Dream Walker

by HistoireEternelle

Summary

It was common knowledge that the bigger the age gap was, the more powerful the soulmates were and to fulfill the Prophecy they’ll need every power they could muster. [Lizzington AU]

Notes

This idea has bugged me for months now so I finally decided to write it :)

I hope you'll like it.

Disclaimer: not mine, don't sue

Love you Rippy!
Chapter 1

The 150 years old parchment glowed in the dim-lighted library, the light outlining the lonely silhouette snoring lightly a few feet away. Its eyelids fluttered a few seconds before opening on deep blue eyes.

“What the heck.” The words murmured echoed on the walls of the cavern-like room.

The silhouette got up, long dark hair cascading down its back and walked slowly to the glass casket the parchment was displayed in and frowned. It had never happened before.

“Ressler? Keen. You have to come down.”

Elizabeth Keen put her phone back in her pocket and bent over the casket. Every single words of the Prophecy shimmied with a golden glow.

“On the day of her thirtieth birthday he will come. Together they will mend the rift. What was two will become one. What had been separated so long ago will be reunited. In fire and blood the rift will be mended. On the day of her thirtieth birthday.”

She had spent years in this room, learning about the Guild and its history, watching the parchment closely every time a female Dream-Walker turned thirty. And it had been so for the past 150 years. For every generation of Dream-Walker, one was selected to watch over the Prophecy.

“What’s going on?” The voice breaking the silence of the room made her jump.

“Don! You scared me!” she scolded her partner. “Come here,” she beckoned him to the parchment. “We need to call the Elders,” he said suddenly seeing what Elizabeth’s body had hidden.

Elizabeth nodded silently and took her phone out once again. She knew the Elders wouldn’t be happy to be woken up in the middle of the night, but she had no other choices.

“It’s time,” she simply said before hanging up.

The silence stretched between them, heavy and full of excitation and dread.

“Whose birthday is it today?” Ressler asked, his eyes still on the parchment.

“Mine.”
She was shaking; perspiration breaking at her brow, Elizabeth took a step back and collapsed on the closest chair.

“Liz!” Ressler was kneeling at her side in an eyeblink and took her in his arms.

“I’m a healer, Don! I’m not fit for the job!” she sobbed, tears running down her face.

“I know, I know, calm down,” he breathed closing his eyes, his hands on her back trying to comfort her.

He couldn’t believe it. Elizabeth Keen was the chosen one. It meant… It meant that her soulmate would be known today. A shivering breath left Ressler’s body when he realized she would never be his. After losing his own soulmate he had thought that maybe… since she was a Loner… of course she was married to Tom Keen, but he wasn’t a Dream-Walker so… maybe…

Footsteps echoing down the stairs burst their bubble; someone was coming. They broke apart and Liz dried her tears, ready to meet the Elders. The two of them straightened slightly when Alan Fitch and Diane Fowler strode into the room.

“What happened?” Diane asked in a brisk voice.

Liz cringed at the tone. She had never liked Diane, preferring to interact with Alan when it was possible.

“Look by yourself,” Liz said. She watched Diane almost run to the glass casket and take a sharp breath.

“What did you do? What does it mean?” The Elder’s voice showed a hint of panic.

“It means the time has come. The Prophecy will be fulfilled and we will once again be whole,” Alan said in a deadly calm voice.

Diane turned her head to him and realized he wasn’t looking at the parchment; his eyes were glued to Elizabeth Keen. She frowned. Alan was the Keeper of the Guild. It was his Gift, being able to remember every information he chose to remember. He was basically the human database of the Guild. Of course he wasn’t the only one but he was the oldest and thus his mind held secrets he was the only one to know.

“Alan? Whose birthday is it today?” Diane asked dreadfully, already knowing the answer.

“Elizabeth Scott Keen,” he replied immediately, a slight smile at the corner of his mouth.

He perfectly knew that Diane didn’t like Elizabeth. She had never told him why, but she had never hidden it either. She had been the only opposition when he had proposed Elizabeth’s name when the time for a new Watcher had come. But as a Keeper, he knew things no one else knew and had more
information on Elizabeth Keen than herself.

“But I thought she was a Loner,” Diane said, trying to find an alternative. “Obviously we were wrong,” Alan replied, smiling gently to Elizabeth. “We should continue this elsewhere. I’m sure Harold wouldn’t mind if we used his office.”

The Elders led the way and the two Agents followed. Ressler squeezed Liz’s shoulder lightly before pushing her forward gently. She was lost in her own thoughts, not believing what just happened. She was a Loner; she’d always been a Loner. And now they told her she wasn’t? How come? Liz remembered that dreadful day on her twentieth birthday perfectly. She had been stressed and excited at the same time. It had been the last day her soulmate could have made himself known.

It was the first rule Dream-Walkers learned on their first day at the Post Office. Soulmates were the same age. For centuries, the biggest age gap between soulmates had been two years. It was common knowledge that the bigger the age gap was, the more powerful the soulmates were.

But on the day after her twentieth birthday, Harold Cooper – the youngest Elder and director of the Post Office – had called her in his office and told her he was sorry but she was a Loner. Loners weren’t unheard of but they were rare. They didn’t really know why they existed. Speculations were going on. Either their soulmates had died before coming of age, or they were just anomalies in the Guild. Loners were usually assigned to desk jobs at the Post Office except if their powers were powerful enough to have a field job.

Liz had been classified as a Healer on her first day at the Post Office and thus had been assigned to the medical division of the Guild. She had loved every single minutes of her time there. And then Fitch had told her she would be the next Watcher and she had dived into the archives of the Guild. Spending her time when she was off-duty in the cavern-like library in the basement of the Post Office and had learned what she thought every Dream-Walker should know to understand the depths of their task in this world.

“Have a seat, Elizabeth,” said Fitch, taking her out of her thoughts.

She looked around and realized they were in Cooper’s office, the two Elders watching her closely from behind the desk, Ressler swaying uneasily behind her. She nodded and sat in the chair Alan was pointing at.

“Thank you Agent Ressler, we’ll take it from here,” Diane dismissed him, not even looking at the man.

“He can stay,” Alan countered when he saw the anguish on Liz’s face. “But…” Diane began.

“No, he already knows and Liz here will need support,” Alan cut her off. “Sit down, Donald.”

Ressler obeyed and immediately, felt Liz’s hand squeezing his. He took it in both of his and run his thumb on the back of her hand in soothing circles. They had been partner for years; he wouldn’t let her down, no matter what.

“Do you know why we’re here?” Alan asked gently.

“Because I’m the one destined to fulfill the Prophecy,” Liz replied, head low, in the small voice.

“Yes. And it means you’ve been lying to us for… twelve years,” Diane said frowning.

“I didn’t!”

“Yes you did! You must have known you weren’t a Loner! You must have had shared dreams for at least ten years!” Diane banged her fist on the tabletop, her eyes turning grey and wind blowing into the room.

“Get a hold on yourself Diane!” Alan scolded and the wind immediately stopped. “Liz, try to
remember, please,” he said in a soft voice.
“I don’t know… Yes, I had strange dreams sometimes, but as a Loner, they said it could happen. They said my mind would seek the soulmate that would never come and build a persona to keep me sane,” Liz replied, her mind going back on those dreams and trying to see them with this new perspective.
“Can you tell us a little bit more about those dreams? When did they start? What did you see?”
“It was… I don’t know… I feel like they’ve always been here. For as long as I can remember I’ve always had those dreams. They were reassuring, soothing. He would come and take me to what he called the writer’s room. My father – Sam – told me he was my imaginary friend and would always be here for me…” Liz explained, her eyes unfocused, a small smile on her lips.

She had always loved those dreams. Every time she had felt down, she had known he would come, conjure their room for nowhere and sit on the couch with her surrounded by rows and rows of books. She remembered the feeling of his arms around her while she cried on his shoulder the first time her heart had been broken.

She was so lost in her memories that she missed the look Diane and Alan shared. But Ressler didn’t. Frowning he cleared his throat.

“Isn’t… Isn’t it impossible?” he asked.
“We only know one case when the soulmates had been connected since birth,” Alan said, giving time to Liz to assimilate the information.
“What?”
“Hepzibah and Elijah,” Diane supplied between clenched teeth.
“What? The founders?” Ressler asked wide-eyed.

As every Dream-Walker he had learned the base of the Guild’s history. Donald knew the names of the Founders and how they came to create the community but didn’t understand the link between them, Elizabeth and the Prophecy.

“I think Elizabeth here would be the most capable of explaining. She had spent years studying the Guild’s history,” Alan said and every eye landed on Liz.

She wriggled before sighing. They were right. Liz took a deep breath before starting.

“Five hundreds years ago a couple of Dream-Walker realized they had to do something to save our species. Dream-Walkers were persecuted and killed because people didn’t understand them. They founded the first community in Europe. Sadly, the exact location has been lost through time. They gave a safe heaven to every single Dream-Walker seeking them. As Diane said, the Founders, Hepzibah and Elijah are the only one we know for sure that had been linked since birth,” Elizabeth nodded to the Elder, who didn’t blink, she just looked bored.

Liz turned her stare to Alan seeking direction. “Continue,” he said smiling softly. As a Keeper, he loved history and learning. Liz smiled back, feeling less like a professor lecturing students.

“There are some archives, what we come to call Hepzibah’s diary, explaining how her parents had thought her crazy because of the dreams she used to have when she was young. And later after she had met Elijah, she talks about how those dreams became something else.”
“Like what?” Ressler cut her off.
“No idea, they were the most powerful Dream-Walkers ever listed, there’re no records of what Hepzibah was talking about,” Liz explained. “As we all know, Dream-Walkers work by two. Their powers complement one another, an offensive and a defensive. They’re soulmates, powerful by themselves but nothing equal the power a couple can muster. According to the researches, Hepzibah and Elijah were twelve years apart and since them, no couple has been more than two years apart.
and no other couple has been as powerful as them. What their shared dreams became, we have no clue.”

“But what about the rift the Prophecy talks about? And the Prophecy by itself?” Ressler asked.

“Well Hepzibah and Elijah founded the Guild and their work perpetuated through time, we are the living proofs of that. As I said, at first the Guild was a place where Dream-Walkers could live peacefully in a closed community. But years going by, after the Founders’ death, the Elders realized they could use the Dream-Walkers’ powers to do so much more. They could stop wars, help people, but they also could overthrow government, manipulate economics, etc.”

“Did they? Did they use us as weapon to shape the world?” Ressler asked, surprised.

“Look at the Europe’s history through time. Does it seem natural to you?” Alan asked gently.

Liz smiled once again. Alan had always been a kind man. For sure he could be cutting sometimes, but he had always been patient and supportive with her.

“Two hundreds years after the Founders’ death, what we call today a Loner knocked at the Guild’s door and presented himself as Blaine. He was tested and was categorized as Seer, for no better term. His Gift was to be able to sense when a new Dream-Walker inherited their power and, with him, the Guild grew. With his help they could now find, protect and from the new Dream-Walkers. Teach them to use their powers at their best with their soulmate. In her diary, Hepzibah wrote about something called the Fulcrum.”

“The what?”

“The fulcrum! Are you deaf or just stupid Agent Ressler?” Diane barked. She seemed more annoyed than ever.

“I heard the word, Madam. I was just asking for more precisions,” Ressler replied on the verge of being rude.

“Well ask clearly then, boy!”

Ressler closed his eyes and balled his hands into fists at his side. Sitting next to him, Liz could feel electricity picking at her skin. She swiftly put her hand on Donald’s fist and waited a few seconds for him to calm down. She knew sometimes he had difficulties to control his powers and she had learned during the years working with him how to calm those outbursts.

“We know that when Blaine started to point out Dream-Walkers in America, the Elders decided to form a new branch there,” she continued when she was sure Ressler had a hold on himself. “Half of them left and built the Post Office. We found in the archives some indications leading us to believe that the Fulcrum – whatever it is – was so powerful that they decided to divide it in two. One half was to stay in Europe with Blaine as guardian and the other part went to America.”

“But how did they communicate? I mean if they left their Seer behind how could they find the new Dream-Walkers?” Ressler asked, making sure to enunciate his question clearly.

“They did something horrible but necessary. They split up a couple. As Blaine was a Loner and the only one with such a power, they used the split couple as messengers. That’s why our HQ is called the Post Office, ironic isn’t it?”

She let this information sink in everybody mind. Splitting a couple was the worst thing that could be done to soulmates.

“Anyway, after years working dutifully for the Guild, Blaine went rogue. We don’t exactly know why, but he killed the Elders of the European branch and every Dream-Walker opposing him. We know this for sure because it happened when the Messengers were sharing a dream, it’s all recorded in the archives.”

She saw Ressler stiffen at her side. Everybody in the room knew what the young Agent went through when his soulmate, Audrey, died eight years ago.
“My guess is,” she continued after squeezing Donald’s hand, “the thing the Prophecy is talking about is the Fulcrum.”

“And now you seem to be the one destined to reunite the Fulcrum,” Alan said smiling.

“And with the help of an unknown soulmate who should pop up from nowhere today,” Diane added, her cold stare never leaving Liz.

Liz felt the blood leave her face, for a few minutes, she had almost forgotten her role in all of this. The Guild’s history was so fascinating, she had forgotten she was destined to write one of the most important pages of it.

“You should go back home. He won’t show his face in the middle of the night. And you’ll have to find a way to break this news to your husband, Liz. You know what being soulmate entails,” Alan said, his hands on Liz’s shoulder, she hadn’t even realized he had moved.

Tom… How could she have forgotten Tom? Of course she knew what being soulmates entailed. To be in harmony and use every single ounce of their potential, they had to be intimate. The connection couldn’t be whole if the relation stayed chaste.
The drive home passed in a blur and soon Elizabeth found herself on the couch in the living room. She didn’t know what to think. She didn’t know how to feel. She felt empty and ready to explode at the same time. And Tom… She loved him. They were trying to adopt a baby. They had a life together, they had built a life together and now she was supposed to throw everything away? How could she explain the situation to him? He wasn’t even aware of what she really did at the Post Office. He wasn’t a Dream-Walker, he didn’t know about soulmates, he wouldn’t understand.

She felt tired. Oh so tired. Grabbing the blanket on the back of the couch, Liz lay down and closed her eyes. She couldn’t join Tom in their bed. She simply couldn’t play with him. She had to figure out what she would tell him in the morning first.

As soon as she felt sleep cloud her mind, the room she dreaded and waited so much to see started to create itself around her. The writer’s room. Liz looked upon rows of books, manuscripts laying on every flat surface, the piano behind the sofa and the view. She had always loved the view from the couch, the way rays of light burst through the window painting everything with their greenish glow. She walked to the window and saw what she should have noticed long ago. The trees outside had grown. If the room had been a construction of her mind, everything should have stayed frozen in time.

She felt his presence behind her and stiffened. Liz didn’t dare to turn around. For as long as she could remember, he had never showed his face, he had always been a presence, nothing tangible but solid at the same time. She didn’t know what she was expecting this time. Would he lift the veil on his identity or remain a mystery? She looked at his reflection on the window and frowned. All she could see was a hat. He was manipulating the dream so his face wouldn’t show.

“Who are you?” she asked, still facing the window.
“You know who I am,” he replied in a deep voice.

She could feel him move behind her, close the distance between them. But he didn’t touch her and she was glad for that.

“So you’re real then?” Liz asked. She needed to be sure it wasn’t a mistake, needed to know he was really here.
“I am. But why don’t you ask what is burning your tongue?”

“Why didn’t you tell me? You’ve been part of my whole life. You’ve been here when I felt bad. You’ve been with me every time I needed you! Why didn’t you tell me you were my soulmate!?” Her voice rose with every word she said and she could feel tears burn behind her eyes.
“I couldn’t. It would have been too dangerous for you, Lizzie.” She could feel his body heat on her back and the tension in his voice.

“Why? And don’t call me Lizzie! You’ve lost that right when you lied to me!”

“I never lied to you, Lizzie,” he replied ignoring her demand. “And I will never lie to you.”

She closed her eyes at that. He was supposed to be her soulmate, they were supposed to work
together, they were supposed to – no, she didn’t want to think about that part of the link they shared – and he was lying to her.

“How are you?” she asked again.
“You can call me Red,” he replied and she felt his breath graze the nape of her neck.
“Not your real name then,” she shook her head.
“Not my full name, no. But some people call me that, it’s as close as I can go for now.”

She didn’t reply, pondering what he had just said. So Red was a nickname of sort. Going through her memory, she searched someone around her age or younger whose name could fit the nickname. He was bound to be younger or he would have been detected sooner. But suddenly, it hit her. She had had those dreams for her whole life and in her dreams; Red had always been a grown man.

“How old are you?” she asked finally turning around to look at him, but he stopped her, his hands on her shoulders.
“Not yet, Lizzie,” he breathed.

She felt her muscles relax under his touch. She had thought she would feel disgusted, angry if he touched her, but instead, she felt her skin tingle where his hands had landed. Heat spreading from her shoulder to the tip of her toes, she felt dizzy. So that was how it felt to have a soulmate. She leaned against his chest and felt his hands leave her shoulders and his arms close around her waist. She didn’t know why she was reacting like this. He had taken her in his arms many times and she had never felt like this. She didn’t understand but her mind was too clouded by the sensation to really care.

“You didn’t answer,” she whispered. It felt good, oh so good to be in his arms.
“No, I didn’t,” he breathed against her neck, his lips grazing her skin.
“I’m married!” She suddenly jumped out of his arms, breaking the spell and turned around.

He wasn’t here anymore. She couldn’t feel his presence; smell his scent anymore, nothing. He had left before she could see his face.

“Coward!” she said at the empty room.

There was no point in staying there any longer. Red had left and wouldn’t come back. It was frustrating. He was frustrating. But Liz knew she would have her answers soon. He had to show himself today, and wouldn’t be able to hide his face anymore.

The room started to dissolve around her; she was awakening when she heard it. The disembodied voice of Red echoing in her mind: “I’m sorry, Lizzie.”

Liz’s eyes shot open, her body covered in a thin layer of sweat. He had been there. He hadn’t really left. Liz realized she had a lot to learn about shared dreams and how to manipulate them. She wasn’t even sure she had been the one creating the room anymore. She suddenly felt heat envelop her, the same heat that had spread into every cell of her body when he had taken her in his arms.

“Red?” she thought, as an experiment. But nothing happened. She shook her head and left the couch, leaving behind her the strange sensation.

She could hear move upstairs. Tom was awake. She placed the blanket back on the couch and tried to erase the wrinkles on her clothes so he wouldn’t know she had slept here.

“Hey babe. I didn’t hear you joining me in bed,” Tom greeted, walking to her smiling.
“I just got home,” she replied, lying through her teeth.
“Something up at work?” he asked, kissing her lightly on the lips.

She couldn’t help the shiver running down her spine at the touch. She plastered a fake smile on her lips and took a step back, breaking the contact between her husband and her. She couldn’t help it. She knew deep inside that she loved Tom but since she had learned about Red, since his lips had touched the skin of her neck, she felt a new feeling grow in her heart. Once again, she felt the strange presence behind her and its heat envelop her body. She stepped sideway and the presence disappeared.

“Uh… Well…”
“What? You lost an important package for the White House or something?” Tom joked.

Liz couldn’t help but smile. The official cover for the Post Office was… well, a post office. It was a dumb idea but it had worked for centuries. Something as mundane as a post office didn’t raise too many questions and she knew that the front desk was actually occupied by Dream-Walkers with the Gift of Persuasion so they could send eventual customers away.

“No, nothing that important, but I had to stay there all night long and I just dropped by to take a shower and I’m due there in… shit, half an hour,” Liz said feeling every lies weight on her heart. “But…”
“No time Tom! I’ll see you tonight! Love you!” she said running up the stairs to evade Tom’s questions.

From his spot beside the couch, Tom watched her leave shaking his head. As soon as he heard the sound of running water, his features hardened. He perfectly knew she was lying; she was an open book he had known how to read from the first time they had met.

“Shit!” he breathed seeing the clock hanging on the wall before grabbing his keys and leaving the house. He’d grab a coffee on his way to school.

An hour later, Liz walked past the doors of the Post Office and went directly to the office she shared with Ressler.

“Oh gosh Liz! You look like hell,” Ressler greeted her.
“Thanks,” she replied sitting heavily on her chair.
“Did you sleep at all?”
“Yeah, a few hours.”
“What happened?” he asked when he saw the evasive look on her face. They had worked together for too long not to know when she was saying only part of the truth.
“He came,” she sighed, leaning against the back of her chair and closing her eyes.
“Your soulmate?” Ressler straightened up excitedly.
“Who else? We talked… well I asked questions and he deflected them. And before you ask, no, he didn’t show his face nor give me his name.”
“He didn’t tell you when he would show up either, I suppose?”
“No he didn’t,” she replied.

Liz hesitated before asking her next question, she knew how hard it was for Don to talk about Audrey, but she had to ask.

“Something strange happened, though. I was awake, I was talking to Tom and I felt… I felt
something. As if his arms were around me. As if he were standing behind me. Did something like
this ever happened when…” She couldn’t find the force to finish her question.
“When Audrey was still alive?” Ressler finished it for her.
“Yes,” she fidgeted on her chair.
“No. It nothing like this happened. We shared dreams. We were able to communicate and exchange
information through our dreams but we were always asleep.” he replied a pained gleam in his eyes.
“I’m sorry Don, I shouldn’t have asked.”
“It’s alright,” he smiled sadly. “Do you think it’s what Hepzibah was talking about when she wrote
her dreams became something else after she met Elijah?” he asked not willing to dwell into his
soulmate death.
“I don’t know, I really don’t. I guess we’ll have to find out by ourselves. I hope Red will show up
soon. I’m tired of waiting, I want, need, answers,” she sighed exhausted.
“Red?”
“Oh yes. When I asked his name, he told me I could call him Red. Do you have any ideas of who he
could be?” Liz asked.

Ressler was a few years older than her and even if she had spent years studying the Guild, her field
of expertise wasn’t the Dream-Walkers by themselves, but the Guild’s history as a whole.

