

# SHADOWHOUSE FALL

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SHADOWSHAPER  
CYPHER  
BOOK 2

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SCHOLASTIC INC.

# *For Sam*

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# ONE

Sierra Santiago closed her eyes and the whole spinning world opened up around her. A brisk wind whispered songs of the coming winter as it shushed through browning leaves and then whisked along the moonlit field, throwing Sierra's mass of curls into disarray. Up above, the first round of overnight flights leaving JFK cut trails across the cloudless sky. Traffic whirred along just outside the park walls, and beyond that the shuttle train sighed and screeched to a halt; doors slid open; weary passengers collected their personal belongings as instructed, adjusted their earbuds, and headed off into the night.

But that was the simple stuff. Sierra had learned to expand her senses out farther than any normal person. It wasn't easy, but when she quieted her mind and the spirits were close, she could hear the city's clicks and groans half-way across Brooklyn. Tonight wasn't about meditation or the ongoing urban symphony, though. Where were her spirits?

As if in response, a vision sizzled into view in her mind's eye: There in the forest, not too far from her, a figure crouched. She could make out the silhouette leaning against a fallen tree, see the person's fast-beating heart telegraph frantic pulses out into the chilly night. The person scratched something onto the tree and looked around for nearby spirits.

*I see you*, Sierra thought, tensing her face into a smug smile. *Whoever you are. Now who else is out there?* She let the image go and immediately another appeared: in the field she sat on the edge of, a figure lay facedown in the grass, breathing heavily. After a few seconds, the person hunched up on their elbows and peered into the darkness. *Okay. Sierra nodded. Got it. What else?*

The next vision appeared so suddenly it almost knocked her over. Dark trees whipped past, and someone was panting. Running and panting. Sierra felt her own heart thunder in her ears. The other views she'd seen had been through spirit vision: a cadre of shadows she'd come to think of as her own Secret Service detail. But this was different — it was someone alive. Or *something* . . . Branches whisked out of its way as it bounded across the forest. *Which forest? Was it . . . was it close?* Sierra tried to scan for clues, but everything was moving too fast.

*Spirits*, Sierra beckoned. *Find this . . . thing*. She didn't remember having stood up, but she was on her feet. A wave of dizziness rushed over her as the half dozen views of

Prospect Park swimming through her mind veered suddenly skyward and then turned toward the shadowy fields and forests below.

All but one.

Whatever it was kept storming through the forest, panting, its whole body tensed with intent. It was . . . it was hunting. Sierra felt its hunger deep within herself; saliva flooded her own mouth. Flesh would be torn, a panicked heart would race and then falter and finally fail in this monster's jaws. The thing lunged, and Sierra's eyes popped open as a hand landed on her shoulder.

"Gotya!"

Sierra screamed and spun around, elbows first. She hit something soft and jumped back.

"Ow! What the hell, Sierra?" Big Jerome stood there rubbing his chest and pouting.

"I . . . Jerome . . ." Sierra scanned the field behind him, the forest beyond. Nothing. "I don't know . . . what happened."

"I do: You were so surprised I actually won a practice round you damn near cracked a rib."

"No . . ." Sierra rubbed her eyes. A branch snapped in the woods she had been facing. She turned, probed the darkness for movement.

"Sierra?" Sierra's mom, María Santiago, called. "¿Qué pasó, m'ija?" She walked up next to Jerome. "I was hiding and then I saw this guy barrel past and actually reach you and I knew something had to be going on."

“Whoa,” Jerome said. “Mrs. Santiago with the snark. If you hadn’t tangled your chalk spirits with my twig monsters at the last training run, neither of us would need extra practice.”

“Mind your manners, jóven,” María snapped. “What’s a twig monster supposed to do anyway? Set itself on fire and dive-bomb the bad guys? Come on, man. Anyway, you didn’t ’shape anything this round to win, you just ran through the field like a lost moose! That doesn’t even —”

“Shh,” Sierra said, her eyes still on the forest.

María scowled. “Sierra, don’t you —”

“*Shh!*” Sierra hissed. “Something’s out there.”

If María asked a bunch of annoying parenty-type questions instead of being quiet, Sierra was going to scream. A year ago, that’s what her mom would’ve done, but since embracing the family legacy and becoming a shadowshaper four months back, María had let go of some of her extra-eyeroll-worthy mom habits. She sighed, probably scrunched up her face, but said no more.

Sierra exhaled. Squinted into the forest. If her kinda-sorta-maybe-sometimes boyfriend Robbie had shown up like he was supposed to, at least she’d have another skillful shadowshaper to face this down with. But of course, he was once again a no-show.

Her spirits had swooped back down into the park and were springing along through the underbrush. The charging, starving whatever-it-was was gone. At least, she couldn’t

see through its eyes anymore. Maybe it was right there at the edge of the darkness, watching her.

