

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 358

Sephle

Adrik and I were the last ones to breakfast the following morning. Everyone gave us knowing looks and I suddenly worried that I'd been too loud the night before. Adrik felt my sudden panic. He slid his arm around my waist, his lips next to my ear. "Nobody heard you. But if they did, they're just jealous." He was clearly amused at the possibility of them hearing me. It was an ego boost for him. It was insanely embarrassing for me.

"Good morning, princess," Ivan said. I was fairly certain he felt my momentary panic as well. He was becoming quite good at feeling as much from me as I could feel from him. "We made bets as to whether you would wake up late today or not. You're due for a late morning."

"Sh ut up."

"No, it's true, gazelle. It's been a few weeks since you've slept in. I think you're past due, actually," Misha said.

I couldn't hide my amusement at them apparently knowing my schedules better than I did. "I had no idea I was so predictable," I said, sitting in an empty chair beside Viktor. He put his giant arm around my shoulders, hugging me sweetly. He kissed the top of my head, saying, "you're allowed to sleep in whenever you like. You waste a lot of energy taking care of all of us, sestrichka."

"I would not call that a waste, Papa Bear."

"I, for one, am relieved that you didn't sleep in this morning, spider monkey. I was going to feel bad about letting you go full speed yesterday morning if you had," Andrei said.

I laughed, but before I could respond, Aleksei looked at me, half-confused, half amused. "Do they all call you different names?" I smiled at him, nodding my head. "I assume there's a reason for such strange names?" he asked, wanting further explanation. Clearly, Alyosha was jealous at our imaginative nicknames.

"There's a story for all of them," Misha said. Both Aleksei and Vitaliy looked at all of us curiously, wanting to hear why they called me by the names they did.

"The first day I stayed with her while Boss was working, she jumped on my back so I had to carry her around every chance she got. She still does it. That's why I call her spider monkey," Andrei said as he smiled and winked at me. I knew he'd come to love carrying me around as much as I did. Half the time, he'd offer first.

"She likes to go for runs and since I'm the only one that runs on a regular basis, I was forced to go with her. She almost killed me that first time. She's like a gazelle. I like to remind her that she almost killed me as often as I can," Misha said, his wide smile stretching across his face.

Ivan laughed. "Much like she put you in your place yesterday, Alyosha, she put me in mine very quickly after first meeting her. I had called her princess to try and piss her off. I was giving her shi t while she was trying to help me. She adopted it right then and she's been the princess ever

since."

"Why would you try to piss her off?" Vitaliy asked.

Before Ivan could answer, I said, "Ivan has a very special set of skills that he enjoyed using on your son's past girlfriends."

"How so?"

"His demons pull their demons out for the world to see, so everyone else can see the person as Ivan sees them. He just didn't realize that I have many of the same demons he does and I'm very good friends with them, so it didn't work on me." I laughed, remembering that morning in my kitchen. "He'd been hurt and needed stitches. It was before I knew of his aversion to doctors. I was offering to clean him up and trying to talk him into going to the hospital but he was giving me shi t. I gave him shi t back so he let me clean his wound, but I told him he needed stitches. He said he wasn't going to the doctor and then taunted me about stitching him up. He didn't know that I really could stitch him up, so I told him I was going to enjoy the pain it would cause since I had nothing to numb the area. I also didn't know that was not a thing that happens with him. I was just trying to piss him off the same way he was trying to piss me off, honestly."

"It was the first time we'd seen Ivan laugh in years when she told him she wished she had a lollipop to give him and thanked him for not killing this princess when she was done," Viktor said, his arm moving around my shoulders once again.

Stephen laughed loudly. "I didn't know about the lollipop comment. I would've paid to have seen his face."

Vitaliy and Aleksei were also laughing. "You really have nothing to worry about when it comes to my contacts in Italy, sladkaya. You'll be able to handle them just fine," Vitaliy said, still laughing. He was quiet for a moment, looking at all of us thoughtfully. Then he said, "the more I learn, the more impressed I am." Then he stood up and walked away from the table, leaving everyone slightly stunned at his words. I glanced to Adrik, who was more stunned than anyone, his mouth slightly open, his eyes wide.

It was Aleksei that broke the stunned silence. He looked at Adrik, "she offers him a sweet reminder of things long lost to him. This was the father were too young to remember." He placed his hand on Adrik's shoulder as he, too, got up to walk away from the table, once again leaving us all in

silence.

you

"Jesus I haven't seen this kind of melodrama since Vlad first came to power," Stephen said, completely straight-faced. We all erupted into laughter, which inevitably grew as we looked at Trino's confused expression.