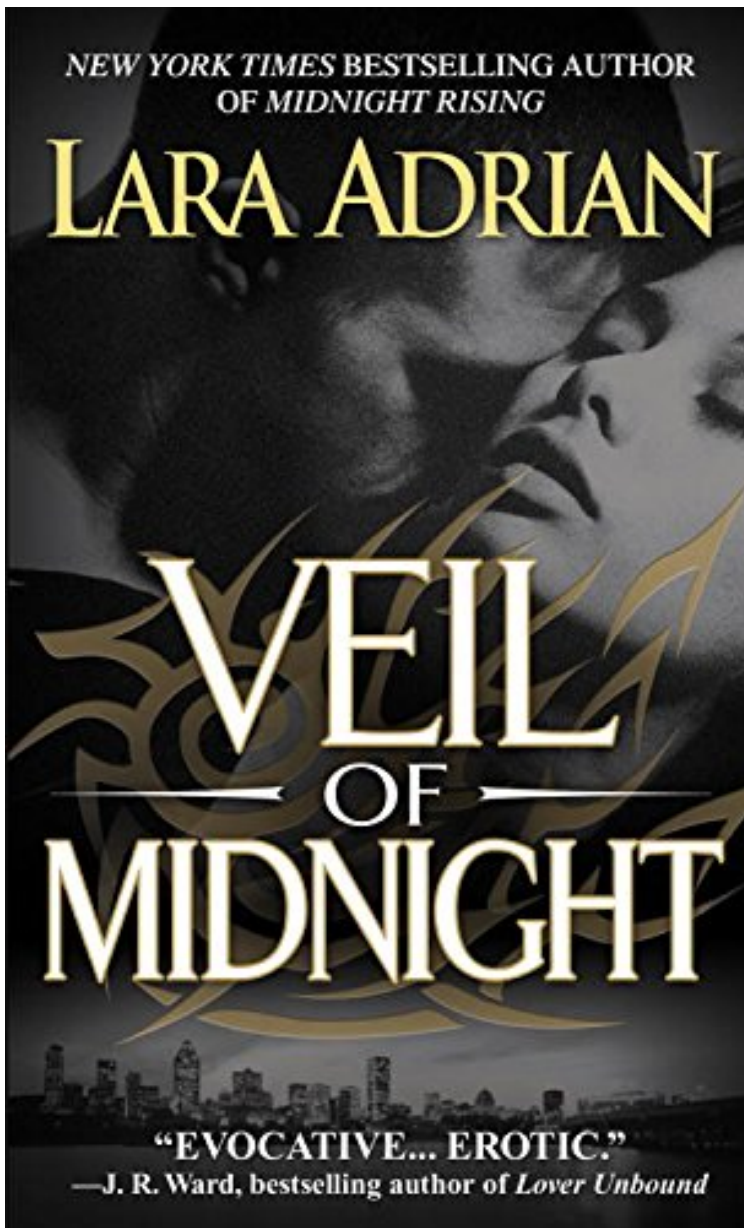


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Veil of Midnight: A Midnight Breed Novel



Par Lara Adrian
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurBound by blood, addicted to danger, they'll enter the darkestand most eroticplace of all.A warrior trained in bullets and blades, Renata cannot be bested by any manvampire or mortal. But her most powerful weapon is her extraordinary psychic abilitya gift both rare and deadly. Now a stranger threatens her hard-won independencea golden-haired vampire who lures her into a realm of darknessand pleasure beyond imagining. A combat-loving adrenaline junkie, Nikolai dispenses his own justice to enemies of the Breedand his latest quarry is a ruthless assassin. One woman stands in his way: the seductive,

cool-as-ice bodyguard, Renata. But Renatas powers are put to the test when a loved one, a child, is threatened and shes forced to turn to Niko for help. As the two join forces, as desire fans the flames of a deeper hunger, Renatas life is under siege by a man who offers the exquisite pleasure of a blood bond and a passion that could save or doom them both forever. From the Paperback edition. Extrait Chapter One

