

## King of the Underworld by RJ Kane

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Sephie

We talked with Battista for a few hours more, but we still struggled to come up with a plan for Martín. We didn't have quite as many details on him and the Mexican cartels were a definite wild card in everything. We were going to need more information on them as well before coming up with a plan on how to handle that situation.

Once Battista left, the mood in the room was noticeably lighter. Everyone seemed relieved to finally have some kind of plan. It had felt like we were stumbling around in the dark for weeks now, trying to decide what to do.

On the elevator to the penthouse, I asked, "how likely do you think it will be that Martin will get word of what's happening in the city and will run or try something else?"

"Is he smart enough to run though?" Ivan asked.

I laughed. "I think that's fair, but I'm also not totally sure what you mean. For once.)

Ivan waited until we were all inside the penthouse, in the kitchen, to explain further everyone basically working with him because they likely don't have any other choice, he's probably thinking he's untouchable already."

have a feeling that Martin thinks he's won already. With Trino gone and

Stephen added, "that could work to our advantage. If we keep Trino here and stay completely away from Colombia until after Ricardo and Sal are taken care of, he's very likely to get comfortable and think he's safe down there. That's good for us."

"I think we need to talk more with Trino. We need more details about what's going on down there before we come up with a definite plan for him," Adrik said.

"You're going to bring the mayor and the DA in on the plan for everyone else?" I asked Adrik.

"Yes. I would like to meet with them once more before turning Dr. Moretti over to them. I want to be sure about them before I hand him over."

"Oh, he's the loose end you don't want to have to tie up for them," I said, remembering his earlier statement about being p\*ssed off. He smirked at me, walking to me. We still couldn't stand for there to be any unnecessary distance between us. Even my demon would calm down when he was touching me. She wasn't rowdy when we were apart, but there was an increase in my level of anxiety until I was with him again.

"We need to meet with the leaders of the 'resistance movement' in the city again and let them know what's happening. If they know it's coming, they can be better prepared," Ivan said.

"And apparently armed to the teeth thanks to Battista and his strange connections," I said. "Nobody will be sad about that little detail."

Ivan looked at Viktor and Adrik both. "I do wonder just who this arms dealer is that his friends with. My money is on Boris," he said.

Adrik chuckled. "I almost asked if it was him when he brought it up. I think we should ask to meet him."

"Who's Boris?" I asked.

"He's an old friend of Vitaliy's. He's been running arms around the world my entire life. War is his profit. That being said, he's not a totally bad guy. He always makes sure to supply both sides of every conflict," Adrik said, unable to hide his smile.

I couldn't help but laugh too. "Grey area," I said.

That evening. Vitaliy and all his men were coming over for dinner. When he took Aroundo's house, I made him promise that he would still come for dinner regularly while he was in the city. He made good on his promise. He would come over at least once a week to have dinner with us. Sometimes he would come with just Aleksei and other times, he would bring everyone.

Tonight was a special treat because Ilya brought Jessica with him, much to everyone's surprise.

When everyone walked in, Vitaliy caught me and pulled me slightly away from everyone. "Ilya told me everything about her. She's not as strong as the rest of you, but she's much like all of you when I touched her. She's still very much a scared little girl, however. Ilya has been good for her so far. She's been good for him, too. He seems happier. He asked if he could bring her so she could see you again. He told me she asks about you often. Forgive me for not telling you. I hope you don't mind, *sladkaya*, but I think it would be good for her to spend time around you," he said.

"You should know by now that I've perfected the art of feeding a small army. Even if she eats like me, there will be plenty. I'm actually really happy to see that things are working out between them," I said, watching Ilya with her over Vitaliy's shoulder. He was affectionate with her and clearly protective of her. Not that he had anything to worry about with us, but men tend to become protective of the women they're developing feelings for. Most of the time, without even realizing it's happening. It was, in fact, adorable to witness.

I hugged Vitaliy's neck, feeling him relax as he held on to me. "I've missed you, old in," I said, grabbing his hand and walking further into the kitchen.

"You feel different than the last time I saw you, *sladkaya*," he said in Russian. Clearly Jessica knew some things, but not other things just yet.

"You should shake your son's hand, Vitaliy. He's the reason I feel different," I said, grinning at him. His eyes went wide, but his curiosity got the better of him. He walked immediately to Adrik, who offered him his hand. He was smirking at Vitaliy, Charly already enjoying the reaction we were all expecting.

Vitaliy cursed when he took Adrik's hand. "You... But... How?" he finally managed to get out.

Adrik chuckled. "It's quite a long story. I don't want to be rude in front of our newest guest, so we'll get into it later," he said, still in Russian.

"Come. Let's eat first," I said. I might've snooped in her head, but I knew Jessica was starving. I gingerly grabbed her free hand that Ilya wasn't holding and pulled her toward the food. "Your stomach is going to drown out the conversation, so let's give it something to do," I said, winking at her. Her cheeks went red and she looked like she wanted to hide. "Don't worry, mine can wake the dead when I'm that hungry. Ask any of the guys. They've all heard it," I said, laughing.

"Even I know about her stomach, *ptichka*," Ilya said to Jessica. "Vitya told me about it many times."

"See? It's legendary," I said. As Jessica got her food, I leaned closer to Ilya, telling him in Russian, "um, the fact that you call her your little bird might be the cutest thing I've ever seen." His cheeks turned bright red. I just winked at him and walked back to Adrik.

I tucked myself into his side. He was smiling as he asked me, "what did you say to hit to make his face turn so red?"

"He calls her *ptichka*. I told him it might be the cutest thing I've ever seen."

Adrik pulled me closer. I could feel a twinge of resentment. "Not cuter than me calling you *solnishko*."

It was so hard not to laugh, but I somehow managed. He was actually jealous and maybe a little worried that Ilya's pet name for Jessica was better than him calling me *solnishko*. "That's because you calling me *solnishko* is not cute." I felt the resentment quickly turning to anger, so I stepped in front of him, placing my hands on either side of his face. "It's divinely enchanting, I told him, loving the switch between his anger and the smile that stretched across his face. I stood on my toes and pressed my lips to his as I told him, "I would much rather be your sun. We both know not delicate enough to be a bird anyway." I ended up finally losing the struggle

to not laugh and I giggled against his lips.

"I wouldn't have it any other way," he told me as he wrapped his arms completely around me, holding me tightly..

After dinner, I caught Ilya and Jessica slightly away from everyone else. The rest of the guys were deep in discussion, switching between Russian and English, which meant Jessica couldn't really understand most of what was being said. "How are you Ilya? No more issues?" I asked him in English, hoping he would understand my question.

"None. I've been quite good. I really like working for Vitaliy. Aleksei has helped me tremendously. I feel like I'm really catching up in my training," he said, proud of his progress.

"Yeah? We should train together again soon. I would love to see it," I said. I looked down at Jessica. "And how are things with you? You definitely look much better than the last time we met," I said, smiling at her.

She grinned at me. Her grey eyes lit up as she looked up at Ilya. "Much better, I can't thank you enough for helping me that night. I'm very happy it happened, as I never would've met Ilya otherwise, but I would like to never be in that situation again

"I can't say I blame you there. How long have you been able to see these things?" I asked her, curious about her ability to see angels.