

## King of the Underworld Chapter 371 - 380

### Chapter 371

Sephie

“Battista arrived last night. He wants to meet tomorrow. He made reservations at his favorite spot,” Vitaliy said during a lull in the conversation at dinner.

“Please tell me his favorite spot is someplace fun, like the zoo,” I said.

Vitaliy laughed. “Net, but you might be able to talk him into it next time.”

“Da mmit. Missed opportunity,” I said, “Where’s his favorite spot? Although I can tell you right now, I’m not going to enjoy it as much as I would the 700.”

“He loves one restaurant at his hotel downtown. He always has important meetings there. But since he owns the place, he’s usually the only one in the restaurant for those meetings. It’s very convenient,” Vitaliy said.

“What hotel?”

“Same one Mr. Turner works at,” Ivan said.

“Oh, that hotel. Sh it. That means I have to wear heels. Yet another point for the zoo over this boring ass hotel,” I said. “But my consolation prize is I’ll get to say hi to Mr. Turner.” I hadn’t been back to that hotel since the night of the ball. I couldn’t say I was looking forward to it.

While everyone was busy talking, Ivan caught me off to the side. “No one is leaving your side this time, princess. Especially not me. Especially not your goddamn prince.”

“You’re getting very good at reading my emotions, Squish. Even when they’re not out of control yet.”

This one was easy, princess. I have the same fear as you do. There’s no way I’m letting what happened last time ever happen again. You won’t be alone at any point. Might make the bathroom situation awkward, but that’s a sacrifice I’m willing to make,” he said, grinning at me.

I laughed at him. “You’re my favorite, Squish. Don’t tell the others.”

It was quite the sight to behold when we arrived at the hotel the following day, Between the seven of us, plus Vitaliy and all of his security, you would’ve thought a foreign dignitary had arrived.

Mr. Turner, always happy to see us, was waiting to open the door as we walked up the steps. “Miss Sephie, you look beautiful as always,” he said, bowing his head slightly.

I stepped away from Adrik to give Mr. Turner a hug. “It’s good to see you, Mr. Turner. How are things today? Good? Quiet?”

“You know I love my quiet days, Miss Sephie.” Before he let me go, he whispered in my ear, “come see me when you can.” I nodded as discreetly as I could. Mr. Turner very rarely asked me to come see him, so I had a feeling he knew something he thought I should know. He winked at me as I stepped back to Adrik. “I’m glad to see you fine gentlemen taking care of her as usual,” he said, nodding to Adrik and the guys. He opened the door, stepping to the side for everyone to enter.

Once inside the hotel, Vitaliy looked at Adrik and I, somewhat surprised. “He used to be my neighbor. I’m nowhere near that friendly to just anybody.” I said, laughing at the relieved expression on Vitaliy’s face.

Battista was waiting on us in the restaurant. It was just as Vitaliy said it would be. The entire restaurant was empty, except us.

Battista was around the same age as Vitaliy, maybe slightly younger. His alive skin and black hair gave him the appearance of a much younger man, however. Vitaliy greeted him as warmly as he was capable of. When Adrik stepped away from me to shake his hand, the guys all silently moved closer to me, effectively boxing me in. I smiled to myself.

L

There were two other people with Battista, which was unexpected, at least to me. He introduced the first one to Vitaliy. I watched as Vitaliy shook his hand, his cold smile on his face, like normal. The second person had gotten a phone call as we were walking up, so she had stepped away just before we got to them. She had finished the call and was walking back to us. I noticed Ivan, who was standing partially in front of me suddenly stiffened. No sooner had I felt his unease and I felt his protective bubble go up

around me. Since no one was necessarily paying attention to us yet, I grabbed his hand, asking quietly, "what's going on?"

He squeezed my hand and turned to look at me. He looked shocked, but I could also see a flash of fear across his face before he got it under control. "Something's happening. It's different. I'm okay, but I might need you," he said. I nodded my head,

keeping my hand in his as he turned back toward Adrik, Vitaliy, and Battista.

I watched as Battista introduced the woman to Vitaliy. When Vitaliy shook her hand, I noticed the very quick look of shock flash

across his face before it went back to cold and hard. Adrik noticed too, as he cut his eyes over to me before looking back at

Battista as he introduced him to the woman.

Vitaliy turned toward me, motioning me to come and meet Battista. I looked at Ivan, silently asking if he would be okay without

me for a moment. He nodded his head and let go of my hand. Adrik saw the exchange between us before I walked to his side.

After I greeted everyone, he quickly searched my eyes to find out what had happened with Ivan. He raised an eyebrow, but said nothing as he gently pushed me back toward Ivan and the other guys. I grabbed Ivan's hand as soon as I was partially behind him and Andrei once more. I felt him relax slightly, but he was definitely on high alert. There was something about the woman that he definitely didn't like. I had a feeling that Vitaliy didn't like it either, but I couldn't exactly ask in front of everyone.

We sat down at a table that was large enough that Ivan could sit next to me. I kept my hand on his knee under the table the entire time. I'd only ever seen him like that when he was at the hospital, so it was unnerving that he was having this reaction now.

Since Vitaliy was with us this time, I wasn't needed for translation purposes. It meant I could sit and observe everyone, which I was happy about. Adrik was happy about that as well. I could tell that Battista and Vitaliy had a good relationship. It was obvious that Vitaliy was at ease with Battista. Adrik was too. The other man that was with Battista was quiet, but honest when he spoke.

While Battista was loud and boisterous, his associate was quieter and almost shy. The woman was a little bit of a different story.

She wasn't quite as old as Vitaliy and Battista, but she was older than Adrik by at least a decade, if not more. It did not stop her from gazing longingly at him every chance she got. After his initial introduction, Adrik hadn't even glanced at her, but she was almost fixated on him. She didn't talk much, but when she did, she was fake. Very fake. I did not get a good feeling from her, but she wasn't talking enough for me to figure out why I didn't like her.

Every time she spoke, Ivan would tense. He would look away from her, even. It was starting to concern me. After they got the important business out of the way and the conversation turned to more meaningless subjects, I leaned over to Adrik. "I need to get Ivan out of here for at least a few minutes. He's going to escort me to the bathroom. I could use Andrei too, if that isn't going to cause too much of a scene."

He nodded his head. He leaned in, a small smile on his face as he kissed me gently, his lips lingering on mine before I went to get up. He looked to Andrei and jerked his head slightly toward me as I stood up, excusing myself for a moment. Ivan was immediately by my side, as was Andrei. We walked quickly toward the restroom at the back of the restaurant.

Once we were away from everyone, I asked Ivan what was happening. "I'm not exactly sure, princess. But that woman, I can't look at her. Does she look normal to you?" he asked. He sounded almost afraid when he asked me.

"I don't get a good feeling from her, but I can't figure out why. Have you gotten anything from her, Bubba?"

"Same as you. I don't like her, but she's not saying enough for me to figure out why I don't. Why can't you look at her, Ivan?"

Andrei asked.

He was quiet for a minute, looking from me to Andrei nervously. "Squish, Bubba has known about your past longer than I have.

He knows what happened to you. He heard you one night talking in your sleep. You can say whatever you need to say," I said, grabbing his hand once again.

He looked almost relieved to know that Andrei knew about his past. "Part of the reason that I'm so haunted by the doctors that

used to experiment on me is that their faces never looked normal to me. Princess, when you said that my demons pull other people's demons out so the world can see them like I do, I'm not sure if you knew how accurate that statement is. I never saw the doctors' faces. I saw the demons inside them. It's only ever happened at the facility and I had written it off to being a kid and being tortured, but I'm seeing it in that woman out there."

"You're not the only one. Vitaliy gut something from her too. I saw his look when he shook her hand that meant something was off about her," I said.

"Vitaliy is different too?" Andrei asked.

