

The background of the entire cover is a composite image. At the top, the word 'FIRE' is rendered in large, bold, orange and yellow flames. Below it, 'IN THE MIND' is written in a light blue, glowing, sans-serif font. A red horizontal band with the text 'FREE PREVIEW' in white, bold, sans-serif font separates the title from the lower half. The lower half shows a person in silhouette walking away on a wooden bridge. The bridge is surrounded by vibrant, swirling light trails in shades of blue, purple, and red, creating a sense of motion and energy. The overall aesthetic is futuristic and spiritual.

# FIRE IN THE MIND

**FREE PREVIEW**

ARJAY LEWIS

**FIRE  
IN THE  
MIND**

ARJAY LEWIS

***Fire In The Mind: Doctor Wise Book 1***

Copyright ©2017 Arjay Lewis

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Cover Design: Marianne Nowicki, PremadeEbookCoverShop.com  
Interior Layout & Design: Fusion Creative Works, fusioncw.com

ISBN-13: 978-1545504499

ISBN-10: 1545504490

Published by:

Arjay Entertainment, Inc.  
474 South Main Street  
Phillipsburg NJ 08865

*“The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled.”*

— **Plutarch**

*“I dream in fire but work in clay.”*

— **Arthur Machen**



DEDICATION:  
TO MY WIFE, DEBRA,  
WITH WHOM ALL THINGS  
ARE POSSIBLE.



## PROLOGUE

In the last ten minutes of his life, Philip Mishan stumbled down the street as he tried to run on legs that for too long had carried his bulk at nothing more than a trudging walk. Over fifty and very overweight, he panted as he gave the appearance of an out-of-shape executive who decided to jog to work in his best suit.

He pushed his way along the fashionable shops of Upper Mountainview, New Jersey, and shoved open a glass door painted with PHILIP MISHAN, FINE JEWELRY. It almost shattered from the force of his thrust.

Behind the counter, an attractive young woman, startled by noise, blurted out, "Mister Mishan! Are you all right?"

"Got to... call the police," he puffed as he loosened his tie, his voice strained. "That's what I have to do... tell them... the whole... damn story."

"You're flushed, Mr. Mishan," the woman said.

He looked at the girl, Wendy. At one time, he'd thought she was merely a frivolous young woman. But his partner informed him that

he had no choice but to employ her. Soon after her arrival, he had learned to see the iron hidden under the velvet.

All in all, it wasn't too bad. She was nice to look at, like his jewelry. His last lover, Tomas, had been nice to look at as well. Pretty things were the focus of his life.

But the handsome young man had expensive tastes, and Phillip had pushed his partner to make more money. A lot more money. When his partner didn't respond fast enough, Phillip had made threats.

That had been his undoing.

"You're sweating, Mr. Mishan," Wendy said, her eyes growing wide with fear.

"It's hot in here," he said. "A phone...I have to call..."

Wendy reached behind the counter, extracted a phone and held it out to him.

He stumbled toward it. He felt dizzy and decided it was from running.

"Are you having a heart attack?" Wendy asked, staring at his face as it became more and more red.

"No, no," he said as he yanked his jacket off, a beautiful Yves St. Laurent jacket in pale blue wool he'd bought years ago. "Damn it's hot," he said as he reached for the receiver in the girl's hand.

"Mister Mishan, your jacket!"

He looked at the cloth and saw wisps of smoke rising from it. He stared at it, fought to rationalize what was happening.

With a *WHOOSH*, the coat burst into flames.

Mishan dropped it with a cry and stepped back aghast.

"Oh my God!" shouted Wendy. "Stomp it out!"

“The bastard!” Mishan yelled as he watched the coat burn. All at once he knew what the only explanation could be.

He glanced about the store and realized how many flammable liquids were stored there. That’s when it occurred to Mishan that his partner had planned this.

He knew the bastard had to be there. Had to see what he wrought. He turned to Wendy. “Oh God! I’ve got to get out of here. I’ve got to get under a shower or into a tub...”

Wendy looked at the burning coat and then at him as if he’d gone mad. “You can’t just let that—”

“Get a fire extinguisher!” Mishan screamed. Then, all at once, he felt the presence. He looked out the plate glass window until his eyes found the one man he feared.

There he stood across the street dressed all in black, with that annoying smirk on his face.

“An extinguisher!” Philip Mishan repeated, but it was nothing more than a hollow whine. They were the last coherent words he would ever say.

With another loud *WHOOSH*, his body was engulfed in flames. His clothes, skin, and hair were on fire. The air was filled with the stench of charred flesh. He screamed pathetically as Wendy backed away, unable to hear him over her own shrieks of terror.

She turned and ran to the back exit of the store, slamming through the heavy metal door, just as the entire store became engulfed in flames.

On the street, a crowd formed on the sidewalk opposite the store, as close as the billowing smoke and flames would allow. In the distance, fire sirens sounded just as the flames burst the plate glass

window and began to lick at the brick facade. The inferno stretched its orange tongues up the rest of the three-story building.

The man in black turned and wandered through the crowd, the smile still on his face. As the sirens of fire trucks approached, he strolled away in the opposite direction.

# ONE

The wheels rattled and the train shook as it traversed the expansive bridge over the Delaware River. It click-clacked toward the end of three thousand miles as I crossed into New Jersey.

*My home state*, I thought.

*Home.*

Never mind that it had been years since I'd been here, or even on this coast.

I shifted my sore rear end in the uncomfortable seat and tried to squirm into a better position to no avail. My paralyzed right leg stuck out in its unbending glory, which forced me into one uncomfortable position.

Taking the train was the slowest and most difficult way to travel. A bus would have been more direct, but for a trip that spanned days, I thought a train with a sleeping berth the better choice.

My transportation had ricocheted me around the country: Los Angeles to Chicago—change trains; Chicago to Washington DC—change trains; and now the final trip north to New Jersey. If I had

taken a plane, I might not have been able to find the space for my leg. And I definitely couldn't have brought my cane.

It's not much to look at, a wooden stick with the head of a cobra at the top. It fits in my hand well and gives me the balance I occasionally need with my leg.

Of course, airport security might have had a problem with the twenty-four-inch sword hidden within it.

Like almost everything I currently possessed, it was a present from my friend, mentor, and the man who probably saved my life, Doctor Fritz Kohl. I needed a cane anyway, and he decided this one might prove useful in an emergency.

Or to carve an extremely large steak.

I looked out the window at the rolling hills, lush and green with the spring. It was a beautiful time to travel; it was neither too hot nor too cold, and the country burst with new life, new growth.

My dissertation had recently been accepted at the Southern California University of Health Sciences. However, my only real interest for the last four years had been my work with Doctor Kohl as I devoured his teachings in parapsychology.

Parapsychology—the study of phenomena that investigates mental abilities, extrasensory perception, and the like.

Seven years ago, I would have laughed at the idea of studying such pseudoscience or anything that spoke of the world of the invisible.

Back then, I had just graduated summa cum laude from Johns Hopkins University Medical School, I was engaged to a beautiful woman, and both of us were about to start our residencies at the Rutgers Medical Center.

*Cathy...*

Her image flashed in my mind. Her short, blonde hair and lanky body with those surprising breasts.

*Cathy hanging upside-down in the twisted wreckage...*

I winced at that memory and then focused on my breath. I was on my own, without Doctor Kohl, and I needed to use the techniques he'd taught me to control my mind.

I returned home a doctor—the thing my parents always wanted. Not the kind my famed neurosurgeon father would prefer, but a doctor nonetheless.

I'd had my PhD for exactly one month.

I'd been sober for twelve.

Amazing that I had been able to study and even start the work on my dissertation while each evening was spent in a stupor.

I watched the hills roll by, each mile was more and more familiar. I could see why I was drawn to face the past. At the end of the line would be my oldest friend, Jon Baines.

Then, all at once, there was a *buzz*.

*Something's wrong...*

It was so strong, I didn't have to stop and analyze it at all. I sat up with my senses awake.

A buzz is my personal code for a quick extrasensory insight, a flash of awareness, what might be termed precognition. Sometimes, it comes as a picture, occasionally as a sound or voice. This time, it was the feeling I needed to be someplace.

With my cane, I pushed myself from my seat as if in a dream.

I don't always need the cane as I am not yet thirty and in good shape. I am strong enough from the exercises I was taught in physical therapy while recovering from the accident. But the cane does help me get up and down from a seat and, of course, on stairs.

I've cultivated the professorial look, with my tweed jacket, short trimmed beard, and my long hair tied back in a ponytail. I like to think I have a hipster meets Freud look.

I stepped out of my sleeper berth, basically a small room with a fold-down bed, seats, and a bathroom, and I went into the hall, where I was led to turn toward the dining car.

*Something's wrong...*

Whatever attracted my extra senses pulled me in that direction.

I have learned to trust this feeling. Not like when I first became aware of what I laughingly call my gifts, as Doctor Kohl always referred to my abilities. I'd always considered the unwanted impressions that bombard my mind as my curse.

After all, the event that opened them got Cathy killed.

*Cathy hanging upside down in the wreckage...*

That thought stopped me for a moment, and there was a pain in my chest. I wanted to break down, as I had so many times over the years.

Even worse, I wanted a drink. Just one little goddamn drink, that would make me forget my sore rear end, help my muscles relax, and shut off the endless flow of unwanted input.

