

*Aneidotes  
Tarot*

# Anecdotes Tarot

## A Guidebook

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## Introduction

*Our lives come easy and our lives come hard.  
And we carry them like a pack of cards:  
some we don't use, but we don't discard,  
but keep for a rainy day.*

This guide is meant to give an outline of my inspiration and process for each of the images in Anecdotes Tarot. It is impossible to trace out every detail. Some are probably even lost to my conscious mind.

As much as some would like to insist there is a right and a wrong order to tarot, there are so many traditions, and it's helpful to know from which an artist is approaching it.

I hope that my writing will give some context to those tarotists who are unfamiliar with Joanna Newsom's music, and the other way around.

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# The Trumps

*Above them, parades mark the passing of days*

The 22 *triumphs*, or *trumps*, arise from a tradition of Renaissance pageants. Like characters on parade floats, this suit shows us a succession of allegorical figures both celebrated and notorious, familiar from history, legend, and the city streets.

The order of the trumps has been standardized over the generations, by both card players setting rules and occultists seeking a book of wisdom. Yet, the distinguishing feature of the tarot deck, unlike a book, is its ability to be shuffled. The triumphs do not come in a single file, but in a twisting and mutating loop. This links neatly with the themes of recurrence and circular time found on the album *Divers*, and for that reason the trump sequence begins and ends with the two parts of the album's initial-terminal song, "Anecdotes" and "Time, As a Symptom."

The trumps follow the numbers of the Tarot de Marseille. Many of the traditional trumps' titles are tied to sex and roles which do not appear in the source material – take, for example, The Pope. In particular, since this deck is inspired by the writing of a woman, most of the characters have a feminine presence. While some such as Bear or Colleen are explicitly female in their songs, the gender of the rest is up to interpretation. To leave readings open and avoid the confusion of invented names, no words appear on the cards. The common names given for the trumps in this book are abbreviations, and not official titles. I believe the characters in this deck fulfill the spirit of their cards, if not the letter of their names.

Twenty-one of the trumps are numbered, while the cards of the other four suits are numbered one through ten. Thus, many divide the trumps into two sequences of ten, or *decades*, singling out the unnumbered trump and XXI. This deck was created with such a structure in mind, and the descriptions keep in mind each card's place in its own decade, and its counterpart in the other. We begin with the unnumbered trump.



## Bridges and Balloons

*We sailed away on a winter's day  
With fate as malleable as clay*

**T**he unnumbered trump is known as the Fool. It depicts a jester, a lunatic, or a naïve and disheveled wanderer. “Bridges and Balloons,” with its storybook travelogue, captures this same innocence. Depending on who you ask, the song’s tone can be taken as a healthy sense of childlike wonder, or as condemnable childishness.

Our traveler carries a model ship, and wears a dress decorated with pictures of the four Aces floating above a fantastical sea voyage. They have experienced the wider world through stories and games, but have yet to see it firsthand. The balloons in the distance bear symbols from the final sequence of trumps, anticipating the journey ahead.

It is a bright and cold winter morning, the pale blue sky glowing against the rich brown earth. In their outfit of bright primary colors, the Fool stands out sharply from the landscape. But just as the primary colors can blend to any shade, we hope that the Fool can transform to meet the occasion.

Without a set number, this card is a wanderer who can fit in anywhere. Their fate is undecided, but that detail, like the open door of their bird-cage, seems not to worry them.

*Meanings.* dreams, impracticality, exploration, restlessness, a different way of seeing the world, childishness or naïveté, impressionability



## I. Anecdotes

*It ain't about how rare you are,  
but how hard you are to see.*

**T**he trumps traditionally begin with a Juggler, a street performer or mountebank. Whatever tools they carry, this is a tricky character who lives by their wits and eloquence. Hourglass in hand, our Nightjar-Juggler bends time into a lemniscate – the shape of infinity. With their binoculars, they can discern what is far away, and see without being seen. Smiling, they perform a disappearing-appearing act. Like the birds they blend into the winter leaves, or they are miraculously *born into open air*.

The three birds surrounding the Juggler are recurring characters on the album *Divers* (see also the Page of Swords, Queen of Swords, and King of Swords). In the song, they are united in some covert operation. They are enveloped in the warm grays of a misty winter day, where those of us less discerning than these scouts can easily become lost. The picture is meant to evoke the feeling of hearing a birdcall without being able to discern its source, the feeling of being tricked – pleasantly, but tricked all the same. If this card occurs in a reading, one must determine whether the querent is using the cleverness of the Juggler themselves, or taken into one of the Juggler's illusions.

Just as the hidden provenance of “Anecdotes” is revealed at the end of *Divers*, the rest of the trumps will arrange themselves to show the elusive Juggler's place in the cycle.

*Meanings.* skill, communication, cleverness, sleight-of-hand, trickery, facades, camouflage, manifestation, air



## II. Divers

*The twinned and cast-off shells reveal a single heart of white.*

**F**rom the airy *place beyond the dawn*, we travel toward sunset and sea. Trump II introduces duality: dawn and dusk, birth and death, *the divers and the sailors, and the women on the pier*.

In the Tarot de Marseille, II is the Papess, counterpart to V. In this deck, their titles are changed, but their kinship remains. Both bridge two worlds: here, the worlds are land and sea. Where V teaches, II tends to guard her secrets, like the pearl that she holds by her feet.

This card represents gestation. Popular lore tells us that all life emerged from the sea, and in the creation story of Genesis the landscape before the Earth is formed consists only of the waters. The ocean is the place where things reside before they *choose their form*. II is immersed in this source. Her skin is colorless like a creature of a submerged cave, and the coral on her dress branches like primitive veins.

The Female Pope is widely believed to depict the legendary Pope Joan, who rose to the papacy by impersonating a man, but finally exposed herself through pregnancy. When her sex was revealed, she was executed for overstepping a woman's place. "Divers," while not about the Catholic church, speaks of similar binding rules. While men are allowed to explore the oceans and hunt for treasure there, women must wait for them on land. In this context, the calm of II can appear deathly, like a submission to this restrictive order. The golden ropes crossing on her chest tie her back, like a yoke. Yet while she is physically bound to the pier, her thoughts can move across the water. She weighs these dualities and looks to the place where they rejoin – the heart in the center of the shell.

*Meanings.* contemplation, intuition, mysteries, passivity, numbness, unity or division, femininity, water, fluidity, purity, coldness



### III. 81

*It was dirt, and dirt is all the same.*

**T**he third trump is traditionally the Empress, counterpart to IV. The Book of Right-On. But this is no appointed Empress – she claims her secluded plot of land by herself, and renews her right to it with the work she puts into it.

The scene reflects the song's themes of innocence and compassion. The burning heart which grows from the dirt in the palm of her hand is a common symbol of Charity, as is the stork, which is said to feed her children with her own blood in hard times. The snake, while an antagonist in the Garden of Eden, is also a symbol of wisdom, and coils around her tiller to make it into a ruler's scepter. Behind her, two vines twine around a tree. One is friendly and leafy while the other is barren and thorny, but both are equally supported and nourished.

Specifically in Christian symbolism, both stork and fish have been used to represent Jesus' sacrifice. The fish is also symbolic of the goddess Venus, through her birth at sea as well as through the origin of the constellation Pisces (see XVI. Kingfisher). Her crown is made of two golden ears of corn, tying her to XIII. Cosmia and XXI. Time, As a Symptom, and the solar symbols on the hems of her dress link her with IV.

Whether an archetypal mother figure or the young founder of a new empire, III provides a gentle atmosphere in which to grow.

*Meanings.* labor of love, generosity, support, innocence, ingenuousness, presumptuousness, temptation, adolescence, growth, earth



## IV. Book of Right-On

*Do you want to run with my pack?  
Do you want to ride on my back?*

**I**n contrast to the shaded spring of the previous card, IV sits in a shining and arid landscape under the *wandering sun*. The motifs on his clothing and table refer to the Sun (see XIX. Sprout and the Bean), and this solar energy comes with both clarity and austerity.