I smiled and nodded my head. "That's why we told him about you and Misha. He felt it when he shook my hand. That's how he's special. He can feel if a person is good or bad when he touches them. We all feel different to him, for the record."

"Must be where Boss gets it," he said.

I glanced at Ivan. "What do you need to be able to make it through the rest of this meeting? I'll fake an illness to get us out of here if I have to."

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Chapter 372

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Sephie

“I’m not sure, princess. This has never happened before so I don’t know how to handle it. Your hand on me helps keep me grounded,” Ivan said.

“I can do that. Adrik knows something is happening. He’ll be able to get most of this conversation when we get back to the table without me saying anything. I’m hoping he can make the meeting shorter. I don’t want to have to look at her make bedroom eyes at my future husband any longer than I have to anyway,” I said.

Andrei laughed. “She’s worse than Giana about making it obvious.”

“Right? Is there no subtlety left in this world?” I asked. Before we walked back to the table, I pulled Ivan toward me. I wrapped my arms around his neck, knowing he was struggling to keep it together.

“We’ll get out of here as soon as we can. You’re doing great and I’m proud of you,” I said. He held onto me tightly for a few moments before I felt his arms relax around me.

Andrei and Ivan both walked slightly in front of me as we walked back to the tables. I had a hold of Ivan’s hand still. I was mostly lost in my own head, thinking about Ivan and how to help him when I felt his grip on my hand tighten. I looked up, snapped back to reality.

The woman was sitting in my chair, turned toward Adrik, talking to him quietly. Adrik had leaned as far away from her as he could without falling off his chair. He was forced to look at her, but would only glance at her before looking away, I said to Ivan and Andrei, “get behind me. hand on my back, I need to let go.”

Ivan put your

We still had some distance before we were back at the table, so they moved instantly behind me and I felt Ivan's hand on the small of my back. I crossed my arms over my chest as we walked the last few steps to the table. We were walking behind the woman and Adrik, so while he knew we were there, she still hadn't seen us. I cleared my throat as I stopped behind my chair this woman was sitting in. She continued talking to Adrik like she didn't hear me, so I cleared my throat louder this time. She finally glanced at me but didn't make a move to get up. I could feel everyone's eyes on me, but I was so angry at her blatant disregard for my presence that I didn't care. As she was talking to Adrik, I could hear the thoughts in her head. I could also feel the hatred she had for me. She was doing this on purpose.

I looked at Vitaliy, then to Battista. In Italian, I said loud enough that everyone could hear me, "Battista, do you always surround yourself with such ill-mannered women, or you brought her special for us? If you did, I'd like to thank you. It's been quite some time since I've had the chance to make another woman cry."

Vitaliy couldn't contain his laughter. Even Battista looked amused. The woman stopped talking to Adrik, noticing everyone looking at her. She finally made a move to stand up. When she turned around to look at me, I felt Ivan's hand press into my back at the same time I felt his bubble go up around me. When she looked at me, I saw exactly what Ivan saw. It wasn't her face that I saw.

It was something entirely different and not exactly human.

As she turned to walk back to her original seat, she looked at me with every bit of hatred she could muster. It was very much the same feeling that I had when Sal and Armando looked at me when they took me and Ivan. I didn't like it. I felt the panic start, but

I pushed my anger to the surface as much as possible, trying to override the panic. Ivan and Andrei both caught on to what I was doing and I felt their anger feed into mine. The panic was pushed down and I was able to hold her gaze until she looked away.

As she moved to walk past me, I said in Italian, so only she could hear, “try to touch him again and you will no longer have functioning hands.”

She didn’t respond, but she walked very quickly to her original seat. I graciously sat back down with as pleasant of a smile on my face as I could muster. Adrik moved his chair closer to me, so I could still keep a hand on Ivan. He stretched his arm across my lap, leaning over to kiss me in front of everyone. I had to admit to feeling ecstatic when I looked at her and saw her red face at seeing him give me affection.

Battista and Vitaliy had been quietly conversing while this was happening. Vitally caught my eye, winking at me. The woman was much quieter for the rest of the meeting, but would still interject occasionally. Her little stunt seemed to irritate Battista, as he was much colder to her for the rest of the meeting. Before, he would let her talk and seemed to take her opinion into account. After, he was very dismissive of her and would interrupt her frequently.

Ivan managed to hold it together, as long as I could keep a hand on him. I was anxious for the meeting to end so I could tell him that I saw what he saw. I was curious if Andrei could also see it. The woman still took every opportunity to look at Adrik, but he never took his hand off my lap and he made sure to look at me more often than normal. He practically didn’t look at anyone else the rest of the time.

When the meeting finally came to a close and everyone stood up to leave, I felt his arm around my waist, pulling me as close to

him as possible. I made sure that she saw it. Adrik walked to Battista, shaking his hand, never letting go of me. The guys were close behind us. Battista stepped closer to us, taking my hand. He turned it over, kissing the back of my hand as he said in Italian quietly, “you’ve done me a huge favor today. I’m in your debt.” He smiled warmly at me as he stepped back and went back to talking to Vitaliy,

While Vitaliy and Battista continued to talk, Adrik looked at his watch. I knew he didn’t have anymore meetings scheduled today, but he still told them he needed to get back for one. They both nodded, both of them smiling at me as we turned to leave. I caught her staring at us one last time as we turned to walk away from everyone. I felt Adrik’s hand slide down to my a ss as we walked away. I could barely keep my laughter in until we were out of the restaurant,

“You’re just as savage as I am now. I f\*\*king love it.”

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### Chapter 373

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Sephie

As soon as we were safely in the penthouse, I stopped Ivan and hugged him again. He was much more relaxed after leaving the hotel, but I knew he was still completely unnerved by what had happened. He wrapped his giant arms around me tightly, picking me up for a few moments. He just stood there, my feet dangling, holding onto me as he slowly calmed himself down.

When he set me down, I said, "I saw what you saw." I quickly looked at Andrei. "Did you see anything when she finally got her ass out of my chair and turned to look at me?"

"I saw her extreme hatred for you, if that's what you mean," Andrei said.

I looked at Ivan's shocked face. "She didn't look human," I said.

Andrei started to put it together. "That's why you panicked when she looked at you."

I nodded my head. Misha, always curious, said, "okay, you guys are going to have to explain what the hell happened. I also want to know what you said to Battista to get that woman out of your chair."

Before I answered him, I asked, "did you get anything from her, Misha?"

He nodded his head, emphatically. "I was insanely nauseous the entire time we were there. But only when looking at her."

Before I could speak, Ivan moved to lean against the counter in the kitchen.

He looked at everyone, sighed, then said, "when I

was a kid, my mom sent me to a research facility where they did horrible experiments on me because of my inability to feel

pain. She didn't know that would happen. They gave her some other story and promised to send my siblings to school. My dad

had died shortly after my youngest brother was born, so she was trying to raise four kids on her own and she agreed. She thought I would be taken care of. The reason that hospitals f\*\*k me up is because I'm reliving what they did to me in there every single time. It wasn't just physical torture. They tried to break me. They tried to turn me into a monster and they enjoyed it."

As he was talking, I hopped up on the counter next to him. I hooked my arm through his and rested my head on his shoulder. I felt him squeeze my arm as he continued talking.

"When Sephie told you all that my demons pull other people's demons out so the world can see them as I do, she didn't know how accurate she was. When I was at the facility, I never saw the doctors' real faces. I saw the demons inside them. That's why I'm so haunted by it and why I fight so hard anytime I have to go to the hospital. I'm trying to kill the doctors, but they keep coming back. I can't see whoever is in front of me. I only see the demons' faces from that facility."

I glanced around the room at everyone's shocked faces. Ivan continued, "that woman at the hotel today. I saw the same thing with her that I saw with the doctors. As soon as she walked up to introduce herself to Vitaliy, I saw it."

