

Bitten

(BOOK #3 OF THE VAMPIRE LEGENDS)

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Also by Emma Knight

SWORN (Book #1 of the Vampire Legends)

TAKEN (Book #2 of the Vampire Legends)

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“Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies.”

--Aristotle

Chapter One

Rachel lay there, in a puddle, floating on her back, looking up at the midnight sky. As she looked up, she saw the huge full moon, lighting up the clouds, which passed impossibly fast beneath it.

She heard a distant screeching noise, growing louder and louder, and the source of the noise came into view: thousands of thousands of bats began to swarm across the sky. Soon, the moonlit sky completely blackened with them. They swarmed together from both sides of the horizon, and met in the middle. As they did, they suddenly all took a turn, and dove down, right for Rachel. It was like an ever-growing tornado, its funnel widening, as the bats screeched, heading down to earth, right for her.

She tried to move, to get up, but as she did, she realized that her arms were stuck to the water—which now was not water but a pool of sticky blood. She pulled her head up just a few inches, just as far as it could go, just enough to see thousands more bats plunging towards her.

As they got closer, there appeared in front of her, a shadow, a figure. He bent down over her, and she looked up into his eyes, and saw those large, glowing, incandescent eyes, and recognized them instantly.

Benji.

“Save me!” she pleaded to him, frantic.

As the bats came down to earth, now only feet away, Benji leaned back his head. As he did, his face turned impossibly pale, stark white, and long sharp fangs protruded from his teeth. He lowered his head, and sank his teeth right into her throat.

Rachel screamed out in pain as she felt them enter her. As she opened her mouth wider, screaming and screaming, the bats plunged down, right for her, and entered her screaming mouth.

Rachel woke up screaming. The room was dark, cold and smelled of must. She lay there on a firm mattress, under a thick, heavy quilt, looking up at the wooden four-poster bed with carved images of crosses at the top of each post.

She lay still, not moving a muscle. She feared something was different, and he wasn't ready to face what had happened. Her mind raced with scenes of last night, but they were foggy, she couldn't piece anything together.

Her eyes wandered about the room, scanning the marble mantle that surrounded the fireplace, which had a small, flickering fire. She glanced at the midnight-purple wallpaper, which she strangely felt soothed her eyes. She scanned the large cathedral-like ceilings and then looked to find the door. She didn't remember coming into this room, and she wanted to find her way out. The door was at the back left of the enormous room she lay in; it was a big arched door, with iron locks and bolts on it. She prayed she wasn't trapped.

Taking a moment to listen, Rachel sat up in bed. The mattress coils creaked, as if nobody had slept in that bed in centuries. Her body was achy as she turned from side to side, stretching her torso and neck. She peered off the bed and saw a deerskin rug at the foot, it's head still on, mouth open and eyes staring at her. She got a chill down her spine.

She wanted to hide under the covers, but knew she wasn't safe here. She had no idea where she was or what day it was. The room was pitch black, except for the small amount of light that the fireplace gave out.

Rachel slowly slid her body out of the heavy blankets and put her cold, bare feet on the stone floor. She had no clothes except for the oversized flannel shirt and shorts that she was wearing. Which, now that she thought about it, didn't belong to her.

Still struggling to piece together what had happened, she began to remember. She saw flashes of Violet, Hunter, of policemen and sirens, flying vampires and fangs. She suddenly remembered Benji and vaguely remembered him flying her to this castle.

She walked quickly to the bedroom door to go and find him. She turned the large, brass circular handle and pulled hard. The door slowly opened, creaking at the hinges.

She slowly tiptoed out of the bedroom and down the long, dark corridor. Silence filled the air and the only noise she could hear was the sound of her own breath as she inhaled and exhaled. As she crept through the never-ending hallways, she saw small, porthole windows with black stained glass. It didn't let in much light, but it was enough light that she could see directly in front of her.

She stopped outside of a large door, similar to the one outside her bedroom. It was closed tightly, and Rachel put her ear to it. She didn't hear anything and debated whether or not to go in. She thought that perhaps Benji was asleep inside and she desperately wanted to talk to him.

