

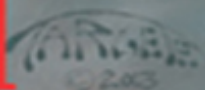
"YOU'LL LOVE THIS."

Charlaine Harris, bestselling author of *Club Dead*

KIM HARRISON

*In the Hollows,
the vampires
come out to play . . .
and it's always
witching hour*

DEAD WITCH WALKING


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“Your death is going to be a pleasure for both of us, Rachel Mariana Morgan. Such a twisted way to die—in pleasure.”

The air blurred before me, and I staggered as I realized the thing had changed again, now into a tall, sophisticated young man dressed in a formal frock and coat. Was it a vamp? A really old vampire?

“Perhaps you’re afraid of pain?” the vision of an elegant man said, its accent now proper enough for even Professor Henry Higgins. Grinning, it picked me up and threw me across the room.

My back hit the cabinet with enough force to knock the air from me. The clatter of my knife on the floor was loud as my fingers lost their grip. Struggling to breathe, I slid down the broken cabinet and was helpless as the thing lifted me by my dress front.

“What are you?” I rasped.

It smiled. “Whatever scares you.”

“A fun-fair ride through a fascinating version of our world.”

Charlaine Harris

“It isn’t easy to write a protagonist who blends qualities of Anita Blake and Stephanie Plum, but Kim Harrison carries it off with style.”

Jim Butcher

**KIM
HARRISON**

**DEAD
WITCH
WALKING**

 HarperCollins e-books

To the man who said he liked my hat.

Contents

Cover

Title Page

One

Two

Three

Four

Five

Six

Seven

Eight

Nine

Ten

Eleven

Twelve

Thirteen

Fourteen

Fifteen

Sixteen

Seventeen

Eighteen

Nineteen

Twenty

Twenty-one

Twenty-two

Twenty-three

Twenty-four

Twenty-five

Twenty-six

Twenty-seven

Twenty-eight

Twenty-nine

Thirty

Thirty-one

Thirty-two

Thirty-three

Thirty-four

Acknowledgements

About the Author

Copyright

About the Publisher

One

I stood in the shadows of a deserted shop front across from The Blood and Brew Pub, trying not to be obvious as I tugged my black leather pants back up where they belonged. *This is pathetic*, I thought, eyeing the rain-emptied street. I was way too good for this.

Apprehending unlicensed and black-art witches was my usual line of work, as it takes a witch to catch a witch. But the streets were quieter than usual this week. Everyone who could make it was at the West Coast for our yearly convention, leaving me with this gem of a run. A simple snag and drag. It was just the luck of the Turn that had put me here in the dark and rain.

“Who am I kidding?” I whispered, pulling the strap of my bag farther up my shoulder. I hadn’t been sent to tag a witch in a month: unlicensed, white, dark, or otherwise. Bringing the mayor’s son in for Wereing outside of a full moon probably hadn’t been the best idea.

A sleek car turned the corner, looking black in the buzz of the mercury street lamp. This was its third time around the block. A grimace tightened my face as it approached, slowing. “Damn it,” I whispered. “I need a darker door front.”

“He thinks you’re a hooker, Rachel,” my backup snickered into my ear. “I told you the red halter was slutty.”

“Anyone ever tell you that you smell like a drunk bat, Jenks?” I muttered, my lips barely moving. Backup was unsettlingly close tonight, having perched himself on my earring. Big dangling thing—the earring, not the pixy. I’d found Jenks to be a pretentious snot

with a bad attitude and a temper to match. But he knew what side of the garden his nectar came from. And apparently pixies were the best they'd let me take out since the frog incident. I would have sworn fairies were too big to fit into a frog's mouth.

I eased forward to the curb as the car squished to a wet asphalt halt. There was the whine of an automatic window as the tinted glass dropped. I leaned down, smiling my prettiest as I flashed my work ID. Mr. One Eyebrow's leer vanished and his face went ashen. The car lurched into motion with a tiny squeak of tires. "Day-tripper," I said in disdain. *No*, I thought in a flash of chastisement. He was a norm, a human. Even if they were accurate, the terms daytripper, domestic, squish, off-the-rack, and my personal favorite, snack, were politically frowned upon. But if he was picking strays up off the sidewalk in the Hollows, one might call him dead.

The car never slowed as it went through a red light, and I turned at the catcalls from the hookers I had displaced about sunset. They weren't happy, standing brazenly on the corner across from me. I gave them a little wave, and the tallest flipped me off before spinning to show me her tiny, spellenhanced rear. The hooker and her distinctly husky-looking "friend" talked loudly as they tried to hide the cigarette they were passing between each other. It didn't smell like your usual tobacco. *Not my problem, tonight*, I thought, moving back into my shadow.

I leaned against the cold stone of the building, my gaze lingering on the red taillights of the car as it braked. Brow furrowed, I glanced at myself. I was tall for a woman—about five-eight—but not nearly as leggy as the hooker in the next puddle of light over. I wasn't wearing as much makeup as she was, either. Narrow hips and a chest that was almost flat didn't exactly make me streetwalker material. Before I found the leprechaun outlets, I had shopped in the "your first bra" aisle. It's hard finding something without hearts and unicorns on it there.

My ancestors had immigrated to the good old U.S. of A. in the 1800s. Somehow through the generations, the women all managed to retain the distinct red hair and green eyes of our Irish homeland.

My freckles, though, are hidden under a spell my dad bought me for my thirteenth birthday. He had the tiny amulet put into a pinky ring. I never leave home without it.

A sigh slipped from me as I tugged my bag back up onto my shoulder. The leather pants, red ankle boots, and the spaghetti strap halter weren't too far from what I usually wore on casual Fridays to tick off my boss, but put them on a street corner at night..."Crap," I muttered to Jenks. "I look like a hooker."

His only response was a snort. I forced myself not to react as I turned back to the bar. It was too rainy for the early crowd, and apart from my backup and the "ladies" down the way, the street was empty. I'd been standing out here nearly an hour with no sign of my mark. I might as well go in and wait. Besides, if I were inside, I might look like a solicitee rather than a solicitor.

Taking a resolute breath, I pulled a few strands of my shoulder-length curls from my topknot, took a moment to arrange it artfully to fall about my face, and finally spit out my gum. The click of my boots made a snappy counterpoint to the jangling of the handcuffs pinned to my hip as I strode across the wet street and into the bar. The steel rings looked like a tawdry prop, but they were real and very well-used. I winced. No wonder Mr. One Eyebrow had stopped. Used for *work*, thank you, and not the kind you're thinking of.

Still, I'd been sent to the Hollows in the rain to collar a leprechaun for tax evasion. How much lower, I wondered, could I sink? It must have been from tagging that Seeing Eye dog last week. How was I supposed to know it wasn't a werewolf? It matched the description I'd been given.

As I stood in the narrow foyer shaking off the damp, I ran my gaze over the typical Irish bar crap: long-stemmed pipes stuck to the walls, green-beer signs, black vinyl seats, and a tiny stage where a wannabe-star was setting up his dulcimers and bagpipes amid a tower of amps. There was a whiff of contraband Brimstone. My predatory instincts stirred. It smelled three days old, not strong