

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 259

Chapter Two Hundred Fifty-Nine

Adrik

We set a meeting with the people organizing in the different areas of the city that we knew about so far. Since Armando was at his house, I had everyone come to the building to make it easier. I regularly met with groups of people from all areas of the city, so it wouldn't raise suspicion. It wasn't the same as having known drug dealers walk into the building to meet with me. After the meeting, we had planned to go to the house. I knew the guys were just as stressed as I was. Being away from everything, if only for the weekend, helped everyone relax to make it through the week.

The meeting went well and Sephie was happy with the people that showed up as well. "It's obvious the people love you. It's always been obvious to me. You're so popular that I still can't believe I'd never heard of you before the night I first met you at the restaurant. Not once did any of the other bosses mention you when they were meeting at the restaurant," she said. We were in the backseat, on the way to the house.

"I do try to stay as anonymous as possible. The other bosses wouldn't necessarily need to mention me unless there was a problem. That's why I showed up that night," I said.

"Was it just Anthony's side hustle or was there something more?" she asked me, as curious as always.

"That and I was already hearing rumors of increased taxes in a few areas of town. Not as bad as it is now, even. Anthony made sure that conversation didn't happen, so the bosses took advantage and raised taxes on everyone quickly."

"At least the people are smart enough to know it wasn't you. Now they know they can count on you to help solve the issue, too." She leaned her head on my shoulder. "You're a good King," she said wistfully.

Our conversation on the way to the house made me start to wonder if Anthony had been put up to doing what he did that night at the restaurant specifically so I wouldn't call the other bosses out about raising taxes. They couldn't have known I would come to Sephie's defense. I'd never shown any favor to any woman in public, well, ever. At this point, I was starting to question everything and everyone around me.

Later that night, I brought it up to Sephie again. "How well did the other bosses know you, solnishko?"

"I think you'd have to ask them that question, but Armando is the only one I ever really spoke to. Even with him, it was rare. He asked me questions a few times about whether I had a boyfriend and things like that, but he made it seem like he was trying to set me up with one of his sons. He would always say 'my son is about your age' and then he'd tell me what his son did or was going to do about whatever we were talking about. I just let him talk, same as I do now," she said. She thought for a minute, then added, "I got free help out of him when it would happen, so I never really minded. But I kept the details about my life to myself. I didn't like the idea of him having more information about me than I wanted him to, regardless of whether he was nice

to me or not."

"Maybe he was trying to gauge your interest in him, not his son," I said. I hadn't given it much thought, but Armando was very affectionate toward Sephie, even from the very beginning.

Sephie looked at me and scrunched up her face. "Eww."

I couldn't help but laugh. I never had to question her love for me. I would be more worried about her leaving me for one of the guys than I ever would about her leaving me for someone else. And I never worried about her leaving me for one of the guys.

"I mean, Armando is a nice-looking man. He takes care of himself much more than the other bosses. Those dudes have been letting their money attract women for years now. Armando still has some self-respect and tries to keep in shape. He looks good for his age, although now that I think about it, I really have no clue how old he is," she said.

"He's roughly ten years older than I am," I said.

"That's young to be a boss. I know how you became the world's youngest boss, but how did he manage it? And how long has he been a boss?" she asked as she climbed into bed, waiting for me to turn the overhead light off.

"Armando was the underboss of the man he took over from. That man only had one daughter and she was never interested in anything related to business. He handed everything over to Armando when he became too ill to run things." I stretched out on the bed, waiting for Sephie to lay across my chest.

"And has he done a better or worse job than that guy?" she asked, settling in. She rested her chin on my chest, so she could look at me.

"Mostly better. He's made a few deals that have gone bad, as you know. Overall, he's tried to win the favor of the people in his area. He's quite generous, has a good relationship with the important people, and looks out for the people in his area."

"Did he become boss before or after you did?" she asked. I could see her mind trying to make a connection, but I wasn't exactly sure where she was going with this line of thinking.

"Before. Until I took over, he was the youngest boss the city had ever seen," I said. She chewed on her bottom lip, lost in thought. I stayed quiet, curious where her mind was going. I also loved watching her when she was deep in thought. It was almost as adorable as when she was confused about something.

"What if he's been playing both sides this whole time?" she asked. She thought for a moment longer. "He always had a good relationship with the other bosses, from what I could tell at the meetings. He was always the one that would get everyone to come to an agreement when they'd argue over something. He would work the problem out. Eventually, the other bosses started to look at him for direction. Like they would defer to him, almost." She sat up, crossing her legs, so she could fidget with her hands. I sat up farther as well, so I could see her better. "Let's just pretend for a minute that he got it in his head that he was going to run the city, because the other bosses had been giving him more respect. Add in that he might've been trying to feel me out," she shuddered at that thought. "Still gross, for the record," she said, smiling at me. "You were gone for a few months prior to the night I met you. Maybe Mando started thinking he could run the city himself, without you. Then you come back and in one night, take the city back and take me from him. Remember that first night at his house in Italy? How weirdly thoughtful he was about trying to set me up with his son and how that didn't work out because I was meant for bigger and better things? And then again when we were at the restaurant after the meeting with the scummy lawyer?" she asked.

I nodded my head. "I let those go because I thought he was just being a creepy old dude. You guys made me all squishy inside talking about me anyway, but Mando's comments made me tense. It was just covered up by what you guys said about me. Mando doesn't know me well enough to say things like that about me. He still doesn't. He might think he does. He might wish he does, but he doesn't. I would take a comment like that from Trino better than I would Armando. At least Trino is honest about his intentions." Her fingers were nervously picking at the waistband of my pajama pants. She had taken the drawstring, rolled it up, unrolled it, twisted it around her fingers, and now she'd moved on to the waistband as she talked.

I thought about what she'd just said. "I knew Armando had a good relationship with the other bosses, but I didn't realize they had put him in any kind of leadership position, if you will," I said. "I did miss out on some very important details while we were gone trying to get Viktor back." I ran my hand through my hair. That period of my life was one of the roughest times I've been through. Trying to get Viktor out, without getting the rest of us caught was quite possibly the hardest thing we've ever done. I was more nervous walking into that meeting at the restaurant that night than I'd ever been. I'd been away for months. A lot can happen in that amount of time. Everything faded away when I walked in and saw Sephie staring at me.

I felt her fingers lightly running over my cheek and through my short facial hair. "Penny for your thoughts," she said quietly.

I looked at her, smiling at me. Her hands had quieted and she was waiting for me to think through what was going through my mind, just as I had waited for her. It was one of the many things I loved about her. "I was thinking about being gone, trying to get Viktor out. It was a rough time. I rarely get worried about business, but I was nervous walking into that meeting that night at the restaurant. I'd been gone longer than I had wanted to be. I didn't know what to expect. Then I walk in and find you

staring at me," I said, smiling at her. "Everything else seemed inconsequential from that point on."

The smile that spread across her face made my heart threaten to stop.