

THE KEY TO
LENORMAND

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To my true and faithful followers,

It is to you, my friends, that I dedicate this
feeble book.

Your very humble and very obedient servant,

M. A. Le Normand.¹

An Appointment with
Le Normand

Rue de Tournon, Paris. The sign above the door reads *Mademoiselle Le Normand: Bookseller*. Upon entering, shelves of antiquarian books close in, and on a row of chairs against the back wall, a client sits and waits. You are told to take your place beside them, and you doubt, for a moment, if this is the right place to be. It is hard to image the Empress Joséphine knowing of a place like this, and, if the gossip proves true, you could be waiting for Napoleon himself to slip out from a back-room before it is you who takes up the chair he was sitting on moments before. Unless you'd remembered wrong, and Napoleon disapproved of his wife's interest in such matters. Regardless of the tantalising talk of the Napoleonic court, there is an uncertain feeling about a bookshop that does not intend to sell its books.

A moment passes - a bookcase swings open on hinges, and a woman steps out to meet her friend sitting beside you. They leave the bookshop together. The narrow opening in the shelves gives way to a small room beyond. You can make out the green baize of a table scattered with cards, and you can see the hem of a dress underneath. Your doubts were misplaced; this is where the reputable Le Normand works, the one whose arrest you'd read about in the papers, the

one who can tell your fortune with a deck of cards...

Marie Ann Adélaïde Le Normand (1772-1843).² Our memory of her is scarce and contradictory. In appearance she is described as a 'monstrous toad, bloated and venomous', and that 'she had one wall-eye' while 'the other was a piercer,'² though we must at once accept that 'her eyes, even in age, preserved their brightness and vivacity.'⁴



(Above) Jules Champagne, Portrait of Marie Lenormand, 1858.⁵

Perhaps we should not trust these descriptions, or perhaps Champagne thought that history would favour beauty.

Although Le Normand wrote several books, I have only found one English translation of her work,

that being *The Historical and Secret Memoirs of the Empress Josephine* (1852).⁶ At the time I am writing this, her works (in any language) are not available from reputable publishers, so we are limited to the writings of others. That too is scarce and, I suspect, sensationalist. An aura of mystery surrounds her life and work. It is at once fitting, and frustrating; I want some insight that goes beyond the page, but to know her fully would be to unwrite the elusive character in which I am invested.

On a trip to the British Library, I find myself acting as historian. I request to view books credited to Le Normand in the hopes of gleaming a sense of her character. Sitting in the reading room, I carefully open and read the introduction to *The Oracle of Human Destiny* (1826),⁷ and I am carried away by the first-person account of a young Le Normand sitting at the bedside of her dying aunt, who gifts to her an ancient manuscript that contains a method of divination - the very same manuscript reproduced in the book. To my disappointment, the introduction was signed 'Victorine Le Normand', and the book turned out to be a gimmick. It contained pre-written fortunes arrived at by drawing playing cards.⁸ This book was yet another example of Le Normand's name being used to sell a product based on her fame as a card reader.

Now would be a good time to tell you that Marie

Le Normand has no connection to the “Lenormand” cards bearing her name, other than that they have been named after her.

Still, we owe Le Normand some credit. I’ve seen several books on Tarot mention Le Normand dismissively when discussing the history of card reading. In fact, books about Lenormand cards only tend to mention Le Normand in an explanation of the eponym. They tell you that she had no connection to the cards, that they were published after her death, and they leave it there, forgetting to consider the role she plays in that history.

Le Normand is famous as a card *reader*. Although she did write on the subject, she did not publish her own decks, or write books on how to interpret the cards. While this means that the intricate details of her methods are lost to history, we can find value in her celebrity status as the first fortune-teller to use a deck of cards. Without her, perhaps the very idea of card reading would still be reserved for small circles of esoteric interest. She stands out as being the only woman we remember among the names of men in shaping the field: Court de Gebelin, Etteilla, Eliphas Lévi, and later, A.E. Waite - the list goes on.⁹ Maybe we should credit Le Normand with the image of the turban-wearing psychic delivering messages from beyond this world. In this case, there are many Le Normands today - simply turn to the back of a

newspaper or magazine and you'll see the ads for people who have adopted the role. For this, perhaps, we should not be grateful, but for the role we can assume she played in establishing card reading as a widely-known practice, we should be, or else neither you, nor I, would probably be aware of this fascinating subject.