The number four signifies stability and foundations, as in the four cardinal directions, the four classical elements, or the four legs of a table. IV is the card of law and order. As it is written in his book, so it goes in the world. The eight-spoked wheel of his glowing scepter references the wheel of XIV. No Provenance. His cloak has a four-colored rainbow, and the heptagram on his boot is a reminder of the Chaldean order of the planets, from which we derive the days of the week. He is crowned with a laurel wreath of victory, and like his dogs he is at ease but ready to fight if the need arises.

This card walks the line between confidence and arrogance. The question to work out is whether his strength is protection, or domination.

*Meanings.* clarity, ambition, prowess, arrogance, belligerence, order, stability, tyranny, imperialism, support, protection, predation



## V. Emily

*Squint skyward and listen—  
loving him, we move within his borders:  
just asterisms in the stars' set order.*

**T**he fifth trump is traditionally The Pope. Though the song “Emily” does fit the bill with its Biblical references, this depiction is modeled not after a pope, but after Renaissance personifications of Astrology or Astronomy. The Pontiff acts as a bridge between heaven and earth, and interprets celestial mysteries for the people of the Church. An astronomer fills a similar role in the secular world.

In the sky are two of the asterisms mentioned in the song, the Big Dipper (see also XI. Bear) and the Pleiades. The astrolabe's rule points to the months when they are at their most visible in the Northern Hemisphere. The Pope uses the two keys of St. Peter to represent his power on heaven and on earth. This symbol is converted here to the reflections of the stars and skipping stones – what is done on earth is done also in heaven, and observed.

The counterpart of V is II. Divers, both conduits for spiritual power. The ledger in this card represents the more systematic and educational approach that sets V apart from II. As well as a researcher, V is a carrier of tradition, passing it on to the following generations. Thus, this card can signify both new discovery and heritage, truths that continue to renew themselves.

*Meanings.* teaching, mediation, research, experiments, observation, science and pseudoscience, factoids, astronomy and astrology, traditions, secrecy, religion



## VI. Esme

*The phantom of love moves among us  
at will*

**T**he subject of trump VI is Love, a light and effortless feeling, like a kite carried on wind or a boat on waves. The image is the archetypal mother and child pair. Venus and Cupid, Mary and Jesus, mythological heroes or simply one's own friends – all converge into one in this card. There is no single original, but the image recurs. The mother and child are at the center, but the love and loyalty represented by the bulldog is not limited to blood kinship. The song “Esme” encompasses all changing human relationships.

The thorns of the blackberry and the blood drops on the mother's gown are reminders of pain and sacrifice, but the overall effect is wonder, at the mother emerging from Earth and the child from Air. *Ties and rails fall into line bearing kindness.* While some force or machine must be there to build the railroad, the only concern in this card is to be carried along, grateful for the protection and the generosity: the guardian bear of the boat and the ghostly hand that holds the kite-string.

*Meanings.* love, family, partnership, generosity, possessiveness, infantilization, beauty, ideals, adulation, blind loyalty, communion, community



## VII. Waltz of the 101st Lightborne

*There was a time we were lashed to the prow of a ship you may board, but not steer*

**L**ike the previous card, VII is being moved by unseen forces, but in a more unsettling way. The figurehead of a ship puts on a fine display, but is not the one in control. There is no captain visible on board. The ship and attendant birds float above a *round desert island* that is just one of infinite instances of Earth and its Californian ruins, powerless to return home.

The nightjar and mourning dove make a reappearance from *I. Anecdotes*. Both birds' calls can serve as markers of time (see also IX. Soft As Chalk). Both also make distinctive, alarming noises with their wings, the nightjar while diving and the dove while ascending, as one can imagine them doing in this picture. The tetrad rainbow, which binds the figurehead to the ship, links to IV. The Book of Right-On and the imperial dream of colonizing both Space and Time, which by the end of the song turns into an unstoppable nightmare.

This card does have a positive side. *Traveling light* is a marvelous spectacle, and this ship lets one see from an entirely new perspective. Before you board, make sure you know who's behind the wheel.

*Meanings.* parade, spectacle, colonization, crusades, power struggle, changed perspective, travel



## VIII. Does Not Suffice

*The tap of hangers, swaying in the closet—  
unburdened hooks and empty drawers—  
and everywhere I tried to love you  
is yours again, and only yours.*

**J**ustice is the first of three Cardinal Virtues to appear in the trumps. More than legal justice, she signifies the ability to treat all (including herself) with fairness and equity. The scales in her left hand, upon which she balances a heart, represent carefully weighing a decision. The scissors at her right represent acting on that decision, as the narrator of the song does when she divides what is hers from what is her former lover's. Her feet point to the East and she is ready to go somewhere new. This feeling echoes the migrating geese in their V outside the window.

The heart in the scales rises, no longer *heavy as an oil drum* – but she may be manipulating the scales with her legs. How much of Justice is letting things take their natural course, and how much is making a conscious choice?

The challenge of this card is to honestly take stock of one's life (along with one's jewelry and pretty dresses). Once the clothing and curtains are bundled away, the room has complete light and openness.

*Meanings.* departure, packing, taking stock, decisions, making a change, balance, fairness, manipulating evidence, self-sufficiency, the end of a relationship



## IX. Soft as Chalk

*No time! No time!*

*Now I have got all the time in the world*

**T**he ninth trump has two common identities. One is Time, typically an aged Saturnine figure hobbling along with a crutch. The other is the Hermit, a sage who has retreated from society to find their own path.

This figure faces the East, raising their mourning-dove lantern to what will become dawn. The cloak's pattern anticipates the Sun (see XIX. Sprout and the Bean). The waning crescents on the hem of their dress represent the decline at the end of this decade, while the lemniscates recall eternity and *neverdoneing lawlessness*. As in other cards, the number seven is used as an indication of time. The seven mushrooms are *Amanitas*, a genus often symbiotic with pines, which contains some of the best known deadly and psychoactive mushrooms.

Accustomed to solitude, this character is on the defensive. The peace of hermitage has been disturbed by the unknown in the form of the black bear, who lurks just outside the lantern's light. Thus, this card is not about the stasis of the sanctuary, but a moment of disruption and potential crisis. IX sits in the liminal space of not-quite-night-not-quite-morning, but time will quickly change that.

*Meanings.* time, retreat, isolation, rest, awakening, wisdom, obscurity (literal and figurative)



## X. Sapokanikan

*Interred with other daughters,  
in dirt, in other potter's fields*

**A**t the end of the first decade – the midpoint of the parade of trumps – comes the Wheel of Fortune. This version swaps the popular allegorical Wheel for a circular depiction of the geocentric universe inspired by the “Prima Causa” of the Mantegna Tarocchi (see Selected References). Around the Earth are the orbits of the seven classical planets, surrounded by the realm of the fixed stars, and within another ring of light. The Washington Monument, a centerpiece of the song, rises above the desert.

Three pairs on the ground illustrate the layers that build up through the passage of time. The leftmost is from Titian’s ill-regarded painting “Tobias and the Angel.” The middle is the mother and child uncovered beneath that work, which suddenly gave it interest. The third is meant to be a layer deeper, an underpainting.

In contrast to VI. Esme which depicts convergence, this card shows different paths diverging from a central source, one piece or land or one painted panel. As Time obscures or destroys, it clears space for new monuments built on the bones of the old. In the same way, X clears the stage for the next decade of trumps.

*Meanings.* end of an era, renewal, uncovering, unearthing, fading, covering up, cycles, passing time, history, chronicles, untold stories



## XI. Bear

*Sooner or later you'll bury your teeth*

**E**ach of the two decades begins with an image of birth or rebirth. *I. Anecdotes* materialized in open air, and XI sheds her skin to leave her shadow in the sky.