“No idea, sorry.” Don replied after a few minutes of silence.
“It was worth trying. I should maybe ask Alan, as Keeper and Elder, he’s bound to know, don’t you
think?” she demanded getting up.
“He’s not here yet. But you can always ask Aram. Even if the information is classified, if that Red is
in our database, Aram will be able to find him in no time.”
“Aram?” She knew the name, she had heard of him, but didn’t really know how he could help her.
“Yes. His soulmate, Samar, and he are in the tech team. He can infiltrate every network just looking
at it; it’s his Gift. Give him a phone and he’ll unearth Putin’s Internet history for you,” Don smiled.
“And what’s Samar’s Gift?” Liz asked curious. Soulmates were supposed to complement each other.
“She can manipulate electricity and then power up every piece of tech Aram needs to access to.”
“The perfect team then,” Liz laughed before leaving the room. If Fitch wasn’t here yet, her best
chance to find out who Red was before he arrived was no doubts Aram.

At the front desk of the Post Office, young Amy was bored. She had inherited her powers and joined
the Guild a year ago. Her soulmate hadn’t showed up yet so she had been assigned to a desk job
until the Elders could determine if the future couple was fit to go on a mission. She was dozing when
the front doors suddenly opened. A man in his fifties, wearing a tailored dark grey three-piece suit
and matching fedora strode into the hall.

“I’m sorry sir, the post office is closed at the moment. You should try the one two blocks north.”

It was what she was supposed to say. She had been trained to repel eventual customers even if her
Gift wasn’t Persuasion. She had been categorized as a Diviner. If she was close enough, she could
feel what power a Dream-Walker had inherited.

“I’m here to see Harold Cooper,” the man said, stopping on the other side of the desk.
“Do you have an appointment?” she asked tensing at the heat oozing from the man facing her. She
could feel Fire.
“No. But tell him Raymond Reddington is here,” he replied smiling gently.
“I’m sorry sir, if you don’t have an appointment…”
“Tell him the *Phoenix* is here,” he cut her off.

And Hell broke on Earth.
Sirens blaring in the room, men in black rushed through the door. Under their puzzled look, Raymond took off his hat slowly and put it on countertop before walking calmly to the center of the room. Kneeling, he put his hands on his head and waited for them to close on him.

“Hands behind your back,” someone ordered and Raymond complied immediately.

He felt something close around his wrists and suddenly the noises around him became muffled. Here we go, he thought, looking up to see two men walk past the reception desk.

“Harold! Donald! So happy to see you!” he greeted when the men stopped a few feet from him. “I see you haven’t lost an ounce of your powers.”

He knew the restraints on his hands were the work of Cooper and his telekinesis Gift and the muffled sounds came from the shield Ressler had put around him to contain his powers. It had been part of his mission, knowing everything he could about the Post Office and the Dream-Walkers.

“Up!” Cooper ordered.

“Be careful with the hat,” Raymond said when the men escorted him through the doors at the back of the room.

They walked him to a brightly lighted room where a simple metallic armchair was waiting for him. He had known what to expect when he had walked through the doors a few minutes ago. Sitting diligently, he felt the shield around him strengthen and the hold on his hand loosen.

“Put your hands on the armrests,” Cooper ordered.

As soon as he obeyed, the chains hanging from the chair closed around his forearms. He tested the restraints but he couldn’t move an inch. He was effectively trapped. Crossing his legs, he smiled smugly waiting for them to start the interrogation. But before Cooper could open his mouth, footsteps echoed behind them and the smile on Raymond’s lips widened.

“Out. Everybody out,” Fitch yelled almost running from the steps to where Cooper and Ressler stood.

“Alan, what’s going on?” Cooper asked.

“Leave us alone,” Fitch said, his eyes never leaving Raymond.

“Sir…” Ressler began.

“He won’t hurt me, Donald. Please, leave us alone,” Fitch cut him off.

From his chair, Raymond watched the scene unfold itself in front of him. He could feel the shield around him flutter. Young Donald was obviously surprised and since powers were intimately linked with emotions it wasn’t that strange his shield lost some of its strength.

“You too Harold,” Fitch added when Ressler began to step back but Cooper didn’t move.
Alan and Raymond stared at each other until Cooper and Ressler had left the room. The restraints on Raymond’s arms stayed in place, but the shield around him disappeared the moment Donald walked past the door.

“Alan, it’s been a while,” Raymond said smiling.
“What are you doing here, Reddington?” Alan replied frowning. “I’ve thought you dead for the past twenty-five years!”
“Did it break your heart, my friend? Or were you just slightly annoyed to have lost your best asset?” If Alan didn’t want to play fair, why would he?
“Ray…” Alan sighed shaking his head.
“Don’t ‘Ray’ me Alan. You’ve sent me on this mission. You knew what I risked!”
“It was necessary and you know it. Your position was unique, you were the only one fit for the task,” Alan retorted. Raymond had always known how to get under his skin, how to use his weaknesses.
“I had lost my family! You played on my sorrow and rage! You took advantage of me when I was at my weakest!” Red barked finally losing his calm, his eyes tuning ice blue.

Two stories up, in a lab, the technicians jumped back. The flame from the Bunsen burner they were using suddenly rose out of control before going back to normal a few seconds later. In his chair, Raymond took a deep breath and unclenching his fingers from the armrest, looked down. The imprint of his hands showed in the half-melted metal. It had been a long time since he had lost control on his emotions.

“What are you doing here Red?” Alan asked again.
“I’m here for Elizabeth Keen.”

OoO

“What’s going on?” Liz asked when Ressler walked into their office.
She had been on her way to find Aram and try to have some answers about Red when she heard the sirens blare their warning through the building. She had stopped dead in her tracks and ran back to the medical division in case they needed her. After a few minutes the alarm had stopped and since no one was coming to get them, Liz left the room and went to her office. She knew Ressler would come and tell her what just happened.

“The Phoenix is here,” Ressler said, sitting on his chair.

The Phoenix had been a rumor at the Post Office for decades. Everybody knew the name, but no one could say for sure he existed. There were rumors, people saying they had seen him walking through the flames of burning buildings. She had herself healed Dream-Walkers raving about the Phoenix saving them. But no one had ever been able to give a clear description of his features. Some talked about ice blue eyes, others about a fedora.

“How is he? Did you see him?” Liz asked excited.
“Fifty-something, tall, wearing a three-piece suit and matching hat. He seemed so at ease kneeling in the hall surrounded by Dream-Walker powerful enough to blast him into pieces,” Ressler described.
“Wow! I wished I’d been here to see it! What happened next?”
“Cooper and I led him to the Cage and then Fitch arrived and sent us away.”
“Alan?”
“Yeah. He seemed to know him. He was confident the Phoenix wouldn’t hurt him.”

Both of them stayed silent, wondering what was the connection between the Keeper and the
legendary being that was the Phoenix.

“Don’t you think…” Ressler began, his eyes on Liz.  
“No!” she cut him off.

There were no chances on earth that her soulmate was the Phoenix. It would mean they were twenty-something years apart. It was impossible. And yet, the witnesses and Ressler had talked about a hat and the only thing Red had showed her in their shared dream was the hat he was wearing. Could it be possible?

“But why would he show up just today, then? He’s been a myth for the last twenty years. Why now? Why today?” Ressler asked.

“I don’t know. But I’m sure it has nothing to do with me. I would have felt it if my soulmate had walked in, wouldn’t I?” The more she thought about it, the less she felt confident.

“Not necessarily. He has been able to hide his presence in your life for…” Ressler stopped, his eyes going wide. “It fits Liz! It fits perfectly!” he exclaimed, getting up suddenly. “I can’t believe your soulmate is the Phoenix!”

“He is not my soulmate Don. Yes it’s a strange coincidence, but he is not my soulmate,” Liz calmed him down. “I need some air,” she said getting up and leaving the room under Ressler’s stare.

Walking through the open space between offices, she heard bits of conversations. All of them seemed to be about the Phoenix. Walking past Cooper’s office, she overheard a few words of his conversation and froze.

“Yes Diane I know. But you know him; he’s been your soulmate for more than forty years now.”

She scooted closer discreetly. “Raymond Reddington. Yes the Phoenix…”

Liz felt ice close around her heart. She knew the name. Raymond Reddington, also known as the Concierge of Crime, had been a high-ranking member of the dissident organization Blaine has formed three hundreds years ago, the Order. He had been known to be ruthless and charming at the same time. And he was supposed to be dead for twenty-five years.

His name was tuning in her mind. Raymond. The Phoenix. Reddington. Red. No, it couldn’t be possible. Her soulmate couldn’t be this man. And then something was tingling at the back of her mind. Something she was supposed to know. She suddenly felt heat around her and could smell smoke, flames burst behind her closed eyes and she heard a man scream.

“Elizabeth?”

Cooper’s voice took her out of the strange experience she was living and she opened her eyes to meet the Elder’s worried ones.

“Are you alright?” he asked, putting his hand on her shoulder.

“Yes. Yes, sorry. I didn’t sleep that well last night. I’m just tired,” she replied, trying for a smile that came out as a grimace.

“Are you sure? Diane told me about what happened last night. It must be stressful for you.”

“I’m good, sir. I just want him to show up to start working,” she wasn’t lying. She really wanted her soulmate to show up so she would be sure he wasn’t that man held in the Cage.

“Did you have time to talk to your husband?” Cooper asked showing her into his office.

“No, not yet, sir,” she replied sitting on the chair the Elder was nodding at.

“You know you’ll have to tell him soon. The connection can’t be…”

“Yes, I know sir,” she cut him off. She didn’t need someone else stressing out this particular point of the Dream-Walkers connection.

“But…”
“But I don’t know how to proceed, sir. I don’t know how to tell him we can’t be together anymore without telling him everything about the Post Office. We are... We were adopting a child.”

Liz could feel tears burn behind her eyes. She was already tired of this situation and she had been in it for a few hours, what would it be in a few days? In a few years? A box of Kleenex landed smoothly on her knees when the first tear escaped her eyes. She looked up and smiled sadly at Cooper.

“You’ll figure it out with the help of your soulmate. Together you’ll figure it out,” he said smiling back.

“Here you are!” a voice coming from the door startled them.

“Alan! What are you doing here? Who’s with Reddington?” Cooper asked, worried.

“He’s in the Cage and I’m sure your hold on his chains is strong enough to keep him there,” Alan smiled. “And I’m here for Elizabeth. I need to talk to her.”

At his words, the blood left Liz’s face. Maybe someone else had come? Maybe it had nothing to do with the man downstairs? As an out-of-the-body experience, Elizabeth saw herself get up and follow Fitch to the next empty office. She didn’t seem to be controlling her body anymore. He made her sit on the lonely chair present in the room and crouched before her.

“Elizabeth?” he called in a soft voice, taking tenderly her hands in his. “You know what I’m about to say,” he continued when her eyes focused on him.

“Yes,” she nodded.

“And how do you feel about it?”

“I don’t know. I mean he was supposed to be dead. He’s part of the Order. He’s a ghost, he’s the Phoenix. He’s legendary and I... I’m nobody,” she cried out, closing her eyes.

“Elizabeth. Liz, please look at me,” Alan said softly. “He’s not who he seems to be. Believe me,” he said when she finally opened her eyes.

“What do you mean?”

“I know him. I’ve known Raymond since the day he walked through the doors of the Post Office when he was eighteen. He had been shut out of his childhood home after burning down his uncle’s house. The man was a child molester. Raymond is a good man, trust me.”

“What are you telling me this?” Liz asked.

“Because he asked for you. And even if we won’t know for sure until the two of you touch, I’m pretty sure he’s the one.”

“Why do we have to touch each other?” She had never heard about soulmates needing a contact to form the link.

“Usually soulmates meet in their dreams. They exchange information. And when they meet, they know each other at first sight. But your case is an unusual one. He didn’t give you any information about himself, did he?”

“He told me I could call him Red,” Liz replied.

She had the strange feeling of betraying Red by giving this information to Alan. As soon as she had this thought, she felt a presence behind her and a hand on her shoulder.

“Then it settles the matter. You have to come with me now, Elizabeth.”

She felt the presence standing behind her chair engulf her into an intangible hug before releasing its hold. Liz nodded and Alan helped her to her feet, leaving the heat behind her. Dream-Walkers watched her walk through the Post Office with Alan Fitch and whispers started to follow them. He led her to the yellow elevator and, before the doors close on them, Elizabeth saw Ressler soft smile from where he was standing beside Cooper.
“Everything will be alright. I promise you. I’ll be by your side,” Alan said when the elevator’s doors opened on a long dark corridor.
“No,” she said. “I want to do it by myself. If he’s really my soulmate, I want this first time to be ours, at least in appearance. You can watch from the observation room,” Liz explained her hand on Alan’s forearm.

He looked at her a few seconds before nodding. Together, they walked down the corridor and Alan stopped in front of a door on the left.

“Good luck,” he said before entering the room and closing the door behind him.

Liz took a deep breath and walked forward, ready to meet her fate.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for those lovely comments and kudos! They make my day!

Liz stopped her hand on the handle. She felt excitation and dread fighting in her veins. The man that was probably her soulmate was chained in the room she was about to enter and she didn’t know what to think, what to feel. Taking a deep breath, she finally pushed the door open and walked in.

Here he was, cross-legged, smiling tenderly. She could feel her hands shake and goosebumps spread on her skin. A strange kind of electricity seemed to fill the room. She hadn’t imagined him like this. She had known he was older and it wasn’t a problem. She hadn’t known what to expect but… maybe more hair. The strange thought run through her mind and at the exact same moment, he laughed. She looked at him frowning and he just nodded at the chair waiting for her a few feet from him.

“Elizabeth, what a pleasure,” he said in his solemn voice.

She could feel it now. The pull. The irrepressible need to touch him, to be close, to let him take her in his arms and never let her go. She could feel it. She had tried to deny it, she had tried to find another explanation, but here he was. Her soulmate. The man she was supposed to spend the rest of her life with. She felt panic rise in her chest and clutched her hands together, rubbing absentmindedly the scar on her wrist.

“May I see it?” he asked suddenly, his eyes darting to her hands.

“Why?” she replied tensely.

Her scar had always been something private, her own talisman, giving her strength when she needed it and now he asked to see it? To what end? Did it have something to do with their link? Was it significant?

“Because it’s part of you,” he said and she felt once again heat engulf her body and her fear recede. “Stop it!” she snapped. She didn’t need him to confuse her any further; he was already doing a good enough job.

His mouth formed the cutest moue she had ever seen but the presence around her disappeared. He was playing with her and she knew it. If they were to work together, to be together, he’ll have to stop it, soon. She needed to know her feelings were hers and not something he had imposed on her. They had to be on an equal footing.

“Why didn’t you show up earlier?” she asked suddenly, her left hand hiding her scar from his view. “Because it wasn’t time. And it could have been too dangerous for you,” he replied smiling at her attitude.

“Then you knew about the Prophecy,” she said, and it wasn’t a question. He must have known.

He seemed surprised a few seconds before his mask slipped back in place. So he didn’t know about the Prophecy, she realized. He had showed up today for an entirely different purpose. She smiled at the realization; she had some leverage on him now. She shook her head, this relationship seemed to
be a battle of will; one she wasn’t sure she could win. She had to gather every ammunition she could find.

"Why today then?"
"Because my cover had been blown," he replied evasively.
“What cover? What are you talking about?”

She didn’t know where the strength she felt was coming from but it helped her to ask those questions. She was a Healer, she had never been formed to conduct interrogations and here she was, demanding answers from the Concierge of Crime, the Phoenix.

“We’ll talk about it later,” he said confidently. “Don’t you want to please our audience? I’m sure they’re dying for us to touch, up there,” he added smiling smugly to the camera.
“You were supposed to be dead for at least twenty years, Red!” She ignored his question.

She frowned at the smile on his lips before realizing why he was smiling. She had called him Red, she had already accepted him as the man she had shared a dream with, as her soulmate.

“I’ll explain everything later Lizzie. I promise, but now the pull is killing me slowly. I’m sure you feel it too and it must be as hard for you as it is for me,” he said, finally showing some discomfort at the chains around his arms.

And suddenly, it came back with full force, exactly as Red had said. A pull, an itch she couldn’t scratch, the heaviness at the back of her skull. His words seemed to have free every sensation she had tried to suppress since the moment she had walked in the room.

“Release me Harold, you know I won’t hurt her. You know I couldn’t hurt her even if I wanted,” Red said at the camera.

Cooper was in the observation room then, Liz thought. How Red could know, she had no idea, but she was sure he was right. As she knew it was the truth when he said he wouldn’t hurt her. She knew this man for less than ten minutes and she was already trusting him with her life. It was part of being soulmates she thought. She felt herself nod and suddenly, the chains around Red’s forearms unrolled and lay still, hanging from the armrests.

He was free but didn’t move. She saw his head nod, thanking Cooper, and soon, his eyes settled on her. He was waiting for her to make the first step. He was giving her time to gather her thoughts and decide the moment she would make her move and she was grateful for that. Maybe he wasn’t as controlling as she thought he was at first sight.

She finally found the force to get up, shaking from head to toes; she was as tense as a bowstring, ready to burst. He mirrored her movement, and stood still a few seconds before taking a step forward. Her eyes went wide, she could feel her legs weaken under her weight and he took another step forward. He was only a few inches from her now and she could feel the heat exuding from his body.

“May I see it now?” he breathed.

She didn’t have to ask for precisions, she knew what he was asking for and she felt how important it was for him. She could feel his emotions going wild, his blood rushing into his veins as if they were her own. Slowly, she raised her right hand, palm up, and presented her scar to his eyes. He seemed frozen on the spot, his eyes on her wrist, his breath as short as hers. How could she feel so much without exploding? How could a man she had never met make a feel that way without even touching her?
Suddenly, she saw his hand close the distance and his fingers brushed hers. The room was sparkling with electricity, everything seemed frozen in time except this hand making slowly its way to hers. She felt heat, as if his fingers were burning her when they finally closed around her palm. She could feel his emotions mingling with hers; it was overwhelming; it was too much. She tried to withdraw her hand from his touch but it was too late.

His lips had made contact with the scarred skin of her wrist and everything went black, then white, then black again. Liz felt fire run thought her veins, everything was burning, she could feel her own Gift expending, straightening, to counter something her body hadn’t been ready to shoulder.

“Lizzie.”

She heard her name coming from far away. Everything was black. Why was she surrounded by darkness? Liz felt panic rise in her chest and she tried to move, to find some light. That’s when she felt it. Strong arms around her, keeping her safe, fingers in her hair, stroking tenderly. She took a deep breath and smelt it, his scent, Red’s scent, the scent that had filled her dreams for as long as she could remember, mingled with something else, something bitter.

She could hear him clearly now, he was calling her, breathing the letters of her name against her hair, his nose buried in her dark curls. It had been too strong, too much and she had passed out, she realized. She finally opened her eyes and met shadows; a strange green light was bathing the room previously brightly lighted.

“Stay,” he breathed when she tried to move and she realized they were sitting on the floor and he was cradling her in his arms.

“What happened?” she asked, relaxing in his arms.

“It was too strong and you passed out,” he explained.

“The light?” She leaned into his embrace, she felt good, protected, safe in his arms.

“It was too strong for both of us. I’m sorry Lizzie I… I lost control for a second and… I could have hurt you.”

She could feel him tremble against her. She remembered the heat, the fire in her veins, her blood almost boiling and she understood. The Phoenix, the man walking through the flames, ‘In fire and blood the rift will be mended’, his Gift was to control Fire. Pyrokinesis.

“No, you couldn’t have,” she reassured him.

She had just realized it. They were the perfect match, their powers complementary. He couldn’t hurt her because even if he lost control, her own Gift was here to protect her, to heal her.

“I’m a Healer, Red. My Gift protects me,” she explained when he finally looked down in her eyes.

Both of them knew it didn’t work that way. Healers couldn’t heal themselves, it was the downside of their Gifts but they weren’t conventional Dream-Walkers, their bond was different, they were different and their powers too. They were meant to be together, they were soulmates and soulmates couldn’t use their Gift against each other.

She closed her arms around him and buried her nose in the crook of his neck and felt his hold on her straighten. She finally felt calm, whole.

OoO

“Harold,” Fitch greeted without moving his eyes from the monitors in front of him. “What took you so long?” He had known the Elder would come.
“I went to get Reddington’s file,” Cooper explained sitting next to Alan, a thin file in his hand. “And?”
“Nothing. It had been redacted,” he sighed angrily.
“I know. I ordered it,” Alan replied calmly.
“Alan, I’m an Elder, I have to run this place, I need to know who he is,” Cooper said firmly.

Fitch sighed and turned his eyes from the couple talking on the screen. He had known this time would come, the time he had to explain himself for his biggest mistake but he wasn’t ready to give the whole truth yet.

“Thirty years ago today, something happened and Reddington’s family died. His wife and daughter were killed.”
“Did he…”
“No! He loved his family and he still loves them. You have to understand, Raymond was twenty-four at the time, and he had been classified as a Loner when he joined the Post Office. On his twentieth birthday, when his soulmate didn’t show, he had been authorized to marry. Carla was lovely and more importantly, she knew about the Dream-Walkers, she was perfect for him. A year later, Jennifer was born,” Alan explained, eyes unfocused.
“What happened then?”
“We don’t know, and I’m not even sure Raymond does,” he replied shaking his head.
“How did he end up in the Order if he was with us at the beginning. How did he become the Concierge of Crime?” Harold asked.
"Release me Harold, you know I won’t hurt her. You know I couldn’t hurt her even if I wanted,” Raymond’s voice coming from the speakers startled them.

Cooper looked at Alan for instructions and when the Elder nodded, he closed his eyes and the chains around Red’s arms fell down.

“Here we go,” Alan breathed, his eyes once more focused on the screen, their previous conversation long forgotten. There will be time for explanations later.

The two Elders watched the couple on the screen close the distance, with each step forward the static on the monitor became heavier until everything went black at the exact moment Red put his lips on Liz’s scar.

“What happened?” Cooper asked, panic in his voice.
“He lost control and probably melt the wires,” Alan replied as a matter of fact.
“What!”?
“You know how powerful the first meeting between soulmates can be. Now think about how many years apart they are and what they’re destined to accomplish,” Alan pointed out calmly.
“Elizabeth!”
“She will be fine.” But Cooper has already left the room.

Alan slouched into his chair and took his head between his hands. His mistakes were coming back to bit him hard. He’ll soon have to explain himself before the Council of Elders.