Please, think of Le Normand when you use her name, but now, let's turn to the cards.

Reading Lenormand

The images seen on a Lenormand deck come from an 18th century game called *The Game of Hope*, or *Das Spiel der Hoffnung*.¹⁰ The game is played by laying all 36 cards in a grid and using them as a board. The players use a die to move between the cards, most of which affect the progress of the players in some way. A translation of the original instructions is available in *Learning Lenormand* by Marcus Katz and Tali Goodwin. Interestingly, these instructions suggest a method of divination using the cards, which, given that the cards are still used for this purpose, must have been more popular than the game itself:

*If the person querying is a woman, one starts from sheet 29, spinning a jocular tale from the cards nearby around the figures on display. If it is for a man, the tale is started from sheet 28 and again makes use of the cards surrounding this one. This will bring much entertainment to any merry company.*¹¹

In essence, this is a method still used today called the Grand Tableau, but now there is an established meaning for each card, which we will explore soon.

Learning to read the Lenormand system is a sober experience compared to Tarot. For one, there are

far fewer cards (only 36 compared to the 78 of Tarot) and the cards have straight forward meanings. There are hundreds of books explaining the meanings of Tarot, which is testament to Tarot's complexity and multiplicity. Without a traceable history, Tarot has been mythologised, and made into a thing of mystery and secrets. The Lenormand is traceable, so it doesn't have the same mystique. Perhaps that explains why there is not as much interest in Lenormand as Tarot.

While it is recommended for those familiar with Tarot to try and separate it in their minds to the Lenormand system, let's first consider something we can learn about Tarot from the Lenormand.

The Lenormand structure has its origins in playing cards, clearly referenced in the card associations usually present on the cards themselves. The deck is structured Ace, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, Jack, Queen, King, making the total number of cards 36. This kind of abridged card deck is not uncommon for playing card games, such as Piquet, which uses a 32-card deck. When deciding to add images to the cards in the creation of *The Game of Hope*, perhaps the creators thought that their new game would be more marketable if its cards could be used for such card games, too. No doubt the creators of the Tarot deck anticipated it being used for card games, given that the only thing differentiating a Tarot deck from a standard deck of playing cards is an additional

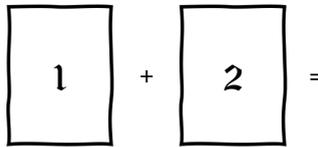
court card in each suit (that being the Queen, although nowadays we are unfamiliar with the Knight),¹² and the twenty-two Trump cards. In other words, an extra suit.

There isn't much difference between the origins of the Tarot and Lenormand. The Tarot is an expansion of playing cards, and the Lenormand is a simplification of them, but both illustrate the deck, bringing images and symbols to the cards to which our attention is turned in the act of card reading.

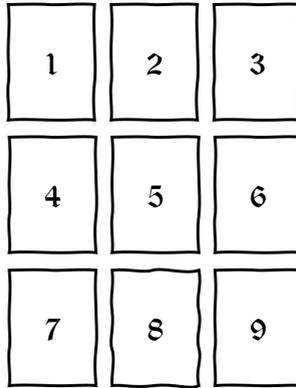
That's where another similarity between Tarot and Lenormand lies. Neither structures are still used for their original purpose, and instead have survived as a system of divination. Maybe in a few hundred years people will have forgotten the history of the Lenormand and will begin to write books explaining its spiritual significance. I doubt it, though. That's not to say that the Tarot doesn't have spiritual meaning; even if that meaning wasn't intended, it has certainly been inserted. If we can see Lenormand for what it is (a system of divination that "works" based on the associative power of signs) then why is it that we consider Tarot to contain so much more? On the flipside, if Tarot and Lenormand share a similar history in their evolution from playing cards, could Lenormand have more to teach us than first meets the eye?

For now, cast the Tarot from your mind.

