

Chapter 13

From the Novel

Remember to Recycle: Psychological Suspense

By Tantra Bensko



(end of this document includes background information)

So Psychic

Thursday

OK, gotta fill you in, I know. Been a while. Sorry. I just don't feel like narrating my life silently all the time, OK? (Not that I remember most of my life. Hell, that's one of the best perks of being fucking drunk as shit, right? Not like I'm going to spend all that money to drink and then still have to remember some obviously goddamn awful life.) Hell, no. I mean, would *you* put up with that? Earlier today, I walked back to Becky's street, and tacked up the flyer I made on Monday to the electrical pole in front of her door. No way she won't go for it. She likes to go to that cafe down the block anyway for lattes. The flyer's got the name of the place on it: *Random Cafe. Psychic Readings from 6:00 - 10:00.*

She won't be out here any earlier or later anyway. I know her schedule. Pathetically early to bed. If I know her, she'll show up this evening. And she'll pay me. Sweet.

A man with kooky hair and a flannel shirt is staring at me, holding his cell phone up. That's weird. I haven't seen him around before. It makes me nervous not to know the details about people walking around the neighborhood. Never know what people are up to if I don't know what kinds of things they buy. If you don't study their mail. Probably came from my childhood. I barely remember my past. But then, that's how I want it. Hell, I barely remember my present. The look he's giving me is just spooky.

Anyway, after that, I hung out for a while around the bridge in among the trees, practicing my voice, my walk, and re-reading the pages she tore out of notebooks where she scrawled her dreams. Sometimes she gets tipsy and writes and that's hard to decipher, too. I used to have a magnifying glass but I lost it. Life is shit without it.

But, OK, now, I'm back at the cafe. I had no trouble finding an empty seat at a table with another seat facing me. Typical this time of day. But I'll get them more business. Glad to help them out. They should give me free coffee. And one of them raspberry pastries.

I've set up the sign that says *Trixie of Fate, Tells All* on the table, and took the empty peanut butter jar out of my pocket. Becky washed that jar so well, that angel. I put it down for any tips in addition to the "half-off" price. They're going to get a great deal today, even if they tip.

A man walks in and sees me. Uh oh. Shit. He's not one of the people I've studied from recycling. What am I going to do? He doesn't live on my route, so he's kind of cheating by expecting a half-price reading from me. That's OK. I can do it, for Becky. I can do anything for that gal. Looks like he's coming toward me. Could be my first reading! I'll find out if I can even pull it off with strangers. If not, my plan might fall apart. Oh, God. If I blow this, I'll never be able to make her mine forever. Please, no.

Sweet. I know I look pretty good by the way he stares. He sits down, and smiles. "Hiya," he says. He thinks I'm hot. I'm so hot.

"What is your first question?" I nudge my customer under the table a little as if by mistake, and leave my foot barely touching his trousers. I know he can feel it. He doesn't move his leg away. This is going great.

"Which team is going to win Saturday?"

“Oh, let me explain this to you. This isn’t a parlor game. This is serious. If messages come through for you, your spirit guides have come a long way to tell you something. I want you to let yourself relax into your feelings. Get in touch with your feelings, your body, and get out of your head.”

I push my calf up against his.

“Whatever you tell me will be fine, babe.” He puts his hand on mine.

“I can see you are a very sensual man.”

“Yes!”

“And you definitely don’t live near here.”

“Correct.”

I’m getting sweaty. I have nothing. “Your spirit guide says you must be generous to all around you. You must not be stingy or ill-tempered any more.”

“I can’t imagine why anyone would spend his whole life, or death, or whatever the heck it is, giving me inner messages, especially when I never listen.”

To my credit, I don’t hit him. In fact, I agree with him. Anyone with half a wit knows spirit guides don’t exist. I do say: “Well, maybe no spirit guide cares about you either. Maybe that’s why you haven’t seen one. They are usually pretty good judges of character.”

