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A Fool's Journey: Poetry Through the Art of the Tarot

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A Fool's Journey:

Poetry Through the Art of the Tarot

By

Rachel Lynne Howell

A thesis submitted to the Department of English of the State University of New York
College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

January 21, 2010
A Fool's Journey:

Poetry Through the Art of the Tarot

by Rachel Lynne Howell
Dedication

To

Ben Wroblewski,

My source of laughter and love, who holds me when I’m sick, inspires me when I’m blank, and finds me when I’m lost.

Thank you for being my happily ever after.

Stephen Fellner,

For his unwavering support throughout this ordeal.

my Father,

Who helped me realize the value of education.

and my Mother,

Who has an eye that will always catch the prepositions I end my sentences with.
Abstract

As a medium, poetry often delves into the unknown, into the subconscious levels of our private and public selves. It is in that spirit it is almost identical to the art of the Tarot. Tarot has been used to represent the unknown, the foreseeable future, or, conversely, elements within the reader or client (if the cards are used in a divinatory purpose) of which they may or may not be aware. The purpose of this poetry collection was to delve into that unknown within myself, to use the art and lessons of the Tarot to create a collection that was kinematic...constantly moving in different directions without a particular reason. That is the essence of the Tarot, and the journey of life that the Tarot reflects; there is no set pattern to life, it is constantly changing. The turning points for the Fool within his journey through life are representative of the journeys we all must make, the shuffling of the cards, representative of the randomness of the world and the journey we take. It is with this random, uninhibited mindset that this collection is presented.
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Introduction

I have been interested in the art of the Tarot since I was very young, and have yet to find a collection of poems based on the cards which date back to the early 1400s (though an earlier deck is still partially intact from 1390). The poems that I present for my thesis are representations of, reflections on, and general reactions to the seventy-eight cards found within the most widely accepted variation of the cards, the Rider-Waite-Smith deck, or, conversely, a reaction or reflection upon the stage of life that various cards represent. The Fool’s journey, which traditional Tarot readers describe as the path that the Fool (card “0” in the Rider-Waite-Smith deck) takes, represents the voyages we all must make towards enlightenment, or, the World (card XXI in Rider-Waite-Smith). The Fool begins his journey naively; full of the hopes, dreams and the lightness of soul that accompanies an unmarred heart. Throughout his journey, the Fool is shown the lessons of the various Trumps (the twenty-two Major Arcana in the Tarot), until reaching the completion of his heart’s desire in the World. The sardonic, often pessimistic voice that is heard throughout my poetry collection reflects the disillusionment that one could argue the Fool feels as his hopes and dreams are fulfilled, reworked, and often shattered along his path to completion.

“To understand [the Tarot’s] nature,” Cynthia Giles states in her “The Tarot: History, Mystery, and Lore,” “one must begin where [it] begins— in the realm of the imagination. Imagination is the faculty that allows us to experience the immaterial. Ordinary perception operates through the senses…but imagination is not bound by the rules of space and time which govern materiality,” (Giles, ix). It is in this mindset
that I began my poetry collection; the poems are often beleaguered by the material world, but, equally as often, they transcend into an immaterial level of perception. Time frames, as well, are toyed with; it is not uncommon within this collection to view a medieval setting alongside Gary Coleman.

My main influences as a poet, I feel, come from a variety of feminist poets, and my own general realist/nihilist personality and reactions to the world at large. My writing is extremely blunt, which I feel should be done more within the art world. Too often writers, especially poets, write around their true feelings to avoid seeming crass and to bypass offending someone. In my opinion, this is detrimental to the poem as a medium. The plain language, voice, and wry humor which feminist poetry embodies is essential to my own work, as is the penchant that feminist poets have for noticing the radically obscure elements of life and making them seem almost mundane. Within Kim Konopka’s “I Want,” she creates beauty and humor from the blandest task, laundry:

I want

to share a laundry basket,
get our clothes mixed up,
wait for the yelling
when my reds run wild
into your whites
turning them a luscious pink,
your favorite color of me.
I enjoy the first person voice that feminist poetry almost always offers, because it creates a sense of camaraderie with the audience that many other forms and voices within poetry fail to do. This need for truth, regardless of the toes stepped on or the stereotypes dispelled, is integral to my view of poetry, and, coincidentally, the Tarot.

The Tarot as an art form tells the story of the journeys one makes throughout life, each card representing a turning point in one’s path, and, in a similar manner, does not avoid relaying messages that the user may not wish to hear. The pictorial keys that essentially are the Tarot were not only important as an art form, but also to shield the bearer from being labeled and executed as a religious heretic. Though the cards are traditionally used for divination, their “advice” can be taken without the necessity for indulging in occultic references, as the majority of civilization will go through the same “trials” outlined in the deck. For example, Death, The Tower, and The Devil, all widely understood by Tarot believers as cards with very bad connotations, can also symbolize regeneration, sudden change, and temptation, respectively, each an element of the normal lifespan, or even an everyday occurrence.

The history behind not only the Tarot, but also the specific deck I am using as my focus is interesting not only as a poet, but as a female, if only based on the past of the artist who did the paintings for the Rider-Waite-Smith deck. The illustrator, Pamela Smith, lived a life wrought with devastation, but did not allow it to let her lose her belief in her own abilities, which is a sentiment that I feel is reflected in my own work. Through the often used tactic within feminist poetry of strategic essentialism, I feel that my poetry comes across as fresh, intriguing, and hopefully
unexpected. Within strategic essentialism the goal is often to create a sense of need in the reader for the group described, or, to show how integral that group is to society. Feminist poetry does so by displaying the honesty and perspective that can only be achieved through a realistic outlook on society and the world at large.

My main influences within the poetry world are Kim Konopka, Anne Sexton, and e.e. cummings, all of whom have varied styles and topic choices within their works. In addition to my favorite poets, I often found myself using the works of Denise Duhamel and Kim Addonizio for inspiration while working on my thesis. In regards to the need for accuracy when representing the Tarot within my thesis, I used a variety of books that discuss the history, myths, and symbolizations that the cards as a whole and individually represent. While these books were a useful secondary tool, I mostly focused on my own reactions to specific cards as the primary driving force behind the poetry collection, however, I did, on occasion, poll various acquaintances on their reactions to a specific image on the card and written from there. While writing this collection, I used not only my reactions to the images themselves as fodder, but also used the images to draw out life experiences from my own past.

With my poetry, I strive to show a realistic representation of my feelings, even when done so through a somewhat fanciful lens. I have a darkly humorous, sardonic tone within most of my poetry, which is balanced with the honesty of the general purpose of the poem, whether it is a representation of a good memory, a painful experience, or a general thought on a topic. I am aware that the pessimistic attitude represented in poetry can be construed as repetitive and boring, however, when
coupled with the vulnerability that is visible within my work and the work of the poets I will continue to read while writing the rest of my thesis. Anne Sexton’s collection of poems, *Transformations* have influenced me more so than most other poems I have read, because she focuses on emotions realistically, and utilizes traditional fairy tales in an unconventional and interesting manner. My favorite, “Little Red Riding Hood,” discusses the typical children’s tale through the lens of feminist theory:

Long ago

there was a strange deception:

a wolf dressed in frills,

a kind of transvestite.

