



shocking. My work was going really, really well. She told me to prepare myself because it would all change. The very successful company I worked for decided to have a restructure and I was no longer in it.

'Now the psychic I use is more of a life coach, not so much predicting the future but working through possible outcomes. I see her twice a year because I don't want to waste time pursuing situations that don't look as if they will turn out well. These days, where less attention is paid to religion, it feels good to connect to a higher power.'

For me, I hate wasting time with decision-making. That's part of the appeal: instant resolution. And that's why I decided to try out two psychics for myself. I had a reading in June from psychic counsellor/medium Jacqui Cosham, who I saw in her West End office. She has platinum hair and lilac nails, and her manner is comforting, non-judgemental. She won't name her celebrity clients, but she says 80% of her clients are women, mostly aged 20 to 40; 15% are gay men; 5% straight men.

'Why do people see me instead of a therapist? A therapist can't tell them if they are going to sell their flat, be promoted or if the IVF will work,' she says. 'People want immediate answers. They don't want to see a doctor and an estate agent *and* someone else about their love life.'

Jacqui's readings are 50 minutes long, mainly with Tarot cards. The cards told me a friend who'd had seven IVF cycles would get pregnant naturally. It happened one month later: incredible. Then, as she held my bracelet, my cousin, who died of cancer seven years ago, came through, spoke about our childhood and her horse that I used to ride. It was magical and emotional to feel close to her. Jacqui also told me that my interview with Hillary Clinton, just cancelled, would happen in four weeks' time. She got it right to the day.

My next appointment was with Teresa Symes, a psychic whose clients include Jennifer Aniston and Kate Winslet. She's based in the UK and likes to do readings on Skype - though you just hear her voice. She is the epitome of the modern psychic and believes the future is 70% free will, 30% destiny.

She knew absolutely nothing about me and I told her nothing. The first thing she saw was that my work was at a major crossroads: a cliché but true. She saw that a script had just been optioned: true. She described a relationship with a man as something taken out of the freezer a long time ago, now rotten and toxic. She also talked about friends demanding help and attention, who are never going to give back. Not what I wanted to hear, but she was truthful to the core, her vision clear and lacerating.

'The powerful people who come to me are not powerful in all of their life,' she says. 'I give a reading as if it's a map.

I tell you what I see happening, but also suggest what you might want to do to make other things happen.'

The goose bump moment came when she felt pains in her legs and feet, as my mother does. She diagnosed the problem as peripheral neuropathy, absolutely accurate. It had taken doctors years to diagnose.

When I described this to Professor French, he said, 'She could really be psychic and pick up information from sources that would not be recognised by traditional science.

I think that's unlikely as we've tested professional psychics and, under controlled conditions, they can never do it.' These test conditions - the last one was Halloween last year - are agreed in advance. Five volunteers sit behind a screen while the psychic writes down their feelings and predictions. Afterwards the volunteers are asked which reading they think is theirs.

French says they almost never get it right (the scores for the two psychics that day were 0/5 and 1/5).

He explains Jacqui's predictions as 'a lucky guess'. He thinks Teresa could have googled me (my mother's newly diagnosed condition is not on Google). 'There are techniques for readings,' he says. 'One is hot reading, where you do background research. The other is cold reading, which refers to a collection of techniques con artists use in order to convince complete strangers they know all about them.'

(Though some psychics confuse their excellent, natural cold-reading skills for the real thing, he says). French told me he'd learnt how to cold read from an instruction manual, then convinced

an audience member on Richard and Judy's show that he was psychic. 'You could say something like, "I'm seeing an accident you had in your teenage years", and if no one admitted to it, say, "Maybe the accident happened to someone you knew", and so on.'

Whether you believe in psychics or not may, says French, depend on your personality type. 'Non-believers tend to have an "internal locus of control", ie, think most of what happens in their lives they are responsible for.' Psychic fans tend to be the opposite: 'People who have an "external locus of control" believe that things happen to them and there are external forces out there operating in the universe.'

Which brings us back to the question: are women who see psychics creating their own destiny, or destined? For me, the truth is somewhere in-between. Both the psychics I saw gave me new perspective. Not hope as such, but a feeling that I have power to deal with what comes up. Is that addictive? Definitely, yes. Will I go again? I think so. Seeing a psychic is both thrilling and reassuring; they deal with everything: relationships, work, finances, medical and emotional issues. And who doesn't want to know what's going to happen? ■

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