

First Contact

by Gabriel Orgrease

She wakes up and feels funny. This morning when Patti Stretzhure wakes up she feels funny. Dick usually gets up earlier than Patti. By the time Patti wakes up he has already started the coffee pot, let out the dog, let out the chickens, fed the pygmy hedgehog, stocked the wood stove and gone off to work. But this morning something inside of Patti feels different, not quite connected with herself.

"Dick, I feel funny."

"Hunh?"

"Never mind."

Patti has a desire. Her arm tingles. Her fingers twitch. A nagging to write something down. She is not the sort of person who ever writes anything down longer than a short grocery list. Maybe three items tops. Milk, bread, cream cheese. Dick would write down beer, actually, he would not write down anything he would just remember what he wanted to get an hour or a year later. Patti prefers an occasional glass of red wine, something local, something dry. She moves from under the covers, gets up out of the bed and goes into their kitchen.

In the utility drawer she rumbles around between knife blades, barbecue forks, the potato peeler, cork screw, chop sticks and other utensils until she finds a wooden pencil. She uses a knife out of the drawer to fine sharp the lead as she gazes out the window into their rear yard.

By then Dick is in the bathroom and he walks out and starts a fire in the wood stove. "What are you up to?"

"Writing."

"Ok, I'm going to be late."

That is how it started.

Alone in the kitchen her arm moves and it writes down on a pad of paper. The handwriting scribbled. Patti has a difficult time making out the words.

"You will fly in the supreme light of cosmic knowledge."

"Who the hell is this?" she blurts out into the kitchen. The dog crawls under a bench in the mud room. The pygmy hedgehog curls up under a half shell of a coconut.

"I am Alphonse."

"The jazz tuba player?"

"No, your father."

"I thought you were dead? Is this some sort of trick?"

"Jesus, Patti, cut the crap and just write what the fuck I say."

That is how Patti got to chapter one of book one of the prophecy. Her arm hand jerked cryptic scratches across yellow pages of the paper pad for forty-five minutes before it was all over with and she felt not only funny but the experience had drained her of energy and made her feel empty and alone and so she boiled water on the stove and made a cup of peppermint tea and when she sipped of the warm vapor it made her feel full and alive again and her heart went kathump kathump and as the sun warmed the morning Patti once again melted into her normal condition of slightly dazed trance with not a care in the world but the health of her African violets that she now tended to on the window sill.

In the afternoon she called the psychic phone line and asked to be connected with Madame Marinachucker. It was not her first or her last call, in fact, Dick was upset with the \$2,685.14 bill that Patti had accumulated in such household expenses.

When out on the wall laying up field stone he complained incessantly about it to his crew. He complained so much about it, before they started, while they started, while they worked between hammer whacks, at break, work over the roar of the gas saw, lunch, dusty work again with the hot sun and all the way on the road back home he would just not let up on the subject in the dump truck that it made Jeff tell Stan one day that he wanted to hit Dick in the head with a rock if he would not shut up with his complaints about Patti's weirdness.

1:42 P. M.: "Good afternoon. This is the Frederick Exley Celebrity Psychic Network. Madame Marinachucker speakin'. I sense a man, a dark hair man; a sensitive man is in the shadows of your life," Jade

says with her best psychic channeler's voice and Patti responds in a breathy whisper, "Yes, yes. I think I know who that is. He sent me a message this morning."

"But first I need yer name, address, e-mail and phone number." Reaching for her pen.

"This is Patti, Patti Stretzhure. Cripes, Madame Marinachuker, I call your extension all the time. I'd think you'd know my voice by now."

"Of course it was you I knew. I must have been pickin' up a special message from the Akadung record." Quick to change the subject, "Are you standin' near a harpsichord? I feel like a harpsichord."

"I'm near our piano," as Patti draws seahorse ears with her index finger on top of the black baby grand.

Feeling slightly nauseous and mentally strained, squeezing with palms on her temples, Madame Marinachuker says, "I've a sense of... a sense of -- quills." Patti remembers the morning scene in the driveway from the day before. "You mean like in bird feathers?"

"Someone does in yer family write music?"

