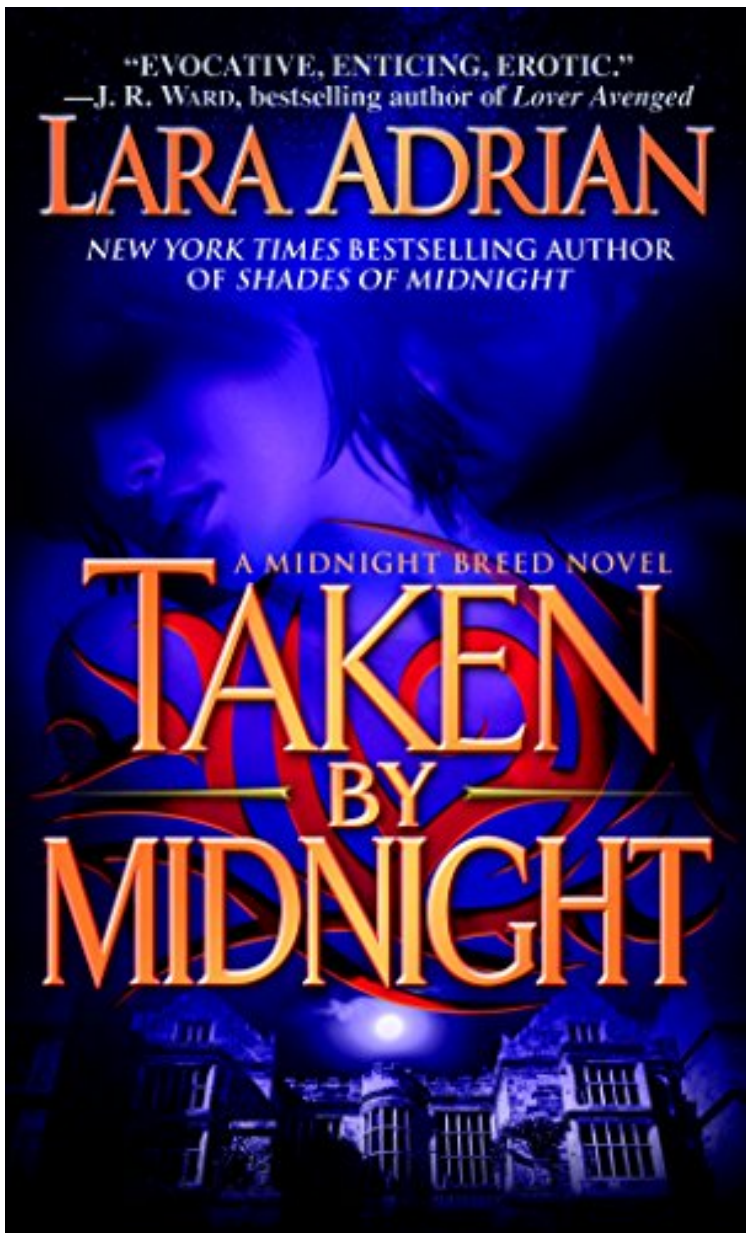


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Taken by Midnight: A Midnight Breed Novel



Par Lara Adrian

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurAT THE CROSSROADS OF DEATH AND DESIRE, A WOMAN TASTES A PLEASURE NO MORTAL IS MEANT TO SURVIVE.In the frozen Alaskan wilderness, former state trooper Jenna Darrow survives an unspeakable breach of body and soul. But with her narrow escape comes an even greater challenge. For strange changes are taking place within her, as she struggles to understandand controla new hunger. To do so, she will seek shelter in the Boston compound of the Order, an ancient race of vampire warriors whose very existence is shrouded in mystery. Perhaps the most mysterious of them all is

