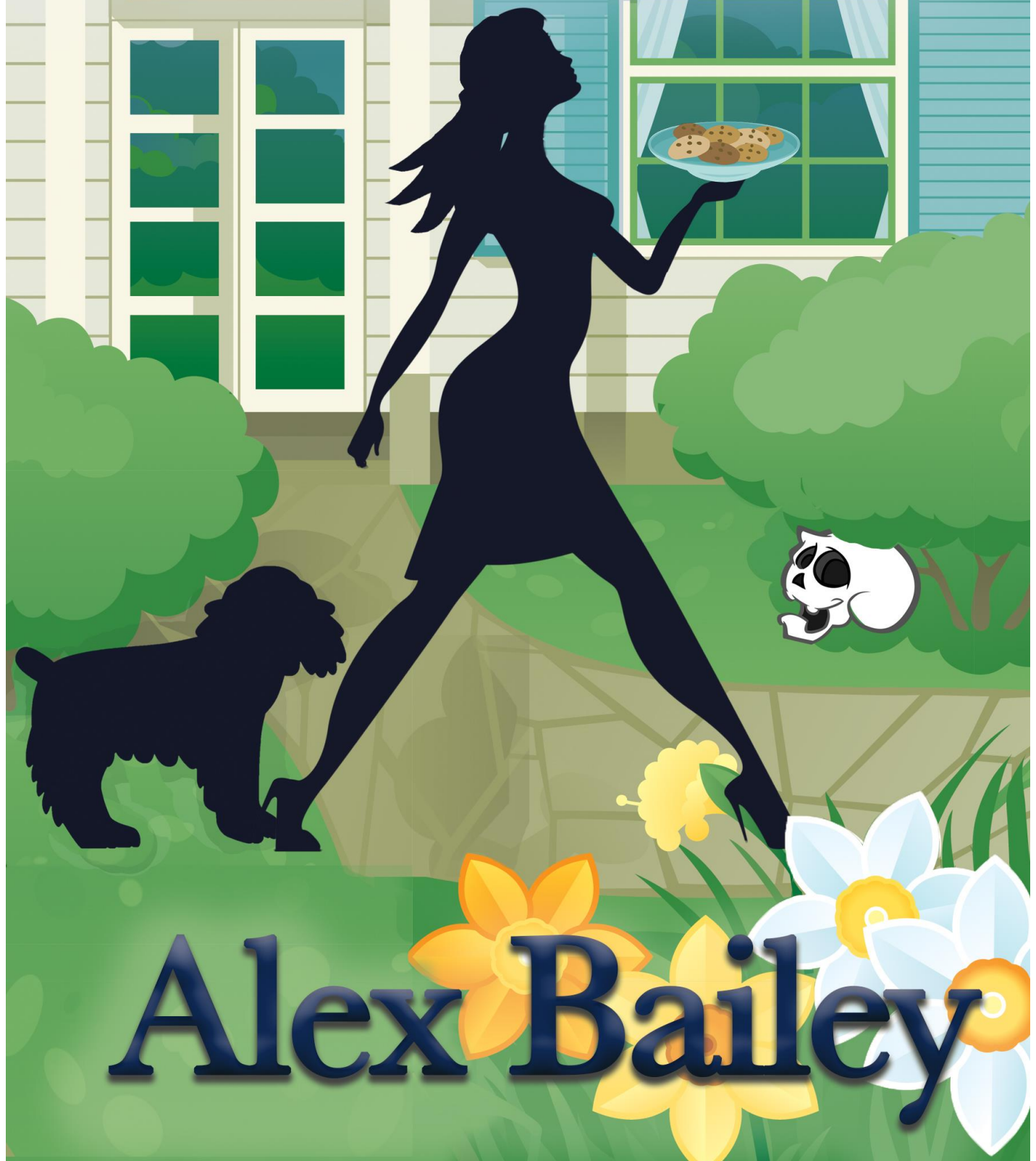


The Future Memoir of *Ann Jones*



The Future Memoir
of
Ann Jones

ALEX BAILEY



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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! "Uh, 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...

Chapter 2

As Ann changed her life from the West Coast to a small town on the East Coast, she worried. She worried about everything, for starters, finding a job, would Honey—her blonde, just like Ann—cocker spaniel would make friends, and most importantly, could the East Coast brew a decent cup of coffee. She'd never been a worrier before, but then again, she'd never been a widow before either.

Stepping off the plane in an airport named for a U.S. president, she rented a car and drove several hours. She had sold her car before the move, not wanting to drive it out from the West Coast alone, and figured she'd just buy a new one. This, of course, was one more thing to worry about.

When she arrived in her new town of maple-lined streets, Burrburgh, known for its bitter cold winters, she stopped first at her realtor's office and picked up the key to her new home. She'd bought it over the Internet, flown out once to attend the settlement and felt instantly at home in the two-story brick, Victorian house. She'd been so excited that day she'd forgotten to retrieve the key. Her realtor offered to express-mail it to her, but she declined. Ann would stop in to see her again.

