

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

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Sephie

The guys were all laughing as we walked into the kitchen. They all looked to me, like they knew I was about to make their morning even better. I was taken aback by their knowing glances.

"We can feel your f**kery, gazelle. I, for one, am very excited about this development in my life," Misha said.

Adrik caught my eye, his mischievous grin slowly creeping across his face. "Apparently, I'm not the only one," he said, kissing my temple.

"Not the only one for what?" Ivan asked.

"He can feel all of you the same way I can now. He knew you guys were here before I did this morning. He can tell you the order you came up, even," I said.

They all looked at Adrik skeptically, like they didn't believe him.

"Ivan, Stephen, Andrei, Viktor, Misha," he said.

"Okay, so new level unlocked," Ivan said, laughing.

"We were

talking this morning. It feels like the connection is getting stronger each time we do something new," Andrei said. "It used to only get stronger for Sephie, but now I think it's getting stronger for all of us."

"I agree, Bubba. I think you guys pick up more each time. Not just with me anymore, either. You're picking up more between each other now, too," I said.

"We were talking this morning too. It felt like our demons were quieter last night at the fundraiser than they were at the meeting with Battista. We can't figure out why. There were more demons last night than at the meeting with Battista. It doesn't make sense they'd be quiet last night," Adrik said.

"I noticed that too. I was going to bring it up this morning. Any theories?" Ivan asked.

"Sephie thinks it might have something to do with that girl that could see my mother and Kostya. Maybe they knew and were hiding from her?" Adrik said.

I looked at Andrei. "Bubba, did you by chance do any snooping with her? Do you know if she could see everything? Or is she more like you, in that she can only see the good?" I asked.

"I did look when I saw her zero in on Ivan. It worried me, so I

ted to see what she saw," Andrei said. He looked at Ivan. "You're going to be shocked, man. I didn't know how much you wanted Battista know, so I didn't bring it up last night."

He pushed what he saw when Jessica looked at Ivan, then me, then Adrik. She couldn't see our demons, but she could very clearly see the outline of a pair of wings behind each of us. My dad had told me that Ivan's wings were black, white, and red. Jessica could only see the white in his wings, but they looked different to her than what Kostya and Lena looked like. She saw the same difference when she looked at me and Adrik.

We all stood in stunned silence for a few moments. Andrei and Misha worked together to push it to Viktor and Stephen at the same time.

I finally got over my shock and looked to Ivan. "I wonder if she'll be able to eventually see how much cooler yours are than everyone else's." It helped snap him back to reality as well. Adrik quietly slid his arm around my waist. I felt the pull in my chest from him, knowing he was thinking about how much more this made him love me, just as I was for him.

"She saw Boss's mom and Kostya the same way, but they look different than you guys," Andrei said. He pushed us the images of both Lena and Kostya that she had seen. "She called them ghosts because she didn't think anyone would believe her and she wasn't even sure if angels were real," he said.

"The ghost angle makes sense, since you can see through them," Stephen said after seeing what Andrei was sharing with all of us.

"It doesn't explain why our demons were quiet, though. Just to bring it back around to that," Ivan said. "I would like to know why that is."

"Maybe they were quieter because you listened to them last time. They didn't have to shout this time," Misha said. "The more I used my gift at first, the more subtle it got. But it was also clearer. Maybe that's what's happening. They were louder the first few times, you got the message, now they can

be subtle."

I noticed Viktor getting a glazed over look, but I didn't feel like he was uncomfortable with this conversation. I was hyper-aware of his comfort level when it came to any discussion of our demons. He was getting better, but I know he still didn't like it.

He joined us back in the present moment, surprising everyone by saying, "Kostya said he thinks Misha is right. He's not completely sure, but from what he can tell, Misha's on the money."

"Did everybody just hear that? I just want to make sure. Viktor, you might need to repeat it a few more times. Just to be sure we all heard it," Misha said, his wide, handsome smile across his face.

"Your first time is always the most memorable," Ivan said, raising his eyebrow at Misha. The rest of us could do nothing but laugh. Misha's cheeks got red, but he was laughing with the rest of us. I walked to where he was sitting, hugging his neck while standing behind him. He held onto my arms as we tried to get our laughter under control.

Stephen, always the analyst, was quietly contemplating our conversation and everything that had happened recently while I started breakfast. Finally, he looked up at everyone. "I think we should have another conversation with Dario. I want to make sure we didn't miss anything the last time. It's been a while since we've been in the same room as him and Sephie was the only one that could pick up on something extra the last time."

I studied Stephen for a few moments. "Is there a reason this popped into your head now, Yoden? Have you been thinking about Dario or He just randomly popped into your head this morning?"

"He's come up a few times for me the last week or so. I just can never find the right time to bring it up. I don't necessarily think we missed anything before, but I also want to make sure. Especially if he goes free at the end of this. We need to make sure he's really worthy of that ending," he said.

"I agree," I said, looking to Adrik.

"We can talk to him. Now that Armando is gone, he can be moved to a more comfortable room, since he's going to be here for a while longer," he said.

"Today is a good day to do it. No one else will be in the office," Viktor said.

"Has anything else come up for you about Dario, Yoden? Just that you want to make sure we didn't miss anything?" I asked. There was always a reason that things like this seemed to "randomly" come up. We just had to find the reason.

Stephen thought for a few moments, analyzing his own thoughts, "I was also thinking about how broken his mind already is. I want to know more about why that is. Part of me wonders if it was an act, part of me is curious if it was Massimo or Sal that did it to him. And if so, how. There's just something that feels slightly off, but I don't know if it's Dario or something else."

"You're wondering if maybe he was acting broken to get our sympathy? Adrik asked. Stephen nodded. Even Adrik was thoughtful for a few moments. "I'm the one that made the decision that he could go free," said. He looked at me. "You were struggling with your anger after being told that Sal and Armando were going to get into a fight over you. It's very possible I missed something." He thought for a minute more, then looked at Viktor. "Have him moved to a more comfortable room than where he's at this morning. We'll go talk to him tomorrow afternoon, when we get back."

Viktor nodded his head, pulling his phone out to give the necessary orders. Misha asked, "you want to go to the house this weekend?"

Adrik nodded this time. "I think we could all use a break. That seems to be the one place where we can all turn everything off for a bit. Now, we need

it even more."

Ivan's sly grin turned up one side of his mouth. "You've been hanging around the princess. You're getting really good at that."

We were now all slightly on edge, wondering if we'd missed something before. I was grateful that Stephen had thought of it, as the rest of us had mostly forgotten about Dario. We hadn't needed him for information, so he was just waiting until we took care of the rest of the bosses before he could go free. With the return of Niko and Vito possible in the very near future, it would help to know everything about Dario.