

KITCHEN TABLE Tarot

PULL UP
A CHAIR,
SHUFFLE
THE CARDS,
AND LET'S
TALK TAROT



MELISSA
CYNOMA

About the Author

When Melissa Cynova was fourteen, a kid in her class gave her a deck of tarot cards for unknown reasons. She's been reading ever since. In addition to being a prolific tarot reader, she teaches classes at her kitchen table and at tarot conferences. She lives near St. Louis, Missouri, with her husband, Joe, her amazing kiddos, two cats, two dogs, and a tortoise named Phil.

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*To Mary Elizabeth Strange,
who believed in me and my readings before I did.
I love you.*

Introduction



My friend Karin called me a while ago. She grabbed her first

tarot deck and book and was so excited about starting her tarot journey. Then, the texts started coming in.

Karin: My beginner tarot book recommends bundling a new deck and sleeping with it under my pillow for two nights.

Me: That's gross. Don't do that—you'll mess your cards up. Set them next to the bed. Or don't. Just think about each card before you go to sleep.

Karin: It also says to charge a quartz crystal to keep with it to absorb poopy energy anyone might bring near the deck.

Me: Also, bring the deck to a verdant meadow under a new moon to let fairies flip through it and sigh over it.

Karin: ...

Me: Kidding. The crystal one is actually not a bad idea, but I don't do it all the time and my cards work just fine.

Karin: It also says I should shuffle left-handed.

Me: Karin, shuffle with whichever frickin' hand you want.
Love, Melissa.

Karin: LOL, yes, sensei. I cleanse crystals and decks with salt and full moonlight. And whatever fairies want to stop by.

Me: Right. Like you do.

These conversations sum up exactly why I wanted to write this book. Reading cards is difficult, and learning them can be really confusing. When I started reading in 1989, before the Internet, we had to rely on books and word of mouth to gain information. I know, right? It was archaic. I also went to Catholic school. Guess what they don't teach you in Catholic school? Yeah. So when I was fourteen, my friend Steve gave me a tarot deck out of the blue and a book to go with it. I still don't know why, and I really want to find and thank him. Anyway, I sat down with my new book and started reading about the World and the Hierophant and Death, and the book that I had was so cold and academic that I couldn't figure some cards out. What does a guy in a funny hat have to do with my friend's boyfriend? If someone gets the Death card, they're not going to die, right? I mean, they aren't, right? It was uncomfortable and frustrating. I would try to give someone a reading and suddenly I'd stop. I'd look at the World card and say, "Well, it says here that the four animal heads in the corner represent the four apostles and that you should probably, like, go to church? Or something? I don't know." People generally don't generally come to a tarot reader to hear "I don't know."

I started practicing readings. I learned by intuiting meanings and confirming with my tarot book. I learned cards by just reading the pictures in front of me. I did it

completely backward. It took about ten years until I was comfortable enough to do it without the books, but it was worth it. The Internet came along about ten years after I started reading. Nice timing, universe. Very funny.

I'm not dismissing those books with the history and symbolism. Absolutely not. One of my favorite books is *Holistic Tarot* by Benebell Wen, and it's bigger than my head. You're supposed to fill in your tarot studies wherever you can. What this book shows, and what I want to teach you, is that you can pick up a card, see where it's going, remember a few keywords or mnemonic devices, and then *own* the card. You'll have it. Once you have the card, you can't lose it again. It belongs to you, and you can embellish it as much as you'd like. This book is for beginners, and I think it will help you start off on the right foot. Which is a metaphor that describes the Fool card perfectly, by the way. See what I did there? I'm teaching already.

I started teaching tarot to my friends at my kitchen table. We would have a few beers, and I'd hold up a card and pull out every pertinent detail I could about the card—where I'd seen it in readings, what was happening next, who it reminded me of. The kitchen table isn't always the most comfortable part of the house, but it's where everyone gathers in my house. It's a place for conversations, for ideas, and for sharing what's worrying you. Most of my early readings were born out of conversations around the table. A friend would be stuck, and looking at the cards would help us figure out how to get them unstuck. My classes began in the same way. I'd start telling stories about the cards, and before you knew it, we were fifty cards in and they were well on the way to knowing how to read for themselves. I want to bring the old knowledge to

the table and break bread with it. I want to make it approachable and accessible. That's why this book is called *Kitchen Table Tarot*. Because we're about to become friends, you and I. Pull up a chair. I have a lot to teach you.

XOXO,

Lis

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Chapter One

Getting Started

*The true Tarot is symbolism;
it speaks no other language and offers no other signs.*
—arthur waite, the pictorial key to the tarot

First of all, you have to pick a deck. I know that your cousin's friend's sister said that you shouldn't buy your first tarot deck because it's bad luck or whatever, but I think that is just silly. Just find a deck. I would recommend starting with a basic deck in the tradition of the Rider-Waite-Smith deck. Here is a short list of decks that could qualify as one of these:

- Llewellyn's Classic Tarot
- Radiant Rider-Waite Tarot
- 1JJ Swiss Tarot
- Albano-Waite Tarot
- Anna K Tarot
- Gilded Tarot
- Universal Waite Tarot

A lot of people don't like the Rider-Waite-Smith deck. It can be very yellow—so bright ... so shiny. It is not diverse, generally featuring straight white people. It can be confusing and can feel foreign if you weren't raised in a Judeo-Christian tradition. However, this is the beginning. Pamela Colman Smith was commissioned by Arthur Waite to illustrate his book and cards. This is arguably the beginning of the tarot deck as we know it. Right now, I need you to stop reading this book, go to the Internet, and

look up Pamela Colman Smith. I want you to read about her life, her creativity and amazing energy, and her enormous and overlooked influence on the cards you're about to learn. She is the Mother of Tarot, and your tarot practice can only be enhanced by studying her life and art.

I'm not saying that you can't switch to another deck down the road, but I've been doing this for almost thirty years. You need to trust me on this. I am telling you that a deck in the Rider-Waite-Smith tradition will assist you in learning the basics of tarot better than the Deck of the Supercilious Fairy Realm of Gondor. I promise. For simplicity in this book, I'll refer to decks in the Rider-Waite-Smith tradition as "Basic." I encourage you to do your homework and find a Basic deck that appeals to you. I have at least sixty decks, and I know tarot readers with over a thousand! There are some amazing pieces of art out there masquerading as tarot decks. I promise you this, though: knowing the Basic deck will help them become more than just pretty pieces of paper.

Although the historical tarot is full of straight white folks, there are a host of other decks that feature queer people, people of color, and queer people of color. A lot of the tarot is about symbolism, and that extends to the color of the characters' skin and the relationships they're in. You don't have to be a white female to identify with the High Priestess. You don't have to be in a straight relationship to live in the Lovers card. I often come up as the Knight of Swords in readings, and I don't identify as a white cis male. That being said, it's really nice to do a reading with cards that are representative of your color, culture, or love. Here is a list of recommended diverse decks:

- The Slow Holler Tarot

- The Tarot of the Silicon Dawn
- The Gaian Tarot
- The Trungles Deck
- Modern Spellcaster's Tarot
- Sun and Moon Tarot
- The Goddess Tarot
- The Relative Tarot
- The Lover's Path Tarot
- The Fountain Tarot
- The Mary-el Tarot
- The New Orleans Voodoo Tarot
- Tarot del Fuego
- Motherpeace Tarot
- Morgan-Greer Tarot

I like the Basic deck because the symbology is very rich, and I like starting my students off with the traditional decks. It's a friendly deck, and I liked using it a lot. I used this deck until after college—for about ten years. And by the way? I used the book for about nine of those years. Yeah! I did! During readings, too! I used the book because it takes time to learn about the cards, and there is *nothing* wrong with bringing in a book to help you out. I carry a small tarot book in my car just in case I blank out or need mental reinforcements. So, yeah. Do that. Use your tools—that's what they're there for.

I taught a Tarot 101 class to a very good friend a while ago, and I remember saying, “Use your book! Read all you can. Find a favorite tarot book and read it until it falls apart.” He asked when he could stop using the book, and I think I said something like, “When you’re finished with it.” Completely vague and Zen advice, but true. It was easy for

me to decide to stop using my book. It happened because I forgot it at home. I was a little scared, but the meanings of the cards came to me, and pretty soon I didn't feel as nervous before a reading. I was able to look at my cards and make them dance together.

There are a few decks out there that switch around the numbering of the cards. There are some that change the figures in the card so much that some of the meaning is lost. I've seen decks where the Fool is *falling* off the cliff. No, no, no. The Fool is happily walking off that cliff. It's deliberate. To make him fall off negates the basic meaning of the whole card. It's dumb. There, I said it. I have strong feelings about this. If you start with a deck that diverts from the Basic, it's difficult to be sure you're getting the proper information about your cards.

Although I don't like buying decks that I can't touch, you can't always get what you want, and the Internet exists. I know that in some places, your local bookstore (if you have one) won't carry tarot cards or will only carry a few decks. If you need to go online, I really like www.TarotGarden.com by Dan Pelletier and Jeannette Roth. I've never found a more complete collection of tarot decks online. Or go to Amazon. Just get a deck.

Once you have your deck, get to know it. My friend Beth Maiden of www.LittleRedTarot.com does readings to get to know her new decks. She asks what she can learn from the deck, how they're going to get along, and how she should use and approach the deck. Go through each card in the deck and just look at them. Look at the colors and the elements present. You don't have to read a book or go online to intuit some of the meanings. This is a first date—you're just getting to know your new tools. The Tower

card? Where lightning strikes the top of the tower and people are plunging to their doom? Not a great card. The Two of Cups, in which two people meet each other on firm ground and share chalices with each other? That's a partnership. Got it. I'm going to point out things to look for in your shiny new cards that will help this step. When you're getting to know your deck, I strongly suggest buying a journal or a notebook. Have two or three pages set aside for each card. Write down your first impressions. Point out the symbols that grab your eye and how you find them in readings. This journal will be a wonderful tool moving forward in enhancing your knowledge of the cards.

I've heard a lot of people say that they sleep with a card under their pillow every night and journal about the card every morning. That's super, honestly. All I could think about was rolling over and tearing my new card. Maybe put it by the bed? Anyway, you can make up your own ritual to learn the cards. You can meditate on each card every day. You can become the card for a day, as James Wanless suggested at the 2015 Northwest Tarot Symposium. You can put the cards down and walk away from them for a while. They'll still be there when you get back.

My friend Steve may have been onto something when he handed me that Rider-Waite-Smith deck and said, "Here. You should learn how to do this." I used that deck until it was literally in tatters. The sides of the cards are worn smooth and feel like fabric, and the book is held together with masking tape. I still have them—still in that old green bag—and even though I don't read with them anymore, I teach with them. I pull one every morning when I do my daily card draw. They feel good in my hands, and they feel like home.

How Do You Read?

You can read a billion books, you can go to every site on the Internet that has anything to do with tarot, and you still won't know how *you* will read tarot. It's different for everyone. Intuitive tarot reader, astrologist/reader, clairvoyant reader, numerologist/reader, empathic, clairaudient (info received through sounds), etc. Honestly, there are so many ways to do this. When you're first reading for other people, you're trying to find your voice. It's okay to be hesitant, and it's completely normal to use your book. It's okay to tell your client that you're not sure. Above all other advice, this is the most important: be honest. If you try to come off as a hooded mystic but don't know the meaning of the Hierophant card, you're not going to be taken seriously. Be sure that you match your reading style to your skill level. You can surround your readings with as much—or as little—ceremony as you'd like. There are people who pray, burn incense, and store their cards in a velvet bag in a wooden box on an altar. There are people who keep an extra deck in their glove box in case they forget to bring one along to a reading. Your rituals work because you believe in them.

If anyone tells you that they have The Way to do readings, I suspect they're trying to sell you something. There is no one way. There is no one path. There is you, your cards, and your gift. That's it. Read a lot. Watch other readers. Practice on your friends (and tell them that you're practicing). You can figure out your style with some research and time. No worries. Remember, this is supposed to be fun. In tarot readings (and in all other things), please

stop comparing yourself to other people. Compare yourself to yourself.

Lay the Cards Down

One-Card Reading

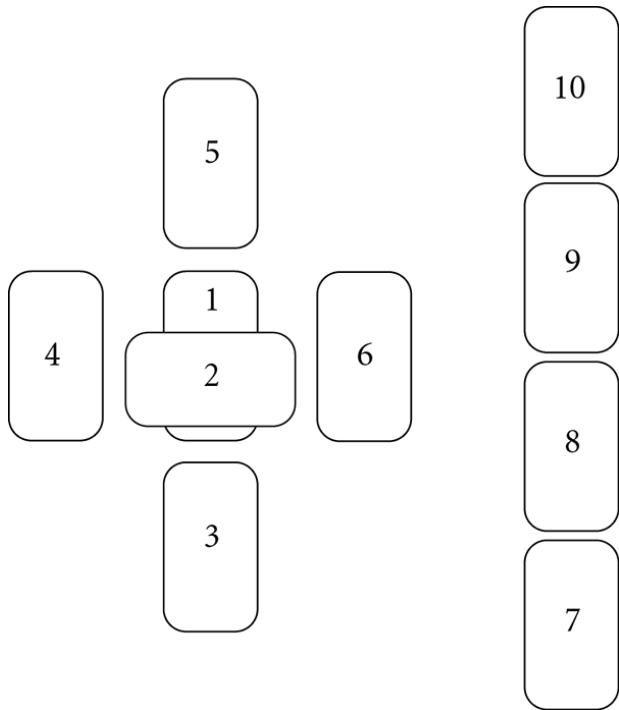
The easiest way to read the cards is a one-card reading. I've recently starting pulling a card a day. I look at the card first thing in the morning and think about what it means for me and where I might see it later in the day. At night, I reflect on the card and write about where it showed up. Fun fact: It's almost always accurate.



Celtic Cross

The classic spread is the Celtic Cross, illustrated on the next page with numbered cards.

1. This card covers you. You can see what's going on for you and what is directly influencing the question.
2. This card crosses you. It shows what influences are moving in and out of your life that have bearing on the outcome.
3. This card position shows what's at the base of your situation. What's at the root of the story?
4. The card to the left speaks to influences from your past that are still affecting you.
5. The card at the top is what crowns you—what's directly influencing you and what blessings or bounties you can hold on to.
6. To the right we have a card that shows an influence that's coming your way.
7. The bottom of the line is you right now in the present—the “you-est” you.
8. Going up the line, card 8 is you through others' eyes.
9. Second from the top is your hopes and fears.
10. The top of the line is the final outcome and most likely result.



All of this together tells a story. Look at it in three pieces. Cards 1 and 2 are telling you what's going on right now. Cards 3, 4, and 5 tell you what happened in the past and how it's currently affecting you. The rest walk you through the rest of the story. Who is influencing you? How do you feel your most authentic? What can get in your way? The last card says where you're likely to go.

When I read, I use the Celtic Cross for longer readings—ones that I know will take about an hour. I read it differently, though. I use cards 3, 4, and 5 as the first part of the story and read them together. Cards 1, 2, and 6 are the middle part of the story, and then I read the “line” as the ending of the story, or the future part. It works really well for me; might not work for you. Play with it until you find your voice. They make *sense* to me like this. I would wager if anyone else futzed about with their cards like I do, they wouldn't read the same way. To the beginner, though,

the Celtic Cross is a good start. It helps you see how the cards interact with each other, and it tells a pretty good story.

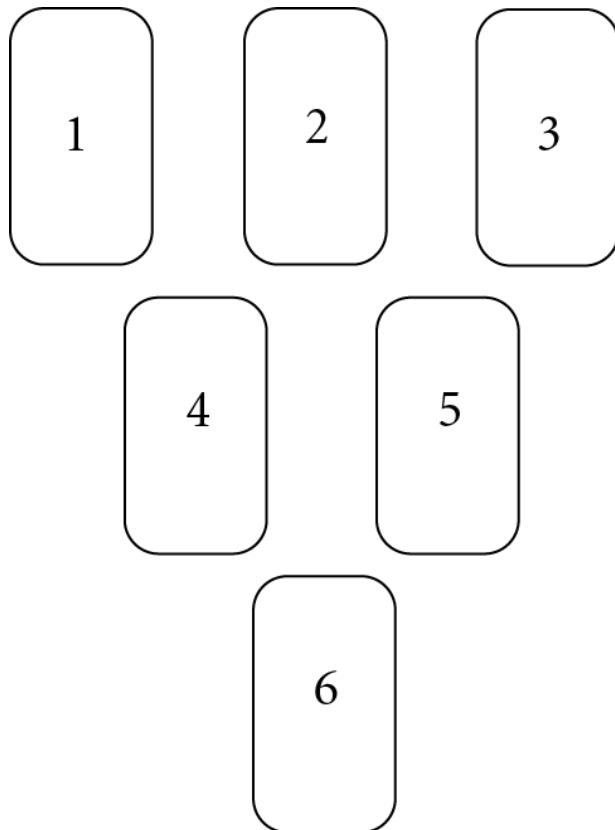
Six-Card Spread

Another spread is the six-card spread. The top row is past, the middle row is present, and the bottom row is the future.

Row 1: Cards 1, 2, and 3—Past

Row 2: Cards 4 and 5—Present

Row 3: Card 6—Future



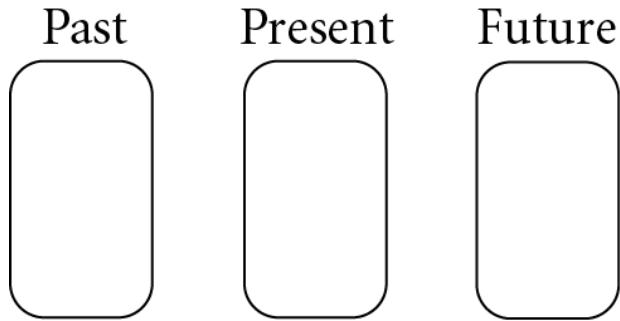
In this one, you use the first three cards to see what was going on in the past that had a direct influence on the querent. The cards in the middle show what's *really* going on in the present: the tools that you have now, things you can hold on to, and whether or not you're making the best choices. The card at the bottom is the “pivot” card. I can’t

think of a better word. When I do this reading, the bottom card is whatever homework the client needs to do in order to get where they need to go. When you use this spread, efficiency is helpful: "Here's where you were, here's where you are, here's where you need to go." It's a bossy little reading, but it works nicely.

There is a great technique in this spread, too. The cards that touch on the diagonal generally have a connection. Cards 1 and 4 are touching corners and likely have a causal relationship. When you look at 3 and 5, ask yourself how *this* past experience and *this* present feeling are connected. Is someone from the past still yanking your chain? Do you have emotional baggage still hanging out there?

Past-Present-Future Spread

The other spread that I use is *super* simple. Three cards: past, present, future. It's fantastic for beginners and for quick questions. When I was learning the cards, I would often make a list of questions and pull three cards for the same question over and over. I was surprised at how often the cards or sentiments repeated themselves. It was a good way to get texture out of the readings, too. Three cards doesn't seem like a lot to work with, but if you look into the cards, they each have a story to tell. Why doesn't the Chariot driver have reins? Why is the Queen of Swords so stiff and straight? Let the cards talk to you. Ask how the past card caused the present card. Did the callousness of the Devil bring the Queen of Swords into being?



When you have the meanings of the cards more firmly under your belt, you'll be able to find your flow in a reading. When you're first starting out, you'll find yourself using the word "ummmmm" a lot as you go from card to card. Let's call it a chant, shall we? Your chanting, while assisting your brain with catching up to your face, can be a distraction.

Instead, take a second to look at the spread in front of you as one piece, one story.

If you're using past-present-future spreads, look at each part. For example, you can see that the story reads deliberation (Two of Swords), change (Death), clumsy action (Page of Wands). You can present this question to the client and turn the reading into a discussion: "It seems like you've done a lot of thinking and there are some serious changes going on right now. Are you filling your time with nervous energy and movement instead of being patient and calm?"

How do you get the cards to tell you a story? Practice, practice, practice. I would hold my book in my left hand and read with my right. Look at the "covering" card in the Celtic Cross spread—what does it say? If it's the Tower, you know that change is happening right now and that you or your client is a bit overwhelmed. You can see that any

decision they make right now is under the influence of chaos, and maybe they can just be still until things calm down. If you follow the rest of the cards, you'll find a solution or at least a way to make it gentler. I used my book for a decade, and I still will pull Rachel Pollack or Mary K. Greer down if I get stuck. You're always going to be learning this craft.

So, however you begin your studies, remember that doing a reading is like having a conversation with your cards. If the spread makes sense to you, it makes sense to your cards. If it works for you, run with it.

The creativity comes in when you put the book down and start reading organically. It's good to learn the Celtic Cross and other standard readings, but after a while, you make it your own. I still use the Celtic Cross spread, but I read it sideways, and the cards mean different things than they used to. I've assigned meaning to where my cards lie and they tell me a story now. I can give a reading with three, six, ten, or twenty cards. My intent goes into my cards and the reading comes out. Practice your spreads by writing them down. Decide that this position means *this* exact thing. Fix it in your mind and then do your reading. Your intent makes it so.

It's hard to teach that, but by sharing stories and describing what it's like to my students, hopefully they'll figure it out when it happens. Until that moment of "Holy crap! I got it!" (which is a very cool feeling), use your book. Practice the Celtic Cross and other spreads. Make up your own! Figure out how to place the cards so that they tell you a story.

Exercise: Tell Me a Story

Shuffle your cards. Lay down three cards. Tell me that story. Let a friend shuffle. Lay down three cards. Tell them that story.

Seems really simple until you try it. Tarot is storytelling at its base. You are using the tool of the cards to elaborate someone's story. Getting in touch with your storytelling self is one of the most important things you can do in your journey through tarot. My storytelling self swears a lot. I see the pictures in my head of what has been, could be, will be. Yours is going to be different—embrace that. When you look at the first card, I want you to see your friend or client in the card. If they're the Fool, where are they jumping? Into romance? Moving? New job? Tell them about themselves. Allow yourself to be wrong if you have to, but just talk and tell the story.

Exercise: Introduce Me to the Card

In your journal entry, tell me who is in the card. In the Seven of Swords, who is taking all the swords away? Are they his? Is he stealing or taking them back? Who is he stealing from and why? What about those guys in the corner of the card—are they his friends, or did they just bust him for stealing things? Write as if you're talking to someone who's never seen a deck before.

What Is It Like?

I can't remember reading anything in my tarot books about what tarot readings are like, so I want to touch on it briefly. Again, everyone will have something different. This is how I see things.

The best way to explain it would be with stories from my experiences. Once upon a time, I gave a reading in which

the Tower card moved. The picture moved. I could see the client fall, fall, fall ... and then they bounced. It was outstanding, and I briefly thought I was losing my mind. They ended up being the only person who didn't get their ass handed to them in this particular situation. Everyone else on their team at work was laid off except for them.

Sometimes when I'm reading I get a stomachache or a headache, or my back will be killing me. I touch whatever part of me hurts, and the client reacts. We talk about what's causing this ailment in them, and then it goes away. Sometimes the pain is pressure on my chest and I say, "Ow. You're so sad." This will be met with tears on their end. Sometimes it's emotional pain that you'll pick up on.

Sometimes I hear things. I hear music a lot. I read for one client and couldn't get "Ring of Fire" out of my head. I asked what that meant to them, and they'd just recovered from a house fire.

Sometimes I hear dead people. No kidding. It freaks me out, and I don't like it. But it's something the client needs to hear. This usually comes across as a feeling or presence, and I try to be as honest and open with the client as possible. One time, I kept hearing a woman yelling in German. I don't speak German, so I didn't know what she was saying. I saw an image in my mind of an older woman, shaking her fist, hair in a bun, and *really, really mad*. I tried to ignore it, but that was impossible. After a few minutes, I stopped the reading and told the client what I was seeing, and she burst into tears. "*Mom!*"

Sometimes I smell things. Vanilla, grandma's house, gasoline. I always mention it, and it's usually relevant. Scent memory is so strong.

Once upon a time, I was reading for a dear friend who I'll refer to as an elder. He's been here before, he'll be here again. He's one of those people who are always calm, and you're pretty sure they're a bodhisattva or an earthbound angel. Well, he has a lot of spirit guides. I could hear the guides listening in and chatting about me: "Oh, bless her heart, she's nervous." I had to ask him to tell them to hush. It felt like a freakin' group job interview.

Most of the time there aren't as many fireworks. I lay down the cards, and they talk to me. I see the Tower and know that it was necessary, and I see the dust settling and what the path ahead looks like (usually dusty). I throw down the Seven of Wands and feel my client bristling with protective energy. I can hear the celebration in the Four of Wands, or see the connective energy in the Three of Cups. My cards come alive for me. That's the best way I can describe it.

How do you know I'm not making it up? You don't. Things work because you believe in them. Call it faith or will or coincidence or whatever. If you believe it will help to light a candle and ask the universe to help you understand the mystery and meaning of the Hierophant, then it will. Don't spend a bunch of money on learning how to get to know your cards. Just do it. Say hi to them and get to work.

Reading for Yourself

Since readings are about helping find answers, questions are a huge part of what we do. Most of my new clients are more nervous about *how* to ask questions than they are about getting the reading. Your first readings will be for yourself, and it's best not to overthink your questions. It can be as simple as "What's with today, today?" So, I'm going to make a handy dandy list for you just in case you've ever wondered, "What should I ask?"

1. *Everything*. Well, honestly, this is a good way to get a reading. If someone is unsure about what to focus on, I ask them to think about themselves. Their lives. Dreams, goals, fears. Whatever they concentrate on is fine. The most important part of this is the shuffling. It calms you down and helps you focus. I tell my clients to shuffle until they feel like they're finished.

2. *Nothing*. Some people get readings when everything is just fine. No major concerns, nothing particularly troubling. All is well. I ask them to look ahead however far and let their curiosity drive the reading.

3. *That one thing that I can't stop thinking of no matter how hard I try*. Let's call it an obsession. Bad relationship, bad job, bad whatever. You push the thought around in your brain like a tongue worrying over a loose tooth. I ask these clients to please breathe and shuffle and ask themselves why. Why is the job bad, why are their coworkers such jerks. Why do they keep carrying their work home with them. This kind of concentration will help me pull the question apart into smaller bits.

4. *Work/love, home/future, dreams/fears*. Most two-question readings are two sides of the same coin. I ask

these clients to focus on the connection between the two things. What about your dreams makes you afraid?

5. *Sometimes you'll get someone else's reading.* I swear. Sometimes a loved one's life can be so compelling and concerning that you can't keep it out of your thoughts. You might get an entire reading about how your son can turn his life around, with bupkus advice for you. It happens. I ask these clients to call me back when their lives have settled a bit, so we can talk about them.

I'm sure I've said this before, but when it comes to getting a tarot reading, intent is everything. Truly. Breathe, calm down, and try to focus on yourself. Allow the universe to tell you what you need to hear. Remember the shuffling. I think that gets overlooked quite a bit. Shuffling the cards is a very calming experience. Alternatively, I have had clients lay their hand on the deck, and the reading is just perfect. There's a lot of confidence there. I have a client who tosses cards in the air—like seventy-eight-card pickup. She piles them back up and hands them to me. I *hate* it when she does this, but you know what? The reading is always right.

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Chapter Two

Care and Keeping of You and Your Tools



Your state of being will affect your readings. This is important.

Even the most experienced reader has bad days. You have to take care of yourself to give good readings. You're the tool in this exchange. You're the conduit. If you're feeling broken down, your reading will be battered as well. Here are some ways you can be sure to give terrible readings:

- *Mental:* Doing readings while you're drunk or high just is a bad idea. How are you supposed to help someone find their path when you can't even stand up on yours?
- *Emotional:* If you've just suffered a crisis and are emotionally wrought, please don't read for other people.
- *Physical:* Pain can alter your perceptions. You might be cranky because of it. You might be distracted. Just be aware of your body and its limitations. If you have the flu, put the cards down.
- *Spiritual:* If you are world weary. If you have had too much bad news lately and it's really getting to you, just

reschedule the reading.

Once you find your groove, make new habits that help you before and after readings. I've been reading for a very long time, and my routine is still changing. I have a morning meditation time, which is something that I've never done before. I choose a card for the day and journal about it, and then I feed my tortoise, Phil. It's twenty minutes of my day that gets my head on straight and gives me time to wake up.

