

**THE IMPORTANCE
OF FRESH BREATH**

1. HILL. EXT. NIGHT.

1.

HEIDI and HELEN, two excited fifteen-year-olds, run up a hill, holding hands. Ahead of them is a GYPSY CIRCUS, replete with stalls and sideshows; Heidi buys them both cotton candy, they gawp at a strongman, and together they fail at winning a teddy. Then they spot a tent which says "PALM READER".

HELEN

You should get your palm read.

HEIDI

Me? What about you?

HELEN

You're not scared, are you?

HEIDI

You should get your head read.

2. TENT. INT. NIGHT.

2.

Inside the tent is the chintziest fortune teller décor conceivable. It reeks of sham. Helen openly smirks while Heidi manages to make her smile seem almost polite.

PALM READER

Hello, girls. So who is here to have their fortune told?

The woman looks middle-aged, except for a very wrinkly forehead. She speaks with a denture-like muffle.

PALM READER

Both of you?

Helen pushes Heidi forwards.

HEIDI

Just me.

PALM READER

Fifteen dollars.

HEIDI

(waving a \$5 note at Helen)

That's all I've got.

Helen sighs irately and pulls out a ten for Heidi, giving Heidi a serious "you'll pay me back" face. Heidi pays.

PALM READER
For your fifteen years.

HEIDI
You guessed my age.

HELEN
That wasn't hard.

PALM READER
(to Heidi)
I didn't guess.

Palm Reader looks hard at Helen, then speaks to Heidi.

PALM READER
Sit.

Heidi sits. Palm Reader puts one bumpy hand onto the table, palm up. When Heidi doesn't move, Palm Reader makes a tiny thrusting move with her open palm, and Heidi squeamishly puts her hand on top, also palm-up. Palm Reader rubs Heidi's palm with her free hand, leans intimately close to it, and blows. Palm Reader stays there, rubbing the hand it again. A burst of laughter snorts out of Helen's nose. Palm Reader looks up.

HELEN
This is bullshit. You can give us our money back now.

PALM READER
Your language is not very nice.

HELEN
This is the worst fucking tent I've ever seen. It looks like a sideshow clown fucked a burlesque dancer and they couldn't be arsed hiding the evidence. Glitter and clown paint and fucking shit everywhere. What the hell is this?

Helen picks up a handmirror. The glass appears smooth but her visage is fractured like a Picasso and tinted red or pink in places as if it's been deliberately painted.

PALM READER

What do you see?

HELEN

A fucking toy, just like everything
else in this dump. Fucking cheap
fucking plastic bullshit fucking
tricks.

Heidi is getting really uncomfortable. When she tries to pull
back she realises that Palm Reader has an iron grip.

PALM READER

These are not tricks.

HELEN

"These are not tricks." Hinky hinky
wah wah mojo blah blah doo do.

Palm Reader's forehead becomes smooth - except for the fifteen
eyes which have opened. Both girls scream. Palm Reader sits
up straight and makes an unearthly squealing scream in
response. Her mouth opens and becomes too long, opening sores
in the skin and revealing a second, more normal sized mouth
with spiky, bloody teeth, and a tongue which unrolls, lolling
down over her torso and bleeding from perforations.

PALM READER

Do not mock me.

Helen falls down and scrabbles out the door of the tent.
Heidi begins to cry and tries to get away.

PALM READER

Don't worry about your friend.

2A. HILL. EXT. NIGHT.

2A.

Helen is running back down the hill in the dark.

2B. TENT. INT. NIGHT.

2B.

PALM READER

She dies.

2C. HILL. EXT. NIGHT.

2C.

Helen trips over a tree root and smashes her head into a pine tree. The force flings her body one side, then she rolls one-and-a-half times and drops face-up into a hole in the ground.

2D. TENT. INT. NIGHT.

2D.

PALM READER

It's okay, nobody will find her. Not for a long time.

2E. HILL. EXT. NIGHT.

2E.

Two carnies start shovelling dirt on top of Helen. She is unconscious but still breathing; her breath puffs dirt off her face and clumps roll off her chest. They keep burying her.

2F. TENT. INT. NIGHT.

2F.

PALM READER

But you're not going anywhere.

HEIDI

Do I stay here forever?

Palm Reader starts to laugh in earnest.

PALM READER

You have no idea what forever is.

Heidi realises that she is well and truly screwed.

PALM READER

Do you know how many of us are in here?

She breathes, close to Heidi's face and all pointed teeth.

PALM READER

And we're all hungry.

Heidi's wide eyes begin streaming tears until slice of cheap white bread sponges her cheeks and chin. Palm Reader tidily places the tear-soaked bread on the end of her tongue and uses both hands to roll the whole thing neatly into her mouth. She makes wet eating noises. The fifteen extra eyes open and close with satisfaction, winking out when the bread is done. Palm Reader finds a velvet pouch of small silver coins and upends it onto the table for sorting.

PALM READER

You can go now.

HEIDI

I can go?

Palm Reader grunts approval. Heidi starts backing away.

HEIDI

What about my friend?

PALM READER

She's dead. Almost dead. Close enough.

HEIDI

She's not dead?

PALM READER

Now she is.

Heidi crumples and starts crying again.

PALM READER

Child, you're wasting a perfectly good meal. Come back and do that when I have more bread.

HEIDI

Why don't you just eat my face off?

PALM READER

No. You don't taste very nice. It's all that junk that you eat. I tried once, just to try it, but oh, my stomachs! I couldn't sit down for a week, I was in so much pain!

HEIDI

How many stomachs do you have?

PALM READER

(dismissive)

I don't know.

HEIDI

Do you even know what you are?

PALM READER

I know what you are, and that's enough.

HEIDI

Did you know who my friend was?

PALM READER

Yes.

HEIDI

Did you know she was my best friend?

PALM READER

Why don't you tell me what fun you two had together?

HEIDI

We played ball-toss and ate fairy floss.

PALM READER

You bought the sweets.

HEIDI

So?

PALM READER

Did she offer to pay you back?

HEIDI

No, she's my friend. It was a present.

PALM READER

Did she give back the dress you loaned?

HEIDI

It's a dress, it doesn't matter.

PALM READER

Your father worked late nights for a week to get you that skirt.

HEIDI

No he didn't.

PALM READER

Yes he did.

Heidi suddenly feels ashamed for forgetting that.

PALM READER

Did she apologise last year for holding
your head under the water?

HEIDI

She said it was a game.

PALM READER

Until you broke her finger.

HEIDI

I couldn't breathe.

PALM READER

Then was it a game?

HEIDI

No.

PALM READER

No.

HEIDI

But she didn't deserve to die.

PALM READER

"Deserve, deserve", pah! Everybody
dies. Get used to it.

PALM READER

You should go home. Try to sleep.

Heidi doesn't look like moving. Palm Reader fixes her with
her normal eyes, then crouches next to her.

PALM READER

Do you want to know your fortune?

Heidi faces the monster.

PALM READER

You live.