

## TRUCE

Adora witnessed how the arrogant girl who had chased her in outrage from the library was transformed in just a second into an unrecognizable beast. Her body was still the same, small and tan; her hair an indomitable brown mane. But her eyes lost all traces of intelligence and rationality to turn into those of a monster. Her pupils narrowed until they almost disappeared; the blue and gold of her irises gave way to blood red; her lips, drawn back in an animal grimace, revealed uncommonly long fangs dripping with saliva.

Adora took an involuntary step back, but tripped over a loose cobblestone and fell to the ground. The noise alerted the beast, that turned her head in a swift movement and looked directly into her eyes. Adora froze at the brutality contained in that gaze. She could see how the muscles of her body tensed prepared to attack. She wouldn't be able to dodge. Without giving her any more time to think, Catra threw herself at her in a powerful leap, claws first. Adora had just enough time to lift her bloody arm to prevent her from ripping her neck with one bite. She felt her sharp claws dig into her skin. The beast lunged at the open wound and dug its fangs into her forearm. Adora screamed in pain. The vampire began to suck the blood quickly, her arm growing more and more numb as the blood poured out of her body. She had to think fast, find a way to get rid of her grip before she passed out from blood loss and it was too late. She tried to find something she could use to immobilize her while she was distracted drinking. Suddenly she remembered the trick her father had taught her. As the vampire continued to suck the blood from the wound, Adora prepared to act. She took impulse with her legs, straddling the vampire's back as she pinned her elbows with her knees.

However Catra had not loosened her grip and was still clinging to her arm, it was useless to try to loosen her bite by force, she was too weak. Adora could no longer feel the pain, but she was starting to get dizzy. If she kept losing blood she wouldn't last much longer. Luckily she had already dealt with bites from raging beasts before, she hoped her technique would work, she always carried a bit of her special ingredient in case of emergencies. She licked the fingers of her uninjured hand, then shoved them into the back pocket of her pants. She took them out, impregnated with a reddish powder. Then she clenched the vampire's jaw forcing her bite open just enough to thrust her fingers into her mouth. The effect was immediate. Catra let out a heartrending screech, finally freeing her arm. She began to roll across the kitchen floor, spitting and hissing uncontrollably, bumping into the cabinets and cupboards that got in her way. Adora stood up without letting her guard down and watched her. If the situation were different, it would have been even funny. She watched her evolutions around the kitchen for a while, and realized that the blood red that had taken over her eyes had disappeared, they were now their normal color. "She's not going to be very happy after this", Adora thought. Well, at least her plan had worked. Calmly, she picked up one of the bowls on the table and filled it with water. Then she put it down and stepped away.

Catra became aware of herself again only to discover that she was in hell. Her mouth burned as if it was set on fire. She put her hands to her tongue in an attempt to calm the scorching feeling and realized that her fangs had returned to their normal size, but the saliva was not enough to reduce the heat, she needed to drink something. She watched how Adora put a bowl full of water on the ground and pounced on it. She was already filling another bucket by the time she finished, and set it in front of her without a word. If it had been up to Catra, she would



have put her whole head in the water, but she had enough dignity left not to do something so vulgar in front of a simple commoner.

At least it looked like it was working. She downed the contents of the bucket in long gulps and sighed in relief when she finished.

“Have you calmed down yet?” the girl asked.

Catra raised her head with difficulty. She was always exhausted after the beast took control, it was as if it consumed what little energy she had all at once. Adora wasn't looking at her, she was focused on bandaging the wound on her arm with the bow she wore as a bracelet. When it was covered, she clenched the loop between her teeth and examined it with satisfaction. Catra looked at her in amazement, it was incredible. The unfortunate humans who had witnessed her transformations had not lived long enough to tell the story, the castle's graveyard was witness to it, but this girl had not only kept calm, but also had the cold blood to get away from the beast as if it were nothing. And now she was watching her resolutely with her hands on her hips, without any hint of fear.

