

# *Second Chance*

Lizzy Lee (2013)

"Everything going alright over there?" David Aurel asks over his old flip phone while on break. His amnesiac roommate was just released earlier that day from the hospital after a car accident that had rendered her comatose for weeks, but he couldn't get the day off. Now, she's at their apartment with their alcoholic roommate and her estranged parents.

Reed Jameson sighs on the other end of the line. "Her parents are trying to convince her it'll be better for her to move back home rather than live here."

"Why? She left for a reason."

"You explain that to her."

"They do realize they didn't want her there anymore than she wanted to be there, right? The amnesia won't change her personality. She'll still hate them, and they'll still hate who she will always be."

"You explain that to them. They seem to think that if they take her, they'll be able to mold her into what they want her to be."

David sighs as he pulls his phone away from his ear to check the time. "I have to go. Good luck with them," he says before hanging up.

When David gets home from work later that night, Devon is curled up on the couch watching television while Reed sits beside her feet, staring out the window.

"You're lucky. Her parents *just* left."

"They were kind of over-bearing," Devon mutters from under a blanket. "When and why did I move out, anyway?"

David is actually curious about this, since it's not something that has ever come up in conversation in the last year he's been living here.

"About three years ago. When you turned eighteen, you went and got that tattoo you have on the back of your neck. After all the other shit throughout high school you and you parents fought over, that was the straw that broke the camel's back." Reed then laughs at this, and smiles at Devon. "Imagine the reaction they'd have if they knew about the heart you have on your ass."

Devon blushes at this comment. Apparently she didn't realize Reed knew about this tattoo. David certainly didn't until just now. Once she's recovered from her embarrassment, she asks, "How did I get here, with you two?"

Reed answers this question. "Your cousin Andrew and I rented this apartment after we graduated high school about five years ago. I guess he pitied you, so he let you take over our small office we really didn't use anyways."

Devon then looks at David, and Reed continues.

"Upstate New York was getting to be too cold for Andrew. He moved to Connecticut almost a year ago. I placed an ad in the Observer Dispatch, and David was the only non-creep who answered."

Devon takes this all in as she stares at the ground. She then looks up at Reed. "I'm hungry. What do we usually do for dinner?"

"Eat out," he states simply. He then adds, "Sometimes, microwave meals and cereal in front of the television." This makes Devon laugh, but Reed just shrugs.

After dinner, as the three walk through downtown Utica back to their apartment, David momentarily forgets about Devon's amnesia and Reed's budding alcoholism. For a moment, it's just the three of them, each in their early twenties, enjoying each other's company. Reed says something which makes Devon laugh. As she does so, she leans towards Reed, whose next step brings him slightly away from her to avoid physical contact. It all seems so subconscious, but it makes David curious.

When they arrive at their third-story apartment, Reed grabs a beer out of the fridge and hides away in his room. David watches as Devon turns into the small office that still holds her clothes, but hasn't been slept in since he started living there. Hoping she's just changing into some pajamas, David lets it go for the moment and showers. After he's finished and dressed, he notices Devon's still in her own room. He knocks on the door lightly, and she opens it.

"Are you sleeping in here?"

This seems to confuse her. "Isn't this my room...?"

"No, it is. Just sometimes, you fall asleep on the couch watching Lifetime Movie Network," he lies. He hates to do it, but it wouldn't be the first time she's been lied to.

She laughs, all confusion gone. "Oh, okay. Maybe I'll try that tomorrow night," she replies with a smile.

He returns the smile and nods. "Alright. Goodnight, Devon," he says before going to his room and collapsing onto his bed.

The next day, David is off to work before either of his roommates are awake. When he comes home, he's surprised to see Devon out. Reed sitting on the couch, the stench of alcohol about him, doesn't come as a surprise, though. "Where's Devon?" he asks casually, leaning against a counter in the kitchen.

"Out with that slut friend of hers," Reed slurs.

"Stephanie?"

"That's the one."

David nods, glad she's out with her best friend. He then decides to utilize the time he has alone with Reed. "So, why is she sleeping in the office?"

"That's her room."

David crosses his arms and gives his drunken roommate a sideways look.

