

# **Hellcursed**

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Author's note:

*Hellcursed* is a companion short story to my urban fantasy novel SHADOWFAE, about a succubus, Jade, who's in thrall to a demon lord for a thousand years.

You don't need to read *Hellcursed* to understand the novel. And *Hellcursed* has an historical setting, where SHADOWFAE is contemporary. So please don't be misled into thinking the novel is an historical.

But I think *Hellcursed* is an intriguing (and sexy!) little introduction. Especially if you're wondering how Jade ended up in thrall to a demon in the first place.

And when you're finished, you can read on for an exclusive preview of SHADOWFAE. Hope you enjoy it.

Hellcursed

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Excerpt from Shadowfae

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## **Hellcursed**

My new master stared at me, ash drifting from his golden hair. I shivered. Even for a demon lord, Kane was creepy.

No smile on his crimson lips, his black eyes scorching with promise and power, he reclined on the sunken lounge, elegant in black silk. Idle scarlet flame flickered between his fingers, throwing eerie shadows on the marble palace wall, and the air thickened with his delicious scent of thunder. "Will you sit with me?"

"Not a chance." I tugged at my bodice, flushing. My torn blue gown had been to hell and back—literally—and no longer covered me properly. Sultry midnight breeze drifted into Kane's bedroom from the wide stone courtyard, but I didn't feel warm. Silken drapes masked the ceiling. Opium smoke drifted like ghostly dragons between green-tiled columns, stinging my nose like acid.

Kane's soft voice grated like metal. "Sit down, Jade."

I crossed my arms, satin sleeves ragged, and opened my mouth to tell him to go back to hell.

But I didn't.

I couldn't.

My voice jammed in my throat like a cork. The golden hellbangles he'd clamped on my wrists last night buzzed and scorched like angry wasps. Bumps rippled my skin, and compulsion spread in my veins, dark like lust, ashen stink clogging my nostrils. My pulse thudded. Heat flushed my belly, a lover's sly caress, and I burned inside. His will effortlessly overpowered mine. I wanted to sit down. I *needed* to. If I didn't, I'd scream, or claw my eyes out.

Or die.

My leg muscles dissolved to water, and I crumpled to the green satin divan, magical nausea gnashing in my intestines around a core of hot, undeniable need. As my thighs hit the cushions, pleasure broke within me, tiny but definite, gentle waves of sweet contentment that I'd obeyed him.

And that was my first glimpse of the life I'd made.

Succubus. Soulthief. Hellbitch. Demon's thrall-slut. Those epithets still lay in my future. But my thrall had already begun.

Yesterday, I was a different kind of prisoner, slave to my own foolishness, chained in a rusty dungeon by the sorcerer who'd pretended to love me. But last night, my treacherous captor gambled with Kane, and lost. I was the prize. And now Kane owned me.

At least, that's what Kane thought. We'd see about that.

He leaned his head on one jeweled wrist, blond locks tumbling. His black silken shirt and trousers drew my eye to his body's tempting curves, the glimpse of smooth demon skin where his collar fell open, the hard line inside his thigh where I could run my fingers, taste his skin, let my tongue explore....

He waited for me to catch his eye, and smiled faintly, hot blue sparks crackling in his hair. "Do you see?"

My palms itched, yearning for the hardness of his chest, his golden hair's soft crush, the smoothness of his naked skin. I flushed, and tidied my dirty brown ringlets, irrational warmth filling me. Oh, I saw, all right. With his gentle cheekbones and soft mouth and altarboy hair, he wasn't even to my taste. He

was enchanting me with these cursed magic bangles, filling me with lust not my own to make me obey him.

I gave him my fiercest scowl, practiced for years in brothels and taverns. "Don't ever do that again."

Distaste swirled scarlet in his eyes. "Don't order me, Jade. It doesn't make you pretty. You will do as I desire. You must."

My hungry gaze fixed on his lips, watching them move. I imagined them brushing my throat, kissing me, his hot tongue licking at my pulse.... With an effort, I scrambled away across the cushions, my body burning inside. My torn dress rasped across my suddenly sensitive skin. My nipples ached. If he grabbed me, I'd let him. "Get out of my head. I didn't ask for this. Leave me be!"

He didn't grab me. Didn't move. Just lay there, luscious black silk and golden locks and dark stormy scent. "Too late for that. The bangles are part of you now. It's called *rapture*. Rapture is your power, so don't deny it. Learn to use it, and no one will be able to resist you."

My bangles tingled again at his commands, rippling hot sensation through my veins. Everything he said, every offhand order he gave, I burned to obey.

Horror crawled in my blood. My vision crackled around the edges like melting wax. I wanted to scream, to claw his face bloody, to climb onto him and crush his velvet hair in my fist and take what my body craved.

I scrabbled back, shaking. "No one owns me, demon. I'd rather die than submit to you."

"Don't pretend. If I wanted you, you couldn't stop me." Ice crystals crackled in his hair, his black eyes glinting a dangerous blue. "If I said the word, you'd beg."

