

Chapter Fourteen, "Sired"

Kimberly stared at her hands, head cocked to one side, like she was looking at them for the first time. In a way, she was. Her fingernails were familiar but now sharp and deadly. She touched her face, feeling the textures and curves. Her hands traveled down her body, exploring herself.

She stood naked in the center of the large cave. Papa put her hands on the young woman's shoulders.

"Have a good, long feel," she said, "because you'll never see yourself in a mirror ever again. It's okay, though, because you look amazing. And you always will. How do you feel?"

"I feel great," Kimberly said. "Like I was always meant to be like this."

"It's freeing, isn't it? Liberating. I was sired in 1067, during the Norman invasion. I was just a simple country girl living in the North but when I was turned, oh, baby, I became a warrior. They called me the Night Queen and I fought the Normans and the French for years. Almost won, too. But they had numbers on their side. Funny I never thought about creating an army until relatively recently. But, now, I have an army nearly a hundred strong, been raising them for almost ten years now. Impressive, I know."

"How can I help?" Kimberly said.

She felt a strange kinship with Papa now. It was as if every time she felt like defying her sire, her mind would suddenly change and she would be okay with whatever Papa wanted. And yet... in the back of her mind, somewhere deep down, something stirred. It was music. A song, in fact. It was "Queen Bitch" by Bowie. But Kimberly could barely hear it.

"You, my dear, are going to get our cute little werewolf to come around to our way of thinking," Papa said. "I want you to find her. It won't be difficult. She's tracking us now. I want you to head her off at the docks, maybe an old, empty warehouse. Try to conceal your nature from her. And when she least expects it, put the bite on her. Now, she won't turn into a vampire but she will be under your control, at least for a while. You bring her back here and we'll see where it goes from there. If we can get her on our side, great. If not, well, there are other victories to be had."

"Why are you running, Manny?!" Wendy called out.

Manny didn't stop but her voice was always near. She never tired. So why hadn't she caught up with him yet? She was playing with him, that was why. He tried to ignore her.

"My mistress Asa is not cruel," she continued. "She is wise. She's as old as Rome! Can you imagine? Rome! All she wants is happiness and freedom. I see it so totally clearly now. I was so sheltered before. I was blocking! Now I'm free. Free to do what I want, to eat what I want! I'll never grow any older! And you don't have to, either, Manny! Asa totally has a place for you, I'm sure of it. She is kind, giving. Just join us!"

Manny's heart leapt as he passed out of the woods and into town. The first building he saw was a convenience store. Its harsh florescent lights looked like the lights of Heaven to him. He ran inside.

"Help me, please!" he said.

"Hey, hold on, mister," the man behind the counter said.

He was middle-aged, big and bearded. He wore a name tag that read, "Clark". Clark pulled a pistol from under the counter.

"Now, I don't want any trouble," he said.

"What?" Manny said, out of breath.

Then he realized how this must look. He was a large Black man covered in sweat and had run into the store holding a huge meat cleaver.

"No," he said, "it's okay. I'll put this down. I don't mean you any trouble. I need to use your phone."

"The Hell you want my phone for?" He didn't add 'boy' but it was implied.

Manny sighed and put the cleaver down on the ground.

"Look," he said, "someone is after me. She's already killed two people and caused an accident. And that's just the tip of the fucking iceberg, believe me. We got a whole Hell of a lot of problems tonight."

"She?" Clark said. "I'm supposed to believe you've been running away from some girl?"

Manny nodded. "She's not just any kind of girl, man."

Clark huffed. "I'll bet. What, you owe her money or something?"

"Look!"

"Don't you raise your voice to me, mister," Clark said and pointed his gun menacingly. "I'll call the cops."

Manny risked a step towards the counter. "Call 'em!"

"I will."

"Better do it fast. She's right behind me."

Clark picked up a phone from under the counter, started to dial. There was a loud screeching sound as something pushed Manny aside, sending him tumbling into the snack rack.

The something was a bat creature. That was the only way to describe it. It was humanoid but with bat features, dark grey skin and wings. It flew into the store and slammed into Clark, clawed feet first.

The thing's wings flapped as it dug its claws into Clark's face. The man's cheeks were shredded, his lips split down the middle under the stress. His exposed teeth and jaws were red and slick. He screamed.

Blood poured out of numerous wounds on the man's face. His gun went off three times, each round embedding into the ceiling harmlessly.

The thing tore him apart, sending his flesh and blood in clumps onto the bottles of liquor behind him. Manny was frozen in fear as the bat creature drank deep of Clark.