But I get ahead of my story.

In the beginning

there was just little Red Riding Hood.

Kim Addonizio’s work, specifically her poems, “Mermaid Song,” and “Salmon” taught me to focus not only on the important elements of life, but also on the mundane, because, even in the mundane, beauty can be found. Denise Duhamel’s “Snow White’s Acne,” “Yes,” and, “On Being Born The Same Exact Day Of The Same Exact Year As Boy George” are also representations of the stylistic choices that I use throughout my collection. They are innovative (“Yes,” for example, uses a listing pattern within the poem that I haven’t read from any other poet) and I find
myself unable to stop reading Duhamel’s work once I begin it. Kim Konopka’s “I Want,” especially, reflects the type of poems that I often find myself writing; they are based on love/hate relationships in interactions within oneself and in interpersonal connections.

In my thesis project, I have included seventy-eight poems, each representing a specific Tarot card, labeled and presented based on where in the divided Arcana it resides (Major: greater mysteries, or Minor: smaller elements). It is my goal to turn this set of poems into a publishable work for release with a deck of Tarot cards, most likely done by an artist with whom I am acquainted.

The poems themselves often represent stages of my own journey, or, conversely, simply pick up on an image, teaching, or general feeling I drew from the card it represents. For example in the Rider-Waite-Smith deck, card thirteen of the Major Arcana, Death, is represented by a skeletal figure riding a white horse. The figure, a representative of the grim reaper as pictured within the medieval Danse Macabre, is pictured holding a black flag with the “mystic rose” emblazoned upon it. The image brought up a long-suppressed memory within the caverns of my mind:

He landed: limp, hopless, warty,
a few yards away,
not waking to hear my apologies.
whispered into where I assumed his cars were
I placed him in a plastic seashell case
that had housed a string of fake pearls my mother gave me.
Conversely, the poem inspired by the Three of Cups was brought about more so by my imaginative reaction to the image and the influence of pop culture, than any experience I have had in my past. The distinction between the persona I sometimes adopt and my actualized self within my poetry is denoted by the capitalization of the “I” within the poem. The persona “I” is capitalized in accordance with traditional standards, while the actualized self is represented by a lowercase “i,” alluding to not only the lack of adherence to tradition, but also to the self-effacing voice with which I represent myself in my poetry. In some instances (III The Empress, especially), the persona “I” will address, or comment on the actions of the poet “i,” in others, the poet “i” comments on the action of the “you,” the assumed protagonist of the action. The “you” within the poem, is predominantly my voice attempting to talk to the reader, however, at times, the speaker (be it myself or the persona “I”) within a poem has a certain “you” in mind.

The formatting of the poetry is possibly the only “traditional” element of the collection, beginning with “0, The Fool,” and ending with the “King of Pentacles.” The poems themselves don’t need the placement they reside in at present, certainly, Tarot as a medium is meant to be shuffled, to be continually changing and rearranging placements, however, if only for the visual aspect of the collection, the poems are arranged as the Rider-Waite-Smith deck arrives when untouched: Major Arcana first, followed by the four suits of the Minor Arcana, Wands, Cups, Swords, and Pentacles. It is no coincidence (for, in Tarot there are no coincidences) that the Minor Arcana begins with Wands, the suit of Fire, of a Choleric Jungian persona; it
begins with ambition, energy, and passion. Following Wands is Cups, the relaxed curiosity of the Phlegmatic Water. The impulsive, Sanguine, Air of Swords follows, and is followed by Pentacles, the suit of Earth, the dissatisfied Melancholic. The reflection of my own journey is reflected best in the transition of the Minor Arcana, from the fiery passionate Wand (I began my journey, and remain, in part, a Leo, a fixed fire sign), to dissatisfied Melancholia; in truth, perhaps my own identification with the Fool’s journey from passion to dissatisfaction held more weight in my decision to choose the layout of the manuscript, however, I feel that it is successful in its aim to show the pathway to enlightenment, even if that enlightenment ends in disillusionment.

The journey I took to create this collection of poems for my Thesis was quite the long-haul. One could say that I’ve been preparing for this collection with every step along the path to my “enlightenment.” In conclusion, I feel that this collection of poems truly sums up not only my personality, but also the effect that the Tarot has had on my life…one could argue without much debate that while my viewpoints effected how I read the Tarot, the Tarot has caused a distinct change in how I read everything else. It is my sincere hope that the poems have an effect on the reader, as many are an accurate representation of my own Fool’s journey.
Major Arcana:

The Greater Secrets
The Fool

begin your journey
off a cliff with
a white dog,
one of those miserable little yappy ones,
nipping at your heels.

nothing
but a red napkin holding
your life’s contents.
(they’re dripping
in the boiling sun, you know.)

colorful droplets
stain that nasty little mutt,
that you hurl into the ravine below
before turning to
begin your journey.
eternity is set somewhere between earth and air,
up in the stratosphere.
you’ll know it when you find it, because there’s a table
in a hanging garden,
a cloud oasis, and a striped barber’s pole labeling it.

flowers of every shade grow and hang around a creator,
not God, but his cousin, Bill.
Bill wears a white toga under red robes and lays all of your secrets,
or at least seventy-eight of them, out on the table.
he,
Bill, I mean,
is a seer. A long-haired Nostradamus in 2-D.
his mouth is wrenched shut, but you hear his voice regardless.

his voice is tinny and low, and it stays with you while you sit there,
awkwardly, with him,
Bill, I mean,
forever, or at least until he kicks you off of his floating garden
and into some new life.
you’ll be a beetle for a while,
and, when you arrive again in the garden, he,
Bill, I mean,
doesn’t notice you and you’ll be able to scuttle
and munch on the vines to your little buggy heart’s content,
in your heaven.
II The High Priestess

Nancy Drew
in a bishop’s hat,
my strangely erotic
Halloween costume,
uncommon knowledge
only gained through delving
in hidden computer files
midget porn and loads
of orifice-related screen names,
conversations.
“lone wolf”
underscore
“kitty eater”
you called yourself
online
my wedding dot com page sparks her interest
on Thanksgiving
my mother answers her call
then holds me over call waiting
III The Empress

three minutes spent poised over a white hunk of plastic
and some type of magical machinery that can tell you
if your life is about to end,
last even longer when they occur
on Christmas Eve.

you hover over the toilet, trying to get your aim right,
lest you piss all over the new red dress you specifically bought
for tonight’s celebration.
you pray to Jesus, and Buddha, and Allah, and Krishna, and
whatever gods that answered the prayers of long since dead civilizations
that lived in mud huts.
you decided to ask the mud hut gods
because you know that they haven’t met their miracle quota
and you don’t want them to get a pink slip on your account.
IV The Emperor

Aries ram
beheaded
and mounted
on a throne.

A Dodge D150 to be precise.