She slowly turned the handle, and opened the door ever so slightly. As she peered in, she saw one reindeer, two fox and a handful of rabbits turned upside down, hanging from the ceiling. As she scanned their bodies, she saw their necks cut open and pools of blood under

each animal. Scared and utterly disgusted by the sight and smell, Rachel quickly closed the door, standing with her back towards it, panicked and gasping for air.

As she continued down the hall, each consecutive door that she passed was also closed shut; she didn't dare open the doors for fear of what or who might be inside. She didn't want to take any more chances.

She neared the end of the hallway and came to a large opening that led to a wide spiral staircase. She peered down over the banister to see what was below, but couldn't tell in the darkness what lay before her. She slowly crept down the steps, one foot after the other down the never-ending staircase. Her feet felt like ice pops as they grew colder and colder from the stone floor. At the end of the staircase, she saw a large floor to ceiling mirror. She walked up to it, anticipating her reflection, but saw nothing.

Trying to defog the mirror with warm breath and the sleeve of her flannel shirt, she ran her arm in circles over the mirror. It was dusty, and her sleeve left a big, clear circular area in the mirror. She peered into it again, but all she could see were the clothes on her body—her face, limbs, body and appendages disappeared as she gazed back at herself. She couldn't figure out what was going on. She touched her face, hair and neck, which all felt normal to her. She did a quick scan of her body, looking down at her feet, legs and then rolling back her sleeves to see her arms and hands. Then, she lifted up her shirt and peered down at her stomach. It was there—she saw it. It was a hole, the size of a bullet and she suddenly remembered the guns, the sound of the policemen firing openly and then being shot. She remembered the excruciating pain, lying helpless and weak on the ground.

Her eyes swelled up as a tear streamed down her cheek. She sank to the ground, gripping her stomach, and the wound that changed her life. She let out a scream, “Benji!”

Nobody answered. Silence filled the dark walls as she sat there, alone and scared, her body aching as she began having flashbacks of that night.

Suddenly, she heard loud footsteps coming down the hall, and the grumbling of a man's voice echoed as he cleared his throat. The footsteps got louder and louder as they came closer to the staircase. Rachel sat there, in horror, waiting for her fate, as the man suddenly came into view.

Out of the shadows, appeared a short, heavy-set bald man, dressed in a black smoking robe. He smelled of dead animals as he stood there sucking the tips of each finger.

Rachel couldn't imagine what was going to happen to her. She sat there, on the ground looking up, waiting for him to say something.

"You, dear, have started a great war," the man said.

Rachel looked up at him, speechless.

Clearing her throat, she mumbled, "Who are you and where is Benji?"

"You have no idea the trouble you have caused. Never mind who I am, what matters is who you are, and the fact that you may never see Benji again."

"I don't understand," Rachel murmured. "I have to see him."

"Well, the Great War has begun and he is off to fight. You never know what could happen now."

Rachel sank to the ground crying as the man stomped away out of the dark foyer. Realizing this might be the only person who could help her, Rachel yelled out, "Wait! Sir, wait! Who are you? Can you help me?"

He turned and smiled.

"Follow me."

Chapter Two

Rachel quickly followed the hunched back, short man into a dark library, smelling of old books. The man stopped and the two of them stood there in silence, staring at each other. She watched as the man reached deep into the breast pocket of his smoking robe and pulled out a pack of matches. He walked slowly around the room, lighting the black candles on every surface. She felt more scared than ever, as she sucked in the dusty, smoky air.

The man turned back to her and motioned to a chair in the corner of the room, “Sit,” he said.

She slowly walked across the wide-plank wood floors that creaked beneath her every step. As she grew closer to the chair she gazed at the various spines of the books that faced her. *Vampire, The Lost Century, Fangs, The Chosen Vampires*. The titles glared at her and she suddenly grew numb with fear as she sat down in the stiff chair, which looked to her to be made out of animal bones.

As she tried to settle into the chair and get somewhat comfortable she watched as the man started to walk towards her. The silence was unbearable for her and she suddenly felt the need to speak, to say anything to calm her nerves.

