
THE PALM READER
GILLETTE FOREVER
DEFINITIVE EDITION



THE PALM READER: SEQUEL

The encounter with the ninety-two-year-old Portuguese palm reader in Boston, a few days before, had left me a surprise and a pleasant memory inside my silence, together with a smile that said no words but always thought the same thing: and now what will happen that I haven't already foreseen?

The esoteric discipline, inside Pythagoras and his geometry, had been my cultural foundation for the last thirty-three years. Magic, white or black, I had never truly met — I had used it ironically, for noble purposes, only in reading horoscopes and zodiac signs. It took nothing, every morning, to read the little columns in the newspapers, and I aimed their usefulness at only one thing: winning beautiful, impossible women, women who said they weren't waiting for men, but were always looking for exactly one like me.

That evening I went back to the hotel, on Twelfth Street — though it wasn't really a city address, it was just me, counting the number of blocks from the restaurant to where I slept, so I wouldn't get lost.

Dinner was the same as always, for years — I would never give up my linguine with lobster at the MAIN, the kind that spoke English, while mine spoke Afrikaans and wasn't always understandable, a mix of African tribal languages and Dutch.

About the wine there was no doubt: one glass per meal, always, red, Italian — the palate asked for nothing else. But when the pocket set the rhythm, there was nothing to do but give it up and switch to tap water.

My room was beautiful, full of amenities that stayed closed — a pool, a golf course, a sauna, a massage room, two blonde women and two Black women and one redhead, a winter garden, all folded into a single painting hanging at the entrance like a puzzle.

And then that single bed, where turning over made the springs scream, a red armchair full of holes, a small table — all included in the price, a few dollars a night, paid before you went in.

The bathroom was the standout piece — the first true call-ahead bathroom in history. You just had to shout: is it free? If no one answered within ten seconds, it was yours — one space in the hallway serving twenty rooms, unisex, so as not to create inequality.

It was 10:34 pm. I was tired, about to fall asleep, when I heard a knock at the door. I thought someone had the wrong room and didn't get up. Then another knock came, and by the clock it was 2:46 am — time moving on regardless, with no one aware of it.

I got up to open the door and found no one there. When I turned back toward the bed, someone was sitting in my red armchair. Frega, he said, I finally found you.

His image was blurred, not human, like a reflection. I tried to figure out if it was some trick inside a hologram. I found nothing to confirm it.

There's no use looking, or trying to work out who I am — I'll save you the trouble. I'm the ghost you met at the palm reader's, and I've come to learn the ending of volume 15 of the Gillette saga. In exchange, I'll give you two secrets for your GILLETTENARRATIVE.

If I had told this story to anyone, they would have had me committed to Boston Hospital on the spot. So I made sure never to tell it to a soul.

The final part of book 15 is this:

Two Cuban women, mother and daughter, young and beautiful, had each — at different times, in different ways — set aside space to be alone with me, to talk, and each had come out of it shaken. Both wanted the same thing: to marry me.

I have never worn a wedding ring, on account of a congenital defect in my fingers, certified before my marriage in 1993 — and my wife had accepted this flaw of mine too.

One morning I left Cuba. I took the first flight to Italy with no reservation — anyone who knows those places can imagine the difficulty, but never how I managed it — telling the women, one by one, in total confidence, that I would be back soon, that I would marry them.

It never happened.

I thought that one day they would forget about me and my promises. Instead, no: they decided to hire an Aifá of the African religion of Orulá, to invoke evil and put a death curse on me — the kind that comes with no refunds.

And it was working. I was rushed into intensive care, the antechamber of death, after they found a hemoglobin level below five percent, fluid in the lungs, difficulty breathing — and the report gave me thirty-six hours to live, at most.

The funeral company arrived too, and set the coffin down beside the bed. I watched it all. I had no strength left to push out a breath. Even then, it never occurred to me to write.

Everything seemed ready. Everything was proceeding according to the ritual of black magic, when, after thirty-three hours, I got up from the bed, pulled out every tube, and walked out of the ward in my pajamas to go home.

I walked five kilometers on foot, rang the doorbell, and my wife fainted. I told her to make pasta e fagioli, I was hungry. Twenty minutes later the Carabinieri rang the doorbell, alerted by the hospital.

They were looking for the dead man, and when I told them it was me, they grabbed their balls and left.

The moment came to tell my guest that this was part of the ending, and that I was asking him to leave, given the hour. He smiled: aren't you curious to know what I have to tell you?

I said no — because curiosity is a feminine thing. Women wear it to win against other women. And my mother had always told me one thing: stay a man inside a woman's mind.

Ferdinando