

Right, wrong, witches, vampires, life or eternal existence, all choices?

Gabriella's Law Book 1

by Angelique

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*Gabriella's
Law*

BOOK ONE



Angelique

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CHAPTER ONE

It was another beautiful spring afternoon in New Orleans. It took me exactly two days to realize I could not eat the usual culinary fair offered in this historic city. Stated very simply "Cajun" means fire hot in my culinary dictionary. So, as I found myself most afternoons, I was sitting in the patio of Café DuMonde at the end of Bourbon Street, drinking a latte and eating one of the most incredible delights known to man - beignets.

The artesian walk, as I call it, was full of potential customers, tarot card readers, palm readers, sculptors, painters, hand-made clothing, a myriad of occult items, jewelry, the list was endless. The constant theme of the walk, like so many other places in New Orleans, seemed to focus on the occult or new age movement. I had a pretty good vantage point from where I sat and found it curious that most people looked, but very few actually bought anything.

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I wondered if it was because they didn't have a clue what that pentacle on the plate represented. Were they afraid of tarot readers or fortune tellers? Was the jewelry just way over the top with the daggers, swords, broomsticks and flying dragons?

For the third day in a row I noticed a man, dressed all in black. He wore a very long hooded cape that was decorated with symbols embroidered in black. His shirt was black, his tie, which was more like a lacy decoration than a tie was also black and his vest was a velvet black material. His boots were thigh high and had big black buckles on the side. He sat on a small wooden fold up chair, in front of a table with a black cloth and a purple bundle in the middle of the table. An empty chair sat across from him inviting someone, anyone, brave enough to sit down and request a tarot reading. Compared to the other readers, he was understated. He had no signs, no loud music, no decorations, just him sitting in that chair, one leg stretched and crossed over the other, head down half hidden by the hood of his cape.

I began to study him a bit closer and noticed his hands. Long thin fingers, pale white skin with violet

veins, almost like a porcelain doll, long pointy finger nails painted black, and a large family crest ring adorned his ring finger. I was mesmerized studying his hands when he slowly raised his head to peek beyond his hooded cape. His eyes caught mine and he displayed a faint smile. He made a gesture with his hand and bowed his head as if to say, "Are you brave enough?" I returned the smile and quickly turned back to sipping my latte. I was drawn to his gaze; to his probing eyes which seemed like pools of black oil; to that porcelain white skin that had not seen the sun in years. I got the feeling he was inviting me into his space. The question was, should I accept?

I checked my trusty Mickey Mouse watch to see what time it was - 1:45 p.m. I knew I had about 2 hours before the rest of the group would be back from the luncheon on the Mississippi River Cruise. I chose to stay behind as I don't do Cajun and just the hint of water and riding on it, makes me queasy. The only thing holding me back was a last sip of my latte and that last succulent beignet.

As I walked towards his make shift booth, the man in black, stood to greet me. "Hello, I see you decided to

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take me up on my offer." He made a gesture with his hand that invited me to sit in the wooden chair opposite his. I sat down and tried to make myself comfortable. "Are you comfortable, I have a pillow if you'd like."

"No thank you, I'm fine," I replied. I didn't want to make myself too comfortable. I wanted to be as alert as possible for what was about to transpire, whatever it may be.

"I have watched you for the past couple of days. You seem to arrive with a group of ladies and you all have coffee and beignets. But, today you are alone. If I am not too presumptuous may I ask what happened to your group?" The man in black spoke in soft deep tones, with a New Orleans twang, asked politely.

"We, my friend and I, lead spiritual journeys and we brought a group to New Orleans to explore its' many wonders." *I sounded like a freaking travel agent.* "I don't do Cajun food, and the group wanted to take the afternoon Cajun luncheon cruise, so I chose to stay behind." Why did I feel like I owed him an explanation?

"There are no coincidences in life, do you agree?" he asked with that deep mesmerizing twang.

"Actually, I do agree, and I knew a few days ago, I would end up in this chair." Why did he need to know this? I couldn't seem to keep my mouth shut.

He looked at me with that same hint of a smile I had seen before and asked, "Would you like a tarot reading?"

I had been reading tarot for about 20 years, and had only received 2 readings from other tarot readers. Funny thing was, I felt compelled to have this very somewhat eerie looking man give me a tarot reading. I did not answer him verbally; as I was afraid I would tell him my whole life story. Instead, I just nodded.

He began to unwrap the bundle that sat on the table, revealing his deck of tarot cards. He methodically unwrapped each corner of the purple printed cloth. Then, on the third corner he said, "My name is Crow. I have been reading tarot for some time now and I consider myself to be an accomplished tarot reader. Do you know anything about tarot?"

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Damn, do I tell him the truth, that I have taught classes on the subject and consider myself to be an accomplished tarot reader as well. Or do I play dumb and see what he has to say? "A little", I answered.

Crow smiled and said, "I will give you a very short explanation of the cards and what a reading represents. First a deck of tarot consists of 78 cards, 22 are called Major Arcana and 56 are called Minor Arcana. The Major Arcana represent the big things in life, while the Minor Arcana represent the everyday things. Arcana means mystery, so the cards are the mysteries of life. A tarot reading is simply your thoughts being validated by the reader. It is not as mysterious or daunting as many people want to think and if you participate in the reading it can be even more informative for both of us."

I knew immediately what he meant. So many people have come to me for a reading and just sit in front of me like a sphinx. They don't participate in the reading for whatever reason; I have heard so many explanations. I wanted to test you to see how much you really knew. I was afraid to break your concentration. I didn't know you could talk or ask

questions. I was afraid. The list is endless. "Trust me, I won't be shy" I replied.

"Okay then we can start", he said while shuffling the cards he so carefully unwrapped. Crow shuffled the cards three times and then handed them to me saying, "Now you shuffle and think of any questions you may have while shuffling the cards."