On stage in the cavernous jazz club below Montreal's street level, a crimson-lipped singer drawled into the microphone about the cruelty of love. Although her sultry voice was pleasant enough, the lyrics about blood and pain and pleasure clearly heartfelt, Nikolai wasn't listening. He wondered if she knew if any of the dozens of humans packed into the intimate club knew that they were sharing breathing space with vampires. The two young females sucking down pink martinis in the dark corner banquette sure as hell didn't know it. They were sandwiched between four such individuals, a group of slick, leather-clad males who were chatting them up without much success and trying to act like their bloodthirsty eyes hadn't been permanently fixed on the women's jugulars for the past fifteen minutes straight. Even though it was clear that the vampires were negotiating hard to get the humans out of the club with them, they weren't making much progress with their prospective blood Hosts. Nikolai scoffed under his breath. Amateurs. He paid for the beer he'd left untouched on the bar and headed at an easy stroll toward the corner table. As he approached, he watched the two human females scoot out of the booth on unsteady legs. Giggling, they stumbled for the restrooms together, disappearing down a dim, crowded hallway off the main room. Nikolai sat down at the table in a negligent sprawl. "Evening, ladies." The four vampires stared at him in silence, instantly recognizing their own kind. Niko lifted one of the tall, lipstick-stained martini glasses to his nose and sniffed at the dregs of the fruity concoction. He winced, pushing the offending drink aside. "Humans," he drawled in a low voice. "How can they stomach that shit?" A wary silence fell over the table as Nikolai's glance traveled among the obviously young, obviously civilian Breed males. The largest of the four cleared his throat as he looked at Niko, his instincts no doubt picking up on the fact that Niko wasn't local, and he was a far cry from civilized. The youth adopted something he probably thought was a hardass look and jerked his soul-patched chin toward the restroom corridor. "We saw them first," he murmured. "The women. We saw them first." He cleared his throat again, like he was waiting for his trio of wingmen to back him up. None did. "We got here first, man. When the females come back to the table, they're gonna be leaving with us." Nikolai chuckled at the young male's shaky attempt to stake his territory. "You really think there'd be any contest if I was here to poach your game? Relax. I'm not interested in that. I'm looking for information." He'd been through a similar song-and-dance twice already tonight at other clubs, seeking out the places where members of the Breed tended to gather and hunt for blood, looking for someone who could point him toward a vampire elder named Sergei Yakut. It wasn't easy finding someone who didn't want to be found, especially a secretive, nomadic individual like Yakut. He was in Montreal, that much Nikolai was sure of. He'd spoken to the reclusive vampire by phone as recently as a couple of weeks earlier, when he'd tracked Yakut down to inform him of a threat that seemed aimed at the Breed's most powerful, rarest member—the twenty or so individuals still in existence who were born of the first generation. Someone was targeting Gen Ones for extinction. Several had been slain within the past month, and for Niko and his brothers in arms back in Boston a small cadre of highly trained, highly lethal warriors known as the Order—the business of rooting out and shutting down the elusive Gen One assassins was mission critical. For that, the Order had decided to contact all of the known Gen Ones remaining in the Breed population and enlist their cooperation. Sergei Yakut had been less than enthusiastic to get involved. He feared no one, and he had his own personal clan to protect him. He'd declined the Order's invitation to come to Boston and talk, so Nikolai had been dispatched to Montreal to persuade him. Once Yakut was made aware of the scope of the current threat—the stunning truth of what the Order and all of the Breed were now up against—Nikolai was certain the Gen One would be willing to come on board. First he had to find the cagey son of a bitch. So far his inquiries around the city had turned up nothing. Patience wasn't exactly his strong suit, but he had all night, and he'd keep searching. Sooner or later, someone might give him the answer he was looking for. And if he kept coming up dry, maybe if he asked enough questions, Sergei Yakut would come looking for him instead. "I need to find someone," Nikolai told the four Breed youths. "A vampire out of Russia. Siberia, to be exact." "That where you're from?" asked the soul-patched mouthpiece of the group. He'd evidently picked up on the slight tinge of an accent that Nikolai hadn't lost in the long years he'd been living in the States with the Order. Niko let his glacial blue eyes speak to his own origins. "Do you know this individual?" "No, man. I don't know him." Two other heads shook in immediate denial, but the last of the four youths, the sullen one who was slouched low in the booth, shot an anxious look up at Nikolai from across the table. Niko caught that telling