"My name is Leonard, and I am an alcoholic," I recalled from my last Alcoholics Anonymous meeting before I started the journey.

I know the real reason I didn't take the plane. That cart with all those little bottles that would pass so close to me. So immediate, so available.

No, no, I just had a momentary lapse. They told me in AA it would be like this.

I cleared my mind and focused on the buzz to lead me, to point the way. I wanted to follow it, let it run me. Nice and simple, don't

think, just allow myself to be pulled. I'd know what it was all about when I got there. I just had to remain in the present moment.

I stepped into the dining car, and everything looked perfectly normal. I paused when I couldn't see anything unusual or wrong. Then I started to walk, slowly, and tried to see if anything caught my eye.

*Something about to happen...*

At first, I noticed nothing, and I wondered if it was a false alarm. But no, that was the rational part of my brain, and I have spent years learning to look past it. I trust these impressions, even if I don't know their cause.

As I looked around the room, I saw a couple sitting at a table having their meal. Down at the woman's feet, right in the aisle, sat her purse. The bag appeared to glow with an inner light that pulled my eye.

*Watch...*

Everything moved in slow motion; the world around me and even my own motions seemed ponderous. My heartbeat boomed like a drum in my ears. I was in the midst of an event and compelled to be part of it.

The purse was not in any way extraordinary, a large black leather bag open on the floor, but I saw the wallet that lay on top, in plain view.

I slogged my way toward the purse as if I was swimming through mud.

There was a man at the next table whose napkin fluttered to the floor like a dying bird. It landed scant inches from the open purse.

Slowly, his hand went down to grab the napkin, and in one excruciatingly long movement, grasped the cloth and slipped into

the purse, expertly extracting the wallet using the napkin as cover for the theft.

I was in exactly the right position. I merely shifted my weight and in one movement, smacked his fingers with the rubber tip of my cane.

The wallet fell languidly back into the purse, and all at once, the world sped up.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” the woman who owned the purse said to me as she reached to pick up her bag. “Is my purse in your way?”

“Thank you,” I said, not needing to share with her what happened. I heard no sound from the next table, but as I passed, I saw the man biting his lip and rubbing his sore hand. He was a fellow of average size, thin, and good-looking in a Bohemian way.

Our eyes made momentary contact.

*He knows*, flashed through his mind. In that meeting of our eyes, I got a glimpse, a gentle touch, of his thoughts. He was nervous, surprised that he’d been stopped. He was also angry that such a simple heist was foiled by my intervention.

I broke eye contact and paused as if unsure of my destination for a moment, then I turned and headed back in the direction of my cabin. The raven-haired would-be thief gave me a sidelong glance as I went.

I rocked back and forth to maintain my balance in the moving hallway. Once I got into the berth, I pulled the bed down from its folded position and lay down.

*Is that all I was called to do?* I thought, annoyed. *Stop a two-bit thief from pilfering some lady’s credit cards?*

I never asked for any of this. I never wanted it. What kind of huge cosmic joke gave me these insights and appointed me some

ersatz champion? I didn't want the job. These things came, and I wish they wouldn't.

Doctor Kohl had an expression for the entire phenomena of psychic ability. He referred to it as a "fire in the mind."

I burn with that fire, and I was damn tired of the heat.



## TWO

At six o'clock, the train made one of its last stops before New York City, in the town of Mountainview, New Jersey.

You would think the railroad authorities wouldn't bother with such a sleepy burg since the population isn't huge.

The stop was necessitated by the advent of the prestigious Garden State University years ago. Due to its proximity, students come in from around the country and use trains as one of the major modes of transport.

The sky was overcast, and it appeared that the sun had set early. In the dark and gray, I stepped slowly down the metal steps from the train and gingerly set myself on the ground. I had a thin raincoat on and my backpack. I'd traveled with Doctor Kohl to so many places—and for many of them I needed to bring essentials: sleeping bag, towels, even food. That's because haunted houses and out-of-the-way locales were part of being an active parapsychological investigator.

"You can't do this vork in a lab," I remember Fritz told me with his thick German accent. "That's vat the mistake vas in the sixties

ven they began to study ESP. They put people in a sterile environment and expected results. But I haff found that is is only out in the world that you can achieve actual results.”

It had begun to rain. The heavy droplets fell in a steady rhythm that smacked my head and made a chill run down my spine. I wanted a drink even more. A nice cognac to warm my fingers and toes and make me forget about dead fiancées, thieves in dining cars, and old teachers.

“Len!” I heard a boisterous voice bellow.

The tall man, more leggy than my six feet four inches, galumphed up to me with all the excitement of large, friendly dog. He pulled me into a bear hug with such abandon, I was afraid I’d fall over, backpack and all, and lie helpless on the ground with my arms and legs waving uselessly like a rather large beetle.

“Jon?” I gasped, as I tried to hold onto what little breath I had.

“Who else?” he boomed in my ear. “Come on, the car is right over here.”

He brought me along to a space where one of those large SUV’s stood waiting like a trained elephant one would ride in India. He released me from his jovial clutches long enough to open the tailgate.

I took off my backpack and put the mass of cloth and metal into the open cargo space. I then moved to the passenger door and attempted to sit. The bucket seat was up close to the dashboard, but in a few moments, I found the controls and pushed it all the way back. Then I got my stiff right leg in, as well as the rest of me, and closed the door.

“Sorry, I didn’t put that back,” Jon Baines said from the driver’s seat as he started the car. “Jenny rides with it all the way up.”

“Jenny?” I asked.

“Yeah. I told you I got married, right?”

“Uh...no,” I said. To be honest, he hadn’t told me much at all. Two weeks ago, I had received a call from my old friend as I sat in my sparse California teaching assistant’s dorm room.

“Hello?” I’d said.

“Is this the esteemed Doctor Leonard Wise?” the familiar voice said.

This is Len,” I said to the voice, puzzled.

“Well, Mr. Big Shot *Doctor*, you might like to hear from an associate dean from a university who wants you to give a lecture.”

That’s how it started. I learned my old college chum was that associate dean, and he wanted me to come to my old alma mater in New Jersey to give a talk about parapsychology—for money, no less.

But married?

I looked over at my oldest friend in the light from the dashboard. His hair was short, and his hairline was further back than it was seven years ago at Cathy’s funeral.

He was so young, mid-twenties, then but now—at least thirty-two and married—I guess it made sense.

I’d be married if Cathy were alive. That’s what was supposed to happen.

“When did all this...?” I asked, trailing off.

Jon laughed his big laugh and gave me a carefree grin. “It took a while, actually. I met this girl about six years ago, and dated her for five before she finally said yes.”

“Why did it take so long?”

“She planned to not get married. She likes to follow a plan. But after years of begging, I wore her down. You’ll like her, Len—I mean, *Doctor*.”

“Enough with the Doctor crap, Jon. It’s no big deal.”

“No big deal? You graduate first in your class in medical school—”

“That was years ago—”

“Then you go off to California to study psychiatry—”

“Neither was my path,” I interrupted as I attempted to sound sage.

“Yeah, right. Then you go off to study with Kohl—one of the biggest names in the field—and finally get your PhD. It took you long enough. Len, you ought to be proud.”

“I am, Jon,” I said. “Just not stupid enough to think that *any* degree means anything in the real world. Your lecture was the first job offer I’ve had. There isn’t much call for doctors of parapsychology.”

“Hell, Len, for twenty bucks, I can get you a certificate that makes you a reverend who can perform weddings.”

“It might come to that,” I grumbled as I watched the wet pavement and how our headlights reflected on the shiny surface. Just like the night Cathy died. Roads are treacherous in the rain, especially the busy, hilly roads of my native state.

“Earth to Leonard,” Jon said, and I realized he’d been speaking.

“I’m sorry,” I said and tried to focus. “Long trip. What were you saying?”

“I was saying that there may be more opportunities than you think. You’ve received a lot of press over the last year.”

I made a sound that was a cross between a grunt and a groan. “Yeah, mostly in the *National Enquirer*: Super Psychic Hunts Down Treasure in Haunted Mansion.”

“Come on, Len. It was the Associated Press, and it *was* impressive. You actually found physical evidence that only the person who died in that house could know.”

“I got lucky. Doctor Kohl deserves the credit, he trained me.”

“But you’re the one who found the stuff. And that house was famous—so many other people tried...”

*And I didn’t finish the job.* The words jumped into my head as I watched us move along. The windshield wipers smacked to a steady beat. “So where am I staying?” I asked. “Some motel on Route Three?”

“Staying?” Jon clucked, taken aback. “Len, you’re staying with us—Jenny and me. Come on, I didn’t bring you here to stick you in some motel. We have a lot of catching up to do.”

I smiled. “I’m sorry. It’s just I haven’t been here since...the funeral.”

“I know, Len,” he said. “That’s why I think some home cooking and friends would be good for you.”

“You didn’t invite me out here just to offer me a handout, did you, Jon?”

“Len, you are giving a lecture, and you’re a hell of a lot cheaper than most lecturers.”

With his eyes on the road, Jon released his right hand, reached into the back seat, and brought up a single-page flyer. Emblazoned across a bad photo of me were the words:

## PARAPSYCHOLOGY & EVIDENCE GATHERING

Is energy reading the new forensic science?

