

King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

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Sephie

Once Adrik had finished with his last meeting of the day, we waited for Stephen to come back after escorting that last meeting back to the lobby and we all joined Adrik in his office. Both Adrik and Stephen knew we were up to no good, just like Ivan did.

"One part of me loves that you're all automatically in on it whenever something funny happens, but another part of me is frustrated because it kills the suspense," I said as we walked into the office. I quickly shared an image of Trino and his new lady friend to Adrik before Viktor brought them all

to his office.

"That was unexpected," he said. He thought for a minute, then added, "he wants your approval, no doubt."

"I think he needs all of our approvals. He just doesn't know it yet," I said.

"Diabolical. I might love you a little more right now," Adrik said, standing up and walking toward me.

I giggled as he wrapped his arms around me. We heard Viktor's deep voice talking to Trino as they walked to the office door. Adrik quickly said to everyone, "I don't care that she's a potential love interest. Everyone gets thoroughly vetted now. That means Gus, Oscar, Chris, Keith, AND Trino. I'm taking no chances. You guys see or feel anything suspect on anyone, you let me know,"

I glanced over to see Andrei discreetly touch Stephen's arm, so he got the message as well. We were still trying to think of ways to communicate with him that didn't involve touching him, but we hadn't figured out how to make it happen quite yet. He still required physical touch to get the message, but it happened instantly and someone could just brush his arm and convey the information to him.

We all carefully studied everyone as they walked in the office. Viktor was at ease with everyone, as everyone was at ease with Viktor. The woman that was with Trino seemed nervous, but she was walking into an office with six more giant men she didn't know who were hired based on their abilities to intimidate people with one look. I could understand her apprehension.

"Trino. Now I understand why you've been MIA," I said, smiling at him as he walked in, his arm around her.

He smiled at me, walking to me and Adrik. After he shook Adrik's hand, he said, "Miha, I want you to meet Emilia." She smiled shyly, extending her

hand to me.

"Keep your hand on me, please. I'm borrowing your gift," I told Adrik as I went to shake her hand. I didn't feel Ivan's bubble, which was a good sign for her. Bad sign for Misha. When my hand touched hers, I felt nothing but a moment of joy from her. Poor Misha was going to be so disappointed....

Emilia was practically a midget compared to the rest of us. She even made Trino look tall, but she was beautiful. She had jet black hair, olive skin, and golden-brown eyes. Her smile, while nervous, was genuine. Trino noticed me looking her over. He couldn't keep the smile from his face as he said, in Italian, "you know I want your approval, Miha."

My mouth fell open. "Since when did you learn Italian?" I asked him, still in Italian.

"It's closer to Spanish than Russian. Baby steps," he said, smiling proudly at me.

"That gives me hope for learning Spanish easily," I said.

"If you picked up Russian that quickly, Spanish will be a breeze," he said.

"Noted." Trino was still smiling, but he was also looking very expectantly at me. I couldn't help but laugh. "So far, so good, Trino. I need to hear her speak to give you the complete okay," I told him. He nodded, pulling her with him toward one of the couches.

I quickly gave the guys a translation of what he'd just said to me. "I'm impressed he learned Italian," Ivan said.

"Apparently he had the thought of being left out of most of the conversations between us and Vitally if I didn't insist on English for him," I responded.

"Misha, stop pouting. There will be other chances," Adrik said.

Misha couldn't keep from laughing at being chastised for that. Everyone else looked at him, wondering why he was laughing. "So remember that one time when Giana cussed Martin out in Italian? Yeah, that was a good time," he said, trying to cover. It was so absurd that it made me also laugh, which made the rest of the guys laugh. Trino and his group just thought they were being left out of a joke.

"Nice save,

kid," Ivan said, still laughing in his head.

"I gotta work on that, Clearly," Misha responded, pretending to shove Stephen over so he could sit down next to him. To everyone else, it looked like they were clowning around. In reality, he'd just let Stephen in on our conversation. Even Stephen had trouble hiding his smile once he learned what

Adrik had said.

"So, Emilia, how did you meet Trino?" I asked. She immediately looked petrified that I'd asked her anything. Poor thing was scared out of her mind.

I could feel Andrei zero in on the fact that she seemed overly scared. Before, I could never tell when he was actively fishing through anyone else's head. I could feel him in mine, just as he could feel me when I went snooping through his, but I had never felt anything when he looked at anyone else. I knew he was just being thorough with her, which I appreciated.

She cleared her throat, looking at me. "We...we met kind of by accident," she said. She glanced up at Trino, like she wasn't sure she should say anything further.

Oscar laughed. "Trino literally ran into her on the street and knocked her down. She got up and cussed him out. Most romantic meeting ever," he said.

Trino was laughing with Oscar. "She ripped me a new one. I think she might've bruised my sternum from her finger poking me as she cursed me and pretty much my entire family in Spanish."

I raised my eyebrow, glancing around the room quickly. I could see that everyone else shared in my so far favorable impression of Emilia. I looked between Oscar and Gus, asking, "and what did he do in response?"

They both laughed. "He didn't say anything at first, then he asked her to dinner. We were sure she was going to smack him, but she accepted instead," Gus said.

I looked to Trino, unable to hide my smile. "I like her," I said, in Italian.

"Me too," he said, his smile stretching across his face.

"Bubba, did you find anything?" I asked. He glanced at me, shocked that I knew he'd been looking. I laughed, internally. "You were very discreet. I can feel you looking now, apparently

He exhaled, visibly relaxing. He shared what he could see of her aura, as he said, "nothing out of the ordinary. She actually really likes Trino. He told her everything right away. She knows who he is. She doesn't know the extent of what we're facing, but she's fine with who he is. Sorry, Misha."

"She needs Viktor though. I can see that," I said, looking at what Andrei could see.

Ivan looked to Viktor, asking him in Russian, "how long does it take Kostya to fix someone? Like could you do it from a handshake?"

Viktor thought for a moment, then said, "it's possible that's all it would take. Unless there's extensive damage. It takes longer in that case."

"Judging by the others we've seen, I would not call this extensive damage," Andrei said.

"Can Kostya be ready to help you tonight? Headlights off this time," Ivan asked.

Viktor simply nodded. "I say we look at everyone. Viktor can fix as many as possible tonight without drawing too much attention to it. We can come up with a plan on how to tell Trino everything later," Ivan told us all.

Adrik steered the normal conversation toward Trino's security team, giving the rest of us time and space to go through everyone else in the room. Everyone checked out, much to my relief. I was beginning to get slightly paranoid at the constant betrayals we couldn't seem to get away from.

The longer we talked, the more relaxed Emilia got too. She laughed along with everyone, she gave Trino a hard time a few times, and she seemed to be more at ease than when she first arrived. She whispered something to Trino at one point. He looked to me, asking where the bathroom is.

I stood up, along with Ivan and Andrei. "I can show her," I said. While she had been relaxing, she was once again petrified that Ivan and Andrei had stood up with me. I laughed. "Don't worry. They're just very protective of me. They're much nicer than they look."