. There were two meetings that Keith wasn't able to record, because Armando shut the door, but Chris was able to get a picture of the men he met with. One of them was the man we now knew as Ricardo, the man that I'd overheard Armando arguing with.

"Viktor, what if Ricardo is the missing link?" I asked. Viktor looked at me, somewhat puzzled. "What if he's the go-between. Can you find any deals he's made with the other bosses? Like what if he's the silent partner in all this? It might not look like he has a hand in the illegal side of things, but he invests so much in the legitimate side that he has a say in the illegal side." Viktor just raised his eyebrow as he thought about the question, then returned to his computer and started yet another search.

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King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 263

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Three

Sephie

Adrik had stood up from his desk and pulled me up from my chair to go outside for a bit before the sun went down. We both needed a break, but I had the idea about Ricardo and wanted to ask before I forgot. “Come, we’ll resume this later,” Adrik said as he pulled me from his office. We stopped at the closet so I could grab a jacket, then continued downstairs. He held my hand in his, his fingers laced through mine.

As soon as we were outside and mostly alone, I felt the stress melt away. I took a deep breath, inhaling the fresh air. “I needed this break,” I said.

“Me too. You’re the best excuse for getting me out of the office,” he said.

“Especially now that I can feel what you’re feeling more.

I know when you’re getting stressed. I can ignore my own stress, but I’m incapable of ignoring yours. I want to make it stop as soon as I feel it.”

I moved closer to him, my other arm holding on to his arm as we walked hand-in-hand. “I do love that you’re so protective of me.

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It might seem over the top to someone else, but I completely lost the feeling of safety when I lived with my uncle. Even after I got away from him, I never really got it back. That feeling of constantly being on edge, constantly looking over my shoulder, or waiting for the next attack to happen never went away until I met you.” He let go of my hand so he could put his arm around me. He stopped, pulling me closer to him. “It’s kind of silly when I think about it. I know I can survive things most people wouldn’t, because I’ve done it. I’m still here. But the hypervigilance gets exhausting after a while. You’ve brought peace back to my life and now I never want to be without it again,” I said. He inhaled sharply. “Sephie, I never want you to worry. About anything. You’re a very big reason that I made the decision to get rid of the other bosses. I don’t want to have to constantly worry about one of them trying to hurt you to get to me. I want you and Misha to be able to run through the city again without worrying you’re going to be attacked. I want to be able to walk to Vinny’s to get you your favorite sandwich in the middle of the day without worrying someone is going to try and grab you. I want you to always know that you’re completely safe with me. And if I’m not with you, I want you to know you’re completely safe with

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whichever one of the guys is with you.”

“Or three,” I said, laughing.

“Or three. Safety in numbers, solnishko,” he said, laughing with me.

I wrapped my arms around his waist, resting my head on his chest. His arms held me tight against him, causing me to feel

deliciously warm throughout my entire body. “I love you, Adrik,” I sighed.

“I love you, Sephie. More than anything.” he said, kissing the top of my head.

After we left the office, the guys moved everything downstairs. They were spread out on the couches when Adrik and I came

back as the sun was setting. I had a feeling they did it so they could be closer to the kitchen. They’d all grown to love me cooking

for them, especially now that I was trying to make more traditional Russian dishes, but it felt like they enjoyed helping just as

much as they enjoyed eating. I never had to wash a dish when they were around and they were always willing to jump in and

help. It gave us a chance to talk about things, just the seven of us. It was a strange dynamic, our weird little family, but it was one

that I adored.

“I have more for you to translate, sestrichka,” Viktor said as we walked in.

“Your idea that Ricardo is the missing link between the

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other bosses and Armando seems to be a good one, but I need you to translate to know for sure.”

I scanned the articles that he'd found while Adrik and I were gone as I walked to the kitchen. They all got up and followed me, sitting around the large kitchen Island so they'd be ready to help and we could all still discuss the day's topic of choice. “It looks like Armando has deals with Niko and Vito as well. The only names I'm not seeing are Darlo and Massimo, as far as the bosses go.” I clicked to the next article, scanning it briefly. “And there's Lorenzo,” I said, looking up at Adrik. “So, Armando has deals of varying sizes with everyone. Except maybe Dario and Massimo, but that could be because we just haven't found them yet.” Adrik did not look happy.

“So, it looks like the theory that he's playing both sides is a solid one,” Ivan said. “Now the question is how much has he told the other bosses about our plans.”

“This makes me worry about Trino, too. He has all of them down there against just him and Martin,” I said.

“I need to have another conversation with Trino,” Adrik said as he walked to me. He put his hands on my hips as he stood behind

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me. “But after dinner. I’m starving,” he said as he leaned down to kiss my cheek.

“Say no more. I can fix that,” I said as I pulled his arms around me tighter.

“This might be one of many reasons why I love you so much,” he said, kissing my neck.

As the guys were cleaning up after dinner, Adrik called Trino. He put him on speaker so we could all hear the conversation. I had hopped on the counter, so he was standing in between my legs, but with his back toward me, so everyone could hear.

“Jefe, que pasa?” Trino picked up on the first ring. “I’m beginning to get used to these frequent calls. It makes me feel loved, if I’m being honest.”

Adrik chuckled. “You might change your mind after you hear what I’m about to tell you.”

“Are you going to tell me that Armando has turned against you and now he’s coming down here to meet with me also?” he asked. His tone was jovial, like that was the most outlandish scenario he could think of.

“Well, you’re half right,” Adrik said. There was silence on the other end of the phone for a moment.

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“For real, Jefe? He’s turned against you?” While Trino had been joking, he was now very serious. His voice had an edge of anger to it.

“We don’t know for sure yet, but the more we uncover, the more it looks like he’s been playing both sides. He’s made deals with three of the other bosses. Dario and Massimo are the only two he apparently hasn’t made deals with. But because he’s definitely made deals with Salvadori, Niko, Vito, and even Lorenzo, I’m not sure how much information he’s given to them about our plans.

I want you to be careful, Trino,” Adrik said. “You’re free to do whatever you feel is necessary when it comes to the bosses that are still down there.”

Trino thought for a moment. “If Armando is giving Information to Anthony and Lorenzo, that would make them the world’s best actors. I didn’t think they had that in them. I could be wrong, but they’ve always come across as, well, idiots.”

“Well, you’re right about Anthony, at least,” I said. “He’s definitely an idiot, but he does have a certain level of cunning to him. I think it’s from Lorenzo more than anyone. He’s the only one I’ve never seen in person. He’s the one that was mentoring Anthony

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on his side gig into human trafficking. If there's an evil mastermind among those two, it has to be him. Anthony can barely spell his name on a good day.”

“Miha, have I mentioned how much I love your Inability to mince words?” Trino said, laughing.