I know readers who will meditate before each reading or will do a cleansing ritual. I've never prepared a lot before readings, but again, everyone is different. I am personally a very straightforward person, and this is reflected in how I approach tarot readings. I just do them. I used the book to suss out the card meanings for about ten years, but honestly? When I read for someone, about 20 percent of the information comes from the cards, and 80 percent comes from my brain. I hear names sometimes. I see pictures or scenes play out like a movie reel.

This works out in a few ways for me because giving readings is truly as natural as breathing. I've read for people at bars, on Venice Beach, in the grass, in the woods, while riding in a car—wherever. I've never had problems preparing to give readings or getting in the right headspace.

The problem is this: I've never learned how to properly ground and center my energy. Gasp! Scandal! Yes. This is truth. I've picked up a few tricks along the way from people who have been doing this longer than me, but I never really thought about it until a few years ago. The purpose of grounding and centering is to make sure that you're on

solid ground emotionally and spiritually, and that you're going to be fine after the reading is complete. This is why you have your tarot cards. I gave a reading without my cards (bad, bad, don't do this) a few years ago, and I was *swimming* in my client's emotions. She drove home grinning and singing, and I drove home sobbing hysterically and calling my Reiki angel, begging her to get it off, off, *off* me (and she did, and I love you, Jenny). Our tarot cards are the conduit between our client's selves and ourselves. They're like a welder's blast shield and keep you separate and protected.

Self-Care

Whatever your spiritual path, I feel that learning how to visualize protection energy is extremely important. If you envision a shield around you, you not only have the visual to boost your confidence, but you've been still, have taken the time to slow your breathing, and have mentally prepared yourself for what's coming up. It's like putting on emotional/mental armor. I don't know that my readings will change for this, but I know that I will. I'll be stronger and better able to do my job. I am not good at picturing a ball of light surrounding me like Glinda the Good Witch. This is often recommended as a way to protect yourself against negative energy. What I am awesome at, however, is imagining Tony Stark's Iron Man suit flying to cover me in badass energy or Wonder Woman's tiara and bracelets (they're really called the Bracelets of Submission—no, really) strengthening your already immense reserves. Once the facemask hits, I'm ready to go. You do you—figure out how to protect yourself and be consistent.

Grounding is essentially settling down. After doing energy work, after readings, after finishing a huge nonmystical project, where does that energy go? Well, nowhere, really, unless you send it away.

Have you ever had so much energy that you can't stop moving? I'm a bouncer. I bounce and fidget constantly. If I don't pay attention to it, I literally don't stop moving. Sometimes, though, especially when I'm about to do a reading, that kind of Tigger behavior is distracting and inappropriate. It's especially bad for me *after* I've done a lot of readings. I can't concentrate. I can't stop talking. I call my poor friends and blather on and on about my day. I'm annoying as hell.

Elemental Grounding

To help you remember how to ground yourself, so you're not as annoying as I am, I'm going to use the four elements as teachers.

Here are a few things you might do to get ready for your readings or wind down from them, organized by element. Weird, but it works.

- *Earth*: Stomp your feet on the ground. Go running or walking. Lie down in the grass. Garden. Put your hands in the dirt. Pet your animals. Have really good sex. When I was a social worker, I would stop outside of my car before I left for the day and stomp my feet like crazy to get all of that (sometimes very negative) energy *off* me before I got home.
- *Air*: Breathe! Yoga breathing is outstanding. This kind of breathing pattern by Dr. Andrew Weil works great for me: you breathe in for a four count, hold for seven, and exhale for eight. It feels great. You can read or meditate, too.
- *Fire*: Use a candle to meditate. I would say smoke, because that worked for me for a long time, but smoking is bad for you, so light a candle and stare at it for a bit. Send your energy to the wick and imagine it getting turned into smoke and blowing away.
- *Water*: Take a shower. Take off all of your jewelry and put it in water to disperse any energy it has collected. Take a bath. Go for a swim. Stand in the rain.

Sleep and Dreams

What sleep can always do for a reader is let you put your mind at ease. You can say goodbye to the readings, the constant contact with people, and the processing of the readings you promised yourself you'd let go of a few hours ago. You can put all of that down and just go away. Sometimes in the process of letting things go, you can pick up little things you've missed—messages, signs, or more information that might be pertinent to you or your clients later on.

When you *get* readings, sleeping can give you a perspective that you missed the first time around. Readings are often a lot of information in a short amount of time. You can record them or take notes, but still—someone just laid your life out for you. You have to have time to process that. I got one of the best readings of my life at Marie Laveau's shop in New Orleans. This man saw me. Really saw me. (Drop me a line, and I'll tell you his name.) It kind of freaked me out a little, if I'm honest. I remembered most of it that day. I remembered a little more the next. I had reading-flavored dreams for several months until the day that the last prediction came true. Then they stopped.

When you *give* readings, pay attention to your dreams before and after. I feel weird if I don't remember my dreams the next day. They've become like a running narrative of this other world that sometimes makes sense. Sometimes I peel my face off and put it in a drawer. It's a crapshoot, really.

Dreams can be powerful tools in prediction. I dreamed about my little girl when I was fifteen. For fifteen years, I dreamed about a curly-haired toddler with dimples named

Z. I told my parents about it, friends in high school and college, and I always wondered—how does a Native American have a little girl with curly hair? Well, you have a baby with a Jewish guy, that's how. I had Z when I was thirty. Curly hair. Dimples. If you're into cards, you're likely going to be into some other things that dance around in the ether. Dream interpretation, meditation, Reiki, etc. I can tell you from experience that these three things will enhance your readings, help you calm yourself, and make you a stronger vessel for what you do. I can also tell you that sometimes your dreams are going to involve you and your best friend driving a Mack truck around Hazzard County. You're going to have to decide which to look into and which are just your brain cleaning house. Have fun with them. Remember that everything in your life is a tool if you use it properly. Sweet dreams.

Card Care

I might know someone who carried a deck in the bottom of her purse. It was held together with a rubber band and got kind of grody. It may have had cat hair and crumbs on it. It stopped working—almost as if in protest. Be *nice* to your cards. It doesn't matter what you keep them in, as long as they're safe. I have a friend who keeps all of his cards banded together in a special box. You can keep them in a bag, in a box, in a bag in a box. Doesn't matter. Are they dry and safe from harm? Great. Do that thing. You, being the ultimate authority on how you take care of your cards, have extra-special significance assigned in whatever you decide to do, obviously.

You can keep them in the box in which they came. You can! I've done this before for a few years. I don't travel with these decks; they're mostly for phone readings. But you can keep them in the box if you're careful. If you're not—if you're, you know, like me—you need to figure something else out. Boxes will get worn and stop closing and pretty soon, your pretty deck will be at the bottom of your purse covered in gum wrappers and hair ties and broken promises. Reaching into a purse and pulling out the Seven of Swords along with a tube of Burt's Bees and an old receipt is not the best way to take care of your cards, in my experience. Be nice to your cards.

You can wrap them in a cloth. That's it—nothing fancier than a piece of cloth. Some of my friends do this for ease of use, and it's easier to charge them under the moon and whatnot. As with tarot cards, the wrappings of your deck should match you and nothing else.

You can get a nifty bag. I've made a few, but I am terrible at sewing, so I pretty much look to my friends or websites to find one. I used a banking bag on my first deck of cards for twenty-five years. Still use it—it still works. I know that some people stand on more ceremony when it comes to readings. I'm just as comfortable reading at a coffee shop as with lying-on-my-bed readings. These days, I use makeup bags for storage. They're cute, inexpensive, and the proper size. There is a great subscription service called Ipsy that costs ten dollars a month and delivers makeup and a tarot ... er, makeup bag! That's me, though. If you like the extra—the protection, the beauty, the ceremony—do that.

I think that the important thing with the care and keeping of cards is to do the research and then figure out what works best for you. Reading cards is personal. You can do it either for entertainment or professionally. You can take it seriously or read for fun. Silk bags or cardboard boxes. The important thing is that you're being authentic to yourself. That's the one thing that doesn't change reader to reader. However you approach the cards, if you're authentic, it will come through in your readings.

I have some decks in the original boxes. Some with rubber bands around them. Some in boxes and some in bags. One is in a Chinese box with silk on the inside. Why? Because I'd just gotten that box when my tarot box fell to pieces. And it fit. Beautiful. Just do the thing if the thing feels right.

Cleaning Energy from Your Cards

Cleaning them energetically is a practice I would take up after every use if possible. When you read for people, the cards get kind of energetically funky. Clean your decks by using one of the four elements:

- *Earth*: Rap your knuckles on your card. Put the deck in order—Ace to King for each suit, Fool to World. Stack them up. Put them on the (clean) grass and let them go to ground for a bit. Clean with fanning powder.
- *Air*: Use a smudge stick to clean them with smoke. Breathe on them.
- *Fire*: Tricky with flammable cards. I find that incense feels more fiery than smudge sticks. Light a stick of incense or a candle in front of your cards and put your intent into the lighting of it. You can also put your cards out into the sunlight.
- *Water*: Also tricky with cards. This might be me being weird, but I look to the Moon for water cleansing. It controls the tides, right? Put your cards on the windowsill in front of the moon and let them soak up the goodness.

The reason for energetic cleaning is to get the funk of the reading away from your tools. Let's say you don't believe in all this stuff. Reiki and energy and stuff like that. That's okay. You don't have to, but let me ask you this—have you ever walked into a room when other people have been fighting in it? You know how stiff and thick the air feels? That's negatively charged energy. You'll give people readings about loss and breakups and death and disaster. Do you really want that mess sticking to your cards? Think about it. If nothing else, it's a nice ritual to close out your

reading time. Even if you're reading for yourself, closing out a reading with smudge or stones or moonlight is a respectful way to treat your tools. If you treat your tools properly, they'll do right by you.

Some readers don't allow clients to touch their cards, and some do. It comes again to personal choice. I always let people shuffle and cut the deck in person, and if they have follow-up questions, I shuffle for them. I swear, most of the advice in this book will come down to this: Do you want to do the thing? Do the thing. That's what makes it right.

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Chapter Three

The Ethics of Reading



Just do your best. Sometimes I'm just wrong, and I say I'm sorry and

move on. Honestly, it doesn't happen that often, so I try not to worry about it. It distracts me from my job. You have to own this, guys. You have to decide that you are good at readings. I know that sounds silly, but you have to decide that you can do this. A lack of self-confidence can affect the quality of your readings more than almost anything else.

What if I'm Wrong?

That will happen. You'll misinterpret or follow yourself down a rabbit hole and get disconnected from the reading. Some people are really difficult to read for. I have laid out the cards, stared at them, and then said, "Do over." If it doesn't make sense, stop talking. Be honest. You can say no to someone who wants a reading. You can start a reading and then stop midway. Just be honest.

We're none of us perfect. I've come to believe that if I give someone the wrong information, it's because they weren't meant to hear the right stuff yet. Readings get canceled or rescheduled. People get sick. All kinds of things happen so that a person can get a reading when they need it.

Sometimes that includes you being less than 100 percent accurate. Just do your best.

Holy Crap, What if I'm Right?

You're supposed to be right, right? Well, yeah. But you have to be careful, too. If you see that someone is sick, how do you share this? If you see that they're cheating on their partner and about to get caught, how do you make them take you seriously?

You don't, really. You have no responsibility for what people do with your readings. You could tell them exactly the best way to get out of debt, and the next day they could max out their credit cards. Not your fault. Not your problem.

That said, your responsibility extends to *how* you give a reading. Be kind. Be gentle. These are people's lives, you know? Which leads us to ...

Responsibility

You are responsible for when you read, how much you charge, and who your clients are. You are responsible for dealing with any negative feedback that comes your way. Here are some tricky situations you'll want to assess before you start reading professionally:

- *Reading for people who are drunk or high.* This is a personal call. I used to read for people in a bar. Sometimes it was fine, and sometimes it was bloody awful. Sometimes I opened up emotional wounds of someone who wasn't in the right place to hear it. Sometimes I poked at people who were angry or violent. Someone took a swing at me once. It was bananas.
- *Reading for people and trying to tell their futures.* Fortune-teller is a bit inaccurate, as names go. I can't tell you the date and time you're going to meet your person. Or their birthday. Or their name. I can tell you about when you're going to meet them and kind of what to look for. If you decide to lock yourself in your house for three months, you're not going to meet them. If you ask in a reading how you can be healthier or happier and you change nothing about your life, guess what happens? Nothing. For a reader to tell a client that they can fix the client's problems—that's nonsense. You can't do that. It sets people up to fail and takes the responsibility for living out of their hands. Don't do that.

There Is Room for All of Us!

I make it a rule to not talk smack about other readers. If I believe in a reader and if I know them, I will promote them. It's as simple as that. Why do I promote other readers on

my sites? Because there is room for all of us. I'm a very good reader, but I'm not everyone's cup of tea. I have some really great skills, but I don't read about death or birth. If those questions come up, I'll refer to a friend. Be kind. Build community. Be gracious. There aren't that many of us, and I've seen reputations crash and burn within a day on social media. Don't be a jerk.

Use your network to find someone that you know does great readings. If I swear too much for your taste, I can refer you to at least five other tarot professionals that will give you a great reading. I don't mind losing a client if I know they're going to get a solid reading somewhere else.

On the other hand, don't fall for gimmicks. I got a reading in Chicago once that was just astoundingly terrible. I had a hangover, and my friend was wearing St. Louis Cardinals gear. When I walked back in the reader's office, I kept getting distracted by a light near her knee. She kept taking big, dramatic breaths and closing her eyes. She laid down the cards and said, "Oh, you are covered with a dark shadow. This is a curse, and it follows you around."

I said, "Like Pigpen from Charlie Brown?" Apparently so. She said that I was sick (hungover) and had traveled from far away (the St. Louis Cardinals gear). She said that I was shy (HA!) and had no intuition to speak of. That it was hard for me to make friends (nope) and that I'd been sick (hungover) for a long time (nope). *Then* she said that if I hired her as my personal psychic advisor, she could remove the curse. For five hundred dollars a month. She also said she could sell me a magical candle for three hundred that would help with my inability to succeed at, well, anything, really. I finally figured out at this point that the light shining on her knee was the reflection of a TV screen. She

had a hidden camera in her waiting room. This lady had quite the setup. I let her keep the twenty dollars, but I did tell her that she should be ashamed of herself. People get tarot readings when they're upset or scared or anxious, and she was just milking that fear for all it was worth. For every good reader out there, there seems to be two of these jerks. Just be careful.

Also be careful with people who promise love or money. Those things are fluid, and while there are things that you can do to change your life, someone else's influence has little to do with your success. Your success is in your hands. Be careful of people who try to snatch it or manipulate it.

It's Not Always Easy, but It's Always Worth It

When I give readings, every now and again I'll sigh and say, "Okay, this is the part where I yell at you."

It happens a lot. I'm not going to lie. Even though I'm not quite the clueless jerk that I used to be, a lot of tarot readings are confrontational. If the universe has been sending you messages and you haven't been listening, a tarot reading is a really good opportunity for the universe to yell at you. And I get to be the vehicle for your ass-chewing. You're welcome.

What I like about this is that the information comes through very clearly. There is little interpretation when the message is "Hey, stop sleeping with a married man. You're not that kind of person and you can't pull it off." I get the wide eyes and the "Um, how the hell did you know that?"

I used to apologize a lot. I'm sorry I made you cry. I'm sorry I yelled. But the thing is, I'm not supposed to own my client's reading. I have to give it, good or bad. I have to

pass on the message, even if it's the last thing they want to hear. Even if it makes me feel like a bully.

After the yelling, though, we get to figure out what comes next. Deliver the message, be as stern as you need to be, and then help them figure out what comes next. I sat down for a reading a few years ago, and before we started, the client said that she was just about to snap. Work, home life, partnership, kids—her whole life had become overwhelming all at the same time. A perfect storm of crap, if you will. With tears in her eyes, she shuffled the cards, set them down in front of me, and said, "Fix it."

Well, hell.

I had to tell her what I'm going to tell you. I can't fix your life. That's not what a reading is or does. What a tarot reading does is essentially lay out a pathway for you so that you can continue on your most authentic path. That sounds pretty, doesn't it? It's essentially me and the cards giving you homework. And occasionally, yelling at you.

I can give you advice; I can see what pitfalls are coming and what you can drop to make the trip lighter. I can tell you what you need to worry about and what's just taking up your time needlessly. This is what readings can do. What I can't do is fix it.

That's your job. It's your life, and I caution against using readers who tell you they can make you rich, find you love, blah dee blah. Can't. Doesn't work. What a good reader *can* do is be your partner in the search for something true. Something better. We can see what's broken and often, that you've already got the tools to fix it. You just have to pick them up.

I had a gig at the City Museum in St. Louis. I love that place, but at night it's truly something to behold. I was

watching all these executives walk through the caverns, grinning manically and asking how to get to the ten-story slide. It was lovely watching all of them turning into silly eight-year-olds before my eyes.

One of the women that I read for looked a bit nervous. She had long, dark hair, an anxious smile, and a friend with her. Right when she sat down, I asked her if she was going to get a haircut. It was so odd—just fell out of my mouth. She looked startled, and I said, “Well, I see you with short hair—really short hair. It looked amazing! Not sure where that came from, I’m sorry!” She started crying. Her friend teared up, too. Turns out that that long dark hair was a wig, and she was recovering from an illness. The reading went very well, and I apologized for startling her.

The thing that resonated with me, though, was the responsibility I have as a tarot reader to my clients. I got to have a conversation with this woman about her health, her happiness, and her life. She allowed me in. That’s a very huge amount of trust that I take seriously (and yes, I asked if I could write about this). When someone sits down for a reading or picks up a phone, there has to be trust present. People don’t get readings (generally) when everything is hunky-dory. People get readings because they’re worried, unsure, or feeling small. I feel that it’s my job to listen, to encourage, and to remind them that the pattern is very hard to see when you’re in it. The maze that you’re walking through can look like vast walls that you can’t possibly navigate. That’s the lovely thing about readings. I can see the whole picture and point you in the right direction.

Not to sound cheesy, but I’m really honored to be able to do what I do. It’s a gift, and I do my best to be respectful about using it and sharing it.

When Not to Give a Reading

I've given myself permission in the last few years to *not* give tarot readings on occasion. This sounds weird, I'm sure, but for the longest time, I felt an obligation to read if someone asked me. We would be at a party or at a friend's house, and someone would let the tarot monkey out of the bag. "Melissa does readings. No, really! It's great—you should get one." And then out came the cards. And then, four hours later, everyone had a reading, I was exhausted, and the party was over.

Or I was reading for a friend at a bar or restaurant, and a passer-by would get interested. And I'd feel that obligation. I don't want to be rude, because what I do is weird and I understand the curiosity. I also don't want to be a poor example of a card reader, right? I'm not good at playing all mysterious, and I like to be accessible. The problem was that I was being too accessible. I have some guidelines.

Some of these will be across the board for readers, and some will be just for me. That's okay—you gotta do what works for you. (This is code for "You read the list and promise you're not going to write me a nasty letter about why I should do readings about death. You're not my mom.")

1. *I do not read for that drunk person over there.* Seriously, drunk or high person, you're going to get beer on my cards. You can't focus on the reading, and I really, really don't have time for this mess. You need to have a modicum of clarity to get a tarot reading. Here's my card. Call me when you're sober.

2. *I do not read for jerky jerks.* "Hey, psychic! Give me a reading, psychic! Give me some lottery numbers if you're

so smart!" Quiet, you. I've got nothing to give this person, and I'm not going to dance for them. If you don't believe in readings, you really shouldn't get one. If you're trying to embarrass or shame me into giving you a reading so I can prove myself to you, you got the wrong girl. I don't shame easily.

3. *I do not do readings about death or birth.* I was told in a very stern, celestial manner about fifteen years ago that some things were not my business. Some readers do readings about death or birth, and that's cool. I don't. I have peeked at both of these occasions in the past, and it was very sad both times. I will read for someone who is terminally ill at their request, so they can get their affairs in order. I will see if someone's family "looks complete." That's really it.

4. *I do not give readings to minors without a parent's permission.* This one is tricky. I think kids can handle readings, I really do. I see kids as a clean slate, and I really don't need to be writing on other people's clean slates. I gave a reading to a lovely girl once with Mama sitting right next to her. All I said was, "It's not coming back. It's okay." Girl started laughing and saying, "*Told you!*" and Mama started crying. Girl whipped off her wig and told Mama that it was time to grow the hair out. Suck it, cancer. That was an awesome reading.

5. *I do not give readings if I don't feeeeel goooood.* Bad readings, yo. I can't abide giving a bad reading. If I'm sick, or tired, or worried, I'm out. One weekend, I was consumed with worry about my grandmother, and I canceled all of my readings and postponed a class. I just couldn't do it. I can't stomach the idea of giving someone a bad reading because I felt the need to be strong when I'm really not feeling it.

So I don't. All of the same stuff will happen. Scheduling falls through, I can't make my cards work, and nothing I throw down makes sense. This happens when I haven't been taking care of myself. I've learned in the last bajillion years to not let this happen and will leave a week free of readings when I know I have a lot going on. There were a lot of years between realizing that it was a problem and making a point to keep it from happening. Personal growth —achievement unlocked!

Also, if you have the confidence to sit down in front of a stranger and tell them their story, you should also have the confidence to tell them that now is not the right time. It took me too long to learn that, so I encourage you to listen to yourself. It's more professional and will save you a lot of stress.

6. *I do not give readings if you don't listen to me.* This doesn't happen all the time. Three times, in fact, in the past twenty (*mumble*) years. I've had clients who have come for a reading for the second, third, or fourth time and didn't listen to a damn thing I said the *last* time. Jesus. First of all, I'm not your mom. Secondly, if you're not going to listen to me, we're both wasting our time. I get that life intervenes sometimes, but on the fourth reading and the cards are saying the Exact Same Thing? Get up out of my chair and walk. No reading for you. You're grounded.

7. *I do not give readings to creeps.* About ten years ago, I was about to do a reading when I looked up and locked eyes with the guy who'd just sat down. All I could think was, "No." I told him to get up and leave. I felt like throat punching him. This is not how I usually greet clients. I looked into his eyes, and I got this very strong, visceral impression that he liked to hurt children. When he

questioned me about asking him to leave, I said that I could see what he did, and he quickly got up and left without another word—he was a predator. I could have been wrong. I don't think I was, but I could have been. I've been wrong before, and heaven knows I've made some serious mistakes in my life, but I still follow my intuition as much as I logically can.

8. *I can't give readings to pragmatists*—unless they let me. People can develop very good mental shields. Whether they believe in readings or not. If they don't, they will construct a very good wall whose job it is to keep me out. Guess what? It works. I had a dude sit down for a reading one time, and I could *see* him sitting there (in my brain) with his arms crossed, smirking at me. I could see it. I couldn't read him, but I did tell him that he was being an asshat and shouldn't waste my time trying to prove I was a fraud while there were people waiting in line for a reading. I told him that I didn't go to his job and slap the test tubes out of his hand, so he shouldn't mess with me while I was working. He looked like he'd been slapped. He walked away, came back to ask how I knew he was a chemist, and then gave me a fifty dollar tip. That was fun.

9. *I can't give readings to people who were trained to put up mental shields.* Some churches teach their members how to block spiritual interference, and guess what? It works. I have a very good friend who is Southern Baptist, and I literally can't read for her. I put the cards down and they're like paper to me. She was taught mental exercises to keep people out of her mind and soul.

10. *I don't read for people when I don't want to.* There are going to be people who just make you uncomfortable, and you won't be able to put your finger on it. If you don't want

to read for them, don't. I've turned down those who wanted me to help them put a curse on whoever it was who hurt them. I've turned down clients that I just didn't want to read. No other reason than that. I had a bad feeling and didn't want to, so I just said no. The reason I'm sharing these encounters is to encourage you to set healthy boundaries in your clientele. If someone makes me uncomfortable, I don't read for them. If I see something not okay, they can go somewhere else.

Also, and I hope you don't need me to tell you this, don't go into a stranger's house unless you know you won't be alone. Always tell people where you're going to be. Meet in public if you can. I do most of my in-person readings in coffee shops because I don't have an office and I'm not having strangers in my house with my children. Remember that you're in charge of who your clients are. Beware the wackadoodles, and be safe.

11. *I can't read when the universe doesn't want the person to know what's up.* Yes, sometimes the client is right in the middle of a huge life lesson, and the universe needs them to figure it out on their own. I get a bit of a heads-up on occasion. Someone will try to schedule a reading and for whatever reason, it will be canceled and rescheduled. Sometimes I'll schedule their reading and show up having forgotten my cards. Or we'll be interrupted. Or my cards won't make sense. I get to sit there like a doofus and say, "Um. You don't get a reading right now." Awkward.

12. *I don't read for clients who have ill intent.* "What is my ex doing? What can I do to get them back or make them hurt?" People never ask these questions in a straightforward way, but it's plain as day as soon as the cards hit the table. I just pick them back up and put them

away. I'm not in the business of revenge readings. It's not kind.

Be Gentle

William Butler Yeats wrote this lovely poem called “Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven.”

Had I the heaven’s embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
 Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
 But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
 I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

Isn’t that pretty? If you’re going to do readings for people, I encourage you to memorize the last two lines of this poem. Write them down and put them on your wall or in your tarot bag.

I’m telling a lot of stories in this book about my early tarot reading stupidity. Not because I like feeling like a jackass, but because I didn’t have anyone to tell me this stuff when I started out, and I hope to spare you an experience like this little number. Twenty years ago (-ish? whatever), I was in my early twenties and still doing readings for beer and pot money (like you do) when I threw down some cards for an acquaintance. “Wow—your boyfriend is cheating on you!” Yes. I said that. Just like that. To me, it was just a reading, and I was thrilled to have been able to see something that accurate. To her, well, it was some clueless jerk breaking her heart. I caused a great deal of pain because I didn’t tread lightly. I forgot that I wasn’t just giving a reading. I was talking to someone about her heart. Her life. Her

XOXO. I stepped on her dreams, and I should have known better. So shame on me.

Remember when you read for someone, you're carrying their dreams in your hands for a short while. Even if you have to deliver bad news, do it gently, and hand their dreams back unbruised.

Palliative care treats the symptoms, not the problem. This is true of tarot readings. I would like to tell you that one call to me will fix all your problems and make you change, make you open up all of the possibilities in your life and truly embrace your potential. I know some readers who claim this. Those readers are liars.

What you'll get from a good reading are things that will help the day to day and things that will help down the road. A reading can identify what the root causes are, but to dig that far you need to do the work yourself. Readings are not cures; they're roadmaps. If you follow the map and do the work, you'll get where you need to go.

Persistence is needed for when the symptoms seem overwhelming and the problem seems too huge. Break the problem into pieces. Attack the symptoms one by one, and the problem will often dissolve. A good reader will give you homework. A good reading will make you feel ready to take on the world and kick some butt.

Once upon a time young Melissa got a reading. Oh yes. This reader was new to Melissa and was Very Serious and used a Very Serious deck. It was a Thoth deck, if I remember correctly, and it had cards called Strife, Oppression, Kicked Right in the Fork, and Ruin. (I think—it was a long time ago.) I was awfully young, so I can only remember the feelings I had during and after that reading.

I kind of felt like I was going to throw up, that nothing I touched would ever grow, and that I might as well just give up and dissolve into a pile of ash. Also, that I would never find love and would fail at anything I ever tried. Ever. Forever. I was told that I would never succeed as an author and a tarot reader and that I was delusional.

Looking back, I think that perhaps this reader could have handled this reading a touch differently. Certainly there was struggle in my life (just like everyone's), but damn. Can there be hope? Can we have some cheer?

I've given readings in which I've told people they were actively dying. (They asked, chronic illness, rare.) I've told people they were going to get divorced, lose touch with their children, lose a job, lose friends, and, on occasion, lose touch with reality. But there is a way to tell people this stuff. It isn't all sad-eyed and tail between your legs, either.

When you read for someone, you tell them that they are going to get *through* the Ten of Swords. That they will be there to stand up after the Tower hits. That the Moon that frightens them so much is going to look like a little boo-boo kitten after they shine a light on it. You have the responsibility to show your clients the optimism to get through whatever is coming.

As one of my heroes, Harvey Milk, said, "You gotta give 'em hope." You do. What's the point, otherwise? The other option is being like the reader who made me cry and didn't give me anything to do afterward. Boo. Do better than that.

One of my favorite movies is called *French Kiss*. The main character, Kate, has to face a lot of her fears, and her knight in (slightly dented) shining armor is Luc. This is one of their first conversations:

Kate: Do you believe in love? The kind that lasts forever?

