

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Heart of Ice

by Mia Sundby

Isabela Rhinde slumped at the bar and shakily exhaled a plume of smoke through her chapped lips.

The bartender watched her, smiling amiably. A nod of his head indicated the glass in her numb fingers as he said, "Goes down well that Inferno-whisky, doesn't it."

She tried for a weak smile, and thought she mostly succeeded. "It does."

"Rough day of work?" The bartender asked.

Isabela's lips quirked at that. She took a breath. Then another sip of the whisky, relishing the burning heat as the liquid seared down her throat.

"Yeah," she answered, glancing up at the man, "Yeah, you could say that."

He smiled again, turning to replace the glass he'd been polishing. Over his shoulder, he added, "Let me know if there's anything else I can get you."

Offering what she hoped was a friendly, well-adjusted smile, and not the lip-clenching of a battle-frayed maniac, she lifted her tumbler in a mock-salute.

For several minutes, she sat at the bar in silence, breathing out smoke from the Inferno-whisky she downed, and watching her hands slowly return to a more natural colour. The skin itself... She winced as she looked at it. She had downed a healing potion, but the skin of her hands was still blistered and peeling in some places, flayed from where she had grabbed magically-cursed ice without gloves or, well, anything to protect her.

A voice to her left startled her.

"I came as soon as I received your message." The voice told her in refined, clipped tones.

A real smile spread across her cold-battered face as she turned to see Ashir pulling out a stool beside her.

The man's mouth twisted into a friendly smirk as he seated himself. "Drinking without me, Rhinde?"

Mirroring his expression, she muttered, "I needed it, believe me."

"I don't doubt that. What happened? You look..." Ashir faltered, gesturing vaguely with his hand, his lips pursed. "Shaken."

Isabela opened her mouth, only for the bearded bartender to make his way over. She waited as Ashir ordered himself a drink.

As he lifted the delivered drink to his lips, she took a deep breath and said,

"I stole away her heart and replaced it with ice."

Ashir choked on his wine. Placing the glass back down, he turned to stare at her with wide eyes. At last, those wide eyes flicked down to the bag at her feet. They shuttered, his pale fingertips lifting to cradle his temple, as if she had struck him over the head with one of the bar stools.

His words were strained when he spoke next.

"Please don't tell me it's in there."

His exasperation warmed Isabela more than the finished tumbler of Inferno-whisky ever could have. "Of course not," she answered, in mock-horror. "It's in a jar."