

A tarot-inspired zine about playfulness, curiosity, and storytelling by Tiffany Sostar, with contributions by:

Beatrice Aucoin

Rachel J. Sharkey

Kat Thomas

Dulcinea Lapis



"I'm not going to let them tell me what to do—" I mutter.

"Who's tryin' to tell ya what to do?"

I almost let go of the sheer cliff face, which, even with my safety harness and secured rope, makes my heart feel like it's going to leap into my throat. A cool tawny brown hand, lighter than my own sepia skin tone, gently touches my arm.

"Didn't mean to scare ya," the slender woman perched on the narrow rock ledge to my left says.

She removes her hand, and I feel its absence keenly. Her dark eyes twinkle in the moonlight, and her curly black hair is cut stylishly short.

"But I was comin' into the harbor and saw ya here and wondered what ya were doin'."

"Climbing down the cliff," I grumble.

"Yah, I see that, but why?"

"Because I hate the Companion candidates the Sisters want me to choose from." I breathe slowly.

"Ya must be Déa, the next Seer. And yer climbin' down to get away from it all," she states. It's not a question.

I don't answer.

"How did you get here?" I ask instead.

"My other form is a golden eagle," she answers with a wink. "I flew up 'cause I was curious. It's not every day I see a beautiful lady rock climbin'."

I feel my cheeks flush and hope she can't see.

“I’m Leitha,” she says. “When ya get down, meet me on my ship.”

Swiftly, Leitha flings off her tunic, transforms into a golden eagle, and with her talons catches her tunic fluttering toward the ocean below.

“What’s a Companion do?” Leitha asks. She’s invited me to rest in a hammock with her in her quarters. Despite the fire going near us, the night air still holds a chill. Leitha has covered us with a blanket. I snuggle into her and rest my head on her shoulder.

“A Companion is the Seer’s grounding connection to the world, so the Seer remembers her or their humanity.” I roll one of my many long black braids between my fingers. “Before I Ascend to Seer, the Sisters require me to have a Companion. I’ll spend most of my time in my tower having visions, interpreting them, and being the Dragon Archipelago people’s spiritual leader.”

“That’s heavy,” Leitha remarks. “No wonder ya need a break, Déa.”

“I’ve been training for my Seer Ascension since I was four, when I first realized I am female. That’s when the Sisters came to my village to get me.” Seers were either female or nonbinary. Sahrina, the current Seer, once told me they’d known my truth from the moment I was born but waited for me to say it first.

“Do ya ever get a vacation?”

“A few times a year, I go rock climbing on Indigo Scale Island. I like that.” I pause. “That’s where I’m headed.”

“Would ya like me to show ya some of the best cliffs and mountains I’ve ever seen? Ya can show me about rock climbin’. I just take my ship, *Whimsy*, or fly everywhere.”

“Thank you. I would love it.”

Suddenly, I feel the ship start to move beneath us.

“*Whimsy* listens to my thoughts,” Leitha explains. “Don’t need a crew. I just think where I want to go, and *Whimsy* takes me.”

I hand the letter over to Leitha, who reads its one sentence aloud: “Come home when you’re ready.”

The letter closed with the Seer’s official seal—a dragon biting her own tail with waves of the sea beneath her—is waiting at our sixth port six weeks into our trip.

This is why I didn’t bother to leave a note explaining I was coming back. Sahrina would have been keeping tabs on me.

“Are ya ready?” Leitha asks, looking up from the letter to me.

“Not quite,” I say. I take her free hand in one of mine. “You’ve shown me some amazing places for rock climbing.” Leitha usually did a bit of rock climbing with me at our majestic destinations but then would transform into a golden eagle and fly to meet me at the summit or base. “But there’s one place I want to show you before we go home.”

“Indigo Scale,” she replies with a grin. “And ‘we go home’?”

I flush. “I mean, if you want, if you’d like—“

A long kiss on my lips tells me her answer.

A TINY TAROT TUTORIAL

Tarot offers us a rich set of archetypes, symbols, and potential storylines within which we can see ourselves (or our characters), and better understand the knowledge that we already have about who we are, what we want, what we need, what we fear, and where we want to take our lives.