As I began to shuffle the cards Crow gave me some further instructions. "Once you are through shuffling, cut the cards into 3 piles and place the piles in front of you please. Then place the piles on top of one another in any order you choose, then pick them up and hand them to me please."

I recognized this as part of his ritual before beginning the actual tarot reading. Most readers have a ritual they go through to prepare themselves to really become a vessel for information. I followed his instructions to a tee and when I finished I picked up the deck and handed it to him.

Crow took the cards and said, "I am about to lay the cards down in what is called a spread. I use my own

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spread and I will explain what each card represents according to how they appear in the spread." He slowly laid the cards down in what looked like a cross, using 6 cards. Then he dealt 3 additional cards and said, "These cards are for my guides. We can read them at the end of the spread or not, that will be your choice." He placed the 3 cards on the side of the spread and knocked on them with his knuckles 3 times. The rest of the cards he carefully placed on the purple cloth from which they originated.

It was really hard for me not to read the cards before he did. I knew what each card represented to me and the way I did readings, but I was not sure how Crow would interpret them. Crow used a different deck than I did, which had some very interesting images. I began to study the images in the cards on the table and actually felt excited to see what he was going to say.

"The first card in my spread represents everything that you have experienced from the time you were born to this minute. And, if you should ever get another reading from me, this card will represent

everything from this day to the day you get the next reading. Do you understand?" Crow asked.

"Yes, I got it. I plan on going home in 5 days, so another reading may be a little difficult to squeeze in before I leave," I answered a bit contentiously.

"You were raised in a loving atmosphere with a very proud heritage that was instilled in you at a very early age. Religion was a big part of your life; however, I sense that you have grown more spiritual as you have matured." Crow spoke softly and never took his eyes off the cards.

That was a mouthful. He was right on with his interpretation so far. I was raised in a large and loving Italian family. I lived with aunts, uncles, grandparents, parents etc., we were all one big happy loud family. My grandmother or Nonie, was the matriarch of the family and she ruled with an iron fist. After 3 strokes, she was confined to a chair and always had her trusty cane close by. If she wanted to make a point she would take her cane and grab you with the curved end. She was very adept at snagging you by the arm, leg, whatever part of the body that

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was close enough to grab. You knew you were in real trouble if she started waving the cane to make a point. She seemed to do this mainly with the adults, but on occasion she would single out one of her 25 grandchildren.

I attended Catholic school most of my life, that is until I was kicked out in the eighth grade for asking the wrong question - "Why". That was not allowed when I attended school; you just accepted what the nuns had to say- which was often times reinforced by a priest. I knew I was pushing the envelope when I challenged Sister Helen Therese with the "w" word. I was given ample time to recant my statement and apologize, but I just couldn't seem to make the words come out of my mouth. This little rebel was asked to leave and find another venue for my disrespect. I believe those were the exact words spoken the day I left.

"I see at a young age you questioned your religious teachings. Although, you still believed in the basic principles, you have chosen another path for your spirituality." Crow spoke with his soft, twang.

I found myself more interested in the sound of his voice than what he had to say. I began to study his hands more closely. The veins that were visible from across the court yard were more pronounced. I could almost see the blood flowing through them. His skin was almost incandescent and had a slight light blue hue to it - was I imagining this, or was it really true? I felt like I was in a horror film about to find out that I was going to be the next victim of a very sudden and unexpected death.

Examining his face revealed a complexion a teen age girl would kill to have. His skin had that same light blue hue without a single wrinkle. Damn, how did he manage that? I was sure he was older than I was and I sported my share of lines around the eyes and mouth.

My concentration was broken with his words, "I also sense that although you are now a very spiritual individual, it took time for you to decide to take that path; sometime and some soul searching."

"That's true. I taught at a Catholic school for 12 years attended by my children and some things

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transpired that led me to begin to believe that my true path was not Catholicism" I answered all in one breath.

"Yes, that is apparent in the cards; however, it seems to be more than just a simple disagreement or lack of faith. In fact, I would say your faith was shaken to its very foundation." Crow continued.

I nodded my head in agreement as he continued.

"I hesitate to continue with this as I sense it was a very difficult time in your life and I do not want to bring up unpleasant things. It is not my intention to make you remember bad memories. I will jump ahead if that is alright with you and concentrate on more recent events."

Gratefully, I nodded my head in agreement.

I was a bit surprised when he placed his hands on the cards and said, "We could continue to do this reading, or we can just have a conversation. I sense you really don't want a tarot reading and would just like to talk

and ask some questions. I might be wrong, but I don't think I am."

"No, you're not wrong. I would love to just have a conversation, but I don't exactly know where to start." I answered.

"Well, you may start with telling me why you really came over to my table." He said with a challenging look in those deep black eyes.

I had no intention of lying, as I could tell he would know immediately if I even tried to beat around the bush. "Your appearance intrigued me and I sensed, maybe wrongly, that you wanted me to come over and speak to you."

"No, you are not wrong. It is not often that I can truly have a conversation with someone who can believe in what I am, understand what I represent." Crow spoke in a quiet tone.

I sensed he was about to be openly honest, and trusted me. I almost felt privileged and had no idea why I should feel that way. I took a deep breath and

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jumped right in, "I'm sure you can tell I am not a shy person, so please forgive my bluntness. Are you for real or is this an act for the tourists?"

Crow smiled widely and for the first time I could see his teeth, the most prevalent being two fangs where his eye teeth should be. "Does my smile help?" he asked with a bit of a twinkle in his eye.

If he thought the fangs were going to scare me, he thought wrong. They didn't deter me either. "Obviously, you want me to see your fangs. I see them and they are duly noted. But we both know they could be surgically implanted. So, again, are you for real?"