"I don't want a stranger in my bed."

"*You* know exactly who she is."

Reed stands and takes a couple steps closer to the kitchen, a beer in his hand. "Do you want to explain to her why she slept in my bed? Despite her rebellious tendencies and hatred for her parents, she is a good girl. No drugs, no run-ins with the police. I'm pretty sure I was her first, even. She's out with Stephanie now, and no doubt they'll talk about her past relationships. I know she never told her about us sleeping together. Her reasoning? Because we were never in a real relationship, and she didn't want Stephanie to judge her. For all the whore knows, Devon is still a virgin. Do *you* want to ruin that for her?"

"You know there was more than just sex."

"Only for her."

So he doesn't deny there were feelings involved. This actually surprises David, because he always thought he was blind to Devon's heart. "She didn't fall in love with the sex. She fell in love with you. Unfortunately, you're still the same person. It happened once, it *will* happen again."

Reed looks David straight in the eye, taking another step closer and setting the empty bottle on the kitchen counter. "Not if we don't repeat the past."

David can't even open his mouth before the apartment's front door slams shut behind Reed. Why does he care? It takes him a brief moment, but he realizes that, even though he hasn't known Devon for that long, he thinks of her as a sister.

Wanting and needing a distraction from this, David heads out with plans to see a movie with one of his friends. When he opens the door, though, Devon is standing in front of it, her hand ready to open it. The expression on her face tells him she heard at least *some* of the argument.

"How much did you hear?"

"Who fell in love with Reed?" When David doesn't say anything, she crosses her arms. "I loved him?" she asks as if she can't believe it.

David nods. "You never actually said it, but a blind person could see it."

Devon seems to process the information as she sits on the couch. "But... The feeling wasn't mutual," she observes after a long moment. "Is that why he acts standoffish around me?"

David sighs and looks down as he sits next to her. "If he wasn't as fucked up as he is, I'm sure it would have been different. I think there were feelings there, even though he tried to claim it was only sex—"

"I slept with him?"

David nods sadly. "That's why I was surprised when I saw you sleeping in the office. Sure, your clothes have always been there, but for as long as I've been here, you've been sleeping in his bed."

Neither say anything about this for the rest of the evening, but instead settle with a movie on Lifetime Movie Network.

The next morning, Saturday, David wakes around ten. He finds Devon at the kitchen table, reading the newspaper over a bowl of *Lucky Charms*. "Good morning," she says between bites.

"I never got to ask you, did you have fun with Stephanie yesterday?" he asks, pouring himself a cup of coffee.

Devon smiles wide. "Oh, yeah," she laughs. "We went shopping and had lunch and got our nails done," she explains, holding out her hand to show off the manicure.

It warms David's heart to hear Devon sound happy. "Stephanie has always been able to get you to have a good time," he says as he sits across from her.

Before either could elaborate on the subject, Reed emerges from his room and sluggishly heads into the kitchen. He grabs a cup of coffee himself, and disappears into his room as quietly as he appeared.

David just shakes his head. Devon obviously picks up on his anger toward their roommate, and tilts her head curiously. "Don't worry about it. He's just being a selfish prick."

David guesses he hears this, because Reed is in the hall, outside his door, in an instant. "I'm the selfish prick?"

"Reed, don't start."

"No, no. I didn't start anything. *You* did."

David gets up, really not wanting to fight in front of Devon. Before he can get to the door, though, Reed speaks. "Where ya going, buddy?"

"After all the times you've taken the easy way out, you're going to chastise me for doing the exact same thing?"

"Oh, so I'm taking the easy way out, am I?" David just stands in front of the door, his back to his roommates at the kitchen table and in the hallway. "Huh?" Reed persists when David says nothing.

He finally turns around. "Yeah, you are. You and I both know it."

Reed puts his hand up. "No." He then holds just his index finger up. "Oh, no. I'm doing the right thing."

"How the hell is this the right thing? Avoiding her like she's diseased? She's only lost her memory. She's still the same damn person she was before! Whatever was there will be there later."