Luc: I loved my mother.

Kate: No, everybody loves their mother. Even people who hate their mothers love their mothers. The question is, one man meant for one woman. That is the question.

Luc: But it is not an interesting question. It is the question of a little girl who believes in fairy tales.

That last line is the one that goes through my head when someone says, “Okay, I want a reading, but don’t tell me anything bad.”

I understand the inclination—I do. Tarot readings are freaky by nature, and they can be scary if you don’t know what to expect. Just like anything new, you are informed by your history. If you grew up hearing that tarot cards are the devil’s business, I’m going to make you a little jumpy. If you heard that I gave a reading that was so accurate it scared someone, that fear is now part of your expectations.

Beyond that—beyond the reeducation and nerves—there is this tendency for some clients to slap their hands over their ears and say, “LA LA LA! JUST THE GOOD STUFF!” I could do that. I could give you a reading that left out the bad things and only mentioned the good. I could—it’s pretty easy. It would be a crappy reading, though. It would have no depth, little honesty, and no integrity, but it would be pretty and shiny.

The thing about readings—and about fairy tales, for that matter—is that they’re not all rainbows and sparkles. Bad things happen in life, and our responses to those things shape who we are and where we’re headed. Getting a heads-up about some of these bad things can give you tools to defend yourself or to prepare. As Ani DiFranco says, “Every tool is a weapon if you hold it right.”

So while you don't want a reading of doom and gloom, you also don't want to smooth over the rough spots. There is a great deal of balance required. Of Temperance, if you will. Can you tell people whether their heart is about to be broken? Can you move past that breaking heart into healing with your client?

Another tricky part of reading is tarot reading for couples. I can read for couples, but as I've gotten more experience with readings, I usually don't.

When a couple calls for a reading—and it's a planned thing —they're usually on the same page in their relationship. I've done readings for anniversaries and birthdays, and the couples for whom I've read have been looking in the same direction. I can do one reading for both people or a reading for each, and they are generally in sync and oftentimes have some of the same cards. Those readings are super. Some of my favorites, actually.

I see these couples reflected in the Two of Cups. This is the card for emotional balance, trust, and partnership. In the Basic deck, the couple is looking at each other from the same position. They can carry each other's burdens and share each other's joys equally.

If I'm doing readings at an event, though, I've learned not to do couple readings at all. Luckily, I can tell within a few minutes if a relationship is solid or not. The energy between the two people is noticeably misaligned. Having their readings together would just be uncomfortable for everyone. I usually tell the first person that privacy is helpful during readings and then read them individually. This has come in handy when the first thing one partner says is "Does he know I'm cheating?" or "Can I end this

without going broke?" (Yes, I've had both of those questions.)

These couples remind me of the Lovers card. That is a powerfully intense love. It's represented in a lot of decks with one person higher than the other. They are wrapped around each other or using the other to balance themselves. What happens if one of them looks away? What if they lose their balance? The card gets so heavy that it starts going inverted. That intensity has to go somewhere, and most often it goes down a dark path. One partner is looking in another direction, and the other starts staring with that creepy ferocity that leads to hatefulness and spite. Yikes. Excellent for the short term, intense in the long term. It's easy to resign yourself to what is comfortable and stable instead of waiting for what you deserve.

People generally get readings when they're worried, or unsure, or afraid. The greatest disservice any reader can offer a client is dishonesty. Even when a couple is having problems, if they've made the decision to get a reading together, you can honestly point out trouble spots and advise them. I've had readings in which I've seen that divorce or separation was the best decision for the couple. It's hard to hear, but it's sometimes a relief and what they were looking for.

If the readings are separate, you have the opportunity to freely speak about heartbreak, deceit, or even just a drifting apart. For the beginning reader, I suggest starting with one person at a time. Giving bad news in readings is tricky and takes some getting used to. When I first started out, I would throw down the cards and get out my little book. Sometimes I couldn't help blurting out "oh shit."

Luckily, I was practicing with friends. Practice makes perfect with the cards. Letting clients know ahead of time that you're going to be honest is helpful. (I've had a few clients change their mind about readings after hearing this.)

After a while, you learn how to deliver your truth in the most authentic way, with the simplest terms. Your clients will thank you for it.

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Chapter Four

The Major Arcana

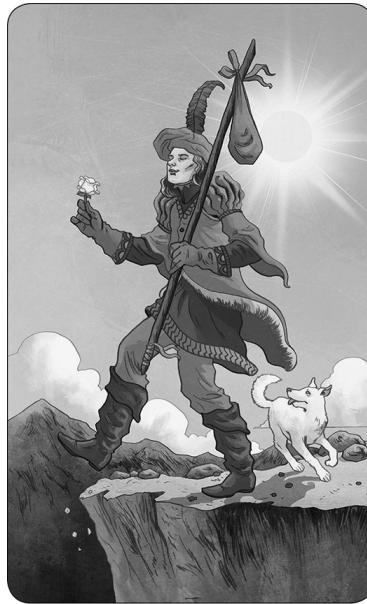


What's the difference between the minor arcana and the major arcana?

They're equally important, and they both tell stories. The difference is that the major arcana is your life in ALL CAPS, and the minor arcana is just your life. For example, if you get the Seven of Swords (minor) and Death (major), I can see that if you don't stop lying, you're going to SERIOUSLY change your life. Probably by pissing people off and causing drama. The way these two cards interact is that the Seven of Swords is absolutely within your control if it's your behavior. Death, though? Death is in charge of Death. You can shore up your behavior and change as much as you're able, but by the time it shows up in a reading, Death is coming to visit.

The majors are the bend in the road. The minors are the road signs. Death is coming whether you like it or not. The Fool is gonna jump. If you try to delay, he'll flip over and fall off the cliff. When you see a major card in a reading, I want you to stop. Learn the card. Learn how to apply it. Don't be afraid of the Fool's Journey through the major

arcana. You've been taking the same path since you were born.



0 • The Fool

I am going.

If you look at our Fool, you see he's surrounded by a clear blue sky, the bright shining sun, and his little doggy pal. He's traveling light and carrying a beautiful rose. Jaunty feather in his cap and a smile on his lips.

He is surrounded by majesty and beauty, and yet he is paying attention to nothing. He is, in fact, about to walk off the bloody cliff. I don't see this as a tragic card. I love the Fool. Walking along, exploring and curious, and after you smack into that brick wall, walking away having learned. I can't help but think that the drop that he's about to have isn't that far at all—that after his fall, he'll stand up and grin. He's carrying a small bag—not weighed down by anything—and the flower in his hand is blooming, indicating growth.

Historically, the Fool is the only person the king will listen to. The jester is a beloved character. Notice I didn't call him a clown. That's important because clowns have nothing of substance to say, and they're creepy and vapid to boot (in this author's opinion). The Fool, on the other hand, has no agenda, no hidden plans or shenanigans up his sleeve. He is guileless. He is honest. He is genuinely happy. Even his dog is happy. He's the one who told the emperor that he was naked. He is going to move forward, to say what's on his mind. He's going to be honest and forthright regardless of the circumstance.

In every deck, the Fool is in a precarious position. Think of all of the idioms we have for taking chances: going out on a limb, break a leg, going for broke. These all sound really painful, but what they're about is deciding that being still is not for you. When you see this in a reading, you'll know it's time to jump.

The Fool Inverted

Inverted, the Fool is the guy you don't want on your side. He's the "Well, how else would I get the toast out of the toaster? The knife fits just fine!" guy. He doesn't pay attention to anything. At all. The Fool inverted represents deliberate ignorance and being obtuse for its own sake. It's not good for you. I'm surprised that evolution hasn't taken care of that particular trait already, but it's still around. This card inverted tells you to wake up.



I • The Magician

I am doing.

The Magician has all of the magical tools in front of him—pentacle, wand, cup, and sword—but he's not reaching for them. He has his own two hands, one usually pointing up and one down, which calls to the Wiccan prayer, "As above, so below." He is in control of the elements. He is calling the shots. The Magician uses his own energy to make things

happen. He is surrounded by growth and beauty and is adorned with an infinity symbol.

He's looking straight ahead and is completely aware of his abilities. This card always reminds me that we are magic. Remember, the first chalice was a cupped hand, the first wand an outstretched finger, and the first pentacle an open hand. The first sword was probably a sword, but whatever. The point is we don't have a need for trappings; we only need ourselves.

He is surrounded by growth—the bower over his head and the flowers at his feet. This is a card of action. The infinity symbol near his head also speaks of kinetic energy. He's about to make things happen.

The Magician exudes self-confidence. One of the most telling parts of a stage magician is the level of hard work that goes into his expertise. He can spend hours and hours on a presentation or trick, but all of that will remain hidden, and he'll pull off the presentation as if it were completely spontaneous.

That kind of swagger, the "I got this" energy—that's the Magician. You see this card a lot with successful people or with people who've just found the correct path in their life and have just had that eureka moment. Just sit down, kiddo. He's got this covered.

When the Magician shows up in a reading, the reading becomes charged with potential. It represents self-love, self-awareness, and confidence. It's one thing to know for certain that you're going to do something. It's something altogether different to know for certain that you're going to succeed. It changes the flavor of the reading and breathes new life and magic into whatever you're working on.

The Magician Inverted

The Magician inverted is a jerk. It is power and swagger gone bad. Look over there! (While I'm a crazy bad guy over here.) Think of all the politicians who've been busted for having sexual escapades—the ones that were on all of the morality councils and then are caught in an adulterous scandal? The police chief busted for possession? This is that jerk.



II • The High Priestess

I am knowing.

I had a student ask, “What’s the difference between all of these ladies?” She was referring to the High Priestess, the queens of the minor arcana, the Empress, and Justice. Seated so similarly, this is not helpful when you’re learning the tarot. So we look to the card: the High Priestess is looking straight ahead. We don’t get her profile; we get to

look right in her eyes. We have to be brave. When I give a reading outdoors with sunglasses on, my clients see themselves in my lenses. That can be a little jarring. When someone is reading for you and telling you your story, looking at yourself can be uncomfortable, but the best way to get to the answers is to ask the hard questions, and that's not always comfy either. Think of what you do when you're made physically uncomfortable. You shift your weight. You change your position. When you're made emotionally or spiritually uncomfortable, you do the same thing with your life and your thought processes.

The crescent moon is at her feet. The moon is on her crown. The moon, in tarot, is intuition. She has it in spades. There is a great sea in the background of this card. Water is emotion, and when it is the entire sea instead of the trickle of water we see with some of the court cards, this card holds in it the whole of human emotion. The curtain is drawn, and only the High Priestess stands between you and the curtain. I get a very strong feeling that she'd slap you one if you tried to peek without permission.

She is the keeper of secrets. She decides who sees behind the veil. She's a deeply mysterious card and represents calm, patience, and hard work. When this card surfaces in a reading, she is warm and welcoming, stern and judging, kind and compassionate. She encourages you to be authentic and whole. She wants you to look harder, ask questions, and dig deep. This card frustrates and fascinates me. When I see it in a reading, I tell the client to look deeper, ask questions, trust their intuition, and mind their manners. There is a proper etiquette to asking the universe questions. You have to do your homework. You have to show respect. Or she just might close the curtains and send

you on your way. She isn't really a Mother archetype but more of a visionary. This is the card for tarot readers and wise women (or men). When you think of High Priestess, think of the attendants of the Delphic Oracle or the keepers of the temples of goddesses throughout various cultures.

Look behind the curtain—the vast sea. Every card that contains water has to do with emotion. In this card, the High Priestess is the only person who has access to that water. She's the translator, the soothsayer, and the agent for change. This isn't an easy card, but it tells you that the hard work will pay off.

The High Priestess Inverted

When this card is inverted, it can mean that someone is being superficial or shady. It doesn't invite depth and doesn't feel very reliable. Inverted, our High Priestess is manipulative and tricksy. I had a classmate in grade school who said she'd be my friend if I shared my snack with her. Yikes. A gossipy person who twists reality to make it suit her agendas. Inverted, the High Priestess doesn't want you to look deeper, doesn't want you to see her, because she feels she is flimsy and shoddy. It's actually quite sad. Personally, I often flip it. Feels like a right-side-up card to me.



III • The Empress

I am loving.

She is lounging in her chair, not sitting up like the other women in the deck. She is comfortable and so, in readings, is comforting. She is surrounded with lush growth and

flowers. She holds the symbol of the divine feminine, and in early decks she was pregnant. Water is flowing behind her—moving water shows energy flowing out of her. The trees are green, the sky is lovely, and there are flowers everywhere and stars in her luxurious hair.

There is a lot of love to give here. It can be sexual or sensual, but it can also be the love of a parent for their child or the love of a farmer for their field. This is a love that encourages growth. She can refer to pregnancy, delight, desire, sexuality, fertility, and sensuality (bow chicka bow bow). This lady is warm, enveloping love. It can refer to pregnancy when it comes up in a reading, so be careful if you're not looking to expand your family. It also stands for fertility with finances or art. Everything you touch grows.

A neat thing I've noticed after doing this for over twenty years is that this card comes up during readings all the time during the spring. People tend to get more prolific with their lives and their art—more passionate and focused—and this card reflects that.

The Empress is Isis, Tara, Brigid, and Changing Woman. She's our Mother, she is the nurturer and the protector. The romantic and the lover. She is lush and loving. She is me. She is you, too.

The Empress Inverted

The focus can be a problem, though. If that warm, enveloping love doesn't shine gently, it will turn into a laser and burn people. Don't be smothery. It becomes that clichéd love that is calling your partner fifteen times a day to say hi. Dude, don't do that. Inverted, this card is jealousy and nastiness that comes from obsession. It can also be the card of the "mean girls." Nasty for nasty's sake. Mean to be mean. Casting aspersions and hurting feelings just because you feel like it. Tsk.



IV • The Emperor

I am directing.

The symbolism is very strong: a stone throne, a scepter, and a suit of armor underneath his red robes. The fact that he's wearing armor underneath those lush, beautiful robes gives us some insight into the man. It makes me think about a Kevlar vest under the uniform of a police officer.

The image he presents is professional and competent. Underneath the uniform, though, there is steel. The symbols on his throne are dominant, as well. Ram heads on his throne and in most Basic decks, gold or a shiny item in his left hand and a staff in his right. For some reason, the gold looks like a set of brass knuckles to me, but I'm weird. He's got shifty eyes; he's incredibly attentive.

The mountains behind him are the most noticeable background feature, but look at the bottom of the throne. In some Basic decks, there is the smallest trickle of water running behind him. In Llewellyn's Classic Tarot, the waters are still. Both of these conditions show that emotion is present for our Emperor, but only just. Think about that. When we see water in tarot, we know that that's emotion. The water in this card is so easy to overlook. When we see this card in a reading, maybe we're not going to get what we want right away. We need to deliberate and try to figure out which approach is the best approach.

Someone has to make the hard decisions. Someone has to decide that we're going to invade here, not there. Someone has to decide what to do in a crisis, and someone has to be That Guy, or nothing will get accomplished. In a way, this card is John Wayne, the sheriff, and your dad on his best day. He's going to make everything okay. He has authority, stability, and common sense. He can take care of things and make sure that tradition is carried on and that everything is safe. He's a soldier, a police officer, a fireman. He's going to take care of us.

Even when the card isn't inverted, though, he can be domineering. I always think of the Bible story about Jericho. God said, "Hey, go build a city over there. There's already a city there? Hang on, I'll knock it down. Now build

your city." It's that "my way or the highway" thought process that I can't go with. With the Emperor, it's good to remember that the difference between being an effective leader or a tyrant is that when you're a leader, people don't wince while you're talking.

The Emperor Inverted

This card is about being reckless. You have to learn the rules before you break them. Kind of a “damn the Man,” “forget about being safe or taking precautions” kind of card. It also represents bullies. Racists and egomaniacs—all talk, no substance.



V • The
Hierophant
I am unlocking.

The Hierophant card and I have a messy past. I used to dislike this card, solely because I didn't understand it. Remember, I'm old. When I started reading, there was no Internet. I had one book, and it said something like, “The Hierophant is about social conformity and religion” ... and? And I didn't want to conform and was eyebrow-raisey about religion, so this card didn't resonate with me at all. I would

pull it for a reading and look at it, and then at my book, and then at my client ... and I would be derailed. Damnit.

I took it very personally when a card didn't resonate with me right away. What I didn't know was that studying is the key. I would get frustrated and half-ass my way through the reading and get fussy because I thought it was a stupid card. It's just like Eddie Murphy said about the moonwalk in *Raw*: "It's the dumbest dance ever. 'Cause I can't do it—that's why I say it's stupid." Yup.

Then, many moons later, I read something that likened the Hierophant to the trickster gods. What's this? You don't say? Coyote, Hermes, Jesus, Fox, Anansi, Loki—these are my boys. They take information that we can't quite wrap our heads around and make it discernible. I like him a lot more now, all trappings aside. The Trickster is the messenger between the gods and man. Stealing fire, teaching us forbidden secrets, giving us an apple. The Hierophant is the go-between for the gods and man, just as Coyote stole fire. In order to make the unattainable ours, risks are taken. How does the conformity fit in with tricksters? I kind of see it as hard work. You've got to work to get the knowledge. Josep Sobrer called the Hierophant "He who shows the sacred" in *The Book of Oracles, or A Poet's Tarot*. This dance between the profane and the sacred is the dance of the Hierophant.

Tricksters never made anything easy. The Hierophant earned those robes and his followers. He's got two people listening intently to him, but you know there are more in the background, learning. He has his hand raised in a blessing, and seems to have earned his big, huge crown. The important things in this card are the crossed keys at his feet. That's what matters. You don't just get them

handed to you; you have to earn them. You don't just get to assume you know everything, or Fox or Anansi will eat you for breakfast. You have to be cunning, clever, and fast. You have to work so you can get to the throne. So you can pick up the keys.

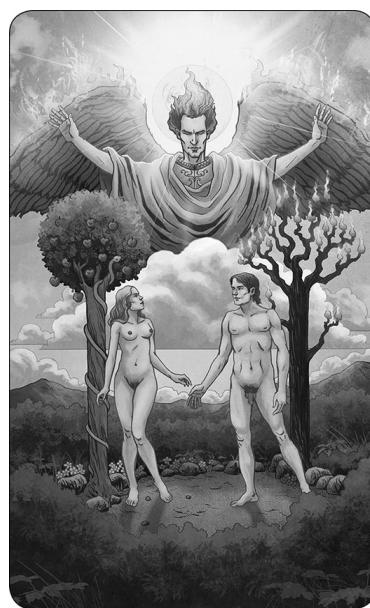
In a reading, this card can have several meanings. The Hierophant is a teacher. He represents a group or class and is an authority. He has studied for a long time. He's learned all that he can and is passing it on to others as his life's work. He is all about tradition and using the old knowledge to teach the new generation. There is obviously a religious angle to this card as well. He takes information and passes it on. He's an archivist and a librarian. Also, weirdly, this card comes up all the time for computer professionals. I didn't get it at first, but think of what they do: they take massive amounts of data and make it make sense to us. Tricksy.

The Hierophant can indicate the need to conform and educate yourself, or that you need to establish a spiritual tradition. I see it come up before kids go off to college or if someone has lost their focus at work and needs to pursue another degree or career. He comes to us as a means to an end—a pathway to gain the education that lets you live your most authentic life.

The Hierophant Inverted

Inverted, the Hierophant is any person who is right because they say so. Inflexible and unforgiving. The principal in the movie *Matilda*, Agatha Trunchbull, is a good example of this as she accuses Matilda of placing a newt in her water: “Besides, even if you didn’t do it, I’m going to punish you, because I’m big and you’re small, and I’m right and you’re wrong. And there’s nothing you can do about it. You’re a liar and a scoundrel! And your father’s a liar and a cheat! You’re the most corrupt lowlifes in the history of civilization! Am I wrong? I’m never wrong! In this classroom, in this school, *I am God!*”

In a nutshell, I think that the key to the Hierophant is this: underneath all of those fripperies and layers is the Truth. You have to work to get to the Truth. You have to search to find the Keys—and then you open the door and there’s usually another door waiting for you. It’s never easy, and it’s always going to leave you with more questions than answers, which is the point, really.



VI • The Lovers

I am focusing.

The Lovers. Aw, come on. What a gorgeous image. The sun is shining high and bright, the Angel of the Outlandish Flaming Hairdo is giving a blessing, with a fog machine, the Tree of Knowledge (complete with serpent) on one side, and a burning tree on the other. Hello, overt biblical references! How ya doing? You gotta love it. The important figures here are the man and woman. Naked and beautiful and drawn to each other.

The man is looking forward, the woman is looking up and the Angel of OFH is closing its eyes in a benediction. The most important feature in this card is that the people are naked. They are vulnerable and exposed, and they have to trust that each means what they promise to the other.

The word that comes to my mind when I see this card is “magnetic.” Have you ever looked at someone and immediately felt your heart drop into your shoes? Have you ever felt so compelled to touch someone that you had to physically restrain yourself from doing so? Have you ever been unable to break eye contact but not sure why? You just grin and accept the fact that your life is going to change.

That’s this card. It doesn’t even have to be romantic, although that’s most often the case. Some people who walk around on this earth are Tribe. They’re yours. You might take a couple of decades to find them, but once you have, they’re yours. It’s as if they were never not in your life, and they fit in your nook perfectly. It’s kind of awesome, really. Walking around, collecting your people—I’m a fan. When this comes up in a reading, it’s about attraction, sex, self-

esteem, and confidence. It's about rearranging your life to center around joy.

The Lovers card asks a question: Will you be there for me? Even if I screw up? Even if I hurt you? Even if I accidentally show you all of the terrible things that I think lie inside of me? Will you love me then? When this card shows in a reading, it doesn't represent those who are dating or those who "like-like" each other. This is about love. The kind of love that inspires poets and that holds us to our highest ideals. Dan Savage has a relationship theory called the price of admission. In it, he talks about relationships being based on us believing the best about our partners. Eventually we're farting around each other, but when you love someone, you pretend every day that your partner is the better person they presented at the beginning of the relationship. We become better people than we actually are by living up to the ideal us that we have shown to our partners.

This card is the love of sonnets. Of fate. Of forever.

The Lovers Inverted

It's difficult to find happiness when you don't love yourself. Sounds clichéd and silly, but it's true. Before you can truly love someone else in a healthy way, you have to love yourself first. You have to be The One that you're looking for. If you are broken and pull other broken people to you, you try to complete yourself with parts of them, or vice versa. This doesn't work. That painful thing is that love exists there, but it doesn't have a firm ground to stand on. Sooner or later, the parts of them that clung to you fall away, and you're bleeding again. This can be heartache, sadness, and the pulling apart of two souls. Sound heavy? Damn straight. The Lovers isn't a card for the faint of heart. It hits you like a ton of bricks.

If the Lovers were separated, pieces of themselves would be torn away; they would be incomplete and wounded. The inverted Lovers is honestly a bit creepy. Impulsive, destructive, damaging to oneself and to others. What happens when you love someone so very much, and they don't love you anymore? What happens when you adore your job and you get fired? That love curdles. It turns into something sticky and heavy, and it is so damaging. It's that thing which causes our brains to turn off and our ears to close to reason. This is Romeo and Juliet, kids. This is that love that means that everyone is dead at the end of the play, and no one is happy.



VII • The Chariot

I am driving.

I always find it interesting that his steeds have no reins. He's driving the chariot through willpower and that's it. This card is about being in control. You got this. You are confident, resourceful, and savvy. He's got no reins in his hands—the imagery is pretty important because it implies that the driver needs nothing else to get to his goals. Doesn't matter if he's got a fancy canopy or a couple of sphinxes ready for any request he has. He can just go. No obstacle is too big, and no opponent is too strong. There is a lot of passion in this card. That's the key to the Chariot. It's got to matter, and it's got to be difficult. If he doesn't have to work for it, what's the point? This guy owns his own company because he doesn't like having a boss. He says things and expects people to listen. He doesn't wait to see if they take his advice. He knows that they will. Or they will fail, and he'll continue on without looking back.

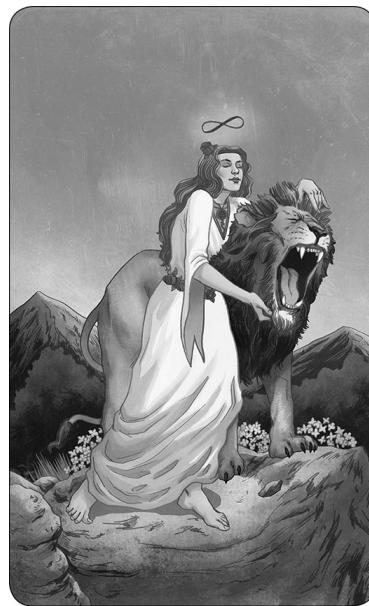
If you look at the bower above him, it's reminiscent of the Four of Wands. The Four of Wands is about celebrating new beginnings. When applied to the Chariot, this tells us that the driver of the chariot is ready to go. There is an air of anticipation and positive energy associated with him.

In a reading, this card comes up when someone is recognizing their strength or when they're about to start on a new crusade. The magnetism that he has is palpable. People want to follow him because he inspires passion in them, too. This is another time that it will show in a reading. If you've begun to follow someone with a lot of charisma, the Chariot will come up.

The thing—there's always a thing—the reins? They're inside of you. You have to reach down inside of you and pull yourself up by your will. Your indomitable, badass will.

The Chariot Inverted

Inverted, it's passionate chaos. No control, no direction, and no concern for whoever might get caught under your wheels. You do what you want, when you want, and damn the consequences. It's Eric Cartman from *South Park*: "I do what I want! Seriously!" He often does what he wants and then gets his butt handed to him later.



VIII • Strength

I am graceful.

This card is about strength through gentleness. Although the lion has the boldest and most terrifying reputation, the woman is the strong one in this picture. She may as well name the lion Fluffy and put a pink sweater on it. She reminds me of a mother who has nearly lost her temper with her children: she stops, takes a breath, smiles, and continues. Strength comes from within. She has the same

infinity symbol over her head as the Magician. What these two have in common is self-confidence and follow-through.

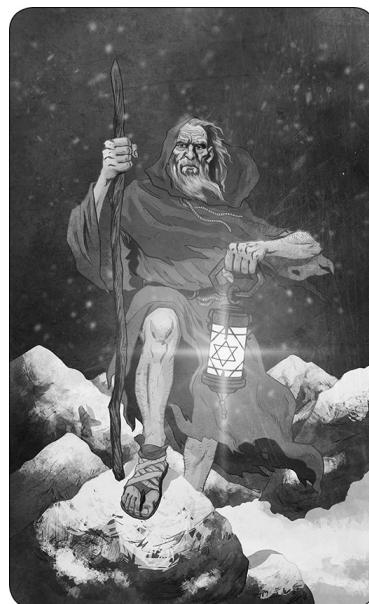
If you think about Strength, it seems like something that is always kinetic. We're trying to find strength, bring strength to others, lend our strength, and dig deep for it. It's a quality that is all around and inside of us, if we believe the idioms. A pillar of strength, a tower of strength, give me strength, and even a prayer—grant me strength. This card comes from a place of courage. We use it when we feel small or when we are afraid. You'll see it in readings when the client needs to be brave, and you can help reassure them that they'll find the strength they need.

The Strength card is about persistence and composure. I see this come up often in readings where the client will need to use really good manners—really put people at ease in order to move things along. Not “strong like bull,” but strong as in “I can do this.” It’s about squaring your shoulders and doing your best.

Strength Inverted

Inverted, it is pretty conditional. Usually it's one of three things.

1. You're sick or not mentally or emotionally strong enough to deal with the situation.
2. You're being a weenie and not even trying to deal with a situation.
3. You're being *too* strong and bullheaded. Strength can work against you if there is no cerebral element to it. "Strong like bull"—well, cows are stupid. You can hunt cows with a hammer. I'm just sayin'.



IX • The Hermit

I am thinking.

The Hermit is a card about being alone. It's not about being lonely. There is a big difference between alone and lonely. Have you ever gotten frustrated because no one around you can see what you see? No one is hearing you, and you

need to go sit and be still so you can get your thoughts in order. That's this card. The light that he's holding doesn't shine very far out. It's just for him. He's not looking away into the future, he's looking right in front of him. He's got his staff to lean on in case he gets weary, because he's not going to stop until he finds the answers he needs.

