

The Palm Reader is Packing It In

RICHARD LUFTIG

Since the cops have cracked down
there's no future in fortune telling anymore.
Anyway, she finds it too hard to keep
having to put a good spin
on the cards or make up good news
when the life-lines are all bad.
But it doesn't take a mind reader

to know that the parts plant is shutting down,
the newspaper is folding and the local
bar-convenience store-video palace
is closing up for good or how
the downtown is all shuttered
and the store windows littered
with signs for-rent-by-the-week.

Even the pawnshops and cash checking
gyp joints have left the place
to the drunks, the has-beens,
and the plain just-out-of-luck
folks to fend for themselves.
So now this old woman,
her own palms damp

and not quite still, is trying
to predict what will happen
when she calls up her daughter
in Orlando, the one she hasn't spoken
with in two years, and asks
to stay in her basement
until she can figure things out.

She closes her eyes
and tries to imagine the voice
on the other end of the line,
wishes she could tell
in advance how it is all going
to play out, this future, so fragile
it can be crushed by a single word.