Running down the pitch-black corridor, Cooper yanked the door open and froze. How powerful this man could be? The room was a mess; neon bulbs shards were covering the floor, the cameras previously hanging from the walls were forming a puddle of metal and plastic on the floor. Even the metal chairs had lost their shape. And in the middle of the room the couple was sitting on the floor wrapped in each other arms, oblivious to the chaos surrounding them and the man watching them.
Chapter 6

The doors opened and every single eye immediately landed on them. Red squeezed her hand before releasing it and she looked at him, smiling lightly. The moment in the Cage had been overwhelming and Liz still didn’t know how to react. It was sure with no doubts now that Red was her soulmate, they were supposed to fulfill the Prophecy together, but they hadn’t talked. Not yet.

A few minutes after regaining conscience, Liz had spotted Cooper watching them from the door and had extricated herself from Red’s arms and stood. He had joined her rapidly and had closed his fingers around hers. But she had shaken off his touch and had walked to the Elder, not looking back. After a few seconds, Red had followed silently.

She had been caught in the moment, driven by her emotions and had forgotten everything that wasn’t Red, but as soon as the excitation had fallen, she had remembered Tom and their life. They had to talk. They had to figure out what their next move would be. But for now, there were more important questions she needed answered.

They walked through the open space and Liz could see heads turning and feel eyes following them and the brush of his hand. Always the brush of his hand. He walked so close to her that with every step, his hand brushed against hers. She may have refused the touch earlier, but his presence, his heat was reassuring her. The moment they had left the Cage, Fitch had joined them and the four of them had taken the elevator and were now heading to Cooper’s office. Liz wasn’t the only one needing answers.

They took place into the Elder’s office and waited for Red to talk. Even if she tried to suppress the pull, Liz’s eyes were dragged to him and she found herself assessing him. He looked good. More than good. His perfectly tailored suit was like a second skin, hugging his body, emphasizing his broad chest. They had taken his vest, hat and tie when they had chained him in the Cage but he was still wearing his waistcoat and had rolled up his sleeves. Liz’s stare was navigating between the few hairs she could see peeking from his opened shirt collar to the strong muscles of his forearms she could see moving under his skin every time he moved his hands.

“We have to talk.”

Cooper’s voice took her out of her daydream and she focused on the two men facing them, blushing.

“Focus!” she snapped suddenly, hitting Red in the ribs.

She had perfectly felt what he was thinking and had almost heard the chuckle he had repressed at her blush. She knew he had felt her checking him out and hadn’t missed her thought. If he could read her that easily, it would be a problem soon. She had to learn to control her feelings and thoughts when he was so close.

“Ouch!” he chuckled out loud this time, rubbing his ribs. “Not my fault if you can’t rein your thoughts,” he laughed, looking at her smugly. “Stop playing with me and I’ll be able to focus on this meeting!”

On the other side of the desk, the two Elders looked at each other before turning their eyes to the fighting couple. They were still arguing and they couldn’t begin to fathom what the discord was about.

“Get off,” Liz barked, sliding her chair away from Red’s.
“What’s going on? He didn’t touch you,” Cooper said, puzzled.
“Oh, he perfectly knows what’s going on. I can feel his presence all around me messing with my mind!”
“You can… feel his presence?” Cooper asked looking at Alan who seemed as lost as himself.
“Red! I’ll warn you once. If you don’t stop right now, I’ll punch a hole in your neck with this pen!” she warned, grabbing the pen lying on Cooper’s desk.
“All right, all right,” Red said, raising his hands. “I can’t control it sometimes. It’s as new for me as it is for you.”
“Bullshit,” she said under her breath but she could feel the presence around her recede and disappear.
“I think I know what Hepzibah meant when she said her connection to Elijah became something else after they met,” Liz said when she saw the look on Cooper and Fitch face.
“Care to explain?” Cooper voice was like a cold shower for Liz. She had never seen the Elder so annoyed.
“I can… feel him. I don’t really know how to explain, but I can feel his presence, the heat of his… him around me even if he’s not touching me,” she explained uneasily. She really didn’t like to share this strange link between them. It felt… private.
“And we can sense each other’s feelings too,” Red said suddenly dragging his chair to hers and taking her hand in his. “It’s alright, Lizzie,” he breathed feeling how distressed she was.

She didn’t push him away, letting him take her hand and put his arm around her shoulders. At this moment she needed him more than anything else. She could feel her guilt regarding Tom and her growing feelings for Red fighting in her mind.

“We’ll talk about this in private,” Red breathed against her temple, his lips grazing her skin. “What do you want to know?” he asked suddenly, his eyes on the Elders, his cold mask slipping in place.

The Elders were taken aback by the sudden change of tone and stayed silent a few moments before diving into the interrogation.

“How did you survive?” Alan asked.
“I… Someone helped me,” Red replied.
“Who?”

He didn’t answer. He wasn’t ready to divulge the whole truth about this incident. Not to the Elders anyway.

“You’ve been part of the Order for thirty years and you decided to turn yourself in today, why?” Cooper asked knowing he wouldn’t answer Fitch question.
“I’ve never been part of the Order. I was sent on a mission…”
“You’re the Concierge of Crime! You’ve sold information to the Order for years before ‘your death’!”
“I’m the Phoenix! The Concierge of Crime is the title they gave me. Ask Alan about the Phoenix, he knows more than he says,” Red replied, Liz’s hand on his wrist preventing him to lose control.

He didn’t understand what happened. He had spent years reining his emotions, never losing control since that dreadful night twenty-five years ago and he had been about to lose it for the third time in a few hours. He didn’t understand what was going on. He was so lost in his own thoughts that it took him a minute to feel the flickering presence behind him, the inconsistent arms, as light as smoke, trying to close around him. Lizzie. His Lizzie was trying to comfort him.

Red turned his head to her and smiled tenderly. She was learning, and fast. He was so proud of her. She smiled back and he felt her presence straighten, a ghost-like hand rubbing the back of his head softly, ghostly nails scratching lightly his scalp. At the touch, he felt fire rush through his body and
heat pool in his lower belly.

“Who’s playing now,” he rasped, crossing his legs to hide his growing arousal.
“What do you mean?” Cooper cut them off when Liz smiled wickedly.
“I was the one who sent Raymond to infiltrate the Order,” Alan said suddenly.
“You didn’t send me, you played me into doing your will. It’s different, Alan,” Red said coldly, feeling Liz’s presence disappear now she was once again focused on the conversation.
“You’re playing with words, Ray,” Alan retorted.
“My wife and daughter had been killed. You told me it was the Order and if I wanted to avenge them you had the perfect mission for me!”
“You… Your wife? Daughter?” Liz breathed suddenly and Red could feel her distress oozing from every pore of her skin.
“Lizzie… look at me,” he said softly when she took her hand out of his grip. “You have to understand, they told me I was a Loner, just as you, and I was allowed to marry outside the Guild, just as you were,” he continued when she finally turned her head back to him. “We were married for four years and Jennifer, my daughter, was three when they were killed.”

Liz closed her eyes; she could feel how damaged he was. She could feel the part of him that had died with his daughter so long ago. She could feel the blood still oozing from his broken heart. He had had a life before her, she had known it but hearing it from his mouth was something she hadn’t been prepared for. And then she realized the hypocrisy of her reaction. She was married; they were about to adopt a child. If Red had showed up a few months later, she would have been in the same situation.

“I’ll explain everything later. I promise, sweetheart,” Red said, there were things too personal to discuss in front of the Elders. Liz nodded but didn’t let him take her hand back.
“How did you become the Concierge of Crime,” Cooper asked when he saw they had postponed the conversation.
“It was part of my cover,” Red sighed. “I was to give them information about the Guild to secure my position in the Order and rise in the organization. And it worked. I became what you call the Concierge of Crime, dealing in information, blackmail and arson for four years. I rose through the ranks rapidly until that night,” Red explained.

He had to give them some information to make sure he could move freely in the Post Office but wasn’t ready to divulge everything. Something told him not to trust them entirely.

“And what about the Phoenix?” Cooper asked when he realized Red wasn’t going to go any further on the subject.
“Ask Alan,” Red replied. “I have to talk with Elizabeth and it’s lunch time. I’d like to get my vest and hat back, thank you,” he said, getting up, his outstretched hand waiting for Liz’s.

Liz sent a half-apologetic look to the Elders before taking the hand waiting for her. She needed answers for her own now. Everything Red had said was true, she could feel it deep inside. He had never betrayed the Guild. Still hand in hand, they walked out the office and through the Post Office. She shook her head when they walked by Ressler. They’ll have time to talk later, now she needed to be with Red.

“Where are we going?” she asked when the elevator doors closed on them.
“I know a little hole-in-the-wall where they serve the most delicious tartines I’ve ever had,” he said smiling.

What the hell were tartines, she had no ideas but Red seemed a man with good tastes so she went for it, trusting him. They got through the doors leading to the front desk and there, on the counter, were
waiting Red’s vest, hat and tie. He let go of her hand and put the vest and hat on, stuffing the tie in his pocket. Liz couldn’t help the soft whimper leaving her mouth when the jacket hid Red’s backside.

“We’ll have time for this later,” he chuckled, not missing her disappointment and she blushed. She really had to learn how to keep her thoughts for herself. “Coming?”

Once again she took his waiting hand and together they left the Post Office under the scrutiny of Amy who hadn’t missed a second of the conversation. Once outside, a black Mercedes was waiting for them, a tall dark skinned man leaning against the hood.

“Dembe my friend! See, I told you not to worry,” Red said hugging the man.

Lie watched the man return the hug; she could see the gun hanging from the holster under his left arm before his jacket once again hid it. A bodyguard of sort then.

“Lizzie, this is Dembe. Dembe meet Elizabeth, my soulmate,” said Red proudly.

“Miss,” Dembe greeted in a strongly accented voice.

Liz nodded and smiled slightly to the man. She’d need time to get used to somebody following them around. Red led her to the back door Dembe was keeping open and let her slide in before joining her.

“To Alfredo, Dembe,” Red said when the man settled behind the wheel.

The bodyguard nodded and started driving. On the backseat, Red took Liz’s hand and smiled tenderly when she looked at him. It felt strange to be here, in this car, with this man. She knew he was her soulmate; they had been made for each other, but Tom’s existence weighted on her mind. She knew this little lunch with Red was the perfect moment to talk and find a solution about her husband but she wasn’t sure how to start the conversation. As always Red seemed to feel her conflict and squeezed her hand reassuringly. It was scary how easily he could read her when she was barely aware of his presence when they weren’t touching.

Liz started when the car stopped suddenly and the door on her side opened. She took Dembe’s hand and got out of the car. Red stood beside her in a matter of second and pointed to the small restaurant a few feet away. She would have walked by the entrance without noticing it if it weren’t for Red. He led her to a table in the corner and pulled the chair out for her to sit before sitting his back to the wall.

From the corner of her eye, she could see Dembe sitting not far away, his eyes on the front door.

A heavy silence spread between them, something they hadn’t experienced yet. Liz played a few seconds with the glass of water the waitress had put on the table with the menus, ill at ease. It was the first time they were on their own outside the Post Office and both of them seemed to feel the importance of the moment.

“My daughter would have loved it here,” Red said suddenly breaking the silence.

Liz looked at him surprised, she took his hand across the table and suddenly could feel how talking about his daughter cost him.

“How was she?” Liz asked softly.

“She had the most mesmerizing blue eyes I’ve ever seen and long strawberry blond hair. She was beautiful, so tiny and fragile…”

His voice broke on the last words and Liz could feel her own heart breaking a little at his tear-filled eyes. She rubbed his knuckles, trying to comfort him but deep inside, she knew nothing could ease
such a sorrow. The waitress materializing beside their table broke the moment and Red broke the eye contact between them.

“We’ll have a chèvre et Comté tartine and a mozzarella di bufala tartine and two glasses of red house wine, thank you,” Red ordered for both of them.
“Right now, sir,” the waitress said before leaving them alone.
“What?” he asked when he caught Liz’s eyes on him.
“You ordered for me… and I don’t even know what,” she replied a little annoyed.
“Two glasses of Saint-Estèphe, sir,” the waitress cut them off once again.
“I’ve always hated when Tom did this,” Liz said when the waitress left.
“Your husband…”

Liz felt a shiver run down her spine, she hadn’t planned to talk about Tom that soon.

“Yes, Tom Keen.”
“I’m sorry, I should have asked,” Red said after a few seconds of silence. “How is he?” he asked cautiously.
“He’s a fourth grade teacher, a nice man. He doesn’t know anything about Dream-Walkers,” she said, hoping he would understand her dilemma.
“He’s not who he seems to be, Lizzie,” Red finally said after a minute or so of silence.
“What do you mean?”

But they were once again interrupted by the waitress bringing their dish, the girl put a slate plate in the middle of the table, announced the dish and left them. Liz looked at the food. A half baguette sliced in the middle topped by melted cheese for one and mozzarella and tomatoes for the other.

“This one is chèvre et Comté,” said Red, pointing at the melted cheese one. “Goat cheese and Comté cheese and this one the Mozzarella di bufala, tomatoes and olive oil,” he explained. Try it Lizzie, I’m sure you’ll love it,” he added when she kept looking at him.

“What do you mean, Tom is not who he seems to be?” she asked instead.
“I remember that weekend I spent snowed-in in that pittoresque little hotel in Chamonix, the Chef had left and the second was sick. They put me in charge of the kitchen with the kitchen boy and this guy was a genius. I’m not kidding, he had the most unhelpful Gift ever, super taste buds as he put it, but in a kitchen… oh gosh… Of course, he didn’t tell me point-blank, I walked on him once, he was napping and I felt him share a dream with his soulmate. Sometimes, when you concentrate enough you can feel it…”

Red’s eyes were dreamy, unfocused, a small smile playing on his lips and Liz frowned. He had eluded her question but his words seemed important to the subject all the same. What was he implying with his little story? She didn’t know ordinary Dream-Walkers could sense the Gift in somebody else, she had thought it would need someone as Blaine or Amy, someone with this particular Gift to know. And how was it related to Tom? She was pretty sure Red wasn’t someone to talk for the sake of talking; his little story must be related to the topic.

“Are you implying Tom lied to me? Are you saying he’s a Dream-Walker?” she asked. She needed to be sure.

Red didn’t reply; he stayed silent, just looking at her. She could feel a faint presence around her, he was trying to know what she felt but, this time, she seemed to be able to block him. She needed time to think about this, to find if he said the truth. Even if he didn’t show it, she knew he was jealous. He must be jealous. As soulmates they were meant to be together and knowing she had a husband waiting for her at home, waiting to make love with her was something she knew he couldn’t accept. God! She had been jealous of his dead wife; she couldn’t imagine how he felt right now. She didn’t
know how she felt herself.

“Talk to me Red!” she suddenly whispered angrily, tired of his silence.  
“I can only put you on the path, Lizzie, you have to walk the road by yourself,” he replied calmly.  
“I’m a patient man; I waited thirty years for you, being here when you needed me, seeing you fall in love with men that weren’t me. But know that this time has ended the moment we touched, Lizzie. I won’t share anymore,” he added after a short silence, his eyes turning ice blue and Liz could feel the room temperature going up.

That’s the moment when she fully realized how dangerous the man facing her was. She knew deep inside he would never hurt her but nobody else was safe.

“Try the tartine Lizzie,” he said suddenly in a soft voice, a smile on his lips, eyes back to their blue-green natural shade.

She didn’t want to try the dish, she wasn’t even sure she wanted to be here with him anymore. He had frightened and confused her. She needed time to think about the implication of his words. If they were true… Without a word, she got up and left the table.

“Lizzie…” he tried to call her back, but she didn’t stop and got out of the restaurant without looking back.

Red sighed and closed his eyes. He hoped she had understood his words, even if she had blocked him, he had felt the conflict going on in her mind.

“It could have been worse,” Dembe’s deep voice brought him back to the small restaurant.  
“Could have been better,” he replied.  
“Why didn’t you tell her the whole truth?”  
“She has to discover it by herself. It’s killing me to let her walk back to him but she has to do it by herself or she would never trust me,” he shook his head not sure it had been the right decision after all.

He hoped his words would be enough to stop her going back to her husband. If the pull she felt was as strong as the one dragging him to her was, he didn’t have to worry but Sam had taught her the sacred nature of marriage vows and even if he had done so to prepare her to meet her soulmate, Red feared she would apply it to Tom.

“Help yourself Dembe, I’m not hungry anymore.”
Liz spent the day trying to avoid the Elders and Ressler. She knew they would ask how the lunch with Red had been but she wasn’t ready to share. She didn’t know what to think about Red’s words. What if he had said the truth and Tom had really lied to her for years? To what ends? She was nobody; she had never been anybody. She couldn’t understand why someone would want to plant a spy in her life. Except... Except if they knew about her link with Red and the Prophecy. No, it was impossible, she hadn’t known before Red showed up...

Liz left the Post Office with her insides knotted. She knew she had to face Tom and try to find out if Red had been right or had just made everything up to unsettle her faith in her marriage. He had been perfectly clear, he didn’t want to share and she didn’t want either. The simple thought of another woman putting her hands on Red could push her on a killing spree but Tom had always been a loving and supportive husband. She didn’t want to hurt him.

The walk from the bus stop to her house helped her to calm down a little. She knew Tom was probably waiting for her at home, ready to talk about his day and small anecdotes about the children he was working with. She had always loved those stories but today she was dreading them. She tried to send a ‘do not play with my feelings now’ vibe to Red, hoping he would get it and not interfere with her evening with Tom. She needed to know her feelings were her own and not mixed with Red’s.

Liz pushed the door open and breathed a sigh of relief when silence greeted her. Tom wasn’t here yet. Looking at her watch, she frowned, he should have been here. Turning on the lights, she walked to the kitchen and found a note stuck on the fridge “parents/teachers meeting tonight, I’ll be late. Don’t wait for me. Love you, Tom”. She was sure the note hadn’t been here when she had left the house in the morning; Tom must have come back on his lunch break. Why didn’t he call her, or just tell her when they talked this morning? And if he didn’t spend his lunch at school, why didn’t he call her to meet up?

Elizabeth shook her head, she was thinking too much. Red’s words were ringing in her head, he had planted the idea of Tom’s treason in her mind and this seed was growing slowly but steadily. She hated him for that. Tom had been at her side for six years, they were married for three years and were trying to adopt a child. And now, this man, her soulmate, a stranger, was messing with her life. She was about to open the fridge to get some leftover when her phone rang.

“Keen,” she said, frowning at the name on her screen.
“You think too much Lizzie,” the voice said and Liz sighed.
“Nick’s pizza? Really Red?”
“Don’t you like it? I can change if you want.” She could hear the smile in his voice.
“What do you want?” she asked.
“You asked me not to interfere tonight. Yes, I felt it. But you’re the one messing with me right now. What’s going on?” he asked and she could feel how proud of her he was.
“I hope I didn’t upset your digestion,” she replied, sarcasm dripping from her voice. He had nerves to
call her out about her feelings when he was the one trying to eavesdrop.
“What’s going on Lizzie?” he asked again and she heard the worry in his voice now.
“Tom’s not here. He didn’t call and…”
“You’re worried,” he finished for her.
“Yes,” she sighed.

Silence spread between them, their breath in sync the only noise in her ear. She felt like a
weathercock since the Prophecy had revealed its meaning. She couldn’t stand the idea of her
soulmate breaking her marriage, but as soon as she was close to Red, even on the phone, she
couldn’t help longing for him.

“I can come if you want,” he said softly.
“No!” she replied a little too forcefully.
“As you wish.” She could hear the disappointment in his voice.
“I didn’t mean it like this, Red. You know it. I’m sure you can feel how much I’d like to have you
beside me,” she said. Once again she didn’t know what to feel about this connection.
“Just know I’m a phone call away. If you need me, I’ll be there in a matter of minutes. I’ll be waiting
for you in our room,” he said softly before hanging up.

Liz lowered her eyes on her phone before shaking her head. He was an enigma she couldn’t
understand. It was frustrating and exciting at the same time. And here came the weathercock again.
Liz opened the fridge and took the Chinese leftovers out to heat them up. She was in no mood for
cooking tonight. She had to talk to Tom and hoped he would come sooner than later. She had to
settle this matter if she wanted to start working with Red on the Prophecy.

She sat down on the couch, eating her food while watching a stupid show on Netflix. Once her
dinner finished, she put everything back in the kitchen and went back to lay on the couch, a blanket
around her and waited for Tom.

She felt her eyes close periodically; she was so tired. Those few days had been overwhelming and
she needed to sleep. As soon as she closed her eyes in earnest, the room started to form around her
and here he was. Red was waiting for her on the couch.

“I told you I would be here when you’d feel like coming. Yes you’re the one deciding here. I’m just
creating the room for you,” he explained waiting for her to join him on the couch.

Without a word, she walked to him and sat a few inches from him. She already could feel the heat of
his body penetrating her side. It felt good, as good as when she used to come here before being
aware of his identity.

“Come here,” he breathed, putting his arm on the back of the couch, waiting for her to close the
distance.
“Nothing will happen. I’m still married and until things are settled with Tom, nothing will happen
between us.” She had felt what he had tried to hide. She seemed able to read him more easily here
than in the real world.
“I never thought otherwise,” he lied openly, a small smile at the corner of his lips.

She laughed. She had to laugh at this. He looked like a teenager with his smug smile and his puppy
eyes. She felt it herself. Deep inside, the pull was strong; she knew their link wouldn’t be complete
until they breach that last barrier. They had to be intimate for their link to be strong enough to fulfill
the Prophecy. They hadn’t talked about the Prophecy, she realized suddenly. When she had brought
the subject up, he had seemed surprised. They’ll have to talk about it but not now. Now she wanted
to enjoy the feel of his arms around her, his fingers running up and down her side. She hadn’t even
realized she had moved and was now almost on his lap. She looked up at him from her spot on his shoulder and saw he was looking through the window, watching the sunset through the green leaves of the trees outside. Shadows were painting his face, outlining the curve of his jaw and nose, bringing out his eyes.

Slowly, she raised her hand, traced the line of his nose, brushing his lips and stopping at his chin. She nuzzled his jaw when he finally looked down and smiled. He pulled her closer to him and her hand slipped from his face to land on his chest. His waistcoat was open, his white shirt the only barrier between their skin. Their eyes still locked, Liz slipped a finger between two buttons and felt an electric jolt at the contact of his skin. He was even hotter there, close to his heart than every other part of his body she had touched so far.

