

A NOVEL BY  
ANNA-MARIE ABELL

# HOLY CRAP! THE WORLD IS ENDING!

HOW A TRIP TO THE  
BOOKSTORE  
LED TO SEX WITH AN  
**ALIEN**

AND THE  
**DESTRUCTION**  
OF EARTH





## AWARDS AND HONORS (YIPPEE!)

*FOR ANNA-MARIE ABELL AND HOLY CRAP! THE WORLD IS ENDING!*

Abell was Voted Top 40 of *Your Favorite Contemporary Science Fiction Authors* by Book Riot Readers

30th Annual IBPA Benjamin Franklin Awards Silver Medal Winner for Best Science Fiction & Fantasy and The Bill Fisher Award for Best First Book (Fiction)

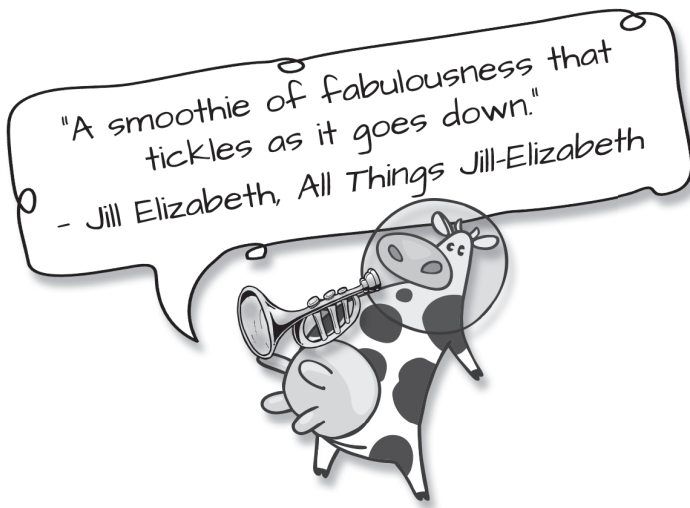
*Shelf Unbound* Magazine – 2018 Best Indie Book – Notable Indie

2018 Next Generation Indie Book Awards  
Best Chick Lit Novel – Finalist

2017 William Faulkner–Wisdom Competition  
Novel Category – Finalist

2017 The Southern California Book Festival  
Honorable Mention





## PRAISE

“An unexpected story that promises to be one of the most creative fictional discoveries of the year...a fun approach to the entire save-the-Earth-from-alien-invasion scenario which successfully turns traditional approaches upside down.”

— D. Donovan, Senior Reviewer, *Midwest Book Review*

“An awesome read! Warm, witty—and thought provoking—a beach read that stays with you throughout the year!”

— Aionios Books

“A rollicking seat of your pants fun ride through the universe!”

— Joan Silvestro, Booktrader of Hamilton

“This book starts with a lot of humour, but quickly gets a very rich storyline with great characters and seriously... this ending?”

If you like to be blown away, you should read this!”

— Esther, *BiteIntoBooks*

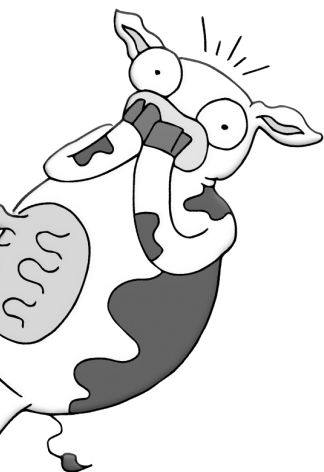
“Anna-Marie Abell has succeeded in weaving her years of study into in the ancient Sumerian culture and their gods with common conspiracy theories, pop culture and random human quirkiness into an out of this world end times romp that will have you laughing out loud at the most inappropriate times and possibly even shedding a tear or two before it’s all said and done.”

— Jennifer, *JennlyReads*

**HOLY CRAP!**  
**THE WORLD IS ENDING!\***

\*TOPIC SPOILER ALERT.

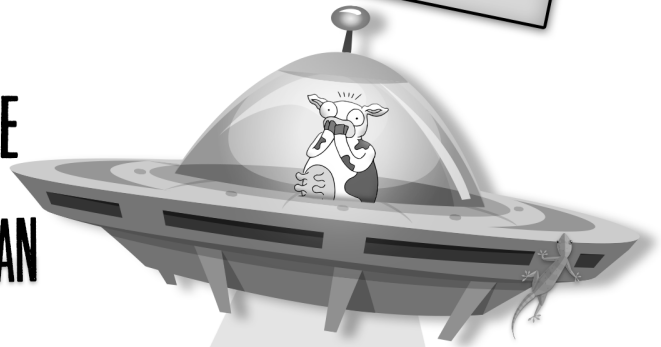
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ALIEN  
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# ALIEN ABDUCTION PRESS

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In this book, the author used the brand names of actual places and products—as an homage to the things she loves. With some of these places and products she has more of a love/hate relationship, but she in no way meant to put any of them in a bad light.

