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Eight of Wands

By E.M.B.

Popcorn, scary movies, and tarot cards what more could you have at a slumber party? Spring was in the air in Roshell, Illinois. My bedroom window was open as a breeze blew in softly. Nag Champa and patchouli incense smoke spiraled around our heads. I wore a black tank top and fluffy black pajama pants. Marie wore an alpaca onesie with her hair in a messy top knot. Diana, looked as sophisticated as ever, with French braids and silk beige pajamas. Lidia wore bright green boxers and a white tank top. We all were different in our own way, but none of that mattered. We were the best of friends. We sat on my bedroom floor while I read each of their tarot cards.

"Okay, let's do a group one and see where our friendship will go after I move," Diana suggested.

I nodded as I shuffled the deck. A single card fell face up, *Death*. It never means death, or that someone will die. It simply suggests that major change is on its way. This caused a sunken feeling in my chest. Diana let out a sigh.

"Keep goin'," Lidia insisted as she shoveled a handful of popcorn into her mouth.

I placed the card back into the deck and reshuffled. I did past, present, future. Simple, quick and easy to read all around. I flipped one at a time. The first card was straight forward, it was the *Two of Cups*. This was showing our friendship. We were a close-knit group; nothing ever came between us.

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I flipped the second card, the *Eight of Cups*, this had shown us the sadness we felt at that very moment. Diana was getting ready to leave town in the fall. Her dad was in the Air Force and was being stationed to a different state seven hours away.

Our eyes met after I flipped the final card. It was the *Eight of Wands* reversed, this meant violence, quarrels, and courage.

"Flip one sideways on top of it, it should give us a better meaning," Diana spoke matter o' fact.

I pulled another card as a second one fell. The one I had pulled from the deck was *The Tower*, ending of friendships. The card that fell was *Death*, again. A pit grew in my stomach, worry grew across my face.

My three best friends stared at me with confusion. I shook it off, picked up the cards and placed them back in my ornate wooden box.

"Welp, that's a thing," said Marie as she stood and walked towards my TV.

"Yeah, kinda scary," I asked as I stood with the box in hand. "Do you really think our friendship will end?"

"Nah, we're good," Lidia said as she picked popcorn kernels from her front teeth.

"That is gross Liddy, please stop!" Diana squealed, "Besides Nikki, don't worry, we'll be fine. The future is never set in stone."

I let out a sigh, I couldn't help but feel she was wrong. She was leaving, this was about to change our whole dynamic.

###

Fall approached us quickly, but summer didn't feel like it would ever end. The air so thick and hot you could cut through it with a knife. This did not make easy work for the four of

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us as we helped Diana pack her room. Her parents were selling their house. She would ship off with her family in a few weeks. We tried our best to act normal.

"So, where do you want your books? You don't want to just pile 'em into a box, trust me!" Marie stared at the novel in her hand, flipping it over before placing it on a pile.

"Of course, you're worried about the books." I laughed and threw a small pastel pillow at her, it hit her skillfully in the neck.

"Wow, mature, Nikki," The words came from over my shoulder as Lidia scowled at me.

Diana snatched up her pillow her face stern. "Can you not break my stuff?"

"It wasn't your stuff she broke! It was me!" Marie whined.

Diana moved her eyes to Marie and smiled. "Oh, then that's fine."

Two of us laughed, Marie included, and continued our packing. Diana closed up a box of her nick-knacks and taped it shut then labeled the top.

"I'm going to run this down to the garage really quick. Don't break anything." She walked out with a smile.

As soon as Marie heard her feet hit the stairs, she looked at me with a smile.

"What are you smiling about?" I asked.

"I think we should have a party. One with drinks and a fire," Marie said, she taped up a box. "My mom just had the back patio redone."

"You know what," I smiled at her, "That sounds like a great idea."

"This sounds fun! Do you think you guys would mind if I invite a friend?" Lidia asked.

Marie and I stopped; we took a moment to look at Lidia in bewilderment.

"Um, I mean, is it someone Diana knows? After all its for her," I asked.

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"Well, no, but she's really nice, come one I have other friends you know," she said as she leaned into me. "I think you guys will like her."

I shifted my eyes to Marie who seemed to be the one that had to answer.

She furrowed her brow and pursed her lips before letting out a breath. "I guess, but if she's not cool, she has to go."

Marie and I shared another glance, but something was different. Something around us changed. We didn't have long to think about it before Diana's footsteps thundered back up the stairs.

