

ANATOMICAL
MAGNETISM



Willow Scarlett
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Love Has No Boundaries

An M/M Romance series

ANIMAL MAGNETISM

By Willow Scarlett & Andrea Speed

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love Has No Boundaries* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a free gift to you.

What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what they do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love Has No Boundaries*.

Whether you are an avid M/M romance reader or new to the genre, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Animal Magnetism

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Photo Description

The photo is of a hot nerdy guy. There's really nothing more to it than that.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

Do you laugh when you read a blurb about another book with an obscure animal shifter? Do you ever want to write a shifter story of your own but tire of those wolves and big cats and dragons? Well, here is your chance to write a character that changes into an animal your readers will be rushing to Google!

This man changes into one of [these](#) amazing creatures (your choice). Is he a timid African [bongo](#), with graceful vertical horns? Is he a waddling [capybara](#), who make some people giggle with mirth and others jump onto their dining room chairs at the sight of him?

Is he a [civet](#), captured in an underground perfume trade? Is he a [jerboa](#), with a tail longer than Princess Diana's wedding train? Or a [kinkajou](#) nicknamed Pooh-Bear for his love of honey?

Is he an [okapi](#) who looks like he can't decide what animal he is?

The story, barring a few specifications, is entirely up to you!

Story MUST:

-not take itself seriously (obviously!). Bonus points for humor!

-make this character nerdy/geeky/uncoordinated/whatever, as long as he's uncool. And not poser uncool like a hipster... unless unbeknownst to him he's cool because he's so uncool, like a real hipster... nevermind. He's an outsider among his kind, for whatever reason.

-not be bittersweet. HFN is fine.

-and no girl parts please!

Sincerely,

Kyle Adams

Story Info

Genre: paranormal/contemporary

Tags: shifters/non-wolf-cat, support group, comedy, geeks/nerds, self-esteem, heroes, animals, therapy, sweet no sex

Word count: 4,336

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When Terry found the door, he thought it led to a closet.

It was at the end of a narrow, poorly lit corridor. He was sure it simply couldn't be what he was looking for and he must have taken a wrong turn at the bottom of the stairs. But as he hesitated he caught a whiff of coffee, and decided to open the door and see what was behind it.

Although his damnable shyness reared its ugly head again, he swallowed it back and slowly peeked inside. For some reason, the light surprised him. It was clean and inviting. He was surprised, too, by the number of chairs. Most of them were occupied. How many people were here? A quick count told him ten, including the primly dressed woman he took to be the therapist, and he was about to walk away when he realized someone was looking at him.

“Come on in, don't be shy,” said a jovial bearded man, standing at the side table where the coffee pot and a plate of cookies waited for everyone.

Of course Terry still wanted to run. But now everybody was looking at him, so rather than show what a coward he was, he walked in. He feigned a smile, nervously pushing his glasses up to the bridge of his nose while he scoped out the nearest empty chair. He decided to sit next to the middle-aged woman knitting what looked like the world's most rectangular scarf, figuring she was too busy to strike up a conversation.

It turned out he was the final arrival. The bearded man eventually wandered to an empty seat as the therapist took her seat and crossed her legs, smoothing her hands over her knees in a practiced gesture. “I think it's about time to start. Before we begin the session, it's important that we all remind ourselves that this is a safe space. There is no judgment here.”

There were some nods and murmurs of agreement from the group, and the therapist smiled in satisfaction. “We have newcomers to the group this evening. Would they like to introduce themselves?”

She turned to Terry. He looked down quickly to avoid her intense gaze, hoping to act nonchalant and like he just hadn’t seen her. Unfortunately, jerking his head down so fast made his glasses—slightly loose on his nose—slide right off and bounce onto his knees. He couldn’t dare look up now, imagining everyone staring at him. He fiddled with the loose plastic pad to fit make it fit on the bridge of his nose and tried not to think of how blotchy his cheeks were when he blushed.

