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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.