This card is inspired by the second of the tarot's Cardinal Virtues, Fortitude. Bear exemplifies both physical and spiritual strength. Despite her physical advantage, she endures Monkey's humiliations for the promise of a better life. She escapes his deception not by the obvious route of mauling Monkey, but by ascending into the stars and eternal remembrance. Sloughing off her physical body, she chooses to *bury* rather than *bear* her teeth. Monkey would prod Bear into displays of her strength, thinking it no more than dumb savagery. Leaving her corporeal form gives Bear the chance to determine her own life, a new sort of strength.

*Meanings.* fortitude, courage, bravery, magnanimity, power, audacity, emancipation, disintegration, endurance, legacy



## XII. You & Me, Bess

*I hope Mother Nature has not overheard!  
(Though, she doles out hurt  
like a puking bird.)*

**T**he sun rises upon more drama by the seaside. The upside-down hanging of the tarot is a form of public humiliation rather than the public execution that takes place in the song, but a punishment all the same.

Like II. Divers, XII shows the duality created by the *laws of the land*. The seaside town in the West opposes Bess in the East. One is rules and civilization, the other is freedom and wildness. In between the two, the hanged horse-thief loses both freedom and carefully-collected provisions. They are in a predicament, beaten up by the ocean and stuck as tightly as the snail shells clamped to the posts.

Human society and Nature each have their own punishments, one the gallows and the other the laughing gulls. The first is specific, the second is haphazard. But Bess, whose simple animal nature gets the narrator caught in the first place, is able to escape the consequences. Running free outside the borders, she brings hope to this gloomy card.

*Meanings.* punishment, predicament, getting caught, life on the lam, criminal, scapegoat, betrayal, alliance, taking the fall for a friend



## XIII. Cosmia

*In the cornfield,  
when she called me*

**W**here III. '81 tills and plants, XIII comes to harvest. Made of water and fire, *Cosmia* rises into the air, shedding rose petals as she tears away from the Earth. At the bottom of the picture, one ear of corn is hidden in leaves, another is golden and ripe, and a third is blackened and rotting on its stalk. This last represents a slow decline, as opposed to the swift end offered by the crescent blade.

Many tarot decks superstitiously leave XIII nameless, displaying only a terrifying figure with a scythe, who is presumably too awful to call down. Others are quick to lighten the meaning of XIII to metaphorical rather than literal death, something like transformation. The song “Cosmia” presents a very real confrontation with Death, which should not be diminished. However, the softer interpretation is available here in the form of the moth, whose caterpillar-self completely disintegrates in the coffin-life cocoon, to emerge later with wings.

*Meanings.* death, mortality, loss, illness, grief, mourning, severing, harvest, transformation, comfort to the grieving



## XIV. No Provenance

*Not informed of the natural law,  
squatting, lordly, on a stool, in a stall,  
We spun gold clear out of straw.*

**T**he last Cardinal Virtue in the tarot is Temperance. This is the ability of humans to control their animal nature, represented as a bridle for the mysterious little horse. The ball and block beneath the woman's feet are borrowed from Etteilla imagery (see Selected References). The foot on the block is stable and gives motion to the spinning wheel, while the foot on the ball holds steady only through constant movement. One must practice Temperance continually – halting or rushing results in uneven and lumpy spinning.

The apple motif refers to Johnny Appleseed, who is mentioned at the end of the song. He is an icon of conservation and well known for an ascetic Christian lifestyle. However, he has also been criticized for spreading invasive species. He sows seeds indiscriminately and leaves them behind, as we can see from the sprouts poking through the tall grass. Thus, he can be taken as either a representation of Temperance, or of its opposite.

Some occult readings see Temperance, rather than a virtue, as transmutation or alchemy. This could be reflected in the picture too, as straw turns into gold.

The song refers also to the *Big Return*, the idea that our lives loop infinitely in a cycle with no source, only recursion (similar to XVI. Kingfisher). The narrator regrets the blindness that each new recursion brings, which dooms one to repeat all previous mistakes. In this light, Temperance can be read as a path to self-improvement, hoping to spin the wheel in a new direction.

*Meanings.* temperance, self-control, restraint, harmony, health, conservation, preservation, transmutation, excess, animal nature, protection, asceticism, repetition



## XV. Monkey

*Deep in the night  
shone a weak and miserly light*

**H**alfway through the cycle begun by XI. Bear, we encounter her nemesis. XV is traditionally the Devil, who, like Monkey, stands for greed, deception, and subjugation.

Like the Fool, Monkey carries a stick over his shoulder, but his holds infernal light. He walks to the West (that is, the Past), showing a reversion to base instincts. On his back he has a picture of Bear in captivity, as a reminder of his selfishness.

Similar to many artistic depictions of the Devil, Monkey “apes” the shape of a human. In the song, his *hand* as opposed to Bear’s *paw* is used as a mark of superiority. Where V. Emily is a bridge between terrestrial and celestial, XV is a bridge between human and bestial.

Still, manipulation can have a nonnegative sense – the five fingers of a hand (or a Monkey’s foot) are a marker of developed skill. Questionable motivations aside, Monkey is very clever. Ingenuity can fashion tools, as well as hold leashes.

*Meanings.* evil influence, materialism, greed, selfishness, captivity, bondage, deception, malice, plotting, manipulation, cleverness, leading



## XVI. Kingfisher

*And with your knife, you evicted my life  
from its little lighthouse on the seashore.*

**K**ingfisher inhabits an apocalyptic landscape of volcanic eruption. The common image for XVI is a burning tower. This version, with the fleeing woman, is taken specifically from the Florentine Minchiate (see Selected References). This destruction is freeing in a way, as what was *bound and calcified* turns to flowing lava.

As in VI. Esme, this song hinges on a moment of recognition. Lovers from past lives meet each other in a new recursion of the timeline, hoping to break the cycle in violent confrontation. The blood which spirals serpent-like from the evicted woman pools in the heart of the Earth, feeding both the carnivorous lion and the peaceful kingfisher.

The constellation Pisces drawn at the bottom of the picture, besides being Fish for the kingfisher, echoes the same theme of being bound through time. According to one origin story, Venus and Cupid transformed into fish to escape the monster Typhon, and tied themselves together so as not to lose each other in the rushing waters of the Euphrates.

This is the most ominous of the cards. The lighthouse's beacon is a warning, as the kingfisher announces the end of halcyon days.

*Meanings.* destruction, annihilation, alarm, warning, omen, disaster, deliverance, breaking a cycle



## XVII. Colleen

*Will you come down there with me?  
Down where our bodies start to seem  
like artifacts of some strange dream*

**A**fter the volcanic throes of the previous card, Colleen slips quietly away into the waves. This card is typically called The Star(s). This image is specifically inspired by the Leber-Rouen tarot's *Inclitum Sydus*, a personification of a guiding star for sailors (see Selected References).

We began this cycle with XI. Bear shedding her skin, recalled in the eleven small stars above. As we wind to the end, the Selkie finds her own skin. She throws away the false name of Colleen, leaving behind the convent and her confining shoes. She moves Westward, returning to her interrupted past life. The watering-can, which overwatered plants on land, helps her flow back to her aquatic home.

Both VII. Waltz of the 101st Lightborne and XVII go to extremes, the former high into the air and into the undiscovered, the latter deep into the sea and into memory. This card is an emblem of healing and restoration, casting off what is artificial and confining. “Colleen” *was blessed among all women to have forgotten everything*, but the Selkie is blessed to finally remember.