"Vitaliy saw something, too. I caught his look when he touched her," Adrik said.

"I saw it when she stood up to get the f\*\*k out of my chair," I said. They all laughed at my irritation.

"What did you say to Battista, gazelle?" Misha asked.

I giggled. "I asked him if he always surrounded himself with such ill-mannered women or if he brought her special for us. Then I said if he did, I needed to thank him because it's been a really long time since I made another woman cry."

They all laughed. Ivan slid his arm around my shoulders, hugging me to his side. "What about when she turned to leave? You said something else to her that nobody else caught," Ivan said.

I cut my eyes to him, unable to hide my smile. "I told her if she tries to touch Adrik again that she will no longer have functioning hands."

They all erupted in even louder laughter than the first time.

"What did Battista say to you before we left?" Adrik asked.

"That's where it gets even more interesting. He told me I did him a huge favor and that he's in my debt now," I said.

"His attitude toward that woman changed after you put her in her place," Stephen said. "I don't know what they were saying, but he was very dismissive of her after it happened when he wasn't before."

"I noticed that too," I said.

"She was worse than Giana about staring, though," Misha said.

Andrei snapped his fingers and pointed to Misha. "Same."

Adrik scoffed. "I don't even know how you knew she tried to touch me because it happened while you were gone, but it made me sick."

I hopped off the counter and walked to Adrik, clearly feeling his disgust. I couldn't help but love him a little more for it. I wrapped my arms around his waist. "I f\*\*king love you," I said as I rested my head against his shoulder.

"I think there's more to that woman being there today than we know about, especially considering what Battista said to Sephie before we left," Viktor said.

"We definitely need to have this conversation with Vitaliy when he gets back. I know he knows something about her that he couldn't say in front of everyone." Adrik said.

“I just want to point out how convenient it is that you’re so good at reading my mind now. I didn’t have to tell you Ivan was unnerved. I was planning on letting you figure out why he was unnerved when we got back, but that heifer put a hold on those plans.”

Adrik pulled me closer. “You’re adorable when you get all bitchy,” he said, kissing my temple.

The guys took advantage of Adrik’s mostly free afternoon while we waited on Vitaliy to make it back to the penthouse. They all took care of little things they’d been putting off because of more important tasks. Adrik had some work in his office to get done, so I went with him so the guys could! come and go as needed.

I stretched out on the couch, suddenly exhausted from everything the past few days. I tried to stay awake, but inevitably fell asleep. Since Ivan and I were taken, I hadn’t fallen asleep once without someone next to me. I wasn’t even sure it was possible anymore.

It was possible. It happened.

I wasn’t sure how long I’d been asleep when I felt Adrik’s warm hands on me, gently shaking me awake. “Solnishko, you were having a bad dream. I need you to wake up.”

I was somewhat startled awake and immediately worried I’d been talking in my sleep. “Shi t. Was I talking?”

He smiled sweetly at me, his warm hand resting against my cheek. “You were mumbling, but I could see the shaking from across the office. Andrei is on his way back so you can go back to sleep on him. You are overdue for sleeping in. It took you two seconds to fall asleep when you laid down.”

“At least I wasn’t yelling this time,” I said, sitting up.

Andrei walked in, looking somewhat concerned, but he relaxed when he saw me awake and talking to Adrik. “Spider monkey. I’m surprised you even fell asleep without anyone next to you. I didn’t think that was a thing you could do anymore.”

“I didn’t either, Bubba. You were right, apparently. I am overdue for sleeping in. I’m really tired,” I said.

“Being bitchy always makes you tired,” Adrik said, grinning at me. He stood up, leaning down to kiss my forehead. “Go back to sleep, love. Andrei can keep you warm. I just have a few more things to finish up and we can go back upstairs.”

Andrei sat down at the end of the couch, stretching one leg out along the back of the couch, opening his arms for me. I curled up in his arms, resting my head on his almost warm enough chest and was asleep again in a matter of minutes.

Author’s Note: Thank you all for sticking with this story for this long. I love reading all the comments and watching the story unfold through different eyes. I try to respond to all the comments, but please know that I read them all, even if I don’t respond.

Thank you so much for loving my characters as much as I do!

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Chapter 374

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Sephthe

When I woke again, I was in the penthouse. I knew I was laying on Adrik now instead of Andrei without even opening my eyes. I could feel Adrik's perfect warmth against me. I started to stir and felt his arms hold me tighter.

"Mmm, I still love when you hold me down as I wake up," I said. I could feel the vibration of his quiet laugh in his chest. I looked up at him. "You moved me and I didn't wake up?" I asked, realizing I was no longer in the office.

I heard Andrei laugh from one of the other couches. "You were completely out, spider monkey."

"We'd all been talking for like half an hour, thinking you'd wake up. You never did, so Andrei carried you up here and handed you off to Boss," Misha said.

"Guess I really am overdue," I said. I looked around to see if Vitaliy and Aleksei were back yet.

"They'll be here soon. Along with dinner," Viktor said.

It was that moment that I realized how late it had gotten and that it was now dark outside. "Sh it," I said, under my breath.

"You need a break, Seph. Don't feel bad," Stephen said. "You're always extra tired when new stuff happens. You've had multiple new things happen lately."

I looked at Andrei, then to Ivan. "That reminds me. I forgot to ask if you two knew you were pushing your anger to me when I was fighting to keep the panic at bay at the hotel."

Andrei nodded his head. "I could feel you panic but then I felt you get angry and figured out what you were trying to do. I had no

idea how to do it, but I tried to push mine to you. I know you can deal with insane amounts of anger, but you struggle with the panic and fear. I was hoping the anger would override everything else.”

“You’re so smart and so handsome. It’s like you’re a double threat,” I said.

“It was a little different for me. Your anger amps mine up to the point that it’s all I notice. I felt yours getting stronger, which made mine get stronger. I think it was having the same effect on me as it was you because it calmed my nerves when looking at her,”

Ivan said. “It was a welcome change.”

“That’s different,” I said, chewing on my bottom lip. “I felt your bubble too, Squish. A couple of times.”

“Have you learned how to keep your demon eyes under control, Seph? I was sitting across from you and I didn’t see them once when you were talking to her. I was incredibly impressed,” Stephen asked. We hadn’t had a chance to fill him and Viktor in on my mood ring eyes yet.

“She’s been wearing contacts since we went to Panama. Her eyes have a mind of their own now. The demon eyes aren’t the only trick she can do now, but she has problems controlling it. Since we were all a little punchy after Trino’s guys had such a problem with her, Boss had contacts made for her so she wouldn’t have to worry about anyone seeing and we wouldn’t have to kill anyone,” Ivan said. He had his devilish grin on his face.

“What else are they doing, sestrichka?” Viktor asked.

“It’s easier if I show you. Be right back,” I said, running to the bathroom to take the contacts out. When I came back out, they’d all moved to the kitchen, where there was better lighting.

I walked to Adrik, knowing how much he loved seeing my eyes change to blue. The smile on his face told me they had changed.

He called Viktor and Stephen over so they could see.

“Her demon eyes started as the brown overtaking the other colors and turning darker. Now it’s to the point that they’re black when it happens. The other colors started doing it now too whenever she feels different emotions. Blue means she’s thinking about how much she loves me. Green means she’s being a shi t and sarcastic,” Adrik said.

“Now that we’re all here, I want to see the wh ite,” Misha said. He was always the instigator and I loved him for it.

“Wh ite?” Stephen asked.

I nodded. “When I get scared, they turn almost whi te. There’s just a hint of blue still, but it’s mostly wh ite. The other day when the Wonder Twins asked me about my demon eyes, I showed them the other colors but I didn’t want to show them the whi te because Ivan feels me panic and you guys were gone to get Vitaliy. I didn’t want to distract him. We haven’t tested it to see how far away it works, but my panic and fear are very strong so he and Adrik get punched with it when it happens.”

