

# Fishladder: A Student Journal of Art and Writing

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Volume 16  
Issue 1 *Fifteenth Anniversary Edition*

Article 28

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2018

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### Recommended Citation

Wagner, Haley (2018) "My Future in Past Lives as Told By Tarot Cards on a Tuesday Night," *Fishladder: A Student Journal of Art and Writing*: Vol. 16: Iss. 1, Article 28.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/fishladder/vol16/iss1/28>

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# MY FUTURE IN PAST LIVES AS TOLD BY TAROT CARDS ON A TUESDAY NIGHT

**HALEY WAGNER**

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*In a past life tarot card reading, eight cards are chosen. The reader lays them down in an inverted pyramid of three lines; four, three, one. Each card is interpreted as though the past life of the person is comprised of the elements revealed by the cards and can be projected on the present.*

## **1. The King of Pentacles** [inverted]

I am counting the money I have. I have ten dollars for all A's on my seventh-grade report card. I have twenty dollars—two dollars for every pound I have lost,—sealed in a white envelope from my grandpa. I am dividing my money, sitting on my floor in my blue bedroom. *With ten dollars, I will buy those knock-off Chucks that everyone is wearing. With the twenty, I will buy one thing for every pound I haven't lost.* I will come home with candle holders, tiny trinket boxes, and a new picture to hang on my wall. I will decline when I am invited to a movie by a friend. I will sit at home and arrange my new things.

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The pentagram shines behind the upside-down face. It's all green trees, golden staff, and vermilion legs. I can't see his face. It's distorted, but strikingly similar to my own, in that I barely recognize it. Maybe if I focused, maybe if I tried harder I could see, but I don't. He has a crown that stays upon his head.

Entitlement is a feeling that tingles. Where is mine?

*That's the whole problem, the king tells me. You never look internally. You struggle so much with your internal self that you look outward until you look so hard that the image goes blurry.* It's like when you say a word over and over again until the word sounds foreign, and feels foreign, and, for a moment, you think you understand how your own language must sound to someone who doesn't speak it.

He tells me that, at one time, I did have it all, but that it was never enough. So now, I try too hard to have a lavish home decorated with the best that money can buy, when I have the money to spend. I take pride in the pretentiousness of expensive presents. He scrutinizes me and I puff.

He looks around at my room. *We surround ourselves with things instead of people and then wonder why our minds feel so cluttered.* Cheap pictures are scattered in cheap frames with the appearance of being a class act—relics of weight loss and report card money tossed at garage sales. There are perfume bottles, books, flowers, jewelry, and incense. *Not much has changed,* he seems to say to me, and I begin mentally packing all the things I will later throw away.

## 2. The King of Cups

I am sitting on the beach. It's August, and a swirling summer storm cloud has rolled in to swallow the sun. The humidity is omnipresent and my curly hair is damp with lakewater. My mom is handing me half a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich and I am watching my lanky cousins rush at the shoreline while the waves rush back. I'm humming a flat melody, looking at gulls as they swoop in for a crumb. *Haley, sit up straight, okay?* I sit up and stack my vertebrae on top of one another, one by one. I suck in and tighten muscles I don't have, nibbling slower on the sandwich. I look down and focus on the red and white checks of my bathing suit and the rise and fall of my breath in my belly. I pose and focus hard. I look up and I have missed the next 16 years of my life.

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Saturn looms in the background, sitting above the king's throne. It hovers over him, donned in red, swinging a foot above the ground. He's shorter than his throne. Perhaps he means to show me that my head was once too big for my actions, or maybe it was the other way around. He stretches a leg down to meet the floor and poses at an angle pleasing to the eye. He is focused on his cup.

*This, he says, is determination and pride. This cup, he says, is everything you put into it. In lives gone by, perhaps you put too much in this cup and focused so hard that you lost yourself to the inner swirl of your mind.* I look at Saturn again; around and around. I sit up straighter.

The cup is gorgeous. This is not a college game of King's Cup, this is a golden cup; a symbol of success.

