

Triana Rosas | Magic

It's more than a trick.

The Magician was showing me card tricks one night.

“Is *this* your card?” he asked, turning over the Queen of Spades.

“AMAZING!” I shouted, the perfect audience. “How do you *do* that one?”

“Afraid I can't tell you. It's part of the code I'm sworn to.”

“Bull-*shit!*”

“It's true. I can't betray any trick I learn from the Brotherhood of Magicians.”

I grabbed his cards and started shuffling blindly. “That's all very well,” I said nonchalantly, “but you can't *really* call yourself a magician until you can draw an ace from someone else's deck.”

“You can't *really* do that,” he answered loftily. “That would be *real* magic.”

“Wanna bet?” I set down the deck, cut it at random, and turned over the Ace of Diamonds.

He left with his eyes still wide that night.

When I was fourteen, my mom had got me my first deck of Tarot cards. “It's about time you learned how,” she said.

Going through the guidebook that first night, I was impressed by the eleventh member of

the Major Arcana: Justice. Her picture showed a fiercely serene woman commanding the universe from within a swirling blue gown, a crown aglow at her head and massive wings at her back. In one hand was a red sword; in the other, the scales of Libra. Behind her stood a small pyramid—a simple triangle—which to me spoke the prefix of my name: Triana.

As I nervously shuffled my cards for the first time, I kept thinking: *If the first card I draw is Justice, then all of this is real and I'll be a great reader. If the first card is Justice . . .*

I set down the deck. It felt like the rest of my destiny depended on this single test. It was either a life of magic or an abrupt, bitter disappointment.

I reached for my first card.

A few weeks later, the Magician was still trying to master the Ace-at-will trick. “I’m getting much better at it,” he assured me.

We were hanging out at my house again. The subject of cards made me suddenly decide, “I wanna see a magic trick! Do the one you named after me!”

“I actually forgot my cards today. It’s weird—I feel so naked without ‘em now.”

“Hmmm . . .” I pondered aloud, still irritated that he wouldn’t share his stupid stage secrets. “You could use one of *my* decks.”

A few minutes later, he was toying with one of my Tarot decks, one eyebrow arched. “I’m not sure I can use these,” he frowned confusedly at someone from the Major Arcana.

“Sure you can,” I answered. “We can play Magic War!”

“Magic *what* now?”

“It’s where you pit your magical-moxie-mojo against the other person’s and see who can summon better cards. Cards two through King are in order of power, Aces beat Kings, and a Major Arcana can beat anything in the Minor Arcana. Simple, see? We played it all the time in

high school.”

The Magician was persuaded. His eyes bored through mine in his best Svengali as he challenged theatrically, “And now we shall see who the more magical one *really* is.” I ignored the snideness and just let him shuffle.

Round one—one-card war: We both cut the deck and examine which cards we get. The Magician’s eyes go sneaky and self-satisfied, and I realize the bastard is probably trying to cheat.

“Put ‘er down,” I dare him.

He slams down the King of Cups and smirks. Nice, very nice.

“You remember what I told you about who can beat a King?” I ask.

He bites his lip as I smile and slam down the Ace of Cups. His eyes go wide for just an involuntary instant.

“I thought you said you were getting better at this,” I tease.

Round two—another one-card war: The Magician sends out a pitifully weak Minor Arcana soldier to the battlefield. I sing “Here comes the Sun” as I lay down solar number nineteen of the Major Arcana corps. The Magician starts to look edgy.

Round three—three-card war: We both summon our troops—weakest cards go first. The Magician puts down the Six of Cups expecting to be beaten, but my bag of tricks isn’t empty just yet.

“That’s funny, I got a six too,” I muse, covering his with the Six of Swords. He sends out soldier number two: the Page of Coins. “That’s funny, I got a page too,” I mimic, setting down the Page of Swords. “How *very* strange, don’t you think?”

He smiles and sends out his last troop, thinking he’s won: It’s my old friend, Death.

“You finally drew a Major Arcana! I’m impressed.” I slam down mine: the Chariot.

“Chariot means victory. Death stands still, but Chariot marches on.”

“Hey, that’s cheating!”

“Nope, just storytelling.”

Last round—one-card draw to finish the night; feeling sympathetic, I decide to let him win. “This time decides everything,” I tell him as we cut and draw. “The card you summon will determine the rest of your destiny.”

I set down the Nine of Cups and wait for him to follow, but his face seems to have gone a little funny.

“Did you finally get the card you were waiting for?” I ask slyly.

He sets his down: the Magician.

“Awesome!” I shout like a child. “You drew yourself! Looks like the cards are saying you’re finally becoming a real magician now.”

He just keeps looking at his card, dumbstruck, the long silence opening a space for me to say whatever I want. So I consider how best to scare the proper shit out of him. Some part of me is still thrashing around inside, snarling for retaliation at this silly boy who didn’t believe I could beat him. Then it comes to me.

“The thing you’ve got to remember about Magic War,” I say, for the kill, “is that it’s easier to do the magic than it is to do the trick.”

Later that night, I got his email. He’d left the house looking extremely edgy after our stupid card game, so I wasn’t that surprised to see what he’d written. He thought I was “beautiful” and “unique” and all that other bullshit, but I was also a “force of darkness” that was threatening to corrupt his moral center, and his religion prohibited him from associating with me intimately.

Yep. Serves me right, I suppose. Never try to surpass a Magician at his own craft. This

was probably how the first witch trials began. It's never seemed quite fair or just, how some can be so fascinated by the magic of the mountebank and yet be so repelled when it all becomes too real for them.

Oh well. I've learned that you can't expect Justice to show up every time you want her, even though she *was* the very first card I drew.