###

It was the night of the party; there was food splayed out on a table an assortment of drinks and snacks. A beautiful bon fire flickered and danced in the middle of the patio. I stoked the flames, as I listened to everyone around me chat, and then there it was. A droning sound washed over my senses like a tidal wave. There sat Jade, her long dark hair flowed past her shoulders contrast to her pale skin. She moaned and groaned about her woes in life. I tried to ignore her as I kept my focus on the fire.

However, it grew louder. Her words pierced through my ear drums causing me to cringe. I calmly stopped what I was doing and gave her my unrequited attention. She wanted to be the center, and in my less rude way possible, I gave it to her.

"So, I like, lost my front teeth from having a seizure in my bathroom," Jade said as she sat cross legged on a stone bench.

"I'm so sorry that happened," Diana asked, her hands on her chin as she listened intently to this intruder. "So, they're fake then?"

Lidia ran up behind her with her boyfriend, Gerad, and hugged Jade from behind.

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"So, I see you got here okay?" Lidia squealed.

"Yep, she sure found us alright," I bluntly stated as I stood up to hug Lidia.

Lidia brushed me off and glared. She mouthed, "Be nice," towards me. "Everyone, this is Jade. We met through our boyfriends," Lidia had chimed.

Marie smiled softly and hugged Lidia. "Yeah, she introduced herself and seemed to fit right in."

I stood there politely and introduced myself. "Sup, I'm Nikki, sorry I kinda get lost thought around bon fires."

"S'okay, like she said, my name is Jade, and I am so happy that you guys invited me out tonight. I never get to leave my house much when my parents are working." She flipped her hair in a way you would only see in stupid teen dramas.

The party had gone on for hours. We talked and giggled with each other. The fire's embers softly glowed as the warmth radiated from the pit.

Diana looked up at the sky, she leaned back on her elbows and softly yawned. "Nik, how many more days until the full moon?"

"Ten, why?"

"Well, I was thinking since I'm moving and all, that ya'll would need another member to our group."

I nodded as I looked over at Jade. Something was off about her, almost as if she was trying too hard to impress us. She did seem nice though, we had a lot in common. She liked the same bands and shows I did.

"Sure, I don't see why not. You'll be here for that last one any way and you can help with planning, right?"

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Diana chuckled and nodded her head.

"So, you guys are like witches?" Jade questioned as she made a squeal of excitement that broke my face.

"Yeah kinda, Diana and Nikki have this full moon meeting every month," Lidia gushed.

"That is so cool, I can't wait to join you guys!"

I felt like I needed to vomit.

Marie poked at the embers with a long stick, softly she hummed our favorite song. This took my mind away from that grotesque feeling.

"Hold my hand—" sang Diana.

"Ooh, baby it's a long way down to the—" Lidia added.

"Bottom of the River," we all sang in unison, except Jade.

"Um, I totally don't know that song, it's pretty though," Jade interrupted our performance with what seemed like a jaded laugh.

"It's ok," Lidia beamed over.

I rolled my eyes and turned back to the dim embers. Moving closer to Marie, I scuffed my feet against the ground. "I don't think I can do it."

"What?" Marie looked over at me, it took a moment before she registered my words.

"You mean her?"

I simply nodded my head.

"Dude, she might just be nervous ya know?"

"That is a point."

"Well I need to get going," Jade stood up and brushed herself off. "Can I add you on Friendsgroup?"

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We all smiled and in creepy unison said, "Yeah!"

The three of us chuckled.

"That wasn't creepy at all guys," I said as I waved goodbye to Jade. "We need to stop doing that."

Diana, Lidia, and her boyfriend had left shortly after.

I stayed behind as I usually did to help Marie pick up. It was the rules of her mom. The two of us had better pick up whatever mess we made before we went in for the night when I stayed over.

###

A few nights later I had a notification on my phone from Jade. Reluctantly, I had added her to Friendsgroup.

I then received a message from Lidia,

"So, what did ya think of Jade?"

I replied slowly as I tapped the keys on my phone. "She's okay I guess; I just didn't like the vibe I was getting from her though."

As if we were in a mean girl movie here came Jade's chat ellipsis. "What vibes was I giving, like, I totally didn't mean to do anything to upset you. I was just trying to make friends."

My eyes widened they trapped me.

Jade's chat bubble popped up. "Were you going to not tell me that you felt some sort of way about me?"

I rolled my eyes and sighed. "I thought we were fine. I just meant, it felt like you were sad and lonely. It gave some kind of dark energy about you."

"Oh," was all Jade had replied.

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"I mean, we can fix that for you, Diana and I are really good with sage and cleansing crap like that," I quickly replied. I hadn't intended on her feelings getting hurt. I was a bitch, but I wasn't cruel.

I added Diana and Marie to that chat, thus came to be Coven Chat. Things calmed down for a while. We chatted about full moons, sabbats, rituals, even tarot. Nothing seemed like it was going wonky.