“It’s scarier than her demon eyes when it happens,” Adrik said.

Viktor laughed, the uncertainty evident in his deep voice when he said, “I’m not sure I want to see that, then. I’m still trying to get a handle on your demon eyes when that happens.”

“Aww, Papa Bear. It’s never directed at you. You’re my favorite,” I said, smiling sweetly at him.

“I don’t want to fr eak you out and make you panic, but I’m definitely curious,” Stephen said.

I looked at Adrik, who looked concerned. “You don’t have to show them. You struggle to control your fear. I don’t want you to be overwhelmed, but I will be right here to calm you down if you need it,” he said. I chewed on my bottom lip for a moment, then said, “I have an idea.” I stepped in front of him, pulling his arms around my waist.

“You always help so maybe you can keep it from getting out of control, but still let me feel it enough that they can see.” He wrapped his arms around my waist tighter, leaning down and resting his chin on my shoulder, I closed my eyes, taking a deep breath. I started to replay the afternoon’s events in my head when that woman stood up and looked at me. It didn’t take long and I felt his grip on me tighten as we both felt my panic coming on. Ivan stood up a little straighter, followed by Misha and Andrei. “It’s working,” they all said at the same time.

I opened my eyes to see Stephen’s shocked expression. It worked. Misha and Andrei also walked closer so they could see.

Viktor couldn’t help himself and also walked closer to see. They were speechless. I could feel my panic starting to grow stronger as I looked at their shocked faces in front of me.

I felt Adrik’s lips close to my ear. “You’re with me, love. You’re safe. We all love you.” He just kept repeating those words until he felt me start to relax.

I finally took a deep breath. I had closed my eyes when he started talking to me. Their shocked expressions had an unexpected affect on me, so when I opened my eyes, they were the almost amber that meant I was sad. Adrik felt the shift. They all saw the new color before he turned me around.

“Why are you sad, spider monkey?” Andrei asked as I hid my face in Adrik’s chest.

“So that color brown means she’s sad?” Stephen asked. “That’s different than her normal brown.”

Adrik nodded his head. “I’ve only ever seen that amber color once before. When she was thinking about Trino seeing his m om for the last time,” he said. He gently put his hand on the back of my neck, pulling me away from him so he could search my eyes.

He cursed under his breath, pulling me back to him. “We love you no matter what, Sephie. That’s never going to change.”

I heard Andrei quietly explain to the others and I knew he had done his own searching. “She doesn’t want to scare us with everything that’s happened. She doesn’t want us to look at her differently, either. She’s sad at the thought of us feeling uncomfortable around her now.”

We heard the door to the penthouse open, signaling that Vitaliy and Aleksei were back. Adrik kept his arms around me, but walked us quickly back to the bedroom. Once we were alone, he stepped back from me, looking me in the eyes. “They were just shocked. The white eyes are scarier than the demon eyes the first time you see them. They still love you as much as they ever have, Sephie. Nothing is going to change that.”

I nodded my head, but didn’t say anything. I walked to the bathroom so I could put the contacts back in. He followed me, standing in his favorite spot behind me, his chin once again resting on my shoulder while he watched me put the contacts in. It had become one of my favorite things. It was such a simple thing, but I found myself loving the little moments we had together.

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Chapter 375

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Adri

Sephie still felt slightly upset, but she was trying to smile through it. She turned toward me after putting her contacts back in, smiling sweetly up at me. She reached up and pressed her lips to mine. "I love you." she said as she grabbed my hand to walk back to the kitchen.

The guys were still in the kitchen as Sephir led me back out. They looked concerned, but I could tell that she smiled at them and softened. Vitalis and Aleksei were standing with them. Sephie didn't waste any time. "Vitaliy, what did you feel when you took that woman's hand all of their faces today"

He looked surprised, but there was also an air of amusement. "It's good to see you

he said, a shy smile across his face.

my question and I'll lay over you, but not before. I saw your react when you touched her," she said, crossing her arms across

her chest. The guys were struggling to not laugh

Vitaliy chuckled, but answered her question. "She's very evil. Battista owes of my ability. Occasionally, he brings people for my approval. She was one that he was seeking approval on," he said.

"Then why did he tell me that I did him a huge favor and he's in my debt now before we left?" she asked

"Because you gave him a valid reason to get rid of her quickly. They've been working on a few small things together and it's gone

well, but he said he's never felt completely comfortable with her. He just didn't know why. That's when he usually seeks out my services. She's very influential with a few other business associates of Battista's, so he can't just cut ties with her without a valid reason. You've given him a valid reason. He may be a womanizer and he might openly flirt with women, but never in the disrespectful manner that she did today. He knows his boundaries. She clearly did not, but you did an excellent job of reminding her, *sladkaya*," he said, laughing. "What did you tell her when she got up\*\* "That if she ever tried to touch him again, she would no longer have functioning hands." Sephir said, her arms still folded across her chest. She was clearly still irritated with her.

Vitaliy and Aleksei both looked surprised, but both laughed at Sephie's words. She moved to lean against the counter, chewing on her bottom lip. \*Vitaliy, how does your ability work? Is it a black or white situation? Or do you feel like levels of good and evil?" she asked.

"It's more nuanced than black and white. Like I said before, some people are ruled by good, some by evil. But there's also what they're doing about it. I can feel that too. Some people fight against the evil and ultimately end up being very good people. Some people are ruled by good, but still choose evil for whatever reason. It depends on the person. This woman today, though. There was no good in her," he said.

Sephie looked at Ivan, silently asking if he was okay to tell Vitaliy what happened. He nodded once. "Ivan and I saw her demon. She's completely consumed by it," she said.

Italy raised his eyebrow. "How?"

Septurund, "we're still not entirely sure. It's happened to Ivan before today, but it was rare. It's never happened to me before."

She suddenly looked at like she'd made a connection. "It might've happened with me because your hand was on me. Like I borrowed it from you same as I do Misha."

Vitaliy looked at Ivan. "You can see the face of evil?"

Ivan shrugged his shoulders. "It hasn't happened in so long that I'd convinced myself I was imagining it when it happened before. I was here before."

kid when it

"When you were at the facility?" he asked, Ivan looked surprised, then turned to look between me and Sephie. Vitaliy quickly added, "I figured it out. They told me nothing other than you were incapable of feeling pain and you had a hatred for doctors. I'd heard stories of the facility for years. Your inability to feel pain was highly sought after in Russia years ago. You shut the program down the night you escaped, for the record. You scared them."

Ivan looked stunned. Sephie went to him, sliding her arm around his waist. He put his arm around her shoulders, pulling her to

him. He kissed the top of her head, saying, "thank you. I needed to know that."

He looked back to Vitaliy. "When I was at the facility. I never saw the doctor's faces. It was always their demons. It's why I'm so haunted by it, even still. It hasn't happened

since I got out, so I just convinced myself I was a traumatized kid. But then as soon as that woman turned toward me today. I

could clearly see it on her. Sephie saw it later." He still had his arm around Sephie as he

talked. She quietly stood next to him, happy to be his anchor.

Vitaliy thought for a few minutes, then looked at Andrei and Misha before looking at me. "Did you three get anything from her today?"

“I was nauseous every time I looked at her. That’s how I know something is going to go very badly,” Misha said.

“I didn’t get anything good from her. I didn’t like her, but she didn’t talk enough for me to be able to figure out why I didn’t like her,” Andrei said.

“She made me si ck when she tried to touch me,” I said.

Vitaliy looked at me, both eyebrows raised. “Does that happen often?”

