

## Cemetery Party

“Oh, you all look so cute in your costumes!” trilled Ellie Tanner. “Okay bunch in for a picture, and say, Halloween.”

“Halloween!” chorused her three youngest sons and their girlfriends.

Well, mostly their girlfriends. There was still one playing hard to get, but she didn’t seem to be playing that hard. Ellie knew from first hand experience just how irresistible a Tanner man in full-on woo mode could be. She glanced over at her mate with a lusty expression and then growled.

“Hank! Stop it, those are for the trick or treaters!”

Hank, his strong chin smeared in chocolate looked up and grinned, completely unabashed at literally getting caught with his hand in the candy bowl.

“Can’t help it, babe. You got the nuts and raisins kind – they’re my favorite.”

“I got everything but the nuts and raisins kind because I know they’re your favorite and I wanted to keep at least a few of them for the trick or treaters.”

Hank frowned at looked down at the bowl. “Huh. I wonder what I was eating then.”

Ellie shook her head and turned back to her kids and the girls. They were all teenagers and had long since grown out of trick or treating, but they were all dressed up for the school dance.

Ellie and her family were all wolf shifters, as were the twins currently dating and enamoring two of her boys. But she was surprised that one of her kids – Eric – possibly her most easygoing, and by far her hungriest, and therefore largest, son had started dating a little bunny shifter called Missy. The young woman looked terrified at any given moment to be surrounded by so many wolves. Or maybe it was just her and Hank that she was a little wary of – which was ridiculous, because she was nice as pie and, if she didn’t know any better, she’d swear Hank was a big pussycat.

“Okay, well you guys have fun tonight.”

“We will,” said her second oldest son, Darryl, with just a bit too much of a smirk in his tone for her to be comfortable.

Ellie narrowed her eyes. “Will you?” she asked pointedly.

Gwen, Darryl’s girlfriend, elbowed him in the chest. Darryl immediately looked as innocent as a fat free chocolate cake - as did both of his brothers. Gwen just smiled serenely – Ellie suspected that she was quite adept at pretending she wasn’t up to no good, mostly because she had to be otherwise her oldest brother would lock her in her room until she was thirty. Missy, and Gwen’s twin, Britt just seemed mystified.

Ellie folded her arms. “What are you up to?”

“Nothing,” denied Eric.

“Mmm hmmm.” She’d been raising unruly boys for over twenty years now – no way did she believe that. “I don’t believe that for a second,” she confirmed a moment later.

“Well,” said Craig, shrugging exaggeratedly, “I guess if you don’t trust us we could stay home all night, and hang out with you guys all night.”

His eyes flickered over to his father, and Hank snapped to attention. The rapidly decreasing bowl of candy was soon forgotten in the face of his sons ruining his quiet night in with his mate.

He damn near leaped across the room. “Nope, go, get out, have a good time, but don’t do anything illegal. Here’s fifty bucks for emergency.” He tossed some bills at Britt, thinking that she was maybe the most responsible there.

“Hank,” protested Ellie with a small chuckle.

“Come on, go, get out, and don’t do anything I...” Hank stopped mid-sentence and winced. “Don’t do anything your mother wouldn’t do.”

Yes, the list of things Hank wouldn’t do was pretty damn short. It was where the boys got their rambunctiousness.

Ellie watched in amusement as Hank shepherded them out of the house, and laughed as he put the half-empty bowl of candy on the stoop and locked the door

“Hank, what are you...”

She stopped as he pulled his shirt off and tossed it aside. He grinned wolfishly and she flushed. Well, Happy Halloween to her!

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“What was that about?” asked Britt when they were crammed into the Darryl’s negligibly safe car.

“Oh, we’re not going to the school dance,” said Gwen, nonchalantly.

“What?” exclaimed Britt. She cut her eyes to Craig and growled. “You knew about this?”

Craig shrugged, but his smile told her he knew.

“Why not?” asked Missy quietly.