“You’re playing with fire, sweetheart,” he breathed and she could feel his muscles contract at her touch.

She chuckled and slipped her hand further, popping a button open on her way, and her fingers met coarse hairs. They stayed silent, Liz fingers playing with his chest hair and Red’s tickling lightly her side under her shirt. She felt good, better than ever. If a simple touch could make her feel like this she couldn’t imagine how it would feel to have his body moving above hers, their skin sweaty, breath mingling in a searing kiss.

“Lizzie,” he rasped closing his fingers around her wrist to take her hand out of his shirt.

She could see the bulge in his pants when he linked their fingers together. He had felt her thoughts; he had felt her arousal and his body showed the result.

“I’m sorry,” she said, squeezing his fingers.

“We have to settle the matter with your husband sooner than later. I won’t be able to control myself much longer. Not when you’re having such thoughts,” he said, kissing the top of her head.

“I know. I’m sorry but the pull is so strong when we’re here.”

“I feel it too.”

“Did you say the truth? About Tom?” Liz said after a silence.

“You have to find it by yourself, Lizzie,” he sighed, closing once again his arms around her. “I could tell you everything right now, but deep inside, you’d never believe me without seeing it by yourself. But know something Lizzie. I would never and will never lie to you.”

“But you’re not telling the whole truth,” she said, burying her head in the crook of his neck.

“Not when it might be too dangerous for you. Look at me Lizzie,” he said waiting for her to rise her head. “I will never lie to you.”

He was saying the truth; she could see it in his eyes. She could feel it through their bond. She could dig in his mind and find the truth, uncover every single secret he held, she could use their link to make his life meaningless, she realized. Jerking out of his arms, she looked at him fear in her eyes.

“And I have the same on you. It’s why soulmates are that powerful when they work together. They can’t hold anything back; they can’t hide their feeling. Even if our bond his special every Dream-Walker can sense their soulmate, even if they’re not aware of it,” he explained pulling her back to his chest. “I have to let you go for now, my love, your husband is at home,” he breathed against her head, kissing her hair lightly.

Liz felt the room dissolve behind her closed eyes and she was back on the couch, in her house and Tom was smiling down at her when she finally opened her eyes. She felt Red’s ghostly hand brush against her cheek, giving her strength.
“You shouldn’t have waited for me,” Tom said, extending his hand for her to take.
“What time is it?”
“Eleven. We went for a drink with some teachers.”

She took his hand and let him lead her to their room. After her nap and the time spent with Red in their shared dream, she was ready to test his theory. She would wait for Tom to fall asleep and try to feel if he was sharing a dream. She still wasn’t sure Red was right, but she had to believe him to some extend. He had been right, she realized. She had to find the truth by herself or she would never be sure he hadn’t lied.

When they reached the bedroom, she felt the faint presence of Red around her. He was here, his intangible presence giving her strength, watchful in case Tom suspected something, but he didn’t interfere. She was glad of his presence, she felt safer knowing he was watching over her. She was changing into the shorts and top she was sleeping in when she felt something like a breeze brush against her breasts and she started.

“What?” Tom asked at her sudden movement.
“Nothing,” she replied, pushing Red back as much as she dared without blocking him completely.

Their time in the writer’s room seemed to have inhibited him. She had to make sure her arousal wasn’t showing or Tom would want to… No, she didn’t want to think about it. Even if she was still married to him, she knew deep inside that the only man allowed to touch her for the rest of her life would be Red. She was his. And I’m yours, she almost heard in response.

“Coming?”
“Yeah, give me a minute,” she replied, walking to the bathroom.

She wanted to give Tom time to fall asleep, so she wouldn’t have to lie. She had seen the look in his eyes and after six years together, she perfectly knew what it meant. She could feel Red’s approval at her move, and his anxiety recede slightly. She took her time getting ready for bed, brushing her teeth and hair before returning to the bedroom. As expected, Tom was fast asleep, snoring, his mouth wide open. She smiled at the familiar sight, he had never been a graceful sleeper, even less after drinking.

She slipped in the bed; her senses wide open. She didn’t know what to expect, Red had told her she would feel it if Tom was a Dream Walker, but she hadn’t asked how. And now she found herself lying in bed, next to her snoring husband waiting for a sign she wasn’t even sure to recognize. Once again she felt the reassuring heat of Red looming around her. She closed her eyes and concentrated on the man beside her, trying to differentiate him from Red. Seeming to feel her problem, Red stood back, still here but not interfering, watching from above.


She shook her head to clear her mind and looked at Tom. He was still sleeping but the snoring had stopped, he was deeply asleep now, his eyes moving behind his closed eyelids. He was dreaming. Liz put her hand lightly on Tom’s and closed her eyes, concentrating on him. She had always been more aware of Red’s feelings when she touched him. Liz took a deep breath and, suddenly, felt it. It was like a sound she couldn’t hear, the vibration of a cord, a heavy weight at the back of her skull. Tom’s body was beside her, but it was empty, just an envelope, his mind was elsewhere, with someone else. She yanked her hand from him and left the bed.

He had lied. He had played her for six years! She couldn’t believe it. They were about to adopt a child and he had a soulmate waiting for him somewhere. It was the worst, she thought. Having a cheater and liar for husband was something she could get over, but bringing a child into the lie? No. Nothing could excuse using a child for such a dirty work. Not looking back, she walked down the
stairs to the living room and slid her finger on her phone screen when it started to ring.

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault, Red,” she said tears running freely on her cheeks.

“I can send a car to pick you up, Lizzie,” he proposed knowing it wouldn’t be a good idea for him to go to her house while Tom was there.

“No. I need to figure out what I can do to use him as he used me,” she said firmly.

A plan was forming in her mind. Tom had played her for years, infiltrating her life and gathering information. She had to find a way to make him pay, and use him for her own purposes. If he had been planted in her life by the Order, he must have been a high-ranking agent. And…

“Did you know him? You said you were in the Order, you’re the Concierge of Crime a known associate of the Order, a high-ranking member. Did you know Tom from your time with them?” she asked suddenly.

“I do. But I’d prefer not talking about this on the phone. I’ll explain everything, I promise,” he replied sighing. She was too clever for her own good. “You need to sleep now,” he added softly.

“I can’t go back to him. I don’t want to see him ever again,” her voice broke on the last word.

“Leave a note then, and I’ll send a car for you. Dembe will drive you wherever you want. Go back to the Post Office, come here, do whatever you want, but don’t stay there.”

Liz could hear the worry in Red’s voice. He was right, she was in no shape to confront Tom and stay in character. It was too soon. She needed time to think, she needed time to figure out how to play him and get the information about the Order she needed.

“Alright. I’ll be waiting for him,” she finally said. “Stay with me until he’s here?”

“I’m always with you Lizzie and I’ve always been. Even if you don’t feel it yet, I’m here,” he whispered and she felt his ghostly arms close around her waist and the heat of his lips on her neck.

“I really need to learn how to do this,” she whispered back.

“And you’ll drive me crazy,” he laughed, his voice sending shivers down her spine.

“As you’re driving me crazy right now,” she replied in a whimper when his unsubstantial fingers brushed the underside of her breasts.

“Dembe’s waiting for you, my love,” he breathed out before hanging up.

My love. He had called her my love again. He was driving her crazy and she knew that, even if he had given her the choice, she wouldn’t go to the Post Office. She would go wherever he was. She needed him. She needed to feel his heat and know he was real, not a creation of her mind. She wrote a short note saying that she had had to go back to work and stuck it on the fridge under the one Tom had left earlier. Two lies side by side. Grabbing the overnight bag she kept in a cupboard in the vestibule and putting on an overcoat, she walked out. The soft click of the door closing behind sounded so definitive. Her husband had never existed, the man she had loved had been a ghost; she had to move on now. Looking up, she saw Dembe’s dark figure waiting for her, keeping the black Mercedes back door open.

“Where are we going?” Dembe asked when he sat behind the steering wheel. “The Writer’s home,” she replied.
Chapter 8

The driver wasn’t talking; the only sound in the car came from the engine. And Liz was thinking. She had left her house, her life and was on her way to Red’s. And she wasn’t sure it was such a good idea. Going to him in such a vulnerable state was playing with fire, literally. Blocking Red from her mind, she tried to find an alternative. She didn’t want to go to the Post Office, not now. The building never slept. Dream Walkers were always there, either working or living there for the most dangerous ones.

She had always found strange that some Dream Walkers needed constant monitoring until they could master their powers, but after seeing the damages Red could cause when he lost control, she finally understood the need of such a service. She didn’t have that many friends and all of them were friends with Tom too, so she couldn’t go to them.

“Ressler!” she breathed suddenly. She could go to Ressler’s and spent the night without ulterior motive. “Pardon?” “Stop the car, please,” she said and the bodyguard complied immediately. “Is there something wrong?” Dembe asked looking at her in the rear mirror. “No. No, I just changed my mind, turn over,” Liz said, still blocking Red from her mind.

She knew he wouldn’t like it. He had felt she was coming and would be disappointed when Dembe would tell him where she went. She knew the bodyguard would call Red as soon as she would leave the car and she couldn’t prevent it. At least he would know that she didn’t go back to Tom. Liz gave Ressler’s address and looked silently through the window while the car drove back to Washington.

The car parked in front of Ressler’s building a few minutes later and Liz got out without waiting for Dembe to open the door. Red was obviously trusting the man with his life – and hers – but she still wasn’t comfortable with the dark skinned bodyguard. She didn’t know him and being followed around by a complete stranger wasn’t something she enjoyed.

“Thank you, Dembe. You can call him now,” she said closing the door. “I wasn…” “Yes you were. Your allegiance is to Red, you have to call him, I understand,” she smiled before walking to the door, leaving Dembe on the sidewalk.

She could feel Red bouncing against her mental block like a moth against a window. She could feel his frustration at not being able to follow her. The feeling suddenly changed and she knew Dembe had called him. Her own mental block was preventing her to exactly feel what he felt, but she knew it wasn’t good. She sighed when his presence suddenly disappeared completely. Liz felt her phone buzz in her pocket the exact moment she knocked at Ressler’s door. She didn’t have to get it out to know it was Red.

“Keen?” “I didn’t know where else to go,” Liz said and Ressler stepped on the side, letting her walk in without a word. “Thank you.”

He led her to the living room and motioned her to sit on the couch. The TV was still on and a half full bottle of beer was waiting on the coffee table, he hadn’t been sleeping then. Ressler disappeared in what she assumed was the kitchen and came back a few seconds later with another bottle of beer. He put it in her hand before sitting next to her.
“What happened?” he finally asked, muting the TV.
“Tom lied to me for six years,” Liz blurred out.

She knew she’d have to explain for him to understand, but for now, her thoughts were completely upside down. She sipped at her beer, her eyes unfocused on the images moving on the screen facing her. Her phone buzzed again in her pocket and she took it out this time, putting it down next to Ressler’s beer after seeing the caller ID. Nick’s pizza. And, at her side, Ressler stayed silent, waiting for her to start to talk. After a few minutes of silence, Liz took a deep breath and started her story.

Forty miles north, in Baltimore, Red was walking back and forth like a caged lion in a room full of manuscripts. He had been sure she was coming to him. He had felt it, the moment she had taken her decision, he had known. And now Dembe just called to tell him she went to Ressler’s! And she had blocked him! He couldn’t feel a thing from her side and it was infuriating him. He was glad she had learned so fast how to keep her mind for herself but right know he wished she hadn’t.

Picking up his phone he had thrown on the couch after Dembe’s call, he tried to call her. He threw the phone across the room when she didn’t pick up and took a deep breath. He had to calm down or he would burn the place down. He had no reason to be that angry, the rational part of his mind understood her move and he knew she was safe with Ressler, but the part longing for her touch was turning wild. He needed her close to him. He needed to see her safe, by his side, in his arms, not at another man’s place doing God knows what with him.

Red went to the bar and poured a glass of Scotch. He was being stupid. Ressler could protect her with his shield and he perfectly knew she would never allow her partner to put a finger on her if there were any doubts about his intentions. And she had warned him, nothing would happen between them until Tom is out of the picture and even if she had learned the truth about her treacherous husband, she hadn’t ditched him yet.

He went to retrieve the miraculously unbroken phone and tried Liz’s number once more. When she didn’t take the call, he didn’t lose his temper but instead dialed Dembe. He had to be sure the bodyguard was still there.

“Where are you?” he asked briskly when the bodyguard picked up.
“Where you sent me, Raymond,” Dembe replied calmly.
“Good. Don’t move, I’m coming,” Red said before hanging up.

He couldn’t stay here any longer. He had chosen this place to stay tonight because he had been sure his Lizzie would come to him after discovering the truth about Tom, but now, without her, the room seemed empty. Dembe had taken the car but thankfully, he had plenty to choose from in the garage. Settling behind the steering wheel of a silver Mercedes, Red drove on, jazz playing from the speakers, his senses wide opened.

He knew Liz wouldn’t be able to block him while sleeping and they had to talk. They had to form a plan to use Tom Keen and take him down at the right moment without endangering Liz. He didn’t like this plan but he knew there were no other options. Of course he could have called a Mind Reader, someone with the Gift of digging out secrets from the depth of the conscience, but he didn’t want the Guild to know what they would discover. Not now. There was still something that wasn’t ringing right with the Guild. Something had changed during the years he had spent with the Order. Something so subtle that even the oldest Dream Walkers wouldn’t notice.

And there was the Prophecy thing Liz had talked about the moment they met. He couldn’t believe it had been less than twenty-four hours since he had walked through the Post Office’s front doors. Less than twenty-four hours he had held his Lizzie in his arms for the first time in years and the pull was already almost killing him. Soulmates were meant to be together, leaving them separated for too long
was torture and even if they could meet in dreams, nothing could compare to the union of two soulmates in the real world.

He could feel his body heat rise at the simple thought of Liz’s body under his, the soft whimper she would breathe out with each movements of his hips, her nails scratching at his back, leaving marks on his skin, marking him as hers. He let out a sigh and rolled down the window to let the cold air cool him down. Less than twenty-four hours and she was already driving him mad with longing.

Red parked the car behind Dembe’s and got out, closing the door silently. Screwing his hat on his head, he climbed the stairs and pushed the building’s door open. Everything was dark, not a sound in the house. Taking a gun out and moving close to the wall to make sure the wooden floor wouldn’t creak under his weight, he walked silently inside. He made his way slowly, his gun ready in his right hand, the left one, creaking with energy. Would it be an ordinary being or a Dream Walker waiting for him behind the door, he was ready for either situation. A floorboard cracked behind him and he turned around, his hand raised, ready to transform the attacker into a pile of ashes.

“Don’t!” Dembe’s voice broke the silence and Red put down his hand and gun.
“I could have killed you! Where were you?” he asked, waiting for Dembe to join him.
“The only thing you could have achieve would have been to burn the place down and then I would have had to put everything up elsewhere. The gun might have been a problem though,” Dembe chuckled.
“Remember who saved you from drowning when you were eighteen,” Red retorted.
“I would not have been drowning if you hadn’t set the house I was in on fire,” Dembe countered smiling. They had had the same discussion for years without finding who had saved whom that day.
“Where were you,” Red asked again, knowing the discussion would go on for days.
“I was on the other side of the street. Everything is set up, we’re ready to work.”
“Good. Let’s do th…” Red stopped, his eyes unfocused. “What is he doing right now?” he asked suddenly, his eyes back on the bodyguard, a small smile playing on his lips.
“Snoring.”
“Alright. Take the first watch, I’ll relieve you in a few hours,” Red said before leaving the room and heading for the bedroom he knew was waiting for him.

He had felt Liz’s mental block disappear; she must have fallen asleep. The time he took off his shoes, vest, waistcoat and tie, he could already feel her. She was searching for him. Calling him in her dreams, and he was pretty sure she wasn’t even aware of it. He opened a few buttons at the collar of his shirt before lying on the bed. He had never been a sound sleeper, but every time he had felt her calling for him, he had almost fallen asleep on the spot, no matter where or with whom he was at the time.

His eyes weren’t fully closed yet that he was already building their room in his mind. She was the one waiting for him this time. He froze at the sight. She wasn’t wearing her usual clothes but her sleepwear, shorts and tank top. He felt his skin pickle at the sight and the weight he hadn’t realized he was carrying disappear and he sighed in relief, she was here.

“Ressler, uh?” he said, walking to sit beside her on the couch, choosing not to point out her clothes.
“I thought it would be safer this way. I’m not sure I can control myself when we’re together,” she replied smiling slightly. She knew he was upset but was trying to control his emotion so she wouldn’t feel it.
“Would it really be a problem?” he asked softly, taking her hand in his.
“I don’t know. I feel like we need to wait, I feel like it had to be special. I know, it’s stupid,” she shook her head.
“It’s not stupid at all, Lizzie. But you know we’ll have to move to the next step soon,” he replied, putting his arm around her shoulders to pull her close.
She let him do it, putting her head on his shoulder, her hand on his chest. She could feel his fingers slipping under the waistband of her shorts, playing with her panties’ elastic.

“Behave,” she said when his hand moved around her hip to brush against her lower belly. “Not when you’re in those clothes. You’re killing me, sweetheart,” he breathed kissing her hair before putting his wandering hand back on her waist.

He would respect her will and wait until she was ready to breach that last barrier, even if it killed him. He felt a light breeze in the room and, looking down, saw she had changed her clothes, she was now wearing sweatpants instead of shorts.

She felt his gratitude at her change of clothing and smiled in he crook of his neck. She knew the pull was strong, she felt it too, and knowing he would control himself because she asked him to was heating her from the inside. He was respecting her choices and she felt her love for him grow in her heart.

“What was that Prophecy you were talking about when we first met?” Red asked, squeezing her against his chest to thank her.

“It’s something I had the charge to look after since they categorized me as a Loner. The Prophecy by itself says: ‘On the day of her thirtieth birthday he will come. Together they will mend the rift. What was two will become one. What had been separated so long ago will be reunited. In fire and blood the rift will be mended. On the day of her thirtieth birthday’,” Liz explained pulling back to look him in the eyes.

“And that means you and I? How can you be sure?”

“The parchment glowed golden on the day of my thirtieth birthday and you showed up that day,” she smiled.

“And you didn’t realize it was you sooner?” Red asked awestruck.

“What do you mean?”

“You spent years doing researches about the Guild, learning about its history and you didn’t realize the Prophecy was talking about a Loner?”

Liz looked at him, mouth agape. How could she have missed that? How could the Elders have missed that? Loners weren’t unheard of but they were rare, they should have realized it by themselves. And for how long did the Guild miss that point?

“By the look on your face, you didn’t,” Red smiled gently. “Do you know what the Prophecy is talking about and how we’re supposed to fulfill it?”

“I think it talks about something called the Fulcrum. We have no indication about what it is, but it seems to be a powerful device. So powerful they decided to divide it, leaving half of it with Blaine in Europe and bringing the other half here, in America,” she explained, her eyes studying Red’s face, her senses wide open to feel his thoughts.

“Blaine? Who’s Blaine?” Red asked ignoring her frown, he knew she had felt his reaction when she mentioned the Fulcrum, but they could come back on this point later.

“He’s the man who formed the Order in the first place. He was a Seer, his Gift was to feel when Dream Walkers inherited their powers. Why?”

“The actual leader of the Order’s name is Blaine. It can’t be a coincidence,” Red shook his head. This whole thing was becoming more complicated with every information he learned.

“What do you know about him?”

“I saw him a couple of time, talked to him only once,” Red replied, chewing on his lip.

“What did you talk about?” Liz asked, knowing he was hiding something important.

“He sent me on a mission to retrieve something twenty-five years ago,” Red replied, avoiding her eyes.

“Twenty-five years ago… That’s about the time of your supposedly death, isn’t it?” She stroked her
hand on his cheek, inciting him to turn his head to her.

“Yes. Raymond Reddington officially died that night,” he said, smiling sadly.

“And your mission was to retrieve…” she began, already knowing the answer.

“The Fulcrum, yes,” he said, linking their fingers together.

“So you know what it is then?” Liz asked after a few seconds of silence.

“It’s some kind of key, I don’t know what it looks like. Blaine told me I would feel it when I’d touch it.”

“We have to let the Elders know! You should have told them when they asked!” Liz burst out. She could have spent her afternoon in the archives instead of hiding in the lab.

“No. Listen to me Lizzie,” he waited for her to focus on him before continuing, “something’s rotten in the Guild. I don’t know what but I can feel it. We have to keep everything we discover for ourselves for now,” he said his eyes never leaving hers, making sure she understood his words.

“But…”

“No buts Lizzie. My cover in the Order was blown the day you turned thirty. My family died the day you were born. I don’t know how all of this is linked, but since we’re both destined to fulfill this Prophecy and the only known copy is in the Guild’s archives, we can assume someone is playing both sides here. Someone planted a spy into your life, probably hopping you’d let something slip out.”

“But how? And why? I’m nobody. I didn’t even know you were real before you showed up!” Liz left the couch and started to pace in the room, her arms closed around her body.

“I don’t know. I really don’t,” he stood up and walked to her, taking her shaking body into his arms and hugging her tightly. “We’ll figure it out together, I promise,” he whispered before kissing her forehead.

She closed her arm around his waist and breathed him in. She had always loved his scent, it never missed to calm her. She kissed the skin exposed by his open collar and she felt him hum at the heat of her lips. They both knew they’d have to leave that safe heaven soon. Dawn was upon them and soon they’ll have to wake up and go on with their life.

“I’ll see you soon, sweetheart,” Red breathed kissing her forehead once more and Liz felt the room dissolve around them, the sensation of his lips on her the last to disappear.
When she opened her eyes, Liz frowned. She could hear noise coming from the kitchen. She got up and, wrapped in her blanket, went to lean against the doorframe. Ressler, she was at Ressler’s. Her time with Red in the Writer’s room had almost erased the events of the precedent evening.

