



The Goblin King (Shadowlands, Book 1)

By Shona Husk

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"An intriguing story, engagingly told. Who would have thought a goblin could make such a compelling hero? Darkly Celtic, richly imagined, this is paranormal romance at its best." – Juliet Marillier, award-winning author of Daughter of the Forest

Once upon a time ...

A man was cursed to the Shadowlands, his heart replaced with a cold lump of gold. In legends, he became known as

the Goblin King.

For a favored few he will grant a wish. Yet, desperately clinging to his waning human soul, his own desire remains unfulfilled:

a willing Queen.

But who would consent to move from the modern-day world into the realm of nightmares? No matter how intoxicating his touch, no matter how deep his valor, loving him is dangerous. And the one woman who might dare to try could also

destroy him forever.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Husk constructs a unique mythology for the goblin hero in her paranormal debut.... romantic and intriguing.

" - *Publishers Weekly*

"The characters were amazing, the story line brilliant, and the ending was beautiful." - *Sexy Women Read*

"The story line grabbed me right from the first paragraph and held me in it's spell through the last words. " - *Yankee Romance Reviewers*

"Shona Husk put together an amazing story about loss, love, redemption and discovery... A Night Owl Reviewer Top Pick" - *Night Owl Reviews*

"Steamy, sensual, and dangerous... Dark and delicious" - *Fresh Ficton*

"A great fairy-tale feel to it. Dark, fresh and tantalizing." - *Anna's Book Blog*

"A magical world... The *Goblin King* is worth its weight in gold. " - *Cheryl's Book Nook*

"Unique... Intriguing... " - *Manga Mania Cafe*

"A gorgeous world..." - *Bookaholics Romance Book Club*

"Entertaining... A very interesting world and mythology. " - *That's What I'm Talking About*

"A dark and haunting adult fairy tale. The world building was fantastic." - *Book of Secrets*

"This series is so unlike anything I've read before and is so different that I found myself cleverly drawn into this incredible world filled with unusual creatures and compelling stories. I loved it. " - *The Romance Studio*

"An interesting and exciting paranormal world that has a distinct feeling of legends and fairy tales" - *Heart to Heart: The B&N Romance Blog*

"A good book that had me reading fast... I enjoyed the romance and the passion... " - *Book Girl of Mur-y-Castell*

"For every person who has watched the movie, The Labyrinth, and dreamed of running away with David Bowie, The *Goblin King* is for you!" - *Sizzling Hot Books*

"The *Goblin King* didn't disappoint... sexy and irresistible. " - *Once Upon A Chapter*

About the Author

A civil designer by day and an author by night, **Shona Husk** lives in Western Australia at the edge of the Indian Ocean. Drawing on history, myth, and imagination, she writes about heroes who are armed and

dangerous but have a heart of gold—sometimes literally.

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Chapter 1

The summons pulled at every cell in his body, tearing the bonds that held him together and dragging him from the Shadowlands. He fought the compulsion to answer, as he did every time. And lost. As he did every time. The urge to obey his summoner's orders he'd tamped down long ago. Yet he attended, as he did every time.

The beads in his hair jangled and chimed, lifted on the breeze created as he moved from one world to the next, like golden music in his ears. He moved into the Fixed Realm wrapped in shadows to hide from the eyes of his would-be commander. Then he paused and looked around.

A bedroom. Not the first he'd been summoned to. The only light spilled from the nearby bathroom. His nose wrinkled at the smell of wet dog and wine. He frowned. No summoner stood before him, demanding an audience with the Goblin King. The human who'd called him from the Shadowlands and sought to control him lay on the floor at the foot of the bed. Immobility. Wounded. Female.

The goblin kept his hand on his sword and stepped forward. As he did, the shadows sloughed off him and slid away to the corners of the bedroom. The tension in his skin eased as the compulsion to obey faded. He'd attended. He could leave. Yet he couldn't look away.

The woman breathed, her breasts lifting with each inhalation. Her black silk dress clung to each curve, hiding and revealing without ever moving. His fingers rubbed together as if feeling the glide of silk on skin.

His concentration was broken by a knock on the door. The handle turned slightly. He raised one hand and metal jammed, securing the room. The door would hold until he was done.

"Eliza, you have to come down." A man's voice came from the other side of the door, the words just shy of an order. The handle jiggled, then a fist pounded on the door as the man tried to get into the bedroom. Could he sense the darkness creeping under the door, leaking from the goblin?

The goblin squatted and studied the woman the man had called Eliza. Eliza. Her name echoed in his ears as if he should know her. Her head was bleeding, the dark blood seeping into the darker carpet. He reached out to touch her, drawn to her beauty the same way he was drawn to the gold hanging from her ears. The light from the bathroom cut across his mottled gray skin. He jerked his hand back as if he'd been burned. It was this body the woman would see if she woke now. A body not even he could bear to see. He should unlock the door and leave. Let the man who kept knocking tend her cut feet and bruised head.