The woman beside Terry cleared her throat, and her knitting needles clicked as she held them in her lap. Terry assumed she was laughing at him until she said to the circle, “You may call me Mrs. Carlin. I am here today because I am the last of the dodos.”

“Hello Mrs. Carlin,” everyone replied. Terry, glasses back on his face but cheeks still burning, tried to join in the chant but started late and continued a moment after the beat.

She gave a fussy little flourish of her needles as she picked them back up and started knitting again. The *clack-clack-clack* every time the needles clicked together continued constantly as the circle began their introductions.

“I’m Joe,” mumbled a large man to Mrs. Carlin’s left. “Warthog.”

“They call me Sheriff. I’m a honey badger.”

“Hello. I’m Nancy, and in my spare time I’m a jerboa.”

And so on. The voices and list of animal forms continued over the machine-gun clack of knitting needles until Terry relaxed. He finally drew his eyes away from his knees and looked around the circle. Everybody here seemed so calm—even the bearded man, Roger, a walrus. There really was no shame. And shame was what he’d expected most—it was part of daily life, for an odd species shifter like himself.

Terry was feeling at ease until the young man on his right started talking. Then Terry remembered that he still hadn’t given his own introduction.

Everyone would be staring at him. The sudden panic nearly drove away his ability to hear the man beside him say, “I’m Craig, and I’m a kinkajou.”

All eyes now on Terry, he lifted his chin high and focused on not doing anything humiliating. “Hello. My name is Terry, and I’m a pangolin.”

His was the final introduction. When the responding chorus of hellos had died out, the primly dressed therapist said, “Hello everyone. I’m Doctor Susan Webster, and I’m a kiwi. The purpose of this group is to encourage everyone to be proud of their inner animal. We can’t all be werewolves, werelions, or werebears, and that’s okay. Every animal is special in its own way—”

Terry tuned her out. Much of this was on the webpage. Why was he even here? He wasn’t exactly a group therapy kind of guy. But he really didn’t know what he was supposed to do with himself. He was a lame were in a world that only seemed to like good ones, and he had no idea what he was supposed to do. Hiding seemed like a good idea, but that wasn’t always possible.

“You doing okay?” the young man beside him asked quietly.

Terry gave him a side-eyed glance. He was kind of cute, in a scruffy sort of way. His name was Craig, Terry remembered. “Yeah, I’m just not sure why I’m here.”

“We’re all like that at first. I know it sounds like a bunch of psychobabble, but the people here are really nice. Give ’em a chance.”

Terry had no intention of staying long enough to give anyone any kind of chance. There was nothing to be gained from therapy—except maybe coffee and a snack, but it looked like he may have been too late even for that. He was feeling more and more that he shouldn’t have come here. It was just like any other group activity: if it wasn’t embarrassing, it was just depressing.

Doctor Susan Webster kept talking like she had a PowerPoint display in her head, rattling off buzzwords like *comfort healing* and *road to acceptance* and even an ironic *safety in numbers* with a little patronizing laugh. Terry cringed. He promised himself that if she mentioned *synergy* he would just walk out, despite the fact that it would make him look like a coward.

He tuned out, and looked again at Craig. Yes, definitely cute. Terry had never even heard of a kinkajou. It sounded like a made-up name. But considering that the same could be said for Terry's pangolin, the obscure species form just made Craig cuter. He had his fingers intertwined in his lap and kept tangling them in different ways, keeping his palms flat on his legs but twisting his fingers around and around each other like tangling worms. He could have been nervous, or he might have been as bored as Terry was.

Just as Terry was thinking that, Craig looked up at him. He turned his head and met Terry's eyes, raising an eyebrow. Their gazes locked and Terry waited for Craig to speak, to give more reassurance or an anecdote about the group. When his gaze kept holding, it occurred to Terry that Craig might just be weirded out by his staring—or he might even be flirting.

The thought made Terry's heartbeat speed up and he looked down in embarrassment. Just fast enough for his glasses to fall off again.