“Sleep well?” Ressler asked, his back still to her.
“Yeah,” she replied, walking in the room to watch over his shoulder. He was cooking. Eggs and bacon. She smiled.
“How are you?” he asked cautiously, finally turning around.
“Still upset, but Red…” A dreamy smile spread on her lips, and Ressler chuckled at her sight.
“He’s not that bad, uh?”
“No. He’s a perfect gentleman, and we talked about the Prophecy,” she said, walking to the table, her plate in one hand, a cup of coffee in the other, the blanket hanging precariously from her shoulders.
“And?”
“I learned things. I don’t really understand myself, so I can’t tell you yet. But soon,” she replied, wolfing down her breakfast.

She had realized the moment she had left Red that she had made a mistake. She should have gone to him last night. He was a perfect gentleman, respecting her choices and the boundaries she put on their relationship. She shouldn’t have been afraid.

“What about Tom?”
“We didn’t talk about him. I guess Red will show up sometime today and we’ll work on this at the Post Office,” Liz replied.
“Do you know what you’ll do?” Even if he didn’t show it, Ressler was worried for his partner. Liz had been here for him when he had lost his soulmate and he had made the vow to pay her back someday.
“I don’t know yet. If he’s really in the Order, we’ll have to find a way to make him talk,” Liz said, taking her empty plate to the sink.

She sipped at her coffee, watching Donald eat his breakfast at a slower pace. Sharing dreams with Red seemed to sap her energy. She had to make some researches on the subject, as a ‘Loner’ she had never learned how to control that aspect of the soulmate link. She felt a shift in the room atmosphere and knew Red was awake. Hearing her phone buzz in the living room, she went to retrieve it and picked the call up without even taking the time to check the caller ID.

“Did you sleep well,” she breathed smiling.
“Liz? Where are you?”
“Tom? Shit,” she said under her breath.
“Were you expecting someone else?” he asked suspiciously.
“No. Of course no!”
“Where are you?”
“I’m at work. They called last night after you fell asleep and I had to go,” Liz lied. She had overcome her reticence at lying to the man pretending to be her husband. “I left a note on the fridge.”
“Yeah, I saw it. What the hell is going on with your job? You work at a fucking post office, why do they need you to come over in the middle of the night?” he asked obviously angry.
“Something happened and they needed me. I can’t tell you anymore,” Liz replied, knowing he wouldn’t buy it. She suddenly realized that he had known she was lying for years.
“Come on Liz! It’s a post office you’re working at, not a fucking secret society! What’s with the
“Tell Red he has to let you go for now. We have to be at work in a hour and you still have to take a shower!” Ressler said walking in the room fully dressed, ready to go.

“Who was that? Where are you?” Liz closed her eyes and clenched her jaw.

“It was Ressler, you know him, he works with me at the post office,” Liz said, praying he wouldn’t ask more.

“How did he say you have to be at work? I thought you were already there! You told me you were there! Tell me the truth!” Tom finally lost control.

As soon as she heard the words, she felt an uncontrollable compulsion to tell him everything. She couldn’t help it, she had to tell him; she had no other choice. She looked at Ressler, panic in her eyes. She couldn’t tell Tom about her job. She couldn’t tell him about Red and the Prophecy. The moment she opened her mouth to talk, she felt Red’s presence engulfing her, giving her strength and from far away, she heard a phone ring. Her mind was in a cloud; she couldn’t differentiate her thoughts from the compulsion Tom had put on her. Red’s presence was slowing everything down, but she knew she wasn’t strong enough to resist much longer. She once again opened her mouth to talk when Ressler’s hand grabbed the phone from her hand, cutting off the communication. She immediately felt Tom’s order recede and turned her shocked eyes on Ressler. Her partner didn’t say a word but put his own phone in her hand. She brought it to her ear like an automaton.

“Lizzie, listen to me. You have to fight it. It’s not as strong as when you were on the phone with him, but it’s still here. He knows you, he knows how your mind works. Close your mind, my love. Cut everything out, do it. Now!” Red’s voice on the phone was urgent, full of fear.

She did as he had told her. Closing her mind she felt Red’s presence disappear, leaving her alone. At the same moment, she felt her ears pop and her mind clear. She felt as if she had spent years under water.

“What happened?” she asked Red and Ressler at the same time.

“Tom’s Gift must be Persuasion,” Red said while Ressler was shrugging.

“What do you mean, Persuasion?” she said panicky.

“Calm down, sweetheart,” Red said.

“He’s calling again,” Ressler said showing the phone ha was still holding.

“What do I do?”

“If you want to play him, you have to pick up. Keep your mental shield up and it should be enough. I’m sure he realized he had made a mistake and he won’t try it again,” Red replied calmly.

“And if he does?”

“Then ask Donald to keep an eye on you and if you start to say things you shouldn’t, he has to take the phone.”

“But… What about the thing we talked about? You know…” she didn’t know if she could trust Ressler after what Red had said about the Guild.

“You can trust him, Lizzie. You’ll need someone you can trust at your side. I’m not that stupid, I know you’ll need friends. Ressler is a good man,” Red sighed.

“Thank you Red. You stay on the phone?”

“Yes.”

She nodded to Ressler and her partner gave her the ringing phone, taking the one she was giving him. Taking a deep breath, Liz raised her mental shield as much as she could before answering the call.

“What happened?” Tom asked in a much calmer voice than Liz had thought.

“Sorry my phone crashed, I had to reboot it,” Liz said happy to see that her mental block was holding and she could think clearly.
“Are you coming home?”
“Yes, tonight after my shift,” she replied sighing.
“You forgot, didn’t you?”
“Forgot what?”
“The appointment with the adoption agency.”

Liz closed her eyes. Yes she had forgotten the appointment. She had forgotten almost everything that wasn’t Red since that night. Looking at Ressler, she saw him talking quietly on his phone, probably relating everything she said to Red.

“You changed Liz. I don’t recognize you anymore,” Tom said in a small voice when she didn’t reply.
“What do you mean?”
“Where are you? I know you’re not at your job,” he demanded ignoring her question.
“I’m at Ressler’s. He lives near the post office and was nice enough to lend me his shower so I don’t have to spend the day in my overnight clothes,” she said exasperated. “Don’t you trust me, Tom? Do you really think I would lie to you? After everything we went through?” She could hear the anger in her voice and tried to calm down.

“No. I’m sorry Liz. I don’t know what happened,” Tom replied in a so convincing tone that Liz checked her mental shield.
“We’ll talk about it tonight, I have to go.”
“What about the appointment? Don’t you want to know if we gonna be parents?”
“Of course I want to know!” she replied grimacing. “Look, I’ll do my best, alright?”

She only heard him sigh before hanging up. Liz let the breath she wasn’t aware of holding out and slouched on the couch. After a few seconds of deep breath, she lowered her mental shield and immediately, Red’s presence was around her. She took back Ressler’s phone and soon Red’s voice flooded her ear.

“You did well, sweetheart,” he said, strengthening his hold on her body.
“What do we gonna do?” She felt exhausted after her mental battle against Tom. “Are you coming?”
“In a few hours. I have something to take care about first and then I’ll spend the day with you at the Post Office. We’ll figure it out together,” Red explained. “Stay with Ressler until I’m here. He knows the signs, he be able to help you if you need him.”
“I’m gonna miss you,” she breathed.
“I already told you, sweetheart, I’m always with you,” he replied softly and Liz felt his hand brush against her cheek.

She closed her eyes at the soft touch and waited for him to hang up. But he didn’t. She could feel his hand on her body, caressing her neck, her shoulders, tracing her collarbones. And his breath. His ragged breath in her ear, the only sound she could hear. The only sound she wanted to hear right now.

“I’ll see you soon, my love,” he murmured before the line died.

His hand stayed a few seconds before disappearing. She could still feel him looking over her, but he wasn’t here anymore.

In a building on the other side of the city, Red’s eyes were glued on a surveillance screen over Dembe’s shoulder. The moment he had felt the compulsion take over Liz’s mind, he had raced from the bedroom to where Dembe had been watching over the footage from the house on the other side of the street. The moment he had seen Tom Keen on the phone, his eyes a nice shade of emerald.
green instead of their habitual blue, he had understood.

He had suspected his emprise on Liz from a long time now but couldn’t believe he had made such a mistake. The man had been trained to infiltrate people’s life, to never lose the control he had on his Gift and he tried to impose his will over Liz’s in such an ungraceful way? Something was off; Red could feel it. The phone Dembe had thrust into his hand had taken him out of his panicky state and, his eyes still on the man standing still on the screen he had told Liz what to do.

Thankfully, she had understood and soon he hadn’t been able to feel her. Even if it was killing him to realize she had learned to entirely cut him off, he had been glad. She could protect herself from her treacherous husband.

“What do we do?” Dembe asked when Red put the phone back on the desk. “We have to find out who his soulmate is and her Gift. The Persuasion is a defensive power, even if it’s pretty annoying, we can counter it. I’m more worried about the offensive Gift of his counterpart.” Red was walking back and forth in the room, obviously agitated.

“And how do you plan to do this?”

“We have to hack into the Order database. Blaine is not as trustful as the Guild. They don’t have Keepers, Blaine has a hidden server with everything about the Dream Walkers working for him. Their powers and soulmates.”

“Aram Mojtabai?”

“Yes.”

“You’ll have to deal with his soulmate first. And she’s a real pain in the ass,” Dembe warned. “Don’t worry, I know Samar for a while now. I know how to deal with her,” Red smiled. “Go search the house when he leaves and then take some rest, my friend. We have people following him around when he’s out.” Red said squeezing Dembe’s shoulder before leaving the room, the phone in his hand. He had a call to make before heading to the Post Office.

At the Post Office, Liz was walking in circles in the office she shared with Ressler, her eyes darting periodically over the front door she could see through the window. She knew Red was on his way, she could feel it.

“Calm down, Keen.”

“Don’t call me that!” she snapped.

“Would you prefer ‘Reddington’?” Ressler asked a smug smile on his lips.

She stopped in her tracks and looked at her partner, mouth agape.

“What? You know it will eventually end up like this. You’re soulmates. We don’t need to marry but most of us prefer to do so, it helps keeping our cover in the world.”

She was about to reply when she felt it. Turning around, she looked through the window and saw him. He was standing alone, his back to the front door, in his customary three-piece suit and matching fedora, his eyes on her even if he couldn’t see her. Without another word to Ressler, Liz left the room and walked briskly down the stairs under others Dream Walker’s gaze. Of course the rumor had spread. The Loner wasn’t a Loner anymore and her soulmate was no other than the Concierge of Crime, the legendary Phoenix. She almost run the last steps to him and he welcomed her in his open arms.

“You’re here,” she breathed against his neck when he closed his arms around her.

“I told you I would come,” he replied, kissing her hair lightly. “We should go somewhere more… private,” he said, his fingers running down her arm to close around her hand.
Liz nodded and, linking their fingers, led him to her office, ignoring the stares following them. They’ll get use to it. Red shook Ressler’s hand when they walked in the room, a wave of mutual respect passing between them. Liz smiled at that, she was happy her soulmate and friend would go along well.

“I wasn’t expecting you so soon,” Liz said, leading him to the couch at the back of the room. “I sent Dembe on a mission and called in a few favors. Being with you is more important,” Red replied, taking off his hat before sitting on the couch and pulling her close to his side. “I’m sorry I didn’t come to you yesterday. It was stupid,” she whispered, not wanting Ressler to hear.

“I understand your need to go slowly, sweetheart,” he replied in the same tone. “Thank you for your help this morning, Donald,” he continued looking up at Ressler. “You’re welcome,” Ressler nodded. “I’ll leave the two of you alone now.”

“You should stay,” Red stopped him. “You’re part of the events now. And I know Liz wants you to stay,” he added, smiling down at Liz.

Ressler took place in Liz’s chair, the closest to them, and Liz and Red disentangled themselves from each other, sitting up, Red’s arm on the back of the couch, his fingers grazing her shoulder. Donald smiled at the effort. He knew how hard it was for them to keep their hands for themselves in the early stages of the soulmate bond. He remembered perfectly the pull he had felt the first time he had met Audrey and how hard it had been to wait until they could consummate their relation.

“What do you know about the man posing as Tom Keen?” Donald asked when it as obvious Liz wouldn’t.

“Not much. Dembe is working on it as we talk. We will need the Guild’s resources soon but it can wait. For now we have to figure out how Lizzie will face her husband without being manipulated,” Red replied, brushing his fingertips on the nape of her neck.

“And how will we do that?” Liz asked.

“Meera,” Ressler said.

“What?” Liz turned her gaze to her partner.

“Meera Malik. She’s the head of the Psychic team. Part of her work is to train Dream Walkers with the Persuasion Gift to work at the front desk at first and if they prove themself good enough they’re sent to infiltrate ‘the real world’,” Ressler explained.

“I heard about her. She would be perfect!” Red smiled.

“Perfect for what?” Liz asked, pushing back Red’s hand. She didn’t like the look Ressler and Red shared, they obviously were on the same page and she, on her side, was lost.

“She is going to train you. You need to learn how to block Tom without blocking me. I can’t be at your side and neither can Donald. You’ll be on your own and we can’t risk you wearing a wire. Our ability to feel each other will be our secret weapon,” Red explained, waiting for Liz to calm down.

“Sorry I’m overreacting here,” she finally said ashamed of herself.


“Sure.”

He waited for the young man to leave before turning to Liz. He could feel her emotions but not as well as before, he realized. She was scared, terrified even, he could feel it. Putting his hands on her shoulders, he turned her toward him, their eyes locked. His hands slipped along her neck, cradling her head. His thumbs brushed her cheekbones and he pulled her to him, their forehead meeting, their noses brushing. They stayed silent, their eyes still locked, their breath mingling.

“Let go, my love. He can’t reach you here,” Red breathed.

And suddenly he felt it. The expense of her feelings unfolding around him, flooding him by their
intensity. She had shut down every single barrier, for the first time since they first met so long ago, she was really showing herself. And she was beautiful. Red felt tears burn behind his eyes and his throat tighten. His thumb brushed the corner of her lips and he kissed the tip of her nose lightly before breaking the contact.

“Meera’s waiting for you.” Ressler’s voice made them jump apart.

They had work to do, now wasn’t a good time nor a good place to explore their link any more further.
Chapter 10

Liz had never met Meera Malik, but she knew her reputation. She was known to be one of the most strong-minded Dream Walkers at the Post Office. She had mastered her Gift to a level nobody had never even dreamed to reach. Feeling her stress, Red squeezed Liz’s hand and smiled when she looked at him.

“I’ll be by your side, sweetheart,” he whispered.

She nodded but didn’t reply, she didn’t know what to expect. The three of them walked into a bright-lighted room and froze. The room was white from floor to ceiling and, in the middle, stood a woman dressed in black.

“Take off your shoes and everything that is not necessary,” the woman said with a strong British accent.

The three of them looked at each other before complying. They left their clothes and shoes in a white locker and walked to the woman waiting for them.

“You’re the reason I’m training most of our pupils with the Gift,” Meera said her dark stare on Red. “I like you already,” he replied smiling broadly and the woman shook her head. “Tell me what happened,” she asked, choosing not to argue with Red. “She was on the phone with…” Ressler began. “Not you,” Meera cut him off. “I want to hear it from Elizabeth.”

Liz looked at the woman facing her; her stern face, the blackness of her eyes; she looked intimidating. And Liz could feel a strange aura around Meera. She felt Red move behind her and close his arms around her shoulders, his nose buried in her hair.

“I’m here, you’re safe,” he breathed against her head and for the first time, Liz saw Agent Malik smile slightly. “I guess you haven’t consummated your relationship yet,” she said. “Keep the skin contact, it’ll help for now.”

They nodded and Red stepped aside, putting his arm around Liz’s waist, his fingers slipping under the hem of her blouse.

“I was on the phone with my husband,” Liz began. “We were arguing and he knew I was lying. I couldn’t tell him where I was.” “And where were you?” Meera asked. “At Ressler’s,” Liz replied, not looking at Red. “May I ask why? The two of you met a few days ago if the rumor is true, why not going to your soulmate’s?” “Because I was stupid,” Liz replied curtly. “Anyway, Tom called this morning and when he said ‘Tell me the truth’ and I felt like I had to tell him everything. I couldn’t help it, I had to.” “How did you counter his order? He must be powerful to put a compulsion on someone through the phone.” “I tried to help her. I tried to block him from my side but when I realized it was too strong, I called Donald,” Red explained. “And I cut the call off,” Ressler added. “And I closed my mind, cutting everything and everyone out,” Liz finished. “What do you mean from your side?” Meera asked, her eyes going from Red to Liz and back.
“Our bond is… different,” Red said. “We’re still trying to figure out everything.”

Meera seemed to see them for the first time since they walked in the room.

“How old are you?” she asked suddenly, her eyes on Red. “We’re 23 years apart,” he replied, squeezing Liz’s side lightly. “That’s impossible!” Meera gasped. “Unless… Unless you’re the ones destined to fulfill the Prophecy.”

Red and Liz looked at each other and laughed. They couldn’t help it. The Post Office’s Dream Walkers seemed really obtuse sometimes.

“We are. But that’s not the point. We’re here for Lizzie and her ‘husband problem’,,” Red finally said.

“Right, sorry. So, tell me everything. From the moment you met your husband,” Meera said, focusing on Liz.

“We met six years ago in New York. I was in a relationship at the time, with…”

“Nick,” Red supplied.

“You knew?” she cringed.

“Of course I knew. I’ve been your imaginary friend your whole life,” Red replied, kissing her temple tenderly to make sure she understood he wasn’t mad at her.

Ressler and Meera stayed silent, watching them communicate silently. The couple had had a life before finding each other and Ressler and Meera didn’t really understand how they could stand it. Their situation was unique; they were unique; their link was unique.

“Why did you break up with Nick?” Meera asked when she saw they had reached an understanding. “I… I don’t know. We didn’t really break up. He… Nick walked on us. I mean he walked on Tom cooking breakfast in his underwear and it sort of ended like this,” Liz explained, lowering her eyes in shame.

Liz felt Red’s aura close around her, the heat of his hand on her waist rising. Her own hand was rubbing at her scar on her wrist for the first time since that day in the Cage. She felt Red’s ghostly hand close around her wrist and caress tenderly her scarred skin. She looked up at him and nuzzled at his jaw to thank him.

“Do you think he could have used his Gift on her since the beginning?” Ressler asked breaking the sexual tension crackling around the couple.

“I’m sure he did,” Meera said, happy to see someone was following her. “Reddington?” “Yes,” he finally turned his attention to Meera.

“You said you’ve been Elizabeth’s imaginary friend her whole life. Does it mean the two of you have been linked even before you got your powers?”

“Lizzie wasn’t aware of it, but yes.”

“Did you feel any changes in your link when she met Tom?”

Red stayed silent a few minutes, trying to remember how their shared dreams had been after she met Tom.

“I don’t really know. If I remember correctly, she seemed happy. In no need of me for some times,” he said sadly.

“After I met Tom, I remember not being able to come to our room. It felt strange at first, but I thought it was because I didn’t need it anymore. I’m sorry Red,” she said running her hand on his arm.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Meera said. “He tampered with your mind. I know everything I need. Let’s work now.”
“What’s my role in this?” Ressler asked suddenly.
“You’re here to observe so you’ll recognize the signs if Elizabeth can’t block him. Step back now. Both of you, I need to work with Elizabeth alone.”

Red brushed his lips to Liz’s temple before stepping back with Ressler. He could feel Liz’s anxiety through their link and see it in her posture. It killed him to see her like this, but knew it was their only chance.

“Calm down Elizabeth, I’m not going to hurt you,” Meera tried to reassure her in a soothing voice. “Are you ready?” she asked and, when Liz nodded, focused her stare on her.

From their spot next to the door, Ressler and Red saw Meera’s eyes turn red and Liz take a step back. Ressler’s hand on his arm was the only thing keeping Red in place. He could feel Meera invading Liz’s mind. He could feel her dig into her memories. She was bound to discover what had been done to Liz’s mind so long ago. He had known from the beginning that he would have to explain himself but hadn’t realized it would be so soon. Clenching his jaw, Red watched the two women fight mentally.

The moment she saw Meera’s eyes turn red, she felt a presence in her mind. Something entirely different from what she experienced when Red’s presence was around her. The Dream Walker in front of her was invading her mind. She saw images of her childhood flash before her eyes, remembered things she thought she had forgotten.

“Try to push me out,” Meera said.

Suddenly, Liz felt Red’s presence around her, giving her strength. She knew him, she knew she could draw in his strength to expulse Meera from her mind. As soon as she realized that, Meera stepped back, her eyes back to their natural color.

“How did you do this?” she asked.
“Red helped me,” Liz said turning around to smile at her soulmate.

Eyes wide open, she immediately run to him. Red had collapsed on the floor, Ressler kneeling at his side, fingers on his throat. She immediately put her hands on his chest, feeling his heart beat under her fingers.

“Red!” His eyes fluttered open after a few seconds and she breathed a sigh of relief. “What happened?”
“I don’t know! We were watching you and he just collapsed,” Ressler said, panic in his voice.
“You took too much,” Meera said, looking down at them. “I’ve never seen such a thing. I’m sorry, I didn’t realize how different your link was.”
“You’re okay?” Liz asked when Red put his hand on hers.
“Yes,” he rasped sitting up.
“I’m sorry, Red. I’m so sorry.” Liz eyes were full of tears, fear pooling in her stomach.
“It’s alright Lizzie.”
“I could have killed you!”
“I’m stronger than you think, Lizzie. You just surprised me,” he said softly before kissing tenderly her forehead. “If I can help you, I’m willing to pass out a few times until we find a way to control this new ability.”
“Should we try again?” Meera asked when Red finally stood up. “But this time try to do it by yourself. Stay back, Reddington.”

Liz closed her arms around Red and kissed the skin exposed by his open shirt collar before walking back to Meera.
Liz nodded and once again, Meera’s eyes turned red and Liz felt her presence in her mind. Moments from her youth flashed before her eyes. Her first Christmas with Sam. Her first day at school. Her first boyfriend. And something else. Something she couldn’t clearly see but that was clouding every memory. Every moment she remembered was surrounded by smoke. She could almost hear someone screaming. An uncontrollable terror spread in her body and she closed her mind as tight as she could. When she opened her eyes, Meera was looking at her surprised.

