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Delivering

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Delivering
Rylee Betchkal

“Your chakras are a little bit off, girlfriend!”

Bethany set her long, pink-painted fingernail on the first card and tapped it gently, as if coaxing sap out of an old tree. It was the end of a brisk December, and Katie was on break from college. They were sitting at the end of Bethany’s large dining room table, where she had lit a candle that reeked of citronella and where there lay a small collection of white crystals and smooth stones. Katie shifted in her chair as that burning gaze moved from these items to her.

“So,” she prompted, “are you off balance a little bit?”

Bethany was not how Katie had imagined her to look. She could have more convincingly been a grandmother, with her whitish-blond hair, her dark knitted poncho, and the deep lines accenting the corners of her eyes. Or she could have been just a kindly neighbor who was giving Katie lessons on how to tend to her pansies while she was out of town. Either scenario was more plausible than the actual one, which was that Katie’s mother, despite her daughter’s skepticism, had paid this woman to reveal her fate. Hoping to fix the crisis that Katie had developed this past semester about her future.

“Um...” Katie began, her voice falling into an uncertain soprano. It was the same singsong tone she had often assumed in counseling as a younger teenager. To the listener, it said, “I don’t know what to say.” But what it really meant was, “I have nothing to say.”

It’s a nifty little trick. Had helped her to dodge talking about her feelings for as long as she could remember.

Bethany sidestepped the non-answer and kept going. “It’s all about bringing your energy back together. So, take some time to do what you love.”

That would have been helpful if Katie knew what it was. Or at least if it was a stable career choice.

She placed the next card on the table. It was ten in the morning; Katie wanted to take her off-balance chakras and go back to bed.

“Interestingly enough, you’re my creative girl. A Queen of Wands.”

The woman on the card looked more like a witch to Katie. All hips and ankles and rolling movement frozen by paint. The woman is a witch and a queen ready to march into a world of her own making. Laughing.

Bethany continued. “You have the mind of an artist, but you’re hard on yourself, do you know what I mean?” She paused, considered her words. “You give yourself your own war wounds. Do you know what I’m saying?”

This was not the first time Katie’s mom had arranged for her a kind of divine intervention. Almost twenty years earlier, when the doctor announced that she was ready for the world, her sweaty,

labor-induced mother asked if she could keep her in another twenty minutes – this, she believed, being the requisite time to give Katie the rising sign most compatible with hers. The doctor consented by means of incredulous laughter. He was a generous man.

The third and fourth cards came down. Bethany asked her if she was seeing anyone. Hesitating, Katie shook her head.

“Oh, good,” she cheered. “Because I see a relationship that begins for you in the springtime.”

Katie heart skipped. *Don't start buying into this crap because you miss having a boyfriend*, she warned herself.

“And it changes your life,” Bethany added, her silver earrings dangling. “It's a victory for you. A total yippy-skippy.”

A couple of years after Katie was born, a psychic told her mom that she saw in her cards the death of a sister. Not the figurative death that pervades much of tarot – not the kind that signifies change – but an actual, physical, sororal passing.

Her mother was an only child; Katie had a brother.

Her mother had feared for her life ever since.

Bethany hovered over the fifth, sixth, and seventh cards. She sniffled and wiped the underside of her nose with one of her knuckles. “You're an old soul. A super-duper old, old soul. You've had something like eleven lives already.”

Eleven lives: it was probably her most outrageous claim yet, and yet Katie found herself clinging to it. She had often felt, especially in her adolescent years, that the youth of her body betrayed the age of her mind. As if her inner life were an antique grandfather clock, shoved inside a fragile, unpolished Apple Watch. It was partly that sense of disconnect, of clumsy misplacement, which had made growing up so odd, so uncomfortable.

Her mother swore that such is only fitting for a Pisces-with-a-Cancer-rising. That it was in Katie nature to be so introspective. But this explanation had only ever left her unsatisfied. It had left her resentful of the stars and resentful of her mom's reliance on them to lead the way forward.

Cards eight, nine, ten, and eleven hit the table. Bethany was busy organizing them into straight, orderly rows. In the brief silence that followed, Katie noticed light piano music playing somewhere in the house.

“So, babies,” she began. Katie was hardly twenty; she tensed at the mere mention.

“When you have babies, your life comes full circle. Because you dedicate your entire life to your children, with teaching, with bringing them abundance.” She flashed her a warm, coffee-stained smile. “You'll make a great mommy someday.”

Katie's mom always knew that she would be a mother and she had only hoped that she could be so lucky as to have a girl. Once, as a teenager, she dreamt that she was lying on the curb outside her

high school, her fingers facing skyward. A spirit came down to greet her and, in precise Hebrew, wrote a message in her palm.

B'haba ha ema shel yalda, it read. In the future, the mother of a daughter.

Upon waking, she trusted that the universe would deliver on its promise.

Bethany set forth cards twelve, thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen. They issued a particularly marked *pt, pt, pt, pt* as they made contact with the table's surface. "I'm also seeing here that the moon is an energy resource for you. It's your friend. It helps you with anxiety, with trying to heal those war wounds, okay?" Bethany then leaned in as if to tell Katie a secret, one that not even the crystals before us could know. "Everybody has an energy resource. Mine – mine is people. That's why I do this work, you know?" She placed one wrinkled hand on top of the other and stroked it thoughtfully.

Katie felt my shoulders relax. Her candor was surprising.

Later, once they had made their way through the whole deck of cards, Katie summoned her mom from Bethany's living room, which doubled as a waiting area. It was her turn for a reading. She rose from the couch as soon as Katie entered.

"So, how was it?" she asked. "Did you learn lots of good stuff?" Her mother was beaming – beaming in that giddy, unbridled way a person does when sharing what she loves with whom she loves.

Katie thought back to what Bethany told her. Was it good? Did it help her to decide on a path? Maybe. The fortune teller hadn't told her what major she should settle on. 'Take a quick dip into the biology department, girl. That's the best for you. Yes, it is.' No, she hadn't told her what she wanted. But Katie did feel calmer. Maybe saw herself a bit clearer. The 'good stuff' was happy stuff. Didn't tell her where she was going to be or how she was supposed to get there. But she said she'd be happy. And Katie thought that if she chose to borrow just a bit of the enthusiasm her mother had, she could believe it too.

Katie looked at her mother and grinned. "I'm going to have to give you a full report on the ride home, aren't I?"

Her mom squeezed her arm before turning away. "Look who's the psychic now," she said.

As Katie watched her walk down the hall, the soft chords of a piano lilting in her head, she prayed to her friend the moon – wherever she lay hiding – that Bethany was even a little bit right. That she could one day bring her children abundance, or, if abundance were too much, that she could at least give them something to believe in.