

happy, hopeful about the future, not bloody terrified.'

And herein lies the problem, says top psychotherapist Phillip Hodson, a fellow of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapists. 'A psychic is usually just going to tell you what you want to hear. A psychic makes life look a bit more fun. What they tell you, however, has nothing to do with what is going to happen. You can't predict the future. What you can do is give people a sense of hope. After a visit to your psychic, it may well be that you feel more driven, more focused and optimistic. Positive things are always more likely to happen if you are in a positive frame of mind. But the effects are temporary.'

'When you go to see a psychic, you are seeking simple answers to complex questions,' he says. 'Therapy is tough. If there was a quick fix, there would be no problems in the world. Committing yourself to therapy can be a long and arduous journey and you may have to face up to things along the way that you'd rather not. With a psychic, it's a holiday from all of that.'

I ask him how Lady Lilac seemed to *know* so much. 'You have no idea how much information we leak all the time,' he says. 'It's as if you've got your pin number on your forehead. It's written all over your face, in your voice, the words you write. A psychic is simply someone who is very gifted at reading people. This is something a good therapist, who has trained for nearly a decade incidentally, can do. I do it to friends sometimes. I'll be having lunch with a friend, and I'll say to them: "Did something just happen to you on the way here?" or "Did you have a difficult conversation with your mother yesterday?" and they'll say, "How did you know?"'

I tell Hodson that my therapist seemed a bit put out when I told him I was seeking psychic help. 'Do you blame him? It sounds like he lost a bit of heart. I mean, he trained for years to do his job and you tell him you're off to see a fortune-teller – someone who maybe used to work in the steel industry, was made redundant last year, put on a frock and got a crystal ball

and is now calling herself a psychic. What you're saying, by going to see a psychic, is that you don't want to face reality. What you're also saying is that what happened to you is so terrible that you sometimes feel that you can't face up to it. We all want to hear what we want to hear – like children. But therapists are duty-bound not to do that to you. We are not there to collude with you. We're not "yes" people. We're not fortune-tellers.'

I make an appointment to talk to Kenzer. She offers to do a reading over the phone. She, like Lady Lilac, believes one of the reasons more women are turning to psychics is because we're fed up of rooting for answers when none exist. This idea appeals to me, even though Hodson warns me that 'if we don't deal with our problems, they deal with us'.

My problem is I think I'm starting to like not facing up to reality, if this is what I'm doing. I felt happy and hopeful when I left Lady Lilac's little flat. I allowed myself to daydream about my white knight waiting in the wings. Ordinarily, I don't let myself have such pretty thoughts. I tend to knock my knight off his horse the second he puts his foot in the stirrup.

But Kenzer's reading is different from Lady Lilac's. It's more intense, darker. When we begin, she tells me two guides are coming through to her; two spirits that are connected to me. They're showing her that I am holding on to a lot of pain, some of which may be down to my past lives. 'You have had past experiences that weren't so nice,' says Kenzer. 'There's no nice way to say this... I wish I could see roses and rainbows, but I don't. I'm picking up past traumas, claustrophobia, being held against your will. Do you ever feel suffocated? Like, you can't get out of a situation?' Later, she says: 'I'm getting the number 32. Does this mean anything to you? Did something happen to you when you were that age?'

At the end of the reading, I'm exhausted and emotional. Kenzer/PsychicGirl says

this is normal. She tells me that in the last 80 minutes, we have released some of that negative energy and assures me I will feel better tomorrow. She'll call to make sure.

I do feel better, it turns out. When we speak again, Kenzer says this is because I have let go of some of what was stifling me. We tend to hold on to a lot of pain and therapy doesn't help vanquish it, it just gives it strength, she continues. 'It's a bit like having a closet that is so full, you can't fit in one other thing,' she explains.

'You go along in life collecting up all kinds of energy and experiences, yet no one teaches us how to clear them out. I just helped you clean out your closet so you can start to fill it full of new things and not just wake up tomorrow doing the same thing you did yesterday,' she adds.

Fast-forward a week and three interesting things happened to me that were predicted: someone whose name begins with J came back into my life, I met a man and I got offered two pieces of great freelance work, just like Lady Lilac said I would.

How did she know? I'm not sure. Maybe it's luck or fate... Maybe I'm

*'Women are turning to PSYCHICS because we're fed up of rooting for ANSWERS when none exist'*

leaking information like a sieve. Maybe it's a case of self-fulfilling prophecy. Maybe it's because she is psychic. Whatever the answer – if indeed there is one – maybe I shouldn't look a gift-horse in the mouth and just go with it.

'That's fine,' says Hodson. 'We should all do what we want to do as long as it is not going to hurt children or animals. We should all follow our own desires and choices but we should be conscious of what we are doing. Go and see a psychic – enjoy the experience. You have every right to have a holiday from yourself. But you will still have to deal with all of those awkward feelings – eventually.' ■