He hesitated. Eliza had called the Goblin King.

"Open up, Eliza." The knocking became more urgent. The tone less caring. "You look like a fool hiding from your own birthday."

Charming. She is unconscious, you fool. And drunk.

Something was amiss. He rocked back on his heels as he assessed the woman and the bedroom. Glass and wine covered the bathroom floor. Eliza lay unmoving. Yet the man demanding her presence knew none of this. He shook his head and the beads rattled. This wasn't his problem. The gods knew he had enough of his

own.

But Eliza had wished. Wished to be taken away. And he wanted to obey. Her words pulsed in the air and shook in his presence. The goblin let her wish settle around him like a cloak made of the darkest dreams-where hers ended and his began. He forced out a breath. No good would come of this.

The door vibrated under a fresh onslaught of hits this time accompanied by muttered swearing. His fingers brushed over the ends of her blond hair. There was something disturbingly familiar about her. Her face, the curve of her lips. Where had he seen her? Had she summoned him before? There was something about the magic, her words...His eyes narrowed and he glanced back at the door. He couldn't think through the thousands of summons he'd answered with that incessant noise. Couldn't the man give him some peace?

"What am I supposed to tell the guests?" The man's silence seethed with fear. "Fine, have it your way. We'll talk tomorrow." He gave the door a final slap before his footsteps faded away. No fight to be had.

The goblin smiled. Eliza was his.

He scooped up her limp body. Her fair skin was scented like summer blossoms. It had been so long since he'd felt the summer sun on his skin. So long since he'd been able to touch a flower without killing the bloom. So long since he'd had company, female company.

Her head lolled against his arm. He cradled her closer and murmured against her hair.

"You should be careful what you wish for, Eliza." Her name rolled easily off his thick tongue. "For I am all too happy to oblige," he said with a laugh that held no joy.

The shadows closed around the Goblin King, drawing him, and his prize, home to the Shadowlands.

Eliza was warm against him. She glowed as if lit from within, a radiance not usually seen in the Shadowlands. He hesitated, not wanting to lay her down and lose contact. He liked her weight in his arms and the touch of her skin against his. If she woke now, in the Shadowlands, he would look human with a face he had no qualms about Eliza seeing. He inhaled her delicate female scent once more. His body responded as any man's would, and the lust for something other than gold burned through him as unfamiliar as it was pleasant.

Soon enough. He preferred women who participated, eagerly.

He placed her on his bed, and her dress rode up over her thighs, revealing long, smooth, creamy white legs. He ran his thumb over the scar on her inner knee. Like dew on a spiderweb, it accentuated the perfection of her body. He brushed the scar again. Years he chose not to count had passed since any woman had called the Goblin King, and he intended to make full use of the summons.

Who was he to disobey her command?

He fanned her hair over the sheets on his bed, an old four-poster taken from a palace. The posts were cleverly carved with a hunt, the prey forever chased by the hunter. He doubted the French king who'd originally had it noticed its disappearance.

He'd gathered beautiful objects from all over the world to fill his caves. Authentic Persian carpets, Ming vases, silk drapes, gold statues, gold mirrors, gold coins. Yet...something was always missing. So he followed his goblin nature-when in doubt add more gold. It was an easy way to decorate.

But an empty way to live.

Now he had another beautiful object to entertain him while he wasted eternity. His knuckle traced her cheek. Eliza didn't flinch and her eyes remained stubbornly closed. She would look upon the king she'd called and have her audience on her knees.

He tore his gaze away and stared at the cavern's ceiling. The beads in his hair hit his back like hail as they resettled. He was hard, ready. He fisted his hand, fighting the urge to possess the woman he had taken, and drew in three deep breaths. They did nothing to settle the rough lust riding in his blood.

Did he want her with the need of goblin, or the desire of a man?

Did it matter anymore?

Yes.

He still had a human soul, if only barely. If he were truly goblin, he would already be buried to the hilt, enjoying his first root in a couple of centuries.

His nails broke the skin on his palm. The pain grounded him and gave him something else to think about besides his daily battle with the curse. He uncurled his pale fingers. Scarred knuckles, callused palm. His hands. Warrior's hands. Not the gray, gnarled hands of the monster he was cursed to be. He ran the palm of one of those hands over his groin as he got up. The jagged need didn't slacken, but he wouldn't be the monster today. He didn't need to be.

She would awaken soon enough and realize what she'd summoned.

He pulled back the gold, embroidered silk curtain and found his subjects waiting for him on the other side. He truly never got any peace. His brother, Dai, and Anfri stood, arms crossed, in the hallway. They would've known the second he'd returned.

"She's mine." It was all he needed to say. He had been their king in life, and he was their king in curse. They were all who were left. The others had been granted the mercy of death, except the one who had faded to goblin.

