

Chapter Two: The Beginning



It had been an ordinary, not too shitty but nothing special day. You'd been at Table 6, explaining the specials to some college kids from NYU, four of them out on a double date, when every phone in the room went off, a cacophony of chimes, pop songs, emergency alerts.

The kids all reached right for their phones, tuning you out as they stared at the glowing screens. "Is it the terrorists?" One of the girls said, grabbing her boyfriend's arm.

"Don't worry," he said, as he swiped at his phone. "I can't get out of this message," he said. "You?"

The other guy shook his head. "I just keep getting the same dumb ass message."

"Maybe it's all bullshit," the other girl said.

“I’m gonna go get your drinks,” you said, and no one responded. Curious as your phone vibrated in your pocket you headed to the bar. Checking a cellphone on the floor was a fireable offense, and you needed the money. You headed back toward the bar, slipping your phone out of your pocket. The bartender, Amber, stood there, looking at her phone, her face a study in feminine anxiety. She was cute. Nice figure. Dimples. Great ass. You’d been hitting on her for months, but she kept insisting she didn’t date guys she worked with. You kinda thought she was probably a lesbian.

“What is this?” Amber held out her phone, and you saw she was getting the same text messages you now saw on your own phone, repeating every thirty seconds: The Hive has landed. Await further instructions.

The Hive had landed. Await further instructions.

“I don’t know,” you admitted, then wanting to be the hero, the guy, you said, “I’m sure it’s nothing.”

“What should we do?”

The other wait staff gathered. Kevin. Lisa. That was all of you. Business had been slow. “Maybe we should close?” Kevin said. Not surprising. There wasn’t a night he failed to suggest you close early and go home.

“It could be aliens,” Lisa said.

You all laughed. She was totally into all that alien conspiracy stuff. Had even gone on vacation to Roswell. She pretty much saw aliens everywhere.

Just then Andy, the manager, came out of his office. Pot-bellied and balding, he'd landed at Senor Frijoles after, he claimed, having been "really big" at a tech start-up. "Let's just keep on keeping on," he said. "Await further instructions."

"Do you know what this even is?" Amber asked.

"Don't worry," Andy said. "I'm gonna connect with some of my old buddies from the tech world. I'll find out what's up." He slouched back to his office.

All the phones kept buzzing, chiming, playing music. The noise was starting to get to you, and you tried to silence your phone, but nothing. "Am I the only one who doesn't feel confident Andy's imaginary friends from the tech world are going to know anything?" You said, immediately regretting it as Lisa was something of a rat and would probably tell him what you said.

"Fuck him," Kevin said. "Let's just all leave. I need to get back to Astoria, and what if they shut the trains down?"

"Go ahead," you said. The prick. "We don't need you."

"Hey, bro. Take a step back," Kevin said, dropping into some kind of martial arts pose. He was one of those guys, always talking about how tough he was, preening, dropping hints about

the underground fight club he belonged to, though you'd never seen him with so much as a scratch on that pretty boy face of his.

You took a step forward. There were females present. You couldn't let them think you were chickenshit.

"Guys, come on," Amber, ever the peacemaker, said.

Your pissing contest, however, came to an abrupt end as a customer over by the window shouted, "Holy shit." He jumped to his feet, craning his neck, looking up at the sky. "What the fuck is that?"

The other customers all jumped to their feet and rushed to the window, their chatter now joining the noise of the phones. Your head started to pound. You all ran over to the window, crowding to the glass. You looked up, and at first you saw nothing, then Amber said, "Oh, shit," and she pointed, and you followed her hand and, what the fuck?

What looked like a huge, black egg hovered in the air above the city. It didn't seem real, somehow. It seemed like a bad photo edit, it seemed to impossible and out of place, the glassy surface gleaming with the reflected lights from the city below.

"Omigod," Lisa said in a breathy voice. "The aliens! They're here!"

"Aliens?" Someone said, and the word began to circulate among the crowd. You could feel the panic growing, and people

started heading toward the door, some pausing to toss cash onto their tables of half-eaten food. You saw Table 6 heading toward the door, and there went a really good tip. “Guys,” you called, hoping to stop them, get their money. “Your drinks?”

If they heard you, they didn’t respond, but just headed out along with everyone else. The restaurant cleared; the cell phones grew silent. Now, the only sound was the treble heavy, canned “Mexican” music piping in over the extremely low-fi sound system. Suddenly, closing seemed like a good idea, after all, not that you would give Kev-bro the satisfaction.

“Guys, there is nothing to be worried about,” Lisa said, her eyes gleaming with a maniacal light. “Any species advanced enough to master inter-stellar travel will and must be enlightened, advanced, beneficent. It’s not like those Hollywood movies,” she said, shaking her head side to side. “It’s the dawning of a new age!”

“You spend way too much time on alien blogs,” Kevin said as he started to undo his apron. “I’m getting out of here.”

‘I’ll walk you home,’ you said to Amber, and she gave you a suspicious look like, seriously? You’re coming onto me now?

“You, too,” you say to Lisa, wanting to play the hero.

‘Oh, shit,’ Kevin said, realizing his mistake, how much of a pussy he must look like, planning to run off without a thought about the girls. “Yeah, no, I’ll do that, too.”

“I don’t know,” Amber says, looking at Lisa for support. “The message said to wait for instructions, right?”

“We should totally wait for instructions,” Lisa said, and she’s so weirdly excited. “The aliens, I wonder if they’re octopoid? They are friendly. We should listen to them.” Kevin is looking at her now, an odd, fascinated look in his eyes as he almost seems to be spacing out.