Devon stands, the noise her chair makes causing the guys to pause their argument. "Would you stop talking about me like I'm not here, or like I'm some kind of child? I'm twenty-one fucking years old." She then crosses her arms and looks away. "At least, that's what they *tell* me," she mutters.

David hears the frustration in her voice, and he knows it's geared toward not only this conflict, but her lack of a memory in general. He opens his mouth to apologize, but Reed talks right over him.

"So, let's include you in the conversation. Devon," he says, stepping next to her and putting his arm around her shoulder. He looks into her eyes for what David believes is the first time since she woke from her coma and discovered she couldn't remember who he was. It takes Reed a second to speak again. "I'm avoiding you because he's right: what was there will always be there. I dragged you down a dark path, someplace that I don't want you going down again. This is your fucking second chance at something you actually deserve." He then looks at David. "So, forgive me if that's not the fucking right thing to do."

Reed disappears back into his room again, and Devon just stands there. David doesn't know what to do, or even what to think. He just watches Devon, who stares in the direction of Reed's room. He tries to read her face, but she gives nothing away. Pain, contentment, confusion, anger; anything could be there.

She takes a seat on the couch, pulls her knees to her chest, and rests her head on her knees, facing the window. David sighs and sits next to her, pulling her into his arms. Both remain silent for a long time, listening to the buzz of cars outside their third-floor apartment. After about half an hour, David wonders if Reed's passed out yet. It isn't until Devon stirs to sit up straight that

he realizes they've just been sitting there, staring at the uneventful brick building on the other side of the busy street.

"Something happened," she whispers. David knows exactly what she's talking about, but he doesn't say anything. After another few minutes, she looks up at him. "It was the first time we've touched." There's a brief pause before she adds, "That I can remember, anyways." Again, she looks at the window.

David shakes his head. "You deserve better, Devon."

"Was that the first time he acknowledged there was something between us?"

He nods slowly, his brows pulling together. The revelation is seemingly random, but he's afraid of where it will lead to.

"It seems like he's become more conscious of the situation between us."

"Devon—"

She puts up her hand. "Doesn't that make him better than before?"

David shakes his head more aggressively this time. "Devon, no."

"I love him. I don't remember how, exactly, but I can feel that I do."

"You can't go back to that. It's going to be hard, but his resignation should be taken as a sign. You can't have a healthy relationship with that man. He's a child, incapable of love. Trying will only get you hurt. Maybe this amnesia is your mind's way of protecting itself from what it knows would be a hard thing to get over."

"My mind didn't just wake up and decide to get amnesia, David. It was the car that hit me and put me in a coma that caused the amnesia."

"I'm not religious in any way, and I never knew you as being religious either... But maybe there's something up there protecting us, some kind of guardian angel. Or, maybe this was fate's way of trying to get you back on the path you are meant to be on. Even he admits he dragged you down a dark path. Do you really want that again?"

"Maybe this is fate's way of shedding light on that dark path and making it right."

"I'm not going to win, am I?"

"What would be you winning?" David thinks about this for a moment, but he doesn't have time to answer. "Reed ending up alone, passed out and choking on his own vomit?"

David is almost offended by this. "Of course not."

"Then what do you want?"

"I just want you happy, Devon."

"Then why can't you accept that I love him?"

"Because that man has insane trust issues and extreme hatred for the world. He's a child incapable of loving even himself."

She's quiet for a few minutes. "I don't think that's true," she answers quietly. "I may not remember anything specific about my life, but there are feelings that I know are true. One, you're like a brother to me. Two, I must not have had much of a relationship with my parents ever in my life, because not once have I had the urge to call or talk to them. And three, Reed and I are meant to be together. I don't care what it takes, or what goes on in his head. And even though I barely know him, I feel like I do."

David doesn't know what to say. She seems sure about this. Even without memory, she loves him. Is that what "meant to be together" really means?

She breaks his train of thought as she stands. He almost opens his mouth to speak, but realizes he still has nothing to say. As Devon reaches the hallway that leads to their rooms, she pauses, staring at Reed's door. From where he's sitting on the couch, he can't tell if the door is closed or not. When he sees Reed's arms pull Devon closer, he realizes he's been there the entire time. From someone, he hears a whispered confession of love. After a moment, he hears a second.