Damn. This isn’t going to help at all with word of mouth recommendations. I need more people from this neighborhood to come in, people I’ve read about in their letters they’ve put in recycling. In their sad failed job applications, their poetry revisions. Half the time, it doesn’t even rhyme.

“What’s that perfume you’re wearing? It’s a little strong for me.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I’ll go wash it off. Don’t want to disturb the reading of a *half-price* paying customer.” I go to the women’s bathroom and wash up. So much better than the men’s. There aren’t any paper towels, so I use toilet paper. When I get back

to my seat, he's gone. Good riddance. Still, what if he tells people I wasn't good? This is so scary!

I dip my dress sleeve in my water and get a spot of perfume I missed.

When the waitress brings my latte, I empty into it the contents of one of their non-dairy creamers. Free extra calories. I might be about to have no source of income if I spend all my time failing at this line of work instead of recycling.

I tip her with a coupon for a free fifteen-minute reading. I know enough about her to make it a good one. Once she threw away the draft of a love-note on a napkin, in the wastebasket in the restroom at Random. I'd been watching her write it, crossing things out, one slow night.

Poor girl. She got her heart broken. I could make a difference. I could help if she gives me a chance.

I know what it's like.

#

Becky's standing outside the coffeeshop window. I *knew* it was her night to go to the liquor store. Haha, she never fails, as many times as she makes those lists about stopping her habits to cut down on expenses.

Oh, God, I hope she comes in on her way back home. She seems undecided. What's not to like? Come on, girl, do it to it!

No! She's turning around. She's walking toward her apartment. What could she be *thinking*?

I get up and run outside. "Hello, Miss!" I follow her. She must not realize I'm talking to her. I don't want to alarm her, so I just keep following silently after that. I realize I have some toilet paper stuck to my cheek. Damn cheap trash bin razors, always dull.

She doesn't go into her door, just turns and stands staring at the flyer in front of her apartment.

I try again. "Oh, hello. I see you're checking out my flyer. I'm just on a brief break, but I'll be back at Random any minute."

"I just have to make a quick purchase for my cat."

"Wait, your cat, she is brrrrrown, correct?" I rolled the r's. I love doing that, heh.

"Yes, she *is*!" That's it, Becky. Now we're getting somewhere.

"Goin' downta Meow-town, honey?" I sang the advertising ditty for Meow-town, which I knew she gave the kitty on special occasions, and she smiled. "That's the brand you buy for your cat. I can *see* it is."

"You're *right*, actually. Pretty good."

I could see little flecks of green in her eyes with the sun hitting them from that angle. Nice. "Your cat wants more catnip. She sits there all day while you're at work. She's getting way too fat. She needs some excitement in her life."

"Not bad, Trixie."

Heh, heh. Trixie. "See you inside at the table in the back corner in, say, fifteen minutes?"

"Sure, works for me. I've been thinking about finding a good psychic. I have questions I need to ask, and a lot more of them that just came up today. You're looking at a gal who needs answers, all right."

"Like what?"

"Like about my best friend. I'm worried about her!"

"I *know*." I give her a jokingly wise look I know she can't refuse. I've got to steer her away from recommending me to Nancy, though, because she's not on my route. I read her notes about her. But I have no idea what to tell her about that mystery lady.

I head off to the corner store, buy an airport bottle of vodka, put it in my bag, and head back to Random fast, before they clear away my table set-up.

Don't want to get in there and some turdboy is sitting in my seat and I have to sit on him. Heh, heh, like he wasn't there. Me, doing a reading, and the clients thinking I'm farting but it's a boy trying to talk under my butt. Haha, almost makes me want to do it. Ah, I hear your spirit guide now. Do you hear him too? Haha!

