

FANTASY NOVEL: PROJECT ASA (WORKING TITLE) BY LIZABETH GELASSEN

*Summary: Nelly Wors is vaguely aware of her special abilities, until living weapon Charles McArbit breaks into her sheltered life and exposes the truth. That she is one too. He teaches her to control her powers and together they take on both the light and dark forces influencing their lives.*

The Stranger walked down the town's empty streets. The quiet clung to him like the stagnant breath of a vicious beast. The man was used to noise and colors. Even sunlight failed to fully penetrate the dome arcing above the town, a barrier that crumbled for him like wet sand. It left a dark tint over the identical white sided houses with their sparse gardens and perfectly trimmed lawns. Now and then, the Stranger's focus was drawn to cheers and jeers that came from all directions at once. He'd dismiss the raucous quickly, his superior hearing searching for clicks and slides that could mean a weapon was drawn. Or for angry roars at the discovery of his abandoned motorcycle and the hole it left in Plainsville's precious force field.

He took a left off of East Street onto Welcome's Way, the latter being placed at the center of town, nowhere near the one official border patrol station, far from the sight of any potential visitor's. It was a major road, featuring town hall, shops, and a small community college. The Stranger knew he faced consequences if discovered on Local's Ground. But he also knew that his best cover was a sunny Social Day afternoon. The locals would be busy at whatever sporting event the North and South High Schools were hosting. Welcome's Way would be without an unwelcome.

**FANTASY NOVEL: PROJECT ASA (WORKING TITLE) BY LIZABETH GELASSEN**

The man paused at a statue of a stout man in minister's robes. It shined in the glow of spotlights set along the base. The Stranger pulled down his black hood for a closer look at the monument. The brass plate's engraving credited a Carson Q. Karzon with founding the town and continued to praise his many accomplishments as both its legislative and spiritual leader. The Stranger pulled his hood back up, and resumed his walk, shoulders slouched. He followed a path made by shadows of the surrounding buildings.

He noticed a malt shop. Bold white letters outlined in red declared "PLAINSVILLE DAIRY BAR." A cardboard sign hanging in the window listed shop hours: First Day through Social Day open 2:00 PM till 20 minutes before Evening's Curfew. Closed Birth Day. The Stranger had never seen a malt shop before. He looked through the large glass windows, noting the red booths lining the walls, black and checkered countertops, and red stools circling a long shiny, metal counter. A few patrons occupied seats. The man wondered about the clientele. He made a few assumptions, based solely on the words "bar" and "malt (liquor)." The man suddenly realized how thirsty he was.

He pulled open the shop's glass door, allowing it to swing shut behind him. Another man paused as he passed by the Stranger. The men looked at each other. The Local's expression twisted into curiosity. He opened his mouth to say something, but instead chuckled and shook his head. The Local exited. The Stranger found himself staring at a black sign on a silver, metal pole. "Seat Yourself." He scanned the shop and decided to claim a stool, seating he was already accustomed to.

Another customer at the counter, a man in a white leisure suit and fedora, stopped sipping at a bright pink liquid through a straw and leaned forward. His eyes widened as they acknowledged the Stranger.

**FANTASY NOVEL: PROJECT ASA (WORKING TITLE) BY LIZABETH GELASSEN**

“Pss. Psst. Daddio, you a stranger?”

The Stranger tensed, but remained silent.

A fruit fly danced between the two.

An older mustachioed gentleman wearing a yellow and red striped shirt beneath a pink apron stood behind the counter. He was drying an empty glass. “What’ll it be?” he grunted at the newcomer.

The Stranger furrowed his brow.

“Psst...” whispered the man in the white suit. He grabbed a trifold paper menu from between a napkin dispenser and condiments stand. He handed the menu to the Stranger. The Stranger read it over.

“Sonny, what’ll it be?” the mustachioed man snapped. He set down the glass and adjusted his paper pink cap.

The Stranger was completely unfamiliar with the menu items. Bonnets? Waffle bowls?

The man in the suit spoke up again. “Get a malt. Trust me.” He then returned to slurping his pink beverage.

The Stranger set the menu down. “A... malt?”

The mustachioed man stared back at him. “Well, Sonny, what kind?”

“Kind?”

“Yes. What flavor.”

“Regular?”

