

## **Chapter Seven, "Animal Magnetism"**

The She Wolf pounced. Kimberly watched, mouth agape, as the creature flew through the air and landed in the shallow water in front of her. She hit the beach with a splash and immediately swiped a clawed hand at one of the dead women. Her sharp nails dug long, deep grooves into the flesh of the dead woman's face. The woman didn't react and the werewolf grabbed both of the woman's arms and pulled, putting one foot - paw, actually - on the woman's midsection. With an effort, both arms popped out of their sockets. Black blood sprayed from the empty stubs where her arms used to be as she fell backwards into the water.

Using the woman's arms like clubs, the werewolf attacked the rest of the Blind Dead, swinging wildly but effectively. She hit faces and heads, legs and elbows, stomachs and necks.

The Blind Dead, for their part, tried to use the werewolf's strength against her, trying to off-balance her, push her over. The werewolf was having none of it. She kicked, jumped over and pummeled the women.

One of the arms that the werewolf was using as a weapon finally snapped in two from abuse and the Beast threw it aside. She eyed the other club arm for a split second and decided to throw it aside as well.

Now she meant business.

Grabbing one of the dead women by her empty eye sockets, she picked her up and swung her at two other women on her left. The force of the blow knocked both of the women's heads off. They went flying into the ocean. Their lifeless bodies fell over into the water and the werewolf swung the body she was using around to the other side, doing the same thing to one other woman.

Finished with the woman's body, the werewolf slammed it as hard as she could against one of the dock supports, where it broke into three pieces. She turned just in time to catch the hand of one of the Blind Dead who was wielding Pat's jaw as a weapon, trying to slice open the werewolf's neck with it.

With her free hand, the She Wolf grabbed the dead woman's head and pulled it at a mad angle until she heard it crack. The dead woman's neck was now exposed and the werewolf bit a large chunk out of it. The Beast seemed to not like the taste of the dead flesh and spit it out. She pulled harder on the dead woman's head until it came off with a repulsive ripping sound.

She threw the head as hard as she could at an approaching Blind Dead. Kimberly saw the dead woman's face collapse inward with the force and drop into the water.

There was only one Blind Dead left and it wasn't moving. It just stood there, head cocked at a strange angle, listening. The werewolf growled and approached her. All at once, whatever was inside the dead woman - controlling her - left. It looked to Kimberly like the thing's soul departed its body, which fell lifelessly into the water a moment later.

The werewolf howled triumphantly, framed by the moon above her. Kimberly decided to speak.

"Thank...thank you," she said.

The werewolf spun around to face her and growled. Kimberly, still on her ass in the sand, backed away as far as she could.

"No, please," she said.

The She Wolf approached her, fast. Soon, she was right on top of her, straddling her. Her vibrant green eyes were piercing - an animal's eyes - and they burrowed into Kimberly's head.

"You saved me," Kimberly tried. "Please. You're good. You are. I can tell."

The werewolf started to look more human. Kimberly could read confusion and indecision on her face. Slowly, gradually, the hair on her face began to recede, pulling back into the girl's pores. Her sharp teeth became normal and the glow in her eyes faded. Her snout receded into her head.

Soon enough, the werewolf was just a girl: cute, maybe seventeen years old. A girl that Kimberly recognized. This was the girl who she had shared a moment with. The girl on the street. What were the odds?

"I'm sorry," the girl said.

"Hey," Kimberly said, taking the girl's face in her hands, "you saved my life."

They were silent for a moment but shared something all the same; something indefinable passed between them. Kimberly suddenly noticed that now that the girl was normal, she was almost totally naked, her clothes in tatters. There was a strange mark on her inner left wrist. Was it a burn?

"You're going to freeze to death," Kimberly said.

She got up, searched the water nearby. Wincing, she dredged up Pat's body and managed to get his coat off. It was wet and bloody but it was better than nothing. She wrapped it around the girl.

"That's a little better," she said. "Now, can you get up?"

The girl nodded.

