

[Life Within Walls]

Lizzy Lee (In-progress)

PREFACE

“Andrew Seregon, a nineteen-year-old living in Gorgery Point, northern section by the main gate. Pale green eyes, dark brown hair. Looks exactly like his ancestor. Think you can find him?”

Tarnil Anarion gawked at the mage before him. “You’re serious, aren’t you? You’re actually going to send me into a human city?” The very thought of going inside was baffling.

Felagon Selius didn’t change his expression, or his mind. “Tarnil, are you trying to tell me that you cannot do this simple quest?”

“It is our duty to protect these humans and to keep the world hidden from them. To keep magic a forgotten part of their ancient past. Sending an elf into their city will ruin everything we’ve strived to accomplish. It’ll—”

“You worry about the task I’ve assigned to you. I’ll worry about my job.”

“Sir, with all due respect, I think you’ve gone mad.”

“Cleric, don’t argue with me. I know what I have seen, and I know that this Andrew is the key to preventing it. Do as you’re asked, or his Highness should revoke your status.”

Tarnil grumbled a curse. He worked too hard to be stripped of his position as head cleric. He wasn’t about to let it slip right out of his hands just because of a small, easy request as this. Just get the human and come back.

Somehow, the cleric had a feeling that this would amount to more than just retrieving someone. He sighed heavily as he grabbed his enchanted mace and gold-trimmed shield.

“The other elders and I expect you back soon, Tarnil. Blend in as much as possible. That means shedding the chainmail and finding yourself a *modern* outfit.” Felagon chuckled, remembering a human he spotted not too long ago. The man’s clothes had seemed so horrendous. A smile crept up on his aging face as he imagined Tarnil wearing such clothes. “Good luck.”

The amusement in his voice irritated Tarnil. “You can take your luck and shove it—”

“Your manners, cleric,” Felagon reminded him, the amusement still rich in his voice.

I

"Just once I'd like to go out there and see what's keeping us all inside these fucking walls." Andrew Seregon crossed his arms and leaned against the window of his fourth-floor bedroom. He gazed longingly out the glass pane, wondering why there were no documented records of *why* all of humanity lived in walled cities across the earth.

"Go ahead, Andrew. I'd love to be an only child."

He turned to Alessia, an annoyed look on his face. He hadn't realized she was there. "You ruined that for me, so I'm not letting you have it."

"You act like it was my fault Mom and Dad wanted a girl. After two years with you, I don't blame them."

Andrew snickered. "Why are you here, anyways?"

"Because I live here?" She was playing dumb, and Andrew knew it. And it drove him insane. Most people fell for the innocence she projected through her emerald eyes, but not him. *You can't bullshit a bullshitter*, he'd always tell her.

"Why the fuck are you in my room?" he yelled at her this time. He was losing patience quickly.

She took a step back and put her hands up. "Calm down, Andy. Mom and Dad are fighting again, and your room is furthest away."

His face softened. Their parents were loud, vocal combatants, but it was their words that hurt. They meant everything that came out of their lips, and sometimes the kids were bashed in the arguments. Andrew didn't blame Alessia for not wanting to be alone, even though she was seventeen. He may have hated her, but he wasn't going to let that get in the way of his role as an older brother.

"Can we play the PlayStation?"

Andrew sighed. "Go ahead. I've got homework," he answered, sitting back down at his desk. He stared at his textbook. Trigonometry was his least favorite subject. Like it'd ever help him in the real world. Maybe he was going to spend the rest of his life building new cities with triangular walls, which is why he'd need to know the sine, cosine, and tangent of the three angles.

He chuckled quietly. Traditional jobs weren't for him. He longed to explore the world outside the four giant stone walls, kept secret by whatever creatures roamed the probably-barren lands. No one has ever explored the woods surrounding the roads linking the many cities across the continent, or the seas across which bridges connecting continents spanned. When a traveler would stray too far, he would end up missing, never to be found. Most people had accepted this as an unwritten law of the earth. It just made Andrew itch more to explore the forbidden wilderness.

Andrew barely realized he'd been staring at his textbook for almost ten minutes until his sister spoke up.

"What's bothering you?"

He shook his head. "Haven't you ever wondered why people go missing when they stray away from the roads? Or why we have to live cooped up like livestock?"

"Because it's dangerous out there. Why is that such a big deal?"