It’s never in the driveway when it should be:
when everyone is awake.
And it reeks
of WD-40 and exhaust fumes.
You have to drive with the window open,
even in the winter.

It suits him.

A father may be embedded in there somewhere,
the patriarchal glimmer might try to shine
through the cracks in his eyes,
but you wouldn’t know.
you wonder if he owns a 7-11.

A bottle of
windshield washer fluid
clutched beneath
Power Rangers bed sheets
is the closest
you’ll get to
a goodnight kiss.
V The Hierophant

Jupiter,
draped with
red velour and polyester;
plunder from
Captain Kirk’s closet.

Lovers flock
and worship
at golden feet,
not noticing
his raised brows.

A few
cardboard sets
and Styrofoam rocks
will be destroyed tonight,
but the crew can always rebuild them,
he reminds,
unlike so many dead wives in pools.
VI The Lovers

Freya intently listens
to her prayers,
whispered,
hopeful phrases,

Choose fire or apple,
but beware
each will sting
in blister or bite.

Her choice is stolen
by a streaker.
Perhaps it's just an illusion...
a body suit.
Skin colored and tight.

It isn't.

Silence,
for the theft of choice and
virgin eyes,
warrants
a diamond at least.
VII The Chariot

ride along
that which you wish to defeat.

black and white
sphinxes
saddled up for battle.

a modern day Ben Hur,
without Charleton Heston’s physique,
rises before a fool.

victory is no end,
but another beginning.
VIII Strength

lions can be tamed
by slathering peanut butter
all over your hand.
try it.

I'll wait.
IX The Hermit

greet the dead-eyed statue, once all of my heart,
toss a lantern at his fixed grin

watch him crumble before me.
chunks of granite,
his cold remains, cradled to chest, slice my hands
as I gather them into the skeleton of the lantern.
they arise again, screaming,
screaming of love
of hate

i run for sanctuary, for solitude— but cannot escape,
even when buried in the mountainside.

a futile act, this self-graving,
because i can’t get away,
for his sliver still remains in my palm.
X The Wheel of Fortune

Vanna White
in a Sphinx ensemble this week
guards the four elements
as they write in their
diaries and Trapper Keepers.

Smiling Anubis,
attached to the clicking wheel at the hip,
spins, clapping and chanting:
“Big money, big money!”
he frowns
when he bankrupts.

The two-sided coin
flips and twirls
on a magician’s table,
squishing the poor snake
that happened
to get in his way.
XI Justice

salad bowl haircut grown out to shoulder length

cut with a double-edged sword in a magic mirror

“Yes, you are the fairest one, sire,” it said,

a bit of tongue-in-glass humor.

Solomon’s wisdom does not encompass the realm

of fashion, and a Tim Gunn,

restrained underneath billowing red robes,

can make only an accidental statement.
XII The Hanged Man

upside down Jesus
a kind of vacation
or an ad
for Pantene Pro-V.

Maybe that’s what
the “body of Christ”
really meant.

He always had
fabulous hair
for a guy from the desert.
XIII Death

his name was Alexander.
at least that was the name i bestowed on him,
there was no way for me to know
what his amphibian mother really named him.

anyway…

i was nine and he was in his
post-tadpole phase of life.  
it was summer; balmy, bright and
cottonwood infused.  
we were lounging on my lawn,  
i could see a white horse a few miles away
in my neighbor’s neighbor’s backyard.  
Alexander and i were enjoying a cool breeze
when the unthinkable happened.  

my hands,  
that once cradled his toady body
were inundated with a warm liquid,  
and, aside from the wetness,  
they were empty.  
i looked up and saw Alexander’s wart-covered frame
as it jettisoned through the air.  

oh god.

He landed: limp, hopless, warty,
a few yards away,  
ot waking to hear my apologies
whispered into where i assumed his ears were.  
i placed him in a plastic seashell case
that had housed a string of fake pearls my mother gave me
and buried him in the yard, laying a chrysanthemum.  
the closest to the mystic rose i could find in my mother’s garden,
on his grave.  
i worried that his widow,  
or the amphibian police
would soon be after me for toadicide.
XIV Temperance

two crocuses
...croc i?
fell in love.
they built a
perennial life together
on the bank of a brook.

it was lovely there:
plenty of dotted sunlight
and loads of CO$_2$
to go to their soft yellow heads,
making it easier for
the influx of penetrating bumblebees
to open up their petals
for a few long strokes;
their Barry White buzzing
drowning out the tsk-tsking
of the ruby-winged Sophrosyne.
XV The Devil

submit
to a torch-wielding gargoyle,
the artificer of power and knowledge.

don’t look behind the curtains
or you’ll see
the crazed balloonist
operating your greatest fear.

best to silently wear the staple attire of the underworld,
which you’ll receive with your “Welcome” fruit basket:
a Viking helmet
and a tail of fire,
or grapes,
the variation based only
on the bulge
in your invisible pants.

when you notice that the only items in the fruit basket are
pineapples and KY Jelly,
it will be too late to say anything,
because your guide, Danica,
will have already attached your tail
with her union approved staple gun.

Munchkins,
on their lunch break,
will meander through the door you’ve attached yourself to.
only to rape you,
destroy you from within,
with oversized lollipops
as they chat about
the Kansas Mary Magdalene
and a straw Jesus.
XVI The Tower

the devil’s lightning tail
cracks above
(a harbinger of doom).
a white shoot of bamboo,
built up in elephant ivory blocks,
grows from beneath
tornado black skies.

we flail our arms
as the ground
prepares to swallow us up
like Jonah’s famished whale.

fire drops from clouds
caress your arms
and red riding hood cloak.
I still wonder why you chose that ensemble
for our excursion,
and if the spat that followed
caused this collapse, and
if you blame me for it.

my face and a single
molasses tear
reflect an understanding
of the ravenous beast beneath
smacking its rocky lips
to gobble us,
crown and all.
XVII The Star

harvest water so you can drizzle it back onto the ground, a foot away from its source.
a bird
with a disconnected head towers atop an infant tree, trying to find how to get
how to get to Sesame Street.

promising opportunities lie ahead, if you can find something to wear.
weave a garment out of grass bedazzle it with red thistles, wilting broaches.

whatever you do is in vain anyway. optimism is only fulfilling as long as the water jugs are full.

and Poland springs can only last so long.
XVIII The Moon

the lobster dinner is our bickering topic today.
why did you want to have a picnic?
and why
if we had to have a picnic,
did you bring lobster
with melted butter in a little Tupperware bowl,
a bunch of loose baked potatoes
and crusty rolls in a Pier One basket?

the lobster wasn’t cooked all the way.
he was warm,
slightly,
and probably pretty relaxed,
because he’d just come from a nice Jacuzzi.

he jumped out of the wicker basket,
knocking over the crusty rolls
and the loose baked potatoes,
and popping the Tupperware open,
spilling butter down the slope
into the duck pond.

the lobster did a belly-flop down the butter,
in an unrecorded Slip-n-Slide commercial,
sending you a backwards glance,
and laughing
in its little crustacean way.