I fell backwards off the divan, cracking my knees on hard stone, torn ringlets falling in my face. Fury rippled my lust harder. I fought to my feet, threadbare blue skirts tripping me, and spat at him, moisture darkening the satin cushions. "Don't count on it," I snarled, and stalked out.

The door slammed behind me, so hard it bounced open again, but I didn't stop. He didn't speak. Didn't call me back. But I could feel his devilblack gaze on me, his filthy hellmagic inside me, raping me, making me ache, and as I stalked out of earshot, I swear I heard him laugh.

Polished granite pillars glared in my eyes as I strode past beneath a gilded dome ceiling. I glanced down at my new golden bangles and muttered a rancid curse I'd learned from Luna, that treacherous sorcerer who'd gambled me away. The bangles wouldn't come off. I'd already tried. Latin words were carved on them in spidery letters, but the inscription made no sense. If it was a spell, I couldn't break it.

The metal whispered back at me, sneering like an evil parasite. Rapture, Kane had called it. Very well. Do your worst, demon. We'd see who enraptured whom.

I marched out, pebbled mosaics warm beneath my bruised feet, into the moonlit palace courtyard, where only a few years ago Ottoman courtiers schemed and plotted and poisoned their lovers, and magicians had played pipes to sneaky serpents and stuffed amorous djinni into old brass lamps. Almost abandoned, now, the Sultan's court gone across the Horn to the new palace, leaving behind old ways and older magic. The perfect hiding place for the real ruler of Constantinople. And I'd be damned if I'd return to it—or to him—ever again.

I hadn't yet realized I was damned no matter what I did.

Hot summer breeze fingered my hair as I turned the corner beneath the tall entrance arch. A green fairy girl giggled at me, swinging by one elbow from an iron rail above my head, silver glitter puffing from her wings. Glamour crackled the air around her, the lying fairy magic that hid her from superstitious eyes. It didn't fool me. I'd had my eyes opened to the dangerous fae world long ago.

And now I was part of it. Hellslave. Demon's whore.

I shook my head, determined. No man owned me. Not Luna, my beautiful and deceitful lover. Certainly not this

guileless demon lord, with his irritating, oversexed choirboy looks and cruel sense of humor.

A pair of bearded scholars in robes sidled past me, dark eyes disapproving of the rude English girl in showy blue silk, flaunting bare shoulders and showing her ankles beneath torn skirts. I scowled back. A muttering spriggan crabwalked along behind them like a fat black toad, her thick wiry hair sticking up, her leathery fingers gleaming as she reached stealthily for their purses. Glamour coated her, too, a sly overlay of *don't see me* and *nothing strange here* and *just a dirty urchin*.

Stars glittered too bright, and heat flushed me as I walked the cobbled streets. I fanned myself irritably, silk sleeves billowing. But I couldn't cool down. The warmth in my belly wouldn't ease.

Uncomfortable slickness stained my drawers. My head whirled, featherlight, and I weaved, steadying myself against the wall. I needed a drink. They didn't imbibe, these Ottomans, but in a city full of expatriates and infidels, prohibition was useless. I knew exactly where to go. My favorite bar, complete with luscious male dancers and snake charmers and glowing fairy wine.

But by the time I got there, down a shadowy alley rich with the stink of piss and rancid meat, I'd forgotten alcohol. Those rotten bangles ripped at my skin like teeth, and no matter how I tugged at them, they wouldn't come free.

My body was on fire, my pulse sprinting, fevered breath searing my lungs. Jagged thirst parched my throat. My sex swelled so thick it hurt to walk, every slide of flesh on wet flesh both a relief and an agony. My breasts hurt, my nipples raw and longing for fingers, a mouth, anything. My every muscle ached with need for a man. As if inside me, some hideous little lust-demon crouched, licking me with his tiny forked tongue, stroking my flesh to abandon and senseless need.

And real hunger tore at my guts, too. I craved sustenance. I longed to gorge myself, eat until I died, meat, gravy, the saltiness of flesh.

What was happening to me? My head swam, starved of blood. Fever swamped me. Heat blurred my vision. Sweat streamed down my face, soaked my sleeves, slicked my legs. My knees buckled, and against a greasy wall I fell, breathless and quivering with lust.

The rough bricks pulled threads from my silk. I didn't care. I tore at my hair, scrabbled at my bodice, burning to rip it away and rake my nails over my swollen nipples. I pressed my legs together, but it didn't help. I hungered for a man's touch, his body crushing me, his hot hardness ramming inside me until I shattered. I'd had plenty of men in my time. I'd never needed one so desperately as I needed it now. What foul spell was this?

Wild, I clawed my skirts up and thrust my hand between my legs, tearing my soaked drawers away. Hot slickness coated my hand, so welcome. My swollen flesh flowered in my fingers, deep pleasure ravaging my sense. I groaned and pressed harder, faster, but it wasn't enough. Never enough.

I screamed and banged my head back against the bricks, sweat droplets showering. Kane had done this. Rapture. It was unbearable.

I scraped the horrid bangles into the wall, grating them over and over until my wrists bled, but the scorching heat they spilled into my body wouldn't stop. The nasty creature inside my womb giggled and stretched, stroking my flesh faster, harder.

