

# QUEERING THE TAROT

CASSANDRA SNOW

Foreword by Beth Maiden



WEISER  
BOOKS

# CONTENTS

FOREWORD, 1

WORD, 7

WHAT IS QUEERING THE TAROT?, 9

## 1

---

THE MAJOR ARCANA, 15

The Fool 17

The Magician 19

The High Priestess 21

The Empress and The Emperor 23

The Hierophant 27

The Lovers 29

The Chariot 31

Strength 33

The Hermit 35

The Wheel of Fortune 38

Justice 40

The Hanged Man 43

Death 46

Temperance 49

The Devil 53

The Tower 57

The Star 59

The Moon 62

The Sun 65

Judgment 68

The World 72

## 2

---

### THE SUIT OF WANDS, 77

The Ace of Wands 79

The Two, Three, and Four of Wands 81

The Five and Seven of Wands 84

The Six and Eight of Wands 88

The Nine of Wands 91

The Ten of Wands 95

## 3

---

### THE SUIT OF SWORDS, 99

The Ace of Swords 101

The Two, Three, and Four of Swords 104

The Five and Seven of Swords 110

The Six of Swords 114

The Eight, Nine, and Ten of Swords 117

## 4

---

### THE SUIT OF PENTACLES, 121

The Ace of Pentacles 123

The Two of Pentacles 125

The Three of Pentacles	127
The Four of Pentacles	129
The Five of Pentacles	132
The Six of Pentacles	135
The Seven of Pentacles	137
The Eight of Pentacles	139
The Nine of Pentacles	141
The Ten of Pentacles	143

## 5

---

### THE SUIT OF CUPS, 145

The Ace, Two, and Three of Cups	146
The Four of Cups	149
The Five Through Seven of Cups	152
The Eight of Cups	156
The Nine and Ten of Cups	159

## 6

---

### THE COURT CARDS, 165

The Page of Wands	167
The Knight of Wands	170
The Queen of Wands	173
The King of Wands	176
The Page of Swords	179
The Knight of Swords	182
The Queen of Swords	184
The King of Swords	187

The Page of Pentacles	189
The Knight of Pentacles	191
The Queen of Pentacles	193
The King of Pentacles	195
The Page of Cups	197
The Knight of Cups	199
The Queen of Cups	201
The King of Cups	203

FINAL THOUGHTS ON QUEERING THE TAROT, 207

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, 209

---

# FOREWORD

Beth Maiden, July 2018

When I look at the surprisingly few, yet dearly loved-books on the shelves of my tarot room, I am greeted warmly by queer family and friends. From the veteran Rachel Pollack's classic *Seventy-Eight Degrees of Wisdom* to Michelle Tea's fresh and impassioned *Modern Tarot*, from Barbara Moore's many and wide-ranging tarot guidebooks to the transgenerational project that is *She Is Sitting in the Night* by Rima Athar, Oliver Pickle, and Ruth West, LGBTQ+ folks are all over the tarotsphere, and this makes my queer heart sing.

That's not to mention the queer-centered decks that have recently exploded my once modest collection—*The Numinous Tarot*, the *Shrine of the Black Medusa Tarot*, the Malakh Halevanah deck, the *Delta Enduring Tarot* and the *NEXT WORLD TAROT* to name just a few—all the work of LGBTQ-identified creators who have found that tarot, with its infinite capacity for reframing, reinterpretation, retelling, is a perfect medium for sharing and exploring queer stories and experiences.

Whether comfortably taking up space in the mainstream conversation or fiercely reclaiming tarot to reflect the experience of marginalization, seizing the 78 cards we know as tarot and using them to reflect our experiences has become part of our community's lineage and literary canon. Through rereading and retelling the journeys found in the tarot, we explore our collective story, its struggles, its resilience, its growth. A deck of tarot cards in the hands of a young queer is every bit as important and vital as an esteemed text in the queer canon—each and every time the deck is picked up and we lay out those familiar cards, it becomes a new story, its well-known symbols and archetypes ready to be reshaped to reflect our many and diverse lived realities.

• • •

Why is it that queer folks are so drawn to tarot and other witchy, magical or esoteric practices? I believe it has to do with a righteous reclaiming of the marginal

spaces we inhabit. As we embrace what makes us different, we turn to tools and practices that have themselves been ridiculed or shamed. I spoke about the value of queer magic recently in an interview with queer designer and moon-witch Sarah Gottesdiener:

Queers—especially those with other intersecting marginal identities—tend to exist in the spaces the mainstream neglects; beautiful, scruffy, overgrown edgelands (see Cristy C Road’s *NEXT WORLD TAROT* for gorgeous visuals!) where we can experience a little freedom, support each other to thrive, get real about our pain, and continually look outward. We have to look outward because as well as being reviled and scapegoated, queers are also exotified and tokenized, and the radical spaces we create are rapidly gentrified and commodified, claimed by the mainstream, and sold back to us in plastic packaging (we can see this happening with trendy “witch vibes” right now). This is always painful, but I think queer folks are used to it. It can be fuel for the fire. We push boundaries and move a little further out of the mainstream, where we discover new sources of inspiration, create new kinds of magic. We’ve always had to do it for ourselves, and that DIY, punk approach is also part of magic.