Ann lowered her windows a few inches for Honey. Since it was a lovely fall day, and she'd only be a minute, Honey would be fine. She gave her a big squeeze around the neck and kissed the top of her head. "Be right back, Honey."

This didn't dispel Honey's look of apprehension as her owner shut the door.

Seeing as she was in mourning over the loss of her husband, Ann wore a Black Sabbath t-shirt and jeans. She'd recently cut her thick blond hair to shoulder length, but it was still long enough to slip into a ponytail.

She liked the feel of her ponytail swinging from side to side as she pranced up the walk to the realtor's office. It made her feel like a teen again.

Gloria Stonehenge met her with a bear hug. "Fabulous to see you again, Ann!" she said in a thick British accent. Gloria was a busty woman with a gleaming dark skin tone, who wasn't afraid of showing an enormous amount of cleavage.

"Yeah, I made it! Still can't believe I forgot the key." Ann shook her head in disbelief.

"Well you had quite a lot on your mind at the time," Gloria forced a cheerful smile.

Ann nodded. It had only been a few months since she'd buried her husband when she found the house on the Internet. And as a coincidence, it was the first one that popped up on the search engine the very first time she made the query. Ann had felt lucky at the time that she didn't have to pore through house after house. It was perfect; a Victorian with a front porch, hanging baskets of flowers, a small yard, with an established vegetable garden. A brick patio and large trees toward the back of the yard were all in perfect order.

Ann loved trees, especially of the palm variety. But she'd left those behind for her future filled with beautiful, mature maple trees.

After retrieving the key, she gave Gloria one final hug and scampered back down the sidewalk carrying her welcome package, which included a Burrburgh phone book of Gloria's recommendations.

Ann thought how friendly it was of her and climbed back into her rental car to be greeted by glad-to-see-you-didn't-leave-me-forever licks from Honey. Ann rubbed the fur on Honey's head and took off down the street, excited to start her new life.

She was going to miss her West Coast friends, but she had a laptop with a camera, so she'd be able to keep up with everyone. It was the kids, Adam and Adrien, who were the most upset by her move.

"Mom, we just lost Dad, and now you're leaving us too," Adrien had moaned when she left.

"I'm not leaving *you*," Ann had tried to reassure her. "I need to get away. The pain is too intense here. The memories are too fresh."

Adam put an arm around his mom and said, "We understand, Mom. We're just going to miss you." He glared at his sister, daring her to say another word.

"Besides, you guys don't need me anymore. You're away at Berkeley now."

But when she stuck the key into the lock of her new life, she passed over the threshold with more immediate worries. Would her furniture arrive on time? Where was the best pizzeria? And she was right to be concerned about pizza, because come on, it's pizza!

Ann checked out the house, moving from room-to-room, like she'd examined her babies when they were born, counting toes and fingers. Only now she was counting windows and the number of steps to the bathroom. Just in case she woke up at night. She was grateful the previous owner had left a bit of toilet paper on the roll. And it was the nice plush type, instead of the cheap stuff. Ann couldn't stand wiping sand paper on her bottom.

When she'd made sufficiently sure she'd have no problem in the middle of the night, the doorbell rang. Right on time. The movers had arrived. She'd timed her arrival perfectly, by staying with Alex a few days before she left. They'd had a good visit together—reminiscing over fun times their families spent on vacations, cookouts, white water rafting, and wiping snotty noses with anything they could muster, including the table skirt at a wedding they once attended.

When the movers finished unloading the truck, Ann was surrounded by boxes. She spent the rest of the day unboxing her belongings. First things first, the kitchen. Honey needed food and water and having her drink out of the plastic cup Ann had stashed in her purse was getting old. And Honey had just finished the kibble she'd stored with the cup.

After she fed her pooch, Ann made pasta she had brought from her favorite market back home and brewed a fresh pot of coffee. Honey watched her eat but kept her distance. She'd been trained early on that unless she wanted Ann taking her food, she wouldn't beg for Ann's.

When she had cleaned up the dishes, Ann collapsed onto the sofa, surrounded by boxes. She thought she had gotten rid of most everything, since she was downsizing, and was surprised at how much was still left. How much stuff does it take to maintain a single woman and a four-year-old dog?

When the doorbell rang again, Ann had just made the decision to get started unpacking her bedroom. She had everything she needed for the night in her suitcase, but unless she wanted to sleep on the sofa, she'd need to find the bed sheets.

She walked across the shiny wooden floors and opened the front door. A large chocolate cake stared at her. She instantly fell in love with whoever was behind it.

Ann reached for it, and behind the cake was just as large a smile, on a tiny woman with straight black bangs and a bob haircut. Ann never was any good at guessing ages, but to her the woman seemed 60ish. She had a pointy chin with a large mole in the center that screamed of the Wicked Witch.

"Welcome to the neighborhood," an unusually vociferous voice came from this petite little thing.

"Why, thank you very much. Come in, come in." Ann stepped aside to allow the woman to pass.

