

## Everything Comes in Threes

## Chapter 1

Maybe it was curiosity or the lure of doing something perhaps a little illegal or just plain desperation that had me answering the last ad on my list. Whatever it was, it changed my life and not necessarily for the better.

I read the ad again, “Phone psychic wanted, no experience needed.” With no job up in my field, I was down to asking, “May I super size that for you?” , or phone psychic.

I couldn’ t do this. Psychic abilities had torn my family apart. I had to find something else. I tightened my grip and the paper in my hand crumpled. I tried to weigh the pros and cons on a mental list. It still came down to I had to find something.

Every job I’ d interviewed for had resulted in one of three things, I was either over or under qualified or the person next to me had fifteen years experience. I figured they thought I’ d return to my old job at the airline as soon as I could. That wasn’ t an option now either.

Stepping out of my car I paused.

There *had* to be something else... anything else.

But with my savings account balance approaching zero at supersonic speed. There wasn' t.

I slammed the car door.

Across the street I swung open the glass door and stepped into what looked like an old karate school. The walls were painted black and one shade short of red, and the door leading out of the small reception area had kick marks on it. I could only hope this was from the former occupants and not a current disgruntled customer. Curtains draped the short wall next to the door softening the jump and kick affect of the rest of the room. Unfortunately the wall and the drapes clashed.

A sat trash laden desk sat angled in the corner where the black and off-red walls met. Behind it a skinny brunette looked bored as she watched me enter. "Are you here for a reading or the job?" she asked as she gnawed on a wad of gum.

"The job."

"Ever done any phone soliciting?" She deposited the gum on the overflowing trash can as she pushed pink streaked bangs out of her eyes. The gum rolled to the floor.

"No. I' ve--"

"Doesn' t matter. Any contact with the public?" She took a drink from a filthy coffee cup.

"I worked as a flight attendant for four years." That is definitely *dealing* with the public.

“Yeah, I guess that’ ll do.” She reached over and knocked three times on the black wall. No doubt some psychic code.

A few seconds later, a woman in her forties appeared at the door. Her long caftan swished as she moved making a faint whispering sound. A knot of black hair was twisted into a plump bun at the top of her head and speared with picks. Tiny bells dangled from their ends accenting her words with happy tinkling sounds. “I’ m Rose. You’ ve come about the job? Yes? Of course you have. This way.” She smiled and her almond eyes sparkled. One of her parents had to have been Chinese and the other black. Her skin was the warm color of coffee with cream and her eyes so black they appear not to have irises.

I followed her down a short hall into a windowless room filled with the scent of lemons. The fresh clean smell gave the impression of a window opened onto a meadow. I’ d expected incense. The walls were draped with flowing material that boasted every hue of the rainbow and accented with gold swirls. It flowed from ceiling to floor in a dizzying flurry of color and pattern. She indicated an ornately carved brocade chair.

Born in Idaho and raised by an Air Force father whose roots are solidly in the Midwest I’ d had plenty of contact with people from other realms, but Rose came from a place all her own.

In Idaho we have cows and horses; sugar beets, apples, and wineries; lots of rocks and trees; and a big tech company; but few psychics. There’ d been none in the Air Force.

I told myself, was a temporary survival measure. I sat in the elaborate chair. She took a seat on the other side of a wonderful old writing table. Carved ivy twined up mahogany legs to the edge of the writing surface.

“Now, tell me about yourself.” Her voice held a melodic quality. Her bright, soothing tone gave me the impression she could sell sand to camels and they’ d be grateful for the opportunity.

“There isn’ t much to tell.” Yes, I was testing her. I wanted to see if she had any psychic ability. I desperately needed this job to at least not be illegal.

Silence.

Great. I tightened my grip on the chair’ s arms.

Her expression changed as her eyes drifted closed. Her mouth lost it’ s ready smile and her expression became meditative. She spread her hands on the top of a leather writing pad. After several seconds she opened her eyes. For a second she looked as if she were going to pull out a crystal ball any second.

That super-sizing thing sounded better by the minute.

Then she said, “You are from this city, but you haven’ t lived here much.”

I remained quiet. I wasn’ t going to give her any hints. Wait. I needed any job. “What you definitely don’ t need is a record,” the logic voice in my brain yelled.

“You moved here from far away. No that is not right. You have a lot of motion in your past. I see many homes until very recently. Is this not true?”

I’ d gotten a demand letter yesterday and needed money. I couldn’ t blow this chance. Bringing home old hamburgers would feed the dog, but it wouldn’ t pay the bills. “Yes.”

I felt myself relax. I hadn’ t realized how tight I’ d been holding my shoulder muscles.

Her forehead wrinkled as she tilted her head. “You have a familiar aura. I feel as if I know you.”

“I see some of your family close—” She stopped. She studied my face for a long minute then her gaze dropped to my hands. She leaned back in her chair as if she’ d just been given all the answers to her questions and said, “Why do you want to work here?”

“I have a lot of bills, my savings are all but gone, and I have two hungry mouths to feed.” If she wanted to think the mouths belonged to children instead of a large dog and cranky cat who was I to stop her? After all, she was the psychic.