Contact: [info@alienabductionpress.com](mailto:info@alienabductionpress.com) or visit [AlienAbductionPress.com](http://AlienAbductionPress.com)

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This book would never have happened if not for the  
inspiration of two people...

Zecharia Sitchin, the late great overlord of the ancient  
astronaut theory. Your research led me down a rabbit hole of  
discovery, and because of it, I will be forever changed, both on  
an intellectual and spiritual level.

My friend Pam, who excitedly told me about a “super tall  
hot guy” she saw reading UFO books at Barnes & Noble.  
And so the story was born.



## WHAT IF?

### HAMBURGER BOOBY TRAPS, RAMPAGING GIRAFFES, AND TOILET WIZARDS

*What if...*

Ever since I was a kid I've been fascinated by the unimaginable. I used to gaze at the night sky and contemplate a series of *what ifs*. But I'm not talking about the boring typical *what ifs* such as:

*What if I won the lotto?*

*What if I quit my job and moved to Tanzania?*

I'm talking about those outlandish ones:

*What if I ran across a herd of three-inch pigmy cows capable of producing solid gold milk, but each ounce I extracted took a month off my life? Would I still do it?*

*What if we could suddenly have intellectual conversations with all animals? Would we continue to eat them?*

*What if the whole world went blind and deaf all at the same time? Would we survive as a species?*

Another favorite childhood pastime of mine was observing ants clambering atop one another to locate food or gather leaves, like inhabitants of a metropolis bustling to work. Ants are innately oblivious to the threat of a gargantuan foot looming over them. I've



often wondered if humans would behave the same way if the tables were turned.

*What if a jumbo foot came down on us and squashed a city block on a regular basis? After a while, would we just shrug it off and alter course to go around it like ants do?*

Some people go out of their way to squish any and all bugs that come across their path. Not me. I have a strict “no kill” policy with every type of animal.

Well, that’s not entirely true. I have an exception for animals I buy in a grocery store. I know: this is incredibly hypocritical. But dammit, I love me some cow. Perhaps I should define my “no kill” policy as “not slaying a creature simply because it annoys you—or simply because you can.”

For example, I can’t help but wonder:

*What if I were reincarnated as a fly in my next life?  
Would I appreciate getting stuck on a glue trap?*

Put yourself in the fly’s place. You’re ambling along, minding your own business, when out of nowhere the glorious aroma of In-N-Out Burger wafts in your direction. Those freshly cooked fries and juicy burgers fill your senses with food ecstasy. Just when you can’t take it anymore, a sign pops up out of thin air that reads:



Salivating, you charge toward the smell all excited. Then—*BAM!*—you step onto a glue pad, unable to break free. Not only are you doomed to a lengthy, torturous death of dehydration and starvation,



but your last days are filled with the constant aroma of those heavenly cheeseburgers you can never have.

Not the way I'd want to kick the bucket, that's for sure.

My fixation over these *what ifs* is why I was so into UFOs, ancient aliens, near-death experiences, ghosts, and really, anything paranormal. Truth be told, I'm not sure if deep down I believed in all these things, or if I just *wanted* them to be real, so I'd have something to hope for beyond the monotony of human life. I mean, think about it. What would be more entertaining: cleaning a toilet, or cleaning a toilet haunted by a ghost? (Well, a friendly one. It might get messy if your bowl were possessed by a demon.) Phantom commodes win hands down.

I'll never forget the day this whole obsession got started. When I was six, I asked my mom what life was going to be like when I grew up. She was always one for blunt honesty, and she said, "Well, you'll go to school for a really long time, marry a guy who will lose all his hair, get a job you'll probably hate, have kids, get old, poop your pants, and then die."

I broke down in tears.

My mom ended up regretting having told me all that, because at the age of seven, I convinced myself that those things wouldn't happen to me, and that it was my destiny to one day rescue the planet. I am talking about a Will Smith in *Independence Day* style rescue (except I imagined myself with a breadstick in my mouth instead of a cigar). In one childhood fantasy, I used a butter knife and my badass Barbie Mobile to defend the residents of my neighborhood from a rampaging, genetically mutated, alien-giraffe hybrid that had escaped from a secret government lab. (Kids, if you ever want your mom to get fired as the president of the PTA so she doesn't embarrass you in front of your class, simply splatter your shirt with ketchup and burst into the annual Teacher Appreciation Luncheon with a spork screaming about man-eating giraffes. Trust me, it works like a charm.)

This desire to be the hero had me hooked on stories where people discover they're part of an amazing new reality—a world where the impossible becomes possible. If I waited long enough, I thought, maybe Hagrid and his flying motorcycle would come crashing into my bathroom as I sat on the toilet and proclaim, "You're a wizard, Autumn!"

ANNA-MARIE ABELL

But it's one thing to dream it, and an entirely different thing to live it. Had I been smart and heeded the advice of the Pussycat Dolls when they warned us to "Be careful what you wish for, 'cause you just might get it," then maybe things would have played out differently.

