

BLACKWINGS

Forgotten

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High Noon Books

Novato, CA

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International Standard Book Number: 978-1-57128-958-2

24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15
10 09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01

www.HighNoonBooks.com

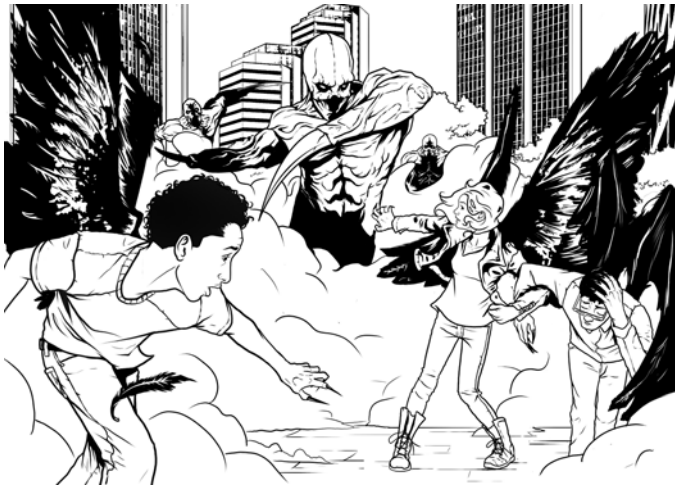
Shadow Lands Set 1 order number: 8943-8

Shadow Lands Set 2 order number: 8949-0

Shadow Lands Set 3 order number: 8955-1

CONTENTS

1	Surrounded	1
2	The Bridge	8
3	Serena's House	13
4	At the Jail	18
5	Locked Up	23
6	Serena's Secret	29
7	A Final Fight	34
8	A New Life	40



Shadow Demons are attacking in Rockport, and only the Blackwings can see them. Gabe is the oldest. He teaches the others what he knows. The person who taught him is gone. Nobody knows where she went. Alexis has been fighting the Shadow Demons since she was 14. She can save people from the Shadow Demons, but she doesn't have many friends. DeAndre is the newest Blackwing. He liked being on stage, but now he has something much harder to do. The Shadow Demons are attacking. They eat the life out of people. They must be stopped.

CHAPTER 1

Surrounded

“Turn here,” Alexis told Gabe. She pointed to a dark street.

Gabe turned the car down the street. It splashed through dirty puddles.

“I don’t like this part of town,” DeAndre said from the backseat. “I don’t think my parents would want me to be here.”

“And they don’t even know about the Shadow Demons,” Alexis said.

“There’s a reason so many Shadow Demons are here. This area has plenty of people getting into trouble,” Gabe said. “The police are always busy here, chasing the trouble-makers.”

“True,” Alexis said. “And we get to chase the Shadow Demons.”

“Look!” Gabe pointed at a building across the street. Through the rain, they could see trash piled up around it, and boards nailed across the windows. Three tall, gray shapes were climbing the stairs up to the front door. Each of their arms ended in a single, huge

claw. Smoke hid their legs.

“You see the lights in that building?” Alexis asked. “It should be empty, but I bet people are in there using drugs. That’s why the Shadow Demons are there. They go where people are helpless. Gabe, park here. Quick.”

Gabe parked the car, and they got out. They were wet in seconds, but they didn’t notice. Their wings tore through their backs, and their long, sharp nails grew from their fingers. They stood still for a moment, waiting for the pain to go away.

“Ready?” Gabe asked.

The Blackwings flew quickly across the street. Gabe grabbed a Shadow Demon and threw it to the ground. He stabbed its chest with his nails. They left a large hole.

Alexis wrapped her wings around another one. It began to scream and burn up. She threw it down the stairs onto the street. She came down the stairs after it and kicked it in its side. The Shadow Demon fell, and Alexis stuck her nails into it. The Shadow Demon turned to smoke and disappeared.

DeAndre ran and pushed another Shadow Demon partly through a broken window. It tried to use its claws to come back out. The

Shadow Demon was so large that it got stuck. That's when DeAndre cut it with his long, black nails. The Shadow Demon turned to smoke.

The Blackwings looked around. "Are we done?" DeAndre asked. "Did we get them all?"

"I don't see any other ones," Alexis said, but all of their wings were still out.

Gabe said. "So, there must be more Shadow Demons around here."

All three of them turned to see a group of Shadow Demons coming down the street toward them. The rain started to fall harder.

"Get ready," Alexis said. She pointed in the other direction. Another group of Shadow Demons was coming from that side.

"There's too many!" DeAndre said.

"Don't worry," Gabe said. "You're strong. You can beat them."

