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## **Angela's Psychic Readings in Reverse**

I wasn't born knowing I was psychic, although I was often called "sensitive" as a child. It seemed I always knew when people needed a hug or a helping hand or a stern look. Some people, my aunt for one, found it unnerving. "A kid that small shouldn't be so intuitive, Missy," she used to tell my mother. "It's eerie."

In junior high, I began watching the news each night with my parents. As the stories unfolded, I'd try to predict where they were going. Did the dictator get overthrown or not? Did the jury decide in favor of or against the high-power executive? I'd blurt out my prediction at the start of the story, before any telling details had been revealed. I was always wrong, always, which amused my father. My mother would simply say, "Angela, just watch the news."

It wasn't until high school that I started to have "feelings" about things, and not until my senior year before the dreams started. In that year, three of my teachers were pregnant at the same time. For each of those women, I had a separate dream in which I saw their babies. Feeling bold, I told them my predictions for the sexes of their offspring. In all three cases I was dead wrong. That's when I started putting the pieces together and determined I was no ordinary psychic. My abilities worked in reverse.

To test my theory, I started making predictions for my friends. With some of them, I found a simple touch could generate a “feeling.” With others, I needed to dream my prediction.

“Am I going to pass my calculus test?” Lisa asked.

I grabbed her hand and closed my eyes. Back then, I thought I needed them closed. Probably because that’s the way the psychics did it on TV. “Yes,” I told her firmly.

“All *right!*” she shouted, dancing off toward class before I had a chance to remind her that with me, yes means no. I saw her later that day in the cafeteria. “Your psychic powers suck, Angela,” she said. “That test killed me.”

In time, my closest friends got used to the backwards nature of my predictions.

“Did you dream it last night?”

“Yes.”

Did David ask me out?”

“No.”

“No! That means yes, right?”

Right. David not only asked her out, he married her six months after high school.

By the time I had graduated, I’d grown good enough at making predictions that I could sometimes do it over the phone. Still, I chose a college only thirty-five miles from home in case anyone needed me. For the first two years, I didn’t declare a major. Only when my advisor sat me down, handed me her ballpoint pen and said “pick” did I finally decide. I chose psychology because people, naturally, fascinated me, and because I hoped there would be some scientific explanation for my unusual talent. I never did find that

explanation. To be honest, I didn't look too hard. In fact, I didn't do anything too hard in college. My mother said I was drifting. It felt more like swimming backwards to me. I *was* propelling myself, just not in the right direction. I could feel the world around me, like that water in the pool, but I couldn't isolate a single sensation. I could lie beneath a tree and try to focus on a few single leaves, but all I saw was the patch of sky between them. I took up yoga to try to focus my mind.

My father had less patience for my drifting, especially after I graduated and still had no "plan" for my life. Dad insisted I apply for graduate school, and, in the meantime, get a job, preferably something in my chosen field. Instead, I heard myself ask the cashier at the local grocery if they were hiring. By the end of the week, I had donned the blue polo shirt and white name tag of an Albertson's employee.

Six weeks into the job, an unusual woman approached my line. I sensed her before I saw her, sensed her watching me. She was older and very tall and had a hint of gold glitter in her died-black hair. She wore several long chains around her neck and a lace skirt over black leggings. I recognized her immediately.

"Paper or plastic?" I asked.

"I brought my own bags." She reached a hand toward me. "What lovely earrings," she said, fingering one oversized hoop. As her hand grazed my neck, I felt a tingle run up my spine.

"You're Allora," I said. "The psychic who does readings at the mall."

"I am. Have I done a reading for you?"

"No, I do my own," I said, "I'm a psychic myself, you know?" I was teasing, but she didn't laugh.

“You’re lucky to have the gift.”

“If it’s a gift I should return it. It’s a bit faulty.”

“Why, what’s the matter with it?”

I stretched out one of her cloth bags and snuggled a pint of orange juice inside.

“I’m what I call a reverse psychic. I can make predictions, but I’m always wrong. So that’s not really psychic, is it?”

She pulled a checkbook from her purse. “Only you know what you feel,” she said.

“Oh, I know what I feel. The trouble is people never want to hear it. The other day my friend’s sister asked me if she should move to Sacramento to take a job. She asked me to dream about it, so I did. I told her I dreamed she should take it. Oh, good, she says, that’s what I wanted to do. Wait a minute, I tell her. I’m a reverse psychic, remember. ‘Oh, there’s no such thing’, she says, and takes the job. Four months later the company downsizes. Last hired, first fired, right? Now she’s mad at me because she’s unemployed in Sacramento. So, I’d hardly call what I’ve got a gift.”

Allora ripped off her check and handed it to me. “People hear what they want to hear no matter how you present it,” she said. “How do you think I stay in business?”

I pushed her bags to the end of the counter and came around closer to Allora. “So, it’s true then? I saw a program on the Discovery Channel about psychics and how they make general comments and let people infer what they want. Then they feed off those responses and maybe their body language. That’s how you do it then?” As I said it, I realized I was calling her a fake. I wouldn’t have blamed her for turning on her boot heel and walking out.

Instead, she gave me a knowing smile, “You’re upset because if your friend had listened to you, she wouldn’t have taken the job. She would still be employed. She wouldn’t be mad at you. But your friend *wanted* to move to Sacramento. She felt called there. She just needed a push. You gave her that push. Predictions are not about being right or wrong, they’re about giving permission. It doesn’t matter if anyone believes in us. Do they believe in themselves?”

Allora reached past me and took her two bags. “Come and see me at the mall,” she said. “We’ll talk.” As I watched her walk away, I took a deep breath and concentrated on the question I wanted to ask myself. “Should I?” I asked. The answer that came back was a definite no.

So, a week later, I quit my job. I moved back in with my parents and turned my grandmother’s nearby detached garage into a psychic reading center. I called my business Angela’s Psychic Readings in Reverse. My mother helped me decorate. She never voiced her approval of my new path, but every now and then she’d reach out and squeeze my arm. My father, on the other hand, put a limit on my madness, vowing to cast me out if I hadn’t earned enough to support myself in six months. That seemed reasonable to me. After all, I still wasn’t all sure I was doing the right thing, but I had Allora now, and she was the first teacher I’d ever had who made me want to learn. Allora wants to move to Tucson. She’s tired of the cold. She says if I prove to be good at what I do, she’ll send her clients to me. Maybe by then I’ll be able to afford her space in the mall.

My first week in business, my grandmother asked if she could bring by some friends who were thinking of forming an investment group. Half of them watched the stock market anyway, Grandma explained. They might as well play it. It would put some

excitement back in their days. But their children were all against it. “No doubt afraid they’ll blow the inheritance,” Grandma laughed. When Grandma and her friends sat in a circle around me in the pink glow of my covered lamp, I lowered my chin and scrunched my eyes to study the paisley print of my table cloth, the way Allora does, and felt strongly they should not form their group.

And that’s what I told them.