I wished it.

I got it.

And now I'm about to die.

**PART ONE**





## SALTY STICKS OF HEAVEN, A HAIRY DIPSTICK, FLAMING CATS, AND ECSTASY-INDUCING ABS

It was Friday, and my vacation week had officially started. Woohoo! I'd just finished wrapping a shoot for the ad agency I worked for. The product was a rotisserie machine, and after twelve hours of smelling roasted chicken, I craved it so badly I nearly crashed my car when I passed by a KFC. I had to refrain from stopping for food, however, as I was en route to my monthly pig-out fest with my best friend, Emma. We both share the same passion for food. It borders on rehab-level obsession, especially for over-processed, sodium-rich, artery-clogging morsels. If it contains a natural ingredient, we usually pass. (The pinnacle of our eating career thus far was when Taco Bell first offered their tacos encased in a Doritos shell. I will never forget the day we saw the ad on TV. We almost wet our pants.)

Our love for all things edible started twenty years ago, at the age of six, when we discovered my mom's secret "PMS Emergency Junk Food Trunk." (That was not a name we gave it, as we had no idea what PMS was at the time. The trunk literally had a metal plaque etched with that name.) Assuming PMS meant "Pre-Meal Snacks," we dug in and ate it all—then puked. In the subsequent two decades, we developed the ability to pack in more grub than a seven-hundred-pound man at a Las Vegas buffet. Now, I don't want you to get the wrong idea here—we're both quite slim. You see, we have mastered the art of eating large quantities of food without losing our girly figures by fasting forty-eight hours prior to our gorge-fests.

Balance is key.

While driving to Emma's apartment, I was listening to my usual podcast: *Coast to Coast AM* with George Noory. If you haven't heard of the show, it's a late-night radio program on paranormal and conspiracy topics. It covers all the unexplained phenomena: from UFOs, to cryptology, to secret government projects. The topic for this particular podcast was Light Beings, with guest William Henry. To be honest, I usually bypass topics like this one—it's a bit too far-fetched even for me. But it was the only podcast I had left on my iPod, so I gave it a go.

William Henry presented quite the case for Light Beings in his interview—citing ancient texts, pointing out depictions of light bodies in popular classical paintings, and briefly discussing symbolic artwork in the White House. Based on this and other podcasts I'd listened to about Light Beings, the consensus seems to be that they aren't ghosts or apparitions, but are believed to be another type of entity made of pure light, and able to shift from their luminous form into a physical one. Some people are convinced they're demonic, and others feel they are spirits sent directly from God—the “divine light,” if you will. William Henry believes that our ultimate purpose as humans is to morph into this “divine light.” Maybe there's some validity to that idea. After all, countless people swear they “see the light” when having a near death experience. What if they're evolving into the very light he's speaking of?

As I was pondering this theory, my phone dinged. It was a text from Emma, saying she was running late. Having extra time to play with, I decided to take a quick side trip to Barnes & Noble to search for books on Light Beings. I had to admit, William Henry had piqued my interest.

After I pulled into a parking spot, I stretched outside my car for a minute before heading in. It was a fairly warm night, a typical summer evening in Southern California. A silvery full moon shone above a palm tree. It was one of those nights where the moon appears close enough to reach out and touch. Many people claim to see a face there—the fabled “man in the moon”—but even with the assistance of alcohol, all I see is a bunch of pockmarks.

While I was attempting to identify a face among the contrasting craters, an unnerving chill sent prickles down my spine. It was that feeling you get when you're playing hide-and-seek and you know



someone's about to find you. Shivering, despite the warm night, I rubbed my arms to get rid of the goose bumps. I could've sworn there were eyes on me.

But the parking lot was empty, except for a smattering of cars and an abandoned McDonalds' bag (which made me crave fries). Because it had been two days since I last ate—in preparation for my day of gluttony—I was tempted to open the bag and inspect the scraps. My stomach growled its approval at that idea, so I made a hasty retreat to the entrance of the store before it could convince me to join the ants in devouring the leftover salty sticks of heaven.

As the automatic doors slid open, I felt something brush my shoulder, and when I spun to see what it was, a jolt of electricity fired up my leg. I jumped sky high, expelled an involuntary squeak, and then pranced around, afraid to touch the floor until I was a safe distance from the door. Heart thudding in my chest, I studied the ground, expecting to see an exposed wire, but saw only a black rubber mat, a trampled receipt, and a petrified wad of gum.

Looking around to make sure no one had seen my moment of insanity, I composed myself, drew in a calming breath, and continued through the entrance, doing my best to walk like a normal, sober person.

I was not successful. Right as I entered, a dizzy spell had me stumbling into the front book display. I had to grip it with both hands to keep myself upright, knocking several books off in the process. The pistons that kept my wits operating stuttered and hissed—my internal check-engine light flickered on. Embarrassed, I avoided contact with anyone while I picked up the books. One of them had a large tear on the cover, so I hastily shoved it under the rest of the stack, placed them back on the shelf, and casually walked away.