I pour a little vodka in my coffee, even though it curdles the creamer, and settle into my open-hearted smile, adjusting the sign for my services so it catches the light. The lighting in Random is some of the best I've seen, nice and dim, warm colors. I feel good. Really good. I think all this studying people's recycling is going to pay off! This is going to be solid work for me once the word gets out how I know all the neighbor's secrets. I'll be able to support Becky. I don't want to stop her from getting married and not have something fair to offer her. I can't leave that sweet thing on her own to deal with life. Life is tough on people like her!

I feel even better when she walks in the door. I can't wait to tell her about Stan. I can't wait to see the expression on her face when she finds out soon she won't have to bother herself about that jerk anymore. She'll be free and ready to love me. To say yes to a true actor, someone who can be all the different personalities she wants to enjoy. All new ones of course. I'd let her suggest her fantasies to me. I could be a cowboy one night and an Indian the next.

Obviously, since she saw me as Pete Zelite, and Connors and Trixie, they will have to die. I wouldn't kill them off for anyone but her. Poor sweethearts. I hate to sacrifice them, but it's for a good cause. Love. Pure love and protection. And at least whoever is listening to my thoughts out there got the chance to watch the show, eh? Yeah, I'm talking to you.

When she sits down with her latte, I cross my legs in a lady-like way. I adjust the wig, because I feel like some of my regular hairs might be sticking out a bit on my left side. I turn my right side toward her. I know it's awkward turning my eyes sideways to see her, but I've gotta do it.

This woman's boyfriend is not who he claims to be, I promise you. That's why you need to hear this. He's an invasive species. He's like a machine. He feels no emotions big enough to appreciate the depth of her personality. Word is on the street he doesn't even let recyclers get to know him. He's got to have a shredder in there and put it in the compost. Or maybe he burns his papers. What kind of cold motherfucker does that? Doesn't he even have a sense of *community*? If she marries him, her life will be miserable. It doesn't take a psychic to see that.

"What's your question? Wait, I'll answer it before you ask it. First, I should mention, your tinnitus has been a problem lately, hasn't it? You're even seeing medical treatment now."

"Oh. Yes, it has. I am. You're spooky good!"

"Listen, sweetheart. You don't need to keep using that caviar facial cream. You're beautiful. You're still young, but even when you get old, if someone loves you, he'll love your wrinkles."

"No! How do you know?"

"Just be sure to tell all your friends how accurate I am, OK? Miss Trixie could sure use the bixness."

"I will. Especially if you predict something, and it turns out to be true."

"This is what I see for you. You should *not* get married to your boyfriend, Stan." I adjust the balloons in my bra. Damn that squeaking.

Yes, yes, love to see that shocked look, sweetheart.

"Think about how Stan makes you feel. Do you feel honored and joyful? Does he simplify your life or make you argue with him in your head? I think we both know the answer to that one."

"You're *amazing*. I know. And you even know his name! But I need to settle down with someone so I can devote myself to building my career. And I do enjoy

his company. I have a thing for Italians, too,” she whispered, blushing. She probably could tell I have some Italian blood myself.

“If you have a child with this man, like you’ve been thinking about doing . . . ?”

“Wait, what would the child be like?”

“A monster.”

“Oh, I see.”

She’s crying. I don’t blame her one bit. A monster is not good. But crying now, yeah, that’s good. I offer her my napkin. I’ve hardly used it.

“And Stan works in the city somewhere, but I’m not sure what I’m seeing.” I look at her with all my sideways intensity. She doesn’t say anything. “You’re getting together with him very soon. What I have to tell you may shock you. I can see that he won’t live long at all after that, if you accept his proposal. Even if you *think* about accepting it. I give you my guarantee. It’s a cosmic thing. Sort of like karma. Just don’t go blabbing that to the police when he dies that I let you know you’re the guilty party, you hear?”

I know she’ll think about it. She won’t believe me, though that would save them both. “That’s all I’ve been doing. Planning to say yes. How would we have a child if he dies from me thinking about marrying him?”

She got me there. I spilled some coffee to change the subject, and she helped me mop it up with the napkin I’d lent her. I don’t know if she could smell the vodka or not. “The world is mysterious, my dear. Nothing is as linear as we think.”

