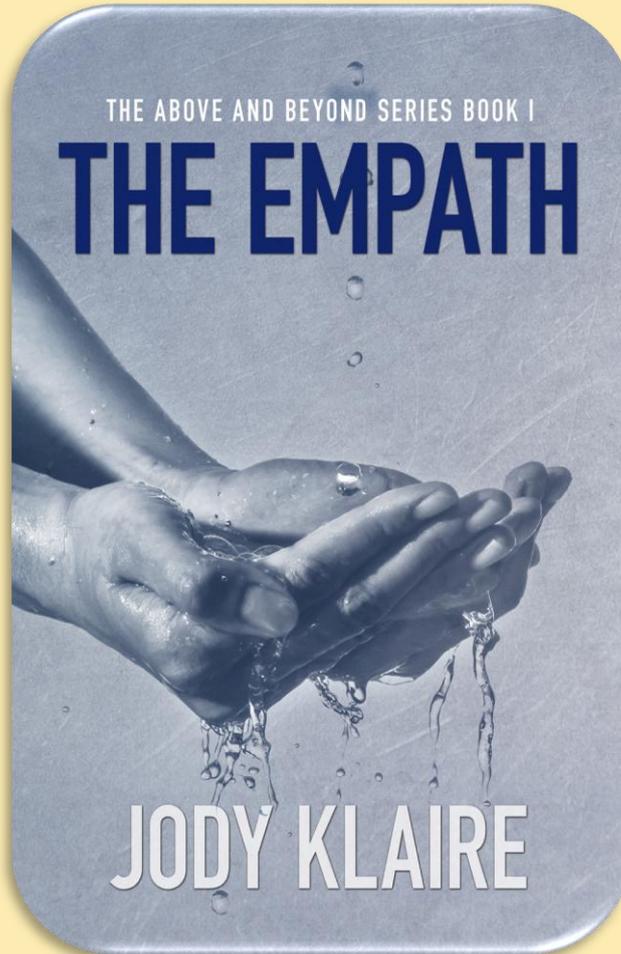


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TEASER



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Chapter 1

MY PROBLEM IS that I know too much.

I see things. I can tell a person's life from their jewelry, I can read other people like you would read the morning newspaper. Plus, I can displace ailments, heal and wound . . . and none of it is voluntary.

I'm different and for some people being different is what makes the world love them. They have talents that everyone else wishes they had. Hell, they might even be a genius of some kind.

I don't know how to stop it and I sure as hell can't control it. When I try to explain these "burdens" to people, I either become a freak-show, a threat, or they think I'm just another crazy person, which is why I am now in a secure mental facility and have been since the age of sixteen. I murdered someone—at least, I think I did. The authorities found me guilty of manslaughter.

My name is Aeron Lorelei. Aeron, because right up until birth, the family thought I was a boy and my father wanted a boy more than anything, a son called Aaron. They were all

pretty disappointed when I appeared and at a loss of what to name me, they changed the A to an E and so I got a name that stuck out as much as I did.

Not that any of that matters anymore since I was convicted as no one in my family will admit I exist. Aeron, the odd runt who talked to animals and wandered around telling people things about themselves they didn't want known. Who'd want that kind of gossip?

I mean, my family tried . . . really tried. I was even sent to a priest once. They thought some holy water and chanting was going to fix me right up but the priest was actually kinda nice. Still, I didn't tell him a thing. Even back then I knew that my family and the local folks figured me for a freak.

They were probably right all things considering. Look where I ended up, wearing orange and sitting 'round in a concrete tomb with a bunch of other misfits.

I share my cell with a woman named Lori. She's a bulky woman with mad professor hair. Now, Lori murdered her entire family as they slept and I don't think she even knows why. I can see this nasty dark cloud over her, its slimy tentacles leeching away her sanity. I could get rid of it for her but then I'd have to figure out what to do with it. Besides, it's been attached for so long that it would leave a great big crater in her mind. Sure, they'd free her, they would say she

had responded to whatever "miracle drug" they were dishing out this month.

Then, when she was out in the world, that great big hole would attract a different leech . . . Someone else could get hurt and it'd be my fault, like always.

So I do nothing but watch her getting fed on by the cloud over her head. It sounds cold, doesn't it? I know, but I don't believe in messing with the future, in messing with people. No one should have that kind of power or knowledge.

So, like I said, I know too much, and the last thing I want is to have more blood on my hands.