

## *Where the Grass Is Greener*

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Although very little of the late April sunshine actually wedged itself down to the pavement, the narrow streets of lower Manhattan were swarming with lunchtime crowds. A pale, freckle-faced, blondish young man in pinstripe suit and tie sauntered into Zeldana's Psychic Reader shop in one of the remaining old buildings of Church Street. Zeldana happened to be free and able to receive the seeker of hidden knowledge. She brushed her long dark hair back over her shoulders and spread the ample folds of her colorful skirt over a chair by a small round table, the usual accessory of her profession. At the same time she beckoned to the young man to take his seat on the chair across the table. He obeyed after a moment's hesitation; he seemed torn between the conflicting emotions of agitation and indecision. His eyes kept riveting from one wall to the other and his lips working without making a sound.

"Relax, take your time," Zeldana smiled at him like at a child who was trying a potty for the first time. "You've never seen a psychic reader before, have you?"

"No, I have not," he admitted with a slight blush.

"Inquiries are free, don't worry, feel free to ask about my services. The preferred way to start is with a complete psychic workup and then go on from there. For a start you could give a name."

"A name?"

"It doesn't have to be your name, just tell me what I should call you."

“Call me... call me Ernest, yes, I'd like that.”

“You look like you need emergency care. So tell me Ernest, who's chasing you? What are you so nervous about?”

The young man tried to compose himself but remained sitting at the edge of his chair as if to get a better view of the woman.

“I understand you're not allowed by law to tell the future. Is that right?”

“Yes, that's the law. People who make the laws don't realize that the future is already present in the past in a timeless dimension of the universe. They want to burn fortunetellers at the stake. If you want to know what the stock market will do tomorrow or next week, go to a stockbroker, I am not the person to consult. But I can see you're beset by personal problems, and with those I can definitely help you. Your future is in your hands, in more ways than one.”

“Well, it's not really about my future... Or you tell me if it is,” the young man was now forming his words carefully and raising his voice to a more audible level. “You claim to be a psychic, and I had an experience a half an hour ago, and I want to know if it was psychic or what. I thought it might come under your purview.”

“Under what? Ernest, please stop stalling and just tell me what this is all about so I can tell you what you need right now and how much it'll cost. You know I have a rent to pay and children to feed...”

“Children?” Ernest was taken aback. “I thought psychics had relationships only with the other world. Or cats.”

“Yes, I do have a cat too. And she lives in this world, the other world, the world hereafter; they're all the same one world, only different dimensions of it. Some of us have an innate ability to enter

those hidden dimensions and that's why we can communicate with a wider world than most people. Most people live in a small world they can see and are afraid to reach beyond it. Most people are afraid of the future and don't want to see the past, only the parts they're allowed."

"Well, I saw something a little while ago, something my mind does not allow me to accept as real even though it looked real enough to me... Frighteningly real..."

There was an expectant pause on both sides of the table. Finally Zeldana began to speak encouragingly: "Ernest, I can see you're still frightened. And you're not used to that feeling."

"No, of course not. Life has been good to me. I sailed through schools without a hitch, got an MBA from Harvard and a great job with an investment bank... Still a carefree single guy with my eyes on a well-situated girl, possible marriage material. Things could not be better."

"So you had a bad dream," the fortuneteller pronounced her judgment. "It could be a premonition, telling you something to watch out for. It's definitely something I can help you with. No problem. But it looks urgent to me, there's no time to waste. I suggest we have a full reading now and get started without delay. The first reading is always half price, at an introductory rate. I have just enough time to work with you, later I have a pressing engagement, another emergency. Many of my clients come to me when they need immediate help, and they get it from me in every case. That's why they keep coming back."

"I am afraid I did not make myself quite clear. Let me start all over again. A half an hour ago I witnessed what looked like a surrealistic scene that most people would not believe. I don't believe it myself. But there must be an explanation; I cannot be crazy, I'm a professional

man, a stock analyst, not given to flights of fancy, and I was not asleep. I was walking and could not have been dreaming. The only way I can explain that horrible scene I witnessed is that it was a psychic experience. So what I want to know is whether or not one can have a spontaneous psychic experience. You're a professional psychic, so tell me, do you have such things happen to you unbidden, or do you always work yourself into a trance...?"

