

Crystal Visions

Thomas J. Weston III, 20-years old, full of sarcasm and joy, and wanting for nothing, laughed, basically scoffed, at his girlfriend's request to visit Madame Florina's strikingly purple fortune-telling wagon, with its gaudy gold writing proclaiming "authentic crystal visions" and "genuine Romany heritage", parked inappropriately on the side of a road near his apartment on Sweetmount Avenue. Marie-Therese worked her magic on him though, and was soon climbing the small, worn staircase and knocking on the purple, wooden door requesting a session with the "world-renowned" tarot-card reader and crystal gazer.

"Come in" came the heavily-accented invitation, and Marie disappeared inside, re-emerging 15 minutes later and fifty euro lighter. As soon as Thomas saw the door opening, he turned his back and began walking toward Dundrum Town Centre: their original destination.

"Tommy!" Marie beckoned as she clumsily hurried to catch up with him in her towering platform pump shoes with crystal-embellished ankle straps – a gift exceeding a thousand euro, that had her family gushing over Tommy for months.

"What's the hurry, Tommy boy?" she said, grabbing his arm and linking with it.

"I know you're gonna make me go in if I don't walk away, so..."

"Tommy, you have to go in – she's amazing! Please Tommy! I love you so much and I'm gonna love you forever and ever and ever. Oh, she's the best!"

"I knew it! Please don't make me go in Marie. You know I'm not into that stuff."

Tommy had an unconscious rule of three, rooted in his overbearing mother's snapping point:

"Thomas, you will do as I say."

"But mother, I don't want to."

"Thomas!"

"Mother, please – I don't want to."

"Thomas J. Weston the third, you will obey your mother. How dare you contradict me! Do you want me to get the wooden spoon?"

She had only gotten the wooden spoon once in his life, but he had never forgotten that day.

And so it was that Marie-Therese, an empathic young woman by all accounts, begged him three times and had him marching back, shoulders slumped, head shaking, with a playful, resigned smile on his face, to the bright purple wagon, wherein Madame Florina would reveal to him his fortune – assumably on a large rug, by a fireside, doting on his and Marie's three kids.

"Come in" came the heavily-accented invitation again, and Tommy went inside. He laughed quite loudly as he entered. Owing to his family's great wealth, he was unused to self-censorship and the overwhelming purpleness of the interior was hilarious to him.

"If outside is purple, what would you call this?" he thought.

His eyes widened and he somehow managed to suppress a second laugh when he caught a glimpse of the purple crystal ball, reflecting the soft yellow-and-red lighting, atop a dedicated purple table and tablecloth patterned with gold leaves.

“Wow, even the crystal ball is purple. I didn’t even know that was possible!” he silently mused, with a noticeable smirk on his face.

At this, though, he decided he was actually into it. There was something about going all in on the purple that sold it to him; and it was much classier than he had expected, so he began nodding his head in approval as he sat in the purple chair, opposite the purple-clad clairvoyant’s piercing gaze.

“Fifty euro please for the reading” Madame Florina begged, holding out a delicate hand. Within seconds she had understood that her new client didn’t believe in anything occult and especially not in the supernatural powers which she firmly believed she had. She also guessed, by his age, expensive outfit, and timing of his visit, that he was cajoled into her chambers by the young woman she had just read for. She had met so many sceptics in her career and she usually treated them with a subtle contempt, spitefully giving them a reading that would highlight some flaw in their personality, or gently uncover a hidden insecurity that might even plague them for weeks or months if she was lucky. Being highly sensitive to people’s energy though, she keenly noted the moment that Tommy had embraced the situation and could even mildly appreciate the emotional honesty he displayed upon entering. Anyway, it was always easier to read people who actually knew how to really feel their true emotions. He also had a natural way about him, graceful yet confident, and she was drawn to the vulnerable, innocent look on his face and his large blue eyes, which engaged her own equally large green-hazel eyes in an open and respectful manner. She leaned in as she regarded him and began:

“Welcome to your future Thomas. I see you are a sceptic.”

She raised an eyebrow and gently nodded as though she had played an impressive chess move. Tommy was momentarily taken aback and his forehead creased as his brain fumbled, searching for the perfect comeback. He took too long though, and they both laughed in celebration of her wit.

“Well, you’re no fool!” he eventually replied, somewhat joyfully, after figuring out that his girlfriend may have revealed more to her than he would have liked.

“Oh how gracious of you!” the wily, middle-aged woman sarcastically retorted.

