

# Accidentally Engaged

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Published by Little Black Dress

Extract

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## Daily Horoscope – Pisces

*Your kindness will be tested. Stand up for yourself fish-woman!*

*A placemat collects silver, while a doormat just collects dust . . .*

‘Clair, please. Just do this one for me. It’s just one little reading. Please, please, please, please, *please*.’

I pulled my beaded, green purse protectively to my side where my Tarot cards were resting peacefully in their box, happy to be done for the day.

‘Why won’t you do it?’ I said, trying to sound mature and reasonable when what I really wanted to do was jump up and down and whine, ‘I want to go home, I want to go home!’

‘Because I know the girl. I sort of – used to date her. I just . . . she’s kind of . . . I can’t get into this right now Clair,’ my friend and colleague, Brian Shepard, said. He glanced over his shoulder as if someone were stalking him and then lowered his voice to a harsh whisper. ‘She’s standing right *over there*. Please. Please, please, please, please.’

I contemplated Brian like a lizard stares at a fly right before its slimy, red tongue shoots out and wraps it in deadly saliva. Not that I didn’t sympathize with his plight. It’s truly difficult to do a reading for someone you know.

Family and friends hit me up all the time for free readings, but I was always worried I'd let the things I already knew about the person subconsciously influence the outcome. Like the year I was nine and my brother Tommy broke his leg in a motorcycle accident. The cards said he was entering a long period of rest and introspection, and I happily relayed this to him.

But instead of praising my astounding psychic abilities, my brother glared at me like I was a Happy Meal sans the fries and the prize. 'Duh, Clair. Incredible talent you got there. Hmm . . . broken leg – period of rest. What a wanker. If you're so psychic, why didn't you predict the accident, huh?' I stared at him, dumfounded. 'Why'da let me break my Mother-Fudging leg in the first place, lunatic?'

But as bad as it was to give someone a 'duh' reading, it paled in comparison to giving them the *exact* answers they wanted to hear, and then spending the next twenty-three Christmases listening to – say your sister Abby – getting smashed and shouting, 'Clair you said I'd be married with two identical, blond, extremely brilliant twin boys and living in Quebec, Canada, by now. Where are they, Clair? Where are my two twins? Where is my tall, entrepreneurial, Canadian husband and my two twins? Eh? Eh? Is Santa bringing them this year, Clair? Is he? Is *he*?'

It took superhuman strength on my part not to shout back at her at the top of my lungs, 'Twins *means* two, Abby. You don't say "two twins"; it's redundant! Obviously they must get their brilliance from their tall, entrepreneurial, Canadian father!'

Besides, I gave her that reading when I was *twelve*. It took me years before I could take off my psychic training wheels. Abby, on the other hand, still hadn't let it go. The above tantrum was *last* Christmas. I'm thirty-two and she's thirty-eight, and she still blames me for her naked ring finger and barren womb. I also told her she would lose her left eye in a freak mining accident, and you don't see her holding me responsible for that one not panning out.

‘Come on, Clair. Are you going to do this one for me or not?’ Brian whined.

We both knew I was going to do it. I was a complete pushover by nature, and as my three ex-husbands could attest, I have never been able to resist a man on his knees. But that didn’t mean I wasn’t going to milk it a little before giving in. Especially since I had already put my Tarot cards away, taken down my sign, and packed up the yellow silk scarf I used for my ten-card Celtic spread.

‘If I do this – and I’m not saying I will – what are you going to do for me?’ I said. Brian sighed, folded his arms across his chest, and tried to match my intimidating gaze while I studied my reflection in the spoon hanging around his neck. It was starting to turn his Adam’s Apple slightly green, but Brian refused to take it off. He was determined to bend it with his mind, twist it into tiny knots using only the Power of Thought. He’d been wearing it a little over a year and a half.

‘You could charge them double,’ Brian said, jerking his head toward his tent. ‘The two of them are walking advertisements for Gucci, Prada, and Coach.’

