

Rebecca bent her head further down over the book she was studying. It was a 18<sup>th</sup> century journal of the leader of a small satanic cult in New England and difficult to read. If she looked busy enough, maybe Alexander Merette would pass her by when he was finished resealing the vault where valuable and volatile objects were kept. She knew it wasn't rational, but the nightmares that had been afflicting her didn't promote rational thought. For the moment, she wanted to steer clear of her chantry leader and, for the past week, had been quite successful in doing so.

But Rebecca's luck had finally run out. She heard Alexander approach her and realized that to ignore him further would be insolent. She glanced up at him, trying to arrange her features into an expression of polite interest.

"Why are you here?" Merette asked bluntly. "I thought you were going to give me an update on that skin culture those students were working on at Berkeley?"

Rebecca racked her memory. Skin cultures? Berkeley? It didn't sound familiar. "I wasn't aware that any such samples were being worked upon." She admitted, surprised. "I can follow up on that later tonight." *At the expense of my own work*, she didn't add.

"As for what I'm doing here," she added testily, "This is the library, and I am the closest thing we have to a lore-keeper right now..." *That* was bordering on rude, she knew, but she was hoping Alexander might get the hint and go away. Although it had been five nights since the recurring nightmare had last plagued her, she still felt very uneasy in Alexander's presence. How could she be sure what was truth and what was imagination – given the powers that vampires had at their command?

Merette stiffened. He had noticed Rebecca's tone and didn't appreciate it. "No one's challenging your position," he told her with false mildness, "but this is a very important study." Merette paused and decided to return like-for-like with his tone. "I suggest that you check your in-box more often, then maybe you wouldn't fall behind."

Rebecca swallowed a surge of irritation – despite the fact that she had earned the rebuke. "Okay," she shrugged casually. "I'll go down to campus tonight." *Right after I finish this entry*, she decided, turning back to the volume before her.

But Alexander wasn't letting it go. "While we're on the subject, this behavior seems to be typical of you, lately. Communication seems to be woefully lacking throughout the chantry as a whole."

Rebecca's irritation flared into anger at that. *It's hardly been a two-way street*, she thought, angrily remembering that the past week's communications had been done mostly via a dry-erase board in the chantry's common rooms.

"Sir," Rebecca said carefully, using a title she knew Merette disliked and that she only employed when annoyed by him. "You know we've been pushed beyond capacity with our recent losses." The chantry had shrunk from eight to three members in less than a year. "And the chantry members are only as good as the example they're given." She braced herself, aware that she might be waving a red flag before a bull. "I'll admit that I've been somewhat remiss...but I've been lacking any direction from you, lately, also."

*That's going to go down poorly*, Rebecca realized, bracing herself for a blistering retort. *But it had to be said.*

Rebecca had no idea *how* poorly her statement was received, as Alexander managed to catch himself before he clouted her across the room for her insolence. When he spoke, his voice was thick with repressed anger. "Ms. Logsdon, I have been an administrator for this clan for longer than you can imagine. I won't have an apprentice questioning my ability. Is that understood!"

When angry, Rebecca retreated into childishness, and this time was no exception. She jumped up, just barely avoided saluting and snapped "Yes, sir!" and turned to storm out of the library - leaving her notes and accoutrements behind.

Alexander could sense the fury seething through Rebecca, but was too angry himself to wonder at it. However, he was *not* going to allow this neonate to behave in this manner. Before she had taken half a step, Alexander grabbed Rebecca's shoulder with a grip that brooked no opposition. "And do not turn your back on me when I am speaking to you again!" Only the ingrained habit of discretion stopped Alexander from shouting in her face.

Merette's grip was too closely associated with her nightmares (*memories?*) for her to remain calm. She forced herself to stillness and took a deep breath. "I'll keep that in mind." *And fuck you, too.* "Anything else I need to *remember* sir?"

Alexander could feel Rebecca shaking in his grasp and he sensed that there was fear underlying her anger – far more fear, in fact, than fury. This bothered him. Frightened Tremere could wreak havoc. He quickly muttered a short invocation that would temporarily infuse him with prodigious strength. Rebecca heard the Latin words, but could not understand the ritual and she wondered if Merette was preparing to tear her apart. Such thoughts did nothing to calm her.

"So anyone else and it's perfectly fine," Alexander demanded. "But when I touch you, you cringe is that it?" *What have I done for her to fear me so much?* Alexander considered the nightmares that had recently tormented several members of court while Rebecca was in Seattle, and began to form a hypothesis.

Rebecca glared at the wall in front of her, glad she couldn't see Alexander's face. If she could, she would probably spit in it – or scream. "Since when is it alright for *anyone* to touch me without my consent?" she asked, picking her words with care.

