

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 139

Chapter One Hundred Thirty-Nine

Sephie

"I KNEW IT!" We were all laughing now.

"Ivan's right. We all watched him ditch you that night in the restaurant, after not seeing you for a week, for some random girl who's name he probably can't remember," Misha added.

I shrugged my shoulders again. "That's just Max, though. He always did that."

"No, that's an as shole, spider monkey. As sholes do that," Andrei said.

I snapped my fingers at him, pointing at him. "Language, mister. Language."

"Don't try to change the subject just because we're right," Andrei said quietly.

I thought for a moment, inhaling deeply. I loved the smell of the meadow, the dirt, the trees, the grass, the lake. Everything felt fresh here. Alive. It helped me recharge to come here. I looked at all three of them, smiling. "You are right. You're all right. I've been hanging on to him because I was scared to be alone without him. That was the hardest part about losing my mom and being sent to my uncle. I felt completely alone. Even though I had a mostly sober uncle for the first year or so, it was still living with a stranger, so it was almost the same as being completely alone. When I met Max, I suddenly didn't feel so alone anymore."

I was staring at the dirt at my feet, still tracing patterns with my fingers, but I heard one of them get up. As soon as he sat down next to me, I didn't even have to look. I knew it was Misha.

"You're not alone anymore, gazelle. You'll always have us to annoy the shit out of you," he said, his wide smile across his face.

I heard the other two get up and come closer to me. Andrei sat in front of me while Ivan sat next to me, leaning his good shoulder into mine. Andrei looked at me, more seriously than I'd ever seen him, "we're not going anywhere, spider monkey. You're never going to be alone again." He reached out and grabbed my ankle, squeezing it. Ivan didn't say anything, he just leaned over and kissed my cheek. I had tears in my eyes at their response to me thinking out loud. I leaned my head over to Misha's shoulder, then to Ivan's, smiling at Andrei the whole time.

"I love you guys."

All at once, they said, "we love you too, Sephie."

We sat and talked for a while longer until my butt started to get sore from sitting on the ground. We stood up to walk back to the house. When Ivan stood up, he swayed back and forth before catching himself. I held on to him, as best I could, somewhat panicked that he was going to go down completely again. He stood for a moment, waiting for the feeling to pass.

"You okay, Squishy? What's going on in there?" I asked, concerned that we'd overdid it with him. He lost a lot of blood yesterday.

He looked at me and I could see a flash of fear before he masked it and got control again. "I'm okay. I just stood up too fast.

"Liar. Are you okay to walk back?" He nodded his head. "Okay, when we get back, you're taking a nap. No arguing. You didn't sleep this morning when we got to the house, did you?"

He shook his head no. I saw the fear flash on his face briefly and knew why he didn't want to sleep. I grabbed his good arm, putting it around my shoulders, and wrapping my arm around his waist. I looked at him, smiled, but said as seriously as I could, "If you start to feel yourself slipping, tell me. When we get back, you can nap on the couch." He started to protest. "With me,

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Squishy," I said quietly, so the other two wouldn't hear. He looked down at me, a look of relief on his face.

We walked slowly back to the house. I was once again proud of Ivan for making it back, mostly on his own. He went to his bedroom to change into more comfortable pants.

"Bubba, how's your shoulder feel now? When do you take your next pain pill?" I asked when we got back to the house.

He looked at the clock. "Not for a few hours. My shoulder is sore, but it's fine. I think I'm doing better than Ivan, honestly."

"You're not wrong. He lost so much blood yesterday." My eyes went wide, lost in the memory of the puddle of blood under us while we waited for Adrik and Viktor to find us. I looked back to Andrei. "I literally don't know how he's still alive."

"You're both very difficult to kill," Andrei said, smiling.

We waited for Ivan to come back from his room, but after ten minutes, we still didn't see him. I started to worry, so I went to find him. I knocked on his door but heard no response. I opened it slowly, hoping that he was decent. The scene before me was not one I thought I would ever see.

Ivan was sitting on the end of his bed, his head in his hand, sobbing. I quietly walked in the room, closing the door behind me. I sat down next to him, wrapping my arms around him. I rested my chin on his good shoulder. I knew I didn't have the words to make his pain go away, but I could at least give him the one thing he'd never had since he left home. Comfort.

We had been sitting in silence, while Ivan quietly sobbed when I heard the door open. Misha stuck his head in just enough to make sure we were okay. I smiled at him but made it clear that he should leave. He nodded, understanding. The door closed and I rested my chin on Ivan's shoulder once again. I just sat with him, rubbing his back while he let out what was probably years of pent-up emotion from everything he'd been through.

He finally got enough control that he could speak. "I'm sorry, princess. I shouldn't do that."

I chuckled. "Says who?"

He sat up straighter, so he could look at me. His eyes still showing nothing but pain. "Says me."

I thought for a moment, trying to find the perfect words. "Ivan, do you know how special you are?"

He looked at me questioningly. He wasn't sure how to take my question, as being special had gotten him experimented on, so that wasn't necessarily a good thing. I smiled at him, understanding his confusion.

"Okay, bad phrasing. What do you remember from the moment of the crash?"

He thought for a moment. "I heard the metal crunching and I turned toward you." He sucked in a breath, clearly remembering what he saw. He turned to me. "... I don't know how to say it without you thinking I'm crazy."

"You saw wings around me, didn't you?"

His eyes went wide in shock, as he nodded his head.

"But that's not all you saw, is it?" He looked at me, like he wasn't sure he trusted his memory. My hand was rubbing his back gently. I laughed quietly at him. "Ivan, I already know what you saw, so you can tell me."

"You saw it too??" He was clearly shocked at this point.

head no, bringing back confusion to his face. "No, I didn't see what you saw. What you saw.

everyone to see. Just you." I reached and grabbed his hand. "Ivan, those were your wings you saw. Well, not at first. They changed color on you, didn't they?" He nodded his head. "The first pair of wings were my dad. He's been watching over me for my entire life, but after yesterday, I have a new protector." I squeezed his hand. "Those were your wings, Ivan," I said, quietly.

Trying to get him to realize exactly what I was saying.

"But, how? I'm not dead," he asked, clearly still confused.