What was wrong with me? I shook my head hoping that whatever had come loose would rattle back into place, but it only made me dizzier, and I staggered into a rack of *ATV Bikini Babes* calendars. At that point, several people had turned to watch the crazy drunk lady in the calendar section. I gave a big thumbs-up to let them know I was okay. I wasn't though. It took a full five minutes of pretending to examine the calendar entitled *America's Best Barns and Feed-Deep South Edition* before I regained my composure.

Given the way my mind was functioning, I decided it wise to ask a friendly sales associate for help in finding a book on Light Beings. If left to my own devices, I was afraid I would end up in the bathroom trying to read the toilet paper roll.

After straightening my shirt (which had apparently twisted up and got snagged under my bra at some point), I made my way to the customer service kiosk, where a shortish lanky dude, I'm guessing in his mid-twenties, scanned a stack of books into the computer with a yawn. His appearance was average until you took a gander at his hair. When I first saw it, I thought the cold front overtaking my mental faculties was making me hallucinate, and I had to pinch my forearm to double-check that what I witnessed was, in fact, real. This anomaly of human nature standing in front of me must have used an entire can of hairspray to create the strangest mountain of brown hair I'd ever seen in my life, complete with twin peaks at the top. It almost defied the laws of physics, towering well over a foot high. I was surprised snow didn't crest the peaks with such an elevation. He had clearly used his hair to make up for his deficiency in the height department. Adding to his overcompensation disorder, he had supplemented his mound-o-hair with that deliberately trimmed haven't-shaved-for-a-few-days-so-I-seem-like-I-don't-care look.

He creased his forehead with an air of irritation as I approached. I waited patiently for him to finish what he was doing, which he sure took his sweet time on. He slapped the enter key a ridiculous number of times before asking me, without even sparing a glance in my direction, "Can I help you?"

*What an ass.* Despite his major 'tude, my mom did teach me manners, so I put on my best fake "nice" voice and responded with a polite, "Yes, please. Do you have any books on Light Beings?" As soon as the words escaped my lips, I regretted saying them. When you broach paranormal subjects such as Light Beings or aliens, you tend to get the same look you'd get if you'd just dealt a huge fart.

He peered at me with one raised eyebrow. It didn't help matters that I couldn't keep my eyes off his hair. Its sheer presence commanded my attention. And when he caught me staring, he hoisted the other eyebrow to join the first. I hastily pretended to be stretching my neck, rubbing and tilting it up and down, exaggerating extra pain in the direction in which I'd been caught staring.





He didn't fall for it.

"Did you say '*Light Beings*'?" he asked.

I nodded and swallowed hard.

At least he refrained from rolling his eyes as he entered it into the computer. Several pounds of the keyboard later, he gave a cheesed-off sigh and swung the monitor toward me. "Light Beings as in near-death, aliens, or ancient civilizations?"

Deciding I needed to appear educated in order to redeem myself, I replied, "Ancient civilizations. I'm doing a paper for my sociology class." My cheek twitched from the lie. Lying was not a skill in my repertoire—it typically backfired nine times out of ten.

He sized me up, obviously unconvinced by my fib, and clicked on "Ancient Civilizations." In punishment for my lie, what results do you think manifested on the monitor? New Age books, of course. A ton of books on crystals, astrology, astral projection, and the end of the world. He lifted one corner of his mouth in a sardonic smile. I flushed, unable to repress my embarrassment.

Pointing behind me, he said, "You see that super tall dude over there? That's the New Age section."

I zeroed in on the area he'd indicated. On the other side of the store stood an extremely tall guy wearing a gray knit beanie. And when I say tall, I do mean *tall*. The shelves in Barnes & Noble were about six feet high, and this man surpassed that by at least a foot, probably more. I couldn't make out his features because the book he was reading, which had a mystical glowing eye on the cover, concealed most of his face.

"Thanks," I said to my not so friendly sales rep—whom I mentally nicknamed Mr. Hairy Dipstick. Before I left, I dared to take one last peek at the petrified mop on his head—in case it had been only a trick of the light that had made it appear so utterly ridiculous.

*Nope, it's just ridiculous.*

As I made my way over to the New Age section, my eyes darted from one side of the store to the other, hoping no one was watching me. *Why do I get embarrassed when it comes to aliens and UFOs?* Probably because the media has an unspoken rule that anyone they interview about the phenomenon must:

1. Have been on a minimum of one episode of *Jerry Springer*;

2. Speak with such a thick southern dialect they require subtitles on screen;
3. Have a maximum of three teeth.

Even a casual mention of the word “aliens” among friends or family had them leering at me as if I’d joined a cult and was about to drink the Kool-Aid. Or at least, it did, until I got the idea to pretend I was doing research for a science fiction novel I was writing. Plus, as an added bonus, I could tell people I was an author and sound way cooler than I actually was.

