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## Bitten

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“I was a belly dancer in a past life,” said the old woman as she shuffled the tarot deck. Her gnarled, wrinkled hands shook unsteadily as she cut the deck.

I smiled and nodded at her, as if I believed what she said. I’ve never believed in the hocus-pocus stuff, and I really was only there getting my cards read because my friends threatened to send me back home if I didn’t. According to them, if we chose to go to New Orleans on Halloween, then we might as well get into the spirit of it. Not that going back home was really a choice right then; we still had a huge amount of work to do in New Orleans. Right then we were being paid an insane amount just to see what churches were available for the Christi-Lavanado wedding.

You see, my friends and I do weddings. We set up the flowers, hire caterers to provide the food, choose the right decorations, hire a local photographer, and find the perfect church to fit the couple’s specifications. We aren’t the typical wedding planners. I mean, we do all the same stuff, but we’re more into the artistic side of wedding planning. Basically, after college, none of us could find a job that suited our abilities: one art major, one history major, and one party major. Nothing really fit us. So we decided to start a business that people would pay an arm and leg to hire. Weddings were the perfect target, with all the families out there willing to make their little princesses’ dreams come true. We organize weddings for the people who want that fairy-tale experience, and for the most part, we enjoy it. Especially when we get to travel to cities like New Orleans. Unfortunately, it was hard to find a suitable church for a daytime wedding during the night, so my dearest friends dragged me out to explore the city.

We ended up going from bar to bar, ordering anything that sounded fun, like a Ghostbuster, Screaming Purple Jesus, and my personal favorite, Strawberry Peach Daiquiris. That could be another reason why I was so easily persuaded to get my tarot cards read. The world had a fuzzy hue to it, and sometimes the ground rolled like the tide. My ears, too, could make out the steady roar of the ocean, but water was nowhere in sight. But I refused to say that I was drunk, because I wasn’t. Yet.

So there I was, poised unsteadily upon a rickety plastic stool at this old lady’s booth while she started laying out my future, according to some stupid cards. She started muttering something, but all I could hear were a barrage of ocean waves drowning out her voice. After laying the last card, she looked up at me. Over the crashing waves, I heard her say, “Child, you’re going to be bitten.”

What the heck? Bitten? I wasted twenty bucks just so some crazy old bat could tell me that I was going to be bitten? I slid off the treacherous stool, and almost collided into my friend and co-partners, Hannah and Leila. I tried to regain my balance on my deadly pair of heels.

“So what did she say?” Leila asked me, with a bit of a drunken slur.

“That crazy broad didn’t even try to act like a real psychic. I spent twenty bucks just so she could tell me that I would get bitten. Yeah, Leila, getting my fortune read was a spectacular idea.” I’m not sure if my words all came out like that, because now I did have to admit to being past tipsy and on my way to inebriated—if the ocean soundtrack in my head was any indication, I was getting closer to drunk each second.

“Well, maybe you just heard her wrong,” Hannah said, without sounding the least bit tipsy. “Maybe you’re going to be smitten.”

“Trust me, she said ‘bitten.’”

“How do you know? You’re drunk!” said Leila.

“I am not drunk,” I said with righteous indignation. “I’m just a little ways past tipsy.”

“Yeah, sure. Whatever you say, oh great and mighty drunken boss. Just remember that I told you not to order that last daiquiri,” Hannah replied, still showing no sign of all the alcohol she had consumed.

“Fine. Don’t believe me,” I said, as I started teetering away. “And by the way, you’re as much the boss as I am, remember?”

I made it about three steps before the waves that were still sounding off in my head started crashing against my legs. I knew there was a reason that I wore flats when I drank. Those waves were vicious. At least normally I do. Tonight, though, I was wearing red stilettos to match my red blouse. Stumbling, I continued down the road.

“Wait up, Kelly!” Leila was shouting over the waves.

I ignored her because to stop now would mean that I would have to start again, and I was not up for that. I was having a hard enough time moving against the rising surf. If I paused I would surely be knocked over by the tide. So I kept walking forward, fighting against the raging current.

I was definitely sure I was drunk now. I had no idea where I was, but all the liquid courage in me kept me moving. Somehow I came to an eerily dark alleyway. None of the lights from the bars penetrated the pitch-blackness. It was almost as if the lights that I just passed were afraid of this caliginosity and dared not enter. Looking back, I saw neither Leila nor Hannah. In fact, the dark had distorted the entrance to the alley. Now the only hint of civilization was a small speck of light. Nothing could sober a person up faster than fear; I could feel both a chilling

terror and soberness creep up on me.

I stopped moving altogether when I heard a scraping noise. The fine hairs on the back of my neck stood up as I whipped around to face it. In the obsidian alley there was nothing to see, though. The sound came again from behind, louder, closer, and far more menacing. It was almost as if something was being dragged across the ground. Something that was large and heavy. Stories of dead bodies being lugged behind a murderer, and my mother's warnings about the dangers of the city, were like an endless recording echoing in my mind. Images of zombies dragging along their rotting limbs, and chasing the drunken girl danced through my head. The fear escalated as the sound came closer and closer.