It's the many colors of my hair, the many brands of makeup in my bag, the many lies I tell. "I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine—" words that sparkle off my teeth like the stones in the cup. But they are sparks, and they hit my brain, and flames lick and snap and burn.

*We are our best when we entertain*, he says. *You were quite the entertainer, you probably still are*. And he isn't wrong. Maybe once I held grand balls or owned a theatre to which I was the star. Now, I offer my mind and my body, my wisdom and my laughter, to anyone and everyone. It's second-nature, as if it has always been; just me, spinning and spinning, and everyone else, watching and waiting.

The King does not look at me or acknowledge me, even as I sit straight and fix my eyes. I am hit with the cruel rationalization of what it means to only ever entertain, rather than interact.

### 3. The Emperor

I am wavering between boredom and amusement, patient as the most serious and well-behaved seven-year-old can be. Tugging on my mom's hand, I am asking so many questions: *Why are we here on Christmas Eve? Aren't we supposed to be opening presents and laughing by now? Aren't I supposed to be helping grandma clear the table? Who is God and why is he a man? I don't think I like Jesus and I don't think I will when I am older*. I am ushered out of church, told that, one day, I will change my mind; one day, I will want babies and a man and I will thank God for both, before I die. We leave the church and I don't contemplate death ever again.



Our authorities are matched and I see myself in the Emperor immediately. His clothes are grand, his look is stoic. He is a balance of violet hues. Behind him lay mountains.

*I know what's mine, he says, and you know what's yours. You are someone who refuses the rigidity of religion, and you deny all other authority and rule your own self with your own rules*. I stiffen. I feel called out. I feel like I knew this already, but hearing someone else say it aloud grinds me, skins me, and thumps me to bruises.

*You always start your sentences with I*, he says. I grimace. I ponder. And then I realize I am doing it right then and he smirks. I know what my convictions are. I know that I do not believe in a god, and if I did, she would be a goddess and humans would be long-extinct. I know that I am a point of consciousness in this universe and that I will only ever know myself and own myself.

*That's fine*, he says. *But you forget that your convictions mean nothing to the world or universe at large. You will die one day, and you will have no authority over that*.

#### 4. The High Priestess [inverted]

I am sitting by the window and searching for my life on the other side. I can feel her: my future? my lover? my everything? standing behind me. She's begging me silently to say something, anything. She wants to hear that it isn't over, but even I don't have an answer for that. *You always have an answer for everything* she'd said ten minutes ago and it has scared me to silence. At that moment, I realize I don't think I've ever really known what I want. I stare at the sky and I catch the full moon in my eyes, as if the clouds have parted just for me, and I wish—I wish that I would feel like we were both heavenly bodies in this universe.

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She's slender and curved like the crescent moon behind her head. She's sheer, exposed, gracefully naked and doused in liquid light. I am enraptured, burning, staring at her upside-down form. Here is this high priestess, ethereal and lucid, and as she falls, she and I are in opposition.

*You are not yourself*, she says. *You have not been, truly, yourself, in any life.* When she speaks, I hear my own voice. *You know how to look internally, you even preach to others to do the same, but you've led yourself astray. Look at the way you look at me; you are unable to appreciate what I am without comparing it to what you are not.*

This may be why there have been threads of scars on my body. This might be why I put other women on pedestals and wish myself into their existence. This may be why, when I look into the eyes of the two people who have ever loved me, I resent them; one, for treating me like a conquest and testament to his masculinity, and the other, for loving me more than I thought I deserved and for convincing me that only she ever could.

#### 5. The Moon

I am sitting on the floor of my dorm room, having dragged myself from the shower with sticky clumps of hair trapped in my hands. My ribs feel like they are ropes, vibrating and pulling on the boulder settled in my stomach. My face is hot, but the tears are hotter until they splash on fingers. But I keep my phone on silent and I crawl back into my bed. The knocks on the door will go ignored, but when I am needed by some friend who's going through a breakup, or some other tragedy I didn't catch on the phone, I will bat away tears and step up to the plate.