Tarot can be a tool for self-care, self-knowledge, and collective liberation. It can be a tool for creativity, and for opening doorways to imagining possible futures. This is true especially when tarot is intentionally and explicitly focused on justice, conscious of the effects of trauma on marginalized communities, and actively working to mitigate and counter the harms of ongoing colonialism, racism, ableism, transantagonism, heterosexism, classism, and other forms of systemic oppression.

Tarot is divided into sections, with significant overlap and resonance between sections. These sections are:

∞ The major arcana.

These 22 cards can collectively tell the story of a major journey from The Fool beginning the journey to The World finding completion. They can also present archetypes or momentous occasions or rites of passage. They are often considered “big” cards.

∞ The minor arcana.

These four sets of 14 cards (10 numbered and 4 court cards) each represent one aspect of the world/the self, or one element. Each suit also tells a story, an echo of the major arcana.

Cups: Water. Emotions. Relationships.

Wands: Fire. Passion. Creativity. Spirituality.

Swords: Air. Thoughts. Communication (especially related to conflict).

Pentacles: Earth. Material concerns (body, health, finances, work).

You can pay attention to these things when you read the cards, or you can focus on the images on the specific cards, or on the patterns that you see in the spread, or on anything else that you like! Although learning the meanings of the cards can be helpful, it is also entirely possible to use tarot as a tool for self-exploration with nothing more than the cards and your imagination.

open to interpretation

I don't think I've ever interpreted someone's
instructions the way that I was "supposed to":
It took 28 years of intellectual doggy paddling and positing;
repeating questions and statements
"um, I'm sorry, I don't quite follow" or "could you please repeat that?"

As if there were a memo everyone received
except for me.

As though everyone was marching and
I was a half a beat off.

As if there was a group hug and
I was pushed out of the embrace,

As though a new crush
forgot my name.

I'll never forget First Year Humanities class:
Our final assignment was to interpret Plato's "Allegory of the Cave"
The last day of classes came, it was time to present our projects.
Students went up, one by one
in front of the class and showed art work they'd made:
songs, paintings, sculptures.
Panic bloomed inside my lungs, sweat dripped, pupils became pinpoints.
I went last, last project of First Year,
And showed them a clip from the film "V for Vendetta".
I looked at my instructor with tears stinging my eyes,
as the clip finished to

awkward,
hesitant

applause.

Speech impediment triggered, I sat down with
cheeks stained angry, humiliated fuchsia.

I got a B- and a pseudo-apology-explanation:

“student misunderstood project parameters”

After I graduated with my BFA,

I took tests to determine my mental faculties.

I was *gifted*

8 diagnoses/pseudo-apology-explanations re:

why my brain intakes/externalizes information the way it does.

- MDD – ADHD – BPD – FASD – GAD – DPD – HPD – AvPD-

Blood rushes in my ear drums, my nervous tics betray me as I hear

“here are your formal diagnoses, there aren’t any known cures”.

10 years of med school in exchange for a laundry list of my mental inadequacies,
and you supply me with a \$300,000 shrug as my remedy?

NO! FIX MY BRAIN, YOU FUCK!

I WANTED TO GRADUATE WITH DISTINCTION, TOO.

YOU WON’T TELL ME IT’S BECAUSE I’M LAZY,

BUT SIMPLY THAT MY BRAIN, MY Brain, my BRAIN, is Different.

I outgrew my anger, I met more and more road-and-stumbling blocks

Society’s cardboard box I was squishing soft pink matter into
got soggy, and disintegrated before I realized it.

My employability and the patience of my friends evaporated, too.

Rage; an old ally, metamorphosed into despair and defeat.

Only to meet one human

who refused to cease believing in the potential of my thoughts.

New relationships spun and wove around me, spoke to me:

“you are not alone” “I’m sorry” “your brain is not the problem”

Growth, connection, politics, empathy, understanding.

All became non-linear;

moving backwards and forwards through time.

Conversation became a game; a tool for curiosity and play
rather than a weapon.