In spite of her protestations, and embarrassed blushes, she was perched on Eric’s lap for the journey. Mostly because there weren’t enough seats for everyone, but partly because Darryl and Gwen were upfront, and Britt refused to sit on Craig’s lap – despite his overtures – and she was technically the smallest, in height at least.

Eric gave her a squeeze. "We're going somewhere better."

"Better?" she repeated with a sinking feeling.

"Yeah, some guys Darryl went to school with are having this party in a cemetery," said Craig.

"It's gonna be way better than some high school party," snorted Darryl.

"Apparently, some of girls there are witches and they're going to try and wake the dead!" gushed Gwen.

"Oh boy, that certainly sounds like something I would want to happen," deadpanned Britt.

"Yeah," agreed Eric, completely missing her sarcasm.

Missy just sighed inwardly and her inner bunny snuffled. She had spent the better part of two days decorating the gym for the dance, and had been just a little proud of her work. She'd been thrilled at the thought of her new boyfriend seeing all her hard work and being impressed, but it wasn't to be, and she felt completely foolish for getting excited about it. Belatedly, Missy realized it wasn't the kind of thing Eric would be impressed by, and now she felt silly. So now, instead of spending the night sipping on punch and dancing to Monster Mash while showing off her gorgeous boyfriend, she was going to freeze her tail off in a cemetery.

A brief spark inside told her she should voice her objections, but once glance up at Eric's handsome face told her she never would – she was far too submissive and far too enamored of him for that.

So, they were off to the cemetery!

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"Darryl!"

Gwen growled as a pretty, goth girl witch threw herself at Darryl. She understood that Darryl had dated her for a while before he started noticing Gwen. Darryl looked mighty pleased by her reaction until he noticed Gwen's claws pushing out of her fingers. He loved it when Gwen got all wolfy and possessive over him, but he wasn't about to put his ex-girlfriend at risk of being mauled just because for a brief burst of titillation.

Darryl cleared his throat and disentangled himself from Albuquerque – and yes, that was her real name. Darryl used to call her Quirky as a nickname, and almost burst a blood vessel while laughing at the fact that Gwen was jealous about it. Gwen thought Al suited her much more.

"Hey, Quirky, how's it going?"

He smirked at Gwen who tossed back her black hair and sniffed. She was Morticia Addams, and had somehow managed to get Darryl into a suit, and had him dress as Gomez.

"Oh, Darryl, I love your mustache," giggled the bubbly Albuquerque.

“Thanks, I drew it on with my eyeliner,” said Gwen with more than a little relish.

Albuquerque gave her a fake smile, and Gwen – who practically perfected the fake, mean girl smile – returned it, almost knocking the black lipstick right off her face.

“I’m so glad you could make it, Darryl,” continued Albuquerque, pretending Gwen wasn’t there.

“Yeah, party looks fun,” he said, pulling Gwen against him.

His smug smile told her he knew about the death threats she was currently thinking but not saying, and he was enjoying himself. People always considered in her family that her eldest brother got all the crazy temper, but they’d be surprised by what she was capable of.

“Just you wait until we try to raise the dead,” gushed Albuquerque.

“Yeah, you think it’ll actually work?” asked Darryl.

Albuquerque preened. “Well, it’s a special talent. Not many have the same power I do.”

The eye rake over Gwen suggested that being a wolf shifter was somehow lacking when compared to a witch. Her inner wolf growled but Gwen soothed her.

“Oh, we can’t wait.”

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“Wanna beer, sweetheart?” asked one of the leering males.

Craig opened his mouth to object on Britt’s behalf, but she got there first.

“No, I’m underage,” she told him firmly.

The guy – dressed like a low rent vampire – shrugged and wagged a beer in Craig’s direction.

“Neither does he,” she said primly.

Craig rolled his shoulders. “Girlfriends, huh?”

The vampire chuckled while Britt punched him in the arm. The party wasn’t as bad as she thought it would be. It was basically just a bunch of people hanging around, talking, playing some low key music, and having a good time. She had expected a lot less from Darryl’s moronic friends so she was pleasantly surprised. The cemetery itself hadn’t been used in over a hundred years, and was often used for movie nights and occasionally some weddings. They weren’t being nearly as disrespectful as Britt expected!