He answered with a bit of indignation in his tone, "I can assure you they were not surgically implanted. I am 100% real. The question is, real what? I am not at liberty to tell you what I am, however if you state what I am, I can agree or disagree with your assessment."

I took another deep breath and continued, "Okay, I think you are a vampire and yes I believe in vampires, the afterlife, soul mates, twin flames, and a variety

of other unpopular beliefs according to your average Christian."

"I can see you don't believe in beating around the bush. I am a vampire, however, I'm not sure you are completely aware of what that means." Crow was more intent now as he spoke.

I listened as he explained that while in his early 40's he was stabbed and almost died. He was reborn with the help of his benefactor, another vampire named Desmond. He spoke about Desmond as a father figure more than a benefactor. He told me of the years he'd spent with Desmond learning about the gift that he received - being a *vampire*. Desmond taught him about culture, all types of culture: art, music, literature and the film industry. Desmond was very fond of films and watched the film industry grow from its infancy.

I felt an immediate rapport with this Desmond character. I too, loved film and studied it in college. I wanted to be a film historian, but my dream was interrupted when I met my ex-husband and subsequently had 4 children.

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It was quite evident that Crow's admiration for Desmond went beyond that of a benefactor or parent. Desmond was Crow's parent, friend, teacher, mentor, confidant, and at times it sounded like, his lover.

Desmond had instilled in Crow, that being a vampire was a gift - not a curse. He taught Crow that killing another human was not necessary to survive. That he did not have to hide from the daylight, sleep in a coffin, or be afraid of garlic. In fact, it seemed like every basic idea of what I thought a vampire was and did, was not at all true. Desmond had gifted Crow with eternal life; he also showed him how to appreciate this gift and grow with each passing century.

"Desmond taught me to order a fine wine to enhance the perfect meal; he taught me about centuries of fashion; everything I know is because Desmond took the time to teach me. I have no need to worry about money. I'm sure you are wondering why I sit in a crowded artesian mall reading tarot. Let me answer that before you ask. I enjoy human contact and need it like any other human. Alas, it is difficult for me to

meet people under normal circumstances, reading tarot gives me the opportunity to meet the occasional accepting person, such as yourself. At least this gives me a venue of acceptance that I would not otherwise be able to achieve." Crow was speaking openly and sincerely.

I could only imagine how difficult it must be to be shunned by almost everyone you come in contact with on a regular daily basis. Because of his appearance, it was obvious that Crow was not your average kind of guy. I found myself becoming somewhat sympathetic to his life style, but I did not feel sorry for him. I'm sure it was because he made it sound like being a vampire was a special gift that was given to him centuries ago. To my absolute amazement, I was not afraid of this professed vampire sitting opposite me. On the contrary, I couldn't get enough of his stories.

I was startled when my cell phone rang. "Hello" I answered. It was one of the ladies in the group looking for me. "We are back from the cruise, where are you?"

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I was shocked that so much time had passed while I was talking to Crow. "I'm just down from Café DuMonde. I'll meet you in the parking lot in about 5 minutes."

Crow looked disappointed, "Well, it seems as though our time together is about to come to an end."

"Yes, I have to go. We have a pretty full schedule and we are teaching a class on hands on healing this afternoon. It was a pleasure to meet you and I thank you for sharing yourself with me. I want you to know it was thoroughly enjoyable and I am sorry it has to come to an end." I was sincere as I was saying my good bye.

"Perhaps we can meet again and finish our conversation. I am here every day between the hours of 2 p.m. and 10 p.m. I will watch for you in hopes that you may have time to see me again, Ms., I don't know your name." Crow said, as I was about to turn and leave.

"My name is Gabriella Morretti and perhaps we will meet again" I said, although I never expected to speak with him again.

Chapter Six

Melissa and I spent the next two days following Desmond and Crow in our little Ford. I was glad the Duce only had two seats; we did not have to make up some excuse why we didn't want to ride with them. We ate at absolutely the most amazing restaurants and the best part - the food was not too hot for me. Everywhere we went it was obvious that Desmond was not only recognized - he got the royal treatment. Desmond continued to call me Gabriella, as I couldn't come up with a name for the other million-dollar library. He was a perfect gentleman, never seemed to step over the inappropriate line, however he did skirt it with innuendos. Last night he even kissed my hand and started working his way up my arm, but stopped at the elbow. Damn, I thought he would at least try and kiss me, I'm just being honest. *Hey, it has been a long time.*

This was to be our last night in New Orleans; Desmond and Crow had something special planned. A

black limousine arrived at our little bed and breakfast around six o'clock and picked Melissa and me up. We drove what seemed like a long time; by the time we reached our destination it was totally dark. Our chauffeur opened up the door to the limo and held out his hand, "Watch your step ma'am, the road is not paved and rather rocky."

I was looking down to see this unpaved road when I heard Melissa, "Holy shit, what the hell. This is straight out of some horror movie."

I looked up to a huge structure which seemed to be at least 7 stories tall, with banks and banks of stained glass windows. This castle, that's what it looked like to me, was dimly lit from the inside. Every 6 to 8 feet there was a glow coming from a bank of windows. Whoa, it was the house from '*Rocky Horror Picture Show*', one of my favorite movies. I contemplated telling Melissa my thought, but often times when I would try and give her a visual, she hadn't seen the movie. However, this time I knew she had seen the movie and the play so I wasn't about to get that imagination going.

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We were standing in the unpaved rocky road looking at this castle, house, whatever it was, when suddenly our chauffer sped off into the night, leaving us like two babes in the woods. We stood looking at each other like, 'what the hell' when the giant door equipped with a knocker which was at least 12 feet long, opened slowly with a creaking noise. You have got to be kidding me, I know it sounds unbelievable, but I knew behind that door Richard O'Brien was going to poke his bald head out and invite us into this den of weird people, doing weirder dances, singing weirder songs. My imagination was soaring, Dr. Frank-N- Furter was not going to come down an elevator, at least I didn't think he would.

