

---

# ACCEPTING ANNIE

Triple A - Book Three

---

RJ GRAY



Published by Blushing Books  
An Imprint of  
ABCD Graphics and Design, Inc.  
A Virginia Corporation  
977 Seminole Trail #233  
Charlottesville, VA 22901

©2019  
All rights reserved.

No part of the book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. The trademark Blushing Books is pending in the US Patent and Trademark Office.

RJ Gray  
Accepting Annie

EBook ISBN: 978-1-948045-18-6  
v3

Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

---

## Prologue

---

January 2, 1988...

**F**resh snow covered the treetops and frosted the yard, the howling bitter wind causing the already low temperatures to plummet further. A modest brick home sat on a slight hill overlooking several acres of land. Holding an unopened envelope, Martha Campbell paced back and forth in front of the roaring fireplace that heated the small study. The nervous energy was all but tangible in the room as Martha flipped the unassuming paper over in her hands, tracing her thumb over the neatly written address in the left corner before gazing again at the foreign stamp in the right. Her heart raced with anticipation of what the contents of the correspondence might hold. She had been waiting for the answer to her letter, a letter she had written with every ounce of emotion she had been pushing back for the past seven months.

As she took a deep breath, she summoned enough courage to open the envelope. Plopping down into the navy blue oversized La-Z-Boy chair, her father's favorite, she slowly pulled the lined piece of paper out before unfolding the letter and starting to read

it. Nausea hit her like a one-two punch, her stomach lurching at the impersonal opening, a feeling of foreboding flooding over her. Martha read the letter with shaking hands. Her gasp filled the air. She couldn't believe it. Through tear-blurred vision, she reread it, the falling tears smearing the ink on the page. Surely, there had to be some mistake? This just couldn't be right. She read it a third time. Nothing changed in the words or the meaning, no matter how many times she read it. The response was the last thing she had expected. Deep inside, she had known this was a possibility; she had considered every viable option, but her heart had told her he wasn't like that, he would never shirk his responsibility. Martha had thought he cared about her. Maybe, he didn't quite love her; after all, they had only known each other for a short time, but she could have sworn she saw care in his eyes when he looked at her.

She was wrong. She had never misjudged another person as badly before. She had hoped... It didn't matter what she had hoped, her hopes weren't reality. This letter containing his answer was all that mattered now. For a moment, she allowed herself to sob quietly, her heartbroken angst joining the crackling flames in song. Her sobs soon quieted as she considered the news of his betrayal.

Besotted with anger, Martha balled up the letter and threw it with all of her might. The crumpled piece of paper went flying through the room, her aim blurred by her tears. It just missed the fireplace, bouncing off of the bricks and landing a few feet away. Martha's hand rested over her swollen belly, her daughter's kicks moving fiercely under her fingers, reminding her of the life that grew within. With her other hand, she wiped away the hot tears running down her face. She sighed deeply, regaining control of her emotions. "It's okay, baby girl. Mommy's got you. It's just you and me against this big, wide world. We don't need him. We don't need a man to be happy or successful." She pushed her

shoulders back and jutted her chin out, stubborn determination replacing the hurt she had felt just seconds before.

Awkwardly, Martha pushed herself out of her chair to standing, her eight-month-pregnant belly leading the way. She waddled over to where the offensive piece of paper lay. Bending down, putting a hand on the floor to steady herself, she picked up the piece of paper, smoothing out the wrinkles. "This will be my motivation for greatness. We will be great, baby girl. You will do great things; of this, I have no doubt. I promise, sweetheart, that you will always have what you need provided for you." Standing back up, Martha took the paper, folded it neatly several times and put it in the back of her grandmother's old bible, before putting the bible back in its box and closing the lid. She picked up the discarded envelope, took the check out and, with a frown, examined it. There were way too many zeros on it for her to be comfortable. She had a decision to make now, but it would be best if she slept on it.

---

## Chapter 1

---

The large, clunky black phone on the desk gave off an annoying, shrilling ring, startling senior investigative reporter, Annie Campbell. *I hate that damn thing!* She cringed as the brrring brrring filled the air once more. She snatched up the handset, putting the bulky cold plastic up to her ear. "Campbell."

