Alex - Within Her

20101210 : A couple of scenes recovered from the Flesh & Blood revision. These were adapted from scenes in the Avatars rough draft.

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All night long, a face had hovered between her and any hope of dreams. In her sleep, she had studied the image trapped in her mind's eye. At best, she could only pick up the details peripherally. A feature would begin to resolve, only to be replaced immediately by a remembered glimpse of some other facet of the image. Her inner eye would be captured by those intense, opalescent, grey eyes, and the vision would flicker and vanish again before she could bring anything else into focus. As they flashed by, she had been fascinated to note how the eyes sometimes appeared twilight blue or emerald green, depending on the mood they were captured in. It just went to show how many different faces a person could show. Always changing, always the same—like an eternal flame.

All these memories, and yet that face remained as elusive as a dream.

A spear of light burned through the morning mist, bringing the room to life and disturbing her sleep. The girl rolled onto her back and clutched the sheet to herself without waking. But dawn was relentless, and soon a flood of glaring warmth reached out to caress her cheek. The light poured through an open window, piercing thin curtains that shifted lazily in the morning breeze. Her eyes blinked open, staring out through slitted lids as the sun stretched itself into shape at the crest of a distant hill.

Awakened, but not entirely wakeful, she allowed her gaze to drift about the room, watching the blue tinged shadows brighten and then turn white, while the edges of things became highlighted in gold. It was so beautiful she immediately forgave the sun for coming up so very early.

On any other day, she would have been impervious to the dawn, curled snugly in her bed.

All at once, the dream came back to her. It bothered her that her mind had found such a common sight as her own face impossible to grasp. She realized it was a symptom of her recent ordeal, but at the moment, she was still feeling the imperative of her dream. She rolled onto her hip, and turned to study her reflection in the mirror across from the bed. Her mind embraced the image, as it was a word or name that emerged after eluding thought or speech, though the meaning had burned perfectly clear.

The face in the mirror was hard to keep in focus. She gazed at it, reaching up impulsively to touch herself. She traced her fingers over her smooth and gracefully curved brow. She stroked the flawless surface, savoring the velvet softness of her skin, and admiring its pale, mother-of-pearl complexion. She extended that caress down to the round point of her chin, which softly united the angles of her jaw—integrating subtler angles suggested by the faint hollows of her cheeks as they merged with the strong curves of her cheekbones. Her nose was straight and demurely sharp. Her mouth—it was exceptionally expressive when she chose, naturally hinting at an enigmatic smile—hid sharp, slightly pronounced canines very capable of piercing flesh.

A mane of fine, full, blood red hair framed her features. Her hands came up, fingers thrilling in the texture of liquid silk as she ran her hands through her hair. Long, straight and sheer, it had a tendency to develop a curl from the ends rather than the root. Both of her hands met at the nape, and slid down the slender column of her neck. Looking straight into her eyes, she struggled with what she saw.

Half of her mind was used to seeing it from a different perspective. That was all she needed to know to confirm that the experiment had gone too far. Turning away from the silvered glass, she closed her eyes. Her face, as it appeared to others, as it had appeared to him, formed in her mind’s eye. That subtle difference in perspective thrust to the core of her anxiety. It had been a week since he had left, and yet he had never been closer. Never more a part of her than he seemed now.

How ironic that an attempt to share themselves completely had cost them everything. Over the years, as they mastered their psychic talents, they had been warned of many things, many dangers. Oddly, no one had ever warned them of the risk of building such a close rapport. Was it possible that no one had ever attempted the kind of intimacy they had indulged in? She could not even remember what really happened that night. It had taken her days to sort out who she was, for the part of her that was him to accept that he was trapped within her.

The black silk sheet, stretched tight over the wide mattress, released a sigh as she sprawled onto her back.

Her throat ached to apologize, to beg for forgiveness for her impetuousness.