“My father banished Lorenzo years ago. There's a reason he banished him instead of handing down another punishment. I think Sephie is right. He's the brains behind Sal and Anthony's plans. I just don't know where Armando fits into their plans and I don't know how much Information he's given them about what we're planning. I know you take your security seriously, but extra careful with all of them down there. You can send them back at any point, too. We'll take care of all of them Adrik

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Chapter 264

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Four

Sephie

“Ife, I’m still having too much fun fu cking with them. I did get Anthony to admit they were trying to make a deal with the Mexicans. Lorenzo wasn’t with him, so that theory tracks. You know how well I take betrayal. I’m looking forward to sending a message to anyone in the future that even considers betraying me like this. I’m still letting Massimo believe that I’m going to let him live. I’m really working up to crushing his soul completely right before I light him on fire.” Trino was silent for a moment. We all tried not to laugh too loudly. We were still more amused than we should’ve been at Trino’s choice of how to end Massimo.

“Dario, though,” he said. He sighed. “I actually feel bad for that guy. It’s clear that he’s been me ntally broken by Massimo all these years. He’s losing his grip on reality some days. Other days, he’s still with it. Those days, he asks if he can get out. He says he’ll disappear and no one will ever see him again. He just wants to be left alone and to never see Massimo again.”

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“You can send him back here. Not that I doubt your assessment of him, Trino, but I trust Sephie’s more. She gets the final say on whether he can disappear or not,” Adrik said.

Trino laughed. “I won’t argue with you on that one. Mostly, I won’t argue with her. On anything.”

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I couldn’t help but laugh. “When all this is over, I promise to come to Colombia to help you find a suitable girlfriend, Trino. You don’t have to sweet talk me.” I said as I wrapped my legs loosely around Adrik’s waist.

“Miha, you’re welcome here whenever you like,” Trino said. “I’ll send Dario back to you so you can see his mental state. It’s just like Sephie said it would be, Jefe. And I’ll be extra careful with Anthony and Lorenzo now. It’s possible their plans with the Mexicans are much worse than we originally thought. I have spies throughout Mexico, I’ll see what I can find out. In the meantime, I’ll get extra security.”

“Let me know what you find out. We’ll help with the Mexicans once we take care of the other bosses here,” Adrik said.

“We’ll see if it comes to that,” Trino said. “Keep me informed on Armando, too. I’ve never had any problems with that guy, but,

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he's always been too nice for me. I don't trust anyone who's too nice."

"I think you just implied that I'm a bitch, Trino," I said, trying to hold in my laughter. He was silent, as I'm sure he was trying to figure out a way to answer without offending me further. "That's fair. Totally fair," I said, laughing finally.

I heard the sigh of relief on the other end of the line. "Miha..." he said, laughing.

They ended the call after a few more minutes of discussion. Trino was going to send Dario back to the city within a few days.

Massimo was never leaving Colombia again. Anthony and Lorenzo were free to leave, should they attempt it, but Trino had plans for taking care of both of them as well.

Adrik inhaled deeply once the call was over. He turned to face me, his hands running up my thighs. He was stressed over this entire situation and legitimately worried about Trino's safety. He caught me smiling at him. "What?" he asked, his smirk slowly appearing on his face.

"You're worried for Trino's safety. That's not very Lord King Boss of you, but I happen to like it. Don't worry. I won't tell anyone," I said.

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He laughed quietly. “Trina has always been honest with me. He’s a good guy. He had a rough rise to power, but things have been great since he took over. I don’t want to see him lose that.” He sighed. “And it seems like he might be the only one I can trust now.” I just wrapped my arms around him, not really knowing the right thing to say. At least I could give him some comfort in the moment.

I hadn’t mentioned anyone yet, but I was starting to feel a sense of impending doom. I just didn’t know exactly what it was about yet. But I knew the storm was almost upon us.

The weekend was over all too soon and we had to move back to the penthouse to face reality for another week. I was starting to enjoy our weekend getaways where no one really knew where we were and we could just relax, enjoying being together. Adrik.

and I always managed more alone time at the house than the penthouse, which I was never going to complain about. I knew he was busy, but I was grateful for any chance I got to have him all to myself. Viktor, Stephen, and Ivan had left for the private airport, leaving Andrei and Misha with Adrik and I. Dario was set to arrive. from

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Colombia shortly this evening. Adrik wanted him brought to the penthouse right away, so no one would know he was back in the city without Massimo. He knew Salvadori had been trying to get Darin away from Massimo as well.

We were waiting in Adrik's office for them to bring Dario to the building. Of course, we were talking about everything we'd learned over the weekend while we waited.

"We have to remember to add the end of the month to the whiteboard tomorrow. I think Giana is going to rob him and disappear at the end of the month," Misha said. We'd talked about his anger toward Giana a few more times after we finished a run in the mornings at the house. He was starting to feel less angry toward her, but there was still no love for her with him.

"I think that's a safe bet, my adorable Russian guardian. The bigger question is whether Armando will disappear with her or not,"

I said.

"And what he's going to do to her when he finds out she's stolen from him," Andrei said.

I looked to Adrik, curious. "What was Armando like with his ex-wives?" I asked.

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Adrik thought for a minute. “I’m not really sure. Once he ended the relationship, I never really heard much about any of them. He moves on quickly to the next woman and his focus is on her.” I suddenly felt a sense of dread when he said those words.

Something didn’t feel right, but I couldn’t figure out what. Adrik and Misha both noticed. Misha also felt something was wrong, but wasn’t sure what yet, either. Adrik had been at his desk while I was on one of the couches. He moved to the couch with me as soon as he felt my mood change. “What is it, love? What’s wrong? I can feel something is wrong,” he said as he sat down next to me.

“I’m not sure. I just got this weird feeling of dread when we were talking about Armando,” I said. I chewed on my bottom lip, trying to figure out what it was that made me feel this way.

“I did too,” Misha said. “But I don’t know why.”

We didn’t have time to analyze what had happened, as the doors to the elevator opened. Viktor was back with Dario. Adrik looked at me, concerned. I smiled at him, my palm resting on his cheek. “It’s okay. It can wait until later,” I said. He leaned in and quickly kissed me before standing to meet Dario as they walked into his office.

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King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 265

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Five

Sephie

Viktor walked in first, with Dario behind him, and Ivan and Stephen behind Dario. “Any problems?” Adrik asked Viktor.

“None. Everything was quiet. Only your people at the airport. They put a different flight path on the paperwork, so no one will know that plane came from Colombia,” Viktor said. He walked past Adrik to sit down with Andrei, Misha, and I. I stood up quietly to hug him. They were only gone for a short time, but I was always relieved when they came back safe. The smile on Viktor’s face when I went to hug him told me that he felt the same relief. He hugged me tightly, kissing the top of my head, before sitting down.

Ivan and Stephen had walked around Dario, who was talking to Adrik. Each of them hugged me before finding a seat as well.

Stephen whispered, “it’s bad,” in my ear as he hugged me. I looked at him, surprised, but said nothing. I took my usual spot behind Adrik’s desk so I could see Dario as he talked.