I learned jokes for dismantling sarcastic vortices at parties
and how to trust my friends when words won’t come out right.

Is this how my mind has always been, a portal to infinity and joy?

Perhaps the cause of my grief is also the cure,

and healing is non-linear,

Perhaps my brain is

open to interpretation



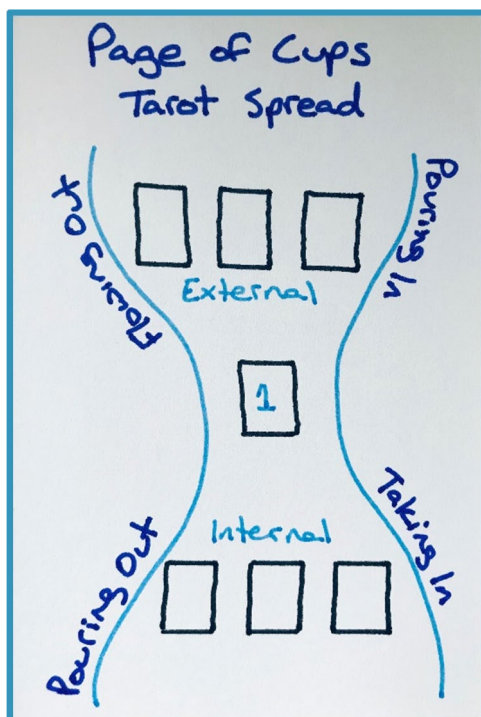
KAT THOMAS

A Page of Cups Tarot Spread

This spread is designed to be read in either direction: pouring out from the internal to the external or taking in from the external to the internal.

We flow in both directions in our lives. We pour out from ourselves; giving support, offering care, sharing our stories, our joy, our fear, our anger. And we take in; support, and care, and stories (sometimes helpful, sometimes harmful), and the joy and fear and anger in the world.

This spread is an invitation to consider how things are flowing, and to bring some attention to the pause between external and internal. Sometimes this pause is experienced as constriction – an inability to get it out, or to let it in. Sometimes it is experienced as intentionality – a breath before letting it out, or taking it in. Sometimes it's something else.



Spread designed by Tiffany Sostar.

Laying and Reading the Spread

Draw a card to represent the pause between external and internal or place the Page of Cups in position 1 (or both).

If you're reading from internal to external, lay the three internal cards first and then the three external, and vice versa.

Here are some questions to ask as you interpret the cards.

Pouring out:

- ∞ What do I have to offer in this moment?
- ∞ What is overflowing in my heart, or in my life?
- ∞ What are my thoughts and stories about this experience?
- ∞ What are the parts of myself that I want to share with the world?
- ∞ How might these offerings be received?
- ∞ What have I learned about myself as someone who pours out into the world?
- ∞ What do I hope or fear will be received by the world outside myself?

Taking in:

- ∞ What is coming towards me from the world around me, or from the person or people related to this experience?
- ∞ What is the context of this experience?
- ∞ What stories have I been told about this experience, or about myself within this experience?
- ∞ What am I willing or able to accept?
- ∞ What are the effects on my own life of these stories or offerings that I am taking in?
- ∞ How have I learned to make choices about what I take in?



The Sound of Her Voice

DULCINEA LAPIS

Her voice is soft and earnest, “Are you ok, Babe?”

You’re not ok and you’re never ok. The past two years have added a pile of troubles to your plate. You never thought it would be so hard to get out of bed and face the day. You’re trying to get work done but it’s just frustrating. The banging on your keyboard and tossing around of papers is a dead giveaway.

“Love?”

You’re flustered now that you’re noticing exactly how not together you are. You can feel the blood pounding as your heart hammers. The words on the screen bleed together, your desk is a mess (Why can’t you ever clean it?!) and nothing you need is anywhere but you can’t look away. Your know your thoughts circle and spiral but you’re helpless to stop.

This isn’t work, it’s a slow motion breakdown.

“Sweetie? What’s wrong?”

You don’t want to lie, but telling the truth is scary. “I’m... not *not* ok.”

