

# PROLOGUE

## Garden District, New Orleans 1965

The full Sturgeon moon rises above the horizon. The air feels heavy and pregnant with possibilities. A bubble is ready to burst. This is one of those nights when people don't linger at the Madigan mansion in the Garden District in New Orleans. This house has a history: the family that lives here is different. On a sunny day they look like your average neighbor, but on nights like this, parents warn their children, 'don't linger, strange things happen there.'

The Madigan's arrived in the area around the eighteen hundreds and were one of the first families to build a mansion in the neighborhood. Even though they never seemed short of money, they didn't mingle with the elite and were more comfortable in the rowdy French Quarter. Quickly superstition and their reputation for trouble grew. Whispers about them being 'different' spread like wildfire, fueled by animosity against them. People started to keep their distance. They were both attracted and afraid of the Madigan's mystical and herbal healing skills.

The backdoor opens and Sarah Madigan nervously looks around before she steps out. Her black summer dress billows around her, although there is not a breath of wind. Her unruly, red curls laced with grey streaks and her worry lines betray her age. She clutches a heavy, old manuscript to her chest. She glances at the full moon and lets the moonbeam wash over her. This seems to calm her. 'Help me, Goddess of the moon. Help me to make the right choice.' She makes her way past the meticulously kept vegetable and herb gardens, over the grassy field,

and towards a pretty kind of wilderness in the back. The trees and shrubs are thick like a wall. When Sarah approaches, the trees bend and twist to create an opening for her to slip through.

Sarah steps into a clearing and looks at an overpowering stone tomb. It's elaborately decorated; a statue of a phoenix stares down at her and a salamander encircles the tomb, chasing its own tail. Etched into the door is the image of a fierce woman, surrounded by the four elements—earth, air, fire, and water, the zodiac signs, and various animals. A nervous sigh escapes her mouth before she puts her hand on the fire symbol—a triangle pointing upwards. The door silently slides open and without hesitation she disappears through the opening. Immediately the door slams shut behind her. The inside doesn't match the outside; magic must be at work here. The space is a huge dome. With a snap of her fingers, the torches along the walls flare to life. Ceramic hands, which look eerily lifelike, come out of the wall and hold up each torch. In the middle stands an altar made of birch wood with four huge candles on each corner. After many years of rituals, the wax from the candles that dripped down to the floor formed their own misshaped, sinister castles. The walls are covered with ivy, and although there's no sunlight, the plants seem to flourish. Ancestral tombs line the walls, encircling the altar. Each tomb is unique with stone-etched lids full of flowers, animals, zodiac signs, and food. Very carefully Sarah lays the book down on the altar. Her family's Book of Shadows; it's an heirloom full of spells and occult knowledge of generations of Madigans. Reverently she opens it and aimlessly turns the pages, which are filled with old-fashioned handwriting, stories, spells, and drawings. Some pages are orderly while others are chaotic and creative. The book is incomplete. Sarah's name is on the top of the pages she filled and a few blank pages.

For several minutes she stares at them, wondering what she will write about tonight. Hopefully her daughters understand her wishes and all will be well. She closes the book. It's very quiet, even the dead ancestors hold their breath. Their sprits linger in the tomb and it's hard to concentrate when they give their opinion on one thing or the other. Sarah wanders along the tombs, her left-hand brush over them until she reaches the most recent one. 'You made it sound so easy. It's not. And now I have to burden one of my children with it. I was never the right person.' Sarah reaches in her pocket and takes out a Wand, a long piece of elegant wood, which at the end becomes thicker like a natural handle. It feels familiar in her hand. Such a plain thing that holds so much.

The sound of the door sliding open pulls her out of her train of thought. Easy chatter reaches her before she sees her daughters, Lucy and Tara, identical twins in their mid-twenties. Tara has a spunky streak in her colorful, easy flowing clothes while Lucy seems more uptight in her pencil skirt. Their clothes express the difference in their personalities. Lucy is ambitious, a go-getter—not many things can keep her from her goals. She's vastly gifted as a witch and she easily overpowers her easygoing sister. Although Tara is just as powerful as a witch, her caring and nurturing nature indulges her twin and let her take the lead most of the time. Sarah wonders how they can be exactly the same and still be so different. She smiles at them and gently places the Wand next to the book.

Lucy follows the gesture. 'So what are we doing here tonight?'

Seamlessly Tara adds 'The energy of the full moon is delicious; we can't let it go to waste.'