Deliberately ambling, I took the long route to give the tall male beacon in the New Age aisle time to finish and vacate so I could have the section to myself. However, he didn’t show any signs of budging, apparently too absorbed in his book. Intuition told me that tucked away behind that paperback was a hot guy, but I couldn’t confirm that, because as I walked, he subtly moved the book to prevent me from glimpsing his features. *Weird*. That brought another one of my *what if* fantasies to the forefront: *What if he puts his book down, and upon making eye contact, fireworks ignite and we fall madly in love?*

That was way too normal of a *what if* for me. Mr. Hairy Dipstick had put me off my game. I had a better one. *What if he puts his book down, and upon making eye contact, he shoots flaming cats from his eyes, burning down the store?*

Yeah, that was more like it. Even though I’m an animal lover, cats rank the lowest on my list. I’d rather have a pet tick than a cat.

While enjoying the funny visual of cats shooting out of someone’s eyeballs, another chill ran down my spine. What the hell was going on? To make matters worse, with each step that brought me closer to the New Age section, the tingles grew exponentially. By the time I got a couple rows away, my palms were sweating so bad that I had to wipe them on my pants, which left a visible wet mark behind. My god, I was a mess.

And that’s when I got lightheaded. *Great*. I escaped to the next row over from Mr. New Age Dude, plunking my butt on a bench with my back to him. Perhaps I was getting sick. That must be the reason for these sudden symptoms.

In an attempt to distract myself from the threatening fainting spell, I picked up the magazine lying next to me—a deluxe issue of *Cat Fancy*.



Karma for dreaming up cats on fire, no doubt. On the cover, one of those hairless feline atrocities glared at me, and the headline next to him read: “The Scoop on Poop.” Yes, a pet tick would definitely be a superior companion. Flipping my *what if* scenario, I pictured flaming humans shooting from the cat’s eyeballs. That made me giggle.

I tossed the feline periodical aside. It hit the bench and slid off. *Of course.* As I bent to pick it up, this overwhelming sensation that I was about to be attacked had me leaping up, doing a one-eighty, and then swinging my fists like some old-timey boxer, ready for a fight.

No one was there.

*This is absurd.*

I was in a bookstore—a very *public* bookstore.

Yet I still felt eyes on me.

Holding my breath, I listened for approaching footsteps. At first I only heard Muzak playing through the store’s loudspeakers. But then a shrill mechanical hum clicked on in my head, drowning out the music. Soon it was so loud that I had to clap my hands over my ears.

*Shit. Shit. Shit. I’m losing my freaking mind.*

Between the buzzing in my ears and the pounding of my heart, I thought I might go crazy from all the noise. All I could do was pray that my mental breakdown could wait—at least until I exited Barnes & Noble.

Before I could move, a new sensation struck. Butterflies fluttered to life in my stomach—the kind you get when you’re falling in love and you kiss your new boyfriend for the first time. Butterflies at Barnes & Noble? Maybe I was having a brain aneurysm. Then again, I doubted I would be capable of conceiving of lame *what ifs* if an artery had ballooned inside my cranium.

Finally, the loud buzzing faded—only to be replaced by an over-modulated metallic voice. “You must leave now,” it screeched in my ear as if someone had shoved a megaphone directly on it.

“Oh my fucking god.” I stumbled, lost my balance, and slammed into an end aisle display, which happened to hold an assortment of bobbleheads. Bobble Batman, Bobble Thor, and Bobble Trump all tumbled to the floor, wobbling their oversized noggins at me through their plastic boxes.

“Ignore the mess and exit the building,” the tinny voice said, and this time I recognized it as a male voice. “Get in your car and drive away. Don’t make eye contact with anyone.”

Idiotically, I did the opposite of what the voice said. I spun around and made eye contact with the first person I saw. Mr. New Age stood there—his blue eyes fixed on me. With the book no longer covering his face, his true magnificence was revealed for the first time. My intuition had been right: he was, hands down, the most gorgeous creature I had ever had the pleasure of drooling over in my life. My eyes feasted upon a living, breathing, artistically chiseled statue of a Greek god. His skin was a golden white, and his complexion was perfect, all smooth and velvety; not a single flaw marred his contours. And although I was sure this had something to do with my delirious state, I could have sworn he *glowed*. He looked to be in his late twenties to early thirties. Underneath the knit beanie he wore, his dirty blond hair stuck out in several directions, cut into that long messy style I loved.

Continuing my unabashed admiration of this pinnacle of human evolution before me, my eyes roamed to his torso—clearly God’s masterwork. His vintage *Led Zeppelin* T-shirt fit nicely, showcasing his firm chest. Toned shoulders and biceps bulged under the fabric, looking as if Michelangelo himself had sculpted them. I knew his abs would provoke fits of ecstasy if they made an appearance.

I was vaguely aware that my mouth hung open in astonishment. *Oh, yes, me likey very much.* He was far hotter than any fictional character ever described in a book or concocted in my imagination. I shut my slack jaw to hold in the drool, but it just popped open again.

