

# HYPOTHESIS

The Hekapolis Trilogy

ANA BASTOW



Astrogea Books

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Printed in the United States of America  
First printing, September, 2013

ISBN:978-1490322407

ISBN-10:149032240X

Cover Art: Jeremy Sandrik

## DEDICATION

To my firstborn Orion.  
Thank you for teaching me that motherhood is alchemy.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Stephanie Chan. My star editor

To Amy Miller without her help this book will still be in 'last edits' stage.

To rikathull. This book is 1000% better because of your wisdom and guide.

To my husband. Always supporting me in every single way. Couldn't had written this without you in my life. I love you.

Blessings to all of you.

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## *The Hypothesis: the existence of Magic in the physical world.*

Gabrielle I. Bridge, Cal Poly Pomona, 2010.

### **ABSTRACT**

~~There were little facts about the reality of magic in our world up until now (2010). Most theories suggested that it was all the fruit of superstitious individuals under the influence of drugs or of charlatans looking for making a quick buck from ignorant trusting people. But now we had witnessed, tested, measured and documented the activities of a whole race of individuals indistinguishable from Homo Sapiens that hide in plain sight using their powers for multiple purposes. The results showed that all of them can affect, change and dominate the physical world with a series of words, ingredients and rites. The conclusion is that magic is real.~~

Dear Sage,

I was going to tell you what happened before my disappearance in the manner of a scientific paper, but I don't think the intensity of my encounter; or the pain, love, lust and loss I felt could be properly expressed that way. As funny as it might sound to you, I'm choosing to tell you my story in the manner of feelings instead of facts, not like proper scientists communicate their discoveries. After you read this, you will understand why.

Above all else, I have always wanted to know the mysteries of the universe. I amused myself thinking that Pandora's Box wouldn't last a second after reaching my hands. Not even a split second, despite warnings of ill portent, I would have opened the lid, condemning myself and the world to the pain of all its woes. The idea that knowledge could damn our entire existence was alien to me. I never bought it.

Until I met him. Pandora's Box came into my life in the figure of a man.

# ALPHA

Maybe because it was the most unreachable goal a woman like me could attain, I decided, the day my father left, that I was going to win the Nobel Prize one day. I elaborated a simple but foolproof plan and visualized it like a blackboard inside my mind:

- 1- *Physics degree,*
- 2- *Masters in Astrophysics,*
- 3- *Prestigious professorship,*
- 4- *Graduate work in theoretical physics,*
- 5- *Make a major scientific breakthrough,*
- 6- *Win the Nobel Prize,*

At the bottom of this list. Almost as an afterthought.

- 7- *Get a boyfriend.*

It seemed simple enough, but for me it was particularly complicated. My deadbeat dad left us scraping bottom, or so my mother said. And all the scholarships I applied for rejected me.

*“Their loss...”*

I had to submit myself to the most shameful act a scientist, or any woman for that matter, could endure to collect the necessary money to enroll at Cal Poly Pomona.

*“Many women enjoy that kind of...event, you know?”*

The rest of the money for my education I was earning honestly with a part time job at a grocery chain. At this point the first item of my list was half way finished.

Sadly, I didn't know how I would pay for my Masters and I had yet to meet any other acceptable ambitious scientists to start working with on research. But then during the second quarter – exactly in the middle of the semester – my perfect guy started to share one of the classes with me.

That particular spring, global warming had decided to play one on us again and made the weather unnaturally hot for the season. It was particularly uncomfortable for me, because I insisted on looking professional at all times. Buttoned up shirts, long pants, closed-toe shoes, and a ponytail: my perpetual self-imposed college uniform.

The truth is that I tried to always look like I could be a teacher. My own way to push my credentials even though I still didn't had them. It worked so well that in fact a few times I got mistaken as one.

*“I love those moments!”*

As you can imagine, all I could think about was for winter to come and make my existence a bit easier. Maybe that’s why I decided to take so many credits that quarter; every time I ducked into the cool, crisp air-conditioning of a classroom; I breathed a sigh of relief. Sometimes I would stay in the car between classes, running the AC for a few minutes just to endure the heat.

Mom, the few times she was sober enough to notice, always tried to convince me of wearing more fresh and sexy clothes to no avail.

This twister of hot weather and too many classes was the moment the three of us clashed together, like the meteor that impacted Tunguska. It changed the landscape and our lives forever.