Alexander turned Rebecca to face him – and with his magickal strength, Rebecca had no chance of resisting. Merette's expression was strangely dazed, as if he couldn't quite believe what was happening. "That's just it. Consent." He murmured, apparently disturbed by Rebecca's choice of words. Ignoring Rebecca's yelp of alarm at Alexander's easy manhandling of her, he asked "Am I so repulsive or did you fear what would happen?" his distracted tone quickly sharpened to anger.

*In what case?* Rebecca knew better than to voice *that* question. She had the distinct impression that Alexander was suddenly addressing another issue. *Oh hell*, she thought. *I've trespassed onto something else entirely.* Elders were known for their strange passions and intense hatreds. Rebecca's fear spiked as she realized the situation might be escalating from social upset to life-threatening altercation.

"Repulsive?" she gasped. "No! No!" she shook her head, vehemently. "It's just..." her voice trailed away, struggling for words that would not come.

Alexander's other hand found purchase in Rebecca's hair, and he pulled Rebecca to him in a grip that was like iron. Rebecca wanted to get away from whatever Merette had in mind, but she hadn't a chance. Struggling now would be like a mouse wriggling under a cat's paw – and would no doubt have the same results. Trying desperately to keep hysteria at bay, Rebecca waited for what was going to happen next – and hoped she would survive.

Alexander's voice was suddenly calm, his anger receding as quickly as it had manifested. "It's just what?" he insisted.

A whisper was all Rebecca could summon. "I've had dreams," she admitted. "Terrible dreams."

Merette refused to relinquish his grasp. "Tell me," he insisted, ignoring Rebecca's obvious fear and growing embarrassment.

Rebecca spoke slowly, forcing out the words. "You, the elders...hurting me...smiling in my face and tearing me apart." She paused for a moment. Voicing the memory (*dream?*) was even more difficult than she had anticipated. "And you just watched." She couldn't hide a sense of betrayal as she remembered. It was stupid to be so beholden to a bad dream, she knew, but it had been so compelling!

Alex gave a half-nod - acknowledging what, Rebecca couldn't guess. "And do you really think that I would ever let that happen?" he asked intently. "That I would ever be so weak-willed

as to be forced into that kind of situation?” Rebecca recognized self-persuasion when she saw it, and she wondered what cause Alexander had to doubt himself.

“You're an elder.” Rebecca replied. “How can I even begin to guess how your mind works?” *Particularly at times like this?*

“Yes, I am an elder. An elder whose duty it is to protect my apprentices from outside danger. Have I ever given you any reason to doubt that before?”

Rebecca knew why he was applying logic to an emotional situation, and it brought her back to earth with a thug. “No.” Although she might not have been aware of it herself, Merette caught the slight hesitation before Rebecca's reply. He thought for a moment and then realized, *of course! She doesn't know that she's not the only one who has been suffering from bad dreams!* Such an obvious thing, but it had caused so much discord.

Disregarding how the statement might alarm Rebecca, Alexander told her “I had a similar dream, akin to your own – playing the part you describe. Do you think that such a happening can be a natural coincidence?”

Rebecca gasped in surprise. “It can't be!” Alexander saw hope flicker on Rebecca's face, then fade. “But...memory can be so inconsistent.” She sighed.

“Not mine,” Alex assured her with the confidence of a vampire who had successfully fought off any number of psychic attacks. “Something is being done to us.” He told her. “I want to find out what's behind these dreams and put a stop to it.” *Before we kill each other.*

Rebecca was thinking very fast now. The possibility that her sleeping mind had been violated so brutally outraged, and her anger at Merette was immediately transferred to her unknown enemy. But... she only had Alexander's word that the situation was as he described it.

“But, to succeed, I will need your *full* trust and cooperation.” Merette warned Rebecca, still holding her tightly and very close. “Do I have that?”

“I want to... I mean - yes.” Rebecca sternly reminded herself of her place and duty. “Of course. I shouldn't have questioned it in the first place.”

Alexander smiled – a not entirely reassuring gesture. “Good. Show me.” He ordered, bending towards Rebecca's throat.

**If you wish to read the scene that exists between the one that precedes and the one that follows, please go to [rebecca15a.pdf](#) – you must type in the URL, as no direct link is possible. The scene is adult in nature and can be skipped with no detrimental effect on the story as a whole. Suffice to say there's blood and naughtiness involved. I'm offering it as a separate section for those who don't care to read such things.**

Some time later, Merette broke the silence. “Rebecca?” he asked, with some concern.

Rebecca smiled at the ease of his tone. “Yeah?”

“I think I needn't mention that this will remain strictly between us. The clan frowns on this sort of thing and we'd both be put at risk.” Despite the gravity of the situation, Rebecca could sense that Alexander had relaxed by an order of magnitude – just as she had. *Who would have thought?*

Rebecca nodded, moving an inch to pull a ballpoint pen out from under her back. She feared its imprint would be left permanently on her skin. “Of course. Just don't mess with my memory as insurance, alright?”