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He looked like he'd aged at least ten years since the last time I saw him. His once salt and pepper hair was now much more salt than it was pepper. Dario had always been clean-shaven before. He was an older man, probably in his 60s, but I never thought he looked bad for his age. Now, however, he looked much older than 60, especially with his white facial hair growing in. He had a nervous look to him, like he was legitimately afraid for his life.

Dario had been a quiet man in the meetings. He rarely argued with the other bosses, but they rarely argued with him. I was never sure if it was because they were scared of him or Massimo. He exuded a quiet confidence in the meetings. The man sitting before us now was in no way confident. His eyes darted around the room like he was waiting for something to happen.

Adrik noticed the change in him and caught my eye as I walked past his desk. My eyes went wide as I walked past him, knowing no one else could see me. He gave me a knowing look as he looked back toward Dario. Adrik usually liked to make people nervous by staying quiet, but he chose to speak first this time, trying to put Dario's nerves at ease. "Dario, Trino tells me you'd like to get out," he said quietly,

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Dario looked to Adrik, then glanced around the room again. His eyes never stayed on one thing for very long. He looked to me, then back to Adrik, then the door, the couches, each one of the guys, back to me. He nodded his head, his eyes still darting around the room. “I just want to be left alone. I won’t bother anyone. I can disappear. I’ve been planning it for years. No one will find me,” he said.

“You’ve been planning it for years?” Adrik asked. “How do you know no one else knows about it if you’ve been planning it that long?” Adrik’s tone of voice was similar to one he’d have with a young child. “I haven’t told anybody where I’m going. They can try to look for me, but they won’t find me,” he said.

“But you’ve told people you’re going to disappear?” Adrik asked.

Dario nodded his head. “I told Sal. My kids don’t want any part of the business. They’ve been estranged from me for years. After they found out what Massimo did to my parents and that I stayed with him after I found out, they left. I haven’t spoken to them in years. I don’t even know where they are now,” he paused, like the weight of what he’d just said was hitting him. He started to speak, but stopped himself. Instead, he just sighed. “I was going to turn my part of the city over to Sal and disappear.

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“Why didn’t you come to me or my father about what Massimo did to you?”

Adrik asked.

Darlo’s eyes darted to Adrik. He looked scared. “Massimo would’ve found out.

Sal told me that you wouldn’t do anything anyway.

He was very adamant that I shouldn’t come to you. He told me you would punish me.” He looked to the floor quickly. He stared at

the floor for a few moments.

“Apparently Massimo isn’t the only one that’s been fu cking with his mind,” I said in Russian.

“Dario, I wouldn’t have punished you. You did nothing wrong. Massimo is the one that killed your parents. Why would you get punished for that?” Adrik said.

“Sal was very adamant,” Darlo said quietly.

“Did Sal threaten you against coming to me, Dario?”

Dario’s eyes darted up to Adrik. He didn’t need to answer. The look on his face told us everything we needed to know. I heard

Adrik curse quietly under his breath. I knew exactly how he felt in that moment.

“Dario, do you know anything about what Sal has been planning in the city?”

Ivan asked. While Ivan usually sounded like he was

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low-key threatening you with his words, his voice was soft when he spoke to Dario, He sounded like he did when he would talk to me, especially when I was upset.

Dario was quiet for a moment. He looked like he was having an internal struggle. His leg started bouncing up and down. He chewed on his nails. I knew he was anxious, but I honestly didn't know how to give him any comfort right now. I stood up and moved closer to him. I thought maybe the fact that I was the only woman in the room, it might help him to feel at ease. I moved to the front of Adrik's desk, in front of Dario, but still so Adrik could see him. "We can protect you, Dario. We can give you a safe place. No one knows you're here. Not even Sal. We know that Massimo hurt you. He's a very bad man. Sal, too. They're both bad men. We want to protect you from them," I said. I felt like I was talking to a child, but by the looks of him, he couldn't handle much more.

His bouncing leg slowed. His gaze was fixed on a spot on the floor beside me, but I considered it progress that his eyes weren't darting around the room. He slowly lifted his gaze to me, like he was seeing me for the first time since he came into the office. "I

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remember you. You were always at the restaurant. Sal and Armando were fighting over you when Ghost came back,” he said.

I tried to keep my own anger from rising to the surface at the thought of Sal and Armando thinking they had any kind of right or access to me. “The delusions of Sal and Armandu thinking they ever had any kind of chance with me aren’t important right now,

Dario. Do you know anything about Sal’s plans? What he’s planning with Anthony and Lorenzo?” I asked. I glanced behind Dario at the guys. They were all tense at this new revelation.

Dario nodded his head. “Yeah, I know. Sal brags a lot. Almost as much as Massimo,” he said.

“Will you tell me what his plans are?” I asked, still trying to be as soft and quiet as I could. Dario looked at me once more. This time, he actually looked at me. He studied my face, my hair. For a few minutes, he just looked at me. I felt Adrik getting tense behind me. He was not a fan of other men looking at me, but I didn’t get the feeling that Dario was having any kind of inappropriate thoughts. It felt like he was stuck in a memory as he looked at me. I discreetly motioned to Adrik to stay calm and to let it happen.

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“You remind me of my daughter. She doesn’t have red hair, but she’s about your age. She’s beautiful like you though. At least she was the last time I saw her. You know, I’m glad she got away. I’m glad she’s not in this life. Sal was starting to look at her, too. You know he traffics girls, right? He blamed it on Anthony, but it was his idea. Lorenzo got him into it. Sal is a dirty old man. Anthony is just like him. Sal puts on a show in front of people, but he’s just as bad as Massimo. That’s how he knew about Massimo all these years. They recognize the evil in each other. Sal wants to take over the city. The only good thing about his plan is that he wants to get rid of Massimo. All the other bosses are helping him. You know that, right?” Dario asked. He was looking at me the whole time he was talking. I wanted to keep him talking as much as I could, “Even Armando? He’s helping Sal?” I asked.

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King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 266

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Six

Sephie

“Yeah, they’ve been in business together for a few years now. Armando was trying to position himself as a leader for a while there too. I thought he and Sal were going to get into a war with each other, but then Ghost came back. It all kind of went to hell that night at the restaurant with Anthony. Nobody expected Ghost to react that way over you. Half of us lost a substantial amount of money that night because we thought the rumors of him being gay were true. We knew he was coming back to stop the tax increase. Anthony was supposed to make a scene so that didn’t happen. He just got carried away once Ghost yelled at him in front of everyone. Nobody expected the outcome and nobody expected him to banish Anthony. It made Sal mad. He started trying to turn the other bosses against Ghost immediately. It was that same night that he met with the other bosses after we all left the restaurant. He called us all to his house and convinced us all we could overthrow Ghost.”

“All the bosses were there?” I asked. “You’re positive?”

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“Everyone but Ghost. Everyone agreed. We got used to his absence. The bosses that wanted to raise taxes were irritated that he was going to try and stop them, so they readily agreed. Armando took the most convincing. He didn’t want to. He felt like there was another way. He didn’t completely agree that night, but he didn’t disagree either, if you know what I mean.” Dario’s eyes were still on me, like I was the only person in the room. The guys were all quiet. It almost felt like they were scared to move or speak. They didn’t want to break whatever spell he was under that was making him talk to me.