I’m hungry.
XIX The Sun

golden eyes,
hooded,
peer over
sunflowers and a
pre-Coppertone infant
on a docile mare.

arrogance,
in the form of
wavy locks and free hands,
pervades the refuge,
reins are for squares.

create a portal
to a melanoma-free existence.
it's easy
if you really concentrate.

you aren’t doing it right.
XX Judgment

“Awaken! Awaken!”
the flame-haired seraphim heralds
on a golden trumpet.

nude gray bodies
hold arms outstretched
to catch judgment’s notes,
harsh,
but better than
eternal nothingness.

one ice-capped mountain
watches defiantly,
refusing to raise
its peaks any higher.
dead souls will leave soon
and he will sleep in solace.

bliss.
XXI The World

I was Helen of Troy in a past life & I’m glad I wasn’t Cleopatra— because everyone’s been her at some point.

I’ve been a Viking, too, with a full red beard and giant biceps, which pulsed sensually, I’ll wager, as I raised my arms to pull off my horny hat.

I think I built a pyramid too, but that was long before I bled out in my hoop skirt, pierced through my lower back, the spot where I have that weird birthmark, with my mother’s parasol.

But I digress… being pulled in two directions and watching a stuffed wooden horse roll over my cat, Mipsy, tends to push out the inner bitch, my eternal Viking, and whoever “wins” me is in for one hell of a surprise.
Minor Arcana:

The Lesser Secrets
Ace of Wands

even a small flame
makes leaves fall, forest dying--
graveyard of ashes.
II of Wands

what do you do when someday isn’t someday soon enough?

my father worked for forty some-odd years at an air conditioning plant. he said it was always warm inside, which he found particularly funny. he came home smelling of gasoline and radiator fluids, alabaster hands stained black with oil. fingernails full of grit of unknown origins.

when he retired, without much pomp or circumstance, they ushered him out of the warm factory and thrust an engraved plaque in his hands.

they spelled his name wrong.
III of Wands

when you get lost in the desert,
it’s important to set up sticks in a triangle,
at the highest point you can find,
so rescuers can find you.

see,
that’s why you find bleached skeletons in the middle of the sand,
with little shiny black and gold scorpions
scuttling in and out of the empty eye sockets.
the skeletons,
before they were lying bleached in the sand,
probably danced around in leaves of three,
then itched their skin off because they were fresh out of calamine lotion.

you just can’t give some people advice.
IV of Wands

we did it.

took that visceral leap,
rationally thought drowned out by the thump thump thumping of our hearts,
holding pom pom bouquets,
wearing garlands of flowers in our hair.
I wore white, despite the jokes you made at my expense,
calling it false advertising.
it was June.
not because we bought into the rhyme about June brides, but because...
well, so maybe we did buy it,
but we were too jubilant for our own good.

there was an archway decorated with vines and flowers and apricots.
we sidled through it together,
clutching our sweaty palms in an embrace,
the closest we would get to any action
until we climbed into the limo we hired to carry our bodies,
full of alcoholic bubbles,
to our suite.
you snuck your hands under my taffeta and lace and I came
down as we pulled into our hotel.

the meandering walk to the room is a blur,
but soon we were curled around each other, nude, aside for a veil and one black sock,
clutching our sweaty palms together.
V of Wands

y they raised their staffs in anger, arousal, and rivalry. “Don’t allow your ego to force you into an uphill battle you can’t win,” the director said. “It’s business, not social, remove upheaval or else.” Orgies take so much energy, especially when you are the sole female in the group, being poked and prodded from all sides, your once sassy Liza haircut matted in what you hope is just sweat. Set aside space for your ego to hide while you, too quick to say you’re doing it just for the money, allow dozens of hands to roam over you like scurrying cockroaches.
VI of Wands

the last thing she saw was a Christmas wreath, hovering between two yellow beams of light.

the day hadn’t begun on a sour note, at least, it didn’t leave her expecting this.
she had awoken early, had a leisurely breakfast with her daughter and trotted through her uneventful day, the dream of comfort and ease finally realized.

her demise came, thusly, as quite the shock after reaching the apex of her day.
the wreath came hurtling towards her as she cantered across pavement, in search of some aimless diversion just on the other side of the asphalt.
she froze--
horror filling her calm brown eyes,
she felt the impact, saw her legs break and wobble in the air as flecks of glass and pine sprigs and shining red ribbons sprinkled and danced in the hazy yellow light.

she blinked once...twice then her eyes fell back, glossing over and rolling up, staring at the crumpled wreath above her.
VII of Wands

I defended you, you know.
after you ran off.
Back towards the hill we came from.
Our attackers were of that other race,
you know the ones.
Their bodies are thicker than ours, barbaric,
more suited to the acrid climate our hilly home sat in.

They reared up at the two of us, en masse.
This was when you ran off.
I wanted to give you the full account,
in case your eyes were closed when you scurried away,
your metasoma tucked between your legs.

When you returned, heading up the cavalry, it was too late.
my body was divided into parts on the ground.
My elbow twitched above my face when you were near me once again,
in a final attempt at waving goodbye.
It was unintentional.
VIII of Wands

there was a tiny sapling,
or whatever a tree is called when it is past its infancy,
but not quite tall enough
to be considered a “real tree.”
it grew on the edge of a sloping hill
that led down to an interstate.
but, for the moment, let’s forget that concrete distraction.
the tree, that little piece of pubescent greenery,
was surrounded by hills
that were covered in a moss of larger trees.
despite the blow to his coniferous ego,
the sapling stretched his brown limbs higher,
reaching towards patchy sunlight.
IX of Wands

there’s no need to look shiftily at the clotheslines,
just because you staggered into ours, and three of our neighbors’ last night,
after you polished off my bottle of Root Beer schnapps.
you, in your drunken, rambling stupor,
decided to build a 4 a.m. shrine in our backyard.
but by the time you set eight of the lines up again, finally
getting them untangled from the heap they were in,
you were battered and bruised, and the neighbors were rallying
to collect their posts and lacy things.
X of Wands

it was a half mile trek.
not quite the horrifyingly difficult length of road leading up to Golgotha
that they show in the movies.

albeit the burden was cumbersome,
the weight of your average sixteen-year-old chick
without an eating disorder.

he sweat, profusely, as he pushed himself forward,
a tattered blood-stained breechcloth draped around his waist,
hyping up the dramatics for the passersby.

fodder for quips centuries later:
why did Jesus cross the road?
he was nailed to the chicken.
Page of Wands

i caught you stroking it outside of my bedroom window.  
an odd ode to me.  
grunting and jerking in the dark, eyes sparkling in the clouded moonlight--  
pursuing your bliss, your clammy fingers waxing your rod.  
i glanced out my frosted window, in an eager attempt to discover *wherefore wert thou.*  
your face paled when our eyes met.  
i leaned back, my hands disappearing beneath my sheets,  
my glittering irises regulating,  
expanding,  
gyrating in my eye sockets.  
i imagined that was what you wanted to do to me.
Knight of Wands

a salamander meandered its way up your neck.
curved and black and covered in nearly invisible scales,
his long tail wrapping around itself, mid-flick when i spied it.
the two of you are closer than i had imagined at first,
slimy and cold-blooded.
we sat together in steel chairs, yours had a thick armrest, which you didn’t use.
your head hung forward, beads of blood trickling onto your shirt,
i snapped a picture, for posterity.
when the blood had settled, we switched chairs, and i was hoisted backwards,
my head lolling back and shuttering as a ladybug scuttled up my hip.
Queen of Wands

Whitewall was her first cat. He crawled up her apartment steps and mewed angrily until she opened the door. She nursed him back to health, and he became fat and happy. She repeated this process, this nursing into lethargy, with my father.