Lenormand is different from Tarot in that it is not read one card at a time. Each card points to something, such as your family, your love interest, or your career, and it is through the placement of the cards in a spread that meaning is understood. Imagine that each card of the Lenormand is a single word, whereas Tarot is a sentence, or even a paragraph. Of course a single word communicates meaning, but it is much better understood when other words are placed around it form sentences. Bearing this in mind, you should always draw two or more cards to do a reading, combining their meanings in order to understand them. Here is one way you could look at a two card spread:



Think of card one as an adjective, and card two as a noun. For example, you might draw card 1, the Rider, and card 17, the Stork. The Rider, being about movement and motivation, could be understood as 'quick'. The Stork, we'll say, is 'change'. Our message, therefore, is 'quick change', which will mean much more when framed by a specific question. This is only a suggested spread, and you may find that meaning comes more easily the more cards you use. It is typical to do three, or nine-card spreads.



In a nine card spread, I would suggest that you begin in the middle. This takes us to the heart of the reading, suggesting the central theme or topic. You should then consider it's four surrounding cards, the cardinal points: position 2, 4, 6 and 8. From these, details should begin to emerge. You can then get further clarity by looking at the corner cards, which will not only expand the meaning of the cardinal cards but reveal new associations. Cards 1 and 3 are linked via card 2, cards 1 and 7 are linked via card 4, and so on. You may choose to read diagonally too, linking cards 1, 5 and 9, and 3, 5, and 7.

This may seem overwhelming, but remember, the movement between cards should be a quick and associative process. As in the two-card example, simply "add" the meanings of the cards in order to understand them. When you begin practicing, you will see how all these different connections work in your favour. If you do not understand the

relationships between a given set of cards, you can simply approach it from a different angle, or consider other ways in which the cards are working together to create meaning.

In summary, the Lenormand system uses a method of reading that does not involve the understanding of cards on their own, but in pairs or groups. The basic meanings of each card should be combined with the cards which fall next to it, which will generate more detailed and complex meanings.

On pages 44 and 45 of this book, there is a quick reference guide to the card meanings which you may find helpful to have at hand during your readings.

When you have practiced this method of reading and feel comfortable combining cards, you can move on to the Grand Tableau.

The Grand Tableau

Layout

The biggest difference between Lenormand and Tarot is the number of cards used in a reading. While it is typical to use three or ten cards out of 78 in a Tarot reading, Lenormand offers us the Grand Tableau, in which all 36 cards of the deck are used in a single spread. The cards are laid out in one of two ways. The first is an 8x4 grid with a bottom row of four additional cards. The second is a 9x4 grid.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
		33	34	35	36		

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36

Signifier Cards

First, shuffle your deck and lay the cards face up in your preferred format of the Grand Tableau. If you are reading for a man, you will need to locate card 28 in the spread as your starting point. If you are reading for a woman, your starting point will be card 29. This is called the signifier card.

In my deck, I have included an additional Man and Woman card so that you can do same-sex readings. This is done by swapping the card of the opposite sex so that your deck contains two Man, or two Woman cards. So as not to interrupt the numbering of the deck, the additional Man and Woman cards have reversed numbering. The Man, which is normally card 28, is now 29, and the Woman is 28. This way, when paired with the original Man/Woman, your deck will still follow the correct numbering.

If you wish to completely step away from the Man/Woman binary, I have also included two new cards which I am calling the Mirrors. These cards are designed to “reflect” whoever is looking at them so as not to exclude any gender identities, sexualities, or races. If you want to use them, the Man and Woman cards should be removed from the deck, and the Mirrors included in their place.

In any case, you should decide which (if any) of the alternative cards you want to use to represent your sitter, and then remove the other cards from the deck so that you are only using 36 cards.

Time Zones

Now that you have laid out the cards and identified your signifier, you can split the spread into three time zones. All the cards to the left of your signifier are the past, the cards in the same column as the signifier are the present, and all the cards to the right are the future.

<i>past</i>		<i>present</i>	<i>future</i>					
9	3	24	13	15	33	20	31	2
32	10	23	25	4	17	1	7	30
6	34	28	22	36	21	19	18	29
5	16	27	14	11	35	12	8	26

It may be the case that your signifier card is in the far left column, in which case the reading will be focused on the present and the future, or it may be in the far right column, in which case it will be focused on the present and the past. This example is future-centric but gives us two columns of insight into the past.

Reading the Spread

Now that you have established the time zones, you can begin to explore the spread. As in a nine-card spread, I recommend beginning with the four cardinal cards surrounding your signifier. In this example, this would be cards 23, 22, 27, and 34.