The creaky door opened wider to reveal Crow, "Good evening ladies welcome to St. Andrews. May I please take your coats? And please this way." I noticed as Crow spoke he sounded like Sam Elliott too.

We followed Crow as he put our coats in what seemed like the entrance to a dungeon. *Gez, get me out of here.* Crow put both his hands on his hips leaving a place for each of us to take his arm. We followed his lead and took his arm - he seemed so proud of, I can

only imagine, his home. We walked about 30 feet into this beautiful ornate entrance hall decorated with cherubs, lions, gargoyles, bunches of grapes with leaves dripping down, and that was just the ceiling adornments. All cement and very cold and austere. The floor was marble, the kind of marble from Italy, it was rich and had of white hue that radiated the dim lights. The light came from sconces that were all around the entrance. These sconces were "R" rated! Each one had two people in what was obviously a sexual pose. It seemed like Crow was walking very slowly, I can only guess he wanted to make sure we saw everything, including the suggestive sconces. We finally arrived at two double doors they seemed to be mighty oak trees at first glance; further investigation revealed carvings of party goers dancing, singing, drinking and oh yes it was an orgy. There were lots of couples bumping uglies everywhere.

"Ladies, after you." Crow very politely instructed us to venture forth into.....

The room was the most spectacular thing I think I have ever seen. Bright colors adorned the walls with

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murals of, you guessed it, people procreating. The murals were painted in an almost El Greco style with elongated faces, and hands. As the colors danced around the room it felt like the room was slowly turning. It was breathtaking and looking towards the ceiling were those same cherubs from the entry hall, the same grapes hanging, everything was the same. It was just a continuation of the entry hall only with vibrant, brilliant colors.

Desmond seems to just appear out of nowhere. He had on a grey silk suit that fit him to a T, and a black and gun metal grey tie that complimented the suit. His shirt was a bright red, which was very unlike him. At least in the two days I had been with him. He usually wore very subdued colors, but tonight was different.

"Gabriella, I wanted to make your last night in New Orleans a special night that you will remember always. Melissa, I hope you enjoy what Crow and I have put together for our very special friends from California." His voice hypnotic and very Sam Elliott as he continued, "We have arranged a little entertainment for you. You mentioned that you loved

zydeco music, but really didn't know where you could go to hear it live. So, if you would like to take a seat in front of the stage, we have brought zydeco to you."

The deep green velvet curtains slowly opened to zydeco music. It was a band consisting of a lady with a wash board, a man fiddler, a man playing the drums, a woman with a long brightly colored skirt. who appeared to be playing a triangle, and the lead singer, a woman, who played the accordion. It was smaller than a regular accordion and she was playing and singing and dancing all at once. She was a large woman with black skin, wild kinky reddish hair, with a huge bow. She was dressed with a colorful skirt and a blouse with a scoop neck. She was singing in French and the band was following her every step.

Zydeco is fast tempo and the accordion or squeeze box is usually the lead musical instrument. It made perfect sense that this captivating black woman would be the center of attention, even though the woman with the triangle kept walking around the stage dancing and tinkling; her triangle that is. It's hard to keep your feet still when you hear this music. The beat reminded me of the music we used to dance

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the jitter bug or hip hop to when I was much younger.
Okay much younger.

Melissa seemed to be enjoying the music as much as me, as her feet and head were keeping time with the music tapping and bobbing. I was touched, nah, I was blown away that Desmond even knew I liked zydeco. Then I remembered Melissa and I were following Desmond and Crow in our little Ford yesterday, when I told her I really liked zydeco and wished we could have seen it in person while were in New Orleans. I wondered what else he heard as Melissa and I had shared some pretty private thoughts about Desmond and Crow. Very private thoughts!

Although I couldn't understand the words to the song it didn't make any difference, it was the sound and beat of the music that I really liked. The song ended and Desmond walked over to the stage and kissed the black woman's hand and escorted her over to where we were sitting.

"Ladies, I would like to introduce my very good friend, Rosie Ledet. She has graciously agreed to

spend some time and share her extraordinary talents with us tonight."

Rosie Ledet, I wasn't familiar with her, but I enjoyed her music and was happy to accept her extended hand when she spoke in a Creole accent, "Cherie I am soo hoppy to meeet cha and yah must be Melissa. I gwan to sing for you bodt my new song, I houp you like it." With that she turned and took Desmond's arm and began speaking to him in French. He was nodding his head while patting her hand. He walked her back to the stage and helped her climb the steps while holding on to her elbow.

The music started and this time Ms. Ledet sang in French and English, sung with a very heavy Creole accent. Accent or not it was obvious when she began singing her new song, "Eat my Poussiere". I immediately looked at Melissa and she nodded her head, I didn't even have to ask her if she got it. Yeap you got it too, it sounded just like Eat my pussy. I could feel my face turning red. I didn't want to seem embarrassed or shocked, but hells bells, I was both. This never-ending song went on forever repeating the title over and over. I don't think it had any other

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words; if it did, they eluded me. Finally, the "my Poussiere" song was over and we clapped in appreciation. The band began playing song after song and the fast pace syncopation slowly allowed my red face time to vanish.

The energy in the room was electrifying and it was all I could do to stay in my seat, after the red face was gone that is. Ms. Ledet was very natural and relaxed when she sang. It appeared she didn't expend any energy at all, yet with the help of her band she energized that room. They performed for almost an hour nonstop and when the music stopped, Ms. Ledet went to the microphone to speak in her Creole accent. "It has bin a pleazore to sing forthy ya me cherries. I houpe you vizit again and we meet anoda day. Au revoir mon amours." She blew us a kiss and the big green velvet curtain closed while we applauded in appreciation.