We work to liberate ourselves and each other. Queers understand that personal and collective liberation are interwoven and we are used to supporting and uplifting each other in a way that runs counter to the me me messages of the mainstream. We critique what we are offered (or sold) and turn it on its head.\*

To a world that categorizes us as non-normative, we say “Your loss! We’ll build our own communities, economies, and structures of care right over here.” Picking up affordable, accessible practices like tarot, astrology, and herbalism—folk tools that to the capitalist white heteropatriarchy are useless because they can’t be neatly explained, co-opted, and sold—is part of this radical community building process. We use tarot to better understand and care for ourselves and our communities.

---

\* Interview on Sarah Gottesdiener’s website, Visual Magic, 2017 <https://visualmagic.info/portfolio/beth-maiden-interview/>

*Queering the Tarot* is a brilliant contribution to this collective work. Cassandra's interpretations zoom in on the generally accepted meanings of each card, examining time-worn archetypes, symbols, tropes, and rites of passage via one simple yet crucial question:

*How can this card relate differently for queer-identified readers?*

The asking is itself a radical act. It is a question that makes space for difference. It is a question that centers the marginal, the unseen, and makes it visible.

Too often, mainstream discourse on LGBTQ+ experiences focuses on how queers are "just like everyone else." We hear about "same love," we talk about how we are all human, we fight for permission to enter the patriarchal, capitalist institution of matrimony, and so on. I frequently hear confused voices drifting over from the mainstream, asking: Why do you need your own special hairdressers? Do you still need Pride, now that gays can get married? Why would you seek out a queer therapist? and so on.

These questions contain their own answers; their very asking shows us why and how much we do need these things. While, of course, it's important to talk about human commonalities, while, of course, love is love, and while for many LGBTQ+ people, a seat at the mainstream table is a revolution in itself, it's also the case that the queer experience is different than the hetero experience (depending on other intersecting circumstances such as race, class, mental health, or body type, often vastly so.) We need our own hairdressers, visibility parades, therapists, and so on because so often the people and institutions around us *do not get it* (or choose not to). Heteronormative society doesn't know what it is like to have a stylist alter that haircut you've asked for in order to make your gender expression fit their comfort zone, doesn't know how it feels to be continually assessing the fluctuating cost of speaking in your own voice, wearing the clothes you choose, or simply touching your lover's hand. Heteronormative society doesn't see the shame and the fear every queer person has confronted (or will at some point need to confront) that is the result of growing up categorized as not "normal." No single queer person I know (regardless of how supportive their family may be) has been immune to this shame and fear. Queer identity—with all of this shame and fear, and with its pride and its resilience and its deep, unconditional love, too—is a maze through which we walk, or crawl, or fly, or drag ourselves, or dance, or dream, or fall, or fuck, as we journey



toward the truth of who we are and who we can be. Tarot is a compass for navigating that maze with curiosity, consciousness, honesty, and compassion.

For any tarot reader, The Fool's Journey is a quest for self-discovery, connection, integration, and healing, culminating in self-actualization, where the individual comes to recognize their unique yet interdependent place in what the poet Mary Oliver beautifully names "the family of things."\*\* For me, endlessly shuffling, endlessly re-reading, tarot is the best of tools, because it holds space for everybody and everything in the cosmos. The most common thing I hear from my own tarot clients runs along the lines of "wow—it was so good to get that confirmation." The cards so often tell us what we already know! Over the years, I've come to realize that this is tarot's most beautiful gift. For queer folks—and for anyone experiencing systemic oppression and the layers of fear and shame that come with that—tarot holds up a mirror to the truths we hide away, helping us to piece together our identities and understand the beauty and complexity of our non-normative lives and, ultimately, live them with pride.

Cassandra draws on many years of practice working as a healer, witch, tarot reader, and in other roles at the heart of their LGBTQ+ community, as evidenced by the wide-ranging suggestions offered for each card. In *Queering the Tarot*, the Two of Pentacles speaks of the pride and pain of juggling intersecting identities ("As soon as we gain a cool piece of legislation, we lose another one we were counting on"), The Hermit can open up a conversation around asexuality or aromanticism, and the entire suit of Swords makes space for acknowledging that LGBTQ+ folks are far more likely than their straight peers to suffer with mental health and addiction issues.

Death is another simple example, with its well-understood connotations of transformation and letting go. The difference between reading platitudes around "big life changes" versus on point notes on, for example, gender transition and deadnames, is massive, and vitally important to a person about to undergo such a change. So, too, is the opening of space to talk about how and why Death's unstoppable change may be happening; when reading about the Death card we often hear that change is inevitable, and it's up to us to embrace it, to go with the flow. A queer-centered reading might also dig into who or what is forcing those changes,

---

\*\* From "Wild Geese," by Mary Oliver, 2004

since, for example, queer people are so frequently outed before they are ready or before it is safe. Again, the queer experience is witnessed in its complexity and in the context of a heteronormative world, rather than watered down to blend with more normative tarot card interpretations.



These are just a few quick examples. Each on its own can mean that a queer person feels better understood. Together, as a guidebook to the entire tarot, they are a compass, a friendly guide, and a witness to each and every queer journey.

At the same time, there is so much more to explore here. *Queering the Tarot* is one volume. As one author, one reader, one healer, Cassandra can cover only so much ground as they present their interpretations of the cards. I know that Cassandra would be the first to say that this book is a contribution to a huge and ever shifting conversation—not a conclusion or a definitive guide. What is so radical and so wonderful about this book is that it carves out space for that conversation, while its mainstream publication amplifies it, spreads it, opens it further. But don't forget that this conversation is already taking place. It's happening in blogs and in bars, in bedrooms and coffee shops, in parks and on social media. Each time you pick up your deck, you add to the conversation. As you open this book and shift your gaze to take in the perspectives presented here, understand that the cards are a springboard for your own interpretations, prompts for your own self-enquiry. What happens next, what you find in the cards you lay before yourself, depends on you. Will you claim your story—in all of its complexity? I hope so—because that is queer self-love in action, and that where the revolution happens.