I shook my head no. “Only twice that I can think of and only since I met Sephie. Both times were other women trying to touch me.

There was one time a woman at a bar touched me and it was not as extreme of a reaction. I didn’t like it, but she didn’t make me

si ck. The other two made me si ck. Almost to the point of anger both times.”

For once, Vitaliy smiled at someone other than Sephie. “That’s how it started for me. I was about your age when it started, too,”

he said. “It started with women other than your mother. I couldn’t stand for them to touch me. It was very intermittent when it first

started, but it started to get more prevalent. Then it started happening with everyone. The more I paid attention to it, the more

precise it got. You, though. You’ve always felt different to me, I could always feel something from you, even before I could from

other people. From the first time I held you as a newborn, I could feel you were special. I’d never found anyone else that felt like

you until you brought Sephie to me.”

“And then you found out he brought you five more. You have a very generous son, Vitaliy,” Sephie said, grinning at him.

Vitaliy nodded his head, agreeing with her and unable to hide his smile.

“I think your math is off slightly, Seph,” Stephen said.

Vitaliy looked at him, seriously. “She speaks no lies. You feel the same as the rest of them. I don’t randomly put my hand on your

shoulder because I'm a warm and fuzzy guy, Stephen. I didn't believe her at first either, so I checked. All of you. You're all the same."

Stephen and Viktor looked at Sephie, the surprise clearly written on their faces. She couldn't help but laugh. "You both have something special about you, but you're very timid about believing it. We don't know what it is until you start to believe it for yourselves. It's also not an absolute guarantee that you'll figure it out in this lifetime, which is just fine. You'll figure it out in your own time, on your own terms. This is a lot to take in for all of us. You're both dealing with your own things on top of everything else. There's no time limit on any of this. It will happen when you're ready," she said.

They were both quiet for a few minutes, mulling over what she'd just said. Stephen's phone beeped, to indicate dinner had arrived. He finally looked up at Sephie. "Vlad is going to be so pissed that I kept this from him for this long," he said, as he stood up to go downstairs.

We all laughed as once again Vitaliy and Aleksei were left confused at just who this Vlad person was and why he would be pissed at Stephen. I found myself loving Sephie a little more for her random silliness that gave us so many of these moments now.

I never wanted her to stop.

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 376

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Adrik

I woke the next morning before Sephie. I fully expected her to stay asleep. She was so tired last night, even after she slept most of the afternoon, that she fell asleep in under two minutes. She was laying across my chest in her favorite spot, her fingers lightly playing on my chest. I ran my hand through her curls, causing her to snuggle into me more. I continued to run my hand over her body, loving the quiet moments I got with her.

“Good morning,” she said quietly, without moving.

“I didn’t expect you to wake up with me this morning. You can go back to sleep, love. I know you’re exhausted,” I said, my fingers playing with her curls.

“I feel bad sleeping when your father is here. Feels tude,” she said, finally picking her head up and looking at me.

“He won’t care, Sephie. He’s not the boss of you,” I said, grinning at her.

Her smile stretched across her face. “Somehow I don’t think he’s going to stay in the city for too long. He’s very grumpy about having to meet with people he hasn’t seen in years. I think there’s a reason he hasn’t seen them in years, but they clearly can’t take the hint.”

“He’s still considerably less grumpy than I’ve ever seen him before, since he met you,” I said.

“It’s because I know he’s a cheeseball and he’s trying to be extra nice so I don’t tell everyone else he’s a cheeseball,” she said, climbing over me to get out of bed.

“Have you called him that yet?”

“No, not yet. I haven’t found the right moment yet, but I will. I’m looking forward to it,” she said, looking back at me grinning ear-to-ear as she walked in the bathroom. “What’s your schedule like today?” she called from the bathroom.

“Light. I have a few meetings, but they should be short. Neal is the last meeting. We’re finishing up removing Armando and Ricardo from the building project. He’ll be happy to see you, if you want to stop by,” I said.

“That might work out. I forgot to tell you that Mr. Turner wants me to come see him. He whispered it to me yesterday when I hugged him. He very rarely asks me to come see him, so I know he has something he needs to tell me. He always works the early shift, so he’ll be home by early afternoon, she said, walking out of the bathroom as she was putting her hair up on top of her head. My breath caught as I watched her walking around in nothing but my shirt, her hair messy from the night before. She caught me staring at her, still in bed. She walked back to me, climbing on top of me. She hadn’t put her contacts in yet, so her eyes changed to blue right away, making me smile.

“What? You’re beautiful in the mornings,” I said as she was silently giving me a hard time for staring at her.

She gave me her heart-stopping smile as she held my face in both her hands. She leaned in and kissed me sweetly. “I love you, you know.”

The few meetings I had went by quickly. I was looking forward to the meeting with Neal at the end of the day. I was anxious to get Armando and Ricardo off the building project so it could continue to move forward. I didn’t need either one of them to make the project happen. I brought Armando on as a courtesy. At the time, I still believed he was loyal to me and was going to reward

him for it. Once I found out his loyalty was in question, I had them start the process of removing him from the project.

That process was going to be finalized today. Neal was bringing the paperwork to the office for me to look over and sign. What Sephie didn't realize yet was that I replaced Armando with her on the project. I had discussed it with Neal first, as he was a close business associate that I'd been partnering with for years. He was very happy with that idea. "She's got more business sense in her little finger than Armando does in his entire body. I've never met someone so successful and yet so dumb in my entire life. I don't understand how he's stayed in business this long. But she's clearly just getting started," Neal had said when I brought it up to him. "If we bring her on for no other reason than her marketing and persuasion skills, it'll be worth it. He laughed. "She has a unique way with words."

Neal didn't know why I wanted Armando and Ricardo off the project, but he also knew well enough to not ask. He did an excellent job of keeping the legal businesses and the illegal ones separate. He'd made a significant amount of money with me over the years, so he never said a word about the darker side of my business dealings. Even still, he seemed relieved to not be working with Armando any longer.

He walked into my office promptly at 4. We ran through the paperwork, discussing a few changes. "There are no traces of Armando or Ricardo on any of the documents for this project any longer. Sephie is also now a partner on the project, as you requested. I just need her signature on the few places that are marked in red. Once that's complete, it'll be official. We're

breaking ground on the first of next month. We've still got a few contractors to find and hire, but there's time to do so before they're needed," Neal said.

"I have a guy. He does great work. He's only got a small crew though, but he's very dependable. I'll send you his information. You won't be disappointed if you use him," I said.

Neal nodded. "That'll save me a huge amount of time trying to find someone else."

We were discussing a few more random details on the project, when Sephie walked into the office, followed by Ivan and Andrei.

Neal stood to greet her, extending his hand to her. "Sephie, it's good to see you again. How have you been?"

"Hi, Neal. I'm good. You?" she said, taking his hand.

"I'm good. I need your signature while you're here. Then we can get this paperwork filed and official by the end of the day today.

That'll make me very happy," he said.

Sephie looked at me, surprised. "Um, why do you need my signature on anything?"

Neal looked to me, surprised. He wasn't aware that I hadn't told her yet. I smirked at him. "You're replacing Armando and Ricardo on the building project," I said, enjoying the look of surprise on her face.

"Um, why am I replacing them? I don't know anything about business!"

"That's where you're wrong, Sephie. You know more than you give yourself credit for. You're the reason we have all the restaurant space leased out before we've even broken ground on the project. I'm pretty sure if we put you in charge of the marketing for the office space and apartments, those numbers would also jump to 100%," Neal said.

"But..." she was too stunned to be able to argue. She was cute when she was speechless. I just smiled, holding a pen up for her

as Neal flipped through the paperwork finding the places she needed to sign.

“No buts. Just sign,” I said, winking at her.

She squinted her eyes at me, but walked over and took the pen from me. Neal pointed out each section she needed to sign.