LECTURE

by Leonard Wise PhD

The flyer was designed with garish colors and it made me wonder if I would be giving a lecture or be part of a circus. Perhaps if I did magic like my brother, the Las Vegas star, it might attract a larger audience.

“I think I have pulled off a coup. I got you before you became so busy that I couldn’t afford you. After all, I’ve got a budget to keep balanced.”

“I thought associate dean was more of a figurehead position.”

“No, Len. I’m the one who does the work. But Dean Walters can shake hands with the best of them—and charisma—he gets people to donate money like it was *their* idea. That’s really what a dean does. I’m learning a lot from Walters.”

“Good attitude,” I said as he pulled the car into a driveway.

We were on one of Mountainview’s slumbering streets, with houses lined up on similar plots of land. Each had a two-car garage and enough variation to not look like a “created” neighborhood, though I was sure it was.

The garage door opened with the push of a remote control, and we drove inside. The door rumbled down behind us as we got out of the car.

Jon ran back to the tailgate and with a grunt, extracted my backpack.

“What the hell you got in here, Len? Rocks?”

“Pretty much everything I own, Jon. I have a low-possession lifestyle.”

He held up his two open fingers in a peace sign. “Groovy, man.”

“Part of my training,” I shrugged.

We walked to a nearby door that he went in first, bellowing, “He’s here!”

I felt like this was an entrance into a party where hidden guests would leap out and yell, “Surprise!”

The garage door led us past a laundry room, and he steered me to a bedroom next to it. It was simple but tastefully decorated, with yellow drapes and bedspread. He dropped my heavy bag on the small bed, which it almost completely covered.

“This OK?” he asked.

I nodded. “Fine, fine.”

“Come on,” he said and patted my shoulder. “I’ll fix you a drink.”

“Got any herbal tea?” I asked, my mouth full of cotton.

“Maybe,” he said with a frown as we walked into the kitchen.

“Well, there you are!” a female voice said.

I looked up and stopped. There stood a woman I knew—or was it her? For a moment, I thought my tired mind had begun to hallucinate. Before us was Cathy.

*My* Cathy stood in front of us.

Jon didn’t even notice that I had stopped and was gawking in his hallway. He pushed past me to give this woman a kiss.

She wasn’t a ghost or the creation of my brain. This woman was real, flesh and blood.

They both turned to look at me.

“Len, this is Jenn...but most people call her Jenny,” he said with pride, then he hesitated for a moment.

“Are you all right?” Jenny/Cathy asked.

I shut my open mouth so fast and hard, I heard my teeth clunk together. “Yes!” I said too brightly. “I’m sorry, I’m fine.” I held out my hand. “I’m Leonard, Leonard Wise.”

“*Doctor* Leonard Wise,” Jon added.

I shook Jenny's hand and tried hard to focus on her face, to find anything that didn't match my memory of Cathy. Her hair was a slightly different shade, perhaps her bosom a tad larger—I could see now that she was several inches shorter. But there was no doubt. She was the physical embodiment of my Cathy, from the color of her eyes to the way she held her head.

Jenny was aware I was staring.

"Is something wrong?" she asked, her tone playful. "Did I grow a second head?"

"I'm sorry," I said and glanced away. "Jon didn't mention the resemblance."

"Resemblance?" Jon frowned. "What are you talking about, Len?"

"You're kidding," I said. "You don't see it?"

"What?"

I met his eyes, and for the briefest moment, touched his mind. He didn't see it, not at all. Christ, the three of us had been great friends back in the day.

I remembered the night of the party—the last night I could bend my knee. Jon came up to me, drunk as could be. He hugged me and told me how lucky I was, how much he would've liked to find a woman just like Cathy.

Apparently, he did.

"He must be talking about my resemblance to several great starlets," Jenny said to fill the silence with good humor. "After all, I'm a dead ringer for a *young* Meryl Streep."

"If you were taller, thinner, and your hair a different color," Jon said to play along.

"Or Kathleen Turner?"

"Not even close!" Jon roared.

“Sandra Bullock?” Jenny went on.

“She’s too skinny, I like you the way you are,” Jon said and gave her a peck on the top of her head.

“Yes,” I said, forcing a smile. “That must be it. I mistook you for all three of them.”

Jenny nodded with a grin. “I think we’ll get along fine, Len.”

“How about that drink?” Jon suggested, steering us to the nearby kitchen where he opened a cabinet.

“I was more interested in tea,” I said.

“I have chamomile,” Jenny offered, opening a cabinet lower to the floor. She must have been a foot shorter than Jon. She pulled out an almost empty box and lit a fire under a steel teapot on the stove.

I fought my desire to watch her move, to find the differences I desperately sought.

I looked over to Jon, who was opening a brand-new bottle of my favorite cognac. The bouquet of the amber liquid teased my nose even from several feet away as he poured it into a brandy snifter.

I closed my eyes for a second or two and tried to create some distance. I needed to put myself into the role of the observer, the way Doctor Kohl taught me, where I perceived everything, but held no attachment. It was just pictures in my mind. Inhale and exhale.

I opened my eyes to find both Jon and Jenny staring at me.

“Sorry,” I said, embarrassed. “I didn’t get a lot of sleep on the train.”

They both nodded and became the perfect hosts. They asked me about the trip, and we stood around the darkened kitchen drinking our tea and cognac. I kept my focus on Jon, and each time I turned to Jenny, I was again struck by the uncanny likeness to my dead fiancée. I did pretty well, though. I didn’t stare or lose my train of thought again.

“So, you’re giving the lecture on Tuesday, Len,” Jon was saying. “Is that enough time?”

“It’s already written,” I assured him. “I’ll run over my notes one or two more times. This is Sunday, so yes, Tuesday works.”

Two days away. Two days of living with my oldest friend and a clone of my long-lost love. I considered that I could lock myself in the guest room and never come out.

“That’s great!” Jon said. “And I love the title, Parapsychology and Evidence Gathering. It was an immediate sellout.”

“Really?” I said. “I was hoping there *might* be some interest—”

“Interest? There are still people calling,” Jon said. “I’m telling you, Len, this a great time for what you do. I mean, with the interest in higher consciousness and all.”

“And you’re there to take it to the bank,” I said with a laugh.

Jon pretended to be wounded. “I try to give a diverse learning experience. If the university can get some favorable press and a few sold-out lectures, even better.”

“Jon, I think Len is tired,” Jenny said, and I became aware that she was staring at me for a change.

“Of course, of course,” Jon said. “You know how I get, Len. Go to bed. Jenn will show you around tomorrow. There have been a lot of changes to this town in seven years.”

“That would be, uh...nice,” I said as I avoided her eyes.

We all said our good-nights, and I went to the bedroom, pulled my huge bag off the bed, and put it in the closet. There was a small bathroom with a shower, and I unpacked my toiletries, showered the smell of travel off me, and got into bed naked.

My mind wanted to keep racing, but I focused on my breath, putting myself into a light meditative state until I dropped off.

## THREE

I cleared my throat. “So, I'll conclude with what I see as the next step for forensic science. It will include not only the use of more sophisticated DNA technologies but the use of trained investigators who study the energy of a scene, working hand in hand with the police and scientists to pursue the truth. Which is, of course, the true desire of *any* science. I thank you.”

The capacity crowd rose to their feet and applauded as a single creature while I walked off the stage. The lecture had originally been scheduled for one of the smaller halls, but due to demand, had been moved to the larger auditorium in the Shadowvale Communications Center. The name came from the original estate the college was founded upon, although no buildings still existed from that 1880s original construction.

Jon was backstage in the wings and gave me two thumbs up, then pushed me back out again to bow and thank the crowd.

I smiled at the applauding group. It went better than it had any right to. When I'd started, I experienced a moment of stage fright, which was magnified by a man in the first row. Too old to be a

student, he sat with crossed arms and legs, wearing a rumpled suit and a scowl that dared me to impress him. Fortunately, I was very prepared, and my experience as a teaching assistant for Doctor Kohl kicked in. I got off of the outcome, and focused on my message.

Monday and Tuesday had passed quickly, and I had adjusted to life at the Baines's house. There was a moment of embarrassment Monday when Jenny came in to shake me awake at eleven, and I almost leaped out of the bed in my altogether. She giggled at my attempts to cover my nakedness, just as I remembered Cathy would giggle at moments of my discomfort.

I dressed and took a half-hour for my morning meditation before I came out and headed for the kitchen, where fresh coffee awaited.

"How did you sleep?" Jenny asked.

"Like the dead...what time is it?"

"Almost noon. Guess you needed to catch up. I took the day off from work to show you around."

"I feel guilty about sleeping so late."

"It gave me a chance to clean the house."

She told me about her job. She worked at Associated Insurance, a major indemnity firm, where she was the head claims adjuster. She and Jon had met while they were both going after their MBAs when Jon found out he had no talent for medicine. He'd spent their senior year proposing.

"Jon mentioned you kept saying no. How come?" I asked.

She sighed heavily. "Jonathan Baines is like a force of nature. I grew up in Salt Lake City, Utah..."

"Mormon?" I asked.

"With bells on. I was one of the middle children in a family of ten."

“Ten! Geez.”

“I was in a protected environment, where each girl was supposed to grow up, have a bevy of children, and stand by her man. I *never* wanted that. And I didn’t want my dear Jonathan, who is like a big puppy—”

“Always has been.”