My methodical examination of his physique was interrupted when he cleared his throat. My face went hot as I realized how long I’d been staring at him. I slowly raised my eyes to meet his cool gaze. An unexpected rush of emotions washed over me. I wanted to laugh, cry, overturn the bench next to me, and tackle him all at the same time. But all I managed was a whimper, unable turn away.

I swear his eyes had their own gravitational pull—a pureness that lured me to them. Their blue was reminiscent of the tropical waters in Fiji. I could imagine sailing into those eyes, the cool breezes carrying me away.



*Okay, Autumn. Stop ogling him like a deranged creeper woman. Time to cut and run. Your embarrassment level has reached critical mass. Abort! Abort!*

Unfortunately, my legs wouldn't comply with the mental command to flee. And to make things even more awkward, he was clearly not as enamored with me as I was with him. He looked like someone frozen during a standoff with a rattlesnake. I had to say something to reassure him I wasn't nuts.

"I'm not nuts," I said stupidly.

He didn't respond.

"Um, yeah. I umm... just think your beanie is super neat."

He still didn't speak.

Suddenly, everything in my peripheral vision dimmed, and Mr. New Age became a tiny point at the end of a dark tunnel. *Oh shit, maybe I am stroking out.* My chest began to vibrate, and the sensation quickly spread to my limbs. I felt like a rocket getting ready to launch. I was gaining all this energy—for what reason, I didn't know.

There was a pop, and the next thing I knew I was floating above my body, watching my physical self standing there gaping at Mr. New Age. Wow, did I look terrible. My darkish auburn hair had partially come out of its ponytail, my already way-too-white skin had turned a few shades lighter, and the mascara on my right eye had smeared down my cheek. Dozens of displaced bobbleheads stared up at me from the floor, shaking their heads in disappointment.

*Well, crap. This can't be good.*

To my surprise, Mr. New Age snapped his gaze straight at me. And I don't mean at the physical form that I no longer occupied—he stared straight at the floating thing I'd become. Then he flickered, blinking out of existence for a fraction of a second.

Panicked, I drifted toward him, consumed by a desire to reach this captivating creature before he disappeared. The disembodied male voice spoke again, with more urgency this time: "Stop. This isn't the place. Return to your body now."

With the speed of a rubber band snapping, I was catapulted back into my body, and almost toppled into the shelf behind me. I felt as if I'd taken a wallop punch to the gut. Wheezing and ready to faint, I bent over and clutched my stomach.

Once I'd regained control of my breathing, I dared another glance at Mr. New Age. There was no mistaking the shock on his face. His eyes were practically bugging from their sockets.

That abruptly ended whatever trance I was in.

"Sorry," I said and turned to leave.

The aisle was empty, thank god. There had been no eyewitnesses to that fiasco. Well, no one except Mr. New Age, whom I could feel staring at the back of my head. I chewed my lip, not wanting to face him again. Implausible as it seemed, I was pretty sure he was the reason I'd left my body.

A radiant flash of light burst from behind me. I whipped around, thinking, strangely, that Mr. New Age had spontaneously combusted. I saw no flames, no puff of smoke, yet Mr. New Age was gone—poofed—vanished.

Flustered, I raced from aisle to aisle, searching for him. People scurried out of my way, not wanting to be anywhere near the deranged lady on a rampage. One gal even clutched at her purse. *He has to be here. No way he's gotten away already.*

Except that he had. Mr. New Age pulled a Houdini and vanished. After all, he was a mile tall; if he had been in the store, I would have seen him. *He must have made it to the parking lot. Maybe I can still catch him before he drives off.*

I barreled toward the exit like I was on fire. Just as I was about to reach the doors, my shin smacked into something hard, sending me flying through the air. I landed on my butt and skidded into the calendar section, knocking the *ATV Bikini Babes* calendars off their display.

*What asshat dared to send me sprawling?* Mr. Hairy Dipstick was at the top of my list of suspects. To my amazement, no one was around, nor was there a stray book anywhere in sight that I could've caught my foot on—only the squeaky clean marble floor. *Maybe I slipped?* No way. I could've sworn something had slammed into my shin, because my leg still tingled where it had made contact.

The shuffling of feet and the murmuring of voices let me know a crowd had gathered to gawk at me. I flared bright red as it became evident I had most likely tripped myself. Mortified, I kept staring at the floor. If I were lucky, a sinkhole would open and swallow me whole.



A finger tapped my shoulder, and my stomach rolled in response. I jumped, mumbling a few choice curse words. An oversized puff of hair came into view beside me: Mr. Hairy Dipstick. He examined me with the same holier-than-thou look he had given me earlier before offering his hand. I took it reluctantly.

The instant I connected with him, a wave of nausea hit. I pulled away and covered my mouth so I didn't projectile vomit across the entryway. Thankfully, the nausea subsided the moment I let go of him. Seconds later, it was as if it never happened.

He cocked his head. "One of those Light Beings chase you down?"