You gotta know I looked her up on the internet once we got home and found out she was one of the most popular talents in New Orleans and internationally known. In fact, an article I found, no name to submit said the following:

"Ledet provides a unique female presence in the male-dominated zydeco world. She sings in both Creole French and in English. Her songs are often sly and lusty and combined with her natural good looks and distinctive, bluesy singing voice, she wows audiences wherever she goes."

As the curtain came down and our applause stopped, Desmond walked over to us and said, "I hope you enjoyed Rosie's performance. She and her husband, Morris, are very good friends of mine. It is a pity she will not be joining us for dinner, but she has a prior commitment."

Before I could even respond Desmond was leading me to another room, while Crow and Melissa followed. A room full of the same ornate decorations on the ceilings, those very suggestive sconces spreading just enough light for you to see what the figures on the sconces were doing. In the center of the room was a huge table, with four place settings at one end of the table. I was expecting the plates to have some suggestive poses; instead they were adorned with the St. Andrews family crest. Very impressive full of color, a red heart, two swords crossing, and some

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words, I believe in French, which I couldn't read. The silverware and napkins had the same crest and the glasses were etched as well. *How utterly subtle, not.*

"I hope you don't mind but I have asked that we all sit at one end on the table, that is unless you enjoy shouting and hand gestures." I think that was Desmond's attempt at some humor.

I looked at Melissa and we both smiled at Desmond. It was the polite thing to do as he was trying to make our last night in New Orleans a memorable one. Crow pulled a chair out for Melissa and Desmond did the same for me. Then Desmond sat at the head of the table to my left while Crow and Melissa sat next to each other across from me. I could tell by the look on her face she noticed the family crest affixed on everything including the backs of the chairs.

Thinking back, it was also on the front door and on the floors of both the entry and the front door. Although I hadn't seen it yet, I was expecting the same family crest on the toilet seat in the bathroom. This wasn't like put your name in indelible ink on your sweater so you won't lose it on the playground. This

was serious hand carved painted images and they were everywhere. I was being a perfect lady and not commenting on the subject, however Melissa has no filter.

"Holy shit, your family certainly wasn't afraid of being obvious." Melissa blurted out while Crow was pushing her close to the table.

"My maternal family were French aristocrats and this castle was built in the 1500s. It was the practice to affix your family crest on your possessions, as it was a sign of nobility. I'm afraid you will see the crest on every door, at the bottom of the steps and on every landing, on towels, bedding, on just everything. I have lived here for many years off and on and I don't even notice the crest. Crow, do you notice the presence of the family crest?"

"No not anymore, however I remember the first time I walked in the front door that the crest adorned the door and other items. Like you Desmond, it has been too many years and I see them now as just part of the charm of the castle." Crow with his twang and smooth voice answered Desmond.

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"I have arranged a dinner that will suit your appetite Gabriella. Melissa, I had cook prepare the family seafood jumbo, which I believe you will enjoy. "

"I can't wait, the seafood here is amazing. We had some alligator, snake, frog, but the shrimp I had was fabulous and nice and big. Thanks, so much Desmond." Melissa was excited she loves fish all kinds.

"And I can only assume that beignets are on my plate." I was being serious as even when we would go out to some of the restaurants with Desmond and Crow, the cuisine was a little hot for me. I'm such a wimp when it comes to spicy foods.

"I can assure you this meal will please your pallet and cook knows how to prepare everything to perfection. He has gone all over the world to learn the cuisine of each land; he is now an expert on any cuisine you choose." Desmond was proud of his cook.

"How long has he been with you?" I asked.

"Hmmm it has been awhile. I would venture to say at least 100 years, maybe longer. I truly cannot remember." Desmond didn't avoid answering the question.

That innocent little statement hit me like a ton of bricks. Desmond and I had the opportunity to have several private conversations and I realized each one was centered on me. He answered some questions about his favorite author, movie, surface questions, nothing really personal. I really didn't know anything about him except he was a gentleman, appeared to be very wealthy, dressed like a model about to do a shoot, seemed to know everyone in New Orleans and smelled so divine.

Thinking back, he seemed to be captivated by anything and everything I said. I was not usually so talkative; in fact, I was the one who would question others. I must have been under some freakin' spell as I answered every question he asked. I was more transparent than cellophane. He knew a lot about me and I knew very little about him.

Angelique

"Gabriella, are you alright? You seem to be very quiet and frankly in another world?" Desmond with another question; all he needed was a bright light shining in my eyes and a cold cup of coffee on the table and a smoking cigarette.

"I'm sorry, yes; I'm fine, I was just thinking about what you said."

"What I said Gabriella?"

"Yes, that cook had been with you for 100 years."

"Ah yes, well I suppose I could look at some records to see exactly if it is important to you or, Crow was cook with me when we transformed you?" Desmond looked at Crow while asking the question.

"I'm sorry Desmond, like you I honestly can't remember. I am so used to relying on cook and Mrs. Mullin that I can't remember a time when they weren't with us." Crow's answer was sincere and apologetic.

I almost felt bad for being the reason Desmond questioned Crow. Gez, I'm just trying to find out how old Desmond is, hell how old is everyone in this house.

"Mrs. Mullin, you mean the housekeeper that was at the mansion?"

"Yes, Gabriella, Mrs. Mullin takes care of all the residents and I'm afraid I rely on her completely for the comforts of ... "

Desmond paused and seemed to be searching for the right word. I wondered if I should help him and put him out of his misery. No, let him suffer, if that's possible. My mind started to wander again, does he even have emotions, can he feel anything. Were the last 2 days just a change of scenery, a change of people, who weren't vampires? weren't made by him?

It suddenly dawned on me that Melissa and I could very well be the next notches on his vampire belt. What the hell is the matter with us? We are actually sitting in the house, castle, home, whatever, with a couple of vampires. They didn't drug us to be here. They didn't drag us after they had their way with us.