DeAndre ran at a Shadow Demon and pushed it back. He tried to rip a hole in its face with his nails. But the Shadow Demon pushed him harder. DeAndre's shoes slipped on the wet ground, until his back was against a wall.

Alexis kicked one Shadow Demon in the

face. But another one came from behind her. It picked her up. "Gabe!" she yelled.

Gabe ran over to Alexis. He wrapped his wings around the Shadow Demon that was attacking her. It began to burn. It dropped Alexis.

But then two more Shadow Demons attacked Gabe and Alexis.

DeAndre was still fighting against his first Shadow Demon. He saw more coming toward him, too. "Gabe," he called out. "We might be in trouble! There's *way* too many of them!"

Just then, one of the Shadow Demons who was coming toward DeAndre exploded. A huge hole opened up in the other. The Shadow Demon screamed. DeAndre pressed his hands against his ears. The sound was horrible.

What's going on? DeAndre thought.

He got to his feet and ran to help his friends. But someone else had gotten to Gabe and Alexis first.

She's got black wings and nails. She's like us, DeAndre thought.

"Serena!" Gabe and Alexis called out at the same time.



She's got black wings and nails. *She's like us,*
DeAndre thought.

DeAndre stared at her.

Serena turned to DeAndre. "What are you looking at? Let's fight."

DeAndre and Serena attacked the Shadow Demons that were fighting Gabe and Alexis. A Shadow Demon raised its claw above Serena. But she kicked it in the side of the head. It fell to the ground. DeAndre jumped on top of it and ripped it to pieces.

Serena, DeAndre, Gabe, and Alexis continued to fight until all of the Shadow Demons were gone. Then their wings and nails went away.

Wet and tired, they finally turned to face each other. Serena opened her arms, and Gabe and Alexis gave her a big hug.

"We haven't seen you in so long! Where have you been?" Alexis asked. "How did you get here? I have so many questions!"

Serena laughed softly. "One thing at a time. First, I need to meet ..."

"I'm DeAndre. You're Serena?" he asked.

"Not just Serena," Alexis said. "But THE Serena."

"Serena taught me everything I know," Gabe said. "And she helped me teach Alexis, too."

“We used to fight together a lot,” Alexis added. “But lately ...”

“I’ve been away,” Serena said quietly.

“You showed up at just the right time. Did you see how many Shadow Demons were after us?” Gabe asked.

“I just felt something wasn’t right. I had to find out what it was,” Serena explained. “But I’ve got to go now. I’m only in town for a few days. I’m staying at my parents’ house.”

“Can I text you later?” Gabe asked.

“Sure,” Serena said.

Then the three friends watched Serena fly down the street and disappear into the darkness.

CHAPTER 2

The Bridge

Later that evening, Gabe was at a café. He was trying to finish a paper for a class he was taking at the Rockport Junior College. But the music was loud. The lights were too bright. All he could think about was how cool it was to have Serena back in town.

Rockport just hadn't been the same without her.

He tried to write his paper. But then he stopped again. He kept thinking about all the times Serena had saved his life.

He thought about how Serena had joined them earlier in the evening during the fight. He thought about how she had destroyed the Shadow Demons. She was the best fighter he had ever met.

I hope she comes around more. Alexis and I could use her help training DeAndre, he thought. And I need someone to talk to. I didn't know how much I needed it until I saw her today.

He looked back at the screen again. Then he put his head in his hands.

Writing is so hard when I'm thinking about other things. How am I ever going to finish this paper? How am I ever going to finish school?

Suddenly, his phone buzzed. It was a text from Serena.

Need help. NOW. Get everyone. Meet me at bridge.

Serena has never asked me for help before, he thought. She always has everything under control. She always knows what to do.

Gabe shut his laptop and threw it into his backpack. He sent DeAndre and Alexis a text.

Problem. Serena wants us at the bridge. Now!

Then Gabe ran out of the café. His wings came out, and he flew toward the Rockport Bridge. The sky was still full of clouds, but the rain had stopped.

The bridge was old, with two towers. There were lots of cool places to hang out, high above the road. Only people with wings could get there, though.

The Dark Forest was on the other side of the river. Serena used to like to look over the forest from the tower. Even with no moon, there was plenty of light from the city.

Alexis was at the top of the bridge tower

when Gabe showed up. She was sitting at the edge with her feet hanging down. There wasn't much room up there, anyway. She looked out over the Dark Forest, just watching.

When Gabe landed behind her, she turned to look at him.

"What's going on?" she asked. "No one's here."