'A love spell for Mrs. Flowers perhaps?' Smiles Lucy.

Tara bursts out laughing ‘Then we need all the help we can get for sure!’

‘Or are we finally getting rid of those pesky toads in the yard?’

Sarah’s face turns serious. ‘It’s a family matter.’

This gets the girls attention. Lucy glances at the wand. ‘Is it about the Wand?’

Sarah is shocked. ‘How do you know?’

Tara gives her a reassuring smile. ‘We’ve known about the Wand since...when?’ She glances at Lucy, who finishes, ‘I think we were about fourteen. You’re always different when you use this particular Wand.’

‘I never use it!’ Defends Sarah. Tara shrugs in a carefree manner.

Sarah takes a deep breath. ‘It’s time for you to know about our family legacy.’ She picks up the Wand and touches the Book of Shadows and mumbles ‘Show us the secrets past, power of fire, element of action, passion, and strength—guide us.’ She taps the book again and it flips open. The book riffles through its pages and falls open at the beginning, and a three-dimensional image folds out of the book and hovers above the page. The girls are fascinated.

Thirteen witches form a circle in the woods under another full moon. The circle contains on the east side a small tornado; on the south side a fire; on the west side a small waterfall; and on the north side a small tree in full bloom. The witches chant in union and hold hands. Sarah explains, ‘In the 1780s, the Industrial Revolution started to change the world. People lost touch with the natural world and a coven of witches formed a bond with the elemental powers.’

Slowly the tree, the waterfall, the fire, and the tornado start to shrink. It looks like the tree has been sucked into a wooden disk, the waterfall into a cup, the fire into a wand, and the tornado into a dagger.

‘The elements gave the witches an object that contains part of them, so they could call upon them when needed and in return the witches promised to keep them safe.’

The image starts to change. It’s day and the witches are in a heated argument. Sparks fly and some of them glance around to see if they’re being noticed.

‘The objects were so powerful, the temptation was too much for most witches and they started to fight over the ownership of the elements. Dark powers began to consume them. To prevent total disaster—’

The image changes again. This time it’s a dark stormy night, the wind is fierce and four witches huddle together. Each of them holds one of the objects of power. They raise their objects and solemnly repeat an oath. To seal the deal they clink the objects together. Lightning crashes down and even in the tomb the thunder resonates like a loud rumble.

‘Four of the strongest witches decided to hide the objects from the others. They vowed to never use the objects again. If all the objects would be together and someone would use them, then it could destroy the world.’

The four witches embrace for one last time and disappear into the dark night.

‘One of these witches was Mary Madigan, our ancestor, a powerful witch who started this book of shadows. Our grimoire.’

The image starts to dissolve and Sarah looks at her daughters. She

catches Lucy staring at the Wand. A flicker of desire crosses Lucy's face. Sarah feels a pang of disappointment.

She picks up the Wand and holds it reverently. 'It's been passed on to the eldest daughter ever since. We are the guardians of the Wand of Wisdom.' Both girls take a closer look. It looks rather insignificant, but the waves of power that flow from it are exceptional.

'Wow, how does that work?' Tara is curious and thrilled.

'When I'm ready to pass it on, we will do a ritual to attune the Wand to you.'

'Can it be attuned to two people?' Tara asks and looks at Lucy, barely hiding their excitement.

'No. So I have a dilemma. This Wand is a huge responsibility and I've always found it hard not to be able to talk to anybody about this. I hoped it will help to have your twin as support.' Sarah looks from Tara to Lucy.

'I'm the oldest.' Eagerly Lucy reaches for the Wand. Sarah appears resigned.

'I've decided that the burden should go to Tara.'

'What?! That's not fair!'

As always, Tara tries to calm the situation. 'You can have the Wand Lucy, I don't want it.'

Sarah shakes her head. 'I asked guidance from the element and it has to be you, Tara.'

'I want it!' Lucy steps forward and Sarah immediately steps back.

'You can help me. It would be from both of us.' Lucy turns to Tara.

‘You want it for yourself. You want all that power.’

‘No! I would share it...with you.’

‘You can’t share it. I’m the oldest, it’s mine.’ Lucy starts to gather her magic. A wind blows through the tomb. Their hair and clothes start to flap in the wind.

Sarah is alarmed, ‘Lucy! Control yourself!’ She inches backwards to create some distance between her and Lucy and Tara. The lids on the coffins start to rattle.