Angelique

They didn't threaten us. They didn't lure us here with big promises. None of that, we were just stupid, stupid, stupid. We were actually invited very politely if we wanted to come for dinner, and like a couple of halfwits we graciously accepted.

"...I suppose the correct word would be home. Mrs. Mullin takes care of Crow and me. We want for nothing and she makes sure our clothes are cleaned and pressed, that each residence is cleaned and stocked with whatever we desire. Saying all that makes me think she is actually more than a housekeeper, she is like our mother in many ways. Trust me when I tell you she does mother Crow; however, I don't allow her to go above and beyond for me. I don't require such nurturing.

Gabriella, have we lost you again you seem to be in another world?"

"I'm sorry, I just remembered that I promised several people at the guest house that I would give them a tarot reading before we left. I'm afraid we are going to have to leave, so I can read for them. We have an early flight and I don't want to let them down

as they have been wonderful to our group and to Melissa and me personally." I tried to be matter of fact when I spoke and the quick look I gave Melissa alerted her to just agree. Melissa and I had always been able to talk without words and if ever there was a time not to ask questions, but to do or die. No pun intended like hell no pun intended. I just wanted to get the hell out of there. Melissa got my drift and chimed in immediately.

"Oh, that's right I forgot too. We were having such a good time I forgot all about the time and I still have to do some laundry before I finish packing." Melissa was very convincing.

"I am disappointed that you have to leave. Do you by chance have time for dessert? Cook actually made a special treat for Gabriella, homemade beignets." Desmond asked almost pleadingly.

"Oh, I'm so sorry but I promised and I do not break promises." Then I thought homemade beignets, oh man, "Would it be possible to ask cook if he could put them in a bag so we could take them with us?" I asked

Angelique

pleading with big eyes. *No class I know, but I love beignets.*

"Crow will you ask cook to come in here please."

Ah, he's going to actually have me ask cook thinking that I would just say yes and stay, well he doesn't know me as well as he thinks he does, bastard!

A masculine man came into the room. He had a very well kept goatee, gotta love that damn facial hair, he was well over 6 feet and stocky, but more muscular than fat. He certainly didn't look like a cook, he looked more like a body guard or hit man. There goes that imagination again. His hair was light brown and he had strikingly blue eyes, and when he spoke it was Sam Elliott again. *Are there any men around Desmond that don't sound like Sam Elliott?* He had a white chef's jacket on and black and white checkered pants and an apron with a white towel hanging from his waist. He was dressed like a chef, but you wouldn't kick him out of bed - if you get my drift.

"Yes sir. Is there a problem with the meal?" The hunk dressed like a chef asked.

"No, no on the contrary. I would like to introduce our guests, this is Gabriella and this is Melissa." Desmond gestured towards me and then Melissa as he spoke.

"Desmond, if you don't mind. You prepared a wonderful meal for us and I know Melissa enjoyed her gumbo as much as I enjoyed my filet mignon cooked to perfection. It truly was the best meal I have had since I have been in New Orleans. I wanted to thank you for myself and for Melissa. You are very talented and, I'm afraid I'm just avoiding the question. Would you mind putting your homemade beignets in a bag so I can take them with me? I forgot I have an appointment and we have to go."

The hunk shot a quick look at Desmond the then responded, "Of course not madam.

I made them for you. I will make sure Crow has them before you go. And thank you for your kind words. It is not often that I can prepare a meal." The hunk looked like he wanted to say something else but Desmond shot him a look that could kill.

Angelique

"Thank you cook, that will be all." That was Desmond's way of saying "Fuck off" However I must admit I have never heard him say the "F" word or any other four letter word. I guess it's more like get out of my face. I didn't really understand his border line rude behavior concerning cook. He seemed to be happy to show him off, but cook *Does he have a damn name?* must have said something that didn't set very well with the boss man. I wasn't going to get into a discussion with Desmond about how he treats "the help". However, if I was planning to stick around for any length of time that discussion would certainly be had.

"Crow will you be so kind as to bring the car around so our guests can leave for a prior appointment. Ladies did you bring wraps or a coat?" Whoa the temperature in the room just went from a comfortable 71 degrees to 32 degrees. Could Desmond be any more detached?

"Crow, please make sure you get the ladies wraps before you get the car." How gracious of him, the least he could do is walk us to the door. "Ladies I'm sure you can find your way out. You must excuse me,

but I have to leave for an appointment. If you should ever find yourselves in New Orleans again, please do not hesitate to let me know if I can be of service to you." He took my hand and continued, "Ms. Morretti it was a pleasure; however, the real pleasure was never experienced by you. But as the French say, *c'est la vie*."

I can't say he was rude or even disrespectful; it was like he was talking through me and his cold blank stare was chilling.

"Melissa, *ma poule*. Crow has told me so much about your generous nature. Please keep in touch" Desmond kissed her hand and bowed. I get Ms. Morretti and she gets whatever *ma poule* means. He gave her big smile and walked backwards out of the room.

I was way too perturbed to let that little scene go by without some sort of explanation. I wanted an explanation of "real pleasure" as well.

"Desmond, please wait, I would like to ask you a question."

Angelique

"Certainly, Gabriella I am always at your disposal." Desmond began to walk back into the room. I was still sitting in one of the hand-carved family crest chairs.

"Why are you so cold? What have I done to deserve your obvious disinterest in me." Desmond just kept looking at me with that same blank chilling stare. "It is obvious with your body language and your....." Desmond would not let me finish.