An oriental fiddle wailed, echoing my whimpering, and the smells of roasting goat and cumin overlaid with wine forced greedy spit into my mouth. The dark alley smothered me, cracked walls shuddering, threatening. The air around me shimmered like a heat haze with some vile spell, and as I stumbled through the liquor den's creaking door, I clung to a sharp wire of hope that this horrid demon magic would cloak me invisible and no one would see.

Heads lifted as soon as I opened the door. Hashish smoke swirled, lampflames stretching in the breeze of my entry. Drunken eyes, focusing on me in dark blurs of desire. Slow hot



stares, drinking me in, sliding over me like lustful fingers. Lips parting, breaths sharply drawn, the sweet glint of a vampire's fang, the air thick with pulsing blood and body heat, the soft beat of swollen fairy wings and the rich smell of male sweat. Even dark-eyed Iriyo and his rainbow-skinned dancers were thrown off balance, the musicians missing a beat or two.

Confusion eddied in my mind. I was young and slim, but I wasn't every man's fantasy. At least, I never used to be. So much for no one noticing. Whatever glamour my new bangles were coating me in, it wasn't saying *go away*.

I cast my gaze around, and the air ignited, rippling with lustful hellcharms. My blood throbbed harder, and defiance seared my heart. To hell with it. Let them look. I needed to sate my hunger, right now.

I strode to the centre of the floor, stretched my arms to heaven, and danced.

Wailing snake music, the zither's drone pulsating beneath undulating fiddle melodies that stretched and tore. Pulsating drums vibrated my lungs. I closed my eyes, letting the music stroke me, hot breeze caressing my silken dress over my skin. My damp hair trailed over my shoulders as I tossed my head, swung my hips, curved my spine in delight. Pleasure throbbed deep inside me. I dragged my hands up my thighs, pulling my skirt higher, and the air zapped with malicious hellmagic that smelled of thunder.

A smile curled my lips, impulsive. Rapture, the demon called it, and it felt so good I wanted to purr.

Velvety male skin pressed against my half-bare back, damp with sweet fairy sweat, the heady smells of cloves and lemon enticing me. Long brown fingers with one too many knuckles slid wet hair away from my neck, his teasing claws tempting my skin into bumps.

His deep voice vibrated my ear with a smile. "Without your keeper tonight, little cat? Wherever have you been?"

I swallowed a groan. Iriyo. Firefairy dancer, trickster,

whore, dangerously charming with those wild dark eyes and bronze skin and sleek golden wings licked with flame. Luscious plum lips, too, and his costume always left him naked to the hips, those magnificent fairy muscles on show beneath long coalblack hair. Eyed me off all the time, probably only because he knew he couldn't have me. Like all of them, too deathly afraid of my lover to lay a finger on me.

Not any more. Not now Luna had dumped me. Not with this demon magic coating me in cosmic come-hither.

I leaned back, swaying with the music, rubbing my bare shoulders against his hard fae chest, skin on skin. His touch awakened dark excitement deep in my spelldrunk body. Our glammers meshed, mingled, dark twists of my new magic creeping around him, fingering his skin, his hair, sliding into his breath.

His long black hair tumbled over the tops of my breasts, his delicious spicy scent filling me. He slid those long, tempting hands over my hips, flames curling out to caress me. He was already hard, that luscious twist of hot fairy flesh pressing into the base of my spine, and my limbs trembled with anticipation.

"I'm here now," I whispered, and my body thrummed like the zither's strings, taut and ready.

I let my head fall back, turning my face up to a rain of dusty golden wing glitter. The scent of his sweat watered my mouth. His heartbeat throbbed through me as he moved his body against mine, sinew and tendon and muscle, his long thighs hot even through my skirts. My nipples swelled, a deep ache stabbing through my breasts all the way down between my legs.

Iriyo nuzzled my throat, sizzles of hot fairy tongue and clove-scented breath, a glint of razor white teeth. His wings fanned spicy heat over us. "You're stunning, Jadey-cat. You look different tonight. All hot and juicy-delicious-woman. Mmm. What happened? That nasty warlock of yours let you escape?"

"Something like that." I slid my hand between us to feel his hardness under my palm. My lungs squeezed tight, forcing my breath away. So long and taut and swollen beneath his thin trousers, his twisted fairy shape strange but oh, so enticing. I imagined how he'd feel deep inside me, and my fingers curled all by themselves, stroking, folding possessively around him.

He snarled softly at my touch, his whole body tightening against mine, melting us together in the coiling rhythm of our dance.

I gasped, my skin alight with desire, the creature inside me moaning for sex. Muscles deep inside me clenched, desperate for something to wrap around. Wetness slicked out onto my thighs, every movement an agony of flesh on flesh. Sweet Satan's blood, I wanted him.

"Are you sure you're alone, little cat?" Urgency rumbled taut in his voice, his hands already hungry on my bodice, my belly, sliding down my thighs to drag my skirt higher. His slanted cheekbone slicked on mine as he nuzzled my cheek, his sharp nose twitching.