She skipped the usual rigmarole explaining her authentic Romany lineage and impressive family history. Leaning in, she engaged his gaze and spoke with a ferocious intensity:

“But Thomas, you must look deeper. Can you do this? If you do, you will find I am not merely just ‘no fool’. There are things people do; things people say; and I can read these things. They are not so hidden; not so supernatural as many would think. They are plain as day to me. Available for all to see; but they cannot see – they choose not to see. I will say to you that your girlfriend came in here to me and I told her some things. I told her this, I told her that – a lot of things she wanted to hear. I will admit I took her money and gave her a show; but she is shallow as a creek Thomas, so what would be point of telling her how it is. What would be point of telling her... anything? She and her kind would only get mad at me, call me an old hag, and put bad review for me on internet and my business would be gone. But you, Thomas – you are different. Deep as an ocean, I think, and able to see.”

She paused thoughtfully and continued:

“Do you believe I could love you? That I do love you? Not your silly romantic love – I think you understand. Do you believe that this is possible?”

Nobody had ever spoken to Thomas this way. He was not prone to accepting or offering love so freely, but in that moment, she had so fully engaged him that he believed she could love him. He nervously cleared his throat and timidly answered:

“Yes.”

“You are very good boy. Thank you for accepting my love. I have many things to tell you, and you will not like to hear them, so it will be wise for you to hear them knowing I say them with love. Would you like for me to begin?”

“Yes.”

“Thomas, - or would you prefer Tommy?”

“Tommy, please.”

“Tommy, you have wonderful energy about you and a powerful aura – such as I have never seen before. I know you don’t believe it, but I can see such things and I must tell you this. You have such amazing power, but you have great flaws in your person and they are holding you back. If you trust me, I would like to reveal these flaws to you, so that I may help you. Can I do this for you? Say ‘yes Madame Florina’ if you agree.”

“Yes, Madame Florina.”

“It gives me great pain to tell you this and I am sorry, but you are very naive boy and there are people in your life who are taking advantage of you and who mean you, not harm per se, but they are presenting to you a front which is not true. Do you know of whom I speak?”

A powerful sadness hit the young man and he welled up with tears as he quietly squeezed out a painful:

“I think so.”

“Yes – you do, my boy. Of course you do – because you have the power to see. The power, but not the will. You also believe that your great powers come from your family’s position of privilege. This is true, no?”

Tommy closed his eyes briefly, hung his head slightly, and agreed:

“It’s true.”

“Such a good boy. I am here to tell you, in fact there is no truth to this. Within you is the power to achieve anything you choose, if you can only put your mind to it and believe in yourself. This is true if you are fancy rich boy in fancy cars and mansions and such, or if you are beggar on the street with nothing to call your own. Now wipe away those tears and tell me you know this to be true.”

Her voice was stern and demanding, but Tommy heard a motherly kindness in it – something his own mother could never quite pull off. He wiped at the steady streams on his cheeks, which took a few moments and said:

“I know this to be true, Madame Florina.”

He felt a pleasant wave of peace wash over him as he spoke, and the intrepid psychic went on:

“Now that your heart has seen some truth, I must enlighten your mind. In my work, I mostly deal in fantasies and lies. The people – they tell me lies, so I must lie back to them. This is how it is for me – such a pity. But sometimes, I deal in information. Information, my boy, has no basis in good or evil unless we force it to. It is just as it is: information – nothing more. I have for you some information that your heart already knows, and I ask that you see it with your heart and please do not leave this glorious state I can see you are in. You are glowing Thomas. Can you feel it?”

She looked at him as if in awe, and revealed all the secrets his girlfriend had told her during her reading – in particular, that she had been seeing many other men in the time they had been dating; that she was even casually dating one of them since before they had gotten together; and that she had many questions about who the right man was for her. They conversed at length and the artful mystic explained how Thomas’s father could never truly love him as he would only ever be a possession to him; that his mother had some goodness in her, but was over-protective and she had enmeshed him in her delusional picture of the world. She reminded him of her loving intentions, and said that she believed he had been enlightened and would no longer see the false world that had been created around him.

“So go now, Tommy, into the real world – such as you have never seen it before. You have the sight now and much will be revealed to you. I have very much enjoyed our time together.”

“Thank you Madame Florina. You’ve helped me so much.”

“Such a good boy. Go in peace – this is all the thanks I need.”

Tommy put his hand on his heart, which he could now feel more intensely than ever, and bowed slightly before exiting.