The Hermit gets a lot of negative reactions. People tell me it looks sad or lonely. Angsty, emo, and sad. It's an interesting point of view, for sure. The gray robe doesn't help. The equally gray and bleary background doesn't help, either. Snow underfoot. Looks as if he might be on top of a mountain. This is grim-looking stuff, folks.

It kind of reminds me of the Two of Swords. I call that card the "Shut the hell up so I can hear myself think" card. In it, a woman is sitting by herself, balancing her options. Where hers is a solitude sought for peace and quiet, this is one sought for answers. I can't tell you how many readings I give that end with the client saying, "I knew that, I just didn't want to ..." We know what the answer is. We just have to be still to receive it.

The Hermit Inverted

Inverted, the Hermit *is* about being lonely. No support, no one to help, and no one to turn to. The lantern has gone out, and it is dark and scary. It can also be the card of the grumpy old man stereotype who wants you to get off his lawn, you little brat! This is the card for crankypantses.



X • The Wheel of
Fortune
I am changing.

I really, really don't like the imagery on this card in the Basic deck. It's not helpful in figuring out what the card means (at least not to me), and I always used to ignore it. It reminds me of a Demetri Martin joke: "If you want to make your own mythical creature, just take a regular animal and add wings to it. A horse becomes Pegasus. A lion becomes a griffin. And a hawk becomes ... a double hawk." (He labels the double hawk "I'm awkward.")

The Wheel of Fortune card is awkward when it comes up in readings. It's the beginning and the end. Sometimes you're riding the wheel, and sometimes you're ground to dust under the wheel. It's very subjective.

This card is about the law of returns. It can be about good things happening and luck turning around or a warning to batten down the hatches and get ready to rumble. This is a great card to have in a reading, but if you're a reader, it kind of sucks. It's ambiguous, and it's hard to get a clear direction. I just say, "Everything is going to be okay. I don't know what okay looks like right now, but it's going to be fine." That's not exactly why people get tarot readings, but some things just have to work themselves out. You have to go through the whole process to really learn the lesson, and we can't tell you, because it's cheating. I love getting this as a final card because I get to look at the client and say, "Yeah, I don't know. High five!"

It can also mean the exact opposite. Things are going to suck for a while, and I don't know how badly, but everything will work out okay. Your high five will be less appropriate and appreciated at this time.

The Wheel of Fortune Inverted

The Wheel of Fortune inverted reminds me of a quote by W. Edwards Deming that my friend Mary shared with me: “Learning is not compulsory; it’s voluntary. Improvement is not compulsory; it’s voluntary. But to survive, we must learn.” This card comes up when someone has tacked themselves up on a cross and is doing *nothing* to change their situation. “I need a new job,” “I don’t like my health,” “I hate my relationship,” etc., etc. What are you doing about it? Nothing? Okay, then. Things won’t change. If you keep waiting for other people to make decisions about your life, you don’t get to be in charge of it anymore, and you have to deal with their reality and their decisions. This is the apathy card.



XI • Justice
I am balancing.

I always thought that the Justice card was male, but then I did some research and found that it's based on Athena. If you look at the card, there is *no* water. This is a bit unusual for tarot cards, particularly in the major arcana. No water? No emotion. This card is about being critical and impartial. There is no room here for empathy. Squishy, emotional types like me get very uncomfortable when this card comes up. It's cold, objective, and very, very fair. It doesn't care if you had a bad day or if someone bent your feelers.

Everything in this card is even. The robes are symmetrical, the pillars are parallel, and the sword held straight up balances the scales hanging straight down. I have a feeling that she would pull a Solomon without hesitation and cut that baby in half. She will start moving as soon as she makes her decision and will carry it out. Justice is about action. That's why social justice groups are always marching around and making things happen. They'd be called social idea groups otherwise.

Also, don't forget that she's holding a sword. The swords suit is about intellect. If you can imagine that Justice is holding the Ace of Swords, you get an idea of the pragmatism that lives in this card. When this comes up in a reading, you have to take all of your emotions out of the decision you need to make. Make a list of pros and cons. Do research. Be a brain, not a heart. It can also mean that you're about to get judged. You can't really hide from this one, and you can't lie. It's like Judge Judy has a bead on you. Unnerving.

Justice Inverted

Inverted, it's pretty straightforward. Unfair. Overly emotional and ridiculous. It's like trying to win an argument by saying, "Because." That has no merit, and it basically translates to "Because I want to, and if you don't let me, I'm going to hold my breath till I pass out." Simmer down.



XII • The Hanged Man

I am releasing.

There is more than one religion that speaks of a man hanged from a tree. Mithras in Roman mythology, Odin from Norse, Jesus in Christianity, and Osiris from Egypt. This card is often interpreted as representative of martyrdom, as several saints chose to be hung or crucified upside down rather than replicate the manner in which Jesus died. The more accurate word, other than martyr,

would be sacrifice. In each of the cases, the self is sacrificed for the sake of humankind. The expression on the man's face is serene. His leg is tied, and he looks like he could free himself if he wanted to. He doesn't want to—he's going into this willingly.

One of my friends recently shared this with me: "Remember that surrender is an act of will. It is a choice to unclench one's fists and to hang oneself upside down and stay there." The Hanged Man is about potential rather than kinetic energy. It's healing, becoming prepared to act, observing. This isn't the stillness of one who is lazy or afraid; this is the stillness of someone collecting their resources and getting ready to act.

When this card comes up in a reading, it's about release. Letting go of all perceived control of your life and allowing the lessons to be absorbed. It's a good time for learning, because soon he'll have to let himself down from the tree (note the leaves: it's not a cross) and face the new realities that surround him. He is truly suspended, in the air and in time. Sometimes if you don't know what to do or where to go, the best thing is to just sit down.

Let's say that my client is having a hard time. Hard time at work, at home, emotionally, physically, with family members, and in his relationship. This happens a lot, guys. I call it dogpiling. One bad thing hits you, then another, and another, and the next you know, you're just covered in crap. I get a lot of calls from people when they're in the middle of a dogpile. They never ask about all of the things that are going wrong at once. They only ask one question. "Should I leave my relationship?" "Should I move?" Or "Should I get a new job?" They are looking for one thing to fix in order to change their whole lives.

Sometimes it's hard to see the trees for the forest. If your whole life has gone weird, it's very easy to scapegoat a part of your life and make *that* the problem. "I'm unhappy, so I'll leave this relationship and everything will get better." I've actually done this before. The relationship ended, and I was still unhappy and stuck. Except now I was lonely, too. Boo.

There doesn't seem to be a good answer, really, but the one that seems to be the most effective is this: Sit. Down. Stop. Moving. You don't have to decide everything in your life right this second. The world isn't going to stop spinning, nor will you turn to dust if you just sit down and be still for a damned second.

If your life is exploding and all of the dust is flying around, you can't see things that clearly anyway. What could actually be a medical issue could seem like an intolerant partner. What could seem like jerkfaces at work could actually be that you're feeling terribly vulnerable at the moment and really are taking things too seriously. This is a thing. Rather than going completely scorched earth on your life, the Hanged Man encourages you to stop, rest, confirm that the decision you're going to make is a good one, and move forward.

I know that sometimes it's easier to point in one direction and say that this thing right *here* is ruining everything. Unfortunately, because we're people and we're fallible, we are often the ones who ruin it. (That's a word in southern Missouri. *Ruint*: to have ruined a thing in the past.) Through indecisiveness, inaction, not caring for ourselves properly, or putting our fingers in our ears and singing "la la la," we set ourselves up for the dreaded dogpile.

Let's try to be a little more self-aware and a lot kinder to ourselves, shall we? The thing to remember about dogpiles

is that if you're on the bottom, you don't get to move until everything else is gone. Might as well be productive with that still time, right?

I have faith in you.

The Hanged Man Inverted

Kate Hill of www.aeclectic.net has a great line to help remember what the reversed Hanged Man represents: "No pain, no gain." You have to put forth effort in order to make strides. You have to have some sort of clarity in order to see the best way to go. I also see the reversed Hanged Man come up a lot when people are standing still and blaming all of the action on other people. It's a reminder to take responsibility for yourself and your life.



XIII • Death

I am weary.

Okay. I'm only going to say this once. Actually, I'm going to say it five times. Death means change. Death means change. Death means change. Death means change. Death. Means. Change. Every bloody time I see a TV show or a movie that has a killer leaving the Death card at a crime scene, I just want to come up out of my seat. For heaven's

sake, do your research, writers! Your murderer leaving this card implies that he's going to stop killing and straighten up and fly right. How anticlimactic.

Let's look at the Basic card. Death looks pretty noble. He's dead center in the card, getting completely ignored by the other people present.

You see Death come striding through the middle of the card and no one is paying attention. Not the two other people to the side, not the king (who is facedown and dead as a doornail), and not the priest. The sun is rising and Death is on the march. This change is happening and nothing is going to stop it. No one is looking at the rising sun. Death is wearing armor and is completely prepared to knock whatever he needs to out of the way. You have no choice here. This card appears when change is coming, like it or not. It's usually time, too. Things have gotten so stagnant and comfortable that your ass is leaving an imprint on your chair. Time to move.

I like change, however it comes along. You have been still for too long, and the universe has decided to shake you loose. There can be no life without death. You've got to release. Change is coming. It cannot be ignored. It can be scary and difficult and sometimes include great tragedy. Your life, your relationships, and the structure of your universe have all changed, and you have grown. Like it or not. But with this change and struggle comes the beauty of rebirth and new opportunity. If you embrace the change, when one door closes, you can kick out a few windows and let the light shine in.

You've got to release everything old—you have to be stripped down to the bone to start over entirely. It hurts. Man, sometimes it hurts so badly. But it's worth it.

One of the best things about Death is that he is tired. He is coming slowly and steadily, and if you're paying attention, you can walk along beside him instead of being trampled underfoot.

Death Inverted

You have to have Death to have rebirth. If this is inverted, it's stagnancy. I always think of the Black Knight in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

King Arthur: You are indeed brave, Sir Knight, but the fight is mine!

Black Knight: Oh, had enough, eh?

King Arthur: Look, you stupid bastard. You've got no arms left!

That's the kind of obstinacy that you see in people who still tell you stories about their glory days in high school when they're in their forties—who still compare themselves now to themselves then. You're not who you were. Why are you still trying to do the things you used to? Where is your new glory? Your new passion? It reminds me of something that's burned into ashes, but instead of blowing away, the ashes just sit and rot, getting funky and preventing further growth.



XIV • Temperance

I am balancing.

Temperance is similar to the balance found in Justice, but it's more of a day-to-day kinda thing.

The angel is pouring water back and forth between two (identical) cups. If you look at the Basic card, the angel (I love that it's an angel) has one foot on the shore and one in the water. The water being poured from one cup to the other is perfectly balanced. Water in tarot always means emotion—his is calm and directed. On one side is land, on the other, water. I've heard the following words used to describe him: oasis, peace, calm, Zen. On his forehead, a circle. On his chest, a triangle. In many Basic decks, there is also a square around the triangle. The square/triangle/circle have to do with body/mind/spirit. All are represented, because if you fall behind in the upkeep of one, the others will suffer. The wings are equal.

On one side, we have ranging hills leading off into the distance, and on the other, a lovely garden to rest in. One foot on land, one in the water. Balance, balance, balance. This card can also represent alchemy. A little of this and a little of that is okay. You can blend almost anything, and nothing really has to be in extremes. Opposites can be blended, you just have to have patience and the right equipment. Man and woman, fire and water. Hell, even oil and water can be mixed. You just have to know the secret.

There is a balance. We just have to stop and look around to find it. Temperance rests between Death and the Devil in the tarot. Change, peace, chaos.

Grace, peace, wisdom, integration, movement without loss of self, calm, moderation.

Temperance Inverted

Inverted, it's about excess. Generally, anything in excess is bad for you. Love, anger, booze, drugs, exercise, food, socializing, sex, surfing the net. A good rule of thumb is that if you spend more than two hours a day on it (except for sleep) you might need to rethink your day. I also get an image of a whirlpool swirling around and sucking people in. It's so easy to lose your balance when you're precariously balanced like this. So easy to slip. It's hard to pull yourself back out of the water, and even harder to shake the experience off. It's all fun and games till someone gets sucked under the water.

I like to call this the Vortex of Crazy™. I know some people who live very happily (it seems) here. Everything is a crisis. Everything is all about them. Everything is huge. How exhausting.

Sometimes it's not so dramatic when it's inverted. Sometimes you need to cut loose and dive into excess. It can be important to explore and taste and get dirty and bang yourself up. It's exhilarating, and it's a wonderful way to learn. You might get your ass kicked, though, so keep that in mind. With Temperance inverted, there really is no in between.

You can get mad, but do you have to get angry? You can be hurt without being devastated. You can be sensitive without carrying the world's pain in your heart.



XV • The Devil

I am choosing.

There are a few tarot cards that will freak people out if they're new to tarot. The Tower, Death (means change), the Three and Ten of Swords, the Moon, and some others are a bit foreboding.

The Devil card freaks everyone out. Everyone. I've been doing this for over twenty years, and it still gives me the wiggins. It's unnerving, and I'm not sure what the artist could have done to make this more freaky. Have the Devil kicking a puppy or something? Maybe.

The thing is, this tarot card isn't about the Christian construct of "the devil." At least not in the traditional sense. The Devil was based on Pan, who was quite the licentious god. Booze, freedom, and lots and lots of sex. Pagans loved this stuff. Christians—not so much. So our fun-loving Pan got a new name and a new role. And a scowl, and apparently chicken feet. And bat wings. And he seems to be holding a huge spliff.

I don't know any adults who are scared of this guy. I could poll about a hundred of my friends and say, "Okay, you behave like a bastard—is this guy going to come and get you?" I'd bet that they'd all say no. So what is this about? Do you see how the people are chained to his throne? Those are pretty thick chains and look fairly sturdy. Look at their necks. They could slip those off at any time, but they're choosing not to. That's what this is about. Who could create a better hell for us than ourselves? Who knows our weaknesses? Who knows how to make us feel low and dirty and worthless? Who is ready to exploit these vulnerabilities and hurt us at a moment's notice? Yep. Ourselves.

We don't always chain ourselves up without help. Peer pressure, poor guidance from parents, whatever your path is—at some point you have a choice to make. Do I wear this chain or not? Do I drink to excess? Do I treat this person like crap? Do I hurt someone just because I can? Do I steal? Do I judge? Should I take this action or make this choice just because I can and then run over whoever might get in the way?

These choices are ours to make, and I have the feeling the older we get, the heavier the chains get and the harder it is to take them off. So while the picture freaks me out, the card and its meaning just makes me sad. This is not the scary, oogie-boogie devil of mythology but is almost scarier than that. This card is about chaining yourself to those things that pull you down. We turn ourselves inside out and pick and pick and pick until our insides are a bloody mess. I wonder why we allow that. When does it become okay to verbally and emotionally abuse ourselves? In what context and in what fashion does saying horrible things to

ourselves become permissible and even expected? I think it comes down to two things, fear and doubt. Fear that we're not as good as everyone else, and the doubt that allows that fear to trickle in. If we are confident and strong, what someone else says about us bounces away.

The Devil Inverted

Inverted, this card tells about a foggy time. You're not sure where to go or what to do, but you're about two steps away from the fog lifting. Breaking free of negative influences and bad habits. The chain is nearly off you—don't give up. Don't give up.

I found this quote that I really liked from *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* by Tennessee Williams: "Devils can be driven out of the heart by the touch of a hand on a hand, or a mouth on a mouth."

Broken things can be mended. There is always hope.



XVI • The Tower
I am rebuilding.

The Tower is based on the Tower of Babel, a creation of ours that was to reach the very heights of heaven. For the builder's glory, not for God's. Then God knocked it down and told us to quit it. I think that's how it went; it's been a

while since Catholic school. After the tower fell, God came down to the rubble and made everyone speak different languages (babble), and they scattered and formed tribes. To sum up: creation, destruction, confusion, rebuilding.

In tarot, the Tower is about your life dissolving. You've built up this life, this Tower, piece by piece. You were sure about each placement of each stone. Then, from out of nowhere the universe reaches down, grabs your little snow globe of a life, and shakes the hell out of it. Now what?

This can be about someone hurting you so badly you forget who you are. Having someone treat you so unfairly that your breath is literally taken away. About being deceived, robbed, violated, and demeaned. About losing part of your identity. It can be about divorce, death, losing a home or a job, tragedies and accidents, chaos and fear.

It's also about rerouting your life. The golden crown gets knocked off man's creation. The men are falling, thinking, "Oh shit! Bad idea! Do over!" The base of your venture was shoddy—scrap it. I think the thing that frightens people so much about this card is the suddenness of the change. It's about the universe pulling the rug out from under you, and the taller you were standing, the harder you fall. If you're expecting a change, you can roll with it. It makes the recovery and rebuilding a lot easier. Less time is required for healing, and you haven't got as much dust in your eyes and can see more clearly. There is also a huge lack of control. In this card there are people falling, lightning, and fire. You can't stop yourself while falling, can't predict where or how fire will travel, and can't see where the lightning will strike.

When you give a reading with the Tower, you have to be honest. You have to say to the querent that this is going to

be hard, but that it's going to be okay. Honesty is always better, however difficult it is finding that path. I would prefer to start again rather than keep building and building higher. I would rather have a strong base and the truth than a stack of lies.

I don't think, though, that the Tower is a bad card. It is a serious card. Sometimes in our lives we have to face up to real changes. These changes are uncertain, but I think the thing that gets us through it is faith. Faith in yourself. Faith that the universe is trying to put you where you belong, on your authentic path. The Tower clears the rubbish out of the way so we can rebuild on an empty canvas.

I've lived through the Tower a few times. While it's happening, you can't see past the bricks and mortar of your life falling around you. Through divorce, a devastating breakup, loss of a job or friends that you thought would be around forever. There were times in my life when I was certain I wouldn't see the sun again. It's only now, after the dust has settled, that I know why the Tower came. Why it took everything away. It came so that I could be here, surrounded by opportunity and love.

The Tower Inverted

When the Tower is inverted, it's got a few different meanings depending on the reading. It can be about nearly getting flattened. Did you ever have a moment where you nearly got hit by a car and had that cold feeling in the pit of your stomach? That's one of them. A premonition that comes just before tragedy would have struck.

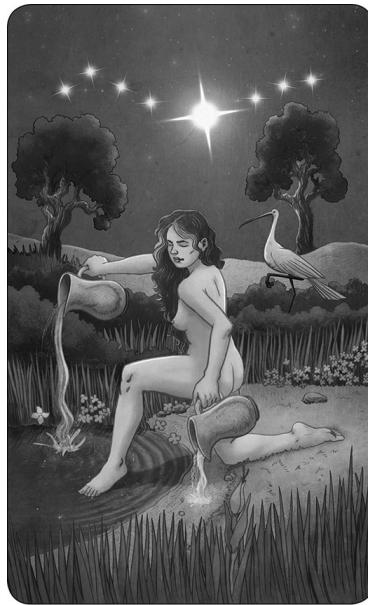
Another is that the lies or the faulty foundation stay put. Liars get away with it, truth doesn't come to light, and the Tower gets higher and higher, with this rot in the middle of it. That's not going to work out well. I've had this come up reversed in readings for people who have the "perfect" life. Everything is great! The job, the marriage, the 2.5 kids—all of it. Everything I've ever wanted! Except, no. Mom is a drinker and Dad is embezzling at work and the kids are up to serious shenanigans. It's like a shellac of perfect that's just about to be shattered. Sometimes the Tower inverted is scarier than upright, because the distortion and general "wrongness" of the situation just gets worse and worse.

One of the most important things to tell your clients when the Tower comes up is that they have to wait until the dust settles to make clear decisions. The Tower rocks everything in your life, including you. I read for a woman recently who was covered by the Tower. She'd gone through a lot of loss in just one year. She asked, "When should I start dating again? When will I feel okay again?" The bad stuff didn't come overnight, and you can't heal from it that quickly. You have to understand that it takes a while to get back on your feet. You have to be able to tell your clients, "Listen, this is going to be really hard. It might be really hard for a long

time, but I swear it will be better in the end. You just have to trust yourself and be patient.”

There is a quote by Fernando Sabino that goes through my mind like a mantra these days: “Everything will be all right in the end. If it’s not, then it’s not the end.”

It’s a bit trite, sure. I did see it embroidered on a pillow. The thing is, if your whole life has just been shaken to its very foundation, you’ll take trite over bleak pessimism any day. At least, I hope you will.



XVII • The Star

I am hoping.

If we follow the Fool’s Journey through the tarot, we’ve been through a lot in the last few cards. We experienced major changes with Death, a realigning with Temperance, and a double whammy with the Devil and the Tower. Things are shaky, and we’re not sure what to think.

If you imagine the Tower’s collapse, what happens after a building falls? There is rubble everywhere. If you knew the

landscape, everything has changed and you're now disoriented. There are clouds of smoke and the air is heavy with ash. You are heavy, too, with the repercussions of what just happened. You're not looking for the glaring light of the sun, or the watery-wavery light of the moon. What you need is a light that will fill your soul and shine on you so gently. This light won't hurt your eyes. The Star peeks out and starts to quietly and slowly illuminate you.

Beautiful. That's what this card is. Hope, beauty, faith restored. This card is like a healing balm on an old wound. Just when you think everything is lost and the dark and twisties have taken you as far as you can go, you see the twinkling of the beautiful stars and your heart lifts—if only just a bit. That's a start. She's got one foot on water and one on dry land. She's got endless resources to renew and rejuvenate herself and her surroundings. She's balanced and happy. She reminds me of my friend Mary, who is so centered, so confident, and Zen. Her reaction to stress is to chuckle and say, "Oh well, we can handle this."

The Star is the beginning. It's the first drink after days, months, years of being thirsty. Do you know that feeling? You're so emotionally wrought and parched that the first spark of kindness makes you gasp and brings tears to your eyes. That's this. In readings, I have to remind people that it's okay to accept gifts freely given. It's okay to put the sadness down for a minute and refocus on those beautiful things around us. We often get so used to depression and negativity that we get stuck. Even after a crisis has passed, we'll continue our reactionary and flinchy behavior, even though it's no longer needed. Almost like post-traumatic stress disorder, really. We have to retrain ourselves to relax and to stop anticipating trauma. It's very difficult to do and

one of the reasons I appreciate how soft this card is. It's not as "Everything is super!" as the Sun card but is more like a gentle hug and a pat on the back. Everything isn't "Super!" but everything is going to be okay.

And sometimes that's enough, yeah?

The Star Inverted

Inverted, the Star is just hopeless. Imagine that Tower falling around you, and after the dust settles, you've got to pick your way free of the rubble in the dark and all alone. It's a desolate, lonely card and the Star that usually lights the way is cold and distant. Very sad.



XVIII • The Moon

I am wary.

You know, you'd think that I'd be a fan of this card. It's about intuition, and who doesn't love the moon? That's why doing your homework in tarot is important. This card is about intuition, but not the fun kind. It's about the feeling you get before you get in an accident. Before natural disasters, animals oftentimes behave erratically. That's this card. It's the same primal thing we share with the dog and the wolf: something is coming and it isn't good. The way that the path seems illuminated is creepy. You can't see

where it's going, and you can't see well enough to make your own path. You have to trust someone else to make decisions for you.

Anxiety, nervousness, looming towers, rough water, and a freaky lobster rising from the depths. There is a lot of power present, but it's the kind that you can't control, and you're not going to like the process. When this comes up in a reading, one of the things that I talk about is that sometimes we're scared for a reason. Sometimes there is someone down that dark road with bad intentions. Sometimes you don't just have a cold—it's worse. Sometimes that guy who gives you the creeps at the store is exactly what you think he is. We've got the amygdala and the hypothalamus hidden beneath our prefrontal cortex telling us that sometimes there *is* a freaking lion out in the tall grass, and maybe we should get the hell out of there.

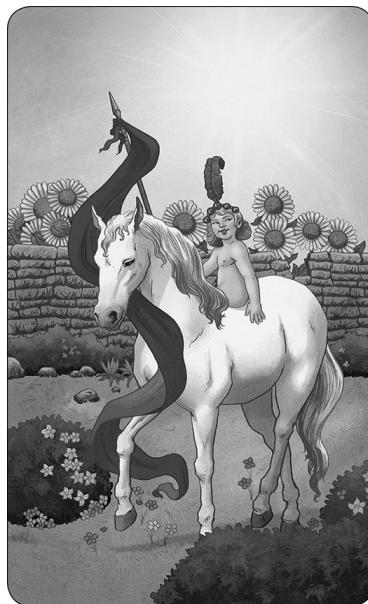
I think that fear—real fear—is dismissed a lot these days. You're paranoid! You're being overprotective or “projecting” or whatever generic phrase has become popular lately. I get this a lot with my kids. I'm very, very protective, and whenever someone questions me, I remind them that it takes eight seconds to kidnap a child. Eight seconds. You're damn right that scares me, and I'm going to protect my family. That's the Moon card. Reminding you to walk with authority to your car, to lock the door to the house, and to remember that every tool is a weapon if you hold it right. How will you wield your fear? Is the blade facing toward you or away from you?

Why are we afraid? Because we *don't know*. We don't know. There is such anxiety tied with uncertainty. I've been poor. I've been unemployed. I've been sick, dying, and mostly dead. I've been devastated and heartbroken a dozen

times, but there was more certainty to my life than uncertainty, so I was okay. Not knowing, not being sure, not having answers, not being able to control a single goddamned thing—this is the Moon card. This is fear.

The Moon Inverted

This is about mental health issues, depression, or letting fear completely overcome you and paralyze you. Often, if I get this card in the wrong position—if it is the final outcome, if it is crowning and covering everything—I will ask the querent to go see a mental health professional immediately. When the Moon card is inverted, that means that fear has won. That you’re not thinking clearly, or have completely blinded yourself to the danger that’s around you. Time to trust your instincts instead of that cool, cold light in front of you.



XIX • The Sun

I am happy.

I've got a friend named Andy. He's a good friend, and I'm amazed at how much affection I've gained for him, having only known him on the Internet and the phone. He's happy. He's ebullient. He's funny and kind and not self-

deprecating. He's the Sun, and when he's around, the whole world feels warmer and safer and happier. He is the Sun because he sweeps through his life, shining the light on those things that are in the dark. He investigates them and leaves them exposed, even if they worry him.

That's the Sun card. Everything is moved into the light. I get an image in my head of the sunshine reaching into the darkest, deepest corners of us, burning away the sadness, the lies and distortions, the broken trusts and broken hearts. The sunshine illuminates and enlightens us and shows us that when the shadows and dark and twisties go away, it's not so scary out here after all. The Beatles absolutely had it right in "Here Comes the Sun."

That's this card. Yes, it's been hard. It's broken your heart and what you thought was going to be just isn't. And you can't fix that, but you can open your eyes and look around you at all the beauty that surrounds us. And on this side, when you're healed? You can better deal with the next Tower or Moon or whatever life has in store for you. Because once you've felt the Sun, you don't soon forget it.

There are a lot of crazy things going on in the world right now. People are being exposed to different lifestyles, secrets are coming to light, and abuse and torture seem to come to the surface in the news daily. I've been constantly shocked by the news—by bad behavior, by terrible acts. I think, though, that we're really coming into a time in the Sun. You can't be a secret racist anymore. You can't hurt kids as easily and get away with it. There are cameras everywhere; the light is shining into the deepest corners of our world and exposing ugliness. Good. It's uncomfortable to look at raw ugliness in the light, but the more we see of it, the less likely we are to ignore it in the future.

A lot of people are really struggling with the status quo shifting. It used to be “the love that dare not speak its name,” you know? Now they’re being asked to be kind about gender reassignment and poverty and racial tension and gay marriage, and it’s uncomfortable for them. I think that those are growing pains. We’re all being pushed and encouraged to welcome everyone into the light with us. It’s going to take a while. It’s going to hurt our eyes a bit. But that warmth? It will grow. We will all share the light and realize that it helps all of us grow, together.

I came by this self-published, really hard-to-find book by way of my friend Bree called *The Book of Oracles, or A Poet’s Tarot* by Josep Miquel Sobrer. Each card in this book is represented by a story. A poem. I’ve never encountered anything quite like it, and I’ve found that the impressions given by Sobrer about each card stay with me whenever I do a reading today. I can’t look at the Sun card without thinking “the clarity is absolute,” which is a line from this lovely little book.

The Sun Inverted

Inverted, it's not all that different. It's going to be a bit delayed, and "okay" might not look like what you expected. But still, it's all right.



XX • Judgement

I am seeing.

