

Brad Davies

READING THE FUTURE

I'm sitting near the back row of my Church. Pastor Parker has just been prattling on and on for the last hour from the biblical book of Numbers, an insomniac's dream. I look around at the congregation and nobody, like me, is paying attention. I have been sitting here playing with my phone. They think I am taking notes, but you see I have really been on Facebook, managing to fool them with the occasional nod of head in agreement at the appropriate time followed by a loud, "Preach it Brother".

I am disconnected. My heart sinks as I scour the sitting dead, looking for a sign of life. Maybe there is no answer here anymore. After all I have been at this for over thirty years and sister Sally is still in a wheelchair believing for healing. Bob, the semi homeless boarding house person from the fleapit down in Edward Street, is still stealing and even steals from the church plate when he helps take up the offering. Then there is the Italian businessman Geo, who bankrolls the place and thinks he owns it. My head is thumping and says you must stay. My heart says, *Go, just go.*

I pick up my coat and walk briskly out the back door avoiding eye contact with anybody. When I step outside, I breathe deeply and put my Jacket on. It is cold tonight as I walk down the road towards the entertainment area of my beloved inner city. The place is alive and buzzing with excitement. I walk past a group of elderly Middle Eastern men sitting at a table outside a Turkish restaurant where they talk in their own language while drinking wine and stuffing their faces with food. I amble past the flashing lights of Amazons—the peep show place where a young man in a tuxedo tries to induce me in.

'Live shows mate. Live shows only fifty bucks.'

He steps in front of me to block my path, but I sidestep and tell him to piss off as I continue walking. My heart is heavy with disappointment, contemplating life.

I shuffle along past the TAB and, as I look in, I see six of so people glued to the screens of the races or reading a form guide. Been there done that; fifty grand poorer and now not interested. Still disillusioned, I continue my walk. Every step gets heavier. I stop next to the flashing 'open' sign at the entrance to a purple building. I step back onto the road to read the sign on the façade.

'See your future. Tarot Card readings. Have your stars read.'

I pause outside for a long time considering what to do. Mother told me never to go in there. 'To hell with it', I say to myself. No answers to life now, so why not? I'll give it a go.

I spring up two wooden steps and into a foyer. Harp music plays as I breathe in the smell of incense sticks alight at the counter. Looking around the room, it's a who's who the spiritual world—the Dali Lama, Buddha, Jesus and the Bhagwan from the orange

people just to name a few, along with cardboard cut-outs of angels plastered on every spare space on the purple VJ walls of the old building that was probably once an old corner store.

On the counter of the store is a bell. I strike it once. Immediately I 'm met by a young, anorexic-looking girl, no more than twenty years old, with short red hair, a nose ring, and a tattoo of a unicorn on her forearm

'How can I help you, sir?' Her voice is soft, barely audible but with a low tone of seduction as she adjusted the sleeves of her bright yellow outfit like that of a genie's.

'How are you?'

'Well, sir, have you come to look into the future?' comes the reply

'I'd like to speak to the reading lady.'

'That is me,' she replies, pointing to herself.

I stand there for a moment asking myself, 'Is she for real?' After all, I was expecting a large middle-aged woman with long grey hair dressed in purple flowing robes.

'No, it's me. Twenty dollars please.' she says, holding out her hand across the counter.

I reach into my jacket pocket, open my wallet, and give her a twenty-dollar bill. She tucks it into her sleeve and beckons me towards an adjoining room dimly lit with a crystal ball in the centre of a small round table.

I sit in the chair with her sitting opposite. She starts rocking backwards and forwards and then looks into the ball, transfixed, just staring.

'OH, yes, I see light and prosperity, the spirit is telling something. Pray tell, what star sign are you?'

'Leo,' I blurt out

'AH- yes, I see it now, the lion, a powerful one, a stranger coming into your life with big, big changes.'

'Sorry,' I say. 'I'm an Aquarius. I got my dates wrong.'

'OH, yes, the spirit is speaking. You will find peace and happiness in the arms of a dark-haired woman. BUT beware, she has an ulterior motive. OH yes, she is digging, digging for wealth ... A GOLDDIGGER.'

I rise to my feet and lean across the table. 'You're full of shit, lady. I haven't got two cents to my name.'

She slumps in the chair, head down nearly touching the table. 'You're right.' This time her voice sounds like that of someone who's just inhaled helium. Not the low seductive peaceful voice she had just been using.

'Sorry, I'm an out of work actress just trying to make ends meet. I'll tell you what. The twenty dollars you gave me.' She removes it from her sleeve and waves it in front of me. 'Let's go to the pub and have a drink.'

'I've got a better idea,' I say. 'I'll escort you to the pub, but I'll move on and go back to my Church.'