

**A sample of
MIDLIFE PSYCHIC
by Carolyn Arnold**

ALSO BY CAROLYN ARNOLD

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Standalone Title

Assassination of a Dignitary
Midlife Psychic

I never expected this change in my forties...

Midlife Psychic



A Paranormal Women's Fiction Novel

CAROLYN ARNOLD

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Midlife
Psychic



To my sister Sherry,
who helped open my mind to the power
and magic of the universe
and the divinity within myself.

I am blessed to have her as one of my
teachers along this spiritual journey called
life.

Introduction

If you told me four days ago that I would be given a vision, I'd have laughed in your face.

My name is Erin Stone. I'm forty-three, niece, sister, mother, divorcee, friend...psychic? I'm still trying that label on. I work for the Toronto Police Services at the emergency 911 dispatch center. My life was rather ordinary and routine before the psychic bit, and that was just the way I liked it. I had my gorgeous gray tabby cat, Harvey—named after that dreamy character on *Suits*—to keep me company. I drank vodka martinis sometimes but *loved* red wine. Slap a nipple on that bottle some days, and I was good to go. I did yoga at my best friend's studio to offset the wine consumption, and I binged *Grace and Frankie* on Netflix any chance I got. Then again, I could somewhat relate to their situation. At least my husband hadn't dragged our marriage out forty years before coming clean with me. More on that later. But as you can see, my existence was quite ordinary. Peaceful, calm, predictable.

That was about to change.

I'm not talking about the changes expected to hit in your forties—hot flashes, new aches and pains, or the battle with the scale taking on epic proportions. No. I had a dream... One extraordinary dream that would change my life forever and complicate the crap out of it.

You see, clairvoyancy, consulting mediums, foretelling the future, having visions—it all went against everything I'd learned and believed my entire life. I might as well be communing with the Devil. But I couldn't just ignore this dream. As I said, it was

extraordinary.

It had felt so real from beginning to end and lingered with me after waking up. Honestly, I thought I was losing my mind. When I found out the events I'd dreamed of had actually happened, I was quite certain I was crazy and headed for a straitjacket and a padded room.

Turns out the universe had other plans for me.

Chapter One

“I’m going to die.”

The words keep running through my head—over and over. The oxygen mask falls from the ceiling, and I rush to put it on. When I’d watched the flight attendants going through the motions before takeoff, I never in my wildest nightmares thought I might need to know any of their spiel.

But now the plane is in a nosedive and shuddering wickedly. Alarms are pinging all around. I’m sitting in the midsection, and when I look forward, I’m also looking down.

We’re all going to die. Among strangers, yet alone. I don’t know one face among the crowd.

I gasp out loud, then hold my breath, trying to stay as motionless as possible. As if any movements I make could worsen the situation. There is no worse. And we’re all powerless to do anything about our fate. This is the end of the line. Our time is up.

People are screaming. Others praying and signing the cross. Others chanting. Making promises and vows. “If I make it out of this alive...”

Somewhere behind me a baby cries, and the mother reassures her child that everything will be okay.

Warm tears trickle down my cheeks. A lie, but how I would love to believe her.

The pinging of the alarms is drilling my skull. Like a woodpecker’s beak rapping incessantly. But I’ve never liked the sound of them, even in smooth flying. Whenever someone flicked on the light to summon an attendant, I’d hold my breath until I realized what the noise was for.

I hate flying. I never should have gotten on this plane. I should have stayed home. After all, I had this feeling... This knot in my chest. I knead it now, but the pilot is calling out over the speaker system. It's hard to make out his voice above the din. But everyone starts leaning forward. I follow their lead and glance across the aisle to this mysterious man.

He first got my attention at the airport. He's wealthy. The rings on his fingers, the cut of his suit, but there's something else about him—an enigma. He's traveling with three men. One sits beside him, and the other two are in the seats in front and behind him. I get the feeling they are his bodyguards. So who is he? Just someone rich and powerful with enemies to match? The leader of a crime syndicate?