gaze and held it. "What about you? Any idea who I'm talking about?" At first, he didn't think the vampire was going to answer. Hooded eyes held his in silence, then, finally, the kid lifted one shoulder in a shrug and exhaled a curse. "Sergei Yakut," he murmured. The name was hardly audible, but Nikolai heard it. And from the periphery of his vision, he noticed that an ebony-haired woman seated at the bar nearby heard it too. He could tell she had from the sudden rigidity of her spine beneath her long-sleeved black top and from the way her head snapped briefly to the side as though pulled there by the power of that name alone. "You know him?" Nikolai asked the Breed male, while keeping the brunette at the bar well within his sights. "I know of him, that's all. He doesn't live in the Darkhavens," said the youth, referring to the secured communities that housed most of the Breed civilian populations throughout North America and Europe. "Dude's one nasty mofo from what I've heard." "Yeah, he was," Nikolai acknowledged inwardly. "Any idea where I might find him?" "No." "You sure about that?" Niko asked, watching as the woman at the bar slid off her stool and prepared to leave. She still had more than half a cocktail in her glass, but at the mere mention of Yakut's name, she seemed suddenly in a big hurry to get out of the place. The Breed youth shook his head. "I don't know where to find the dude. Don't know why anyone would willingly look for him either, unless you got some kind of death wish." Nikolai glanced over his shoulder as the tall brunette started edging her way through the crowd gathered near the bar. On impulse, she turned to look at him then, her jade-green gaze piercing beneath the fringe of dark lashes and the glossy swing of her sleek, chin-length bob. There was a note of fear in her eyes as she stared back at him, a naked fear she didn't even attempt to hide. "I'll be damned," Niko muttered. She knew something about Sergei Yakut. Something more than just a passing knowledge, he was guessing. That startled, panicked look as she turned and broke for an escape said it all. Nikolai took off after her. He weaved through the thicket of humans filling the club, his eyes trained on the silky black hair of his quarry. The female was quick, as fleet and agile as a gazelle, her dark clothes and hair letting her practically disappear into her surroundings. But Niko was Breed, and there was no human in existence who could outrun one of his kind. She ducked out the club door and made a fast right onto the street outside. Nikolai followed. She must have sensed him hard on her heels because she pivoted her head around to gauge his pursuit and those pale green eyes locked on to him like lasers. She ran faster now, turning the corner at the end of the block. Not two seconds later, Niko was there too. He grinned as he caught sight of her a few yards ahead of him. The alley she'd entered between two tall brick buildings was narrow and dark, a dead end sealed off by a dented metal Dumpster and a chain-link fence that climbed some ten feet up from the ground. The woman spun around on the spiked heels of her black boots, panting hard, eyes trained on him, watching his every move. Nikolai took a few steps into the lightless alley, then paused, his hands held benevolently out to his sides. "It's okay," he told her. "No need to run. I just want to talk to you." She stared in silence. "I want to ask you about Sergei Yakut." She swallowed visibly, her smooth white throat flexing. "You know him, don't you." The edge of her mouth quirked only a fraction, but enough to tell him that he was correct. She was familiar with the reclusive Gen One. Whether she could lead Niko to him was another matter. Right now, she was his best, possibly his only, hope. "Tell me where he is. I need to find him." At her sides, her hands balled into fists. Her feet were braced slightly apart as if she were prepared to bolt. Niko saw her glance subtly toward a battered door to her left. She lunged for it. Niko hissed a curse and flew after her with all the speed he possessed. By the time she'd thrown the door open on its groaning hinges, Nikolai was standing in front of her at the threshold, blocking her path into the darkness on the other side. He chuckled at the ease of it. "I said there's no need to run," he said, shrugging lightly as she backed a step away from him. He let the door fall closed behind him as he followed her slow retreat into the alley. Jesus, she was breathtaking. He'd only gotten a glimpse of her in the club, but now, standing just a couple of feet from her, he realized that she was absolutely stunning. Tall and lean, willowy beneath her fitted black clothing, with flawless milk-white skin and luminous almond-shaped eyes. Her heart-shaped face was a mesmerizing combination of strength and softness, her beauty equal parts light and dark. Nikolai knew he was gaping, but damn if he could help it. "Talk to me," he said. "Tell me your name." He reached for her, an easy, nonthreatening move of his hand. He sensed the jolt of adrenaline that shot into her bloodstream. He could smell the citrusy tang of it in the air, in fact, but he didn't see the roundhouse kick coming at him until he took the sharp heel of her boot squarely in his chest. Goddamn. He rocked back, more surprised than unfooted. It was all the break she needed. The woman leapt for the door again, this time managing to disappear into the darkened building before Niko could wheel around and stop her. He gave chase, thundering in behind her. The place was empty, just a lot of naked concrete beneath his feet, bare bricks and exposed rafters all around him. Some fleeting sense of foreboding prickled at the back of his neck as he