"Oh, yes." My voice husked, throaty with need. He needn't be afraid. Luna had abandoned me. Kane didn't care about me. And the starving monster gnawing in my belly screamed at me to move, touch, fuck.

Music howled in my ears, faster, louder. My blood scorched me feverish, my breath searing my mouth. Hot blood dimmed my vision scarlet. My pulse throbbed so hard it hurt, in my throat, my thighs, my sex. If I didn't get him inside me soon, I'd melt in a puddle of fever. I'd never felt like this. Never.

My breath dragged away, raw, weakening my voice to a whisper. "Oh, yes. I'm alone."

Iriyo dug sharp fingers into my trembling thighs, pulling me onto him. His wicked teeth stung my ear, a shock of sensation that tugged my nipples taut. "Good," he breathed, sparks sizzling my skin. "Because I'm going to fuck you until you can't remember your name."

And he wrapped me in sinewy brown arms and swirled me away, dizzy off my feet in a twist of fiery male scent and smoke. A dusty leather curtain, a dim wooden space lit with drug-sweet candles. The room where he whored, where he'd likely pleased dozens of sex-starved clients—not just the ladies, either—with that long pointed tongue and impressive cock of his. I didn't care. Tonight, he was all mine. Every hard, luscious inch of him.

He slammed my back against the rough wooden wall in a shower of flaming purple glitter and crushed my mouth with his.

Not gentle, not sweet or careful but demanding, lusty, his muscular fairy tongue claiming my mouth as his territory. His dark lips slid over mine, so taut and swollen they might burst into my mouth like cherry plums. His clovy taste intoxicated me. Our tongues mingled, famished.

I moaned into his mouth, shuddering. He felt so good. I wanted to swallow him, bite his skin, drop to my knees and undress him and slide his swollen cock between my lips, suck and swallow until nothing was left.

The hungry beast inside me longed to eat him, and I couldn't help but feed it.

I grabbed that silken black hair and pulled him in harder. He murmured and moaned, his wet lips slipping on mine. I wrapped my thigh around his, begging for contact, and he shoved my skirt up to my hip, his fingers hungry on my skin. I rubbed my palms over his odd-shaped fairy chest, feeling those tight curves of muscle, slippery with smoky sweat. He broke my bodice open one-handed, the wire hooks ripping from the silk. I gasped. My breasts swelled in freedom, and he tore away from kissing me to suck first one nipple and then the other deep into his mouth.

Pleasure lanced straight to my sex, sending my legs weak. If he touched me there I'd explode. But no time for foreplay. I wanted to fuck. I dragged his head up, and his hot dark eyes locked on mine for the first time. Possessive, lustful, dark

cinnamon lashes dusted with glitter, his gaze smoking with raw need for me.

My breath caught. Our glammers sizzled together, fighting. The air crackled with sparks and brittle spellwork. My womb cramped, painful but delicious, and the rapture beast inside snarled and dived with razor teeth bared.

Iriyo's eyes darkened, swamped with hellish compulsion, and I knew he was in my power. Victory sizzled in my blood, and I reveled in it.

I smiled a sultry, rapture-drenched smile, and my voice came out a triumphant purr. "Take me, Iriyo. Now."

His skin flushed darker. He grabbed my waist, tossed me on his bed and lighted on top of me, golden wings twitching. Fairy-light, his body, lighter than all those muscles could possibly be, but his weight delighted me, pressed me into the thin cushions.

His hair spilled over my face, drenching me in the dark scent of cloves. I gripped the cushions in shaking fingers and spread my thighs, inviting. He pulled up my skirts and sank flame-wrapped fingers into my wet flesh.

Pleasure scorched my nerves as he forced inside. My muscles felt tight and swollen. His thumb stroked my most delicate spot, my tender nub straining from its swollen hood to meet his touch, and I moaned and wriggled, the monster in me wanting more, harder, deeper.

I imagined his long tongue curling inside me, licking me, teasing my flesh to ecstasy. My flesh throbbed, and I longed to drag his head down between my legs so he could feast on me. But the rapture didn't want that. It wanted his cock, the brutal force of his thrusts, the flooding heat as he came inside me. And its will was far stronger than mine.

I whimpered, my voice sounding all by itself. "No, not that. Please, just fuck me."

"With pleasure." His beautiful dark eyes burned golden, and he pulled his fingers away to drag my thigh around his, pulling

my ripped drawers apart. Desperate, I fumbled between us for his sash, ripping the cloth in my haste. His cock burst free, long and thick and fragrant, and sweet Satan, he was big. Fairies always were. My sex tightened in anticipation, and before I could shift or prepare myself he gripped my ass in delicious claws and rammed his massive length deep into me.

Pleasure slammed into me, hot and wonderful. I was so ready he slid in perfectly, all of him, deep and forceful, the feeling so intense I cried out. Nerves tingled along my thighs, already tightening them for release. My rapture-beast howled in excitement as our sweat mingled. Iriyo thrust again, harder, more. His smoking hair brushed my face, his dark plum lips breathless on mine, filling me with his dark spicy flavor. His eyes fluttered closed as he moved, long lashes dusting damp glitter on his cheeks. His breath shortened, muscles bunching in his arms. "You torment me, little cat... You're so tight and pretty and... Oh, fuck." He rode me harder, faster, his body already losing control.

