

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 189

Chapter One Hundred Eighty-Nine

Adrik

We continued to talk with Andy, but it was starting to get late. Armando wanted to leave to go check on Giana, who had been alone most of the day, as she still felt intimidated by being in the same room with so many men. We set Andy up in a spare apartment, close to Armando's guys. Viktor gave strict orders to all the security that Andy was not to leave the building unless he was with one of us, under any circumstances. They had orders to shoot him if he tried.

I was somewhat relieved for it to be just us once again, so we could relax somewhat. Sephie got up from between Ivan and Misha, declaring, "I need a change of scenery. Everyone come upstairs. We're ordering food." She had a grin on her face. I think she enjoyed giving us orders once in a while.

Stephen pulled his phone out of his pocket. "Chinese or Thai?"

We all looked at each other, then looked at Stephen as we all said "Thai" at once.

"Done and done," he said as he walked out of the room to make the order.

Once upstairs, we continued the conversation about what to do. "I'm going to call Trino in the morning, but I want to keep Armando in the dark for now. I don't think Trino knows Anthony has been talking to the Mexicans. They have a very strained relationship, at best. I don't like dealing with them at all. This could start a war between the Colombians and the Mexicans if we're not careful," I said.

"I think Trine is on your side completely. I think Armando is too, but I don't trust Mike at the moment, until we figure out what his issue is," Sephie said. She thought for a moment. "What does asking nicely entail, exactly?"

Andrei chuckled. "We need more details about the building, so we know where to place the charges. And if we can gain access inside or if we have to do it from the outside."

"What's the difference?" she asked.

"Inside is a cleaner demolition. Outside makes a bigger boom, basically," Andrei said.

"Bubba, I had no idea you enjoyed blowing things up this much," she said, grinning at him.

"Who do you think blew the hole in the wall of the Syrian prison to ask nicely if Viktor could come out and play?" he said, laughing.

"I did not bet on you, I'll be honest. You don't strike me as that turbulent," she said.

He laughed. "I'm not. But I really enjoyed chemistry class."

"Nerd alert!" she said, laughing, causing everyone to join her in yet more laughter.

Right on time.

"So how do you guys get the details of the warehouse that you need to make it go boom?" she asked, clearly curious about this plan.

Viktor exhaled loudly. "That might be the most complicated part. I'm sure they're going to have the place surrounded and watched constantly. If it's at the docks, that could work to our advantage or disadvantage, depending on the exact location. If

it's on the water, that could work in our favor."

Sephie thought for a moment. "Andy said the area was mostly abandoned. What if we make it not abandoned, so there's a reason for people to be down there?"

We all thought for a moment, nodding in agreement. "That could work. We'd need a lot of people to make it work well, though,"

Viktor said.

"How many dealers are in the city? If Chen is right and most of the dealers aren't down with selling brawn, I would bet good money they would help. There's a hierarchy of dealers, apparently, too. Like, I don't even think the bosses know all the dealers in the city. The dealers have dealers who have their own dealers," Sephie said.

We were quiet for a moment, all thinking about her idea. It was a good one. Set up a fake warehouse for a few weeks to give people a reason to be there while they collected information on the building.

Ivan said, "that's not a bad idea. If we can set up a fake warehouse next to the one they're using, it would give us a reason for electricians and the like to be close to their warehouse and maybe even in their warehouse."

Sephie's face lit up. "Chen is a contractor too. He can help us get real...whatever we need to make it look as legit as possible. I'm sure he knows electricians too." She pulled a business card from her pocket and handed it to Viktor. "I know Chen will help us, for sure. He's the most laid-back dude I've ever met, so for him to be angry about something means he feels very strongly about it. He was not happy about the possibility of being forced to unknowingly sell brawn. If he's right about the other dealers, they'll help us out as well."

"We'll start checking it out tomorrow and see what we can come up with," Ivan said.

Stephen's phone rang. He took it out of his pocket, looked at the screen, then put it back. "Food's here. I'll be right back," he said, walking toward the door.

"When you get back, I want to hear your insight into the Mike problem," Sephie said.

"Deal," he said, walking out of the penthouse. Sephie caught me smiling to myself, happy that those two seemed to be getting as close as she was with the other four guys. It took me a while to warm up to Stephen as well, but he was an integral part of the team at this point.

While we were all eating, Stephen enlightened us with his insight on Mike. "I

Was in the gym at the same time as Keith the other night. We were just shooting the shit. I asked a lot of questions, curious about where they all came from. Keith used to work with Mike, you know." He looked at Viktor, who nodded his head.

