



Amelia Atwater-Rhodes

the **DEN OF
SHADOWS**
quartet

Four complete vampire novels
One captivating world

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CHAPTER 1

NOW

I RELINQUISH MY HUMAN FORM for that of a hawk as I leave the zoo, which has been closed for hours. The security guard fell asleep rather suddenly, as many do upon meeting my eyes, so there is no one to witness my departure.

I could bring myself to my home instantly with my mind, but I enjoy the sensation of flying. Of all the animals, the birds are perhaps the most free, as they are able to move through the air and there is so little that can stop their flight.

I land only once, to feed, and then arrive back at my house in Massachusetts close to sunrise.

As I return to human form, I catch a glimpse of my hazy reflection in my bedroom mirror. My hair is long and is the color of old gold. My eyes, like those of all my kind, became black when I died. My skin is icy pale, and in the reflection it looks like mist. Today I wear black jeans and a black T-shirt. I do not always wear black, but that was the color of my mood today.

I do not care for the new, quickly built towns humans are so fond of scraping up out of plaster and paint, so I live in Concord, Massachusetts, a town with history. Concord has an aura—one that says “This land is ours, and we will fight to keep it that way.” The people who live here keep Concord as it was long ago, though cars have replaced the horse-drawn carriages.

I live alone in one of Concord’s original houses. Over the years I have made myself the long-lost daughter of several wealthy, elderly couples. That is how I “inherited” the home I live in.

Though I have no living relations that I know of, it is not difficult to influence the thoughts—and paperwork—of the human world. When mortals do begin to question me too closely, I can easily move to another location. However, I make no human friends no matter how long I stay in an area, so my existence and disappearance are rarely noticed.

My home is near the center of Concord; the view from the front windows is the Unitarian church, and the view from the back windows is a graveyard. Neither bothers me at all. Of course there are ghosts, but they do no harm besides the occasional startle or chill. They are usually too faint to be seen in daylight.

My home has no coffin in it; I sleep in a bed, thank you. I do have blackout curtains, but only because I usually find myself sleeping during the day. I do not burn in sunlight, but bright noonday sun does hurt my eyes.

The vampire myths are so confused that it is easy to see they were created by mortals. Some myths are true: my reflection is faint, and older ones in my line have no

reflection at all. As for the other myths, there is little truth and many lies.

I do dislike the smell of garlic, but if your sense of smell was twenty times stronger than that of the average bloodhound, would you not dislike it as well? Holy water and crosses do not bother me—indeed, I have been to Christian services since I died, though I no longer look for solace in religion. I wear a silver ring set with a garnet stone, and the silver does not burn me. If someone hammered a stake through my heart I suppose I would die, but I do not play with humans, stakes, or mallets.

Since I am speaking about my kind, I might as well say something about myself. I was born to the name of Rachel Weatere in the year 1684, more than three hundred years ago.

The one who changed me named me Risika, and Risika I became, though I never asked what it meant. I continue to call myself Risika, even though I was transformed into what I am against my will.

My mind wanders back the road to my past, looking for a time when Rachel was still alive and Risika was not yet born.