She idly walked around the cemetery reading the headstones. Craig followed, naturally.

“Sherlock Balsamovich,” she read aloud.

“Sounds like a party animal.”

Britt looked at him with a wryly. "How did you know I was dressing up as Bride of Frankenstein?"

For the last two Halloweens, the two of them had been dressed in couples costumes – even though they weren't technically a couple and definitely hadn't co-ordinated at all. Somehow, Craig always managed to find out what she was wearing and matched himself to her. So, this year, he was Frankenstein. It was a big improvement on last year when she dressed as Spongebob, and he felt the need to dress as Patrick.

Craig gave her his practiced innocent look mixed with a little boyish, cheeky charm. "It was just a coincidence."

Britt rolled her eyes. "Sure. I'm starting to think you've got a hidden camera in my bedroom."

Craig almost took on a glassy look. "That would be pretty sweet," he murmured, apparently imagining it.

Her inner wolf snorted. "Yeah, you'd see your brother making out with my sister a lot, and then my brother trying to tear him apart."

Craig chuckled. "Yeah, I can already see half of that at my house."

"At least when they're making out they're pranking anyone."

Gwen and Darryl were never happier than when playing pranks on unsuspecting victims. Well, they were possibly happier when making out, but it was probably close. In particular, they usually liked to play pranks at Halloween, but had thankfully been pretty quiet this year. Britt had braced herself for an onslaught and had been pleasantly surprised when it never came.

Craig snagged one of her hands. "Hey, I'm sorry I didn't tell you what we were doing tonight."

Britt almost let out an ooh at the feel of his skin on her, but she managed to stop herself. "Doesn't matter."

He smiled at her through half a pound of green make up. "You're not sorry you're missing the school dance?"

"Not really," she replied truthfully.

She'd attended plenty of school dances and never really enjoyed herself. She never had a date, and even if a guy asked her to dance, due to her severe lack of rhythm and the threat of her slapping them in the face, they didn't ask twice. Usually, she ended up as a wallflower being made fun of by the popular girls. Oh, Gwen usually stopped them, but Gwen would also disappear part way through the night to make out with her date, so her interventions would be short lived. Gwen was never one for being demure.

Britt agreed to go to the dance tonight because Missy wanted her there, and Missy was so excited about to show everyone all the decorations – particularly Eric. Now he wouldn't see them. Britt doubted her

night was going as well as hers. It had been really important to her, and Eric didn't even notice. She looked up and smiled at Craig. Her wolf rumbled in appreciation.

Maybe it was her good mood. Maybe it was because she was mildly relieved at not making it to the dance. Maybe she just a little tired of always being demure. Or maybe it was because of the warm and fuzzy feelings she got in her stomach whenever Craig was around. But, she didn't stop to wonder at what made her say the next words, she just went with the flow.

"Wanna make out behind that mausoleum?"

She'd never seen Craig look so startled or pleased.

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Missy rubbed her arms, considering that a fairy costume was probably a bad choice of Halloween costume. At least it was around this bunch, who looked like they had staggered here through a nineties grunge festival. They were all dressed as vampires or witches – meaning they had donned fake teeth or witch hats. None had put any effort whatsoever into their costumes. At least at the school dance everyone made an effort, and there would be any number of people dressed as pirates, crayons, Barbie dolls or Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz. But no, they appeared to be in slacker central, and they all appeared to be snickering at her pink, poufy dress.

"Having fun, babe?" asked Eric, twinkling at her as he slipped his arms around her. "This place is pretty cool, right?"

"Umm hmm."

Her inner bunny chittered at the lie. But how could she tell him the truth? If she didn't want to be there with him, there were dozens of other girls who did.

Eric, at least, had put some effort into his costume. He was a wolfman. He had some ripped clothes, fake fur and some fangs – which were currently in his pocket because they made it hard to talk.