###

It came time for the last full moon meeting. The girls sat in a circle on the floor of my room. Jade laid her head on Lidia's lap.

"Like, is this all you guys do?" Jade asked.

"No, Diana and Marie brought some supplies. We are going to make friendship charms so we can stay friends forever," I said, as I placed an orange candle in the center and lit it.

It was dark in my room; the only light came from the flame of the candle. Cedar and stinging nettle burned in a wooden bowl. The smoke enveloped us. Diana pulled out string and beads and held them over the smoke.

"This is to call in positive energy for us and send away the bad juju," Diana whispered.

Jade giggled as she sat up.

Marie pulled out a tattered spiral notebook and opened it. The pages were marked with sticky tabs. "Here are the destructions and incantations."

"You really believe in this stuff huh?" Jade questioned, she looked at the four of us.

"Well, yeah, Nikki has taught us that what we put out it will come true to a point," Lidia answered, "We can't, like, wish for world peace or a million dollars, but we can set our intention."

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I nodded as I stood up. I took the bowl from Diana and waved a feather over it as I walked around the circle. "This is to bless us with positive energy going forward in our lives."

"She looks so serious," Jade said, as she chuckled. "Are we going to play duck, duck, goose now?"

Lidia shushed her.

I sat down. "No, we can do that later if you want," I said sarcasm" dripped from my lips.

We sat together in silence for a moment. Our breaths the only sound that echoed in my bedroom.

"Now we make the bracelets with five charms on each. They will represent ourselves and the bond we have," said Diana as she handed each of us string and beads.

"We will set our intention of keeping our friendship strong no matter the distance," I said as I started to make my bracelet.

Jade nodded; she strung her beads one by one.

We had sat there quietly. Giggles would break the silence from time to time until we were finished. We meditated over our bracelets.

"On this night I do declare our friendship is very rare," I said, "One by one and five by five our friendship will never falter and will survive."

The girls repeated after me and we were finished. Marie stood up, she walked counter clock wise around us as she closed the circle.

"We're done?" asked Jade, her face disgruntled.

"What were you expecting? Lightning to crash outside my window?"

"No, I just never done this before," Jade said, as she glared at me. "You don't have to be mean about it!"

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"I'm not being mean sweetie, I'm being a smart ass," I said, "It's what I do."

Jade let out a heavy sigh and crossed her arms. "Well, I don't like it."

"Okay, I won't be a smart ass to you again," I said, as I patted her shoulder. "I'm sorry."

"Welp, time for a scary movie," Marie said as she put in the newest slasher film.

###

Everything seemed perfectly awesome for the last weeks Diana was in town. This was until I had talked to Gared in Geometry.

"So, what is it with you and Liddy?" Gared had whispered while we listened to our teacher talk about proofs.

I hated them so I just talked to him.

"Nothing everything is fine. Why, did she say something?" I asked.

"You guys haven't been doing your witchy crap in like weeks," he said, "She is just butt hurt that you and Jade don't get along."

"Um, I don't know what you are talking about," I spoke into my desk, "We all get along and have been talking pretty much every day."

"Oh, well, maybe she is just freakin' for no reason," he said as he shrugged.

After class I couldn't shake the feeling that something bad was about to happen.

###

A few weeks went by. I was in the middle of purging my room of items I didn't need any more when Diana called.

"Sup, this is the Nik."

"Oh, you're in a good mood," Diana said, I could hear the concern in her voice. "Maybe I should just leave it then,"

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"No, maybe you should not pussy foot around and spill whatever tea ya got."

"Okay, okay, so Lidia and Jade have been saying some pretty awful crap on the group chat."

"What do you mean? About what?" I had shoved a dusty book into a donation box.

"Well, what are you doing right now?" She had been obviously trying to change the subject.

"I am donating stuff I don't need, and I don't need people who beat around the bush," I said, "Spill it now, or I hang up."

"Lidia said that Gerad said you told him that you didn't like Jade."

"What the hell are you talking about, Di? I never said anything like that, I told him we were getting along great from what I could tell."

"Well, she said you were being dishonest," Diana said timidly, "And that you didn't want Jade to be part of the group."

My phone grew warm against my skin. I couldn't tell if it was my temper that boiled my face or me being on the phone. The conversation had reared to an end.

"Mhmm, okay, yeah, thanks for letting me know," I said my voice strained as I hung up.

I closed my eyes tight as I sighed. Tears welled, they stung, they fell. I shook, it was as if there were tremors in my whole body.

