

# Lover Avenged (Black Dagger Brotherhood, Book 7)

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Rehvenge is used to living in the shadows and dealing with the roughest night walkers around-including the Black Dagger Brotherhood. As his secret identity as a sympath is threatened, he turns to the only light in his ever darkening world-a female vampire untouched by corruption, who's the only thing standing between him and eternal damnation.

J. R. Ward lives in the South with her incredibly supportive husband and her beloved golden retriever. After graduating from law school, she began working in health care in Boston and spent many years as chief of staff for one of the premier academic medical centers in the nation.

All kings are blind. The good ones see this and use more than their eyes to lead.

## Chapter One

"The king must die."

Four single syllable words. One by one they were nothing special. Put together? They called up all kinds of bad shit: Murder. Betrayal. Treason.

Death.

In the thick moments after they were spoken to him, Rehvenge kept quiet, letting the quartet hang in the stuffy air of the study, four points of a dark, evil compass he was intimately familiar with.

"Have you any response?" Montrag son of Rehm said.

"Nope."

Montrag blinked and fiddled with the silk cravat at his neck. Like most members of the glymera, he had both velvet slippers firmly planted in the dry, rarified sand of his class. Which meant he was just plain precious, all the way around. In his smoking jacket and his natty pinstriped slacks and... shit, were those actually spats?... he was right out of the pages of *Vanity Fair*. Like, a hundred years ago. And in his myriad condescendions and his bright frickin' ideas, he was Kissinger without a President when it came to politics: All analysis, no authority.

Which explained this meeting, didn't it.

"Don't stop now," Rehv said. "You've already jumped off the building. The landing isn't getting any softer."

Montrag frowned. "I fail to view this with your kind of levity."

"Who's laughing."

A knock on the study's door brought Montrag's head to the side and he had a profile like an Irish setter. All nose. "Come in."

The doggen that followed the command struggled under the weight of the silver service she carried. With an ebony tray the size of a porch in her hands, she hustled the load across the room.

Until her head came up and she saw Rehv.

She froze like a snapshot.

"We take our tea here." Montrag pointed to the low slung table between the two silk sofas they were sitting on. "Here."

The doggen didn't move, just stared at Rehv's face.

"What is the matter?" Montrag demanded as the tea cups began to tremble, a chiming noise rising up from the tray. "Place our tea here, now."

The doggen bowed her head, mumbled something and came forward, putting one foot in front of the other like she was approaching a coiled snake. She stayed as far away from Rehv as she could, which was not far at all given the furniture arrangement, and after she put the service down, she was barely able to get the cups into the saucers.

When she went for the pot of tea, it was clear she was going to spill the shit all over the place.

"Let me do it," Rehv said, reaching out.

As the doggen jerked away from Rehv, her grip slipped off the pot handle and the tea went into free fall.

Rehv caught the blistering hot silver in his palms.

"What have you done!" Montrag said leaping out of his sofa.

The doggen cringed away, her hands going to her face. "I am sorry, master. Verily, I am—"

"Oh, shut up," Montrag snapped. "And get us some ice—"

"It's not her fault." Rehv calmly switched his hold onto the handle and poured. "And I'm perfectly fine."

They both stared at him like they were waiting for him to hop up and shake his bumper to the tune of ow-ow-ow.

He put the silver pot down and looked into Montrag's pale eyes. "One lump. Or two?"

"May I... may I not get you something for that burn?"

He smiled, flashing his fangs at his host. "I'm perfectly fine."

Montrag seemed offended that he couldn't do anything, and turned his dissatisfaction on his servant. "You are a total disgrace and embarrassment to me. Leave us."

Rehv glanced at the doggen. To him, her emotions were a three-dimensional grid of fear and shame and panic, the interlocking weave filling out the space around her surely as her bones and muscles and skin did.

Be of ease, he thought at her. And know I'll make this right.

When she was gone, Montrag cleared his throat and sat back down. "I don't think she's going to work out. She's utterly incompetent."

"Why don't we start with one lump." Rehv dropped a sugar cube into the tea. "And see if you want another."

He held the cup out, but not too far out, so that Montrag was forced to get up again from his sofa and bend across the table.

"Thank you."

Rehv didn't let go of the saucer. "I make females nervous. It wasn't her fault."

He released his hold abruptly and Montrag scrambled to keep hold of the Royal Dalton.

"Oops. Don't spill." Rehv settled back into his sofa. "Shame to get a stain on this fine rug of yours. Aubusson, is it?"

"Ah... yes." Montrag parked it again and frowned as if he were recasting what had just happened. "Er... yes, it is. My father bought it many years ago. He had exquisite taste, didn't he? We built this room for it because it is so very large and the color of the walls was chosen specifically to bring out the peach tones."