"Hey, fairy bunny, wanna beer?" slurred one of Darryl's friends. He was one of many fake vampires roaming the cemetery that night.

"No, thank you," squeaked Missy.

"You sure?" He leered at her. "It's good stuff – imported. All you gotta do is sit on my lap."

He patted said lap in what was probably supposed to be an inviting way. Her inner bunny eeped.

Eric growled at him and led Missy away. "C'mon, let's explore more of the cemetery."

"Yes," she agreed, trying not to sound too dismayed - after all, there was nothing a bouncy bunny liked more than an eerie, spooky cemetery.

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“Hey, everything ready?” asked Darryl, trying to hide his excited delight.

“Sure is.”

Gwen jogged over – as fast as that damn, hot, tight dress would allow. He growled at her suggestively and she preened.

Everyone thought that he and Gwen had given up on pranks. Nope, not a chance. They were just lulling them into a false sense of security. Allowing them to let their guards down.

Gwen leaned up and kissed him. “This is going to be so funny.”

Darryl gave her a knowing grin. “Right, and not just because it happens to be a prank on my ex-girlfriend too?”

Gwen blinked in surprise. “Is she your ex-girlfriend?” she asked sweetly. “I had no idea.”

He chuckled and kissed her again.

“Here’s the camera,” she said, somehow producing it from the recesses of her very tight dress.

“Wow, it’s very warm,” he murmured, wondering just where it had been hiding, and feeling a mite jealous of it.

“Umm hmmm, just be ready with lots of pictures.”

He certainly would be. What was Halloween without a prank on his brothers and her sister?

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Missy chewed on her lip as she watched a couple of young woman with black hair and lots of eyeliner chant and shake their heads. They were apparently trying to raise the dead. Missy didn’t believe they would be successful, but watching a couple of deluded young women putting on a weird show was hardly how she wanted to spend the evening.

She glanced up at Eric, and he seemed amused, like everyone else around there. Everyone else was either watching and trying not to laugh, or they were just drinking and carrying on quiet conversations. She appeared to be the only one who was miserable.

Indeed, Gwen and Darryl looked excited. While Britt and Craig... actually, she had no idea where Britt and Craig were. She hadn’t seen them since about five minutes after they arrived.

The two witches started chanting in earnest now, and Missy shuffled in her shoes. She’d opted for heels that evening, wanting to get a little closer to the height of her enormous boyfriend, but they weren’t exactly practical cemetery wear.

Her bunny snuffled wearily as the witches started shaking, almost like they were having fits, and when they both screamed, she squeaked and almost jumped up Eric's body. He chuckled, completely unfazed by anything.

A moment later, a blaze of green light emanated from the two witches. Missy closed her eyes as it passed through her, ignoring the yelps of the bunny inside who just wanted to go.

Reluctantly, she opened her eyes to find the two witches looking around triumphantly, and then a little disappointedly. Missy hoped this was the end of the night.

"Maybe we should try again," suggested the witch Albuquerque.

The other witch opened her mouth, but she was cut off by the sound of a moan. Everyone looked around in interest. Well, almost everyone – Missy looked around in dread.

Sure enough, a moment later there was another moan, and then another one.

"Who is that?" rumbled the vampire who had attempted to get Missy onto his lap.

There was dead silence for a moment and then a hand shot out of the ground. Missy screamed. Another hand shot out of another grave, and then another, and another. People erupted into panic as groans, moans and dead people crawled out of the earth.

Gwen howled as two of them grabbed hold of her.

"Gwen!" whispered Missy as her bunny chattered.

Eric held her fast not moving, as everyone else started fleeing. Gwen growled as the green-skinned creatures dragged her to the ground. Missy gasped in horror as red blood squirted everywhere.

"Eric, Eric... we... we...."

Missy screeched as something grabbed hold of her leg. She looked down into the dead countenance of a zombie trying to claw its way out of the earth and screeched again even louder.

It grasped at her dress muttering, "Brains. Brains."

Eric growled and thumped the zombie in the face, who then slapped both his hands over his nose and cried, "Aww, man, I'm shooting a toothpaste commercial on Monday."