“What happened when Ghost banished Anthony?” I asked.

“That’s when the brawn operation went into motion. He needed chaos to get Anthony and Lorenzo back into the city. They made the plan for the assassination attempt at the ball, too. I assume that Armando tipped you off, since you’re all still here. Then we got word that you were in Italy, at Armando’s place. Sal tried to get all of you when he blew up Armando’s office. It was a warning to Armando, too. Sal knew he was trying to play both sides. Armando is a pussy, but he’s not completely stupid. He has Sal’s goddaughter.”

“Giana is Sal’s goddaughter?” I asked.

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“You know her?” Dario asked.

“I’ve met her, yes.”

“Sal was close to her grandfather. When she was born, they made Sal her godfather. Her father has made some poor business decisions, but Sal and Armando have been trying to help him get his fortune back. I heard Armando was sleeping with her, just to make Sal angry. She’s just insurance though. Armando has everyone fooled. Everyone thinks he’s the nice guy. Ask him where his first wife is and then tell me how nice he is,” he said. He crossed his arms across his chest, his gaze once again falling to the Boor

“Oner Sal takes over the city, do you know what his plans are?” I asked. I was worried I was going to lose him, so I wanted to keep the conversation going, despite feeling like I needed a minute to process what he’d just told us

“He’ll get rid of the other bosses, I’m sure. He’s hungry for power. He was close to taking over the city when Vitaliy was still charge. That’s what made him divide the city up. That’s also what made him banish Lorenzo. It was punishment for Lorenzo, sure, but it was more to stick it to Sal for trying to overthrow him. Lorenzo and Sal were always really close. Vitaliy knew it would

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cause more damage to separate them than anything, so he banished Lorenzo to Sicily. For once, I agreed with Vitaliy I always hated Lorenin*

angry with Vitally over that and then Ghost banished Anthony as well, so he's doubly ma

to me once more. "He's angry with you now, You're appvetly very ki ll or kidnap. His goddaughter was supposed to get close to you to make it easier to grab you, but even that proved impossible.

Armando is the one that tipped them off that day they tried to grab you, you know?"

"Sal isn't the only one angry in this situation," I said, somewhat under my breath. Dario still heard me. He chuckled. "I've never heard Sal so mad as I did when he found out you shot three of his guys that day. He managed to get one guy onto Armando's security detail, but that guy disappeared. Nobody knows what happened to him."

"I killed him too," I said. My anger was now fully present, so holding my tongue was next to impossible for me.

Dario just looked at me, a sly smile on his face. "I would like to see the look on Sal's face if he ever finds that out. You should be

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careful. He wanted to kill you before, but he's angry enough now that he might try to sell you to highest bidder."

"I would like to see him try," I said. I stood up from the desk, not caring to keep this conversation going any further. I barely had a chance to take two steps away from Dario and Adrik was by my side.

"Take a breath, solnishko. You know we won't let anything happen to you," he said as he put both hands on my hips. He looked down at me, concerned, but I could also see the look in his eye that meant my eyes had gone dark. I closed my eyes for a moment, trying to regain control of myself.

Ivan moved closer to Dario. "What makes you think that Sal won't know where to find you?" His voice had more of an edge to it this time, but he was still trying to be as calm as he could be.

7

I have property around the world. I can move from place to place. I bought each place under a different name. The people in each town know me as a different person. It's virtually impossible to follow me from place to place. Sal isn't smart enough to link it all together." He paused, like he was lost in thought again. He looked at Ivan, then looked at Adrik. "I want out. I've lost so

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much because of this life. I just want to be left alone. You will never hear from me again if you let me leave.” He sighed, looking at the floor. He knew that people rarely got out of this life alive. He knew more than most, as well, which made him dangerous. It also put him in danger.

Adrik looked down at me, his eyes searching mine. I was still angry, but I was trying to control it. Instead of waiting for my opinion, he said, “I don’t have a problem with you getting out, but I can’t let you leave until I’ve taken care of the other bosses.

You’ll be safe here. No one knows you’re here. You’ll be protected until this is over, then you can leave, but not before. If you try to leave, my men will have orders to kill you. Understood?”

Dario nodded his head. He looked to the floor, almost like he was defeated, but then his eyes shot back to Adrik. “Wait, you’ll really let me leave once this is over?” Adrik nodded his head. “You can leave, with the understanding that if I ever hear of you trying to move against me, you’ll be swiftly dealt with. If you want to disappear, I won’t stand in the way of that. It’s time you had something to look forward to in life, Dario. You can leave once this is over,” he said. I glanced down at Dario. There were tears in his eyes.

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“I’ll tell you anything you want to know if it means I can leave. Right now, I don’t even care that there’s a chance you’ll kill me after I tell you everything. You’ve given me hope that there’s a chance I can get . I haven’t had hope since my parents died,” he said, quietly.

“As long as you stay loyal to me, you have my word that no harm will come to you. You’ll be able to leave. Betray me and I will kill you, Adrik said flatly.

“You’ll protect me until this is over?” Darlo asked.

“It won’t be the most luxurious of accommodations, but we have somewhere to hide you that no one knows about. You’ll be here, You’ll have guards. You’ll have everything you need until this is over,” Viktor said.

tears that were threatening to fall were now flowing down the old man’s face. He looked relieved. Haunted, but relieved.

“Thank you,” he said, looking at Adrik and me. Adrik simply nodded his head toward Dario, while he pulled me a little closer, holding me just a little tighter.

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King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 267

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Seven

Sephie

Viktor and Ivan left with Dario to get him set up in a room, where he would stay until we were sure it was safe for him to leave. I

knew they had holding cells on the other side of the floor. It's where Andy currently was. But apparently, there was another set of "rooms" that even I didn't know about. Dario would remain there, completely out of sight of anyone who came to this floor.

Armando knew about the holding cells where Andy was, but he didn't know about the ones where they were taking Dario.

Once Viktor and Ivan were back in the office, we decided to move to the penthouse. Suddenly, we weren't completely comfortable having a conversation in the office anymore. We wanted as much privacy as possible. No one was allowed at the penthouse without permission from Adrik, which meant we were the only ones that ever went up there. It helped ease my mind that we always had guards outside the door, as well. It was looking like us against the world,

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“Trino needs to know that Sal and Armando have been working together,” Ivan said as we walked toward the kitchen. I might as well make dinner while we talked. It would help me stay calm and I’d grown to love being able to take care of the guys. They meant everything to me. Being able to feed them was a small way of showing them just how much.

“Agreed,” Adrik said. He caught my arm as I was walking to the refrigerator, pulling me back to him. “Let’s call him first. I don’t think this can wait,” he said as he pulled his phone from his pocket. We all stood close so that we could hear the conversation. I felt myself getting nervous. The feeling got worse with each ring. Trino wasn’t picking up. Trino always picked up. Something wasn’t right.