I gave an uneasy laugh and attempted to play along. "Yeah, and the bastard tripped me."

He took a slight step away from me. Did he think I was being serious? Flushing red again, I did a hasty about face and hobbled out of the store, leaving my pride on the floor next to all the pictures of chicks straddling ATVs.



## 2

### ENDORISING OBESITY, FOOT FETISHES, AND ODDLY SHAPED MOLES

After what had gone down at Barnes & Noble, I needed to keep myself occupied until I met with Emma—and there is no better distraction than food. Emma and I usually shop together, but this time I took the initiative and bought the mother lode. I picked up roast beef sandwiches and Curly Fries from Arby’s; a dozen muffin top white chocolate chip pumpkin cookies from a local bakery; pho, fresh spring rolls, and bún from our favorite Vietnamese place; an extra-large veggie pan pizza with double cheese from Pizza Hut; and a bucket of deep-fried olive oil chicken with six different dipping sauces. And that was just what I clutched in my right hand. In my left I had a chocolate silk Marie Callender’s pie; a bag of Tostitos Rounds with a platter of seven-layer bean dip; and biscuits with apple butter from Lucille’s BBQ.

I also had one of the big cans of Red Bull. I figured I’d need extra energy to consume all that food.

After awkwardly stumbling my way to Emma’s apartment with all the bags, I had to knock on her door with my foot. The instant she opened the door she eyed me suspiciously.

“Uh-oh,” she said, stepping to let me inside. “What did you do?” I entered without a word and placed the pile of bags on the counter.

Emma’s an artist, and her apartment showed it. Art supplies were strewn all over. Paint smears, doodles, and splatters covered her formerly white walls. It was how an Aaron Brothers would appear if it had been struck by a tornado. No way she was getting her security deposit back.

We unloaded the food in silence. Emma waited patiently for me to confide in her, allowing me time to sift through events and try to





make sense of them. We've known each other long enough that she recognizes when I need a moment to mentally prep.

Emma whisked past me to flip on the kitchen light, and that granted me a proper look at what she wore. She had on a seriously sparkly tank top loaded with tiny metallic sequins, a pair of equally shiny skinny jeans, and thigh-high studded black boots. The reflection of the fluorescents off her upper half temporarily blinded me. She caught me squinting and did a spin, forcing me to avert my gaze from the light that emanated from her tank top.

"What the hell?" I said, blinking the spots out of my eyes. "Did you have to charge that thing?"

"No, battery operated." She lifted the corner of her shirt to reveal a small battery. "I have LED lights hidden under the sequins, so when I spin it makes quite the impact."

Emma is a walking contradiction. She plays the "anti-establishment" artist, yet style-wise she's a carbon copy of a Forever 21 catalog model. Heads turn wherever she goes, not only because of her fashion sense, but because she is a total knockout, with her smooth Asian features, olive skin, and long sleek black hair with a single blond streak down one side.

Turning a knob next to the battery, she increased the tank top's intensity to nuclear.

I blocked the glare with a chicken finger and asked, "And why the electric outfit for our pig-out fest, anyway? Did I miss the memo that said we were wearing light fixtures?"

"I came here straight from a job." She held up her phone, which displayed a photo of one of her paintings: an eighty-year-old man and his forty-something plastic mess of a wife. At least I assumed it was a female next to him. The copious layers of makeup made her more akin to a drag queen, or possibly a circus clown who'd confiscated every set of fake lashes within a ten-mile radius. "I had to paint for a horny old coot and his lip-injected decades-younger wife today. I knew if I dressed like this, the horndog would pay extra. Besides, his leers made the wife so outraged she put a crease in her freshly Botoxed facade."

I snorted out a laugh.

Emma loved to make jewelry and crafts, which wasn't always a big moneymaker, so she supplemented her income with two other more

lucrative jobs. Her primary earnings came from doing custom paintings of rich trophy housewives and their greasy ancient husbands on the brink of death. (She hated—I repeat, *hated*—having to paint kept women. If they acted snotty, she would secretly hide a phallic symbol in their portraits. My favorite was the time she painted a hairy mole in the shape of an erect penis on a lady’s thigh.) The rest of Emma’s earnings came from drawing and selling smutty illustrations. She had uncovered a surprisingly profitable market for fetish foot porn, and was making a pretty penny at it. In fact, my foot was the model for many unmentionable acts. And no, I never actually did anything with it. Emma would just sketch it at the angle she needed and then add it into her drawings, making it perform things that no foot should do.

After we had finished laying out the feast, she said, “Spill it, what happened?”

I bit my lip, not sure how to start.

“Come on, Autumn.” She pointed at our ginormous spread with an accusatory finger. “This mammoth stash is either due to guilt or a crisis.”

“Complete mental breakdown,” I admitted.

I opened the chips, plunged one into the dip, and began telling her all about the Barnes & Noble incident. I must have been overly animated, because Emma had to cover her own food to protect it from the chip missiles launching from my mouth. When I finished, she nibbled on her bean dip-laced Tostitos and knitted her brows in thought. It was only then that I noticed I’d consumed four times the amount she had.

