

Chapter 71

Arcana

"What does that mean?" Ava asked, staring warily at the nine cards that were gently floating in the space between herself and the witch. "Are they bad?"

Marnie stared at the cards, engrossed in some hidden meaning that Ava was unable to ascertain, "The cards are neither good nor bad, Were-girl. They're just an interpretation of events happening around you that you may or may not consciously understand."

"Then why do you look so concerned?" She questioned.

"Because the story these cards are telling suggests that there's a lot more left unspoken than I'd originally thought." Marnie's eyes shifted from the cards to Ava, "Whatever it is you've got going on, I highly doubt it's going to be sorted out today."

Ava sighed, "What will this tell me, then?"

Marnie shrugged, "That's technically up to you to decide on account of, I don't know you or your life. But, hopefully, it will give you some perspective. Help you identify some areas in your life that need attending to."

Ava continued to stare at the cards feeling weighed down by an inexplicable sense of foreboding. After a few moments, Marnie cleared her throat. "Are you ready to continue?" She asked.

It could have been the incredible display of magic or the suddenly imposing figures staring back at her from the front of the cards, but Ava was suddenly feeling very apprehensive about having her energy read. She had the very unnerving feeling of crossing a bridge that crumbled behind her with every step she took.

What probably unsettled her the most was the realization of just how many times she'd experienced the feeling of crossing into a space of no return. Despite not having much to return to, the concept of change was frightening to her, especially now that things were going so well for her.

It was then that Mia stirred, the eager excitement coming off of the Wolf far more positive than how Ava felt herself at that moment. However, it did remind Ava that things weren't going as well as she liked to pretend -

not for Mia. And, as an integral part of her, Mia's wellbeing should be paramount. Ava wasn't some child trying to avoid the dentist, but that's exactly how she'd been treating Mia's condition, ignoring it in the hopes that it would eventually correct itself with time.

Here Wolf deserved more than that, and now that Ava was finally in a position to think of something other than survival, she wasn't going to shy away from whatever answers she managed to find.

Ava finally nodded, "Yes. Please continue."

Looking resolute, she nodded. "If you haven't caught on by now, I read tarot a little differently than what you might be used to. At least, to real customers. Instead of having you ask a limiting question to the deck, we've left it up to the cards to tell us what energy is vibrating loudest, needing to be addressed. And, while these cards will pertain to you, they may not necessarily be directly about you."

Ava nodded, "Why are there so many?"

"Three is one of those foundational numbers within the universe, you know. Past, present, future. Child, adult, elder - I could go on and on. What's important is that it's a sturdy foundation. These three sets of three cards will come together to represent you as a whole, in one way or another. The goal is to give you as much direction as possible."

"Okay," Marnie gestured to the first set of cards. The first card depicted a beautiful woman wearing a crescent moon diadem and bathed in light and shadow, while the second showed a woman falling through a cloudy sky from a burning tower as lightning flashed in the foreground. The last was a woman sitting on a throne, holding rods tipped with sunflowers in her hands, and a black cat perched near her feet.

"The High Priestess, The Tower, and the Queen of Wands," she said. "The fact that this set holds two cards from the Major Arcana is highly significant. Think of it as the universe shouting at you."

Marnie pointed to the High Priestess card that spun in a slow circle in the air, "Usually, a card either presents itself as upright or reversed, depending on which aspect applies. Since the Priestess is spinning, that means both aspects are of import."

"But what does it mean?" Ava prompted. Seeing her life on display in front of her, represented by these small slips of paper, was making her anxious.

Sophia would feel this way sometimes whenever she stared into the night sky for too long. She'd say that they were small and insignificant, but she found comfort in that. Ava had never fully understood what she'd meant until now. "The Priestess represents the divine female, the epitome of womanhood. She's the unconscious mind that drives your intuition - that almost supernatural sense that women seem to have...females?" Marnie frowns, "Yikes, I'm sorry. I just realized I don't know how Weres identify."

Ava shook her head, her stomach dropping like a stone. "It's fine. It's not about me anyway. Please, keep going."

"Okay, well, since the Priestess is in motion, she wants you to know that she's feeling disconnected from her power source, making her feel unbalanced. She may be withdrawn and silent as a result."