I wrapped my legs around him, tilting my hips up to him to force him deeper. Damn, he felt good, so tight and hard like hot stone, rubbing me roughly deep inside in exactly the right place. He nuzzled my breasts, licking and nibbling at my rock-hard nipples. Pleasure scarred my flesh like hot iron, tension building.

My rapture moaned, over and over, echoing my own desperate sounds. Wildly, I clawed at his narrow back, carving my nails in deep, fumbling for the sensitive flesh where his wings met his shoulders and massaging it. "Harder. Now. I can't wait."

His wings quivered, sparks showering, and he groaned, low and sultry. "Come on me. I want it." His breath slicked my shoulder as he rammed into me over and over, plunging faster and harder until my muscles quivered deep inside and orgasm broke over me. Hot delight flooded to my deepest nerves. My nipples twinged tight. Mindless sounds forced from my lips as my body shuddered with incredible pleasure, over and over,

my muscles clenching like a fist around his thrusting cock, sensation burning my blood until I thought it wouldn't ever end.

Iriyo shuddered and gasped. "So hot. I can't—" And he pushed into me one last time and broke, jetting into me with pleasure so scorching and full that I came again just feeling his body jerk into mine.

My whole body sighed, in delight and sweet relief, as the spasms faded and I struggled to catch my breath. I felt like laughing. My rapture crowed, thrashing inside me in delight, and I wanted to do the same. My skin still tingled like stardust with excitement and the slick sugar of his sweat. Energy raced inside me like quicksilver, quickening my nerves, plumping my skin, bleeding life into my tired muscles. My mind whirled, exhilarating, a million thoughts spinning by in my consciousness. My scalp prickled, alive. If rapture meant fantastic sex like that, maybe it wouldn't be so bad.

A sigh escaped Iriyo's lips, and he relaxed, shuddering. I wriggled aside, panting, giving a whimper of disappointment as his delicious cock slipped out of me for now. His head rested on my shoulder, limp, gold-dusted black hair flowing over my exposed breasts. His wings fluttered and lay still, his pretty flames hissing out.

I gave a lazy smile, stretching my arms out with a pleased sigh. "Wear you out already, lover? I hope not. Jade, see? I still remember."

He didn't answer.

I giggled. "Don't be shy. It was a good start. We can do better, I'm sure."

He still didn't speak. Didn't move.

A minute ago he'd gasped for air, his sweet breath stolen by our pleasure. Now, his chest didn't rise.

Unease stoppered my throat. Gingerly I touched his neck. Warm, smooth, damp. He didn't twitch. I slid my finger lower, into the curve of his throat where golden veins threaded under

taut bronze skin.

No pulse.

My rapture snickered.

I scrambled off the bed, my heart thudding.

He slumped to the side, his golden wings fading limply on the cushions, and when I saw his eyes I screamed.

Wide. Staring. Unmoving. Drained of color, their rich darkness bleached to pale grey.

My golden hellbangles screeched and buzzed in triumph, and the beast within me sank ravenous jaws into a struggling, thrashing thing whose fight grew ever weaker.

Ice speared into my blood, and my legs wouldn't move. My hands shook. I crouched by the bed, staring, scrabbling weakly at my skirts. Our mingled fluids still spilled hot over my thighs. My flesh still twitched from his cock. Now he was dead. Wicked, harmless firefairy. Dead. From coupling with me. And my rapture fed on his energy.

Horror clawed my throat. I was eating his soul, and his body wasn't even cold. And killing him had felt so damned good....

Bile frothed in my guts, and my stomach heaved. Guilt scraped me raw, the sting sparking fresh tingles under my skin. But I didn't have time to vomit, or think. If Iriyo's pimps found me here, they'd take out their loss in trade. I'd already made too much of a spectacle of myself. I dragged a shaking hand over my mouth, stumbled to my feet and ran out, vile spasms of pleasure and lust still warming my belly.

The door slammed behind me, severing the sinuous music like an axe. Outside, the moon glared cruel and white, reproachful, the cobblestones too bright. The warm air chilled my fevered skin, and I clutched my broken bodice together over my breasts as I ran, past broken alleys and deserted buildings and vagrants burning piles of stinking refuse. I didn't care where. I just ran.

My rapture muttered and chewed on Iriyo's bloody



soulflesh, and remnants of my hateful demonwrought glamour hissed and crackled around me, the magic foul on my skin like dirt. In the gutter, a filthy green spriggan rolled and laughed at me, coarse hair knotting in her eyes.

I hurtled around a corner where the marketplace was already setting up for the morning, fishmongers and bakers and gold merchants unpacking their stalls. A vampire girl snarled at me, her breath foul, amber eyes gleaming from her headscarf. I recoiled and crashed into a money changer, sending bundled coins tinkling and rolling on the cobbles. He shoved me and snarled abuse, sleeves flying. I didn't stop. From everywhere, eyes followed me, glaring like cruel beacons, accusing.

