

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 254

Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-Four

Sephie

"So, you really confirmed she's buying drugs when she goes to the lobby?" Keith asked. It was almost like he was expecting us to tell him his suspicions were false.

"She's apparently got a nasty little coke habit," Misha said. He held up the vial he picked off Giana earlier that day.

Keith's eyes went wide. "That's what fell out of her purse that day!" he said, pointing to the vial in Misha's hand.

"If she's buying that much coke twice a week, she's got to be staying high almost constantly right now. It's likely why we haven't seen much of her. That kind of habit eventually gets difficult to hide." Ivan said.

"I wonder if that explains her nervousness around you guys from the beginning. I'm positive she caught on to how observant we all are right away. She's never liked being in the same room as all of us. Hell, she's never really liked being around us much at all, unless there's shopping involved," I said.

"It's easier to hide when shopping. She can be more animated without arousing suspicion," Andrei said.

"Have you noticed her having nosebleeds?" Ivan asked Keith.

"She's had a couple lately. She blames the weather. She says she hates it when it gets cold," Keith said.

"Have you seen Armando questioning her about anything? Not that he would do it in front of you, but I just wonder if he's noticing any of this," I asked Keith.

"I haven't seen anything. Ever since they got into a fight about her basically accusing you of being an addict, which is really ironic now, they've had a strained relationship. I think they even slept in separate rooms this past weekend at least one night.. I've heard them arguing, but they're always arguing in Italian so I can't understand what they're saying," he said.

"It's Italian. They could be confessing their love for each other and it would probably still sound like a heated argument," Adrik said sarcastically.

"I've heard Armando arguing on the phone several times lately too. Again, always in Italian. There was one argument that got really heated, so I recorded part of it," Keith pulled his phone out of his pocket. We all looked at him, somewhat surprised. "I don't like not being able to understand what's going on. I'm not being nosy, but if I'm supposed to be keeping this dude safe, then I need to know what's going on," he said.

"Fair point," I said. He found the recording on his phone and turned the volume all the way up. It wasn't the best recording, so I couldn't hear it well enough from across the office. He tossed his phone to me so I could put it closer to my ear. It was just Armando's voice, so he wasn't on speaker. Not that I could've understood the other person on this recording. I listened to it a couple of times to make sure I was hearing it correctly. "He's talking in very vague terms. Saying things like 'I'll take care of it' and 'you have to give me time. At the end he says, 'I told you that wasn't going to work but you wouldn't listen to me.'" I tossed the phone back to Keith.

Adrik pulled me back against him again, hugging me tightly. He put his lips close to my ear, saying quietly, "if I haven't told you how grateful I am to have you lately, just know I'm incredibly grateful to have you." I felt my cheeks flush slightly. He left his cheek against mine for a few moments.

"What do we know of his business deals lately?" Ivan asked. "He could be talking about a business deal that isn't working out the way it's supposed to. I would like to stick with that option rather than the other option my mind came up with."

"Do we want to know the outlier option?" Andrei asked.

"If he's really considering switching sides, that could explain the first two statements. The third could be in reference to either the ball or the explosion in Italy. Or the failed kidnapping attempt," Ivan said. He had a habit of rubbing his hand over his goatee when he would worry,

"I see why you'd prefer to stick with the first option," Andrei said.

Adrik felt me tense at the mention of those three events. His hands found mine and he laced his fingers through mine, keeping my arms on top of his that were wrapped around my waist. "What else did you find out about Giana this afternoon? You guys have been down here all afternoon, it can't be just that she's the addict among us," Adrik asked. I was both surprised and impressed that he was remaining as calm as he was right now. His fingers lightly played with mine, sending waves of warmth up

my arms as we talked.

"She slipped a note to her dealer. We're thinking it's all in reference to Armando's house, but none of us have been there recently," Viktor said. He produced the note that I had translated earlier and handed it to Keith. "Can you make sense of any of that, in reference to his house?" he asked.

Keith studied the note. "Well, I'm sure you all know his safe is impossible. You have to have Armando to get into that thing, so that checks out." He read the other three sentences and then read them again. "Top of the stairs, third door on the right is Armando's room."

"Does he keep anything special in there or is he the special thing?" I asked.

"He has a second safe in there, but it's just like the bigger one in his office. You have to have Armando to get into it," Keith said. He thought for a few minutes more, studying the note.

"Armando had some very pricey art on his walls in his house in Italy. Do you know if that's the case here as well?" I asked.

I could see the light bulb turn on in Keith's head. "That's what that means. Look, I don't know art. I couldn't tell you how much these paintings are worth or even what the paintings are of, in a couple of cases, but he has the majority of paintings in these rooms on the first floor. He has a few upstairs as well, all in his room. Maybe that's why his room is specifically pointed out. It's really the only one with any kind of paintings in it upstairs."

"It sounds like she's planning an art heist," Ivan said. "If she's looking for maximum profit, that's the way to go if you can't access the safe. But stolen art is very hard to sell. Given that her family used to be wealthy, she might have connections on how to move it, but this seems well above her level of Intelligence."

"Her family is no longer wealthy, then?" Adrik asked.

"Viktor figured it out. It didn't make sense that she was planning on robbing Armando if she came from a wealthy family. She has all the money she could want with Armando. Why would she be trying to rob him, if not for a larger reason? When she 'apologized' to me, it was clear that her family still controls her," I said.

"Her father has made some terrible business decisions since he took over from Giana's grandfather. They're virtually penniless now." He pulled up the first article he found and walked over to show Adrik. "One of the biggest deals that cost him a substantial amount of money was with Armando." Adrik looked at the picture for a moment. I could suddenly feel his anger rising quickly.

up and turned to look at him. He was still looking at the computer screen. He pointed to the man that looked vaguely familiar in the picture, then looked to me. "That's who he was arguing with yesterday after the me

"What does this article say?" he asked me.

"It was originally a huge business deal that they started before they got approval. Three investors pulled out, but it doesn't give a reason why, and the last investor, Giana's father, tried to fund the project on his own. He lost a ton of money. It also doesn't give a reason why approval wasn't granted either," I said.

"What about the other article you haven't seen yet?" Ivan asked, pointing to his computer. I pulled that article up and scanned it. "This one is about a fire that demolished an entire apartment building. Three people died in the fire. Firefighters were unable to put the fire out completely for three days. Um, gory details nobody wants to know about. Ah, Giana's father owned the building," I said.

"Could be insurance fraud," Ivan said. "It's an old scam."

I searched for more articles about that building. Most were just reporting the incident, but I eventually found one that reported the ruling on the insurance claim. "I think you're right, Super Squish. He filed an insurance claim, but they did an investigation and concluded the fire was deliberately set. According to this article, they never found who set the fire."

"Sounds very similar to Armando's exploding office building in Italy," Stephen said.

"Do you think Armando was behind his own building exploding? Is he trying the same scam?" I asked. Stephen just shrugged.

his shoulders. "Follow-up question: did they have these kinds of insurance scams in the 1500s when you were just a wee

vampire of 400 years?"