



A Tea & Tarot Holiday

mystery

Hyperion had never dealt a reading so jam-packed with bad. The Tower and the Devil and Death... He turned over the sixth card, the Knight of Swords, and suddenly he knew.

His client had killed someone.

The Knight wasn't about death or murder, but sometimes these knowings came to Hyperion, and they were never wrong. He'd never told anyone about these flashes. He sure as hell wasn't going to start with this guy, sitting three feet away.

And he'd kill again. Hyperion had a sick knowingness about this too, his ribs squeezing, his heart banging.

He eyed the man in the chair opposite. Hyperion sensed a lean, coiled power beneath the lines of his Armani. His client was a good three inches taller than Hyperion, outweighed him by at least twenty pounds—likely all muscle mass.

Hyperion needed help. Preferably the armed and dangerous variety.

Just read the cards. Stick to the basics. He turned over the final three cards.

They didn't get any better. He imagined the tearoom's white tablecloths, bonelike marble counter, rows of metal tea tins, splattered crimson. Tonight, Hyperion hated his vivid imagination.

Why the hell had he agreed to an after-hours reading when the tearoom was empty? His partner had even put away the silverware. Not that a butter knife would do him much good.

Hyperion cleared his throat. "The core of the issue is choice. A choice that took you down a dark path—"

"I know my past. Tell me my future."

Rows of miniature pumpkins lined the nearby windowsill. They were hard and within reach, but too lightweight to do any real damage. Hyperion glanced at the final card, the eight of swords. "I see a prison—"

The man groaned. "How do I avoid it?"

"There's always a choice." *Strangle him with the tablecloth? No. Too complicated.*

"Then there must be a way to change things." A lingering scent of pumpkin and baked sugar twined with the man's musky cologne.

"Swords represent the mind," Hyperion said. *But not in this reading. Tonight, swords meant sharp, pointy things one sticks in people.* "You need to change your way of thinking."

His client laughed hollowly. "Too late for that. Choice? I didn't have a choice. *He* didn't give me a choice. He boxed me in, collapsed the walls."

Hyperion's hand dropped to his side, beneath the table. He nodded. "You were trapped." Fractionally, Hyperion slid his hand to his phone, in his blazer pocket.

"Trapped, yes, I *was* trapped. The cards really say that?"

“Eight of swords. Right here.” He tapped the card, a man blindfolded and on his knees, surrounded by swords piercing the ground.

“Gladys was right. You are good.”

Silently, Hyperion cursed the psychic who’d referred him. “You see Gladys often?”

“No. Lana referred me to Gladys.”

“And Lana’s...?”

“A palm reader. Do you read tea leaves?”

“No.” Without looking, Hyperion dialed a friend of his, Tony, a local cop. *Pick up, Tony.*

“Disappointing. And then there was the aura reader. And the astrologer. None of them really had the gift though. I do believe you might.”

Hyperion released the phone in his pocket and swallowed. *Fabulous.* Not only was the man a killer, he was also psychic dependent. Hyperion did his best to gently move those types on as quickly as possible. But tonight was something different.

“What else do the cards say?”

“The Hierophant suggests going to an authority figure for help,” Hyperion lied.

“Confess?” He blinked. “No. No, no, no. That... would not end well.”

Then why’d he want Hyperion to see the truth, if not to unburden himself?

Hyperion spread his hands. “The cards don’t always tell us what we want.” *Are you hearing this, Tony?*

“It’s not a matter of wanting. Their message isn’t realistic. Why should I confess? It wasn’t my fault. I didn’t have a choice.”

But there was always a choice.

“Draw another card,” his client demanded. “Show me.”

Hyperion slid a card from the deck. The four of pentacles, a man digging a hole to bury his fortune in. It was normally a card of holding on, of miserliness, of contraction. Now all he could see was the man digging Hyperion’s grave.

The man leaned across the table. “What is it? What does it mean?”

“You’re holding on to something which no longer serves you. The pentacles represent the material world, so something concrete traps you. It drove your choice.” Hyperion’s gaze flicked to the blue door, hung with a Thanksgiving wreath. He’d have to get around his client to reach it, and the door was locked, which would mean more delay.

There was no way Tony would arrive in time...if he’d even been able to hear this conversation, muffled through Hyperion’s jacket.

The client's chiseled face paled. "You're right. They're right. If it hadn't been for the business, I wouldn't have—" He jerked forward and ground his finger into the tablecloth. "I put my life into that business. You understand? It's more than money. It's my *life*."

Hyperion understood. His business meant more than an income to him too. But he wouldn't kill over it.

"It's my life. A life for a life, see?" His client's voice rose to a howl. "It wasn't my fault. The cards show that, don't they? It's self-defense when you don't have a choice."

"One more card," Hyperion murmured. One more option. He picked up the deck, riffled the cards. He pressed their ends together and exploded the cards outward, into the man's face.

His client jerked backward, raising his hand in a warding gesture. Hyperion launched himself from his chair, sprinted through the white-clothed tables.

"Stop."

Behind him, a gun click-clacked, the feeding of a cartridge into the barrel. The flesh between Hyperion's shoulder blades heated. Every muscle in his body tensed.

"Turn around," his client said.

No. All he needed was to get outside. There were people outside. Cars.

People. People who might get hurt.

There's always a choice.

Hyperion turned. He was still only three feet away. He hadn't gained an inch, and a hysterical laugh bubbled up in his chest.

"Now," his client said. "What do the cards say—?"

Hyperion grasped the back of a nearby chair and hurled it. A shot rattled the tearoom. The chair struck the client, and he staggered. Hyperion picked up another chair and swung it like a club, wood splintering, cracking. And a chaos of shouting, shouting, shouting, until Hyperion wasn't even sure what was his voice and what the other man's.

He didn't stop swinging until Tony pulled the chair from his shaking hands.

Tony retrieved his cuffs from the back of his belt. "Easy now. He's done."

Hyperion stepped away and dropped the remains of the chair. Adrenaline cascaded through his veins, and he felt sick and shaky.

"I got your call," the detective said conversationally. "Not sure a chair was the smart play, but I reckon you didn't have much choice."

Hyperion bent to retrieve the Death card and agreed that he hadn't.

You can spend more time with Hyperion and his partner Abigail in *Steeped in Murder*, book 1 in the Tea & Tarot cozy mystery series.

Tea, tarot, and trouble.

Abigail Beanblossom's dream of owning a tearoom in her California beach town is about to come true. She's got the lease, the start-up funds, and the recipes. But Abigail's out of a tearoom and into hot water when her realtor turns out to be a conman... and then turns up dead.

But not even death puts an end to the conman's mischief. He rented the same space to a tarot reader, Hyperion Night. Convinced his tarot room is in the cards, Night's not letting go of the building without a fight.

But the two must work together, steeping themselves in the murky waters of the sham realtor's double dealings, in order to unearth the truth – before murder boils over again.

Steeped in Murder is the first book in the Tea and Tarot cozy mystery series. Buy the book to start this hilarious caper today.

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