

# Fortune Favours

by Stuart Millard

“Oh,” I say, with that oft-practised face. I’ve got the face down to a tee. Imagine a doctor on the other side of a desk, an x-ray in his hands of a lung clouded in inoperable shadow. That second of clinical empathy before he verbally flips the little egg-timer; that’s me, that’s the face. “The cards are...listen, it’s not good.” But I don’t really have the gift. Nobody does. You can’t know the future from the dregs at the bottom of a mug. We’re all just meat and atoms who can no more sense into the great beyond than a horse can fly a plane.

I wouldn’t even class myself as a con-artist, I’m more of an anthropological observer. I just like seeing how people react. When someone like that learns that Fate’s decided to crush them under her heels, you never know what’s going to happen, other than it usually being *hilarious*. I don’t always use specifics — illness, accident, your partner’s cheating — sometimes the suggestion is enough, the performance. Maybe I’ll kick over the table and yell at them to get out, crossing myself and babbling in pidgin-Latin, or clasp my face in my hands and stare off blankly into the middle-distance. If I’m feeling particularly playful, as a treat to myself, I’ll flee from the tent in floods of badly-acted tears, their frantic protestations of “wait!” trailing weakly after me as I giggle off down the street.

Such is the one-hit nature of my social experimentation that I rarely see the results beyond the confines of the tent. Some, I’m sure, just shake it off; a forecast they didn’t want to hear suddenly turning them into confirmed non-believers who only *really* spent their £5 in the winking spirit of knowing irony. Others, well, perhaps they’ll leave here and finally start living their pitiful lives, soaking up those precious “last moments” like a dehydrated man slurping at a puddle. Maybe the stress will turn the prophecy into a self-fulfilling

tumour, or they'll be so terrified of a prospective car crash that they'll wrap themselves around a telegraph pole speeding home to tell their kids how much they love them. Anyone who buys into that nonsense deserves everything they get.

Just for kicks I read my own, for the first time, dropping the cards onto the table like I know what I'm doing. They tell me I've been bad and I won't see another sunrise. They say that all that's in my future is a knotted rope and a ceiling beam.

I pack everything neatly away, turning over the hand-painted sign so it reads 'Closed,' and start heading home. You can't fight destiny.

