

The Tarot Card Reading of Nathaniel Abbott

By Kendall Clarke

Past.

VIII of Wands

I am an artist.

I knew when I was eighteen. It was the first time I saw the new house and my parents showed me what would become my bedroom.

White walls. There was a window stretched across the top of the far wall, long and high beams of light filtering in. Amplifying the white. It was deafening, this sudden blankness.

There was an itch behind my eyeballs, a squirming bundle of many-legged energy. I placed my hand on a wall and felt the itch worm through my veins, skittering just below the skin. It coiled within my fingertips, colliding with electrified force against the solid nothing. The emptiness disgruntled something deep within me. And I was to be the one to fill it.

I pleaded to them, my parents, and they let me flesh out the walls with color: scarlet, ruby, carnelian, chrysanthemum, gold. Paint dripping from my brush, I turned light and air into fields of poppies and marigolds, sculpted line and shade into high-frequency vibrations that set the wall ablaze.

I started to see emptiness everywhere, parts of the world that needed to be filled. Opportunities for me to expel myself into existence. The ambient possibility of the canvas scratched at my soul. I was a fervor of creation, a fever you couldn't sweat out.

I was an artist.

Am an artist.

Present.

VIII of Swords

The independent artist is the ideal, isn't it? Free from worldly distractions, the artist can focus on channeling his creative spirit. His inner muse. The artist need only himself, for he is wholly responsible for the power of creation.

Of course, I heeded to my art professors. Must learn the basics, after all. They are the whetstone with which I sharpen my sword. Besides, it would be a waste to pay all that money only to ignore their advice. Aside from when I've absolutely had to, I've never subsumed myself to anyone, nor have I ever worked under a mentor or collaborated with a colleague. And then there's those artist communities. Cesspools of talentless heathens, sucking energy from the few true creatives in their midst. When they're not wallowing in desolation, they're busy making bedroom eyes at each other. More likely to pick up an STI than a paintbrush in those places.

The model I hired for my most recent project has been a particularly suppressive influence. She likes to linger in the studio after our sessions. Probably fancies herself a connoisseur from chatting with a handful of amateurs. She asks questions like *what does light do when it's melancholy?* or *have you ever wondered how a pear feels?* or *what color is the smell of fresh bread?* These abstractions and cigarette-smoke ponderings are useless to me. The world is inherently ugly. When I paint, I weave beauty into the fabric of reality, cutting through and peeling back the coarseness to reveal the ideal. Raw blood. Only then is the world worthy of contemplation. I shape, the audience feels. I create, they receive.

I am an artist. So when my brush hovers over that sinister white canvas, and I choke, paralyzed by the weight of possibility, I know it is the world that is lacking, not me. Never me.

Future.

IX of Swords

I am coiled to strike at the first moment of inspiration, my cells vibrate with the passion, the desire, the need to create. So why do my hands wring the breath of the muse from my own neck?

What do the cards say?

No.

No, no, no.

How dare you – *you* – after pouring myself out, laying myself bare out on your table, heart exposed and pulsating, how dare *you* accuse me of being blocked off? Become a receptacle of the world you say, but what does the world have to offer me? I am not the empty chalice in need of filling. You, you who have no wit or whim of your own, you who simply acts as a conduit for these bits of paper, you who creates no meaning of your own. You. *You*. You see me as the Fall of Man, as the Tower of Babel.

I am not bound.

I am not mute.

I am not blind.

I am an artist.

Was an artist.