They were done in a matter of minutes and the paperwork was finally official.

My plan to completely erase Armando from history

was one step closer to completion.

## King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

### Chapter 377

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Adrik

After Neal left, I turned to Sephie, who was still mostly in shock. I just pulled her in my lap. I knew I'd made the right decision.

She would figure it out eventually, once she got over her surprise. It was also a guarantee that she'd come to more of my meetings. I wasn't mad at that.

"Did you see Mr. Turner?" I asked, brushing a stray curl from her face.

She nodded, still chewing on her bottom lip. She glanced at Ivan and Andrei, then looked back at me. "You know he knows just

about every influential person in the city, because they all eventually come to the hotel for business. He overhears everything,

too. He's also said it never fails to surprise him how freely people will talk in front of him, like he's not even there. We used to joke about it when I was still working at the restaurant," she said.

"Who did he overhear this time?" I asked, my hand rubbing her back lightly.

"He said the mayor was at the hotel a week or two ago. He was talking about replacing the police commissioner, Henry, as he

left the hotel. If he gets re-elected, of course. Then, he said that Henry was at the hotel with a few other police chiefs a few days

after the mayor and they were talking about how to prove the mayor is in Sal's pocket. He said a few of the police chiefs were

sure they had enough evidence to prove the mayor was dirty. But then he said two of those police chiefs were back at the hotel,

with the mayor, like three days after that. He didn't hear anything that time, but he said it looked very suspicious, given what

everyone was talking about the first time around," she said.

I looked to Ivan. "Does he know the police chiefs?"

He nodded his head. "He said he can't remember one of their names, but he recognized him. He gave me the name of the other one."

Andrei added, "he's also nervous. I've never seen him nervous before, so I might've snooped. One of the police chiefs that met with the mayor saw him walking into the building one afternoon. He was walking down the street. Mr. Turner was sure he recognized him and he watched him walk in. He thinks he's been followed a few times since."

"You still have guys on him, correct?" I asked Ivan.

He nodded his head. "He still doesn't know. I was going to talk to Viktor and add more in the morning. It's possible he's noticing our guys following him now because he's nervous. Once we see what the extra guys can find, we'll know if he's really being followed or if he just now noticed our guys on him."

"You've had him followed this whole time?" Sephie asked.

I chuckled. "I assigned guys to him when he moved here, just in case. We had him watched after you left your apartment, but I assigned a regular team to him once he moved here."

"Why?"

"Because I knew you were fond of him and that he'd always watched over you when you lived at your apartment," I said, smiling at her confusion..

"You did that? Really?"

"Of course, solnishko. It would make you very unhappy if something were to happen to him. I'd like to prevent that."

Her beautiful smile crept across her face. "I love you," she sighed as she put her head on my shoulder.

"I think it's worth calling Henry. I can take the files on the police chiefs back down to him so we know who the second one is that

met with the mayor. If Henry is trying to build a case against the mayor, he's not going to get very far if those two know everything," Ivan said.

"Find out who the second one is. I want to know what areas they're in, too, along with any other information we have on them.

Then I'll call Henry," I said.

Ivan nodded. Both he and Andrei stood up, walking out of the office to gather the information. Sephie was fidgeting with my collar, her fingers lightly running up and down my neck. I closed my eyes, leaning my head back, enjoying a moment with her.

"Long day?" she asked.

"Not bad. Just stressed. The information we got from Battista so far doesn't make me happy. I'm still irritated about that whole meeting, but most importantly, I'm worried about you."

"Why? I'm okay," she said, lifting her head from my shoulder so she could look at me.

"Mostly. I know you're fighting sleeping. It's starting to show."

Her brow furrowed. "Did I do something? Did I zone out again?"

I chuckled. "No, love. You're just darker. Your light dims when you're exhausted. It's becoming visible. At least to me."

She leaned her head back on my shoulder. "Maybe I am a little tired," she said, her fingers returning to my neck.

"Which is why you should stop fighting sleeping in," I said, holding her tighter.

"You're not the boss of me," she said, as she snuggled in closer to me. I heard her giggle softly.

The guys came back to the office a short time later. Sephie was still in my lap, lazily talking about random things. When they

walked in, she realized. what time it was and went to get up. “I should go upstairs. I’m hungry. I’m sure you’re all hungry, too.”

Viktor smiled his sweet smile that was reserved only for her. “Sephie, I already ordered food. You’re tired. You need a break from taking care of us.”

“Told you,” I said, pulling her back to me.

“I don’t know how I feel about you all having such excellent observation skills now,” she said, resting her head on my shoulder once more.

“It’s your fault. You only have yourself to blame, gazelle. You brought it out of us,” Misha said, trying to be serious, but failing miserably.

“Accountable,” she said, giggling at him without even looking at him.

## King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

### Chapter 378

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Adrik

When I woke the following morning, Sephie was curled up next to me under the covers. I pulled her back against me, but she didn't move. Finally. Instead of trying to wake her up, I kissed the back of her shoulder and got out of bed as quietly as I could. I was worried that she would start to shake once I left, so I stayed close. Luckily, she was wearing pants for once as she was cold last night when we went to bed, so I could move her to one of the guys if needed.

I took the quickest shower possible and got dressed. I didn't hear her talking, but when I walked back to the bed, I could see her shaking. It wasn't bad yet, but she was just starting to mumble as well. A quick text to Andrei and I scooped her up, carrying her to the couch.

It didn't take long for Andrei to come upstairs. He stretched out on the couch, happy he could sleep a little longer too. "I'm so happy she finally did this. I'm so f\*\*king tired," he said.

I raised my eyebrow at him as I laid her next to him. "More so than usual?" I asked.

He nodded his head. "Feels like I got run over by a bus. It started after we were at the hotel. I haven't recovered yet."

That made sense. "New level for you. It always makes her extra tired. Same thing happened to Misha. The only one I haven't seen it affect yet is Ivan," I said. As soon as Sephie was lying next to Andrei, her body started to relax and she curled up next to him. She hugged his arm as he tucked the blanket in around her. It was, in short, adorable. Even if I was jealous that he got to

stay with her and not me. “She’s likely going to sleep until noon, so take advantage of it. I’ll keep everyone as quiet as possible,”

I said. Andrei just nodded his head, looking grateful.

I motioned for the other guys to be quiet when they walked in. Aleksei and Vitaliy walked out of their rooms at the same time. No one had seen Andrei on the couch with Sephie yet.

“Sephie finally lost her battle with sleeping in. She’s on the couch with Andrei.

I tried to leave her in bed, but she was shaking and starting to mumble by the time I got ready. He’s experiencing new level fatigue anyway. It works out for both of them,” I said.

Vitaliy looked curious. “You let her sleep with them?” he asked.

“Gross, dude. She’s like our little sister,” Misha said, a look of reproach on his face..

“It’s also very obvious that she looks at Boss very differently than she looks at the rest of us. She loves us, but she belongs with him,” Ivan said.

I couldn’t help but laugh. “I trust them. And I trust her even more. Since she and Ivan were taken, she hasn’t been able to sleep without someone next to her. It brings her nightmares back if she’s alone. Her body reacts sometimes violently. We noticed it early on that I could stop it, but they’re able to keep it from starting if she’s next to them. And Andrei has the warmest body temperature out of all of them. She’s incredibly sensitive to cold.”

“That girl has lived through just as much trauma as I have, Vitaliy. Some wounds stay fresh for a very long time,” Ivan said.

“She’s also exhausted anytime something new happens to her. She’s had a few new things happen recently. We’re all surprised she lasted this long without sleeping in,” Stephen said.

“What new things?” Vitaliy asked.

Misha chuckled. “She gave me and Andrei an extra “f\*\*k you” boost to drive the point home with your two guys. That’s never happened before. I also think she’s incredibly adorable when she’s feeling protective of us, for the record. She was ready to kill those two,”

“How?”