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The moon, for all she's worth, is mighty, moving tides and emotions, but she's calm. She's even. She's the harmonic light that floods the darkness. And anything I owe her I will offer her on a silver platter. But when she speaks, her voice is shrill. It is the voice of anxiety and lies. She is the cracking voice of

impatience and wariness. What do I owe her?

*What do you owe yourself?* She asks. *You owe the world your presence, and you can't do that because you owe yourself kindness.* What is kindness, but allowing myself tears when I don't want them? What is kindness but to feed myself, bathe myself, and allow myself to live? What is kindness to myself but to indulge when I can? *The basic needs of a human life is not kindness. You are neglectful of yourself and the world suffers because of it.*

No wonder the high priestess of my head is upside-down. She can't see the moon. She can't breathe. I may let the tears fall, but I don't feel them. I indulge in ways that cover other needs; I drink to laugh, and I laugh to cover pain, and I cover pain to detract from the fact that I am not sure I have ever been happy, and that is too terrifying to sit with.

Below the moon, wolves bay and a crab creeps from an ebbing tide. I wonder whether I am the mourning wolf or the clenching crustacean. Am I calling for attention, or do I cling to the moon with my claws and hope that her light will infiltrate my body? I should, instead, offer myself to myself, and my kindness to the moon, and my life to the universe.

## 6. Justice [inverted]

I am pinned between my roommate and a man whose face I can't see. She's looking back and cackling as I mouth the words to some forgotten song from our more primitive high school years. I am slightly intoxicated, though not as much as everyone else. But I know how to pretend. The floor is packed, heaving with bodies and sweat. I flip my head back, roll my hips, and laugh while the faceless man holds tight. I close my eyes. In my head, I am sitting somewhere quiet, just listening to someone. Listening and watching.

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*You carry around the injustices of lives past,* she says. Justice, as she stands in pure white robes, holding a harp, is blindfolded. She can't see me, but I can look directly upon her. And she is upside down. *You have failed to let others see you as you are.*

Seeing Justice flipped on her head seems so wrong.

*You are unable to see the wrongs you create by always feeling the need to be right.*

The ten year old me, who was embarrassed of being wrong, ever, is preparing to be defensive. She is standing on an apple crate, leveling herself out with the rest of the world, but she gets too tall and looks right over it. *Tell her to step down.* I don't know if I can. I have hardwired myself to be on the right side of the Libran scale. I aim to balance, and I balance to please. *Therein lies the consequence of your existence.*

So when I wonder why I go home at night feeling lonely after being the center of attention, lit up, flared out, and heard, I can't help but know it's my own fault.

### 7. **The Star** [inverted]

A test of faith, perhaps. The lack of a guiding light. When you don't let people in, how would you know. When you can't even tell the person who shares your bed that your stars feel misaligned, that you aren't sure if you can find what you're looking for, when you use *you* to refer to yourself instead of just coming out and saying "I am lost, I have no North Star," what, exactly, do you expect?

A star for direction is useless unless you know where you want to go.

This star is silent. Her goddess is nude and frozen in place. I am waiting and waiting for her to say something, anything, and I get frustrated at my lack of interpretation. And that's what this is. No one can guide a person through life. No star in this universe is big enough or bright enough to guide any one of us in any direction. That elusive star is deep within us and it is an emotional endurance test to not lose faith in our own sense of direction.

### 8. **The Fool**

There are an endless number of forks in the road. Or am I in the air? Or am I on thin ice? Deep water? I don't know.

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*What you know is that you do not know, and so, what is there to know at all? Will it make you feel better to have your life plotted out, like farmers sectioning their land? Plot all you want, but don't you know that weather may or may not destroy those plots? Aren't plots for books with characters written with direction while you look to the sky for yours? Will you not be happy unless you are able to know what it is, about the stars, that makes your heart skip? Would any of that matter if you weren't so concerned with following one of them?*

*Would any of it matter, at all, if you just waited it out and enjoyed the view?*