But he is calm as he sits there, as if he's prepared for the day of his death and is ready to face it head-on. He holds a small book open in his lap, one hand splayed over the right page, his eyes following the text on the left. His lips move behind his mask as he reads in an undertone. A chant? Scripture? A prayer? All this is hard to reconcile with my fabricated image of a leader of organized crime. His companions don't appear to be equally at peace. Rather their faces are masks of fear.

The plane swerves side to side, careening like an out-of-control car skidding on ice, and the nose plunges farther downward.

The baby screams louder. No assurances come from the mother this time. I hear her sobs. Despite the racket and cacophony of noises, there's an underlying stillness, quietness—a sense of serenity in our final minutes—and all my senses are highly attuned.

"We're all going to die," the woman beside me cries.

As if voicing the inevitable makes it more manageable, bearable. Though it doesn't change the fact there is some sort of finality hurtling toward us. But is it an ending or a beginning? We'll soon find out but have no one to tell.

I grip my armrest so tightly my fingers go numb.

The confident man continues to read. Unfazed. On another plane of existence.

The aircraft takes on a violent spin, like a shooting bullet whizzing through the sky on a downward trajectory.

This is it! I yell in my head.

The woman next to me takes my hand and squeezes. A person I have never met, but with whom I'll be eternally linked. I look down at her hand in mine. Hers so fragile and brittle to the touch, riddled with age spots against my milky flesh and bright-orange nails. I allow my mind to drift away, to try and find some comfort in these final moments. My heart slows. My last inhale becomes caged within my chest forever as we thunder into the ground.

I had expected some pain before oblivion, but instead I find myself floating over the crash site. Below me, the plane is in pieces and debris is spread out for miles over a country field. Fireballs shoot from the wreckage and catch the wheat on fire. But there's something unsettling about the flames being licked by the wind... They perform a beautiful dance, but it's one that marks utter devastation and tragedy.

Chapter Two

In four days, it will have been twenty-eight years since my parents died in a plane crash. Friday, three days before Thanksgiving. Sometimes it feels like I lost them yesterday. Other times, it's like it happened another lifetime ago. It was probably their crash that caused my nightmare. After all, I'd had other dreams about plane crashes—my shrink told me it was to be expected—but none had been like the one from last night, not even the ones that replayed my parents' deaths. It just felt so incredibly real, like I was actually on the plane and not sleeping in my bed, in my Toronto townhouse. Safe on the ground.

I woke up and went through the motions. The morning constitutional. A long, hot shower. Feeding Harvey, my gorgeous gray tabby cat. Grabbing something to eat and downing coffee. As I waited for another one to brew, I studied my reflection in a compact. The face looking back at me belonged to a forty-three-year-old divorcee and mother of a nineteen-year-old woman. Lines were starting to move in around the eyes and mouth, and the brows were starting to sag—just a little, but I was in denial. I pulled up on my left eyebrow and imagined both eyes the way they'd been in my twenties. No draping skin, perfect for applying eyeshadow, but I would let nature take its course. No Botox for me. I kept my eyebrows plucked and narrow and had full lips my best friend, Trish Gamble, had always envied. My hair went past my shoulders and was blond with highlights from a bottle. The baby hairs framing my face and my roots were gray, but I wasn't ready

to let them run wild just yet.

“See you, Harvey.” I talked to my cat as if he were a human being. To me, he was as much a part of the family as my daughter, Jenna. Little Harvey and I had become quite close over the last five years. I’d adopted him for Jenna after her father, Chris Pittman, and I had separated, but when she went to university, Harvey stayed. Not that I’d ever regretted the idea. He’d been by my side through the divorce and the move back to Toronto from where I’d lived with Chris in London, Ontario.

I headed out of my townhouse at just after six. If I hit the lights just right, I’d be ten minutes early for my twelve-hour shift that started at seven.