*Meanings.* healing, restoration, one's own element, sanctuary, confinement, remembrance, forgetting, instinct, inheritance



## XVIII. Sawdust & Diamonds

*From the top of the flight  
of the wide, white stairs*

**W**e remain by the sea, now looking up to the Moon. This is a card of intense dreams, illusions, and even madness. The Moon pulls the ocean as well as animals and humans along in her cycles. This influence is like a *system of strings* (or the strings of the scales in VIII. Does Not Suffice), which tugs at and connects its elements in symmetric tension. The figure wears a wing upon their head to match the dove whose string they pull. If unbalanced, the relationship becomes that of puppet and puppeteer.

Seven trees line the shore for *seven days out to sea* (roughly a quarter of the Moon's journey), and eighteen red drops on the figure's apron allude to menstruation – two ways in which the Moon marks time for humankind. But the guide through this deep night is the promise of eternity, the place at the top of the wide white stairs where the Moon waits to receive.

*Meanings.* the moon, visions, deeply-felt emotion, lunacy, nightmares, possession, symbiosis, interconnection, puppetry, tides, storms



## XIX. Sprout & the Bean

*Should we go outside?*

**W**e go from purple night to red day and the life-giving, scorching Sun. The triplets on this card are an allusion to the song's music video. Like the three Fates, they spin out the double-twisted thread of life. The highest holds a shining seed-like golden ring, and wears an upward-facing crescent to represent receptivity and increase. The triplet one branch lower holds a sprout and wears a full-moon symbol for the wholeness of life. The one who stands in the stream abandons the sprout to the current, and wears a downward-facing crescent to represent decrease and letting go.

The leaves of the trees are changing to red and brown, their colors reflected in the flying dew drops. Like IX. Soft As Chalk, this card is at a turning point, this time between seasons rather than night and day. The question has changed from *Who is there?* To *Should we go outside?*, an invitation rather than a challenge. The Sun dissolves shadows, bringing to light both triumphs and failures.

*Meanings.* the sun, outdoors, nature, heat, light, languor, sultriness, cooperation, friends, children, siblings, family, life



## XX. Baby Birch

*I saw a rabbit, as slick as a knife,  
and as pale as a candlestick,  
and I had thought it'd be harder to do,  
but I caught her, and skinned her quick*

The final card of the second decade traditionally shows the Last Judgement. Baby Birch represents a more personal moment of reckoning. Against her wishes, the narrator must choose one path to go down, cutting all others off.

The area between the two birches is filled with night, trapping the figures in a dream. The woman is dressed in all flesh tones, reflecting vulnerability and a feeling of nakedness. The knife poised to skin the captured rabbit is also pointed at the woman's own heart. Meanwhile, the goose above is the epitome of the protective mother. The volume of her call clears out the landscape, beating against the woman's hesitation and uncertainty. The sky-colored egg on the ground is a token of hidden possibilities to be hatched.

The violence of the song's climax is shocking. However, the sacrifice of innumerable possible futures is necessary to move forward in one. When this card appears, it is a prompt to choose.

*Meanings.* decision, judgement, revelation, reality check, sacrifice, paths, the unknown



## XXI. Time as a Symptom

*White star, white ship—  
Nightjar, transmit: transcend!*

**O**n *Divers*, this song closes the loop with “Anecdotes”. In the tarot deck, XXI ends the trump sequence and starts a new, uncharted decade.

The central figure holds an ear of corn and a sickle. These are emblems of the god Cronus or Saturn, patron of time and the harvest. They are enclosed in a mandorla-shaped wreath, and bound within this wreath are the hourglass of *I. Anecdotes* and the pearl or egg of *II. Divers*.

The song alludes to the Eleusinian Mysteries, a festival commemorating Demeter’s search for her daughter, the Maiden. The earth goddess’ desperate journey was the origin of Earth’s seasons. Though not much is known of the Mysteries, their culmination was the reaping of an ear of grain.

During Demeter’s search, she was raped by the sea god Poseidon. The figures at the bottom of the picture are two children of this union. Her son Areion had the form of a speaking horse. Her daughter is known only as the Mistress, and was venerated herself as an Earth goddess. At the top of the picture are a White Star and a Nightjar, those called upon to transcend Time and link to the end to a new beginning.

The culmination of the trumps shows the fullness of the cycle of time, in harmony and permanence. *We sow and we reap, again, and recommence the parade.*

*Meanings.* wholeness, unity, permanence, eternity, inertia, stasis, ecstasy

# The Numbers and Courts

The ten number cards of each suit are modeled after the decades of the trumps. This is a list of the general shared qualities of each number. Some are intuitive and shared across numerology systems. Others are particular to this deck and the corresponding songs.

- 1 – the beginning, the advent, the essence of the suit and its external face
- 2 – waiting, incubation, alliance and opposition, those outside society
- 3 – growth and harvest, expansion and transformation, innocence and loss of innocence
- 4 – stability and stagnation, control over oneself and others, protection and oppression
- 5 – guidance and influence, exploration and temptation, binding, traditions
- 6 – communion, renewal, acts of God: miracles and disasters
- 7 – depth and dimensions, extremes, freedom and control
- 8 – balance and imbalance, permanence, interconnectedness
- 9 – things at an end, time passing, awakening, enlightenment and crisis
- 10 – possibilities and choices, clearing and transition, culmination

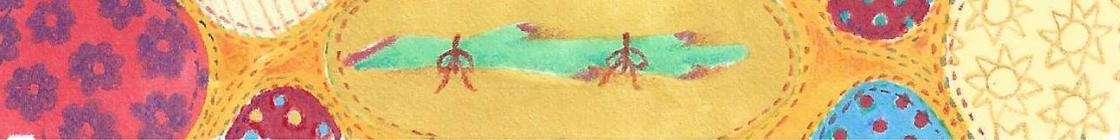
Each suit also has four cards which are given roles from a medieval court. This list retains the traditional titles for simplicity, though the Queen and King need not be female or male. On the cards, each rank is denoted by a chess symbol.

♙ Page – represents a young person, who is still in the process of learning. Some qualities of the Pages are youth, indecision, eagerness, and diligence.

♘ Knight – the most active court card. This is a person who goes to seek out the unknown. Some qualities of the Knights are adventurousness, impulsivity, and bravery.

♚ Queen – a defender and guardian. This is a ruler in the heart of their kingdom. Some qualities of the Queens are protectiveness, dedication, constancy, and wisdom.

♔ King – a planner and expansionist. This is a ruler with an eye on the frontiers of their kingdom. Some qualities of the Kings are grandeur, ambition, keenness, and magnanimity.



# The Suit of Batons

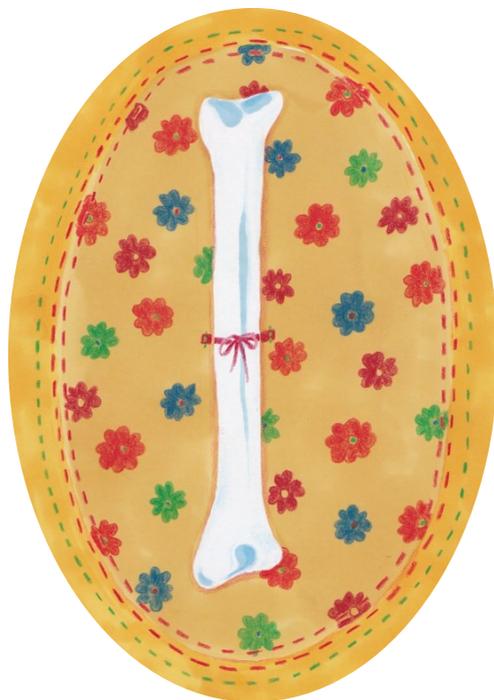
*Album:* The Milk-Eyed Mender    *Element:* Fire

*Season:* Summer

*French Suit:* Diamonds

The suit of Batons deals with life as an artist, a craftsperson, a student, or anyone involved in creative pursuits. A Baton may be a tool, a toy, a weapon, or more generally a token from the natural world. Many songs on this album weave in the tension between nature and art, or between instinct and learning.