I glanced at Misha, who had that faraway look in his eye. When he came back to the present, he glanced at me. He looked worried, but not as worried as I felt. “Something’s happening, but it doesn’t feel like it’s all bad,” Misha said.

I walked to Misha, grabbing his hand. “Did you see anything specific or you just have a general feeling?” As soon as he looked down at me, I could see what he saw. This is new. I know my eyes went wide, just as his did. He saw Trino, in trouble, but he

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also saw him get out unharmed.

“How did you just do that, gazelle?” Misha asked, completely shocked.

“Do what?” everyone asked at once. We glanced at the other guys, who looked worried, but curious.

“She just looked in my head and saw what I saw,” Misha said. He was still holding my hand tightly, like he was afraid to let go.

“What did you see?” Ivan asked. I could hear their voices. I was present for the conversation, but it was also like I wasn’t totally there. I was still watching Trino somehow. Misha kept glancing at me. He knew I was still watching because he could still see it too. I felt Adrik step closer to me, but he was apprehensive about touching me. I could feel that he didn’t want to interrupt whatever the hell was happening. I felt Misha grab my other hand and hold it tightly as well.

I was watching Trino trying to get out of his house. He was under heavy gunfire. His men were deadly, but they were outnumbered. Martin was with him, too. I could see outside the house. I could see the men that had surrounded the house.

“Where’s Massimo, Anthony, and Lorenzo?” I asked in my head. I didn’t think I said it out loud, but Misha answered me. “He

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keeps them at a different location,” he said. I surveyed the scene again. There was a way to get out at the back of the house, but they were going to need help getting there. There were sections to the house. Trino, Martin, and their men had made it as far back as they could, but they were cut off from the exit. “They need help,” I thought. As soon as I had that thought, there was an explosion that made me jump. I still felt Misha’s hands gripping mine tightly and I heard him say, “no, don’t. She’s okay, just startled.”

The explosion was exactly what Trino and his guys needed to make a quick exit. The explosion put a barrier between them and the men that were trying to get to them. I could see them make it safely to their exit, not wasting any time. They ran down hill, to waiting vehicles. Once they were in the vehicles, speeding away, everything went blank and I could see Misha standing in front of me again. He was still holding both of my hands tightly in his. I looked up at him, mostly confused at what just happened.

His expression mirrored what I felt.

“What the fu ck was that?” I asked. Misha laughed at me. “I was hoping you’d know, gazelle,” he said. “I feel like you just hijacked my brain.”

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I felt Adrik's hand on my back, no longer apprehensive to break whatever spell I was under. Now I felt his concern. "Solnishko..." he said, tentatively.

"I'm okay. Pretty sure, anyway. Trino's okay, too. But if you really want to fu ck with his head, send him a text telling him to call you when he makes it to safety," I said, giggling.

Misha pulled me to him, hugging me tightly. "You're a little bit evil, gazelle." I stepped back from Misha, looking at the very surprised and very concerned faces of the guys. Adrik pulled me to him, a

questioning look on his face. "I have no idea what just happened, but I saw Trino under attack, basically. They had him.

surrounded in his house. Then there was an explosion and they maile it out. You saw all that too, didn't you?" I asked Misha.

He nodded his head. "But you left out the part where you caused the explosion," he said grinning at me.

"I did no such thing," I said.

"I saw it, gazelle. You clearly said, 'they need help' and then then kitchen exploded."

"We all heard you say it," Ivan said.

"You guys heard that? I just thought that in my head. I didn't think I said it out loud," I said, feeling even more confused. "I could

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still hear Misha, but I didn't hear anybody else.”

“Do you know who it was that was after Trino?” Ivan asked, looking at Misha.

“Not for sure, no. My best guess is that it was the Mexicans. There was a whole lot of Spanish being spoken that I didn't understand,” he said.

They all looked to me. “Don't look at me. I only know curse words in Spanish. There were plenty of those being thrown around, but that doesn't give us any valuable information here.”

Misha, who shared my love of comedy probably more than any of the others, said, “does this mean you're going to drop in my head regularly? That could prove to be awkward. Can you give me a warning or something? Make sure I'm wearing pants, at least? I'm very shy.” He crossed his legs and crossed his arms over his crotch like he was blocking me from seeing something I shouldn't.

We all laughed. Adrik looked down at me, his deep blue eyes laughing as he let me search his eyes.

“I think she needs to touch you to make It happen, anyway. It started as soon as she grabbed your hand,” Stephen said. “It got stronger when you grabbed her other hand. So just wear gloves when you want her to stay out of your head. You'll be fine,” he

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said, completely straight faced, which caused us all to laugh again.

Adrik's phone rang. He pulled it from his pocket, putting it on speaker for us all to hear. "Trino, what happened?" he asked.

"Jefe... Trino still sounded almost out of breath. "I almost didn't make it out.

Guys from one of the Mexican cartels tried to take

me out. The only reason I'm talking to you right now is because my kitchen exploded. It gave us enough cover to make it

out the back. The entire house blew as we were running down the hill. I don't know what happened or what faulty gas line

caused it, but I'm thankful for whatever that was."

"You're sure it was the cartels?" Adrik asked.

"Positive. This has to be Anthony and Lorenzo."

"Where are they?"

"I'm still holding them at a different location. This house was one I only use occasionally, but I've met with Tony and Enzo there a

couple times. They had to have given the information to the cartels on where it was," he said. "They're dead men."

"Looks like war is coming. If you take care of Tony and Enzo, do you think the cartels will stop?" Adrik asked.

"Oh, they'll stop. They're all going to die, too. We had an agreement that they would stay out of Colombia and I would stay out of

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Mexico. Since they didn't stay out of Colombia, I'm not staying out of Mexico. They suffered greatly on my rise to power. They're going to get a reminder of what happened the last time they tried to cross me." Trino's voice was dripping with anger.

"Once the situation here is under control, we're here to help you as much as you need," Adrik said.

"Jefe, thank you. I might need some help. How are things there? Did you find out more about that puta Armando? What about Dario? What did you decide on him?"

"Don't trust Armando. He's in deep with Sal and has been for years. Giana is Sal's goddaughter, even. It's a giant mess. It's easier to just get rid of all of them. As for Dario, he's being held until this is all over. I'm fine with letting him go once the other bosses are out of the picture. That guy needs a happy ending to his fucked-up life," Adrik said, sighing.

There was silence for a moment on the other end of the line. Trino took in a deep breath, exhaling loudly. "Jefe, I'm glad you decided that. I would've supported whatever decision you made on him, but you're right. He needs something good for once."

Trino's voice had softened as he talked about Dario. I could clearly hear the sympathy he had for that old man. "The others,

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though? I'm going to have to get creative on how I want to end them.”

“If anybody can wow us, it's you,” Adrik said.

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King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 268

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Eight

Adrik

Once Trino and I ended the call, we all stood in stunned silence for a few moments. Not only had Dario dropped heavy information on us, but Sephie and Misha had seen what happened to Trino, seemingly as it was happening. How?