‘You’re scared that I will be more powerful than you.’ Lucy turns towards her mother.

‘Oh Lucy...’

Lucy lashes out, she throws her open hand forward, a fireball erupts from her hand, and she hurtles it towards Sarah. The fireball hits the surprised Sarah in her chest.

Tara screams. ‘Lucy! No!’ Sarah topples backwards, and while she tries to regain her balance, the Wand slips from her fingers and flips through the air. She lands hard on her back. Tara is frozen in place. Lucy doesn’t falter. She grabs the Wand and without hesitation points it at Tara.

‘What are you doing?’ Tara is confused; she doesn’t recognize her twin.

‘Don’t come closer.’ Lucy reinforces her threat with a little wave of the Wand.

Sarah tries to scramble back up. ‘Resist the temptation!’

Concerned, Tara steps forward. Lucy starts to breathe harder and the lids fly off the tombs. They’re dangling in the air. Startled, Tara looks at

them. Sarah manages to get back up. The remains of the ancestors start to move. Curious, they look around.

‘I can feel the power!’ Lucy is ecstatic.

Sarah slowly makes her way towards her against the wind. ‘Please, Lucy—’

Lucy raises her hands; fire drips from the tip of the Wand. Power consumes her. She points the Wand at Sarah, Sarah puts her hand up, and shouts ‘IGNIS VENI AD ME.’ The Wand is ripped from Lucy’s hand and flies back into Sarah’s hands. ‘I’m still the most powerful witch in this family.’ Resonates Sarah’s powerful voice through the tomb.

For a moment Lucy is shocked, and then anger takes over and she starts to weave another spell. Sarah stands her ground. ‘Lucy, stop!’

Lucy slings another spell; Sarah mumbles a quick spell and waves her Wand. The spell hits her shield and slides off. ‘Don’t! Or you’ll leave me no choice.’

Lucy chants another spell. Sarah shouts, her desperation is mounting. ‘Find the light! I beg you—’

Lucy slings her spell; it falls apart into a thousand sparkles against Sarah’s shield.

Tara tries to reach her sister, but she is unable to touch her. She would get through to her. But an invisible wall stops her. She bangs on it!

‘Lucy! Lucy!’ Lucy’s face is full of hate. ‘It’s me, Tara.’

Sarah’s voice is full of anguish; ‘You leave me no choice.’ She waves her Wand, takes a deep breath, and says with a booming voice ‘With the power of three, I ban thee from this family.’

Tara is shocked. ‘Mom, no!’