9	3	24	13	15	33	20	31	2
32	10	23	25	4	17	1	7	30
6	34	28	22	36	21	19	18	29
5	16	27	14	11	35	12	8	26

Combine the meanings of the cards directly above and below the signifier to understand the present, giving you a focal theme or topic for the reading. The card to the left of the signifier will deepen this meaning by giving it context in the past, and the card to the right will lead you into the immediate future of the situation. You may then continue moving outwards along these lines to expand your understanding of the first four cards, looking further into the future as you move away from the signifier, or deeper into the past.

Remember, you should always combine the meanings of the cards with their neighbours, and the movements between them should be a

quick and associative process. You should also note that cards can be read diagonally, too.

9	3	24	13	15	33	20	31	2
32	10	23	25	4	17	1	7	30
6	34	28	22	36	21	19	18	29
5	16	27	14	11	35	12	8	26

You may pause on any card along the path and look at its surrounding cards to clarify its meaning. In this example, if you were unsure about card 21, you would use cards 33, 17, and 35 to help decipher it. Keep in mind the time zones we established earlier. If you are reading up and down, you are looking at the "present" relative to that card but reading left to right (or right to left), you are looking further into the past or future of the card. In the example of card 21, cards 33, 17, and 35 would be speaking about the sitter's future, but on the same timeline as card 21. However, if you were to seek clarity for card 24, you would be using cards 9 and 3 from the querent's past, and cards 13-2 from the future time zone of this spread.

If you feel ready to move on, or would like to consider a specific question, you may choose to

jump to a card that best suits the new area of interest. Say the sitter had a question about property, you may jump to card 4, the House, and begin to read in the same way as previously described, moving left and right, up and down, or diagonally, to find meaning.

9	3	24	13	15	33	20	31	2
32	10	23	25	4	17	1	7	30
6	34	28	22	36	21	19	18	29
5	16	27	14	11	35	12	8	26

In this way, you may move away from the paths dictated by the placement of the signifier cards and begin to include more of the cards in your reading.

The Second Signifier

You should also consider the placement of the second signifier card, that being 28 or 29 depending on which one served as your signifier for the sitter. In this example, number 29.

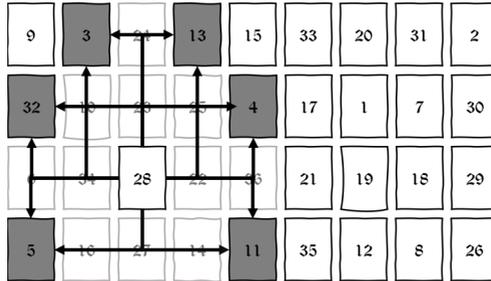
This card represents a significant other in the sitter's life. Where it lies in the spread relative to the sitter's signifier card may help you to understand the nature of the relationship. If it is in the past time zone, it may represent an ex

it is near the sitter's signifier card, the relationship may be obvious or strong, but if it is distant, it may be strained. Look to the surrounding cards for clarity.

9	3	24	13	15	33	20	31	2
32	10	23	25	4	17	1	7	30
6	34	28	22	36	21	19	18	29
5	16	27	14	11	35	12	8	26

Knighting

When looking at your own spread, you should begin to see patterns of meaning emerging from the cards. An advanced way of identifying these patterns and navigating the spread is called Knighting. This is based on the movement of the knight on a Chess board. A knight can move one place left or right, then two places up or down; or, two places left or right, then one place up or down. Here are the cards knighted to card 28 in the example spread (overleaf):



Knighting cards may help to you to focus on underlying themes in a reading. It may help you to realise connections between cards that were not immediately apparent. You can choose any card and begin to look at its knighted cards at any time during a reading, but you do not have to use this technique if you find that you are already getting enough meaning from the cards as they fall side-by-side.

The Houses

If you wish to add another layer to your readings, you may choose to introduce the Houses. To understand, first look back at your chosen Grand Tableau layout.

This is not only how you lay out the cards, but each of the positions (1-36) carries the meaning of the card that shares its number. Position 1 is The House of the Rider, because the Rider is card 1. position 2 is the House of card 2, the Clover, all the way through to position 36, the House of the Cross.

During a reading, you may consider how the House a card sits in affects its meaning. In other words, you can interpret cards based on their position in the spread by looking at which card (House) this position corresponds to.

In the previous examples, card 17 is the House of the Bear (position 15), so the meaning of card 17, the Stork, can be combined with card 15, the Bear, to add to your interpretation.