“I didn’t want him to have to face my family and all those questions about his spiritual life,” Jenny said as she stared at her coffee cup held tightly in her hand. “I didn’t even drink coffee until I went to college. And then Jon, well, let’s just say I put off intimacy for over a year.”

“He’s a patient man.”

She sighed. “He romanced me relentlessly—and oh so sweetly—until I assented. Same thing with proposing. I said no, and he’d go off on a sulk. But he always came back with nothing but love in his heart. Eventually, I realized he wasn’t going to chain me to the kitchen or turn me into a baby machine, so I finally said yes.”

“What about your parents?”

“We had a small wedding and wrote them afterward. They haven’t tried to rescue me, or even visit me, so I figured they just decided I was the odd child.” She glanced at her watch. “If you’re ready, I have a tour planned.”

Jenny took me out and around Mountainview, showing me malls and stores that had sprung up over the years of my absence. She finally took us to a late lunch with Jon at the university cafeteria. I was pleased to see that the ensuing years had left it untouched since I studied pre-medical sciences ten years earlier.

It was a delightful afternoon, and Jenny was the perfect hostess. I forced myself not to stare at her and just tried to enjoy her for

herself. She possessed a ready wit and a ringing laugh, and I did my best to be amusing, just to hear that laugh.

That night, we all went out to dinner to an Italian restaurant on the edge of town. It was a newly renovated place with a lot of woodwork, open space, decorative flowers, and drapes. The food was simple and tasty. Jon bought wine, but I stuck to the water. After dinner, we strolled the streets; the spring air was mild, so our jackets kept us warm enough.

Back at home, they had cognac, and I had the herb tea.

“Quite a dinner,” I said, as Jenny puttered about, and Jon and I sat at the kitchen table.

“Yeah, Fratelli’s is an out-of-the-way place, but the food is good,” Jon said. “Getting acclimated?”

“Jenny is a good guide,” I said. “I’m starting to recognize things.”

Jenny pulled out her phone and told me and Jon to say cheese as she clicked off a photo. Then she sat down, and her eyes went from Jon’s face to mine.

“What is it?” I asked. “Now is there something hanging from *my* nose?”

She giggled. “No, it’s just that you are younger than Jon, but Lenny you seem much older.”

I looked at my teacup. “Maybe I’ve seen more of life than I should.”

“It’s probably just your beard,” Jon said.

Tuesday morning, I shaved it off.

It was something to see my bare face again. I had the beard the entire time I lived in California, and it sometimes had become sloppy and long, but I usually kept it close-cropped and well trimmed.

Jenny was right. Removed, it took years from my appearance.

Tuesday, I wandered on my own as Jenny had to go back to work. It was good for me to be alone. I needed to center myself in the new surroundings—and practice my speech.

So Tuesday night, with the lecture over and done, I came off-stage for the last time ready to relax for the rest of my visit.

“Len, that was great!” Jon said. “You received the best response of anything we’ve done this entire *year*.”

Jenny came up alongside her husband and held my face to give me a quick peck. I rose, blushing.

“That was great, Lenny!” she said, giddy and breathless.

The light in her eyes unsettled me.

“Come on, Len,” Jon said, “we have to meet and greet.”

“What?” I said, unsure of what he meant.

“All the lecturers do it. We have coffee and cake in the next room, and you try to act like an intellectual.”

“I don’t do impressions,” I said as they dragged me off.

We walked down the corridor and into a small anteroom set up with folding tables laden with food and urns of coffee. Many of the listeners were there, and I was pulled quickly away from the Baines by people who wanted to question me about points I’d made.

Lectures are hard enough when I am in control of the situation, but parties annoy me. So many minds, which all put out a constant *chatter*, like background noise. So many thoughts to surround and suffocate me.

*Does he like me...?*

*I knew this dress made me look fat...*

*I wonder if my guy is for real. He can't be that nice...*

All around me. Many people have a fear of groups, but mine is based on the fact that I can’t completely shut out all the voices,

all the feelings. I can't even be sure which mind each thought comes from.

I focused on the image of white walls to separate me from the invasive psychogenic yammering. I slapped on a fixed smile, shook hands, and tried to listen to real voices, not the ones intercepted by my brain.

One drink would stop it. Just one good sized belt of scotch or a nice snifter of brandy and the voices would stop. Then I could relax. My mouth went dry with the desire for the taste of any fermented beverage. But, I focused on my breath, made myself listen to words, and calmed down. I moved from person to person and gave the best responses I could off the top of my head.

*Danger...*

The buzz came unexpectedly, and I lifted my head from a conversation to look around the room.

"Uh, Doctor, are you all right?" said the matronly lady who had been telling me about her personal psychic, who had predicted she would be at the lecture tonight.

"Uh, fine," I said and turned my attention back to her. "Would you excuse me..." I walked a few steps away.

"But I didn't tell you..." she started to say, then her escort distracted her.

I gazed around the room and tried to find the source of that buzz. It had been brief but powerful. The problem was that if I opened myself up completely, I'd be drowned in the soup of the collective mental prattle.

"That was a very nice speech," a woman's voice said.

I turned to see a petite African-American woman behind me, standing next to a man six feet tall and rail thin.

“Thank you,” I said, and as I looked into her kind eyes, I couldn’t help but smile.

“You made everything so clear and easy to follow,” she said.

“I wanted to get the ideas across, not impress people with my vocabulary.”

All three of us laughed. I noted that they were both older, at least sixty, perhaps more. The woman was in a dress, neat but plain. The man wore a suit that had seen better days but had been well cared for, and he added a dashing bow tie that only made him look skinnier.

“So, what brought you? You two appear to be a little old to be freshmen.”

This drew another laugh, and the tall black man held out his hand, which I shook happily. “Not at all, Doc. I work here. I wanted to see the guest lecturer that all the fuss was about.”

My eyebrows went up. “Oh, are you a professor?”

The pair exchanged a pleasant look and the woman said, “He’s the custodial engineer.”

I frowned as I tried to comprehend the title.

The man moved close to me and said quietly, “That’s a fancy name for a janitor. I’m Jim Stevens and this is my wife, Ronnie.”

I smiled. “I would think you would be tired of this place if you worked here all day.”

Jim shrugged. “The kids are grown and on their own, and Ronnie and I like to go to things like this.”

“Especially your speech. You are truly a gifted speaker,” Ronnie added.

“Thank you. So, Mr. Stevens—”

“Just Jim, Doc.”

“I guess you’re looking forward to the summer, maybe some time off?”

“Nah, I like to work. In the summer, I work at a state facility.”

Ronnie frowned a bit. “They call him in during the year, too. Sometimes for overnights, an’ I don’t like that.”

Jim shrugged again. “It’s hard to get folks in on the overnights. I don’ mind.”

“Well, nice meeting you both. I’d better keep mingling.”

“Nice meetin’ you too, Doc,” he said with a smile as the pair of them wandered off.

Several other groups pulled me in, and all the while, I tried to locate the source of my buzz with no luck. The crowd subsided, and I cringed my way through a cup of their bad coffee.

“So, do you really believe that psychics can be an integral part of an investigation?” a deep voice behind me said.

I turned to see the speaker. It was the man from the front row. He was my height, perhaps an inch taller, still rumpled, and his clear blue eyes burned into me like a laser. Yet I received none of the brain chatter from him. He was totally focused on my answer.

“Why, yes,” I responded, a bit unnerved. “I think someone sensitive to the mental energy, specially trained as an investigator, could be a remarkable help.”

“You know someone who can do that?” he said almost as an accusation. “Someone who could actually do what you say?”

“Yes,” I shot back, not cowed. “Me.”

“You?” he frowned.

“This isn’t a bunch of theory to me,” I said. “I live what I spoke about. I’ve been involved in research—”

He held up his hand. “I know. I read up on you before I came. Haunted houses and the like. I’m talking about investigating a crime—not ancient history.”

I blinked. “The techniques are the same. I don’t see that a recent event would be any different. Can you tell me why you’re asking?”

“Hmm. Right to the point. I like that,” he said. His hand went into his jacket and extracted a leather billfold, then he flashed a gold shield with a police identification card. “Doctor, I’m Detective-Sergeant Bill McGee. I’m with the Mountainview police.”

My eyebrows went up. “How can I help you, Detective?”

He glanced about, checking the room with the practiced eye of a cop. Then he spoke in a low tone. “If I were to ask you to become... involved in a case, Doctor, could I trust you to keep it confidential?”

I frowned. “Why?”

Again, he glanced about the room, just to make sure no one was close enough to hear. “Unorthodox methods—well, they wouldn’t go over very well around here. If my captain found out that I was talking to a psychic...” He shrugged his massive shoulders.

“I’m technically a parapsychologist, but I get your point. It might not inspire confidence from your superiors.”

He nodded. “I’ve only been with the force for a year. And I have—” he smiled “—a colorful background. But I’m stuck on a case, and when I read about you online, I decided to hear you speak.”

“That’s very kind—”

“Kindness has nothing to do with it, Doctor. Let’s just say I’m willing to try anything at this point. Hell, I’d deal tarot cards or throw runes if it would help.”

“Well, nice to know I’m in the same category,” I smiled.

He smiled back. “No offense. But if you can...”

"I'm in town for a few more days. Tell me how I can assist."

"OK. Come by the Mountainview police station tomorrow—first thing," he said, his jaw becoming set.

