

## “A Reason to Be Here”

By Valerie Kuhn Reid

I am not a Gypsy Fortune Teller.

But for some reason I said *sure* when they called from the Assisted Living Center and asked if I'd come to read palms at their big Halloween bash. *How hard could it be?* They will look right through the hoop earrings and ruffled skirt and say, “That’s Valerie—she works with us, leads the sing-a-longs, the reading circles.” They will not, after all, expect me to be real.

Besides, I actually owned a pack of palm reading cards, one of those baffling birthday gifts one gets. I would just use those.

So I spent an hour copying little crib notes and taping them to the back of each card. I'd look at the hand, match the hand to the

card, then read the hidden note. There was one small catch—the book offered no predictions, only a slew of statements like “You are introspective,” “You are quick-tempered,” or “You have a knack for making money.” Then again, I’d be reading the palms of people age 80 and over. Predictions would be limited.

Still, I was supposed to be telling the future. So, I wrote up four fortunes:

- 1) You will receive unexpected news about good health.
- 2) Someone you worry about will have a dramatic change for the better.
- 3) Something you did years ago will soon bring favorable results, and
- 4) There’s a challenge ahead you will sail smoothly through.

My plan? Count the lines on their wrists. Two rings? Change for the better!

The big night arrives. At what is normally my bedtime I am sashaying into Barrington Commons wearing a black lacey get-up and scarlet lipstick. I set up shop in the library, spread my cards on a table, and perch myself in a chair.

*It's awfully dark in here, I notice. Atmospheric, but awfully dark.*

*Might that be a problem?*

And then they arrive—forty or fifty of them. These are not my residents. These are staff and guests! *They think I'm real!*

People everywhere. Packing the room, lining the hall. I take the first palm in my hand. I see nary a line. I barely see the notes on the little card.

*What am I doing here?*

I persevere. One after the other, I hold hands and tell people they are introspective or quick to anger or good with money. Some nod and smile, but mostly they look puzzled, or worse yet they frown and say, "No."

I glance at my watch; surely the hour's almost up. No! There are 40 minutes and over half the crowd to go! My black lace is stuck to my armpits.

My clever little notes have become ridiculous. If anyone were listening closely they would catch on. "Hey!" they'd shout, "she's saying the same thing over and over! She's no gypsy fortune teller; she's a big fat phony!"

*Why do I do these things to myself?*

I am grabbing cards willy-nilly pretending they correspond to all those lifelines I cannot see. One solution remains: make stuff up.

Down sits a young woman in her early twenties. Yes! Options abound. I take her hand. She is all ears and no dummy. "You will have only one husband," I decide.

"Good," she nods, leaning closer.

"And two children. A boy and a girl." She's thrilled.

"Yes, and they will be athletic and musical..."

Yep. This is working. I'm still sweating and wearing my shoulders around my ears, but I know I'll survive.

They keep coming and I keep lying, and then, with only five miserable minutes left, I spot my last client. Now that the crowd

has thinned, I realize she has been there, waiting patiently in a corner. She is 80 plus with soft white hair and powder blue eyes. I take her delicate hand and begin. I reach for the card that says she should trust her feelings, not second-guess herself. She listens politely for a minute or two and then she can't stand it; there's something she has to know.

"I wonder," she pauses. "Oh, maybe this is silly; so silly at my age. But ... I wonder," she leans in closer, "do you see anything there ... about love?"

"Well," I say, "let's see." I peer into her palm.

*I think I know what I'm doing here.*

"Yes," I tell her. "Oh, yes, definitely."

She is timid, so I am careful: I don't want to say the wrong thing.

But I sense immense importance here so I ask her point blank:

“Are you wondering about love in general, or do you have someone special in mind?” Her powder blue eyes turn to star sapphires, and I see a young girl before me.

“Yes, someone special! I see him every day, and I just can’t explain it— I’m overcome with love. Love as real—*more* real—as any I have ever felt. I’m young again. Alive! On *fire*!”

*I may not be a Gypsy Fortune Teller, but this I know about.*

“Yes! “I say, “and each new day is exciting, and you can’t wait to get up, because you know you will see him, and maybe today...”

“Yes, maybe today!” she says. “Maybe today we will talk. Maybe today he will look at me and feel it, too!”

“Does he know you feel this way?”

“No,” she admits. “Not yet. I think maybe it’s silly. To feel this way at my age.”

“NO,” I say. “NOT silly. Not remotely silly. Love is always good, no matter what the age.”

“Yes,” she beams, “like a gift. It feels like a gift from God.”

*Now I’m the real thing, an imposter no more.*

“That is precisely what it is,” I say with authority, “believe it.”

Her joy shimmers.

“That’s how it feels!” she says. “I really think it is! Heaven sent.”

“Besides,” I remind her, “The cards say you are not to second-guess yourself. Remember? Trust your feelings.”



On and on we talk. I was free to leave twenty minutes earlier. But who's counting? *This is why I'm here*—to read the future by the light of her eyes, to claim the promise in tomorrow.

And it all feels like a gift, by golly—the odd invitation, the deck of cards in my drawer, the mob of strangers in a room too dark to see—a gift from God, intended for us both.

And a very good reason to be here.