

# Ordinary Magic

Alison Stone

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# Contents

## The Major Arcana

- 0. The Fool / 15
- I. The Magician / 16
- II. The High Priestess / 17
- III. The Empress / 18
- IV. The Emperor / 19
- V. The High Priest / 20
- VI. The Lovers / 21
- VII. The Chariot / 22
- VIII. Strength / 23
- IX. The Hermit / 24
- X. The Wheel of Fortune / 25
- XI. Justice / 26
- XII. The Hanged Man / 27
- XIII. Death / 28
- XIV. Temperance / 29
- XV. The Devil / 30
- XVI. The Tower / 31
- XVII. The Star / 32
- XVIII. The Moon / 33
- XIX. The Sun / 34
- XX. Judgment / 35
- XXI. The World / 36

## The Minor Arcana

### *Wands*

---

- King—Hercules in Retirement / 41  
Queen—Lilith's Daughter on a Date / 42  
Knight—Prometheus Examines his Motives / 43  
Page—Boy on a Hothouse / 44  
10. My Brother's Collections / 45  
9. Rope / 46  
8. A Bird! A Plane! A Frog! / 47  
7. Mother Lion / 48  
6. Another Treatment / 49  
5. Captions that Twirl / 51  
4. Tether / 52  
3. "Adam and Eve, Not Adam and Steve" / 54  
2. Curious George and the Nazis / 55  
Ace—Sunset / 56

### *Swords*

---

- King—First Meeting with the Guru / 59  
Queen—As Though You Owned that Time / 60  
Knight—Don Quixote / 62  
Page—It Might Pop / 63  
10. Like or As / 64  
9. Festival of Light / 65  
8. Hep C / 66  
7. Slowly, Dangerous / 67  
6. Friendly Floatees / 68  
5. Animal / 69  
4. Eurydice to Orpheus / 70  
3. Divorce Court / 71  
2. Rats Live On No Evil Star / 72  
Ace—The Story / 73

- King—Love Song for Lou Reed / 77  
Queen—Vivienne Eliot / 78  
Amazon—Persephone After / 79  
Page—Magic / 81  
10. Tenth Anniversary / 82  
9. Many Parties / 84  
8. Better than Sex / 85  
7. Foolish Teenage Heart, / 86  
6. Missing / 87  
5. Memorial Park / 88  
4. Forty-Seven / 89  
3. Independence Day / 90  
2. Why, Because / 91  
Ace—Finally / 92

*Pentacles*

---

- King—Steve Jobs / 95  
Queen—Lilith to Adam / 96  
Amazon—The Workshop Leader Tells Us to “Become” a Power  
Animal / 97  
Page—Strawberry Shortcake / 98  
10. Thanksgiving / 99  
9. My Mother Graduates from “Model Mugging” / 100  
8. Brandeis Senior Year / 101  
7. Galatea to Pygmalion / 102  
6. First Pomegranate / 103  
5. Blues Café / 105  
4. Sweets / 106  
3. Found Art / 107  
2. Unemployed / 108  
Ace—Fa La La / 109

## IV. The Emperor

Every life needs edges.  
I protect you from the meadow's  
wanton splendor,  
passion running amok.

Lean against my law  
the way a child lets go  
into a father's arms. Pruned  
and tethered vines bear stronger fruit.

Defy me  
if the sobbing  
of jailed innocents  
grows louder than rain.

Kill me  
when the names  
for animals and sky  
replace the animals and sky.

## **Knight—Prometheus Examines his Motives**

It wasn't only pity,  
though they huddled thin-skinned  
and shivering, gnawing raw food,  
while animals got feathers,  
wings, speed, fur.  
Nor to show my brother a fool—  
He does that well enough  
without help.  
I had no plan.  
The torch stood unguarded  
while earth froze; winter's first  
flakes began to fall.  
My hands reached and grabbed.

Shackled to this rock  
whose crevices and mica-flecks  
I know better than my own heart,  
I search for understanding,  
want my reasons revealed the way  
my liver shows itself to the probing beak.  
Was I noble?  
Scapegoat? Savior? Chump?  
Who knows why a god  
or man does anything. Punishment  
brings no insight, just a dull,  
pain-induced detachment from the body  
which muddles everything further.  
Mornings now when the eagle approaches—rapt,  
unstoppable—for a second  
while he seeks the spot to penetrate,  
his absorption feels like love.

## Amazon—Persephone After

True, the first time I went willingly. What girl  
could resist his leather pants

and rock star swagger, switchblade  
in his pocket, my name

quivering between his lips? How better  
to escape Mom's pretty vines

than to sway in a poured-on miniskirt  
across hell's endless

dance floor while stretched skin  
drums throbbed? My gut burned from pomegranate

juice and vodka. The goth house band keened.  
Match light flickered on his skull ring

as he whispered smoky promises and blackened  
bottoms of bent spoons. His touch

wiped out every ache or question.  
My straight-A vocabulary whittled down to *more*.

Soon my dependence  
angered him. He gestured

at my puffy eyes and flat hair.  
Turned away with a slap.

Mother hauled me home.  
A month in rehab, then a shopping spree

for high-necked shirts and  
frilly dresses. Good-girl life

to slip back into like the cloak  
I dropped on my way down.



Triggered by a song,  
a whiff of sulfur—

in any season, broken  
ground inside me opens. Memory

drags me back.  
Put off by my pink

cheeks and filled-out limbs, the shades  
won't know me now.

I try to tell my mother what I saw there.  
How I lived. *All that's over. Let it go.*

My friends steer the conversation  
back to fashion.

## 4. Sweets

I love you like an anorexic teenager  
loves chocolate. All boundaries and mastered  
greed. Hips sharp, she's memorized  
the recipes for Devil's Food, Black Forest—  
beats butter and eggs, spoons batter  
into greased tins. She won't try a bite, her empty  
fork aimed at God.

Vulnerable to you, I might become  
one of those moon-faced women, wounded  
and obvious, spilling out of a loose dress.

Some nights when we hold each other,  
my clenched teeth relax. I taste  
how it would be to love you  
like a glutton guzzles milkshakes, gobbles  
slabs of syrup-drizzled cake. Dizzy  
with sugar. All those bony  
years of discipline undone.