‘I don’t care if they’re carrying gold bricks,’ I said. ‘I’m not charging anybody double.’ Brian sighed and ran his hands through his hair. He wasn’t exactly a handsome man, slightly elflike in appearance, despite his six-foot frame. His blond hair was curly and static, ears splayed out like television antennas, his nose terminally pink. On the plus side, he had sparkling emerald eyes, a full head of hair, and a charismatic aura he never failed to inflict on women. How else could you explain a tall, lanky elf-man getting so much tail?

Although, according to my best friend Karen, he had a very large package, so that could have accounted for a hefty percent of it. She unwrapped the said package in the upstairs hallway at my birthday party last year after drinking four shots of tequila off his stomach. Incidentally, all I got was a cheap crystal ball and a pair of orange-striped gym socks.

‘God, you’re such a Girl Scout. Fine. Do this for me and I’ll fix you up with my friend Scott.’

‘Brian,’ I warned. He knew full well I wasn’t going to go out with his friend Scott, or John, or Jeff, or T-Bone, or any of the other men he’d tried to push on me the past year. I was on a long, long, hiatus from men. As a bona fide recovering in-love-aholic, I was officially cut off.

‘Okay, okay, calm down. Do this for me and I’ll switch places with you tomorrow.’

Our booths were stationed at the Chicago Psychic Fair, in the gymnasium at the Healing Arts Community Center. We were sandwiched in between booths on acupuncture, massage, herbal remedies, yoga, and vegetarian cookies. I had the unfortunate luck of being next to a vegan fanatic whose booth was covered with pictures of bloody cows. Although I was all for the humane treatment of animals, I couldn’t ignore my inner carnivore; I’d been craving a cheeseburger all day.

Brian’s booth, however, was across from homemade fudge. Whereas the sugary scent drew customers to his vicinity, the bloody cows scared them away from mine. His offer was generous, but I couldn’t take him up on it.

‘I’m not here tomorrow,’ I told him.

‘What do you mean you’re not here tomorrow?’

‘I’m going on my pilgrimage,’ I bragged. Every year, for the past three years, I’d taken a road trip. It was the only thing that had kept me sane – and single – since my last divorce. This year I needed it more than ever.

‘Who’s here instead?’ Brian asked, his voice rising in pitch and cracking like he was going through puberty. He started fingering his spoon. ‘Don’t tell me it’s Dame Diaphannie. You know I can’t work with “Double D.”’ Not wanting to get him started on her, I reached into my purse and touched the gold-embossed envelope I’d been carrying around the past week like a time bomb strapped to my chest, hoping Brian would pick up on it and ask me about it. Ed, my third husband, ‘the one that was supposed to stick,’ was getting married.

Alexis, his twenty-four-year-old ballerina-bride-to-be, took it upon herself to invite me to the blessed event. If I didn't get out of town, I might just show up. And at the toast, I might very well raise my glass and announce to everyone how Ed said he'd always love *me*. How he'd stood on our back porch one humid Friday evening, still dressed in his work clothes, and tearfully confessed that he didn't want to be married. How he hoped I'd find it in my heart to forgive him. How he had really, really, really tried because of how much he loved me – but, he just wasn't the marrying type.

Oh, yes, I needed my pilgrimage. My sanity was at stake. Brian was still ranting about Dame Diaphannie.

'That cow listens in on my readings and corrects me when I'm doing my best work.'

'I know. . . .'

'Last time she actually yelled over the curtain, "It's never gonna happen, honey: he's having an affair with your sister."'

'She's out of control,' I agreed halfheartedly, as images of her colorful turbans, stick-on rubies, and sandalwood incense floated through my mind. She spoke in tongues, smoked two packs of cigarettos a day, and occasionally rolled her eyes back in her head as if she were having a full-blown epileptic fit during readings. I pulled the invitation out of my purse and waved it hypnotically in front of Brian.

