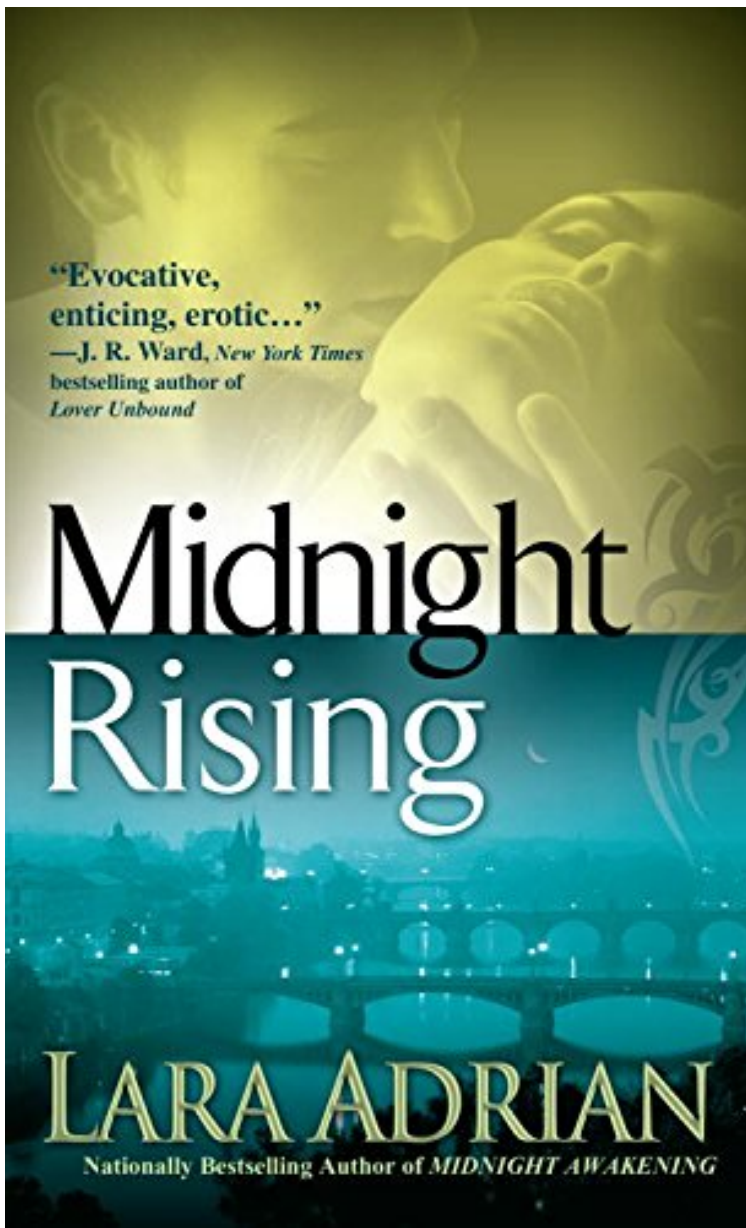


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# Midnight Rising: A Midnight Breed Novel



Par Lara Adrian  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn a world of shadows and dark, cosuming hungers, desire is the deadliest weapon...For journalist Dylan Alexander, it began with the discovery of a hidden tomb, thrusting her into the center of a gathering storm of violence and secrets. But nothing is as dangerous as the scarred, lethally seductive man who rises from the shadows to draw her into his world of dark desire and endless night. Fueled by pain and rage over a shattering betrayal, the warrior Rio has pledged his life to the war against the Rogues. He will let nothing stand in his wayleast of all a mortal woman with the power to expose the entire

vampire race. For an ancient evil has been awakened, and a stunning darkness is on the rise. Suddenly Dylan is powerless to resist Rios touch, even as she uncovers a shocking link to her own past. And now she must choose: Leave Rios midnight realm, or risk it all for the man who has shown her true passion and the infinite pleasures of the heart. . . .From the Paperback edition.