Ann set the cake on the coffee table in the living room and stuck out her hand, "I'm Ann Jones."

"Freda Gout," she shook Ann's hand with a firm grip. "So, where you from? Married? Got kids?"

Ann knew all too well the neighborhood had elected this woman to scout her out, for she herself had been the designee when they'd had a newcomer to her old neighborhood.

"I'm from a small town on the West Coast, Hotlandtown. A widow, two kids, twins, in college in California." Ann had a feeling Freda would appreciate her getting straight to the point rather than beating around the bush and making her dig for information.

Freda gave Ann an eerily knowing look, and nodded as if she knew the answers before she asked them.

"You knit?" Freda asked with her arms crossed over her chest.

"In fact, I do." Although she hadn't knitted anything in quite a long time, even though she had recently visited a knitting store back home.

"Well, then, you'll have to come to Knitting Club. Just a group of us old bitties sitting around stitchin' and bitchin'. I think you'll have a lot in common with these gals."

Ann was excited to meet new people and make friends, so she accepted the invitation, "Absolutely! When and where do I show up? And what shall I bring?"

"We meet each Wednesday at 7:30 PM. Always at my house, just three doors down. Do you have a pen and paper? I'll write down my address and phone number for you."

Ann dug in her purse and pulled out a small notebook and pen and handed it to Freda.

"Would you like to have a piece of this yummy looking cake with me?" Ann offered.

"Never eat my own food," Freda warned, as she handed her contact information to Ann. "Well, I need to get back to my sweetie."

"Your husband?"

Freda let out a laugh as hearty as her handshake, and said, "My dog. He's part Siamese cat. Gets real finicky if I leave him too long without letting him know where I am. Since he was asleep when I left, thought it best to leave him be."

"So how do you manage to leave him during Knitting Club?"

"Don't. We bring our pets. You're not allergic to nothing, are you?" Freda glanced at her out of the corner of her eye.

"No, I have a dog." Ann called, "Honey!" Her pooch bounded down the stairs. She was surprised Honey hadn't come bustling down when the doorbell rang.

Freda gave a heavy pat to Honey's head and commented, "Cute. She'll fit right in."

"Should I bring something to the knitting group?"

"Knitting needles and yarn if you plan to knit. Anything else's optional. Some of the gals may bring a munchie, if the mood strikes 'em. But not necessary. Gotta go. See you Wednesday." Freda moved toward the door.

"It was very nice to meet you, Freda. Thanks for the cake. And thank you for inviting me to the knitting group. I'm looking forward to it." Ann was anxious to make friends as soon as possible.

"Remember," Freda said as she opened the door without turning back, "Initiation's at 7:30. Don't be late." She closed the door behind herself.

Initiation? That's a funny way of referring to meeting a group of ladies. But, then again, Freda did seem a bit odd. Ann turned to see Honey eyeing the chocolate mound. Knowing that chocolate would make Honey sick, she moved the cake to the kitchen.

Since she had been working all day unpacking boxes, Ann figured she deserved a treat. She cut herself a rather large slice. Of course, this called for more coffee, and even though she normally preferred it black, but when she was already overloading her insulin, she preferred to make it extra sweet. She decided to throw caution to the wind and stirred in three level teaspoons of sugar into her cup. The South has their sweet tea so the West Coast, though now she was on the East Coast, could have their sweet coffee.

Ann put a large piece of the luscious cake on her fork and scraped a heaping helping of frosting next to it and then shoved it into her mouth. She just as quickly spat the entire horrid mess across the table, some of which landed on the floor.

Honey ran over, sniffed it, and backed away slowly, with her ears sagging. When she had backed away sufficiently far enough, she began to growl.

Ann dashed over to the sink and ran water into her mouth from the faucet, rinsing the repugnance out of her teeth. It tasted like what she imagined vomit,

sewage, and dog farts mixed together in a dumpster of dirty diapers would taste like. She took a few gulps of her coffee to replace the memory of the worst cake...no, the worst anything, she had ever tasted. And that included eating cat food and play dough as a child. She was thankful for the caution she had thrown and had the sweet flavor of sugar to replace that vile mess, Freda called cake.

What was Freda trying to do, poison her? She couldn't figure out what Freda had put in that "cake", but chocolate, flour, eggs, and sugar were definitely not among the ingredients. She made a mental note to herself, when someone says they don't eat their own food, be damn sure to trust their judgment.



About the Author

Alex Bailey was a bored writer/editor of documents as monotonous as vacuum cleaner manuals. She left that life behind to create more exciting worlds than the one she lived in. *The Future Memoir of Ann Jones* is the first book under her assumed identity. When she's not listening to friends reveal wild stories about their future, she's tending to her organic garden while belting out show tunes. Ironically, Alex does not have the patience to sit still long enough to knit. Some of her favorite hobbies include: embarrassing her children in public with her rhythmically-challenged dancing, cleaning the small disc around the stopper of the bathroom sink, and dallying. She'd love to tell you more about herself, but as you know, she is incognito so as not to reveal the true identity of her friend, Ann Jones.

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