She looks confused, but that’s OK. That’s when they’re most vulnerable to suggestion. I’ve heard people always try to make psychic readings make sense, if there is a compliment. “I can see that you are a special person. Maybe an angel. Do you ever suspect you are one?”

“Well, yes,” she says, shyly, looking down. “Someone did kinesiology on me, you know, asking yes and no questions of your subconscious by pushing down on my outstretched arm, like this.”

She demonstrated, and hit the waitress with the wonky hair right across the crotch by mistake. “Oh, excuse me!” We both giggled. “And the kinesiology test said I’m one. When your arm stays strong it’s a yes. But I don’t know. I feel silly talking about it.” Her cheeks rosy up. “I do feel my wings, almost can see them sometimes. I use them in my dreams. I know because I write them down in my diary.”

Anyone else said that and I’d laugh. “Is he spending the night tonight?”

“No, he’s leaving. He always does. Gosh, you know, I hope he doesn’t ever read my diary. I don’t know what he’d think about the angel thing.”

“It’s easy for me. You’re so beautiful. I can picture it now, no problem. I’d never leave you. He always leaves at ten o’clock. Doesn’t he?”

“Yes! He says he can’t sleep in the same bed with anyone. And I’ve never been to his house.”

I can identify with that. I never took women to my bridge.

“I never thought about it until today, but I don’t even know if maybe he’s living with someone or something.”

Hell, I don’t know. There’s not been much point in taking buses all the way to his place in the hills for nada. I don’t want to take a chance on getting anything wrong. I need her to tell everyone how good a job I did by predicting what’s going to happen to him. I know the rules of business. Generate buzz.

I want her to be happy. She just doesn’t know what’s good for her. She’ll come to me for advice every day, once she sees how real this shit can get. And, so will everyone else in the neighborhood.

I tell her, “You’re killing him right now by considering his proposal. But I know you can’t help it. It’s been in your mind so long. Don’t worry. I don’t blame you. I’ll never hold it against you. I’ll be the only one who knows your secret.”

She’s looking creeped out. I didn’t know she could raise one eyebrow that much higher than the other one! Hell, that’s almost a talent. I wonder if this was a good idea, making her feel guilty to keep from spilling the beans. Hmm. She’s got that, “Get me out of here” expression, and a, “please don’t die, Stan,” vibe mixed together. Poor girl, it won’t be long. She’s scared she’s going to be living her life alone. No worries, there, little Missy.

I tell her. “I can even help you get back in God’s graces.”

She looks at me horrified. Funny, I swear it made her hair kinda frizz out. Her mouth’s open so wide I can see she had fillings in the back.

She gives me thirty dollars, plus a nice tip in the upturned lid on the table. She leaves the coffee shop. I drink the rest of her latte.

Now, I just have to hire a cab to wait down the street from her apartment at ten, and follow him home. Easy peasy. I’ve always wanted to take a cab and now I can. I’m so happy I can hardly stand my luck. I don’t actually think it’s luck. I think it’s karma. Haha, yeah, right, karma.

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The Agents of the Nevermind series dramatizes the heroism of exposing social engineering.

Tantra Bensko lives in Berkeley, California, and edits manuscripts and teaches fiction writing online with UCLA Extension Writers Program, Writers.com, and Tantra Bensko's Online Writing Academy (OWA).

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What's this chapter all about?

The POV character, Dave, lives under a bridge, where he keeps several costumes. Here you see his scheme for making enough money to support his fantasy woman, Becky, whom he stalks, though she doesn't know it. He's been supporting himself by going through people's recycling bins and selling cans etc, but he also takes an interest in the papers, reading and memorizing everything about the neighborhood denizens. He's internally speaking throughout this book to Mr. Interrogator, who Dave believes listens to what he thinks. He and Becky share passionate hero-worship of the organization called the Rescuers in a country similar to Syria, which are key to the novel.