“You felt her anger when we were in Panama. That level was barely registering on her meter. She can deal with insane levels of anger and outwardly, she looks completely calm. She learned she can push her anger to them that day at the gym. She’s been doing it with me for months now, with other emotions too, but it’s much easier. She had to get it to a raging inferno to be able to push it to them,” I said.

“When we were at the hotel, we figured out we could give it back to her. She panicked when that woman looked at her and she saw her for what she really is. She struggles with her fear, It’s the only emotion she can’t control. Like her anger, all her emotions are that strong, so when she feels fear, it’s to the same insane, inhuman levels, but she can’t control it. Instead of having to deal with that, she was trying to keep her anger levels high enough it would override everything else. Andrei figured out what she was doing and learned he can push his anger back to her. When he did, it fed into mine as well.” Ivan said. “The few times I’ve felt her anger at high levels, I’ve never been that angry without someone dying. But she walks around like it’s a normal Tuesday.”

“You can’t push yours to her, Vanya?”

“No, I can. It seems to work slightly differently with me and Boss. It’s more connected, like hers is a part of us and ours is a part of her, just in different ways.” Ivan said.

“How?”

“She explained it the first time it happened. She said she can feel the difference between us. She called me her sword and Ivan her shield. She said my anger was beside her, moving through her, waiting for direction. Ivan’s is directed outward from her, away from her, more like a barrier. Like a shield,” I said.

“That’s why you called him that,” Vitaliy said, making the connection.

“She can feel the difference between me and Andrei as well,” Misha said. “She said Andrei’s is calm and controlled, but deadly.

She said mine amps up the f\*\*kery, which I’m totally here for.” He grinned mischievously at Vitaliy.

Vitaliy thought for a few moments. “I keep thinking I can’t be more impressed by her and she just keeps proving me wrong.”

I laughed. “I say that almost daily, Vitaliy.”

I checked on Andrei and Sephie before leaving to go downstairs to the office.

They were both sound asleep on the couch. I

caught myself wondering if she waited until today so Andrei could sleep too.

He’d been busy the last few days. It wouldn’t surprise me if she knew he was also exhausted.

Ivan and Viktor walked into my office a few hours later. “Mr. Turner does have a tail that isn’t one of ours. Just one guy. We had our guys watch him. to see who he reports to,” Viktor said.

“I’m guessing it’s the police chief that saw Mr. Turner walk into the building.

Our guys said this guy was terrible at his job. Our

guys have been on Mr Turner for months and he still hasn’t caught on, but this guy was on him for a couple days and was made.

The police always think they’re on top of their game,” Ivan said, shaking his head.

“I need to have a conversation with Henry,” I said. “That information we got from the journalist about Ricardo ties him up into a

very neat package. I'd like to not f\*\*k that up. Have you heard anything more from the journalist about the mayor?" I asked Viktor.

He shook his head no. "He seemed to think it would be quick work, but I think he overestimated his sleuthing skills. We've found a few things, but they're circumstantial at best."

I nodded. "Keep looking. Maybe ask for an update from him. Might help him along. Chen seemed to really enjoy lying to that guy, so he'll be ready to meet him again when we need him," I said. "Set up a meeting with Henry, in the evening, I want Sephie there when I talk to him."

They both nodded and walked out of the office. I leaned back in my chair, exhaling. The hardest part of all of this was the waiting.

Waiting to collect information, waiting for the next piece of the puzzle to reveal itself, waiting for the next betrayal. I was getting impatient. That didn't bode well for everyone against me right now.

## King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

### Chapter 379

379

Sephie

I could hear Andrei snoring when I finally woke up. He was louder than Adrik, so I knew who I was sleeping on before I even opened my eyes. I would've been able to tell even if he wasn't snoring. I wasn't warm enough. It was almost warm enough, but not Adrik's perfect warmth.

I opened my eyes, looking outside to try to get a feel for how late in the day it was. It was definitely afternoon, judging by the dim winter sunlight coming through the windows. I picked my head up to look at Andrei. He was pretty adorable when he slept. He was handsome anyway, but he had a boyish innocence to his face when he slept. I found myself watching him sleep for a few moments, enjoying his peacefulness.

He probably needed this extra sleep as much as I did. I hadn't thought about it before now, but he had a new level unlocked between the match with Vitaliy's men and what happened at the hotel. He was probably exhausted. I needed to check on Misha and Ivan to see how those two were doing after the last couple of days' festivities.

I tried to get up as quietly as I could, but his giant arms were still wrapped around me. I knew he was trying to ensure maximum warmth as I slept. Poor guy must be having a heat stroke with me on top of him plus a blanket. He felt me trying to quietly move his arms and he woke up.

"I'm so glad you finally did this, spider monkey. I was exhausted too. You're my favorite," he said, letting go of me to rub his face in his hands.

I laughed. “i was just thinking about that. You got a new level unlocked. It always makes me exhausted when it happens. Are Misha and Ivan just as exhausted as you?”

“I think they’re okay. Boss said he’s never seen it affect Ivan this morning when he moved you out here.”

I thought for a minute. He was right. It had never affected Ivan the same way it did everyone else. “Huh. I never noticed, but you’re right. I knew he was a superhuman!” I said, laughing as I got off the couch and Andrei. I stood up to stretch, my joints popping like normal.

Andrei stood up next to me, looking at his phone that had been on the coffee table. He opened it and started typing. “I know if I’m this hungry, you are too. I’ll have someone pick up Vinny’s for us.”

“Bubba, how much longer are you going to make me wait to marry me? I mean, seriously. Stop toying with me already,” I said.

He grinned at me. He’d finally gotten over his nervousness with me teasing him about marrying me.

He pulled me to him, once again wrapping his arms around me, holding me to his chest. “I love you, spider monkey. But not like that,” he said laughing.

I stepped back from him, feigning outrage. I clutched my chest. “It hurts, Bubba. It hurts right here,” I said, pretending my heart was breaking. When I looked up at him, he looked surprised.

“Green really does mean sarcasm,” he said, smiling at me. I smiled at him, but the sadness from the night before came back. He picked up on it immediately. It seemed like Andrei was very quickly becoming very sensitive to my subtle mood changes, just like Ivan. He was almost as good as Adrik, especially considering it hadn’t been happening very long for him. “Don’t be sad, spider

monkey. It changes nothing. It was just shocking last night when we saw the white eyes. Boss was right. They're scarier than your demon eyes. We just didn't know what to him, his strong arms holding me tightly. "Nobody is going to be uncomfortable around you because of it."

he said, pulling me back to

I sighed, nodding my head, but didn't say anything. He was quiet for a few moments, then added, "all of this is strange for all of us, but we've had you to help us through it. You've had to deal with everything on your own for so long that it's going to feel scary to share with us, but you're the reason I can do what I can do now. I saw you doing it so easily and it gave me courage to try."

I remembered what the acupuncturist had told me about Andrei. I laughed quietly. I looked up at him. "Nobody thought you were going to figure it out this lifetime. You're the youngest out of all of us," I said. He looked confused. "I'm older than Misha, spider monkey."

I smiled at him. "Your body is older than Misha, but his soul is older than yours. Your soul is the youngest." I thought for a minute, then added, "which really just goes to show how smart and capable you are. You surprised everyone."

"How do you know this?"

I looked up at him, trying to gauge whether he could handle the truth. I decided he could. "You know my dad is a bit of a guardian angel, right for Adrik's mother. They're around, checking in on us." He nodded his head. "There are also guardian angels that live among us."

"The acupuncturist," he said, like he'd just answered the riddle.

"Did you fish that out of my head or you figured it out before?" I asked.

"I saw there's something different about her. She has a glow that most people don't have," he said.