You went for glib, but you’re sure you sound cliché. Idiot. Of course, it didn’t go over well. Why can’t you just talk to her like a normal human being? Why can’t you just communicate for once in the way other people expect you to? Why can’t you just be ok?

She doesn’t have patience for this, of course. You knew it as soon as you got evasive and she knows exactly how you’re feeling when you refuse to answer. She knows how the spiral goes. She’s behind you in the space of a blink. Her hand on your shoulder is gentle and firm.

“What’s wrong?” the firmness of her grip has hardened her voice a little.

You can’t answer this time. It’s overwhelming. Your look is desperate.

And she understands.

She has your hand in hers, warm and soft but strong. She pulls you away from the desk, taking you to the couch. She sits and pulls you down, laying you across cushions with your head ending in her lap.

You feel her body shift as she breathes, your natural rhythm syncing with hers. In and out goes the breath, your mind focusing on a point in your chest, and the feeling of the circulating current of air. She didn’t even have to tell you to do this, the mindfulness has become second nature. You can imagine her crooked smile and how it reaches her eyes. How pleased she no doubt is that this has become routine. She strokes your hair gently, and you can feel the pounding in your chest settle.

“You need to be kind to my love. I know everything is hard, but you just hold so much in and it hurts someone I care very much about. Can you do that for me, Sweetie? Can you be kind to the person I love? Please?”

Her voice is like burnt sugar for your ears. Long conversations that have deepened trust have made it so. Your connection is so strong...but your head still spins with the fear that you’re being needy. That you’re difficult. You’re a burden. The only sound you make is a soft strangled whine. Not a moan or a cry, just an expression of pain.

She’s still stroking your hair. Still breathing.

She’s quiet for a time, and then speaks again. “Just let it all fall away. Every one of those overwhelming worries, one by one they’re all going to fall away. Just let a nice, empty calm replace them. Hard things, sharp things, things that we hold on tightly, too tightly, all of those can just fall away.”

It’s easy to listen. And her voice is so calming. And you love her, so it’s easy to just do as she asks. For her, of course. Her voice loses any edge, it’s soft and gentle and you wait on every word like water in the desert.

“The all of your world is you and me and this apartment. That’s all that matters right now. Everything in the way of that can just keep falling away. No cars or classes or jobs or bills. No family or obligations or chores. It’s just you and me.”

Her voice fills you and there is nothing else now. Her word is your everything. Almost divine. A sacrament. You lay and breathe and obey. What else is there?

“You don’t need to worry about anything else tonight my love. I’ll take care of everything. All you need to do is listen. All you need to do is obey. That’s easy. It’s the easiest thing. Let everything else fall away...just listen to me...”

You don’t know how long you lie there in her lap, her words becoming more and more of you. It feels never ending. Eventually she asks you to get up, though the specific words don’t feel important. She asks you to put something on to watch as she heads off to get something to munch on. A wonderful evening curled up with each other.

What else could there be?

THE PAGE OF CUPS

This zine is inspired by the Page of Cups.

Cups are associated with water, and with emotions, relationships, connections. The Cups are your heart, and also the heart of your relationships, and the hearts of everyone around you. The Cups are where we find each other, and ourselves, and where we see ourselves and each other through the watery filter of our emotions. They are full of tears (laughter, sadness, overwhelm), and full of tea (shared together and taken in solitude, comfort and consolation and habit and home).

Pages are associated with a fresh approach to the topic at hand. They might be new to the work, or perhaps they have maintained a perspective of openness, creativity, sometimes delight. Sometimes their fresh approach is inexperience, but sometimes it is something else – a skill of renewal, practiced over many years. They are excited about what’s happening, or about what could be happening instead, and they can look at things from new and unexpected angles.

In the *Next World Tarot* guidebook, Cristy C. Road writes, “Page of Cups learned to speak in poetry through both suffering and living life to its fullest. Walking between worlds of plight and calm, the Page of Cups learned to turn conflict into song.”

