

JENNIFER ABRAHAMS

THE
DEN

BOOK #1 IN THE VAMPIRE'S WITCH SAGA



THE DEN

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The Vampire's Witch Saga**

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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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*Long Years apart – can make no
Long Years apart – can make no
Breach a second cannot fill –
The absence of the Witch does not
Invalidate the spell –
The embers of a Thousand Years
Uncovered by the Hand
That fondled them when they were Fire
Will stir and understand -*

-Emily Dickinson

Inspired by Actual Events...

-One-

Alone Again

Skyla Jane Judge shivered again—not the kind of shiver that reminds one of the holiday season but the kind of teeth-chattering, bone-chilling, muscles-trembling shiver that causes the mind to wander toward much darker affairs.

Skyla had been suffering this way for the past two days. Two days: That was how long it had taken for her world to come tumbling down. That was how long it had been since she had slept or eaten.

Skyla looked around the crowded college cafeteria and noticed that no one else seemed to look cold. Everyone seemed to be enjoying lunch this sunny May afternoon. Skyla thought that the guy and girl in the booth across the way were staring at her, so she looked down.

Is it actually cold in here? Skyla shifted a heavy mug from hand to hand and watched the steam rise. She breathed in the vanilla-nut aroma smothering her face.

Skyla still couldn't shake the foggy feeling that she was functioning within a dream. She squeezed the mug hard. Her fingers began to feel the hot tea inside, but this warmed only the very tips of her fingers. The heat would not travel up to the rest of her body. Skyla shook her head back and forth and willed herself to focus.

Two days ago she had a sense of self and a boyfriend, Craig, who had spoken of wanting to marry her. Two days ago she had never heard of Yvette, the clairvoyant who had just brought her world to an abrupt halt. The words kept spinning in her head, regurgitating themselves into a mixture of terror and hopelessness.

Skyla couldn't get the tidings out of her thoughts. They echoed over and over like a bad dream. Only it hadn't been a dream. The psychic was real, and she had told Skyla only what she saw in the cards. She used them only as a vessel. Of course, some would never believe in those kinds of things. They would say that the crazy lady was a fake and that tarot-card reading was for mere entertainment. That's what the other girls had been saying when Tamarah, from the dorm room next door, had said her mother was coming for a visit and would do a reading for anyone who was interested. Everyone had thought it would be great fun, and since it had cost only thirty dollars, they all had done it. Afterward, all the girls gathered in the common room at the end of the hall, joking and teasing each other about the results of the reading. They had thought it was hysterical to know how many kids Yvette thought they would have and were shocked to hear who would be getting a divorce one day. It was just for amusement anyway. No one placed much stock in the predictions—no one except Skyla.

There was no way Skylia could deny the truth of the clairvoyant's words. In fact, Skylia had known what would be said before Yvette walked into her dorm room two days ago. Skylia felt it with every fiber of her being. It was as if the psychic were retelling a story Skylia had read in a book a long, long time ago. It was all very familiar. It had all been locked away deep down in Skylia's soul.

Skylia suddenly remembered she was not alone in the booth: *He* was sitting here, too. He was looking at her. It was obvious. He was about to leave.

Skylia wondered how he would do it. She saw his mouth open and then close again: He was rethinking his strategy. His eyes darted around the cafeteria. Skylia bet herself that he wanted to run. She smiled a bit as she realized no one would wager against it. Skylia noticed that his left leg pointed out of the booth. Somehow his other leg shook impatiently at the same time. His left arm rested on the back of the red pleather seat. He was ready to make his escape.

It wasn't the first time this had been played out. Skylia had seen this scene before, and God knew it would not be the last time either. After all, Skylia Jane Judge's biggest problem was keeping her mouth shut, and so she had the uncanny ability to make boys run away. She could remember three off the top of her head: Chris from junior high school, David from high school, and Keith from freshman year at the first of the three colleges she had attended.

Skylia should have known better than to share Yvette's words with Craig, but they had really affected her. So she shared them with him. He did ask, after all.

Then again, they always ask, "What's on your mind?" and yet they never really want to know.

Craig tapped the fingertips of his right hand on the table and took a deep breath. He looked over the top of Skylia's head, studying the door at the far end of the cafeteria.