Alexander smiled. “That, I wouldn't do. But I just want you to know that this includes everyone.” He paused for a moment. “Including your Domitor.” Merette waited for Rebecca's reaction.

Rebecca flinched in surprise, and then shrugged and sighed. *The attitude of one who has been caught and sees no point in denying it*, Alex had seen it before.

“Oh, I guess you would know... now.” Rebecca sighed sadly, thinking of her most recent meeting with the one she was enthralled to. “We're not on as good terms as you might expect. Don't worry about it.”

“If that's the case, I'll do what I can to help and I won't say anything about it,” Alexander reassured her. “But I have to know who it is.” Rebecca stiffened at that, but quickly considered her choices. *If I don't tell him, we're going to start arguing about trust again – and he could just find out by himself, anyway.*

“It's Stuart - my sire.” She admitted.

Alexander nodded. “I suspected something much like that.” Which was true. Rebecca had missed her Sire far too much for their connection to be merely the usual one of blood. “I believe that we can both help each other out with our respective goals.” Alexander kissed Rebecca briefly. “Surely there are going to be many mutual benefits to working together like this.”

Rebecca's response was a crooked grin. “There surely are!” *Along with some godawful risks, she thought. Is he suggesting this is going to be a regular thing?*

Alexander looked around at the scene of minor devastation. “I think we should get dressed, don't you?”

Rebecca had almost forgotten that they were in the library. *Oh god, I hope Sampson stayed in his rooms!* Not bothering to stifle a grin of embarrassment, Rebecca followed Alexander's leave and picked up her clothes.

“You mentioned poor examples, earlier.” Alexander commented, once they had tidied up and hidden the obvious signs of their tryst. “I had thought that the current mood was more in response to the prince's apathy on most issues other than this war.”

Rebecca considered her reply. “Well, if you're looking for an honest opinion...?” Alexander nodded. “Tell me when a single out-of-court dignitary has been well received and well-treated by the elders of this court?” Alexander wondered how she had heard about the elders' treatment of outsiders – such things were kept behind closed doors. Still, that wasn't the issue, now.

Rebecca continued. “If the neonates see their Primogen treating a visiting archon with too much familiarity and too little respect, why should the neonates feel obligated to treat their leaders any better? As for the Prince, I don't understand him. I've stopped trying.” Rebecca shrugged.

“That's exactly the attitude that we can't have.” Alexander warned her. “It's bad for morale. I'll try talking some sense into him, but he's rather stubborn. It may eventually come down to a power-play between the elders to maintain stability. If it does, I unfortunately see no viable replacement for him.”

*Jesus, it's gone that far?* Rebecca was stunned. She knew that elders had their frictions with the Prince, but if replacements were being considered. *Well, it'll take a lot to remove Audran, as whoever hired those Assamites last year found out.* She shook her head wearily. “Heavy stuff.”

Alexander thought about Rebecca's last comment for a moment, before realizing she was speaking in the vernacular. “Indeed.” He nodded.

Rebecca sighed. “It makes me glad I'm a neonate. I can try to stay out of these things.”

“Don't be so sure you can stay out of it,” Merette warned her.

Rebecca shrugged again. “I'll cross that bridge if I come to it. Although, if I can speculate for a second?” Alexander indicated that she could continue. Despite what had just happened, Rebecca was assuming that certain limits were still in place – and Alexander approved of that caution. It suggested that she could be discreet.

“If there was a power struggle between the upper echelons of the court,” she asked. “aren't you afraid that Bannister will come out on top?”

Alexander shook his head in an emphatic negative. “The Elders showed a unanimous lack of support for her bid for status recently. I don't fear her becoming Prince.”

Rebecca quirked an eyebrow. *So, Bannister lacks strong support amongst the elders? Is that why she likes to spend so much time with the neonates.* Rebecca pushed the thought aside for future consideration. "I'm glad to hear it." She admitted. "That woman scares me."

"I'm not surprised," Alexander commented mildly, hoping his true feelings remained hidden. There was no need for Rebecca to know quite how strongly Merette disliked the infamous Lady Bannister.

Still, he must make sure that Rebecca was not jumping to conclusions "But don't think I'm disloyal. You may have noticed that the prince has given me much leeway in terms of both collecting and researching occult phenomena. More leeway than most Princes would give our clan." Rebecca nodded – that much was true, but only because it seemed that Prince Audran didn't care about occult matters himself. "So as long as he keeps the area safe. It is within clan Tremere's best interests to keep him in power. But only as long as he keeps the area safe..." Alexander concluded.

Rebecca nodded. "I follow you."

*In more ways than one, I hope,* Alexander mused. "Then I suggest we finish tidying up and return to business as usual. I would like to see you later on this evening to 'brush up on your Spirit Manipulation skills.'"

Rebecca nodded her assent. During the past few days, her studies had suffered and Alexander was the only chantry member who knew the path of spirits that she was studying.

"Good. I'll see you then..."