“I’m sorry, sir, but could you tell me who you are?”

She waited as he took a few steps closer and pulled up a chair facing hers.

“Yes, dear, my name is Uncle Drew and I am one of your kind. Well, I guess technically I should say, you are one of my kind now.”

Rachel thought for a moment before responding. She didn't know exactly what he was talking about, but the bullet mark and the vivid dream came flashing back into her mind. She suddenly remembered Benji leaning down towards her neck as her world went dark.

She cleared her throat. "What do you mean by that?"

"Please, call me Uncle Drew," he insisted. He stopped and looked at her.

"Uncle Drew, I'm lost here, I don't know how I got here or where I am. Can you please help me?"

She sank down in her chair feeling hopeless.

"Rachel, dear. You are a vampire now. Don't you remember?"

Rachel began to hang on his every word.

"Tell me more," she said in anticipation.

"Don't you remember the Greslins? The bullet wound? You were about to die and you asked to be turned." He waited a few moments and then said, "Is this ringing a bell?"

Rachel's mind began to race with images of Violet, policemen, Hunter, and flying in the sky with Benji. She felt a chill travel down her spine as she rubbed her arms with her hands.

"I have some recollection, but who are the Greslins?" Rachel asked shyly.

"Oh, child, the Greslin Coven is our worst enemy. There have been many wars with them over the course of history, but none as bad as what I feel is about to come."

Scared, Rachel asked, "What do you mean?"

"You have caused this war, I'm afraid to say, and now, our beloved Benji is caught in the middle of this, fighting for his life to save yours and the rest of our Vladiccus Coven."

"Vladiccus? I'm not sure exactly who you are talking about."

Drew's voice became stern as he said, "Listen up, you are now part of the Vladiccus Coven. That's what I am, that's what Benji is and the rest of us around here.

He stopped and looked at Rachel square in the eye. “You have a lot to learn, and to be honest, I just don’t have the time right now.”

Feeling a mix of emotions, she sat there, quiet, and then said, “But, but, when is Benji coming back? I need to know.”

She watched as Uncle Drew got up from his chair and began to walk towards the door.

“Please!” she cried. “Please don’t go.”

He turned around and faced Rachel. “Fine, but I need to make this quick.” He grabbed an old dusty notepad off the shelf, and a quill pen, and threw them across the room. Rachel reached out and grabbed it in mid air, surprised by her quick reflexes.

“Take notes, dear, because I will only say this once.”

He paused.

“Benji is on a mission to repair the damage that you have created. It could be days until he returns. It could be weeks. You are not the same person you once were. You’ve changed. You are still changing. You are now one of us. You think you can go back to normal life as it once was. You think you can go back home. But what you don’t realize is that *this* is your home. We are now your family,” Uncle Drew said as he took a breath.

“Of course we are not keeping you here. If you want to go back home, if you want to pretend that you can ease back into your normal life, by all means. That is a choice for you to make. If you want to stay here with us, in safety, then you are going to need to learn how to become one of us. You are going to need to learn to harness and understand all of your new skills. Learn what it means to be a vampire.”

“But how do I learn all that?” she asked back in confusion.

“There are others here who can teach you. I don’t have time for that sort of thing. I have a war to wage. In fact, I have already wasted enough time with you already.” He turned and began to storm out the door.

“Wait!” Rachel screamed. “You can’t just leave me like this. I need to know more. I am all alone here. Like, what do I do next? Where do I go now?”

He opened the door and then stopped and turned and grinned back at her.

“Try the north tower. Matilda might have time for you.”

Rachel quickly jotted that down on the piece of paper and then looked up to find Uncle Drew gone and the door swinging back and forth on its hinges.

She folded the piece of paper and put it into her pocket as she stood from the stiff chair. Her body creaked as she arose. North Tower? She thought to herself. How do I find the North Tower?

She took a look around the library to see if there might be a map that could direct her to the North Tower. Then, suddenly, she felt herself being pulled, like a magnet, by a strong force out of the room, back through the large foyer and across another corridor. It felt odd to her, but she didn’t want to fight this force. She figured it might be her only chance at finding the North Tower.

