

JENNIFER ABRAHAMS

THE
SEVENTH
DAY

BOOK #3 IN THE VAMPIRE'S WITCH SAGA



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The Vampire's Witch Saga**

Jennifer Abrahams

About Jennifer Abrahams

Jennifer Abrahams is the author of *The Den*, *In the Blood*, and *The Seventh Day*.

While studying Psychology and Sociology at Boston College an event took place that significantly altered her life and ultimately inspired the creation of *The Vampire's Witch Saga*. She lives with her husband in New York City.

Jennifer loves to hear from you, so please visit www.jenniferabrahamsauthor.com to stay in touch.

Books by Jennifer Abrahams

THE VAMPIRE'S WITCH SAGA

THE DEN (Book #1)

IN THE BLOOD (Book #2)

THE SEVENTH DAY (Book #3)

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A Dream Within a Dream
Take this kiss upon the brow!
And, in parting from you now,
Thus much let me avow-
You are not wrong, who dream
That my days have been a dream;
Yet if Hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
*Is it therefore the less **gone**?*
All *that we see or seem*
Is but a dream within a dream ...

-Edgar Allan Poe

Inspired by Actual Events ...

-One-

Faith

It was daytime in New Orleans, but the den was dark below the Quarter's cobblestone streets. Skyla sat cross-legged in the circle, chanting. The once-cool concrete floor grew warm underneath her. She was one of five members who were left in the makeshift home underneath the local bar, Steve's Place. They had been at "the practice" for hours, pausing only for water breaks and the last sips of the remaining bottled blood.

Brooke, Skyla's oldest and best friend—from this lifetime—was dead asleep on James' bed. They had all agreed that Brooke required an hour of rest before beginning again. She had gotten used to sleeping through the day, usually with

James by her side. Brooke had been bitten only twice—she had not yet been turned into a vampire, but her body was acclimating to that way of life.

James was uncharacteristically awake, even though his body ached during daytime hours. He could not miss the opportunity to pray for strength and guidance with his remaining den brothers and sisters—not while Lucy and Peter were out searching for their missing father and leader, Steve. James would chant *The Seven Sacred Let Lines* and lead the den in Steve's absence.

Brooke was doing better than Skyla would have thought. Brooke seemed to be catching on and was even able to read a few thoughts toward the end of the last meditation session. James was determined that Brooke would be ready for her impending immortality.

Alex was glad for James' interest in Brooke. It would divert the vampire's attention away from Skyla. *My Skyla*. Then he quickly shut his mind again so that the others would not hear his private hopes. He had not taken the long road trip with Skyla to simply hand her over to Steve. The dreams of the evolving den were no longer his dreams.

The bar would open late today, not until the chef got in at 5. Then the five would have to break up the circle and the final decision would be made. Would Brooke be the next immortal in the den? Skyla would breathe easier when that was official. She would book her flight back to New York City. She would pack up the things from the little apartment on Avenue C. She could not bear to live there without Brooke. Skyla would move back in with her mother, Vera, for the time being. Vera would be surprised and thrilled.

Vera was alone in that big brick house in Chestnut Hill. Skyla could picture her now—pulling down wine bottles, Champagne, anything and everything she could get her hands on to toast to Skyla's return. Not that Vera ever needed an excuse to drink.

Skyla would clean out Brooke's stuff from the apartment, too. Brooke had followed Skyla down to New Orleans on a whim, expecting to be gone for a week at most. Skyla would ship anything Brooke wanted down to Steve's Place. One thing was sure in Skyla's mind: She was never coming back here again.

Skyla thought about her childhood house. She missed it for the first time. For some reason, she felt drawn to it. It was as if she were being called home. She wanted to feel safe in her own room. She wanted to go back and start again. Skyla would wait for Alex to come, and they would start their new life together. She had a loving mother, an occasionally present father somewhere on the other side of the world, and a loving partner to spend the rest of her life with. It seemed too much to hope for. Skyla was eager to be finished with the chanting.

"Pull it together!" James said out loud. "You need to concentrate, Skyla. We still need you."

