

The Ones Like Me

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Halloween is the only night I look forward to. Not for the scares, movies, or candy—but for the people. Let me start at the beginning. I'm Cory Parker Lee. Fifteen. Homeschooled. I have albinism—white-blond hair, porcelain skin, red eyes. Most days, I stay inside. Not tonight. Manhattan smells like subway and beer. The air is thick with fog, candy, perfume, sweat. I didn't dress up—I didn't need another reason for people to stare. Hood up, earbuds in, no music. I wanted to hear everything. Sirens. Costumes brushing brick. Crowds—accents and languages rolling into one wave.

I turn onto Delancey Street and stop. A group stands talking and laughing. Teens under a streetlamp. Two girls in Hogwarts robes—Gryffindor and Slytherin. Three guys dressed like food, in cheap twenty-dollar costumes. But it's not the costumes. It's their faces. Pale—not makeup pale. Eyes glowing red—not cheap contacts. Same red as mine. Same translucent skin. Same eerie light. Their hair was colored—blue, black, brown, and one blood-red. I froze.

Slytherin caught my eye. She smiled. "Nice jacket," she said. I nodded. "I like yours too." "You alone?" asked the tall guy. His voice was low, smooth, a little rough. He stepped closer. Taller than I thought. "Yeah." "Cool. So are we."

They introduced themselves. Lilith and Selene, the witches. Theo, Killian, and Dante—the fast food. Dante walked beside me. He smelled like cold metal and cedarwood. His voice was velvet and ash. "You from around here?" "Brooklyn." He grinned. "Me too."

We walked. They didn't mention albinism. Talked about music, horror movies, weird dreams. I laughed more in one hour than all year.

We ended up in a quiet alley off the Lower East Side. Neon graffiti. Overflowing bins. The air smelled like concrete and syrup gone sour.

Dante stopped. "You really do look like us," he said.

I smiled. "I noticed."

"You are like us, though... right?" I blinked.

"What do you mean?... I'm not wearing makeup." I wiped my sleeve across my face.

He stepped closer. I expected heat, but a chill swept through me. I've never been so scared of someone dressed as a KFC chicken. His breath smelled like cigarettes and rust. His eyes searched mine until I looked away. "You're not..." His voice broke. I laughed nervously, stepped back, hit the wall.

"Not what?" He didn't answer. Brushed my hair back. Fingers like ice. Then I saw them. Fangs.

My heart stuttered. I tried to push him away, but he jerked my face up. "What the—" He grabbed my wrist. Firm, not cruel. My heart thudded blood pumping through my veins I don't think I've even been afraid of someone in a KFC costume. "You could be like us," he said. What the HELL that mean?

The others watched, eyes gleaming like blood under glass. "Let me go," I hissed. "Please." "I can't."

Dante leaned in. His lips grazed my neck. Breath-cold. Then-pain. Sharp. Deep. Like fire laced with ice. My knees buckled. I gasped, stumbled, clutching my neck. The alley spun. I pushed away, he didn't stop me.

I don't know how far. My feet staggered. Breath rasped. The city blurred-costumes, lights, music. I crashed into a bin, fell hard. Palms scraped gravel. I crawled, collapsed. The world smelled like iron, asphalt, fear. I pressed my neck. Warm. Sticky. Vision flickered. Heart pounded.

Footsteps. Not chasing. Just strolling. I convulsed. Dante stood at the alley's edge. Unreadable. The others behind him, faces blurring. "Sorry," he said softly.

I wanted to scream. But my voice was gone. Sirens sounded. One of them leaned forward, grabbed his arm. I wanted to scream for him to not leave me, I was too weak though it5 didn't matter because he turned and disappeared.

I lay there, trembling, heart hammering, blood on my skin. Fear gripped me. The spasms weakened. I couldn't feel the pain. I closed my eyes.

And somewhere deep inside, something hungry stirred.