

Palming It Off . . .

Mother Meddles with the Mysteries of Psychic Science

by
ANNE HOPE

MY mother has been for years a firm believer in card-reading, palmistry, pschiatry, clairvoyance, telepathy, television, technicolour and everything else she cannot understand.

Her faith dated from the afternoon tea party, where a tea-cup-reading friend prophesied for her "disappointment, very close, connected with something yellow." Mother went home to find her bed of yellow tulips specially imported from Holland were perversely budding into scarlet. From that moment, psychically speaking, she never looked back!

She often quotes, as further evidence of unseen powers, the Case of the Astrological Handbook. It appears she had been vainly searching drapery shops for weeks in order to find matching material for a blouse for her new blue skirt. Then, one day, long after she had given up in disgust, she was making a dozen pounds of chutney in the kitchen and idly going through the cook's store of light literature at the back of the cutlery drawer. There she came upon the Handbook, and, naturally, turned up her own birthday to see what the stars had to say about her.

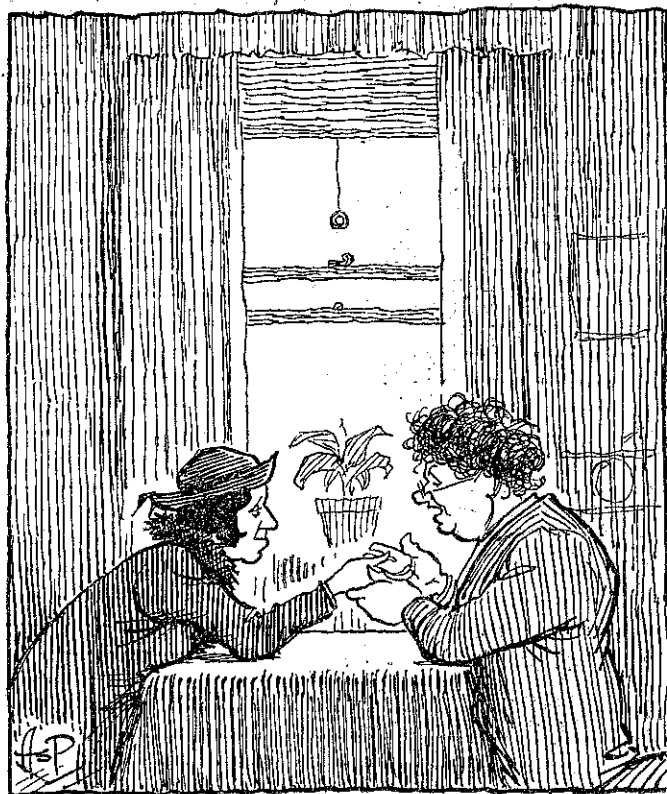
TO her delight, the stars had been more than obliging and had mapped out her whole year's work for her, explaining clearly at what dates to buy and sell, and plant and transplant, and sew and take a holiday. Moreover, it so happened that this very day was specially mentioned as "propitious for shopping!"

My mother wasted no time. She turned the gas low under the chutney, pulled on a hat and hurried down the street. In her own words: "It was remarkable. In the very first shop I came to I saw the exact stuff I had been wanting! So there must be something in it!"

When I pointed out the pleasure of finding a yard or so of material for a blouse was hardly sufficient compensation for the loss of twelve pounds of chutney—which had burnt to solid charcoal in her absence—my mother waved me airily aside. "It was my own fault," she confessed. "The Handbook distinctly says for that day, 'any creative work unlikely to be successful.'"

And from that day forward, the hopeful woman has been guided by the Handbook in her housekeeping. Fortunately, she has an incorrigible habit of losing things which often robs her of it for days on end, and leaves her to her own initiative.

NEVERTHELESS, I will say it for mother that she is not in the least bigoted in her psychical inquiries. She never cares what star she hitches, so long as it is mystic. When she visited me last week, and forgot her Handbook, she soon consoled herself for the bereavement by



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making an appointment with a clairvoyant card-and-palm-reader in a suitably murky street.

I had to take her to the house. She was dressed weirdly in her oldest clothes ("you don't want to make it too easy for them"), but spent the walk in clearing her mind ("it's no use if you are not in sympathy with them").

"Wait outside, Anne. Don't let them see you," she hissed excitedly, and I peeped from a hedge to see her taken into a dark and grimy house by an old, bent man with a beard.

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ACCORDING to mother, the fortune-teller was wonderful. She told mother everything, from all the illness and doubts she had suffered in youth to the colour of her seven children's eyes. "Exact-

ly" exclaimed mother jubilantly. "She even knew about Joe's squint."

"Did she say he wore spectacles?" I asked.

"As a matter of fact, she thought Mary had the squint," replied mother casually. "But don't you think it's wonderful how they see it, Anne? She couldn't possibly have known who I was!"

I brought out my usual complaint that mother at the fortune-teller's is a mass of leading answers. "Oh no," she said eagerly, coming over all cunning, "I was careful not to give away a thing. She tried to find out if I was a widow, but I could see she was digging for something, so I just said 'N-no,' reluctantly like that, without any elaboration at all. She said then she could see a separation, she thought, and it might be divorce possibly."

"What did you do?"

"Naturally, I was a little annoyed," admitted mother. "and I told her it was absurd."

"Was she knocked back?"

"Not a bit. She had a closer look at my hand then,

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