You are witnessed. You are seen. You matter. You belong.

With deep and endless love  
for your unique and magical queer journey,  
—Beth

---

## WORD

In this book I use the acronym LGBTQQP2SA+, which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Pansexual, Two-Spirit, Asexual, and anyone else who identifies as *not straight*, *not cisgender*, or both. The + is divisive, and I do recognize that not everyone likes their inclusion seeming like an afterthought. I see you, I hear you, and I'm always looking for more inclusive solutions. Please know that I consider anyone who is not both straight and cisgender a Q, as in *Queer*. You're already under the umbrella and celebrating our queerness with us in my eyes.

I also know that the word *Queer* isn't comfortable or right for everyone. This is a word that originally just meant *odd* (another label I happily claim) but, over time, became a slur lobbed at those who were—or were perceived as—something other than straight, cisgender, or both. It was a word meant to hurt us and other us. It was a word used to make us feel that we were different, not welcome, not safe. Over the past several years, our community has done some brilliant work reclaiming this word that once put us in a limiting box. It is now a word that means *out of the box*. It's a word that allows us to take pride in being original, nonconforming, unique, expansive, freeing—all beautiful, wonderful qualities. It has also become a word intended to create community with as many identities and *others* as possible, as we've reclaimed them. The world might think you're different—and maybe they're right. But we celebrate that here in our community, and we welcome you with open arms.

In this book, I embrace polyamory in relationships and families. I myself am genderfluid and certainly welcome genderqueer, gender non-conforming, agender, pangender, and otherwise non-binary readers. You will see a lot of the singular *they* pronoun as a result. It is not a typo. I embrace elements of relationship anarchism even though I never quite describe it as that. My own queerplatonic partner is the most significant person in my life, even though we do both date and have sex (just not with each other), and the idea that all types of healing and loving relationships

can be equally important comes through throughout the book. I also identify with the kink community, and am incredibly sex-positive. So sex comes up. A lot. While each of these things could be their own book, I try to delve into them with some gusto throughout this one, among the other marginalized identities and relationships you expect to see.

Queering something, then, means taking what our society has given us and finding our own way, outside of that society's limits. They put us in a box, and we still find ways to create and prosper and make it the most well decorated box you'll see. Queering erases the narrowness and small-mindedness of *normal*. It embraces the beauty, the mystery, and the vastness of our differences. It welcomes everyone who needs a safer space, and it takes responsibility for helping those people heal. Tarot is supposed to help people heal, after all. Yet this stunning divination form does create some division where it means to be welcoming with its binary court cards and stress on values we may not all share. In *Queering the Tarot*, I am literally taking tarot *out of the box*. All genders, sexual identities, relationship orientations, and faiths are welcome at this tarot table—and I sure am glad you found your way here.

---

## WHAT IS QUEERING THE TAROT?

Tarot is a tool of self-discovery, healing, growth, empowerment, and liberation. Tarot archetypes provide the reader with a window into present circumstances and future potential. It is a window that shows us where we've been and where we are going. But what if that window opened up only on a world that was white, European, and heterosexual? The many excellent books that have come to us through the ages focus largely on the symbolism of the cards, and so the interpretations of the tarot that have been passed down through tradition generally presuppose a commonality and normalcy among humanity. But humanity is diverse—culturally, spiritually, sexually. Tarot has the power to serve a greater population if we allow ourselves to unlock the tarot's deeper meanings, if we allow ourselves to *queer* the tarot.

People regularly ask, "Why Tarot?" when I tell them what I do with my life. I never even know where to start answering that question because the real answer is that tarot saved my life at a time when I was experiencing a crisis of faith and complete personal meltdown. I was a freshman in college, away from an alcoholic, poverty laden home for the first time. It was supposed to be a fresh start, but I was raped twice in one month and then lived with a genuine sociopath who stole my identity in a number of terrifying ways while pretending to be my best friend in the world. I was also deeply in the closet, trying to make it work with men and fit into Christian boxes I was never meant to fit into. I was deeply depressed and in the thrall of undiagnosed PTSD. I was lost. I wanted answers from somewhere, anywhere, and when a friend handed me a novelty deck in the basement of our dorm almost as a joke, I started finding them. To me, then, tarot is about healing, survival, and empowerment. It is about finding a way to thrive when the whole world seems to be against you. Tarot is about finding a way through your past and making sure you're not repeating your own unhealthy cycles. Tarot is life. I know that sounds dramatic,

but the world is cruel and we need answers, straight talk, and empowerment. That's what tarot gives us, and for many people it's the difference between turning your life around and spiraling into complete disconnection.

Tarot is and can be a tool of the oppressed. It has been by my side as I created a company for queer art and artists, as I developed resources for projects aimed at donating money to Black Lives Matter, and as I encouraged and empowered others to march to the beat of their own drum—and when that drum was taken away, just to march. Yet this set of 78 cards isn't perfect. A standard deck gives in to outdated stereotypes of gender roles, heterosexism, European centrism, and gender binarism. It pushes forward toxic capitalism in much of its approach. It weirdly subscribes to a number of Christian principles, many of which are harmful to almost everyone likely to pick up a tarot deck. If you don't fit into a straight, white, cisgender mold, a traditional tarot deck may not hold much for you. And honestly? Most of us don't fit into that mold. So our tarot practice needs to be as diverse as we are.

