

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

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489

Sephie

What I found in Dario's head was not wholly unexpected, but it was surprising that it came from Sal and not Massimo. The reason he was so willing to help us get information from Sal was because Sal had been the one to tell Dario's family about his family dying when he was younger. Sal is the one that told them Massimo killed Dario's parents, but Sal also framed it like Dario knew about the plan and was in on the plan.

"Bubba, you're seeing this too, right?" I asked, Andrei.

"Yeah, I knew Sal was evil, but this is past even what I thought he was capable of. Why would he do this?"

"I'm not entirely sure, but I want to ask him about it."

1 quickly shared what we'd found with Adrik, who was equally as shocked as Andrei and I. "That's a good reason to want revenge on a person," he said.

"I agree. I want to ask him about it and see his reaction. Just ask him why he wants to help us take down Sal. It can't be just because he wants to go free," 1

told Adrik

Adrik looked at Dario. "Is there another reason you're offering to help take down Sal, Dario?" Adrik's gaze was intense enough that 9 times out of 10, when he would ask a direct question like that, the person would always give a truthful answer. There was something about Adrik that usually compelled people to tell him the truth. That attribute had only grown stronger lately. His intimidation factor was ever present, even when he didn't mean to. Most people got the feeling that he was looking at their soul when he stared at them. It made many people uncomfortable.

Dario adjusted his position in the chair he was in, contemplating his answer. He decided the truth was the best option. "Sal is the one that told my family about Massimo killing my parents when I was young. That wouldn't have been the end of the world, except he made it seem like I knew about the plan and went along with it. My family was so disgusted with me that they left. Massimo is to blame for a lot of things, and he's partially to blame for that too, but Sal is the real reason my family left me and won't speak to me."

"Why would he do such a thing?" Misha asked, completely appalled at Sal's behavior.

Dario shrugged his shoulders. "Evil doesn't need a reason."

"Dario, you keep talking about Massimo and Sal and referring to them as evil. Granted, they've done many evil acts. That's not being argued here. I'm just curious if you've ever seen anything else that makes you think of them as evil?" I asked.

He looked slightly uncomfortable at my question; he didn't answer right away. Everyone picked up on his unease.

I could feel Andrei looking further through Dario's mind, as well as feel Misha's nausea as Dario thought about Massimo and Sal. Ivan still felt normal and Stephen still felt normal, so it wasn't anything to do with Dario himself, but he knew more about Massimo and Sal than he was saying.

He opened his mouth to speak, but then stopped himself, trying to find the words to say.

"Dario, do you know if either of them made any deals? Like say, for their souls?" I asked, just to see what would happen.

His eyes went wide as he looked at me. "How did you know about that?" he asked.

"There's a lot of things I know that I shouldn't," I said. "Which one was it? Sal or Massimo?"

"Sal, Massimo never knew about it, from what I know. He would've wanted his own deal had he known."

We all breathed a sigh of relief to know that Massimo hadn't made a deal with a powerful enough demon that he would reincarnate into roughly the same person each time. Now that we all know what we knew, I was slightly disappointed that we'd let Trino kill Massimo. It would've been better had Stephen broken him, the same as Armando.

"Do you know the details of that deal?" Adrik asked.

He shook his head no, as he said, "no, not specifically, Sal just told me that he made a deal with something very powerful. He tried to talk me into doing the same. Said he could get my family back, even. He also promised I could have exponentially more power if I did it."

"So why did you say no?" Ivan asked.

"Something didn't feel right. It wasn't that long ago that Sal told me about it. After that night at the restaurant when Ghost came back, for sure. I think it was when he found out that Sephie knew everything about Massimo. He said then he was going to use her to get to Ghost so he could kill him and that he had enough power to do so now," Dario said, "It was shortly after that when Massimo and I went to Colombia, so I never heard any more about it."

Adrik laughed. "His demon also oversold and underdelivered." A few of us snickered at Sal thinking he would be successful in overthrowing Adrik.

"What do you mean? His demon?" Dario asked.

"That's what he made a deal with. Basically, he literally sold his soul," Adrik said.

"That would imply he had one to begin with," Dario said thoughtfully. While he was not trying to be funny when he said it, it did make all of us laugh. We unwittingly made him nervous by laughing at him, until we assured him none of it was a joke.

"Dario, there are things happening that are not easily explained and Sal and Ricardo are at the center of them. There is a network of people around the world trying to take them down. Not just us," Adrik said,

Dario thought for a few minutes, then looked at Adrik. "I can get information. I don't know what else I can do, but I can at least do that. If what you've said is true, then he must be stopped. His entire family must be stopped. His children take after him in every way. Even the girls. Anthony was not an anomaly."

Adrik looked at Ivan, the two of them clearly having a silent conversation that the rest of us weren't privy to. I didn't get anything but honesty from Dario, nor did Andrei. He passed Misha's tests as well. We really could use all the help we could get at this point. If he was able to get information directly from Sal, it would make our lives much easier. Battista didn't even know about Sal's deal yet. We clearly needed some more help.