Rose put her hands on the desk and stood. “You have a nice voice. You’ re hired.”

“Just like that? Don’ t you want me to fill out an application or check my references?”

“First let us see if you have the knack.” She ushered me across the hall into a large room. Rows of cubicles hid the occupants from view. As we walked down the a row I saw women and men of all ages and races as they sat talking on head sets. Each compartment held a table, a phone, a computer a phone psychic.

Rose led me to a table away from the others. A phone set in the center of the table.

“You must read this over first.” As she gave me several sheets of paper, I noticed her hand. Every finger had at least one ring and all were of high quality. She had a good fifty thousand dollars on that hand alone.

“Business must be good,” I said, looking up at her.

“I keep body and soul together.” She let the sleeve of her caftan fall past her finger tips. Her body and soul took a lot more to keep together than mine did. “Have a look at these and I’ ll be back in a few minutes.”

I shuffled through the sheets in front of me. On them I found a list of statements and questions. Things like; I see darkness around you, there’ s been a misfortune close to you. I see movement, something is altering your future. Someone close to you is undergoing a change. All vague enough that they could easily apply to anyone at just about any time in their life.

As I flipped through the pages I couldn’ t help but wonder again what I thought I was doing. This wasn’ t exactly the place I’ d ever expected to work. No, my plans had a much more academic future. Somewhere in the lines of socio-cultural anthropology since that’ s what was printed on my degree. I closed my eyes and squeezed the bridge of my nose with my fingers.

It was all the credit card bills and demand letters from lawyers rolling in by the gross. The bad news was the bills weren’ t mine. I’ m not the one who’ d bought all the clothes and had the good times. Nope. These were from credit cards my *former* roommate opened in my name right before she and my *former* fiancé left town for a warmer climate.

The struggles with the credit card companies had gone from devastating to pure panic since I’ d been laid off.

As I assured myself this was a temporary situation the phone in front of me rang. Oh, what the hell? I thought as it rang again. I shrugged. I’ ve got to do something or I was going to be living out of my suitcase behind a Dumpster training my dog to beg from passersby. No, the little voice in my head said. There has to be something else, I can’ t possibly be this

desperate. I tried to think of something else I could do to make money. Walk dogs—

Another ring.

I looked around hoping someone would answer it. No one did. It rang again. Of course. I reached for the phone. This had to be a test. I flipped back to the section on answering the phone. They wouldn't put me at a working phone.

Lifting the receiver I said, "Institute of Awareness. This is Amory your guide to the spirit world." I cringed. "This hotline is for entertainment purposes only and your account will be charged one dollar per minute. May I have your credit card number?" I had no computer system and since this was only a test I figured it didn't matter.

"Is this the psychic hotline?" the timid voice asked.

"Yes."

After a long pause, "I've never done this before."

Good, we were on even ground. I said the first thing that popped into my head. "You're in trouble." I blinked. That certainly wasn't on the list of innocuous phrases.

"How did you know?" The caller's voice took on a breathless quality. "Of course you would, wouldn't you?" Another pause.

I could almost see her with one hand clutching to her throat and the other the phone as she looked around to see if anyone was eavesdropping.

Ignore the scene in your head. This is a test I reminded myself. But it didn't feel like one. I flipped through the pages Rose had handed me trying to disregard the undercurrent of panic threatening to sweep away my rational

thought. I'd settled on, "You must trust those around you," when I glanced at the blank wall across from me. Like a movie shown in a too bright light, I saw the caller standing in a dim hallway. I could almost smell the pot roast cooking in the oven. She looked around and I could see the fear in her eyes.

This was no test.

This was real.

"I don't know what to do. I need your help." Her voice now sounded as if she were about to be engulfed in a tide of fear. "I...I'm in trouble and I don't know how to get out of it. Please, tell me what to do."

That's when I heard myself say, "Gather all your strength and leave now." My words flowed unchecked. "Don't stop for anything. Hang up the phone, grab your dog and run. Get out of the house immediately." My fingers began to ache as I tightened my grip on the receiver.

"I-I can't do that. Where would I go?" Her voice trembled with Panic.

"You don't understand, it doesn't matter. You have to leave," my runaway mouth answered. If I'd had any hopes of getting this job they'd just evaporated. I shook my head, disgusted with my idiocy and at the same time sensing I had no other choice. Yet, who was I to tell this woman to leave?

"Your life depends on it." Okay, where did that come from? I almost said the words out loud.

I felt as if I was at the mercy of wind tossed waves. My head felt light and my stomach queasy from the motion. Meaning to say one thing and hearing myself say another. My thoughts dipped and spun.

"Hey," I heard a man's voice.

I could see him silhouetted at the end of the hall. I got to my feet. “Run.” I nearly dropped the phone.

He stepped toward her. “I told you—” The line went dead and the wall went back to... a wall.

My pulse throbbed in my temples and my neck ached. “It’s too late,” I said as I slumped into the chair and replaced the handset. I could only stare at the device in front of me. The hollow feeling in the pit of my stomach grew until the numbness spread throughout my body. With it crept a bone-chilling feeling that all was lost for this poor woman. I didn’t have the energy to raise my hands to rub my aching head.