Her body moved through the halls as if being pulled by a current. She breezed by pictures of people hanging on the walls, which she assumed were some of her new “family members.” Replaying Uncle Drew’s conversation in her head, she had difficulty considering him family—let alone the many others she had not even met.

At that moment, seeing all the photos and thinking about family, she longed to see her mom and dad. She missed her sister Sarah, who had recently become like a best friend to her, and even Mark, her annoying younger brother. She wished she could see them again, and part of her wished she had never snuck out. If she hadn’t, she thought, this would never have happened, and she would probably be in the car with her mom, on her way to Apache High School right now.

Her nostalgia came to a quick halt as she heard a sawing noise coming from inside one of the rooms off the long and winding hallway. Her heart stopped as she replayed scenes from horror movies in her head.

As she approached a large metal door, she saw sparks coming out of the cracked doorway. She tried to pull her body away, but the force wouldn't let her move. She stood back so she wouldn't get hit by the flaming sparks, but couldn't get a peek inside. Gaining a new sense of calm, she inched closer and craned her neck to look inside, but she was still too far away. She inched even closer as the sparks began to fly right towards her body, and quickly jumped back, but it was too late—her skin was being hit with thousands of fiery sparks.

She watched in fear as they hit her skin and hair but was surprised to find that they didn't hurt at all. In fact, she couldn't even feel them. She continued to watch the sparks and then saw that they were turning to water as soon as they touched her. She looked down to the floor and saw that her feet were in a puddle of cold water.

The sparks stopped and she heard other strange noises coming from inside the room. She walked closer and then stuck her head through the small opening in the doorframe. She couldn't believe her eyes. It was like Santa's workshop: there were small, dwarf-like people in yellow and black outfits working at their workbenches with hammers and chainsaws, creating toys and furniture out of bones. It was the coolest and grossest thing she'd ever seen.

All the dwarfs stopped and looked up in silence, staring at Rachel. The room went dead silent as all eyes were on her. Her body grew cold and stiff, and she wished she had never peeked her head through the door.

A small man came charging at her and tapped her on the leg, "What are you doing here?" he said in a high-pitched voice. "You shouldn't have come here."

Looking down at him, she said, "I'm lost. I was on my way to the North Tower, but I don't know my way."

A small woman came over and pushed the man aside with a look of disgust, "Well you should've said so, we can help!" The crowd of little people cheered and waved their tools in the air.

"Where did you say you were headed, Miss?" the woman asked.

"I was sent to find Matilda in the North Tower. Is that close to here?"

"Oh no, my child, that is quite a ways, but if you take this map, it will bring you right there." The woman handed her a slab of bone with a map of the castle etched into it. She took out a pen and dipped it into red ink and drew the most direct way to the North Tower.

"Thank you so much!" Rachel said as she took the slab and headed on her way. The force that was pulling her before had died down, and she felt totally on her own.

She followed the guided path down the hallway, which led her onto a rickety wooden bridge with brass chains on either side. She held on for balance. While she couldn't let go of the fact that she was in some ancient castle, this bridge brought back memories of the fun house from the Dutch Fair. Despite feeling the similarities of the wooden bridge, she couldn't help but forget that she was on a mission to find the North Tower. Nothing could stop her, not even her sappy memories of the past. She wouldn't, and couldn't let her mind go there.

She clutched the bone slab tight as she crossed the long bridge, not wanting it to fall beneath her. Her body was surprisingly stable as she walked along; she even got the courage to look over, despite her fear of heights. As she peered down she saw a moat that surrounded the castle with florescent like eels swimming around. At that moment, a neon yellow eel jumped out of the water and snatched an owl that was flying low in the sky above it. She began to move even faster to get out of the line of vision of the eels. She didn't want to take any chances with those creatures.

As the bridge came to an end she saw multiple paths; it was like a maze. Looking up in the distance she saw many cupolas and wondered which one was the North Tower.

Looking down at the slab, she followed the red line that appeared to bear left. She flipped the slab around and around, making sure she wasn't reading it upside down.

