

## The Fortune Teller

Sunshine was beating down on the back of my neck. I walked beside my most trusted friend Amanda, through the Stroudsburg 37th annual Fair setup. I had been going there since I moved here as a little kid. The lot they held it in was on the west side of town, residing beside the Stroudsburg Inn. It was dusty, with dirt clouds hovering low over the Earth.

“Not a bad turnout for a rural town’s fair,” Amanda commented.

It certainly wasn’t. The place was buzzing with activity. Tiny children on carousels, couples sharing sugary clouds of cotton candy, elderly people sitting on benches, lines at some booths seemed like miles long, and farmers delightfully grinning at families who went to look at their livestock.

I responded with, “Yeah, but crowds aren’t exactly what we want as visitors. Where to next?”

Our eyes simultaneously fell onto a stall that provided fortune-telling services. It was a black tent that sat on the very outskirts of the fairground. The structure’s roof held a sign as dark as the rest of the tent with white, old-fashioned, cursive letters which read, “Fortune Telling: Palmistry, Tea Leaf Readings, Crystal Ball, and Astrology Readings.” There was not a single person waiting, and the inside of the tent would be ten times cooler in temperature.

“Want to go get our fortunes revealed?” I asked.

“Sure!” Amanda exclaimed.

Amanda and I strolled to the fortune-telling booth through the dusty, dry terrain. The inside of the tent was canvas the color of the night sky. The flooring was a maroon carpet with a decorative diamond arrangement stitched into it with thick black thread.

In the center of the circular room sat a spindly table draped in a cloth with a design identical to that of the carpet. On one side of the stand, an elderly woman was perched on a wooden chair. She wore a velvet red dress with flowing sleeves that hung loosely over her forearms. Her hair must have previously been dark and silky, but had started to gray and dry out considerably. It was long and pulled back into a dull orange bandana. Her eyes were a cloudy gray and her olive skin was severely wrinkled.

“Greetings, what brings you to my neck of the woods?” she questioned.

“We would like to have fortunes read with tea leaves,” Amanda answered.

“Ah, a wise choice. Pull up some chairs and join me,” the woman exclaimed.

I pulled up two chairs for Amanda and me. They were carbon copies of the one the fortune teller rested in. I sat down and an intricately painted tea cup had already been placed on the table in front of where I sat. Upon closer inspection, however, the murals on the cup portrayed quite disturbing scenes. A young girl lay dead on the alluring landscape. The background held a partially hidden man in a black cloak. A little boy sat beside two adults that must have been his parents; but they were painted with pale colors, almost like they were ghosts.

The woman slowly poured the boiling tea and added tea leaves to the cups. She told us, “Drink the cups until only the dregs remain. Then you shall swirl them thrice with the silver spoon on the saucer.”

We followed her instructions. Proceeding that, she reached out a shaky hand and grabbed my cup. She made ominous gestures around the cup and began examining it.

The woman said, “You will have a mysterious encounter with someone you know. However,

you will be gone before you ever reach home. No one will find you when it matters the most. You will be sent to rest down by the coast.”

The haunting words caught me by surprise. They sounded more sinister than I expected. The tent seemed kind of sketchy anyway so I tried not to take the words to heart. I mean the lady was probably just making stuff up. It still sent a shiver down my spine. I felt uneasy. The woman then looked down into Amanda’s cup.

She continued, “My dear, you shall betray someone who thought you were a friend. You may be the one who brings her to her end. You will turn away from her by a foolish choice. Regret will fill you, but you never raise your voice.”

The fortune-teller made it sound like she would murder someone and get away with it. Then Amanda did something out of character. She laughed. The fortune teller’s face shifted to a sneer of pure malice. She yelled, “Out. Get out of my tent.”

We walked briskly out of the booth into the blazing sunlight. We had an immediate and unspoken agreement that we would not be using this experience as a subject of discussion. We went on a roller coaster once the lines had receded; then we got some pizza at a cart as well as some ice cream. I bought shirts for Amanda and I. We went on some more rides and then we decided we were exhausted. We walked home, the sun slowly setting. Eating the last of the food we had gotten at the fair. The street lights turned on and we walked into the night.

Nothing ever happened to us. The prophecies never came true. At least mine didn’t. It has been years since we sat in that old tent to have our fortunes read. I am not really worried about it any more. Don’t believe all that you hear, especially when it comes to old women pretending to see the future. But if I am being honest it never really sounded likely to begin with. What she said was just so frightening I took into consideration for the smallest sliver of a moment. It turned out to be one great lie.