“Did you do it by yourself?” she asked.
“I think so,” Liz replied, rubbing at her suddenly burning scar.
“Elizabeth… How did you get that scar?” Meera asked after a few seconds of silence.
“I don’t really remember. My… Sam, my adoptive father told me my parents died in a fire when I was four. I guess it comes from that time, I don’t remember anything before Sam,” Liz explained, that strange ghostly smell of smoke grazing her nose.

“Ressler, Reddington? Could you leave us alone for a few minutes?” Meera asked, looking at the men.

“Why?” Red immediately asked.
“Because I need to talk with Elizabeth and I don’t want you to interfere,” she replied, her eyes on him, making perfectly clear she knew his role in what she had just discovered.

“It’s alright Red,” Liz said when he opened his mouth to protest. “I’ll see you later.”

She concentrated and projected her presence around him, her ethereal nails scratching at the back of his head the way she knew he loved. She saw him clench his jaw and she smiled smugly. He wasn’t the only one able to play this game. The women waited until Red and Donald had gathered their clothes and left the room before sitting down, cross-legged on the floor.

“I’m going to tell you something you won’t like,” Meera began. “Someone has tampered with your memories.”
“You already told me. Tom…”
“No. Before Tom.”
“What do you mean?”
“Did you know any Dream Walker with a Psychic Gift before the Post Office?”
“No that I’m aware of. But we’re supposed to keep a low profile, aren’t we?” Liz replied confuse.
“What do you mean?” she asked again when Meera stayed silent.
“When I was in your mind. I felt something. A barrier. Something keeping me away from a part of your past.”
“But… You’re supposed to be one of the most powerful and skilled Dream Walker here.”
“Precisely.”
“Can you determine who did this to me?”
“I can’t, but I can tell you it had been here for a long time, since you were a child. It must be what saved you from Tom having full control over you. It protected you.”
“How so?”
“You see it wasn’t the first time someone messed with your mind. You’ve spent almost your whole life with this block in your head so when Tom tried to manipulate you, your mind knew what to do and protected itself from that new attack.”
“A blessing in disguise,” Liz murmured. “Do you know what memories had been suppressed? Can I recover them?”
“We can try to figure it out together, sometimes remembering bits of the memory helps to lift the block. The other solution is to find the person who put it in the first place,” Meera explained, taking Liz’s hands in hers. “Tell me what you remember from before Sam. From the fire.”
“I remember Sam sitting next to my bed when I was a child. For a year or so after my father adopted me, I had recurrent nightmares. I don’t remember what they were about, but I remember the heat and
the smoke,” Liz said, eyes closed trying to remember what she couldn’t.
“So someone blocked the memories of the fire.”
“I guess so.”
“I can’t lift the block, but I can help you find your way back to this moment. You have to trust me
but I can’t guaranty it won’t hurt,” Meera said softly, squeezing her hands.
“Can Red be here with us? I feel like he should be here . . . ”
“Not yet. As I understand you have a special link, call him only if you can’t find your way back, understood?”

Liz nodded and closed her eyes, feeling Meera presence infiltrate her mind, the Dream Walker’s
voice guiding her back in time until she found herself facing a dark closed door.

“It’s your choice Elizabeth. You can chose to open the door or try to find the person who closed it
for you. But know there’s no going back if you open that door . . . ”

Meera voice seemed far away. Liz was standing alone in the dark, the door she was facing outlined
by a flickering orange light. Her hand shook when she put it on the handle. Taking a deep breath,
she pushed the door open and suddenly felt sucked in the room, the door closing loudly behind her.
She could barely hear Meera’s voice now, it was a whisper at the back of her mind. And then she
heard voices.

“We’re is it?”
“I don’t know what you’re talking about! You’ve been misled!”
“Tell me where it is! Tell me where the Fulcrum is!”

She suddenly recognized the voice. Red. It was Red. He had been there that night.

“Yes. Raymond Reddington officially died that night.”

The fire. The Phoenix. The man that could walk through flames.

“Know something Lizzie. I would never and will never lie to you.”
“But you’re not telling the whole truth.”
“Not when it might be too dangerous for you. Look at me Lizzie, I will never lie to you.”

Suddenly flames were around her. The whole room was on fire. She could feel the heat bite her skin.
She ran. She didn’t even know where she was going. She just ran as far as she could from the heat.
She went to hide in a closet. Curling up, she tried to make herself as small as possible. Smoke seeped
under the door. She coughed. She had to do something. Scream. Scream, a small voice in her head
said. And she did. She screamed. Her lungs burning she kept screaming until she couldn’t anymore.
The closet was full of smoke; she couldn’t breathe anymore.

And suddenly Red was here. She felt his ghostly arm around her. The closet door opened and
someone take her in their arm. She was much smaller. A child. She curled up in the man’s arms. She
couldn’t feel the heat of the flames anymore. The man was protecting her. He walked to the living
room. Everything was ablaze around them but he didn’t seem to be bothered by the fire. She
sneaked up her arms around his neck the moment they were about to cross the front door and
suddenly her hand found skin. The instant their skin touched, she felt fire run in her veins. She
screamed. It hurt. She fell. The man had collapsed on the floor.

“Wake up!” she yelled at him, but he was unconscious on the floor. “Please wake up!”

She could see the flames slowly creeping toward them. Liz looked at the door. She could step out
and leave the man on the floor. She could save her life and leave him to die. Fear was rooting her to
“Don’t touch me!” he yelled when she took his hand to drag him outside. “You’re burning!” she yelled back. Her little hand closed around his big wrist. “We have to get out!”

And he suddenly stopped moving. He was dead. Liz was sure he was dead. But she couldn’t leave him like this. Closing her two small hands around his wrist, she pulled as hard as she could. Slowly she managed to drag him across the threshold. She didn’t know where this strength came from. Once a few feet from the burning house, she turned the man on his back to smother the flames. He grunted at the movement. He wasn’t dead.

“Please wake up! Tell me what to do,” she cried, her hands on his face. “Clothes,” he breathed and she understood.

Her little fingers trembling, she ripped his shirt open taking the burned material of his overcoat off with it, she threw it away, leaving him naked from the waist up. She didn’t know how, but the moment she saw his burned shoulder, blood oozing from his back, staining the grass beneath him, she knew what to do. Gathering all the strength she has left, she turned him on his belly and put her hands on his back.

She suddenly felt something grow inside her. She felt as if her skin was too small for her. It hurt. It hurt like hell. She was screaming again. And the man was screaming too. She felt a searing pain on her right wrist and the man pushed her away.

“Stop!”

She fell down on the grass, crying, her right hand cradled in her left. She looked up at the man that was now standing. He turned around and she saw the scarred skin of his back. She knew he had been badly hurt and didn’t understand how his skin could look like this so soon. He bent to retrieve his scorched overcoat and turned back to her. Liz curled up fearfully when he walked to her.

“Let me see,” he murmured, kneeling in front of her. “It hurt,” she cried. “I know but please, let me see.”

His voice and eyes were soft. She nodded and he took her hand in his, looking at the burn that would definitely leave a scar.

“I’m sorry sweetheart,” he breathed, his eyes filling with tears. “Where is my daddy? Who are you?”

“I don’t know, sweetie,” he replied, pushing back the hair falling over her eyes. “But I know someone. My friend will take care of you until we find where your daddy is,” he added, waiting for her to take his hand. When she did, he pulled her to him and lifted her in his arms.

“What’s your name?” she asked yawning against his shoulder. “Red. You can call me Red.”

She nodded and slowly her eyes closed. She felt good in his arms, safe. Before sleep took her, she noted a strange shaped mark of sound skin on his left shoulder.

When Liz opened her eyes, she was lying on the floor of the white room. Red and Meera kneeling at her side.
“Are you okay?” Meera asked.
“You were there,” Liz breathed her eyes on Red. “I remember.”

A single tear escaped Red’s eye when she scooted away from him when he tried to touch her.
“What do you think they’re doing?” Ressler asked after leaving the white room with Red. “I’m not sure,” he replied, but deep inside, he knew that whatever was going on behind that door was likely to have dire repercussions on his relationship with Lizzie.

He didn’t like it. He didn’t like knowing Liz was alone with Meera in that room. He had always known that the moment he met Liz again, he would have to explain himself on that dreadful night twenty-five years ago. But he had hoped to keep his secret a little bit longer. At least until they had taken their relationship to a new level. But now, because of that Tom scumbag and his little trick, he would have to face it much sooner.

“Can’t you feel anything?” Ressler asked impatiently. “I could if you would shut up for a second!” Red barked, stopping his pacing to turn his dark stare to Ressler.

Ressler’s eyes flashed yellow and Red felt an invisible force hit him, sending him collide into the wall behind him. Turning his ice blue eyes toward Ressler, he smirked. He knew the boy wasn’t strong enough to fight him if he decided to reciprocate. But now wasn’t the time; Ressler had made his point and Red wasn’t about to lose time provoking him for the sake of his own entertainment. He had more important things to think about. Taking a deep breath, he soothed his power and the next time he looked up at the young Dream Walker, his eyes were back to their usual color.

“Are you done yet?” Red asked, crooking his eyebrow. “For now,” Ressler replied.

Red nodded and closed his eyes, focusing on the faint spark that was Lizzie in his mind. Her attention was elsewhere and she was unconsciously blocking him, he could feel it. He lurked for a while, trying to feel what she was experiencing on the other side of this door, when fear suddenly burst in his mind and spread in his body. He balled his shaking hands into fists, his body mirroring what Liz’s was experiencing in the white room. Sweat broke at his brow as he took a step back, pressing his body against the wall for support.

“What’s going on?” Ressler asked, running to his side. “Lizzie,” he grunted, clutching at his chest, sliding down the wall to sit on the floor.

He had been so focused on her that her sudden terror had seeped into him and he couldn’t find a way to shake it off. She was drawing into his strength.

“Close your mind!”
“Don’t!” Red panted between clenched teeth. “She’s going to kill you and then you won’t be here to help her anymore! Cut the fucking link!”

Ressler took hold of his shirt and shook him. Red wasn’t cutting the connection; he could see it. Taking a deep breath, Ressler closed his eyes and let his Gift expend, the thin layer of energy around
him expanding to include Red. After a few seconds, Red’s breathing started to calm down and he opened his eyes.

“What happened?” he asked.
“You’re a stubborn ass! That’s what happened! Now get up and go to Liz, she needs you!” Ressler barked, his shield receding.

Red was about to reply when his body left the protective bubble Ressler had put around them and, suddenly, he felt it. The terror. Jumping up on his feet, he ran to the door and wrenched it open. Lizzie was laying on the floor, curled up, Meera by her side trying to calm her down. He crossed the room in a few steps and knelt beside his soulmate.

“What happened?” he asked, his eyes never leaving the woman jerking on the floor. He didn’t dare to touch her.
“She went too far. I can’t get her back!” He could hear the panic in the Dream Walker’s voice.
“What did you do? You’re supposed to know how it works! You know what could happen when someone tries to break a block by themselves!” Red burst out suddenly, his mask slipping for the first time in her presence. “Move.”

Meera backed away a few inches and watched the couple. Red took a deep breath and put his hands on Liz’s shoulders to still her. She fought against his hold, kicking her legs to push him away.

“Lizzie!” he called her name. “Calm down!”

Tears ran down Liz’s face, her mouth open in a silent scream; he could see the rapid beating of her heart at the pulse in her neck. And the fear. The ultimate terror only a child could experience. He knew what she was seeing, living. He knew where this terror came from. He had experienced it all so long ago. He moved his shoulders slightly, the skin of his back suddenly stinging.

He couldn’t do anything. She had to live the memory to its end and then she’d be able to come back. He took her in his arms, her head on his lap, caressing her hair tenderly. He felt so powerless.

As abruptly as she had stilled, her peacefulness suddenly shattered. He felt her suck in his strength and saw her hands close on empty air. He closed his eyes and bent to lay his forehead against hers, his arms closing around her shoulders, letting her take as much as he dared. He knew it wouldn’t be long now. The memory was almost at its end and soon she’d open her eyes.

Without warning, electricity crackled around Liz’s hands and a heat wave broke into the room. Meera felt a warm feeling seep into every cell of her body, seeming to emanate from her right shoulder and, suddenly, the pain she had learned to live with disappeared. She pulled the edge of her shirt to the side and looked down at her shoulder. The scar was still there, but the pain had vanished. She looked at the couple in awe.

Liz was waking up. Red had felt the healing wave hit him and knew what it meant. He laid her down gently on the floor and moved to kneel by her side. From the corner of his eye, he saw Meera
mirror his movement. His Lizzie was calm now, relaxed as if asleep.

“Are you okay?” Meera asked when Liz finally opened her eyes.
“You were there,” Liz breathed deeply her eyes on Red. “I remember.”

Red felt tears burn at the back of his eyes. He didn’t know what to think, what to feel. He was afraid. For the first time in a very long time, he was afraid. He hesitantly extended his hand to touch her, but she scooted away, closing her mind.

Fear and confusion mingled in Liz’s mind. She didn’t know what was real and what was part of the memory. She couldn’t shake off the terror she had experienced. Every movement, every sound was distorted. She squeezed her eyes shut, her hands on her ears.

At her movement, Red felt his heart tighten; she looked so lost and young. A single burning tear escaped his eye when he met her stare. The tear slid down his cheek and fell on his thigh, the heat causing the fabric of his pants to singe slightly.

Meera’s eyes followed the wet path left by the drop, eyes wide. The man was literally crying tears of fire. It was the first time she witnessed such a phenomenon. But now wasn’t the time to think about the strangeness of the man kneeling in front of her. Liz was rocking beside her, her knees folded against her chest, lips pulled back in a grimace.

“Ask Donald to call Dembe,” Red ordered without looking up at Meera.

The Dream Walker hesitated a few second before getting up. She turned around to look at the couple one last time before leaving the room. Liz was still rocking but Red had moved. He had closed the distance between them and was talking softly, not touching her. Meera couldn’t hear what was said but the expression on Reddington’s face was heartbreaking.

As soon as Meera had begun to away, Red had started talking. He had to calm her down. He had to help Liz recover after what she had been through. He didn’t even know what nonsense he was saying, but the sound of his voice seemed to soothe her, so he kept talking, slowly closing the distance between them. He didn’t want to frighten her any more.

“Lizzie, look at me. You’re safe. I’m here,” he whispered when the door closed silently behind Meera. “My love, please,” he begged, his hand just an inch shy of making actual contact.

He was dying to touch her but didn’t know how she would react. Reliving the fire had been hard for her. Hell! It had been hard for him and he hadn’t even been the one experiencing it. He finally let his fingertips brush against her cheek and she immediately focused on him. Her glazy eyes clearing, she laid her cheek into the palm of his hand and closed her eyes. Red let out a sigh of relief and took her in his arms. She was still shaking slightly.

“I’m sorry,” she breathed in a small voice against his collarbone.
“What for?” he whispered, his lips against her temple.
“I was stupid. I wanted to know.” She looked up with sad red-rimed eyes. “You knew.” It wasn’t a question.
“Yes.”
“And you know who blocked the memories.” Again, not a question.
“I do.”
“Who?”
“Not here, sweetheart. Dembe’s on his way. Come with me and I’ll tell you everything.”

Her eyes on his, she finally opened her mind and felt everything his carefully crafted mask hid. The
pain, the sorrow, the shame. And his love. She could see it now, burning behind his eyes, in every
gesture, in every word. She put her hand on his thigh and leaned forward, their breath mingling, their
lips an inch apart when she stopped, frowning. Looking down, she moved her hand slightly and saw
what her finger had felt. A perfect circle burned in the fabric of his pants.

“What…”

The door opening behind them cut her off. Both of them turned their heads and saw Dembe and
Ressler standing by the door. The men seemed worried.

“Let’s go,” Red murmured taking her hand before standing up, pulling her up with him.

She nodded and followed him outside, squeezing Ressler’s hand on her way out. She knew she’d
have to talk to him, explain what was really going on in her life and with Red, but for now, it would
have to wait; her soulmate was more important. Together, they climbed into the backseat of the car
and Dembe pulled out into traffic, driving in silence toward their destination.

Liz was lost in her thoughts. Red’s immaterial presence was all around her; his thumb caressing the
back of her hand and the heat from his body the physical proof of his existence. She looked around
when the car pulled over and realized they were parked a few feet away her own house. She looked
at Red, surprised, but he just smiled softly before exiting the car. She followed him outside, her eyes
on the house on the other side of the street. It felt strange. She had always loved her house and her
life there, but now, it didn’t feel like home anymore, and her life no longer made sense. The only
sure thing in her life at this point was the man beside her and his arms were the only place she felt at
home.

She smiled back and followed him into the house across the street from her own. Dembe was already
inside when they entered the living room. An old sofa, a desk, three computer screens and two chairs
were the only furniture in the room. Liz walked to the desk and looked at the screens.

“Is it… This is my house?” she asked, watching the images change to different views of the house
she shared with her husband.

“It is. Dembe set up the surveillance yesterday when you were at Ressler’s,” Red explained,
answering her next question before she had to ask.

She nodded, not really knowing how to feel about the cameras in her house. She knew it was for her
protection, but as before, when he introduced her to Dembe, she didn’t like the feeling of being
watched over all the time. Once again, she realized, Red had been watching over her most of her life,
keeping her safe, being there when she needed him. Her mind went back to the fire and the
recovered memories. They had to talk about it. She had to know what really happened that night.
She had to know what happened to the man in her memories, her father.

The heat of a cup of coffee in her hand shook her out of her reverie and she realized they had moved
to the kitchen. Red was standing before her, concerned eyes studying her face.

“You saved me that night,” she smiled slightly.

“I endangered you that night,” Red replied sternly.

“Red,” she said his name softly. “Look at me.” She waited until he turned his eyes to her. “You
didn’t know I was there.” That much she was sure, even if she didn’t really know what happened
that night, she was sure Red hadn’t known about her presence in the house.

“You almost died.”

“But you saved me. You came back for me. You literally walked through the flames for me,” she
said, reaching for him.
He shook his head at her words. She didn’t understand the weight on his conscience. He had almost killed his soulmate. If she hadn’t screamed… If he hadn’t heard her… Everything would have been different. He couldn’t lose her. Not now. Not after meeting her. Not after knowing her.

Liz’s heart cracked at the look on his face. He seemed so lost, so tired. She put the cup on the counter and raised her hand to his face; wiping away the lonely tear he shed with her thumb, feeling the stinging burn of the drop on her skin. The small hole in the fabric on his thigh. She understood now. Her fingers ghosted over his eyebrow, her eyes never leaving his, mesmerized by the lightness of his eyelashes when he closed his eyes, she traced the line of his nose. He nipped lightly at her fingertip when she ran it over his lips.

Closing the distance between them, she brushed her lips against his in an ethereal kiss. The air was crackling around them, waves of heat seeping from his body; she tilted his head slightly and pressed her lips to his in earnest this time, drawing a moan from his throat. Her tongue on his lower lip, begging entry, seemed to take him out of his frozen state and he closed his arms around her, opening his mouth to welcome her.

The moment their tongues met, the coffee in the cup beside them began to bubble silently. Despite the air crackling with electricity around them, the heat rising with every second, the two of them seemed unaware of it. Hands caressing skin or tangled in long dark hair, they were blind to their surroundings.

They suddenly broke the kiss when something exploded behind them. Still wrapped in each other arms, they turned around and burst out laughing at the sight. The coffee maker was on fire on the counter.

“I swear to God…” Dembe mumbled, angrily walking in the room.

Liz watched the bodyguard stop next to the burning item and put his hand next to it on the counter. Wide-eyed, she heard a faint sizzling noise and a cloud of vapor rose from the flames. In a matter of seconds the fire was dead and Dembe turned his dark stare back to Red.

“For God’s sake, Raymond, try to get a hold of yourself,” he grumbled.
“T’m sorry my friend,” Red laughed.

Dembe shook his head and walked out. Red looked down at the woman in his arms and smiled as he dropped his lips back to hers.
After cleaning the mess in the kitchen, Red and Liz settled on the couch in the living room. They had to talk. The dynamic in their relationship had changed in the last few hours. Liz knew he still held secrets about her past and what happened that night, but she had learned enough to consider a new line of questioning.

“Red?”

He closed his arms more tightly around her, his hand on her waist under the hem of her blouse. She could feel how peaceful he was through their link. Their kiss seemed to have freed him to some extent. He was more open, letting her sense his feelings, his love, how much he cared about her.

“Yes, sweetheart,” he breathed against her head resting on his shoulder.

“What happened that night?” she asked, feeling him tense against her.

Red sighed before tilting her head to kiss her lips. He wanted to kiss her as much as possible before she decided to leave him. Because she would leave him when she’d learned the truth, he was sure of it. His tongue brushing against hers sent shivers up his spine, electrifying his whole body. He fought to keep his powers in check when she moaned deeply into his mouth. He wanted to map her mouth, to find every spot that would make moan and scratch her nails over his scalp; he wanted to learn how to make her lose control. He wanted to make her feel how much he loved her before losing her.

They broke the kiss, breathless, and Liz realized she was straddling his thighs, grinding her hips against him, his hard length pressed against her core. She felt heat creep up her cheeks when she sat back on his lap and ran her fingertips on Red’s face, love shining in her eyes, and he felt his heart bleed at the sight. He knew that anger and fear would replace love in her eyes as soon as he started talking.

“What’s wrong?” Liz asked when she saw the light fade in his eyes and their connection wane. He was closing his mind; he was shutting her out.

“I love you,” he suddenly breathed against her lips, closing his eyes, finally breaking the mental connection.

Liz’s heart missed a beat and her hands left his face. She looked at him, his closed eyes, the small grimace on his lips, his creased brow. She couldn’t feel anything from him; his mental shield was raised, blocking her outside. For the first time since she met him, heat wasn’t radiating from his body. He felt cold and the coldness was seeping into her. She was scared.

His eyes still closed, he put his hands on her hips, silently asking her to sit back on the couch. Liz complied, ice constraining her heart. She watched him open his eyes and get up without looking at her. She didn’t understand what was going on. He had said he loved her and now, he was acting so coldly. Was it because she hadn’t said it back? Did he think she didn’t love him?