He hurriedly slid them back onto his face—again—and glanced back at Craig. Craig was still watching him, now with an amused half-smile. He had to be flirting. There was no other reason a guy would hold eye contact that long. Unless he was a serial killer.

But then Craig gave a little sideways jerk of his head. When Terry followed the direction of the movement he saw that the entire group was looking at him. Craig wasn't flirting. He was just waiting for Terry to answer a question that Doctor Susan had asked him while he wasn't listening.

He cleared his throat. "I'm sorry?"

She didn't look annoyed. She just nodded serenely at him and said, "It's perfectly natural to still experience feelings of embarrassment at your first meeting. With time you'll come to feel more comfortable with your animal shape and, so, with yourself."

"Okay."

It wasn't the response she had been looking for. The circle of faces just kept facing him. To his left Mrs. Carlin said politely, "Perhaps I could be the first to share an experience from the week?"

“If Terry has no objections?” Doctor Susan asked him brightly. There was just enough emphasis on the first syllable of his name that it was clear she’d made a point of memorizing it.

“Sure, go ahead,” Terry said, still bewildered. He glanced back at Craig, who was now grinning at him like a child catching an adult using a naughty word. It was clear he had realized that Terry had zoned out during Doctor Susan’s speech, and found it kind of funny. Terry blushed and looked away.

Mrs. Carlin carefully placed her knitting in her lap. She took a short, hissing breath before saying, “I visited the zoological museum again. This time I only stayed in front of the dodo display for two hours.”

There were murmurs of encouragement and praise from the circle. Doctor Susan said kindly, “Well done. How do you feel about that now?”

“I feel that I would have stayed longer if some boys hadn’t been making fun of the stuffed displays,” she said, and picked up her knitting again.

“All progress is positive,” the doctor urged. “I think we should all be proud of Mrs. Carlin.”

There was a small round of tepid applause, and while this was going on, Craig leaned over and whispered, “Wanna go get a coffee after this?”

For some reason, this made Terry relieved. Maybe because he’d get something out of group therapy after all? “I’d love to.”

The rest of the session was a blur of happy talk and lukewarm affirmations of loving their inner animals, which still struck Terry as hilarious. Had they seen a pangolin? Cuddly was the last thing you’d think about one of them. It was like the unholy union between a snake, an anteater, and a pineapple.

Terry followed Craig to a coffee shop just down the street from the group therapy center. It wasn’t a chain, either, which was nice, but sadly that also meant it was kind of empty. They were alone except for a woman laboring over her laptop in the corner.

Terry ordered a coffee, but Craig ordered a black tea with a shot of raspberry syrup and honey. They had their choice of seats, and ended up taking a nice table by the window.

They settled in and Craig asked, “So what do you do, outside of changing into a pangolin?”

“I’m a cube rat. I work for a software company.”

Craig smiled. “So the glasses aren’t a hipster affectation. You’re a genuine nerd.”

“Hey. Now that’s a stereotype.”

“Who’s your favorite X-Man?”

Terry sighed, rubbing his eyes. “Jean Grey. But I kind of like Mimic from Exiles too.”

“See? I didn’t understand that last sentence at all.”

Terry smirked and dropped his gaze. It had been a trap, of course.

But Craig leaned closer over the table, his smile warm. “I think nerds are hot.”

“Clearly you’ve never been to a comic con,” Terry replied.

As Craig chuckled, Terry decided to turn the tables on him. “So what is it you do, besides being a kinkajou?”

“Bit of this, bit of that,” Craig shrugged. His shaggy brown hair was just long enough that it curled against his shoulders and bounced as he shrugged. “I work at a bed store at the moment, but I have a gig doing nights at a radio station twice a week. That’s what I’d really like to be—a radio DJ.”

He gave Terry a look just challenging enough to prove that he was used to being mocked. Terry smiled. “So you’re a DJ. Would I have heard you?”