"Tomorr—" I said, surprised. I thought fast. "Would you give me access to the crime scene and forensics?"

"Of course. Just so you know, I intend to tell anyone who asks that you are a forensic pathologist."

"No problem," I said, as I recalled the days I worked on cadavers in medical school. With my training, I would be able to speak the jargon with any coroner I ran into. "What kind of case is it?"

"Murder. Can you handle that?" he said, his eyes daring me.

"Well," I said, not taking the bait. "I'll do the best I can."

He took my hand in a firm handshake. "Thanks, Doctor. I'll meet you at the Mountainview Police Department at oh-nine-hundred!"

I disentangled myself from his grip and nodded as I fought the urge to salute. As he left, I noticed the room was almost cleared out, with only a few volunteers left to help Jon and Jenny.

"What was that about?" Jenny asked as I approached.

I met her eye. McGee wanted to keep my involvement with the case a secret. I trusted Jenny, but I didn't know if I was even going to be any help.

"Old friend," I lied. "I'm meeting him for breakfast tomorrow."

"Oh?" she said and watched me closely. "It's nice that you ran into him."

"Yeah, nice."

I rode home with them, and Jon offered to drop me off downtown the next day.

I lay in bed, sleepless. I was finally going to be involved in a police inquiry. I'd succeeded in cases with Doctor Kohl, but this would be the first time I worked on a criminal investigation.

And a murder, no less.

This was what all the practice to hone my abilities with Doctor Kohl had been about. Now I would find out if I could use them in ways that would work in the real world.



## FOUR

As we drove downtown Wednesday morning in his SUV, Jon glanced at me and said, “Len, I’m telling you that was a great show last night.”

“Show? Here I thought it was an educational experience.”

“Yes, it was studious, intelligent, thought-provoking, and all the other PhD crap you want to call it. But it was a great *show*. I got calls from three newspapers about interviews with you, me, the school. I’m telling you, your entire approach to parapsychology and energetic reading is the right thing at the right time. This could do wonders for fund-raising.”

“Glad I could help.”

“Help? It’s a godsend this time of year. By spring, everything is old hat, and the students are only interested in graduation. To get this much interest...”

“I’ll do anything you need.”

“That’s great.” He glanced over from the road and patted my shoulder. “It’s also nice to see you again. And Jenny is so impressed by you.”

“I’m impressed by her, Jon,” I said, and wondered if I should ask my next question. “Tell me, when you started dating—did you notice the resemblance?”

“Resemblance?”

“To Cathy,” I explained.

“Who...Jenn?” he said, a puzzled look on his face. “What do you mean?”

“Well the hair is different and she’s shorter, but I saw it right away.”

He shot me a quick glance. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Len. Jenn doesn’t look like Cathy at all.”

...

I was dropped off across from the Mountainview police station, at oh-eight-fifty-five, as McGee might put it. In the lot and spilling into the adjacent streets, I could see traditional black and white police cruisers boldly jutting out between less conspicuous cars.

The building itself was an angular structure that rested on the corner of Bloomdale Avenue and Valley Road. It was constructed with a granite block foundation, and a pair of smooth pillars rising up the tan brick facade. Facing the broader street, a curved tower crawled up the full height of the edifice like an afterthought.

Over the main entrance were the words Mountainview Municipal Building carved into the stone, but a newer sign next to the door read Mountainview Public Safety Building. This city offices had moved to a new location years earlier.

I made my way to the public entrance of the first floor police station. I was wearing a dark blue suit with a plain tie borrowed from Jon. It was big on me. We were the same height, but he

had an extra twenty pounds or more. But I had worn my own good Harris tweed jacket the previous night, and I wanted to look more formal. My long hair was pulled back into a ponytail, and I tried to look as intelligent and forensic as possible.

Actually, it looked more like I was going to a funeral. I hoped it wasn't mine.

I was grateful there was only one step to the door, as going up steps are my biggest challenge, especially without a handrail. Going down is a lot better because I can jump steps if I'm in a hurry.

McGee stepped out as I climbed the step and gave me another of his engulfing handshakes.

"Morning, Doctor. Glad to see you made it."

"Couldn't stay away. Where to?"

"You wanted to see the crime scene? I can take you," he said and stopped. "You need to look over the case folder? I left it at my desk."

*He's testing me...* flashed in my mind.

"No, thanks. I wouldn't want to get too much information. It might interfere with my impressions."

He smiled. I'd passed the test.

"Good, let's go," he said as we walked around the side of the building. We passed a pair of large bay doors that I assumed housed the fire engines and headed for one of the cars parked in the lot. I looked up and noticed a storage company next door to the police station.

It was a much taller edifice, constructed from red brick, and it looked as if it was built at the turn of the century. As I looked up, I noticed that the side wall was unbroken by windows, except on the very top floor. There, several new ones reflected the morning sun.

There was a name emblazoned on the front of the structure, done in individual tiles to spell the word “LEACH.”

We got into an unmarked car, a large white Chevrolet coupe with “City of Mountainview” on the license plates, and drove off. McGee turned on the street and aimed toward the more fashionable Upper Mountainview section, where trendy shops overlooked stately mansions.

In a short period of time, we pulled into a small parking lot behind several small buildings that housed shops. One of the buildings was cordoned off with yellow tape bearing the words “Police Scene – Do Not Cross.”

McGee reached into his pocket and took out two pairs of latex gloves, handing one pair to me.

“Can you work with these on?” he asked.

“Won’t affect me,” I said. “Is this to help maintain my forensic identity?”

“The forensic team has been through the place over and over... but I wouldn’t want to accidentally contaminate evidence from *either* of us touching something.”

“I understand.”

We approached the building tentatively. It was obviously the site of a fire. The windows on the first floor were gone, and large scorch marks rose up the walls above the empty sills.

“Was the whole building gutted by the fire?” I asked as we approached. I could see the blackened wood through the large openings but caught the glimmer of glass on the second and third-floor windows.

“No, the fire was contained to the first floor. But it was pretty devastating.”

“Arson?” I asked.

“Why don’t you tell me?” McGee snickered.

“Fair enough,” I said and smiled back as we drew closer. “I can’t promise empirical evidence. What I do isn’t an exact science—yet. I don’t know what I’ll get, and at this point, I may not know what it means.”

“Not what you were saying in your speech last night,” he pointed out.

As we drew close to the building, I saw that a uniformed officer stood outside next to a heavy metal door.

“I believe I said the processes are being set up to make it more exacting. Imagine a hundred years ago with the art of fingerprinting. Energy reading is about at that point. We are only beginning to understand the applications,” I said.

“Good Morning, Detective,” the uniformed man said, and McGee silenced me with a quick hand gesture.

“Good morning...Hastings, isn’t it?” McGee said.

“Yes, sir. Taking another look, sir?”

“Hopefully the last one. When will this building be secured?”

“They said this afternoon, but it was supposed to be done yesterday.”

“Then I got here just in time,” McGee said. He turned to me and added, “Shall we have a look, Doctor?”

“Thank you, Detective,” I responded as I followed him in through the metal door, which Officer Hastings held for us.

We were in a storeroom. Everything was covered in black soot and still wet from the downpour of fire hoses. But I recognized a discolored Mr. Coffee in the corner on a desk with a fallen computer monitor. Built into the wall was a large vault.

“Jewelry store?” I asked.

“Psychic impression?” McGee asked.

“Simple deduction. Building doesn’t look like a bank, it’s in a fashionable neighborhood, and there is a safe built into the wall.”

“That’s what it was.”

“Anything stolen?”

McGee nodded and gave a smile. “Fire to cover the theft? I like the way you think. We’re still going over inventory, but it doesn’t look like it. There was a witness, and no robbery attempt was made.”

“So far we have a fire and a death. I will deduce that you believe they were connected?”

“I thought you didn’t want too much information.”

“Very well,” I said and glanced around the room. From the smell of burned wood and dampness, I fought to suppress a sneeze. “The next step is to put myself in a light trance. I am going to tell you things as I see them. Would you mind writing them down?”

He pulled out a thin notebook and extracted a pen from his breast pocket. “Ready when you are, Doctor.”

“Feel free to ask me questions—try to get as much information as you can. That will force me to describe things in more detail.”

He nodded and I finally sneezed. I wiped my nose with a tissue from my pocket and leaned on my cane. Then I closed my eyes and focused on my breath.

I used the techniques Doctor Kohl had drilled me on again and again. Focus on the breath, shift the mind into an alpha state, then open myself up to what comes.

I slowed down my breathing and heartbeat until I began to slip into another level of consciousness. This would allow impressions in, and the residual energy could be interpreted by my mind. I heard

my own heartbeat as it thumped slowly in my ears, and my breath rumbled with a roar like a giant set of bellows. In...out, in...out.

I opened my eyes; everything possessed a sepia hue as if I had suddenly awakened inside a black and white movie. At the same time, my every sense was heightened. I could smell the burned wood down into its very fibers. I could even detect the fragrance of a pine cleaner used in a nearby bathroom days earlier. I could hear McGee's feet make the floor creak as he shifted his weight.

What was more important, I could see the room, not merely the remnants as it was now, but as it had been. No soot, no water—just a clean little back room where a man put away his wares and ran his business.