*The Milk-Eyed Mender* is likely the most straightforward of the four albums, and in turn the images of this suit are bright, clear, and economical. Every card in the suit is based on a lyric from the album, with some songs appearing more than once.





## Ace of Batons

*Dig up your bone*

Though specifically tied to the title track “Sadie,” the bone is a recurring image on *The Milk-Eyed Mender*. Like the album cover this picture combines natural with manmade material. A bone picked clean puts one in mind of death, but a bone is also a foundation to build life upon. For this reason, the Ace of Batons usually represents the raw material for creativity.

## Two of Batons

*The talking of the tadpoles who know th’outside*

The tadpoles from “Sprout and the Bean” are new to the world and still have not left the shelter of the water, yet they instinctively know what awaits them outside. This card pertains to genetic memory, and yearning toward something which one does not yet fully understand. More literally, it can signify immaturity (the tadpoles need to grow before they can walk on land) or idle chatter.



## Three of Batons

*Peach, Plum, Pear*

Growing up and going out inevitably brings some disappointments. This next card represents the difficult passage from theoretical to practical knowledge, as in, *I have read the right books to interpret your looks*. But on the surface this is also a card of enjoyment, a trio of fruits that make a picnic.

## Four of Batons

*Clam, Crab, Cockle, Cowrie*

The Four of Batons seeks the usual balance of its number in the form of reciprocity: *will you just look at me?* Like the final verse of this song, the stability of Four combines with the creativity of Batons to give a contrary sense of happiness tempered with boredom. The sea, though thrilling, does not make a very responsive waltz partner. This card can represent company, usually of a sedate sort; or more general mixing, like the ocean flowing in and out of tide pools.



## Five of Batons

### *Cassiopeia*

The mythological Cassiopeia was imprisoned in the sky for her vanity, bound to the chair of her constellation. The narrator of this song is similarly held hostage by insomnia. This card can represent deadlock, feeling constrained physically or creatively. It can also encompass the more positive side of the number Five, in creative exploration and skill. In sleeplessness and the constellations, the narrator manages to find inspiration.

## Six of Batons

### *Paw at the wild, wild night*

In contrast to chained Cassiopeia, in the Six of Batons the body becomes a vessel for what is outside. This card represents abandonment to joy, appreciating the physical senses, watching the blooming of nocturnal flowers. It finds beauty in that which is loud and potentially destructive, like the freight trains from “Swansea.” Whatever morning brings, in this night there is contentment.



## Seven of Batons

*Makes calm canaries irritable*

A new day dawns on a strange place. The Seven of Batons shows the urge for exploration, the stirrings felt in previous cards manifested in tumultuous activity. There is the excitement of travel, but also the gnawing disquiet that prods one onward. Changing places and changing ways of thinking both create friction. Like canaries of “Bridges and Balloons” which are brought along in their cages, this card can also mean being along for the ride, for better or for worse.

## Eight of Batons

*Svetlana sucks lemons across from me*

This card brings cool relief and satisfaction. Back in Four, the protagonist looked to the sea with an open-ended question. Here there is acceptance instead of worry. Not a border to chafe against, “This Side of the Blue” illuminates the narrator’s place in the world, and fits all pieces together. This card signifies harmony with both the people and landscape that surround you.



## Nine of Batons

*It burns irrevocably*

As in the Nine of Cups, the Nine of Batons shows the destructive aspect of its element. Old ideas are processed and consumed in the bonfire. There is something of defeat at this point of no return, with Summer dying into Autumn. “Sadie” laments the loss of things that one assumed would always be there. But, the way of Batons is not to dwell on the loss. The driftwood fire burns in a spectacular display, and afterward lightens the load and clears fertile ground.

## Ten of Batons

*I go where the trees go*

In this final card, the contest between nature and art is decided in favor of the former. The autumn leaves are the *dusty wings that fell from flesh* in “En Gallop,” representing transformation and letting things fall away both literally and metaphorically. This card’s design is one of the most similar to the typical Marseille Tarot – based on the central blue diamond of the Batons – and its meaning is close to the cartomantic one. In a concrete sense, it represents a journey. More abstractly, it means a big change in one’s creative approach.



# Page of Batons

*Inflammatory Writ*

This Page is an aspiring writer, or any sort of messenger. Like the narrator of the song, they are in a mild crisis: comparing their laborious attempts to the effortless of the flying geese, and probably contemplating burning their tract. Their baton is a large staff, a source of support.

The admirable qualities of the Page of Batons are diligence, respect for the natural world, and willingness to learn. Their unfavorable qualities are intellectual posturing and chronic hopelessness.

# Knight of Batons

*Sadie, white coat*

The Knight of Batons is playful, enjoying a moment with their dog. Their baton is the bone which appears on the Ace, turned into a toy. This is not a Knight on a big mission, instead they go wherever the wind takes them. In a constant game of fetch, they never rest in one place long.

The admirable qualities of this Knight are spiritedness, affection, and energy. Their unfavorable qualities are hastiness, restlessness, and haphazardness.



## Queen of Batons

*A lady bright*

As in the Etteilla tradition, the Queen of Batons is a woman of the country. She is inspired by the mother of “Three Little Babes” and she waits at home to welcome her children, whenever they may return. Her baton is a distaff, a tool for crafts as well as a symbol of the domain of women. Thus, this card can represent a spinner or textile artist.

Her positive qualities are warmth of spirit, hospitality, and attentiveness. Her negative qualities are pride and difficulty letting go.

## King of Batons

*The milk-eyed mender*

The King’s baton is a cane, a symbol of age and earned wisdom. This King is a teacher or creative mentor, one who passes crafts and skills down to her family and proteges. She displays her handiwork on the on the walls and on her clothing, creating the world of the album and the suit.

The positive qualities of the King are a keen eye, learning, and great strength despite age. Her negative qualities are harshness and fault-finding.



# The Suit of Coins

*Album: Have One On Me*  
*Season: Autumn*

*Element: Earth*  
*French Suit: Clubs*

This suit symbol requires no abstraction – Coins are money, our wealth and possessions. The Suit of Coins encompasses both our belongings, and the places where we belong. The question in this suit is what to hold onto, and what to let go.

The designs for the coins themselves are after the Tarot de Marseille and similar decks like the Jacques Vieville (see Selected References). The four-petaled flower or cross in their center puts one in mind of the four classical elements. The cross can also be a reminder of religious or societal values.

As in the suit of Batons, every card in the suit of Coins is based on a specific lyric from the album.





## Ace of Coins

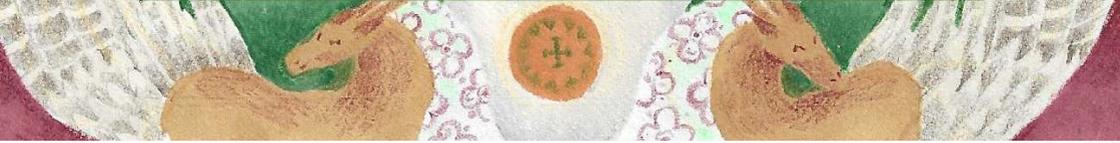
*Cuckoo, cuckoo!*

The suit begins with the chime of a cuckoo clock. Shaped like a little cottage, this card represents one's house or home. More abstractly, it signifies being rooted, to a specific place or a specific time. The line is from "In California," which belongs also to the Queen of Coins, and the spider pendulum dangling at the bottom is a reference to Lola Montez, who is the King of Coins.

## Two of Coins

*A brace of jackrabbits*

The Two hangs in an uncomfortable position. This song is like an apology letter, with regrets and hopes of mending a relationship. The narrator of "Jackrabbits" is not the hunter, but the swinging limp carcasses that he carries home. The ribbon connecting the coins is the iconic motif of this card. Here it is also a reminder of prevailing friendship: *you can take my hand, in the darkness, darling, like a length of rope*. Thus this card signifies both mistakes, and reaching out to fix them.



