

Gammon

by Heather Levy

I was sitting underneath a statue of a man's head today, looking at flowers and green insects. All of the babies on Spring Garden Road were stopping in their strollers to listen to a penny piper. I marvelled how these small beings always have to have at least two fully grown people jockeying for position on the plastic canes of their canvas buggies. There are five billion people in the world. Only the massive distribution of dual cassette machines can save us from our fetish for expensive replicas.

The penny piper was a seventeen-year-old man who turned to me during a break in the performance. The infants were on sabbatical. He told me that he was a retired naval officer. He smiled when he asked me for my name. He also asked if I was waiting in line for the fortune-teller.

I thought that he looked like a bald bird with a copper twig in his mouth so I gave him an oblique look. He asked me if I was skeptical about everything in the world. I told him that my name was Annabelle and that I spent all of my money on lottery

tickets and soothsayers. I also told him that my assessment of male character was the only thing in my world free from skepticism. He kept talking. He said that he believed that psychic power existed, as did the Devil and God, that we should not mess with other worlds, the devil of Mister God. I excused myself and went to the bank machine.

I extracted eight dollars even though I was a bit skeptical about paying for cards I would not read. I was also a bit skeptical about eight dollars meriting forty-five minutes of shuffling cards, futures and hat-bands. One of my old roommates had a series of postcards from Salem — witty postscript dismissing dunking stools and shackles. I decided that like all women, soothsayers should have their incomes supplemented by more than mere speculation.

The soothsayer was quite conservative in her camel corduroys and bone sweater. Her eyes were wild behind thick blue glass frames. She kept her cards in a brown matchbox labelled fragile and I noticed that her sign was held together with red circles and blue triangles. Adhesive tic-tac-toe. I remember **Bewitched** reruns that were more convincingly mystical. She looked wise and I wanted to ask her if she could foresee any improvement in the structure and if tentative hooking with people could sustain us beyond broken dalmatian cups and broken covenants of mind and body.

It was fifteen minutes before six and she had just finished telling two American tourists that I was the last person that she could see today. They were explaining the vanishing-point theory of American travel dollars. So I asked her if I would ever find the copper bracelet lost in a broccoli garden during a happier rainstorm.

After a few death cards, one lethargy card and two cards with yellow-haired women with thin reeds and swords through their backs, she told me that I was a difficult pushover. The cards said that I was extravagant, jealous and passionate. The cards indicated that I would be twice married and would work in a hospital.

I am a lesbian who faints at the sight of blood — real or imagined.

Virginia Woolf said that we should live in houses as portable as small shells. The soothsayer folded everything up at six o'clock. The canvas of her blue pop-out chairs was made from the same webbing that the powerful babies favour in buggy construction. Her name was not Annabelle.



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