

The Halloween Party
by Lesley L. Smith

I rushed home from work to finish getting everything ready for the party. I filled coolers with ice and beer, set out bowls of candy and nuts, and put out chocolate Halloween cupcakes with spooky sugar spiders on the top. I strung twinkly-white and orange pumpkin lights, and sprayed fake cobwebs all over the place.

My roommate Minerva seemed amused. "You always go so overboard, Cari." Minerva wore a long ragged black dress, black and white striped tights, pointy black shoes, and a big black pointy hat.

"So, sue me. It's my favorite holiday." I loved Halloween; it was so fun and wonderfully naive. In honor of the occasion, I'd worn a long marbled navy and black dress, black suede boots, and a black velvet cape. I looked awesome, if I did say so myself. I'd just have to remember to keep my fangs covered until after the spell.

It was a beautiful night in the low 60s, with none of the usual rain, snow, or wind to attack the trick-or-treaters. Minerva and I had been answering the door and passing out candy all evening to scary- or cute-costumed kids.

The doorbell rang again, and Minerva, grinning evilly, went to answer it. The little kids shrieked when she opened the door. This time, it was a couple of pirates, wearing off-white tunics, big black belts with cardboard swords stuck in them, black eye patches and broad-brimmed hats. A middle-aged man stood behind them, smiling wearily, a little way down the walkway.

Minerva asked, "Can I invite them to stay for the spell?" inclining her head toward the kids, as she grabbed the bowl of candy. "They're only pirates."

"Of course not. They're kids, they can't stay up that late," I said, crossing my arms.

She turned back to the kids. "Arg, me mateys. Are you getting lots of loot?" The two boys just giggled as they reached into the bowl with grimy fists.

I waved goodbye to the boys as Minerva closed the door.

"You're no fun," she said, leaning against the door. "I think the world needs more pirates."

"Oh, good grief," I said. "Pirates aren't even evil; they're just mean." I glanced at my watch. "Where is everyone? It's after 7:00."

The doorbell rang again, and it turned out to be our friend Julian, dressed in a tux, with a black cape, white makeup, and slicked-back hair.

"Julian, nice." I nodded. "Very old school."

"Thank you." He swished his cape. "I'd like to present my friend, Tony."

Tony stepped out from behind him, in a tux with a cape, white makeup, plastic fangs and slicked-back hair. He was gorgeous, like a model, albeit an undead one.

Minerva beat me to him, holding out her hand for a shake. "Tony, it's fabulous to meet you. I'm Minerva."

He smiled broadly as he shook her hand. "Likewise, beautiful."

Minerva beamed, as I muttered to Julian, "He's too good-looking to be straight."

Julian pretended to be disconsolate. "If only that were true. I brought him for you, but apparently you weren't fast enough."

Minerva was already leading him out to the patio and the coolers of beer.

"You snooze, you lose, honey." Julian flashed his fangs at me. "Now where are the goodies?"

The doorbell rang again.

I pointed at the dining room table. "Goodies, there. Beer on the patio. Hey, speaking of which, why didn't you bring any snacks?"

He grinned, showing his fangs again. "I brought Tony."

I opened the door as Julian wandered away. Our friends Jessica, Ashley, Amanda, and a stranger stood on the doorstep, all dressed as witches with black dresses and big black hats. They cackled gleefully as I applauded.

"Very nice. You guys look great. Come on in. Let me show you to the goodies." I introduced myself to the stranger and it turned out her name was Jennifer. Jessica, Ashley and Amanda did bring refreshments and added them to the goodies table. That was more like it.

I asked Jessica to watch the door and went out to the patio.

I snagged a beer and sidled next to Tony and Minerva.

"It's a shame the full moon is still five days away," Minerva said. "Then we could really party."

Tony clutched a beer in his hand. "I don't see what the moon has to do with anything."

Minerva cackled, startling Tony.

"Don't mind her, Tony," I said. "She's getting into the spirit of things. I'm Cari, by the way."

Male and female werewolves, Matt and Nicole, stepped onto the patio along with a large, hairy, rabbit I didn't recognize.

"Don't go anywhere, Tony," I said, smiling.

I approached the werewolves. "Matt, Nicole. It's great you could make it. Who's your friend? And what's he supposed to be? A rabbit?" Were those fangs I detected?

Matt grimaced. "He's a were-rabbit."

I burst out laughing. "Oh, my god! You've got to be kidding."

Nicole giggled a little too. "I'm afraid not. This is Dan."

Dan spit out his plastic fangs. "Hi. What's the big deal? All the werewolf costumes were rented."

I shook my head. "It's not a big deal. Welcome, Dan. Beers are in the coolers."

Nicole said, "We brought some bottles of wine. They're on the table. Do you have a corkscrew?"

I nodded and went over to Minerva. "Minerva, can you help Nicole find a corkscrew?"

She glanced at Tony unhappily. "All right. Come on, Nic." They went inside.

I introduced Dan and Matt to Tony and we exchanged the typical party small-talk. The breeze brought with it the scent of wood smoke and made the pumpkin lights sway. The patio filled up with an assortment of monsters, as people wandered out from the house.

Minerva cranked up the stereo and people started dancing.

I stayed on the patio chatting with Tony and drinking beers. Time flew and before I knew it, it was almost midnight.

Minerva, Jessica, Ashley and Amanda came outside with their equipment. They cleared an area of the patio and started drawing a giant hexagram with chalk.

Tony gestured with his beer bottle. "What are they doing?"

I giggled and bared my fangs. "I guess we'll soon see." I may have had too much to drink at that point.

Tony stared into my mouth. "Say, your fangs look very realistic. How do they work?"

I smiled and pointed at the coven, who stood in a circle, chanting. "Shh. This is interesting."

Tony shrugged and took a swig of his beer.

Julian approached us. "There are some party crashers inside."

"Too late for them, now," I said. "I guess they'll get more than they bargained for at this party."

The witches finished their spell and I wobbled a bit, dizzy.

Tony grabbed my arm. "Are you all right?"

"I think I may have had too much to drink." I giggled. "How do you feel?"

Tony squinted. "I feel odd. Very strong, and very hungry." He looked at me, surprised. "I have a craving for blood."

"That's my boy," Julian said. "Welcome."

Dan, the were-rabbit screamed. "I can't get my fangs out! I'm all furry! My costume won't come off!"

The were-wolves tried to calm him down.

Screaming erupted inside, and people ran onto the patio.

I spied Minerva exiting the house with everyone else. "What? What is it?" I asked her. "Did someone react badly to the spell?"

The crowd continued to spill outside, shaking and cursing.

She trembled, pointing her finger toward the living room. "No. That's not it. There's, there's a pope in here."

I gasped. "Who let him in here?"

She shook her head. "No idea. It wasn't me!" She was on the verge of tears.

"But a pope could send us all straight to hell!" I said, suddenly stone-cold sober.

Then the pope appeared in the doorway, long green robe, huge gold cross, gold staff, big gold hat, beatific smile, holy water and all.

"Is that a woman?" I asked Minerva.

She shuddered and nodded. "Yes."

The female pope stepped onto the patio and everyone cringed.

Some people shrieked.

"What's going on?" she asked. "Why is everyone acting like they're afraid of me?"