He glared at Dai, then at Anfri. Anfri held his gaze for just a moment too long before looking past his shoulder to Eliza.

"A woman, Roan?" Dai acted as if they had never brought women to the Shadowlands before.

They hadn't. Not like this. In the past they had parted with gold, then silver, for a woman's company. Now they would rather keep the coin. A reminder of how far they'd come from being men who'd fight and drink and fuck, to becoming misfits so almost goblin they'd rather the glittering lure of gold.

"Only one." Anfri moved for a better look at Eliza.

Roan blocked his view. He placed a hand on Anfri's arm. "The woman is mine."

Anfri's face contorted as his eyes yellowed and bulged. The gold heart in Roan's chest ached in response. He could no longer ignore the change in Anfri.

He knew the signs too well and it was happening again. Anfri was fading.

"Roan, this isn't wise," Dai said. "What about-"

"This is different." Roan glared at him.

"Yes, brother, you kidnapped her." Dai pressed one hand against Roan's chest where his heart should've beaten. Concern deepened the lines in the younger man's face. Dai should have been the older sibling-he was always watching, making sure Roan didn't slide into the curse without noticing. His men's lives would have been so different if he had died that day on the battlefield.

Roan removed Dai's hand. "She asked."

"She didn't know what she asked."

"Too late." Too bad. Eliza was his. A prize fit for a king.

"She is injured," Anfri said, stopping Dai's arguments.

Roan turned away, not wanting to see the judgment on his brother's face. Instead he focused on the cuts on her feet, where blood stained her soles and spread to his sheets. His gut tightened as the magic of the Shadowlands ran through him, begging for use, urging his surrender. He hissed. He didn't want anyone else touching Eliza, but her wounds weren't life threatening, so no magic was required. He had to let Anfri tend to Eliza. He was the closest thing to a doctor they had, patching their injuries hundreds of times over the centuries.

"Get your kit," he said to Anfri before turning to his brother. "I didn't do it." He knew exactly what his brother was thinking, the same way Dai knew his thoughts too well. "I'm not that close to succumbing."

Dai nodded. They both knew. Not this time. Maybe not next time. But soon.

Milk dropped into Steven's coffee like a turd. It splashed onto his hand and the cuff of his shirt. He swore and tipped the foul brew down the sink. Then he pulled out another carton, the low-fat, high-calcium crap Eliza liked, and gave it a trial sniff. He gagged. Every drop of milk in the house had soured overnight. It would have to be black coffee, the perfect end to the perfect night spent in the guest room after Eliza's little temper tantrum.

He drank the coffee fast even though his stomach complained, still struggling with the after-effects of last night's alcohol. Last night, what a nightmare that had turned out to be. He'd made excuses for her not being there to cut her cake. A migraine. His knuckles whitened. She was giving him a fucking migraine.

Steven left the cup in the sink and stalked upstairs. He'd break the door down to get in if he had to. He should've hauled her out last night. He shook his head. No. Better she acted the fool in private. In public they were perfect, the soon-to-be Mr. and Mrs. Slade, heirs to the Coulter legacy.

He twisted their bedroom door handle. The metal groaned and opened. Last night the handle hadn't budged. He shrugged off the faint sense of unease gathering around him like whispered accusations. She must have jammed the door and then felt repentant this morning. Pity he wasn't in the mood to forgive.

He stepped into the room, then reared back at the appalling stench. His bedroom smelled like a party of drunken rats had drowned and then dried under a relentless sun.

"Jesus." It was worse than the milk.

His wardrobe door hung open. The rails where his suits and shirts had hung were gappy and grinning like an old man missing teeth.

"What the hell?" His face twisted with rage. Every suit was gone.

Steven turned. The bed was empty and un-slept in. Where was she? He spun. She wasn't in the bathroom but the bath was full. Every one of his suits was stuffed into the tub.

"Fuck, no."

The stink was wet Italian wool and wine. And was that wine or blood on the white tiles, pooling in the grout?

Steven snatched up the phone from his side of the bed and dialed Eliza's cell phone. This little stunt was too much. She had no right to do this, after everything he'd done...

A chirp answered his call. Anger congealed into a sharp-edged brick that wedged in his gut. He stomped around the bed and flung open her wardrobe door, knowing what he'd find. Her handbag. He pulled the little black bag down from the shelf. Her phone lit up the interior. Keys. Wallet. Sunglasses. All still inside. His rage exploded. The phone slid out of his fingers and bounced in the soft burgundy carpet.

It could have been the hangover, or the smell of his ruined suits, or that Eliza was gone and he would have to involve the police. His stomach heaved and acid coffee scratched his throat. Steven ran for the bathroom, stepping on the smashed wine glass and slicing his foot. He didn't have time to curse. He barely made it to the toilet.

If she ruined his plans, he'd kill her, he swore as he threw up.

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