Brooke gasped upon being woken from her sleep by James' outburst. She looked around the room as if she had forgotten where she was. She looked pale and sickly. When she stood, it was with great effort. Brooke walked over to where James was seated and sat next to him, wedging herself between Skyla and the vampire.

James looked at her and sighed. "Don't worry. I will have Mara take you out tonight. You need a drink. We will be out of our bottle supply very soon. Mara will have to teach you, because I won't leave here. I can't leave the den unprotected. You can bring me someone back."

"Where is Mara taking her?" Skyla asked.

"Oh, stop pretending like you don't know! You never noticed how Alex is gone during the night? You never noticed how he has so much more energy than you do when he wakes up? What, do you think that is magic?" Mara spit the words out.

"I don't know what it is!" Skyla retorted.

"I'll tell her!" Alex said. Then he took a deep breath.

*

Peter remained slumped on the hard wooden floor of the witch's bedroom. He was on his knees, and he held his head down in his hands. The song "You Are My Sunshine" started playing in his head. It was a Louisiana state song that his almost-forgotten mother had sung to him so many years ago. He was hearing one of the verses over and over.

The witch, Beverly, remained seated in the purple chair, but Stella hovered over Lucy's still body. She gently prodded and lifted limbs. Stella's tiny head shook back and forth every few minutes, her ageless black tendrils draping onto Lucy's pale face. Peter couldn't stomach the scene. He kept his head hung low, listening to his lost mother's voice singing in his head.

Time spun in frozen intervals, measured only by the sad song. When Stella finally spoke, her voice cut into one of the lines.

“It might not be too late. There may be some hope yet. If ... if we have faith in her soul,” Stella said.

Peter brought his head up to look at the tiny witch. The blood rushed out of it and he grew dizzy. He tried to rise, but both of his legs had fallen asleep beneath him. He fell to the floor, folding like a pretzel.

Beverly rose and Peter watched her walk around to the other side of the bed. He heard footsteps on the winding stairs. Ruby entered the room and swished over by Beverly. Beverly and Ruby stood back and looked at Stella. Peter was able to push himself to his feet. He gently sat on the edge of the bed, but Stella gave him the evil eye. He carefully backed up and sat in the purple chair previously occupied by Beverly.

“This girl is cursed for sure,” Stella said. “She is under a strong spell. The night devil has touched her down deep, but not to her soul—*not* to her soul. She still exists in there. We must bring her out. We must give her spirit a chance.” She paused. “Perhaps she is strong from her years of practice over at Steve’s. Perhaps she channels that learned inner strength. But that practice can’t help her now. She needs only light and love. None of the dark arts should be allowed to touch her.”

Peter laughed out loud. It was a hysterical sound. The three witch sisters snapped their heads in his direction.

He answered their gazes with a whispered question. “Witchcraft is not dark?”

“You know nothing, child!” Beverly scolded.

“Oh,” was Peter’s only reply.

Peter tried to remember what Steve had told him about witches, but his cloudy mind could not locate the memory. Too much had happened, and it seemed like ages since he’d felt Steve’s thoughts in his mind. He felt strangely disconnected from his den life. Peter suddenly missed the others. He had a rogue thought: He could run away. The witches wouldn’t stop him. Then he reprimanded himself for it. He would not leave Lucy. He would stay by Lucy’s side until the end—whatever that meant.

“What do we need to do?” asked Ruby a bit wearily.

“Yes. Let us get started,” Beverly said.

“Go into the swamp and get me a cottonmouth. Capture it alive and bring it to me in the kitchen.” Stella spit the order at Peter.

“You want me to go catch a poisonous swamp snake that could kill me?”

Peter didn’t know if she was serious or if that was a witch’s way of saying, “Go fly a kite.”

“Yes. You will see a snake basket in the boathouse down by the dock. Take Ruby with you. She has a way with snakes. She will help charm it for you.”

“We could search the entire day and never find one,” Peter said.

“Best get started then.” Stella looked down at Lucy. “Like I said, no time to waste here.”

“You want me to just leave Lucy with you and Beverly?” Peter said.

“You don’t have any choice, boy,” Beverly said.

He knew she was right. Ruby walked around and took his hand. It tingled at her touch. She led him out through the bedroom door.

