

tarot cards for the new mother (w.i.p)

Ruth Charnock

You sit down, opposite a woman. She lays out a square black cloth, with gold rectangles marked out on it. She explains to you that the cards cannot predict the future, that they are not a way to escape from anything, that you should think of them as helpful provocations regarding your current situation. Every card contains an invitation, she says, if you're willing to accept it.

What do you want to talk about today? You touch your stomach, you touch your head, you touch your throat, you touch the table. She nods and hands you the deck, inviting you to draw three cards.

pt 1: the lovers

Writing seems so small in comparison to motherhood. It doesn't feel like it will fill up all the nooks and crannies of the soul. And perhaps it won't. But even if one is a mother, are all the nooks and crannies filled up? [Sheila Heti, 187]

something about sex that will fill me up.

"What fucks you?" the tarot reader asks casually, wiping the crumbs caught on her neck bristles. "What are your holes?"

She pauses.

"Remember that time when everyone was in you and you were in everyone and all was a wet all was a touch a touch a touch meeeeeeeeeee all was a get up get up get up let's make love tonight all was a I've been really tryinnnnnggg baby trying to hold back this feeling for so long all was a red light special all was nipples and tugs down and into station cubicles and train carriages and park trees and library carrels and afternoon carpets and hallway stairs because you just couldn't make it upstairs before you had to?"

lovers #1:

When he is conceived, you feel it: this rising silver orb of laughter, images of Puck-like changeling nestled in the nook of an oak tree as you come. Later, you go to try and cleanse some of your bad mother feelings with your shaman friend, and he appears to you like this again: little pixie boy with naughty lips, strapped to your back as you hobble across some kind of frozen plane. You drop him but don't realise, until you have cause to turn around and see him, fifty feet behind, dead, snowdust on his applecheeks.

lovers #2:

You're talking in a circle after he's born and you're trying to explain that you don't want to have sex because it feels too close to what you do with your baby. Same nipples isn't it? If you could just have another body – maybe the old one, or the one before it, then

Mummy I want cuddles

Ok

Mummy a bee has stung me and you need to kiss it

Experimental Writing Prize - Winner

Head Judge:
Clare Fisher

*The University of Sheffield's
Creative Writing Journal*

tarot cards for the new mother (w.i.p)

Ruth Charnock

Ok, sweetheart. Where has it stung you?

On my chin

[Kisses chin]

No under my chin

[Kisses under chin]

On my belly

Kisses sweet little custard belly

Under my nappy

[What was it that you wanted to write about – something to do with the Empress card and receiving or your threshold for receiving but now it's gone. You keep losing the Empress card from your tarot decks – off she goes, spreading her bounty somewhere else.]

He stays away from you during pregnancy. You both stay away after he is born. You've never been more touched and less. Instead of having sex, you watch programs about people having it or not having it. You watch *Fleabag*. Later, a friend just texts you the word 'kneel' at random and this too is sex of a kind; this too is a compliment you've been missing.

Another friend tells you that the secret to sex is to act, at all times, as if you have a secret. But there are baby fingers everywhere and you are still split open on the bedroom floor and, when he stitched you back up, you didn't know to tell him to put your secret back. Didn't know you were supposed to have one.

Rachel asks you if you've thought about looking elsewhere for your sex: in singing or clothes or writing or movement.

Cupping your root, she says: 'but your sex is yours to do what you want with' – as if she's surprised that you haven't realised this but you haven't ever, not really.

lovers #3:

This morning you let a man touch you, though you knew he was skeezy as soon as you walked into the drop-in massage shop – no crotch in his trousers, bumcheeks edging a rip in his jeans when he turned around to set up the chair. Now your body is revealed to you as an equation that no-one – least of all yourself – has wanted to solve enough to stick with. Keys, you think, as he presses into your sore, tight wings, or syllogisms

if this touch then desire
if desire then no home, no him, all cast out
if mothering then no desire except for mothering
if you feel desire outside of mothering or for other mothers
maybe you are doing it wrong –
the desiring and the mothering
desire other mothers only for what they show you is lacking in your own
mothering
stop desiring them when you know how to re-route this desire back into
your mothering

Experimental Writing Prize - Winner

Head Judge:
Clare Fisher

***The University of Sheffield's
Creative Writing Journal***

tarot cards for the new mother (w.i.p)

Ruth Charnock

You buzz out into the street afterwards, remembering being 22 and 24 and 32 and maybe 34 when sex was everywhere and you could move it around with others like some kind of golden fizzy orb, some kind of tai-chi thing. That evening, you go to see a film about a woman, in her late fifties maybe, who has never had an orgasm. She hires a younger man to have sex with her though, belligerently, she insists that he won't be able to make her come. Between sex, the woman tells the man about her children and how ambivalent she is towards them. You cry and cry throughout this film, even though coming has never been your problem. At the end of the film, the woman brings herself off when the man isn't looking and grins, cat-like and cryptic, when he turns around.

lovers #4:

The first time you fell in love and had sex with a mother, your mother told you that you would have to murder someone before she would ever cut you off. As if what you'd done was close but not quite.

lovers #5:

'There once was a boy called Orestes', the tarot reader interjects. 'Integrate that shadow!' she continues, palms pushed against your cheeks. 'Eat up all that nastiness you've done, gobble gobble.'

That boy in the park, when you were 12 and he was 14?
INTEGRATE.

That one who passed out in your muff?
INTEGRATE.

The one where you hated doing it and you hated not doing it so you just kept doing it and not doing it?
INTEGRATE.

She flicks open a tarot guide and starts to read in a monotone: 'The Lovers want you to turn towards that which you think isn't for you, that which you think you can't have. When drawing the Lovers in a reading, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What are you excluding from yourself that you think resides in the other?
2. If you had a twin, who would it be? Can you eat them?

lovers #6:

You find yourself, suddenly, unbiddenly, sick-vaulted back into desiring again – another mother, one you never saw coming. She wants you or she doesn't want you or you want yourself or you don't want yourself. As with all the women you've ever desired, she says you're alike, as if that's a compliment.

lovers #7:

You find one of your Empress cards.

Experimental Writing Prize - Winner

Head Judge:
Clare Fisher

***The University of Sheffield's
Creative Writing Journal***

tarot cards for the new mother (w.i.p)

Ruth Charnock

You lose her again.

Your baby places rusks very carefully on the shelf above his bed: 'for later'.

You dream of yourself in unlikely sexual encounters with men you worked with years ago, but haven't thought of since.

You dream of sneaking hold of a woman's hand in a house you've claimed as yours but which is being invaded by Jimmy Saville. He dies after you administer a lethal injection to his thigh.

You dream of sitting opposite Charles Saatchi, wearing a fucked-up wedding dress. He lights your cigarettes with his mind.

You tell your partner your theory about *The Tiger Who Came To Tea*; that it is a barely-encoded account of how queer desire intrudes into heteronormative life and how het life wants this intrusion and doesn't want it and is sad when it leaves ['goodbye, goodbye, goodbye' says the Tiger who, at the end of the book, 'never comes back'].

'Of course that's how you would read it', replies your partner.

['Of course that's how you would read it', assents the tarot reader].

Your baby screams about tigers in his dreams at night but, in the daytime, roars in your face when he feels ignored.

All those other mothers you've ever wanted come crashing in like an interruption, a putting right, an orb, a coming, a changeling, that baby kiss, that morning on the street.

Experimental Writing Prize - Winner

Head Judge:
Clare Fisher

***The University of Sheffield's
Creative Writing Journal***