

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 381

381

Sephie

“I don’t know about that, but I do know that your sisters were very wrong about you,” I said, putting Stephen to work washing a few dishes I’d dirtied.

“On some level, I know that too. There’s…” he started to say, but he didn’t finish. He was quiet for long enough that I knew he wasn’t going to finish.

“I know there’s more, Stephen. You don’t ever have to tell me. I know you’re struggling, but I won’t pry and I won’t fish. You know the best way to conquer your demons, Voden?” He shook his head no. He was still facing away from me, his shoulders slightly slumped. I knew this was difficult for him. “It’s to stop fighting them and make friends with them. They have no power over you that way. The more you try to ignore the monster you’re trying to keep locked away, the bigger and stronger it grows. You have to make friends with it before it consumes you.”

I went back to what I was doing, not wanting to force him to talk anymore than he wanted to. I heard him turn the water in the sink off, then he dried his hands, tossing the towel back on the counter. I felt his hand on my arm as he gently turned me around, then he pulled me against him so tightly, I wasn’t sure I’d be able to breathe. I heard him sniffle a few times. I kept my arms around him just as tightly and would do so for as long as he needed.

“I’ll be right here the whole time, Stephen. You don’t have to face it alone.”

I thought there was no way he could hold me any tighter, but I was wrong. I was so wrong. I knew he was struggling, but I didn’t realize it was this much. I heard him inhale sharply, like he was choking back sobs and my heart just hurt for him.

“I love you, Yoden. And as much as whatever you went through sucked and still sucks, it made you into my absolute favorite vampire of all time. Without you, no one would know what enabling is,” I said, trying to sound serious, but unable to hide my smile.

He laughed and his grip on me loosened. He wiped his eyes before he let me go completely. “I didn’t realize how much I needed that, Seph. I still don’t understand how you do it, but please never stop.”

“Can’t stop, won’t stop,” I said, grinning at him, which made him laugh again. Now come here, I could use extra hands for this part.”

Stephen’s phone beeped while we were waiting for the cookies to come out of the oven. “Henry will be here tonight. Viktor said Boss wants you at the meeting, so whatever we’re doing needs to be finished by 6.”

“He’s very bossy today,” I said, crossing my arms across my chest.

Stephen pretended that he was typing a reply to Viktor. “Sephie says you’re not the boss of her and you can suck it. Send.”

I laughed. “Even with your lightning fast vampire thumbs, I could see you weren’t even touching the screen. He’s always so sweet about ordering dinner when I need a break, but I seriously think it makes him grumpy when I don’t cook.”

“Um, I thought that one was obvious, Seph. Everyone knows he hates it when you don’t cook. He’s just so nice that he’ll never admit it.”

The timer for the oven went off. “He’ll be happy when he sees whatever we’re doing completed by 6, then,” I said, pulling the cookies out of the oven. “The question is, though, should we take one to him before the meeting or make him wait until we’re done for the day to come back up here and find

them?”

“Option 3, I think,” he said.

“What’s option 3?”

“I think you should put them in his apartment. We never lock our doors. We don’t need to. But I think he’s gonna need a minute and it’ll be better if we’re not watching him.”

“Yoden, you’re so incredibly smart. That’s perfect, I would’ve tortured the poor man,” I said. I glanced at the clock on the oven. “Okay, so now we have to hurry slightly to get whatever we’re doing done and down to his apartment and back to the office by 6. Oh my God, the pressure!” I said, dramatically.

Stephen laughed, shaking his head at me. He joined in the dramatics though, taking an extra baking sheet and fanning the cookies so they’d cool faster, which made me laugh.

“You’re my favorite. Don’t tell the others,” I said.

Stephen and I finished up Viktor’s favorite cookies, then snuck downstairs to deliver them to his apartment and made it to the office with five minutes to spare. Everyone else was already in the office, waiting on us, but also still waiting on Henry to arrive. Just as we walked in, Viktor’s phone beeped, signaling that Henry was in the lobby. He walked out right after we walked in.

“What have you two been up to?” Adrik asked. I could tell he was amused that I’d disappeared with Stephen and not one of the others.

“Strategic planning. Vlad’s army is going to be magnificent,” I said.

Stephen surprised us all by laughing loudly. I could get him to laugh when it was just the two of us, but he rarely laughed loudly in front of the group. It made me happy to see. “Seph has a mind for logistics. He was only defending Wallachia before, but now he can finally see the complete destruction. of the Ottoman Empire. I can’t wait to tell him. Those Turks totally have it coming.”

Everyone laughed at his answer. Several of the guys looked surprised at how relaxed Stephen looked. They all caught my eye at one point, giving me small, knowing smiles.

“You shouldn’t fight sleeping in for so long next time, princess. You look much better tonight. Andrei does too. He’s prettier,” Ivan said.

“He is a pretty, pretty princess, Squish. You’re absolutely correct. I think we both needed it,” I said. I heard the doors to the elevator ding, so I got up from Adrik’s lap after kissing him quickly. He still had a very amused expression on his face.

Viktor walked in with Henry and the mood turned more serious in an instant. Everyone went into boss mode.

Adrik extended his hand to Henry as he walked to his desk. They shook hands before Henry sat down in front of Adrik’s desk. He glanced back to me, smiling. “Sephie, you’re looking much better than the last time I saw you.”

“I mean, that depends. Sometimes I want to be colorful,” I said, referring to the heavy bruising I’d had the last time. “But life is much better with two arms again.”

He chuckled, shaking his head. He looked at Adrik. “What do you have for me this time?”

“Your police chiefs. How well do you know them?” Adrik asked. He was now very serious. There was no trace of the amusement that was evident not two minutes ago.

“Well, before you asked me that question, I would have said very well. Now that you’ve asked me that question, I’m wondering if that’s the correct answer,” Henry said, a look of worry on his face.