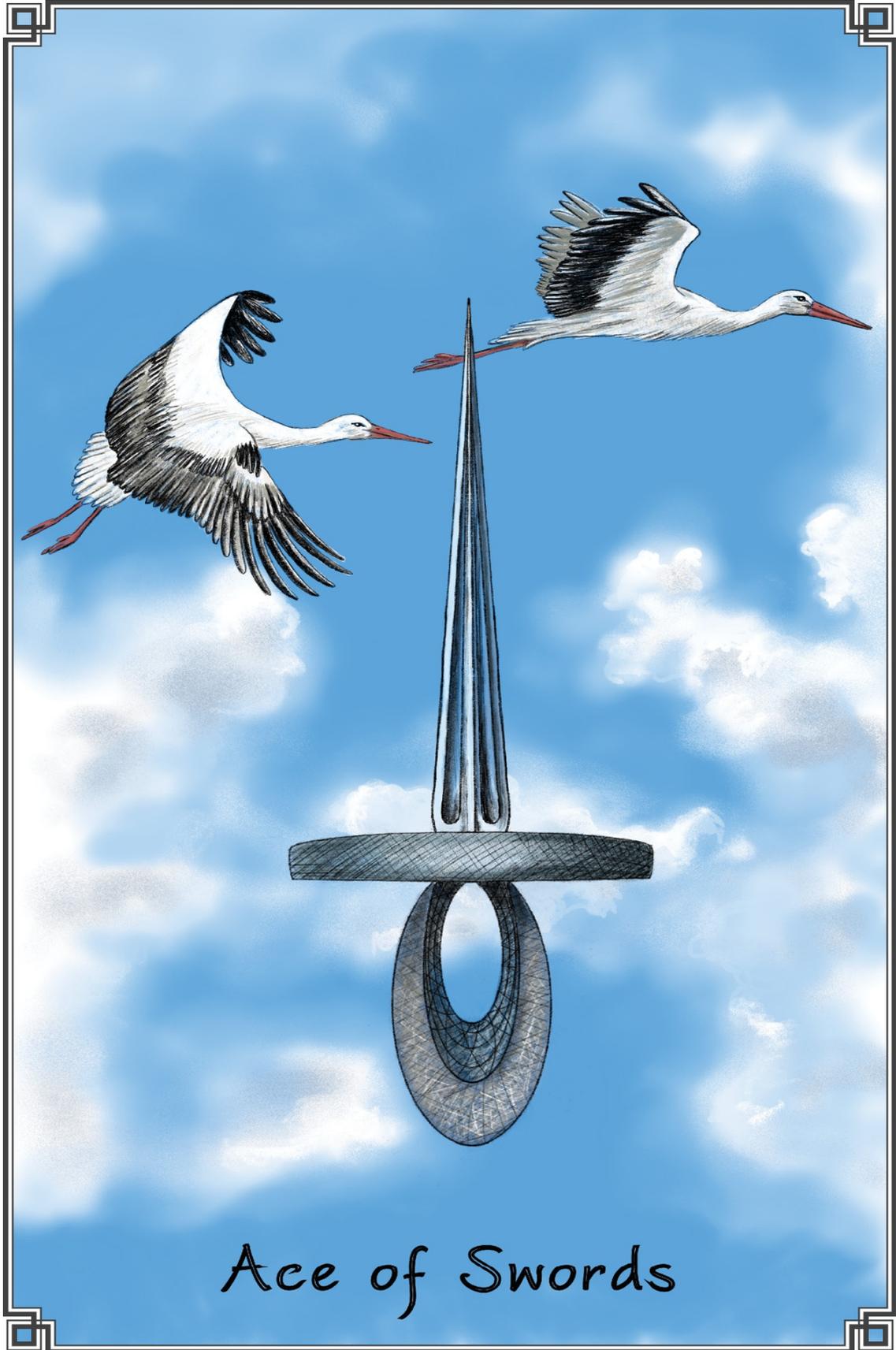
‘One, your name will never be uttered by us. Two, you will never be able to set foot on family property again.’ Slowly awareness comes back into Lucy’s face. She lowers her arms. ‘Mom?!’

‘Three, you will not be able to use our name or heritage.’

Lucy all of a sudden looks agitated. ‘Mom! I didn’t mean it!’

The wind picks up, and Tara struggles against it to reach her sister. Lucy desperately reaches for Tara but the wind is too strong. Tears stream down Sarah’s face while she watches her girls. She never imagined this would happen.

Lucy looks terrified, and Tara doubles her efforts to reach for her twin. Their fingers touch, with an extra push Lucy manages to lock fingers with Tara. The wind picks up Lucy, and the girls scream. The wind pulls and Tara is horrified when she feels Lucy’s fingers slip through her fingers. ‘TARA!’ Lucy gets slung out of the tomb and of the property. Abruptly the wind dies. The ancestors fold back into their tombs, and lids tumble down back into place. Tara stands frozen; slowly she looks full of horror at Sarah. Silent tears still stream down her face. The book on the altar starts to riffle through the pages. It stops on the page with Lucy’s name on it. A loud sizzle, and Lucy’s name gets scorched out of the family chronicles.



Ace of Swords

# PART 1

## *ACE OF SWORDS 'THE SEED'*

*'You and only you are responsible for your life choices and decisions.'*

—ROBERT KIYOSAKI

### **NEW ORLEANS, PRESENT DAY**

The sun peeks over the horizon and its golden rays fall on a ghostly white figure. Tara Madigan walks towards the family mansion. Now in her mid-seventies, her white nightgown flows freely around her as she moves through a big grassy yard. Her long grey hair cascades down her back. She seems to absorb the sun and radiate it from within. Her feet barely touch the ground. Tara's herbal healing skills are renowned in the area; people love her compassion and endless energy, as she is always willing to help her neighbors. But word goes, if she turns those crystal blue eyes on you, she looks straight into your soul and sees your deepest darkest secrets. So, people still keep their distance from the Madigans. In all those centuries, not much has changed.

It's quiet in the early morning except for the joyful chirping of the many birds in the yard. Tara stops for a moment to talk to them. They fly around her and a brave one flutters towards her and lands on her finger for a moment. It makes her smile, just for a second. Her night meditation in the tomb didn't bring her any answers, and the cheerful world is a