

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 310

Chapter Three Hundred Ten

Sophie

Once all the needles were removed, Ivan was talking quietly with the acupuncturist while Adrik helped me get dressed again. He had brought one of the shirts and a pair of insulated leggings that the guys had picked up while they were out. “We modified the shirt,” he said, holding it up so I could see they cut the sleeve off. “I think it will work.” He slid it over my cast and helped me get it the rest of the way on, then helped with the leggings.

“Do you guys need anything from me this afternoon? Because you have approximately 20 minutes before I’m asleep again. I’m about to be so warm,” I said as he helped me put his sweatshirt back on. He chuckled, leaning over to kiss my forehead. “You can sleep as long as you need to, solnishko.”

We set the meeting with the journalist a few days after he suggested it to give the guys time to watch him. Better to be extra safe right now. “I was correct. Recluses are quite possibly the best people to have to watch. He has the same routine every day. He’s only out of his apartment for precisely 95 minutes each day. He spends the rest of the time inside,” Stephen said.

“Seems boring. Oh wait, that’s me. That’s what I do every day,” I said, laughing.

Adrik clicked his tongue. “You’ll be able to go more places again once this is all over,” he said.

“I wasn’t complaining,” I said. “Although I do miss the gardens and the lake at the house, now that I think of it.”

“Soon, love,” Adrik said.

Viktor’s phone beeped to let him know that Chen was in the lobby. While he left to go fetch him, the rest of us moved down to Adrik’s office. The bruises on my face were much lighter now, so I didn’t feel so self-conscious being seen in public. The bruises on my body were still quite colorful, but they were much easier to hide. I still got a few curious looks from people here and there, but the guys were quick to pick up on it. They just moved in closer around me so people had a harder time seeing me.

“Sephie, you’re looking much better, my girl,” Chen said as he walked in the office.

“Not so colorful anymore,” I said, smiling at him.

“How’s your arm? Still hurts like a sumbitch, huh?”

“Mostly only when it’s out of the sling right now. I can’t tell if it’s getting better or I’m just used to the pain now, but I don’t notice it all the time anymore. The ribs are worse, if I’m being honest. Do not recommend.”

Chen laughed. “Noted.”

We filled Chen in on everything he needed to know to make this meeting believable. I went over the email exchanges with him, so he would be familiar with the conversation we’d had with the journalist so far. We gave him details on Ricardo and Lorenzo that we’d found, so he’d have a working knowledge of the information and could respond quickly.

“If you’re ever not sure of how to answer, just pause like you’re thinking of how to phrase your answer. Look down at your coffee thoughtfully, or watch a person walk by before responding. You’ll be able to hear us in your earpiece, so we can give you the answer you need. Try not to stare at him while you’re listening to us. It’ll make it more obvious you’re being coached on what to say. You want it to come across as a normal conversation. People maintain eye contact, but they also look away periodically in normal conversation. People who are nervous tend to try to maintain too much eye contact. It’s a dead giveaway every time,” Stephen said.

“If he says anything in Italian, I’ll be able to translate, but I told him in the last email that I used translating software so he had to speak English. He might try to speak Italian to gauge whether that was a lie or not,” I said.

“Stephen will have you covered the whole time. We’ll be watching from down the street as well. And you’ll be able to hear us the entire time,” Viktor said.

“Okay. I think I can do this,” Chen said.

“You’ll be fine, Chen. Just try to stay relaxed. And if you feel like something is really off, say the word and we’ll make sure you get out of there as quickly as possible,” Andrei said.

“Yeah, uh, I meant to ask before, who’s idea was it to use mayonnaise as the safe word?” Chen asked, trying not to laugh.

“You really have to ask that question?” I said, laughing.

“I should’ve known,” he said.

“Technically, it was Max that came up with the idea for ridiculous words. I just stole it. Made it my own,” I said, smiling at him as we walked to the elevator to leave.

“Yeah, you know I stopped by the restaurant a day or two ago. He hasn’t figured it out yet, but I know you guys saved that dude’s a*s in the parking lot after work. I don’t know how many times I’ve told him to be more aware of his surroundings, but he’s the dumbest motherf**ker I’ve ever met when it comes to that. No idea how you guys knew what was happening and I’m positive I don’t want to know. I just know it had to be you,” he said.

“You’ll have to let us know if he does ever figure it out. We have a bet pool going on whether it’ll ever happen or not,” I said. I caught Andrei’s eye, smiling widely at him. He seemed like he was doing better after our little talk. I was curious to see what else he was capable of, after my talk with the acupuncturist as well.

We made sure that Chen was the first one to the café so he would be waiting on the journalist to arrive. I gave a description of Chen to the journalist so he would know what to look for. Chen looked relaxed while he waited for the journalist to arrive.

Right on time, the journalist appeared, walking from the direction of his apartment. “Got a visual. He’s on his way, Chen.” The streets around the café were mostly quiet. It was an older part of town, quiet, not as many people to contend with, which worked to our advantage. It gave us a clear view of Chen, which helped put his mind at ease.

The journalist was carrying a briefcase. He walked right to Chen, asking him the question we’d given him. Chen answered with the correct phrase, so each knew the other was the person they were meeting. It was all very much like a spy movie..

The journalist set the briefcase down on the table as he sat down across from Chen. He opened it, getting right to business. He talked quietly, but his English was good. Chen should have no problems understanding him.

“Like I told you in the emails, I’ve been watching this man for years. He’s very connected to very powerful people. But what I’ve recently discovered makes me believe he’s behind all those powerful people he’s connected to.” He paused, looking directly at Chen. “They say this city is run by one man. No one knows who he is or what his name is. I think I do.” He pulled a stack of documents out of his briefcase, pushing them toward Chen.

I glanced nervously at Adrik, gauging his reaction to this guy potentially uncovering who he was. He simply smirked at me and pulled me tighter against him.

The journalist started showing Chen the evidence he’d collected. “All of this, these business deals,” he’d flip through a few more pages, “these bank transactions...they all prove that Ricardo is the man who runs this city,” he said very quietly.

I felt Adrik squeeze me tighter, almost like an “I told you so.”

“The entire city? You think it’s this guy? Like he’s over all the other bosses as well? From what I’ve seen, he’s not even a lower-level boss,” Chen said.

“That’s because that’s what he wants you to think,” the journalist said. “This is why I had to go into hiding. If he knows I found out about this, I would be dead. He’s worked very carefully for years to make it seem like he’s not the one in charge, but I believe he is. We need to get this information to the police. Or the politicians of the city. I know the police commissioner isn’t on the take, but I can’t speak to the rest of the police force. I know there’s at least one politician that might be trustworthy.”

“Tell him you know Henry personally. The police commissioner. You can take the information straight to him,”

Adrik said to Chen.

“Henry? The police commissioner? He’s a family friend, actually. He’s like an uncle to me. I can take this information straight to him. I don’t know about the politicians, though. I think by definition, being a politician means you’re on the take,” Chen said.