

A short excerpt from Nine of Swords Reversed

It was good to be out of the house, sitting down with Ezra in one of our places, a feast spread before us. Comforting to see our canes leaning against the booth next to each other, to know Ezra wouldn't let lunch pass without pushing me to tell zir what was going on. Ze had already indicated that in the car, clucking zir tongue over my low maintenance outfit—just a deep purple maxi dress and my sapphire boots—and how tired I looked, demanding I say what would taste the best for lunch, and driving us all the way to Berkeley for it.

A magical herbalist, Ezra favored floral colors. It had started as a joke ze pulled on one of zir first magic teachers, but had evolved into zir signature style. Today, Ezra was of course dressed impeccably, curly dark hair flowing over zir shoulders, nails pale peach and sparkly to match both zir lipstick and zir hat, in a gorgeous white suit with a dark peach dress shirt. It was Shabbos, and Ezra always dressed up for shul. Besides, ze had this image in zir head of our Friday lunches, our own genderfluid brand of Ladies who Lunch, which absolutely included dressing impeccably. Ze even insisted on singing the Sondheim tune at least once on the way, every time.

As we ate, I concentrated on getting my hands to hold things while Ezra entertained me with a story about teaching zir new boy how to weed the garden properly and not throw away any of the good stuff. Then ze said it was time to tell zir about it.

“I don't know where to start.”

“Start with why you look so tired, of course.”

“Oh, that. I woke up too damn early because of this dream-vision.”

“That sounds like where to start. Written it down yet?”

“No,” I said quietly. “My hands hurt too much.”

Ezra clucked zir tongue in empathy, and went rooting through zir bag, taking out a notebook, a pen, and a jar of zir salve, which ze opened and gently rubbed into my hands, humming all the while. It felt like ze was rubbing soft sunlight into my skin and the sensation was so much to process that I couldn't speak, or even look. I closed my eyes, counting my breaths, feeling the pain ebb away. In some ways, its immediate absence was sharper, harder to tolerate.

When ze was done, ze pressed the jar into my hand. "I brought this for you, 'cause you said you'd run out."

I took my time putting it away in my bag, getting used to the absence of pain, gathering myself back together. Then I took a long sip of tea, before I started telling zir about being made of ice, surrounded by it, protected by it, in the dream-vision. How at first I felt safe in my ice silo, didn't even notice the cold until light came and hurt my eyes, and then I was freezing, and able to see the chasm below. A chasm separating me from Noam. How I realized that I couldn't move, or speak. That they were stuck in their ice silo and me in mine, and Noam was terrified and trapped, just like me. I was helpless to do anything about it. I kept trying, but I could not get to them. How I watched their ice silo shatter, and the dust that was Noam blow away on the wind, waking me into a terrified meltdown.

Ezra didn't say a word, as ze scribbled down the last details. My heart was a tiny frantic bird beating against my chest, as I remembered. I felt so cold that I took out my tarot deck, put it on the table, and huddled in the scarf I usually wrapped it in, my hands the only thing that felt warm. Ze waited for me to stop trembling before ze spoke.

"What do you think it means?" Ezra asked quietly.