Chapter One

The woman looked completely out of place in her pristine white blouse and tailored ivory pants. Long, coffee-dark hair cascaded over her shoulders in thick waves, not a single strand disturbed by the moist haze that hung in the air of the forest. She was wearing tall elegant heels, which hadn't seemed to keep her from climbing up a wooded path that had the other hikers around her huffing in the humid July heat. At the crest of the steep incline, she waited in the shade of a bulky, moss-covered rock formation, unblinking as half a dozen tourists passed her by, some of them snapping pictures of the overlook beyond. They didn't notice her. But then, most people couldn't see the dead. Dylan Alexander didn't want to see her either. She hadn't encountered a dead woman since she was twelve years old. That she would see one now, twenty years later and in the middle of the Czech Republic, was more than a little startling. She tried to ignore the apparition, but as Dylan and her three traveling companions made their way up the path, the woman's dark eyes found her and rooted on her. You see me. Dylan pretended not to hear the static-filled whisper that came from the ghost's unmoving lips. She didn't want to acknowledge the connection. She'd gone so long without one of these weird encounters that she'd all but forgotten what it was like. Dylan had never understood her strange ability to see the dead. She'd never been able to trust it or control it. She could stand in the middle of a cemetery and see nothing, then suddenly find herself up close and personal with one of the departed, as she was here in the mountains about an hour outside Prague. The ghosts were always female. Generally youthful-looking and vibrant, like the one who stared at her now with an unmistakable desperation in her exotic, deep brown gaze. You must hear me. The statement was tinged with a rich, Hispanic accent, the tone pleading. "Hey, Dylan. Come here and let me get a picture of you next to this rock." The sound of a true, earthly voice jolted Dylan's attention away from the beautiful dead woman standing in the nearby arch of weathered sandstone. Janet, a friend of Dylan's mother, Sharon, dug into her backpack and pulled out a camera. The summer tour to Europe was Sharon's idea; it would have been her last great adventure, but the cancer came back in March and the final round of chemotherapy several weeks ago had left her too weak to travel. More recently, Sharon had been in and out of the hospital with pneumonia, and at her insistence Dylan had taken the trip in her place. "Gotcha," Janet said, clicking off a shot of Dylan and the towering pillars of rock in the wooded valley below. "Your mom sure would love this place, honey. Isn't it breathtaking?" Dylan nodded. "We'll e-mail her the pictures tonight when we get back to the hotel." She led her group away from the rock, eager to leave the whispering, otherworldly presence behind. They walked down a sloping ridge, into a stand of thin-trunked pines growing in tight formation. Russet leaves and conifer needles from seasons past crushed on the damp path underfoot. It had rained that morning, topped off with a sweltering heat that kept many of the area's tourists away. The forest was quiet, peaceful . . . except for the awareness of ghostly eyes following Dylan's every step deeper into the woods. "I'm so glad your boss let you have the time off to come with us," added one of the women from behind her on the path. "I know how hard you work at the paper, making up all those stories" "She doesn't make them up, Marie," Janet chided gently. "There's got to be some truth in Dylan's articles or they couldn't print them. Isn't that right, honey?" Dylan scoffed. "Well, considering that our front page usually runs at least one alien abduction or demonic possession account, we don't tend to let facts get in the way of a good story. We publish entertainment pieces, not hard-hitting journalism." "Your mom says you're going to be a famous reporter one day," Marie said. "A budding Woodward or Bernstein, that's what she says." "That's right," Janet put in. "You know, she showed me an article you wrote during your first newspaper job fresh out of college you were covering some nasty murder case upstate. You remember, don't you, honey?" "Yeah," Dylan said, navigating them toward another massive cluster of soaring sandstone towers that rose out of the trees. "I remember. But that was a long time ago." "Well, no matter what you do, I know that your mom is very proud of you," Marie said. "You've brought a lot of joy into her life." Dylan nodded, struggling to find her voice. "Thanks." Both Janet and Marie worked with her mother at the runaway center in Brooklyn. Nancy, the other member of their travel group, had been Sharon's best friend since high school. All three of the women had become like extended family to Dylan in the past few months. Three extra pairs of comforting arms, which she was really going to need if she ever lost her mom. In her heart, Dylan knew it was more a matter of when than if. For so long, it had been just the two of them. Her father had been absent since Dylan was a kid, not that he'd been much of a father when he was present. Her two older brothers were gone too, one of them dead in a car accident, the other having cut all family ties when he joined the service

