

The Red Wizard—Gerald Franklin—pulled free of Henry, whose face fell into an expression of loss and disappointment. Red flowed from Henry's arms into Eli's. Red wrapped around him, through him, in him, until he was consumed. There was no Eli and no GF. No disembodied Wizard and untrained young man. The aura of the Red Wizard flooded into Eli with so much power it felt like he could hold up the weight of the highway all on his own.

Along with the thought came a high Eli hadn't felt since his last meth rush. He felt filled with energy, ready to take on the world, euphoric even.

See how much better we are when we work together?

And they were. Linking the power of one Red with the next generation made Eli into the most powerful being that had ever existed. There was nothing they couldn't do.

No. No. But the words didn't come out of Eli's mouth. They were stuck in his head. He looked down at himself. His arms glowed red. But—wait—was this him? Or was he someone else?

We are The Red.

He was The Red.

*Look. Look around you.* He/they were no longer standing under the viaduct, but on top of it, looking over the side at the carnage and fighting below. Traffic whizzed behind their back; horns blared at their unexpected appearance.

I did this. To show you this is what the whole world would look like if the Truth-tellers had their way. Chaos and war. Unbridled grasping for dominance and power. Magic must be rationed, known only to those with enough intelligence and self-control to use it properly.

Vision spiraled.

*FLASH*

*"Don't be such a snob, Gerald." The speaker is beautiful, young, familiar. She stands with one hand on a dining room table, hair swept up in a bun at the back of her head, lips frowning.*

Stay out of my head.

But Eli had no choice. They were one mind, one unit. Even while he knew the emotion he felt belonged to GF, not him, his chest burned from the hurt and rejection of the woman's words. Eliza. Eli's mother.

*FLASH*

*"She's gone, Gerald." An older man with a mustache and goatee in a wing-backed chair. His words harsh. No sympathy in his expression. "She chose Jude. You have to get past this."*

*"I'll get past it when they've both paid for betraying me."*

You think this will help you? That dredging up my past will set you free? I have been controlling people for years, some with far more experience than you. You are as helpless as they were.

Helpless wasn't quite the right word. Pliable, maybe. Because while a tiny crumb of Eli felt appalled at what was happening, the rest of him felt so damn fucking good. He could stay like this forever, if Gerald would choose not to leave.

Just like Henry.

*FLASH*

*"What do you mean, Relocate into me?" Henry asks.*

*They are in the same room the old man had been in, but standing near a window. There is snow outside. A cold draft filters in through the window trimming as wind shakes the glass.*

*Henry goes rigid. He shrugs his shoulders and closes his eyes. A shiver runs through him. Grinning. "Yes, I see now. No, no, I don't mind at all."*

"This is wrong." Eli managed to get the words out even though most of his mind rejected their meaning.

Henry doesn't think so. Nor do any of the others. They are grateful to partner with me, knowing that what we do together will always be greater than what we would be capable of individually