

Heart of the Witch

Excerpt

The woman broke eye contact first. Nick couldn't have. Wouldn't have. Didn't want to.

Something had sparked in him when he'd held her gaze. Something alive and real. Something that really mattered, for the first time in years.

Was this Ravyn Skyler, or was Ravyn the blonde speaking with the older woman? He'd gotten a vague description, and he believed the Skyler chick had dark hair. The blonde was a looker, though. She was definitely the perp's type. And with all the hair-coloring women did these days,

either of the two could be the one Nick was looking for. He couldn't take his eyes off the dark-haired woman, though. There was a sultry nonchalance in the way she moved, in the way she brushed a hank of hair back from her face. She wore black eyeliner that emphasized the green of her eyes. The wide, overlong sleeves of her silky blue shirt slid back on her forearms, revealing slender fingers laden with rings. Acid-washed jeans hugged long legs. Every move oozed pure sexual magnetism—like, Nick imagined, the magnetism of those sirens of myth who lured sailors to their doom.

“Can I help you?” she asked.

He hadn't even been aware she approached. Words froze inside him. He sucked in a breath and struggled for the ability to speak.

“Sir? Are you okay?” she asked in a voice that was a smoky blend of softness and sandpaper.

“Sorry. Yes. Just a little lightheaded for a second.” Nick looked at the candle he held in his hand. How had that gotten there? He lifted it toward her. “Do you have this fragrance in the eighteen-ounce size?”

She stared at him for a moment. Not a friendly look.

“I'll check.”

As she turned and disappeared through a gauzy white curtain behind the counter, he suddenly wished he'd asked the blonde for the candle; he didn't want to let this beautiful creature out of his sight. He still didn't know if she was Ravyn Skyler, but he thought she was. He *hoped* she was. Then he'd have an excuse to be around her more.

God. What was wrong with him? He hadn't been attracted to a woman since Annie. Damn sure not like this. He wished he hadn't had those drinks this morning. Could she smell it on him? He reached into his shirt pocket, searching for a breath mint but coming up empty. Damn.

She returned quickly, but it seemed like she'd been gone for hours.

"I'm sorry. We don't have the eighteen-ounce size in Lavender Dream right now. I'll make some more later in the week, if you want to come back."

Lavender Dream? He inwardly groaned. How manly.

He nodded. "I'll be back. Later in the week."

She returned his nod but didn't speak. Her eyes seemed veiled, as if they held deep secrets. Nick wanted nothing but to unlock those. And not just whatever information she had about the Tin Man. He wanted to know everything about her. Hell, he just wanted to keep listening to her voice. Wanted to watch her face as she spoke. Inhale her fragrance. She smelled faintly like the smoky outdoors, like a campfire in the winter. She was warm yet cool. She was utterly fascinating.

He blinked rapidly, as if coming out of a trance. Guilt slammed into him with the force of a tidal wave. In the five years since Annie's death he'd barely looked at another woman, and now he was lusting after a complete stranger? Muttering something in the way of a thank-you, he turned

and groped for the front door. He stumbled outside of the shop, not able to breathe freely until he was standing in the fresh air.