

# THE HIEROPHANT CARD



*A Tarot Mystery by*

B e v a n   A t k i n s o n



## **The Tarot Mysteries by Bevan Atkinson**

The Hierophant Card

The Emperor Card

The Empress Card

The High Priestess Card

The Magician Card

The Fool Card

# THE HIEROPHANT CARD



A Tarot Mystery

by

Bevan Atkinson



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A grateful member of Mystery Writers of America, Sisters in Crime, and Left Coast Writers, I grow increasingly introverted as I ossify into this writer job, but look! I joined groups!



For

James Michael McGowan

Gone too soon, but Mike, that fervent contrarian,  
would probably have disagreed.

He loved a good listener.



To the living we owe respect, but to the dead we owe only the truth.

— Voltaire

Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force ... When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand.

— Karl A. Menninger

We are like islands in the sea, separate on the surface but connected in the deep.

— William James



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The landline phone rang. It was a slow afternoon. I'd already taken my long stroll along Ocean Beach at the western perimeter of San Francisco, and maybe I really did win a Rolls-Royce and a free trip to Bali.

"Yolanda says you have to read my cards," a woman said, as if she were annoyed by the idea. Her voice reminded me of a band saw cutting a steel plate.

"I live to obey Yolanda's every command," I said, "but why don't you tell me who you are, and we'll see where that takes us."

"Are you or are you not Xana Bard?" she demanded, mispronouncing my nickname, saying "Zana" instead of "Ex-Anna." My odd nickname comes from my baby sister's inability to pronounce "Alexandra" when we were kids.



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"Not yet," I said.

"What?"

"Not until I know who's calling, please."

There was a pause.

I waited.

I heard her sigh, the sigh of a provoked and impatient person.

"Thalia Thalassos," she said, pronouncing her name "thuh-LEE-uh thuh-LASS-us. "I work with Yolanda."

I thought of the Muse of Comedy and decided to treat the call as a source of later hilarity when, over a lovely dinner at our favorite café, I would detail this conversation to my gargantuan and inscrutable sweetheart, Thorne Ardall. Thorne was currently away bodyguarding some ridiculously rich tech wizard who felt threatened by the world at large and was willing to pay Thorne's fee in cash. Thorne, my figurative Id in the basement, lives downstairs and is always paid in cash, which he immediately converts into gold. Yes, gold. McDuck-like, he stashes the coins in a storage-unit money bin.

"I see," I said to Thalia, not really seeing anything, but to encourage her to keep talking. "So why did Yolanda refer you to me?"

A Yolanda Jackson referral was, in general, a good referral. I've known YoYo—a brilliant, meticulous CPA and tax attorney—since we were in sixth grade. I've done tarot card readings for

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many years, and she has been the Querent (requestor) for some of them. In payment for the free readings, she cooks up a giant pan of mac and cheese, which I then refuse to share. You wouldn't share it either.

"As if I knew why she would send me to you," Thalia said, still sounding annoyed. "She just told me I had to call and make an appointment. She told me you don't charge anything. Which is good, 'cuz I'm stony broke right now."

"And yet, not knowing why you should take Yolanda's advice, you called me. So there's something going on that spurred you to do this."

The folks who ask me for a tarot reading are generally troubled by the commonest human concerns: love, money, work, health, family. If they've never had their cards read, they're likely to be afraid of the unknown outcomes of the "fortune-telling" experience. But they don't see any other way to address the problem they're struggling with, so people like Thalia face down the ooga-booga reputation of the tarot and ask for help.

I heard another exasperated sigh.

"It's just ..." she said. "Everything is a mess, and none of it is my fault."

Of course not.

"What sort of mess are we talking about?"

"Aren't you supposed to tell me? You're the psychic."

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I held my temper. YoYo had referred her, and Thalia's life was a mess, and I'm the adult child of alcoholics — in other words, Codependents 'R Us. I basically can't resist diving right in to fix everyone and everything except me.

"You haven't had your cards read before, have you?" I said.

"God no. Never. All those scam artists' storefronts with neon palms lit up, paid for by idiots who are too stupid to figure things out for themselves."

"Of course. Well, you'll be thrilled to see how little neon my card readings entail."

"What? What are you talking about?"

"Thalia, when I read cards for someone it's a partnership. We work together to figure out what's going on and what would be the best way for you to proceed. You will not be asked to cross my palm with silver, nor am I going to say you'll meet a dark stranger on a long sea voyage—unless you've already signed up for a cruise to South America. When we're done, if we've done our job well, you'll feel both recognized and released, instead of feeling lost or hopeless or whatever you're feeling now."

"Huh."

I waited. I never offer to set up an appointment, because that step belongs to the Querent. People who discover that I read tarot cards will often say, "I'd love to have a reading," or "Would

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you read my cards?" and I always say yes. Then I wait for them to ask, "When can we do it?" and they almost never do.

I think they stop short because reading someone's cards means that, to some extent, I'm invading their life. So I leave it to the Querent to say something like, "Are you free next Monday?" If they feel like they can trust me, they ask. If not, they don't. I'm fine with either outcome.

"How soon can we get together?" Thalia said, taking the necessary step. "Yolanda says the sooner the better."

"That's up to you. My schedule is pretty open."

My schedule is open because I don't have a day job. I used to have a director-level title at a tech startup (and I was excellent at Directoring), until a new COO came on board who wanted me gone so she could commandeer my budget. The end result was a massive legal settlement in my favor, followed not long ago by my father's death and a whomping inheritance, both of which allow me to live in my comfortable house next to the Pacific Ocean with a significant (some would say excessive) number of pets and an unusual (and unusually sizeable) cash-to-gold-converting downstairs cavalier.

Yes, I do volunteer work. No, I don't feel guilty that there is enough money to last me, barring an insane gambling or drug habit, for at least

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my lifetime. I am grateful, and am daily watchful about feeling smug.

Thalia made an appointment for the next afternoon. I called Yolanda to find out what the hell was going on with the lady who had pretty much all of Bulfinch's and Edith Hamilton's Greek mythology books bundled into her name.

"I should let her tell you," YoYo said. "But my personal assessment is that she's screwed up to the max, which she didn't used to be. She's basically a good person, and until recently she'd been a solid and reliable help around the office. I'd like to see her revert to that, so thank you for taking this on. I owe you a shipment of mac and cheese."

Okay then.