The autumn air was crisp and cool. I burrowed into my coat and watched as my breath ascended in wisps of white, all the while wishing away the scattered imagery from the dream-slash-nightmare. Really, *nightmare* would be a better definition than *dream*. What was more troubling was how it clung to me, like I’d lived through it somehow, more like a memory than a figment of my subconscious.

“Maybe I’m just losing my mind,” I said out loud to no one but myself. That fact alone convinced me I might be onto something. After all, only crazy people talked to themselves.

I got into my Ford Focus and let it warm up for a few minutes before driving off. I needed to be at the Toronto Police Service dispatch center in time for the pre-shift “parade” which took place at six forty-five. The parade informed new arrivals of situations in progress. We also found out if we’d be fielding calls or working dispatch.

I had my brother, Jason, to thank for my job as a communications operator. While my divorce netted me a livable sum of money, I needed something to keep me busy and give me purpose. As it turned out, working for the TPS as a communications officer was a blessing, but it wouldn’t be a job for everyone. In fact, there was a lot of turnover in staff. The hours were long and the rotating shifts hard, but it was what we faced on a daily basis that tested our

character.

Traffic was favorable and so were the lights. It was six thirty when I pulled into the lot for work. By the time I carted myself into the parade-slash-lunchroom, I still had five minutes to spare.

The unit commander heading up the parade today was Jayne Loughlin. She was a civilian, like me. It used to be that each platoon was overseen by a staff sergeant, but about ten years ago, they changed the command structure to a civilian one. At higher levels, we were still overseen by a superintendent and the deputy chief.

Loughlin was a large woman. Five eleven, solid build, and she could probably bench press my five-foot-six, one-hundred-thirty-two-pound frame without breaking a sweat. She was standing at the head of the room and bid me a good morning as I took a seat in the front row, and I replied in kind. We'd never really connected personally, but on the job, we had a mutual respect for each another. In fact, as a group, operators had a very tight sense of comradery. It probably had to do with the fact we could relate to what our fellow colleagues were going through and had been through. Most people were familiar with the term "Thin Blue Line," but as a group, we represented the "Thin Gold Line."

There were already about fifteen people in the room when Lauren Wells dropped into the chair beside me.

"Good morning, Erin." Lauren was smiling, a smile only Lauren could pull off. It immediately lit up the room, and sometimes I wondered how she could always be so happy in spite of the job we did, the things we heard, the situations we dealt with. I loved her cheery disposition, even if she was a morning person—something I couldn't completely relate to. It took me a cup of coffee before I wanted to talk to anyone, and two to be personable. I imagined Lauren hopped out of bed with a bounce in her step and a grin on her face.

"Morning." I smiled back, then took a pull on my third coffee of the day, thankful it was my only real vice. Many of my coworkers struggled with serious addictions.

Lauren swept her long, brown hair over a shoulder and pulled out a notebook and pen.

The room filled up fast after that—approximately another twenty people. At any given time, there was a minimum of seventeen dispatchers and anywhere between twelve and twenty call-takers assigned to each shift.

Loughlin commenced the meeting. The good news was there wasn't a whole lot going on, but the bad news was that might mean a slow shift—though that could change on a dime. Each shift really was like pulling the handle on a slot machine; you never knew if you were going to be passing the time tapping your fingers or hopping with a nonstop barrage of calls and requests from officers in the field.

Loughlin called an end to the parade and doled out our assignments and where we'd be sitting. "Stone, you'll be taking calls today."

At that point, I stopped listening and left the room to get to work. I parked behind my desk, throwing my coat over the back of the chair and tucking my purse next to my feet. We used to have lockers and a real place to put our personal belongings, but with reallocation of square footage and the fact we now shared the building with other police units, we ended up with less space. Another reason our parade room doubled as our lunchroom. Even the room we work in wasn't that expansive. It was L-shaped, and while dispatchers and call-takers didn't necessarily have eye contact, we were able to maintain situational awareness.

