

# King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 429

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Sephie

Stephen walked out of Adrik's office with his last meeting of the day just as we were walking up. He said quietly, in Russian, "I'll be right back. Don't start without me."

"I wouldn't dream of it," I answered, giving him a wink while still on Andrei's back.

Adrik was smiling when he saw me still hitching a ride on Andrei. "How did it go?" he asked. He visibly relaxed when he saw me smile at him.

"I almost had to karate chop her hands away to keep her from touching Ilya, but she managed to control herself," Misha said, pretending to slice through the air. Adrik looked at me, his eyebrow raised, like he was deciding whether to be angry or amused. I hopped down from Andrei's back and went to him.

"What? He's still struggling when he has to talk about everything. I got the urge to comfort him," I said. Adrik decided on angry, as his eyes switched to black. "I didn't do it," I said emphatically, as I wrapped my arms around his waist, unable to keep from laughing at his overprotective side.

Stephen walked back in a few moments later. He stopped briefly when he saw drik's eyes, looking back to the office that was still full of people. He didn't say a word, he just closed the door behind him. When he turned back to face us, he said, "villagers. I'm still a little jumpy about villagers."

"We've confiscated the pitchforks. This is a pitchfork free zone. We should be fine, Yoden," I said, smiling at him. My eyes switched to green, which made Adrik's eyes go back to normal. Ivan's too. He didn't even know why his were changing, they were just there for support.

"I take it Viktor is still sleeping?" Adrik asked.

"Yeah, he's been out this whole time. Ilya thought he might need longer than he did even," Andrei said.

"And you said Ilya is still struggling?" Adrik asked, pulling me with him to one of the couches.

"Only when he talks about it, I think. He looks much better overall," I said.

"Sephie was right, though, when she said it would've killed him if Viktor had fixed him. He told us he came here to say goodbye to Viktor," Misha said. We heard Stephen curse under his breath.

This time, I felt the darkness creeping back in before I felt Adrik and Ivan send me their anger. It still surprised the Wonder Twins and Stephen, who all three looked at me when they felt it. I did get some enjoyment out of the looks on their faces as they tried to understand how I could operate with those levels of anger.

"See? Now I'm glad I closed the door. Could you imagine needing a signature for your expense report and walking in on that?"

Stephen said pointing. to me, Adrik, and Ivan. I giggled as I pulled Adrik's arms around me tighter.

Adrik looked to Ivan, "did that happen when you were with Ilya?"

"It started, but my idea worked. She didn't feel anything from him. I cut her a from the Wonder Twins too, though. And apparently, I also cut her hearing off, but now she can listen through my head, which seemed perfectly formal to me at the time, but now sounds weird to say out loud." Ivan said.

"Normal is relative anyway, Squish," I said, grinning at him.

"It happened when Ilya told Sephie she was right and that he came to say goodbye, Same as just now," Andrei said.

"That must be how the demons are getting in. It wears you down so much that you feel completely hopeless," Stephen said.

"I think you might be right, Yoden. I do think he's much better now, but I also think he's still at risk of having it come back. Can you see if he shakes it off for good, Misha?" I asked.

He got his faraway look in his eye as he was checking possible outcomes. He looked back to me, saying, "he looks fine eventually. I think it'll just take time."

"I think he needs to hear what you and Bubba said to him about a million more times, too," I said. I looked between the two of them, grinning. "It must be such a burden to be so incredibly handsome and so wise at the same time."

"I mean, some days, yes. Most days, no," Andrei said, cutting his eyes over at ne.

I could feel Adrik's chest vibrate as he laughed quietly. He looked back at Ivan, asking, "did you mean to cut her off from those two or it just happened that way?"

"It's always been that way. You're the only one he's never cut me off from," I said. "But I think he might be able to adjust it next time. We should go check on him again tomorrow. We can experiment." Ivan's devious grin spread across his face as he agreed.

The next day was a weekend day, so all of us went to check on Ilya and Viktor Adrik wanted to see for himself how well Ivan's bubble worked. "I guess I'll see if that poor kid really does have nerves of steel now or if our eyes just didn't change yesterday," I said as we walked to Viktor's door.

Ilya was happy to see us all again. He was even happier to see the food I brought him. "Vitya won't shut up about your cooking. It's a good thing our mother isn't here. She'd be jealous," he said, his warm smile on his face.

"He does look better than the last time we saw him," Adrik thought as he watchel Ilya.

"I'm assuming Viktor is still dead to the world?" I asked.

"He woke up for a few minutes last night. He looked better, but he went right back to sleep and hasn't woken up since," he said.

I felt Adrik's arm around my waist, pulling me gently, but firmly, against him saw Ivan catch his eye, too. "And how are you, Ilya? You look better than the last time I saw you," he said.

Ilya smiled, but we could all see the struggle still behind his eyes. I felt Adrik grip on me get tighter and felt Ivan's bubble go up immediately before Ilya even had a chance to answer.

"I'll be your interpreter for the duration of this visit," Ivan said to both me and drik. We could hear him laughing in his head, but his face was completely serious and he kept his focus on Ilya.

Ilya looked at Adrik, surprise was evident on his face. He took a step back, which let me know that our eyes had likely changed.

Andrei glanced at us, noticing it too. "Don't be worried, Ilya. You still have sonjething hanging around you. They can feel it. That's going to keep happening until you finally get rid of it. It's not directed at you. It's directed at whatever is trying to break you down," he said.

"It's still alarming," Ilya said, fear evident in his voice.

"Alarming is a nice way to put it, yes," Stephen said, stepping closer to Ilya. But if you consider that they're trying to help you by figuring out what the hell it is that's hanging around you, then it's much easier to stomach. The just have unique methods." We all laughed at Stephen's explanation, but it was Andrei who looked between Stephen and Ilya, with wide eyes.

"Is this the first time you've spoken in front of Ilya?" he asked Stephen..

"I think so, yes," Stephen said, looking very confused.

Andrei looked back to me and Adrik, then to Ivan. "Boss, I think Stephen just literally made whatever it was leave. Ivan," he said, indicating for Ivan to lower his bubble. "You both are really quick at catching it, so she'll be fine if it comes back, but I want to see if she can feel the difference now."

I felt Ivan's bubble slowly retracting. Adrik kept a firm hold on my waist. I could feel both of them smoldering, just in case. I looked at Andrei, nodding once to let him know Ivan had removed his bubble. He then looked at Ilya and said, "Ilya, tell us again how you are since the last time Boss has seen you."

This time, it was still evident that he was carrying things he was going to have to continue to work on, but the darkness was gone. Ilya hadn't even

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spoken yet, but I could tell he felt it too. "You can tell too, can't you? That heavy darkness that has been following you is gone now?" I asked him.

His eyes were as wide as they could possibly be as he looked at all of us. He stood up a little straighter, like he felt lighter. "I feel...better," he said, like he still wasn't quite sure. We watched as he took internal inventory of his body, then a wide smile stretched across his face. "Yeah. Definitely better."

\*Your mind didn't immediately jump to your breakup this time. You thought about you for the first time since anyone has asked you that question,"

Andrei said.

\*Keep it that way, man. Whatever it was that was on you can still come back, but you have to let it. You're in charge again. Which means you're in charge of your own thoughts, too. Thinking about what just happened to you in any other context than trying to learn from it and heal from it will roll out the red carpet for it to come back," Misha said.

Ilya's wide smile spread across his face as he thanked all of us. We all watched as his light grew even brighter in front of us.