Brock, a brooding, dark-eyed alpha male whose hands hold the power to comfort, heal . . . and arouse. As she recovers under Brocks care, Jenna finds herself drawn to the Orders mission: to stop a ruthless enemy and its army of assassins from subjecting Earth to a reign of terror. Yet in spite of their resolve, a purely physical relationship without strings soon binds Brock and Jenna together with a desire fiercer than life and stronger than death itself until a secret from Brocks past and Jennas own mortality challenges their forbidden love to the ultimate trial by fire. From the Paperback edition. Extrait Chapter One Life . . . or death? The words drifted at her through the darkness. Detached syllables. The rough scrape of a flat, airless voice that reached into the heavy drowse of her mind and forced her to come awake, to listen. To make a choice. Life? Or death? She groaned against the cold plank floor beneath her cheek, trying to bar the voice and the relentless decision it demanded from her mind. This wasnt the first time shed heard these words, this question. Not the first time in the space of some endless hours that shed peeled one heavy eyelid open in the frigid stillness of her cabin home and found herself looking into the terrible face of a monster. Vampire. Choose, the creature whispered thinly, the word drawn out in a slow hiss. He crouched over her where she lay, curled and shivering on the floor near the cold fireplace. His fangs glistened in the moonlight, razor sharp, lethal. The tips of them were still stained with fresh blood her blood, drawn from the bite hed made in her throat only moments before. She tried to get up, but couldnt rouse her weakened muscles to so much as flex in response. She tried to speak, managed only a rasping moan. Her throat felt as dry as ash, her tongue thick and listless in her mouth. Outside, the Alaskan winter roared, bitter and unforgiving, filling her ears. No one to hear her screams, even if shed tried. This creature could kill her in an instant. She didnt know why he hadnt. She didnt know why he kept pressing her for the answer to a question she had been asking herself nearly every day of her life for the past four years. Ever since the accident that had taken her husband and little girl. How often had she wished shed been killed along with them on that icy stretch of highway? Everything would have been so much easier, less painful, if she had. She could feel a silent judgment in the unblinking, inhuman eyes that fixed on her in the dark now, searingly bright, pupils as thin as cats. Intricate skin markings tracked all over the creatures hairless head and immense body. The webbed pattern seemed to pulse with violent color as he watched her. Silence lengthened while he patiently examined her as he might an insect trapped inside a glass jar. When he spoke again, this time his lips did not move. The words penetrated her skull like smoke and sank deeply into her mind. The decision is yours, human. Tell me what it will be: life, or death? She turned her head away and closed her eyes, refusing to look at the creature. Refusing to be part of the private, unspoken game he seemed to be playing with her. A predator toying with his prey, watching it squirm while he decided whether to spare it or not. How it shall end depends on you. You will decide. Go to hell, she slurred, her voice thick and rusty. Iron-strong fingers clamped onto her chin and wrenched her around to face him once more. The creature cocked his head, those catlike amber eyes emotionless as he drew in a rasping breath, then spoke through his bloodstained lips and fangs. Choose the course. There isnt much time now. There was no impatience in the voice that growled so near her face, only a flat indifference. An apathy that seemed to say he truly didnt care one way or the other what answer she gave him. Rage boiled up inside her. She wanted to tell him to fuck off, to kill her and get it over with, if thats what he meant to do. He wasnt going to make her beg, damn it. Defiance churned in her gut, pushing anger up her parched throat and onto the very tip of her tongue. But the words wouldnt come. She couldnt ask him for death. Not even when death might be the only escape from the terror that held her now. The only escape from the pain of having lost the two people shed loved the most and the seemingly pointless existence that was all she had left since theyd been gone. He released her from his hard grasp and watched with maddening calm as she sagged back down to the floor. Time stretched, impossibly long. She struggled to summon her voice, to speak the word that would either free her or condemn her. Crouched near her still, he rocked back on his heels and cocked his head in silent consideration. Then, to her horror and confusion, he extended his left arm and sliced one talonlike fingernail deep into the flesh above his wrist. Blood spilled from the wound, dripping wetly, scarlet raindrops falling to the wood planks below him. He thrust his finger into the open cut, digging into the muscle and tendons of his arm. Oh, Jesus. What are you doing? Revulsion squeezed her senses. Her instincts clamored with the warning that something awful was about to happen maybe even more awful than the horror of her captivity with this nightmarish being whod taken her prisoner hours ago to feed off her blood. Oh, my God. Please, no. What the hell are you doing? He didnt reply. Didnt even look at her until hed withdrawn something minuscule from within his flesh and now held it pinched between his bloodied thumb and finger. He blinked slowly, a brief shuttering of his eyes before they pinned her in a hypnotic beam of amber light. Life or death, the creature hissed, those ruthless eyes narrowing on her. He