Sephie was still standing next to me, tucked into my side like she was made for that spot. I had a tight hold of her, feeling even more protective than usual of her. I'd lost count of how many times I'd told her that she was the most amazing woman I'd ever known, but she continued to raise the bar on that standard. I found myself curious to see what else she could do.

I glanced at Misha, who was still stunned at what had happened. He had his hands on his hips and was staring at the floor in front of him like he wasn't sure what to do or say.

"Misha, how does your gut instinct usually work? Can you normally see things as they happen?" I asked him.

He snapped back to reality when I called his name. He looked to me, then to Sephie, then back to me. "I get snapshots of what's

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going to happen, but it's like still pictures. When Sephie was holding my hands, it was a full-on movie. In real-time, apparently."

He still looked stunned and almost baffled at what had happened. We all were, really.

I looked down at Sephie, who looked back at me. "Don't look at me. I have no explanation," she said. She looked just as stunned as Misha did.

I caught Ivan's eye, then looked back at Misha. "If I've learned anything from Sephie, it's that she shows you what your potential is," I said. "She shows you how to get to the next level, if you will. Think of her like the Game Master."

She looked up at me, smiling. "Calling me the Game Master implies I know what the hell this game is that's happening with all of us. I'm in the dark just as much as the rest of you."

"I think you're selling yourself short, spider monkey. You might not be completely conscious of what's happening, but you feel literally everything around you. I could tell you were anxious before Boss called Trino. It got worse when he didn't answer. It got worse still when Misha had the same reaction. You know more than you think you do, Sephie," Andrei said. Sephie looked at

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Andrei, but didn't know how to respond. She was chewing on her bottom lip; her hands were starting to fidget as well.

"I saw her eyes go dark this time when she was talking to Dario, too," Ivan said. Stephen nodded beside him. "I did too," he said.

I felt her anger rise quickly at the mention of the conversation with Dario, but she had it under control just as quickly as it appeared. She looked at Ivan.

"Holy sh it, I see it now," Viktor said. Sephie looked to me quickly, confused.

"Blink, love," I said, kissing her temple. Her eyes were as dark as I'd seen them, but she felt completely calm to me. She closed her eyes, taking a deep breath. I got hit with a sudden feeling of panic that I knew wasn't mine. When she opened her eyes and looked to me for confirmation they were normal again, I could see the fear in her eyes.

"What the f**k is happening to me?" she asked quietly. Her feeling of panic was growing. She was an expert at controlling her anger, but her fear was clearly a different story. She was losing control quickly. I wrapped my arms around her, pulling her tight against me. She clung to me like I was her lifeline to reality.

"Princess, you joked that your eyes going dark was your villain origin story, but I think it's exactly the opposite. I think it's your

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hero origin story. We may not know what happened just now, but you're doing what you always do- making sure that people you care about are taken care of. That's hero behavior," Ivan said. She took a deep breath, but didn't loosen her grip on me. Her face was still buried in my chest.

"Didn't your dad tell you that you were here to help each one of us with something important?" I asked her, trying to coax her head away from my chest. Not that I minded her body pressed against mine. I just didn't want her to be scared. She nodded her head.

"He did?" Misha asked. She nodded again, but this time she looked up at me. The look of fear was slowly disappearing. She turned so she could look at Misha, but she kept my arms wrapped tightly around her.

"He told me I was supposed to help you develop your gift, my adorable Russian guardian," she said, looking at Misha. She then looked at Andrei. "Bubba, we're apparently here to make each other better. It's why you're so good at pushing me and training me to be better and why I'm constantly reminding you of how awesome you are." Andrei's wide smile stretched across his face.

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She looked at Stephen and said, “Yoden, I was supposed to show you how much better life can be when you just decide to be yourself.” Stephen’s cheeks blushed, as he ran his hand through his hair. “And Papa Bear,” she said, looking at Viktor. “I was supposed to help you get your confidence back. You do a very good job of hiding it from everyone else, but I know how debilitating it was becoming for you since you lost your wife.” Viktor looked at her, smiling. She really had helped him feel much more confident since she’d come into our lives. I hadn’t noticed it much before Sephie, but Viktor was back to the way he was when I first met him. He’d lost his light before Sephie, but she was the spark he needed to remember who he was and how great he was at his job.

“What about Ivan?” Misha asked. Sephie looked at Ivan. I could tell by the look on his face that she was smiling at him. His face always got softer when she smiled at him. She glanced up at me and held my gaze. She was silently asking my thoughts on whether she should tell them everything. I nodded once.

She sighed, then walked to Ivan. “Ivan and I have a special deal. My dad explained it like this: there are different types of

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soulmates. Adrik and I are meant to find each other and fall in love over and over again in many lifetimes. I don't think any of you are surprised by that," she said, laughing. "I don't know how many lifetimes I've spent with the rest of you, but Ivan gets the role of my protector in each one. He proved he was ready the day Sal's guys tried to grab me when he used his body to shield me from the impact of the truck that hit us." She had put her arms around his waist as she was talking, with her head resting on his shoulder. He held her tightly, kissing the top of her head.

"I nominate Stephen to document each future version of us that he meets in his one extremely long lifetime," Misha said. The smile that Sephie gave him was enough to make the room twice as bright. She squeezed Ivan then ran to Misha, laughing. He picked her up and swung her around. Her squeal was music to my ears. "I love that you're as much of a dork as I am, Misha," she said as he set her down.

"He definitely wasn't this much of a dork before you came along. You brought it to the surface," Andrei said, laughing. "Just like you did with the rest of us."

"I mean, I'll apologize if you don't like it, but I happen to love it. You're all much more entertaining this way," she said, walking

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back to me.

“Don’t you dare apologize for it,” I said, pulling her to me forcefully causing her to giggle as she wrapped her arms around my neck. She pressed her lips to mine, still laughing against my lips.

“Come on, I’ll get started on dinner,” she said, pulling me back toward the kitchen.

“We can order takeout, sestrichka. It’s been a long day for everyone.” Viktor said.

“Papa Bear, if you haven’t figured out by now, feeding you is how I show all of you just how much I love you,” she said, her sweet smile on her face.

Andrei pushed his stomach out to give himself a belly. “So Much Love,” he said, as he rubbed his pretend belly.

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King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 269

Chapter Two Hundred Sixty-Nine

Adrik

The next morning, the guys were back in the penthouse early. We had agreed the night before that we didn't trust anyone else.

so all conversations between us were to be had in Russian and in the penthouse when possible. Sephie struggled to wake up this morning. She was so exhausted last night that she was sound asleep almost immediately after laying across my chest. I can't take the blame for her tiredness this morning. Whatever happened between her and Misha completely zapped her energy.

Not to mention dealing with the stress of everything Dario told us.

When I came out of the bedroom without her, the guys were noticeably concerned. I smiled at their concern for her. "She's awake. She's still getting ready. She was exhausted last night and struggled to wake up this morning," I said.