“Not unless you make a habit of listening to alt-pop radio between eleven at night and one in the morning.”

“I don’t.”

“No one does. But it’s a foot in the door. And the studio space is huge. It’s connected to this old concert hall with rafters a mile high. Sometimes after work, I’ll sneak into the concert hall alone and shift. Climb up into the rafters and on the ancient chandeliers. From that high up you can’t even see the ground.”

“Sounds dangerous,” Terry shivered. “I stick mostly to parks and playgrounds, but out of the way and always after hours.”

Craig smiled lazily and leaned closer, elbows on the table between them. “It’s a thrill. Breaks up the monotony of the day. Sometimes I wonder why I even bother with the radio gig at all. No one’s listening. I might as well not even talk. Sometimes I think about just putting on a whole John Cage album to see if anyone complains.”

“At least you have a dream. I don’t think much further than my next day’s coffee and next week’s project,” Terry joked. It felt good to be able to talk to someone who knew about his animal form but didn’t think it was a big deal—who could even relate, without laughing.

“I doubt that. You’ve got this kind of intense look about you, and it’s not just the glasses. Like a man with a mission. I like it.”

Their drink order arrived, and Terry was saved from having to think of an answer. He stirred sugar into his own drink as Craig took a sip of his tea and let out a low rumble of contentment.

Craig leaned back in his chair with his eyes closed and the tea cup cradled between his hands like a squirrel holding a nut. Terry took the chance to study him while Craig wasn’t watching. There was nothing forced or styled in his scruffiness—he just didn’t seem to care how he looked. He was a few days late to shave, and his hair was mussed. It suited him.

Craig’s eyes snapped open. Terry darted his gaze away so fast he might get whiplash. He felt like he’d been caught pressing his nose up against Craig’s bedroom window. He hastily took a sip of coffee and burned his tongue.

Craig leaned onto the table again. “So what brought you to the meeting tonight? You hardly spoke two words.”

“I’m a bit shy.”

“Shy and nerdy? You just keep getting sexier.”

Terry blushed and looked away, watching the woman from the corner leaving the shop with her laptop held to her chest. He took a deep breath and forced himself to look back at Craig. That’s what normal people did—looked at each other. “I read about it online. And I thought... well, it’s true, isn’t it? We can’t all be werewolves or werebears. But that doesn’t stop us wishing we could be.”

Terry heard the bells on the shop door chime and carefully didn’t turn to look. Not acting like he was terrified of any passing noise might be a good way to impress a cute guy.

“Hand over the fucking money!” a man suddenly exclaimed, making Terry jump. A quick look showed that the man who’d just come in was wearing a black hoodie and holding a small gun, which he waved menacingly at the barista, who simply stared at him like he was crazy.

“Dude,” the barista said. “It’s been a slow night. There’s, like, twenty bucks in the register.”

The robber smashed the gun against the side of the barista’s head, sending her reeling backwards. “Shut the fuck up!”

“We should do something,” Terry muttered, before he realized what he was saying. Oh hell, did he actually say that?

Craig looked briefly alarmed, and then kind of intrigued. “Well, we are animals.”

Yeah, but he was a pangolin, which was no one’s idea of a hard-charging dynamo. Was a kinkajou any better? Still, he suggested it, and he might as well follow through on something for once. “You go high, I go low?” Not that he had any choice in the matter. Pangolins were low to the ground, so he was sticking with low unless he came across a catapult.

Craig nodded, and started sinking beneath the table. Terry did the same thing, as it was probably for the best.

Underneath the table, he willed the change, and then had to climb out of the tangle of his clothes. Craig did this easily. It turned out a kinkajou was a bit like a small cat, spry and agile. Terry's own pangolin had huge claws built better for tree climbing than walking.

Terry managed to get out of the snagging net of his clothes and started walking across the floor to the legs of the robber. He was saying something, but Terry couldn't make out what. He was just concentrating on the robber's dirty sneakers.