"Just checking on your ancestry piece. I'd like to get it on the calendar," Annie's editor, Tony Garcia said.

"Good morning to you, too," Annie muttered. "I've still not received my results. When I do, you will be the first to know. Couldn't come over and ask me or send me a text?" They had developed a friendship over the past three years that had transcended a boss/subordinate relationship.

"Nah. I know how much you just love your office phone."

"Oh, yes. It is my most favorite of all sounds." Sarcasm dripped from Annie's voice. "You are a little one office over from me."

"I didn't feel like getting up."

"That sounds about right." Annie hung up with a frown. Before the interruption, Annie had been putting the finishing

touches on her latest article about the increase of amphetamine overdoses in America. Looking it over once more, satisfied with the results, she emailed the finished product over to Tony. With a frustrated sigh, she pulled up her current fluff piece. *It isn't so bad*, she thought, reading it over. *I just need my results to come in and I can get this darn thing off my desk*. She spun in her chair in her much sought-after corner office on the top floor. It had been reserved for the top ranking of staff members and Annie had gleefully accepted it, along with a sizeable raise, after her second Pulitzer Prize win.

At thirty-one, Annie was the youngest senior reporter at World Report Press. The combination of her age and gender meant that she was constantly trying to prove herself to her coworkers. Just in the past year, Annie had won two Pulitzer Prizes, for her contribution to investigative pieces. The nominations alone were quite the honor; winning had been the icing on the cake. Annie knew she should be proud and yet, it wasn't quite the validation she sought. The goal was to be awarded a Pulitzer Prize for independent work, and she had no doubt that she was employed by the best news organization to achieve it.

One of the articles was a piece on human trafficking that had helped to free over three thousand enslaved children. After bringing the issue into the limelight, the countries who had been turning the other cheek had been forced by the United Nations to act or face harsh sanctions. It was one of the most rewarding moments in her life. She would never forget when the detectives in Spain had thrown open the back doors of a large semi-truck and rescued dozens of children from the sex trade. For six hours, she sat in a hard, empty room with harsh lights, reading to and holding the children as their parents were contacted. Eventually, she was told that she had to leave, and that journalists were not permitted in the building. She had all but forgotten she was a journalist. At that point, she was just a human comforting other humans in their time of need. There had been several moments

like that in her career—dancing with the indigenous people of far off lands, feeding starving children in impoverished countries, giving out aid with the Red Cross in refugee camps, evacuating hurricane victims and bagging the flooded Mississippi River, alongside National Guardsmen.

Annie loved her job. It was more than just writing to her; it was being an ambassador for truth and change. She wanted to make the world a better place. She wasn't the type to be able to affect change from a political stage or an operating room, but she sure could do it with her words. Working for World Report Press, or WRP, a globally recognized new media outlet, their initials alone making people stop and pay attention, was the biggest honor of them all. WRP reporters had been embedded in every country, every major conflict, political and organizational scandal for over a hundred years. With a daily readership of more than half the world's population and a dedication to preserving ethics in journalism, their reputation preceded them. Annie had set her sights high and would not have settled for any other publication. A woman of goal setting and list making, her life had been dedicated to achieving her first objective on the list, to become a journalist at WRP. After achieving it, she worked her butt off, quickly moving up in the ranks.

WRP published over 2,000 articles every single day, and Annie knew if she wanted to continue to succeed, she would have to find a way to set herself apart from all the other journalists on staff. She hadn't figured out how to do that, not yet anyway. Annie had become "one of the guys" among her coworkers, who were mostly men. She wore that badge with honor; it had taken a while for her male counterparts to stop babying and protecting her at every turn. She had to prove that she was capable of taking care of herself in even the most violent of situations. Finally, she had been accepted within their circle as an equal, a peer. Now she just had to figure out what steps to take to rise above.



Annie volunteered to take the hardest pieces, travelled around the world and embedded herself in extremely dangerous situations looking for that one story that would change her life. In a million years, she would never have imagined that out of all of her stories, it would be a fluff piece that would pick up her life, shake it all around and throw it, crashing into pieces on the ground.

