

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 371

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Sephie

"Battista arrived last night. He wants to meet tomorrow. He made reservations at his favorite spot," Vitaliy said during a lull in the conversation at

dinner.

"Please tell me his favorite spot is someplace fun, like the zoo," I said.

Vitaliy laughed. "Net, but you might be able to talk him into it next time."

"Da mmit. Missed opportunity," I said, "Where's his favorite spot? Although I can tell you right now, I'm not going to enjoy it as much as I would the

700."

"He loves one restaurant at his hotel downtown. He always has important meetings there. But since he owns the place, he's usually the only one in the restaurant for those meetings. It's very convenient," Vitaliy said.

"What hotel?"

"Same one Mr. Turner works at," Ivan said.

"Oh, that hotel. Sh it. That means I have to wear heels. Yet another point for the zoo over this boring a ss hotel," I said. "But my consolation prize is I'll get to say hi to Mr. Turner." I hadn't been back to that hotel since the night of the ball. I couldn't say I was looking forward to it.

While everyone was busy talking, Ivan caught me off to the side. "No one is leaving your side this time, princess. Especially not me. Especially not your go ddamn prince."

"You're getting very good at reading my emotions, Squish. Even when they're not out of control yet."

This one was easy, princess. I have the same fear as you do. There's no way I'm letting what happened last time ever happen again. You won't be alone at any point. Might make the bathroom situation awkward, but that's a sacrifice I'm willing to make," he said, grinning at me.

I laughed at him. "You're my favorite, Squish. Don't tell the others."

It was quite the sight to behold when we arrived at the hotel the following day, Between the seven of us, plus Vitaliy and all of his security, you would've thought a foreign dignitary had arrived.

Mr. Turner, always happy to see us, was waiting to open the door as we walked up the steps. "Miss Sephie, you look beautiful as always," he said, bowing his head slightly.

I stepped away from Adrik to give Mr. Turner a hug. "It's good to see you, Mr. Turner. How are things today? Good? Quiet?"

"You know I love my quiet days, Miss Sephie." Before he let me go, he whispered in my ear, "come see me when you can." I nodded as discreetly as I could. Mr. Turner very rarely asked me to come see him, so I had a feeling he knew something he thought I should know. He winked at me as I stepped back to Adrik. "I'm glad to see you fine gentlemen taking care of her as usual," he said, nodding to Adrik and the guys. He opened the door, stepping to the side for everyone to enter.

Once inside the hotel, Vitaliy looked at Adrik and I, somewhat surprised. "He used to be my neighbor. I'm nowhere near that friendly to just anybody." I said, laughing at the relieved expression on Vitaliy's face.

Battista was waiting on us in the restaurant. It was just as Vitaliy said it would be. The entire restaurant was empty, except us. Battista was around the same age as Vitaliy, maybe slightly younger. His alive skin and black hair gave him the appearance of a much younger man, bowever. Vitaliy greeted him as warmly as he was capable of. When Adrik stepped away from me to shake his hand, the guys all silently moved closer to me, effectively boxing me in. I smiled to myself.

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There were two other people with Battista, which was unexpected, at least to me. He introduced the first one to Vitaliy. I watched as Vitaliy shook his hand, his cold smile on his face, like normal. The second person had gotten a phone call as were walking up, so she had stepped away just before we got to them. She had finished the call and was walking back to us. I noticed Ivan, who was standing partially in front of me suddenly stiffened. No sooner had I felt his unease and I felt his protective bubble go up around me. Since no one was necessarily paying attention to us yet, I grabbed his hand, asking quietly, "what's going on?"

He squeezed my hand and turned to look at me. He looked shocked, but I could also see a flash of fear across his face before he got it under control. "Something's happening. It's different. I'm okay, but I might need you," he said. I nodded my head, keeping my hand in his as he turned back toward Adrik, Vitaliy, and Battista.

I watched as Battista introduced the woman to Vitaliy. When Vitaliy shook her hand, I noticed the very quick look of shock flash across his face before it went back to cold and hard. Adrik noticed too, as he cut his eyes over to me before looking back at Battista as he introduced him to the woman.

