

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 449

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Sephie

We arrived at the hotel where Mr. Turner worked to meet with Battista and his associates, once again like modern-day royalty. Vitaliy was with us, as were all his guys, minus the little flowers. I watched Ilya as he was working. He fit in perfectly with Vitaliy's other guys. He was considerably younger than the rest of them, but he knew exactly what to do, exactly when to do it. They worked together like they'd been a team for years, rather than weeks. I caught his eye as we were walking up to the front door of the hotel, he smiled broadly at me, then went right back to boss mode. It made me happy to see him happy. His light had stayed just as bright as it was since Stephen scared off the darkness hanging around him.

Vitaliy's other guys were almost happier to be rid of the little flowers than Vitaliy was. It meant they could come to dinner with him again. Apparently the way to all of these men's hearts was through their stomachs.

As we approached the door to the hotel, we were greeted by Mr. Turner, who was just as happy as always to see us. I stepped away from Adrik, to give Mr. Turner a hug before we continued inside. Battista was waiting on us in the empty restaurant, like usual. He was standing with three men this time. I couldn't help but feel relief when I saw there was no woman with them. While the guys were usually very serious while they were working. I heard them all laugh quietly when they felt my relief at seeing Battista standing with only men.

"Not gonna lie, princess, I might've enjoyed watching you embarrass that woman the last time a little too much," Ivan said silently.

Before I could answer him, Adrik responded, "Let it play out, Ivan. We both know she's equal opportunity. If this guy deserves it, it'll be just as glorious as the woman." He looked down at me, smirking, as we continued the rest of the way to Battista.

"This is the first time I've regretted being able to hear both of your thoughts," I said. I could hear both of them laughing in my head, but outwardly, they looked as serious as ever. They were really getting good at this.

I caught Andrei's eye as Battista was making the introductions with Vitaliy. He let me see what he saw when he looked at the men with Battista. I felt Misha's nausea coming on, but I couldn't tell which one it was from right away. I just knew it was one of them that was making Misha nauseous.

"Ivan? Anything?" I asked.

"Definitely. Short guy on the end. I saw it as we walked up. It's stepped back, though," he said.

"Same guy

Andrei pointed out. Misha confirms it, too."

Stephen and I had discussed our options before we came to the hotel. If there was a situation like we had with Ilya, where the demon wasn't necessarily attached, we would signal to him to speak to see if he could scare it away. If the demon was already attached, it was going to be slightly more complicated. We would wait to reveal who he was until a little later. Since we didn't have much experience, we were hoping to gain some knowledge on how they would react to us.

Battista motioned for Adrik to meet his associates. He didn't let go of me as he went to greet them. The first two men were fine when he shook their hands. The last man, the one that everyone had pointed out, made Adrik feel nauseous when he shook his hand. Because he was still touching me, I could feel what he felt.

Ivan's bubble went up around me as I went through the line, shaking everyone's hands as well. I wasn't worried about our eyes changing since we now all had contacts in, but this time was different. I knew our eyes were black, even without seeing them. It felt similar to the agitation we felt around Viktor, but stronger. Our demons were itchy.

Battista took my hand, flipping it over to kiss the back of it, as he always did. As he looked up, he raised an eyebrow, silently asking if there was anything to be worried about as everyone else moved toward the table. I nodded once, discreetly. He looked almost excited as we walked to the table.

The business associates of Battista had come to the city under the guise of investing in various projects throughout the city. None of these projects were real, but Adrik, Vitaliy, and Battista discussed them as if they were. I stayed quiet, watching everyone as they talked with each other. I felt nothing bad from two associates, but I could tell the third one was watching us just as carefully as we were watching him.

Andrei caught my eye, telling me that the guy was focused on me, Adrik, and Ivan. "He knows there's something different about you three, but he can't figure out what."

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"Ivan told me his demon stepped back when we first got here. Can you feel it?" I asked.

"Yeah, it's the same as that woman before. Not cold, I mean. But it's there, whether it's in control or not. It's definitely there."

"I'm so impressed that you can feel that now, Bubba," I said, winking at him when no one was looking. "How's Misha? Tell him to stop looking at the guy. I can feel his nausea when he does."

Andrei coughed once to keep from laughing, then I saw him have a silent conversation with Misha. Misha caught my eye, grinning at me. Stephen was quiet, as was Viktor. Since we hadn't figured out a way to communicate with Stephen yet, he was mostly on his own, but he could still feel what I felt. I was certain he had felt both Misha's nausea, as well as Adrik's when it came to the one business associate we'd singled out. He was staying quiet, for now. Doing what he did best. Watching. Waiting.

The conversation shifted from business to more benign subjects. The three men were from different areas in western Europe. In an effort to keep the conversation going. I asked questions about where they were from, capitalizing on the dumb woman stereotype. They indulged me, happy to answer my questions.

"Are your demons getting itchy?" Ivan asked.

"The whole time we've been here," Adrik answered.

"He's focused on the three of us. He knows there's something different about us, but he doesn't know what yet. What can you see, Ivan?" I asked.

Instead of describing what he saw when he looked at the man, he pushed a snapshot to both me and Adrik. We could see the man, but we could also see the demon, just behind his face. Like a demonic shadow.

"That was impressive," Adrik said.

"Show off." I said, trying not to laugh.

"What are we going to do with him?" Ivan asked. It was a good question. Battista had told us he simply wanted to know if there was a reason to be wary of this man. We had plenty of reasons to be wary of him. I ended up asking Vitaliy, in Russian, if any of these men spoke Italian. He shook his head no, then looked at everyone like I had just reminded him of a funny story related to the topic they were all discussing. As he finished up his pretend story, I looked at Battista, asking him in Italian how far he wanted us to take this.

Without s*ipping a beat, he answered me quickly in Italian and then followed Vitaliy's lead, making up a reason for me to be speaking Italian to him. None of them were any the wiser.

"He said he wants him exposed; however we need to make that happen. He said the other two know enough that they won't freak out," I told Ivan and Adrik.

"We need to ditch the contacts, then," Ivan said.

"Agreed," Adrik responded.

I leaned over, whispering to Adrik, "would you gentlemen like to escort me to the restroom?" He stood up, extending his hand to me. He looked at Ivan, who stood up with us as well. He excused us, walking toward the back of the restaurant. I gave Andrei a quick update as we were leaving.

They surprised me by coming into the women's bathroom with me. I couldn't help but laugh at them. "This is some weird porn fantasy right here," I said, walking to the sink so I could take my contacts out.

Ivan groaned when he took his out. "I understand why your eyes have been so itchy, princess. I do not want to wear these things any longer than I absolutely have to."

"You do get used to them," I said. "But I still don't like wearing them for extended periods."

We all looked at each other, our eyes turning black immediately. We couldn't keep from laughing at each other.

"I think we unlocked a new level. I've never noticed my demon get this itchy before when we've been around another demon. I don't know what that means," Adrik said. "It kind of worries me."

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I thought for a minute, trying to get a sense of what was going on. "I don't think we're the ones that should be worried about it. I think they're trying

to help us more as each new thing happens. It feels like mine is trying to tell me something." I said.

"New level for sure," Ivan said, grinning at me. "So, what's the plan for this dude?"

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