"Gabriella, you are mistaken. I am not void of any thoughts or feelings. All I do is think of you, every minute of every day. I have to protect you at all costs. You didn't have to lie to me in order to leave. You have forced me now to tell you that you have captured what little soul I have left. I am bereft at knowing that I can never be with you, hold you, stroke your hair, feel your soft skin against my cold body. I know why you are leaving. You became aware of something that you haven't even considered. I am a vampire. A vampire who has not loved a woman, not in his previous life or his after death life. Gabriella, you must go now, please just go."

Crow walked into the room just as Desmond had finished his confession to me. "Ladies are you ready?"

Chapter Eight

Going to see Mama Juju every three days became a hardship for two reasons; one she was an hour away, two although she gave me a break, it was still costing me \$12.50 a visit. I had already spent \$375 and that was just in a month. I couldn't afford going to her much longer, but I couldn't afford not to either. Every time I would try and stretch my visits to 4 or 5 days Desmond once again would be in my every thought. I decided to ask Mama Juju some questions I really didn't want to know the answer, but I was between a rock and a hard place. *Where the hell did that saying come from?*

"Mama Juju you have been wonderful and I don't think I would have survived the past month if it hadn't been for you and your powerful magic." I was not blowing smoke I really meant it when I said it. "Mama I don't know how much longer I can come and see you. I know you are just charging me for the

ingredients of the potion and the herbs; but even that is getting expensive."

"I nah chiul I nah I tole ya I wood fined da cure, butt awl me fredns nevr herd of dis tang and we dawn't kno how ta fite it fer mor dan 3 days. Chiul ya gwone have ta go bac to New Orleans, bac to de man dun put dis spell on ya. Ya will need powful magic an somun dat nose bout blak magic."

"Can you come with me Mama Juju?" I wasn't about to go back to the scene of the crime alone.

"Ah chiul I don no do de magic. I be a whyit witch, a healin witch lik me mum and granie. I kno de witch ya need he be wat ya neeed." Mama Juju had a slight smile on her face when talked about this man witch.

"I be askin him, but dis be dangros and he has ta be redy fer da battul."

"Ready for the battle, what battle? I don't understand Mama."

Angelique

"I dun tole ya chiul ya got sum bad bad blac magic spel on ya. We bin fitin it for loong time an me can't beet dis tang dat got ya. I kno a blac witch ta hep ya. But ya gots ta decide ifn ya wan to opin da door to a hole nother worl, a blac worl. Everytin dare is negative an bad, I fraid to go dare. Ya half no biznes gwon dare but ya half ta go ifn ya want da spell ta stop. Ya dent wan ta go dare alown."

I could tell Mama Juju was worried about me going to New Orleans, but at the same time she knew it was the only way I could release this spell. I wasn't real thrilled about the fact that she was afraid to go there. She was sending me there with some black magic witch, who apparently is a warrior ready for battle.

I knew from my studies on 'the craft' that men are witches too; no such thing as warlocks. Again, a stereotypical word meaning, oath breaker, liar, the list goes on. I guess the movies and books needed a way to distinguish a male witch as opposed to a female witch. Basically, they're white witches, who heal, break spells, etc.; black witches, these guys practice voodoo and black magic; then there's crones,

that is a witch that is an old wise woman, who knows a lot about everything witchy. It takes 13 witches to make a coven, a witch's circle or a gathering of women and men who practice 'the craft'. And lastly there's the solitary witch, like me, who aren't part of any coven or organized religious group such as Wicca. We do our own thing and choose our own path be it black or white. That is a short explanation of the witch hierarchy if you will.

"I need cawl Adriano see if he cum meach ya." Mama was dialing her old rotary phone that she was not going to give up, over the protests of the phone company.

I could only assume Adriano was the powerful warrior she wanted to accompany me to New Orleans. I wasn't sure how I felt about some total stranger protecting me. Of course, he may say no, but I strongly doubted that, as you don't say no to Mama Juju.

"He gwon ta cum now chiul an ya cun meat him. Ya gots ta go soon an ya tell nobodee. Dis be privet - onla da tree of us no, you, me and Adriano."

Angelique

I didn't even have a chance to say I was going down that road; Mama Juju made up my mind for me. I was scared and excited at the same time. I was trying to act like I was in total control and this was all normal; my heart beating out of my chest - hey that happens every day.

I was lost in thoughts thinking about how I was going to tell Melissa I was going out of town and I couldn't tell her where I was going or when I would be back. I knew she would figure it out, but I was going to try and follow Mama's instructions. I was thinking about.... when I walked a tall drink of water about 6 ft. 2 ins, with black curly hair, dark eyes, long curly eyelashes, a perfect nose, and a mouth with full kissable lips. And that was just his facial features. He looked like an Olympic weight lifter and his blue shirt struggled to keep his muscles contained. He wore a black suit, blue shirt; collar open which exposed a dark curly tuft of hair. His face didn't really have a beard, it just looked like he hadn't shaved in a few days. But it wasn't scruffy, it was sexy. Damn facial hair gets me every time.

"Adri luv, cum geve Mama sum yare luvn. I wand ya meat Gabriella Morretti, she be my frend an sheee be n big trubl. Cum wid me n I tell ya." With that declaration, Mama Juju and the hunk disappeared behind the curtain leaving me on the couch in the living room. I didn't even get a chance to shake his hand or even get his whole name. He gave me a very quick glance when Mama said my name and that was the extent of my introduction to my protector. There I sat, chopped liver, waiting for my instructions from Mama Juju and that beautiful specimen of a man. He could have been the guy on a commercial just standing there raising an eyebrow. Bottom line I wouldn't kick him out of bed for eating crackers - I hate crumbs in the bed!

