

## The Reading

Louise watched a single tear trek down the sloping cheek of the woman on the opposite side of the table. Why did they always come to her? The desperate. The lonely. The bereaved. Clinging to her few quietly offered words like the floating wreckage of their shattered lives.

“I need to know he’s okay,” the woman said.

Louise let the Devil slip between her fingers, laying him down with his creased edges, on the table.

“Is that bad?”

“Tell her,” a voice whispered in Louise’s ear.

Louise nudged a box of tissues across the table and the woman drew one.

“Sometimes,” Louise said, “it’s about you rather than them.” She pointed to the two figures chained at the Devil’s feet. “Guilt can feel like it’s imprisoning you.”

“It’s just... Adrian was such a tormented soul. Our relationship was...passionate, sometimes tempestuous. I need to know he’s at peace because sometimes it feels like his passing was my fault.”

“Loss can make us feel that way,” Louise replied. She drew another card from the deck. A heart with three intersecting swords. “You see,” she said, “this represents your grief.”

“Tell her.” The disembodied voice repeated. “It was her fault...and I’ll make sure she’s next.”

Louise started turning the corner of the top card of the deck, revealing a skeletal figure riding a pale horse. Death.

The woman dabbed at her eyes. While she was distracted, deftly as any magician, Louise returned the card to the pile and drew her an alternative future.