Adrik sighed. "I have no issue with you talking to Sal on the phone, but anything past that is not going to be safe for you. I'm not worried about betrayal, even. That would mean you're dead with the rest of them. I'm worried about your life being in jeopardy if they know where you are."

Dario looked surprised at Adrik's statement. Like he wasn't expecting Adrik to be worried for his safety. He thought for a few moments, then said, "Sal knows how paranoid I am. He also knows how secretive I can be. If I tell him I'm in hiding, he likely won't ask anything past that, as he knows he won't get an answer. He knows what happened to Massimo?"

"We're not sure. He had already fled to Italy when Massimo was killed," Adrik said.

"Eh. Then I tell him what happened to Massimo. I tell him I escaped and made it somewhere safe, but they're looking for me. I want to know what he's going to do to make it safe for me to return to the city. Then maybe I offer my area and Massimo's area for helping me. He won't be able to turn that down. He's too fucking greedy," Dario said.

"It could work," Ivan said in Russian, after thinking about it for a few minutes. "We need information on Sal. Anything helps, at this point."

Viktor agreed with Ivan, adding, "just on the off chance that Sal can trace his call, we can make it look like he's anywhere in the world but here. Sal won't be able to tell the difference."

Adrik looked to Misha, who was checking on outcomes. He finally returned to the present, saying, "he'll be useful. There's multiple ways this plays out. though."

"We can discuss that later. The important issue is whether to let him talk to Sal and whether that benefits us or hurts us," Adrik said.

"It will benefit us in each scenario," Misha said.

Adrik looked back to Dario, asking him in English, "you're sure you want to help us get information from Sal? You can say no. It changes nothing about our deal. You still go free at the end."

"I want to help. I'm tired of ignoring the evil he's done. If I can help hurry along his comeuppance. I'll gladly do it," Dario said.

Adrik simply nodded once. The conversation ended shortly after and Dario was taken back to his room. Once Viktor came back, we moved upstairs to

the penthouse since that was the only spot we really felt comfortable discussing; anything these days.

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"What were you two discussing 1 asked, looking between Adrik and Ivan.

Ivan's mischievous grin spread across his face. "I thought the whole point of being able to communicate telepathically was that no one else would notice when it happened?"

"No one else but her," Adrik said, pulling me to him. He turned me toward him, his palm resting on my cheek. "Much like what you witnessed in Battista's associate's head, I don't think you need the details of that conversation, solnishko."

He didn't need to say anymore. I knew it was not something I was going to enjoy knowing, so I happily let it drop.

"It's so weird when she doesn't argue," Ivan said, trying to sound serious.

Adrik put the back of his hand on my forehead, like he was checking my temperature. "She doesn't feel like she's got a fever, but that doesn't mean she's not coming down with something "

1 playfully punched him in the ribs as I turned and walked toward the bedroom to take my contacts out. He caught me as I got halfway down the hallway, wrapping his arms around me as he walked us both back to the bedroom. I could feel his happiness at having me in his arms. I knew he could feel mine, as well.

He waited patiently while I took my contacts out, then spun me around to face him. His lips immediately found mine, kissing me deeply. He broke the -kiss, leaning back far enough that he could see my eyes. The sweet look of satisfaction on his face told me they were deep blue. He caught me

smirking at him. "What's that look for?" he asked as he traded places with me to take his contacts out.

"You get a look of satisfaction on your face when my eyes turn blue. And only when my eyes turn blue. It's the only color I'm 100% positive on each time it happens, just by the look on your face," I said. I wrapped my arms around his waist and rested my head in between his shoulder blades while I waited for him to take his contacts out.

"That's because it's my absolute favorite," he said as he turned around to face me.

"You're my absolute favorite," I said, standing on my toes to kiss him again. He groaned softly as he pulled me against him completely. His lips were still on mine as he slowly walked us out of the bathroom, toward the bedroom door again. I could feel his reluctance to let go of me as we made it to the bedroom door. It made me giggle.

"You're not the only one who's feeling extra needy lately, apparently," he said, finally coming up for air.

"What is wrong with us," I said, wistfully as I pulled his arms around me tighter as we walked back to the kitchen.

I started on dinner as we discussed our conversation with Dario, as well as the conversation with Trino from the night before.

I finally looked to Stephen, asking, "how about now? Does anything still feel off to you about Dario after talking to him tonight?"

In his normal serious way, he thought for a moment before replying. "No, I think it was Sal's deal that was the reason we all needed to have that conversation. I don't know how Battista found out about Ricardo and Martin, but he clearly doesn't know about Sal yet."

"Maybe because his deal is so new? Although, I guess technically, so is Martin's deal. Maybe Sal made a deal with a much less powerful demon so it didn't show up on whatever demon radar Battista has at his disposal?" Misha asked.

I was still interested in knowing why Stephen thought about Dario and why something felt off. It seemed slightly out of character, but not in a bad way. In a he might've leveled up and we hadn't caught it way.

I caught Adrik studying Stephen as he talked. He clearly suspected something else as well. "Stephen, you're beginning to be able to sense demons, aren't you?" he asked.