An hour went by and I was just about to peek through the curtain when the hunk emerged, "I'm afraid we've been very rude Gabriella, allow me to introduce myself, I am Adriano Gualtiero" He extended his long fingered and manicured hand; it was soft and cool. "I have been talking with Mama and she tells me that you find yourself in a rather awkward position. If you don't mind would you be terribly offended if I asked

Angelique

you some rather personal questions. I'm afraid I have to be rather blunt as time does not permit me to be eloquent and charming. So please, if I offend you in any way I apologize in advance. Would it be too presumptuous of me to call you Gabby?" He was sitting on the arm of the sofa looking down at me with a smile.

"No, not at all and what do I call you?" I tried to be very matter of fact, but I somehow sensed he knew I was a bit frazzled to say the very least.

"My friends call me Adri, with the A being very strong. I assume you can tell by my name that I am of Italian descent as I believe you are as well." He smiled and nodded his head like he was agreeing with something I said.

"Yes, I am, my father is Napolitano and my mother is from Tuscany." I answered proudly.

"Gabby did you ever have any physical contact with Desmond?"

"Well no, not really he kissed my hand once and we held hands."

"Are you sure that was the only physical contact you had?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

"I press the point only because in order for him to put this particular spell on you physical or spiritual contact must be made."

"Well we never did anything. What do you mean by spiritual contact?"

"Gabby, you must be perfectly honest with me. Did you ever think about having any physical contact with him, while you were in New Orleans or after you came home?"

Damn, I know he could see my face turn a beat red. I was totally embarrassed. I had to tell this hunk of a man that yes, I had thought, dreamed, fantasized, wished, and wanted a physical relationship with Desmond. I knew he was a vampire intellectually, but

Angelique

my hormones didn't agree. I had been divorced for 15 years and it had been a long dry spell and yes, I want Desmond to sweep me off my feet and devour every inch of my body; paying special attention to the important parts. How do I tell this gorgeous, whatever he was, that I had salacious thoughts about Desmond St. Andrews DuPrie?

"Gabby, please do not be embarrassed. If you want my help you must be totally honest with me. I must know about any relations you had with Desmond real or imagined. I wish I could be more delicate about my approach, but time is of the essence and I need your answer."

"Adri, I, I" my face was red and I stammered like some guilty urchin saying he never caused any trouble.

"Gabby, I understand this is a very difficult situation and you really don't know me. I can assure you I am only here to help you out of the respect I have for Mama Juju. I don't mean to be abrupt, but if we are going to be successful at breaking this spell then you must have complete trust in me, and you must take

me into your confidence in all things. I sense this is going to be difficult for you as Mama told me you were a very private person, I understand your hesitation. I think I can make it much easier for you; however, I need your cooperation and permission."

"What do I have to do?" I didn't want to be difficult but how do you tell a perfect stranger your most intimate thoughts?

"You must allow me to invade your mind without any restrictions. I will in fact put you into an altered state much like a hypnotist would do. And while you are in this relaxed state I will be able to access your every thought." Adri said this so matter of fact it was like he was sharing a recipe with me, only thing is I was not thinking of flour, sugar, and salt! "I know this is a big decision and I wish I could allow you as much time as you needed to make up your mind. Again, we have very little time. Each minute that goes by Desmond has a greater hold on you whether you realize it or not. Why don't we bring Mama Juju into this conversation, I believe she can advise you what to do and I know you trust her."

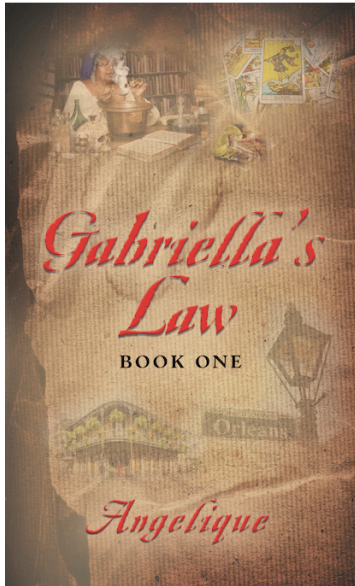
Angelique

I didn't even notice when Mama came into the room, I was too busy thinking. I wasn't prepared to share with a perfect stranger that I was terrified the spell was working. I wanted to be with Desmond. I wasn't afraid of being with him, I was afraid of being without him. I wanted him to tie me to his four-poster bed with those leather straps I saw hanging in the hall. I wanted him to tear my clothes off and grab my hair and pull it so my face was exposed, my lips open begging for him to kiss me. A kiss that was tender, yet his tongue savagely searching my mouth, my teeth, my tongue; his lips were soft as I had imagined. His hands beginning to search my body completely exposed. His hands soft like a baby's tummy, cupping my boobs and massaging them all the while kissing me with an intensity I didn't know was possible. I wanted to grab his hair and push his head into me even harder. I wanted to guide his head to my boob so he could nibble and suck. I wanted to;

"Chiul, ya here me? Wearya be, we got tings ta do. Ya leson ta me gut now. Adri, he lik me sun. I luv ham n trus him. Chiul, he wil neva hurt ya. He cum hear fora

me n Mama Juju tink uoo need ta lish hym gut. He will protec ya. He will die fer ya. He be a blac wich n vamp but he oow me n he a gentmen ya wil see."

There were so many things wrong with that statement; now this hunk is a vampire I was glad Adri was like a son to Mama, glad she had that kind of love in her life. She obviously had history with him. She trusted him. And it would be very easy for him to die for me - isn't he already dead? Jesus, Mary and Joseph listen to me I'm talking like this is just a normal Tuesday. No biggies. You work serving what I refer to as "foo" drinks in the morning; appointment with psychic that tells me the only way you can get some freakin spell that has been put on you by a freakin vampire from New Orleans is to trust another vampire, who just happens to be a black witch to boot. Oh, and to spice the whole day up just a little, you have to let this black witch vampire read your mind. Yeah, just your average Tuesday with Gabby Morretti, freak in training.



Right, wrong, witches, vampires, life or eternal existence, all choices?

Gabriella's Law Book 1

by Angelique

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