There was a high-pitched screech, and suddenly the orangish blur of the kinkajou launched itself like a rocket at the startled robber's face. It clung to him like a face-hugging alien, and the robber let out a shriek of his own as he reached up to grab it. It was then that Terry dug his thick, unwieldy claws into the robber's leg, like he was a fir Terry wanted to climb.

The robber let out a nearly comical scream, arms pinwheeling wildly as he tried to step away and lost his balance, falling over as the kinkajou rode him down, gnawing on his forehead the whole time. The robber was able to grab Craig, as he'd dropped his gun, and pulled him off and threw him across the room. "Motherfucker," he spat, and gave Terry a look that was equal parts confused and angry.

Before the robber could do anything, the barista was suddenly towering over them. She poured a steaming hot cup of coffee in his face.

Now the robber was really screaming, and he grabbed his face and curled up in a ball as the barista added a kick in the stomach for good measure. "That's for hitting me, you fuckwad."

Terry made his way to the table and changed back near his clothes, hastily covering himself with his shirt before squirming into his boxer briefs. All he needed was to be charged with public indecency.

But Craig seemed to have no such hang-ups. He walked back completely naked, ducking down to get his clothes. "You all right?" he asked, grabbing his pants.

Terry tried not to notice that Craig was in pretty good shape, but he was. Maybe if he had Craig's build, he wouldn't have minded walking around naked either. "Yeah. You?"

"Oh yeah. Luckily, kinkajous are pretty flexible." He stood and pulled on his jeans, and just in time, too, because now Terry could hear the sirens approaching. "Maybe we could be superheroes ourselves. Kinkajou and The Pangolin."

"Ahem. Why am I second-billed?" He knew Craig was joking, but no way was he going to let this slip past unmentioned. "I'm the one who actually knows anything about superheroes. Like what kind of names could be catchy, for instance."

"Heh. Let's not hang around long enough for the police to start asking how two exotic animals found their way into a sparsely populated coffee shop. No need to end the vigilante career as soon as it begins." For all his talk of haste, Craig grabbed his tea cup and drained it before following Terry to the exit. The barista had her back to the door and a phone pressed to her ear, and didn't even notice them leaving.

"She'll be okay, right? You don't think she'll be traumatized?" Terry hesitated, looking back through the door. His body was coursing with adrenaline, but he knew when it faded he'd feel sick and shaky.

"Terry." Craig put a hand on Terry's shoulder, calming rather than trying to lead him away. His hair had fallen into his face and it just drew more attention to his killer smile. "We just brought a robber down. And you know what? No way a wolf or a bear could have gotten away with what we just did."

Terry chuckled. "You're right. I hadn't thought of that. Maybe being small and weird isn't a bad thing."

"Maybe it's not." Craig winked to reinforce the words.

Terry blushed and pushed his glasses up. "We should get going?"

"We should. But first..." Craig caught Terry's face in both hands and tilted it upward so they were looking eye to eye. He held Terry's gaze for a long

moment, then lowered his head to press their lips together. It was a tiny, chaste kiss and it tasted like raspberry. “Congratulations on becoming a superhero.”

Terry was grinning too wide to form any words.

Their hands intertwined as they walked away from the scene.

THE END

Author Bio

Willow Scarlett is an erotic romance writer living in beautiful New Zealand. She wrote bleak science fiction until she met the man of her dreams and dedicated her writing to sharing the delighted happiness of love. Her greatest joy is in creating holistic romances, bringing characters through friendship and lust to consuming, eye-opening, world-fulfilling love.

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Andrea Speed writes way too much. She is the writer of the Infected series for Dreamspinner Press, and the Josh of the Damned series for Riptide Publishing, amongst other things. She won a Rainbow Award for best horror/paranormal novel in 2012, and feels she may be ubiquitous on the web. But she is not (sadly) the Italian DJ of the same name that often comes up first in Google searches.

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