Annie had balked at the assignment, but Tony had reminded her that every piece was important and that it was the human-interest pieces that went viral on social media. Still, it was hard for her to switch her mindset from hardened criminals and dying children to fluff. Entertaining fluff, but fluff nevertheless. These pieces had no impact on the world around her. If she had wanted to write fluff, she would have applied to work at one of the tabloid magazines.

One of the most lucrative new trends was using DNA to return ancestry results. Several direct-to-consumer genetic companies had popped up claiming to be able to trace a person's DNA back hundreds of years, classifying their genealogy into neat little categories. Because of the popularity of these companies, Annie had been assigned an investigative piece.

She had started her work on this assignment as a cynic. The pitch had been to interview people who had found out about their pasts using DNA kits. She knew that Tony was looking for a feel-good read, light and positive. Annie wasn't known for light pieces. Feel good, she could do, but they were always deep and often times emotionally provocative. She looked over the short paragraph that had accompanied the assignment. There wasn't a lot of instruction, so she decided to put her own spin on it. She would debunk it and expose the industry as a fraud. She would analyze the science behind these tests and determine if these companies were conning people out of millions of dollars.

Annie would rather be back in Africa covering the poverty crisis or in the Middle East covering the wars, than interviewing

a bunch of twenty-something year olds who had enough disposable income to pay for an unnecessary DNA test to track their supposed ancestral history. She just didn't see the draw. Annie had convinced a couple of her coworkers and her best friend, Addie, to take the test. Always a cynic and determined to prove that the companies were a bunch of frauds, she had recruited three sets of identical twins for her experiment, fully expecting their data to come back different from each other.

The research had been astounding to Annie. Ten million people around the world had paid money to have their DNA analyzed in order to find out where their ancestors had come from. The companies boasted that they could tell you the regions from which your ancestors hailed and how much of each ethnicity, down to the percent, a person had in their DNA makeup. Americans, specifically, jumped at this, many unsure of where their ancestors had come to America from.

It had taken three months, but the outcomes of their tests had all come back. Everyone's but Annie's, that was, as she had sent hers in last. After spending time analyzing the results, Annie found her cynicism fading. The twins all had identical results, which they should, even though Annie'd had her doubts. Between the three different companies, the differences in the results were slim to none. What were the chances that they would all get the same results if this were a fraud? After the results hadn't provided the evidence she needed to disprove and out the companies for fraud, she had dived head first into finding out how the tests were run and what programs analyzed the saliva they had put into those tiny plastic tubes. Hoping for faulty science, she was surprised to find out that the science behind the testing was sound. Using microarray-based testing, companies scan over 700,000 spots on a person's genomes to get the results. She hated to admit it, but Annie had become a believer.

Knowing next to nothing about her biological father, Annie was looking forward to finding out what ethnicity he had been.

Her dark, almost black hair against her blue eyes had always made her wonder. Her mother, God rest her soul, had beautiful hazel eyes. She assumed her eye color came from her paternal side, since three generations of Campbell women had the same hazel mixture of green and brown. The sheer light blue of her eyes contrasted against the darkness of her hair, often making the color pop even more. Both of her maternal grandparents had black hair, although now they both wore their gray hair with pride. Annie's grandmother had gotten big into family trees and ancestry tracing, several years before, and had tracked both her and her husband's sides all the way back to 1500 Scotland, so she assumed she was at least a quarter Scottish.

Annie figured her DNA results would be like her best friend's, a large mixture of different ethnicities. In fact, every test they had run so far had come up with a list of at least six origins on them. Turned out, many Americans were a hodgepodge of different ethnicities and cultures. She refreshed her email, checking again for the results. Finding nothing there, she put the finishing touches on the article, leaving space for a paragraph or two of her own personal findings and saved it.

Stretching her arms overhead and arching her back, Annie closed her eyes. The burning behind her eyelids told her she had been staring at the computer monitor too long. Standing, she grabbed her cell phone, closed the office door and headed outside. Swinging wide the doors, she took a deep breath of the fresh air as she stepped out onto the sidewalk. She had travelled up to her Seattle office for the week; although she preferred staying closer to her apartment right outside of Tacoma, she had to make an appearance from time to time. The noise of the city filled her ears and she quickly put in her wireless earbuds, nodding along to the beat of the music as it energized her.