"My son plays tuba in a bluegrass band. Does that count?"

"Alfred's got red hair. Red hair as brilliant as a blazin' fire. Your offsprin' is like a flamin' peony in a paradise of yer life."

"Why, yes, he does have red hair. But I don't know about any paradise. I wish he would get a real job, stop blowing tuba and move out of the house. He's old enough to amount to something. Some days I feel the night he was born was a waste of contortions."

"Yer husband, I see this, I need to concentrate, help me concentrate, Patty, help me here, yes, it is almot here, I can feel the energy on my sternum, oh, oh, hold on... I see brown hair, thick clumps of dark brown hair has got all up and down on his backside like a walrus mustache."

"What gets my bunny twisted is I don't know how you can know all this stuff like you have us on a hidden television. I mean, half the time you people can't figure anything out. Once I got this fortune

teller at the grocery store kept saying you know I know they know and you know what?"

"What?"

"That lady looked in her crystal ball and said that it is because people will know me. Like I might be famous in Big Lake. But I got to tell you about this morning."

"Patty, you need to remember," she reads from the prompt card that is provided to psi operators as an aid to stretch the length of calls as every minute adds up to another \$3.95 to the Frederick Exley Celebrity Psychic Network and twenty cents for Jade. "I'm in tune with the primal juices of creation, and a series of past lives that date back to twelve millions B.C. in Sumeria when I was first named Daikon Gurubagga... aga...(oh cripes these stupid names) gagaha... hagani, you know."

"What does that mean?" Madame Marinachuker quickly flips over the card to check, "It means... hmmm... woman who was first ate ... this can't be right... ah, well... white radishes with honey dew melon."

"Wow! What does that... no, it doesn't matter... I need to tell you about this morning."

"What?"

Madame Marinachuker wonders where the Frederick Exley Celebrity Psychic Network gets this horseshit. Reading the fine print of a footnote to a footnote, "My spirit guide in this life is Katie Kung, I'm sorry, Katie Kunt, no, hang on, Katie King, I think that's right, daughter of buccaneer Henry Morgan." The seer's attention skips here and there and often stumbles into an uncensored ad-lib. "I'm particularly fond of Jamaica rum and model railroading." What?

"I need help, Madame Marinachuker."

"What is the kind of troubles (Jade recovers to fall back into her medium voice) you be havin', Patty?"

"When I woke up this morning, I woke up earlier than usual, I felt funny my arms all tingly and there was a buzz in my head like I was not myself and I thought at first it was Dick excited or his alarm clock but it was not his alarm clock or any thing else and he lay

there making gas noises but it was really in my head and I had to get up right then and I could not help myself I had to write it all down before it got lost there is going to be a very big flood and all of the country is going to be under water but I'm not sure I am supposed to talk about it, I can't tell Dick about it, I can't say to my own husband, "Hey Dick, guess what I heard? We are going to get wet." So I called you."

"Yes, yes, (Jade quickly looks for the FLOOD card) a ritual sacrifice is called upon by Sirius to appease the Sirenian Debutantes of Chiropody."

"Uh, it was from my father Alphonse from the other side. We cremated him last June."

"So you been feedin' the shark like I told you?"

"Sure, and the dog too. What the hell does that debutante stuff mean?"

"Patty, you are not yet ready for the transubstantiation of glauconitic flocculated basalt and therefore I can only explain to not explain. Be patient, in time all things are revealed as the Masters of Parasystole convene."

"Yes, Madame Marinachuker, so I've been doing just like you said."

"Chief Joe, Master of the Parasystole Queequiskut to be very proud of you he would of you."

After an hour of psychic banter, a good piece of business, Jade removes her headset then remembers to mark in her journal the time and duration of the call. It is close to the thirtieth and the billing cycle will end. Not so entertained by the idea of another fight with the Frederick Exley Celebrity Psychic Network accounts-payable assholes with the bastards already owing her for two months worth of calls. She makes a note to remember to call her group manager and complain. With her calendar up she remembers that she did not remember to ask Patty when is the Big Flood and when are those flying saucers from the Serium Blovation Galaxy scheduled to stop around and pick every one of the extra-special saved people up.