In *Queering the Tarot*, I take these traditional ideas and remix them into something relatable and significant for people who are not straight and cisgender. Queering anything is about reclaiming it, making it your own, and subverting it to fit comfortably in your community. I queer theatre in my *other* life by my compassionate and collaborative approach in a field that insists on hierarchies. I queer tarot similarly. I approach the cards from my own point of view—that is, the point of view of a chronically ill, disabled, multiple trauma survivor who is also incredibly queer. I approach the cards from the point of view of someone who wants to liberate the marginalized and works hard to help make that happen. I also approach the cards from the point of view of someone who cares deeply and passionately about the tarot, but whose humanity is the most important thing to them. I boast on my website that all are welcome at my tarot table. I want to show you stories, ideas, and interpretations of the cards that also help you feel welcome at your own.

• • •

I started developing *Queering the Tarot* in a series of articles for TheColumn and Little Red Tarot, two amazing websites that have provided a voice and an outlet for me and countless others. My original intention was to explore the tarot from a queer perspective but very early on it became something else entirely: It became a series of questions for and from the cards. Some of these questions were to be expected. For

example, the first questions were obviously about gender roles and sexual identity. There is no defined Empress or Emperor in a same sex relationship, so what are we to make of these traditional female and male archetypes? Over time, though, my exploration of the tarot became about healing from personal and collective trauma. It became about empowerment. It became about creating change and setting fire to the oppression that has kept witches, psychics, people of color, women, and, of course, queer people down for so long. It became about everyone I knew and all of the things they were fighting, and it became about finding ways for us to win.

*Queering the Tarot* is a book about reclamation. Reading cards has always belonged to the most oppressed, from the extremely persecuted Romani people to modern day readers from all walks of life. Yet, even now, you will be hard pressed to find any people of color, queer people, disabled people, or people who don't look wealthy in a traditional tarot deck. I wrote this book for all of the people not represented in the aforementioned history of books on the tarot. This book is my love song to my community and to everyone who's been hurt or told they are less than for who they are, who they love, or where they're from.

*Queering the Tarot* is a culmination of years of my life's work making the tarot relatable and accessible to LGBTQIP2SA+ people, including and especially the most marginalized among us. *Queering the Tarot* fights heteronormativity, cisnormativity, patriarchy, and white supremacy. *Queering the Tarot* embraces all body types, all ages, and all generations, loves transgender tarot fans, and believes that bisexuality, pansexuality, and asexuality are every bit as valid as being gay or straight. *Queering the Tarot* is a reclamation of fortune-telling and psychic vision and a deconstruction of the institutions so many hold so dear, but that like to keep anyone *different* from thriving and succeeding. That includes the structure and the traditions inherent in tarot.

Do you need to identify as queer to get the most from this book? No. Although it's tremendously important for me to address the needs of the overlooked LGBTQIP2SA+ community, this book is for any unique soul who has felt wrong, left out, marginalized, different. Which is most people. This book is meant to guide you as you learn tarot, but it's primarily meant to make you ask questions, encourage you to sit with your cards, and learn to let the deck speak to the beautiful, powerful, hurt, confused *you* that you are. *Queering the Tarot* will help you tear down walls, including the ones that block your ability to connect with your deck and became

the super insightful reader I know you can be. In order to enhance your ability to connect with the tarot, I've chosen to illustrate this book with the wonderful *Urban Tarot* by Robin Scott. This deck will visually jump-start your understanding of the tarot in non-normative ways—it is urban, real, contemporary, and it will make you ask questions. And yet, the *Urban Tarot* will resonate with those familiar with the *Rider-Waite-Smith Tarot* deck as well as Crowley's *Thoth Tarot*.

*Queering the Tarot* can be used with any deck. Use each card's section to get a feel for what the card can and should do or say. Then sit with the card or group of cards for a while. See what personal messages pop up about your life, your subconscious, your community, and your world. It's from there that you can start healing. It's from there that you can begin reading with confidence and joy.



QUEERING  
THE  
MAJOR ARCANA

## THE MAJOR ARCANA

**T**raditionally the Major Arcana are the first twenty-two cards in the deck, ranging from The Fool to The World. (I say traditionally because we are in a bit of a tarot renaissance, and there are so many wonderful decks reinventing what tarot can be.) The cards of the Major Arcana address matters of fate, spirituality, and anything the gods have ordained necessary in our lives. If we consider the suits of the Minor Arcana as representing the four elements of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water, then the cards of Major Arcana indicate the fifth element, Spirit. Spirit assures that we are being guided by higher principles. In truth, I don't stray too far from those accepted assignations—they just look a little bit different. I do believe there are elements of fate at play in our lives, but I don't think we're its pawns. In fact, that's a pretty oppressive viewpoint. The ideas of fate, karma, and one or several gods choosing for us have been used to justify everything from slavery to caste systems to abuse of members in exclusive and dangerous cults. They are no friend to those living in the margins. Yet I am not without a sense of mystery or romance. I do think there are people that are supposed to be in our lives. I believe that there are places we are supposed to visit, things we are supposed to achieve, love we are supposed to know. Does that mean I think we've irrevocably screwed up our lives if we don't? Absolutely not.