*

Alex turned to Skyla. He said, “We drink human blood for enlightenment. It gives us powers to see and to hear each other. We don’t need it, because we haven’t been bitten—marked. Once bitten, though, a person will grow weaker if they don’t replenish with human blood. That’s the reason why Brooke grows weaker and more pale. She has been bitten twice. Now she depends on the blood of other humans. After the third bite, she won’t want to eat anything anymore. The act of chewing will be completely grotesque to her. The sunlight will bother her even more, and it will weaken her, too. But, mostly, she will need a drink.”

“What? What are you talking about?” Skyla began to tremble.

Mara crawled across the circle and sat on her knees in front of Skyla. She looked into Skyla’s eyes. She put both hands on Skyla’s face, one on each cheek. Skyla began to tingle. She felt the energy running out of her and into Mara’s hands. Skyla began to calm down; only her hands still trembled.

“Shhh,” Mara said. “It is all fine. This is life, Skyla. This is our life. You go home to yours. Remember this is our world. We let you visit and gave you a chance. We thank you for helping us, but you must leave us be.” Mara leaned in and kissed Skyla gently on the lips. It was the softest of kisses. It was warm and lingering. When Mara pulled away, Skyla leaned forward to make it last longer. Their eyes were locked until Alex placed his hand on Mara’s chest.

“That’s enough, Mara,” Alex said. “I think we should begin again. Time is passing quickly.”

Mara held Alex’s hand where he had placed it. When he began to feel the tingle, he abruptly pulled it away. Mara just smiled and crawled back to her position in the circle. She thought loudly. *She isn’t meant for this world, Alex. I am. I could make you happy. We are meant to be.*

Skyla looked at Alex, and he lowered his eyes. James pretended not to hear, but a slight nod sneaked through. Then they all grabbed hands. The flickering candles cast little white flecks of light around the room. They began again.

*

Peter walked with Ruby out of Stella’s room. They held hands down the winding, narrow staircase and then continued holding hands down the back staircase that led into the kitchen. Ruby led Peter right out the back door.

Peter took his hand back, but he followed closely behind Ruby as they trekked through the short, crisp grass. When the grass grew longer and the ground became damp, they made a turn toward the boathouse, with Ruby still leading the way. She didn’t talk to Peter. She walked ahead as if he were not even there. He thought that this excursion was probably a very bad idea.

Several times Peter had to quash the impulse to turn around. He could grab Lucy and make a run for the den. *But then what would we do with her? No.* Peter would listen to the witches and hopefully avoid getting a fatal snakebite in the meantime.

Ruby's long white ponytail swung back and forth as she took long strides toward the far-off shack. She had let down her braids from the night before, and her hair was wavy and smooth. When Ruby reached the old boathouse, the door flew open of its own accord. It slammed against the outside with a loud bang, startling Peter and causing him to jump back several feet. He heard Ruby chuckle at his expense as she entered the shack. Her voice took on an eerie echo. Peter took a breath and made up the distance quickly. He walked in behind her.

Peter looked frantically around, but Ruby had vanished. The boathouse was stifling. He noticed a huge black spider crawling on the rafter in the far right corner. Ruby chuckled again. Her voice bounced off the rotting wooden planks and hung in the thick air. He took another step inside. He peered around the old rowboat that was lying on its side.

"Aha! Found it!" Ruby popped up holding a large whicker basket.

Peter screamed at the top of his lungs. The scream reverberated throughout the shed. Ruby looked on with wide eyes. She let the basket swing back and forth in her outstretched hand.

When the scream ceased to resonate, Peter took a deep breath and managed an "Oh, good."

"Don't fret. Catching snakes is so much fun! Just mind that you don't get bit," Ruby warned.

"How do you expect to get the snake into that basket anyway?"

Ruby ignored him and started lifting old junk and looking underneath it. Peter watched the spider in the corner. He had captured snakes when he was

younger. The pet store would buy them for a few dollars. They were just little garden snakes or harmless swamp ones, though. This mission was totally different. One bite from a cottonmouth and it could mean death or a hospital visit at the very least. He wondered if Ruby would take him in for actual medical care or just say some magic words, thinking that would cure him. He shook his head. It was hard to stay calm in this heat with a witch as his swamp guide.