"Same," Misha said as he walked to the coffee maker. "I'm starting to understand why you both needed extra coffee the day after whatever happened between you two that zapped you both. I feel like I could sleep for three days right now,"

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“It only lasted a day for me. Hopefully, you’ll be the same,” I said, laughing at his exhausted expression. He looked like he could barely keep his eyes open.

Viktor pulled his phone from his pocket, typed a short message, then put his phone back in his pocket. “Breakfast will be here shortly,” he said. “Although I can tell you right now that I’m not going to enjoy it as much.” We all laughed at his crankiness over not getting Sephie’s cooking.

Sephie walked into the kitchen just as Misha was pouring her a cup of coffee. “Perfect timing, gazelle. You’re going to need this,” he said as he handed her the coffee mug. “I might’ve made it a little strong. Apologies if it’s too strong.”

“Are you as exhausted as you look and I feel, my adorable Russian guardian?” she asked. He nodded. “What the f**k happened yesterday,” she whispered as she sipped the coffee.

“I can’t answer that yet, but I did get more recordings from Keith last night. Armando is back from his house as of late last night.

Keith sent over what he had from this weekend. He said Armando met with Ricardo, but didn’t close the door this time. Keith thinks Armando wasn’t aware that he was there. After what Dario told us, I’m not sure I believe the bumbling idiot persona of

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Armando anymore, so it might've been intentional. It's possible he's caught on to Keith recording his meetings somehow and now he's feeding us false information, but we won't know until we get them translated," Stephen said.

Sephie sighed. "I'll get started after I finish breakfast," she said.

"Breakfast is on its way, spider monkey. Viktor already took care of it. You need a break this morning, Game Master," Andrei said, grinning at her.

She looked at Viktor, her sweet smile that made him melt on her face. "Papa Bear, you're my favorite. Don't tell the others."

Sephie listened to everything Keith had sent over from Armando's meetings over the weekend after breakfast. She had a serious look on her face listening to one of the recordings. She kept replaying it over and over again like she was trying to hear something else on the recording. Stephen had given her headphones again to help her hear more clearly. She finally looked at Stephen, then looked to Viktor. "There's not much that's useful from Armando's meetings, but in this one recording, I can hear Giana talking in the background for just a minute, like she's walking by on the phone or something. It sounds like she asks when

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she can go back to Italy, then it sounds like she says it wasn't her fault. She must walk too far away because I lose her voice for a few minutes, but she comes back through. She's still talking, but it's too jumbled for me to be able to hear what she says clearly when she comes back through."

"There's a way to separate the voices on the recording." Viktor said, "I'll be right back," he said, walking quickly toward the door.

"What about his meeting with Ricardo this time?" Stephen asked.

"Um, let's see. They talked about Ricardo needing to see a doctor for his knee. They talked about the weather, then they talked about how nice it would be to go to a tropical island because it's getting colder here, then they talked about Ricardo needing to pick up his clothes from the cleaners. Oh, f**k me they're talking in code aren't they?" she said, putting her hand on her forehead as she realized what she'd been listening to.

We couldn't help but chuckle at her. She really was tired. Normally she was very quick to catch on to such things. "It's likely it was code, solnishko. Can you tell me exactly what they said?" I asked.

"I'm gonna need more coffee," she said as she put the earphones back in and started the recording again. She started writing

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the conversation out right away.

Viktor came back with his computer to try and separate Giana's voice from the others on the recording. She handed Stephen his phone back once she was done, then handed me the translation from the meeting with Ricardo. Ivan got up to move closer to me so he could read the translation as well. Andrei got up and made Sephie another cup of coffee while everyone was busy.

It didn't take Viktor and Stephen long to get Giana's voice separated from the others, so we could hear her more clearly. Sephie went to listen to what she previously couldn't understand. "I was right on the first two. She asks when she can go back to Italy, then says it wasn't her fault. She sounds angry on the last part. She says, "I'm not a child. You're lucky I'm still here. The longer you leave me here, the more likely I'm going to disappear."

#

"If she's been a plant all along, she might be tired of the game. Armando has been using her, he may or may not have gotten her hooked on coke, and we all hate her now, so maybe her plan to rob him is really her plan to get away from Armando and her family," Stephen said.

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I looked to Misha, to see if he had any thoughts on potential outcomes, but he was still so tired that there was little to no chance he'd be able to see anything. Sephie saw me look toward Misha, then saw the look on his face and giggled. "I don't think it will work on her. Not with the level of hatred Misha has for her. That's going to cloud the outcome," she said, smiling at him.

"She deserves whatever she gets," Misha said flatly.

Ivan, who had been looking over Sephie's translation from Armando and Ricardo's conversation, said, "I think Stephen was right.

The persona of Armando as a bumbling idiot is exactly the opposite of how he really is. He fooled all of us. Unless they've changed their codes, they're talking about a hit on Trino, although I can't tell who ordered the hit from what they said. They're just discussing it."

"Shit," Sephie said. "Could they be referring to what happened last night? When did Keith record this one?" she asked Stephen.

He checked his phone. "It was before they got to Trino, so that adds up. They wouldn't have known it was unsuccessful at this point," he said.

I felt my own anger rising to the surface, but I immediately felt Sephie's almost overtaking mine. I glanced to her, worried she

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was about to lose control, but once again, she looked completely calm. She looked to me, her eyes completely dark. “I know,” she said, indicating that she was in control and was aware her eyes were likely dark. “I’m still not over Dario’s comment about Sal and Armando fighting over me before you came back. I need a minute to be angry about that complete and utter bullshit, as well as being wrong about Armando.”

I couldn’t help but laugh at her response. The guys did too. Stephen looked at her, completely straight-faced and said, “maybe your milkshake really does bring all the boys to the yard, Seph.”

That was all it took to make her laugh and I felt her anger subside. When she looked at me again, her eyes were back to their normal three colors. I was becoming more and more impressed with her level of control of her anger. Her eyes only changed colors when she was a raging inferno internally, but from the outside, she looked completely calm and in control. I could only tell she was angry because I could feel it, not because she looked it. Other than her dark eyes. My Game Master was showing me how to increase my own anger to sane levels while remaining in control of it. I felt her cool hand on my face, breaking me

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free from my thoughts. She searched my eyes for a moment, finding the answer to her silent question of what had me distracted,
She just grinned at me, standing on her toes to kiss me. God, I love her.

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King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 270

Chapter Two Hundred Seventy

Adrik

I had Sephie call Chen before we moved down to my office for my schedule to begin that day. We had also decided last night that we were going to move quickly on shutting down the brawn operations, as well as grabbing Dr. Moretti. Those two things needed to happen at once. After that, I was going to move against the bosses that were in the city before they had a chance to realize what had happened.

I'd been quiet up to this point on purpose. It made me look weak and unsure of making a move against the other bosses. I was trying to lull them into a false sense of security. It was exactly the opposite of what my father would have done. My father was brutal in his rule. He made rash decisions and unleashed chaos quickly. He was effective only because he's a smart man, but he was more like a tyrant than a king.