To me, then, fate indicates things that are best for us, things where the ball has already started rolling (and are therefore unavoidable), or anything you feel called to do. There are so many places to turn in the Majors for healing, empowerment, or even just to reflect on one's own identity, and that's especially true for queer people. Fate is not necessarily totally divorced from the queer experience, but it's also not the only factor in our ability to heal and thrive. It's important for *anyone* who has been oppressed to be able to take control of their own lives. Autonomy matters to everyone, but it especially matters to people who have spent most of their lives being told

they are wrong about who they are and how they feel. We need to claim it, own it, and live it. That makes fate almost a secondary or tertiary factor in our lives. The ball is already rolling on that major career change, for example, but we have other fish to fry while that's picking up steam. So what major role do the Majors play in our lives?

As I've mentioned, these twenty-two cards represent Spirit—the often recognized fifth element. Spirit is our soul, our aura, the *us* that we were given, and the *us* that we are building. Spirit is what survives and keeps us going in the face of trauma. Spirit is that part of us that is already healed. Spirit is also, of course, the part of us that prays, does magick, and manifests our dreams into reality. The Major Arcana pull together the best of the other four suits. These cards give us the Fire to become powerful activists and fighters. They give us the Water to heal ourselves, and the heart to love in terrible times. They give us the Air to make quick and sound decisions and the logic to ensure we don't float away. And they give us the Earth that allows us to grow and thrive no matter what we are planted in. All of this makes the Major Arcana a powerful series of cards that can be used in any aspect of our lives.

Most often, I use these twenty-two cards to represent the general life and spiritual journeys we are on and where we are in those journeys. Other readers do the same thing, and in fact the Majors are often collectively called The Fool's Journey. When queering the tarot, I take into account the unique ways LGBTQIP2SA+ people have been hurt and where healing may be needed. I take our unique joys, communities, and chosen families into account, too. I think about what someone's journey specific to *all* of their identities might be, and how each card looks different in that person's journey. Tarot is highly personal, so looking at it as a monolith is always going to get you in trouble. Still, there are points common enough to all of us to explore. With that, let's jump into these cards!

# THE FOOL

The Fool promises exciting new beginnings and encourages youthful optimism. This card represents babies being born, college students setting off into the world on their own, and anyone who takes the plunge to ditch their day job and start their own career. It's a card that encourages big, almost foolish leaps of faith. Such leaps of faith also require us to keep a positive attitude and assume that things are going to work out for the best. This is true of The Fool more than it is not. It's important to view this card as a card of early stages or starting fresh. There are a lot of cards that show major



upheaval, big risks, and new chapters. This one is special because we aren't starting a new chapter. We're starting a totally new book. That means the road ahead might get treacherous, but we're meant to learn from the pitfalls.

The Fool shows up frequently when we're starting on our path toward our soul's purpose. It came up a lot when I made my decision to move to the Midwest. It came up when I started my theatre company. It came up when I said, "screw day jobs," and made writing and tarot my career. All of these were big, bold choices that I knew were right for me. And they were also all times I listened to my intuition and followed what I knew to be a calling. That is really where The Fool shines—in getting us to live out our highest purpose.

It makes sense, then, that this card comes up frequently for queer seekers. (A seeker or querent is anyone turning to the tarot for guidance.) We cannot live our soul's purpose if we are denying pieces of who we are. If you're considering or have recently come out of the closet, you will likely get the encouraging message of The Fool. You really cannot start your soul's journey or work toward your purpose carrying big secrets on your shoulders. That's not to say that this card doesn't encourage experimentation. Quite the opposite. Admitting you're queer and deciding which

letter of the beautifully long acronym we use now are totally different. My own journey has seen several different identities, all of them queer, and all of them honoring who I truly was at that time.

I mentioned though, that this card came up a lot when I was making my decision to move to the American Midwest. That was an incredibly queer application of this card. Why? Well, I was living in the Bible Belt, attending a Baptist college that refused to let students form a Queer Student Alliance. The college even banned any new groups from being formed on campus in retaliation. I was in the closet for most of that hubbub, and I'm not sure which side of the closet was worse. All I know is that from my side, it hammered home the self-loathing I'd felt over my sexuality for years. It was not a healthy environment for me to be in. The Midwest is hardly a paragon of radical politics, but it's also not a Baptist-run cesspool where even rumors of LGBTQIP2SA+ students getting together would cause an administrative meltdown. The Fool showed up to encourage me to literally start a new journey, one where I could make my own way and find my own voice in an environment where it was at least marginally safer to do so. That's what The Fool wants for all of us: to find a place where we can truly begin our journey.

The Fool represents *any* time we are starting new or starting over. While the examples I've written about deal with very specific situations that many queer people face in their lifetime, there are countless others. Finding a new group of friends or a queer chosen family is one. Starting a new spiritual journey that won't make you feel crappy for being queer is another. Gender transitions often bring up The Fool. So does that first truly queer relationship (whatever that means to you). Queer applications of The Fool abound in our lives, but its message stays the same: remain true to your identity, trust that inner voice, and jump! Sometimes as LGBTQIP2SA+ people, that is all the encouragement we need.

# THE MAGICIAN

Magick. Luck. Creation. These are just a few keywords ascribed to The Magician, a card full of magick and moxie. The Magician represents being able to use the skills and resources at your disposal to create change in your life and the world at large. This card also indicates creating the life you desire through the law of attraction (or other magickal means). This is a next steps card—The Fool starts us on a journey, and The Magician is what happens once we’ve travelled for a bit. It’s a card signifying that a transformation has happened within, and you are now ready to take all of the skills



and magick contained inside of you out into the world, transforming your own life and creating good for others. The minor prophecies therefore include instances of luck—meetings, emails, phone calls all meant to take our life from the “I’m ready” to the “I’m actually doing this” stage.