They met in the same way she and Whitewall did. My father yelled at her door until she went out with him, just to get some peace and quiet. For some reason, they fell in love. They grew together—she, my father, and Whitewall—all becoming fat and happy. Though her fatness was short-lived.

A screaming hunk of baby joined the trio (that’d be me, wasn’t I cute?) and Whitewall began to be ushered outside more often, and his incessant mewing went unnoticed, ignored, drowned out by my baby wailings. I grew fat and happy, my pudgy baby legs carrying me to chase his black and white fuzzy body.

A fifth member shoved his way into the group. A nude, screaming Yoko Ono… but that was redundant. He was a baby version, wailing with no rhythm. He shot up like a sunflower long after Whitewall died and I ceased to be fat and happy. A jingling ball, laden with dust remains his only memento. It sits under the couch surrounded by the chess pieces he absconded with.
King of Wands

his arms were full of a toe-headed boy missing a sandal.
blonde hair covered in dust, curly from the filth.
shoeless, cranky, screaming
in the 4A.M. haze that had settled over the cereal aisle.
blue eyes brimming with bluer tears gazed
at me, and my armful of margarita mixers.
precious cargo, that, as I can’t drink tequila straight.
he glared at me, eyes hooded by a NASCAR hat.
I glared back, but that isn’t uncommon. I’m glaring now.
some blonde-ish woman, draped in a bathrobe with little dancing lions on it,
came up to him, screaming in some dialect I assumed was the broken English people
start to pick up when their dinners are prepared by Chef Boyardee.
I averted my eyes to the candy rack, feigning indecision between
Bit-o-Honey and Oh Henry!
(no contest there).
Ace of Cups

a blue dragonfly
knocked down by a waterfall
lily pad lifeboat
II of Cups

we met by a hill,
a tiny green slope
besieged with white and purple clovers
and a billion jogging ants.
i had on a flowing burgundy top that was speckled with little yellow flowers.
your sunglasses kept me from seeing your eyes.
someone introduced us
and you made a joke about my hot pink Converse.

we piled into my car
and you complimented my taste in music, and i blushed into the rearview mirror.
you bought yourself a coffee and I got a soda water.
i meant soda as in a bubbly drink of the cola variety,
but you screwed it up.
i didn’t know yet that this would become a common occurrence.
it tasted terrible and i was happy when you spilled it on me.

i bought a grilled cheese sandwich
which we split,
because the sign there was so enticing
“What the fuck, it’s only a buck?!”,
you laughed when i said it aloud because i told you i never swear. 
i lied.
there was a bookshelf inside the coffeehouse
and you picked up “Everybody Poops” and read it aloud to me,
i laughed, my eyes watering into my lap.

that was when i fell in love with you.
that clumsy little day,
it was the first time it was just us two.
III of Cups

We had a three-way
in the pumpkin patch,
wearig wreaths and robes and gladiator sandals,
in an attempt to appear like
Pagan goddesses.

There was a price tag
dangling from my white toga,
which killed the illusion, until I,
embarrassed,
ripped the whole of it off and laid down
in the pumpkins and dirt.

We ate grapes and peaches
and got drunk on elderberry wine
while grasping and groping and giggling,
vaguely aware of the voyeur one patch over,
who held a sign welcoming
the Great Pumpkin.
IV of Cups

Buddha was sitting under the bodhi tree,
wasting away
to nothing,
his rotund stomach gone saggy and limp,
deflating like a hot air balloon pierced by a dart.
his followers, the passersby, and even the crows had deserted him.
in his ravenous lethargy, a vision appeared before him.
a hand,
disembodied,
jaundiced,
manicured,
floated before him, jutting out of a popcorn cluster cloud.
the hand offered a chalice,
full of enlightenment, and possibly the little marshmallows you get in hot chocolate.
with darting eyes, he gazed into the liquid, then relaxed against the tree again,
starving slowly, without violence,
the ennui in his heart
growling louder than his stomach.
V of Cups

lights flash in tune
with the tick-tick-ticking of that little beetle you heard about
on the History Channel.
there’s a dead squirrel on the side of the road with a walnut
a few feet from his outstretched paws.
there used to be a butterfly here,
but there isn’t anymore.
he left, with no grave or marker or compensation
for his little butterfly widow, who flutters around looking for some piece of him,
some antenna or dust or anything, just a memento to bury or cremate,
so she has somewhere to plant tiny little flowerpots.
as she searches, EMT’s load up a blanketed body into the silent, flashing ambulance.
a little gust of wind shoots out
when they flutter the white sheet in the air,
pushing the butterfly widow off course
and onto the pavement.
you could scoop her up, but,
then you’d have to stick
a pin through her buggy abdomen
and close her in a book.
VI of Cups

to innocence, a toast--
raindrops caress
cup's rim
and roll down
onto a hooded head.

raise a glass
or six
to jaded eyes
and vodka tears.

tinsel-lined lips
are attacked by a blustered wind.
no sanctuary
for the crippled,
a Charlie Brown Christmas
all over again,
but played back in real time,
without the dancing beagle,
it isn’t as funny.
VII of Cups

when you go out to a bar,
be careful where you set your drink.
clouds are an especially poor choice.
and always keep your eye on it.
your drink, I mean.
because you never know when some looney tune guy,
in a green members-only jacket, is going to think you’re “Superfly”
(his words, not mine)
and, given the opportunity, this gem of a guy will slip glowing pills or
ancient Chinese dragons or castles into your foamy beverage.
you’ll imbibe it, and before you realize anything is wrong, you’ll be waking up,
in a Motel 6, wrapped in a stiff comforter,
listening to the ice machine hum next to your room.
VIII of Cups

with you, i always assume the worst.
every five minute interval wherein i can’t get a hold of you, you’re fucking my best
friend, your ex-girlfriend, or the cat.
and we don’t even have a cat, you sick shit.

i drive by where you work
a lot.
i just thought i’d tell you in case you didn’t know.
i did it today, that crazed thirty-seven mile an hour drive where i turn my head
and stare at your silver Grand Prix, not caring if i plow into the car ahead of me.
which only happened once, by the way.

i have to leave,
for my own sanity, to avoid the stagnation,
the boredom,
that will surely follow my discovery
that nothing is happening.
IX of Cups