I took a different approach. I gave my opponents time and enough rope to hang themselves usually. I wanted to know their plans.

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All of their plans, because when I ended them, I didn't want to have to deal with tying up any loose ends. I had ended complete family lines before. When I made a move, it was utterly devastating. But it was focused devastation. With my father, there was always plenty of collateral damage. I always tried to keep that to a minimum. Innocent people didn't need to get hurt in the process.

It was time to unleash my own brand of chaos on the other bosses. We'd decided days ago on how to hit the three brawn operations in the city. We needed the help of the dealers, though. It was a large enough operation that we couldn't do it ourselves. Not if we wanted it to happen simultaneously, anyway. We decided it was best to recruit the dealers to help us, especially with the two smaller warehouses that were producing brawn. Now, we needed to fill them in on the plan.

"Sephie, you're calling early, my girl. Should I be happy you're thinking of me so early or worried you're delivering bad news?"

Chen asked when he answered the phone.

Sephie laughed. "I guess it depends on your definition of bad news, Chen."

"What's up, my girl?" he asked as he was laughing at her response.

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“We need to set up another meeting with Gus and DJ. We’re going to need help taking out the warehouses,” she said. “We also need to move quickly. Do you think you can get them to the same place tonight? Sorry for the late notice, but things are escalating.”

“Oh, we heard about the attempt on Trino. Gus called him for something else and found out about it last night. I’ve been expecting you to call, actually. I can get them both there tonight. In the absence of Smith and Chucky, there’s been a new guy that’s stepped up to help. He’s one of Trino’s dealers. Do you want him too or just Gus and DJ?”

“Bring the new guy, please. I need to meet him. It’s likely okay if he belongs to Trino, but I want to make sure,” she said.

“I think you’ll be alright with him. He’s like Gus’s number 2 guy, but I’ll make sure he’s there too. See you and your gigantic security force tonight, my girl,” he said.

“Thanks, Chen. You’re the best,” she said, as she ended the call. She looked slightly apprehensive as she gave Viktor his phone back. “I’m nervous about new people now,” she said, chewing her bottom lip. “Don’t be nervous, spider monkey. You still have one of the highest success rates I’ve ever seen when it comes to figuring

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people out. Armando is a special case. Don't dwell on that one," Andrei said as he stretched his massive arm around her shoulders. She leaned into him, resting her head on his shoulder. She sighed, looking up at him. She was upset with herself for being wrong about Armando. She looked tiny standing next to Andrei.

"Thanks, Bubba. It wasn't just Armando, though. Andy, too.

I was wrong on two of the most important players in this," she said.

Misha, who was on his third cup of coffee, was finally starting to act like a human again. He looked at her, almost like he was angry with her. "Now is not the time to start doubting yourself, gazelle. You've been right more times than you've been wrong.

And, technically, you weren't completely wrong on Andy. You never gave him the okay all the way. There's a reason those two were in your blind spot. We just have to figure out what your blind spot is so we can correct it going forward. But this doubting yourself shi t stops right now."

We all turned and looked at him, surprised with the tone that he took with her. If it wasn't Misha, I might've been angry with him.

However, I knew she needed to hear what he said. Andrei, always the protective older brother, pulled her closer to him, but he

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agreed with Misha. “He’s right, Sephie. You can’t start doubting yourself now. We need you.”

“You two are no longer allowed to hang out with Ivan. I like to be able to argue with you and it irritates me when I can’t,” she said, grumpily.

Stephen left first with two other guys that night to set up before we arrived to meet with the dealers. Sephie’s old apartment made it easy to cover all entrance and exit points. While I knew she didn’t pick that apartment for that reason, I was still grateful she chose that apartment as it was making our lives easier right now.

Chen was in his apartment early once again, but Stephen said he was much less nervous this time. “He’s only checked outside a couple times since we got in position. Last time, he was checking every 15 seconds,” he said, laughing quietly.

kind of feel bad for him. He didn’t know what he was signing up for,” Sephie said.

She took Ivan and Misha and picked Chen up on her way upstairs. He was much more relaxed this time. We could hear him joking and laughing with her on their way up to her old apartment.

“Chen, it’s good to see you again,” I said when he walked into the apartment. I extended my hand to him. He grasped it firmly,

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giving me a small smile. “You too, sir,” he said.

“Tell me about this new guy,” Sephie said.

“His name is Oscar. He’s been working with Gus for a few years now. They knew each other in Colombia; Oscar just came up here a few months ago. Gus trusts him and he says that Trino trusts him as well, but since I don’t know Trino, I can’t vouch for that statement,” he said.

“What about DJ? He gets along with Oscar ok?” Sephie asked.

“Yeah, DJ likes him, but DJ generally likes everyone. He’s been mostly quiet around you guys, but that dude has never met a stranger in his life. It’s no wonder he knows everything going on in the city. He talks to literally everyone.”

Sephie smiled at Chen, but was quietly contemplating meeting the new guy.

She was still worried about being wrong. Misha

noticed her look. He simply clicked his tongue at her, which caused her to look at him. He gave her a stern look. He had his

hands on his hips and was tapping his pinky against his hip. It was exactly what she needed to break that thought pattern. She smiled widely at him, relaxing her shoulders.

“First up, DJ,” Stephen said in our earpieces. Andrei and Viktor walked outside to greet him and pat him down, while Misha

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moved to the door. Ivan and I stood in front of Sephie. As we were waiting on D] to make it upstairs, Stephen announced the arrival of the other two. “Gus is here and I’m guessing that’s Oscar with him.” Ivan and I instinctively moved closer to Sephie, given that we didn’t know this new person. I would feel better once Viktor and Andrei checked him for weapons. We heard Viktor knock once. Misha opened the door for Gus and Oscar. Gus, as usual, found Sephie first, smiling at her before acknowledging anyone else in the room. I felt her hand find mine, timidly. She was still worried.

“Do I want to know what Trino has said about me this time?” she asked Gus after seeing his smile.

Gus laughed. “He sings your praises anytime he hears your name.” He looked at me. “Yours too, sir. Trino doesn’t like many people, but he likes both of you. It’s very obvious to anyone who’s known him for very long.”

“I’m glad to hear that. I’m also very thankful that he made it out okay yesterday. That’s one reason why we called you here. We need to move quickly. I’m worried that the Mexicans are going to start a war with Trino and I’d like to be able to offer my help. if

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that happens. I need to take care of the other bosses here first, though,” I said. I glanced to Ivan who put his arm around Sephie’s shoulders. I squeezed her hand once before walking toward Gus, DJ, and Oscar.

“I’m assuming you guys already have a plan for how to take out the warehouses?” Gus asked.

“Indeed. We’d like to hit them all at the same time, which makes it problematic for us. We need your help to make this simultaneous,” I said.

“What are we talking about here? How are we ensuring the warehouses won’t be a problem any longer? Fire? Raining bullets? Bombs? Flood of Biblical proportions? What’s the catastrophe of choice?” Oscar asked.

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