I looked slowly around the room as I tried to decipher the impressions. Emotional situations leave an energetic imprint, a remnant that I can tap into while in this state. My vision distorted a bit, and I saw a heavy man standing in front of the vault, the door wide open as he placed sparkling baubles onto a tray.

"A man," I said aloud. "He spends a lot of time here—I think he's the owner. Average height, balding, heavy. He's wearing a suit that isn't cheap."

I took a step closer to the image, who seemed almost as solid as flesh and blood, but I knew from experience it was simply a projection in my mind. Something he did here had left an emotional impression.

"What's he doing?" I heard a voice ask.

"Putting away jewelry. He did this every night, at closing," I said, watching as the figure looked at each piece, and then placed the sparkling objects into their proper spots. I detected another figure out of the corner of my eye and turned to look.

“Someone else came in. A short man, dark hair. He has features like a rodent,” I said, describing the scene playing out in front of me.

The newcomer began to move his lips, but nothing came out. In a vision, I sometimes receive full information, complete with sound as well as sights. However, on other occasions, all I get is the visual, like a movie with the volume off.

“They are talking. The first man doesn’t like him. He’s unhappy this man came by.”

“What are they saying?” McGee asked.

“Their mouths are moving, but I can’t hear words,” I said. “It looks as if they are arguing.”

“Any idea why?” McGee asked.

“No, but the owner is surprised—and he looks frightened.”

The scene began to dim; the burned storeroom returned. Whatever emotional charge created this scene had faded.

I walked over to an area where the burn marks went up the wall.

“Did you find residue from an accelerant?” I asked.

“What do you think?” my cagey companion replied.

“I saw bottles and cans of something on wooden shelves over here. They looked like some kind of cleaner. From the way these burn marks go up the wall, I would say they were highly combustible.”

“There were traces of flammable liquids—probably used to clean the jewelry.”

I faced McGee. “He had a lot of them. Shelves and shelves. It seemed like a lot more than he needed for a small store like this.”

McGee nodded. “Our fire chief came to the same conclusion.”

I nodded. “Explains why the fire was so bad,” I said and looked around the room. “That’s all I get in here.”

I walked through the open doorway and stepped into the remains of the actual store. Walking past overturned glass cases and burned carpeting, I craned my neck to glance at the discolored tin ceiling where paint had burned and flaked off from the heat. The walls had black soot that rose up in patterns resembling waves. In the middle of the rug was an unburned spot, but the sooty marks undulated outwardly all around it. I touched the rug and grimaced as images flashed through my head.

“What?” McGee said.

“Pain, burning,” I said. I stepped back, and my clothes, hands, hair were all on fire. “I’m burning!” I yelled.

I beat my hands against the burning clothes. But it wasn’t my body—it was heavier—dressed differently. I stopped, cleared my mind, and slowed my racing heart.

“Sorry, I’m not burning, he was,” I said, regaining control. I looked at McGee who watched me intently. “Interesting experience, very intense. I got pulled right in.”

“Any insights?” McGee questioned.

“Not yet. I need to try to stay disconnected. This was recent... last few days?”

“Yes,” McGee said.

“And the man who burned was Philip Mishan?”

He raised one eyebrow. “So, you got that much?”

“Actually, it’s printed on the glass,” I said and pointed at the front door, where in spite of the soot, I could see “Philip Mishan, Fine Jewelry.” Though backward to us, it could easily be read. The display windows had blown out, but the glass in the door was intact.

“This guy burned to death?”

“What do you think?”

“I think you’re not going to give me any information at all,” I said and rubbed my eyes. “But I believe he burned to death. I also believe that you want me to tell you how.”

Now both of McGee’s eyebrows were up. “Why do you think that?”

I made eye contact. “Because that is the question going through your mind,” I stated.

“Should I pick a number between one and ten?” McGee said, snidely.

“That won’t be necessary,” I said, and then broke eye contact to peer around the room again. “Three.”

His mouth dropped open in shock, and I couldn’t help but smile. “Relax, Detective. That’s an old magic trick. Most people pick three.”

He relaxed a bit and smiled. “So, you know magic tricks as well?”

“You did the research on me. You probably already know my brother is a professional magician. We used to do shows together, and that’s how I bought my first car. He’s in Vegas now.”

“Vegas? In one of the shows with the feathers and the girls?”

“Yes, and more girl than feathers, I believe. You heard of Wizini?”

McGee frowned. “Yeah, he had a TV special, right?”

“Yes, his real name is Thomas Wise. He’s my twin brother.”

“Identical?”

“Except both his legs work,” I said. “It’s helpful to know magic tricks. It makes it easier to discover clever trickery masquerading as psychic ability.”

“You can understand my concerns. There are a lot of frauds in your line of work.”

“Yes, there are also a lot of self-deluded people who believe they’re receiving things that are actually projections of their own

minds. That's the hardest part. I have to interpret what I sense without putting myself into it or getting lost in what I see."

"Like just now when you were burning."

"Exactly. Let's see if I can get more."

McGee nodded, and I shut my eyes, slipping back into the alpha state as I reminded myself to stay the observer. I wanted to watch what I saw and not plug it, or I would fall into the same panic Mishan did during his last moments.

I opened my eyes, and although in sepia tones, the store was restored to what it looked like before the fire. Clean, clear showcases with gemstones under glass. I gazed around the room.

"There is a woman...twenty-three, twenty-four standing behind that counter," I said and pointed. "Average height, very pretty, blonde hair, dyed. She looks...bored."

I turned to see the familiar balding man run into the store. He slammed the door with such strength that it shook on its hinges. He moved very slowly as the silent show played out for me.

"Mishan came in. He's in a panic about something—agitated."

I saw the girl reach for a telephone.

"The phone, he wants the phone! Call for help, call the police!" I changed my position, tried to stand where I could look at his face as if he was really there. "He's sweating, scared—so very scared. He's taking off his jacket."

I looked over at the girl to see her eyes widen, and glanced at the coat in Mishan's hand in time to see it burst into flames that moved in black and white tendrils.

*Don't panic, I told myself, it's only an image of what happened.*

Mishan turned.

“He’s looking out the front window,” I said. “He’s looking for someone out there.” I walked toward the window that was now merely an open space. Glancing at the wraith that was Philip Mishan, I tried to see what he saw, know what he knew.

“‘Coming to finish me off,’ that’s the impression I’m getting. He wants to get to water.”

“Can you see who he is looking at?” McGee’s voice came from out of nowhere.

I stared out the window and saw two eyes that burned with an unbearable hate.

I shook the image from my head, and I was back in the burned-out store. All the images were gone. I felt drained. And hot, so very hot.

“You’re sweating,” McGee remarked.

I nodded, loosening my tie. “Is there any water here?”

McGee led me like a child to a bathroom, where I splashed water on my face and drank several handfuls.

“Need water?”

“These experiences drain moisture from the body,” I said, noticing that my hands were shaking. What did I tap into? What force had killed Philip Mishan?

Instead of answers to McGee’s questions, I now had questions of my own.

## FIVE

In the conference room, which also served as a data room at the Mountainview police station, I could hear the sound of computer servers as they whirred and clicked in the background. I sat with my eyes closed, focused on the memory of the rat-faced man I had seen in the back room of Mishan's shop. Across from me sat a police sketch artist named Chuck. As I described each feature the best I could, Chuck drew it. Then I would open my eyes and look at what he came up with.

"The forehead is a little weaker," I said, "the nose a bit larger."

Chuck nodded. With his close-cut hair and boyish looks, he obviously wasn't a cop. But he was good with a sketchpad, and obviously, a small town like Mountainview didn't have the computerized face-matching programs that larger forces use.

McGee looked at the face and fumbled with the file on his lap. He'd left the room several times and come back with a different sheaf of papers each time, which he'd put into a folder. Then he'd review the whole thing again.

That's what police work consists of, you get as many facts as you can, then go over and over them as you try it this way, then that, theorizing, deducing, then eliminating what doesn't work.

I could identify. A lot of the work I'd done in parapsychology investigations used the same techniques. Then sometimes you got lucky. I did, and it got me a lot of attention. But you can't depend on a fluke. You have to put in the work, and that gives the luck a chance to make a spectacular appearance.

Chuck showed me the finished sketch, and I nodded. It was the man I had seen with Mishan in my vision of the storeroom. He showed it to McGee, whose eyes grew hard.

"Two copies and bring me the original," he said. "Thanks, Chuck."

As Chuck left the room, McGee took his place across from me.

"So, Doc, you know this guy?"

"Not at all," I said. "But you do."

"Reading my mind again?"

"Just your face. Can you tell me who it is?"

He gazed at me, his steel blue eyes flashing as he carefully considered how involved he would make me. He sat in front of a nearby computer display, tapped a few keys on the keyboard, then turned the screen to me.

There on the screen was the mug shot of the man who matched my sketch. It was a full-front with a number under him and then a profile.

"Lonny Briback, aka Lonny the Match." McGee said. "When I saw where the sketch was going, I looked up his info."

My eyebrows shot up. "Arsonist?"

"Yeah, and a damn hard one to catch. FBI finally nailed him a few years back. I'm checking on his current whereabouts."

“FBI?” I said. “How does a local cop know what they’re up to?”

He smiled and leaned back in his chair. “I wasn’t always a local cop, Doctor.”

“Tell you what, can you just call me Len or Leonard? I’m really not used to the whole ‘Doctor’ thing.”