"Umm, soooo, did you hear what I said? Skylia, I have just so much going on lately. I don't know if I can give you what you deserve. Anyway, I really did love you. It's just not the right time. Things are crazy right now. I will talk to you soon, though." He slithered out of the banquette and backed away. "I have to go. So, I will call *you*, okay?"

"Oh, just leave, Craig!"

And so Skylia Jane Judge was alone again. Scared again. Not that Craig could protect her, but it was nice to have a distraction, someone who made her feel normal. *Is it possible to run away from yourself?* No. Skylia Jane Judge should know. She had tried.

Skylia stared out the window at the bustling campus. *New England is such a beautifully strange place.* It was just barely sixty degrees, but the girls were in minuscule skirts and flirting with the guys who were practically drooling at the first sight of skin shown since the leaves had turned orange six months ago. It didn't look like they had a care in the world, besides their obvious attractions.

Skylia lived here, went to school here, and was immersed in the same culture as every other person here. So why was she so utterly odd? *I feel as if I am floating around in a bubble that only touches the ground momentarily. Then I am off again and no one has noticed that I have all but disappeared.* It was an epiphany.

Well, enough of the self-pity. And off she went to Philosophy. It was the last week of class before finals, and the excitement on campus was palpable. She made a silent promise to focus on being like everyone else. She tried to notice the warmth in the air and the green leaves that had popped up on the trees. She saw the other students sitting on the still, cool grass that lined the pathway between the cafe Craig had just escaped from and the Gothic-style buildings where classes were held. The church's steeple loomed in the background, standing guard over the campus.

Skyla thought a few girls were staring at her. She smiled to be like them. Then she smiled because she saw a girl nearly half a foot taller than she was shaking a blond ponytail back and forth. Skyla's best friend and roommate waited outside the building for her. Brooke Leigh Collins leaned against the wall, casually posing and effortlessly resembling a classic runway model.

Brooke stared with the same determined look she wore whenever there was a problem that needed to be worked out. Skyla knew that look well because she had seen it consistently for all her life.

"So, Skyla, it's been forty-eight hours since you had the reading, right?" Brooke asked. "So now what? What are you supposed to do?"

"Well, I just don't know. What else can I do? Go to Philosophy, I guess."

"Tell me again what the cards showed." Brooke was being her bossy self.

"We can talk about it after class. We are going to be late!"

Brooke scowled at Skyla. Her bright blue eyes blazed a hole in the back of Skyla's head as they walked into class. Brooke didn't want to wait until after the

lecture, but Skyla would not engage in any conversation while the professor was talking.

Class ended and Brooke promptly resumed the questioning as they bustled out of the room. "So now what? Go over it again." Brooke tapped Skyla's shoulder and said, "Earth to Skyla."

Skyla looked around to make sure that no one was listening. "Craig broke up with me today. He did it in the cafeteria."

"Well, Sky, we knew that was coming." Brooke tried to look adequately upset for her friend's sake, but she'd never really cared for Craig. She looked at Skyla and raised her eyebrows expectantly.

Skyla sighed and began going over what had happened. "Again. The psychic, Yvette, mentioned the lineage on my mother's side. We spoke about my Aunt Terry, who Yvette said was a very powerful witch. Terry had dreams about those who had passed over, and she had premonitions that always came true. I basically knew all of that, though. Yvette said it was obvious that I was a witch, too. I had been a witch, in fact, for the last few lifetimes. But I think she meant it in the nicest way."

"Yes, I am sure. You are Skyla the good witch. I want to talk about that other thing. You know, about someone coming to get you!"

"I just don't really want to talk about that part anymore. It really has me a bit on edge. I keep thinking people are looking at me."

"Come on! Our classes are over for the day. What else are we going to do? We can't just ignore that this happened. We have the rest of the day to work it out. Let's just go over it one more time," Brooke pushed.

“Seriously, we can’t possibly talk about it anymore,” Skylia said.

“Skylia Jane, we have to figure this out. We can’t keep sleeping with the lights on. We have to take control of this.” Brooke stomped her designer ballet flats and stopped in place.