Liz looked around, trying to find Dembe. The bodyguard would know how to handle Red, but she
found no trace of the dark-skinned man. Red was scaring her; she had never seen him in such a state. He was pacing the room, his eyes everywhere except her. She felt useless, powerless. She knew deep inside that he wouldn’t accept her declaration of love now. It was too late. And she didn’t want to say empty words. It was too important; she wanted to mean them when she finally said those three little words. And even if she did love him, she wasn’t ready to say it. Tom’s shadow was still hovering over them and until that problem was solved, she wasn’t sure she could devote herself completely to this relationship.

She saw him stop facing the window, watching over the house she was still supposed to share with her husband.

“I married Carla in 1980,” he began, his back to her. “A year later, Jennifer was born. We were young. Too young. When they died…” his voice tightened and he cleared his throat before continuing. “When I lost them… Alan played on my rage. He sent me to infiltrate the Order. No-one knew who killed my family, so Alan made it look like it was someone from the Guild, making it plausible for me to change my allegiance.”

Liz could see the tense line of his shoulders, his forehead against the cold glass panel. She didn’t dare to move. She was dying to close her arms around him, to comfort him, but she knew he had to go through it by himself. Just as she went through the memory of the fire by herself.

“I had been briefed. I knew what information I could give and what to keep secret. It worked for almost five years. I became the Concierge of Crime. I was the traitor. The monster. The man who betrayed the Guild. And then, one day, out of the blue, Blaine sent me to retrieve the Fulcrum.” Liz held her breath. She would soon know the truth. “I didn’t know there was a child. Nobody told me.”

He stopped again, his ragged breath fogging the window. Liz closed her eyes; it hurt her to see him so lost. She tried to send him some of her strength but his mind was closed, impervious to every attempt to help him. He was in his world and she had no place there, she realized suddenly. Because of her he had lost his family. Because of her his world had shattered into pieces. Because of her, he had spent thirty years alone.

“I was supposed to be the only one on the mission, but they appeared out of thin air. They were two, a man and a woman, a couple. I was arguing with your father and they materialized.” It was the first time since he started talking that he acknowledged her presence in the room. “They started shooting. Your mother fell. I didn’t know what to do. I tried to stop them. I unleashed my powers, but it was too late. They disappeared leaving two dead bodies behind. Your parents.”

She could hear his labored breaths; his gravelly voice barely a whisper. Even with his mind closed to her, she could feel waves of despair and anguish emanate from his form outlined by the early afternoon sun.

She suddenly saw his hand form a fist at his side and before she could say a word, he punched through the window pane in front of him.

“Red!”

She got up and rushed to him, but his outstretched arm stopped her. He didn’t turn to look at her, his eyes studying the blood running from his cut knuckles between his fingers before leaving scarlet drops on the wooden floor and glass shards at his feet.

“I couldn’t do anything for them, it was too late and the house was ablaze,” he said. “I kept searching for the Fulcrum, walking through the flames. That’s when I heard it. At first I thought it was the wood screeching as it burned but I soon realized it was a scream. Your scream. I ran. There was
another human being in this hell and I couldn’t let anybody else die. I followed your voice, hoping I would find you in time.”

“You were so small, so scared,” he finally lifted his eyes to her, a small smile at the corner of his lips. “You curled up against my chest when I took you in my arms.” His eyes on her were soft, unfocused, and Liz knew what he was seeing. “You reminded me of my daughter, the way she would sneak into our bed in the middle of the night and snuggle up to me. You were safe and we were almost to the door when I lost control. I don’t know what happened. I just blacked out. The next thing I remember is waking up bare-chested in the yard, the skin of my back freezing cold and you were crying.”

When he didn’t add anything, Liz took a step forward, slowly closing the distance between them. She stopped when he shook his head, giving him enough space to gather his thoughts and come back from the hell that night had been for both of them.

“We touched, that’s what happened. I saw it when Meera helped me with the block. I touched the skin of your neck and you collapsed. I’m sorry Red, it was my fault,” Liz finally whispered when the silence became too much to bear. “You saved me that night and I almost killed you.” “Oh Lizzie,” he breathed, opening his arms, when he saw her eyes fill with tears.

She walked to him, burying her face in his neck. His mind was still closed to her and she needed the physical contact to make sure everything was all right, that everything would be all right. She breathed him in, his scent soothing her.

“You hand,” Liz whispered when something hot soaked through the back of her blouse.

She left the protection of his arms and took his bleeding hand in hers. Without a word, she led him back to the couch and sat down, waiting for him to join her. When he finally sat, she presented her hand, palm up and waited until his hand was pressed against hers.

“Do you trust me?” she asked. It had always been her ritual before using her healing power on someone.

“With my life,” he smiled sadly.

She smiled back, placed her free hand on top of his and closed her eyes. She stayed silent a few seconds before opening her eyes.

“You have to open up, Red,” she said softly.

Red took a deep breath and Liz felt his mental shield lower slightly. He was a soft buzz at the back of her mind. She still couldn’t sense his feelings, but his presence was here, with her. She felt relief at the sensation. She had never realized how present he had been in her life until he cut himself totally from her. She smiled tenderly and, once again, closed her eyes.

Red watched her closely. He knew about her power but had never actually seen her use it consciously. When she closed her eyes, he felt her conscience infiltrate his mind and spread into his body. She was everywhere, exploring every corner of his being, stopping every few seconds to study an old wound before moving away. It was a strange sensation, not really hurting but slightly annoying. Like an itch he couldn’t scratch, a sound he couldn’t hear.

Suddenly, his hand started to freeze, ice crystals forming and melting instantly around his fingers, he tried to withdraw his hand from Liz’s grip but she stopped him, closing her fingers tightly around his palm.
“Don’t move,” she ordered.

The freezing sensation was too much for him. He was made of fire and he could feel his body trying to push her away, to protect itself. If she didn’t stop soon, he wasn’t sure he could hold back the burning wave he felt growing inside him. But it stopped. As suddenly as she had been there, her presence left his body and she opened her eyes, smiling. Her unnatural ice blue eyes faded slowly to their natural blue and she let go of his hand, breathing deeply.

“See? Not even a small scar,” she said proudly. “How do you feel?”

He stayed silent a moment to reign in his powers, his eyes studying his newly healed hand. It had been a close call and his heart was still beating furiously. Even if she had said that her Gift would protect her from his, he wasn’t willing to take the chance.

“Never do that again,” he said sternly.

She looked at him, hurt shining in her eyes. She didn’t understand. He was pushing her away. His mental shield blocked her when she tried to sense his feelings. His mind was once again closed. Liz felt fury burst into her heart.

“I did it when I was four and I’ll do it again if you need me! You can push me away; you can close your mind all you want. But I’m here and I plan to stay, Red. Look at me!” she barked when he turned his stare away. “I’ll do it again because I love you, deal with that!”

They both froze at her words. She said it. She hadn’t planned to say it so soon but she did love him. It wasn’t empty words. Looking up, she saw his tear-filled eyes and suddenly felt a wave of heat and love engulf her. His mental shield was down and he was drowning her in his feelings. He leaned forward crashing his lips to hers, his body covering hers. She cradled him between her thighs as she stretched out along the length of the couch, his tongue invading her mouth. She scratched her nails across his scalp and moaned when his hand at the small of her back pushed her more closely against his growing arousal.

“Wow,” she breathed when they broke the kiss, shaking her head to clear her mind.

“Sorry,” he rasped, his voice even lower than usually.

He pushed himself back to sit on his haunches, Liz’s legs slipping from his waist, looking up at him from her spot, sprawled on the couch. His wrinkled white dress shirt, his opened vest; he was positively gorgeous. She could still feel his presence around her, his heat caressing her skin. She reached out for him when her stomach suddenly growled loudly. Red laughed under his breath and kissed her lips before getting up.

“Red!” she whimpered.

“Let’s calm that hungry stomach of yours first,” he laughed, waiting for her to take his outstretched hand.

She took it, grumbling softly and he used his grip on her to pull on her hand, making her lose balance and fall into his arms. He took advantage of her distraction and kissed her deeply, his hands squeezing her buttocks. She ran her hands up his back, feeling the proof of his bravery under her fingertips.

“May I see them?” she asked softly when he broke the kiss.

He didn’t ask what she meant. He knew. From the moment he had felt her break the block in the White Room, he had known she would ask that question. Without a word, he stepped back and took
off his vest, placing it neatly on the couch and started to unbutton his shirt when Liz’s hand joined his. He looked at her in surprise; she smiled when he dropped his hands to his side, letting her take care of the shirt.

She kissed him lightly on the sternum, her fingers popping one button at the time. He hissed when she reached the waistband of his slacks, playing a few seconds with the trail of hair she found there before pulling his shirttails out. She trailed her hands up his chest memorizing the old scars she had seen from the inside before slipping her fingers under his shirt at his shoulders and pushing it back.

He stayed motionless, his eyes closed, his breath short; she could see his heart beating fast at his pulse point on his neck. She slid the shirt down his arms and finally took it off, placing it next to the vest on the couch. Liz moved slowly back to him, her fingertips grazing his shoulder lightly before walking around.

“Oh my God, Red,” she breathed when she saw the damages on his back.

His muscles tensed under her stare. She could feel his discomfort through their link but he kept his mental shield down. He started when she kissed the scarred skin of his shoulder.

“You were unconscious on the floor,” she began softly. “The fire was closing on us, I tried to shake you but your eyes stayed closed. I didn’t know what to do. I waited too long. Your coat caught fire and you woke up. You pushed me away when I tried to help you.”

She let her fingers caress the uneven surface of his back, her heart tightening at the sight. She was responsible for his injuries.

“It wasn’t your fault,” Red said. “It was the link.”

“I don’t understand.”

“When you touched me, we formed the soulmate bond and I wasn’t prepared. I lost control,” he explained softly, standing still, his head bowed.

“I drew in your strength in order to drag you out.” She understood now how a four year old could have dragged an unconscious grown man out.

“What happened next?” he asked. He needed to remember as much as her.

“I turned you on your back to smother the flames. You seemed conscious, you talked to me.”

“I don’t remember,” he shook his head.

“You asked me to take off your clothes. When I saw your back. You were bleeding so much,” her voice broke and he felt tears when she kissed his back tenderly.

He turned around, taking her in his arms and kissing her hair lightly. Both were completely open, their mental shields down, their feelings mingling. None knew who felt what. They were living the moment together, as one.

“When I saw your back, I knew what to do. I don’t know how. I just knew,” she continued, her voice muffled. “I put my hands on you and you screamed. I couldn’t stop. I knew I was hurting you, but I couldn’t stop.”

“You were four. You weren’t supposed to have your powers yet,” he tried to reassure her.

“I hurt you,” she repeated.

He pulled her closer, kissing her forehead tenderly.

“Do you know how your Gift works?” he asked, looking down at her.

“I push the body to heal itself. I draw into the patient reserves and guide the body so it can heal the injury,” she explained, not really knowing why he asked.

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“I push the body to heal itself. I draw into the patient reserves and guide the body so it can heal the injury,” she explained, not really knowing why he asked.
He nodded silently at her explanation. It corroborated his suspicion.

“I pushed you away that night, didn’t I?”
“How did you know?” She took a step back, leaving his arms to look at him puzzled.
“I’m made of fire Lizzie. When you heal me, the freezing sensation is too much. I can’t bear it. My Gift protects me,” he explained sadly. “I’m sorry if I hurt you, I wasn’t myself,” he apologized.
“You didn’t,” she replied, not understanding what he was talking about.
“Oh but I did. Look at your wrist. Look at the mark I left on you,” his angry voice surprised her. She didn’t understand.

Suddenly he was kneeling at her feet, taking her right hand in his, he turned her palm up and brought it next to his left shoulder. There, surrounded by scarred skin, a weirdly shaped mark of unblemished skin met her eyes. He let go of her hand and, slowly, she turned it downward, the scar on her wrist matching perfectly with the mark on his shoulder when she lowered her hand to his back.
When she opened the door, Liz raised her shield at its maximum. She was ready to confront Tom and she didn’t want to take any risks even if it meant she had to cut herself off from Red. They had worked on her mental shield the whole afternoon and when the monitors had shown Tom walking into the house, they had decided it was a good time to try to figure out what he was up to.

She walked in the living room, looking for her husband when she felt Red’s presence flutter against her mental shield. She frowned; they had agreed not to use their link as long as Liz was in the house. What was he playing at? She didn’t dare to lower her shield to find out, so she kept walking, heading for the kitchen. She knew it was the last place Tom had been when she checked on the monitors before crossing the street.

She froze at the sight that welcomed her. On the kitchen counter a bottle of champagne and two glasses were waiting, a big card reading “It’s a Girl” and a few balloons on the side. And sitting at the kitchen table, tied to a chair, was her husband. How did this happen in a matter of minutes? Everything had been all right last time she had checked the video feed and now her kitchen was hell. She could still feel Red against her shield.

She took a step forward but stopped dead in her tracks when, from the corner of her eye, she saw a man emerge from the shadows. The man could have appeared frail and sick, with his raggedy clothes and shaved head, but when he locked his dark stare on her, Liz could see power and determination in his eyes, and she felt suddenly frozen on the spot.

“Nice to meet you at last, Mrs. Keen,” he said in a heavily accented voice.

“Who the hell are you? What have you done to my husband?” she asked.

Even if Tom was her husband on paper only since she met Red, she had to keep up appearances. As she walked toward Tom to make sure he wasn’t hurt, she could still feel Red bouncing against her shield at the back of her mind. She wondered for a second why he wasn’t already here with her. And then she understood. He had to keep a low profile or the whole Order would know about their link. And that meant… the man must be working with the Order, and, by association, with Tom.

Her eyes went from her gagged husband to the man standing with his back to the wall, a knife in one hand. How was she supposed to play this?

“Who are you?” she asked again.

“Ranko Zamani, at your service, Ma’am,” he bowed extravagantly, a smug smile spreading on his lips.

Zamani. She knew that name. He was the Order’s henchman. And he was supposed to be dead for six years. Death in the Order didn’t seem to be as definitive as in the Guild. The thought crossed her mind but now wasn’t a good time to be distracted; Zamani was closing the distance between them, his blade raised.
Liz stepped back, her eyes never leaving the knife. She knew deep inside that Zamani and Tom were on the same side. They were both part of the Order. Zamani wouldn’t hurt Tom, she was sure of it.

Muffled sound erupted from Tom’s duct taped mouth and terror shone in his eyes when, suddenly, Zamani drove his knife into Tom’s thigh.

“NO!” Liz took a step forward.
“Tell me about the Fulcrum,” Zamani ordered, taking another knife from his jacket, leaving the first one in Tom’s leg.
“I don’t know anything about a Fulcrum! Please, stop hurting my husband, I don’t know anything,” she begged.

The moment she saw the man stab Tom, she had realized what role she would have to play. They knew about her Gift. They knew she could save Tom in a blink of an eye. If she wanted to keep her knowledge about Tom’s real nature a secret, she had to play the caring spouse.

Zamani ran his blade across Tom’s face; cutting his eyebrow, blood pouring suddenly from the wound down half of his face.

“The Fulcrum. Or your husband will die and you won’t be able to revive him. We know about your Gift and as powerful as you are, you can’t bring back the dead.”

Liz felt cold sweat run down her spine. He was right. She couldn’t revive the dead and even if Tom was a lying scumbag, she couldn’t let him die. She was a Healer; she couldn’t watch someone die in cold blood. She had to do something.

“I don’t…”
“Do not lie to me!” he cut her off. “We’ve been monitoring you for years; we know about Reddington. We know he has been sent to infiltrate the Order and find information about the Fulcrum, and when he cut his ties with you, you sent in the Phoenix. We know the Phoenix is one of your people. The man has been a thorn in our side for decades. Who is he? What’s his name? Where is the Fulcrum?” the man barked, sweat beading at his brow, his hands shaking.

They didn’t know about Red being the Phoenix, then. The man was losing control; he was giving her too much information. She could play on it and make him talk some more. Looking up to the vent on the wall she knew was hiding a camera; she shook her head slightly, hoping Red would understand. She felt him flutter once against her mental shield and step back. She couldn’t feel him anymore, but she knew his eyes were glued to the monitors on the other side of the street and he was ready to step in if she was in any danger.

“Reddington is a traitor. He’s been caged since the moment he stepped into the Guild’s facilities. And the Phoenix is an Urban Legend, a story that doesn’t actually exist,” she said calmly. She had to keep him talking, win time to gather as much information as she could.
“The man is obsessed with you and you caged him up?” Zamani snickered. “You’re more stupid than I thought,” he added shaking his head.
“What do you mean ‘obsessed with me’?” she asked. She needed to know what the Order knew about her relationship with Red. If he had been stupid enough to let slip something about them during his time in the Order, she had to know.
“Almost as if you were… soulmates,” he said, his eyes never leaving hers.

Liz kept her face blank. It was mere speculation, this man couldn’t know about their link. Hell, she hadn’t known until Red walked into the Post Office!

“I’m a Loner, I don’t have a soulmate,” she countered.
So long for keeping her secret from Tom. Liz turned her eyes to her husband and saw him following the conversation. She would have to find a good explanation if she wanted to keep him at her side and weasel information from him.

“Oh, but we know that. That’s why Reddington’s obsession is so unsettling. What could he have to do with a low ranking member of the Guild with no soulmate?” Zamani’s eyes were burning hole in her, his fingers playing with the blade still in his hand.

“I don’t know. Please don’t hurt my husband anymore,” she pleaded, trying to shift the conversation to another topic.

“You see, his obsession with you began after we sent him to retrieve the Fulcrum,” Zamani ignored her. “Odd, isn’t it? Even odder, he faked his own death that day. Our source in the Guild told us Raymond Reddington died that night twenty-five years ago.”

So Red had been right when he told her something rotten had taken root in the Guild. If the Order had a source in the Guild it meant that it was only a matter of time until they discovered her link with Red.

“That’s when your people sent the Phoenix,” he continued. “The three of you are linked to the Fulcrum. Now tell me everything you know, or I kill your husband,” he said in a deadly voice, his blade closing on Tom’s neck.

“I don’t know anything!” she shrieked.

“Is that so? I’m sure we can find another source if you don’t know anything,” he smiled darkly, his knife sliding down Tom’s chest, tearing his shirt apart.

Liz took a step forward to stop Zamani, but it was too late. The man drove his knife into Tom’s belly and muffled cries erupted from her husband’s gagged mouth. She had to act quickly or he would die.

“Now you have two choices. Either you save your husband or you run after me,” he smirked. “But remember something; we know you, Ms. Milhoan, and we’re watching you,” he added before taking the knife out of Tom and stepping back.

Liz rushed to her husband and ripped the duct tape from his mouth. He was unconscious, his head rolling on his shoulders, blood pouring from the wound in his belly. She gripped the knife still in his leg and slid it out, watching the blood slowly soak his pants. Closing her eyes, she put her hands on him and dove into his body. She could feel his skin get colder under her hand as the wound stitched itself closed.

As soon as she opened her mind to help Tom, she felt Red’s presence around her. He had been waiting for her. She felt his ghostly hand brush against her lips, her cheek and down her neck. She could feel his anxiety through their link, and she was sure she could feel him shake slightly when he closed his arms around her. They couldn’t talk through their link, but they didn’t need to. She knew he was there to protect her when she was vulnerable. Lowering her mental shield with Tom in the room was dangerous, she knew it, but she couldn’t let him die.

Red was still wrapped around her when she felt Tom regain consciousness. She immediately closed her mind, wincing at the violence she used to push Red’s mind from hers. She could apologize later though. The moment Tom opened his eyes, Liz stood back and watched him jerk against the ropes tied around his wrists and ankles.

“What happened? Where is he? Why am I not dead?” Tom questions cut into the silence of the room. “Are you going to free me or spend the rest of your life gaping at me?” he barked when Liz didn’t move or reply.

So he wanted to play it that way, Liz thought. Making sure her mental shield was firmly in place, she
closed the distance and grabbed Zamani’s knife she had left on the kitchen table and cut Tom free.

He staggered on his feet when he got up, catching the table to regain his balance. His wounds had been deadly and Liz knew he must be exhausted, but she didn’t move to help him. She didn’t want to touch him more than necessary. She wasn’t *that* confident about her shield.

Once steady on his feet, Tom opened his ripped shirt and looked down at his lower belly and then slid his finger into the hole on his thigh. Liz bit her lip, knowing questions would come. And she wasn’t mistaken, Tom’s eyes turned to her, his brow creased.

“What happened? He stabbed me. I should be dead,” Tom said, slightly confused.

Liz stayed silent a few seconds, amazed by his discipline. He was still in character, not letting it show how much he already knew about her peculiar nature. He could have made her doubt herself if she hadn’t felt his shared dream with his soulmate. That’s why Red had insisted on letting her discover the truth by herself. He had known she needed to be the one witnessing her husband’s treason or she would always doubt the truthfulness of Red’s words.

“I healed you,” she said calmly.

She had no other choices; she had to tell him and play along with whatever he would come up with. He was a really good actor; she had to concede it. The surprise on his features was very convincing; if she hadn’t known the truth she could have been duped.

“You… What? How?”

“I healed you,” she repeated. “You’ve heard the rumors about *gifted* people, haven’t you?” she added when he looked at her, mouth agape. A really good actor indeed.

“They are fairytales, legends. The ravings of crazy people. As crazy as people swearing they’ve been abducted by aliens,” Tom shook his head in disbelief.

“How do you explain those scars, then? I’m a Healer, Tom. That’s my Gift,” she sighed, suddenly exhausted by trying to keep up appearances. She wanted to be over with that part of her life and begin her future in Red’s arms.

“That’s why you get calls from work at all hours of the night. You’re not working at a post office, are you?”

“I’m not,” she replied. “That’s all I can say about it,” she added knowing where he was leading the conversation.

She could feel him probe her mental shield lightly. No wonder she had never suspected anything, he was truly delicate.

“And what about the baby?” he changed direction when he felt he couldn’t push her to talk about the Post Office and the Guild.

“We’re not ready for a baby, Tom. We have things to work out before thinking about a baby.”

“But you want a baby.”

Liz felt his voice reverberate against her shield, trying to infiltrate her mind. She winced at the force of his command but managed to block it. The moment she flinched she knew she had made a mistake. Tom’s eyes grew colder for a fraction of second before returning to their natural softness. He smiled gently and shook his head.

“I need time to process everything you’ve told me. You’re not the person I thought you were. You’re not the woman I married. I don’t know who you are, Liz.”

