

XVI. THE TOWER (Excerpt)

Iris cringed at the array of cards laid before her. Old coffee mugs and dirty plates had been shoved to the side to make way for her tarot reading. The central card showed an imposing building: a tall black obelisk against gray clouds, and from its windows came fire and falling bodies. The colors were scratchy and faded, worn from shuffling, though it had never appeared in any of Iris' daily readings before.

She'd pulled the Tower.

Fuck.

Maybe she was just remembering the meaning wrong. Iris grabbed her faded copy of *Tarot 101* from beneath the table—the book was being used to prop up a broken leg—and flipped through the crusty, water-damaged pages until she came to the chapter on Major Arcana. Skimming past the Fool, Lovers, Death, and Devil, she finally came to the Tower.

"The Tower card represents sudden, unexpected change, upheaval, disruption, and sometimes *destruction*," she whispered. Then she groaned, crossing her arms on the table and dropping her head. "*Fuck*." She wasn't ready for change—hell, she was barely ready for *normal*—and now she had *this* to plague her for the rest of the day—probably for the rest of the week! "Fuck!" she said again, hoping the cards would hear her and undo the reading.

They did not.

Moving on with the day was a slog after that. Iris dragged herself from the table, brushed her teeth dejectedly, and threw on some jeans and a blouse that didn't smell too bad. She had left her apartment, locked the door, and was already down three flights of stairs before remembering she'd forgotten her wallet.

It was going to be a *long* day.

Her trip to the store was similarly frustrating. They were out of apples in the produce section. Seriously, out of *apples*? How does that even happen? Iris scanned the surrounding fruit. Mangos, oranges, bananas. Nothing good. Sighing, she moved on.

The store was out of frozen pizza and boxed macaroni too. Swearing under her breath, Iris left the place with nothing but a gallon of apple juice and a block of cheddar cheese. She'd have to come back later, when they'd "had a chance to restock everything, after the supply shortages," as the boy at self checkout had said. Who the fuck ran out of apples? Who the fuck ran out of *frozen pizza*?

As she crossed the parking lot, Iris heard sirens wailing in the distance. She saw a column of smoke rising into the sky. Then she realized the smoke was coming from the same direction as her apartment. Iris started running, crocs pounding against cracked pavement.