“Found it!” Ruby shouted.

Peter’s startled scream took longer to settle this time.

Ruby had the basket in one hand and a long stick with a bag on the end of it in the other. She walked out of the boathouse looking very much like a little girl going on an imaginary hunting trip. Peter followed behind.

Ruby passed the airboat. She walked to the farther dock, where a rickety wooden boat was tied up. The boat had a small motor, but two oars were on the floor of it anyway. Ruby jumped on, but Peter just peered down at the boat. It had a little white canopy over the driver’s seat to keep the sun out. The only other seats were provided by a bench that ran across the middle. Ruby pointed to the ropes. Peter’s eyes followed her finger in that direction, but his feet refused to move.

“Let’s go!” Ruby clapped her hands, and Peter felt a jolt throughout his body. His eyes popped open.

He walked over, untied the boat, and jumped in. Ruby started the motor. It took three tries for it to sputter to life. Peter was amazed that it worked at all.

“O ye of little faith,” Ruby said as if she were reading his thoughts.

Peter closed his mind tight. He did not want the witch to get into his head. He would have to be more careful. He seemed to be losing himself here. The sun was high in the sky now. He didn't even register the passage of time. He would have to pay careful attention to keep his wits about him. Witches were tricky creatures.

-Two-

The Magic Garden

“Does the sun bother you?” Ruby looked at Peter out of the corner of her eye as she drove the little boat.

“I’m not used to it. I work nights, so I mostly sleep during the days,” Peter answered.

“No, that’s not it. You have been bitten, no?” She turned to face him now.

“What difference does it make?”

“It makes all the difference in the world, my friend. You have begun the change. I can tell. How many marks do you have?”

Peter thought about lying, but he didn’t. “I have two from Steve.”

Ruby shuddered. She turned back to watch the waterway as she drove the little boat at a sleepy speed.

“Does that bother you?” Peter asked.

“Well, one bite is simply a claim—no physical change is really made. But two ... two is to prepare you for your new life. After the second bite you should start acclimating to a new schedule and diet. It is time to get ready for the third bite and the immortal drink, when Stephen will give you his blood.”

“That was the plan. But if he doesn’t return ...” Peter couldn’t finish.

“If he doesn’t return, then you will weaken. Your body is slowly deteriorating as we speak. Each bite draws life from you. That is why you are dependent on drinking the life from others. The rest of your mortal coven only drinks human

blood to increase their powers. You need it. Haven't you noticed? I have. You are paler than you were just yesterday. It is slight, but I can tell. Oh, you can go on for some time in this limbo state, but eventually you will die an agonizingly slow death. There is no saving you if Steve doesn't return. Nothing even Stella can do for you," Ruby said as she shook her head.

"I always thought ... I mean, I was taught that two bites meant I still had some kind of freedom. It was my choice to stay at the den and wait for Steve. Why are you telling me this?"

"You should be prepared." Ruby pointed a finger at him.

"Steve will return. When he does, I am sure he plans to change me, not just let me die."

"I warn you to be on guard for any scenario. I have seen a vampire go back on his word before. Steve may change his mind about you. The way I see it, there are three ways he can kill you. If he is angry, he will bite you and never give you his own blood to drink. He will let you die the painful death. If he still loves you, he may be gentler. He will drink you slowly and completely dry and allow you pleasure as you go. Or ... the worst possible case: he can force you to drink his blood after only giving you the two bites. Any way, it is the end of you." Ruby's voice had become nothing more than a whisper.

A shiver raced down Peter's spine. He tried to speak, but nothing came out.

"First things first. We must heal Lucy, then we can worry about your future. Keep your eyes open for the snakes. You can see them swimming around here from time to time." Ruby thus ended the disheartening conversation.

The sun moved in the sky. Ruby and Peter traveled in their little boat, peering over the sides. They looked for the cottonmouth snake and sat in silence.

*

Beverly and Stella fussed over Lucy's lifeless body. They considered various concoctions. They compared memories of like situations. Nothing seemed conclusive.