In the *Madame Lulu’s Book of Fate: Carnival at the End of the World Tarot* guidebook, Sarah Falkner writes about the Page of Cups, “Time to have your tea-leaves read, for a message of a new future awaits you from afar... Be tender with your own imagination – it might also be trying to tell you something!”

If you, too, feel inspired to turn conflict into song or to write a message of a new future to the world from within your own tender and delicious imaginings, please join us in this project!

Take this as an invitation to dip into the Cup of your own heart, to look at something with the fresh enthusiasm of a Page.

Satisfaction Brought It Back

RACHEL J. SHARKEY

“What possessed you!” Elena yelled.

“I wanted to see what would happen, and-” Marla started to explain.

“Do you have any idea -! You could have – You could have died. You could have died and probably taken me with you!”

“Yes,” Marla replied, “but I would definitely have found out what would have happened. And more to the point, I didn’t. And while we’re on the subject, nor am I likely to have this problem in future.”

But Elena was so upset she didn’t even notice that she’d cut Marla off when she kept going. “This is as bad as the zombie velociraptors! Actually, I think it may be worse than the zombie velociraptors, because I would have thought you might have learned from the zombie velociraptors.”

“I learned a lot from the zombie velociraptors! And it was featured in Nature,” said Marla.

“I don’t care!”

“How could you say that! This is my whole life! How can you be married to me and not care?”

“That is so unfair! Do you actually think I would have sat through you rehearsing that lecture on super-cooled ice crystal nucleation if I didn’t care? It was terrible.”

“It was not!”

“Yes it was, dear. The one on ancient DNA interpolation was fascinating but the nucleation one was terrible, you explained cellular cryoprotectants completely wrong,” Elena started, and then remembered that she was still angry, “And that’s not the point. First it was the carnivorous squirrels and then it was the freeze ray and after all that we still had the plastic-devouring slime that ate all the pipes and then the zombie velociraptors and every single time I am just absolutely sure you are going to die! I can get

published in Science without setting myself on fire. Why can't you? And I'm actually really glad about the Nature paper, I am. Its just that I really don't want you to die because I actually, funnily enough, married you because I like you better than Nature papers about velociraptors."

"Oh..." said Marla, "I mean... that's really... I'm sorry. I know you worry. I should probably have warned you about the chlorine, at least."

Elena took a very slow breath in, and a slower one out, "I forgive you, but yes, you should have warned me about the chlorine, and actually, while we're on the subject, I would also have appreciated a head's up about the polonium."

"Yeah... I feel like a bit of an ass now... it's just..." admitted Marla, "I do know you worry. I know I seem totally clueless, but I'm actually only 95% clueless."

"Only 95%?"

"It's statistically significant. And anyway, my point was, I do know you worry, I wasn't only doing curiosity driven research this time. I made the Elixir of Life."

"You –"