## Three of Coins

*Pluck every last daisy clean,  
till only I may love you*

This line describes a quaint fortunetelling game, something one would do at the beginning of a romance. The portrait in the center represents Bloody Mary, who is mentioned at the end of “Easy” and could be thought of as a fusion of III. ‘81 with XIII. Cosmia. She is a reminder that the easiness and innocence is underscored by darkness and possessiveness. The petals may be removed innocently, but when the plants are bare and the fog rolls in, there will be Winter to deal with.

## Four of Coins

*I have trouble even opening a honey jar*

While the Three deals with possessiveness of a person, the Four shows avidity for property. The sealed-off jars, guarded further by the central shield, show closedness and things tightly held. In a positive sense this can be conservation and good management of resources. In a negative sense it is hoarding and cupidity. The American-esque flag (like the one that drags in “Good Intentions Paving Company”) can also represent conservatism and nationalism.



## Five of Coins

*Though I die,  
Magpie, this I bequeath*

The Five of Coins signifies violent theft. The magpie has a reputation for pilfering shiny objects, and the gold teeth stolen from the jaws of dead women are a reminder of how far the man addressed in “Go Long” will go to satisfy his greed. Most generally, it means ruthlessness and inhumanity in the pursuit of wealth. From the imagery of the song, it is also specifically tied to misogyny, and the legacy of violence against women upon which so many men have built their fortunes and success.

## Six of Coins

*We broke our hearts,  
in the war between  
St. George and the dragon,  
but both, in equal parts,  
are welcome to come along*

The Six of Coins is inspired by the same song embodied by III. ‘81. This card brings old foes together to reconcile their differences and share common ground. The picture shows St. George and the Dragon, at the base and top of the Tree of Life. The coins are its fruit, of which each partakes. Their symmetrical position communicates balance. Even if these two don’t become the best of friends, they can share common kindness and regard.



## Seven of Coins

*I threw my bouquet,  
and I knocked 'em dead.*

Where Six is politic, Seven is careless. Lola Montez is the protagonist of “Have One on Me,” and her chaotic and shocking performances won her fame and notoriety. But this reckless attitude toward one’s craft and audience is not sustainable, and her career went through sharp highs and lows. This card signifies breaking free of societal customs and morals, taking control of one’s image, and making an impression. In a less favorable light, it can mean impulsivity and sloppiness with one’s resources.

## Eight of Coins

*In the winter, 'round the ruined mill,  
the creek is lying, flat and still;  
it is water,  
though it's frozen.*

In the suit of Coins, the balance of Eight manifests in immutable facts of Earth. While brief, “On A Good Day” centers on the essential nature of both creatures and landscape. This snowy scene is quiet and calm. The mill is locked in ice, and while it is not currently functioning, there is still the hope that after a thaw it will be back to running again.



## Nine of Coins

*In a row of silent, dove-gray days*

The Nine of Coins seeks a hiding place as Winter closes in. Of all the Nines, this one is most closely tied to IX. Soft As Chalk. The doves settle to sleep, preparing to brave the cold days. Though as a species they are migratory, many of these birds will stay put year-round. The narrator of “Autumn” feels their body age along with the Earth as they watch possessions, people, and places all slip away. The cast-away wishbone is a wish unfulfilled or rejected. The monotony of the days amplifies nostalgia for things lost, and this hibernation is colored with regret.

## Ten of Coins

*A sparkling ring for every finger*

The Ten shares a song with VIII. Does Not Suffice, and it too is about packing up. As pip cards are generally subordinate to the trumps, this one is more focused on the physical action. It is reflecting on what to leave behind, and what to carry away. In this final stage of the suit, we let go of the places and things to which we were once bound. The coins gain space in their middles to become rings. The geometric designs inside the ribbons’ loops are a simplified version of the album cover, and by giving one last tug on the ends, everything closes up and disappears from view.



## Page of Coins

*Waving my handkerchief,  
running along, till the end of the sand*

The Page of Coins is a treasure hunter, searching the beach. They have one guiding coin in the sky, and one in reserve in the sand beneath the bones. For this reason, they can represent someone who is yet to come into an inheritance, or someone who does not know the extent of the gifts they possess. They also embody the unfounded optimism from “Occident” – building cities in the ocean’s dangerous reach.

On the positive side, the Page is down-to-earth and genuine, with a buoyant attitude. On the other hand, they can lack foresight and place value upon the wrong things.

## Knight of Coins

*Them city girls,  
with their ribbon bows,  
and their fancy sash*

The Knight of Coins is a pleasure-seeker, in an impeccable outfit that matches her bulldog’s. She does not hold a coin, but is guided by a coin in the sky. On her shoulder she carries a bedecked dowsing rod, to seek out springs, veins of gold, and ley lines. She enjoys finery, but she has an eye to the future and is not opposed to philosophical discussion.

This Knight can be charming, self-confident, and thoughtful. She can also be vain and inclined to stay within her comfort zone.



# Queen of Coins

*In California*

The Queen of Coins is a farmer or land-keeper, one deeply rooted and connected to her home. Her dress blends into the landscape, and she holds her coin at eye level, as if it is a mirror. Her loyalty extends to both her own cultivated areas, and the wilderness beyond.

The Queen is hardworking, steadfast, and true to her values. In a negative light, she can be a work addict, and have a narrow and limited view of the world outside her domain.

# King of Coins

*Miss Gilbert,*

*called to Castlemaine*

*by the silver dollar and the gold glitter!*

The King of Coins is the dancer Lola Montez, whose story is woven into “Have One on Me.” More remarkable for her determination than for her dancing skills, she rose from courtesan to countess and exerted some political influence before being exiled and traveling to gold rush sites in the United States and Australia. She holds her coin casually, showing it off.

The King’s positive qualities are great ambition and charisma. Her negative qualities are avarice and lack of principles.



# The Suit of Swords

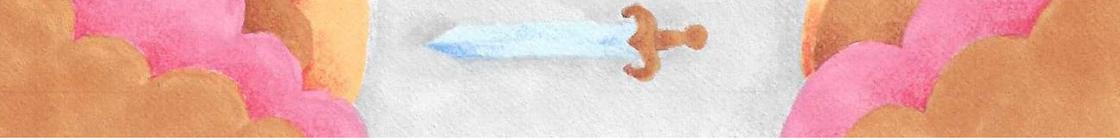
*Album: Divers*  
*Season: Winter*

*Element: Air*  
*French Suit: Spades*

The Suit of Swords deals with intellectual pursuits and challenges. The Sword cuts through problems and can divide systematically. The tension in this suit is between lofty intellectual needs, and the mundane needs of the moment. The suit also confronts mortality, and the legacy we hope to leave. This creates another sort of tension: between the individual, who passes away, and the society, that keeps them alive through memory.

The numbered cards are each inspired by a lyric from one of the ten original songs on the album. Though they do not follow the track order of the disc, they fit a mirrored structure similar to that of *Divers*. The court cards are each styled after a prominent bird from the album.





## Ace of Swords

*Hotdogging loon, caught there  
like a shard of mirror in the moon!*

The Ace features the diving loon of “Anecdotes,” an homage to the album’s title. It is swiftness and precision, plunging straight to its target. It can also mean more generally a descent or fall. Another interpretation of this card is exposure: starkly silhouetted against the moon, the loon is alone and highly visible to friend and foe alike.

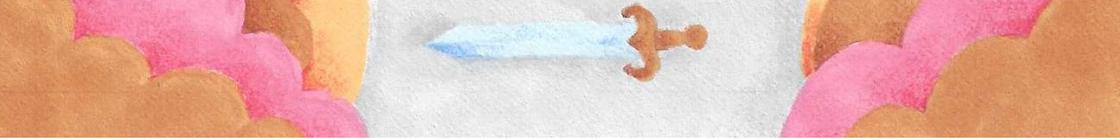
This card links to the Ten of Swords, which shows another, more reflective, mirror.