Cinderella sat in the frozen kitchen of the castle she called home, the fire dead, no cinders to slab war paint onto her cheeks, no doves, or deer, or talking mice to help her pass the day. her prince, her savior, her world, was a hunter. vicariously penetrating soft flesh with his long arrows while his bride sat, glowing still in a virginal light, because he couldn’t get it up. her head would roll later on, but, we get ahead of the story.

there she sat, alone, sootless, corked, envisioning ways to tempt him into piercing her. for days she piled her hair higher, covered herself in white powder, coming to bed ghostly, haunting, dry, but to no avail. a year passed. she found other entertainments, other soot to slather on her face, covering herself in the stickiness left by butlers. it wasn’t enough.

he finally came to her, on a cool August evening, drunk, muddy, stained with blood and animal fur. she laid back, her long legs propping up his smaller stature, marking him with her blood. she awoke then, her eyes growing wide, their pale cobalt melting into an azure. her Crayola transformation came too late, however. you were warned this was coming. her prince, disheveled, and drunk off of toilet sangria, was led away. she followed months later, her hair needing no powder to be white, leaving only a note in soot in her cell’s fireplace. be careful what you wish for.
X of Cups

finding rainbows can take some skill, especially
after tornadoes have ripped through your trailer park.
it’s what you get for living in moveable homes
in the middle of Oklahoma.

they climbed out of the buried storm shelter,
four heads popping up like meerkats,
their tattered Walmart pajamas
dragging on the pop-marked ground.

the kids danced around in glee, celebrating
their swing set making it through the destruction.
their parents, their dark-haired heads swirling in confusion,
focused on the rainbow above, and their unscathed Star Trek bed sheets
hanging in an oak tree.
Page of Cups

waiter? there’s a fish in my wine.

we ordered sangria,
and floated our tortilla chips in the orangey deliciousness.
stealing distressed glances at each other.
yet another break-up dinner, Mexican this time.
the right direction is away from the water, away from you,
your recent activity is a Montezuma’s revenge,
I have to clear myself of your effects to get better,
but I can’t. I love spicy food too much.
Knight of Cups

you can find the Holy Grail sitting on a shelf
in the employee break room at a McDonald’s in Phoenix,
inauspiciously placed next to an etched Crystal Pepsi glass.
Queen of Cups

Everyone goes through periods of depression.
At least that’s what my therapist told me.
So, I downed Prozac horse pills
with water and Jim Beam,
sipped from the elaborate flagon
that you bought me
one balmy July
at the fair.

It rained that Sunday at the fair,
a sticky, melting rain
that pushed us under a rickety canopy
with a second-rate juggler.
You watched his attempts at keeping
the multicolored balls in the air with glee,
as I focused on the thick sludge
falling from the clouds.

One of the balls fell and rolled into the mud.
You and the juggler stared at it,
then at me,
as if I had willed the ball into the muck.
Apologetically, you ran into the downpour,
the falling clumps of Italian ice,
to retrieve the ball,
i worried that you would melt along with the rain.

The juggler thanked you profusely
and we stood under the canopy in silence
until the rain let up.
When the clouds finally broke
you smiled and took my hand,
waved to the juggler,
and led me back to the bustling fair.
You bought me a candied apple.
King of Cups

you drew me in with promises of constancy;
offered a heart open, its brim unable to contain the depths within.
a slight of hand i didn’t pick up on instantly.
your large brown orbs, hovered beneath unsculpted brows
the hint of a smile was etched on your mouth,
coyly bringing me into your charade.
you sat, beneath me, lounging on your side like an emperor.

the leaves were falling around us, crisp and orange,
and apple cider filled the air.
i focused on a mouth, not its words.
your sienna eyes danced in the cooling air,
and your skin grew cooler to my touch.
i wrapped my hands in fuzzy gloves and ignored my eyes.

you held my hand tightly in your own
as we walked into the gray building, surrounded by an angry mob,
white signs bouncing in their waving arms.
wading through their prophesies was safer
than my standby coat hanger, you said.
they gave it back to me when i asked,
it sat on my lap, in a jar, sloshing about while we drove home.
i thought i would place it on my desk,
next to the jar that held my appendix.
you said it was gross to keep it as a paperweight,
so, we buried it underneath our tree, placenta and all.

winter came, as it always does,
and cotton balls dropped from the sky,
blanketing the grassy patch where we had met and mourned.
everything smashed beneath the frozen weight,
obliterating the evidence of our love.
we walked past the gravesite; our hands brushing together,
ignoring the flakes that broke us.

it took a handful of seasons before the carcass was noticed,
a flooded septic system raising it like a zombie,
rotting and open under the oak tree;
the grass bleached where it had laid, that little hunk of us
thought to be embedded in the ground forever.
destroyed, yet eternal, bits of it stuck in the ground impenetrably.
a better ending than we had hoped for.
Ace of Swords

cutting its own hole
in the ozone layer. air
is a masochist
II of Swords

hoodwinked beneath crescent moon,
the divine’s fingernail.
giant swords wielded in four-fingered hands.

still lips and stiff neck pay no heed to wind’s gusts,
which push the waves behind the blinded maiden.

but love can do that to you.

he,
a Viking, an artist, a fiend...
it doesn’t matter what his profession is this week,
he is responsible, in part.
at least for leaving her there,
and tying the cloth about the coal bob
that used to be long blonde tresses.
she blames him for the impulsive cut and dye, too.

she defended her point that he broke her,
before she plopped down on the beach’s sole bench,
hoisted her father’s katanas, and ignored his pleadings,
apologies, screams, and eventual “fine then, I’m going home”’s.

the Weather Channel says there’s a storm coming in,
he says, in a text message she doesn’t read;
her hands are full.
she curses him for leaving her like this, on today of all days.

she soon finds her yellow crescent moon shoes
soggy with salted water, and her bridal gown
feels as if it is Girls Gone Wild see-through.

her clenched jaw opens,
in a final gasp for air,
only to be filled with briny death.
but her banded eyes and guarded heart
suggest she will defend her stubborn fading
into a tidal release
regardless.

she was right, after all.
III of Swords

it was April.

I’ll always remember that.
or it might have been May.

at any rate, it was some month

on some day, some year ago.

it was mid-morning

and I was still curled up in bed,

warm and cozy.

and there was a dog-shaped dent

embedded at the foot of my bed.

there was a faint horn.

and then—chaos.
IV of Swords

a sleeping knight,
his hands pointed into a church steeple, is encased
in gold—a reward for
convalescence and bravery in the face of upheaval.
he was commended with a kind word from _Il Papa_,
before being dragged,
screaming,
to the laminating factory.

to become a trophy is a privilege.
V of Swords

ballot boxes don’t stuff themselves.
and gold broken down into molecules and transported
from there to here
has less of a chance of rematerializing than
little scuba-suited boys obsessed with cowboy TV shows.
empty victories are not completely worthless.
winning is gleeful, regardless of the circumstances.
fighting off a crippled veteran
for the last iPod in stock on Black Friday
leaves you with a funny taste of regret.
fend it off with a strawberry smoothie.
VI of Swords

the drive to the battered women’s shelter is always the longest.
quiet, shuddering tears are more disconcerting
than the constant barrage of questions
and the boy’s unconscious kicking
on the seat in front of him.
violence is hereditary.
VII of Swords

stealing from carnies
is never a good idea.