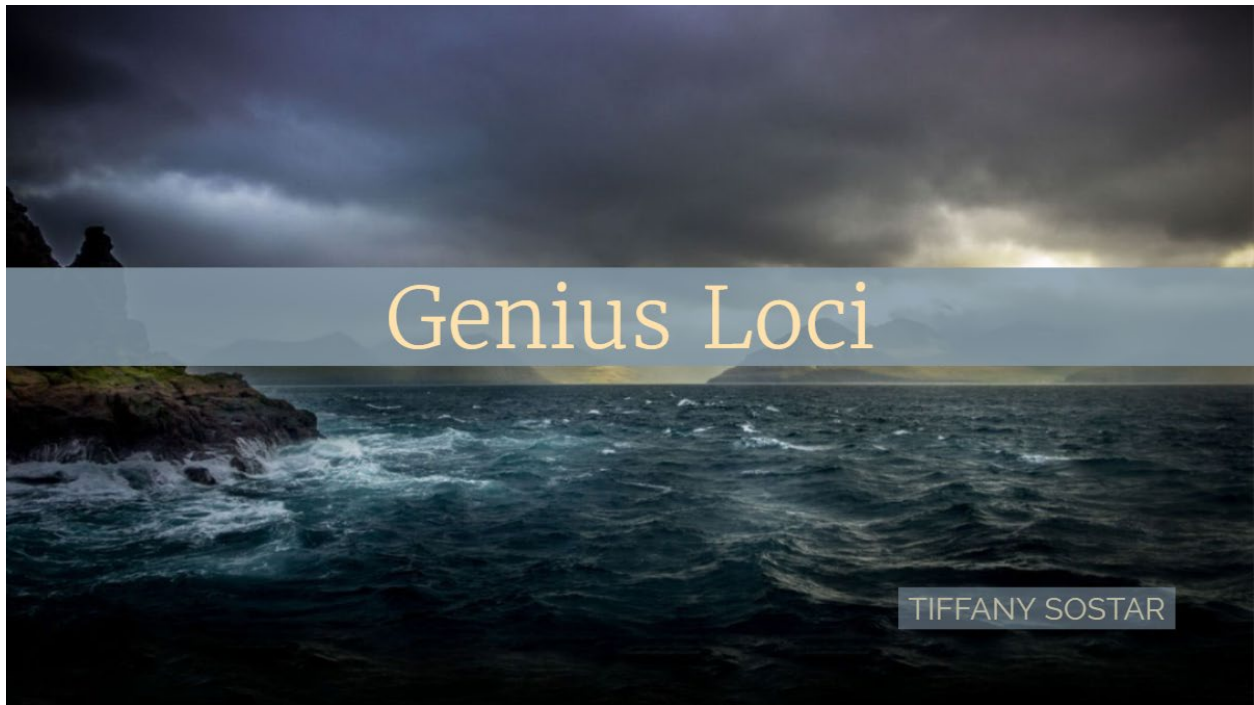
"Made the Elixir of Life," Marla repeated, "and then drank it, I even waited until it wasn't on fire any more. And I am now immortal. So you never have to worry again, even if there are zombie tyrannosaurs. I made enough for you. I was going to tell you, but I didn't want to interrupt. It's there, I put it in the mug you hate because I think it stains, I'm probably going to have to throw away half my beakers, actually."

Elena walked over to the bench and looked at the ugly mug her great aunt had sent her from Florida. The unspeakable looking gunk inside it was definitely staining the sides chartreuse.

She drank it.

"You still owe me one for not warning me about the polonium. I want a really fancy mass spectrometer for my birthday" she said, and then she walked over to Marla and kissed her.

It was not the best kiss they'd ever had. It was, in fact, one of the worst. It tasted of the Elixir, and the Elixir of Life tastes mostly of a dirty swimming pool with a bit of ozone with an aftertaste of other things that you should never put your mouth. But they had time to have many better ones later, after they replaced the beakers and threw away Elena's least favourite mug.



“No, you will not!”

“Mom! I will. I am. I’ve been saving, I’m 18, I’m going. I have to.”

“You won’t come back,” her sister whispers.

Livi thinks about the island she’s never seen, the ocean she’s never tasted, and shakes her head. It’s been three generations. Long enough, thinks Livi.

“I have to go.”

~

There’s an island, two planes and a boat away. It’s mostly port on one side, cliffs and wildflowers on the other.

The old family manor still stands on the edge of the cliffs, overlooking the wide ocean. It’s been converted to a hotel, gets good reviews. Livi stays there, but it doesn’t feel as much like home as the port, the docks, the shores and waves. There’s something about this ocean that calls to her. She finds herself spending long hours on the beach, cold water licking her toes.

There’s a tiny shop in the port, just up from the docks. Antiques and oddities and the proprietor’s hand-made strawberry jam, tea if you ask for it, with a fresh-baked scone. The jam tastes strangely familiar, like her grandma’s and her mom’s. It turns out to be her great-grandmother’s recipe. Olivia.

Livi goes in to the shop every day. Sips the tea and chats with Beth, smears the thick red jam on a scone, pokes around. Her second day, she finds a picture of the port the year her great-grandmother

died. Those buildings are all gone, destroyed in the same storm that killed Olivia and drove her family from the island.

A week into her trip, in the shadows at the back of the shop, she finds a chalice. The cup is a shell, ringed in pearls. The inside shimmers – no matter which way you turn it, it catches the light in a watery glow. The handle is old, tarnished seaweedy green.