'Did I mention Ed is getting married?'

'About seventeen times,' Brian said, throwing a worried glance at his booth. Crushed by his lack of enthusiasm, I mentally blew black smoke over his aura, like a manic-depressive maid sprinkling the dust back on the furniture instead of polishing it off.

'Do the reading, Clair. I know you could use the money.' He had me there. I had a stack of bills at home, all accruing late fees.

'Fine,' I said, dropping my purse on the card table with a thud. 'Let's just get it over with.' I was unpacking my

cards when suddenly Brian put his hands on my shoulders and turned me to face him.

‘Um . . . Clair?’

‘Yes?’ I said, startled at his intensity.

‘Rachel is . . . uh . . . the sensitive type – you know? A little . . . uh . . . *wound up*, I guess you would say.’

‘I’m sure I’ll survive,’ I said.

‘It’s not you I’m worried about. It’s her. She’s extremely . . . uh . . . wound up.’

‘Wound up, wound up. I got it. Don’t worry, Brian. I won’t add any of my own vibes, I’ll just read the cards.’

‘Perfect. But – still – be careful.’

‘Don’t give it a second thought,’ said I, the fool.



## Daily Horoscope – Pisces

*Cheer up, things will get worse.*

**M**y first impression of Rachel Morgan was that she was a woman in a lot of pain. She reminded me of a poodle just out of the bath, staring at you with big, pleading eyes. But despite her obvious distress, she was a stunningly beautiful woman.

She had fresh-from-the-salon blond hair cut in a bob, eyes the color of the Aegean Sea, and a body straight from the gym/tanning bed/Pilates/Bikram Yoga. Whereas I looked the part of a gypsy, with my voluptuous, slightly thinner-than-hour-glass figure, curly brownish-gold hair, green eyes, and my favorite trait – olive skin – Rachel Morgan was pure Super Barbie. She also had the unique quality of being both beautiful and nonthreatening; I had just met her and I wanted to hold her hand, become her new best friend, and tell her everything was going to be all right.

Her friend, Susan, on the other hand, trim with dark hair and hazel eyes, would have been considered beautiful too, except for the dark aura hovering about her, and the fact that she was staring at me like a makeshift slingshot, pulled tight and poised to plunge a rusty pocketknife into my side at the slightest provocation.

‘Won’t you sit down,’ I said, gesturing to the two empty chairs across from me. My cards were out of the box and



lying face down on my grandmother's yellow silk scarf. Susan and Rachel sat down and looked at the cards as if they were a wild animal. I stifled a giggle; unnecessary laughter was a detriment to my mysterious aura.

There are seventy-eight cards in a Tarot deck, divided into the Major and Minor Arcana. 'Arcana,' deriving from the Latin word *arcanus*, means 'closed' or 'secret.' The trump suit, or Major Arcana, is composed of twenty-two cards. Each card has a picture that shows a behavior, action, or possible future event. The cards are also named and numbered – in the Major Arcana they go from One to Twenty-One. The exception to this is The Fool, he is number Zero.

That leaves the Minor Arcana, consisting of fifty-six cards divided into four suits: Swords, Cups, Coins, and Wands. There are fourteen cards in each suit, numbering from Ace to Ten, and four face cards: Page, Knight, Queen, and King. Like playing cards, (which originate from Tarot cards) there are hundreds of decks and styles, and professional readers often have quite a diverse collection at their disposal. I was no exception.

But since I had taken an immediate liking to Rachel, I had decided to use my personal favorite, a Medieval-style rendering of the Major and Minor Arcana, with intricate, hand-painted figures whose vibrant colors hadn't faded a bit with the passage of time.

They belonged to the first psychic in my family, my maternal grandmother, Isabella Ivars, who passed her gift on to me, along with her cards. They are hers and they are mine. This was the deck I used whenever I wanted answers to my own questions; they're my way of speaking to my grandmother, asking for her guidance. Rachel and Susan sat silently and watched me spread the cards out. 'I take it this reading is for you,' I said to Rachel.

