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**Dark Touch:**  
**Shadows**

Written by Amy Meredith

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A Dark Touch Novel  
SHADOWS

Amy Meredith

RED FOX

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# Chapter One

The ghost slipped between the two pine trees, moving silently, not even leaving footprints in the pine needles on the ground. Then it stopped, as if it could smell something – something *living*.

*Don't be scared*, Eve Evergold told herself as her heart began to pound. *I'm strong and I'm brave. I'll get through this*, she thought. She wrapped her arms around herself, and tried to stay absolutely still. But that was impossible. She had to keep breathing, and that meant chest-up-and-down movement.

The ghost moved its head, a fraction at a time, sensing, searching. Its face – smooth, pure white and inhuman – was expressionless. The creature moved its head another fraction, and now it was staring right at Eve. Its eyes shone with a deep red fire. It felt as if those eyes seared everything they gazed at, including Eve's skin. If it kept looking at her, she was sure those eyes

would pull her straight to the burning centre of hell.

Eve turned towards Jess, her best friend practically since birth. Jess's face was twisted with terror as she stared at the ghost. The fire in its eyes brightened. Eve could hear crackling as it moved towards them. It was—

Jess screamed. Almost immediately handfuls of popcorn rained down on both of them. Jess got a few 'shhh's from other people in the theatre, but a lot more simply laughed.

*No more horror movies for Jess and me, Eve promised herself. From now on, there will be nothing scary in my entire life!*

'I can't believe I screamed. Out loud,' Jess complained as she and Eve stepped out onto the broad sidewalk in front of the movie theatre.

'Is there actually another way to scream? Like, in writing?' Eve teased as they started down Main Street. 'Anyway, I can believe it. You always freak at scary movies.'

'This one wasn't supposed to *be* scary,' Jess said. 'I heard it was going to be like a *Twilight* movie. And there wasn't even any kissing.'

'We deserve a treat after that,' Eve told her.

‘Shoes?’ Jess asked hopefully, gazing at the array of sling-back wedges in the window of the Jildor shoe boutique.

‘I don’t think we’re quite that traumatized,’ Eve said. ‘Also, I’ve almost reached the limit on my AmEx.’ Well, her parents’ AmEx. Parents who would not be happy if she went over the limit they set. The very generous limit, as they often reminded her. ‘I was thinking something more like—’

‘Ice cream,’ Jess finished for her.

‘Two scoops.’ As they strolled towards the ice-cream shop, Eve looked for the strings of white fairy lights that were twisted among the branches of the elm trees lining the street. They went on every day at dusk, but she guessed it wasn’t quite dark enough yet. Eve loved those little lights. And the elm trees. She loved Main Street – all two and a half blocks of it.

She’d missed Deepdene, the tiny, exclusive town in the Hamptons where she’d lived her whole life, even though summer in Kauai with her family and Jess had been awesome.

Eve and Jess walked through the yellow door of Big Ola’s Ice Cream Shop at the end of the block. As usual on a Friday evening, every table and booth was taken. In their little town, the ice-cream place was one of the

three possible teen hangouts – Java Nation and the pizza place being the other two.

Eve turned to Jess. ‘OK, who do we know?’

They both scanned the small room. ‘Pretty much everyone. My brother’s over there, with the other stooges,’ Jess commented.

‘Shanna and the crew are by the window.’ Eve gave them a wave.

‘You’re back!’ Katy Emory called from her seat next to Shanna. She gave them the ‘call me’ sign.

Jess moved closer to Eve and lowered her voice. ‘And I think – no, I’m sure – that’s the new minister’s kid, Luke Thompson, sitting by the postcard rack.’

‘Who?’ Eve asked.

‘I talked to Megan. Remember? It was about a week ago, that day you were getting the hot rock massage but I was too sunburned,’ Jess said. ‘Anyhow, Megan said that Luke has floppy blond hair that falls into his eyes all the time – which that guy totally does. Love it, by the way! And she said he’s going to be a freshman like you and me. I told you, she met him over the summer.’

‘Oh yeah. Of course,’ Eve said. Jess’s next-door neighbour, Megan Christie, always got to meet new people first because her parents ran the best – and only – real estate agency in town. They were full-service,

even finding movers and hiring household help for the buyers of Deepdene's huge houses, which ranged from French country-style estates, complete with barns, to ultra-modern, all-glass-and-angles mansions right on the white-sand beach. And that meant that Megan was involved with newcomers from the very moment they set foot in town. It was a big deal in Deepdene, population 2,704, especially because some of those 2,704 included the very rich and very famous, in the categories of movie directors, pop stars, fashion designers, news anchors, celebrity spawn and other magazine-cover staples. Anyone who was anyone and lived in New York City also had a house in Deepdene or one of the other villages that made up the Hamptons, 120 miles away from Manhattan. As long as they had enough money, of course.