Ached, because words could not even form before his thoughts absolved her. She hugged herself, and realized it was actually him, his desire prompting her body to give the comfort he so desperately wanted to give. And it was comforting, even as it roused a species of anger she had only recently discovered. The sanctity of her body, the sovereignty of her mind, was compromised. Everything he offered her, she could feel him taking from her first. And she had nothing to give. All she was, was in a sense now all his. He filled her completely, and emptied her utterly. She could not even assert herself without enhancing him, reinforcing the other that was now a contrast to her. Tears welled hot under closed lids as frustration and confusion spiked painfully. The endless, inescapable torment was such a perfect punishment for their crime.

They had burned themselves into each other’s souls, become utterly inseparable, and it had driven them completely apart.

She rolled onto her back, stretching her arms and legs as she sorted herself out, gently reasserting command of herself. The pressure around her chest finally registered, and she opened her eyes to regard her entanglement. The top sheet clung tight around her torso; she must have wrapped it around herself and tucked it in place fairly tight at some point in her sleep. She was impressed that she had not dislodged it when she first sat up—grateful not to have exposed herself to the cool morning air.

But, it was not safe to linger in bed, so she braced herself to brave the chill. She pulled the sheet away from her body, and flipped it back over the heavy down comforter that straddled her hips. It only took her a moment to realize that he had stripped her gown off of her sometime during the night.

It disturbed her that he did not have to sleep when she did, and that when she did, her body was entirely his. She knew he had not slept through the night since they had sorted themselves out from one another. At the same time, she could not grudge him a little privacy as he adapted to the body he was stuck in.

As long as she tried not to consider how he was adapting.

As she sat up, she grabbed the sheet and pulled it back slowly. "Sorry," she smiled, knowing he would understand she was speaking aloud for his benefit, "if I flash you I doubt I’ll ever get out of bed."

He did not reply, except by straightening her legs, hooking her heel on the edge of the mattress to shift her around, making her confront the mirror again. Her eyes studied the image for a moment, seemingly of their own accord, and then he dropped her hand to her knee, and ran it’s fingertips teasingly up the inside of her thigh.

"Isn’t it unfortunate," he borrowed her voice, prompting her reflection to grin and a shrug, "that some senses cannot be confounded?"

She tightened that hand into a fist and looked down at it sternly. Once again, she wished she knew what had happened to him. To the man, not this ghost that haunted her. She wished she knew if he was truly lost to her. If this echo of him inside her was the only thing left for her to embrace.

After discovering how he was spending his nights within her, she had made a trip to a particular bookstore and purchased anything that suggested help with the mysteries of being female. While he was very much a man in her mind, he could only be a girl acting through her, and he had an abyss to fill any other girl would be horrified by. After stocking up on books to enlighten him, privately, about her body, she visited a seamstress and begged for advice on how to make clothes that would make her appear male, anticipating that he might want or need such a disguise to stay sane. It had not taken her long to realize she did not want someone who lived in her mind to go insane.

He had appreciated the gesture.

She had assured him she could make the clothes herself, once she understood the proper way to put them together. She woke up the next morning to discover he had spent the night tearing apart some of his old clothes and pouring through the books. Once she had managed to assert herself, she checked up on his reading and realized she had to go shopping again.

After purchasing a number of mandatory and elective feminine products, which she was forced to demonstrate for him when she returned home, despair. The money she had saved for his birthday had been eaten up in an afternoon. Being a girl, she had emphasized to him, was expensive and full of inconveniences. The thought of actually buying clothes, struggling with cosmetics and—she almost gagged—enduring gynecological examinations, made her physically ill. The more she read, the worse it got. In spite of that, dry eyes and exhaustion, she kept reading until morning.

She could hardly focus her eyes when she realized that dawn had made the reading light too dim by comparison. She finally reached up, turned off the bedside lamp, and rolled onto her stomach. Her thoughts spun for a bit, but she was satisfied that she could cope with being a girl. She would have to learn a few new tricks, but with psi, she felt confidant she could meet the strange new needs her body presented and retain her accustomed independence.