leaned toward her, blood still dripping from the self-inflicted wound in his forearm. You must decide, right now. No, she thought desperately. No. A rushing surge of fury rolled up from somewhere deep inside her. She couldn't hold it down. Couldn't bite back the burst of rage that climbed up her raw throat and exploded out of her mouth in a banshee scream. No! She raised her fists and pounded on the hard, inhuman flesh of the creature's bare shoulders. She thrashed and raged, railing at him with every ounce of strength she could summon, relishing in the pain of impact every time her blows landed on his body. Damn you, no! Get the hell away from me! Don't touch me! She beat her fists against him again, over and over. Still, he crept closer. Leave me alone, damn it! Get away! Her knuckles connected with his shoulders and the sides of his skull, blow after blow, even as a heavy darkness began to descend on her. It felt thick around her, a sodden shroud that made her movements sluggish, her thoughts muddled in her mind. Her muscles slackened, refusing to cooperate. Yet still she pounded on the creature, striking slowly, as though she were throwing punches in the middle of a black, tar-filled ocean. No, she moaned, eyes closed to the darkness that surrounded her. She kept sinking deeper. Farther and farther into a soundless, weightless, endless void. No . . . let me go. Damn you . . . let me go . . . Then, when it seemed as though the darkness that enveloped her might never release her, she felt something cool and moist pressed against her brow. Voices speaking in an indiscernible jumble somewhere over her head. No, she murmured. No. Let me go . . . Summoning the last shred of strength and will she possessed, she threw another punch at the creature holding her down. Thick muscle absorbed the blow. She latched on to her captor then, grabbing at him, clawing at him. Startled, she felt the crush of soft fabric bunching in her hands. Warm, knit wool. Not the clammy, bare skin of the creature who'd broken into her cabin and held her prisoner. Confusion fired a warning shot in her sluggish mind. Who . . . no, don't touch me . . . Jenna, can you hear me? The deep, rolling baritone that sounded so near her face was somehow familiar to her. Oddly soothing. It beckoned to something deep within her, gave her something to grab hold of when she had nothing but fathomless dark sea around her. She moaned, still lost, but feeling a slender thread of hope that she might survive. The low voice she somehow needed desperately to hear came again. Kade, Alex. Holy shit, she's coming out of it. I think she's finally waking up. She sucked in a hard breath, gasping for air. Let me go, she murmured, uncertain she could trust her feelings. Uncertain she could trust anything now. Oh, God . . . please, no . . . don't touch me. Don't Jenna? Somewhere nearby, a female voice took shape above her. Tender tones, sober concern. A friend. Jenna, honey, it's me, Alex. You're all right now. Do you understand? You're safe, I promise. The words registered slowly, bringing with them a sense of relief and comfort. A feeling of peace, despite the chill terror that was still washing through her veins. With effort, she dragged her eyelids open and blinked away the daze that clung like a veil to her senses. Three forms hovered around her, two of them immense, unmistakably male, the other tall and slender, female. Her best friend from Alaska, Alexandra Maguire. What . . . where am Shh, Alex soothed. Hush now. It's all right. You're somewhere safe. You're going to be okay now. Jenna blinked, worked to focus. Slowly, the shapes standing around her bedside became human. Half sitting up, she realized her fists were still full of the wool sweater worn by the larger of the two males. The immense, fierce-looking African American with the skull-trimmed hair and linebacker shoulders, whose deep voice had helped pull her out of the drowning terror of her nightmare. The one she'd been pounding on relentlessly for God knew how long, mistaking him for the hellish creature who'd attacked her in Alaska. Hey, he murmured, his broad mouth curving gently. Dark brown, soul-searching eyes held her waking gaze. That warm smile quirked with unspoken acknowledgment as she loosened her death grip on him and settled back onto the bed. Glad to see you decided to join the land of the living. Jenna frowned at his light humor, reminded instead of the terrible choice that had been forced on her by her attacker. She exhaled a rasping sigh as she struggled to absorb her new, unfamiliar surroundings. She felt a bit like Dorothy waking up in Kansas after her trip to Oz. Except the Oz in this scenario had been a seemingly endless torment. A horrifying trip to some kind of blood-soaked hell. At least the horror of that ordeal had ended. She glanced at Alex. Where are we? Her friend came near and placed the cool, damp cloth to her forehead. You're safe, Jenna. Nothing can hurt you in this place. Where? Jenna demanded, feeling an odd panic beginning to rise. Although the bed she lay on was plush beneath her, abundant with fluffy pillows and blankets, she couldn't help but notice the clinical white walls, the fleet of medical monitors and digital readers assembled all around the room. What is this, a hospital? Not exactly, Alex replied. We're in Boston, at a private facility. It was the safest place for you to be now. The safest place for all of us. Boston? A private facility? The vague explanation hardly made her feel better. Where's Zach? I need to see him. I have to talk to him. Alex's expression paled a bit at the mention of Jenna's brother. She was silent for a long moment. Too long. She

