

# SHADOW OF THE TOWER - EXCERPT

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THE SEVEN PORTALS  
BOOK 2

ANDRE JONES





Leonie sank deeper into the shadows as another patrol approached. This was the third lot tonight, making Leonie think they were still looking for her. It was not going to be easy. Fortunately, clouds rolled in and she was far more relaxed than before when she had to cross the open spaces of the footbridges.

Almost home. The Web, the name given to the backstreets of Dockside, was where she'd spent all of her life since her mother's death. It didn't look like much, but when it was all you had, you learnt to appreciate it.

Only when the patrol's banter faded did she continue to navigate through the waterfront area. Another shadow among many, she paused occasionally to listen for approaching patrols. She heard a muffled scream from an alleyway ahead.

Leonie considered ignoring it; she was in no condition to get into more trouble. It didn't pay to be too curious around these parts, but it was in her nature. She wouldn't be in the position she was in today if she ignored everything seen or heard. *It's on your way*, she convinced herself. *Just a quick look*. She crept to the corner of the building for a better view.

About ten paces away two men were assaulting a young girl, her clothing mostly ripped. The girl struggled frantically, but when she screamed again, the man undoing his belt struck her, knocking her head back.

"Hold her, Lews!" he hissed fiercely at the man standing behind her.

The scene brought to mind the trauma of her childhood. Circumstances would have been much different if it wasn't for Jade's help, but Jade wasn't here now. *Tonight, it's up to me*.

Overwhelming rage took hold. With fury in her every movement, she silently sped forwards, wondering how best to deal with them. Claw marks would bring too much atten-

tion on every rrell in the city. She glanced at the detritus scattered around her. Spying the leg of a broken bar stool, she scooped it up without breaking stride.

Lews, holding the girl's arms, looked around. As he spun he tried to shout a warning but failed when the right side of his face met the length of wood with force. The other attacker reeled back in surprise at seeing Lews topple sideways. He staggered back while reaching for his sword. Tripping over the uneven ground, his cry cut short when his head hit the flagstones with a wet smack. The sword clattered loudly on the cobblestones.

The insignia of Zander's Royal Guard glinted in a stray shaft of moonlight on the dead man's tunic.

"Slistorf!" she hissed. "That's all I need." She was relieved he hadn't had the time to drop his pants.

The young girl swayed on her feet. Leonie barely caught her and lowered her to the ground.

When she was able to sit up, she saw the bodies of the guards. Tears ran down her face.

Gently placing a paw on the girl's shoulder, Leonie tried to comfort her; asking her name and where she was from, to no avail. Looking at the state of the girl, Leonie was glad she intervened, almost ashamed at her earlier hesitation.

"Sussah," the girl mumbled between her sobs.

"Leonie." As Leonie nodded to Sussah, she heard the faint sound of boots and saw the bobbing light of a lantern coming up the lane.

"There's a patrol heading our way." She glanced at the figures lying at their feet. "This could be difficult to explain. Hurry!"

Sussah's eyes remained unfocused. With little sense of urgency in her actions, the girl slowly pulled the ruined clothing up over her shoulders. It was torn open at the front.

Leonie used her belt in an attempt to tie it closed, leaving nothing to secure her pouch to. *I'll have to carry it.* By this stage it became obvious both wouldn't escape the patrol.

The young girl was in a stupor or dazed by the punch. Grabbing her by the arm, Leonie pulled her to a shadowed area between a heap of refuse and the wall. When Leonie tried to get her to lie down Sussah began to struggle.

"Listen to me girl!" she hissed. "I'm trying to help you. Look at yourself!"

The thin, damp dress clung to Sussah's comely figure, leaving little to the imagination.

"Do you think these guards will treat you any differently from the first two if they see you like this? Or do you like whoring in alleys?"

Leonie's cheek stung as the young girl's hand whipped up and slapped her. "Good! That's better." Leonie rubbed her face. "Glad to know you're still with me. Sorry I said it. Now, lie down here. I'll hide you under some rubbish and lead them off. When they're gone, get home as quickly as you can. Okay? Here, take this." She handed her the old cloak.

