

# HAUNTING ANNA

BY KAREN FRAZIER

These are the things I never thought I would do in my life: climb Mount Everest, participate in a triathlon, fight in a war, give up ice cream, kill my husband.

These are the things I still haven't done in my life: climb Mount Everest, participate in a triathlon, fight in a war, give up ice cream. If I was going to choose one to check off of my list, I don't think it would have been that one.

It's true. I killed Aaron. I can still see my two hands pulling away from protecting my face from his blows and opening the balcony door. In the fading twilight, my hands look like small, white moths flailing at a light. As if in slow motion, the moths reach out to ward off his punches as he rushes out after me, and then they push him away as he grabs for my hair.

Now they fly out of my field of vision, and I can feel them covering my mouth as Aaron pitches over the balcony railing and disappears from my field of view. Then, an ungodly wail pierces the air, and I realize I am screaming Aaron's name.

The investigation and funeral appear to me now in snapshots. There is no feeling there — I am numb. I am vaguely aware that people are talking to me. Asking me questions and carefully watching my responses.

I don't care what they do to me or if they believe me at all. My sister, an attorney, stays with me. It seems

that she cares enough for both of us, and it is she who leads the police investigators to friends and neighbors who are aware of the secret life that Aaron and I led, no matter how hard I had tried to conceal it.

I can see a snapshot of my sister, smiling triumphantly as she tells me that no charges will be brought because the police are convinced I was acting in self-defense.

More snapshots of the funeral. Aaron asleep in a box. A sting on my cheek from where his mother slaps

**Once again, the night is filled with the sounds of otherworldly screams.**

me. My mother crying and leading me away. The smell of flowers — everywhere flowers, until I feel like my head will explode with their cloying scent.

Now Aaron comes to me every night. He is the Aaron I remember from the beginning — sweet, tender, and smiling. In these night visits, he is the Aaron that I always wanted near me — not the one whose approaching footsteps beat a pattern of fear into my thundering heart.

Aaron's visits must be a dream — and yet they don't have the hazy confusing quality of a dream. He is so real and vivid. I can feel each of his touches, and his whispered words of love brush against my ear like a soft sigh.

Surely it must be wishful thinking on my part, because he tells me that it wasn't my fault and that he forgives me. And then he brushes away my tears and takes me in his arms.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is Saturday morning, and I am aimlessly browsing through a rack of shirts when I feel a warm hand on my shoulder.

"Anna — is that you?"  
Looking up, I am surprised to see Marc, my college boyfriend. His handsome face is softer around the eyes than I remember, and there is gray in his temples — but it is clearly him.

My stomach clutches, and I feel as if my arms are paralyzed. I am rooted to my spot, but his face breaks into a boyish smile, and I am enveloped in warmth and strength as he hugs me. He is saying something — but it is muffled by the wool arms that are scratching at my ears.

I am not sure whether I am going to laugh or burst into tears. Both feelings are inside of me, and I can only sit back inside of myself and watch to see which one comes out. I want his hug to go on forever — but he pulls

away and holds me at arms' length.

To my surprise — I neither laugh nor cry. Instead I smile and look into the eyes that I have never forgotten.

Marc is laughing. "I was just talking about you to someone the other day, and here you are," he says. And then his eyes go to the small jade pendant I have around my neck.

He reaches out to touch it. "You still have it," he says. "I never imagined you would still have it."

And suddenly I am right back to where we were. Marc and I always had a pull between us that was stronger than gravity — and as his hand brushes against my throat, I can feel the gravity pulling me toward him as if there were not 15 years of distance between us.

Marc and I go for coffee. Coffee becomes lunch, lunch becomes dinner, and dinner ends at Marc's house. I feel as if I am waking up for the first time since I killed Aaron.

Marc tells me about his marriage and divorce, and then asks me about mine. I try to tell him only the good parts about Aaron, but somehow the rest slips out in a rush of unintended words. After I tell him, I feel as if I have swallowed a hot stone that is burning in the pit of my stomach — but when I look up into Marc's eyes I see no condemnation.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is Sunday morning, and Marc returns with me to my condo. I change my clothes, and we head off to Alki Beach. It is one of those brilliant autumn days where beneath the warmth of the sun and brilliant blue sky is the scent of a crisp chill.

We walk along the beach, and I find myself spontaneously bubbling over with laughter — something that I can't remember doing, it has been so long.

In the afternoon, we pick up some groceries, and I cook dinner at my

condo for Marc. We laugh constantly. Suddenly I can see that maybe there is something ahead for me other than the vast emptiness in which I have existed.

Later I am violently awakened by something pummeling my head. Reflexively, I reach up to protect myself, but find only air. I see Marc sleeping peacefully next to me and decide I must have been dreaming in spite of my throbbing head.

I am ready to lie back down and go to sleep when my hair is yanked back, and I hear Aaron's voice hissing in my ear.

"Who is that, slut?"

I try to cry out, but it feels as if a



rag has been stuffed into my mouth. I reach up to yank it out, but there is nothing there.

Another blow whaps me on the side of the head. Instantly my ears start to ring, and hot tears leap to my eyes. I try to fight back, but I am fighting only air. Next to me, Marc sits up and sees me struggling against an invisible force that is pinning me to the bed.

"Anna, wake up, you are having a dream," he says and reaches over to touch me.

"DON'T TOUCH HER,"

Aaron's voice roars from somewhere behind me, and Marc is slammed backwards and off of the bed.

Suddenly, I am free, but I don't know where to run or what to do. From the edge of the bed, I can hear Marc struggling as if he is fighting for his life.

I roll off of my side of the bed and run around to Marc. I reach to pull him away from the unseen force that is pummeling him, but I am flung backwards and smack against the wall, dazed.

Now, Marc is on his feet, and it appears he is being driven backwards toward the balcony doors. The doors open, and Marc stumbles backwards onto the balcony.

Time slows to a stop-motion crawl. I am filled with icy dread as I suddenly realize Aaron's intention.

Snapshot of me running toward the balcony. Snapshot of Marc punching at an invisible force. Snapshot of the horror on Marc's face as he realizes he is about to go over the railing.

And then once again the night is filled with the sounds of otherworldly screams, which I vaguely recognize as my own.

Just like that, clarity dawns. I can see the road ahead of me like I am reading pages from a book. And the future I see is unacceptable. I know what I must do. I

am no longer in a dream, and the balcony rail beckons.

I imagine what my flight to the ground will be — a slow tumble with the white moths that are my hands fluttering gracefully out to my sides. I step up to the railing and look down at Marc's broken body on the concrete below.

Briefly I worry that I will be condemned to spend eternity with Aaron — but I can feel in my gut that this isn't true. There is only one way to end this. This is my path, and this is all I know. ♦