

Nick and Choose { NICK ALTSCHULLER }

VISION TEST

A meditation on mediums



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THEY SAY THERE'RE NO atheists in foxholes. By the same measure, most of us don't believe in ghosts, until we have to go down to the basement and flip the circuit breaker. Apply the right pressure and even the most rational mind will dart to illogical places.

I, myself, am an open-minded agnostic with wavering thoughts on the supernatural. My stance sounds noncommittal, but I prefer to think that I'm prudently hedging my bets. I'm not expecting to meet St. Peter or the Ghost of Christmas Past, but I won't be struck speechless should our paths cross. I don't think Molly Powers communicated with my dead relatives, but that didn't stop my hands from getting clammy.

Molly Powers is a psychic medium with an office in New York and a small, dimly lit room at Oriental Medicine in Cambridge. She describes her role as "literally the vessel between the spirit world and the psychical world." It's a grave description that belies her personality (or performance) as a cheerful young woman just trying to make good with an unasked-for gift. Put more casually (and rapidly): "Me, Molly Powers, from Lowell, Mass., raised Irish Catholic, father's in church everyday saying the rosary. What do I do with this? I don't tell him; he'll have another heart attack." Whether you view her sessions as treatment or a cheat, the woman is a hoot.

"You ready to go for a little ride?" she asked, before we called upon my grandparents. No matter the truth behind her service, it's impressive to watch Powers work. Through rapid-fire speech with the dead or the client, it's essentially storytelling through sonar. Powers quickly bounces ideas, and by reacting to your affirmations or denials, she crafts an imaginary relationship. If you wanted to, you could direct your own revelation.

Our conversations started with my paternal grandfather, a man I don't really remember. Fittingly enough, he just wanted to talk to my dad. My father's mother, whom I never met, also had little to say. But they did leave me with some months and numbers. Apparently all spirits do this, as if they want loved ones to consult their supernatural almanacs.

We moved on to my maternal grandmother, and things began to click. Powers didn't see my grandfather around, which was accurate. She said my grandmother wanted me to know that she loved our house and hated her nursing home. She explained that my grandmother kept pointing to her hip.

In real life, my grandmother entered a home after slipping on some ice. I remembered visiting and hearing her blame that small accident for the loss of her independence. Then I remembered lots of old ladies hurt their hips, and no one feels comfortable in a nursing home.

"What kind of candy did my grandma keep in her purse?" I asked, deciding to get direct. "I see something in a silver wrapper, like a Hershey's Kiss," Powers replied. I don't have much of a sweet tooth,

but I owe my affinity for caramel to the sticky little squares wrapped in clear plastic grandma always kept in supply. Envisioning my grandmother's service, Powers saw arrangements of red flowers. As my mother later pointed out, "Your grandmother always said, 'Don't give me flowers when I'm dead, give me flowers when I'm alive.'" Ending with my maternal grandfather, and forgetting that she'd already left him out of the picture, Powers stated that this was the grandparent I really knew well. The

man's been dead since the 1950s.

For a skeptic, the question about mediums is whether the profession is defensible or deplorable. Powers has worked as a counselor, and I don't doubt her compassion, but her clients include grieving widows and families of suicide victims. If you don't believe in her abilities, you have to acknowledge that what she's doing is lying to sad people for \$175 an hour.

But clients do find comfort. Perhaps there's no real treatment, but there can be a spiritual placebo effect. It's sugar-pill therapy, but a rational mind doesn't care as long as the symptoms fade.

We lie to ourselves all the time, especially about matters of the unknown. Psychic mediums, rituals of luck or superstition, the vat of worms that is prayer; they're all attempts at finding an answer. If you pick the petals off a flower and end on "she loves me," you know that may not be the case, but it's the result you were looking for. ***

You tell me.



Impersonals

GET AN EARFUL

TO THE KEEPER OF THE QUIET CAR:

I see you every afternoon on the Franklin commuter rail. For some reason, you've taken it upon yourself to be the sheriff of the quiet car. I appreciate the fact that the quiet car exists. Loud phone conversations are the worst after a long day. But seriously, who do you think you are? Unless you're an undercover T administrator, I think you need to shut your mouth. You're trying to keep order, but you're really just pissing everybody off. Especially me.

Better seen than heard

To the parking-lot attendant at Boston Wharf Road and Seaport Boulevard:

Your cheerful greetings more than validate the ridiculous cost that driving into the city for work accrues. You probably get to work at the crack of dawn, just to spend all day either freezing (or sweltering) in a pay booth, but you always have a smile on your face. You inspire me to be less cranky for the rest of the day. Also, you have the prettiest hair ever. What's your secret?

Motor running

To the pair of drunk guys at Paradise Rock Club on Feb. 20:

I'm sure your attitudes and penchant for Bacardi nips will take you far in life. I don't know where you grew up, but pushing little ladies like me and making threats isn't how you treat a woman. And to the bouncers who did nothing after multiple girls complained: Your hair isn't coming back anytime soon, and neither am I.

Over it

Unrequited crush? Bad hair? Need to vent? Send your e-mails of love and spleen to impersonals@improper.com, or visit improper.com/impersonals.

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