Snickers could be heard from the remaining patrons, a group clustered in the nearest booth.

“Never had a malt before?!” one called out.

**FANTASY NOVEL: PROJECT ASA (WORKING TITLE) BY LIZABETH GELASSEN**

“Vanilla is a popular choice. I’ll fix one right up for you, Sonny.” The mustachioed man poured milk and powder into a blender. He then opened a freezer and scooped out a clump of vanilla ice cream adding that too. Last came a squirt of syrup followed by a whirl of the blades. Within minutes a tall glass filled with a thick white mixture was set before the Stranger. He sniffed at the contents before taking a sip. He relaxed as the ice cream combination made its way down his throat. It tasted good.

“I’ll be right back if you need anything, Sonny.” The mustachioed man nudged the man in the white leisure suit. “You make sure this young man is set, now. I’ll be back in a moment. Keep him here.” The bartender rushed to the back room. The Stranger was lost in the sweetness of the malt, amazed that beverages existed that didn’t burn.

The man in the white suit began to fidget. “So... umm...” The fly did another loop passing through the pair. The Stranger swatted it away.

“Name’s Cool Cat Jazz, and I’m one happening swinger,” continued the man in white. “Best swing dancer in the area, Daddio. Not bad with a bowling ball either. Broke 175 my last game.”

The Stranger ignored him and continued to drink his malt.

“You... You really aren’t from around here, are you?” Cool Cat Jazz asked.

The Stranger suddenly slammed his hands down onto the counter and kicked over his stool as he stood. Cool Cat Jazz stared at him, fear creeping onto his face.

“H-hey now... Didn’t mean to offend, Daddio.”

The Stranger removed his hands, revealing money on the counter. As he pulled down his hood he said, “I’m no thief. Not a saint either. But definitely not a thief. Didn’t want the group of men who just came in to ruin that for me. Drag me away before I could pay and all.”

**FANTASY NOVEL: PROJECT ASA (WORKING TITLE) BY LIZABETH GELASSEN**

The Stranger turned to face a group of men in their teens. Most wore varsity jackets and a few were in muddy, grass stained lacrosse uniforms.

“Who won?” someone from a booth yelled.

“South Plainsville High of course,” the clear alpha replied. He stood center of the group, the marking of a team captain on his dirty, bright blue uniform. “And who are you?” His eyes turned to the stranger. Bulky arms crossed his broad chest. His broad forehead and square jaw twisted in a sign of disgust. But his brown eyes stayed sharp, attempting to pierce through the Stranger.

The stranger unzipped his hoodie and tied it around his waist, revealing his own muscular frame and handsome features. His coarse dark hair was pulled back in a sloppy ponytail. His dark eyes returned the Captain’s fierce stare. The Captain almost unclenched his jaw in response to the Stranger’s many silver piercings running along his ears and tattoo of a ring of roses on his exposed arm. The Stranger’s muscles bulged beneath the torn off sleeves of his black shirt.

“My name is Charles McArbit.” The Stranger smiled. “And forgive the cliché, but take me to your leader.”

The teen cracked his neck. Then his jaw. Then his knuckles. “You got him. Student body president, captain of the lacrosse team, and lead usher at Services.”

Charles laughed. “Your actual leader.”

“The mayor?”

“Minister Wors. He knows why I’m here. What I came to take back.”

The teen and his companions stared blankly at Charles.

“Are you seriously going to pretend that old corrupt sod of a minister isn’t running this place from the shadows?”

**FANTASY NOVEL: PROJECT ASA (WORKING TITLE) BY LIZABETH GELASSEN**

The teenagers looked at each other, searching for signs of what to do. So the Captain did as captains do and took command. He lunged forward, allowing his fist to make contact with Charles McArtbit's right eye. The Captain winced back in pain.

"Raf!" a female voice called out.

"Sally-Ann!" The Captain tensed up. A brown haired teenage girl strode up to him as he stroked his wounded fist. She waved her finger around, to say "shame!" before jabbing it into his chest.

"Was this the emergency? Some Unfortunate skipping out on Judd? You know fighting upsets Nelly!"

"Nelly..." said Charles. All eyes were on him. "Nelly... Wors?"

Sally-Ann's jaw dropped. "Raf... This man's not from here, is he?"