

Palmistry for Beginners

by Rob Bullen



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Nefertiti was right - it's important to overhear what people are saying in the waiting area.

“Lighten up, Stevie. You can’t go to Byron Bay and not visit a palm reader, it’s part of the ‘alternative culture’ experience.”

“Yeah, well I just don’t like being ripped off, that’s all. She’ll take our money and sprout useless crap. You know that.”

“Of course she will, but it’s FUN. Come on, join in.” Gavin stood up and spread his arms wide like a circus spruiker. “Let go. Immerse yourself in the experience.” He ran his fingers down a piece of purple silk that hung casually near the door, and gave a big wink. “Let the mysterious Melanie take your hand and show you your future.”

Steve couldn’t resist Gavin when he was in this mood. His face cracked into a big smile, and Gavin planted a kiss on his lips. “You know what, I like this guy already,” thought Melanie.

It was a small room in a light industrial estate on the edge of town, with a flimsy screen separating the “waiting area” from the “consulting room”, but Melanie had done her best to make it feel exotic. She’d got some hints from her friend Nancy (aka Nefertiti) who worked as a Tarot reader. Soft warm lighting; eastern music; lots of fabric everywhere, especially purple and gold; strong, long-lasting incense. And don’t try to be subtle about it. Nancy liked to quote Henry Mencken – “No man ever grew poor through underestimating the intelligence of his audience.” She said it’s even more true for a woman.

One unusual feature of the consulting room was a cot in one corner. Adriana had been diagnosed with cerebral palsy four months ago, and not long after that Chris had decided he needed to further his spiritual journey by moving to North Queensland. Hence Melanie's sudden interest in palmistry as a way to get some income, and perhaps partly pay for the physiotherapy sessions that would need to start when Adriana turned three.

Opposite the cot was a "reading table", covered in thick velvet – red, with gold astrological signs. It had a drawer, invisible to clients, that contained a hand-written note.

BUSINESS PLAN

1. Use my own name. I'm not Zelda the Gypsy from Transylvania. I'm Melanie, and that's that.
2. Web site, social media presence, clothes, perfume, fabrics, it all has to look and feel professional. Don't skimp on the important things.
3. Start with a small room wherever I can get it. Adriana can be in a cot. Or on my lap if necessary. Makes it authentic.
4. Maybe I should read a couple of books on palm reading.
5. Funding: max out the credit card if necessary. I've got another one.
6. I'm scared. I'm so scared. I've got no-one. What if it doesn't work?

"Hello, Gavin and Steve, my name is Melanie. Are you feeling comfortable?"

Make them talk about themselves.

"Very comfortable, thank you," said Gavin with a grin. Melanie looked at Steve but he was silent.

Come on, give me something to work with.

"So, which of you would like to have your reading first?"

"Can't we have them together?" said Gavin. "We want to be there for each other's readings. We don't have any secrets, do we Steve?"

Damn. That's not how I planned it.

"Is that what you'd like too, Steve?" Steve shrugged.

"OK, we'll have the readings together. Now, this is important. I want you both to sit calmly here in silence for a short time, close your eyes, and focus your thoughts on a light globe.

Imagine it hanging in front of your eyes, turned off, and then imagine that, slowly, you see it becoming brighter, as if someone was turning up a dimmer switch. Can you do that?"

Melanie floated calmly out of the room in her floor-length black skirt, then lifted it up over her knees and dashed to the office next door, found a spare chair, dusted it off as best she could, placed it next to the other one in front of the reading desk, then floated back into the reception area.

Light globe. Ha. I should remember that one.

"You may open your eyes now," said Melanie softly. "Were you seeing the light?"

"Very clearly," said Steve, and Melanie wasn't quite sure what he meant.

"Let's begin with you, Gavin," she said when they were all seated around the reading table. She took his hand, turned the palm upward, and began to stroke gently along the soft lines that meandered across it. Experienced palm readers can tell instinctively which parts of a person's hand will give the most pleasure when stroked. Melanie was relying on cues from Gavin's face. As soon as she sensed that he was enjoying her touch, she said "You have a very strong heart line, Gavin. But I see pain in your past. Conflict between your heart and the expectations of others."

"Yes, you're right, Melanie, expressing my sexuality has caused me a lot of pain and a lot of conflict."

No prizes for guessing that.

"And your family ..." She felt his fingers tighten. "Your mother ... your father ..."

My God - you can feel the electricity when I say the word "father".

"Your father has been very important to you, hasn't he? And your feelings for him haven't always been positive."

"He was so cruel. He never accepted me. Never."

I'm going to run with this for a bit.

"I can see your father in your palm, Gavin. See there, that pattern that looks like a rock? That's your father. Like a rock, he's strong and dependable, but he's also cold and unreachable - am I right?" Gavin nodded.

"This rock is blocking your life line – see here? It's directly at the centre of the line, and it stops it progressing."

"But he's been dead for ten years."

"That doesn't matter, Gavin. Your palm shows that he's still there in your life."

There were tears in the corners of Gavin's eyes. "What should I do?"

What am I, a bloody therapist?

"The palm tells only what is, Gavin. What should be is up to you."

Gavin looked despondent.

"Ah, but look here."

Hey, this is good!

"Can you see this faint line leaving the centre of the rock and joining the centre of your own heart line? Look, just here. Do you know what that means? He loves you, Gavin. It's there, in your palm."

Tears rolled down his cheeks. Nancy was right about having tissues close by. Gavin's voice was choked. "Tell me about my future, Melanie."