We shared my fourth period class, Fundamentals of physics. The other subjects were easy and uneventful: General physics, College physics and their respective laboratories. I just glided through the lessons with ease. I only needed to reread the day’s subject a few minutes before the class started. I was ready for whatever question or challenge then.

*“Easy as pie...”*

It wasn’t the first time I saw any of them. I remember vague annoying sightings of William, but Toby was my “first time” to call it some way. The memory of his touch was always lingering in my mind. It was the one and only time Toby and I were so close. I constantly thought about him ever since.

*“Pathetic...”*

When I realized in the first day of class that Toby was in the same period, I was lost in the idea of us getting together again, hopefully for good.

Even though this subject was a bit challenging, I wasn’t doing so bad myself. My enthusiasm and expertise placed me as the third best in the class. But Toby was so far ahead of the rest of us, he could have practically taught the lessons. Consistently number one, he probably knew more than even our instructor, Mr. Robinette.

Admiring him from afar, but unable to find the words to reconnect with him, I came to appreciate him more. Not only was Toby pretty much a genius, but he was also cute: dark brown curly hair, a nice inviting smile with dimples and glasses that I adored. He was simply perfect. Maybe not for my friends Glenda and Tess, but perfect for me. I had a crush the size of the moon on him. That much I could admit to myself.

*“For a change...”*

I couldn't deny that he was part of the reason Fundamentals was my favorite class. His presence, the way he could recite logarithms, his way around thermodynamics, and his total dominance of scleronomous systems ... I imagined that he was talking just to me. And I imagined that I could talk only to him. Two alien civilizations connected by a radio signal only we could understand.

*"Hopefully we will make contact at some point in this century..."*

Sadly, he had no idea about my admiration. It wasn't that I felt that I wasn't pretty enough to be attractive to him. He already showed that I passed his threshold for a hook-up at least.

I also was very realistic about my looks. I had a nightmare of entangled messy hay in my head that according to the encyclopedia was classified as hair. All I could do with it was tying it and hope it wouldn't come alive and eat my books during one of my classes or something like it. At least I liked the color. Light brown that changed with the seasons: chestnut brown in the winter and dirty blond in the hotter months.

I had a healthy olive skin complexion, according to my mother, a gift from a long lost African-American ancestor. Even though I wore my uniform more baggy than it should be. I wasn't ill-shaped by any stretch of the imagination. It's true that I did my darnedest best to get the ugliest, least trendy glasses that I could find, an extra layer of protection against the world. But I was sure a man as smart as Toby wouldn't care about physical appearances. He was not the shallow type. I could tell.

*"But then, Dad looked like a nice guy too..."*

No, I wasn't afraid of rejection about my looks or something nubile like that. The reason he didn't know about my crush was...

*"You are a damn coward!"*

Being open to rejection was not my thing. Even if Toby seemed single and lonely, his opinion was too important for me. I just couldn't stand it if he rejected me and things got awkward between us.

*"No, not awkward ... painful."*

I remembered an occasion when he approached me, looking comfortable and friendly. He wore a plaid shirt with a white round neck T-shirt under it, jeans and some very old-looking tennis shoes.

"Hi Gabrielle!" He said. His voice a light tenor.

"Hey, Tobias!" I tried to look as uninterested as possible. But it was a miracle I wasn't stuttering.

"Toby, please," he said, then joked, "Tobias makes me feel like a Catholic friar or something."

I could barely contain my - excitement? Is that right? I think so, it felt right to hear him like this, casual, smooth, and comfortable with me. I liked it better than I probably should.

*"Like I said, pathetic..."*

I laughed as best as I could to show appreciation for the joke. That surely would get me extra points, right?

*"Not if you laugh like an idiot..."*

"Okay, Toby, it is."

Time slowed down, interminably, stretching to forever with just my silence. Me and small talk were not friends. What do I say now? Something witty? Comment on the weather?

*"...Lame"*

But before I could think of something, he saved me.

"I was wondering if I could borrow your notes? I could barely keep up with the teacher today, but I noticed that you were with him all the way. Very impressive."

I felt a warm feeling spread throughout my body.

*"He'd noticed and was impressed."*

"Thanks," I said shyly, but instead of trying to keep him talking or trying to get a meeting. I just took my notebook and passed it to him. He studied it I watched as he got a couple of Post-Its from his backpack and copied a bit of info. He stuck them onto a clean notebook, with similar notes in what it looked like a very well designed schedule.

