

Chapter 1



*Ms. Bea Shore
30 St. Mary's Road
TRISTAN DA CUNHA
SOUTH ATLANTIC
TDCU 1ZZ
VIA CAPE TOWN*

Dear Bea,

I hope you're having a magnificent time in Tristan da Cunha. Love the postcards, especially the one of the Rockhopper penguins wearing yellow feather hats. That being said, I do miss you terribly. I know your work is incredibly important and you're learning scads about rare wildlife. And yes, it's only a year, but it's a year in the most remote place on earth. No cell phones, no Internet, no way to communicate! I don't understand how you can manage without your lifelines. But as it "is what it is," as they say, I'm resorting to writing an old-fashioned letter and digging up a postage stamp. I simply could not wait until your return next year.

The problem Bea, is that there's been some, well, interesting but bizarre news of sort. And I don't know who else to turn to. I'm contacting you because you're my only sister and I can't confide in any of my friends. They'd think I've gone mad. I need to explain the whole situation in detail and then I need your advice about what to do.

This is about my dearest and closest friend, Ann Jones, not her real name, you know her real name, but in case this letter is intercepted by anyone...you never know—if the mail boat were taken over by pirates, this letter may be the highlight of their booty. Ann bolted through my front door the other day with a wide-eyed look of desperation; her usually perfectly-coiffed hair was tousled, as if it hadn't seen a comb in days. And as you know, that's quite unusual for Ann; queen of the eternally-freshly-coiffed-dos.

It disturbed me to see her in that state. So, I sat her down with a steaming cup of black coffee; served in her favorite mug. You know the one—with a rather disheveled looking Cinderella, who oddly resembled Ann at that moment, with the

quote, "Where is that damn fairy godmother when you need her?" It's not that Ann admires Cindy so much, but it's the largest mug I own; the bigger the better when it comes to serving Ann coffee.

I joined her at the kitchen table with my usual cup of green tea with a single mint leaf plucked from my garden and milk from our goat, Minnie. We got Minnie shortly after you left. She's not mini as in tiny, but she has a rather high-pitched squeak which sounds very similar to a mouse, hence: Minnie. Wait, am I rambling? Okay, back to Ann.

At once, Ann began explaining her dilemma, slowly and reluctantly, which, for her, is a tough feat. You know how she loves to talk. Her husband Tom Jones—no relation to the crooner, and also as you know, not his real name, though his not-real full name is Todd Tom Jones—says that Ann could talk a blind man into seeing when she's with me.

Anyway, she said "I need your advice," then stared straight ahead.

"Okay, shoot," I said, tea in hand, prepared to dole out my best recommendation. I wondered if she wanted some gardening advice since I am the expert, as we all know, or perhaps she was considering a new hairstyle. God, as much as I would love for Ann to take up gardening, at that moment I was hoping she was heading straight for Mulan's Salon.

She started out slow and steady, "I had a vision that Tom died." She looked at me and I must have given her the green light, because she revved up and spilled it. Not the coffee, but her story. It came tumbling out like the Ann I know and love. "And then I moved to the East Coast, joined a knitting club, and was never so happy in my life."

I was stunned. What do you say to someone who confides that something as dreadful as joining a knitting club brought her great joy? "You still knit?" was all I could summon.

She stared at me for the longest time. She was looking for that wise old matriarch in me to pop out. I blinked several times, hoping not to give away my complete bewilderment.

"Well?" she finally asked. "What do I do? What would you do?" She drank half the mug of coffee straight down, which is closely equivalent to the amount of beer she drinks before passing out. You know Ann's such a lightweight.

I racked my brain, searching for the wisdom of the ages that she sought, but all I came up with was, "Do." I made a statement, not a question, trying to bide time. I tried desperately to figure out just what the hell she wanted from me. But in perfect Ann style, she rambled on, saving me from the embarrassment of having to admit I hadn't a clue as to what she was asking. "About joining a knitting group?"

"About Tom," she set her mug down and stared into it. "Should I tell him?"

Tell Tom. That she had a vision of his death? Sounds like a plan! "Oh, Ann Sweetie," I patted her hand across my kitchen table, "why would you want to do that? Wouldn't you just upset him needlessly?"

Ann looked up from her half-empty coffee mug and smiled. "I'm sure you're right. But I could warn him, couldn't I?"

"Warn him?" I cocked my head to one side. Had she completely lost her mind?

"You know. About his impending death," she said as casually as if she were talking about informing him the electric bill was overdue. So he could simply just take care of it.

"Ann, this vision you had. Were you, um..." I didn't know how to say this delicately, so I whispered, "Sober when you had it?" I scrunched my eyes in anticipation of her reaction.

She glared back in my direction. "I'm serious, Alex, this is serious. I'm extremely serious about this."

She seemed really serious about this vision, but I wasn't buying it. "You don't know this will come true. This vision of yours. You don't know what this... vision was. Maybe it was just a bad dream."

Her eyes grew dark, almost as dark as her coffee. "Alex, my dearest friend on earth, have you ever had a vision?" She asked the question sincerely, as if my entire understanding depended on the answer.

Had I? What exactly is a vision? I've had a tele-vision. But I didn't think the look on Ann's face could take a joke right now. "Um, no, I don't believe I have," I finally relented.

"Well, then. Let me explain," she said in typical Ann style. For the next three hours. "I was awake for one thing. And it was a bright sky. Daylight even!" she said with an attitude. "Walking Honey back from errands. First, to the dog groomer. You know how good she smells afterward. And then to the knitting store."

"The knitting store?" This was the second mention of knitting in a matter of minutes. I didn't think Ann had knitted anything since our eighth-grade home economics teacher, who was rumored to be ninety but probably more like eighty, made us knit a roll of toilet paper. He said it was the one thing everyone could use. "Ann, when did you take up knitting again?"

"Again?" She seemed confused that I was even asking the question. "I made the twins blankets when they were born."

I wanted to point out that her twins were eighteen years old and therefore, the question was relevant, but that wouldn't help Ann finish her story. So, I let it go.

Ann continued, "And suddenly, it was like I was watching a movie, right there while I stood on the sidewalk. And no matter how much I wanted to get up and make popcorn or take a potty break," ever since Ann had kids, she has referred to the restroom as the potty, "I just couldn't move. I tried blinking. I even closed my eyes completely, but the movie just kept playing."

And then she paused, with a curious look as if what she had just said sounded bizarre, not that having a vision of her husband's death and being overjoyed about joining a knitting club was totally ordinary, she then explained, "There wasn't really a screen; I just saw it in the air in front of me." Of course, that made so much more sense!

Ann continued for the next several hours explaining every detail of what she saw on the "screen" in the air. And this is Ann's story, told by her, in her own words. And although she told it to me in first person, I'm relaying it in third person, to make it a little easier on you to read. Plus, you know how I can't help but tell stories, so I've filled in her thoughts. You know, I do this with my own characters all the time. It'll be like the old days when I made you read all my stories. I've mostly kept it intact as it was disclosed to me.

So now you understand why I must change the names of everyone in this story, including my own, except for the pets, because no one could possibly guess a pet's owner from names like Spot or Fluffy. If Tom were ever to find out that he is the subject of this vision, it could be devastating. He could walk around with this cloud of worry hanging over him for his entire life. Or worse, it could become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Make of it what you will. I certainly have my own opinion, but I need to know what you think, and most importantly, what...

... to do ...

...about it...