

NAME – Chapter 1.

There wasn't anything he liked about being a vampire. The books and movies made it seem so romantic, those dark things in the night, standing alone in the shadow of a warehouse, conning beautiful girls to expose to them their tender throats. The problem was that all he ever wanted was a girlfriend, someone he could go swimming with and stand next to at concerts, who could take away the awkward feeling of being alone in a crowd. He wanted a girlfriend who would like him, like him, so he could stop mooning around after girls who put up with him but kept him always at arm's length. Now though, he was a vampire. His loneliness was sealed into night forever. He was doomed never to hold another pretty girl's hand, never to eat pizza with her, never, oh god, make love to her. It was terrible, awful. It sucked.

From above on the seawall he could see a long ways to either end of the beach, the girls and boys clustered around their bonfires, drinking and laughing. Though it was dark and the only light was the red of the fires, he could see the girls in their bikini tops as clearly as if it were daylight. The slender bends of their necks goaded at him, signaled to him. The same their breasts, brown above their suits, just a hint of the paler skin below.

He began his walk along the seawall, the asphalt that'd be brimming with roller-bladers and families during the day but was nearly empty now, nearing midnight. Now there was only the occasional vagrant with his bottle or a random couple necking in the starry light. Neither paid him any mind, lost in their own intoxications.

He scanned the groups of people gathered on the beach until he spotted a girl in a red bikini, one who strummed a guitar and sang a song about her stupid lover. Her red bikini, the color of the blood in her throat, shouted at him, Me! Take me! Idiot girl. Why would anyone wear a blood-red bikini? Why would anyone tempt her fate like that?

He watched the girl sing her song, watched her bum a cigarette from a boy with long hair, knowing what would happen next, how she would leave the crowd, pick her way through the sand to the water's edge, stand smoking, alone and friendless, watching the incessant pouring of the waves. He hadn't the slightest idea how he knew, but he knew she would just the same, felt it in his heart, in the blood that washed his brain.

"Stupid girl!" he said, to the vagrant drinking his bottle. "Doesn't she know? Can't she hear the sound of her death shouting in the waves?" He could see her walking toward her destruction, the lovely seat of her bikini winking as she went. Oh god, the beautiful shape of her bikini's bottom.

He headed up the seawall, to the place where the rocks fell down from the hill and to the beach. It was dark there and quiet, and he could avoid any drunken boys who

might come upon him and be stupid enough to pick a fight—a fight that'd be the last stupid thing they ever did. He came to the rocks and with a jump made it to the beach 15 feet below.

He stood for just a moment, contemplating the thing that was coming. He didn't have to do it, didn't have to come to the girl in the red bikini and call to her. He didn't have to listen to the voice inside her head, sounding so much like the slosh of the sea, like the spitting of blood in her throat, the inner voice that would tell him her name. No, he could turn away, he could go to one of the vagrants instead. He could quell his loneliness, his thirst, with the blood of some poor bum, one who'd be better off dead anyways, instead of inflame it with the throat of a warm and lovely girl. Oh god.

As he approached, her pink toes curled into the wet sand, he trained his mind to hers, narrowing his attention to dive below the surface of her dampened hair, into the twirled sea of her thought. He slipped into her mind like a man dropping into a nighttime wave, soundless and effortless, looking for a pearl tumbled in dark water. He swam there for only a moment, grasping the dark and shining word, Jennifer, before coming to the surface with it: Jennifer.

As he came near her, her arms settled loosely across her bikini top, he called that name. "Jennifer," he said. "Hello."

The girl, her red bikini flashing in the dark, her hair tumbled in a curl of waves above her eyes, turned toward him. Her own name in the throat of a strange boy did not startle her, as he knew it wouldn't. She opened to him, arms falling away from her chest, the now unprotected skin of her belly, her throat.

"Yeah?" she said. Her voice was steady and calm. Her eyes did not search his face for danger but landed there and took in his features. So attentive was her look he nearly spat with self hate. As a human, no girl this lovely would ever have given him such a look, as plain and ordinary as he was. It wasn't that he was ugly, it was that there was nothing about him to take note. His features, when he looked in the mirror, were round and regular, dull and uninteresting, his hair with its left-sided part so ordinary, boring, that touch of baby fat still under his chin.

"Hi," said this girl, here and now, now that he was no longer human. She stood arms to her sides, the smoke from her cigarette curling around one thigh and into the air.

"Beautiful night," he said, so lamely he cursed himself. But of course her smile opened to him like the ocean.

"It is!" she said. "Oh man it is!" She put the cigarette to her lips and sucked, pushing back her head to look at the empty sky. Her eyes reflected the color of her bikini top, two pale ponds of blood.

He spoke again, the small stammer of his other life still there. "You live around here?"

"No," she said. "I'm from Iowa, visiting for the summer." He stepped a pace toward her, and she rocked ever so slightly forward on her hip, toward him. "Man, I love it here," she said. "I feel so alive."

He put his hand to her shoulder, still half expecting her to step away, expecting the words he'd heard a million times, "Oh no, it's not like that." But of course not. She practically opened to his touch like a bed of red flowers, tilting back her head, pushing forward her breasts.

"You are so alive," he said to her. He put one arm around her waist, her skin pink from her day in the sun, an aromatic sister to her swim suit. He drew in the smell of salt and shampoo from her hair, pushed back her chin.

"What's your name?" she said, even as her blood came to her throat, spilling to the hollow behind her collarbone.

"It doesn't matter," he told her, pushing his teeth deeper. "You wouldn't remember me anyways."