Sierra narrowed her eyes and steeled herself. She had done enough running away over the summer, when she first learned about the magical art of shadowshaping and her family's legacy. It had only been a few months, but she wasn't that scared little girl anymore. She wasn't even just a shadowshaper — her dead abuela had passed on the mantle and made Sierra into the next Lucera, the beating heart of the shadowshaping world. She was still figuring out what all her powers were, but one thing she had promised herself was that she wouldn't be that freaked-out, screaming girl in all the horror movies. No more running away. She took a step toward the dark forest.

“Uh, Sierra,” Jerome said. “What're you doing?”

“There's something in the trees.”

“I get that. Why are you going *toward* it?”

Shadows rose up around Sierra, tall, long-legged spirits that would leap into her drawings and lash out if needed. Their gentle hum rose in the night air, filled her with that familiar mix of ferocity and calm, like a loving hurricane within. She pulled two pieces of chalk from her hoodie pocket and held one in each hand. “Stay where you are, J. I got this.”

“But —” Jerome started. María must have calmed him with a hand on the shoulder, or probably a gentle slap. She knew better than to try to stop her daughter in one of her gung-ho moments.

Sierra reached her arms out to either side and strode into the shadows. She scraped the chalk along the trees around her as she walked, then tapped the marks once with her fingertips. The forest night closed in around her. Even with the spirits heightening her vision as they slid along in smooth, sparkling strides, it seemed like a blanket of darkness had been thrown over the whole world. She could run — she could always run — but she would never run. She would find out what this was and fight it if she had to. The chalk scratches sped along the tree trunks, flashes of color, and then disappeared in the gloom up ahead. They weren't the best weapons to have — nowhere near as strong as a painted mural, for example — but they'd be able to keep an enemy busy till she could work out something better.

Hopefully.

And then, very suddenly, Sierra stopped. She wasn't alone. The certainty of someone else there, a presence, tickled along her shoulders and the back of her neck.

“Don't be afraid,” a girl's voice said as Sierra spun around.

“Mina?”

Mina Satorius was a grade above Sierra at Octavia Butler High, but she looked fourteen. She had big eyes and her strawberry blond hair was ponytailed, with bangs at the front and a spindly curl framing her face on either side. She stood in the middle of a clearing, wearing a plaid shirt over a tank top and a sweater tied around her waist. Despite what



she'd just said, Mina herself looked terrified — eyebrows creased with worry, bottom lip trembling slightly, arms wrapped around her slender frame.

“What are you doing out here?” Sierra asked. Her towering shadows emerged in a circle around Mina; their gentle glow pulsed in time with Sierra’s own heartbeat. Shimmering chalk marks appeared on the trees, poised to flush forward and attack.

“I’m . . . I . . .” She looked like she might collapse into a puddle any second. Sierra resisted the urge to walk up and hug her. Something had been out here hunting, something ferocious. It was hard to imagine Mina could have anything to do with that panting monster whose eyes Sierra had seen through, but . . .

“Spit it out, Mina. We’re not safe here.”

“I know,” Mina said. “That’s what . . . that’s what I’m here to say. A warning.”

The shadows around Mina rustled, seemed to whisper to each other. Mina glanced up, her eyes widening even more. She had the spirit vision, Sierra realized, just not very advanced. At least, that’s how she made it seem.

“You have a warning for me, so you hide out in the woods and wait for me to come to you? You couldn’t send a text or something? This is creepy.”

“No, I know, I . . . I was gonna come out and talk to you, but then I felt it nearby and . . .”

“Felt what, girl? Come on, now.”

“The . . .” She sighed. “Here.” With a trembling hand, she held up what looked like an old playing card.

Sierra didn’t move. “What’s that?”

“It’s from the Deck of Worlds. Take it.”

Sierra shook her head. “My mama told me not to take freaky magic cards from strange white girls I meet in the woods.”

“Sierra, I’m . . . I’m not here to hurt you. I know you’ve had problems with the Sorrows before, but —”

“You’re with the Sorrows?” All the shadows tensed and took a step forward. Sierra clenched her fists. “Get out of here. Leave. Don’t talk to me in the hallway. Don’t talk to my friends. And definitely don’t let me catch you skulking around these woods while I’m working with my shadowshapers.”

“It’s not like that, Sierra, listen —”

“I listened. I heard what you said. Get out of my sight before I let these shadows loose on you.”

Mina shook her head, took a step backward. “You don’t understand,” she whispered, placing the card in the soft forest soil at her feet. “But when you do, come find me. I’m not . . . I’m not your enemy, Sierra. Take the card. *Don’t* leave it there. You need to . . . you need to take it.” She turned around and ran.

Sierra took a step toward the card.

“Sierra?” María called from behind her. “¿Estás bien, m’ija?”

“Sí, Mami,” Sierra said. “Ya voy.”

She crouched down to get a better look. An archaic, faded drawing was scrawled on the front of the card. It showed a white wolf with blue glowing eyes, its jaws open and lips pulled back into a snarl. Gleaming castle towers spiraled toward a stormy sky in the background. *El SABUESO de la LUZ* was scrawled across the top in elegant, medieval print. On the bottom it read, *The HOUND of LIGHT*.

Sierra stood up. The spirits flushed around her as she backed away from the card, then turned and walked quickly out of the woods.