

[Role Powers]

Lizzy Lee (In-progress)

I

MELONIE GARDE

I have no idea who the four people in my group are. And I shouldn't have to.

I check the time on my cell phone. It's almost one-thirty. I should be back in Connecticut, enjoying a decadent meal at a very expensive restaurant with my two best friends. But instead, I'm here, in the state of Washington, waiting for our group advisor to give us our first assignment.

We're sitting at a round table in the academy library. Being a Reader, I can't help but assess the others in my group. There are two chicks and two guys. I have no idea what their roles are, and that's not something I can read so easily.

Across from me is a gorgeous green-eyed brunette, eighteen years old. I'm completely heterosexual and everything, but she's definitely a very hot, porn star-quality chick. She has full lips, large almond-shaped eyes, a large bra size, a sexy tan, and a body too perfect to be covered by clothes.

The brunette has her head rested on another girl's shoulder. This one, sitting between the model and me, has auburn hair, brown eyes, and fair skin. She's beautiful too, but in a more innocent way. Just by the way she's sitting, I can tell she's very protective of her body, and still a virgin. She's wearing just enough make-up to show off her natural beauty. The two chicks are best friends, but a year apart. The redhead is my age.

On the other side of the model is an amazing guy, a year older than me. He has black-brown hair covering his ears and sparkling blue eyes. His arm is rested on the back of the model's chair and her hand is on his leg, so I can safely assume they're going out. She's fully into him, but I don't know if he's fully into her. They're only dating because everyone expects them to. Everyone sees him as Mr. Popular, but deep down, he wants to be recognized for more than just his ridiculously good looks and strong stature. He has great potential, but no one is letting him fulfill it.

Sitting between blue-eyes and me is a quiet, darkly-dressed blond. His shaggy hair is almost covering his eyes, which are hiding years of pain. His irises are a dull shade of blue, but his long lashes make up for it. He has full, totally kissable lips, but his appearance tells me he doesn't trust anyone enough to be in a relationship. He's type for one-night stands, but only to satisfy his urges. Though he's ruggedly good-looking, he's torn and broken inside. Betrayal, neglect, and heartbreak has plagued his nineteen years of life, and his true, sensitive self hides behind a thick wall.

Because of my role as a Reader, I know these are facts, not just observations. But I don't need powers to notice no one is too happy to be here. Being used like this isn't exactly fun for any of us, but we have no choice.

When our advisor walks up to our table, I check the time again. He's three minutes late. Just a small detail I'm bored enough to notice.

"Don't look so excited to be here, guys," he jokes. We all just look up at him, not enthused. "Have you introduced yourselves to Melonie?"

The brunette sits up and extends her hand across the small table. "Brittney Glass," she says with a sincere smile. She identifies the redhead next to her as Nicole Bransetter, her boyfriend as Collin Richards, and the mysterious guy as Andrew Maverick.

The advisor sighs. "Okay then... And I think you already know, but I'm Jackson Porter." He then looks down at his notebook and flips through it until he finds the page he's looking for. "Alright, I'm guessing you want to know your first assignment so you can get it done and over with.

"As you may already know, Becklist Academy isn't the only school for enhancing role powers. We are, however, the only academy in the state working with the living. Interghast, up north of us, is another academy, but for the undead."

"The undead have powers, too?" Brittney asks.

Jackson laughs. "Well, of course. When you die, you don't lose your powers. Only your physical body. Didn't you learn that in Afterlife 101?"

"They didn't mention that," Collin rebuts. His tone is a little spooked. "As if the undead weren't hard enough to defeat without powers."

"Well, this is why you're in groups."

"Wait, you're sending us up there?" Nicole worries.

"Not quite. A scouting group informed us that there's an outpost of undead nearby. You have some good powers in your group, so you should have no problem defeating them."

"Is there any information on what powers they have?"

"No. Our scouts couldn't get close enough to assess them."

"It's a good thing we have Collin, then." Brittney leans over and pats his cheek. I'm guessing Collin is an Assessor, which means he can tell what powers people have. He'll already know I'm a Reader.

"I'm going to safely assume no one has shared their powers with Melonie?" When no one says anything, he sighs. "Andrew's a Listener. Collin's an Assessor. Brittney's an Emoter, and Nicole's a Healer. You know what all these powers do?"

"Listeners read minds, assessors identify powers, emoters manipulate emotions, and healers speed recoveries." I recite this with the same boredom the others feel just having to listen to it.

Jackson smiles. "Very good. And, even though Andrew and Collin already know this, Melonie is a Reader."

Nicole eyes me. "So you've already judged us." It's more of a statement than a question.

Andrew snickers and looks away. I suddenly realize he heard everything I thought about them. I blush a little and look away. "Not really judged. Just read." I can tell that they'll be asking Andrew about my thoughts later. I don't need my power to tell me that.