“The way I see it, there are only two options here,” she said, tapping the half-eaten chip against her chin as one would a pencil. “Either he thought you had rabies, or he experienced the same phenomenon and panicked.”

I thought about that, and then burped. “In comparison, he made that dude in *The Scream* painting seem mildly upset. Therefore, I’m gonna have to say it was rabies.” I nabbed a mound of Arby’s fries and shoved them in my pie hole. “You think he’ll come back? Should I go and try to find him tomorrow?”

“Duh, yes!” she said. “This encounter was obviously a sign. Dare I suggest... soulmates?”

“Or I could have a brain tumor,” I offered.



“Or you could be discovering you’re schizophrenic. That usually develops in your late twenties.”

“Great,” I replied, and slurped some noodles from my pho.

“Look, Autumn, I know you. You’re gonna obsess over this guy. You won’t be able to get him out of your mind. So go for it. What’s the worst that can happen?”

I had a flashback of me toppling over an imaginary foot at Barnes & Noble and sliding on my ass. “And what do I say if I see him?” I asked. “I’ve never asked anyone out in my life, and I’m going to start with a guy who thinks I’m a nutjob?” Frustrated, I slammed down my pizza slice, scattering olives and bell peppers across the table.

“Hey, no need to punish the food,” Emma said sternly. When it came to food, we were quite protective.

“Sorry,” I said to the pizza, and gingerly replaced the toppings.

I knew she was right. That magnum opus of sexy manhood I’d borne witness to would be trapped inside my memories until the end of time unless I did something about it.

“I can’t exactly spend ten hours a day at Barnes & Noble waiting for him to come back,” I said.

“What if he’s doing the same, searching for you?”

“Fat chance of that.”

“Come on, Autumn! If what you’ve told me is true, then he should have felt it, too. And if he thought you had rabies, he would’ve asked if you were okay rather than running away like a frightened little school-boy. No guy is that much of a dick.” Emma gave a thoughtful pout. “Well, maybe *some* are that much of a dick.” She paused again. “Okay, most. But definitely not a guy who would go to Barnes & Noble and read mystical books.”

“I suppose you have a point. Unless I was sprouting horns while it happened, any decent person would’ve asked if I needed help, right?”

“Totally. I bet he had the same thing happen to him, and that’s why he bolted.”

“Fine. Say I’m not raving mad and we experienced the same phenomenon. Then what in blazes is wrong with us?” I gripped the table with both hands. “I left my freaking body, Emma. I know I didn’t imagine it.”

“Hmm... you hear about that all the time. Love at first sight and stuff like that.”

“If it *was* love at first sight,” I muttered, “it became repulsion at second glance for him.”

Emma slid a slice of pie toward me. I refused it.

She drew in a shocked breath. “*What?*”

I brought my legs to my chest and hunched into a ball. “I’m full.”

“Impossible! You haven’t eaten a single dessert item yet.” She made a tscking noise. “This is serious.”

I appraised the mound of silky chocolate looming inches from my grasp and salivated. “Well... maybe just one bite.”

“Thatta girl.”

I picked at the pie slice while Emma slumped in her seat, considering my dilemma. She crossed her arms and said, “Look, why don’t you go tomorrow? Browse the clearance section. You don’t have to hang all day. Give it one shot. If he’s there, then it was meant to be, ya know?”

I chewed on that, and my chocolate-filled crust, for a minute. *What would it hurt?* I could give it one shot. If mystical forces were drawing us together, they would mostly likely do it again.

“Fine. I’ll do it!” I pushed my mangled pie slice toward her. “Now you take this slice and give me the rest of the pie. I need to stress eat.”

Emma obliged, and I dug in.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anna-Marie Abell grew up in a trailer park. Well, several actually. Her trailer was on wheels so she got to experience the Pacific Northwest's vast array of mobile home parks as her parents moved her from one to the other. Somewhere along the way, she got totally into UFOs. Probably because she was hoping extraterrestrials would come and abduct her. But they never did. Luckily for her she was smart, because her only hope of escaping trailer life was college and a full scholarship. Moving to sunny California on her almost full ride to Chapman University, she was well on her way to her new life. Two bachelor degrees later (Film and Television Production and Media Performance), and several honors and awards for her accomplishments, she managed to start working in an almost completely unrelated industry from her majors: infomercials.

It was in college that she got bit by the “ancient alien” bug after listening to Zecharia Sitchin on *Coast to Coast AM*. In her pursuit to uncover the truth, she has spent the last twenty years researching the ancient Sumerian culture—in particular their “gods” called the Anunnaki—and their connection to the creation of the human race. What she found changed her life, her beliefs, and her understanding of the universe (and beyond). Her humorous science fiction trilogy, *The Anunnaki Chronicles*, is a culmination of all her research, her borderline obsession for all things paranormal, and approximately 2,300 bottles of wine.

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