And you’re looking at Amber’s face now, but not at her face, not how hot she is. You’re looking at her lipstick, eyeliner, mascara. Just the slightest dusting of blush on her cheeks. A strange and disturbing thought pops into your head, as you wonder what shade of lipstick she’s wearing, and if you can borrow it?

“What?” Amber says.

You shake your head, pushing those crazy thoughts away, thinking, it must be the stress, but you can’t stop looking at Amber’s makeup, admiring the way her eyes pop, her perfectly sculpted brows, and you feel plain and naked, and you need to look— no.

Andy comes out of his office, goes to the door, and locks it. You and Kevin are so mesmerized you barely notice, but Amber and Lisa are still functioning. “What are you doing?” She asks, turning to face Andy, and you feel angry, moving so you can look at her, admire that silvery eyeshadow.

“It’s on the news,” Andy said. “Shelter in place...” his voice trails off as he finds himself looking back and forth between Lisa and Amber. He gulps and starts to back away, fading back into his office, and he looks scared.

Kevin steps close to Lisa and whispers in her ear. She giggles and says, “really?”

Kevin nods, glances at you, his eyes cold with shame, then Lisa takes his hand and leads him toward the break room. “Come on, sweetie,” she says.

“Are they about to fuck?” Amber says. She looks up at you now, and the light catches her glossy lipstick, and you ache seeing how her lips shine, wanting yours to shine the same way. You’re pretty sure Kevin just asked Lisa to do his face, because you are struggling with the desire to ask Amber to do the same.

“I don’t think so,” you say, your voice strained, creaking as you struggle against this new urge. You’ve been wanting to fuck Amber forever, and asking her to lend you her lipstick is not going

to increase your chances. You're a man, and she's a woman. Remember that, you tell yourself.

"Fuck it," Amber finally says. "Let's get drunk."

Relieved by the distraction, and you realize you really could use a drink, you follow her to the bar. "What'll it be, fella?" Amber says, putting on a 1920s accent. Like you, she is an actor, just working this survival job until she gets her big break.

"Of all gin joints in all the towns in all the world," you say, trying to put on your best Humphrey Bogart, which, you know, is not good. "She walks into mine."

Amber laughs. It's a bright, silvery, flirty laugh, and at one time you might have even thought that maybe you did have a chance with her, but right now you are far too focused on those long, wet lashes and wondering what brand of mascara she uses. "That was the worst Bogart impression I've ever heard," she says.

"I know. Kentucky Bourbon. Neat," you say. You don't actually love it all that much, but it's a manly drink, and you feel the need more than ever to be the man.

Amber splashes the warm, brown liquor into a rocks glass, mixes herself some kind of pink, frothy, girly drink. You clink glass and walk back to the window, staring up at that glass egg hovering in the sky.

"Do you think it's really aliens?" Amber asks, sipping.

“I don’t know,” you say, “but it seems, and I can’t believe I’m saying this, but Lisa may be right. I can’t think of a better explanation.”

“Let’s hope she’s right about them being friendly.”

Amber is looking up at you, her eyes growing dreamy, those wet, glossy lips parted, her teeth bright and white. You look down at her, and you’re so fixated on that pretty shade of lipstick she catches you totally off guard when she suddenly rises up and kisses you, putting her arms around your neck, pressing her breasts against your body.

You kiss back, the feeling of that tacky lipstick on your lips send a thrill through you like you’ve never felt, and it shakes you, making you dizzy as you feel like your brain is shifting, rearranging... The kiss ends. Amber lingers in your arms, looking up at you, her pupils so wide, so deep. “I’m scared,” she says, and now you feel an old thrill mixing with your feminine new desires as you realize this little female is looking to you for strength, confidence, protection.

She is looking at you to be a man for her, to tell her everything is going to be fine, and as you run your tongue along your lips, tasting the delicious taste of her lipstick, you feel yourself getting hard, and you’re not sure exactly why.

Giggling. Lisa leads Kevin out from the break room. She's holding his hand, and he looks so embarrassed. She's done his face. Lipstick. Blush. Mascara. All of it, and you feel a white-hot hate as you look at him, because he was a pretty boy, and he looks cute, and he has what you want.

"Omigod," Amber says, and you can almost see a shift in her eyes, like her brain is re-arranging, changing, too. "You look so pretty."

Kevin drops his eyes, down and to the side. "Isn't he just adorable?" Lisa says.

You slit your eyes at him. You hate him so much. And now, there is no way in hell you will ever give into this—insane urge—because Kevin did it first, and anyway, what would Amber think of you?

She answers the question, grabbing your hand. "Come on," she says, dragging you toward the break room. "I wanna do your face now!"

Lisa claps. "Oh, goody," she says, doing little bunny hops.

You protest, try and make Amber think you're doing this under duress. You feel you have to, though you want this so bad, and pretty soon you're sitting at the break table while Amber excitedly fishes her makeup out of her purse, the mysterious female tubes and compacts, powders and creams. You have no idea this is



only the
beginning
that soon
you'll have
your own
purse, and
it, too, will
be full of
makeup, no
longer
feminine

and mysterious, but a central part of your life as a boy.

“Is it weird I want to do this all of a sudden?” Ashley asks, scrunching her nose.

You just shrug, and she sees it in your eyes. A wicked little smile spreads on her face and she tilts her head to the side. “You want me to, don’t you?” She says.

You’re broken. You can’t deny it. “Yes,” you say. “I do.”

Amber giggles and pulls out a lipstick wand, and your heart flutters because it is the same color she’s wearing, the same wet, red perfection. “Just keep still, sweetie,” she says, eyes dancing with delight. ‘I’m going to make you pretty.’

“Good luck with that.”

“You’re going to be surprised.”
And you are.