The Houses. The House of the Bear highlighted.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36

Example spread. The Stork in the House of the Bear.

9	3	24	13	15	33	20	31	2
32	10	23	25	4	17	1	7	30
6	34	28	22	36	21	19	18	29
5	16	27	14	11	35	12	8	26

You can compare this to the way Tarot is read according to the position of the cards. When doing a three-card Tarot reading, each of the positions corresponds to a subject, usually the past, present, and future. Whichever card falls in the past position tells you about the past, etc. Reading the Grand Tableau according to the Houses works in the same way. For example, the House of the Mountain (position 21) refers to obstacles and challenges. Whichever card falls in this House tells us about the obstacle in question.

In my experience, this can be a complicated way of understanding the Grand Tableau. Do not try to interpret every card in this way. Instead, use the Houses to help clarify the cards when their messages are not clear.

Concluding Note

Now you are equipped with the basics of the Grand Tableau. This is an excellent method of reading cards, especially for entertainment. Many people who seek card readings do so out of a general interest rather than with a specific intention, and a Grand Tableau offers a lot of scope to give a general reading. You may find, however, a specific message emerging from the spread, or your interest veering towards a certain topic or group of cards.

As its name implies ("the big spread"), the Grand Tableau uses a lot of cards, which can be

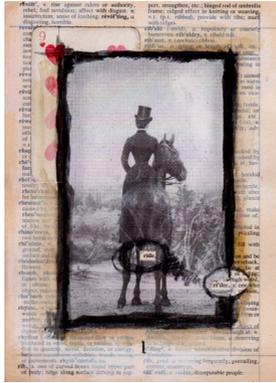
exhausting to interpret.

You should anticipate spending an hour or so with this spread to get the most enjoyment and use out of a Grand Tableau reading. To avoid exhaustion, don't aim to read every single card in the spread, only as many as you need. See where your instincts take you, and use as many cards as is most helpful to you as a reader. The cards are there to help guide you, not to throw you off course.

The Cards

Lenormand cards are simple in their design so that they are recognisable in large spreads. When designing this deck, I wanted to keep the backgrounds and format of each card the same for this reason. I used dictionary pages for all the backgrounds, and, where possible, I used the page of the dictionary that includes the name of the card. You will also see playing cards in the top left-hand corner of each card, corresponding to the traditional card association. These were taken from a vintage deck of miniature playing cards.

While you don't have to consider the playing card associations to be a good Lenormand reader, you may choose to use these associations to bring more depth to your readings. There are many methods of reading playing cards as the meanings have not become standardised in the same way that Tarot and Lenormand have. However, because Tarot is based on a playing deck, you may look to Tarot meanings to help you here. Remember, the suit of Pentacles in Tarot corresponds to the suit of Diamonds; Swords correspond to Spades; Wands correspond to Clubs; and Cups correspond to Hearts. The court cards may serve as signifiers for more people in your readings. I advise you not to focus too heavily on these associations, but first try to understand and work with the Lenormand meanings that follow.



1. Rider | 9 ♥

A motivated start, news, movement, transition period, arrival.



2. Clover | 6 ♦

Good luck, small fortune, positive outlook, spur-of-the-moment, opportunity.



3. Ship | 10 ♠

Travel, distance, a vehicle (e.g. car), holiday or vacation, long-term plan or commitment.



4. House | K ♥

The home, place of residence, family unit or close friends, foundations, the human body.



5. Tree 7 ♥

Health, heritage, growth, slow-pace, patience.



6. Clouds | K ♣

Uncertainty, confusion, clouded judgement,
mistaken perceptions, poor mental health.



7. Snake | ♠♣

Lies, envy, deception, seduction, entanglement.



8. Coffin | ♠♦

Ending, finality, quitting, a transformative process, irreversible change.



9. Bouquet | ♠

A literal gift, talent or skill, creativity, engagement with events, sociability.



10. Scythe | ♦

Physical or emotional pain, removal, detox, a sudden change, sharpness.



11. Whip | ♣

Repetition, punishment, gruelling task, arguments, degradation. Sometimes called the Broom and Whip or the Rod.



12. Birds | 7 ♦

Communication, voices, restlessness, pairings, an elderly couple.



13. Child | 3♠

Innocence, naivety, a child-like character or literal child, curiosity, something physically small or with seemingly little importance.



