Cracks

Laura Kenny
Queensland University of Technology

My grandmother was a witch; at least that’s what my father called her when he was drunk on Jack Daniels and Johnny Cash. She wasn’t really a witch, but she was superstitious, and she taught me to avoid black cats and ladders, and to fear Friday the thirteenths, but especially not to step on cracks in sidewalks, and to stay away from suspicious interstitial spaces.

My grandmother was a fortune teller, but she didn’t know her husband would run off with their neighbour, leaving her in limbo with six kids and no way to pay the bills except by reading tea-soaked leaves for soul-searching strangers. My father said it was a sham, that she should be ashamed of herself for taking their money in exchange for false hope, but she just gave him the evil eye and socks for Christmas.

My grandmother had a voodoo doll, with button-black eyes; she showed me how to stick pins in all the right places. I collected silver hair from brushes and watched her cast spells and curses to cause pain to ease her own. She used a Ouija board and heart-shaped planchette to teach me how to spell. She taught me well: I won spelling bees and silver dollars for sentimental stories with happy-ever-after endings.
My mother couldn’t spell, but she could make believe behind Jackie Onassis sunglasses. According to my grandmother, my mother had the gift, but she refused to use it. She said she didn’t want it; she said it was a curse, that there was nothing worse than knowing the future, because tenses make no sense when you can’t change them.

My grandmother told my fortune when I was thirteen and deemed old enough for tasseographical truth. I drank all but a teaspoonful of the bitter brew and threw sugar over my shoulder instead of salt, for luck. When my grandmother looked into the cup, she paused and said she couldn’t see anything. I thought she meant I had no future, but perhaps it was just invisible.