“Fine. Let’s find a nice spot to talk it out.” Skylia rolled her eyes, but Brooke purposely did not notice.

Brooke walked toward a large oak that stood in the middle of the open lawn. She put her leather backpack down in the shade and sat on it, tucking her short pleated skirt between her legs. Skylia followed along and threw her own canvas backpack so that it landed with a thump next to her friend. Skylia plopped herself down on the grass. The blades were still thin and sparse, and the ground felt hard and chilly. She knew there would be little dirt marks on her jeans when she stood up, but it felt good to be grounded. It was nice to feel that she was part of this earth in some way. Skylia looked around and saw that no one was sitting within earshot. No one seemed to be looking at her. She visibly relaxed and sat cross-legged, leaning back on her hands. Brooke hugged her legs and waited.

-Two-

The Psychic

Skyla honestly did not know where to start. She could usually tell Brooke anything, but this was different. Skyla remembered the day when Yvette had walked into the room. Skyla held the door open and Yvette took one step in. She was a few inches shorter than Skyla, maybe five foot one. She had dark hair that was pulled up into a messy little bun on top of her head. Strands of wispy hair stuck out all around her head like a halo. She had on jeans and a short-sleeve sweater that hung down to her knees. She wore leather flip-flops and carried a fringed bag over her shoulder. Skyla thought she looked ready to hang out in a field and listen to some music.

Yvette took note of the room. She looked around and absorbed all the little signs of a life. She took two steps to the right to study the pictures that were on Skyla's desk. There were two pictures of Craig. One had been taken at that year's winter formal. The other had been taken the previous summer at a Newport Beach party, the night they'd met. There was one of her parents taken during her high school graduation. It was a rare capture and the only one Skyla had of her parents together since they'd divorced eighteen years ago. Her father rarely made it to any big occasion. He always sent lavish gifts or ample funds to make up for his absence. He was now living with his fourth wife in Hong Kong. Her mother never missed a celebration, especially one that called for a toast. On another part of the wall hung a

collage of pictures. In it Brooke and Skyla were pictured at various parties from elementary school through Skyla's twenty-first birthday party. It had been a gift from Brooke.

Yvette walked farther in and circled the tiny space. She settled on the floor between Brooke's and Skyla's beds. Yvette sat with her hands folded and legs crossed, and she waited for Skyla to join her. So Skyla closed the door and went over to sit facing the woman. Then Yvette reached into her satchel and took out a pack of seemingly harmless cards. She held them in her right hand and covered the pack with her left. Yvette looked right into Skyla's dark brown eyes and straight down into Skyla's soul.

"Usually I ask if the client has a question," Yvette explained. "However, I see that you are at a crossroads. I see many beings around you."

The woman waved her arms in the air in Skyla's general area as if to illustrate the point. Skyla looked around the room hoping not to see any ghosts.

"It is clear," continued Yvette, "that you need to know what is next in *this* life for you. You are about to graduate, after all. Our question is, how do you find your life path? Yes?" Yvette held a finger up to warn against an answer. She placed the cards down between Skyla and herself but just a bit closer to Skyla. "Pick those up and cut the stack in half," she said.

Skyla obliged with a little smile and a nod. Skyla swept the cards up and then leaned forward and placed the two stacks right in front of Yvette. The cards were shuffled, and then Yvette repeated the request. Skyla cut the deck again. Yvette picked them up and stacked them together. One by one she began to carefully lay

the cards down in the little space between them. Skyla had no idea what the pictures meant, so she kept her eyes on Yvette. There was no reaction from the psychic. She just narrated as the cards went down.

The first card went directly between Skyla and Yvette. “This is the present issue,” Yvette explained. The second one was placed on top of the first card so that a cross was formed. “This is your test at this point of your life,” Yvette said. The third card went down in line with the first card, closer to Yvette. “This—this is the root of our question.” To the left of the first card, Yvette placed the fourth one. “This card represents your most recent past.” The fifth card was placed in the column with the first, second, and third cards. It was placed down right in front of Skyla. “This will tell us of your potential.” The sixth card was placed to the right of the first card. Yvette slapped it with her right hand and explained, “This shows us what is happening for you now and in the next few weeks.”