"But we've never seen anything. Do you know what lurks out there? I doubt it's the grizzlies or wolves that we can see from the roads. We have a few of them in the woods in here. They're not that dangerous. There's gotta be something more."

Alessia shrugged. "Well, I think that's obvious. A grizzly wouldn't cause an entire team of soldiers to go missing."

"Exactly. Aren't you curious as to *what's* out there?"

"Not really. I'm kinda afraid to know."

Andrew shook his head. "That's like being afraid of ghosts. If you can't see them, how can you be afraid of them?"

"One, ghosts are just creepy. Two, it's obvious what these creatures out there do simply because of how people don't come back. Why are you so stubborn to accept this?"

"I don't know."

"Just do your trig."

"Fuck homework. It's not my kind of thing."

"Are you failing all your classes again?"

"One, I didn't fail *all* my classes last semester. I ended up pulling a three point seven, for your information. Two, I'm not failing any now. I happen to have an A minus in this class."

"Why not a four point oh and an A plus?"

"Fuck you, Ales. We're not all as great as you."

She sighed. Her parents always compared the two siblings, and she was sick of always being labeled as "better". Personally, she always thought of Andrew as the better sibling. He knew how to get people to set the bar low for him so he could hop over it effortlessly. He knew how to get away with things, even if he did have the title of troublemaker. He knew how to get the things he wanted, even if his goals were something most people would look down on. She, on the other hand, was expected to receive perfect grades. She never got in trouble, but simply because she was afraid to live and learn. Goals, like getting into an Ivy League college, were set for her to strive to attain. She barely had her own personality. That was all determined by how her parents thought she should act.

Alessia responded to her brother with silence as she played the video game. She wasn't really into it, her mind wondering about what her brother said. What *was* out there that was keeping them on the travel roads and inside the city walls? Why was there an unwritten 'no exploring allowed' law of the earth?

She shook her head, and went back to the game.

Andrew watched her resolution as she shook the thoughts from her head. "I plan on finding out. I don't care how, but I'm going to do it."

"Dude, that guy keeps watching you. Do you know who he is?" Caleb Washington asked as he and Andrew ate lunch. The two, who had been friends since they started college together a

year ago, sat outside the café on campus. It was too nice a day in the middle of April to be cooped up inside.

Andrew glanced over at the man in question sitting a few tables over. He had a mysterious aura about him, mainly due to the fact that his dark shoulder-length hair casted a slight shadow on his face. The man looked familiar, like Andrew might have known him long ago. No names came to mind, though.

He finally shook his head, answering Caleb's question. "Not a clue."

"Let's go, then. He looks like a fucking whack-job."

Andrew waved his friend off, though he started packing his things. "Go ahead, I'll catch up."

"You're not gonna go talk to him, are you?" Andrew nodded. "Man, he's gonna stab you and push you over the wall. No one'll find you."

"Well, if I do end up missing, you'll know who did it." Caleb shook his head, obviously not satisfied with the answer. "Cal, I'll be fine."

"It was nice knowing ya," Caleb joked as he walked back inside.

Andrew headed over to the man. "You were watching me?" he asked, deciding the straightforward path is always best. The man simply nodded at the seat across from him. Andrew sat down cautiously. For a moment, no one spoke. Andrew looked around, and noticed they were alone. It was close to one, so most students who were on campus were making their way to class. Andrew looked back at the man across from him, whose facial expression still hadn't changed. "Who are you?"

"That is for me to know, and for you to find out."

The man had a distant voice, like he was far too wise for his years. He looked to be only in his mid-twenties, though. He spoke in a thick, old-world accent.

"Do I know you?"

"Once, you did."

"How?" Andrew felt like the man was playing games—something Andrew hadn't the patience for. "C'mon, I have class in like ten minutes."

"I suggest either going to class and waiting until later to finish this conversation, or come with me now to somewhere more secure."

Andrew's brows pulled together. "Just tell me: who the hell are you?"

The man smiled. "Patience, child. You will end up going nowhere in a hurry unless you learn to be patient."

Andrew shut his eyes and inhaled deeply. "I'm going to class. Find me later if you want to talk and actually *tell* me something useful!" Though his tone started quiet, he ended in a yell. He stormed off, pissed about the lack of answers and the fact that he was now going to be late for class.