When the Sun shines into all of the cracks and crevices, it also brings to light a lot of things we shoved away when no one was lookin'. Er, oops. You look behind you and see the lies, the gaffes, the embarrassments, and the really hard lessons learned. You were weak. You've been mean and cowardly. You have deliberately hurt other people, and have really treated yourself like crap. It's hard to look at. It's even harder to take in. At some point, though, you have to just accept that all of these little (or huge) screwups have made you the amazing, shiny person you are today. That's the Judgement card, for the most part. It's about release.

The Basic card has to do with Judgement Day, when all the sins are wiped clean and we're taken bodily into heaven or something like this. All I know about the Rapture is this bumper sticker: "Come the Rapture, Can I Have Your Car?"

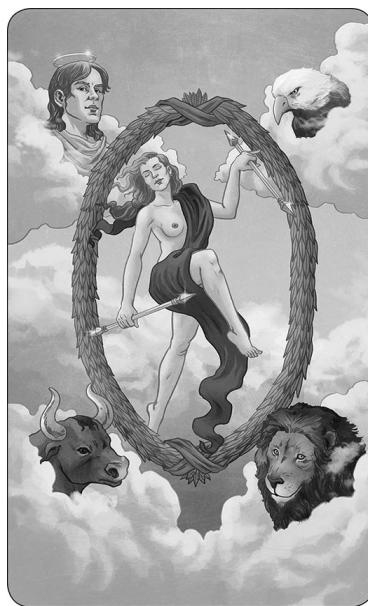
Anyway, the Judgement card is not so much about wiping the slate clean as accepting that your life is full of holes and mistakes and graffiti and scuffs, and all of those marks and flaws are what make you beautiful. That bears repeating: all of your flaws make you beautiful.

This card often comes up when we reach a crossroads. We can continue the way we have been, or we can challenge ourselves and find our authentic path. Our true calling is out there, and although it's easier to remain complacent and accept what has made us comfortable, it doesn't do us a damn bit of good. It doesn't help us grow, and it doesn't help us become more complete people. All of the scars, all of the spills and pieces of broken self that are lying around —those are the strongest parts of us because they're still here. If we accept those flaws and bring them into ourselves, maybe we can feel lighter and move onward and upward.

Judgement Inverted

The problem is accepting ourselves when we are flawed. We compare ourselves to other people. We judge other people negatively to make ourselves look better. This is what the reversed Judgement card is about. Making other people feel small or less than. It is one thing to level our disgust or self-hatred on ourselves, but it is quite another to aim that toxic mess at someone else. If this comes up in a reading, it oftentimes has to do with gossip or flat-out malicious behavior. Negativity pointed outward is just as bad as negativity pointed inward. It just makes more of a splash.

It's also about creating another truth for yourself that doesn't fit and is terribly uncomfortable. How long can you wear that? How long can you punish yourself while the truth is just waiting for you to live it? I get this card a lot with people who are in jobs that don't suit them or marriages that have died on the inside. It seems impossible to change the situation but unbearable to stay.



XXI • The World

*I am
transforming.*

The World card is the last in the major arcana. There are neat little images tucked all over this one. The four images in the corners represent the four fixed astrological signs: the lion is Leo, the bull is Taurus, the cherub is Aquarius, and the eagle is Scorpio. The fixed signs are aligned with stability and persistence.

There are infinity signs at the top and bottom of the wreath that stand for continuity, and the wreath itself represents achievement. The woman is marching ahead, representing action and moving forward. The woman is also a gifted baton twirler, so well done there.

I found this quote about the World, and it always strikes me as perfect: “One does not conquer the world, one discovers it.” I’m not sure who said it, but it covers the focus and achievement of the World. This card is associated with getting the job, finding balance in your life, and graduations and celebrations. It’s a culmination of all of your hard work and the confidence that comes along with that.

The elements mentioned above—the determination, stability, persistence, and achievement—these are reflected in the other cards of the major arcana. If you see all of the cards before this as a journey, this is the happy conclusion. The infinity sign tells us that another journey is beginning, and the wreath tells us that we’re ready for it.

I wonder sometimes if the ends justify the means, but then I remember that it’s the journey that counts. It’s all of the ups and downs, the craziness, the light and the dark

and twisties that help to make us shiny, bright souls. Like a rock tumbler but much more poetic and whatnot.

The World Inverted

Charles de Lint is my favorite author, and he writes mostly about the in-betweens. The land between ours and fairy, the moment between day and night, the hush of quiet before the sun comes up. The in-betweens are a time of uncertainty and of stress. The World card is great if you're looking forward to the transformation it brings, but what if you aren't? The act of becoming isn't limited to good things. Becoming a widow. Becoming single. Becoming poor. Becoming afraid. When the World lands on your table upside down, that is what's coming to your client. Be aware that they came to you for a heads-up, and be careful how you deliver it.

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Chapter Five

The Minor Arcana: The Pips



Elements in the Minors

When I teach a Tarot 101 class, I run through the different suits, which each contain ten pips and four court cards, by elements.

- Pentacles—Earth—Grounding
- Swords—Air—Intellect
- Wands—Fire—Action
- Cups—Water—Emotion

Easy peasy, right? It helps me remember how the elements move in relation to which card comes up. Each suit in the tarot aligns with an element. The elements are pretty easy to remember and also make it easy to remember which suit acts in which way. Each suit begins with confidence and builds and builds until there is just too much, but they behave differently.

Both the pips and the court cards align with elements. Here is a little table that I use to help me remember how each court card behaves:

	Pentacles	Swords	Wands	Cups
Page	Earth/Earth: Grounded	Air/Earth: Finance	Fire/Earth: Rebuilding	Earth/Water: New Life
Knight	Earth/Fire: Quest for Physical	Air/Fire: Quest for Philosophy	Fire/Fire: Quest for Passion	Fire/Water: Quest for Love
Queen	Earth/Water: Nurturing Environment	Air/Water: Nurturing Intellect	Fire/Water: Nurturing Passion	Water/Water: Nurturing Love
King	Earth/Air: Planner	Air/Air: Philosopher	Fire/Air: Harbinger	Water/Air: Poet

Pentacles—Earth—Grounding

Nature. Hard work. Feet on the ground. The Ace of Pentacles is just a good card. Good things will happen, gifts will come to you, and maybe a little magic will float your way. It's a very benevolent-looking card, as if God is giving you a high five or something. Again, there is the crescendo of action from the Ace till the Four. The Five is tricky, the Six is being the boss, and the Seven is an all-out throwdown—standing your ground. The Eight is movement. The Nine is fulfillment. The Ten is a lot. I don't see

it as a good card because once you're truly satisfied, then what? The best way that I see the pentacle is on the ground with us standing on top of it. The pentacle is a magical symbol and includes all elements and spirit. It's the support that we crave. It is the place we draw our energy, and sometimes the place that we lie down to cry. Can you be too grounded? Maybe not in the colloquial sense of the word, but you can feel as though your life has become so overwhelming, you're afraid to let go of the grass for fear you'll float away.

Swords—Air—Intellect

Swords is not an easy suit, and it is not forgiving. From the voluntary solitude of the Two of Swords, to the devastation of the Ten, there is a simple beauty and efficacy to the swords. All of the excess will be pared away. All obstacles are made clear, and there are few emotions and distractions to keep change from happening. The Ace of Swords is the essence of swords. Using only intellect, we charge ahead. I call the Two the "Shut the hell up so I can hear myself think" card. There is a decision to be made, and she has cut off all distractions so that she can make it herself. The Three is unyielding and brutal. The Four is putting your thoughts at rest, and the Five is discord and a warning to carry yourself well. The Six of Swords is a caution to clear your mind, and the Seven is sneaky and impulsive. The Eight speaks to feeling trapped and powerless (even though you're probably not), and the Nine to worry and guilt. And then there's the Ten—I'm not sure that there is a bleaker card in the tarot.

And yet, there is some amazing benefit to having these cards come up for you in a reading. Even the Ten. Sometimes all you need to know is that this is the lowest point—that it won't get any worse—and you can gather the strength to move on. Sometimes, with the Two, you know that the answer is inside of you, and you just have to eliminate distractions to find it. Sometimes that gives us the confidence to trust our own answer.

Swords are an air sign and are about intellect and clarity. That being said, it's easy to get caught up in the symbols of the tarot and forget that these items—these magical items—have everyday use as well. The wand, the pentacle (or coin), the cup (or chalice), and the sword (or, well, okay, it's just a sword). You can get very basic with these: What does a sword do? It cuts things. It's a weapon. It can scare the bejeezus out of people. In the case of the Ace of Swords, it's not aggression but assertion. You can be mighty; you can be respected and defend yourself. You can make yourself heard and have courage.

Wands—Fire—Action

Think of how fire moves. It can be a steady flame, it can be an ember, or it can be a grand explosion that knocks the air out of you. The wands begin with the essence of flame—steady, confident, and full of potential. From one till four, the energy is building, making things grow. Five is tricky. The fire is getting bigger and the number of people adding to the situation grows and could get out of hand. Six levels out, and Seven is when you become the Boss. This has fallout as well—what does your team think of you being the boss? Are you ready? Eight is movement, spreading warmth around and making choices. Nine is fulfillment: you have plenty. Ten is too much: you can't handle it, you can't control it. If the Ace of Wands is a steady burn, the Ten is a wildfire.

Cups—Water—Emotion

The cups are all about emotion. In any of the cards, really, water represents your heart. How you handle things and how you internalize them. Think about what water does. It cleanses, it refreshes, it nourishes, and it gives life. It can also erode and dissolve emotion. You can gauge the amount and intensity by how close the figure is to the water, how they're interacting with it, and how much is in the card. The position of the water in the cards tells us how the emotion is being expressed. A lot or a

little, everywhere or isolated, controlled or wild. The inverted cups show a complete outpouring. The Ace of Cups shows a perfectly balanced cup, held over calm waters. The sun is shining; all is well. The Two of Cups is about coming together. The Three of Cups often represents sisterhood or people who are in your tribe. The Four of Cups is apathetic. The Five is in mourning. The Six is coming from childhood. Seven has two main interpretations: temptation or idealism. Do you want it because you need it or because you just want it? Eight is about being stuck. I love the Nine. He's so satisfied. The Ten of Cups is the only ten that I feel has little to do with excess. All is well. I could literally break down each of the cups cards to talk about love, but let's sum it up like this—the more cups you have, the more emotion is present. The more emotion, the more unwieldy it becomes.

The Pips

These have a lot in common, not only aligned with the suit, but also with the number of the pip. It's extremely helpful when trying to learn the tarot to align all of the ones, twos, threes, etc. There is a keyword with each pip number to help a little more.

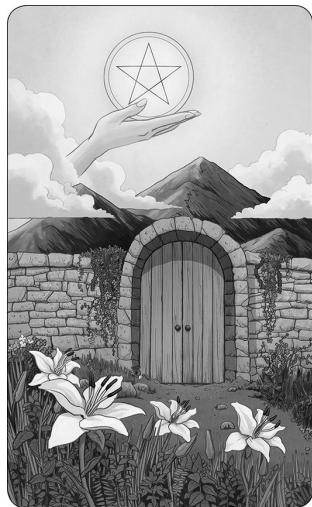
The Aces: Essence

The aces are the very core of what the suits are. I've heard of spirit animals being called Bear or Fox—capital letters intended, to put forth the idea that "Fox" is the absolute essence of what it means to be a fox. It's the complete picture of what Fox entails—traits, tendencies, everything. It is a generalization of what Fox is, but it paints a complete picture of the specific entity to which you are referring.

The aces are very similar. They are the nucleus of each suit: the brain of the swords, the heart of the cups, the backbone of the wands, and the root of the pentacles. The Basic deck always makes me think of Monty Python, so I remember this because of the natural exaggeration of the tools. You've got the Hand of God bringing forth this wand or that cup, and it's presented to you freely as a blessing. The Ace cards represent the pure, undiluted core of what that suit encompasses.



Ace of Pentacles



The Ace of Pentacles is grounding. What I mean by that is that if you break it down into its parts, you have everything you need to stand on your own two feet. The Ace is the essence of pentacles—earth. The pentacle is a magical symbol that holds within it all other elements. The five points of the pentacles are for earth, air, fire, water, and spirit. The first pentacle was likely an outstretched hand—five fingers, five points to our star. Things are coming together. As a magical tool, the pentacle is the shield, which protects the practitioner from harm.

Look at the mountains in the background, the wide path, and the lush garden. The card is telling you that you're on the way to prosperity. Just keep walking toward the gate.

I always imagine the Ace of Pentacles being under the client's feet. The pentacles are perfectly aligned with the earth and are stable and still. They're able to connect to people and make calm decisions. They're more financially secure than they may have ever been in the past. Standing on the center of a pentacle, grounded and one with the earth, welcoming prosperity and growth. This is the essence of the suit of pentacles. Grounded. Centered. Balanced. This card is about wealth and prosperity but also about pulling that energy into you from the earth. This card is abundance, blessings, and luck. All good things.

Ace of Pentacles Inverted

If you use your imagination when you invert the Ace of Pentacles card, the money or security will literally fall out of the hand. It's resting lightly in the palm when it's right side up—no stress, no worry—but if it's upside down, everything falls away. How do you feel when money falls away from you? When you lose security or connections with loved ones? When you lose ground? This is the feeling that comes with the inverted Ace of Pentacles. Anxiety and stress.

Ace of Swords



This card represents the essence of swords, the essence of intellect. Quick, ingenious—a bolt of lightning strikes you and gives you the best idea of your life. You make good decisions. You cut to the chase. (Get it? 'Cuz it's a sword?) The sword is one of the elemental tools in some Pagan religions, representing either air or fire, depending on the tradition. For me, swords are air. The blade is used to direct energy, cast a circle of power, and invoke the guardians of the ritual.

It works as a focus object for the mind. Very apt.

Do you know that feeling you get when you just *know* the answer? You can find your way through the puzzle. You've figured out what everyone else has missed. You know exactly where to go, when to go, how to go, and what you're going to do when you get there. You have no doubt; emotion doesn't enter the decision. It is certainty, plain and simple.

This card is the truth. It doesn't matter what you thought was right. It doesn't matter how you were raised. The truth will cut all of that nonsense away. It is sharp, it cuts to the heart of the matter, and it strips bare the assumptions that we've carried with us.

Ace of Swords Inverted

Missed it by *that* much. Think of what happens when you drop a knife. Whether or not it stabs you in the foot on the way down, you react the same. You gasp. You exclaim. Your body tenses. When the Ace of Swords is inverted, you need to be on the lookout for accidents. Missed opportunities or verbal or written mistakes. Careful how you handle that blade.

Ace of Wands



In magic, wands are used to help you focus your power and take action. In the Basic Ace of Wands, you can see a castle in the distance—a goal in the deck. You've got to work to get there. The Wand is given to you, which could be interpreted as the universe handing you some good luck or good karma, but what you *do* with that is up to you. If you want to reach the castle, you'd better get focused and get moving. It's a heck of a head start, though.

Staves, rods, pipes, or clubs—all the same.

The Ace of Wands is succeeding beyond your dreams. Sometimes even against reason, things line up in such a way that luck, coincidence, hard work, and planning make everything turn out right. Also, that's a pretty big stick. How are you going to use it? For good or for evil? Are you going to guide people with it or clobber them in the head with it? With great power comes great responsibility, right? This card is heavy with responsibility. Take care, and be careful what you do with that stick. You could take your eye out if you're not careful.

Ace of Wands Inverted

The negative aspects are that fire not only warms us and quickens our pulse, but it can get out of control and burn and destroy. I always have this image of restless energy. If a person can't find something to fix, they'll "accidentally" knock over a lamp. "Ooh, lookit. Broke the lamp. Too bad—guess I have to fix it now." Self-destructive energy surrounds inverted wands.

Ace of Cups



The essence of emotion. Essentially, the heart of the tarot. The cup is literally overflowing with bounty and blessings. Also, the cup is a magical tool. The first chalice was a cupped hand, remember. The chalice represents the womb of the goddess in magical practices. Similar to the Christian blood of Christ, this represents the bounty and promise of the goddess filling us with whatever liquid lies within. We bring this blessing into ourselves, and our thirst is sated.

The important thing is to take it and drink. This is about new beginnings. A new love, new job, new butterflies in your stomach because she totally flirted with you, and the hope and excitement is completely overwhelming and makes your brain grin. This is about potential, grabbing onto hope with both hands, and letting yourself bathe in the good vibes and positive emotional energy.

Ace of Cups Inverted

The Ace of Cups inverted is pretty straightforward. Look at the hand holding the chalice and flip it over. That water—those emotions—spill out everywhere. This is unlike the even-pouring water of the Star and of Temperance. This is chaotic. Drama. When this card shows up reversed in a reading, people are generally involved in some heavy emotional craziness, and it's a good indication that they need to stop gossiping, mind their business, and become busy a lot.

The Twos: Coming Together

The twos have a theme of plans coming together. The wands are plans coming together before the action of the Three. The cups are two people becoming a couple. The swords represent clarity of thought and ideas taking shape, and the pentacles show someone juggling all of the responsibilities flowing and taking shape beautifully.



Two of Pentacles



The Two of Pentacles is about juggling. Happily juggling, no less. Handling money, family, your home, your job. Doing all this well. It's about balancing yourself and your partner's needs. The water behind our intrepid juggler is in some serious turmoil, but the juggler is dancing. The infinity symbol comes back again to tell us that this dance doesn't end. Regardless of the surrounding chaos, our juggler is going to handle his responsibilities, time, money, and obligations with no problem. He's got this well in hand. If you look at his left hand, he's got a good grip on the pentacle, and the other hand has a light touch. I like the balance of these things. Some things you keep a grip on, and some things you keep an eye on.

Two of Pentacles Inverted

Welp. You dropped everything. This is not a great card to get inverted, because you're losing control of everything. Your money, your plans, your relationships. You seem to be on the rocking and rolling ship instead of onshore. If you are embroiled in chaos, everything you touch is going to go a little wobbly. This is a good indication to take a deep breath and call for a do-over.

Two of Swords



I think that there is a point in nearly everyone's life where you realize that you're alone. Maybe it's after high school, sitting in your dorm room. Maybe it's after you leave your parents' house for the last time—without looking back. Maybe you feel alone after you've gone from parents to college to husband to single, and you're splitting time with your kids for the first time. Maybe your parents have died or gone and you're the grown-up now. We've all got someone, theoretically. We didn't hatch. As I grow older, though, I realize that the process of growing up will strip people away from you. Friends will betray you. People will go weird and stop calling. Your family isn't perfect, and suddenly, you look around and instead of two tables full of cousins on Thanksgiving, it's just you. And likely, a cat.

Or maybe you're lonely and in a relationship. There isn't anything lonelier in the world than sharing a bed with someone you can't talk to. It's emptying and devaluing and sad.

First, being alone and being lonely are two different things. Being alone means that you've got no one to connect with. I feel alone is a deeper state of being than lonely. That feeling that if you get lost, there will be no one there to find you. I remember thinking, when I first became alone, that if I fell down the stairs, no one would find me for three days. And the aforementioned cat would eat my face off. Nothing like freaking yourself out of doing laundry ... or walking downstairs ... ever again.

Being lonely means that your boss was a complete ass, and you don't have anyone to commiserate with. Or that you haven't been touched for a while. I've seen that when the condition of aloneness is new, it's startling. Who knew the house could be

that quiet? Why does everything sound like a murderer in your basement? Why is it you're only hungry for cold cereal and leftovers? And don't seem to change clothes as much. Or shower. Or anything, really.

I want to propose, however, that there is strength in solitude. I call the Two of Swords the "Shut the hell up so I can hear myself think" card. It is about being alone. This woman has grabbed a chair, a blindfold, and a few swords and marched herself out into the middle of nowhere. All of her other senses are cut off. She doesn't need external influence for the decisions she needs to make. She doesn't need distraction. She is alone and okay with that. This is something she needs to figure out for herself. In the wandering narrative of tarot, this is what happens after the shock of alone goes away. When you realize that you don't need the world's chatter to make sense of your life. That moment when you wander away by the shore, pull up a seat on a bench, and blindfold yourself against distraction.

Two of Swords Inverted

The moon is there, too. Shining above her head. The water (emotion) is still and calm. The Moon in tarot tells us to be cautious. To seek deep inside of ourselves and look for pitfalls and traps, especially the ones we lay for ourselves. The Two of Swords inverted speaks of imbalance and chaotic thought. Sometimes mental illness, sometimes depression, sometimes being surrounded by hypercritical people who drown out your own thoughts.

Two of Wands



The man is looking out into the world. It looks as if he's longing for adventure. Why, then, has he bolted his walking sticks to the wall of his castle? He's holding a globe, a representation of the whole world, yet he doesn't seem to be going anywhere anytime soon. It seems to be very conflicting, but I think it's about deliberation. He wouldn't be looking out in the world if he were content with his own kingdom. He wouldn't have the globe if he didn't wonder what it contained. I think that this card represents hesitation. Sometimes you actually do have to look before you leap. I'm personally terrible at this, but I've heard it can be very effective.

Two of Wands Inverted

There is either hesitance regarding plans or disorganization. Either way, you need to take a beat before you rush into things, or you're going to screw it all up. This card usually comes up right after someone has done just that. Overconfidence or excessive hesitance are both characteristics that diminish our natural talents and skills. If you say, "I got this," and then drop the ball, you're not doing yourself any favors.

Two of Cups



This is partnership. I've got your back; you've got mine. This is a fantastic card to get for a couple, because it's truly about coexisting and support. The cups are balanced. Quite lovely, actually.

This is the card I like to see for relationships. The Lovers is just so intense. There is nothing wrong with intense relationships, but oftentimes they catch fire and burn out. This card, the Two of Cups, shows an immense amount of trust, compassion, and true partnership. This is the couple (or pair of friends) who high five after everything. They have each other's backs and they are a true team. In a relationship, it's the friend that you've always wanted paired with the lover you didn't know you were always looking for.

Two of Cups Inverted

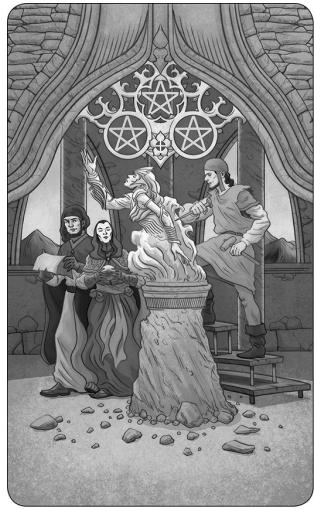
Discordant. That's this card inverted. Again, we've got cups upside down, so all of their contents go splashing around. The word "discord" breaks up into two parts: "dis-" means "apart," to break up, or to sunder; and "cord" means "heart." If we flip around these two partners, we have discord, pain, and hurt. The connection isn't broken yet, but it's close.

The Threes: Journey

The threes represent a journey. An emotional, physical, or intellectual journey. What is certain about all four of the threes is that change is coming. The Empress is the third card of the major arcana. She's all about authenticity and relaxing into yourself. You can use that association to think about the threes in pips. The cards are about finding your stride and getting to the core of the issue, however painful or exhilarating that will be.



Three of Pentacles

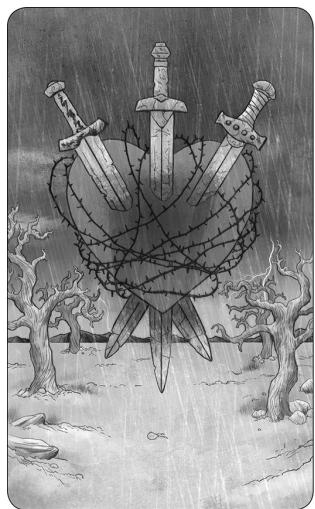


Teamwork! Honest and supportive teamwork, too. This is a fantastic card for business, friendship, new opportunities, and family issues. It's about the triumph of Team Us over the sometimes petty needs of the individual. This is a journey to a goal, and you can't do it by yourself. In the card, all three figures are turned toward the work. Using the direction that the figures are turned is a great way to remember a card. All pointed inward—creating something together. This is a very encouraging card.

Three of Pentacles Inverted

Basically the opposite. Competition and a lack of cooperation within a group. If you're looking for more respect at work, you're going to have to wait awhile. This card comes up a lot in readings whenever there is office drama or no chance for advancement. A lot of times, the clients themselves could invest better in their work and make sure they're in the right place, instead of letting things fall apart around them.

Three of Swords



My first instinct when I see this card is to say I'm sorry. You can't really soften this card. Something broke. Someone died. Someone was betrayed. There was loss, pain, tragedy, and heartache. This is a visceral card. The person who receives it will often know exactly what it's referring to before you start speaking because the event cast a shadow over their life.

Just as the Three of Pentacles is a journey of the mind, the Three of Swords is a transition of the soul. I don't feel that this card can be taken lightly. Every time I receive it in a reading, some kind of universal whammy is aiming at the client. Sometimes they're lucky. Sometimes they have an elderly or ill relative who is ready to go. Sometimes, though, they don't know to whom this card refers. It's not always death. It's divorce, cheating, devastation, car accidents, and calamities. The best thing to do when you see this in a reading is to tell your clients to take a deep breath and brace themselves for uncontrollable change.

Three of Swords Inverted

Grief can only stay with us for a while. We're not meant to swim around in it until our fingers get all pruney. Just as the Three of Pentacles is a journey of the self, the Three of Swords inverted can be healing time or the point when the pain is lessening and we need to realign our purpose. Sometimes we get so used to functioning within grief that after it's abated we still wander around broken. If we walk around with our head down for too long, though, we'll start tripping over things and missing all of the beauty around us.

Three of Wands

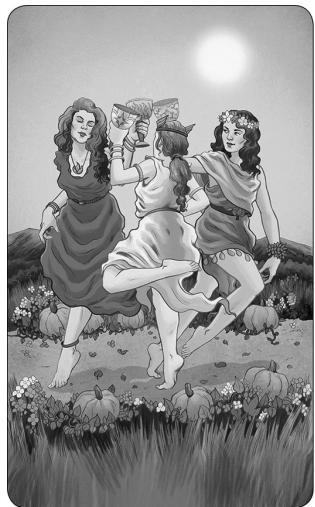


Where the Two of Wands is hesitant, the Three of Wands is listening, watching, and getting ready to go. I think of the three wands with the man as past, present, and future. He's literally turning his back on everything but the future. It's interesting that the Three is outside and the Two of Wands is in a castle. The Three has already traveled some distance. There doesn't seem to be much ahead of him, but I think it's all about perspective. He sees amazing things. He sees his future, his ideals, and his successes played out ahead of him, and he's just about to go for it. When this comes up in a reading, it often has to do with having itchy feet. You might be held back by other people, by circumstances beyond your control, or by yourself.

Three of Wands Inverted

What you're doing isn't working. Stuck, stuck, stuck. Whether it's in a relationship or a job, you hit every possible obstacle and delay, and essentially you're doing it wrong. Either scrap it or go back to the drawing board.

Three of Cups



Whenever I see this card in a reading, I immediately know that the person getting the reading has people. They've got a tribe—a heart family—even if their own family isn't as involved as they could be. The three sisters are swirling around, dancing with their cups in the air, and smiling and enjoying each other. This card is about love, support, silliness, and having absolute certainty that someone has your back.

Three of Cups Inverted

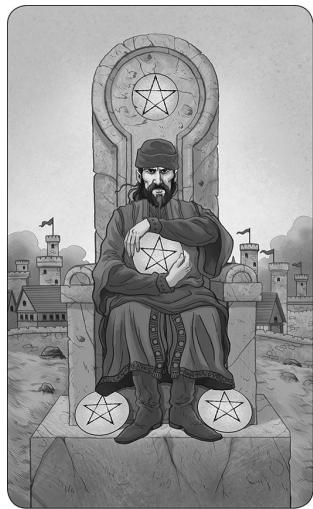
You know how sometimes you have the exact right amount of friends around a table, and then someone else sits down and it all goes weird and awkward? Or when you're cheating on your partner and it always feel like you're just about to get caught? Yeah, that's this card. Too many people in the same space. Too many strained relationships and too much icky behavior.

The Fours: Resting

In each of the fours, there is a moment of peace. Of grace, really. The awareness of your possessions and surroundings in the pentacles, the clarity of mind in the swords, the breath before the celebration in wands, and even the weariness and ennui of the cups. There is a feeling of putting down defenses and relaxing into Now. So much of tarot is looking to the future. The fours are the present.