Sussah nodded. "Why are you doing this?" she mumbled from under the trash.

Leonie hesitated before replying. "Because I could. Because no one else would." Glancing over her shoulder, she could see the approaching guards clearly. At the same time, one of them set up a cry of alarm, alerting the others of her presence.

"Slistorf's Balls!" Leonie hissed. "One of them must be a rrell to see so clearly. Keep absolutely quiet and still." She grabbed her pouch and bolted. With a rrell in pursuit, she was going to have to work hard to escape. But true to her words, she slowed down to hurl abuse, thereby

ensuring all the guards were after her. She ran down the lane.

After a few minutes, Leonie cast a look behind her. They were now well away from where Sussah was hiding, but the rrell was faster and had closed the distance.

*That bastard's going to be a real pain.* She increased her pace. It had been a long night and considering the ordeals she'd experienced these last weeks, she was tiring quickly. Ahead was an area she knew like the back of her paw. If she got that far with enough of a lead, it would be easy to lose them. Just in case, she considered a back-up plan.

Dodging trash, she fumbled at the drawstrings of the pouch and managed to extract the black orb that was the focus of the night's activities. Leonie snapped the fine chain and popped the orb in her mouth. Her mouth was dry as she tried to swallow. She nearly choked at the size of it but managed to get it down only because of its smoothness.

Racing around a corner, she put on a burst of speed. The next corner led to a warren of warehouses and alleys where she'd be safe. If need be she'd drop the pouch in plain sight of the pursuers. With luck, they'd be more interested in lining their pockets than chasing her. She could always get more gems.

Halfway down the street she started labouring. Her breath came in ragged gasps. She kept pushing, concentrating on the next corner and putting one paw in front of the other.

*A little bit further, she told herself. Turn left, then we'll see how good that cat really is—*

She screamed in agony as a crossbow bolt embedded itself into her thigh. She stumbled, crashing into the wall of the warehouse. She dropped the pouch when she flung her arms out to keep from falling, her claws raking the wood.

Determined to escape, she turned her mind back to the girl trying to block the pain.

*Hoping that this was worth the effort.*

Step.

*Did Sussah get away?*

Step. Paw on the corner.

THUD.

A bolt protruded from the wall where her head had been seconds before. Close enough for her whiskers to brush along its shaft.

“Next one’ll split your whiskers, bitch!” a young voice breathed heavily behind her.

Leonie stopped edging along the wall, very slowly turning around to face her attacker.

The rrell guard approached, his tail twitching as he reloaded. The crossbow glowed faintly. Leonie knew there was no way out of this. Other guards caught up, lungs rasping, leaving little swirls of fog in the cool air. The rrell guard was breathing hard also, but his crossbow didn’t waver.

Soon there were four of them gathered around in an arc with their bows out. Their leader finally caught up to them, his chest heaving with the exertion. It was obvious from his sway he was intoxicated.

“Well done, Phellicks,” he said. “Pin the murderin’ scum t’ the wall,” he ordered. “Then we can see ’ow many ways we can skin a cat. The rats can ’av wha’s left.”

The young rrell altered his aim casually and fired without hesitation.

Leonie’s right paw slammed back, pinned to the wall. A dark metal shaft protruded from her palm. Her scream cut through the night.

“Bastard!” she hissed through the pain. She locked her knees so she wouldn’t collapse. *Not in front of this lot.* The

agony was almost unbearable, threatening to engulf her in darkness.

Some of the guards shifted uncomfortably, but Phellicks casually reloaded.

“Don’t insult true-bloods. She is half-breed trash,” he said.

Leonie glared at him venomously.

“Hah. Still got a spark in ’er,” the leader barked, slapping the young rrell on the shoulder causing his crossbow to misfire and splinter the wall beside Leonie’s left arm. “Come on Phellicks.” He waved his sword towards her. “I don’t wan ’er ta give me a back-scratch. Get tha’ other paw pinned down.”

The sound of approaching horses reached her ears.

The guards turned as one.



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