14. Fox | 9♣

Cunning, intelligence, manipulation, covert activity, fraud.



15. Bear | 10 ♣

Physical or emotional strength, power, position of authority, work or career, maternal figure.



16. Star | 6 ♥

Hopes and dreams, multitude, spirituality, inspiration, connectivity.



17. Stork | ♠ ♥

Changes, flexibility, fluctuation, migration or movement towards something, pregnancy and birth.



18. Dog | 10 ♥

Loyalty, friendship, dependence, trust, a literal dog or pet.



19. Tower | 6 ♠

Institution i.e. workplace, school or university,
 prison, hospital, hierarchy, rules, solitude,
 isolation.



20. Garden | 8 ♠

Outdoors, public, a group of people, audience, a
 large social event.



21. Mountain | 8♣

Obstacle, challenge, period of struggle, inhibition,
long-term timing.



22. Path | Q♦

Decision-making, a twist in the path, a
conundrum, in two minds, independence.
Sometimes called the Crossroad or the Ways.



23. Mice | 7♣

Loss, depletion, decay, failure, theft.



24. Heart | J♥

Love, partnership, emotional or physical intimacy, passionate character, a literal heart i.e. may appear concerning cardiac health.



25. King | A ♣

Contract, marriage or engagement, commitment,
long-term timing, something cyclical.



26. Book | 10 ♦

The pursuit of knowledge, secrets, studying,
something unknown, the unconscious.



29. Woman | A ♠

Traditionally represents the querent if female, a love interest if attracted to females, feminine characteristics.



30. Lily | K ♠

Sex, physical or emotional intimacy, union, peace, purity.



31. Sun | A ♦

Revelation, exposure, alignment, success,
happiness.



32. Moon | 8 ♥

Emotions, intuition, psychic energy, the ego,
recognition.



33. Key | 8 ♦

Answers, understanding, spiritual teachings,
certainty, a means of access.



34. Fish | 8 ♦

Materiality, possessions, money, trade,
abundance.



35. Anchor | 9 ♠

Stability e.g. emotional or financial, work, destination (having arrived in port), attainment of goal, grounding.



36. Cross | 6 ♣

Burden, something unavoidable, growth through suffering, sacrifice.



28/29. Man and Woman

Alternative Man and Woman cards with reversed numbering for same sex readings.



28/29. The Mirrors

Second alternative cards for the Man and Woman.

Quick Reference

1. **K**ider | A motivated start, news, movement.
2. **C**lover | Good luck, small fortune, positivity.
3. **S**hip | Travel, distance, a vehicle (e.g. car).
4. **H**ouse | Home, residence, family or friends.
5. **T**ree | Health, heritage, growth.
6. **C**louds | Uncertainty, confusion, clouded judgement.
7. **S**nake | Lies, envy, deception.
8. **C**offin | Ending, finality, quitting.
9. **B**ouquet | A gift, talent or skill, creativity.
10. **S**cythe | Pain, removal, detox.
11. **W**hip | Repetition, punishment, gruelling task.
12. **B**irds | Communication, voices, restlessness.
13. **C**hild | Innocence, naivety, child-like.
14. **F**ox | Cunning, intelligence, manipulation.
15. **B**ear | Strength, power, authority.
16. **S**tar | Hopes and dreams, multitude, spirituality.

17. **Stork** | Changes, flexibility, fluctuation.
18. **Dog** | Loyalty, friendship, dependence.
19. **Tower** | Institution, hierarchy, rules.
20. **Garden** | Outdoors, public, group.
21. **Mountain** | Obstacle, challenge, struggle.
22. **Path** | Decision, twists, conundrum.
23. **Flite** | Loss, depletion, decay.
24. **Heart** | Love, partnership, intimacy.
25. **King** | Contract, marriage, commitment.
26. **Book** | Knowledge, secrets, studying.
27. **Letter** | Written communication,
documents, on the way.
28. **Man** | Querent if male, love interest.
29. **Woman** | Querent if female, love interest.
30. **Lily** | Sex, intimacy, union.
31. **Sun** | Revelation, exposure, alightment.
32. **Moon** | Emotions, intuition, psychic.
33. **Key** | Answers, understanding, teachings.
34. **Fish** | Materiality, possessions, money.
35. **Anchor** | Stability, work, destination.
36. **Cross** | Burden, unavoidable, suffering.

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A special thanks to you all.

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