She nodded but did not speak, which is how I preferred it. There was nothing worse than a chatty Querent. I finished shuffling the deck and asked Rachel to cut them from left to right into three distinct piles. Her hands trem-

bled as she followed my directions. Once again working left to right, I had her gather the piles and place them on top of each other. As I reached for the top card, Susan's hand shot out and stopped me.

'Just a minute. I need to pay you. Rachel, this is on me, remember?'

I opened my mouth to tell her she could pay me later, but we were already in motion. Susan pulled me to the farthest corner of the tent. 'There's something you should know,' she said in a low whisper. I glanced at Rachel who was intently studying a large diamond ring on her right finger.

'She's getting married and she has cold feet,' I said.

Susan's mouth fell open like the lid of a rusty mailbox. She glanced at Rachel who now had her hands folded in her lap, obscuring the ring. I didn't normally resort to such parlor tricks, but I had low blood sugar, was late for my pilgrimage, and didn't like this woman at all.

'Good guess,' she said, composing herself. 'She's marrying my brother Jack—'

'You know,' I said, pulling away from her, 'the less I know the better.'

'You don't understand. This reading has to go well.'

'I don't control what the cards say. But don't worry, even if the reading is – say, less than favorable – she has the power to change any possible outcome.'

'Listen to me,' Susan hissed. 'Rachel is totally freaking out, okay? She had some kind of weird dream last week and suddenly she's confused. Confused,' she said throwing her arms up. 'We've been planning this wedding for two years. We've invited two hundred prominent guests, Chicago's best ice sculptor, and a famous Fusion caterer from the East.'

'I see,' I said. 'But—'

'Not to mention the thirteen bridesmaids who have been dieting their asses off – literally – just to fit into their custom-made gowns. And then there's the ten-foot fountain of Dom Perignon, a cake so exquisite it should be a federal crime to slice, and a collection of flowers so exotic

they're going to make the Garden of Eden look like home-grown herbs on a window sill.' Susan took another microstep toward me. Her breath smelled like cold, hard mints, and her voice poured out like wet cement. 'Rachel Morgan is going to marry my brother in two weeks, and if you say one negative word to her about it, I'm going to make your life a living hell. Do you understand?'

'I understand perfectly,' I said.

'Good,' Susan said, holding out two crisp one hundred dollar bills for the twenty-five-dollar reading. I turned away from the cash and headed to my table where Rachel sat cross-legged on the chair, her skinny leg bouncing up and down like a jack hammer.

'I'm sorry,' I said to Rachel with the most comforting smile I could muster. 'But I can't do this reading.' I gathered my grandmother's cards and started putting them back in the box. Rachel shot out of her chair like a rogue astronaut ejected from the space shuttle.

'Why can't you do it? It's something bad, isn't it? Oh God, you've got a bad vibe.'

'No, no, no. Nothing like that,' I tried to assure her. 'It's late, that's all. I thought I had time for this but I—'

'What did you say to her?' Rachel turned on Susan. 'What did she say to you?'

'Look – a Tarot card reading isn't for everyone,' I explained. 'I can tell just from looking at you, your expectations are too high.' I looked her in the eye.

She didn't budge.

'You've come to the wrong place for the answers you seek,' I said waving my hands mysteriously and slightly rolling my eyes back in my head. Rachel started to cry. I sat down, pulled her down to her chair, and took her hand. 'Maybe we could just talk,' I said. 'Susan tells me you're getting married. That can be a scary thing. I should know, I've done it three times myself.'

'Oh, now there's someone you should be taking marriage advice from,' Susan said. 'Let's go, Rachel.'

'Three times?' Rachel asked, horrified.

‘Yes,’ I admitted. ‘But the first one doesn’t really count because I was only eighteen and the second one was in Vegas, so – really, technically – I guess you could say I’ve only been married one, one and a half times at the most.’

