

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

Chapter 506

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Adrik

Sephie's old apartment was proving to be more useful than I ever would've imagined it would be. I originally kept it in case she ever changed her mind. I knew she was never going to change her mind at this point, but I still kept her apartment for the convenience of an out of the way meeting spot when I needed one.

Chen met us downstairs. If nothing else, he was always early to every meeting he attended with us, proving once again that one could be professional no matter their profession. He was slightly taken aback, as Vitaliy and Battista were with us this time, which meant all of Vitaliy's men were with us as well.

"You guys are multiplying. This must be serious," Chen said as he walked up to us in the parking lot of the apartment building.

"Why use 6 Russians when 12 will do?" Sephie said, her mischievous grin on her face.

"Hey, you miscounted, pretty lady," Boris said in his very thick Russian accent. Battista's arms dealer turned out to be exactly

who we thought it would be. Boris was so tough and crotchety on first impressions that he made Vitaliy look like a nice guy.

"My bad. We have a baker's dozen, Chen. Because one can never have too many Russians on their side when the shit hits the fan," Sephie said, grinning at Boris. Like all of the men in her life, she found a way to politely put Boris in his place when he tested her. Mostly polite. Afterward, he's shown her nothing but respect.

"This maybe lesson your country don't learn too well," Boris said, laughing as he walked to join the rest of Vitaliy's men, who were unloading weapons from the back of their vehicles.

Sephie and Chen looked at each other, trying not to laugh. "My entire life, I've beented that Russia is the enemy. Now I find out these people are just as crazy as we are, only much larger, Chen said thoughtfully.

"It's the governments that are the enemy, Chen. Never the people," I said, pulling Sephie with me toward the stairs to her old apartment. She looked at the building as we walked. I could feel her emotions as she remembered her life before she met me.

"It always looks so run-down when I see it now. It never used to seem that bad to me when I lived here," she told me as we followed Andrei up the stairs.

"When it's all you have, you cherish it. It did its job. It got you through until you found me I told her.

She turned to look at me, her sweet smile on her face. "I never thought about it like that before, but you're absolutely right. I might love this dingey little apartment a little more right now," she said.

"I, for one, am grateful for it. It's proven to be very useful," I said, pulling her closer as walked into her apartment.

"I, for one, am grateful for you," she said, reaching up to kiss my cheek.

Misha, who had followed us up the stairs, said, "I can feel you two being disgustingly cute right now."

Ivan, who was still in the parking lot, but heard Misha over his earpiece, started laughing. "I am so glad I'm not the only one that's happened to," he said.

Sephie's cheeks turned red. She went to apologize, but Misha stopped her before she could even get it out. "Don't apologize, gazelle. I'm having jealousy issues. That's why I brought it up," he said, grinning at her. She went to him, laughing as he ached down and picked her up in a bear hug.

As everyone else finally made it upstairs, Sephie's apartment got very small, very quickly. We eventually decided that Vitaliy's men would stay outside, mostly to give us more room. We asked that all the leaders from the resistance in the city were there tonight, not just the ones from Niko and Vito's area of the city. We wanted to make sure things were as quiet as we'd been told and we also wanted to make sure this everyone was as prepared as possible. It was clear that Sal cared nothing for the people of the city, given his brawn operation, so the idea that he would use the people of the city to cause more chaos was not off the table for him.

Stephen, who was across the street monitoring things from above, alerted us to everyone's arrival. Surprisingly, Dr. Williams showed up along with the rest this time. He was just as surprised to see us standing in the apartment as we were to see him walk through the door.

Battista laughed, telling Sephie in Italian, "I knew I liked that doctor for a reason other than his willingness to accept massive donations." She couldn't help but laugh before sharing the translation with all of us silently.

"Dr. Williams, it's nice to see you here. Unexpected, but nice," Sephie said as she went to shake his hand.

"That feeling is mutual, although I don't know why I would be surprised. Of course it's you," he said. "I think you enjoy your legend in the hospital more than you let

on and you're looking to add to it."

"I mean, who doesn't want to be immortalized with a few legends told about them? no different," she said, nonchalantly. Dr. Williams just laughed quietly, shaking his head as he moved off to the side.

Both Ivan and I were somewhat uncomfortable with so many people in such a small stepped quietly behind both of us. I felt her hand find mine, which helped me keep step forward to begin the meeting.

Sephie, of course, felt it. After speaking briefly with the doctor, she

murderous aura under control. I squeezed her hand lightly before taking one

We discussed Niko and Vito coming back, as they were scheduled to arrive the follow day. "The reason you're here, gentlemen, is that it will send a much bigger message to Sal, as well as the underbosses that are left in the city, if you stop them from collecting taxes once they return. We can and will support your efforts as much as possible, making sure you have everything you need to resist. The message be much clearer if coming from you, however," I said. "The only request I make is that you leave Niko and Vito alive and hand them over to me."

"What happens after they're gone? Are we just going to be fighting you next?" one older gentleman asked.

I chuckled. "That would be somewhat foolish of me to provide you weapons for this or not expect you would use them on me should I attempt the same thing later," I said. "Things will go back to the way they've been for years before the other bosses got greedy. I don't need your taxes. Your communities do. The more money you make, the more you can invest in your local areas of the city. That's what want and that's what will happen once the other bosses are taken care of."

"How do we know you won't change your mind?" someone else asked.

"You don't," Sephie said. "But you do remember how good things were a few years ago, compared to now. This is a much bigger conspiracy than exorbitant taxes. Without the other bosses to harass you, you'll essentially be left alone. Just like you were before." She took one step closer to me, pointing at me, as she said, "he is not the problem here. The other bosses are the problem."

Dr. Williams, stepped forward, adding, "he's the one that found the doctor that's been terrorizing this city for a decade. You've all heard of someone that's had some back-room procedure done on them. He's the same doctor that created brawn, which has been plaguing the city for years as well. This man found that doctor when the police couldn't. He's on our side. He wouldn't be here right now if he wasn't."

"Why hasn't the doctor been arrested then?" someone asked.

"He will be, soon. We needed to make sure we had enough solid evidence that he would be convicted," I said. "We have that, so now he can be handed over."

We continued our discussion, as well as making a strategy for how to handle the underbosses when they come to collect taxes once more. It would be dangerous, but the people had strength in numbers. It didn't hurt that Boris had access to enough power to completely level a block of the city in under two minutes.

He was also willing to donate his supplies to the cause, which he very rarely did. Sephie had been worried that he would also supply the bosses with extra firepower, since I had told her he enjoyed arming both sides of a conflict.

"Most conflicts do not include Ricardo De Luca," Boris had said. "Whatever it takes to make sure his side is crushed, I will happily provide," he had told her.

She had studied him for a few minutes before answering, "is it wrong that I find your hatred of Ricardo to be one of your finest qualities?"

Boris had laughed, but Vitaliy actually spoke up in Boris's defense, telling her, "he's such a bad guy, sladkaya. Maybe a little rougher than some of us, but not a bad guy

My father had known Boris for most of my life. Boris had helped him get out of a few tricky situations, even. Vitaliy spoke the truth. Boris wasn't all bad. He just preferred everyone think the worst of him. It meant less effort he had to put in to nangle an impression. When everyone thinks the worst of you, it's easy to prove them right or wrong. Boris was simply saving his energy. Once a plan was in place, the weapons were loaded into their vehicles and everyone

separately. Dr. Williams hung back for a few minutes before taking his leave, wanting to check in with Sephie one more time. He fought it most of the time, but there was still a scientific fascination with her after her time in the hospital that he couldn't always suppress. It irritated Ivan