He shaded his eyes from the late-morning sun as he alighted from the small purple staircase. Marie-Therese was standing there, waiting, and with a somewhat accusatory and jealous tone, she said:

“You were in there for a long time! What were you guys up to?”

Tommy immediately understood that, for a person who lived in a such a duplicitous world, this was a perfectly reasonable question. He didn’t want to answer though, so he just shook his head and began walking past her at speed. Marie couldn’t keep up and he was soon out of earshot of her increasingly loud insults.

Mulling over the now obvious ways in which the people in his life had let him down, he walked for hours, wandering the streets of Dublin toward the city centre, until he settled on O’Connell Bridge, slumping his body against the bridge’s stone pillars, between a beggar and a makeshift stall selling tacky rings and necklaces, as shadows of tourists and locals busily rolled by. The Sun continued to arc out its relentless journey and the beggar approached him, agitatedly explaining that this was his turf and, if he knew what was good for him, he’d move along. So as not to upset the man further, he silently rose and trudged down the quay that runs along the river Liffey.

Aimlessly wandering beside the pleasantly flowing river, feeling dejected and a little depressed for the first time in his life, the warmth of the day relented and a cold evening blanketed the streets. Physically and mentally exhausted, he settled on the pavement, beside a pebble-dashed wall somewhere near the Liffey Valley Shopping Centre, sank his head into the gentle blue of his cold hands, and contemplated calling a taxi to drive him back to his cosy apartment in Dundrum. He

rejected the thought with a long sigh, not feeling quite ready to return to his ordinary life, which he now found a little distasteful, and anyway: part of him wished to be punished for being so naive and afraid of confronting the problems he could now, so obviously, see. As the warm-yellow glow of the nearby streetlamps gently illuminated the cold, grey concrete all around him, Thomas felt like he'd suffered enough, and awkwardly stood, shaking the stiffness from his numbed legs, just in time to attract the attention of a small group of belligerent teens and twenty-somethings who, upon noticing him, began crossing the street.

"What's up, buddy? Where are you from?" the most belligerent one said, aggressively.

The blood hadn't quite returned to Thomas's legs and he limped nervously, but with determination, in the opposite direction, his heart thumping loudly in his chest, uneager for a confrontation.

"Hang on, hang on. Where you going? Just trying to have a chat with you. He's not being very nice, is he lads?"

The lads cawed in menacing agreement.

"You never answered me, buddy. I said 'where are you from?'" the instigator demanded, as the small crowd encircled him.

Remembering some of his conversation with Madame Florina, who had told him about his powerful aura and ability to achieve anything he put his mind to, Thomas stood tall and proudly, puffed out his chest a little, and with his sophisticated, Dublin-4-style accent, he confidently stood up to his would-be attackers, pulling out his phone and replying, as he tried to squeeze his way between two of them:

"Look, I've had a bad day and I have no grievances with you. I'm calling a taxi now, so I'll be out of your hair in a minute, if you just let me through."

They pushed him back forcefully.

"No, no, no, buddy. Where d'you think you're going? Here, give us a look at that phone, there" his interrogator insisted as he grabbed at the device.

The attack was quite brutal, but didn't last too long, and resulted in Tommy being relieved of his top-of-the-range phone, expensive trainers, and full-grain leather wallet, monogrammed with TJWIII – the only gift he had ever received directly from his father. When it was all over and the quiet street had reverted to a peaceful, warm-yellow glow, he hauled his body over to the wall, propped himself up, and took inventory of his injuries: bloody nose, painful to the touch – potentially broken; damaged shoulder, hard to lift his arm – hopefully not a repeat of the rugby injury where he tore his rotator cuff; large cut on his forehead; and what will definitely be a black eye. He was in a sort of intangible state, somewhere beyond pain when the situation suddenly became quite funny to him and he began laughing, causing a fit of coughs. As he wondered if it made sense to laugh at such an objectively awful situation, he started to question the moment he decided to stand up to his attackers, and his sceptical side returned in force as he contemplated what he now thought of as the rubbish Madame Florina had told him about his aura, and all that other gibberish. A startling thought hit him – a startling, awful, wonderful thought. A gasp escaped and he began mumbling to himself, as if half crazy:

"Oh my God! You old hag! You're definitely no fool... it's because I laughed at all the purple, isn't it!?"

He chuckled a little harder now, causing a shock of pain in his shoulder.

“How am I supposed to know if any of it was even true? Wow, Madame Florina – you actually had me going for a while there.”