"They told me when I was interviewing them that they knew each other," Viktor said.

"Right, well they worked together in a really small town. They were both on the police force. It was the town they grew up in, too. Mike climbed the ranks quickly after joining the force. He was a very big fish in a very small pond, basically." He paused to take a bite of food. I glanced at Sephie. I could tell she was beginning to put pieces together. Stephen continued, "Keith says he's always been that stereotypical alpha male type, but not in a good way. He takes the aggression to an extreme, things like

that."

"Do you know what made him leave that small town?" Sephie asked.

"Keith said he made it as far as he could make it without someone above him dying. He got tired of waiting. He's big on titles. He likes authority, Keith said. My best guess, and you might tell me I'm completely wrong, Seph, but I think he almost feels threatened by you. He operates by the rules of the animal kingdom, if you will. He sees all of us and we're clearly a formidable opponent, so he respects that automatically. But then he sees Seph and at least in his mind, she's clearly inferior, but then he

sees us deferring to her, protecting her, and well, following her around like puppies, because let's be real, we do that. But I mean, it's by choice. We all want to be near her. But for someone like Mike, who isn't necessarily smart enough to see past the black and white of big male equals strength, small woman equals weak rules, it's likely disturbing." We all chuckled when he called us puppies. Guilty. But I didn't see any of us changing that anytime soon.

"Has the man ever been laid?" Sephie asked.

Stephen laughed. "I don't know the answer to that question. That's not really information I was interested in." Stephen looked at all of us, somewhat nervously, adding, "Mike really isn't my type."

I caught Sephie's eye, knowing she knew what that meant, but waited to see if any of the other guys picked up on it. They laughed, thinking he was joking. Sephie looked thoughtfully at Stephen, trying to figure out if he really wanted to have this conversation or not right now. He looked at her, realizing that she picked up on his hint. They had a silent conversation, then Sephie asked, "but Keith is your type, isn't he?" Stephen blushed, slightly, but a small smile crept across his face. Sephie said, "he's way hotter. Good choice."

The other four suddenly realized what he had meant. Andrei looked at him, smiling. "This makes so much more sense. I thought you were a monk, dude. You've never once been interested in a girl. I was beginning to worry there was something wrong. I'm so relieved."

Misha's broad smile stretched across his face. "Me too, bro. And I agree with Sephie. Keith is definitely the better choice. Now I understand why he's been staring at the back of your head so much."

Stephen looked surprised. "He has?"

"Yeah, dude. We've all noticed it. We thought he was just awkward after you saved his ass when you guys went to get Andy. You know, some dules have a problem saying thank you. I put him squarely in that category. Turns out I was wrong." Ivan said, laughing.

Stephen suddenly looked like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. "You guys don't care?"

Viktor looked at him, seriously. "The only thing I care about is that you kept it from us for so long. You could've told us before now. It wouldn't have changed anything. But I have to say I'm impressed you hid it so well. We had no clue."

I cleared my throat. They all looked at me. "Well, it should come as no surprise to anyone, but Sephie knew. She just wanted. Stephen to feel comfortable enough to tell you guys himself."

They all said, "of course" at the same time. Stephen, curious, asked, "when did you figure it out, Seph?"

"Not that long ago, honestly. When we were at the club with Trino. I saw you talking to one of his guys while we were making bets at the bar. He was also very attractive. You like them pretty," she said, grinning at him. Stephen stood up and went to her, pulling her into a hug. "Thank you. For letting me tell everyone in my own time. And thank you for showing me how much more awesome it is to just be yourself all the time," he said. She hugged him tightly.

He walked back to his seat, visibly lighter, I smiled to myself thinking about how Sephie had brought out the best in all of us. I remembered Ms. Jackson's words from so many months ago. She'll show you the best parts of yourself, if you let her. I hoped she'd never stop.

Stephen said, as he cleared his throat, "back to Mike. You add in that she's affectionate with all of us, while usually in the same. room as her boyfriend and Mike just assumes that something else is going on with Seph and all of us, which proves to further his original assessment that she's the weaker of us and using sex to gain favor."

Ivan looked to Stephen. "so how do we check Mike more forcefully, so he learns his place?"

Stephen thought for a moment. "I only have one idea so far, but I'm not sure you're going to like it."

"Let's hear it," Sephie said.

"I think you're going to have to kick his ass," Stephen said.