Montrag looked around the study and smiled to himself as he sipped, his pinkie out in the breeze like a flag.

"How's your tea?"

"Perfect, but won't you have some?"

"Not a tea drinker." Rehv waited until the cup was up to the male's lips. "So you were talking about murdering Wrath?"

Montrag sputtered, Earl Gray dapped the front of his blood red smoking jacket and hitting daddy's peachy-keen rug.

As the male batted at the stains with a limp hand, Rehv held out a napkin. "Here, use this."

Montrag took the damask square and awkwardly patted at his chest and swiped the rug. He was clearly the kind of male who made messes, not cleaned them up.

"You were saying," Rehv murmured.

Montrag ditched the napkin on the tray and got to his feet, leaving his tea behind as he paced around. He stopped in front of a large landscape on the far wall and seemed to admire the dramatic mountain scene with its lone solider struggling against the elements.

He spoke to the painting. "You are aware that so many of our blooded brethren have been taken down in the raids by the lessers."

"And here I thought I'd been made leahdyre of the Council just because of my sparkling personality."

Montrag glared over his shoulder, his chin cocked in classic aristocratic fashion. "I lost my father and my mother and all of my first cousins. I buried each one of them. Think you that is a joy?"

"My apologies." Rehv put his right palm over his heart and bowed his head, even though he didn't give a shit. He was not going to be manipulated by the recitation of losses. Especially when the guy's emotions were all about greed, not grief.

Montrag turned his back to the painting, his head taking the place of the mountain the colonial soldier was on... so that it looked like the little man in the red uniform was climbing up his ear.

"The glymera has sustained unparalleled loses from the raids. Not just lives, but assets. Houses raided, antiques and art taken, bank accounts disappearing. And what has Wrath done? Nothing. He's given no response to repeated inquiries about how those families's residences were found... why Brotherhood didn't stop the attacks... where all those assets went. There is no plan to make sure it never happens again. No assurance that if what few members of the aristocracy return to Caldwell proper we are protected." Montrag really got on a role, his voice rising and bouncing off the crown molding and gilded ceiling. "Our race is dying. We have the remnants of only four bloodlines left after losing thirty-one of us. Cousins and sisters and brothers and shellans have been lost and this can't go on any

longer. By law if Wrath is alive he is king. Is the life of one worth the lives of many? Search your heart."

Oh, he was looking into it alright, black evil muscle that it was. "And then what."

"We take control and do what is right. During his tenure, he has restructured things... look at what has been done to the Chosen. They are now allowed to tally on this side- unheard of! And slavery is outlawed along with seclusion for females. Dearest Virgin Scribe, next thing you know there'll be someone wearing a skirt in the Brotherhood. With us in charge, we can reverse what he has done and recast the laws properly to preserve the old ways. We can organize a new offensive against the Lessening Society. We can triumph."

"You're using a lot of 'we's' here, and somehow I don't think that's exactly what you are thinking."

"Of course, there needs to be an individual who is first among equals." Montrag smoothed the lapels of his smoking jacket and angled his head and body like he was posing for a bronze statue or maybe a dollar bill. "A male chosen who is of stature and worth."

"And in what manner is this paragon going to be picked?"

"We're going to be move to a democracy. A long, overdue democracy that shall replace the unjust and unfair convention of monarchy..."

As a whole lot of blah, blah, blahing got its groove on, Rehv eased back, crossed his legs at the knees and steeped his fingers. Sitting on Montrag's fluffy sofa, the two halves him of warred, the vampire and the symphath clashing.

The only bene was that the internal shouting match droned out the sound of all that nasally, I-know-everything.

The opportunity was obvious: Get rid of the king and seize control of the race.

The opportunity was unthinkable: Kill a fine male and a good leader and... a friend of sorts.

"... and we would choose who leads us. Make them accountable to the Council. Ensure that our concerns were responded to. The monarchy is not working and democracy is the only way-"

Rehv cut in, "Democracy typically means that everyone gets a vote. Just in case you're unfamiliar with the definition."

"But we would. All of us who serve on the Council would be on the electoral board. Everyone would be counted."

"The term 'everyone' encompasses a couple more people over and above 'everyone like us.'"

Montrag shot over a load of oh, please, do be serious. "Would you honestly trust the race to the lower classes?"

"Not up to me."

"It could be." Montrag brought his tea cup up to his mouth and looked over the brim with eyes that were sharp. "It absolutely could be. You are our leahdyre."