"Your future is bound up in your heart line. But I can see another person who is very important there. Perhaps now I could begin to look at Steve's palm."

Very smooth. This isn't so hard after all.

Steve's hand was so different. Tense, stiff, with no sign of a response no matter how or where Melanie stroked it. The books were clear – you need to make a connection, get something to work with. But with Steve there seemed to be no doorway in. In desperation she decided on what Nancy called the Hail Mary strategy – just say the first word that comes into your head.

"Protection."

Wait about five seconds. Then "What does protection mean to you, Steve?"

"I guess it means ... " But Gavin jumped in.

"Wait a minute, Melanie. Are you saying that when he had the affair last year he didn't use condoms?"

Oh my God, what the hell have I got myself into here? Protection. Shit. Check Steve's face. Blank. Unreadable. Slow this down. Take control.

"Gavin, this is Steve's reading. What matters is ... "

And then there was a cry from the cot. A very loud, insistent cry that could not be ignored.

Great! All right, don't panic, I've got a line prepared for this.

"That's Adriana. She has a strong spiritual aura that complements the signs that I read in the palm," said Melanie as she floated across to the cot, picked up her child, and brought her to the

reading table. “When she cries, she is telling us that something important is about to be revealed. Let’s see what it is.”

But Adriana’s crying didn’t stop, it grew louder and more shrill despite all the efforts of her mother. And what Melanie hadn’t prepared for was the vomit. All over the deep, very expensive velvet on the table. And then Adriana’s floppy, uncoordinated arm movements that spread it even further, with a large dollop landing in Steve’s lap. Melanie echoed the common last words of pilots, recorded by the black box as their aircraft is about to crash. “Oh shit.”

The human palm contains a concentration of nerve endings that is equaled only by the lips and the soles of the feet. When these nerve endings are stimulated, electrical signals are transmitted to the brain’s primary somatosensory cortex where, in a process that remains deeply mysterious, the subject forms a conscious haptic image of their palm. Higher processing areas then combine this image with a myriad of visual, auditory and other cues such as music, lighting and smell, creating an emotional texture that surrounds the experience.

Meanwhile, at a level below the conscious, nuclei within the hypothalamus release oxytocin and various endogenous opiates in response to the tactile stimulation. These generate a reflexive reaction of openness and trust, which can sometimes overcome even a strong desire for concealment.

In this way, experienced palm-readers can learn to access emotional material from deep within the human psyche.

Melanie’s embarrassment was obvious as she reached apologetically for the tissues, but Steve seemed remarkably calm.

“Does Adriana have a disability?” he asked.

No point hiding anything now. “Cerebral palsy.”

“I thought so. Can I hold her?” Steve’s voice was so reassuring, and Melanie was so confused, that she handed her daughter over to this stranger without even thinking. He laid her onto his arm and began a gentle rocking motion, while moving his other hand slowly up and down her back. Adriana stopped crying almost immediately. “I’m a pediatric nurse,” he said, without looking up.

The rocking continued for about five minutes while Melanie cleaned up as best she could. At one point Steve said, “It must be hard for you.”

“I do what I can to get by,” said Melanie.

“I can see that.” They shared a soft smile, and Steve’s body visibly relaxed. Eventually he handed Adriana back to Melanie, and she lifted her top and began to breastfeed, quite unselfconscious now.

But Gavin was still there and his heart was breaking. Melanie glanced at Steve and said, “Well, we should continue the reading, shouldn’t we?” Steve held out his hand. She placed it palm-up

on the slightly moist velvet and began to stroke it with her free hand. His palm was so much softer now.

“Your head line and your heart line pass very close to each other, Steve. It’s an indication of an intense personality where warm caring and cold reasoning exist together. And there are so many other lines that intertwine with these two. Small, fragile lines that stretch into the future. They’re weak and vulnerable, but your head line and your heart line give them protection.”

Got the word in. Protection. With another explanation. Hope Gavin understood.

He did. And now there was just one question that Gavin needed to ask. It was the real reason he had brought Steve here in the first place. He spoke very softly. “Melanie, is there one special line in Steve’s hand, one that continues on till the very end?”

Melanie knew where to look. But now Steve’s eyes once again said nothing, and his head was immobile. His hand was suddenly tense again. Gently, patiently, Melanie moved her index finger along his life line, then his fate line, then circled the plain of Mars at the centre of his palm. Finally, Steve’s head moved, almost imperceptibly, from side to side.

“Steve, I see a special pattern here. Look, across your heart line. Can you see this? It’s a small, delicate shape that looks like a butterfly.”

“Butterflies don’t last long,” said Gavin.

“That’s true,” said Melanie, “but while they last, they’re so beautiful.” Gavin’s eyes filled with tears again, but he didn’t break down. He took Steve’s free hand and squeezed it. Steve responded by interlacing his fingers with Gavin’s.

Holy shit, if I’m not careful I’m going to cry too. Get a grip, girl.

Just as the two were leaving, Melanie touched Steve’s arm and he hesitated in the doorway. She whispered, “You did use condoms, didn’t you?”

“Of course. Do I look like an idiot?”

She smiled, and bounced Adriana on her hip.

The following day there were two more likes on Melanie’s Facebook page. And there was a review on Trip Advisor: “... tender, gentle touch ...”; “... highly recommend ...”.

“You did well, honey” said Nefertiti. “But no, it doesn’t get any easier.”