just a word of advice.

you’ll think it’s easy—
because, at about noon,
all of the carnies
are hammered.

you’ll get cocky
and abscond
with an armful
of the Sword Swallower’s props,
sneaking out on your tippy toes.

it will all be great,
 hilarious, in fact,
for the first few hours,
as you show off your pillage
at various dive bars
and grocery stores,
 thrusting a worn copy of Machiavelli
at anyone detracting from your glory.

but later that night,
as you settle in,
under your down quilt,
you’ll swear you hear
a scuttling outside of your door.
you’ll laugh it off
as nerves and the knockoff Goldschlager
you just pounded.

a soft, cool tugging
will wake you,
but your screams
will be drowned out
by the clucking, the horrible clucking,
of the Chicken Lady.

she married the Sword Swallower, you know.
VIII of Swords

spears surround a hog-tied woman, the sacrifice
to some bearded god who feasts on virgins dipped in lava
or bleached in the sun.
crows swarm around her feet, pecking the flesh off of her toes,
one by one,
providing a morbid foot massage in blood.

orange-aid tinted clay melts
beneath the scavengers' hopping bodies,
mixing in with their beakfuls of blood,
allowing them to chew her up like bubblegum.
a crowd forms on the rooftop of the castle,
which overlooks her consumption.
they file up, one by one, toting bowls of hot buttered popcorn
and jugs of Dr. Pepper.
munching in rhythm with the crows' infernal chomping.

soon her height will have dropped a foot, or two,
as her knees become part of the soggy ground,
when she falls,
wobbling like a weeble,
she'll wonder, again, why he left her there,
and why, knowing what he may do,
she let herself fall into his hands again.

worms,
and other hungry creatures,
will meander over to her when the gray sun finally sets.
the feeding frenzy will begin in earnest, then,
and raccoons and bears
and hobos
will fight over who gets to eat her eyes
and other sweet meats.
IX of Swords

in time, your worst nightmares will come true.
they may manifest themselves differently than you dreamed, however.
the knife-wielding Bozo in polka-dotted pants and red Converse sneakers, riding a
rabid zebra, that chases you around the coffeepot at work
may in fact be a mime.
just your average real-life-run-of-the-mill street performer who tries to catch you with
an invisible lasso outside of your boss’s favorite coffee shop.
I don’t know which is scarier.

or,
you could be masturbating in your bedroom, only to find that the door is open and
your roommate and his mother saw you whacking yourself,
instead of the eighth grade math class you dreamt you were beating off in front of for
your desperate “Plan B” show and tell.

and you might wake up to find that, instead of
the you you thought you were, you’re really a you you didn’t even know,
and your skin is turning George Hamilton orange,
a side effect of all the jerking off,
and you’re alone in your bed, covered up in a patchwork quilt.
X of Swords

a blood-soaked toga signals his desolation is nearly complete.
nine blades stick into his spine,
a fatal acupuncture.

the jaundiced emperor
rests his heavy head
against the cool metal of the tenth blade.

Brutus’s, maybe,
driven into the cracked ground next to
his melting face.

his fallen love stares
at his reflection in the blade,
tarnished with his own blood.

with a pulsing gurgle his insides begin to move outside.
intestines squirming out of his agape jaw,
as his eyes roll up to blackened heavens.
Page of Swords

to be vigilant while teetering on a rocky knoll takes courage;
even more so if you’re in a stiff wind,
take up a cause,
a pet project, if you will.
defend something, someone.

it doesn’t matter who.

regardless of your cause, there will be someone,
something, who will disagree.
they may come alone, or in droves. just wait.
you’ll battle them with your drawn longsword,
running up a hill, against frigid wind gusts.

and you’ll all kill each other.
sealing your horse while galloping in the desert,
your armor heating up like aluminum foil in a toaster oven,
metal stilettos gouging into its underbelly
and your parched voice wailing chopply, is a great idea.
that is, if you enjoy slow terror which creeps up as you are launched
into a warm yellow pit, transforming into a silver Christopher Reeve,
watching black scorpions scuttle over your face,
taking stinging jabs at your nose.
which, coincidentally, is the only appendage you can still feel.
you’ll wait there in the desert for nightfall,
and the hungry coyotes to tear your flesh.
Queen of Swords

It was in October.
Two weeks after our anniversary.
The unseasonably warm day put me
in an unseasonably warm mood.
i searched for you through hallways that smelled
like pencils and cafeteria foods.
You avoided my outstretched hand
like mine was falling off like a leper’s.

i wondered why and asked you.
“it’s over,” you had said, or something to that effect,
i don’t recall exactly, my eyes and eardrums were vibrating then,
which distorts the senses.
This type of heartbreak was supposed to happen
at a younger age.
But i was always a late bloomer.
Was that why?

They told me to be strong.
Again, i’m not sure what they said, or who they were,
because of my shaking senses.
i tried to guide my car into the oncoming lane,
but failed.
It was really quite a failure of a day.
At any rate, i got home,
and promptly vomited into my mother’s lap.

i didn’t get over it,
as everyone said i should.
Obviously.
Those unseasonably warm October days put me on edge now,
and i wait for another blow,
leaving my eyes and ears to vibrate,
waiting, maybe hoping to be broken again,
as long as it’s by you.
King of Swords

butterflies are not the best symbol for a powerful ruler, despite the whole “monarch” allusion.

there’s a certain element lacking in the ethical. something i can’t put my finger on. a joke, maybe? that elusive little joke that sits on the edge of your sternum and begs you to call some eight-year-old kid “chubby” when he cuts in front of you in line for a roller coaster, or the giggle that threatens to bubble up when you watch some woman plow into the car in front of her because she took her eyes off of the road long enough to flip you off. the dour line that sets across that all too-pale face when something especially ridiculous happens solidifies that lack.
Ace of Pentacles

snapdragons grow high
grow from even acrid soil
hope for renewal
II of Pentacles

I can understand why you did it,
that balancing act
holding my heart and hers (presumably),
those oversized orbs of affection,
one in each hand.

it must have been a thrill,
because, as time progressed,
you added new extensions to our arrangement,
and ceased keeping us both in separate hands.

my proverbial ship and hers (presumably)
saw the balancing act from a distance.
but, detached as we were from our orb-shaped hearts,
it took a while to react,
which allowed ample time for the lot of us
to be dropped, and covered in the muddy sands
you juggled us in.
III of Pentacles

there was a nun in Mexico
a few hundred years ago
Sister Maria Consuela...
i don’t know, it was
something Spanish.

she would pray, fervently, in her abbey
and bring the poor baskets of onions and carrots
and potatoes from the little garden she tended.
she worked hard, but
the abbey was in disrepair.

so, this carpenter came in,
supervised by a monk
to help her restore the crumbling adobe.
he worked for days,
probably forty, as these things usually work,
until some little something caught her eye.