“What...? How ... how did you get away?” she asked when she managed to get out of her surprise.

Adora tilted her head and looked at her amused.

"I think I'm the one who should be asking the questions, don't you think?" she smiled slightly, but answered her, "It's an old family trick. I always carry a little chili with me.”

She reached into the back pocket of her pants and showed her fingers covered in a red substance. The smell tickled her nose. Catra sneezed.

“You know, spices are the basis of good cooking, and being stuck in the middle of a blizzard with nothing more to put in your mouth than a few strips of dried meat is not very appetizing. This gives it a little spark to it, and also helps warming the body. As you may have seen, it's hot as hell.

Catra watched her with her mouth open. Who would have thought? Defeated by a condiment.

Adora saw the confusion on the vampire's face as she tried to process what had happened. She had kept her wits with her during the attack, it was the only way to have a clear mind when you faced a wild animal, but now that she had calmed down she realized she could have died. She was dangerous, she knew, it didn't take much to figure that out. But it was also clear that the transformation she had suffered was not within her control. There was something else, and Adora had to find out what. The village could be at risk and as a leader she had to ensure the lives of her people.

"But... I... you," Catra started confused.

“Look, clearly we both have problems” Adora cut her off “I need your help and clearly you need to solve... “she made a fuss with his arms pointing at her whole “whatever happens to you” she approached and sat in front of her with her legs crossed . Catra instinctively pulled away a little. She could still smell her, it was better to keep her distance, she didn't want to risk the beast waking up again so soon. The girl leaned forward offering her hand while staring into her eyes. “Let's make a deal, you provide me with medicines and food so that my people can heal and in return I stay in the castle to help you find out what is wrong with you, okay?”

Catra considered her outstretched hand. She looked up. Adora showed no doubt, her eyes were sincere. She wondered why he was offering to help her. Clearly she had come with



the intention of forcing her to fulfill her obligations as Mistress of the Wastelands, she had no need to stay there. Catra cocked her head.

"And what do you get out of all this?" she asked suspiciously.

It was true, she needed help. She had little time left, she could tell. The attacks were becoming more frequent and difficult to control, the curse was about to turn her into a monster altogether. She had to break it before she got to that point or it would be too late for her, but she hadn't found any clues that might help her. She knew that the key was there, somewhere, the beast was linked to the castle and therefore the way to destroy it had to be in the same place. She had no choice, she made a decision. She rose gracefully and took the girl's hand, pulling her up. Adora let out an exclamation of surprise, she did not expect someone so small to have such strength. "We have a deal, human" Catra said. "You can dispose of everything inside the palace coffers." Adora's face lit up with a beaming smile. For a moment it looked like she was going to pounce on her and hug her, but she held back at the last moment.

"Thank you so much! You really have no idea..." Adora began enthusiastically.

"I'm not done" Catra interrupted.

She began to pace around her as she slid her hand down her shoulders. Her tail brushed her leg casually as she passed next to her. Adora gulped and followed her with her eyes. Catra smiled. Apparently she didn't have the nerves of steel she wanted her to believe. She stopped behind her and leaned forward while leaning on her shoulders. She stood on tiptoe so she could speak into her ear. Adora tensed under her touch.

"Get ready to work harder than ever in your life" she said in a seductive purr.

She moved one of her hands to her waist and encircled her. The wound on her neck was closed, but her scent was still there, tantalizing. Jasmine and something else. Catra inhaled, she had to get used to her aroma and the reactions it provoked in her. She was going to have to train her restraint, she couldn't lose control again. She needed her help, and for that she had to stay alive. She didn't want to hurt her again. Catra pressed herself against her back resting her head on her shoulder and Adora turned her head to look at her. She was blushing.

"I'm used to hard work," she said determinedly.

Catra smiled, letting one of her fangs peek from the corner of her mouth. Adora held her breath. It seemed like things were going to get interesting from now on.

"I hope so."