"My dear young man, that's a hundred dollar question!" Zeldana laughed out loud, but her eyes remained firm and her hand stretched out across the table with palm up. "The free orientation session is over."

"Sure, sure," the young man whipped out his wallet and plucked two 50-dollar bills out. "But I want a clear answer now. Did I experience a psychic phenomenon? Did it give me a glimpse of a future event? Or some arcane ritual usually hidden from the general population?"

Like a card shark, she deftly folded the bills with one hand and slipped them into her ample blouse.

"Well now, tell me about your dream."

"I wish you'd stop calling it a dream even before you hear it. This dream paradigm will prejudice your assessment."

"Don't you ever undress your secretary with your inner eye? Don't you ever have daydreams? And what do you have against them? Dreams are indeed psychic experiences. So are daydreams. They're our means of communication with the world beyond, the world not accessible to our senses. Whatever it was you witnessed was a psychic event. Don't be afraid of it, it can happen to anyone, but most people suppress them. Tell me what you saw."

“First of all, I was fully awake. It was past my usual lunchtime, and I finished an egg salad sandwich by myself in the cafeteria and decided to take a quick walk to loosen up my stiff legs. I walked to the corner of Wall Street and then continued around the block where Trinity Church is located. I like to rest my eyes on the fresh green grass of the park-like cemetery around the old church, the only patch of green for miles around. Usually a restful, pretty sight. But now, there it was, that crazy, dream-like scene. I saw three young men in pinstripe suits and lavender ties, all of them down in the grass on their knees and hands, side by side, like sheep, and they were grazing. Really. Taking bites of the grass and chomping on it. I stopped to watch them, and they were really into it. Sometimes they exchanged glances among themselves, but mostly they had their eyes on the grass as if looking for the best way to attack it, as if it was a new experience for them, if you know what I mean. But then I noticed they were also watching someone else slightly ahead of them. A balding older man, somewhat corpulent with thick neck and limbs which were clearly visible because he was completely naked except for his wristwatch and a gold chain. He too was on all fours, sort of leading the way with his broad backside turned toward the others. He had a pendulous belly and very low-hung, enlarged testicles almost touching the ground. I didn’t see his penis, it was probably imbedded in his belly and those huge dangling testicles were so big they reminded me of a cow’s udder. Dangling like some heavy bladder or pouch...”

“But you’re not a country boy, are you?” Zeldana stepped in to fill the pause.

“No, not at all, I grew up in the suburbs, Westchester. But once I watched a bunch of cows herded across a country road in the evening,

back to the barn most likely, and that's what a full udder looked like. Like that fat old slob, naked in that fancy, historical park. He didn't look back at the others, he just kept eating, guzzling that grass and moving slowly to fresh clumps, lumbering with his balls dangling and his pale, wart-covered body looking more like some glob of innards, or a giant slug, and yet he was clearly a commanding personality to those following him. I looked around me but saw no one else join that small herd in their pasture and no one else stopped on the sidewalk to observe the spectacle. I seemed to be the only one drawn to the scene, mesmerized. I don't remember how long I remained standing there. Finally I walked further along the wrought iron fence to get a better look at the face of the shamelessly exposed boss, and he looked just like I'd expected, an older man with his heavy jowls clean-shaven, rather ordinary looking like a small-town mayor, the proprietor of a pizzeria or a deli. Well-fed and well-situated. I continued all the way around the block and on returning to my original vantage point I observed the same scene in spite of my secret hope it would vanish from the park as well as from my mind. And I was still the only one arrested by the sight. No one else reacted to it, no one called 911 or something. People just kept passing by as usual, paying no attention. The little herd of grazers went on chomping, except the young men in pinstripe suits had loosened their lavender ties. I didn't know what to think. Was I hallucinating? Surely not from the sandwich and the Coke I had consumed for lunch. Was I losing my mind? Going mad? No, people don't just go crazy like that. Then I figured I was having a vision, either into the future or another, parallel universe..."

The young man's voice trailed off, but his lips kept moving; clearly he was not quite finished with his story.

“Yes, I understand...” the woman started her answer, but she was too slow. In the meantime Ernest had regained his voice as his pasty face turned pink and then beet red, apparently inflamed by his own narrative.