Four of Pentacles



This is about protecting what is yours. The guy is sitting with two pentacles at his feet, is holding another (really tightly!), and has a fourth above his head. He looks really grumpy, but I don't think that this is an inherently bad card. A lot of people in this world equate possession with selfishness. It's more about taking care of yourself before you take care of other people. If you give away all of your food and starve, what good was that? If you give your friends all your money and your electricity gets turned off, how are you doing good in this world? You have to be sure that you are cared for before you can adequately care for others. I saw this a lot when I was a social worker. The caretakers would wear themselves out completely while making sure their patient was okay. Then they would wind up in the hospital with exhaustion or a heart attack because they weren't showing themselves the same respect they showed their client. It's a bad idea. There are a lot of rocks in the fields and distance between our fella and the town. I get the feeling that the distance is deliberate and that the rocks are representing difficulties that he still has to go through to find peace of mind. He's being so protective of his stuff, and stuff is so tightly tied to emotion. The most important thing that you can ask yourself about your stuff is "Does it serve me?" If not, it's time to find it a new home. If so, then hold tight to it. Don't give it up without a fight.

Four of Pentacles Inverted

Selfish, self-involved, and resistant to change. There is fear here. Fear of loss, of being alone in spite of being in a bad relationship, of not having enough. Hoarding is represented here, as are greed, anxiety, and fear. This is a kind of resting that is more similar to squatting like a toad. Don't touch my stuff. Don't look at it or breathe on it hard, because it's mine.

It can also mean that you've just lost all of your stuff. Sometimes cards are really subjective depending on the reading, so you have to pay attention.

Four of Swords

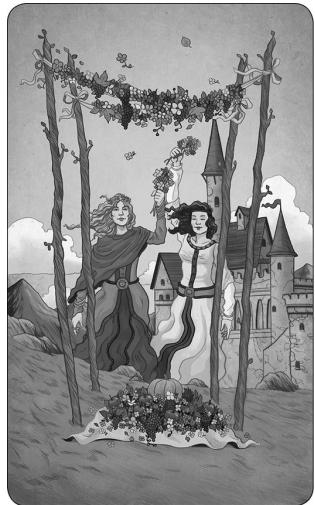


Put your thoughts at ease. This is a knight who is truly at rest. He is surrounded by swords but doesn't need them right now. The three on the wall are waiting; the one lying on or near him is inert. Sometimes you just have to tell your brain to shut up and be still. Sometimes, if you're not sure where to go or what to do, the best thing to do is have a nap and figure it out later. Think about what we've just gone through with the Three of Swords. That was damaging to mind, body, and spirit, and a rest is sorely needed. The windows behind the knight show a rolling hillside and the angel of peace. The whole card is geared toward encouraging you to take a deep, deep breath, unstick your tongue from the roof of your mouth, and relax.

Four of Swords Inverted

Totally scattered, totally overworking, and not listening to your body at all. Sick in mind, body, or soul. It's kind of like a serious case of monkey brain, when you get so wound up you can't stop thinking. Either this or just grinding to a halt and going completely still. Both of these are bad. Whether you're going a hundred miles per hour and missing all of the good stuff or zero miles per hour and turning into a turnip, something needs to change so you can get back in the natural flow of life.

Four of Wands



Walking through the chuppah and ready to join the party. This is about celebration, joy, silliness, and the excitement of completion, union, family, and friends. This is one of the happiest cards in the deck and also one of the simplest. Four sticks, flowers, and a party. I like the balance of the wands, the flowers, and the feeling of joy that resonates from the people in the town.

If you look at the position of the bower and the party in the Basic deck, this is the beat before the music begins. The client has not approached the bower yet and still needs to go up the hill, around the path, and to the castle. There is so much potential here, but we're not moving yet. This card is a reminder to enjoy the moment.

Four of Wands Inverted

You know how sometimes you are heading out for a road trip but your daughter forgot her earbuds? And then you're off ! Except, did I lock the back door? Back we go. And now we're off ! Except, are we *sure* we have the medicine? And the stove isn't on, right? False starts, malfunctions of equipment or people, or collapse and failure of plans and ideals. This card is Exhausting with a capital E.

Four of Cups



This card can be defined by the word “meh.” The person is being particular because they know what they want. Possibly avoiding an unsuitable partner or a job that doesn’t fit them. Maybe it’s best to sit under a tree with your arms crossed until the right one comes along? This card has been related to the Buddha sitting under the Bodhi tree, not budging until the Truth wanders along. He’s so focused on his inner life that the cups are going ignored.

Four of Cups Inverted

Inverted, the Four of Cups is about being unsatisfied and bored. This guy has three cups in front of him and one that's floating on the air next to him but can't be arsed to pick one. They're not right for him.

It is time to get over yourself and get up and do something about your life. This card is apathy at its heart, but apathy can have a few causes. If you have been burned after effort in the past, you're more likely to sit back and not try again. So when this card comes up, maybe you use the sitting-down time to figure out if you're ready to be brave.

The Fives: Renewed Action

After the inertia of the fours, we're gearing up again. The pentacles are recovery, the cups are regret, the swords are revenge, and the wands are revolt. The fives are about unrest and preparedness. These cards are hard. You don't get to pretty these up for clients; you have to just tell them what's going on. You can be optimistic with the fives and look to the next step, but you can't move on until you deal with the unrest and disruption that's going on.



Five of Pentacles



Down on your luck, being ill, being disconnected from hope. This card is really a punch in the stomach. All of those things that keep you up at night. All of those things that you can't control that keep you up at night. You lost your job. You lost your love. The ground under your feet has shifted, and things are going to be difficult for a while. If you look at the Basic card, though, relief is right around the corner. The people are walking along the side of a church, and you can see the warm glow of the lights. Sanctuary is only a few steps further. The distractions are internal. You're not grounded. If you can take a deep breath and lift your head, you'll see the help waiting there for you.

Five of Pentacles Inverted

Things are looking up! I see this in readings where the client has hit rock bottom (Ten of Swords?) and can finally lift their head up and start climbing out of the hole. This isn't saying that everything is super. Things don't fall apart overnight and they won't get better overnight, either. This is saying that the break you've been praying for is on its way. Prayer is a big part of this card—prayer, intent, whichever you'd like. When you pray or speak to the gods, it is traditional to be on your knees—and connecting to the earth that's present in the pentacles.

Five of Swords

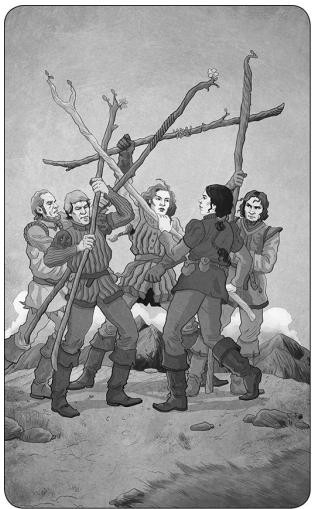


Petty and self-involved thoughts keep you from noticing the people around you. You're thinking only of yourself, and this is distracting you from the greater good. The Five of Swords is kind of sneaky. Rachel Pollack made a really cool point about this card in *Seeker*. Whose swords are those? Is he stealing them or taking them back? Intent is very important with this card, but even with good intent, it's tricksy. The main character has such a smirk on his face. You're almost wishing he would trip and drop them all. Sometimes, though, you have to be tricky in order to stick up for yourself. Intent is everything.

Five of Swords Inverted

Okay, so the guy stole your swords. That was a jerky thing to do, but we're going to give him the benefit of the doubt and let that stuff go. Release it. Honestly, it's just weighing you down. The Five of Swords inverted is asking you *why* you are carrying all of this resentment around. It doesn't serve you. Put it down.

Five of Wands



There are a few ways to look at the Five of Wands. One is frustration, and the other is competition.

The person in the middle is completely surrounded by obstacles and has nowhere to turn, and no one seems interested in helping. It's difficult to see who's on the same team or if all of them are fighting each other. No one is going anywhere because all conversation is blocked. No one wants to talk—it's all stick waving, and what would Freud say about that?

No one is willing to concede an inch of ground, and so they're at an impasse. How freaking frustrating.

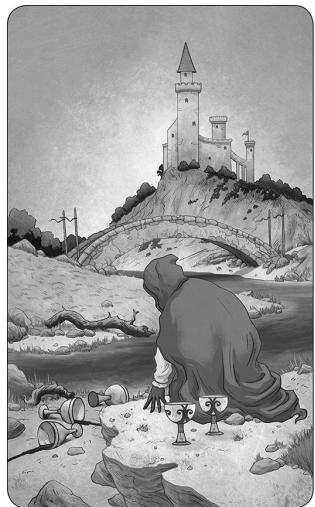
If you look at this card in the spirit of competition, you get a completely different feel for it. All of the men are equally matched, and the one who's worked the hardest and trained the most will be victorious. This card is very subjective, and it really depends on the question asked, the position of the card, and the client. This is a struggle that he's gone into voluntarily or in which he's suddenly found himself. In this situation, you've got to decide whether it benefits you more to continue fighting upstream or to relax and go with the crowd. Get your stick out of my face! Get your face out of my stick! This is the tarot equivalent of a slap fight. You're trying to go one way, everyone else is going another, and they won't stop messing with you. Either way, it's annoying and taking time away from your forward movement.

Five of Wands Inverted

The reverse of the Five of Wands is not so much agreement or the opposite of the upright version. It's more like deciding that this fight is not worth your time. I don't get into a lot of personal drama because I don't tell lies and I don't gossip. You'd be amazed how helpful that is in the "I don't like conflicts" area of my life. I seriously need peace, and in order to receive that, I place myself in positions to honor my requirements.

Five of Cups

I call this card the MaybeLife card.



I talked with a friend who said that his high school sweetheart was pregnant with her first child and that it completely emotionally devastated him. He said that he felt stupid, since it's been almost twenty years since he loved her, but that it hurt like he loved her and lost her just yesterday. I got a little affronted at his dismissal of this love. It's real, it existed, and it probably still exists in some form. I don't know that it was the love that hurt him, either. I think it was the death of the MaybeLife. Twenty years ago, he saw in her his future—his children, his home, and his forever. He watched himself grow old and die with her by his side. Even though life stepped in and separated their paths, that MaybeLife was still breathing—just a little, until her path shifted just enough to make the MaybeLife completely impossible. There would be no heartfelt reunion, no shared children, no home, no future. Not anymore. Not this time around.

The child that wasn't to be, the friendship that dissolved, the loved one who died so quickly and so soon ... We carry these around in ourselves, and when we're feeling like right bastards, we hold them up against our lives to see what would be different. Would I have more security, would I have joy every day, would I be loved more, touched more, appreciated more?

The time doesn't matter. If it's twenty years later or one year later, you can remember that shift inside of you. That moment that you know in your heart that the marriage isn't going to work, that you're stuck in this goddamned town for a few more years, that that one job would have been it for you if you'd only gotten through the second interview. You can feel the split in your path from what should have been to the unknown, and that

is scary as hell. As a tarot reader, I can tell almost daily how terrifying the unknown is to my clients. As a person, it wakes me up in the middle of the night and leaves me breathless and anxious. What if I'm doing it all wrong? What if I made a mistake?

When you have the comfort of the MaybeLife, you have the comfort of a soft place to land. You know that even if you jacked up all of your life decisions, if the stars align properly and you ask nicely, maybe, *maybe* you'll land back where you were. If not too much time has passed, you can tell yourself that you can pick up where you left off and everything will be fine.

The problem with this thought process is that you are not the same. In *A Hat Full of Sky*, Terry Pratchett wrote, "Why do you go away? So that you can come back. So that you can see the place you came from with new eyes and extra colors. And the people there see you differently, too. Coming back to where you started is not the same as never leaving." You are not the same person that you were, so your rationale behind these decisions shifts as well. (We always forget that part.)

The Five of Cups in tarot is pretty much defined by MaybeLifes. The person is staring intently at the three cups that have spilled and is completely ignoring the two cups behind him. We tend to look back blissfully at the maybes and forget about the arguments in the relationship, the growth that we needed to experience, the choice that seemed *so* clear at the time. Going through that, losing that love, moving forward alone—all of that pain, really—forged us into who we are now. And who we are now is perfect. It's so much closer to the whole self that is waiting down the road.

In this card, I imagine the person crying until their eyelids are swollen. Taking a few deep, shuddering breaths and wiping their nose on their robe. The shoulders go back and the sunlight starts to burn their eyes a little. They've probably got the whiffles (when you cry so hard you can't catch your breath) and won't be

able to stop shaking for a bit. They turn around and nearly walk into the full cups that were behind them. They pick those up, drink deeply from one, and then walk away toward that bridge in the background, carrying the other so carefully to avoid spilling a drop. Walk respectfully away from the past. Drink in the present. Walk so carefully toward your precious future.

The Five of Cups is about regret, sorrow, loss, and pain.

Five of Cups Inverted

I think that the Five of Cups doesn't turn over very easily. It's a process card, so the end of the movement is release and moving on, which would be inverted. One could imagine the three standing cups washing away the past and giving you a new start.

The Sixes: Recognition

We look at the laurels that decorate the Six of Wands and then to the charity witnessed in the pentacles. We see the understanding that one needs to move to safety, as the swords urge us to do, and the moving backward to innocence in the cups. The sixes are all about recognition. Whether being recognized for your successes, seeing your place in the world, folding yester-you into present you, or finding a new home, the sixes want you to be aware of where you are, what you have around you, and what you need to do next. They are present-oriented cards.



Six of Pentacles



This card is about generosity, both spiritual and financial. Can you give without judging? Can you take without feeling humiliated? Can you allow yourself to enter into the ebb and flow of community? I think this card gets a bad rap because people perceive it as “begging.” That’s not really accurate. Long ago (when these cards were made), there were no charity organizations. No United Way. No Human Rights Council. If you were going to give to those who were less fortunate than you, you

did it in two places: in church or in the street. If we take the money aspect away from the pentacles, we can call this generosity—of spirit, of body, of mind. This can be listening to a friend, being a kind and caring lover, helping a child find their lost parent. When you give of yourself, that’s the Six of Pentacles. Money is in there, too, but money is just a tool. It’s what you do with it that’s important.

Six of Pentacles Inverted

Falling into debt is like stealing from future-you. When you take from yourself, you're promising yourself and your family a more difficult future. I don't think that a lot of people see it like this, which is why debt is so common. Stealing from other people eats a little bit of you away. Anytime you diminish the light of another human being, you diminish your light as well.

Six of Swords

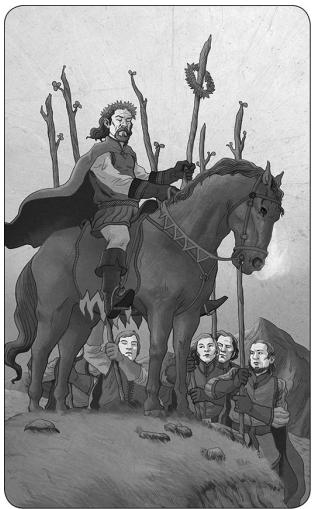


Water has an important role in this card. The passengers are ferrying themselves and their belongings across a river from rough water to smooth. They are determined to make a change in their lives and are *not* going back. They have recognized what isn't working in their lives and have accepted it and, in accepting, have created the opportunity for change. Good for them. They are going from rough waters to smooth—literally. Look at the figures in the front, hunched over and covered in blankets. The swords are acting as a shield for them. They're protected in the back by the man who is rowing them to safety. They are pointed toward new opportunities and growth—and they just need to keep going.

Six of Swords Inverted

Stuck, stuck, stuck. The thing that keeps us from moving into the future is usually baggage we're dragging around from the past. Let it go. It no longer serves you, and it's getting in your way and keeping you from seeing what the world has in store for you. It's exhausting and a waste of time. Move on.

Six of Wands



In this card, you can see that the guy is above all others. Literally. He's got two laurel wreaths and his horse is all decked out. He's sitting so straight and tall—this reminds me of Veterans Day parades. Our heroes are being honored for their service and appreciated for their hard work and sacrifice. This card is optimism, hope, and excitement. This isn't always such a noble card, but it has that element of "Look what I've done. See my accomplishments." Self-confidence, a little bit of swagger, and a whole lot of pride. This card is similar to the Chariot, but instead of a private version of "You're the Best," this is very public. It looks as if the person is being welcomed home. One of the things that I always notice with this card is that he's still moving—he's not finished yet. The horse is going on, so this is just a stop on the way to his goal. I think that the most successful people never stop setting goals for themselves. There is always something more to accomplish.

Six of Wands Inverted

Sometimes people become so full of themselves that it's all they can think or talk about. I think that we all fall prey to this instinct throughout our lives, but some people decide to swim around in it until their fingers get all pruney. This card reversed speaks of a lack of confidence that's expressed in either diffidence or arrogance. Either way, it's a warning to keep an eye out for the greater good and spend less time looking in the mirror.

Six of Cups



My kids made it to age nine with some magic intact. They still believed in Santa and the tooth fairy. I'm sure I'll get some "don't lie to your kids" feedback, but I will graciously ignore it. I've got two kids under the age of twelve that I had to talk to about some schoolchildren being shot in their own classrooms. We've discussed natural disasters, car accidents, the fact that their uncles weren't allowed to get married, disease, divorce, death of loved ones and poor Charlie

Bear the dog having to be "put down" (and what that meant).

All of that and more (seat belts, strangers, germs, and uncertainty) I've walked through with these two. I've told them that I get frightened, too, and that I hurt sometimes, too, hoping that they will see me rise up and that I'll be a good example. I've told them that I don't know why bad things happen, that I hope that there is a heaven or something like it, and that I absolutely believe in Santa, the Easter Bunny, and the tooth fairy. And I do, even as I act in their stead.

It isn't about lying, I think, as much as allowing them to believe in magic. I had them—magic. The people in our lives are there—magic. The fear and pain of part of your body falling out being rewarded with a shiny coin—well, that's just tangible magic, isn't it?

And so, the Six of Cups. I think that silliness, joy, radiating happiness, and nostalgia live here. Drinking out of the garden hose, leaving out cookies and milk, lifting your feet when you drive over railroad tracks (so you don't lose your love!)—all of these things are a defense against the seemingly unending barrage of things that might bruise your soul. It's about embracing the joy of being a child, even as a thirty-eight-year-

old. Or a sixty-eight-year-old. It's about holding tight to magic because that is the counterbalance to all the other things that are so terribly serious and heavy. And, honestly, couldn't we all do with some more magic and joy in our lives?

Six of Cups Inverted

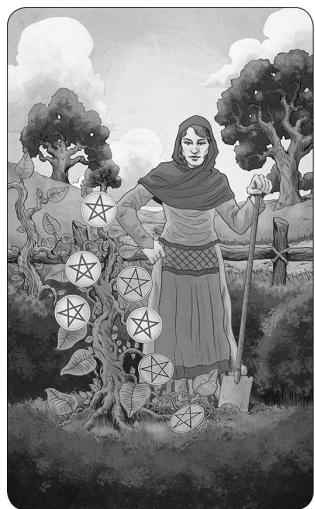
There is a point, however, when you need to put childish things aside. Not forever, and not entirely, but you can't live your whole life drinking from the Six of Cups. Immaturity and complete naïveté. I get this card a lot from people who seem to have frozen their college memories and frame every new experience with them. That was their best self, in their opinion, and they're constantly trying to live up to who they used to be. It's pretty sad, actually, and hopefully when you see it, you can help people see where they can grow up gracefully in their lives.

The Sevens: Conflict

With the sevens, there is conflict. It ranges from conflicting ideals and morals to fighting or frustration. The sevens are not easy cards. Especially if you're impatient. Each of the sevens says that you don't get what you want just yet. Doesn't matter how long you've wanted it, and it doesn't matter how close it appears to be. What matters is why you want it and how hard will you work for it.



Seven of Pentacles



This is the story of the Little Red Hen. The hen planted the seeds, hoed the ground, weeded the garden, tended it, watered it, and then ... waited for it. This card is about hard work and waiting for that work to become something tangible. It's exhausting and annoying for those who are impatient. It's fulfilling and enchanting for those who can pace themselves. It reminds me of the Amanda Palmer song "In My Mind." She sings about waiting until she's older so she'll carefully look after things. Now she's so busy that she can't look at anything. But she's sure she'll look when she is older.

Seven of Pentacles Inverted

Not really the card of procrastination, but close. More the card for the Little Red Hen's buddies. They didn't want to help with any of the work but really wanted some of the reward. When this card comes up, people need to think about the long term instead of the short term.

Seven of Swords



Oh, such a big liar. Honestly. If you look at the card, the guy is sneaking away with something that clearly doesn't belong to him. It could be someone stealing back something from the person that took it from them. But how often does that happen? I don't think that all lies are bad. There are some lies that we tell to protect ourselves or others. These aren't bad lies, inherently. I think that the lies that start to corrode us are the ones we use to protect ourselves from ourselves. Makes sense, right?

Why is it bad? If you're not a follower of Judeo-Christian ethic, it's not a sin, so who cares, right? I think that *we* should care. I don't think I'm being overdramatic here, but I strongly feel like lying chews on your soul. One of the reasons we're on this planet is to seek the truth. Whether that be faith or science, friendship or love, our true calling or our true gifts. Anything that deviates from the truth is bad. Are you working a job you hate? You feel bad. Are you with a person you don't like? Your relationship sucks. It works as a disease, in the truest sense. Dis-ease—it makes your soul become ill at ease if you wander too far from your truth.

So this guy is sneaking off with the swords, with a big, shit-eating grin on his face. But what's this? Back in the corner of the card? In most Basic decks, there is a group of men with swords and spears cresting the hill. In the Llewellyn deck, our Sneaky Pete is rappelling down the cliff, and I have to think that those same men are waiting at the bottom of the cliff for him. The action of stealing is so completely brazen in this card. Seems like he's going to get busted in just a few minutes. What's done in the dark will come to light, and even if it doesn't happen right away, the truth will come out. Even if no one else saw his lie, he

knows. His soul is going to get a pretty good ding on it. I think that we lie to protect ourselves from ourselves when we don't want to have hard conversations (breaking up), when we are afraid to fail (never leaving this awful job), and when we are certain we can do what we want with other people and remain untouched (cheating). We don't want to have these hard conversations because it's easier to buy the bullshit that we're serving up.

Seven of Swords Inverted

We're not looking at the truth with the Seven of Swords inverted; we're looking at dishonesty pointed inward. You tell yourself you're stupid, ugly, not worth anything, and then you believe it. And a cage starts to grow around your self-esteem. With every lie you point at yourself, you restrict your grace. Even if it's not an abusive lie, even if it's a lie that puts you in a better light than you should be at the moment, when you don't reach the expectation that your lie has created, it will all come crashing down.

Even worse, though, is damage and disease that we do to ourselves. We hold ourselves back. We impede our progress to the truth. We save ourselves in the short term, only to suffer in the long term. If we loved ourselves the way we should, I suspect there would be a lot less dis-ease floating around than there is now. Of course, if we loved ourselves the way we should, I wouldn't ever have any readings to do.

Seven of Wands



The Seven of Wands is about taking a stand. Drawing a line in the sand. Standing on your own two feet. Choosing a metaphor. The man is at the top of a hill, so he's worked hard to get there. All of those attacking him are beneath him. It's unclear whether they're trying to knock him down or are just being a pain in the ass. If you look at the bottom left corner of the Basic card, it looks like he's right next to the edge of a drop-off. So his stance there is tenuous, and he's got to concentrate.

It's all about context. It can mean either being confident or bringing the pain.

In readings, this card comes up for a few different reasons. Tenacity is always present but in different ways. The softest meaning is that you're literally working your way to the top. You've got your goal in sight and you're doing what you need to take care of it. Next, you are having to defend your goal or your path. Someone is questioning you or doubting you, and they don't care whether you fail—in fact, they might be invested in seeing you fail. The challenge is now coming from outside rather than within. This change in motivation might affect how you carry yourself.

Now it gets interesting. This isn't just a challenge to your ideals; this is someone actively interfering with your life. It's rarely as straightforward as someone getting in your way. It's usually sneaky or annoying, but the other person's goal is to knock you off track. This comes up a lot in readings in which a sibling, a close friend, or another family member is tossing roadblocks in your way. This is annoying but sometimes works. Sometimes it's easier to acquiesce than to ruffle feathers and cause problems. Here's where it gets serious: again, cards

change their meanings slightly depending on the question, position of the card, etc. Wands especially don't really have a stock answer.

The serious meaning of this card is that someone is threatening you or your loved ones. I think that people forget that we have a fierce nature. "You may not" is a sentence that I don't hear often enough. You may not treat me like this. You may not bring that negativity into my life. You may not touch me. That's a *no*.

This card is not only about being brave and deciding how far is too far but also about deciding what kind of life you want to have. Do you want to allow toxic people into your space? Do you want to permit people to treat you like garbage? Sometimes it's worth ruffled feathers to say no. Sometimes you have to, or your goal shifts and your road becomes strange and untenable. Then you have to fight to reclaim the distance you've lost. Sometimes you have to square your shoulders and tell someone to get the hell out of your face, and there doesn't have to be any politeness about it.

Seven of Wands Inverted

Where the right-side up version of this card is you kicking the world's ass and taking names, the reversed is the world getting even with you. You are vulnerable, a target, whether you show the vulnerability by keeping your head down and your opinions to yourself or by being victimized by others. Again, it's a continuum. Whether you make yourself small or whether the world does, the results are the same. Head bowed, defeated.

Seven of Cups



Sometimes our fantasies feel safer than reality. Sometimes it's easier to imagine what would happen if you stood up for yourself, if you had a better job, a better relationship, etc., than actually doing the work to make these things manifest. A less lazy perspective is that visualization leads directly to manifestation. The trick is to step out of the wistfulness and take action before you lose the impetus to try. It's easier to wish than try, but it's the trying that makes things happen.

Seven of Cups Inverted

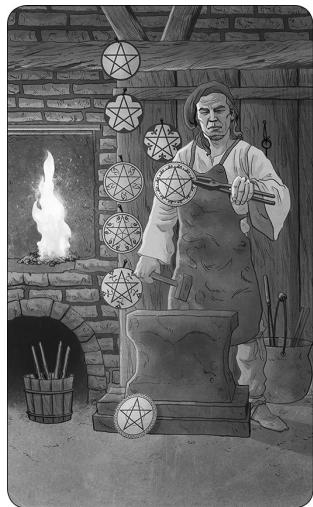
Let's take this information and twist it a bit. What if we still want the treasure but don't want to put in the effort and don't want to leave it as a fantasy? We would absolutely try an easier, sneakier way, right? Maybe we lie, pretend, or scheme to get what we want. Yikes.

The Eights: Hope

The eights are an interesting bunch. The pentacles are talking about hard work and investing in yourself for a better future, and the wands are similar, telling you to choose the best path and pour yourself into it. The cups and swords are fairly bleak, though. While the pentacles and wands are in the midst of hope and determination, the other two are occurring in the moment before the hope kicks in. There is still confusion, still unsurety, but the person is *this close* to getting that spark. Again, if we look at the tarot cards as potentially kinetic, we look to what is actually happening in the reading. That moment when you raise your hand up to be helped up. The moment when you decide it's time to go, pain or no. Those are the moments in time that keep our hearts lifted.



Eight of Pentacles



The Eight of Pentacles comes up a lot in readings for people who have just found a new job or started college or a training program. This is a person who is honing their craft. I love it when it comes up for artists or those in a healing profession. It's about finally finding your path and working your tail off to succeed at it. When you look at the card, you see the successfully made pentacles hanging on the wall and one on the ground discarded. This card is about being discerning about your own work and not giving up until you get it right.

Eight of Pentacles Inverted

If you take this drive and direction and turn it upside down, you get a whole lot of nothing. No hard work. No eye on the ball. No goals or vision for the future. *Nada*. Just spinning your wheels and expecting to go somewhere.

Eight of Swords



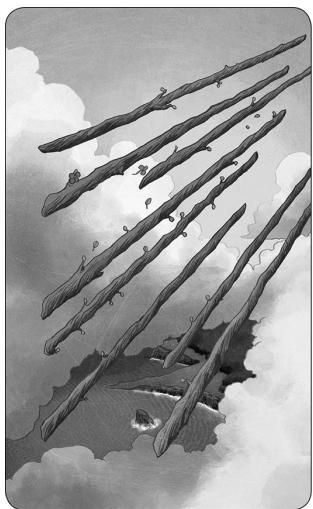
This woman is surrounded by swords. Her hands are bound, and she's blindfolded. But her feet are free. If she is careful, and if she can conquer her fear, she can walk right out of that cage. She will likely be cut and bleeding when she's out, but she'll finally be free, and it will be worth it. The fear is the thing. It's all-consuming and paralytic. This card is about being trapped by your own anxiety and allowing anxiety to direct your life. It's a pretty serious card, as most of the time no one on the outside can see what the big deal is. To the woman standing amidst the swords, though, the fear is everything.