## Two of Swords

*To draw my gaunt spirit to bow beneath what I am allowed*

The Two of Swords steps back from the Ace, from action to deliberation. The narrator of “Leaving the City” waits to make a decision, striving to work within their limits. The question “Are *we* leaving the city?” is addressed to a group, and thus this card also has the meaning of cooperation or decision-making as a team. Throughout this suit, pale blue is associated with spirit and pink with flesh, and here the tension between them is like a strung bow. The crossed arrows create four quadrants. The bridled horse is opposite the barn, contrasting obligations with romanticized self-sufficiency. In the top and bottom, the passively beautiful light is opposed to the dark road that one must toil along.

This card links to the Nine of Swords, where the partitions drawn here are dissolved.



## Three of Swords

*The snow falls above me.*

*The Renderer, renders.*

The Three of Swords is about an intellectual response to Death: anxiety over being remembered. The composition is inspired by the card of the same number in the *Sola Busca* deck (see Selected References). The garland at the bottom indicates commemoration, the proverbial fruits of one's labor on display. The blue blades bend to enclose the pink, showing attachment to one's own life. But the motif on the blades is the double-helix thread of XIX. Sprout and the Bean, showing the interconnectedness that this song also explores (see X. Sapokanikan, which shares the same song).

## Four of Swords

*Time is taller than Space is wide*

This card creates a means to order the world. It shares a song with VII. Waltz of the 101st Lightborne, but focuses on the achievement and vision of time-travel rather than the consequences shown in the trump. The image is a 2-dimensional projection of 3-dimensional projection of a hypercube, one of the most famous 4-dimensional figures. The Four of Swords signifies theoretical scientific and mathematical pursuits, and success in those fields.

The Four links to the Seven of Swords, which expands in the four cardinal directions.



## Five of Swords

*This I won't forget*

Like “The Things I Say” on *Divers*, the Five and Six of Swords act as a crossing between the two halves of the suit, where time flows both backward and forward. Through the association with XV. Monkey, temptation is the province of number Five. Here, the temptation is to relive painful memories and to feel sorry for oneself, recounting *lists of sins and solemn vows*. The memorial can also serve as a guiding principle, and the Sword atop the tombstone is a reminder of the need to look upward, too.

## Six of Swords

*Stand brave, life-liver,  
bleeding out your days  
in the river of time*

Here the focus shifts from being immortalized to joining a greater collective. This image of renewal through self-sacrifice is inspired by the *Nine of Batons* from the Sola Busca tarot. (see Selected References). The Six of Swords signifies a rite of passage, a painful but necessary experience. The pomegranate is a reference of the Maiden, and the sacrifice that she and her mother relived every year, creating the seasons and marking time. This mythology is the center of XXI. Time, As a Symptom.



## Seven of Swords

*Now, overhead, you're gunning in those Vs,  
where you had better find your peace,  
whether north, or south, or west, or east.*

The Seven, like the subject of “Goose Eggs,” travels to the four corners of the Earth. This card is about responding to a call, like the geese who find their place by instinct. It can also represent traveling with a set purpose, and with a close group. In contrast to the Seven of Batons, which also shows seven birds, these geese are the ones in charge of their own expedition.

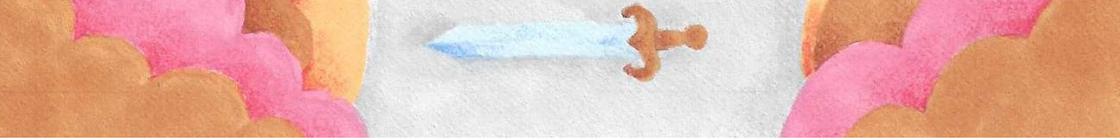
The Seven links to the Four of Swords, which encompasses four-dimensional rather than four-directional travel.

## Eight of Swords

*How long did you climb that night,  
with the ice in your lungs, on the rungs of the light?*

The Eight of Swords climbs up out of the four directions of the flat plane. The narrator of “You Will Not Take My Heart Alive” asserts ownership of the essence of their own heart and mind, that which remains through and past the demise of their body. But taking this ascent too soon requires separating oneself from others. The figure applies the scissors from VIII. Does Not Suffice to their own ladder. As they climb into the cold, the physical world spirals away below them like a severed umbilical cord or vein. On a smaller scale, this card signifies isolation, loneliness, and self-imposed solitude in the pursuit of a goal.

The Eight links to the Three of Swords, which also seeks to immortalize the heart.



## Nine of Swords

*Ancient border, sink past the West, like a sword at the bearer's fall*

A fall follows the ascent. Borders are tools to rationalize the world, to understand things by neatly dividing them into their categories. We have set borders between life and death, between past and future, between ourselves and others. The crisis of Swords comes in the title track “Divers,” with the dissolution of these borders. This image is inspired by both the *Smith-Waite* Ten of Swords and the *Sola Busca* Five of Coins (see Selected References). Though winged, the character is thrown to the ground. Their single blue sword is outnumbered by the fading pink rays, and they confront the *pearl of death* as mortality defeats their ideals. This card represents vanquished expectations, works undone, and feeling defeated by a problem or a puzzle.

This card links to the mental crossroads of the Two of Swords.

## Ten of Swords

*The Selfhood inverts on a mirror*

The resolution of Swords’ quest for immortality is to live on through others. The image is taken from “A Pin-Light Bent,” showing a camera-obscura-like duplication. The Ten signifies reflection – loved ones sharing parts of each other’s spirit in life, or reflecting through memories after death. It also refers to being made in someone’s image, which is not limited to creationist beliefs. We can see ourselves and our personalities as parts inherited from both our ancestors and our friends. This card is a reminder of those connections, and the understanding that they give us.

The Ten links to the mirror of the Ace of Swords.



## Page of Swords

*Rufous Nightjar (Antrostromus rufus)*

In the Etteilla tradition, the Page of Swords is a spy. Here with tiny Rufous Nightjar nestled in their hat, the Page shares some of the slyness of *I. Anecdotes*. They have both sword and sheath at the ready, either drawing the blade or putting it away. If frightened, the nightjar can easily retreat to camouflage.

The Page of Swords is perceptive, quick, and stealthy. On the less favorable side, the Page can be untrustworthy and easily spooked.

## Knight of Swords

*Canada Goose (Branta canadensis)*

The Knight of Swords is a bold and ruthless fighter. The goose is a notoriously vicious bird, unsurprisingly named as sacred to Mars and other war gods. Geese, like knights, are also travelers.

The Knight's admirable qualities are bravery, resilience, and preparedness. Their unfavorable qualities are aggression and a tendency to view others, by default, as adversaries.



## Queen of Swords

*Mourning Dove (Zenaida macroura)*

While the Etteilla tradition associates the Queen of Swords with widowhood, her portrait in the Tarot de Marseille can be interpreted as a pregnant woman. Fittingly, the mourning dove's call features in the motherhood-centric songs "Anecdotes" and "Time, As a Symptom." Mourning doves are native to warm climates, but they will stay through the winter to hold their territory. They are monogamous and form strong personal bonds, and are one of the few birds that feed their young "milk."

The Queen's positive qualities are dedication and vigilance. Her negative qualities are overprotectiveness and inflexibility.

## King of Swords

*Common Loon or Great Northern Diver (Gavia immer)*

The King of Swords is traditionally a lawyer, fitting the suit's type of both scholarliness and combativeness. This King is a hybrid, like the loon which dives underwater as well as flying through the air. He has both theoretical knowledge and the ability to apply it.

The admirable qualities of the King are intelligence, eloquence, and keen judgement. His less favorable qualities are haughtiness and intolerance.