Ava swallowed hard past the lump in her throat that had formed when her chest suddenly warmed, and Mia purred again. Maybe Mia had been silent because she didn't understand what was going on with her either. She hadn't had a way to express the emotions she didn't fully grasp.

"Next up is the Tower," Marnie continued. "In its upright state, it represents turmoil. The chaos that usually follows some major change, like a big revelation, or a sudden shift in circumstances - "

"Or personal trauma? Something physically or mentally disruptive?" Ava interjected.

The corners of Marnie's lips turned downward, but she nodded. "Yeah. That'd do it."

"So, Mi-...my Priestess has suffered a change that's left her feeling broken...."

"Hmm, I'd say bent," Marnie said, "But not broken. The Queen of Wands represents a person's sense of self, usually in the positive. In her reversed state, she's feeling introverted, but those feelings of self-respect and self-confidence are there, just severely bruised. She's a normally outgoing person who's currently searching for a sense of self that she lost somewhere along the way."

Ava nodded as Mia purred in contentment. Her Wolf had found a way to communicate with her, to let her know that she was down, but not out, and searching for a way back. And it was Ava's job to help her find it. "What's next?" She asked.

"Alright, let me see...." Marnie moved over to the next set of three. This time, there were two cards twirling on their axis. The first showed a couple holding out cups shaped like lions to one another; springing from the cups was a pair of winged snakes twining around one another. The second spinning card showed a man hanging upside down from a tree by his right ankle, and the last showed a lone man hammering eight gold coins, each engraved with a five-pointed star. "First is the Two of Cups. This signifies a partnership - nothing specific, but the presence of a pairing rooted in attraction."

Ava felt herself begin to blush, "Okay...why's it spinning?"

Marnie gave her a pointed look, "Don't shoot the messenger, please. It's spinning to signify a rocky relationship with...well, relationships, in

general. There's a fair bit of disharmony and distrust in both the self and the partner." Ava blinked hard, "That one's less clear than the first."

Marnie sighed, "It usually is, friend. This looks like it's gonna be one of those sets that could have a few meanings. The Hanged Man, for instance, sounds scarier than he is but signifies...a cosmic deep breath, I think is the best way to put it. He reminds you that sometimes life makes you pause, and it's up to you how you process things and proceed. The spinning indicates the presence of indecisiveness and a resistance to new perspectives."

Ava cocked her head to one side and stared blankly at the witch. Marnie blew out a breath, "You're stalling. Or stuck. Most likely about a romantic partner. Ring any bells?"

Ava's eyes widened, her head automatically shaking her denial. Marnie narrowed her eyes but continued. "Last is the Eight of Pentacles. In his reversed state, he represents unhealthy self-development. Like, someone who's so focused on improving one area of their lives that they're missing out on the much more important growth needed elsewhere."

"What's next?" Ava's voice sounded harsh to her own ears, but she didn't want to go near...any of what Marnie had just told her. The picture that had reluctantly begun to form in Ava's mind was too messy, too disappointing. Marnie looked at her warily, "Are you sure you want to finish?"

Ava nodded, "I have to, right?"

Marnie looked at the last set of cards, all three cards making gentle circles; A robed man on a throne, a cloaked man, surrounded by tipped goblets, and a heart pierced through with three swords.

"No." Marnie said, "You don't. This reading's gotten pretty intense, and I can tell you it's not going to let up. It happens. It's okay to step away."

Ava shook her head firmly, "No. I want to finish."

Taking a deep breath, Marnie continued, "The Emperor. He represents authority and structure. When he spins, it represents an overuse of that authority...possibly an abuse of authority. Domination, excessive control-" "Yeah, I understand that one." Ava breathed.

Marnie nodded. "Got it, moving on."

She looked at the next card and sighed, "The Five of Cups. Personal regret. When he spins, he indicates the acknowledgment of past misdeeds and failures, as well as the active choice to move forward. He seeks forgiveness and recognizes that he must first forgive himself."

Ava stodgily ignored the tears brimming her eyes, so Marnie did the same, "And, finally, the Three of Swords. It symbolizes heartbreak and sorrow. Whenever it spins, it signifies the need for freedom from guilt and negativity. Forgiveness." On that final word, the damn broke, and Ava's tears began to flow.