Vitaliy turned toward me, motioning me to come and meet Battista. I looked at Ivan, silently asking if he would be okay without me for a moment. He nodded his head and let go of my hand. Adrik saw the exchange between us before I walked to his side. After I greeted everyone, he quickly searched my eyes to find out what had happened with Ivan. He raised an eyebrow, but said nothing as he gently pushed me back toward Ivan and the other guys. I grabbed Ivan's hand as soon as I was partially behind him and Andrei once more. I felt him relax slightly, but he was definitely on high alert. There was something about the woman that he definitely didn't like. I had a feeling that Vitaliy didn't like it either, but I couldn't exactly ask in front of everyone.

We sat down at a table that was large enough that Ivan could sit next to me. I kept my hand on his knee under the table the entire time. I'd only ever seen him like that when he was at the hospital, so it was unnerving that he was having this reaction now.

Since Vitaliy was with us this time, I wasn't needed for translation purposes. It meant I could sit and observe everyone, which I was happy about. Adrik was happy about that as well. I could tell that Battista and Vitaliy had a good relationship. It was obvious that Vitaliy was at ease with Battista. Adrik was too. The other man that was with Battista was quiet, but honest when he spoke. While Battista was loud and boisterous, his associate was quieter and almost shy. The woman was a little bit of a different story. She wasn't quite as old as Vitaliy and Battista, but she was older than Adrik by at least a decade, if not more. It did not stop her from gazing longingly at him every chance she got. After his initial introduction, Adrik hadn't even glanced at her, but she was almost fixated on him. She didn't talk much, but when she did, she was fake. Very fake. I did not get a good feeling from her, but she wasn't talking enough for me to figure out why I didn't like her.

Every time she spoke, Ivan would tense. He would look away from her, even. It was starting to concern me. After they got the important business out of the way and the conversation turned to more meaningless subjects, I leaned over to Adrik. "I need to get Ivan out of here for at least a few minutes. He's going to escort me to the bathroom. I could use Andrei too, if that isn't going to cause too much of a scene."

He nodded his head. He leaned in, a small smile on his face as he kissed me gently, his lips lingering on mine before I went to get up. He looked to Andrei and jerked his head slightly toward me as I stood up, excusing myself for a moment. Ivan was immediately by my side, as was Andrei. We walked quickly toward the restroom at the back of the restaurant.

Once we were away from everyone, I asked Ivan what was happening. "I'm not exactly sure, princess. But that woman, I can't look at her. Does she look normal to you?" he asked. He sounded almost afraid when he asked me.

"I don't get a good feeling from her, but I can't figure out why. Have you gotten anything from her, Bubba?"

"Same as you. I don't like her, but she's not saying enough for me to figure out why I don't. Why can't you look at her, Ivan?" Andrei asked.

He was quiet for a minute, looking from me to Andrei nervously. "Squish, Bubba has known about your past longer than I have. He knows what happened to you. He heard you one night talking in your sleep. You can say whatever you need to say," I said, grabbing his hand once again.

He looked almost relieved to know that Andrei knew about his past. "Part of the reason that I'm so haunted by the doctors that used to experiment on me is that their faces never looked normal to me. Princess, when you said that my demons pull other people's demons out so the world can see them like I do, I'm not sure if you knew how accurate that statement is. I never saw the doctors' faces. I saw the demons inside them. It's only ever happened at the facility and I had written it off to being a kid and being tortured, but I'm seeing it in that woman out there."

"You're not the only one. Vitaliy gut something from her too. I saw his look when he shook her hand that meant something was off about her," I said.

"Vitaliy is different too?" Andrei asked.

I smiled and nodded my head. "That's why we told him about you and Misha. He felt it when he shook my hand. That's how he's special. He can feel if a person is good or bad when he touches them. We all feel different to him, for the record."

"Must be where Boss gets it," he said.

I glanced at Ivan. "What do you need to be able to make it through the rest of this meeting? I'll fake an illness to get us out of here if I have to."