

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 513

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Sephie

We decided to stay at the house until it was time to meet with Trino the following evening. It meant we had one more day to relax and not worry quite so much about everything else going on.

Because of Stephen's admission about his wavering confidence in his abilities now that Adrik had been leveled up, I decided that today was the day that he was finally going to the lake. Because he and Viktor were almost always the ones that went with Adrik to his office anytime we were at the house, it meant Stephen hadn't been dragged to the lake by me like the others had. And it was starting to show.

"Get your coat, Yoden. We're going on an adventure," I said once everyone had cleaned up from our morning workouts.

"Well, this sounds like a fun addition to my day. Is it like a side quest kind of mission? Multi-day mission? Do I need to find someone to feed my bearded dragon?"

he asked.

I laughed. "I didn't know you had a bearded dragon, Yoden. I've been to your apartment, even. I never saw it."

"I don't. It just sounded like something someone would need to feed when gone for multiple days," he said, laughing as he walked back toward his room to grab his

coat.

I looked at Ivan, who was in kitchen with me and having a hard time not laughing at our exchange. "I don't know how you can both love someone so much and hate them just as much all at once," I said.

"Want company, princess? Or this side quest needs to be a solo venture?" Ivan asked.

"The more the merrier, Squish. I've never dragged Stephen to the lake before. Today's the big day for him. He just doesn't know it yet."

"Oh, I'm getting in on that. I've been wanting to see this for months now," he said as he quickly left the kitchen to also go grab his coat.

Adrik walked in as Ivan walked out. He knew my plans already, as we'd discussed it before falling asleep the night before. "I'm stealing Squish, too," I told him as he walked to me. He wrapped his arms around my waist, pulling me against him. I felt the immediate relaxation of my body as soon as his hands were on me once

more.

"You can steal whoever you like, solnishko. It's to their benefit to go there with you. I'm surprised they don't all want to go," he said, pressing his lips to mine gently.

"I don't think the others know yet," I said, giving him my most innocent grin.

He kissed me one more time, then pushed me toward the back of the house when he heard Stephen and Ivan coming back from grabbing their coats. "Go. I'll keep the others busy," he said, a mischievous grin on his face.

"This. This is why I love you," I said, walking quickly to the back doors.

Once outside, the weather was beginning to warm up, but the air still had a bite to it. Enough that I was happy for a warm coat and Ivan's almost as warm as Andrei's but not as perfect as Adrik's body temperature. He wrapped a giant arm around my shoulders as we set off on our mini adventure.

As we walked into the woods, Ivan looked down at me. "I think seeing the stress melt off you helps the stress melt off me when we come here, princess."

I chuckled. "It is noticeable how much it affects everyone when we're here. I do find myself wondering if Adrik will ever even tell Vitaliy about this place. I think we all love our little sanctuary a little too much."

"Ten bucks says if he does tell Vitaliy, he'll threaten him and his guys to within an inch of their lives like he's done everyone who works here," Stephen said.

laughed. "Always wondered why no one ever ratted the location of this place out. Now I know."

"You should not be surprised, princess. You know how intimidating he can be on a good day. He sat every single person down and explained, in horrifying detail, what he would do to them should they ever reveal the location of the house or that it belonged to him," Ivan said. He was definitely proud of Adrik in that moment.

Not gonna lie, I was too.

I thought for a minute, then started laughing. "What do you want to bet that's the moment that Tori fell madly in love with Adrik?"

Stephen thought for a few minutes, in his usual serious way. "That actually holds up to her personality. I always thought Andrei was too nice for her. I think that's why she didn't like him as much as she thought she would once they started dating. He's so quiet, but he looks like the stereotypical alpha male asshole that bitchy chicks like. She thought she was getting someone who she would get a challenge out of breaking, but she got the nicest guy on the planet instead."

"Poor Bubba. He didn't deserve to have to deal with her." I sighed. "I do wish more women understood that a true alpha male isn't domineering or an asshole. Confidence is quiet, not in your face. Bubba is an actual alpha male. He doesn't need to prove himself to anyone, least of all insecure chicks with murderous tendencies."

"I think she actually did damage to his confidence," Ivan said as we came out of the woods to the lake. Ivan headed straight for my favorite spot. I glanced at Stephen, who was still deep in thought, but was also busy taking in the scenery around him. Just the look of innocent appreciation on his face made this outing

worth it.

"I am almost positive you are correct, Squish. I think it was actually kind of similar to Ilya's relationship. I find myself wondering if there was something extra to Tori that we could never confirm. It would explain why you always hated her, but never had a valid reason why. It definitely seemed like the more Andrei gave, the more she took. Same as Ilya."

"I would be willing to bet she did have something extra. It sometimes makes me sad that I didn't discover my gift earlier to take care of some of these people. Massimo is another one I regret not being able to break," Stephen said.

"I've caught myself wondering if we'll get a second chance at Massimo's soul. I don't know how quick someone can reincarnate, but somehow I think that soul will make the same mistakes over and over again. Same for Anthony and Lorenzo," Ivan said.

I couldn't help my smile. "I had no idea you guys were putting this much thought into everything," I said, laughing. "That sounded way more rude than I meant for it to. I didn't mean for it to sound like I was surprised you guys were thinking. You're very intelligent." I kept laughing as I just dug myself deeper into a hole.

"At least we don't have angels telling us we're weirdos, thank you very much," Stephen said, feigning indignancy.

"Fair. Totally fair," I said, still laughing.

Stephen looked at me, his wide, handsome smile that we were starting to see more regularly across his face. He sighed. "Seph, I don't know if you'll ever know how important you are to me, but I think Ivan can also agree that your laughter alone is one of the best reasons we've found to keep going."

"Oh, I've told her already that her laughter was the reason for me to come back anytime I found myself in my darkness," Ivan said.

"I think you guys are giving me too much credit. It's just the spark you needed to remind yourselves of your own light. Nothing more," I said, trying to hold back the tears that were threatening to fall.

"I think it's slightly more than that, but I won't argue with you," Stephen said. "Just this once."

"We've all helped each other. You guys help me with everything just as much as I've helped each of you. Like Ivan said, we're a team. Me and six giant alpha Russian bears. I think Misha was right. I think we should start solving crimes when all this is done."

"Seems like it would be too easy, given that we control most of the crime in the city," Stephen said thoughtfully,

"Dammit. Now I'll never get a giant dog," I said under my breath.

Both Ivan and Stephen laughed. Both looked even more relaxed than they had since we'd gotten our hands on both Niko and Vito. We sat in comfortable silence for a while, taking in the budding signs that Spring was fast approaching,

Finally, Stephen broke the silence. "If I would've known about this place before, I would've told Viktor to suck it and made someone else be his backup with Boss."

J laughed. "Everything happened when it was supposed to, Yoden. You were justifiably terrified of me in the beginning. It would not have been the same." "I've been thinking about the differences in everyone's gifts. I think your gift compliments Boss better than we originally thought, Stephen," Ivan said.