Ignoring the bright green awning of the popular chain coffee shop that sat on every corner of the city, leaves crunched under Annie's feet as she walked a couple blocks away from the main

hustle and bustle to a side street, where a local Mom and Pop café sat. They didn't have a lot of coffee flavors on the menu, but what they did have was perfected. The coffee beans were roasted right there, in house, the depth of flavor unlike anything a chain shop could pull off. Annie breathed in the rich smell and smiled, her mouth watering.

"Annie, dear! It has been so long! What adventures have kept you away?" The slightly plump, just past middle-aged woman behind the counter, called out a greeting. Not waiting for a reply, she wiped her flour-covered hands on her apron before continuing. "I have a new gingerbread latte on the menu. It isn't overly sweet; you'd like it. Would you like one?" Annie had liked the sweet fru-fru drinks when she had started college; like her bestie, she had a tendency to have a little coffee with her milk and sugar. Then, she became an investigative journalist, a globetrotter. There were many places where milk and sugar weren't readily available, and she had grown accustomed to drinking her coffee black. Now, the sugary sweet American concoctions were much too sweet for her. Mrs. Wallace knew exactly how she liked her coffee, and she trusted her recommendation.

"That sounds great!" Annie settled into a tall back barstool at the counter and exchanged her earbuds for the sounds of the café. The grinding sound came first. Achieving the consistency she was looking for, Mrs. Wallace transferred the ground coffee into the basket, raising her hand and banging the metal down on the counter to settle the grounds. Whack! Tap, tap, tap! The tell-tale clank followed, before the water started to flow over the beans. The rich aroma filled the air, and Annie smiled broadly. There were very few things in life she enjoyed more than a good cup of coffee. Nectar of the gods, as Annie called it, flowed into the shot glasses. There was no point in starting a conversation around the noise; she'd wait until the coffee was done. The whistling of the steam wand alerted that the milk was ready. Mrs. Wallace deftly mixed the espresso, a couple squirts of

flavored syrup and the milk before setting the steaming cup before her.

Annie lifted the cup to her lips, taking a long pull of the hot liquid, moaning in pleasure. "Delicious!" The gingerbread-flavored syrup added just the right amount of fall flavor without being overly sweet. Notes of ginger, allspice, cinnamon and a hint of nutmeg blended perfectly together.

"I thought you would like that. Here, eat. I made these fresh this morning. Cranberry orange scones with fresh whipped cream. You could stand to gain a pound or two." It was all Annie could do to keep from chuckling. Mrs. Wallace was always trying to fatten her up. Her baked goods were even better than the coffee. Homemade with a dash of love, every bite was like an orgasm for her taste buds.

Annie had found the café quite by accident on her first day of work at WRP. She had been looking for a restaurant and had turned the wrong way, getting lost. She stopped in at Thistle Stop to get directions, and that was all it took. Mrs. Wallace's Scottish lilt had drawn Annie to her, reminding her of the way her great-grandmother had spoken, and they had become fast friends. Now, every time Annie was in Seattle for work or pleasure, she stopped by and had coffee with Mrs. Wallace. Mrs. Wallace had never had children of her own, although she had married. Her husband had passed away a few years after they had been married, and she never wed again. She assured Annie that she had plenty of male suitors and enjoyed their company, but only one soul mate.

Annie took a bite of the scone, her eyes rolling back in pleasure. "No one bakes like you! I know; I have been all around the world, and I keep coming back here."

Mrs. Wallace's chuckled. "Kind of you to say so, my dear." The two got to chatting and before long, an hour had passed.

"I have to get back to work, unfortunately," Annie said, looking at her watch. "I'll be back next week, I'm sure."

"Let me bag up some of these scones for you to take with you, on the house, of course!" Annie knew it was futile to argue with the woman. She watched as Mrs. Wallace generously filled a bag with a variety of scones, muffins and pastries. "You need to put some meat on those bones, after all. A good man will want a woman with some meat, to keep him warm throughout the winter months. Have a good rest of the day, my dear. Drive back home safely tonight, none of that texting stuff, you hear me?"

"I hear you, Mrs. Wallace. I won't text and drive; you have my word."