*"He is so organized."*

The whole time, I tried to think of something clever or fun to say, but I came up with nothing.

"Thanks!" He said with a smile once he finished. "See you next week." I just nodded and let her go, still a mute.

Of course, the minute he turned around I started to think of all the things I could have asked him; the books I was reading, the music in my MP3, the teachers I was looking forward, and the ones I was not. I felt a bit hungry, maybe tell him that we could eat something now if he was not too busy ... but it was too late. I peered at the door closing behind him.

*"What a wasted opportunity."*

"Maybe next time," I muttered bitterly to myself.

"Next time what...?"

I looked up to see who heard me. The first thing I saw was a ring on a pinky finger. It looked ancient with a willow tree shallowly engraved in it. The trendy clothes gave away who he was.

*"DB?!"*

Short for DumbBill. His real name was William. I admit that “DumbBill” isn’t exactly the nicest thing to call someone. In my defense I never told him to his face and really he was the most obtuse guy in the whole school.

I always had a short temper for bad students. He never got his answers right, and always looked distracted and annoyed. I saw him paying attention, but nothing that ever came out of his mouth was right. Not even close.

*“So irritating!”*

To be absolutely honest, I had no idea why he was even taking the class. If the women who always surrounded him were any indication, then he might as well be making a career as a model or actor.

“It’s rude to eavesdrop...” I said, snapping. He didn’t seem to be offended though. He had a constant amused expression on his face. That, along with his James Dean act, perfectly combed hair stuck with a gallon of gel, tight clothing, and especially that horrible I own-the-place walk made him stand out among us regular nerds and future scientists. In a bad way.

*“If it looks like a jerk, walks like a jerk...”*

“You talk out loud and I’m the one eavesdropping?” He said raising an annoying eyebrow. Clearly amused by my vocal lapse.

“What do you want?” I said. He cleared his throat and for a moment looked formal.

“Miss Bridge...” He started “I would like, if you would be so kind, to have access to your notes of Fundamentals of physics.”

My jaw was about to fall to the floor. I studied his face, that frankly looked like sculpted by a Renaissance artist. Cheekbones that could cut paper and meaty pink lips slightly wet, like he just finished kissing someone. I was trying to read any sign of mockery on them.

*“What in the world?!...”*

I didn’t imagined that he took the class seriously at all. Although the most curious part was the way he addressed me.

“Miss Bridge?” I repeated trying to imitate his eyebrow raising. He opened his eyes wide for a moment, but composed in a split of a second.

“Where I come from is polite to address acquaintances by last name until they announce it’s okay to call them by their first.” He said. I got curious.

“Where do you come from Mr....?” I didn’t remember his last name for some reason.

“Wyseman.”

*“I remember now. The most ironic surname ever.”*

“Call me William. I like to think of myself as a citizen of the world.”

*"I'm a special traveling snowflake..."*

He was staring me down, probably trying to get me to let him use my first name.

*"I don't think so..."*

I smiled annoyingly at him and passed him the notes.

"Would you be fast? I need to go to work."

He seemed to ignore my rudeness. Took the shirt he had folded in his shoulder, and placed it in the seat next to me, he opened his backpack. It looked like he wanted to show up his abs on the, a size or two, too small black T-Shirt he was wearing under it.

*"Ugh! So pretentious"*

I started to gather the rest of my things to leave as soon as he was done. I had something to say to the girls finally and didn't want to lose time with some reality-star-wannabe. When he opened his backpack, many pieces of paper fell out of it. I noticed there were no books or notebooks in it, aside from the one he took. It was like this was the only class he was taking this day.

*"That is kind of odd."*

He took the notebook and opened it in my desk. It was all wrinkly black and white, the pages were dirty white. He passed them looking for a clean spot I presumed and finally turned it sideways to take the notes he needed with a pencil full of teeth marks and a half chewed eraser.

*"What a mess!"*

He frowned a couple of times. His intense green eyes seemed to grow greener with the effort. I felt tempted to try to ask him if he needed an explanation. I desisted thinking how long it will take me.

"That Harker kid was right..." He said, suddenly handing me the notebook back and taking his shirt from the seat. "You are indeed an impressive scientist, I can see you have a great destiny ahead of you." He flashed that annoying smile at me. I wasn't particularly flattered by his comment.