Staring at the guy, Rehv saw the path as clearly as if it were paved and spot lit with halogen beams: If Wrath was killed, his royal line would end because he had yet to sire young. Societies, particularly those at war as the vampires were, abhor leadership vacuums so a radical shift from monarchy to 'democracy' wouldn't be as unthinkable as it would have in another, saner, safer time.

The glymera might be out of Caldwell and hiding in their safe houses throughout New England, but that bunch of effete motherfuckers had money and influence and had wanted to take over forever. With this particular plan, they could clothe their ambitions in the vestments of democracy and make like they were taking care of the little people.

Rehv's dark nature seethed, a jailed criminal impatient for probation: Bad acts and power plays were a constitutional compulsion for his father's blood and part of him wanted to create the void... and step into it.

He cut into Montrag's self-important driveling. "Spare me the propaganda. What exactly are you suggesting."

The male made elaborate work of putting down his tea cup on the corner of his desk, as if he wanted to appear as if he were corralling his words. Whatever. Rehv was willing to bet the guy knew exactly what he was going to say. Something of this nature wasn't the kind of thing you just pulled out of your ass and there were others in on it. Had to be.

"As you pointed out, the Council is to meet in a couple of days in Caldwell specifically for us to have an audience with the king. Wrath will arrive and... a mortal event will occur."

"He travels with the Brotherhood. Not exactly the kind of muscle you can easily work around."

"Death wears many masks. And has many different stages on which to perform."

"And my role is?" Even though he knew.

Montrag's pale eyes were like ice, luminescent and cold. "I know what kind of male you are. So I know exactly what you are capable of."

This was not a surprise. Rehv had been a drug lord for the past twenty-five years, and though he hadn't announced his avocation to the aristocracy, vampires did hit his clubs regularly and a number of them were in the ranks of his chemical customers.

No one knew about his symphath side. And he'd been paying his blackmailer well over the past two decades to keep it that way.

"That is why I come to you," Montrag said. "You will know how to take care of this."

"True enough."

"As leahdyre of the Council, you would be in a position of enormous power. Even if you are not elected as President, the Council is going nowhere. And let me reassure you about the Black Dagger Brotherhood. I know your sister is mated to one of them. The Brothers will not be affected by this."

"You don't think it's going to piss them off? Wrath is not just their king. He's their blood."

"Protecting our race is their primary mandate. Wither we go they must follow. And you must know that there are many who feel they have been doing a poor job of late. Methinks perhaps they require better leadership."

"From you. Right. Of course." Which would be like an interior decorator trying to command a tank platoon: a shitload of noisy chirping until one of the soldiers off'd the lightweight flash in a pan and churned over the body a couple of times.

Perfect plan there. Yup.

But who said Montrag had to be the one elected. Accidents happened to both kings and aristocrats.

"I must say unto you," Montrag continued, "as my father always said unto me, timing is everything. We need to proceed with haste. The time is right. May we rely on you, my friend?"

Rehv got to his feet and towered over the other male. With a quick chug on his jacket cuffs, he straightened his Tom Ford then reached for his cane. He felt nothing in his body, not his clothes or the weight shifting from his ass to his soles or the handle against the palm he'd burned.

The numbness was a side effect of the drug he used to keep his bad side from coming out in mixed company, the prison in which he jailed his sociopathic impulses.

But all he needed to get back to basics was one missed dose. An hour later? He was alive and kicking and ready to play.



"What say you?" Montrag prompted.

Wasn't that the question.

Some times in life, from out of the myriad of prosaic decisions like what to eat and where to sleep and how to dress, a true crossroads is revealed. In these moments, when the fog of relative irrelevancy lifts and fate rolls out a demand for free will, there is only left or right- no option of four-by-fouring into the underbrush between two paths, no negotiating with the choice that has been presented.

You must answer the call and pick your way. And there is no reverse.

Of course, the problem was, navigating a moral landscape was something he'd taught himself to do to fit in with the vampires. The lessons he'd learned had stuck. Although only to a point.

And his drugs only kind of, sort of worked.

Abruptly, Montrag's pale face became cast in variations of pastel pink and the male's dark hair went magenta and his smoking jacket became the color of ketchup. As the red wash tinted everything, Rehv's visual field flattened out so it was as a movie screen of the world.

#### Other Books

Library Journal. Includes, beginning Sept. 15, 1954 (and on the 15th of each month, Sept.-May) a special section: School library journal, ISSN 0000-0035, (called Junior libraries, 1954-May 1961). Also issued separately.

... academic , and special Literature Skira , dist . by Rizzoli . Apr. 2004. 224p .  
libraries . – Cheryl Ann Lajos , Free Lib . of photogs . ISBN 88-8491-571-6 . \$ 55 .  
Philadelphia Americans in Paris : A Literary Anthology ."