

# King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 176

## Chapter One Hundred Seventy-Six

Sephie

While I felt slightly bad for calling Mike out in front of everyone, it was also needed. The longer he went without being checked, the more he would question anything related to me, and in turn, anything related to Giana. While I could stick up for myself, she would struggle with that. I saw her shocked expression, along with Armando's, after I called him out.

Once we were all done laughing at Ivan's comment, I said to Giana, in broken Italian, "don't worry, he'll likely do an even better job now, just to prove me wrong." I smiled at her. Armando winked at me, telling Giana in Italian that I could understand it, but I didn't speak it very well. It didn't help her shocked expression.

We continued to talk about options for dealing with Brian from the water department for a while longer. Mike was noticeably quieter during that conversation. Eventually, we decided to call it a night. Adrik was expecting to hear from Trino the following morning, after he had time to get in touch with most of his dealers in the city to find out what, if anything, they knew about Sal's plan.

Team America, Armando, and Giana left while all the guys stayed for a few more minutes in the penthouse. As soon as the door closed and they had enough time to get on the elevator, the guys all died laughing like little kids that had been forced to hold it in during some serious event.

"I didn't think a man's cheeks could turn that red," Andrei said, wiping tears from his eyes from laughing so hard.

Adrik, gaining control of himself, turned me to face him. "Is he going to continue to be a problem? Should I have Armando get rid of him?"

"I don't think so. That's what I told Giana. I said he would likely do an even better job and be nicer to her now, just to prove me wrong. Most guys like that push until someone pushes back. That's what I get from him. He's not a dick, I don't think. He's just a tester. He needs to know his limits. Now that he knows, we'll likely never have to have that conversation again," I said, smiling at the genuine concern on his face at the thought of Mike becoming a problem. I had to admit that I adored the side of Adrik that wanted to destroy anything he deemed to be a threat to me.

Ivan looked at Adrik, a serious expression on his face. "We'll keep an eye on him. If he needs to be checked a little more forcefully next time, I'm happy to do so."

I turned to look at Ivan, grinning. "Add it to the white board!" I said, causing another round of laughter from everyone, Viktor said, "we're going to need a bigger white board. I'll have someone get a giant one. We're going to have to teach you how to read Russian now too, sestrichka."

"Challenge accepted," I said, smiling at him.

Once the guys all went back to their apartments for the evening, Adrik pulled me closer to him, his hands finding their way underneath my shirt. He ran his hands lightly over my bare skin. He had a slight smirk on his face, but just looked at me for a moment, without saying a word. I raised an eyebrow, looking at him questioningly. He started playing with the curls around my face as he continued to look at me thoughtfully. "You know you're not just the girlfriend, right?" he finally asked.

I smiled at him, unable to contain my laughter. "Of course, I know, I said that to illustrate my point, not because I think that."

He continued to play with the curls around my face as he looked like he was lost in thought. Instead of telling me what he was thinking, he simply leaned down and kissed me.

I woke up sometime during the night, under the covers, which meant that Adrik had gotten out of bed. He rarely got up at night, so I knew something wasn't right. I walked down the hallway toward the kitchen and living room and saw him standing at the windows, looking over the city. He hadn't seen me come down the hallway, so I knew he was lost in thought.

"Is it time for triple strength tea?" I asked as I wrapped my arms around him from behind, resting my head between his shoulder blades.

"I'm sorry I woke you, solnishko," he said as his arms covered mine.

"Technically, it was your absence that woke me. Having trouble getting your brain to shut off?"

He sighed, but didn't respond right away. He's struggling with whatever it is. I walked in front of him, putting his arms around my waist and placing my hands on his bare chest. He looked down at me, his blue eyes looked troubled. For a moment, I searched his eyes, trying to find what it was that was bothering him. Since he'd figured out my trick, he was more open with me whenever I would try to "read" him. I think he enjoyed it, honestly.

"You're worried you're going to turn into your father, aren't you?" I asked.

He chuckled, giving me a half smile. "One day you're going to have to tell me how you do that."

"It works best on you. Everyone else is my best guess. You're the only one I'm sure of," I said. I ran my fingers lightly through his facial hair trying to get him to relax. He closed his eyes and leaned into my touch. "You're not your father. I don't know the man, but I've heard plenty of stories. You're nothing like him."

He opened his eyes. His gaze was intense. "You only say that because you haven't seen the side of me that emulates my father. Since I met you, it's like that part of me went to sleep. Especially after what happened after the ball." He closed his eyes again, his voice cracking as he continued, "I was so terrified that I had lost you and it was all my fault. That part of me, the part that seeks revenge and won't stop until it's finished, it just vanished." He sighed. "Until now."

"Adrik, look at me," I said. His eyes opened again. I could see the rage just below the surface, but I could also plainly see he was afraid. He looked at me like he was searching for what I was always scared I would find. "I know that part of you exists. Even though you say it's been asleep, it's still there. Honestly? It's one of the countless things I love about you." He looked at me, puzzled. "Because in the back of my mind, I know without a shadow of a doubt, that if something were to happen and anyone did manage to get to me, you would not stop coming for me. You would burn this city to the ground if it meant getting me back." I saw his smirk start to creep across his face as he knew I was right. I couldn't help but smile at him. I reached up, placing my palm against his cheek. "Everyone has darkness in them, Adrik. It's what you choose to do with it that matters." I stood on my toes to kiss him gently. This situation with the other bosses is going to mean that a lot of people could potentially die. If waking up that side of you that seeks vengeance against the other bosses means that a lot of people don't die, I fail to see how that's a bad thing."

He looked at me, his eyes now a little softer, but there was still worry there. He played with my curls around my face. He looked like he was trying to find the right words to say. We stayed like that for a moment, with him struggling against his own thoughts. I finally said, "you can't have light without dark, Adrik. The brighter your light, the darker your shadows. You're so focused on your darkness that you fail to see how brightly your light shines, but you're what saved me when my darkness threatened to consume me. Your light was the spark I needed to remember my own light. Darkness will always be here. In everyone. Waiting for the light." I could still see the slightest bit of uncertainty in his eyes. "I will always be here. Waiting for you."