"Tobias is usually right." I simply said, trying to cut the conversation short. He laughed and turned around. A brunette girl was at the door waiting for him. He took her waist and led her out of my eyesight.

"Odd." I simply said "I don't think that dumb guy ever talked to us before..." I shook my head.

Deciding not to dwell on it, I went to have some lunch with my friends.

Glenda and Tess were waiting for me. They were a bit fed up with my inability to put on my big girl panties and ask Toby to hang out or just plain telling him to hook up again and see where this crush could go.

What I never mentioned to them was that there was another reason for my cowardice.

I couldn't allow my crush to ruin a budding professional partnership. I overheard that Toby was also getting a Masters in Astrophysics. Over time, I naturally started to covet him as a partner, and not just in the physical sense

*"He is the man for the job."*

He was the other half I needed. I'm really at my best when I can bounce ideas off other like-minded people. I was sure that we would make an invincible team. We could go far together. Academics papers, research and dare I say it? The Nobel Prize.

*"If someone can get it, is us..."*

Of course a relationship with a guy should always be secondary to a career, especially one that could land me a place in history,

*"Or a place far from here"*

I knew that it would be completely perfect, like the Curie marriage, which I guess is why I was so nervous. But I had to try, and every day, I slowly gathered more and more courage to suggest a partnership. Hopefully no one else would snag him first. The other guys in the class were not very friendly with him for some reason.

*"Probably jealous of his superior intellect"*

Surely they won't pick him as a partner out of fear of being surpassed. That was the theory at the moment. I really didn't know, or cared that much, to be honest.

I even rehearsed what I would say. I stood in front of the bathroom mirror every morning before my Tuesday and Friday class:

"Toby, I think after this class, we should do some projects together. Think about it. You got the highest grades, and I'm not too shabby myself. I'm particularly interested in String Theory we could think of some tests together. I'm sure you have some theories of your own, right? Here are my personal annotations where you can see my first drafts. If you think it's a good idea, we could discuss this over a cup of coffee."

I always carried my personal notebook with me just in case I had the chance to actually give it to him.

*"Yes that sounds right. Professional, to the point, not mushy, no interference."*

*"And no passion, what the hell is wrong with you?"*

*"There is nothing wrong with her. The goal first, men last"*

*"Or never-"*

Of course, in my imagination, I was secure, eloquent and upfront. And, of course, in my imagination, Toby not only agreed to be my partner, but he also kissed me passionately while corny love songs played in the background.

*“At least there is some fire in her ... more like a matchstick, but better than nothing”*

A very silly thought for a scientist, I know. I guessed that all those stupid Hollywood movies, that mom and I watched together damaged my usually sharp, logical brain. Even so I couldn't shake the idea from my head. A warm kiss from his soft, inviting lips and maybe more later...

*“Now you're talking. I'm liking this. Feel it, let it flow”*

It was already afternoon and I could feel sweat trickling down the back of my neck. I picked up the pace a bit and fantasized about a tall iced latte. Usually, I meet the girls for some coffee and chit chat. Today, I definitely had something to chat about, though...

*I don't know if they'll want to hear it.*

Featuring a huge selection of fast food and various food stalls, the Marketplace served as the usual lunchtime hangout spot. It was always bustling at this time, and by the time I got there, it was already crowded. I found Glenda and Tess sitting next to each other. Glenda looked great as usual with her beautiful dark glowing skin and a deliciously black silky hair that I would kill to have. On the other hand, Tess was plain Caucasian, with big eyes and thin lips that accompanied her full figure. What made her stand out were her tattoos and piercings and the fact that she changed her hair color every month or so. She had been sporting it pink for nearly a month now, so I guess she'll probably show up soon with an exciting new color. Maybe even some new piercings to add to the collection of six she already had on her face.

I called out to them and they waved at me without looking away from their smartphones. I knew the routine already, so I went to fetch a turkey sandwich and some iced coffee before heading back to the table. I placed my book bag in the seat with their own bags and backpacks. They were starting to close their Twitter and Facebook accounts so we could bond the old fashioned way: talking in person.

I couldn't afford anything more than an outdated clamshell, with a basic plan, without Internet and very few messages monthly. So my good friends had to be willing to bear my real presence or talk to me over the phone when I needed to contact them. The horror according to Tess.