Eve was giving the cute new boy a stealthy from-under-the-eyelashes look. His hair looked so silky. It made her want to run her fingers through it.

'I still think Megan might have had a little thing going with Luke over the summer,' Jess said. She started to hum 'Son of a Preacher Man', a song from the CD her mother played almost every time she drove them anywhere.

'Of course she did,' Eve said again. Megan's ability to



flirt was legendary. So was the fact that she'd gotten breasts in fifth grade, before anyone else. Eve and Jess were a year younger than Megan, and they'd been deeply impressed. And deeply concerned about what – and when – their own bodies would pop out. Eve's had never popped quite as much as she'd hoped, but the guys didn't seem to mind that she was more on the sleek and slender side. Who knew – maybe she still had some popping in her future.

'Megan moves fast,' Jess agreed. 'But, when I spoke to her, it sounded like she was already done with him and interested in somebody else. She wouldn't say who. You know what a drama queen she is. She loves to hint and make you beg. But I didn't get time to find out any more. She said she was tired and going to bed, even though it was only nine o'clock – her time – when we were talking. She was practically falling asleep on the phone. She said she hadn't been sleeping a lot. Nightmares or something.' Jess gave another glance over at the guy who had to be Luke. 'Let's go sit with him,' she suggested.

Eve laughed. 'Why not? He's had to wait all summer to meet the glorious us. Poor deprived boy.' She led the way over to the table and slid into one of the empty chairs. 'You look bored, Luke. We decided you

need entertaining,' she told him, giving him a smile.

'I'm Jess. And she's Eve. Welcome to Deepdene,' Jess said, giving Eve a little shove with her butt. Eve moved over, letting Jess share her chair. Luke was at a table for two.

Eve moved an empty ice-cream dish out of the way with her elbow. Somebody had been sitting here with Luke. *Wonder who?* she thought. Not that it mattered.

'Thanks, but I've been here for a month. Where were you?' Luke asked.

'Kauai,' Eve and Jess answered together.

'Right. Hawaii. Rich people love to go beach-hopping,' Luke said, nodding. 'Even when they already live on top of a perfectly good beach right here in the Hamptons. I keep forgetting that, being poor myself.'

Jess immediately looked concerned, but Eve laughed. The guy was kidding – she could tell by the little smirk on his face. 'Poor?' she said sceptically.

'OK, no. But we definitely don't summer in Europe. Or, you know, Hawaii,' Luke said. 'Though maybe you two will invite me with you next year. I'm lots of fun, I promise.' He winked.

Eve was too surprised to answer, and she could see Jess's cheeks turning red. This boy was pretty flirtatious for a minister's kid!

‘So go ahead, ask,’ he said. ‘I know that’s why you came over.’

Eve and Jess looked at each other, baffled. He couldn’t know that Eve sort of wanted to curl her fingers into that silky blond hair of his. Could he?

‘What’s it like to be a minister’s kid?’ Luke prompted.

‘You don’t know that’s what we were thinking,’ Jess told him.

‘But we kind of were,’ Eve put in. ‘Specifically, are you the kind of minister’s kid who is extra, extra good?’ she joked. ‘Or are you one of those wild ones who will do anything to prove they are extra, extra bad?’ She had a feeling she knew the answer already.

‘Because it has to be one or the other, right?’ Luke laughed. ‘So using that logic, you’re spoiled. Because rich girls are always spoiled. And you spend every free second shopping or thinking about shopping. Because spoiled rich girls love to spend money,’ he added with a teasing smile.

‘He’s got us,’ Eve said to Jess. It *had* taken quite a bit of shopping to get close to her parent-set monthly AmEx limit. Maybe even a little too much. Those earrings she’d bought at the airport weren’t exactly essential. But the flight back home had been delayed, and she and Jess had used the time to make the round of the gift shops.

‘He does,’ Jess agreed. She grinned at Luke. ‘We love to shop, and we’re very good at it!’

‘I’ve got to go,’ Luke said. He leaned closer to Eve. ‘But to answer your question, I wouldn’t say I’m extra, extra bad.’ He reached out and tugged gently on one of her long dark ringlets. ‘But I wouldn’t say I’m an angel either.’

With that, he stood up, dropped a five on the table, and walked off.

‘Oh my God, he played with your hair! I think he likes you more than me.’ Jess gave an exaggerated pout.

‘I thought your heart was lost to Seth Schneider,’ Eve said, pretending to be shocked. Jess had been into Seth since for ever, but he never seemed to notice.

‘Well . . .’ Jess shrugged.