As long as she did not allow herself to become too upset, she actually enjoyed confronting her altered state. Everything was becoming new to her again, and even the world changed dramatically when viewed through her new perspective. She wriggled around until she was comfortable, sprawled full length on the bed and meditated for a bit. Her body needed to regenerate, flush out fatigue toxins and restore its metabolic equilibrium, but she did not want to take the time to sleep. She had a lot to do, and it was her birthday. She was not about to miss it just because she happened to be a girl or because she had worn herself out trying to figure out what that really meant.

When she felt refreshed and alert again, she jumped out of bed and padded down the hall to take a shower. Jean met her in the hall and did a double take.

"Alex!" he exclaimed in shock.

"What?" she gazed up at him, noting that she was shorter than him now.

"You're naked!" he declared, blushing.

Alex looked down, and then shrugged in chagrin. "Mm. Yeah," she commented, "I pulled all my clothes apart to alter them and got distracted. I sleep in the nude, so I wasn't worried about it. Anyway, it's not like you haven't seen me naked," she observed.

"Me? No," he admitted rubbing the back of his neck sheepishly. "But if my mother sees you wandering around like this she'll have a fit." With an effort, he brought his eyes back up to her face. "You know, you're up awful early, now that I think about it," he noted.

"I haven't slept," she informed him, starting to edge towards the bathroom. He looked toward the door and frowned slightly. "Don't tell me," she guessed, "you're headed for the shower too." He nodded. She grinned, waved him on as she stepped out of the way, and said, "Ladies first." He was smiling and reaching for the door when he stopped and glared back at her. "What? Was it something I said?"

"You," he shook his head. "Get in there. And don't take too long or I'll come in and join you. This girl thing will only get you so far."

She stuck her tongue out at him and slipped past him as he held the door. She stopped in surprise when she noticed someone else in the room out of the corner of her eye. She turned to excuse herself and found herself staring at the startled stranger.

Then she did a double take of her own.

She was facing the image of herself, a stranger standing in a full-length mirror. It took a moment to get used to the odd familiarity of her own reflection. The perfection of her recreation as a girl was clearly demonstrated as she struggled to find some difference between the face in the mirror and the one she remembered. Alex had been a young boy, his features uncomfortably androgynous. Those features had not changed, but some subtle shift had perfected them into a girl's face. She studied it as intently as she had studied her books. The answers she had searched for all night, even a clue as to what she really wanted and needed as a girl, were no closer to surfacing. What did surface was alarming. The boy in her was stunned at her beauty. Alex was in love. Her gaze dropped as he tried to drink her in. Her mind split into two levels—one purely worshipful, the other calm and critical. It was the critical view she found herself trying to cling to, pointing out similarities that extended below the neck, but she had to look very hard to notice them. That was not surprising. Naked as a frog, she could not avoid confronting what she had become.

Even from a distance—twice the length of the bathroom, thanks to the miracle of optics—she caught the eye. Her appearance, deceptively plain at a glance, was understated and elegant. She stood at exactly five nine—she had measured it—a young, well-sculpted female with contours suggesting agelessness, solid and sleek. Her ribcage tapered into her waist in a subtler curve than the arc over her hips. Tall, trim and feline, to her male trained eye, she possessed an unconscious poise—demure and predatorial. Her height was made elegant by the length and proportions of her limbs. Her arms and legs were athletic—slender and powerful from a lifetime of martial arts—ending in long fingered hands and dancer's feet. Her muscles, highly defined but smooth and unobtrusive at rest, had remained toned to a fine balance of strength and suppleness. Her belly was smooth and taut. Her breasts, full enough to suggest ripeness, were not underscored by creases. The shallow rise of her mons—dipping into her new vocabulary—was graced with neatly tended blood red curls, drawing the eye to what was otherwise out of view. That for which "out of sight" was never "out of mind", and she was not at all ashamed to give it due regard. It was amazing, but true, that one of the most erotic parts of a woman's body was no part of her body at all—just a space between her pubic arch and inner thighs, created by the wide shape of her pelvis. Her vulva, eclipsed to an impeccable hairline seam by taut labia majora, could just barely be glimpsed, framed in that classic—and maddening—triangular gap.

To the touch, her skin was a silken envelope radiating a high characteristic body temperature.