

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 20

Chapter Twenty

Sephie

We continued walking around the maze of rooms. The staff quarters were off the kitchen. More bedrooms for guests next to the staff rooms. There was a library on the other side of the kitchen, which I was excited about exploring. Another grand room held a few couches and oversize chairs. There were French doors leading outside to the pool and the gardens that I could see from my balcony. We walked outside, as Adrik said he wanted to show me the gardens up close. As soon as we walked by the pool, we were hit with the loveliest floral aroma from the gardens. It was even stronger than what I could smell from above. It was like walking through Heaven. I inhaled deeply.

“You like?” Adrik asked as we walked through the small maze of familiar flowers and flowers I had never seen before.

“I love. It smells amazing. I want to bottle it and wear it all the time,” I laughed.

“This is one of my favorite places on the property. I come here often when I can’t sleep,” Adrik said.

“What are your other favorite places?” I asked.

“In good time. We don’t have time right now. We must feed you before your stomach wakes up the neighborhood,” he said poking me in the stomach.

I blushed, “yeah, sorry. My stomach has a mind of its own. Clearly.”

He let out a small laugh. “I’m not complaining. You’re not the only one who hasn’t eaten today. My stomach is grateful yours sounded the alarm.” I smiled up at him, loving how relaxed and at ease he seemed anytime he was near me. I’d seen the tension and the murderous aura he gave off when he was taking care of his business, but I knew I’d only seen a peek of what he was capable of. I’d seen the other bosses in the city enough to know how dangerous they were. If Adrik was above them all, that meant he was even more dangerous.

“Excuse me, sir? Your dinner is ready,” Tori said from the back patio, by the pool.

“Thank you, Tori. We’ll be right there,” he said. He watched as she turned to leave and pulled me in close. He kissed me sweetly, his arms wrapping around me the way I had already grown to love. I returned the kiss, but then stepped out of his grasp.

“Race you!” I said, not even giving him time to register what I said before I took off running to the house.

“Oh, hell no,” I heard him say as I heard his footsteps behind me. I giggled as I ran around the pool, trying to stay ahead of him to get to the door first. I barely made it to the door ahead of him and raced inside. I weaved in and out of the couches and chairs, while he chose to simply jump over them. I laughed at him, as he caught up to me and passed me. He turned just before we made it to the kitchen and caught me, sweeping me off my feet. I squealed as he lifted me into the air, spinning me around once. “Got you,” he whispered, slightly out of breath.

“No fair jumping the couches,” I said, laughing, trying to catch my breath.

“Oh, now you make rules? After you lost?” he asked, still holding me like I weighed nothing. I wrapped my arms

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around his neck as he carried me the rest of the way into the kitchen. Tori had set two plates of food on the bar of the large island in the middle of the kitchen. She was washing a pan and looked up as we entered the kitchen. Again, I caught her eyes go wide and this time she dropped the pan she was washing, making a loud bang. She immediately dropped her gaze and kept washing.

We sat down just as she finished up. “That’ll be all, Tori. We’ll clean up. Thank you,” Adrik said.

She simply nodded, as she was drying her hands on her apron. She kept her gaze down and left the kitchen.

“Why was she so surprised when we came into the kitchen?” I asked, cutting into my steak. It cut like butter. I was going to enjoy this. My stomach was already grumbling in anticipation.

Adrik looked at me, confused. “What do you mean, solnishko?”

I finished the bite of steak I had just taken – God, it was better than I thought and said, “she was surprised when you asked me what I wanted to eat and again when you carried me into the kitchen.”

He chuckled, as he cut another bite of steak. “They’re not used to seeing me with a woman, solnishko. I don’t bring women here. Some of the staff even think I’m gay because they’ve never seen a woman here with me.”

“Why not?”

He rested his hands, fork and knife still in hand, on either side of his plate, seemingly lost in thought for a moment. “Because I’ve never found anyone worthy of coming here, until now.” He turned and looked deeply in my eyes, as I was so stunned that I had quit chewing. Ms. Jackson’s words, coming back to mind. “Do you know that man is in love with you?”

I just stared at him for a moment, as he took another bite of steak. “Are you just going to save that bite for later or are you going to eat it?” That smirk that I loved back on his face. I started chewing again, somewhat snapped back to reality. My mind was still racing.

“How could they think you’re gay? Don’t you have hundreds of women throwing themselves at you?” I asked, trying the mashed potatoes that Tori had made for us. Sweet Jesus this woman was now my favorite person because of her culinary skills.

“They try, yes. When I was younger, I dated a few of them. I slept with more of them, but there was no depth there. No feeling.

They were all more interested in the empire than they were me.”

I sighed. I took a drink of water, looking toward the staff quarters. “How sad.”

“Hmm? What’s sad?”

“It must be difficult to be in your position. You don’t know who you can trust and who you can’t. That’s sad. Everyone needs people they can trust.”

He nodded in agreement, lost in thought for a moment. “I have my men,” he said. “I trust them completely. They’re actually good judges of character. In the past, they’ve saved me from women who were just after money and power. The women showed a different side to them than they did to me.” He took a drink of water, adding, “that’s how I knew you were special. Every single one of my guys loves you like a little sister. I’ve never seen them act the way they do when they’re around you.”

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I laughed, “even Ivan? Because I’m still convinced he would like to murder me in my sleep.”

He set his fork and knife down beside his plate and turned in his seat toward me. He grabbed my chair and turned it so I had no choice but to look at him. “Especially Ivan, solnishko. Do you know how many years he’s worked for me?”

I shook my head.

“Ten years. He’s worked for me for ten years and today was the first time I’ve seen that man laugh. I might’ve seen him smile once or twice, maybe. But never, ever, have I seen him laugh. He’s the most serious man I’ve ever known. Until he’s around you. You cracked his impenetrable defenses.”

“I just asked him to teach me how to drive like he does.”

Adrik shook his head, chuckling. “You still don’t see it.”

“Don’t see what?”

“How special you are.”

I scoffed. “Now you sound like Ms. Jackson.”

“If she said you’re special, then she’s a very smart woman,” Adrik said, standing up and taking my completely empty plate to the sink. My stomach was so full and happy now. I leaned back in my chair and patted my full belly, my mind still racing. As Adrik turned on the water, I realized I was being no help and jumped up to help with the dishes.

“I can wash those,” I said, standing next to him.

“Net. I’ll do it.”

I grabbed a towel and hopped up on the counter beside the sink. “Ok, you wash, I’ll dry.”

He smiled as he handed me a clean plate.

“Teamwork makes the dream work,” I said, drying the plate.