“Fair enough. Call me Bill,” he said, then added with a warning finger. “In private...in front of anyone else, make it Detective or Detective-Sergeant.”

“So, Bill, you were with the Bureau?”

“Twelve years,” he said as his eyes focused on the tabletop. “And I was good at it.”

“What happened?”

“I got married about eight years back. We had kids—two boys. I was away too much, working too hard. It was rough on Laura.”

“Your wife?”

McGee nodded. “About two years ago, we had a bust—terrorist cell in Michigan—it went bad. Booby trapped, improvised explosives set to take us out. A couple guys I worked with ended up dead. Laura gave me a choice—change jobs or change wives. I decided to stick with the wife.”

“So, you took a job here in Mountainview?”

“There was an opening for a detective. I go home to my family every night. It’s better all around.”

“So, what about this Lonny guy?”

“Lonny the Match,” Bill said and turned the screen back so he could read it. “He’s good. Studied with one of the old pros who never got caught. But he’s hung up on electronics—builds ignition systems that can go off when he’s a hundred miles away.”

“Nice,” I said sarcastically.

“Yeah, he was finally nailed for a little gizmo that was a stroke of genius. The whole thing was plastic. He sprayed a warehouse with a mixture of lighter fluid and grain alcohol—then this little plastic device used water to start a fire with sodium metal—ignited the accelerant and melted the gizmo.”

“Leaving no evidence.”

“Almost. But he screwed up. He had to use one small metal valve. It didn’t melt.”

“And that was enough to track him down?”

“It was a very special valve made by this one company and sold to three different stores in the whole country. From that one clue, the FBI found him and convicted him.”

“Impressive,” I said. “And considering how Mishan died...”

“Right. It certainly points to someone with the Match’s skills.”

“But how is he connected with Mishan?”

McGee looked at the screen again, then he grabbed a folder off the table and opened it. “Since this case came across my desk several days ago, I’ve done some digging into the life of Mr. Mishan.” He glanced at the open pages. “It turns out that before coming to Mountainview, he had two previous stores.”

I met his eyes. “Which closed due to arson?”

“Fires...yes. Arson couldn’t be proven. But each time, Mishan came out ahead financially. His last place before Mountainview was in an amusement park on a pier on the Jersey Shore—mostly selling trinkets.”

“So, you think Mishan hired the Match to burn his businesses?”

“I suspect an angry firebug might get involved in a murder if he felt he was cheated. You’ve pointed me toward a suspect.”

“You’ll need more hard evidence. My visions won’t stand up well in court.”

“If the Match did it, he left a trail. But to be honest, I didn’t know he was out of prison.”

“Any forensic evidence to point to a device?”

“Like you said, there was a lot of what could be considered accelerants on the premises of the building: High alcohol cleaners, acetone, and the like. Also, there was far more of them than there should be for a normal operation.”

“Which I also pointed out.”

“And forensics also found. Those are what really burned the place down, but the question is what set them off? There was no trace of fuses or timers.”

“It also doesn’t explain how Mishan caught fire,” I said.

“No, but if Lonny perfected his technology—y’know, made something that burned Mishan and then burned up with him.”

“As well as set off everything else in the store.”

McGee nodded and looked at the file again. “I don’t know. But, anything is better than what the coroner suggested.”

“What was that?”

“Spontaneous human combustion.”

“You’re kidding!” I said. “Your ME said that?”

“To be honest, Dr. Latrell may have been making a joke at the time,” Bill said. “Then again, he didn’t have another explanation.”

“I can’t buy that.”

“Really?”

“Yes, and I actually believe in ghosts. After all, I’ve met a few. But even so...”

“I had trouble with that theory as well. But Casey found nothing on the body that could create such a powerful fire in such a short amount of time. Hell, for all I know, Lonny had a giant magnifying glass and fried Mishan like a bug.”

“Do you think that’s a reasonable theory?” I smirked.

“Probably not, but I’ll look into any idea right about now. Lonny the Match is the best lead we’ve got,” McGee said, glancing at his watch. “How’s your time?”

“I’m fine. If I can do anything else...”

“You can, Len. I have a witness coming in, the girl who worked in the jewelry store, Wendy Wallace. Could you be here, see if you get any insights?”

“Sure,” I said, and rose with my cane as McGee got up.

I followed McGee out of the large data center. We turned left up the corridor. As we walked, there was a door to the left that led to the processing area, and I could see three empty holding cells through the open doorway. We turned right and into the detective’s bull pen. The detective’s desks were against the wall on the left side of the room. Bill went to a desk in the corner near a divider that separated the other half of the room. To my right were two small rooms marked Interrogation A and Interrogation B.

Bill picked up a second file from his desk, which was covered with piles of similar cardboard binders. He led me into a third room marked Interrogation C. There was a desk, several chairs, and a large pane of glass that showed the table in Interrogation B quite easily. I decided it was a mirror in the other room that was actually one-way glass.

“Can I get you coffee, Len?”

“That would be nice.”

McGee walked through the room and out a second door, which appeared to go directly into the squad room. I sat at the table and checked my phone for any messages or alerts.

As my screen lit up in front of me, I considered the situation. Bill's theory about Lonny and the victim made sense—good cop sense. So why did I feel like he was wrong? I'd only seen a few pictures in my head, but he said they helped. I should let him do his job while I figured out where I would be going after I was done here.

I could return to California. Dr. Kohl wanted to continue work on Scudder House, the famed haunted house we researched near San Francisco. Then in the fall, I could work with him, teaching—now that the pressure of writing my doctoral thesis was over.

But somehow, when I received my PhD, I felt that it was time to move on. Doctor Kohl was like a second father, but I wanted to go out and make my own mark. Scudder House, although considered a victory, was an upsetting experience. The idea of returning there made me uneasy.

Then again, I didn't have a lot of offers. Good thing I was staying with the Baines's. Until I got the check from Jon, I didn't have money to afford a hotel.

My father the neurosurgeon was happy to pay for my college and medical school when I zoomed through my bachelor's degree and premed at GSU in an astounding two years. Then off I went to study at Johns Hopkins for three years, where I graduated first in my class. I could've completed that four-year course in two instead of three.

But then I met Cathy, and my priorities changed.

Then she died, and my world fell apart.

When I told my father I was moving to California and changing majors to psychiatry, he cut me off. We weren't speaking when, two years later, I met Doctor Kohl and shifted to parapsychology. Fortunately, I got paid as Kohl's TA, and with odd jobs, I didn't starve.

Once I was paid for this lecture at GSU, I'd have enough money to bum around the country for a few months. But where would I go, what did I want to do?

"Who the hell are you?" a gruff voice demanded.

I sat up, shaken out of my reverie, as I saw a balding man at the door that led to the detective's offices. He was thin and hawkish, with beady eyes focused on any move I might make.

"I-I'm Doctor Leonard Wise," I said, and rose from my chair. "Detective McGee called me in as a consultant."

"Oh, really?" the man said, duly unimpressed. "Well when his highness deigns to return, tell him Sergeant Tice is sitting with his witness."

"Oh?" I said, trying to act like I knew what to do. "You can send her back."

"No, I can't," Tice said, not any happier. "All witnesses have to be escorted. And where the hell is *your* visitor badge?"

I patted the breast pockets of my suit as if one might mysteriously appear. But I knew I didn't have one. McGee just brought me in a side door near the locker rooms.

At that moment, McGee walked in the opposite door with two cups of coffee.

"What's going on, Tice?" he asked.

"Your witness is here," Tice said, maintaining his bad disposition as McGee put the coffee on the table. "And where is his visitor ID?"

“He’s forensics, he doesn’t need it,” McGee said, leading Tice out of the detective’s bullpen. “Tice, you have to relax.”

“Why the hell didn’t he tell me, or flash his creds...” Tice said as they went down the hall. I sat back down and noticed that McGee had left the Mishan folder. With a quick glance toward the door, I picked it up and opened it.

It fell open to a page that listed information about the jewelry store, with names of employees, partners, corporations, and the like. The names were nothing more than a short laundry list, totally meaningless to me, but I felt inspired to read each one.

When I reached the Nova Corporation, an odd pain went through my head, like a migraine behind my right eye. I closed the folder and put it down, suddenly feeling warm. I loosened my tie.

“You all right?” McGee said, walking in with a pretty young woman at his side. I recognized her from my second vision of the jewelry store.

“Fine,” I said, as I stood at the table and offered my hand. “You’re Wendy?”

“Yes!” she said, taking my hand and shaking it. Then she looked at me as if to see if I was anyone famous. “You’re some kind of doctor?”

“Yes, I’m Leonard Wise. I hope you don’t mind my sitting in.”

“Anything that helps,” she said.

“I’m glad you were able to get out safely,” I said.

She nodded. “Just in time. It was terrifying.”

I sensed something that she wasn’t expressing. “Yes, it all burned so quickly.”

“Please sit down, Miss Wallace,” McGee said, the perfect host.

“Can I get you anything?”

“A diet soda would be great—whatever you have,” Wendy said.

McGee nodded and strolled off.

“So,” Wendy said to me, her tone conspiratorial. “Are you like a headshrinker? Did they call you in to find out if I’m crazy?”

“Do you think you’re crazy?” I asked.

“I’ll tell you, I’m not sure. I mean, it was impossible. He was just standing there one minute, the next he’s on fire.”