raced deeper into the darkness, but the bulk of his attention was focused on the female standing in the center of the vacant space. She stared him down as he approached, every muscle in her slim body seeming tensed for attack. Nikolai held that sharp stare as he drew up in front of her. "I'm not going to hurt you." "I know." She smiled, just a slight curve of her lips. "You won't get that chance." Her voice was velvety smooth, but the glint in her eyes took on a cold edge. Without warning, Niko felt a sudden, shattering tightness in his head. A high-frequency sound cranked up in his ears, louder than he could bear. Then louder still. He felt his legs give out beneath him. He dropped to his knees, his vision swimming while his head felt on the verge of exploding. Distantly, he registered the sound of booted feet coming toward him several pairs, belonging to sizable males, vampires all of them. Muted voices buzzed above him as he suffered out the sudden, debilitating assault on his mind. It was a trap. The bitch had led him there deliberately, knowing he'd follow her. "Enough, Renata," said one of the Breed males who'd entered the room. "You can release him now." Some of the pain in Nikolai's head subsided with the command. He glanced up in time to see the beautiful face of his attacker staring down at him where he lay near her feet. "Strip him of his weapons," she said to her companions. "We need to get him out of here before his strength returns." Nikolai sputtered a few ripe curses at her, but his voice strangled in his throat, and she was already walking away, the thin spikes of her heels clicking over the field of cold concrete underneath him.

Chapter Two

Renata couldn't get out of the warehouse fast enough. Her stomach roiled. A cold sweat popped out along her forehead and down the back of her neck. She craved the fresh night air like her last breath, but she kept her stride even and strong. Her fisted hands held rigidly at her sides were the only outward indicator that she was anything but calm and collected. It was always like this for her the aftermath of using her mind's crippling power. Outside now, alone in the alley, she gulped in a few quick mouthfuls of air. The rush of oxygen cooled her burning throat, but it was all she could do not to double over from the rising pain that was coursing like a river of fire through her limbs and into the center of her being. "Damn it," she muttered into the empty darkness, rocking a bit on her tall heels. Taking a few more deep breaths, she stared at the black pavement under her feet and focused simply on holding herself together. Behind her came the swift, heavy shuffle of booted feet from out of the warehouse. The sound drew her head up sharply. Forced a look of cool apathy over the hot tightness in her face. "Careful with him," she said, glancing at the slack bulk of the big, nearly unconscious male she'd disabled, and who was now being carried like felled game by the four guards working with her. "Where are his weapons?" "Catch." A black leather duffel bag came sailing at her with barely a warning, heaved toward her by Alexei, the appointed leader of tonight's detail. She didn't miss the smirk on his lean face as the heavy duffel full of metal crashed into her chest. The impact felt like the pounding of a thousand nails into her sensitive skin and muscles, but she caught the bag and swung the long strap up over her shoulder without so much as a grunt of discomfort. But Lex knew. He knew her weakness, and he never let her forget it. Unlike her, Alexei and her other companions were vampires Breed, all of them. As was their captive, Renata had no doubt. She'd sensed as much when she'd first seen him in the club, a suspicion confirmed by the simple fact that she was able to take him down with her mind. Her psychic ability was formidable, but not without its limitations. It only worked on the Breed; the more simplistic human brain cells were unaffected by the high-frequency blast she was able to mentally project with little more than a moment's concentration. She herself was human, if born slightly different from basic Homo sapiens stock. To Lex and his kind, she was known as a Breedmate, one of a small number of human females born with unique extrasensory skills and the even rarer capability to successfully reproduce with those of the Breed. For women like Renata, ingesting Breed blood provided even greater strength. Longevity too. A Breedmate could live for some long centuries with regular feedings from a vampire's nourishing veins.

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