it may have been the carpenter’s sweating skin
or the pleasant way the light reflected on the monk’s head,
but, whatever it was,
that little something,
it intrigued her.
so she lifted up her habit
and showed them her castanets.
IV of Pentacles

he's like a bird. one of those little, anal O.C.D. ones who swoop down to pick up bits of multicolored plastic toys that were abandoned by kids with short attention spans. every half-empty box of crackers or stray book or hooded sweatshirt sitting out of place get harvested in his beak, of sorts. and dropped off in some unknown location. we'll find that pile of crackers and books and hooded sweatshirts someday. probably when we move. it seems the most logical time, though it could just as easily be some odd Sunday off. a disorderly lump of stuff will greet us that some odd someday, when we move the bunny's cage. this tic, this insane compulsion for order and control is an irritant until i picture him again, hopping, scooping, pecking, covered in feathers-- a bounding little sparrow harvesting our knickknacks. i love him.
V of Pentacles

i used your old towel today.
it was ratty and bleach stained--
a peach-bruised plum.
it smelled like mothballs and Oil of Olay,
and only needed the faint hint of a menthol cigarette
and a stain of cooking sherry to be you.
my 100% cotton representation that, yes, you’re gone.

i say “fuck” loudly in the kitchen,
in the hopes that you’ll pop in and scold me,
like a better dressed Endora.
the dog raises his eyebrows at me,
then lays his head back down with a dejected sigh.
the dog is dejected.
i hope you realize what you left.
VI of Pentacles

a mouse named D’artanian scurried down a roadway,
a tiny red cape tied around his neck flapping in the breeze
(it’s as logical as a mouse named after a Dumas character, stay with me).
he scurried,
as mice are wont to do,
down a city street, in the hazy grayness of dusk.
a man was there, dressed in finery,
reds and golds and greens and shirts of silk billowing around him.
before him sat a pair of derelicts, their raw, blistered hands cupped,
to catch the pennies falling for posterity
D’artanian took this opportunity
to writhe his little rodent body into one of the tattered cloaks,
the pocket full of pie crumbs,
and scooped the largest hunks into his cape.
he escaped back to his little mousey family,
lauded, in the rodent tomes,
as the provider of the century.
VII of Pentacles

if he hadn’t allowed that
cell phone company to build
a routing tower in the middle of his cornfield,

he wouldn’t be trying to harvest
glowing corn pancakes from the ground,

instead of the normal yellow cars.
VIII of Pentacles

work on obtaining a reading of yourself that you can understand.
you can tackle a variety of tasks with only a hammer and sickle.
not to sound communist.

through your work, you are met with excellent future prospects. Although you're still in the apprentice stage,
the laborer, the hammering proletariat,
go to school or the Y.

expand your horizons beyond carving stars into plates meant for some vapid twenty-something who has no business getting married, let alone registering for gold encrusted china.

hard work is its own reward.
remember that while you’re rotting in the ground,
find comfort in the irony of it all.
IX of Pentacles

Persephone is draped in dandelions, handfuls of grapes and hooded falcons distracting paparazzi from her Angelina baby bump.
her yearly movement into the overworld, as her neighbors in her winter home call it. is surrounded by longing and introspection.
she misses him, her love, her captor, but is glad for the vacation weeks.

the three months of bounty found in her summertime recess, making reproduction a hobby to pass a monotonous nine months away underground. loneliness is only a detriment if you don’t welcome it. falcons and snails make better companions oftentimes; they eat and speak far less than your average houseguest, and scraps of carrion and slime trails are easily cleaned up.
X of Pentacles

he deserved it, you know.
but that isn’t much consolation.

the blue-onesie’d little tit sucker
waddled around the family reunion
ooh’s and aww’s surrounding him at every impasse, at first.
everyone soon grew tired of his wobbly antics,
and they moved on to more important endeavors:
frosty beverages, gloating, and grandpa’s musings about Korea.

someone should have taught him the value of kindness
at some point,
or at least kept a wary eye on the little bastard.

he reached his pudgy fingers around the dog’s tail and yanked,
as hard as his muscle-less little arms would allow.

the dog reacted as any dog would to such an affront to his ego.
snapping jaws met chubby cheeks,
tiny fingernails dug into a furry chest, filling with dander.

screams and wailings and grandpa’s laughter erupted,
drowning out the salsa music that had been playing.

someone rushed to him, slowed by a margarita haze,
and scooped his tattered form back into the onesie.
we played doctor in the apple orchard,
our soft little hands groping and prodding,
unaware of what, precisely, we were meant to discover underneath
our denim overalls.

a cool autumn breeze shifted some of the rotted apples on the branches and they fell,
with muted plops,
onto the mossy ground beneath them.

we unhooked our overalls and stood before each other, staring.
I pointed at the dangling thing between your hairless legs,
and you pointed at my lack of ornamentation.
“it looks silly, flapping around,” I said.
I stuck out my tongue out when you made fun of me.

we pulled up our OshKosh B’goshes, and ran towards the house,
I wondered briefly how you ran faster than I,
with it flopping between your thighs.
my mom baked us an apple pie, and I swiftly forgot.
Knight of Pentacles

you bedecked your horse with mistletoe,
the dual sprigs sticking up around his ears,
as though you were riding a dwarf moose.
his proud eyes dulled, his furry feet telling of his depression, refusing to move.
frustrated with the lulling equine, you dismounted, and strolled toward a pair of trees,
their branches entwined together.
I was sitting under the right tree, my limbs akimbo, eyes staring up through the leaves
at the pictures forming in the clouds.
you didn’t ask to join me, you just did.
when you pulled your armor off, it fell onto the grass with a clank.
my eyes alighted to yours,
and we joined our branches, watching your horse pace back and forth in the distance.
Queen of Pentacles

Venus sat alone in her garden one afternoon.
i think it was a Thursday.
She stared at the bounty around her,
the ram’s head throne,
the roses,
the blue mountains fencing her in,
the chocolate Easter bunny she stashed away for just such an occasion,
and she sighed.

The garden was boring,
just her and the chocolate bunny,
and she had already munched off his ears, so he wasn’t the best company.
Don’t be offended or upset,
it was just chocolate.
Venus wandered around her garden,
searching for something to do.
Or someone.

This is the story Virgil forgot,
or wasn’t told:
Venus wasn’t alone in her garden.
The gardener was there, at least on Thursdays.
He wasn’t as attractive as her Adonis,
but his muscles were sinewy,
his skin glistening and dark,
and he was more than willing to put in overtime. He’d do.

As their coupling hastened,
she realized the need for decisive action,
but couldn’t *spekin ze espanol*,
after she had finished, she summoned a tornado,
which swept the gardener up into the skies as he finished,
sprinkling his seed across the landscape,
leaving behind only his nametag,
which Venus pinned onto her tunic.
King of Pentacles

the right path couldn’t be found with anyone else tagging along, I guess.
at least that’s what I remind myself of when I see your success.
there’s no telling how quickly Dorothy would’ve gotten out of Oz
if she didn’t have Toto slowing her down.

fucking dog.
Works Cited


Print.