I signed into my phone and computer, and not even ten seconds later, my line was ringing. As I answered, I prepared my mind to handle whatever situation might be on the other end. It could be anything on the scale of petty to serious. I'd never forget being on the line with a man who took his last breath and then picking up the next call to someone complaining about a parking ticket he'd received. It certainly took patience, understanding, and strong intuition for this job.

And while my time at work was never routine, my personal life

was in fairly good order. It had taken three years after my divorce to get to this point, and it was rather nice having some calm and predictability after leaving here. If only I knew my entire life was soon about to change—to flip upside down, in fact.

Chapter Three

I'd fielded over fifty calls by the time lunch rolled around, thanks in part to the Automatic Call Distributor (ACD), a computerized system that pumped calls through a queue based on priority. It was set up to siphon calls eight seconds after an operator ended their previous one. Not a lot of time to reset, but it certainly made time fly. Unfortunately, I didn't pack a lunch today, so I headed out to grab something quick. With the twelve-hour shift, I was given two thirty-minute breaks, to be taken one at a time, so I had to hustle. I hopped on the elevator for the main floor, and the doors started to close.

"Can you hold—" Lauren was running toward me, and I stopped the doors. "Thanks." She let out a whoosh of air and leaned against the back of the elevator car.

"Rough morning?" I'd heard that she was assigned dispatch today.

"You could say that. Actually..." She looked me in the eye. "Three words for you. Secret squirrel detail." There was the hint of a smile toying with her lips, but I couldn't miss the irritation in her eyes.

"Secret squirrel detail" was how we referred to officers who acted on their own initiative and got themselves into trouble. "Oh," I said.

"Yeah, oh, and what a mess."

I shared her frustration. As a dispatcher, we were given authority over all radio-equipped police, and our orders were to be received as if they were coming straight from the chief of police, but not everyone on the ground wanted to see it that way.

Veteran dispatchers like Lauren would have no problem pointing out the policy in this regard, but that didn't mean it was any less aggravating needing to pull rank. "Sorted out now?"

"As much as possible."

"When will they learn?"

"My guess?" she said. "Never."

We took the elevator to the ground floor and headed for the street in search of a place to eat. We settled on McDonald's—the smell of their fries yanking me in off the sidewalk.

We ordered and found a table next to an indoor children's play area. A man was tossing balls at a young boy, and the kid was squealing with delight.

"Remember when?" Lauren popped a fry into her mouth. "They start off so sweet, loving, innocent. They even like us." Another fry went in.

I was starting to wish I'd just given in and ordered the fries, but I'd been struck by self-judgment and ordered a salad. I plunged my plastic fork into the leafy pile and stabbed one small piece of lettuce. At this rate, I might starve.

I turned to Lauren, picking up what Lauren had said and following a hunch. "Something going on between you and Kaitlyn again?" Kaitlyn was Lauren's sixteen-year-old daughter.

"You could say that. She hates my guts. You know, she actually told me that. Can you believe it? I mean, I know I never liked my mother when I was a teenager, but she's taking this to another level."

"You never told your mother that you hated her? Not once?" I never had the chance to get into the throes of teenage rebellion with my mom, but I could imagine it was the right of passage for most teenagers.

Lauren rolled her eyes. "Maybe once...or twice."

I laughed. "See, and you didn't mean it."

"I did at the time."

"Try not to stress about it. Kids say a lot of things."

"I bet Jenna never gave you a hard time."

Lauren might hate me if I admitted that Jenna had been a golden

child—a role model for what every one should be like. But we were also an exception to the standard mother/daughter relationship. We'd always been more like friends. I gave her a lot of free rein, guiding her only when necessary, and she'd never let me down. Lauren was staring at me, obviously seeking out some sort of understanding. "Teenagers are going to be teenagers. There's not much you can do. And I'm sure she doesn't hate you. Teens say a lot of things."

"Uh-huh, so that's a no. Jenna never said that to you."