When we look at reading for the queer crowd, the base interpretation of this card doesn’t change. This is one of those cards where knowing a lot about the queer experience comes in handier than knowing a lot about the tarot. Queer people often go through quite a journey to reach the point of realizing they are a queer person, let alone coming out and living as one, and it can come with a lot of shame and missteps along the way. While The Magician is usually seen as an early stages life card, for queer people, assuming this would be a mistake. It often takes years to feel comfortable presenting as a gender you weren’t assigned at birth. It can take many sexual partners to figure out how you fall in terms of sexual identity, and that goes double for those of us who are kinky too. This card showing up for a queer person is not necessarily about that moment after The Fool, when you realize it’s okay to be you. It’s possibly years later when you’ve actually hammered out what *being you* looks and feels like. This, for LGBTQIQIP2SA+ people, is when the magick starts happening.

Then, there's the issue of confidence for queer seekers in all other areas of their life. Most marginalized people take years learning the skills they want to build their career from, where others take mere months. Does that mean we're not ready sooner? No. What it means is that our inner voice has been so beaten down (by ourselves or others) that we don't think we can acquire that set of skills quickly enough. We wait to start our lives until we are 1,000 percent sure we know what we're doing. The Magician shows up to encourage us to step out and try for success sooner. This card that brings luck to people who are both straight and cisgender also brings confidence to queer people. That's really important, and a side of The Magician that's easy to miss. We can *all* create the lives we want with spiritual prowess, luck, and the work required. It takes a card as sure of themselves as the Magician to make queer seekers see that.

The Magician is a card of literal magic. What that meant for me several years ago while I was still stuck in the Bible Belt, was that it was time to explore alternative spiritualities. Christianity in the right hands is every bit as healing and empowering as any other spiritual path. It's not for everybody, though, and a significant number of LGBTQIP2SA+ people have been hurt by or even pushed out of their home churches because of who they are. Sometimes, what we need to heal that betrayal is a different spirituality altogether. I found witchcraft, ghosts, and tarot in dorm room basements and on various walking paths in the mountains of North Carolina. I was scared at first. I was convinced I was wrong. Some gentle nudging from the tarot and Pagans I trusted eventually won me over, but The Magician showed up a lot for me back then. For all of the life purpose and practical application we see, sometimes this card just wants us to find ourselves spiritually.

# THE HIGH PRIESTESS

The High Priestess digs deep, y'all. This is a card of mystery and intrigue, but it's also a card of deep, profound knowledge. This can be a frustrating card to pull at times since we are taking to the tarot to solve mysteries or rely on wisdom that is not our own, but it is often a necessary wake-up call to tune in to ourselves. This card, generally speaking, shows up in one of two ways. Sometimes The High Priestess shows up because we aren't supposed to know what's around the corner. We are new to our path, and should still be surprised and excited by the things our Higher Power throws at us. In other



words, it's best not to know. Alternatively, this card comes when all of the answers we need are sitting buried in our guts, our minds, or our bones. There are truths we can see or know, but there are also truths we can feel. The latter are the deepest truths there are, and the ones The High Priestess urges you to seek.

Feeling our truths as queer people is one of the most important gifts we can give ourselves. Where does our awareness of our own queerness start? Our minds? Our hearts? Or somewhere deeper, hidden even to us? We've already seen in our short journey to The High Priestess that LGBTQQP2SA+ are quieted and have their intuition thrown off by pressure and bigotry from the world at large. This card is a deep, necessary wake-up call to find that voice again.

The High Priestess is all about feeling our truth, and there are few, if any, things more awakening than sex. Queering the tarot, or taking any radical approach to it, means embracing sex positivity and not quieting the significant role it has in most of our lives. The High Priestess is a fairly dominant force, insisting that if they sleep with you, their needs *will* be met. Once a partner enthusiastically consents to these conditions, though, game on. Queering The High Priestess means committing to your own pleasure, indulging in sensuality, and finding partners who genuinely



enjoy being under you. Don't settle for less than that; you've been through enough in your queer life.

As we talk about The High Priestess' enviable sex life, we touch on another important message for queer seekers: don't settle for less than what you deserve—ever. It is heartbreakingly common for me to see my community members take jobs that do not pay enough because they are queer friendly, or, alternatively, take jobs where they must stay somewhat closeted because they need the money or benefits offered. There's not always a positive solution to this. Sometimes we have to balance the harsh reality queer people live in with our own needs. When The High Priestess is on the table though, that simply isn't true. You can have a partner who stokes your intellectual fires *and* accepts your gender identity. You can have a job that is lucrative *and* safe. You can be who you are *and* meet your needs. Don't worry about the details for now. This card loves its mysteries. It will all sort out the way you need it to, though, only so long as you refuse to settle for less than what you know in your bones you deserve.

# THE EMPRESS AND THE EMPEROR

As we continue to journey through the tarot, queering it every step of the way, some cards make more sense to queer as a set or a series. The Empress and The Emperor are two such cards. Traditionally these cards are seen as *Mother* and *Father*, each representing the best and worst of those archetypes. The Empress is historically said to deal with maternal energy. This is understood to be the nurturing side of ourselves, as well as the side that deals with unconditional love. She's also a positive omen for creative energy and fertility. In the negative, this card can represent a flare up of mommy issues, or love that is overbearing. Not very flattering, but The Emperor has a dark side, too. This card represents so-called fatherly wisdom and the self-discipline we supposedly all learned from our dads. The card also represents control and stability, and, sure enough, angry or strict fathers are also represented here.