The last four cards were placed all the way to Yvette’s right, in a column that stretched from Yvette to Skyla. Yvette explained them in the same monotone as she had done with the first six.

“This seventh card represents your true inner feelings or inner conflicts. The eighth card represents the feelings or energies of those who are surrounding you. The ninth card shows us what you are wishing for in your heart. The tenth and last card that I am placing down will show us the outcome.”

Yvette’s face never gave a sign of what the pictures on those cards meant. Skyla had no idea what to make of the elaborate illustrations, so she busied herself by twirling a lock of her curly hair. The psychic looked down at the cross and

column formations on the floor and placed the rest of the cards to the side. Yvette took a deep breath in and let it out in a little huff. She kept her eyes on the cards and pointed to the first one. Life for Skyla would never be the same.

“So!” Brooke banged her now-bare feet against the hard ground. Skyla jumped. She had to blink several times before Yvette faded and Brooke’s image appeared before her.

“Okay, okay. I am just trying to get it straight,” Skyla said.

Skyla would tell Brooke the gist of what was told by Yvette. The reading was so personal. Skyla didn’t usually keep any secrets from Brooke; actually, she couldn’t remember one thing she ever had kept a secret. This was different, though. How could she talk about something that she really didn’t understand? She had gone over parts of the reading before with Brooke. She had told Brooke the stuff about Yvette’s thinking she was a witch. It was something that Brooke and Skyla had always suspected anyway. Skyla would move on to one of the other things that were touched on: The essence of the first four cards signified what was happening around Skyla now. That’s the part that Brooke was interested in anyway. Skyla remembered all the cards. It had been difficult to determine the pictures and the writing, because all but one had been facing Yvette. They had been upside down to Skyla.

On the first card was a picture of a man standing in the middle of two roads. “The Fool” was written below his feet. The second card had a picture of a beautiful woman with wavy red hair that swirled around her face. A black cat sat at her side. “Queen of Wands” was printed in bold. The third card pictured a man hanging

upside down and read “The Hanged Man.” The fourth card was the only card that had faced Skyla. It was an illustration of a man surrounded by ten swords. The Roman numeral X was written above his head.

Skyla began, “Yvette told me that I was about to go through a breakup. It had not happened yet, but it was already set in my life plan—an inevitable breakup with my present boyfriend. He is not ‘the one.’ Guess she is pretty good, huh?”

Skyla tried to laugh, but the thought of Craig still brought a pang to her chest. She put a hand over her heart. Skyla closed her eyes, and Brooke rolled hers.

Skyla continued where she’d left off. “She saw that I was definitely at a crossroads in this life. She also spoke about a previous life. A life where I was extremely popular, beautiful, fun, and fabulous.”

Skyla coughed a little laugh. It was quite a contrast to this lifetime.

“It wasn’t my very last lifetime, and she wasn’t sure how many I had lived since then. But during this time she saw a lot of rich jewel colors and velvet because I dressed and acted like royalty. I was probably part of an elite class of people, a socialite. I had a busy nightlife, with lots of party people around me all the time. She said those party people were always gravitating towards me. They would seek me out or wait impatiently until I arrived at the ‘it’ place each evening. They were my groupies, sort of. I called them friends. These friends just happened to be”—Skyla took a deep breath and shook her head back and forth—“vampires. Not the vampires that you see in the movies, though.”

“Oh, what are these vampires like?” Brooke tried to smirk.

“Uh, I don’t know. I guess I added that part about them being different. She didn’t seem to make them the typical Dracula types in her description—something about drinking people’s energy. She didn’t say drinking blood.”

“Energy vampires?” Brooke said. “I wonder how that works anyway. Don’t you think they need blood, too?”

“I don’t know. It’s ridiculous really.” Skyla sat quietly for a while. Brooke let her be. She knew that Skyla was trying to bring the story together, and she could tell that the details were starting to become blurred in the retelling.

Skyla put her head in her hands and closed her eyes. She pictured Yvette in front of her. It was a very vivid image. It was as if the woman were following her—staying with her. Skyla wondered how long that would last. She could see Yvette pointing to that first card. She heard her say, “Are you ready?”