"I'm exhausted," the girl said, "but yeah, I can get up."

She stood, her legs wobbling.

"Careful," Kimberly said. She realized that she, herself, wasn't feeling too great. That punch to the stomach still smarted.

The two women braced each other as they stood. Kimberly put an arm around the girl's shoulders and the girl wrapped one of her arms around Kimberly's waist.

"I live pretty close," the girl said. "We can probably make it there without anyone seeing us if we stick to the shadows."

"Yeah, okay," Kimberly said. "Not like we can call the police, I suppose."

She snorted a little laugh and embarrassed herself. But the girl laughed, too.

"I'm Kimberly."

"Camille."

"Nice to meet you, Camille."

They didn't talk much during the walk to Camille's house. They were comfortable in each others presence and didn't feel the need to talk just yet. They had both been through a lot.

When they entered the house, Camille immediately headed for the upstairs bathroom, breaking away from Kimberly's touch quickly, almost rudely. She stopped halfway up the staircase, seeming to realize what she had done. She turned to regard Kimberly.

"I have to take a shower," she said. "I'm filthy."

"I understand," Kimberly said.

"You're welcome to take a shower, too."

Kimberly cocked her head and narrowed her eyes at the girl, puzzled.

"Not with me," Camille said a little too quickly. "I mean there's a bathroom just down the hall there. It's got towels and a housecoat that you can use."

"That would be nice, thanks," Kimberly said with a smile.

"Put on some music if you like. Either on the radio or the turntable."

Kimberly nodded and Camille continued upstairs, disappearing into the shadows at the top. Kimberly flipped through Camille's records, choosing Procol Harum, put it on the turntable and turned it up.

She took a hot, refreshing shower, dried off and got into a comfy, pink housecoat. She returned to the living room and got a fire going in the large, imposing fireplace that dominated the room. Camille

must have been taking her time. She had been covered in much more blood than Kimberly herself had been.

Kimberly idly looked around the downstairs area. It was a strange experience. The house looked like a young woman had infiltrated a dark gloomy place and tried to make it her own. Band and concert posters were tacked onto once fine wallpaper. A bean bag chair sat next to an old, elaborate couch. A stereo system sat not too far away from the fireplace.

"A Whiter Shade of Pale" started up on the turntable and, a moment later, Camille finally descended the stairs. She also wore a housecoat, although hers was purple.

"Sorry," she said. "That was rude of me."

"Think nothing of it," Kimberly said. "Come over and have a seat. I won't bite. And, I presume, you won't, either."

That made Camille smile and it lit up her whole face. Kimberly found the girl even more beautiful in that moment than she already was. Camille joined her on the couch but made sure to keep a little distance between the two of them. Why was she pulling away? Kimberly wondered.

They sat in silence for a moment, listening to the music. Kimberly saw that Camille couldn't help but be entranced by the song. She closed her eyes and swayed a little from side to side.

"So," Kimberly said. Camille looked at her. "How long have you been like... this?"

Camille sighed and didn't say anything for several seconds. Finally, she began to speak.

"I was bitten when I was almost seventeen," she said. "My mother didn't even know. One part of the curse was working right from the beginning: my wound healed before my mom even saw it. I heal really quickly. But everything else was really subtle. I remember always having a strong sense of smell, like I could almost sense things through scent alone. And I always kind of stalked people and animals. Just watched them, followed them, you know? But within a year, I started to change. Always at night, always when I was stressed or felt very strong emotion. It doesn't seem to matter if the moon is full or not, though. It just kind of happens. And I can't... ever get my emotions too high. Because even during the day risk hurting people."

Kimberly listened, enraptured. She nodded, bidding Camille to continue.

"I didn't tell anyone in my family, at least at first," Camille said. "They wouldn't understand. It was like I was a different person. And I became bitter, rebellious. I envied them – my family" She chuckled to herself. "I wanted to move away, to New York, or just somewhere else, you know? I thought of myself as a flower child, a real hippie. I loved music, loved the freedom. The irony is, here I am in Rhode Island, which is not all that far from where I grew up. A little fishing port."