"Well, I will do my best. I must go down and prepare for when Ruby and Peter return with our serpent. Watch over her. If there is any sign of life, call for me immediately."

Beverly nodded and took a seat in the purple chair. She kept her eyes glued to Lucy's face.

Stella went swiftly down the staircases and into the kitchen. She grabbed the large stew pot from the cupboard and brought it to the sink. Stella loved her kitchen. It was a perfect working kitchen. The sink was white ceramic, a good farmhouse sink. She placed the pot inside and turned on the water. She busied herself with other preparations as it filled.

Stella opened the knife drawer and inspected several large knives. She turned them over, examining the different blades. She finally settled on a large one with a wooden handle. This one was Stella's favorite chopping knife. She placed it next to the large chopping block that sat on the counter to the right of the sink.

Stella checked the pot, but it wasn't full enough yet. She walked back over to the cupboard to get out the colander. As she was about to close the rickety

cupboard door, she heard the floorboards creak above. She froze, waiting for Beverly's call.

Nothing.

After a few moments, Stella continued. She found the large silver colander and placed it next to the chopping block.

The pot was half-filled now. Stella shut the faucet. She lifted the pot up enough so that she could rest it on the edge of the sink. It was too heavy to carry, but she could drag it over the counter to the stove. Stella dragged it a foot to the left and then scraped it across the front burners and onto the back two. She turned the knobs until she heard the clicking noise, and a flame burst out of each back burner. She kept it on "high." It was positive thinking. That pot would need to be ready as soon as the snake arrived.

Stella cocked her ear toward the staircase but heard nothing. She walked out to the back porch and picked up her gardening gloves, shovel, and basket. She made her way to the garden.

Upstairs, Beverly heard the slam and the bounce of the screen door. She knew Stella would be out back for a few hours, picking just the right herbs. Beverly watched Lucy and tried to channel her energy to help the poor girl.

Stella walked to the basil first. It grew up to her chin, and she knew that this was the most spectacular herb garden in all of Louisiana. She planted fruits in her herb garden as offerings to the birds. This kept things in balance and pleased the land. Her herb garden thrived, and its fragrances reached all the way through the house when the wind blew just right.

Stella collected basil and then lemongrass. She walked over to the section where her Red Shield hibiscus was planted. She felt so much love for this beautiful plant. It grew tall and flowery. Stella cut off three of the beautiful flowers. Next she walked to where the nettles grew. She said a prayer and cut off a large clump of leaves. She put the nettle leaves into the basket on top of the basil, lemongrass, and hibiscus. She ambled over to the white wrought-iron bench in the middle of the garden.

Stella placed her basket on the dirt and sat down. She sat stiff straight and folded her hands in her lap. She closed her eyes and breathed in the sweet air. The fragrances encircled her, and she let herself be engulfed by the magic garden.

When Stella opened her eyes, the sun had made its arc and was settled in the West. She could see the red horizon outlined in bright oranges and yellows. The air was cooler now. She picked up her basket and left her lovely garden, closing the white picket fence behind her. She walked up the porch steps, dropping her gloves and shovel onto the top one.

Stella walked into her kitchen and peered into her pot, where she saw the bubbles jumping around. She turned down the flame from “high” to “simmer.” The boiling would have to wait for the snake. She placed her basket of herbs on the counter next to the colander. She washed them out and placed them on the chopping block. She chopped and chopped, mixing all the herbs. Together they made an herbal perfume that was sure to please any soul. She grabbed the fresh garlic from the windowsill above the counter. She added that to her mix. Garlic could not be left out of any of Stella’s potions or brews. It was of the utmost

importance where curses were involved. When she was done chopping, she wiped her hands on the dish towel and took another deep inhalation. Then Stella made her way up the two staircases to see if there had been any change in Lucy's condition.

*

Ruby and Peter searched the swamp for snakes. They found several that looked like they could be the necessary cottonmouth but were not. Peter was looking at the setting sun. He felt better now. It was cooler, and the sunlight was not beating down on him.

"Better now, Peter? See, you are a creature for the dark," Ruby stated.