Once the chaos was over and Clark stopped moving, the thing started to transform. It became human again, became Wendy. Slowly, she stood up behind the counter, a horrifying smile on her face. She was naked now, drenched in Clark's blood. Wendy picked up Clark's severed forearm - hand still attached - and squeezed some blood out of it, caught it in her mouth.

Manny's paralysis broke and he took the opportunity to run again, out into the streets. Desperately, he searched the cars in parking spaces and lined along the street. Finally, he found what he was looking for: an unlocked car.

As quietly as possible, he got inside and ducked down below the dash. He waited for what seemed like hours but was probably only minutes. Finally, he heard walking nearby. Somehow he knew it was her.

Wendy stopped near the car he was hiding in. Manny suddenly felt the urge to sneeze and covered his nose, trying to will it to subside.

Wendy moved on, heading off somewhere else. Maybe she had lost interest in him and was off to perform whatever other havoc it was her duty to perform. Slowly, quietly, he set to work hot-wiring the car.

Camille reached the docks, her pack right behind her. She was about to jump down on the beach where the docks ended, when a voice called to her.

"Camille," Kimberly said.

Camille whipped around to see Kimberly standing in the doorway of a warehouse, beckoning her inside. She stood still for a moment - unsure - then turned back into a girl again. The wolves around her

growled at Kimberly.

"It's okay," she told them. "Stay out here."

The wolves did as they were told as Camille ran to Kimberly. The two embraced and entered the warehouse.

"You made it!" Camille said.

"I did," Kimberly said, "barely."

"Why are you naked?"

Kimberly was, indeed, naked. She smiled.

"You can talk," Kimberly said, "look at you."

Camille's clothes were little more than tatters after her transformation, her jeans split up to mid-thigh. Camille shrugged.

"I lost mine in a struggle with the dead women," Kimberly explained. "Does it really bother you?"

"No," Camille said. But she was blushing.

She looked away, trying to regain control of herself. She frowned.

"I know this place," she said.

"What?" Kimberly said.

"This warehouse. I've been here before. I was beaten up right over there."

This was the warehouse owned by Caleb, where she had, in fact, killed Caleb and his mentor, Arthur. It seemed so long ago now, though, in reality, it had only been a few days.

Camille, distracted, wandered about the warehouse. She shook her head. She couldn't believe that she was back here. Everything was circling back around on itself, like a coiled snake.

Kimberly watched Camille as the She Wolf studied the warehouse. She seemed to be sniffing the air. Her back was towards Kimberly. The girl's neck seemed longer than before. It seemed to call towards Kimberly. It looked so warm, so succulent. The vampire licked her lips. She could feel her fangs elongating, becoming sharp, erect.

She crept up silently behind Camille. From outside, Kimberly could hear growling. She looked up at a window and saw a wolf standing on a stack of shipping boxes looking inside the warehouse.

Then she heard more growling, this time from inside the warehouse. She turned to look at Camille again.

Camille was facing her, growling, eyes full of rage. She started to change, hair appearing on her face.

"You vampire shit!" she said. "You were with her all along, weren't you?!"

Her transformation was complete now and she stalked Kimberly around the warehouse. They circled each other.

"My mistress only wants your help," Kimberly said.

"She's not gonna get it," Camille growled.

"I don't want to hurt you."

"Like you could."

Kimberly smiled. She could feel her sharp fangs rub against her lower lip. "And it wasn't like I was turned all along, anyway. Papa just now took me under her wing."

Camille practically barked at her. "Bullshit!"

"Think about it. You saw me in daylight, you saw me in mirrors."

Camille looked unsure, the Beast receding just a little bit. Kimberly seized that moment of weakness and struck. She pounced on Camille.

The Beast just barely dodged the attack, batted at the vampire's face, knocking her away. Kimberly swung out with her leg, trying to knock Camille off her feet. It was no good. The werewolf was ready for it and jumped over the attack.

Kimberly spotted the shelf against the wall and circled around. If she could just get Camille in front

of it.

She goaded the girl to attack her, leaning in and out, tempting her. Finally, Camille took the bait and lunged at exactly the wrong moment.

Kimberly struck out with her mind. Her psychic powers were limited at this point, but she was capable of knocking over the shelf, which she did just as Camille was under it. The radio on the shelf switched on in the chaos.

The metal shelf struck Camille on the top of the head and knocked her to the ground, pinning her under it. She was momentarily unable to move and Kimberly pushed aside the shelf and straddled her in one fluid movement, her thighs pinching Camille's waist. She bared her fangs and went in for the bite.

The wolf in the window went crazy, pawing at the glass, howling. The other wolves crowded at the door to the warehouse, trying to find a way in.

Kimberly had Camille, she could bite her at her pleasure. And yet, she hadn't.

Why hadn't she?