‘Rachel, let’s get out of here,’ Susan insisted.

‘If you had it to do over again?’ Rachel started to say. ‘I mean . . . did you have doubts?’

‘Did I have doubts,’ I said. ‘Good God yes. Of course I did. I had that little voice, you know?’ Rachel nodded, which is the only excuse I can come up with for not repairing the broken dam that was my mouth. ‘Marriage is a huge – I mean huge – commitment,’ I continued. ‘I was way too impulsive. You can’t even imagine the things I never even thought of—’

‘Miss,’ Susan said.

‘I mean the things you learn about a person,’ I railed. Susan was now physically trying to pull Rachel out of the chair. I was oblivious.

‘You think you know him – and *wham* – you find out the man you married paints his toenails black when there’s a full moon. Or that he doesn’t like the way you sip tea. Like there’s a right and wrong way to *sip tea*. Or he suddenly stops having sex with you because the blouse you wore the week before reminded him of his mother.’

‘His mother,’ Rachel repeated in a deathly whisper.

‘Miss,’ Susan said again, louder.

‘Believe me, there are going to be days when you can’t stand the way he looks, smells, talks, and even *breathes*.’ Rachel’s beautiful face had turned to stone. I didn’t notice. ‘But the worst part is when you know – when you just know deep down in your bones – that the man who said he’d love you forever doesn’t want to see, taste, smell, or touch you anymore either.’

‘Miss. You are *very* unprofessional,’ Susan roared. That stopped me. She was right. What was I doing? This whole thing with Ed had me all out of whack. Not to mention staring at bloody cows all day. It was really messing with my mind. All I could think of was Ed – Ed and the

ballerina covered in blood. And I wasn't a violent person at all. I was a Pisces. We're humble and kind. Peace loving. We're not like – what was her name?

'What's the name of the girl who hacked up her parents with a hatchet?' I asked Susan and Rachel. This time both of them started to back away. Oh, God. I needed to get away from other human beings as quickly as possible. But seriously, what was her name? Lucy?

'I'm so sorry,' I said to Rachel. 'I am being very unprofessional. Let's get back on track here, shall we? Let's just see what the cards have to say.' But Rachel had gone white.

'Susan, would you mind waiting outside the tent,' she said. 'I want to be alone with Clair.'

Susan shook her head and locked eyes with me. 'Susan. I want some privacy,' Rachel persisted.

Susan hesitated but relented under Rachel's steady gaze. 'I'll be right outside,' she said.

'Look,' I confessed when we were alone. 'Susan told me you've been having bad dreams. Maybe I can help you interpret them?' Rachel Morgan sat straight in her chair, put her palms flat down on the table, and stared at me without a single tear left in her eyes.

'Just deal the cards,' she said, like we were playing Black Jack in Vegas.

'I thought you wanted to talk—'

'No. I've heard enough. I just want you to deal the cards, and in a very loud voice – so Susan can hear – I want you to tell me that marrying Jack Heron would be the worst mistake I could ever make in my entire life.'

'Whoa,' I said. 'I didn't mean to freak you out—'

'A deadly mistake.'

'I mean just because my marriages were complete and utter failures—'

'Please,' Rachel begged. 'Get me out of this.'

'I'm sorry,' I said. 'I can't continue this reading. I'm normally very professional. It's just that my third husband, Ed – the one I thought would stick – he's getting married

again. To a fucking ballerina. And it's just really messed me up you know? I mean even though we've been over for a long time. Three years.' I felt tears come to my eyes. 'He said he'd love me forever.' I took a deep breath and tried to compose myself. 'A fucking ballerina,' I repeated bitterly.

Rachel's hand flew out and landed on top of my deck. 'Deal the cards,' she said again. 'Tell me not to marry Jack.'