Then, out of nowhere, a hand grabbed my shoulder, causing me to hover a foot in the air, yet I was somehow still balanced precariously on my stilettos. I could feel my heart beating hard enough to crack a rib. I turned to face the body attached to the hand, and the scream that I had been holding in check evaporated in my throat.

The man looked at me with glowing yellow eyes. I caught a glimpse of sharp canine teeth when he breathed, "Run."

Immediately I twisted from his grip, running down the alley, away from the terrifying man-monster. Somehow I found the breath to utter a scream, though it was low with the immense panic that was still obstructing my vocal chords. I ran, staggering with each fall of my heel on the pavement, when the man tackled me. He wrapped his arms around my legs and, somehow, between running and hitting the ground, I was facing him rather than the ground.

Looking at him, I saw to my absolute terror that he was even scarier than just moments before. The once human-looking hand had become claw-like, with black hair slowly lengthening as I stared in transfixed horror. His face had changed, too; now his wolf-like eyes harmonized with the muzzle that was elongating as I lay entrapped. The only explanation for this horrifying transformation was that this man was a werewolf.

That was not possible, though. Werewolves only existed in horror movies. They were meant to be corny and surreal. A man changing into a furry monster was just a myth. At least that was what I had thought before I was being held down by this petrifying creature that could only be a werewolf.

As I watched, I lost my ability to scream, again. I'm not even sure that I was breathing as the wolf man climbed up over me. Now his wolf-like snout was level with my shoulder, and I could see all the teeth in his gaping jaws.

"Too slow," he spoke in a low, gravelly voice. Then, before I could see him move, his teeth were touching my flesh. I could feel each

breath he took, heating the sensitive skin between my neck and shoulder.

Pain ripped into the areas surrounding my collarbone and shoulder as his jaws started to close. I felt my flesh give way as the teeth, sharp as daggers, slowly started to close with my body in between. It was as if I could feel each tooth as it penetrated my skin. The screams that had evaporated before now came tearing from my lungs. I screamed and I thrashed, yet no matter what I did, he held me down. No matter what I did, he was still biting me.

Hysterically, I remembered the old psychic's prediction. She said I would be bitten, and now I was. The wolf man's jaws finally clamped together. I heard my bones snap and crush. Then an intense throbbing in time to my heartbeat washed through my body, and I passed out.

I woke, staring at the clouds that covered the night sky. I was no longer in the alley, but in a field instead. I tried to move my left arm and pain radiated out into the rest of my body. Apparently, the attack wasn't a dream.

Then I heard a long exhalation, and felt a warm breath flutter over me. I looked over and lying inches from me was a large black wolf. Not just large, but huge. There was a huge black wolf near my head, and I couldn't move my arm.

Suddenly I felt a tingling in my body, raising goose bumps across its surface. I looked up and the clouds slowly uncovered the full moon. Then my skin seemed to catch fire as up and down my body invisible needles stabbed into me. It was more intense than the sensation after the wolf had broken through my bones. Somehow, this time I managed to remain dimly conscious. Slowly the needles changed into blunt knives grinding into my body. My vision went black, but I could still feel the open wound which was my body.

When the blackness evaporated, I was standing, but instead of standing on my two feet, I was on four. I was standing on four white paws, and seeing the world with black-and-white vision. If it weren't for the black wolf-head butting me, I would have started to freak out. As it was, I felt a strange relaxation come over me, and I snarled and bit at his head, just missing his ear.

He didn't seem to mind. In fact, he slammed his head into my side again. Starting all of a sudden to get really mad at this wolf that had turned my world into an insane horror flick, I growled and bit him again. He once again head butted me, then ran.

I was ticked. No stupid wolf-man was going to head butt me and run. So I chased after him. Somewhere along the way I lost all the anger and enjoyed feeling the freedom of running. I felt connected to the world. It was empowering, like all the world's energy was in and out of me. It felt like magic.

I ran until I finally collapsed, panting, while the black wolf barely seemed winded. Then I lay under the stars, with that crazy wolf beside me, his head on my back. I had not forgotten that he had attacked me, but at that moment in time it didn't matter. Right then, he was warm and comforting, all I needed. That was how I fell asleep.

The next morning, I woke up in a bed. It was the hotel bed that I had slept in each night that my friends and I had been there. I got up and went to the bathroom, noticing that I was in my pink pajamas with flying cows. I looked at the area between my left shoulder and neck, and there was nothing. No scar, no bruise, not even a scratch. I looked at myself, and nothing was out of place. I was still me, not some crazy wolf-girl. It was all a dream. There was no wolf-man. I was just drunk, and the psychic had freaked me out. I mean, really, werewolves don't exist, and I never have believed in the supernatural. Smiling, I left the room, vowing to myself never to get drunk again.

It wasn't until later that I noticed on the nearby nightstand my carefully folded red blouse covered in bloodstains and soft black wolf hairs.