‘Anyway, he’s clearly in lu-u-u-urve with me!’ Eve joked. Although, no joke, when he’d touched her hair she’d felt it down to her toes. ‘Come on, let’s get cones to go, and walk around.’ Suddenly she was having a hard time sitting still.

They started towards the counter. Eve managed to bump into one of the café tables – things like that happened to her all the time – and she stumbled. She leaned down to steady the table – luckily nothing had spilled – straightening up just in time to see Luke

giving Shanna Poplin's hair a gentle tug. He'd said he was leaving, but he hadn't gotten very far. Only halfway across the room.

Jess followed Eve's gaze. 'Hmm. Looks like he's in lu-u-u-urve with Shanna too. I think our preacher's kid might be a little bit of a player,' she said.

Eve used both hands to shove her thick, curly hair away from her face. Yikes. Seeing Luke do the hair-thing to Shanna about a minute after he'd done it to her kind of stung. Which was ridiculous. She'd spent all of five minutes with the guy.

'He's as much of a flirt as Megan,' Eve said. 'But I think he needs to work on his moves. He's pulled out the hair-touch twice in about a minute and a half.' The very effective, feel-it-to-the-toes hair-touch. Well, at least she'd seen the true Luke. Now she knew not to take any of his *playing* seriously.

Jess ordered their ice creams – Swiss orange chip for her, coconut chocolate chip for Eve. 'So what do you think, now that we've seen him up close?' she asked softly. 'I say Choo all the way.'

'I don't know if I'd go as far as a Choo,' Eve said thoughtfully. After all, Jimmy Choo was the highest ranking on the shoe scale – Eve and Jess's system for classifying boy hotness – and Luke needed to have

some points knocked off for the limited variety of his so-called moves. ‘But he’s definitely a Blahnik,’ she had to admit.

‘And a Balenciaga bag!’ Jess added with a grin. ‘So what about the other new boy in town that Megan mentioned?’

‘Oh yes – Mal, wasn’t it?’ Eve exclaimed. ‘The one who’s moved into the rock god’s house.’

‘Rock god’s *mansion*, you mean,’ Jess corrected. The Razor place – people still called it by the rock god’s name – was huge even by Deepdene standards, which was saying something. And the grounds were almost endless – a large pond, sunken tennis courts, formal gardens, sprawling meadows, all behind a high green privacy hedge. It was surprising that it had been empty so long, almost ten years. Property – any property – in the Hamptons was almost always immediately snapped up.

But the Razor place had a history. Before the rock star killed himself – right in the house – there’d been some kind of software genius living there. One of the Kennedys for a while. And way back when Eve’s grandmother was growing up, a famous director had lived in the mansion. All of them had moved out after less than a year. Jess said it was because the place was haunted. And she wasn’t the only one.

But Eve didn't believe in ghosts, at least not now that she wasn't sitting in a dark movie theatre. She was more interested in flesh-and-blood-and-muscle guys. 'Two new boys in one year. That's got to be a record,' she said thoughtfully.

'I can't believe our luck,' Jess agreed as she paid for the cones. 'And right in time for high school!'

'We've seen one new boy. What are the stats on the other one?' Eve asked. She led the way out of Ola's, noting that Luke was still loitering around Shanna's table.

'Our age. Dark hair. Dark eyes. Cute. That's all Megan could tell me,' Jess replied. 'Like I said, she couldn't stop yawning. It was ridiculous. I wanted to force-feed her a litre of Pepsi Max.'

Eve paused in front of the Madewell boutique. 'The denim bar! I missed this place,' she said. 'Every pair of my favourite jeans comes from here.'

'The consultants understand your butt better than you do yourself,' Jess agreed.

'I want to get a pair with custom embroidery. I'm thinking of—' Eve paused, suddenly becoming aware of little prickles dancing up the back of her neck – the kind of prickles she always got when somebody was watching her. She could almost feel the staring eyes on

her back. *Could it be Luke?* Her bad, bad, too-romantic brain just went there.

*Luke equals player*, Eve reminded herself. *You do not want to crush on Luke. You don't want to, and you aren't going to. Don't even bother to look.*

But she couldn't help herself. She had to know.

Eve glanced over her shoulder. No Luke. But somebody else was staring at her.

A guy she'd never seen before. He stood across the street, leaning against the wrought-iron fence that enclosed the park, one foot crossed over the other. And he was just . . . staring. When he realized she'd caught him, he looked away. But then looked back, and a slow, sexy half-smile spread across his face. Just for Eve. Like the two of them shared a secret.

The fairy lights in the elm trees clicked on. Like magic. Like something out of a movie. A non-horror movie.

Eve dragged her gaze away from him, every nerve-ending in her body tingling. That had to be the other new boy. Mal. But Megan had been wrong. He wasn't cute.

Mal was smouldering.