Beth sees her looking at the chalice.

“My Annie pulled that up from a cave under the island years ago,” she says. “She was quite the diver, so comfortable in that ocean. But not every diving spot is safe as this one. We haven’t had a real storm, not one to speak of, not for 80 years. Safest port in the whole ocean, maybe the world. But my Annie just loved to dive. And not all waters are as safe as these.”

The chalice is calling to Livi.

It’s the sound of the ocean.

At first she doesn’t hear it past the ocean just outside the shop. But it’s there, a darker crash of harder waves.

She reaches out, touches old metal that feels like home. She feels the wind whip, snatching at her hair, at her great-grandmother’s pendant hanging at her throat, snatching the air from her lungs. She pulls her hand back and the air is calm again. Beth is blotting a tear from her eye. “My Annie,” she murmurs, and heads back for more tea and another scone.

That night, she dreams of storms.

In the morning, she heads to the back of the shop, to the chalice.

No tea, no scone, no jam today.

She picks it up, hears that darker ocean, feels the wind. Livi holds the chalice between both hands, iridescent surface swirling, waves crashing against the shores of the cup, the island in the centre, the old port battered by the storm, buildings blown by angry wind, wooden docks creaking, the sound of a raging ocean. A woman on the docks, with hair like Livi’s and a glittering pendant.

Beth’s voice startles her. The chalice is suddenly empty, the tiny storm nowhere to be found.

“I didn’t hear you come in, so quiet like that. I’ll make us tea.”

Livi nods, still hearing the ocean in her ears. This ocean, and *that* ocean. She fingers her pendant and walks slowly back to the table, and the tea, and the scone, and the jam.

That afternoon she walks along the port, up and down each fragile intrusion into the ocean. The bigger ships come in to the cement dock, and she walks out along that one, too, to the edge. The gentle splash of waves breaking is rhythmic, soothing. The sky is full of soft clouds and sun. Livi shivers.

She dreams of storms again. Tastes salt and blood. Screams back at the angry ocean. Not loud enough to drown it out. Not loud enough to stop it.

In the morning, before the dawn, she creeps down to the shop. Slides a window open, climbs inside.

She grabs the chalice. Holds it tight, heavy with the weight of the ocean. There is no shimmer now, only shadow. The waves crash. The island, the port, the buildings old and then new and then old and then new. There is a woman on the docks. Alone. Wind whipping. Screaming into the storm. Holding the chalice. The woman in the chalice, holding the chalice, screaming at the storm, then, and now, and then. She is Olivia, 80 years ago. She is Livi, today.

The wind bangs the window shut.

Livi jumps.

The chalice is so heavy.

The wind is so strong.

The woman is screaming. The waves are crashing. The wind is howling.

Livi drops the chalice and pearls scatter, metal dents, the shell cracks. Outside, the sky is dark. The dawn retreats, and the sky is choked with clouds. The old storm wakes, stretches lightning across the water and booms a thunderous laugh.

The doors blow open, jam jars and tea cups shatter.

Livi runs down to the docks, looks up at the sky.

“Olivia!” the storm booms. “It’s been too long. Come home.”

Around her, the ocean is a living thing, tearing the island apart. Her hands are empty, she doesn’t have the words or the knowledge. She is not Olivia. She cannot stop this storm. She feels the pendant warm against her chest. She cannot stop this storm.

“Let’s go,” she whispers, and dives into the darkness.

(*Genius Loci* is a protective spirit of a place in classical Roman religion.)

This zine was initiated and formatted by Tiffany Sostar.

Tiffany is a writer, editor, community organizer, tarot reader, and narrative therapist. You can find them online at tiffanysostar.com and foxandowltarot.com or email them at sostarselfcare@gmail.com. You can also find them @[@sostarselfcare](https://www.instagram.com/sostarselfcare) and @[@foxandowltarot](https://www.instagram.com/foxandowltarot). You can support their work by picking up this zine, booking a tarot reading or narrative session, or backing their Patreon.