At last I reached the waterfront, where warm salty breeze cleaned the air and torchlit barges glittered over the water. I crouched beside a pile of empty crabpots, the stink horrid but welcome. At least it sloughed the smell of dead Iriyo off me.

I crushed my knees to my chest, shivering. I could still taste him, that delicious fairy flavor. I could still feel his hands on me, his swelling lips on my throat, his hardness stroking me inside. I'd tricked him with my evil spells, and he'd died for his trouble. What did that make me?

Hellslut. Temptress. Murderer.

Would this happen every time? Was I doomed to kill those I coupled with? Spend my life in eternal agony, my body screaming for sex, unable to have what it craved?

A howl broke from my lips, scraping my throat raw with misery. Tears scorched my cheeks. But the rapture-beast stretched like a sleepy lioness, sated, soulblood dripping hot from its jaws. My bangles hummed in demonic satisfaction, and vibration stroked my skin to arousal, sweet and horrible.

Shaking, I tore at the horrid gold until my nails ripped bloody. The bangles wouldn't come off. The metal gleamed smugly at me, stained with sweat and blood and stolen fairy glitter.

I'd seduced Luna, the sorcerer, because I'd wanted demonic powers, to spite the world and everyone in it who despised and threatened me.

Well, now I had them.

Tricked.

Cursed.

Damned.

I wrapped my torn skirts around my legs and huddled there, shivering, until my master came for me.

Gulls croaked and circled, and scarlet sunrise flashed on the water before he appeared, his shadow long and lean on the gritty stones. I gazed up at him, empty, my tears long since exhausted. Flowing black silk, jeweled rings, a curl of hellsmoke hissing from his nails. Ash coated his golden hair. His soft red mouth held no disgust, no shame or malice. A beautiful, emotionless creature of hell. Deep inside, my rapture purred.

Kane crouched before me in the dirt, resting his wrists on one elegant thigh. "Do you see?"

As if our conversation hadn't been interrupted. His delicious stormy scent sickened me. I swallowed, rubbing my arms. "How long?"

"A thousand years." Fact. No sorrow or regret in his guileless eyes. No delight in my misfortune. No escape, either.

Nausea slimed my guts. "Will I grow old?"

"No."

"And then what? Will I die?"

Kane shrugged faintly. "That's what mortals do."

I swallowed again. "Can I ever ... without killing?"

"You'll learn." He stood and held his hand out to me, waiting.

My rapture sighed and reached out, yearning for home. But denial chewed at my bones like a corpse rat, and I cowered against the wall, hiding my face, dreading that he'd say the words so I couldn't refuse. "No. I can't. Go away."

Leave me be, demon lord. Just for a moment. Let me pretend this isn't happening for just a little longer.

"Jade. Look at me, Jade."

I dragged my hair over my face, resisting. But my bangles scorched, and invisible strings of compulsion yanked my head up.

Crimson flame flickered in his hair, and his eyes glowed blue. "Understand. You have power over men's souls. They see what you want them to see. They feel the desire you want them to feel. Your enemies are in your power. You can corrupt any man you wish. *Any* man. Do you understand?"

For a moment, I didn't. I thought Kane was just trying to tempt me. He was a demon, after all.

But I was a demon's minion now. A succubus. Normal rules no longer applied to me. And there was one man I truly, desperately wanted to destroy. Whose face in my mind made me burn for revenge, the blackness of his soul making even me sick with envy and disgust.

Luna. I imagined him beneath me on his bed, blond hair spilling on red satin, his perfect body slick with sweat. His hardness deep inside me, thrusting as he came. His soul torn apart by my screeching rapture. Beautiful amber-green eyes fading. Dead. Damned. Screaming in hell forever.

Nerves tingled between my legs. My rapture coiled, murmuring sweet seduction, and I licked my lips, my mouth suddenly parched.

A master of temptation, my demon lord.

A sly red smile touched Kane's perfect lips, and he held out his hand again. "Would you like to get up, now, Jade?"

Satisfaction slid my own smile across my face, and without hesitation, I took his hand.

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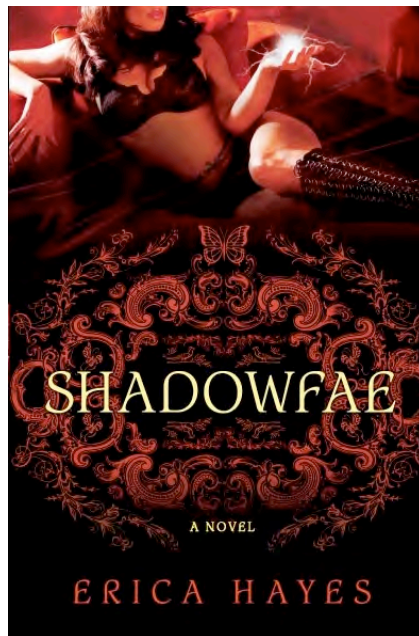
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**"SHADOWFAE is a mind-bending blast into a darkness that enfolds and ensnares you from the first page...Pure magic from the word go."**

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Imagine a secret world veiled in fairy glamour and brimming with unearthly delights. A city swarming with half-mad fairies, where thieving spriggans rob you blind, beautiful banshees mesmerize you with their song, and big green trolls bust heads at nightclubs. And once you're in, there's no escape...