looked over her shoulder to the other man standing behind her. He was vaguely familiar to Jenna, with his spiky black hair, penetrating silver eyes, and razor sharp cheekbones. Alex said his name on a quiet whisper.

Kade . . . Ill get Gideon, he said, offering her a tender caress as he spoke. This manKadewas obviously a friend of Alexs. An intimate one at that. He and Alex belonged together; even in Jennas rattled state of consciousness, she could sense the deep love that crackled between the couple. As Kade stepped away from Alex, he shot a look at the other man in the room. Brock, make sure things stay calm in here until I come back. The dark head nodded once, grimly. Yet when Jenna glanced up at him, the big man called Brock met her gaze with the same gentling calm that had greeted her when shed first opened her eyes in this strange place. Jenna swallowed past a knot of dread that was climbing steadily into her throat. Alex, tell me whats happening. I know I was . . . attacked. I was bitten. Oh, Jesus . . . there was a . . . a creature. It somehow got into my cabin and it attacked me. Alexs expression was heavy, her hand tender where it came to rest on Jennas. I know, honey. I know what you went through must have been awful. But youre here now. You survived, thank God. Jenna closed her eyes as a raw sob choked her. Alex, it . . . it fed off me. Brock had moved closer to the bed without her notice. He stood directly beside her and reached out to stroke his fingertips along the side of her neck. His big hands were warm, and impossibly tender. It was the oddest sensation, the peace that emanated from his light caress. Part of her wanted to reject his uninvited touch, but another part of her a needy, vulnerable part that she hated to acknowledge, let alone indulge could not refuse the comfort. Her banging pulse slowed under the gentle rhythm of his fingers as they traveled lightly up and down the length of her throat. Better? he asked quietly as he drew his hand away from her. She exhaled a slow sigh with her weak nod. I really need to see my brother. Does Zach know Im here? Alexs lips pressed together as an aching silence grew long in the room. Jenna, honey, dont worry about anything or anybody else right now, okay? Youve been through so much. For now, lets just focus on you and on making sure youre well. Zach would want that, too. *Revue de presse* Evocative, enticing, erotic. J. R. Ward, bestselling author of *Lover Avenged*