The anxiety she feels in this bleak landscape is stronger than any chain that could hold her, and only she can let the anxiety go.

Eight of Swords Inverted

Inverted, we're talking about release. I always think of a bird flying out of a cage. No matter how pretty that cage is, it's still a cage. This card comes up in readings after someone has left a bad marriage, ended a toxic friendship, or found a better job. It's also about releasing those restrictions we hold on ourselves inside. One of the most beautiful moments I saw this card was in a reading for a mother whose daughter had just come out as gay. After considerable internal conflicts, the mother realized that she loved her daughter no matter what. This card showed her how free that decision made her.

Eight of Wands



The Eight of Wands catches that moment of release that feels like spring to me. There is so much potential surrounding that time of year. The burdens and troubles of the Seven of Wands are put to rest, and the potential for new growth is upon us.

There is a parable that speaks about a farmer who scatters seed on the ground. Some of the seeds landed on a path, and some were eaten by birds. Some seeds fell on poor soil and couldn't grow the roots they needed.

Some seeds were choked by thorny weeds. But some seeds—ah, yes—some of them grew.

There has to be some kind of hope attached to the season of growing. You can feel the bubbling up of new life and see signs of growth poking up through the snow. This is the Eight of Wands to me. Not achieving your goals, but starting them. Being brave and tossing your seeds in the air. Some of them will fail. This is true. Sometimes you will start and become frustrated and disheartened, but if you don't give up, you'll grow.

I gave a reading recently to a person who gave it “one last shot.” She’d been beat down by so many things—love, loss of employment, financial troubles, and death of those she loved. She was so dispirited, so sad. I saw that things were picking up quickly, and she said that she’d decided to move, to change her surroundings, and possibly (hopefully) to change her fate. And she did! Everything was finally going in the direction she needed, so that she could grow as well.

I used to say “overwhelming choices” when I saw this card, but I think I was off a bit. The Eight of Wands is about choices, yes, but instead of too many choices, it’s about being aware of the paths that you can take. You can do anything, go anywhere. You

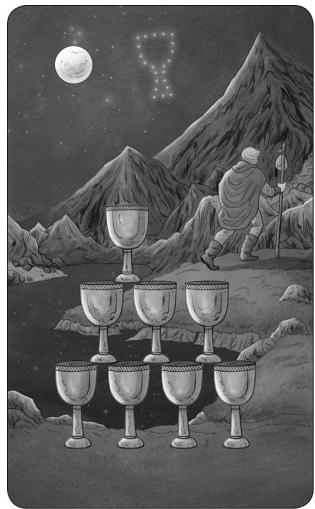
can succeed and fail and discover and laugh and sob and grow and fall down—these are all possible, and it's glorious, really, if you sit and think about it.

When I look at this card now, I think of the Bible story about casting seeds on the ground. Some will grow, some will burn in the sun, some will be eaten by birds, and some will fall into the rocks. But listen—some will *grow*. Isn't that worth it? When this card comes up in a reading, it's about moving quickly toward a goal. Clarity, speed, and good intent come with this card.

Eight of Wands Inverted

Not so much *hopeless* as just no. You can have plans, but there will be some serious Murphy's Law action with them. This card comes up when you run into significant obstacles on the way to a goal. Best to plan around them.

Eight of Cups



I call this the hangover card. It's true, but it can be broadened to include overdoing it in other ways, like being a tyrant at work, being a party girl when you should be home, etc. It's kind of the morning-after, walk-of-shame card. You've somehow walked away from the important truths in your life and have to shake your head to knock the cobwebs out. It's a card that happens just before the client asks for redemption. There is nothing at all wrong with playing video games. There is *so* much wrong with using video games to escape your marriage, parenting duties, or you know ... life. It seems that vices are vices, not because they are inherently bad for us but because too much of them is terrible for us. You can have one drink but not twenty. I could go on and on, but the main point is that moderation is the key.

Eight of Cups Inverted

What if you have the desire to escape but nothing specific to attach to? Eh. Drifting. Your life becomes meh. You lose hope and direction and just kind of wander around. Very sad, actually. This happens to clients a lot after two things: a huge life change (graduation, marriage, new job) or a tragedy. We don't seem to know what to do with ourselves sometimes.

The Nines: Burgeoning

The nines are about maturing. Even the direst of the nines, the swords, is about awareness. Awareness isn't always comfortable. It can make you see that your beloved relatives are bigots or that your marriage isn't always a marriage. Becoming aware is helpful in the cups (appreciating what you have) or in the pentacles (appreciating your harvest). The wands are waking you up to challenges to your moral core. When you grow up, your values change and your perception shifts. It's important to grow along with those changes or we run into trouble. The nines are essentially about becoming awake to the world around you—to the present. It's a wonderful thing.



Nine of Pentacles



Look at the woman's right hand—it's lightly resting above a pentacle as she admires a pretty bird on her left. There is no avarice here. There is no insecurity. There is a woman at peace in her garden. Breathing. It's lovely, really. This card speaks to gratitude and confidence. It's about treating yourself as well as you treat the people you love, and it's the result of hard work and perseverance. This is the bounty that the Seven of Pentacles was working so hard to uncover. The fruits of the perfectionism of the Eight of Pentacles.

Nine of Pentacles Inverted

You can work too much. You can become overeager in your financial commitments and severely limit your financial success. The balance here is working hard, but remember what you're working for. If you spend eighty hours in the office weekly to be sure your kids have a great life, you're depriving those kids of your presence. Most kids would rather have a parent than an Xbox.

Nine of Swords



The first question I ask when I see this card is “Why aren’t you sleeping?” This is about anxiety and sleeplessness. A pain in your stomach, a wrinkle on your forehead. All of these things come with the Nine of Swords. Your mind is too full, your troubles seem vast and unmanageable, and you just can’t put them down. Anxiety comes when we can’t control the outcome of something. What if I have a disease? What if they don’t love me? What if I fail? The uncontrolled dizziness that comes while we’re spinning around, trying to figure out what our life will look like. It’s exhausting yet keeps us from sleep.

Nine of Swords Inverted

When you read reversals, please be sure that you don't just assume that they're the opposite of the reading. Sometimes they're a deepening of the upright card, and that's the case in the Nine of Swords. This is the card for depression. Not sadness —*depression*. Essentially, the anxiety of the Nine of Swords has turned over, the swords on the wall are falling, and there is pain and hopelessness.

Nine of Wands



The Nine of Wands reminds us to protect ourselves. We need time to heal, we need to reassess who we can trust, and we need to gather our resources after we've had the bejeezus kicked out of us. We also need to keep an eye to those who truly have our backs, because that's a gift that needs attention and gratitude.

The wands are so reliant on the question asked, the person asking, and the placement of the card. This man has obviously just been through it. Did he deserve the tail-kicking he received? Maybe. All it did, though, was set his mind more firmly on his objectives. Another question that comes up is who did the thumping. Did he do this to himself with self-destructive behavior? Was it a sneak attack, or was he too trusting? Perseverance is one meaning of this card. He's not budging. You can tell that he's tired and that he's sore, but he's *not bloody moving*. And he's daring anyone to try to make him. I get this a lot with people who are chronically ill and are still trying to maintain a lifestyle that makes them happy. The disease isn't going to change them, not if they can help it.

Another meaning is protecting oneself. He's obviously been attacked, and now he's ready. Unless inverted, our man has support. Some of his braveness is coming from his friend's hand on his back. Some of the strength is being willed to him ... gifted to him. And he's accepting and is stronger for it.

Nine of Wands Inverted

What if you build a fort but no one is attacking you? What if your defenses never go down, even though it's been years since you were last attacked? This card inverted speaks to paranoia and being incredibly defensive. A question I often ask when this card appears is "Why are you being so defensive if no one is attacking you?" The answer is usually habit. Sometimes people get so beaten down by life or by other people that they keep their dukes up long after the threat has passed. That's okay, because dropping your defenses all at once makes you feel vulnerable. When it's not okay, though, is when it keeps you from living your life.

Nine of Cups



If the man seated in this card could speak, he would say, "You know, I don't even have to look over my shoulder to count my blessings. I'm certain of them. I know that even if one cup falls and spills, the other eight will be enough to sustain me, and I will fill the fallen cup back to the brim as soon as I'm able. I am grateful. I am joyful. I am satisfied with life and with my place in it."

When we talk about the nines, the awareness goes to all corners of our life. This includes happiness, when everything is okay. I feel very strongly that when you are grateful for what you have, the universe gives you more to be grateful for. Not stuff, necessarily, but good people, a safe home, and, you know, enough. This card is not about being rich or a having big, puffy shirt. This card is about being satisfied and having enough. And even more so, it's about being grateful for what you've got.

Nine of Cups Inverted

If you turned this card upside down, the guy wouldn't be sad about the water/love/emotion flowing out of the cups. He'd be grabbing for the golden chalices and trying to shove them in his pockets. It's not the contents but the container that he's interested in. Shallow, greedy, and interested in King Stuff. The problem is, even if he collects all of them, all he's got are empty cups.

Nine and Three-Quarters

I like seeing action in the cards. The Fool is about to jump. The Magician is about to put a hurtin' on something that's in his way. The Queen of Wands is about to get out of her chair and make things happen. And then there are the tens. Bleh.



The Ten of Wands is about to fall. Swords is going to bleed to death. Cups is the breath after the occasion where you start cleaning up and looking for change in the couch. The Ten of Pentacles is just so saturated with stuff that it's as boring as watching paint dry. I think that the sweet spot in tarot is just between the nines and the tens—nine and three-quarters, to be precise. Thank you, J. K. Rowling, for narrowing down precisely where magic begins.

In the nines, you have the feeling of wanting—needing—in each suite. The tens are a form of completion. Nine and three-quarters means you're nearly to your goal, but you're still moving. I don't like the complacency that comes with the Ten of Cups. It's very reminiscent of the hopelessness of the Ten of Swords. There has to be something to strive for to make anything worth doing. Resting on your laurels is only going to result in crumpled laurels. Or something equally as deep.

The nine card in the major arcana is the Hermit. The ten is the Wheel of Fortune. That deep breath before adventure. Centering

yourself before tackling a big change. All of his momentum and potential surrounds you. It kind of feels like spring, doesn't it?

When you get the nines in readings, share the excitement with the client. When you get the tens, ask where they're headed next. This is the deep breath before performance; between nine and ten is perfection. Here's the thing: there is something about the space between nine and ten in the tarot that achieves perfection. It's that moment after everyone opens their holiday presents and sits around enjoying each other. It's lying in bed with your sweetheart, not speaking but playing with each other's hands. It's holding hands without thinking about it. The tens are excessive. The nines can be worrisome. Nine and three-quarters (or what I think the Happy Squirrel card is) is lovely.

The Tens: Excess

The tens are just overdone. So much. How flipping long can you stand and wave at a rainbow? What happens after that? The tens remind me of self-differentiation. They are all about having a poorly differentiated self and carrying around other people's nonsense and drama.

Self-differentiation is the act of developing your own sense of self so fully that other people's opinions, emotions, or approval don't cause you to change or adjust how you think or behave. That if people don't like you or what you're about, you can hear them and then go on your merry way. Sounds easy, right? Not so much, turns out. It also includes being able to share your opinions without unduly pressuring others to change their minds or actions to match yours. Even if you disagree. *Especially* if you disagree.

When I was dating, I tried to date like it was the 1950s, without the misogyny. I met some really nice people and had a great time. After a kind of disappointing second date, however, I had



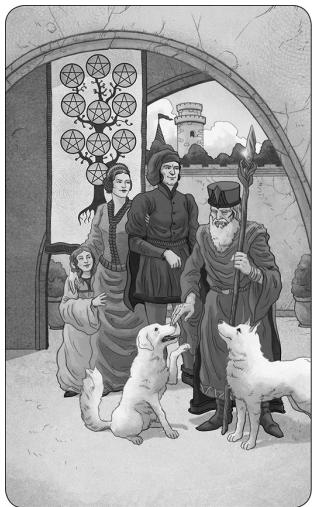
to make that call that everybody hates making. The “It’s not you, it’s me” thing. Blergh. I had to call a really nice man and tell him that there were no butterflies and that I didn’t think we should see each other again. And that it was nice to meet him, etc. And it sucked, and he was gracious, and then I may have cried a little bit afterward because I hate hurting people’s feelings. Then, the very next day? I got that call from another guy I was dating. Well, I got a text. (Hmm.) Basically the same thing: you’re very nice and I had fun, but I don’t see a long-term potential here.

A while ago, that would have devastated me. Seriously, I would have been wondering what I’d done, if I’d behaved poorly, if I’d said something stupid or smelled funny, or if I could have changed something about me to make him OMG PLEASE LIKE ME! Yeah, that didn’t happen. I was a bit disappointed because I liked this guy, but I realized that it was just like the phone call that I had to make. It truly wasn’t me; it was him. It was no butterflies, no chemistry whatsoever, and I wasn’t going to carry that responsibility around, because in order to change the outcome, I’d have to change myself. And if I’m honest? I really like myself these days, so that ain’t happening.

You can be empathetic without owning someone else’s tragedy. You can be compassionate without carrying their hurt around with you. You can cause people to be disappointed because you act one way and not another. You can be okay with that disappointment because it doesn’t belong to you. You can learn to listen to someone’s anxiety without being anxious yourself, and you can absolutely hear “It’s not you, it’s me” and believe it.

So the tens—they’re a lot. A lot more than people need, for sure.

Ten of Pentacles



This is about sharing your wealth, and there is a lot of wealth. Whether it's emotional or spiritual wealth, you have it in abundance and are more than willing to share. It's about inheritance, financial stability, and charity. There is a lot of family legacy in this card. It's not always money that gets graciously passed on.

Pentacles are generally about patterns in your life. The Ten of Pentacles is usually a pattern you didn't design and indicates being unable or unwilling to separate the opinions and needs of others from those that are truly yours. You can't see the tree for the forest, I suppose. It's good to be part of the forest. Even arguments need to come from a place of love. This isn't about separating ourselves from other people or dismissing them or their opinions. It's about being among people without basing your emotional health or well-being on them. That's a load that they don't need to carry, although it seems like a lot of people want to these days.

Ten of Pentacles Inverted

Imagining the card upside down, you can see all of those pentacles falling away. If the pentacles represent money, relationships, and security, you can see what this means pretty clearly. Loss is here. Loneliness is here. Financial stress—even devastation.

Ten of Swords



This is just the worst damn card. Honestly. The best thing that you can say when this card shows up is that at least things won't get any worse. This is literally the bottom. It's excessive, painful, excruciating, and final. So in the card, the guy is flat on the ground. Ten swords are stuck in him. Not near or around, but *in* and *through*. There isn't just ill intent around this card, there are goddamned flesh wounds. Let's not take this too lightly, right?

Is he dead? I hope so. If he isn't, he's awfully uncomfortable. Let's think about what death means in the tarot. The Death card means change is coming whether you like it or not. The Ten of Swords can mean literal death, but it more often refers to the person hitting rock bottom. In this way, I see it as a positive card.

The weight of it all is that the missteps, the mistakes, and the powerless feelings have won, and he is down. This isn't always self-inflicted. Sometimes he's been attacked. The doubt, though—that comes from within. The swords are all about your brain, remember. It's one thing for someone to call you a name; it's another entirely for you to believe it and take it into you. That saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me"? That's not true. Not at all. Most of the time when this card comes up in a reading, I can hear what the client is doing to themselves in their head, and it's scary. People can be so mean to themselves, so abusive. If a stranger on the street said those things to me—"You're stupid, you're weak, you're a coward, you're ugly, you're worthless"—I would probably punch them in the fork. However, we're so quick to say those things to ourselves. We are unable at times to self-differentiate and to tell the difference between someone's opinion and the truth. It's

hard, and oftentimes we're taught to listen to the criticism and take it into us. Ouch, Mom and Dad. Quit doing that to your kids. Teach them to question everything, please. Even you sometimes.

I keep seeing all of these motivational memes that say, "Get up! You only fail if you stay down! You can do it! Yay!!" There are a lot of exclamation marks, and it's kind of patronizing. Of course, I am not advocating digging a hole and then setting up house in it, but there is some value in recognizing that life just kicked your ass and you need a minute. Those saccharine-sweet quotes (I saw one that said, "If Plan A doesn't work, the alphabet has 25 more letters") can be condescending and abrasive and—when I'm not feeling my best—can cause me to tell my computer to shut its stupid face.

If you're flat on your face, you should probably just lie there for a second and catch your breath. It's not going to get any worse, and if your luck has driven you to the ground, you're in no condition to go anywhere. I think that a lot of people feel they can't stay in depression for too long or they're a failure. That's not fair. Sometimes depression is a soft place to land so that you can heal and grow stronger and carry on.

I think rather than embracing the "You're a failure if you don't get up" ethos, maybe we can accept that wounds need healing. That sometimes everything really does suck and you need to lie down on your couch and watch all of *Broad City* while eating boxes of cereal. (That's not a typo. I said boxes.) Sometimes you need to whine and cry and tell your friends that everything is awful—because sometimes everything is awful. This is valid.

I do not recommend staying in this place for more than, say, two weeks. (And I'm not talking about clinical depression. What I'm talking about is different.) I would give yourself two weeks to pout and be pissed and sad and apathetic. This is the perfect time to assess what you're going to do next—what you're going to try in order to avoid this feeling in the future, to decide what you want, to figure out how to make tomorrow different than

today. If I were to sum up the Ten of Swords (which, evidently, I'm about to do), I would say, "Stay down!" You're down there for a reason. Figure out what it is, and then have a nap, okay?

Ten of Swords Inverted

Oh, it's still terrible. Just like, post-nap terrible. At least you got some rest so you can stand up and learn how to deal with all of the terrible.

Ten of Wands



The Ten of Wands shows a person carrying a huge bundle of sticks. This bundle can be stress, obligation, fear, hate, resentment, actual sticks ... any number of things. Their back is sometimes bent, head down, and you can tell that in a few more steps, they'll drop everything or fall. Not only is the person carrying too much, they're carrying it improperly. There is no healthy version of this journey.

I'll bet that it's not all his, though. I'll bet that some of that is the worry/drama/stress of his partner, his kids, his coworkers, his boss, his friends, his family, his neighbors, etc. I'll bet that a lot of it has to do with worrying that he'll disappoint people. Worry that he's going to let someone down or make them angry or lose someone because he's not willing to shift to their point of view. But look what he's doing instead. He is holding so many things—so poorly, I might add—that he can't see the ground in front of him and he's fixin' to fall flat on his ass. How disappointed will the others be when you let their burdens fall to the ground along with your own? And not seeing the ground in front of you—that's a big deal. If you can't see, if you're relying on the input and insight of others to show you the road, it's not yours anymore. You're walking the path of others and your joy is not going to be at the end of it. It's not authentic. It's not for you. And neither is most of the crazy that we carry around with us.

This story is a great example of the Ten of Wands. This is a Buddhist story, and can be found in the book *Zen Shorts* by Jon Muth:

A young woman waited in front of deep, muddy puddles. She couldn't cross without getting mud on her clothes, and she

scolded her servants, who had their hands full with heavy packages, for not helping her. A passing monk picked her up and carried her across the mud. To the surprise of his companion, not only did the woman not thank her helper, she shoved him out of her way when he put her down. The companion later commented on her rudeness. The helpful monk responded, "I set the woman down hours ago. Why are you still carrying her?"

Why is it so hard to learn this lesson?

The man in the card has everything taken care of. He's handling it. No problem! Except that he can't see the road before him, and he looks so tired and sore. He's carrying so much that he's got to be in that numb, fuzzy state of mind where you nearly forget what you're carrying or where you're going. You just keep plodding along. In a reading, the important questions are these: Who is he carrying this for? Why won't he put it down? Why is he doing this? Why is he carrying them like that—and deliberately blinding himself—instead of figuring out a less stupid way to handle them? Finding out why you've burdened yourself so heavily is a good place to start.

Ten of Wands Inverted

I've carried around enough of these dark emotions to know that they're important and should be respected. Fear is a lifesaver, anger protects us from making mistakes again, hate can burn away excuses that keep us still and silent. These emotions should be validated. But for how long? And how many will you carry?

I've found in giving readings, and in my own life, that a person will sense when it's time to let these things go. You'll feel less heated when you think of the person who wronged you. You'll feel strong instead of small when you're reminded of the past. If this time comes and is ignored, the bright flames of these cleansing emotions are extinguished, and we're left carrying around ashes. Sticky, heavy, blinding ashes.

Old resentments or frustrations, old wounds and fears—I've been letting them go. Or, as my honey says, "Put it down, babe." He's much more Zen than I am, and he sees me carry around this stress and wants me to stop carrying it. Whereas I just accept it as my fate. I found this stick, this is my goddamned stick, and I'll carry it as long as I want, even if it hurts me. Very mature, no? (No.)

It's hard to put down these sticks. It's even harder when you've grown comfortable with their weight. Sometimes being free of something is just as frightening as carrying it around. But, you know ... it's freeing to let go of things that no longer serve you. The reverse of this card is heavy, too, but the chance of release is great.

Ten of Cups



Blessings, celebrations, and wishes coming true. Even though I'm not a huge fan of this card, it's not so bad. It's a great card to have for the short term. The kids are dancing. There's a rainbow. Honestly, it's idyllic.

My problem with the Ten of Cups is that it seems to have a "sitting on your laurels" feel to it. You got everything you wanted! Now what? What are your new goals? Will you share this good energy and fortune? Will you roll this fortune into new ventures? When it comes up in readings, I'm quick to high-five the client, but then we talk about what's coming around the corner. I mean, you can only stare at a rainbow for so long. Gets very boring.

Ten of Cups Inverted

*So close to being happy. If you and your partner are in a good marriage but are refusing to talk about that one *thing* that causes fights all the time. If you're working at a job that you don't believe in. If you are so busy providing for your family that you forget to be *with* your family. These are the near misses of the Ten of Cups inverted.*

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Chapter Six

The Minor Arcana:

Court Cards



The only major difference that I see between the pips and the court cards is that court

cards are less subjective. When I see one in a reading, it's either representing the client or a person in the client's life, or representing how people see the client. That's it. I never, ever see them as anything else. Which seriously makes them less complicated.



The Pages

One of the things that help me remember the court cards is Sigmund Freud's three-part structural model of the psyche. According to Herr Freud, these three parts are the basis of human behavior. This doesn't work perfectly, as there are four court cards and only three structures, but if you leave out the queen, it works out nicely.

In this model, the page is the id. The id is the "youngest" of the three. There is little impulse control, and it's basically a toddler or a teenager, depending on the subject matter. If the three parts were an angel on your shoulder, you, and a devil on the other shoulder, the devil would be the id. The pages lack direction or discretion on occasion, follow instincts instead of logic, and have a touch of innocence that usually lets them get out of trouble. These are not bad cards; there is no ill intent. They are victims of misunderstanding, of moving too quickly, and of not having enough life experience to guide them. The pages live in the present, which is an exceptional, albeit tricky, way to live.

Page of Pentacles



The Page of Pentacles is very thoughtful and introspective and is learning how to be himself. He chooses his friends wisely and finds excellent counsel. He is definitely grounded and is growing up well. This page is just a great, goofy guy. He's physical and takes good care of himself. The energy is light, honest, and really, really genuine. Almost a "gosh and golly gee" innocence. This innocence can turn against him, though, when it slips into immaturity. Romantic, creative, playful, adorable.

Page of Pentacles Inverted

Take all of that “feet on the ground, golly gee” innocence and flip it around, and you get a total space cadet. Can’t keep track of things. Can’t pay attention. The pentacle goes rolling away, and this doofus is chasing after it.

Page of Swords

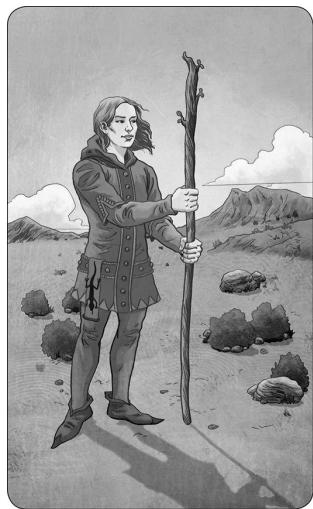


Like all of the pages, there is a huge burst of energy that comes with the Page of Swords—but there is very little direction or experience. He is chatty and curious, he has tons of energy, and his ideas are flying around. They aren't investigated, though, or given much consideration. There is a lot of initiative with this page. He's a sharp kid (*rimshot*). Actually, cheesy idioms will help you remember the Page of Swords: sharp as a tack, razor-sharp intellect, sharp wit, and looking sharp.

Page of Swords Inverted

You can even extend the idioms to the Page of Swords inverted: cross swords; live by the sword, die by the sword; double-edged sword; and falling on your sword.

Essentially, this kid can't hold on to his sword. He's going to cut someone, likely himself. He needs to remember to think before he speaks, to do his research, to stop gossiping, and to be careful of the pointy bits of his speech. Very clever. Sometimes too clever. He's quite sarcastic and can be kind of nasty at times.

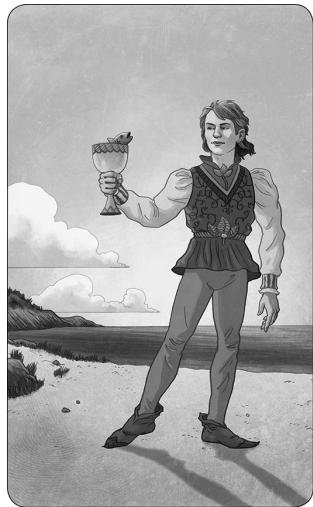


Page of Wands

So earnest, this kid. So earnest. Present, childlike, and full of piss and vinegar, as my grandma would say. He's about opportunity, adventure (cue Indiana Jones theme song), and hope. He's an optimist and a poet, a dreamer and a inventor, an artist and a fiery lover. The Page of Wands is confident, is honest to a fault, is passionate, and will bring you with him. The charisma most often comes across in readings. You believe this guy and get excited about whatever he's excited about. The salamanders on his cloak speak to the fire element that is present in the wands suit. And his sassy orange britches might, too. The Page of Wands is a novice, an apprentice. He's just gotten his wand and doesn't quite know what to do with it yet. He's holding on with both hands, and if he's knocked off course, he's going to drop it and wander around in circles for a bit. He is young and impetuous, but that's not always a bad thing. Creating to create, smiling just to smile. There is an innocence and a fervor that makes this card very appealing. He's playing for himself. He's going to make mistakes, and he's going to stop himself, and drop his wand, and start over again. But he's *moving*. He's moving. And it's beautiful.

Page of Wands Inverted

He's going to drop his stick. He is, and there's nothing we can do about it. Think about the worst parts about being truly grounded. Chin down, feet dragging in the dirt. Complete switch to inertia and depression. While upright our guy is confident and swaggering, inverted he loses his self-esteem. He beats himself up and lashes out at people around him with aggression and nastiness.



Page of Cups

This page is a bit of a dandy in most Basic decks, with big, floofy hats and scarves. In the Llewellyn deck, his hair is flowing in the wind and his outfit is just darling. The ocean behind him is smooth and inviting. He's got a little smile on his face and is giving the fish in his cup a bit of a side-eye. Usually, when a fish pops out of my cup, I'm a bit put out, but this guy loves surprises. He's the card of art and inspiration, of love, lust, and passion. If you can apply those feelings to anything in your life, that's the Page of Cups.

Page of Cups Inverted

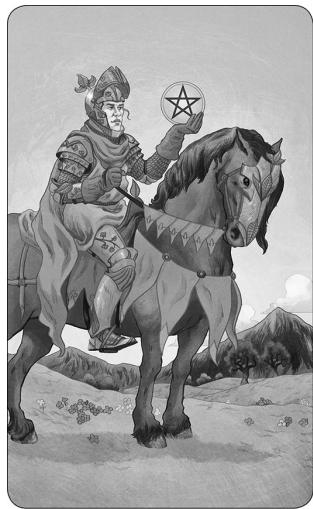
This is no-holds-barred love and affection. Romeo and Juliet—not a love story, kids. This is a story about two people who loved *so hard* that everyone died. They ignored pragmatism, family ties, and common sense, and they dragged the poor friar into it, too. Like the Page of Swords inverted, there is a loss of self-esteem here, too. He flips upside down and his cup empties out. This is the dude shouting up at your window at 4 a.m. like a crazy person. It can also be the worst writer's block ever. All of those ideas that were on fire just go out. This card is exhausting.