years ago. Dylan and her mom had been left to pick up the pieces, and so they had, each there to lift the other one up when she was down, or to celebrate even the smallest triumphs. Dylan couldn't bear to think of how empty her life would be without her mom. Nancy came up and gave Dylan a warm, if sad, smile. "It means the world to Sharon that you would experience the trip for her. You're living it for her, you know?" "I know. I wouldn't have missed it for anything." Dylan hadn't told her travel companions or her mother that taking off for two weeks on such short notice was probably going to cost her her job. Part of her didn't really care. She hated working for the cut-rate tabloid anyway. She'd attempted to sell her boss on the idea that she was sure to return from Europe with some decent material maybe a Bohemian Bigfoot story, or a Dracula sighting out of Romania. But selling bullshit to a guy who peddled it for a living was no easy task. Her boss had been pretty clear about his expectations: if Dylan left on this trip, she'd better come back with something big, or she didn't need to come back at all. "Whoeee, it's hot up here," Janet said, sweeping her baseball cap off her short silver curls and running her palm over her brow. "Am I the only wimp in this crowd, or would anyone else like to rest for a little bit?" "I could use a break," Nancy agreed. She shrugged off her backpack and set it down on the ground beneath a tall pine tree. Marie joined them, moving off the path and taking a long pull from her water bottle. Dylan wasn't the least bit tired. She wanted to keep moving. The most impressive climbs and rock formations were still ahead of them. They had only scheduled one day for this part of the trip, and Dylan wanted to cover as much ground as she could. And then there was the matter of the beautiful dead woman who now stood ahead of them on the path. She stared at Dylan, her energy fading in and out of visible form. See me. Dylan glanced away. Janet, Marie, and Nancy were seated on the ground, nibbling on protein bars and trail mix. "Want some?" Janet asked, holding out a plastic zipper bag of dried fruit, nuts, and seeds. Dylan shook her head. "I'm too antsy to rest or eat right now. If you don't mind, I think I'm going to take a quick look around on my own while you all hang out here. I'll come right back." "Sure, honey. Your legs are younger than ours after all. Just be careful." "I will. Be back soon." Dylan avoided the spot where the dead woman's image flickered up ahead. Instead, she cut off the established trail and onto the densely wooded hillside. She walked for a few minutes, simply enjoying the tranquillity of the place. There was an ancient, wildly mysterious quality to the jutting peaks of sandstone and basalt. Dylan paused to take pictures, hoping she could capture some of the beauty for her mother to enjoy. Hear me. At first Dylan didn't see the woman, only heard the broken-static sound of her spectral voice. But then, a flash of white caught her eye. She was farther up the incline, standing on a ridge of stone halfway up one of the steep crags. Follow me. "Bad idea," Dylan murmured, eyeing the tricky slope. The grade was fierce, the path uncertain at best. And even though the view from up there was probably spectacular, she really had no desire to join her ghostly new friend on the Other Side. Please . . . help him. Help him? "Help who?" she asked, knowing the spirit couldn't hear her. They never could. Communication with her kind was always a one-way street. They simply appeared when they wished, and said what they wished if they spoke at all. Then, when it became too hard for them to hold their visible form, they just faded away. Help him. The woman in white started going transparent up on the mountainside. Dylan shielded her eyes from the hazy light pouring down through the trees, trying to keep her in sight. With a bit of apprehension, she began the trudge upward, using the tight growth of pines and beech to help her over the roughest of the terrain. By the time she clambered up onto the ridge where the apparition had been standing. . . .

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