Enslaved by a demon lord, Jade is forced to spend her nights seducing vampire gangsters and shapeshifting thugs. After two hundred years as a succubus, she burns for freedom and longs to escape her brutal life as a trophy girl for hell's minions. Then she meets Rajah, an incubus who touches her heart and intoxicates her senses. Rajah shares the same bleak fate as she, and yearns just as desperately for freedom. But the only way for Jade to break her bonds is to betray Rajah—and doom the only man she's ever loved to a lifetime in hell.

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# Shadowfae

## Chapter One

The dark shape in the bed didn't stir. I trailed tingling fingers over silken sheets, carpet soft and luxurious beneath my feet. I inhaled crisp male cologne and sweat, and it made me drunk with excitement. The French window lay open, city lights glittering beyond, citrus summer breeze teasing the pale lace curtains. They drifted over me like a lover's sweet touch, and I burned. If I didn't have this man soon, I'd spend the night sick and sorry. And I didn't even know who he was.

Sometimes I feel so cheap.

My demon lord, Kane, calls it *rapture*. Our victims, if they live long enough, call it the sexiest thing they've ever seen, which of course is the point. It's easier to suck out someone's soul if their attention is elsewhere. Only problem is, it's the succubus equivalent of a raging hard-on, and frankly, it's humiliating to slaver like a sex-starved ghoul over some fat chauvinist gangster or unwashed backroom drug dealer just because they were foolish enough to cross Kane and his charming minions, the Valenti crime family.

But it's my job. I'm in thrall to Kane for a thousand years. I was just glad no one could see me this time.

I crawled toward him, arousing my scent so it drifted over him like a sweet cloud. The sheet slid off his massive shoulder,

baring his chest, and I bent to sniff his stubbled throat, my hair brushing his face.

He didn't stir.

The dark smell of his skin made me moan, and I slid my tongue along his warm collarbone, desperate to taste him. My breasts ached as I pressed into him, only my thin tank top separating us.

He didn't even twitch.

I dragged my fingers through his lank fair hair, and his head fell sideways, limp, no breath forcing from his slack mouth.

My racing heart missed a beat. I fumbled on the bedside table, switching on the dim lamp. His hard features lay softened in death, his tanned skin already pale.

I stared. I knew that blond ponytail, that unforgiving mouth, those rigid gym-built muscles. I'd danced with him, dined with him on amatriciana and red wine at Valentino's, peeled his big hands off my ass more than once. Nino Valenti. Gangster, extortionist, multiple murderer. Ange Valenti's right-hand man.

Kane had sent me to kill one of his own minions. And Nino was already dead. His glazed eyes shone vacant, colorless, their once-steady blue drained. No blood, no vomit or marks on his body. It wasn't a typical mob murder. He wasn't drugged, shot, strangled, fae-poisoned. Someone had sucked out his soul. They'd beaten me to it.

What the hell?

I sat up on my knees, my chest heaving, frustrated desire radiating off me like sultry summer heat. Dead. But still fragrant, still warm. Which meant ...

My back thudded into the soft mattress, the weight of a hard male body between my legs pressing me down. Strong hands grasped my wrists, trapping them above my head, strands of my hair pulling in their grip.

"Wrong place, wrong time, sweetheart." The voice was low,

breathless, a hint of exotic Hindi accent. I glimpsed dark tangled hair, a flash of golden-brown eyes, fragrant brown skin. Fresh desire burned over me, my urgent breath searing my throat, my entire body straining, yearning for sex.

Sweat trickled on my skin, running into my hair and dampening my hands. I couldn't believe this. Of all that could possibly happen to me this evening, I'd never imagined I'd end up panting with lust under Rajahni Seth.

Not that Rajah wasn't worthy of some serious panting, along with a scream and an *oh, god* or two. He was the kind of incubus who didn't need the rapture to get his victims begging for him. I'd never even spoken to him before. The words *out of my league* didn't even approximate.

The words *you killed Nino Valenti*, however, did.

"Get off me!" I kicked, wriggling, but succeeded only in pressing him tighter between my legs, my thin skirt rucking up to the tops of my thighs. He wore no shirt, and in the lamplight, his taut brown skin glistened, sweat running on curving muscles.

He twisted his dark head back a little so he could see me, wet dark strands falling in his face. Sexual energy glimmered off him in waves like a heat haze, his eyes glowing with desire, his ripe lips parted and slick. His magic didn't affect me, of course. An incubus's rapture doesn't work on succubi—or vice versa, for that matter. But I was worked up enough already, and likewise I couldn't imagine the smoldering need in his eyes and the deliciously hard bulge pressing into my crotch had anything to do with me.

"Jade?" His sinful lips formed my name, caressing it like a kiss. "Kane's Jade?"

He recognized me. My mouth watered. God, I hoped I had underwear on, or I'd make a mess of his jeans. Then again, if I wasn't wearing any, I could unzip him, squeeze myself onto him and do something about this wasted rapture that made me ache.