She chuckled bitterly once again.

"Can't you go back?" Kimberly asked. "Won't they have you?"

"I can't," Camille said.

"Because they don't know?"

Camille wouldn't look at her. "Oh, they found out. It's just... they're not around anymore. Something happened to them."

Kimberly shuffled closer to the girl. "What?"

"I don't want to talk about it. I'll just say that they turned out not to be as normal as I thought they were."

They were silent for another moment.

"Does it hurt?" Kimberly asked. "When you change."

"Yeah," Camille said. "Every time. But I don't really notice it anymore. It's part of who I am."

Kimberly was afraid to broach the subject but felt that she had to. "Have you ever seen anything like that? Like those... dead women back there?"

Camille shook her head. "Not quite like that, no. They weren't typical zombies, that's for sure."

Kimberly raised her eyebrows. "You've met typical zombies, then?"

Camille smirked. "Oh yes. And a lot of other things, too."

"I see. Does anyone you know now know about your secret? Other than me?"

"No. I don't want them to get too close."

"Why?"

Camille shuffled further away from Kimberly. "I might hurt them. Accidentally, I mean."

Kimberly countered, getting a little closer. "There must be someone. You don't want anyone to help you?"

Camille didn't answer.

"You can't be so arrogant as to think you can do all this by yourself," Kimberly said. "You're younger than me, a teenager. You need help from someone. Or, at least, someone you can confide in."

"I'm not a teenager," Camille said. "I only look like one. I'm older than you are."

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-two."

Kimberly nodded. "Yeah, you're certainly older than me." She shook her head. "Regardless, I want to help you. You can confide in me."

She inched along the couch, getting closer to Camille. Finally, she put a hand on the other woman's leg.

"You saved my life," she whispered.

She planted a small kiss on Camille's cheek. It was like an electric current had been turned on. Sparks flew between them. They said nothing. Camille turned to face Kimberly, their noses almost touching.

The teenager who wasn't a teenager reached out with her left hand and touched the other woman's face, gently, caressing. Kimberly's breath caught in her throat. She felt like a teenager herself again, a young one.

Kimberly couldn't remember later which one of them made the first move but one of them certainly did and they kissed. It was messy, passionate but not awkward at all. It felt right. It was a long kiss, hands and bodies intertwined.

Camille started to visibly shake and the kiss finally broke.

"You're nervous," Kimberly said. "Have you never been with another woman before?"

"I haven't..." Camille said. "I haven't been with anyone before. Other than myself."

They both smiled. Kimberly realized that her housecoat had slipped down during their kiss, revealing her breasts. Camille stared at them, breathing heavy.

"You're so beautiful," Camille said.

"You are gorgeous," Kimberly said.

Camille was still shaking. She made little kitten-like noises and her eyes blinked rapidly. She got up off the couch.

"What is it?" Kimberly said, standing up as well. "Did I scare you?"

"I can't do this," Camille said. "I can't..."

Kimberly took a step closer to her as Camille took a step back. "It's okay. It's perfectly natural. I'm attracted to you. And you're attracted to me, aren't you?"

Slowly, Camille nodded. "Yes."

"Then what is it?"

She approached the other woman and put her arms around her. Camille accepted Kimberly for a moment, rested her head on the other woman's shoulder, but only for that one moment. She pushed away.

"What?" Kimberly said.

She saw Camille's eyes. They had turned a deep, vibrant shade of green. Unnatural.

"I'll hurt you!" Camille said. "Don't you see?! I haven't been with anyone because I'd hurt them! When Betty Nolan kissed me, I scratched her face! She had to have four stitches! I don't want to hurt you!"

She walked away, fast.

"You can sleep in the guest room," she said as she walked up the stairs. "It's the room past the bathroom. I'm sorry. I really like you but we can't be together."

Their eyes met and Kimberly could see that Camille was crying, tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Not ever," she said before disappearing into the darkness at the top of the stairs once more.

To Be Continued...

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