Most readers, at least at the professional level, have figured out how to read around gender in the court cards, but this pair presents a different challenge. Mother and Father are different archetypes with deeper ingrained biases than King or Queen, or even Male or Female. To truly queer these two, you have to be willing to throw out any



gendered notions of them—not only to acknowledge same sex relationships, but also to acknowledge the experience of transgender people, including those who don't identify on the binary. Furthermore, the way these cards interpret Mother and Father is troublingly outdated in a world where dads often stay home and do the nurturing, moms are frequently charged with both roles, and many people aren't even raised by their birth parents.

The Empress, boiled down to the card's core, represents nurturing and creative energy. This is often a person with lots of love to give. This describes as many men and genderqueer people in my life as it does women. I would actually argue that since I run in primarily queer circles, this is more likely than not to represent a non-female friend when it shows up for me. While there are a lot of negative stereotypes of feminized gay men, they do exist, and you know what? They are strong, beautiful, and radical. They also serve as moms to young queers of all ilk who are still in or struggling to come out of the closet. Like The Empress, their love can also be a little bit clingy and overbearing sometimes. As traits, these are not inherently negative, though. They just want to make sure you're okay! Regardless of gender, The Empress brings so much of the heart to the queer community. Queering this card is not just accepting that all genders can be The Empress. The Empress queered is gay or queer bars that are inclusive. The Empress queered is queer open mic nights where anything goes. The Empress queered is letting friends crash on your couch because they have nowhere else to go, buying your friend who doesn't have a job a coffee to perk them up, even handing down your old clothes to someone who's transitioning.

The Empress is also art and creativity. She is, then, any space where queer art thrives or people are creating from their souls. In this concept of creativity, we break down that word and get *create*. This card shows up when we can have any future we want, and it's time for us to set that into motion. Growing up, I was told "college, husband, good paying job, kids"—in that order. Sometimes people actually said this to me, but much of it was subliminal. The Empress showed up when I rebelled slightly by choosing to major in theatre. She showed up big time when I had to figure out what I was doing in Iowa with a theatre degree and a backpack full of spellbooks. The world was my oyster then, and I could see that. I just needed to spend some time visualizing what I was supposed to make out of all this.

While it may be clear that I'm a pretty big fan of a big queered-up Empress, The Emperor is harder for me—to say the least. The Emperor in his simplest form is about control and stability, and those are not bad traits. However, the art and the undertone of this card is often so harsh that it seems the message that comes through most often is control and stability at any cost. This is a hell a dangerous concept for anyone, but especially for queer people who's rights are constantly being given and taken away by our governments and dangled like bait as options for "compromise."

Very few tarot cards however, are strictly good or bad. The Emperor may show up to say "Hey, uh, someone really does have a lot of control over you right now. Sorry." or "Yeah, no, that's going to happen because of this patriarchal law in place." Frequently, though, he shows up to tell us the exact opposite thing, and that's pretty great. This means, in a reading The Emperor is often telling you to take back control of your life. This card showed up before I started trauma therapy. It also showed up before I moved out of an apartment that I shared with a roommate who had broken my heart, and who's continued presence prevented me from healing or being productive. That's actually a really *good* sign for LGBTQQIP2SA+ querents. You are being told to take your life back, which means you have the resources and capacity to do so. That's great!

With all of this queering and healing and taking back of control, why do I still hate this card? Well, for starters, I think most of us would agree we'd rather not be bullied into submission in the first place. Even as we move beyond that, though, taking back control is hard. Trauma therapy was awful but necessary. I had to admit a close relationship was over for good when I moved out of that apartment. I also had to find a new apartment and buy a whole bunch of new stuff! It was genuinely awful. Yes, I'm glad I did it. I still wish I hadn't had to. That's maybe a bit of nontraditional wisdom that I do have for queer folk about The Emperor: it's okay to be mad or feel put upon that you're in this position. You didn't do this. The card wants you to regain control of your life, but that doesn't mean you have to enjoy the process.

Alternatively to everything I just wrote about, it is a sad truth that those of us who identify as not straight or not cisgender frequently have strained relationships with our parents. It's also a sad truth that the damage of those relationships can and does prevent us from moving forward in our lives. It is not uncommon, then, for a

parent of any gender to be seen as the cruel and dominating Emperor. It's certainly not uncommon for negative associations with the mother in The Empress to come out in a reading for queer people either. There are appropriate times to gender cards. Normally I would say that those times are strictly when doing so is affirming and healing to the seeker. Sometimes though, we really do have to wade through the crap we were born into in order to reach breakthroughs. For many of us, that means taking a hard look at how our relationships with our parents have affected our queer adult psyches and relationships.

## THE HIEROPHANT

Full disclosure: I am not a fan of The Hierophant at all. It's not hard to see why. Traditionally, The Hierophant was based on The Pope and represented religious leaders. To me, that indicates a conservative orthodoxy that was popular during Catholic reign. As time passed, church and state have separated in many countries, and The Hierophant has come to represent government and other institutions like college and marriage. The card also indicates tradition. While I personally struggle with most of those things, readings of The Hierophant are not exclusively negative. Some people



see a calling in this card to become a teacher, leader, or healer. Some people take it as a sign that we are in good hands with the institutions in our lives. It can be a healing energy or important time of learning for a querent. Some people spin a card of tradition to be about thinking about one's own traditions and what has always worked for them.