“Hi Gaby. You look happy today. Any news?” Glenda said, while sipping her vitamin water. She was always so perceptive of my moods.

“Actually, I do. Toby talked to me again.”

“Is going to snow today!” Tess said, rolling her eyes. For some reason, she had the most trouble tolerating my high-school-variety crush on Toby.

“At this rate, you’ll be talking to him again next year.”

Tess took a bite of her huge hamburger, sipped her vanilla shake, and arched a studded eyebrow at me. Glenda simply continued her line of patient inquiry with me.

“So ... anything else? Any future... meetings?”

“Not yet ... working that one,”

“You’ve been ‘working on that one’ since we met you,” Tess said, taking another rather pointed sip of her milkshake. “He’s just a guy. Just sleep with him and that’ll take him down from the pedestal you have him on.”

“I don’t have him on a pedestal!” I said, mid-bite of my own sandwich. “I’m just trying to take things slowly.”

Tess’s only reply was another roll of her eyes. It was her preferred reaction to most things, which might be why she lines her eyes with thick black kohl: it makes the judgment seem that much more severe.

“Come on, leave her alone. There’s nothing wrong with being careful,” Glenda said, ever the diplomat. She was always trying to keep Tess’s claws away from me.

“She’s practically a prude!” Tess shot back. “Lucky she isn’t a virgin or I would just tell her to hang out with the religious freaks or something.”

“Being a prude has nothing to do with it. I’m just selective.”

*“Or scared...”*

That kind of comment was the reason they didn’t know that I was indeed, technically, still a virgin. I didn’t want to have a reputation as a frigid, especially since I’m in the sciences.

*“How embarrassing that would that be!”*

It wasn’t like I was a religious zealot. I’m not one of those repressed women who place a ton of value on their first time, or worse, wait until marriage. It was more of a matter of bad luck and bad timing. The last thing I wanted was to lower my chances of having sex to zero, by having a giant V painted on my chest.

“Oh God,” I said, trying to make a show of my disdain for the idea, “I’m slow, not a prude. With some luck, I’ll be sharing stories of my hook up...s with him in no time.”

I didn’t realize I was holding my breath until Glenda smiled at me.

*“Good, they bought it.”*

“Don’t you worry, Gaby,” Glenda said with a cheeky smile. She touched my hands. “And don’t pay attention to Tess. She thinks sex is some sort of Guinness Record-breaking sport or something. Just look at me – I haven’t hooked up in a whole month and I’m not dead.”

“Yet...” Tess added and we all laughed.

“What you need is to live on your own. That’ll spice up your sex life like that!” Glenda snapped her fingers.

She was lucky enough to share a nearby apartment with her very understanding older brother and his wife: another black beauty. Both around ten years her seniors.

I bit my lip.

“You know, I wish I could, but for the moment, I need to save every penny. Plus, Mom lives so close. I can sacrifice myself for a few more years .” Glenda was originally from Washington State so she knew that if she had stayed home she might have had my same problem.

Of course the lack of money was the cover story for the pathetic situation of still living with my mom.

*“The truth is much worse.”*

I noticed that Tess opened her phone to text around, as soon as I talked about saving every penny. She doesn't seem to, have ever not been able to afford anything in her life. Having had three stepfathers who still dote on her and a mother that got married to a wealthy fourth, she never was in want of money.

Just as I was thinking about all these differences between us, Glenda’s cell phone rang and she showed me who it was. All the screen said was: HotGuy.

Glenda picked up after a couple of rings. Her voice taking on a sultry quality that made me feel a little jealous. If only I could had sounded like that when Toby asked me for my notes.

*You could, if you let me do the talking.*

I cringed at that suggestion.

Tess paid all the attention she could to the conversation, and once it was over, they high-fived each other. With a little bit of embarrassment, I did the same.

I wondered when I would be able to join them in this important rite of passage for a young woman.

With that phone call, the intervention was over for the moment. We started chatting more casually about boys and Glenda’s upcoming date. I relaxed until it was time for my next class.

Once I was finished with classes for the day, I sat in my Toyota for a moment before leaving. While feeling the cool breeze of the AC in my face I started to think about what the girls had said. Approaching shy Toby was a priority. Not just because of our possible future and partnership. I really needed to be able to relate to my friends on the same level, be one of the girls and have my complete college experience.

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