“Eventually I managed to drag myself away from the spot, but I still keep seeing that awful scene, I cannot get it out of my mind. I feel like I am one of those young men in the grass, following those hideously huge testicles of that fat old man, following his dumb, shapeless ass and those balls hanging from it like a disease... A powerful disease that hypnotizes people, commands them to get down to the ground and follow. It's something you cannot get around, cannot defeat, cannot forget. The end of the world as we know it. Is that what I saw in my vision?”

“Okay, I've got the picture...” Zeldana again tried to stem the flood of words that was flowing out of the excited young man in an unstoppable stream.

“I keep seeing that hairy ass with the testicles as a bag of flabby flesh hanging down; it's like a sore, an ugly big boil you cannot take your eyes off of. But that's not the worst of it. The worst is the implication. Is this the picture of the future? That's my real question here. Is this the picture of Manhattan after the apocalypse with grass growing in the streets among the ruins? Am I one of those young men crawling on all fours in the grass, following our leader? Or worse yet, have we turned into feral creatures and the fat man is the prey we are stalking? Are we about to pounce on him like a pack of wolves? Competing with each other for the first bite out of that repulsive looking flesh dangling in front of us? The haunches and

those disgusting balls? Are we that hungry? I'm afraid to go back to Trinity Church and take another look... I'm afraid I might go down on all fours in the grass... It's horrible! What do you think? Am I a werewolf?"

Finally he fell silent, but his mouth stayed open as if he had been cut off in midsentence by a recurrence of the image.

"Or you think it's too disgusting to discuss?"

Zeldana reached over and took the hand he'd allowed to drop on the table and looked at it. She nodded slowly with a grim expression clouding her face.

"I never judge my clients. That is up to God and the spirit world that works unseen around us. Life turns ugly sometimes, and we have to get over it. Your lifeline – past, present and future -- shows some conflicts but not ugliness. Rest assured. We're going to untangle the knots, not matter how long it takes. Yes, you've had a genuine psychic experience. So now I've answered your most urgent question, the one you paid me to answer. But what this experience was telling you will require more work on our part. The important thing is that your psychic awareness has been awakened, and now you're ready for a spiritual journey. We're going to see a lot of each other. Before we meet again I will consult the spirits who live outside our time and space, and who see the whole world and its history as one flash in the sky. From the beginning to the end, all compressed into one big picture."

"Yeah, I guess so..."

"But in the meantime we have to face the challenges of the present, we have to cope with this world we know, this studio, this little séance of ours today. The session is over. I hope I've been of help



to you, and you're ready to go on with your life for another day. No, you're not crazy, what you saw was real, but not in this dimension we live in. That's my full answer, but you'll have to come back for the details when I get hold of the spirits that favor me with their presence. Let me see, my schedule is rather full, but there was a cancellation and I could squeeze you in at 4:30 pm tomorrow. I strongly advise you to grab that slot, you're badly in need of help and guidance. But of course, the next session will have to be at the regular rate of 200 dollars, with half of it payable now to reserve it."

She let go of the young man's hand and raised hers in gesture of helplessness, as if to say *C'est la vie*, life must go on, rent has to be paid and reservations covered with a down payment.

At first Ernest looked back at her with eyes still held hostage by a frightening vision. But Zeldana broke the spell with her matter-of-fact voice.

"Here's my card with the appointment written down on it, and now you'll give me an advance of a hundred."

The young man pulled out his wallet and shelled out two more 50-dollar bills.

"Now you're all set for tomorrow," she got up indicating the session was over.

He followed suit, got to his feet and took the card but he looked at it with eyes still focused on something else.

"Sure," he said mechanically and stumbled out of the shop into the hustle and bustle of Church Street. Before he started walking he looked back again into the tiny psychic store through the garish shop window. It was dark inside and the only thing he could see was his

own image reflected in the glass. It had taken him a few seconds to recognize himself. His hair looked like a tropical fruit, his face was white again like a death mask, his tie was askew, one tip of his collar was sticking up like the torn flap of an envelope. He looked like he had just staggered out of a four-martini lunch. He quickly turned away from the shop and looked around to determine the quickest way back to the office. By the time he got to the corner of Water Street the image of his desk came back to center stage in his mind. "What's that on the desk top? Grass growing? I've got to get back and cut it before anyone sees it," he muttered to himself. He tried to fix his tie, straighten out his collar and smooth down the unruly clumps of hair, but the fortuneteller's card in his hand made the task awkward. He looked at it with incomprehension and then headed for the nearest waste basket. □