I shook my head and took another forkful of the salad. This time I lucked out and snatched a piece of chicken. I glanced up at the television mounted on the wall above Lauren's head. It was tuned into *CP24*, a local station that was news all the time with a screen that was split into five sections. Trading numbers scrolled across the bottom. The date stamp and weather were noted in the top right-hand corner with a traffic cam beneath it and text noting any slowdowns. To the left, video was rolling of the current news story, and beneath it was a running ticker tape of other recent news. It was the latter that had my insides turning cold, and I stopped chewing.

*Small commercial plane crashed
in rural Texas. 83 persons dead.*

"Erin? Are you okay?"

That depended on the definition of "okay," because I certainly didn't feel that way at the moment. My eyes were frozen on the screen.

The cameraman was panning the wreckage. Flames and debris spreading out for miles. The crash site was exactly what I'd seen in my— *No, this can't be!* I put a hand over my heart, and it was thumping wildly.

"You're white as a ghost." Lauren turned around, following my gaze. "A plane crash? Did you know someone who was on that flight?"

I spit my mouthful of food into a napkin, still in a daze, fixated on the imagery, on the ticker tape.

“Erin?” Lauren touched my hand that was on the table, and I recoiled as if I’d been burnt.

“None of this makes any sense.” I was mumbling and barely coherent.

“Erin. You’re scaring me. Talk to me. Did you know someone on that plane?”

I slowly shook my head.

“What is it?” Her voice was trembling, the well-assured communications operator crumbling apart.

I met her gaze, and her eyes were filled with tears, mirroring my own. But there was no way I could tell her that I’d seen the crash in a dream—as the plane had been going down. None of this made any sense to me. To verbalize it, she’d have me institutionalized, and I wouldn’t blame her.

It was just a nightmare. Nothing more. Just a dream! Just a dream! Just a dream!

Maybe if I repeated it enough, I’d believe that—but really, what was the alternative? I had the word “vision” pop into my head, but I dismissed it just as quickly. I’d been raised Catholic, and that sort of thing was tantamount to alignment with the Devil.

Still, I found myself looking closer at the TV, examining the glimpses they were showing of the crash site. It looked much like my parents’—maybe a lot of plane wrecks appeared similar. I had to be making too much out of this. As I’d thought earlier, my nightmare had to be about their deaths and my mind trying to come to grips with it yet again. The grief did have a way of coming up repeatedly and unexpectedly.

“Erin?” Lauren prompted.

I met her gaze and shook my head. “It’s nothing... It just made me think of my parents’ crash.” Not a complete lie, but not the entire truth either.

“Oh, right. Of course. It’s coming up on the anniversary of their deaths soon, isn’t it?”

I nodded. “Twenty-eight years ago this Friday. Guess just seeing that...” I let my words trail off and flicked a hand toward the TV.

“I can’t imagine what that must have been like... them dying that way.”

She couldn’t. Not that I’d say that when she was doing her best to be sympathetic and caring.

Lauren glanced back at the TV, then faced me again. “Eighty-three dead. How sad. How many on your parents’ flight?”

“Theirs was a Boeing 747. Five hundred twenty-three.” As I stated the facts, there was no way the crashes could look anywhere near identical. I laid a hand over my stomach, and my skin felt clammy.

“You’re looking like hell. Maybe you should take the rest of the day off?”

I wished it were an option, but I was off tomorrow and then again during the upcoming Thanksgiving weekend from Saturday through Monday. “No, I’ll be fine.” What would I say anyway? *Please let me go home. I’m losing my mind.*

Lauren angled her head as if to question my stand; I was doing so myself.

“I really am fine.” I tried to sound convincing and pasted on a smile, but I wasn’t sure if either came across.

“Well, it’s up to you, but you don’t do anyone an ounce of good if you’re compromised emotionally, Erin. Especially in this job.”

She had a point. Going home early really wasn’t a choice for me though. I’d just have to push the stupid nightmare out of my mind and carry on with life. After all, the alternative was checking myself into a mental hospital.

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