"I don't know. But Serena made it sound really important," Gabe said. "I'm surprised she's not here yet."

Gabe and Alexis heard the sound of wings. They turned, thinking it might be Serena, but it was DeAndre instead.

"Wow. Great view. Why did Serena want to meet us up here?" he asked.

"Five years ago, Serena and I used to come here all the time," Gabe explained. "This is where she taught me how to fly."

"We also used to come here just to talk," Gabe said. "We talked about our powers. About having to always be ready for the next fight. About how hard it can be to be the only ones who can see Shadow Demons. The only ones who can do anything about them."



*She was sitting at the edge with her
feet hanging down.*

DeAndre and Alexis nodded.

Then they were still in the darkness, listening to the cars far below them. After a while, Alexis asked, "How long have we been here?"

Gabe looked at his phone. "It's almost been an hour," he said. "Something is seriously wrong. Serena should be here by now."

Gabe called Serena. But she didn't pick up. He waited a few minutes and called her again. No answer.

"I don't think we should wait any longer," Alexis said.

"You're right," Gabe said. "Let's go to her house."

CHAPTER 3

Serena's House

Gabe, Alexis, and DeAndre flew down from the bridge tower. They flew past the houses on the edge of town and then past downtown Rockport. The night was cold, but the Blackwings didn't care. Something was wrong, and they had to hurry.

"Come on. Faster," Gabe called out. He flew so fast, Alexis and DeAndre couldn't keep up.

When Gabe reached a tall pine tree, he folded his wings and fell like a rock.

DeAndre saw him and thought Gabe was going to crash onto the roof of a house. A few feet above it, Gabe opened his wings. He stopped falling, just inches above the roof, and landed without making a sound.

Alexis and DeAndre landed next to Gabe. They were on the roof of a house, looking across the street.

"Look," Alexis said. "There's a group of people in the alley behind Serena's house."

"What are they doing?" DeAndre asked.

“I can’t see a lot from here,” Alexis said. “If you think about it, though, it’s pretty clear. They’re hiding in a small alley on a cold night. They don’t have a lot of stuff with them, so they’re not homeless. People mostly act like this if they’re doing something against the law.”

“Bigger problem,” DeAndre said, pointing down the street. “Shadow Demons.”

Alexis saw them, too. She was about to point them out to Gabe when she heard his voice.

“Wait ... Serena?” Gabe said softly.

Alexis and DeAndre turned to Gabe. His mouth was open and his hands were shaking.

“What is it?” DeAndre asked. He and Alexis turned to see what Gabe was staring at.

Serena was also in the alley, but she was sitting down. That’s why her friends didn’t see her at first.

She looked weak. They watched as a Shadow Demon grabbed her and stuck a claw in her back. It was feeding on her! Black bubbles floated up from where its claw cut her.

“What happened to her powers? Why isn’t she fighting it?” Alexis asked.

“I don’t know,” Gabe said. “But we need to save her. Now.”

Gabe’s sharp nails came out. DeAndre and Alexis’s nails came out, too. They spread their wings, ready to fly down to Serena.

But then they heard sirens. Three police cars came speeding down the street.

The group of people in the alley started to run. The police cars blocked them.

The Blackwings watched as the police jumped out of their cars. The police started yelling at the group of people.

“Down! Get down! On the ground!” the police ordered the group.

The people stopped running. They slowly got onto the ground.

Serena was already on the ground. She was lying with her face on the pavement. The Shadow Demon had stuck both of its claws into her back. The black bubbles floated up faster and faster. The Shadow Demon was killing her, but the police couldn’t see it.

A police officer looked at Serena and yelled, “Hey! Are you all right? She tried to talk to Serena. But Serena didn’t say anything. She didn’t move. The Shadow Demon dug its claws deeper.



*The Shadow Demon had stuck both of its claws
into her back.*

“Wait,” Alexis said. “What if the officer takes Serena to jail? She’ll die in there!”

The police officer put handcuffs on Serena. The Shadow Demon stayed attached to Serena’s back. Its eyes were blood red.

The police officer lifted Serena to her feet. She put Serena in the back of the police car. The police officer shut the door, and drove away. Only the Blackwings could see the Shadow Demon next to Serena in the car.

More police officers were arresting the other people in the alley. They were all going to jail.

“Now what?” Alexis asked.

“I don’t know why she didn’t fight back,” DeAndre said. “But we can’t stay here talking about it. We’ve got to do something.”

“Come on, Gabe,” Alexis said. “Let’s get to the jail.”

Gabe jumped up. “You’re right. We have to hurry. If Serena’s not fighting the Shadow Demon, it will kill her.”