'Please don't touch my cards,' I said, trying to regain some semblance of composure. 'You know I can't just tell you that. The cards will say whatever they have to say.' Rachel removed her hand from the cards but kept it planted on my side of the table.

'Lizzie Borden!' I shouted. 'Lizzie Borden took an axe, gave her parents forty whacks.' Rachel stared at me. 'Sorry,' I said. 'I just remembered that.' Rachel leaned in.

'Here's one for you,' she hissed. 'Do you remember the Runaway Bride?' Her formerly diminutive voice had flatlined into a frightening monotone. I had just decided I should become the Runaway Psychic, shove everything in my bag and get the hell out of here, but something stopped me. Okay, if you must know, I kind of wanted to know where she was going with this. I took her hand, lifted it, and put it back on her side of the table. We eyeballed each other for another few seconds. Then I nodded for her to continue.

'If you don't help me out of this mess, you're going to know me as the Suicide Bride. I'm going to shoot myself in my Vera Wang wedding gown in front of two hundred well-dressed guests and my unsuspecting groom. I'm going to wait until right before I say, "I Do," put the barrel in my mouth, and say your name.'

'What?' I said, completely thrown out of the riveting melodrama by the mention of my name.

'I'm going to say, "Clair,"' she said, spotting my business card at the edge of the table, ' "Clair Ivars has my blood on her hands." '

She was so convincing I found myself staring at her milky, white face as if droplets of blood would drip from

her pouty lips at any second. She smiled with her perfectly straight, white teeth, and leaned in for the kill. ‘And then,’ she said, whispering as if we were on a first date, ‘I’m going to squeeze the trigger, and put a bullet through the back of my head.’

I must admit, part of me was a tiny bit tempted to ask her how she was going to enunciate all that with a gun in her mouth, but I reined myself in. There we sat, the psychic and the psycho, staring each other down, as red, pulsing, energy danced above our heads.

‘You need professional help,’ I said as quietly and gently as I could.

‘What I need is for you to do this reading,’ she shot back. ‘What I need is for this reading to tell me *not* to marry Jack Heron. What I need,’ she said her voice rising to near-panic level, ‘is for you to yell it out, so that the Ice Pick out there hears you! *Capice?*’

I held my breath and quickly ran through my options. What did Brian say? She was a little . . . *wound up?* I was going to kill Brian the minute I saw him. Maybe I’d skip my spiritual journey. Killing Brian would be my spiritual journey. First I’d torture him, then I’d kill him. I didn’t know a thing about torture except that it usually involved duct tape. *Get duct tape*, I mentally jotted down.

I was in an impossible situation. I wanted to argue with Rachel, tell her that no one in his or her right mind was going to blame me for her actions – that even if I did give her a bad reading, people would still blame *her* for canceling her wedding by shooting herself in the back of the head, not *me*.

Wouldn’t they?

Maybe I should have just kicked her out and told ‘the Ice Pick’ about her threat. Surely, the Ice Pick would have believed me and not her.

Wouldn’t she?

At the least, she wouldn’t want to see blood on a perfectly good Vera Wang wedding gown.

Besides, what woman in love lets a Tarot card reading

stop her wedding? Obviously, this woman wasn't in love. And she was too gutless to end it herself.

In the end, I didn't do it for her. In the end I did it for Jack Heron, whom I had never met, but surely he didn't deserve this kind of fate. Either she would go ahead and marry him and he'd be stuck with someone who really didn't love him for the rest of his life, or she *would* put a gun in her mouth during the wedding vows and blow her brains out, and he would be forever known as the guy who was literally left at the altar by the Suicide Bride.

And, whether it was logical or not, if anyone could manage to understand her mumblings with the gun in her mouth, I would be forever known as the psychic who couldn't predict a suicidal bride to save her life.

*This too shall pass*, I said to myself as I glanced toward the curtain, picked up the first card, and laid it face up on the table. You don't have to be psychic to know what it was. I've already told you.

It was, indeed, The Fool.