Missy's hammering heart stuttered. "What?"

"Way to go, Derrick," grumbled one of the other zombies who had, until a moment ago, been attempting to divest Gwen of her brains.

She clambered off Gwen who sat up, strewn in blood, snickering with laughter. Darryl, holding a camera, was nearly bent over double, trying not to bust a lung while he laughed.

“He broke my bloody nose!” whined Derrick as he tried to pull himself out of the ground.

“But... but...” stammered Missy looking around, fretfully.

Everyone else seemed to momentarily surprised, but then realization dawned, and slowly, a small trickle of laughter started spreading through the party, until everyone except Missy and the two witches were laughing.

“Aww, man, that was awesome,” complimented one of the witches.

“You have no idea,” said Darryl through hiccups of laughter. He pulled Gwen to her feet and waggled the camera. “Just wait ‘til you see your faces. It was priceless!” he crowed.

“You dick, Darryl Tanner!” snapped Albuquerque.

“Certainly is,” laughed Gwen.

“Best prank ever,” agreed a random vampire.

“Prank?” whispered Missy.

She looked up at Eric who was grinning, and realized he hadn’t been fooled by it for a second.

“You knew it wasn’t real, didn’t you?” she murmured, feeling inordinately hurt and not sure why.

Eric shrugged. “Yeah, figured they’d do something like this when they invited us.”

Gwen pouted at him, but as she watched the two witches leave in a snit, she didn’t stay irritated for long.

“If you knew it was fake, why’d you punch me?” complained Derrick who was trying to stop the flow of blood down his costume.

“You were pawing at my girlfriend,” he said indifferently.

“C’mon, let’s get you to the hospital,” said the female zombie, leading the griping Derrick away. Another two zombies followed, waving at their now adoring fans.

“Thanks, guys,” called Darryl, worth every penny.

“You paid them?” drawled Eric.

“Yeah, thirty bucks each and a six pack of beer – out of work actors are pretty cheap,” he gloated.

“What’s happening? We heard screaming,” panted Britt, running over, closely followed by Craig.

They both looked mightily disheveled, and Britt more than a little sheepish. Darryl didn’t notice. No, he was more than a little keen to relate a highly embellished story of his ‘monster’ prank.

Eric slipped his arm from around Missy to join in with the lively storytelling, and an unhappy Missy took the opportunity to slip away.

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Twenty seconds later Eric's inner wolf noticed the absence of a certain bunny and bounded after her. He found her around the back of the mausoleum.

"Hey, babe, why'd you run off?"

He almost thought she wanted to have a little fun – the kind of fun he was certain Britt and Craig had been getting up to, but as he caught up to her and saw the distressed look on her face, he knew that wasn't the case.

"Who upset you?" he demanded fiercely as his wolf howled. "If it was Darryl and Gwen I will kill them, I swear."

Missy sniffled a little. "It's nothing. It's fine."

"It's obviously not, what's wrong?" he demanded.

"I just... I just really wanted to go to the dance tonight."

Eric frowned and even his wolf shrugged. He pulled Missy into his arms and sank to ground with her cradled in his lap. "Why didn't you say anything?" he asked gently, trying to remind himself he was dealing with a nervous, sensitive bunny and not some she-wolf who would happily scratch him and bite his legs – when shifted, of course.

Missy looked up at him through her lashes. "I just didn't think you wanted to go to the dance. You wanted to come here. I didn't want to... say no."

His wolf growled. "You think you can't say no to me?"

She chewed on her lip. "I just thought that if I said no to what you wanted then..."

His eyebrows shot up his head as he understood what she had trouble saying. "You think I'd dump you just because we couldn't do what I wanted? You really think that?"

Missy shrugged in his arms. "I just know that you'll think the things I like are lame and most of the time I don't mind what we do – really, I don't. I just spent a lot of time on the decorations and I wanted to show them to you."

"You did the decorations?" he asked in surprise.

"You didn't know?"