Let's get real though. For most queer seekers, their experiences with the institutions of church and government have not been positive. Many have been rejected by churches, and are still denied equal rights and dignities by the government. Even with the increase in countries allowing same-sex marriage, institutionalized queerphobia is so deeply entrenched in most cultures that we hear "institution" and it's not a far jump to "systematic oppression." Hate crimes are still underpenalized. In many places you can still lose your job and your home for being a LGBTQQIP2SA+ person. Most places have not even begun to make progress on trans rights and dignities. And that's just for starters. There are countless other ways the religious and government institutions that are supposed to keep us safe dramatically fail us. Most recently I have been frustrated by the way those institutions use us as props. When we are needed to win an election, everything is "gay marriage" this and "trans

rights to bathrooms” that. When we become a liability or even a difficulty, though, we are taken off the table and swept under the rug. It’s infuriating. It makes The Hierophant really, really hard for me to swallow in any situation.

If you have a negative view of any card, you do not always have to spin the card positively. I spent years doing this with clients and even in the early days of writing this *Queering the Tarot* project. Sometimes this card comes up because you are being backed into a corner by the very institutions that are supposed to protect you. That sucks. You need to know that, though, if you want to move past or move on from it. The card may not offer advice on its own, though. Rarely will you pull just one card to gain clarity on a situation, so look to surrounding cards for advice. On its own though, it really could go either way. If you’re super backed into a corner, it might be time to call it quits and find a different path. However, if surrounding cards indicate breaking things, healing, or starting over, the hurt and bondage of the traditional Hierophant in our lives could be on its way out. Essentially, The Hierophant could mean the opposite of its traditional meaning—that a break and healing from harmful systematic and institutional oppression is possible. If we want to go really big, sometimes The Hierophant even shows up to call you to action that disrupts or tears down the status quo. This card’s healing energy *is* powerful, and you may be just the force to fix what’s broken in this situation.

Not every queer person hates The Hierophant as much as I do. I mentioned earlier that healing energy is strong in this card. It is. This card then can often be a calling to take up healing others in your spiritual journey, or could be calling you to leadership in your LGBTQIP2SA+ community. For many, institution means resource, so The Hierophant could be guiding you toward working for or at a trusted resource in your community.

The Hierophant is a big card, even among other Majors, so whether you’re being told to set fire to existing institutions, build your own, or simply learn Reiki so you can help queer people individually, the card is guiding you toward a higher purpose. It may not be your soul’s purpose or why you are here, but if we’re looking at the Major Arcana as an adventure book, The Hierophant is an important side quest that shapes who you are and what your world will look like when this particular chapter concludes.

# THE LOVERS

The Lovers card is usually pretty straightforward. Love, attraction, and raw passion rule, when The Lovers kicks off or sits in the middle of your reading. However, this card is more complex than meets the eye. While sex or manifestation is clearly on the table, this is ultimately a card of choice. You have come to a major fork in the road, and you have to choose which way you're headed. It shows up most often for people who have been sitting at the fork entrance, trying to build a life there, but knowing it's in vain. Frequently the dual meanings in this card let querents know that they need to include



their partner in their decision making process. It shows up when people have been in relationships for a while but have yet to commit to the next step. It also shows up when we are manifesting all the right things in our lives but have to decide which path really is our best one.

The most common queer interpretation that I see in The Lovers is with poly-amorous or non-monogamous clients. New relationships or sexual partnerships are almost always on the table, but there are still big decisions to be made about how many relationships is too many and how to balance new partners with existing ones. Don't worry—we do see cards where people live harmonious poly lives where this constant rebalancing and love math is no longer necessary. We're not quite there with The Lovers, though. Either we haven't gotten our bearings in our relationship structure, or we're still figuring things out. That's okay. The Lovers insists we make a decision, but it doesn't have to be today. Your choices will be in front of you for a while yet, but know that most potential partners won't wait forever without some kind of reassurance.

Something many queer people face that straight and cisgender people definitely do not is the reality of romantic relationships where one party is not ready to be fully



out of the closet. It may be legitimately unsafe for them to be so. Nevertheless, we all have our own needs. Sometimes we can be fully head over heels in love with someone but can't imagine keeping our relationship quiet indefinitely. There isn't a right or wrong solution to this problem in the grand scheme of things, but there *is* what's most important to you. The Lovers obviously encourages us to follow our hearts. So if you find yourself in this situation, ask yourself what your heart wants or needs more. Is it this relationship? Is it a fully out relationship? Is there a compromise that can be met? This is your decision to make, but you do need to make it.

As we continue queering this card, we need to look at what we're told about relationships versus what we actually want. A collective unconscious of what relationships are and what they look like does creep into most of our brains when we are being raised in our heteronormative society. Many people—even people who are LGBTQIP2SA+—may see their relationships progress by following the same path a straight couple likely does. In many cases, the hard choice comes when we think about what we want in lieu of that. We may not ever want to get married, because that seems like a purely society-driven desire. We may choose not to have kids even with the plethora of options available to us. Alternatively, we may decide to because our love is awesome too and we deserve to raise a family if we choose to. Declaring that your family is a family too is still radical. That choice, though, has to come from your and your partner's desire and not because that's what people expect you to do.

Outside of our romantic lives, some of these same quandries exist. If you are head over heels in love with a field, or a spiritual community, or anything else where you'll have to keep quiet about your politics or your identity, The Lovers calls you to weigh all of that out and make the decision your heart needs you to make. It's okay if your mom, your partner, or your friends don't understand. This one is all you baby, and you've got to follow your own heart.