Of its own accord, my leg wrapped itself around his thighs, straining, pleasure flowering at the pressure. "Well spotted, genius. You gonna get off me?"

His fingers tightened on my wrists, and he ground against me with a helpless little groan, but his eyes glinted with amusement as well as lust. "Are you sure you want me to? I could get off in you, if you like."

Anger boiled my desire, though the thought of him thrusting into me, exploding deep within me with his lips on mine, made me faint with longing. No way would he use me for his twisted little games, even if he was a secret fantasy fuck of mine from way back. "Give it a rest, Seth. That's a dead body, in case you hadn't noticed."

His lips hovered over mine for a heart-stopping instant, but before I could slide my tongue out to taste him, he rolled off me and rose, pacing, scraping tense hands through his hair.

I sat up, fury searing away my regret. "What are you playing at, using a Valenti for sustenance? Kane'll have your ass."

But I couldn't help watching as he found his shirt and slipped it on. They sure built them beautiful in seventeenth-century Lahore, or wherever the hell he was from. Dark locks tangling on his collar, sensual mouth quivering, perfect nose, strong chin, upswept cheekbones. Legs long and muscular in soft black jeans, tight ass begging to be squeezed with both hands while he fucked me. Broad golden thrall bangles, thicker than mine, glinting tight on his forearms. He moved with raw grace, his movements swift and tense as he struggled to contain his rapture-soaked lust.

He retrieved his etched brass soultrap bottle from the carpet and dangled it in front of my eyes, wiggling it so I could see from the weight that it was full. "Kane's orders. I don't ask, I just fuck."

Which explained the state he was in. He hadn't consumed Nino's energy, but trapped it, and he'd obviously ignored

soultrapping rule number one: Don't let your victim come first. I'd never pictured Rajah as going both ways. Maybe he hadn't either, but Kane's word was law. I sympathized. All the same, my sex ached just thinking about a threesome.

I scrambled up from the bed, jerking my damp skirt down over my exposed thighs. "Yeah, I've heard that about you."

He gave a wicked smile and hissed like a cat, miming striking claws. "No need to be nasty. I offered." His smile turned sultry. "Sure you're not tempted?"

My heart pounded. Oh, I was tempted, all right.

I struggled to keep my mind on the issues. What would Kane want with his own minion's soul? He'd get it soon enough anyway. And why had he sent both of us to do the same thing?

But Rajah's dark, spicy scent wrapped me like a sweet mist, my rapture blinding me to everything but him, his eyes, his wicked black lashes, the pulse throbbing at his throat, that slutty mouth made for pleasure ...

I stepped closer. He stepped closer. He dropped the soultrap bottle with a soft thud and ran his fingers into my hair, twisting, sliding in deeper. My breasts brushed his chest, my nipples so hard the pleasure hurt. I slid my hands over his hips to his gorgeous firm ass and pulled him against me. He was hard, pulsing, so ready, and wetness slid from me, staining my skirt, painting the insides of my thighs with hot need.

We both groaned, the air around us shimmering. Already his burning fingers sought my skirt hem, dragging it upward. He nuzzled my throat, his lips firm and insistent, his clever tongue making me shiver. "Jade," he breathed, his voice thick with lust, "I never knew you were so damn beautiful."

Cold humiliation washed over me, spoiling his glorious caress. He'd never noticed me before. What was I thinking? He was Rajahni Seth, the hottest incubus in Melbourne, who had any woman he wanted with a single sultry glance from those bedroom eyes. And I was me.

Stick-thin, mousy-haired, tongue-tied me. Certainly not beautiful or engaging. It wasn't like we could have a relationship, not in our line of work, even if I wasn't the world's most boring woman and so far below his standards that even a glance from him was charity. So we'd have sex in a cloud of drunken rapture, it'd be magnificent, and I'd be miserable for the next six hundred years pining for him. And he'd forget about me, we'd meet in the street or a bar and smile uneasily and look away, and he'd laugh with his friends about how he was once so desperate he had to fuck me.

"This is a bad idea," I whispered, trying to push him away though my body still ached for him to give me release, my treacherous hands still wanting to explore him, pleasure him. "I don't even know you."

He stilled, his lips wet on my throat. "Are you serious? Most girls don't want to."

Now I did shove him away, my hands trembling more with fury than desire. "Am I supposed to feel sorry for you? Just get out of here before—"

Fists thudded on the apartment door. "Police, open up!"

Before anyone finds us here.

Too late.

For a few pulse-rippling seconds, Rajah's lips bruised mine, shocking, arousing, our teeth clashing in a feral kiss. "Some other time, princess," he breathed, and vanished.

I stumbled into the space where he'd been, the spicy taste of cardamom still stinging my mouth.

Jesus. He'd disappeared. I couldn't do that. How did he do that?

I cursed, and scrabbled on the carpet, but his soultrap bottle was gone. He'd taken it with him. Leaving me with the cops and a dead Valenti body in a room that reeked of sex, and a most unflattering wet patch on my skirt.

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