"Why in the hell would someone say that when I have been nothing but nice this whole time!" I yelled as I threw my phone against the wall. It thudded against my bed. I rushed over to pick it up, there wasn't any damage. I turned it on, my thumb hung over the Friendsgroup app. I tried to convince myself not to look at my phone. I shook my head attempting to shake out any negative thoughts I had.

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I stomped around my room throwing piles of donations into the box. Clothes, books, old stuffed animals. I finally came across a picture of the four of us girls. There was one girl missing. Jade!

I started to feel guilty for my anger. "I will just see if it's true."

I opened my phone back up and the app. I wanted to know what was said. Maybe it was a misunderstanding.

I only saw one message and it was all I needed for me to blow my top.

"So, I've been thinking for a couple days about what you said to my boyfriend. What I would like to know is why the fuck you said you didn't like Jade or me. You were being dishonest and super mean this whole time!"

It was from Lidia. I screamed as I threw my phone onto my bed. " Me, dishonest! The hell? She is one of my best fricken friends! How could she say that!"

I sunk to the floor, my head in my hands and I cried. I had cried for what seemed like forever when I finally stood up and started to text the girls.

"Meet me at the park."

I hurriedly threw on clothes and ran down my stairs. I skipped a few as I almost collided with Marie at my front door.

"Girl, you ain't doin' this alone," she said as she grabbed me by my shoulders. "Let's try to breath!"

"Move your ass!" I roared, "I never said any of that to Gerad."

"Nik, I know that and so does Di," she said, as she stopped in front of me. " We asked him what you said, and he told us the truth." Marie pulled out her phone and showed a text between Diana, Gerad, and herself.

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"Did Nikki say she didn't like Lidia or Jade?" said Diana's text.

"What? No, she said ya'll were cool," Gerad's text said, " Yo, here is a screen shot for proof, I don't want any drama."

The screen shot confirmed what he had said. I became more pissed; this was petty drama and I didn't understand.

"Then why did Lidia say that?" I asked, I pushed passed her. I was on a warpath.

It didn't take long for us to get to the park. The three girls were stood under a pavilion as Marie and I approached. It was the only dry place there.

Jade and Lidia stood to one side as Diana stood away from them. A disapproving scowl on her face.

There was silence for several minutes

I had enough. I pursed my lips, my jaw tightened. "If you don't want to talk about this fine! But I will say my piece then I'm out," I spat out.

My eyes focused on Jade. "If I didn't like you, I would tell you! I told Gerad that I thought we were all getting along!"

Lidia and Jade looked at Nikki awestruck.

"Two more things! One, I don't lie to people, so, how dare you call me dishonest," I said, as I took a shaky breath in. " Two, I'm not the one being dishonest!"

"I know you are pissed so are we but if we could calm down," Lidia said.

"Don't tell me to calm down. You lied Liddy; I want to know why?" I demanded.

Lidia just shrugged with a smug look set on her face. "I'm tired of your smart-ass shit."

"What?" I asked shocked.

Jade played with her hair. Silently, she watched this go down.

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"You know, what friends are supposed to raise each other up, not break each other down," I said as I turned to storm off. "If you want to live in the drama, then so be it. I'm done!"

Jade stopped me. "Nikki, wait, I didn't mean for all of this to happen. I just wanted friends."

"Well, friends don't create drama," Marie said as she took my hand.

"We back each other up and stand by one another," Diana said as she walked to my side.

"Jade, listen, even if this wasn't how you intended it to happen it still did. I can't deal with people who twist my words and assume I'm being a dick," I said tears stung my eyes. "I know I'm a bitch, I know I can be a bit harsh and blunt, but I never said I didn't like you."

"I could feel your hostility radiating off you when we hung out last time," Jade cried out.

"Woah, what hostility? I never did or said anything that could even be considered hostile!"

"You are always a smart ass when any of us say something, and it hurts my feelings. It should hurt theirs too!"

"Dude, I just got done saying I'm a bitch. What more do you want? I am sorry if you think I was being mean or cruel or whatever, but never once did I do anything to actually hurt you!"

"Guys, calm down!" Lidia said as she stepped between us. "No, one likes a bitch, Nikki."

"She is our bitchy smart-ass, that's why we love her," Diana said.

"We wouldn't change her for the world," Marie said as she hugged my shoulders. "She is always honest with us."

"You know what, Lidia," I yelled. "Screw you! I don't need this. Bye, I'm done!" I tore away from Diana and Marie and ran from the pavilion.

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Marie and Diana ran up behind me. They clasped each of my hands and squeezed. Our walk home felt bittersweet. I could feel a burden lift from my mind, but a hole formed in my heart. I didn't need friends like that in my life. I was okay with the consequences of my actions.