Feeling confident with her decision, she began to walk down the desolate path heading left. She felt the temperature swell as she walked through a long hallway of stained-glass windows. They didn't let in much light, just enough so she could see a step or two ahead of her. She put her hands out in front of her body so as not to bump into anything or anyone, but as the walkway grew darker, her vision became clearer, and she felt like a bat navigating through a cave. She put her hands down and her motions grew quicker and she no longer felt that she needed to protect herself from bumping into anything.

She looked into the stained glass as she passed and saw two red dots staring back at her. She stopped to try and figure out where they were coming from. When she moved, they moved and when she stopped, they stopped. She stepped closer and closer to the glass to catch a glimpse of her reflection, and then, for the first time, jumped back. The shining red dots belonged to her. They were her eyes, and while she could not see anything else in her reflection, her eyes shined back at her with immense power and determination. She didn't recognize this person she'd become and knew she had to find her way to the North Tower, and fast. She needed help making sense of this person, or "thing," she'd turned into.

She followed the directions, which led her across another long walkway, through several doors, across another large foyer with silhouettes of angels on the ceiling, up a small dumbwaiter passage and now, she found herself climbing up an endless spiral staircase. Her pace slowed as she tried to catch her breath, huffing and puffing as she trudged along. Her heart was pounding out of her chest and she couldn't take one more step. Peering over the metal railing she looked up to see how much

farther she had to travel before reaching the top, but the journey looked endless. She saw no end in sight, so she sat down.

All of a sudden, the alarm of her purple Swatch Watch started beeping. She looked down and it was flashing an error code. She fumbled with all the buttons until she got it to silence itself. She tried to get it back to the time and date, but failed. It was as if the world didn't want her to know what day it was, and how long she'd been sleeping for. It was a small piece to the large puzzle she was desperately trying to figure out.

Feeling hopeless, she took the watch off and threw it off the edge of the banister, waiting to hear it fall and break into pieces. She waited and waited but it never hit the ground. She realized how far up she must be. She looked over the balcony and saw her watch miraculously travelling back towards her from the depths of the stairwell. Confused and frightened, she began blinking her eyes as if she were seeing things. It was coming at a fast pace and then stopped as it got to her level and hovered there, waiting for her to take it. She saw a string attached to the watch and a small white note dangling from that string. She reached out and grabbed the watch, clasping onto it as if it were a family heirloom. She pulled the string towards her as the note travelled closer. The outside read her name in small script letters. She opened the note and began to read:

One mustn't discard outside personal property in this castle. You never know who might pick it up and you never know what clues it could give our enemy.

The ominous note ended abruptly and wasn't signed by anyone. Taken aback by this, she folded it and stuffed it into her pocket as if it never happened. She felt as if she were being followed or watched, and that scared the crap out of her. Her adrenaline kicked in and she started bolting up the remaining steps.

She reached the top and saw five identical doors, each thick, tall wooden doors with iron bars on them. Her head flipped around as she looked back and forth between all the doors and then back to

the slab. She saw an X marked on the map over the third door and headed over to it, slowly looking behind her as she walked towards it. The tower was silent and the only sounds were those of her breath and her feet tiptoeing closer and closer to the large arched door. As she neared close enough to the door to touch it, she felt scared out of her mind. She couldn't bring herself to knock on the door and wasn't sure if she was making the right decision. She had been creped out way too much for one day and wondered if coming to the North Tower was a huge mistake.

She took a few steps back and stood there, contemplating her next move. Her body and breath grew still and silent as she stood there, debating her decision. Feeling in her heart that she had made the wrong choice, she quickly and quietly started turning back towards the steps. As she put her foot out to walk, the force came back and propelled her body in the direction of the third door.

Figuring it was a sign; she lifted her hand, and began knocking softly on the door. She waited.

But nobody came. She lifted her hand to the door again, and this time knocked louder, figuring that Matilda, or whoever was inside, just didn't hear her first knock. She listened and it was as silent as before. No sign of life at all in the North Tower. Next, she lifted both of her hands up and was about to pound loudly on the door when she felt a strong and cold boney hand tapping her on her shoulder.

{The entire novel is for sale online everywhere ebooks are sold.}