"No, I'm not some crazy stalker like my little brother," he grumbled. Who seriously kept thorough tabs on Britt at all times – he knew her schedule better than she did. Missy was her own person, and as long

as she kept away from unmated males, and showed up for lunch, their dates, and their Bigfoot fan club meetings, then he wasn't going to crowd her. Though, maybe a little crowding couldn't hurt. "You should have told me," he added in a softer tone.

Traces of her sweet smile returned. "It's not important, really."

"Yes, it is," he insisted, "and seriously, if you don't wanna do something, say the word. I only said yes to this place because I thought you'd think it was cool."

This time her eyebrows shot up her head. "You did?"

"Yeah, I was trying to impress you that I was hanging out with a bunch of college dropouts. Which, even as I'm saying it I realize doesn't sound all that impressive."

Missy giggled, looking more like her happy bunny self. His wolf virtually purred.

"I guess I am overreacting a little. I mean, I suppose the prank was pretty funny," she added, though she sounded pretty doubtful.

"Eh, it was okay." He admitted he did think it was super funny, until that bozo actor started pawing at Missy's dress – then he was just downright pissed.

"You don't have to try to impress me," she admitted shyly, "it just sorta happens."

He took a moment to preen before firmly telling her, "You don't have to pretend to like things for me. I'm happy to do whatever with you," he said sincerely. "Seriously, I'm up for anything."

"Even the school dance?" she asked a little shyly.

"When I know that my girl did the decorations, hell yeah!"

She squeaked and burst into laughter as Eric jumped to his feet and started running.

"I'm not sure we'll make it in time," she gasped, bouncing in his arms.

"Yeah we will, we're taking Darryl's car. Least he can do for that whole zombie thing."

Missy kissed his cheek – or at least tried to, given the speed at which he was running and jiggling her around, it was more like a head bump, but he enjoyed it nonetheless. This was one damn fun Halloween.

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"What's going on? Where's your car?" asked Britt as they found Gwen and Darryl sitting by the curb where his car used to be.

"Eric took my car," grumbled Darryl.

“The brain trust here thought it was a good idea to give him the keys for safekeeping,” teased Gwen.

Darryl rolled his shoulders. “The keys would have ruined the lines of my suit.”

Craig, Gwen and Britt all stared at him in disbelief for a few beats before all shaking their heads.

“I called my dad,” admitted Darryl.

“Really, I still have his fifty bucks,” said Britt, “we could have called a cab.”

“Nah, we’re splitting that – this prank was pretty pricey. My dad will be here in twenty minutes.”

Gwen grinned maliciously at Britt. “Plenty of time to think up an explanation as to why you’ve got green paint all over your face.”

Britt blushed furiously and Craig growled in warning. Darryl just hooted in laughter.

“Man, that prank was awesome,” slurred an extremely drunk vampire as he staggered out of the cemetery, partially held up by a witch.

“Yeah,” agreed another guy staggering behind him. “Those five zombies were... were...” He frowned, thinking of a word, before settling on, “Awesome.”

Darryl tried to look modest and failed abysmally.

“Thanks, but it was only four zombies,” corrected Gwen before giving Darryl a pointed look. “Would have been five but someone insisted on a new paint job for the Darryl-mobile.”

The drunk guy shrugged. “I counted five,” he muttered and lurched after his friends.

Gwen frowned. “There were only four, right? I wasn’t really paying much attention while pretending to get eaten. How many did you guys see?” she asked Britt and Craig.

Britt flushed and Craig smirked.

“Oh, right, you were too busy,” deadpanned Gwen.

Darryl shrugged. “He was drunk, he miscounted, that’s all.”

“Yeah, I suppose,” she agreed.

“So,” said Darryl, giving her a devilish smile, “is it too early to start planning our Christmas prank?”

Gwen grinned while Britt and Craig groaned.

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Half a mile away Sherlock Balsamovich eagerly walked toward the bright lights. Or perhaps shuffled was more apt. He wasn't really sure what was going on. For one thing, he had the strange sensation that he was dead, but he wasn't about to let that slow him down.

The end