

# King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 170

## Chapter One Hundred Seventy

Sephie

They got organized, went over the plan once more, then headed toward the elevator. I felt Ivan's giant arm around my shoulders on one side and Andrei's sizeable frame appear on the other side. "Don't worry, princess. We've done this more than once. Same for Mando's guys. They've all got experience, which is why Viktor gave them the okay," Ivan said.

I sighed. "I know. But I can't help but worry a little bit." I thought for a minute. "How long is this gonna take? Are you guys hungry? Do you want to come upstairs and help me make dinner for when they get back? Cooking helps prevent me from worrying about everything that could go wrong."

They both looked at each other, over the top of my head and said in unison, "Yep."

I laughed. I walked back to the office where Adrik and Armando were still talking. I walked to Adrik, who simply opened his arm for me while he finished his sentence. I sat in his lap once again, waiting for them to finish their conversation before I told him my plan. He kept talking, running his hand up and down my back lightly.

Once they were finished, I looked at both of them. "I'm going upstairs to cook. I'm hungry, so I'm sure everyone else is also hungry and I think the guys will be extra hungry when they get back." I looked to Armando, "you and Giana are welcome to come up and join us. I can make enough to feed this army."

"I'll check with Giana. She was admittedly tired after staying up so late last night and traveling today. She might be asleep by now, for all I know," Armando said.

"No pressure. She probably has a hangover, huh?" I asked.

He smiled and nodded his head. "She did get quite drunk last night after you guys left." He looked somewhat embarrassed at the admission.

"Uh oh. Is she a fun drunk or a mean drunk?" I asked, now curious.

He sighed. "Neither. She's a sappy drunk."

"Ohhhh, that's the worst kind. We're going to have to learn her hard line," I said.

"What's that, solnishko?" Adrik asked, his hand lightly running up my back to the back of my neck, letting his fingers linger just on my hairline where he knew he could drive me crazy. It was innocent enough, but I wasn't expecting it and I was suddenly hit with a warm tingle over my entire body. It took me a second to answer his question.

"It's what Max used to call the number of drinks someone could have before they switched from fun drunk to high maintenance drunk. Hard line for a hard no, don't serve them anymore drinks than this or you're crossing the line into dangerous territory," I said, still trying to keep my composure as Adrik kept his hand on the back of my neck. I caught his eye. He knew exactly what he was doing and he was clearly enjoying it.

Armando, thankfully unaware, laughed. "That's very good information to have for the future. I'll pay attention next time."

"Was she drinking the same drink all night or did she switch it up?" I asked, moving so that I was leaning back against Adrik's chest, hoping to make it more difficult for him to reach my neck.

"She kept the same drink for most of the night, but switched it up at the end of the night," Armando said,

"She's complicated. That makes the hard line more difficult to predict. You have to keep her on the same drink to get accurate numbers. Once she switches, the data goes out the window and you have to start over," I said, grabbing Adrik's arms and wrapping them around my waist, trying to safely trap him. Instead, he just discreetly slipped his hands under my shirt, tracing circles on my bare skin. I took a deep breath, trying to maintain control.

Armando laughed again. "Sephie, you always have the most valuable insight."

I smiled at him and shrugged my shoulders. "It's a gift." I thought for a moment, then added, "you know she's very insecure with herself, right? She's a nice girl, but she's worried no one likes her, which ironically makes people not like her. The more you can reassure her that she's great and doesn't need to compare herself to others, the less she'll feel the need to drown her anxieties in alcohol."

Armando looked stunned. "I had no idea. She has no reason to be insecure. She's a beautiful woman. Why would she be insecure?"

"Eh, women are complicated. She has no reason to be insecure, but she doesn't believe that. She's trying to live up to an unrealistic ideal in her head, like most women. She needs to understand that you love her for the her she is right now. Not the her she thinks she needs to be," I said.

He exhaled loudly. "You should seriously start charging for your services."

Andrei said from the doorway, "that's why she's my relationship coach spider monkey."

Once upstairs, I got to work on preparing enough food to feed our small army. Ivan and Andrei helped me while Adrik finished up a few things in his office. Armando had gone to check on Giana and promised to come up at least for a minute, with or without her.

"Viktor is going to be so happy when he gets back," Andrei said, as he was washing a pan I needed to reuse. He turned to look at me, grinning. "He loves it when you cook. I mean, we all do, but he loves it loves it."

I had to laugh. Ivan was sitting at the counter on the island. "Are we starting a bet pool for how long Armando and Giana are going to last, princess? I can go downstairs and get a white board."

I exhaled loudly. "I mean. Yes. We should. But I also think Armando can save it. He's clearly infatuated with her. He's clearly been so since we were in Italy. I noticed the way he looked at her when she first came into his office that day of the meeting with the scummy lawyer. It wouldn't surprise me if she wasn't at all qualified for that job and he hired her anyway, just to be close to her. It doesn't always happen, but sometimes someone else's love is enough to break those dark thought patterns. The bigger question will be whether Armando is strong enough to pull her up or whether she's going to pull him down."

Adrik walked into the kitchen, asking, "who's pulling who?"

Ivan answered. "We were just discussing whether we should start a bet pool on how long Armando and Giana will stay together. Sephie thinks Armando might be able to save it. We can all see that he likely loves her. She said the bigger question is whether he'll pull her up or she'll pull him down."

Adrik walked to me, standing behind me. He gently pulled me back against him as I was standing at the stove, waiting for a sauce to thicken. He moved my hair from my neck, kissing my cheek and lightly brushing my neck with his facial hair. I smiled, knowing he was still enjoying torturing me. He moved beside me, leaning against the counter, so he could look at Andrei and Ivan. "Armando is a strong man, but has always been unlucky with women. He's been married at least twice, I think, and neither lasted very long. He had children with both of them, but it wasn't enough to make it last."

"Children are never the thing that will save a marriage," Ivan said.

I picked the sauce pan I was stirring off the stove and moved it to the center island. "Armando has a bit of a savior complex. I mean that in a good way, but it inevitably means he's going to pick damaged people. He wants to fix them. He has to learn that not everyone wants to be saved."