Something was making her reconsider, to doubt Papa's orders. Suddenly, Papa seemed like a horrible monster again, not the giving mistress that she had become to Kimberly. There was a sound getting louder in her head.

The sound was music. And it wasn't just inside Kimberly's head anymore.

The radio on the shelf was on, had switched on when it hit the floor. Bowie's "Queen Bitch" was playing on some AM station. It cleared Kimberly's head.

Papa was the Queen Bitch. She was the bad guy. It all made sense again. And she and Camille had to work together to defeat her.

"Camille," Kimberly said.

Camille lunged up, the Beast grabbing Kimberly by the shoulders. She opened her mouth to take a bite of her own out of Kimberly.

"Wait!" Kimberly said. "I'm okay. I don't want to hurt you."

The Beast hesitated, just like she had under the docks when she saved Kimberly from the Blind Dead. She looked unsure of herself.

"Papa isn't controlling me," Kimberly insisted. "She's the Queen Bitch. We have to fight her. Maybe now I can really help, now that she made me like this."

Camille still looked unsure.

"Don't believe me?" Kimberly asked.

She leaned in and kissed Camille, kissed the Beast. It was a small kiss but it was real.

"Believe me now?" she asked.

Camille reached out with a clawed hand and gently touched Kimberly's face. The vampire smiled as the furry hand ran along her skin.

"It's okay," she said. "You can't hurt me now."

Camille looked at her, her breathing heavy. She pressed up against the vampire, their bodies intertwining. They kissed again, passionately; two monsters loving each other. Kimberly ground her crotch along Camille's leg and moaned in pleasure. She dug deep scratches into Camille's back, further tearing her clothes up and drawing blood.

The blood ran down Camille's right shoulder and Kimberly broke the kiss to suck on it. Camille swept her head back, eyes closed in pleasure.

Kimberly licked the last droplets of blood off Camille's shoulder and took the werewolf's face in her hands. Camille opened her eyes and their gazes met.

"You're the most beautiful thing I've ever seen," Kimberly said.

They kissed again as they made love, the first time for Camille, and the first time for Kimberly in her new life, her life in the shadows.

Chapter Fifteen, "The Authorities"

Manny finally got the car started. It revved to life, the radio coming on with the engine. Some David Bowie song was just ending. It was replaced with the Patti Smith Group belting out "Till Victory". Manny was feeling pretty good himself. There had been no sign of Wendy in some time and now the car was working.

Briefly, he considered going home to Dana but decided to head straight to the sheriff's office. It was on the other side of town so he drove as fast as he dared, not wanting to attract attention but wanting to get there real fucking quick.

The drive was uneventful except for one incident. About half way there, a man walked out in front of the car. It wasn't a stoplight or sign, the guy just walked right out from between two parked cars straight in front of Manny, who had to slam down on the breaks to avoid hitting him.

The man stopped right in front of the car, not yet looking at it, only straight ahead where he was going. He was older, thin, gaunt. Slowly, he turned his head to gaze at Manny.

The man wore an eye patch over his right eye. Also, the right side of his face was covered in nasty-looking cuts. The man did not look well at all. He pointed an accusing finger at Manny.

"You're fucking with God's work here, pal," the man said. "Watch it."

And he walked on, right across the street and disappeared into an alley on the other side. Manny frowned, shook his head and continued on his way.

He pulled into the parking lot of the sheriff's office a few minutes later. He opened the door and ran into the building, not bothering to close the door or even shut off the engine.

"Sheriff," he said as he entered the office.

Sheriff Barnes sat behind his desk, leaning back, feet up, the very image of comfort. He was middle-aged with longish brown hair and a small mustache. When Manny burst into the office, Barnes stood up, reaching for his gun. When he saw that the man wasn't armed, he let go of the pistol butt.

"Jesus Christ," he said. "Sure know how to scare someone, don't you?"

"Sorry," Manny said. "We got a real problem."

"Well don't leave me in suspense. Spit it out."

"There's been an attack on the diner I work at, Stonewall, on the other side of town." Manny had decided to leave out as much of the supernatural as he could. The sheriff would just think he was a crazy person.

"Stonewall?" Barnes said. "That's that dive, other side of town?"

Manny cocked his head to one side. "Yeah."

Barnes smirked. "Then how do you know about it? Somebody call you?"

"No, I was there."

"You were there? Why didn't you call me while it was happening?"

"There wasn't any time," Manny said, shaking his head.

"So you came all the way over here to report it?" Barnes asked.

Manny nodded. "Yeah."

Barnes' look was suspicious. "You didn't stop anywhere on your way, use their phone?"

"Well..." Manny hesitated. "One of the attackers was chasing me."

"Jesus. He still out there?"