# The Suit of Cups

*Album: Ys*  
*Season: Spring*

*Element: Water*  
*French Suit: Hearts*

The Suit of Cups deals with public and private life. Cups suggest nourishment and feasts, where people come together. As delicate vessels, they are also emblematic of the heart, symbolic containers for deeply-held emotions and dreams. The theme of society is similar to the suit of Swords, but in Cups the focus is more on living up to family ties and community responsibilities.

The sunken city of Ys, for which this album was named, was once surrounded by the sea and shielded on all sides by great walls. Its people, and most specifically the king's daughter Dahut, are accused of all manner of immoralities in different versions of the tale. In all, the city falls when Dahut gets hold of the key which opens the gates and lets the water in.

The five songs of Ys are dense, decadent, and interlacing. As a result, the images of this suit are mosaic, each drawing on lyrics from a few different places. The numbered cards have a mirrored structure like the suit of Swords.





## Ace of Cups

*Sun pouring wine, lord, or marrow*

In this card, we see a city from afar, rising up from the sea. It is cradled in a surrounding forest by a monumental cup. The church spire is prominent, and the sun rising above the cup resembles the host in the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist. The album contains some religious references, and the legend of Ys is itself colored by a Catholic society. Furthermore, in tarot the suit of Cups has almost always been linked to the clergy and religion. As a result, such imagery recurs throughout the suit.

This card links to the Ten of Cups, which shows the city submerged.

## Two of Cups

*Drop a bell off of the dock*

The Two of Cups shows the princess of Ys sneaking out to the dock by night. Her reflection, holding the key to the gates, foreshadows the downfall of the city. The bell dropped into the sea is a covenant with this shadow-self. This card is about alliances, especially secret ones, and more generally things that are suppressed and hidden. It can signify a fateful meeting with another, or a look at one's own reflection.

This card links to the Nine of Cups, where the vision in the water comes to pass.



## Three of Cups

*Peonies nod in the breeze, and while they wetly bow  
with hydrocephalitic listlessness, ants mop up their brow.*

This famously tongue-twisting lyric is the extreme of decadence, a scene of oppressive heat and moisture. The narrator mourns the end of childhood as she calls her sister home. In the overgrowth there is also spontaneous creation. The reclining figure at the bottom is a reference to the *clay-colored motherlessness* invoked in this section of “Emily.” While this could mean literally the loss of a mother, it could also be, figuratively, the opportunity to invent oneself, the desire to be defined as an individual without the influence of one’s forebears. Besides growth, this card also shows the interactions of nature – the ants that walk on the peonies.

This card links to the Eight of Cups, where we see blossoms and bugs of a different kind.

## Four of Cups

*Carry water and chop wood*

One moves past the languor of the Three to make oneself useful. As the maxim goes, “Before enlightenment: chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment: chop wood, carry water.” The simple necessities of life are a constant, balancing out whatever drama plays in the soul. This card shows someone living a well-tempered life, pushing forward through spiritual excess by useful work. In a negative light, it could also signify ennui or boredom with a routine.

This card links to the Seven of Cups, which also goes out to forage.



## Five of Cups

*When the blackbirds hear tea whistling they rise and clap.  
Their applause caws the kettle black.*

The threat of thieving blackbirds is one of the excuses used by Monkey to manipulate Bear, casting her needs as irrational excesses and making her feel guilty for taking care of herself. Delaying gratification – waiting to have a tea party until well out of blackbird territory – can be a great help and motivation in the right circumstances. But for Bear, it’s certainly not so happy. Adhering to this doctrine can lead to privation with no good reason. Similarly, this card can mean being goaded on by phony rewards and threats.

This card links to the Six of Cups, which shows a lonelier picnic.

## Six of Cups

*And all those lonely nights  
down by the river,  
brought me bread and water  
by the kith and the kin*

The bread and water in the Six acts as life-sustaining aid, support in dark times. This card is a reminder of obligations to and from family. The other component of this card is a kind of reversion. The figure is *pushed back into a tree*, a natural sanctuary or a primal form. In this way, we can generalize from remembrance of previous generations to a search for the past and mourning for what has been lost.



## Seven of Cups

*I took my fishing pole (fearing your fever),  
down to the swimming hole, where there grows a bitter herb*

While the Six retreats, the Seven of Cups rows out. The boat is at a wall, a border beyond which nothing but cloud is visible. The pots above hold *yarrow*, *heather*, and *hollyhock*, all of which have medicinal uses. Heather is also a common material for a besom, a tool for both practical and spiritual cleaning. The over-all message of this card is healing, cleansing, and remedies; freedom from illness and from other evil influences.

This card links to the discipline of the Four of Cups.

## Eight of Cups

*Spiders' ghosts hang, soaked and  
dangling silently, from all the blooming cherry trees*

Cherry blossoms, broken by the rain, are a symbol of ephemeral beauty. The blossoms, all spring and youth, contrast with the dead spiders hanging just below. This is a reminder of the hundreds of small crimes committed daily, the seemingly inconsequential creatures that die to sustain the world. The line comes with the refrain *be a woman*. The illusory ideal of femininity is as fragile as the blossoms, and like them is underpinned by thousands of harms. At its most negative, this card signifies a slow, but unstoppable, draining.

This card echoes the call to a sister that began in the Three of Cups.



## Nine of Cups

*Grope at the gate of the looming lake that was once a tidy pen*

Like the other Nines, this is a crisis point, where the building strength of the suit's element becomes too much to support. The image can be interpreted with a typical water-as-emotion metaphor, as feeling overwhelmed with dread building like a looming wave. The familiar sanctuary of the animals' pen transforms into a foreign scene of terror and anxiety.

In this card, the vision below the surface in the Two of Cups moves into the waking world.

## Ten of Cups

*The seagull weeps 'so long'*

At the Ten, we are back to looking at the city from afar like in the Ace of Cups, but now it has sunken beneath the waves. The sound of church bells comes only faintly through the fog, almost indistinguishable from the seagull's cry. The cups themselves are what has washed ashore, those that were able to float. This card thus has the meaning of artifacts, both literal and metaphorical.



# Page of Cups

*The little white dove*

The Page of Cups is a friend of the heart, a favored companion. A white dove nests in their cup, sheltered by a veil. They carry the lid in the other hand, ready to close the cup and protect their charge. More doves fly around their head, helping their friends.

On the positive side, this Page is considerate, meditative, and affectionate. On the negative side, they can be self-effacing, and susceptible to flattery.

# Knight of Cups

*Help me, Cosmia; I'm grieving*

The Knight of Cups is a mourner, or more generally, one who explores their emotions. They bow ever so slightly to their cup, following it in a straight course along the seashore. Their outfit is the wings of the Cosmia moth, in this deck associated with XIII. Cosmia.

This Knight's positive qualities are sensitivity, subtlety, and spirituality. In a negative light, the Knight of Cups can be depressive, prone to put on a show, and inclined to conform to avoid conflict.



## Queen of Cups

*Webs of seaweed are swaddling*

The Queen of Cups is a stewardess of the sea, the guardian of the shores where the Page and Knight walk. She is covered in seaweed, and we can imagine that she appears only at low tide. For a scepter she holds a narwhal horn, an icon of purity. In the other hand, her cup supports a squid, who can obscure and entangle when necessary.

On the positive side, the Queen of Cups offers security and inner calm. In a negative light, she can be dishonest, evasive, and undisciplined.

## King of Cups

*She'd lain, as still as a stone, in my palm, for a lifetime or two;  
then saw the treetops, cocked her head, and up and flew*

The King of Cups sits high in the trees, the only one of his court who has left the seashore. He looks kindly at the bird who was resurrected in his hands. A mystical interpretation makes him a miraculous healer. In a more everyday setting, he is someone who gives second chances.

Seen in a positive light, this King is fair, charitable, and generous. On the negative side, he can be selfish and manipulative, raising himself too highly above others.

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