*Can’t tell...*

A buzz tickled the back of my mind. She wasn’t telling what she knew—in fact, she didn’t want to.

“And you’re sure you didn’t see anyone?” I said as I tried to reach out and sense what was bothering me. “Maybe someone threw something in through a window? Except for the door, the windows were shattered.”

“No. Y’see, I’m standing in the shop, like every day. Things had been pretty slow lately, the economy and all. And in comes Mr. Mishan like a bat out of hell. He’s all red and out of breath, and he says he’s got to call the police.”

“Did he tend to be excitable?” I asked.

“I’ve never seen him so upset, maybe once or twice. He has—uh—*had* high-blood pressure, and made it a point to stay calm.”

“Really?” I said.

Just then, McGee came back into the room with a can of diet soda and a plastic cup full of ice, which he placed in front of Miss Wallace. She poured as we all sat, and McGee slid my cup of coffee over to me. I sipped it and scowled.

“It’s not very good,” McGee said.

“No argument there,” I said.

“So, Detective, why do you think I need a psychiatrist?” Wendy asked.

McGee looked puzzled for a moment. “Oh! No, the doctor isn’t a therapist, he’s forensics. I thought if he could be here it might help everything make sense. Did I say he was?”

“No, I’m sorry, I just assumed,” Wendy said.

“My fault,” I said. “I should have out and out denied it when you asked me.”

“No, I’m just glad you don’t think I’m nuts.”

“Miss Wallace,” McGee said, “you’ve been a big help already. And I hate to bring you down here and bother you with more questions...”

“No, it’s OK.”

McGee pulled the folder in front of him, opened it, and took out a piece of paper.

“Now, is this your statement?”

She glanced quickly at it. “Yes, it is.”

“Do you want to double-check it?” McGee asked.

“No, I know what I wrote,” Wendy said and flashed a smile that could melt hearts. She was very aware of how attractive she was and knew how to use each movement for its best effect. “I was telling the doctor, I don’t know what I could add. It was all so weird.”

*Can’t tell...*

There it was again, the niggling feeling on the back of my brain. It was as if what happened wasn’t weird, but may have even been expected.

“Was there any kind of smell—I mean before the fire?” I questioned.

She grimaced, then looked at me. I made eye contact, slipped in to just the outer edges of her consciousness. The memory of the

smell of Mishan burning was so fresh in her mind that I could experience it across the room.

“Just his coat burning,” she said.

“Could you smell gasoline or lighter fluid—perhaps even alcohol?” I asked.

“Nothing like that,” she said.

It was true, I could sense the memory in her mind.

“He was standing there, and his coat started burning. Then he began to yell that he had to get under a shower—or into a tub of water, then—poof!” she said, shutting her eyes from the painful memory, and our contact was broken.

I had no reason to try to go deeper, so I didn’t attempt to reach in when she looked back up.

“You ran out immediately?” I said.

“Yes, there are cleaners in that shop that were flammable. I was afraid the whole place would go up,” Wendy replied.

*Which it did, but she had enough time to get out,* I thought.

“Did you know of anyone who might want Mr. Mishan dead?” McGee said. Standard police question.

“I told you, everyone liked him. And I didn’t know all that much about the business. He could’ve been in hock to the Mafia for all I knew.”

She changed subjects—cleverly.

“Did you see anyone milling around outside or perhaps someone suspicious in the store around that time?” McGee queried.

She looked up at the ceiling as she tried to remember.

“There were a couple of people in that morning,” she said. “A couple getting wedding rings, a man who got earrings for his wife—oh yeah, a funny dark-haired man who met with Mr. Mishan.” She

paused for a moment. “He left carrying a shoulder bag, like for carry-on luggage. I don’t think he came in with it.”

*The bag...*

Another buzz tingled in the back of my brain.

“He was funny, you say,” I confirmed. “In what way?”

“Well, I don’t like to make judgments about people being unattractive, but he had a face like a rodent.”

McGee reached into his file folder and extracted the drawing his sketch artist had made.

“Is this the man, Miss Wallace?”

Her eyes brightened. “Yes, that’s him!”

McGee and I exchanged a glance, knowing each other’s thoughts.

*Lonny the Match.*

• • •

The rest of the interview was tedious as McGee went over everything again with Miss Wallace. After an hour, we were done, and both of us rose as she collected her things.

McGee met my eyes. “I’ve still got some legwork on this one. Doctor, I’m done with you for right now.”

“That’s great,” I said. “You have my cell number, right?”

“Yes, but give me the number where you’re staying just in case,” McGee said, and I quickly wrote the Baines’s phone number on a piece of paper. “You need a ride?”

“That would be nice,” I replied. “I don’t have a car here in town.”

That was only half-true. I didn’t have a car at all, either here or California. I hadn’t owned one since the accident. And to have a custom one with the special controls I needed was beyond my meager means.

"I'll give you a ride," Wendy said, as she stood at the door.

I gave Bill a shrug. "That would be lovely," I answered.

Bill escorted us through the corridor, then we went to a door with a square panel to the left of it. Bill waved his ID badge in front of it, there was a sound, and we went into a short hallway that led to the lobby.

The lobby had several chairs lined along both walls. Directly across from the main entrance was an elevated desk that had a low banister with a section that opened. As we went through the gate, I saw Sergeant Tice seated behind the elevated desk. He looked down upon us.

"Hey, McGee!" Tice said as we passed. "I called Doug Milbank and they don't have anyone on staff in forensics named Wise."

"He's from out of town, Tice," McGee said without even turning toward him. "Some of us actually know people beyond Passaic County."

Tice muttered something unintelligible under his breath, and we stepped outside. McGee shook both our hands, thanked us, said he'd be in touch, and disappeared back into the station.

I followed Wendy. The view of her tight rear end was even more pleasant than the spring scenery.

"So, what happened to your leg?" she asked as we ambled toward her car.

"Car accident. My knee was fused. I'm lucky I didn't lose the leg."

She sucked in breath at the thought.

"Here's my car!" she said and pointed at a small sports car at the far end of the lot.

“Very nice!” I commented, looking at the fire-red sports car, one of those two-seat jobs with a roof that probably folded back. “Rather pricey for a girl with a job at a jewelry store.”

“It was a present,” she said with a shrug. “People like to give me things.” She stopped cold. “Oh dear! Can you fit? I mean your leg and all?”

“I can manage,” I said as I opened the door, slid the seat back as far as it could go, and manipulated my six foot four frame into the vehicle.

I ended up sitting on my left side, with my right leg crossing over my body. Diagonally, I was able to fit with my legs on the passenger side of the car. This did put my face very close to her shoulder as she sat in the driver’s seat.

“This is cozy,” she said, giving another of her dazzling smiles. I felt myself turn red. My relationships since Cathy’s death had been limited. And here was a very good-looking woman giving me all the signals.

I gave her the address and we took off.

“So, where are you from?”

“Originally Copeland, New Jersey, but I’ve been in California for years,” I said, trying to make sure I didn’t blow my cover as a forensic expert.

“Are you here just to work on this case?”

“I’ve been lecturing at Garden State University,” I said. That was true enough.

“How long are you in town?”

“A few more days. It depends if Detective McGee needs me.”

“Oh?” she said and raised her eyebrows. “Well, it seems to me if you’ve been away for a while, you could use someone to show you the sights.”

“That would be nice,” I said.

“What are you doing tonight?”

“Not a thing.”

“Neither am I,” she said and then bit her lip. “It’s only Wednesday night, and I never thought I’d miss my job, but it gave me something to do. How about I pick you up at eight?”

“Well...”

“Problem?” she asked. Her eyes still watched the road, but she wore a look of disappointment. “You’re not married, are you?”

I gave a hearty laugh. “Nothing like that. I’m afraid I don’t have much money on me...” I said, a bit embarrassed.

“That’s not a problem. We can go dutch, and I’ll pick some spots that don’t cost a lot.”

“Sounds great!” I said with a smile.

We pulled up in front of the Baines’s house, and she turned to face me.

“Until later, then,” she said, her eyes bright.

“How should I dress?” I asked, realizing it had been a while since I’d dated or been out to any kind of club or night spot.

“Casual. Definitely no tie,” she said, smiling as I rose carefully to extract myself from the tiny car. She gave a wave and drove off.

“I have a date,” I said aloud, surprised by the sound of my own voice.

*Thank you for reading!*

Dear Booklover;

I hope you've enjoyed this preview of *FIRE IN THE MIND*. This version has not been fully processed as an ebook, so forgive limitations in the font size and layout.

I hope you will consider purchasing the rest of the book, and that you will join me in the second book of the series, *SEDUCTION IN THE MIND* coming in September. Leonard Wise has been a character who has lived with me since the 1970s and I am grateful to share him with you.

Please feel free to visit me on the web at [www.arjaylewis.com](http://www.arjaylewis.com). You will find links to my Facebook, Twitter and Google Plus pages. There is also a contact page on the site for your feedback.

Reviews are tough to come by these days, due to the plethora of books that are out there. I would kindly ask that if you enjoyed my work, please post a review on Amazon. You can find my books here:

[www.amazon.com/-/e/B071P9NND3](http://www.amazon.com/-/e/B071P9NND3)

Thank you again for reading this preview of *FIRE IN THE MIND*, and for spending time with Leonard Wise and me.

Arjay Lewis