Manny took another step closer to the desk. "Yes. Only it's a woman, a fellow co-worker of mine."

Barnes scoffed. "A chick? That's mighty strange. What's her name?"

"Wendy Dallas."

Barnes pulled an incident sheet out, started writing on it.

"What happened?" he asked.

Manny told him a loose - very loose - version of what happened at the diner, leaving out the supernatural but mentioning Papa and her army of women. He told the sheriff of the accident, just saying that they swerved so as not to hit Wendy, not mentioning the girl's powers, just saying that she slit the others' throats in the aftermath of the crash and that he barely got away. He then told him of the convenience store and his escape thereafter.

"Hell of a story," Barnes said. "Give me a second."

"Sure."

"I'm sure you've heard that I'm down several men. Someone's out there killing my boys and just maybe this has something to do with that."

He turned on the CB radio behind his desk, picked up the receiver.

"Unit 4, do you read?" he spoke into it.

"Ten four, go ahead," a voice over the line spoke.

"Charlie, we got a possible 187 at Stonewall Diner, out on Route 9, you know where it is?"

"Ten four, sheriff, been there a few times."

Barnes nodded. "Go ahead and check it out. We also got an accident nearby and another possible 187 at Clark's Liquor and Goods at 527 Heartshaven. I'm gonna have Simmons check that out and ring up the state boys to take care of the accident. Sounds pretty bad. Over and out."

"Over and out, sheriff."

Manny waited patiently while Barnes contacted several other people on the radio. After he was finished, he turned to Manny, looking at him with a strange expression on his face.

"Okay," he said. "Got to get you into that jail cell."

"What?" Manny said.

"You heard me. I gotta lock you up."

"That doesn't make any sense."

Barnes looked at Manny like he was talking to a child. "You know I can't just take your word for all this. You tell me about multiple murders and stealing a car and I'm supposed to not suspect you at least a little bit?"

Manny grit his teeth. "Suspect me of what?"

"Of being involved in this, at least on some level."

"That's a crock of shit, man."

Barnes pointed out the window behind his desk. "I got four dead sheriff's deputies. That's a fact. That's no story. And until I hear back from my boys, that's all your report is, a story. A good one, I'll grant, very exciting, but a story nonetheless."

Manny gestured frantically at the radio. "Just wait for them to call back, then."

"Can't take the risk. Now get in that cell or I will put you in that cell."

"Sheriff, this is crazy. I've told you the truth."

Barnes nodded indulgently. "You didn't hold nothing back, huh? Come on. I've been doing this job for sixteen years, I know when someone's holding back on me."

Manny found himself back-peddling. "Maybe I didn't tell you every single little detail, no, but--"

"So you admit that you're withholding. That's obstruction. And you got grand theft auto to add to the list. You gotta see, it doesn't look good."

"Now, wait--"

Barnes put his hand on his gun again, looked seriously at Manny. Manny shook his head in frustration before turning to walk into the open door of the cell. It was a long walk. Suddenly, the events of the past couple hours truly sank in. His co-workers dead, the town in danger, supernatural creatures roaming the streets. It was too much. He was very, very tired.

He walked into the cell and Barnes closed and locked it behind him. Manny turned back around and leaned on the bars.

"I don't even get a phone call?" he asked. "I'd like to talk to my wife."

"All in good time," Barnes said.

He slowly walked back around the desk and sat down. He didn't put his feet up again but he did look quite comfortable.

"Just gonna sit there, is that it?" Manny said. "All this shit going on and you just sit the fuck down on your ass and do nothing. You disgust me."

"Shut up," Barnes said. "Don't make me get my can of mace out. I do know how to use it."

Manny slapped a hand against the bars. "Jesus, you're just as bad as one of them. Sitting around doing nothing when you know something's wrong amounts to the same damn thing."

Barnes shook his head, now not even looking at Manny. "But I don't know, do I? That's the problem."

"You'll know soon enough and when you do..."

Manny trailed off, his eyes narrowing. He was distracted. He nearly did a double take at what he was seeing.

Crawling out of the sleeve of Barnes' shirt was a bug. A cockroach. It just crawled out onto his hand like it belonged there. It was a big one, at least two inches long. A mean looking thing.

Manny stared at it. He didn't know what to think.

Sheriff Barnes casually picked up the cockroach with his free hand and popped it into his mouth. He crunched down on it, chewing it determinedly. When he was finished, he swallowed, burped.

"Excuse me," he said.

He looked at Manny, his eyes wide and wild. He looked like a totally different person.

"You probably shouldn't have seen that," he said.

Slowly, he got up out of his chair and walked towards Manny's cell, each footstep sounding like a death knell.

To Be Continued...

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