

DORA GOES TO THE FORTUNE-TELLER

Written for "The Listener"

By

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"DORA, you're not eating your dinner."

I gulped and swallowed hastily. That is what a guilty conscience does for you. I was rushing through dinner to meet Myra Roberts on the 7.15. Mother thought we were going to the pictures. Actually we had an appointment with a fortune-teller. Mother would not have approved. And I never did believe in worrying people unnecessarily.

Myra was waiting. "You better get your questions ready," she said in a stage whisper, "they always allow questions, you know."

"Can I have a wish?"

"Two or three if you like."

I began to collect all my wishes. They ran considerably over the limit. But may be the fortune-teller would be in a generous mood. She should be for 5/-.

"They Know so Much"

The district was mean and dingy where we left the bus, and I felt a thrill of excitement as we picked our way along a narrow, dark street.

"I wonder," said Myra, "why fortune-tellers are always poor. They know so much, you'd think they'd cash in on it. Our cook's mother is one, you know."

We stopped at a little wooden gate. Beyond, the house looked like a crouching toadstool—with a slit of light showing through a side window. The rest of the house lay in darkness.

"Perhaps, Myra—we'd better make it another night."

"Rot!" Myra replied. "Who's scared?" Her knock, however, lacked the assurance of her words.

There were sounds of footsteps, and the door opened slightly to reveal a pale face above a heavy body peering at us out of the dimness.

Myra introduced herself, and the door was held open. We took a faltering step inside.

Dragon's Blood

"Did you bring your eggs?" said the woman, chewing vigorously. Her breath suggested onions.

"Eggs?" said Myra bewildered.

"Of course, you needn't 'ave them if you don't want to. But if you want the Dragon's Blood reading, you've got to 'ave eggs!"

"Oh," stammered Myra, "but we do want the Dragon's Blood. I'll slip down to the corner and get a couple."

"I can let you 'ave a couple—3d. each?"

We accepted her offer gratefully—though when she produced them they looked suspiciously like pigeon's eggs. She assured us they would "do dandy."



"... My eyes were glued on the glass. Surely that must be the Dragon's Blood"

Myra went in first, and I sat on the edge of a chair in a dingy little parlour, staring at family photographs. Presently Myra came out, her eyes bright and her cheeks flushed.

"She's marvellous, Dora," she whispered, as I passed through to the Inner Temple. "Don't forget your wishes. I had three."

The Inner Temple turned out to be the scullery, where the High Priestess had arranged two chairs before a small red-covered table. On it was a glass of reddish coloured liquid and a pack of greasy cards.

"Me old man doesn't like me taking clients into the parlour—so I 'as them 'ere."

I assured her that it would do beautifully, and she nodded me casually to a chair.

Mysteries With Eggs

My eyes were glued on the glass. Surely that must be the Dragon's Blood. Then I turned to her.

She was dressed in a shapeless old skirt and a greasy-looking blouse that gaped at the waistband. Her face was red and shiny and untidy wisps of hair straggled about her ears. But what did these details matter to a psychic soul?

She took one of the pigeon's eggs and broke it into the Dragon's Blood.

"Now watch!" she said.

Watch? I wouldn't risk a blink. I saw the white of the egg curl up in slow writhing shapes through the blood-coloured mixture.

"Watch!" said the voice again.

The white fluid curled itself into a perfect initial—the letter P.

"That," said the fortune teller, with an air of finality, "is the initial of the man you're going to marry."

My brain was racing. Whom did I know with a name starting with P? ... Peter Dunne ... but he was the grocer's boy—and only sixteen years old.

"Perhaps I haven't met him yet? Is he dark or fair?" I asked eagerly.

"What colour do you like best?" she said.

"Well—I usually like them dark ..."

"Then 'e is dark. I can see him quite clear. Do you like 'em tall?"

"Oh, yes," I breathed.

"Then 'e's a six-footer," she said, "muscles on 'im like a prize fighter."

Tricks With Cards

I closed my eyes, the better to conserve the vision. When I opened them again, she was shuffling the greasy pack of cards.

"Cut," she said, "three times."

I cut. She did mysterious tricks with the cards, then she said—"Wish!"

I shut my eyes tightly and wished.

"You don't get that one," she said. "Nasty card—Ace of spades. Try again." I tried again.

"Ace of spades again!" she said suspiciously. "No one sick in your family, is there?"

I had a moment of panic. "Dad had neuritis badly a few months back."

"Then keep an eye on 'im," she said darkly. "Nasty card—Ace of spades. 'Ave another wish."

"Ah, that's better, you get that wish. Bet it was about a boy, wasn't it?"

I felt myself blushing. "Well, yes."

"Known 'im for a long time—have you?"

"About a year."

"'E takes you out—to parties and to hops, don't 'e?"

"Yes—we're not engaged, though."

"But you will be," she nodded vigorously, "if not to 'im—to someone else. How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

"Then you'll 'ave a proposal any time now. Don't take the first one, though—there's no luck around 'im. Wait for the next one."

It's in Your Hand

I had a dazzling vision of a long line of suitors queued up for a proposal.

"Show me your 'and," she said abruptly.

I surrendered my hand into her two fat, moist ones. She took up a small magnifying glass and peered through it.

"Ah," she said coyly, "thought so!"

"What?" I said curiously.

"Never mind," she replied, still in that coy tone. "But I knew you was a one! My, look at that 'art line—you're going to have lots of beaux. You'll be married twice," she said suddenly. She began to count, slowly and methodically—"one—two—three—four—five. You're going to 'ave five children. Two to the first and three to the second. Ye'll 'ave your 'ands full."

"But I don't think I'd like ... I began."

"It's not what you like—it's what you're goin' to get. It's Fate. It's on your 'and. 'Ands don't lie. You're a child of destiny."

Reduction for Quantity

I swallowed hard. It was rather awe-inspiring to be a child of destiny.

"Ever 'ad a serious illness?"

"Measles," I said, running back in my mind, "and, oh, yes, scarlet fever when I was seven."

"Better take care of yourself," she warned. "Someone's going to be very sick around you. Might be yourself. You'll get over it, though. I can see a bit of travelling ahead for you 'ere—not much—but a few little trips ... Like your own way, don't you?"

I blushed and nodded.

"Bit obstinate, aren't you? Got a good head on your shoulders—an' you like pretty things. Like me—I'm very artistic like ..."

She held out her hand.

"Well, that's all I can tell you to-night—except to beware of a dark woman. She's plannin' mischief for you. Take my tip an' keep clear of 'er. Five bob, please!"

I fumbled with my purse. A dark woman? What dark woman did I know who meant mischief? I dropped the money in her hand as she rose laboriously from her chair.

"These sittings fair wear me out. Come again soon. I'll do you at a reduction next time—3/6, or 6/- for you and your friend."

"Mind the steps!" she called after us.

Myra and I clutched hands and stumbled from the house.

"Wasn't she wonderful?" said Myra. "Wonderful!" I breathed.