“Are you all right?”

The voice sounded far away. My eyelids were too heavy to lift. I could only stare at the now blank wall across from me.

Again I heard, “Amory, are you all right?” This time I felt a hand on my shoulder. The touch spread warmth back into my frozen body.

I glanced down and multi-faceted gems twinkled at me. Rose had returned. She knelt beside me. I still didn’t have the strength to talk. I could only gaze into her liquid black eyes.

“That phone was not supposed to be hooked to the regular line.” She lifted the receiver and listened to the dial tone. “But, yet it is.” She replaced the handset. “Come.”

Back in her office I sat in the same purple chair I’d been in a few minutes before. Everything had changed.

The bright freshness of the room had dulled. The fresh lemon scent now made me queasy.

I watched in silence as Rose walked over to a mahogany wardrobe and opened the doors. To my total surprise inside was a tiny kitchen. She opened the small refrigerator and pulled out a bottle and ice. “Normally I would offer you tea.” She took what looked like a martini pitcher from the shelf and began pouring in ingredients. “This I feel is not a tea situation.” She filled a glass with ice and walked to her desk she held a sugar rimmed glass. She poured the lemon colored liquid over the ice. “You will like these. I believe that when one needs a drink they should have something that tastes good. These are wonderful.”

My hands trembled as I reached out. After wrapping both hands around the glass I sipped the cold liquid. It filled me with warmth as if someone had wrapped a warm blanket around my shoulders. I still didn’ t know if I’ d be able to speak. I took another sip.

“That’ s it. Drink it all I’ ve made enough for two. I’ d join you, but I’ m on a diet. You don’ t look like you need to diet.” Rose sat on the edge of her desk and picked up a cup of tea. She chatted about losing weight and diet and that the citrus in the drink should out weigh the calories. I liked her logic. I drank the last of the lemon drop and refused the second. It was too early in the day to be drinking, but this was an extraordinary situation.

When I’ d finished she put her hand under my chin, forcing me to look her in the eye. She tilted her head to one side and gazed at me. As she did, a kind of sadness removed the sparkle from her eyes. “You are psychic.” She let my chin drop. “I should have known.”

I shook my head and said, “No.” The word came out with no conviction. I cleared my throat and tried again. “No, no I’m not.” Okay actually I was sort of. I usually know when the phone will ring and who will be on the other end. I even know who is at the door, but nothing more. Nothing important. Nothing like this.

She smiled, gently took my glass and set it on the desk. “As you like.” She turned my hand over. After several seconds she said, “This business will be hard for you.”

“I don’t have a choice.” I knew better. I had several options I just couldn’t bring myself to opt for any of them. Why did the thought of options keep coming to me? Was my subconscious telling me to get out of here, run for the sake of my sanity? I looked up at Rose. I didn’t think so. It had to be that old feeling of guilt. My psychic abilities had been the reason my mother left us.

“There are always choices. But,” her smile broadened and her white teeth contrasted with her toffee colored skin. “I think this is where you are supposed to be at this time...with me.” Again she looked at my hand.

My stubby, unpainted nails were a direct contrast to her long well manicured mauve ones. I made a note to break out the hand lotion more often.

Her brow furrowed. “You are going to have a difficult time with your gift. This is not something you are comfortable dealing with, nor eager to have.” She let go of my hand. “I feel you are very centered. Your family is balanced. You’ve been under great stress lately. Possibly the reason for the emergence of your powers. You are not given to extremes.” She held up a

finger as if pointing to the ceiling. “Except, when it comes to matter of the heart.”

I had to agree with her there. Not only did I tend to have too soft a heart, it broke easily. My roommate and fiancé’ s betrayal came instantly to mind.

“Tell me what the caller said.” Rose settled into listening mode.

“Nothing like this has ever happen to me.” As I tried to reform the woman’ s exact words in my mind the sense of dread threaded its fingers around my mind. “I knew instantly she was in danger. I...” The next part sounded less than sane. “I looked at the wall across from the phone table. I could see the woman standing in a hall with her hand cupped over the phone’ s mouthpiece. It was dark, not night, but as if the lights weren’ t on. Then in the background, I heard a man’ s voice. I even saw him at the end of the hall. I knew she was in terrible danger.” I stopped and looked straight into Rose’ s eyes. “It all seemed larger than life. Not big, but significant somehow. This is way past knowing who is on the phone or at the door.”

The kind smile she gave me was edged with pity. “You are more psychic than I thought, Dear Girl.” She reached over and picked up a tea pot from the warmer sitting on the edge of her desk. After refilling her cup she went on.

“Life will only become more...” she paused as if searching for words that wouldn’ t scare me to death.

Death.

The word seared my mind. I knew the woman’ s life was in danger.

“What is it?”

“Nothing. Just nerves.” I couldn’ t be right about the woman. I shuddered.

“The things you will see will be at least frightening and more often terrifying because fear is the strongest emotion.” She sipped her tea.

I looked at her. “I can’ t do this. I can’ t work here.”

“But of course you can. This is where you should be and where you need to be. But I think you should not be on the phones. Come we will find a position for you that is more to your liking.”