“She’s the only one you’ve seen that glow on?” I was curious if he’d picked up on Ivan.

He shook his head no. “Ivan has it now too. I never noticed it before he got hurt that day they tried to take you the first time. You and Boss do to but I don’t see it all the time on you three. I’ve seen it every time on the acupuncturist.”

“How long have you been able to see this?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Since I was a kid. I’ve never told anyone because I didn’t want them to think I was crazy. My m om probably would’ve made me wear glasses because she thought there was something wrong with my eyes. I don’t always notice it. Like I don’t walk around looking at glowing people all day long. The acupuncturist is the only one I’ve seen that has it every single time.”

“Does everyone look the same?”

“No. Different colors. The acupuncturist is gold. Ivan’s changes. So does yours and so does Boss’s.”

“I’m so impressed, Bubba. You had levels I didn’t even know about,” I said, grinning at him.

After our sandwiches changed our lives for the better and allowed us a brief stay in gastro-intestinal heaven, we made our way to Adrik’s office. I was trying to find out what his schedule was like and what Vitaliy was doing today.

No sooner had I walked into the doorway and he looked up like he was expecting me to walk through the door. His wide smile stretched across his face. “You look lighter. You needed that,” he said as he pushed his chair back from his desk, opening his arms for me.

“Andrei did too, apparently. That kid has levels I didn’t even know about yet, but he feels much better too.”

He raised his eyebrow at me, but we were interrupted by Viktor coming into the office with his next meeting. "I'll tell you later," I said, kissing him quickly before leaving the office with Viktor.

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 380

380

Sephie

I hooked my arm through Viktor's as I followed him to his desk while Adrik had his meeting. "What's his schedule like today, Papa Bear?" I asked.

"Three more meetings after this one, then he's done. Unless I hear back from Henry's office saying he can meet tonight," he answered me in Russian, since there were plenty of ears around the office.

"What about Vitaliy? What's he doing today?"

"He begrudgingly left this morning and said he won't be back until tonight. I don't think he's going to stay much longer. He's annoyed at having to see so many people," he said, trying not to laugh.

"I find it both ironic and hilarious that he's as popular as he is when he returns to the city," I said. I thought for a few moments, then asked, "when will you know if he has an extra meeting tonight? I'm trying to make a plan for feeding you all since I've been slacking on my duties lately."

He chuckled. "You've been exhausted, sestrichka. You haven't been slacking. I've already ordered dinner for tonight anyway, so you don't need to worry." I squinted my eyes at him, but didn't argue. I decided I would spend the afternoon making him a treat instead.

I looked around to see who else was in the office. Stephen was the only one, other than Viktor. I couldn't steal Viktor since he was on master of schedule duties. "Yoden, are you busy this afternoon?" He looked up from his computer. "Nope. I'm just staring at the screen pretending to be busy right now. It was starting to get

boring, so I should thank you. What do you need?" he asked as he closed his laptop.

I reached down and grabbed his arm, pulling him up. "You're coming with me," I said.

"Where are we going? Do you have a plan? Do we need supplies? How long will we be gone? Am I properly dressed? Do I need a coat? Never mind, I don't get cold. It's physically impossible," he said. He let a sly smile slip out when I looked up at him. Very uncharacteristic of him, but I loved him a little more for it. He quietly slid his arm around my shoulders as we walked to the elevator, creating a visual barrier between me and curious eyes.

Once we were on the elevator alone, I said, "have I mentioned how f\*\*king funny the Vlad jokes in front of Vitaliy are? Like I love you even more each time it happens. The look on his and Alyosha's faces is just perfection. They're so lost. It's so great." We were both laughing when the elevator doors opened.

It took Stephen such a long time to warm up to me, but now that he had, I adored him. He was so smart and so freaking funny.

He was so quietly hilarious that he kept us all entertained. And he could say anything with a straight face, so those who didn't know him thought he was completely serious while saying some of the dumbest shi t you've ever heard in your life. It was a true gift.

Because he ended up as backup for Viktor in his master of schedule duties, it meant I didn't get to spend as much time with

Viktor and Stephen as I did the other three. I was starting to suspect that wasn't helping those two realize how they were special, so I'd decided to try and change that as much as I could. It was easier to get time with Stephen on my own. I was going to need Adrik's help to get time with Viktor.

We walked into the kitchen and I started to pull a few things out of the cabinets. Stephen said, “you know Viktor already ordered dinner for tonight, right? You don’t have to cook, Seph. You should still rest today.”

I smiled at him. “I know, Yoden. I’m making him cookies. You’re helping” He groaned. “My stomach is having a love affair with you. I hope you know that. It’s a little weird. It’s very unorthodox, but he’s very much in love with you. It’s to the point that he almost revolts if I eat food made by anyone else. He’s not happy about it and he’s very loud about that fact.”

I laughed at him talking about his stomach like it was a whole other person inside him. “My stomach feels the same about Vinny.

So much so that I think Adrik got a little jealous in the beginning.”

It was his turn to laugh. “Is he capable of getting jealous? I’ve never once seen him jealous with you.”

“Not when it comes to you guys, bro. Not usually. Although he did struggle with feeling jealous this last time I got hurt. I spent so much time with all of you guys since I did nothing but sleep and apparently I’m incapable of sleeping on my own anymore that he started to feel jealous. It’s why you guys only just found out about my eyes. That’s been happening for quite a while now. He wanted to keep it just between us for a while,” I said. “But he’s very possessive in front of other people that aren’t you five.”

“Huh. I never noticed.”

“Because you’re too busy analyzing what’s been said or what you have noticed. Your brain is very busy. You should cut it some slack for not noticing insignificant things,” I said.

“Guilty. It’s a gift and a curse,” he said. He followed me to the pantry so I could hand him everything I needed for this project.

“I think it’s more of a gift than a curse. You just struggle with believing in yourself so you’re overanalyzing. Your first instinct is always right. Stop second-guessing yourself. Whoever told you that you were dumb when you were younger was completely wrong.”

“You’re not supposed to be fishing in my head, remember?” he said, as I piled ingredients in his arms.

“I wasn’t. It’s so obvious that I didn’t need to fish. Much like Ivan doesn’t want people to know how wise he is because he values his peace too much, you don’t want people to know how wise you are either. But it’s because you’re insecure with your wisdom.

For the record, I find it endearing, but also hilarious. You’re seriously one of the smartest people I know. Especially when it comes to how best to mindf\*\*k someone. I’m guessing you felt very misunderstood as a kid?” I asked.

He squinted his eyes at me, like he was unsure he wanted to answer. He sighed, but agreed. “I was. I was very quiet as a kid.

My sisters are loud as f\*\*k. So are my parents. I stuck out. While they are loud and obnoxious to distract from what they don’t want people to see, I took the opposite approach. I was always quiet, never talked much. My middle sister used to tease me relentlessly for it. She would tell her friends that I was retarded and they would all pick on me. My youngest sister always went along with everything the middle one did, so when she got old enough, she would tease me as well. My oldest sister would join in sometimes, but not always. She never stopped it though.”

“Do you want me to kick your sister’s ass? Because I’ll do it,” I asked.

He chuckled. “No, I think she’s already getting her own Karma. I don’t talk to my sisters often, but my mother keeps me updated

on them. My middle sister is on her fourth husband. She struggles to keep a job for very long. It's because she's a miserable human being, but of course she blames everyone else."

"What about your youngest sister?"

"She's not much better, although she hasn't gotten married yet. That's mostly because she has a very loud reputation for being very easy. She's slept her way through the entire town we grew up in. She moved to a larger city, trying to increase her chances of finding a husband. I think she only increased the number of STD's she has." I couldn't keep from laughing. "I'm sorry. That's not funny. I shouldn't laugh at that."