"Yes. It's true. I am more comfortable now. Doesn't the heat bother you?"

"Oh, no. I love the humid heat that floats off the Bayou. It is so wonderful. I never go outside at night. The night is full of terror. No offense." Ruby giggled and looked away.

"Ha! None taken," Peter said.

Peter was about to tell her all about the wonders of the dark when he spotted it. It was three feet long and swimming in a slithering motion across the water. Its almost-square snout was dark brown with yellow spots. Its body was nearly black, and had it been any darker out, Peter might have missed it. It was making its way to the opposite bank, where it would surely disappear into the brush.

Ruby followed Peter's gaze. She acted quickly. With precision, she moved the boat toward the snake. She motioned for Peter to take over steering the boat. Ruby grabbed the stick with the bag on it and leaned over the bow of the boat. With her left hand she splashed around, and with her right hand she held the bag in front

of the snake. It swam right into the bag, and she lifted it over her head. Peter cut the engine and ran to her side.

“Grab the basket!” Ruby yelled.

“Here!” Peter said as he threw the basket toward her. He wanted no part in the actual capture.

Ruby remained calm and had the writhing snake in the basket in moments. She pulled the stick out and tied the basket cover down. With a smile and a nod, she walked back to her seat and turned the motor back on. The boat was turned around, and they were headed back to Lucy.

*

Beverly was watching Stella check Lucy’s vital signs again when she heard the screech of the screen door. The witches looked at each other and smiled. They knew Ruby would not return without the snake.

Stella ordered Beverly to keep watch, and she went down to the kitchen to start the remedy. She ran straight to the stove and turned the flames to “high.” Then she turned and walked toward Peter and Ruby with her hands stretched out. Ruby handed over the basket as if she were a midwife handing over a newborn. Peter hung back and leaned against the counter next to the fresh herbs. Stella saw him close his eyes and inhale.

Stella brought the basket to the stove. She waited for the bubbles to start popping around the pot.

Stella looked to Ruby when the water was ready. Stella opened the basket and Ruby began humming a song to calm the snake. Stella took the bag out and held

it over the pot. She nodded her head toward the pot's lid, which was on the table. Ruby picked it up and got ready. Ruby never stopped humming her tune as Stella untwisted the bag and held it over the pot. The snake slid out and into the enormous cauldron. Ruby put the top on swiftly and held it down as Stella turned the heat to "low." Peter watched with wide eyes and listened as the snake fought to get out of the pot. Both Stella and Ruby were holding the pot cover down now. It seemed like a long time that the snake was fighting. When it was finally still, Ruby and Stella relaxed and took the top off. Stella rummaged through a drawer and found a large wooden spoon. She stepped onto a little step stool and poked at the snake.

"It was a good fighter. We should have lots of good venom in there," Stella said as she looked down into the pot.

Stella walked over to her herbs and grabbed a handful. She shuffled back to the pot.

"Should I help?" Peter asked Ruby.

"Oh, no. Stella cooks in this kitchen. This is for her to do. Just watch."

Stella went back for a second handful and carefully carried them back to her cauldron. She stepped up on the stool and sprinkled them in on top of the rest.

When Stella swept up the third and final handful, Peter couldn't help but ask her, "What is it?"

"We have lots of mystical herbs in here: nettles for purifying the blood, lemongrass to ease the pain, basil for strength, the flowers of the Red Shield hibiscus

to heal the heart, and garlic to protect her. These herbs, combined with the venom of our sacred provider, will free Lucy from this catatonic state.”

Peter’s legs seemed to give out. He found himself on the kitchen floor looking up at the two witches. They ignored him and went to stir and stare into the pot. When the potion was cooking to their liking, they placed the lid back on top and looked over at Peter, who had made it into a kitchen chair.

Ruby walked over and took his hand. “We will try this now. There are no guarantees, but you must believe. We must have faith in the healing powers of the earth. We must know in our hearts that this magic can work.”

Stella ladled out a good portion of the potion into a soup bowl. She placed the bowl on a tray along with a spoon and what looked like a turkey baster. She placed a cloth napkin on top of the steaming bowl. Stella began ascending the stairs. Ruby and Peter followed behind.