The Knights

Getting back to Freud's structural model of the psyche, we have the head in between the angel and devil. Not a risk-taker like the page, but not as stoic as the king. The knights struggle to balance the impulse of the pages with the endurance and sobriety of the kings. As a result, they often lose their balance. I think that because of this balancing act, the knights aren't as consistent with their focus as they could be. At least, not for long. I've often called the knights the frat boys of the tarot. These guys are hyperfocused or super excited but rarely both at the same time.

Knight of Pentacles



This knight isn't as kinetic as the others. He's a bit shy and feels a bit awkward. He feels the best when he's at home. He's smart, thoughtful, and grounded but not the most engaging person in the world.

Grounded, reliable, has to live honorably—he keeps a stiff upper lip and all that. Eyes straight ahead. His horse has all four feet on the ground and is a big, stocky thing, too. This guy isn't afraid of hard work, and he's very considerate and thoughtful. He can be so grounded, though, that it's hard to motivate him or get him to change direction. Even his horse looks bored, with all four feet on the ground.

Knight of Pentacles Inverted

Take the Knight of Pentacles and his big, heavy horse and flip that card upside down. The pentacle rolls away and our knight is pinned to the ground. This is a pretty good image of what we're dealing with. I think about inertia in regard to this. He likes a person but doesn't get off his butt to talk to them. Jealousy brews. He wants his life to be different but, again, won't take the action to change it. He's moody and petty and broody as hell. What a pouter.

Knight of Swords

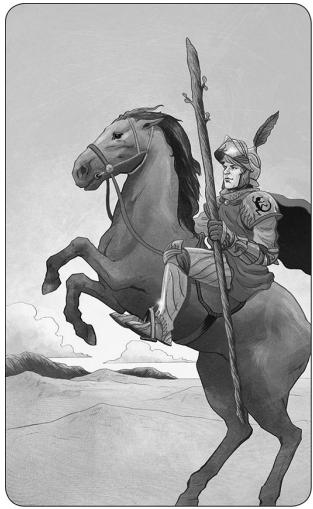


Antsy and on the go. Always in his head. Always moving and challenging himself and others. The horse's hooves *aren't touching the ground*. This guy is the opposite of the Knight of Pentacles. Sword high in the air, armor under his flashy robe—I swear, it's the tarot equivalent of "Come at me, bro!" There is much intellect here but not so much forethought. He will ride his horse (or run his mouth) until he smacks right into a wall, without ever noticing how close the wall is getting to his face. You really do want this dude on your side, though. My friend John said that sometimes you meet people who are so arrogant that you can tell they've never been punched when they deserved it. A good shot in the face will help anyone regain a bit of humility and remember that they're not always the smartest person in the room.

Knight of Swords Inverted

A bit rash. A bit impatient and eager to prove to everyone that he's right, very smart—and impetuous. He's got a big, huge sword and doesn't particularly know how to wield it. He's absentminded and reckless. It's made even worse because he has the resources to succeed, but inverted he can't get it together enough to use those resources.

Knight of Wands



I love this guy. Everyone loves this guy. He's confident, has some swagger, and is ebullient. He's constantly on the go and always seems to have time for everyone. He's kind, compassionate, and engaging. In the Basic deck, he's wearing the fiery salamander, and his armor covers everything but his face. This card is about being bulletproof. The best time for people to attack us is when we don't like ourselves. The Knight of Wands *loves* himself, and the only part of him that is exposed is his face. It's a small bit of vulnerability in an otherwise resilient person. It's also interesting, because the knight is traditionally handsome and a wee bit vain. His horse isn't only on the go, it's rearing back and seems completely impatient. This card in a reading speaks to confidence and growth. It's about moving forward, even if you're unsure of the outcome. Charming, confident, and daring. A fierce friend and passionate even when that passion can get him in trouble. He is strong and smart and makes things happen. He's unpredictable, enthusiastic, and very much like a bear on the loose. He wants, he takes. Someone takes something of his? He goes to get it. The knight is raring to go, and his friends are with him all the way. Some of them may get trampled in a few minutes, but it wasn't on purpose, and to be fair, the knight won't notice for a while, anyway.

Knight of Wands Inverted

“Do you even joust, bro?” Seriously, this is his tagline. He’s driven by his, um, wand. He is impulsive, impetuous, and reckless. He is aggressive and callous. He’s a complete and utter bastard. He is a good, solid person but often gives way to his base impulses before thinking things through. Action, action, action—very little direction.

Knight of Cups



He sits in the quad. Jeans, a white T-shirt, and a worn copy of Vonnegut dangling limply from his hand as he stares out into the distance. He smokes, of course, and his dark hair is tousled and curly. He says hi to you as you pass, but his smile doesn't reach his eyes. He looks sad, and his sadness is on your mind for the *rest of your life*. Dear heavens, does this one make an impact. He is so romantic, I can't even stand it.

Knight of Cups Inverted

Moody. Very moody. Suddenly thrilled, and then just as quickly listening to emo music and wondering why no one understands him. Flip and annoying, and then extremely deep and understanding. Emotion is all over the place, but it's usually genuine and loyal.



The Queens

Grace, mercy, generosity, rage, anger, modesty, and integrity. In a nutshell. The queens are exempt from man's psychic apparatus because they are exempt from masculinity—or what has historically been perceived as masculine. In the tarot, historically and generally we follow gender binaries. With this in mind, regard queens as the mothers of the deck. The hard and the soft. Forgiving and punishing. They are the dichotomies and the simplest cards to understand. They are everything.



Queen of Pentacles

Mother does take care of everyone. Even if taking care of them means isolating them for a while. She does what she can with what she has. I always expect that the Queen of Pentacles is about to slip out of her throne and sit in the grass. She's the quintessential earth mother and is a lovely, warm spirit. She is wealthy, either spiritually or financially (or both). She's nurturing, kind, and a bit strict. She puts us in touch with honesty, home, memories, and family.

Queen of Pentacles Inverted

I keep seeing these articles about moms who spend more time on their phones than they do with their kids. Or people who work seventy hours a week and wonder why their kids aren't speaking to them and their marriage has fallen to pieces. Feeling upended and disconnected? That's this card.

Queen of Swords



She just doesn't give a damn about your motivations or what happens to you because of your actions. She's a big-picture kind of gal, and she cuts away all of the emotion and feeling to get to the point. She's incredibly smart. She's freaky, Mensa-level, intimidating smart. And she really doesn't have the time or patience to mess around with you. She is stern, fair, and has a very sharp tongue. She can be intimidating, but once she's on your side, it's as if you have an army behind you.

She is strong, independent and forthright. A complete badass.

Queen of Swords Inverted

We have a minister in my church who talked about having an inclusive and welcoming environment and that one of the ways to best do that is to “pretend everyone is in the room.” As a great example of this, I have an aunt, with green eyes and blonde hair, who overheard classmates dogging out Native Americans. She got to tell them that she was Native and that they should watch their damn mouths. They were completely shocked. I always think about this. I always wonder how someone would feel if they heard how I was talking about them. Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary?

The Queen of Swords inverted is a nasty card. Full of self-doubt, lack of mental clarity, and bitchiness. Whenever this card comes up in a reading, I caution my clients to think carefully about the words flying out of their mouths. Words are sharp and can cut. They can change someone’s life. They can make someone feel *so* bad about themselves. What you say can have a serious effect on whomever you’re talking about. Words have intent. Even if you get lucky and your gossip doesn’t make it back to its target, guess what? You just spewed all of that negativity into the universe for no good cause. Nice one.

Queen of Wands



The Queen of Wands is funny and warm. Grounded and calm. The cat, the sunflower, and the sprouting wand are all signs of growth and radiant energy. She's friendly and welcoming, and I find she comes up in people with a great sense of humor. She has lots of energy, lots of confidence, and serves up lots of opportunities to laugh your ass off. To laugh till you're crying and your eyes open wide with the lessons you've learned. I see a lot of the Fool in her—that openness and trust that everything is going to be okay. She might not know what okay is going to look like, but she has faith.

Don't be thinking she's a pushover, though. If you mess around, she will ever so gently club you with her pretty wand. Wands are about fire and action, and she won't suffer fools silently. Do you know those women who can look at you, raise an eyebrow, and instantly make you question every decision you've made in the last twenty minutes? This is her. She's not going to shame you, but she's not going to let you act like an ass. She wants you to see the hard truths so she can lend you her strength and lead you through the tough times.

I see the black cat as a sign of her edginess as well. She reminds me a lot of my dad's sisters. The pair of them are strong, funny, and independent. They're mothers, wives, career women, and one of them completed her PhD in between serving our country overseas, holding down a serious military career, and chasing down her personal joy—all while raising four children. That's strength. The other woman raised three children and helped her husband with his military career while working her entire life, and they both have an amazing sense of humor and more grace than I've ever seen in my life. I once saw one of

my aunts dress down two drunks in a bar, and when she finished, they called her ma'am. Yeah. That.

People want to hear what she has to say. She sits straight up on her throne, looking you right in the eyes. She hears your worries and is invested in what you might need. She will also tag you in the back of the head if you're acting like a dumbass, but it's done with love. She might make some missteps, but she'll keep going. She might not be the best at what she does, but she's going to put everything she has into it.

Queen of Wands Inverted

It's about being truly self-serving. Selfish, bitchy, and with a nasty temper. This is one of the cards that I don't read inverted very often, though. Her inherent grace somehow disallows it when I'm doing a reading. Just remember that she's a queen of action and mind your tone around her. Her confidence either pulls inward to shyness or lashes out as aggression. This woman is fierce.

Queen of Cups



The Queen of Cups only has a toe in the water. She is so close to the water—the emotion surrounds her—but she doesn't descend into it or drench herself in other people's emotion. She is often psychic; she is empathetic and kind. She isn't insecure or shallow. She is deep and calm, and is a soothing balm to all who need her assistance. In most Basic decks, her cup is covered! Not only is she not going to spill her emotions, but she's not going to share them easily, either. She will stop to carry a turtle across the road, and she will give a kind word to the sad faces she passes. She will put her heart where her mouth is.

Queen of Cups Inverted

She can sometimes come apart if you push her, though, and she holds grudges. She's really insecure and holds on to the people around her with fingers so tight her knuckles go white. There is no kind of insecurity like emotional insecurity. It makes you so tender and vulnerable and easy to break.



The Kings

The kings are the realization of the goals of the rest of the court, from the fresh starts of the pages, to the action of the knights, to the nurturing of the queens. The kings pull us forward and sit us down. They are caretakers and wave makers. They are solid and reliable and trustworthy. The kings are the grown-up version of the rest of the suit. The king is the superego in Freud's apparatus. The superego is a hard-core moral compass. The needle doesn't even wiggle on this. There is no gray, only black and white. So the kings can be kind of difficult to deal with. There is no imagination that isn't backed up by hard facts. You don't go halfway. Ever.

King of Pentacles



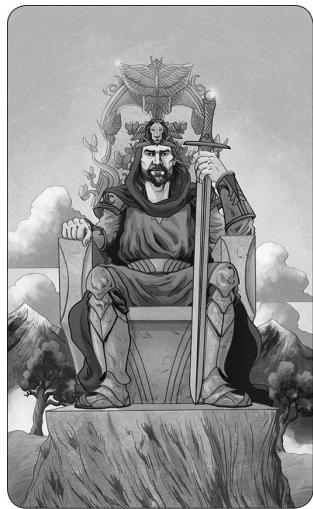
This king is a bit conservative. He is grounded, centered, and unquestionably in charge. He doesn't need to shout or wave his arms around to get attention. He pretty much just has to enter a room because he has an intense presence. He has a very strong work ethic and is easy to respect. He is strong and quiet and hard to forget.

There is a cool thing about the suit of pentacles. They're about being grounded. You can imagine the pentacles being on the ground and helping you align with your surroundings. Being one with the land. The King of Pentacles is respected and loved by his people and family.

King of Pentacles Inverted

If you are *too* grounded, however, you miss things. You spend so much time looking at where you are that you forget to look up and see what's going on around you. You can have a lot of honor but can still be as dumb as a box of hair when it comes to intrigue. A very interesting character but, unfortunately, too stuck to see what is going on around him.

King of Swords

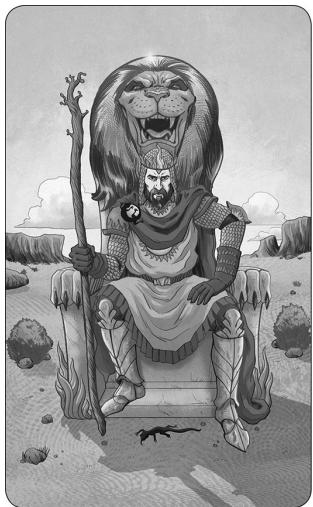


Politically, a king is not someone you choose. He's given to you—even imposed on you. He is a positive figure, however, as it is his job to keep the kingdom running. Part of this is being sure that everyone has food to eat. Another part is throwing down for anyone you're responsible for. A good king should do both with equal enthusiasm. Think of how kings use their swords: to knight their comrades and to execute their foes. There is a balance here. This king is very similar to Justice. He is very fair, and emotion doesn't enter into his decisions very much. If you look behind his throne, though, you can see a dense fog bank. In other Basic decks, you'll see the tiniest stream of water behind him. Both are indicators of the tiniest bit of give-a-damn that he holds for you and your feelings. He is the judge or the policeman. He is intelligent, quick, and sometimes very judgemental. John Wayne. For real. His way or the highway. "Fill your hand, you son of a bitch!"

Kind of Swords Inverted

You can always tell when someone is a true leader. When a true leader speaks, his people don't wince. The inverted King of Swords is terrifying, manipulative, sinister, and abusive.

King of Wands



The page, knight, and queen show the process of learning how to handle your business. The King of Wands is the pinnacle of control. It's all coming from him. He's sitting casually, leaning forward and staring at you. No pressure. He is the instigator. The fire is difficult to manage in the other cards, but not with the king. With the king, the fire is inside of him, and he controls the burn.

I always think that the King of Wands is just about to stand up. He's sitting forward, backed by lions; he has a lizard at his feet (speed, surety) and the fire salamanders on his throne (action). He has flames on his crown and a fiery orange robe, and his hands are clenched. He looks like he's about to jump up and kick some ass, possibly also taking some names in the process. This card captures the energy of the wands suit—action, passion, and getting things done—with the focus and confidence of a king. His wand is a step ahead of him, which is how his mind works. He's an artist, a passionate lover, and an idea man. You know those people who walk into a room and the other people in it automatically make room for them? There is a very subtle hush in the room as everyone takes measure of the new person, and everyone is wondering who they are and how they *did* that. That's this guy. He's probably not a rock star (that's the page or knight), but he's the very successful manager of the rock star.

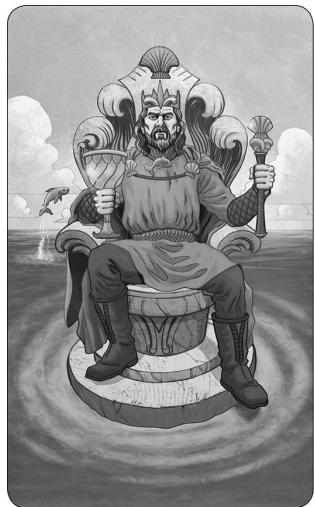
In a reading, this can come up as influence and putting yourself in the position of being an agent of change. It's about recognizing obstacles and leaping over them or going around them. Fire cards are all about movement, and this guy is the master. He has control, which is lacking in some of the other

wands. If this card comes up for you, there is really nothing that can get in your way.

King of Wands Inverted

He's kind of a jerk. Narcissistic, jealous, and foot-stompy. He wants attention, he wants stuff, and, like the Knight of Wands, he really doesn't care what you think about it. His apologies sound like "I'm sorry you think I hurt you" or "I'm sorry you thought that was mean." Jerk. He can also be aggressive, but also like the knight, he isn't particularly malicious. He just thinks he really is always right.

King of Cups



He is fair, a good warrior, and a good friend. He wants what he wants. What a sweetheart. Look at the card: he is surrounded by water, and not a toe is covered. He is surrounded by all emotions and yet can operate in the world without getting positively soggy. This man truly loves, truly invests in people in his life. He is compassionate and kind. He makes everything better for everyone he comes into contact with, sometimes to his own detriment.

King of Cups Inverted

His heart is the thing, however, that gets in his way. He loves who he loves. More than his war, more than his kingdom, and more than his family. He will twist your words to hurt you. He will find out what hurts you emotionally and pile that on top of you. He is moody. He is mean.

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Chapter Seven

Professional

Tarot Reading

When I first started reading in high school, I would read for anyone who would let me. In college, I'd swap a reading for beer or pot money. College was fun. After five years or so, I would charge ten or twenty dollars a reading. After ten years, I was charging a hundred dollars per hour. Why are my readings so expensive? Well, honestly, it's because I'm good at what I do. I've been doing readings for twenty-five years. In the first decade or so, I didn't charge a lot. I bartered. I practiced. I used my book for every reading. Then I got better. Even when I started charging about twenty dollars per reading, I gave away a lot of them. Then I talked to my friend Mary about charging.

I felt bad that I was charging for services. Because it's a gift, right? Sharing this information is a good thing to do for someone. So are Reiki and massage, and we pay for those. I still didn't get it. Then Mary, to whom this book is dedicated, said, "In the old days, the village would bring the wise women food and firewood and keep your house safe. No one is going to bring you food these days, so there has to be an exchange." There really does have to be an exchange. *Oh* yes. Because no one else is going to pay my electric bill.

On occasion, I will donate readings or lower my prices at my own discretion. Why? Because I know what it's like to

be broke and need an answer. I'm very lucky to have friends who would swap readings with me when I was having hard times, but I know not everyone does that. I know that sometimes you just need a little light to shine down, and it would be great if you could find someone reputable to hold the flashlight.

I'm not a reader for the money. I'm a reader because I like to do it. I actually need to do it. I'm not sure really how to turn it off. However, I think that if you undervalue yourself, it diminishes the value of your service. I think, too, that if 80 percent of my readings are done at regular rates, it behooves me to make sure that 20 percent of them are affordable and within reach.

If you decide to read professionally, you will find that the more seriously you take what you do, the more seriously you are taken as a tarot reader.

A Rose by Any Other Name

When I got new business cards, my friend said, "Okay, well, what should we call you?" The first thing that fell out of my mouth was "reader." I'm a reader.

I've always hated that identifying game. Psychic? Tarot reader? Mystic? Fortune-teller? There are more, but none really rang true to me. I'm a fan of science, so psychic gets under my skin a bit. I do other readings besides the tarot kind. Mystic implies a level of wisdom that I'd *hope* to reach someday. Fortune-teller is okay, but it's kind of cultural appropriation on one end (even though my family is straight-up Polska), and on the other end it can make me into a joke.

Reader, though. That resonated. I can read your energy, your cards, your palm, or your future. I can read your mood

or your mind. I'm a huge bibliophile, so this title appealed to me on that level as well. We each have a story. How often do people get the chance to read our stories? What a cool job I've got. (The runner-up name, by the way, is card slinger.)

Tarot Etiquette

I've been thinking about tarot etiquette, and I think I'm extremely lucky in this department. Other than just a few incidents, people have been respectful of me and my cards. Just in case, though, here is a list of bad client manners:

- Don't touch my cards without asking me first. It makes me stabby.
- Please don't get food or drink near my deck. It's not just a deck of cards, it's *my* deck of tarot cards, and *I love them*. A lady spilled a glass of wine on my deck a few years ago and jokingly asked if I hated her a little. Well ...
- Don't try to convert me to your religion.
- Don't try to test my skills.
- Don't argue with me. We can disagree, obviously, but I'm not going to be so invested in your reading that I take it personally. That's not my job.
- Don't haggle. I post my prices very clearly on my website. I don't give away many readings because I do this for a living. Those I do give away are at my discretion. If you send me a message on Facebook or Twitter asking for a free reading, I will totally ignore you.

You will come up with your own list of stuff you won't put up with. Remember that your job is a job. People don't walk into Panera and start challenging their sandwich-making skills. Don't let them do that to you.

Payment

One weekend, I had two in-person readings scheduled back to back. I arranged for childcare, got all pretty, packed up my awesome tarot bag and got ready to go. About twenty minutes before the reading, I got an e-mail that they were running late and could we move the reading back. I couldn't do that, because it would bump off my other reading, and I knew those clients had plans after we were going to meet. I told the first client that we could still meet, but we would only have about a half an hour. This didn't work for her, so she canceled. Damnit.

So I found myself with an hour to kill, ticked off and stewing a bit. I wasn't feeling mad at the client—because this kind of thing happens—just disrupted. And then my sweetie asked if I got a deposit for my time. *No.* Damnit again. I usually only got deposits for parties and events, not for personal readings. He asked why my time was less valuable if it was just for one reading. Sometimes he's so right it just annoys the living hell out of me. Then, I got to the coffee shop and waited for the second client group. And waited. And they stood me up. Damnit!

Since then, I get payment in advance. If people don't want to pay in advance, I refer them to someone else. It's too exhausting otherwise.

Giving readings is hard. When I tried to figure out how best to bill for my readings, I looked around for similar services. An hour for a spa, a pedicure, a manicure, a counseling session, body talk, Reiki, or getting your hair done are about the same as an hour of my time. I see what I do as spiritual and emotional comfort, and it has value. If you are reading for a living, you need to talk to friends and

other professionals about how to appropriately put a value on your skill. I didn't always charge this much; it grew with my skill and experience.

Social Media in Business

I have a confession to make. When I was younger and unfamiliar with the Internet, I started a tarot Facebook page. I got all excited and added a bunch of people that sounded really interesting and into the same stuff I was. People named RiverFlower NightRaven and whatnot. It sounded cool. I was interested in seeing what they had to say about tarot and life. After a while, I started getting friend requests from other cool people. I assumed that they liked my writing and wanted to know more about what I had to say about life and tarot. Recently, I was looking at the profile of one of these people. I literally had nothing in common with this person except that we are both Pagans. That's it. We had 150 friends in common. Of those 150 people, not one had ever reached out to me. Never gotten a reading. Never had one connection with me on Facebook other than becoming "friends."

So I decided that I was using the tool of Facebook incorrectly for my goals. My goals are to talk to other people about tarot. To learn. To be engaged and stimulated and surprised by people. To that end, I reduced my friends list from about 2500 to 700. I can't say whether the reduction of people will change a whole lot, but it has changed how I see the Internet in business.

Each website that I'm on is a way for me to reach out and talk to people. I don't want to collect followers who never interact with me. I want to learn and to teach. I want to engage and enjoy. I want to spend less time online and more time with my head up. Each website that I'm on also diffuses my energy and my name a little further. Sometimes

that's a good thing. Sometimes, not so much. Names have power. Energy has a path.

Social media is a tool and should be treated like one. There is no one way to handle it to run your business, because if you do something that isn't right for you, it's not going to be genuine and it's not going to work. I think that my experiences with Tumblr, Instagram, and Facebook have helped me (through trial and lots of error) figure out how much of me I want out there.

I think that when you spread yourself out across the Internet, it diminishes your energy. I think that there is a part of me in every word I type (it's called a *spell* for a reason) and every interaction I have. Three thousand people who don't know me, don't love me, and don't need me are reading my words? Looking at my pictures? That's a lot of energy to put out there for nothing. If they were all getting readings, that would be one thing. I feel that by controlling the amount of myself I invest in social media, I am controlling my focus, attention, and energy as well. So, for me, ten minutes per day each on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook is thirty minutes per day investing in my business. Most of my readings come from word of mouth or my blog, so I'm going to put the rest of my free time into making sure I give amazing readings and writing my ass off. Those things pay off.

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Chapter Eight

When Readings Go Weird

I get asked a lot about readings that I give. Some of them are odd, some are funny, some are touching. Here are some (that are very, very old and anonymous) that stick in my brain. They're kind of a heads-up to new readers that there is more oddness in the universe than you expect. Especially when you've got a deck of cards on the table.

A few years ago, I got the Seven of Wands in a reading. I got very strong impressions. Violence! And the guy was thrilled about it! It was so odd. It didn't feel abusive, but I could see him punching someone in the face and grinning. I must have had an odd expression on my face. I said to the guy, "Seriously, please don't hit me, but this is what I'm seeing. What the hell?" Well, he'd just won his first boxing belt the night before and was thrilled.

I gave a reading to a lovely gay man at a local picnic about ten years ago. I told him that the man that was living with him was too young and wild and was taking him for granted. I said that the best bet would be to ask him to leave before things got ugly. Behind me, I heard "You bitch!" and a young man stormed away. The man I was reading for handed me some money, grinned, and said, "That was the easiest breakup I've ever had. Thanks, doll."

One of the oddest readings I've given was on the phone. A man called and, in a very heavy New York accent, said,

“Will she or won’t she? I ain’t got much time, sweetheart.” I threw down the Two of Cups and said, “She will!” He replied, “Great. Because I just bought the ring.” *Click.*

I was at a birthday party for my friend’s husband, drinking and celebrating with my friends. This man was following me around all night, asking me to give him a reading. I got a little pissed off and said, “You want a reading? Fine.” I put some cards down, looked him in the eyes, and said, “Whatever you’re doing in the dark is about to come to light, and your girlfriend is going to find out you’re cheating on her real, *real* soon.” His girlfriend was right behind him, and he almost took a swing at me, but you know ... I was right.

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Conclusion

I started writing this book four years ago on my blog as a way to teach my Canadian friends how to read the cards without running up gigantic phone bills. I never thought that my simple, plain-spoken way of teaching would extend past my little WordPress website, but here we are. To me, tarot is a tool. How you choose to use that tool is up to you. It's important to remember that without you, the cards are just pretty pieces of paper. You're the one that drives the reading. Your intuition, your gift, and your connection with yourself and the universe or your client is what makes the cards come alive. Your readings will only have as much integrity as you do, so use your tools well. That includes this book! Use it during readings until you're ready. Do research for other teachers, and remember that regardless of what I or other readers say, your readings and style have to be your own to be authentic. I hope that *Kitchen Table Tarot* has helped you make the cards your own and has given you a good base to build on. Happy reading!

XO,

Lis

Recommended Reading



*Small
Mediums at
Large* by
Terry
Iacuzzo:
The story of
a girl who

grew up psychic in a family of psychics, then went on to become a professional tarot reader. The book that helped me believe that I wasn't crazy and that I actually had a gift.

Anything by Rachel Pollack. Seriously. Even her fiction.

Anything by Mary K. Greer. All of it.

The Book of Oracles, or A Poet's Tarot by Josep Miquel
Sobrer Holistic Tarot: An Integrative Approach to Using Tarot for Personal Growth by Benebell Wen
Tarot Spreads: Layouts & Techniques by Barbara Moore
Psychic Self-Defense by Dion Fortune
The Tarot Bible: The Definitive Guide to the Cards and Spreads by Sarah Bartlett
Secrets of the Waite-Smith Tarot: The True Story of the World's Most Popular Tarot by Marcus Katz and Tali Goodman

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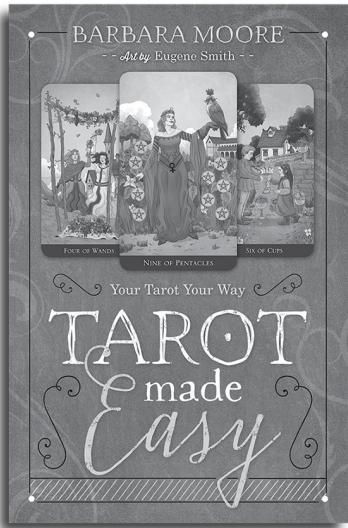
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That's how awesome you are. And to Lauryn Heineman—best editor ever—for making me make sense.

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When **Melissa Cynova** was fourteen years old, a kid in her class gave her a deck of tarot cards for unknown reasons. She's been reading ever since. In addition to being a prolific tarot reader, she teaches classes at her kitchen table and at tarot conferences. She lives near St. Louis, Missouri, and can be found online at www.LittleFoxTarot.com.

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