Jackson laughs. "Looks like you'll get along just fine," he jokes, a little uneasy. But I can tell he has faith in us. He's the only one, though.

"Okay. Now, one of you needs to be assigned the leader. Although it may seem like a cool thing to be in charge, you're also responsible for the group's success. If something fails, it's on

your shoulders. You have a day to figure that out." Though I haven't known these people for more than ten minutes, I know Collin is going to be first pick for group leader. He's more assertive and outgoing than Andrew and Nicole, and Brittney is a slight ditz.

"Since you'll be working together as a group for the remainder of your time here at Becklist, you'll be sharing a five-room suite together. Unti 303, third floor of the Housing Hall, right wing."

Brittney lights up. "A right-wing suite? I've heard those are the best here!"

"Yeah. We reserve them for groups." From the bag hanging from his shoulder, Jackson pulls out five key chains with two keys on each. He hands one to each of us. "You can switch rooms with each other, depending on who you guys want to be next to. The silver-colored key is for the front door; the copper-colored one is for your bedroom.

"You'll have the rest of the day to collect your things from your current room and move into the suite. Your old keys are due at the housing office by five tonight. Any questions?" When there's no response, he continues. "Alright, then. I'll see you tomorrow, same time, same place!" With that said, Jackson takes off. He hates this place, and likes to spend as little time here as possible. He must realize how we're being used, but the money he makes is probably too good to pass up.

Since my things are still in my car after moving from Connecticut, I'm the first to the suite. For a middle-class institution, the unit is pretty decent, close to what I'm used to. Hardwood floors, nice wood cabinets and tables, suede seating, earth-tone walls. There are doors surrounding the common space. The bathroom door is open, and the others are labeled one through five. I take a quick peek into each room since none of the doors are locked and find a single bed, a short but wide dresser, a desk, and a large-enough closet in each.

After checking out the rooms, I throw myself onto the couch and flip on the television. The picture is decent, but not high-definition like I'm used to. The channels only go up to seventy-eight, too; I'm really going to miss having over a thousand channels to pick from.

I get through about half an episode of House Hunters before the others in my group get back. I sit up and peek over the back of the couch. "Hey."

Nicole and Andrew say nothing, but haul their things into rooms four and five. Okay, they don't trust me that much.

Brittney and Collin, on the other hand, smile. "Hey, newbie. You okay with room one?"

I look at the number on my keychain and realize that's the room I have the key for. "Sure, why not?" I agree. Though I'm not too fond of being called newbie, I can tell Collin means it in the most sincere way.

Brittney smiles. "Awesome." After shoving her things into her room, which is right next to mine, she sits down next to me. "What'cha watching?"

Small talk, but maybe it'll bring us closer together. "House Hunters."

"Oh, I like that show. You watch a lot of things on HGTV?"

"Mostly, yeah. Mainly because the shows on here don't have a storyline that you have to follow to understand the show."

"Not much of a TV watcher?"

I shake my head. "What about you?"

"I usually watch the Discovery Channel with Collin."

I smile and nod. "How long have you two been going out?"

Brittney smiles, obviously proud of this. "A year."

"How long have you and Nicole been friends?"

"About two years."

"How long have you been at Becklist?"

"This is my second year. But enough about me. Tell me about yourself."

"Well, I enrolled the Connecticut Academy for the Powers, the only academy in the state, a few years ago."

"Is the age of recruiting seventeen in Connecticut like here in Washington?" When I nod, she continues. "So you're the same age as Andrew and Nicole." I nod again. "Collin's in his fourth year."

"How long is the post-ed here? In Connecticut, it's fifteen years."

"Fifteen? Woah. It's only ten here."

I shake my head. Post-education service is something they hint at when you enroll at the academy. They lure you in with promises of enhancing your powers, then lock you in for years of service for them after you finish your four years of education and training. Though you pay good money to go to the school, they don't pay you for the post-education service. And because eighty-five percent of the world doesn't know about us fifteen percent with powers, the academies are allowed to use us like this.

"Well, Connecticut is a smaller state than Washington."

"Very true. I wonder if Texas only has five years of post-ed?"

I shrug, but laugh at the thought.

"So how did you end up here?"

"I got transferred. I guess there were too many Readers back home, and not enough here."

"But hey, there's less post-ed here!"

I shrug again. "Yeah, but my friends are in Connecticut."

She nods as she looks down. "Oh, very true." She then smiles up at me. "Well, I'll be your new friend. And so will Nicole and Collin." I notice how she doesn't mention Andrew.

I smile and nod. "Thanks."

"Now, I gotta go set up my room. If I don't, then I'll be sleeping on a bare bed tonight," she jokes.

I laugh a little. "Same here." As she heads back into her room, I make my way out to the parking lot.