Tom’s sad voice was like an ice bucket thrown at Liz. She couldn’t believe he was making her the
villain. He was the fucking cheater; not only did he cheat on her but on his own soulmate. He was a lying bastard and she was supposed to let him treat her like she was the one to blame?

She was about to expose him, tell him that she knew about his duplicity when he shook his head.

“I need time,” he said again, turning his back to her and walking to the living room, leaving her standing alone in the kitchen.
“Where are you going?” she asked, surprised. “We’re in the middle of a conversation, you can’t leave like that!” she followed him, feeling her hand start to shake in anger.
“I don’t want to talk about it anymore. I’m going to walk the dog,” he said without looking back at her, grabbing his hoodie from the peg next to the front door.
“But we don’t have…” the door closing behind Tom echoed in the living room, “… a dog,” she finished lamely in the empty room.
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much Literary Bitca and LadyKerby for your help, suggestions and comments. Love you!

Please don't kill me :)

The weight of Lizzie’s head on his shoulder was reassuring. After what happened in that dreadful house with her husband and Zamani, Red wanted her close. When he crossed the street – after making sure Tom had left – he’d been greeted by a flying TV remote and a mine field of shattered furniture he had to navigate in order to close the distance between himself and Liz. She had been enraged and it had taken some time to calm her down. Her shield had still been raised at the time, so he had had to do it the good old-fashioned way.

The moment she had realized he was there with her, Liz had collapsed in the middle of the remains of her old life, crying. As soon as he felt her shield recede, he had taken her in his arms and together they had left the past behind and settled into the waiting car, ready to start their future.

Tom wasn’t an obstacle anymore. His lies and treason had destroyed the last ounce of loyalty she could have felt for him. Nothing was holding her back anymore, she was ready to move on and start her new life with Red.

Dembe was driving silently and Red’s fingers were tenderly caressing her arm when Liz finally spoke.

“Where did Zamani go?”
“He walked through the wall,” Red replied softly. He had thought her asleep.
“Is he what?”
“It’s his Gift, Lizzie. He can walk through solids,” Red explained, pulling her closer now he knew she wasn’t sleeping.
“Where are we going?” she asked, not recognizing her surroundings.
“Somewhere I know you will like,” he said mysteriously.

Liz looked up and met the mischievous smile on Red’s lips. She knew he wouldn’t say another word about their destination. She shook her head and straightened slightly, kissing him tenderly on the lips. She loved the softness of his lips, the way he always nipped lightly at her bottom lip to beg permission. She loved how his tongue brushed against hers, the soft whimpers he let out every time she reciprocated.

She could feel the heat of his body seeping through his layers of clothes. Her hand on the side of his neck felt wonderfully warm and she could feel his heart beat against her fingers.

“I love you,” she breathed, nuzzling his jaw when they finally broke the kiss.

He looked down at her, smiling tenderly. The first time she had said it, it had been motivated by anger, but now, with her mind fully open, he could feel the depth of her feelings for him. She wasn’t hiding anything. He felt a coil of fire burst through his body. This woman was driving him crazy. He
had been the master of his powers for more than twenty years, but every time she smiled at him, touched him, kissed him, he felt like losing control and burning the world to ashes. He didn’t know how he would live without her if she ever chose to leave him, or if something happened to take her from him.

Today had been a close call. Zamani could have chosen to stab her instead of Tom and she wouldn’t have been able to heal herself. And he was no healer. He could have lost her today.

“I love you,” he said, pulling her more closely against him, his arms tightly wrapped around her body.

“Where are we?” she asked when the car finally stopped on a foreign street.

“Baltimore,” he replied, smiling. He knew perfectly well that wasn’t the answer she had been expecting.

Liz looked at him, puzzled. She must have fallen asleep just after leaving her old house. She didn’t really remember anything after the door had closed behind her treacherous husband.

“Are you coming?”

Liz emerged from her thoughts and saw Red’s outstretched hand waiting for her. She took it and left the car. Immediately, Dembe drove away, leaving the two of them on the sidewalk, standing in the shade of a tree. Liz looked around her but nothing struck her as familiar. Of course she had been to Baltimore before, but never in this part of the city. Red gave her a few minutes to study her surroundings before leading her to the door they were facing.

He led her to the second floor, climbing cracking wooden stairs, stopping on the landing.

“Close your eyes,” Red whispered, smiling.

She frowned at his demand, but the hopeful smile on his lips won out. He seemed so eager to surprise her.

“You’re a child,” she smiled.

“Sometimes,” he laughed. “Now close your eyes, love.”

He waited until she did so before opening the door. He took her hands in his and led her into the room. Liz heard the door close behind her and felt Red move around in the room. Suddenly, she heard curtains being pulled open and light flooded the room.

“Open your eyes,” Red’s soft voice murmured.

Slowly, Liz opened her eyes and felt tears pool in her eyes.

“Oh Red,” she breathed, taking in the room.

Rows of bookshelves covered the walls, manuscripts were laying on every flat surface available, an old sofa and a huge armchair were framing a coffee table and, behind the couch, she could see an old piano covered with more books. Slowly, Liz walked to the window; the late afternoon sun going through the tree leaves cast a particular atmosphere in the room.

He had brought her to the writer’s room.

They had visited this place so many time in their mind, it was their place, their safe heaven. Everything looked exactly the same as in their shared dreams, except for the smell. In her dreams, Red’s scent had always been predominant, now that she was here in person, Liz was keenly aware
of the subtlety of the fragrance inhabiting the room. The comfortable, slightly musty smell that came with old books with leather covers, and warmth – if that had a smell – that made her feel safe, and loved.

She was still facing the window when she felt his arms close around her waist, his nose nuzzling the nape of her neck before kissing lightly the top of one shoulder.

“Thank you,” she murmured, tuning her head to kiss his jaw tenderly.

He kissed the tip of her nose, his hands on her waist slipping under the hem of her blouse. He turned her around, looking down in her eyes.

“I’m going for a shower. Explore the house. It’s yours now,” he murmured, his nose brushing against hers.

She nodded, smiling lovingly before kissing his lips, her hand at the back of his head, keeping him close. They broke the kiss and Red took a step back, he was reluctant to leave her, but he could feel she wanted to discover the house by herself. He had chosen that specific setting for their shared dreams when she was young because he had known it would be familiar for her. The first few times he had infiltrated her dreams a year or so after bringing her to Sam, he had discovered her passion for books and libraries, so when she had needed him, he had made it a point to find a place in his memories that would calm her and could pass for something from her own memories, and not his.

Liz watched him leave the room and turned back to the view. This view had always been part of her. For as long as she could remember, this view had been the only constant in her life. Turning away from the window, she walked back to the sofa, trailing her fingertips on the worn fabric before walking to the piano. The light wood seemed to call her. She read a few of the book titles, opening some covers, peeking at the words inside. Most of them where manuscripts written with an old typewriter, the ink fading with age, and all of them were signed Frederick Hempstead. Liz wondered for a few seconds who this man was before pushing the thought aside and walking to the bench behind the piano. She moved some of the books carefully before sitting. The fall board was open, the well-used ivory keyboard staring back at her. She had never learned how to play the piano, but the instrument had always fascinated her. She laid her hands on the keys and played random notes, wincing at the sound she made.

She shook her head and moved away from the piano, hoping that Red would play for her later. She walked through the doors at the back of the room and found herself in another room. A dining room. More books were scattered on the dark wooden tables, on chairs; this house seemed to be filled with books, most of them dusty from disuse, but some obviously read recently. She moved from the dining room and walked to the kitchen. Once again, she met wood. Rows of cabinets hanging from the walls, a grey marble-topped kitchen island hosting a stainless steel sink, and the countertops running against the walls were all clear of books. The room seemed to be the only one so far not clustered by reading material.

Liz went back to the dining room and pushed open another door, opening to a dark corridor. After fumbling to find the light switch, she walked down the hall, pushing open the doors she encountered on her way. A study with more filled bookshelves covering the walls waited for her when she opened the first door. A massive mahogany desk stood in the middle of the room, an old typewriter sat on a dark desk mat, with piles of blank pages patiently awaiting words to one side and a Tiffany dragonfly lamp were the only furniture in the room. The whole room was covered in dust. Liz walked to the curtained window behind the desk and opened it slightly. Even in the late afternoon, as she had supposed, the light was falling on the desk, making it the perfect place to write. Obviously that room hadn’t been used in a long time.
She closed the door silently behind her and moved to the next one. A small bathroom, fallen in disuse if the thick layer of dust was to be taken in consideration. The next door opened on an even dustier bedroom. Cobwebs were hanging between the posts of the four-poster bed. The red silky comforter faded to a greyish hue by the grime and sun that must have fallen on it for decades through the tall, un-curtained windows.

She left the room as she found it and walked to the last door. She could feel that Red was somewhere behind that door. He had said he was taking a shower, so she wasn’t sure she should open that particular door. She was still pondering her options when she felt a soft pull at the back of her mind and, almost as if she wasn’t in control anymore, she pushed the door open.

She stopped dead in her tracks. The room was so different from the rest of the house. Liz took off her shoes and walked in, her bare feet not making any noise on the light wooden floor. She stopped in the middle of the room, looking around in awe. The thick, dark-grey curtains were opened, tied to the widow sides; soft white gauze panels preserved the intimacy of the room allowed the late afternoon sun to paint the cream walls in oranges and reds.

An old leather bound book on a writing desk caught her gaze. It was the only book she could see in the room. Walking slowly toward the desk, she realized it wasn’t a book but a journal. A stainless steel fountain pen was waiting next to it. She ran her fingers on the cover, burning to open it, but before she could work the clasps open, her attention suddenly drifted to the desk lamp. She had never seen such a piece of art. The body was made of five thin – almost as thin as a finger – pipes with coordinating joints and fittings. The shade mimicked the shape of an old fashioned hoop skirt from the civil war era, made of what appeared to be chicken wire. The dark chocolate brown color added just a hint of contrast with the lighter tones in the room.

Liz shook her head to clear it. She knew Red had been diverting her attention from the journal. He obviously didn’t want her to read it. She smiled softly; he still wanted to keep some secrets from her. She turned around and fixed her eyes on the bed. How could she have missed the bed? It was a simple, yet eccentric in design, wooden bed. The four posts were sturdy and thick at their bases, yet they came up and arched diagonally across the bed, creating an X in the center. Leave it to Red to have a custom made bed simultaneously sober and unique. The soft blue blankets folded at the foot cut on the pristine white of the sheets.

Ghostly hands brushing against her collarbone took her out of her fascination for the furniture. Slowly, the hands inched lower, caressing her breasts, her stomach, slipping under the waistband of her dress pants. She hissed when she felt a soft touch at the apex of her thighs and moaned when the sensation became more tangible. Clothes weren’t a barrier when they chose to tease the other through their link and, in the shower, Red was taking full advantage of their bond.

She could feel him calling for her, his arousal tainting his feelings in bright red. Turning her gaze to the only door she had yet to open, Liz closed her eyes for a few seconds. She had to make a decision, now. Tom wasn’t in the picture anymore and Red was waiting for her. She knew she was ready to take their relationship to the next step, to embrace the Soulmate link as a whole, but she was scared. What if their relationship changed after becoming intimate? What if she wasn’t really ready to shoulder such an intimacy with Red? What if?

“You think too much,” Red’s voice startled her.

Her eyes focused back on the now opened door where Red was standing. Droplets of water sprinkled his skin. She couldn’t help but follow one of those beads running from the hollow at the base of his throat down his torso to be absorbed by the white towel around his hips. The fluffy fabric not helping to hide a bit of his arousal. She was frozen on the spot, hypnotized by the intensity of his
stare. She didn’t move when he walked to her, his bare feet leaving wet imprints on the wooden floor behind him.

He stopped in front of her; his fingertips brushing against her collarbone, following the path he had drawn with his mind a few minutes ago. He could feel her shiver under his touch; Red grabbed the hem of her blouse and slowly lifted it over her head. He ran his eyes on her body, taking in the soft curves of her torso. She was beautiful. Perfect. His fingers worked her belt buckle and dress pants open, pushing it down her hips and letting it slide down her legs to pool at her feet. Tenderly, he took her hands in his and stepped backward, pulling her with him. Slowly they made their way to the bathroom where the water was still running.

She could feel his presence all around her, engulfing her in his love and heat. He let go of her hands and turned around, untying the towel around his waist and leaving it on the floor before walking behind the glass panel. She could still make out his shape, waiting for her under the spray. She knew that she just had to take that leap of faith, take that plunge knowing Red would always be there to catch her.

Taking a deep breath, Liz unhooked her bra and stepped out of her underwear, leaving them on the towel Red had been wearing. Red’s immaterial hands were tracing her spine, giving her the strength to walk the last steps separating her from her Soulmate.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much Literary Bitca, LadyKerby and almcvayl for your help, suggestions and comments. Love you!

Liz finally stepped around the glass panel. Red was standing still, his eyes closed, water running down his head and body. He was facing her, a small smile on his lips when he felt her eyes on him, studying his body, trailing their way down to stop on his fully erected member. She gasped at the sight and he suddenly opened his eyes, fire literally burning behind his dilated pupils. Without a word, he opened his arms and she walked to him, plastering her naked body against his, water pouring down their heads.

“I love you,” he breathed, kissing her forehead lightly.

The feeling of his arms around her gave her the strength she needed to look up at him. She had always been self conscious of her body, and Tom had never done anything to help her gain some confidence. Their lovemaking had always been in the dark and in a hurry. Maybe because, at the time, he had been thinking about his own soulmate. The love and devotion she saw burning in Red’s eyes when she met his gaze was something she hadn’t been prepared for. Waves of love were emanating from his body, infiltrating hers, and warming her from the inside.

Liz kissed his lips, moving to his jaw before he could deepen the kiss; her tongue traced a burning path down his neck, contrasting with the relatively cooler water from the shower.

Red could feel his body heat increase with each touch of Liz’s tongue on his skin. He knew that if she didn’t stop soon, he would take her here and then, in that shower, and he didn’t want it. He wanted her in his bed; he wanted to worship her body for hours, he wanted to watch her fall apart under his sweet torture.

Her hands grazed at his back, her index fingertip lightly tracing the mark on his left shoulder before going down and settling on his hips. Her thumb caressing his hipbone, she locked her eyes with his.

“I want you,” she moaned, nipping at his lower lip.

A deep growl left Red’s throat at her words, his hips thrusting against his will. He could feel his control slip rapidly, the heat of his body rising when he felt Liz’s tongue trace his jaw. She had seemed so shy when he had opened his eyes and seen her standing in front of him, naked. But now that her body was plastered to his, he could feel her confidence through their link. Her hands on his hips sneaked between their bodies and she closed her fingers around his length.

“Oh no no no no,” he hissed, closing his hand around hers to stop the movement she had started. “I waited for more than twenty years to have you in my arms, let me worship you, my love,” he added.

Suddenly, his lips were on hers, his tongue invading her mouth, dueling with hers in the most sensual battle she had ever fought. His hand released hers and went to squeeze her buttock, pulling her hips against his; the other one caressing her left breast tenderly, playing with her hardened nipple. He stepped forward, pushing her against the shower wall before breaking the kiss. He didn’t wait a
second before sending his mouth to explore the expanse of her soft skin. His lips kissing, his teeth nipping, leaving a trail of red marks on her on his way south. Liz couldn’t muffle the moan that left her lips when she felt his hot mouth close on her right breast, his burning tongue circling her nipple, turning it into an hard rock peak.

She could feel her core pulse with her heartbeat, his free hand trailing down her stomach, teasing the nest of dark curls he found at the apex of her thighs.

“Please,” she whimpered, her hands cradling his head.

He laughed against her skin, sending shivers down her spine, goose bumps covering her skin even under the warm spray of the shower. She wanted him. She needed him. His fingers, his mouth, him. She needed to feel him in her, moving frantically, losing control.

“Please Red,” she almost sobbed, feeling her body shake with need.

And suddenly, he complied. His fingers sliding between her legs, teasing her entrance before diving in. Liz let out a cry when she felt her inner muscles close around his fingers, her head banging against the wall, her eyes closed, with the intensity of her orgasm. When she came down from her highs and opened her eyes, she met Red’s burning gaze. He was smiling smugly, a few inches from her. He waited for her to focus back on him before moving his fingers still deeply buried in her.

“Fuck!” Liz cried out, enacting a laugh from Red.

His fingers still moving, he kissed the tip of her nose before sinking down to his knees in a fluid movement, contradicting his age. She whimpered when he slid out of her, his fingers warm from her heat closing on her ankle and putting her leg to his shoulder. He looked up at her, waiting for her nod to unleash his passion. She couldn’t believe he asked for permission after everything they’ve been through. His mouth closed immediately around her clit when she gave her consent, his tongue burning hot, circling the tight nub of nerves, not really touching, driving her crazy.

She put her hands on his head and forced him where she wanted his the most, his tongue finally making contact with her clit; his fingers still slick from her arousal sliding back slowly in her. She knew she wouldn’t last long under his ministrations so soon after her precedent orgasm. A hand still on his head, she put the second one on his shoulder to keep her balance when he slightly changed the angle of his fingers.

His skin was burning hot under her touch, the water changing to steam almost as soon as it touched his back, tuning the bathroom into a sauna.

“Red,” she begged in a short breath.

It was too much. The feeling of his mouth on her combined with what went through their link was overwhelming. Every emotion were colliding in her, love, want, need, and happiness. Oh so much joy. He felt such euphoria at pleasing her.

Tom had always been a selfish lover, seeing to his needs without thinking of hers. She didn’t know how to deal with a man putting her above everything else. Every single thought of her past life flew from her mind when, suddenly, Red hummed, his mouth still closed on her clit, and slightly crooked his fingers on his way in, sending her once again over the edge.

Her legs limp, Red caught her as her knees buckled and she slid down the shower wall. She barely paid attention as the water was shut off and he carried her to the bed in the adjoining room, feeling the heat of his body drying her skin. When she finally opened her eyes, willing her body to move
again, she was lying on the soft sheets of the bed that had fascinated her so much earlier. Beside her, his warm body just shy of touching hers, Red was waiting. When he saw her eyes open, he trailed his fingertips softly along her shoulder before lightly tracing the swell of her breast.

She could feel his arousal against her hip, his hand now flat on her stomach; she knew what he was waiting for. Once again she had to make the first move, to take the decision of going even further in the discovery of their bond. Liz turned on her side, the tip of him now poking at her belly; she scooted closer and kissed his lips. He moaned when she brushed her tongue against his, her hand on his shoulder pushing him tenderly on his back.

She followed his movement, lying half on his chest, a leg between his. Her hand trailed down his chest, scratching lightly at the hairs she found on her way south. Her mouth left his, kissing its way along his jaw, nipping at the thin skin of his neck, leaving a mark before going back to his lips. Her mouth ravishing his, Liz straddled his thighs, her breasts brushing against his chest, the tip of him grazing her lower belly.

Her hands on his shoulders, she straightened up and locked her burning stare with his. Her fingertips traced the swell of his lips and he caught her finger between his teeth and flicked his tongue against it. His searing hands on her hips, Red pulled her to move upward, her slickness sliding against his length. She knew he wouldn’t say a word but she could feel his need through their link.

Their eyes still locked, she rose on her knees, a hand on his shoulder and his on her hips helping her to keep her balance, she closed the fingers of her free hand around his member and positioned herself on top of him. Slowly, she lowered her body, moaning as she took him into the hotness of her core. He ground his teeth and arched his back when he was fully sheathed.

“Oh my god, Lizzie,” he breathed, his hand caressing tenderly her belly. “I love you.”

She smiled at his words, her breath as short as his, before moving her hips slightly. He cried out at her movement, his hands gripping at her hips tightly. She was sure she would have marks there in the morning. She kept moving, sliding up and down his length; her hands still on his chest.

He sat up suddenly, closing his arms around her, changing the angle of the penetration and Liz felt her world spin. But it wasn’t enough to send her down the precipice; she needed something else, something more.

Tightening his grip on her, Red pulled her down with him on the mattress before rolling them around, his body covering hers. She immediately closed her legs around his waist, the heels of her feet digging into his lower back, raising her hips with each of his thrusts. He could feel she was close, her inner muscles fluttering around him. He grabbed the headboard, using the leverage to change the angle, he felt her mind go blank and her body shake under his. He kept moving, prolonging her orgasm as long as humanly possible before letting go. His movements became suddenly erratic, smoke seeping between his fingers gripping the bed; he let out a cry, feeling a wave of fire wash over the two of them.

When he opened his eyes a few seconds later, Red rolled on his side, trying not to crush Liz under his weight. He looked down at her; her eyes where still closed, her lips slightly apart letting out a short breath. It had been overwhelming.

She finally opened her eyes after a few seconds and turned her head to him, smiling softly. He was about to return the smile, when her eyes widened.

“Red, the bed! Behind you!” she exclaimed.
“Shit,” he murmured, smothering the sparse flames surrounding them. “It’s only the sheets, it could
have been worse,” he laughed, turning back to her and taking her in his arms.

He had known their first time would be something different and Red was glad that the house was still up and they weren’t laying on a pile of ashes. He tenderly kissed the tip of her nose when she looked up at him from her spot on his shoulder.

She ran her fingers through his chest hair, scratching lightly at his skin as she sneaked a leg between his, scooting even closer at his side. Her body was still vibrating from their union; the fulfillment of their bond had been something she hadn’t been prepared for. Their first meeting had marked him for life; the second one had shut the Post Office down. Those first meetings had been nothing compared to the one they just experienced and she was glad the room was still whole.

“I think I need another shower,” she murmured, kissing his clavicle.

He hummed, his eyes barely opened, his hands caressing her back and side.

“Stay,” he mumbled when Liz kissed his chin before trying to leave his arms.

“You’re insatiable,” she chuckled when his fingers sneaked between her legs from behind.

She batted his hand away and slid from his arms, making him groan at the loss. She sat on the edge of the bed, not facing him and looked back over her shoulder. She smiled at the sight. He was sprawled on the bed, surrounded by scorched sheets, his legs apart not hiding anything of his anatomy. She felt blood rise up her neck and cheeks and turned her eyes away.

“You’re lovely when you blush,” Red murmured, tracing her spine with his fingertip. He closed his arms around her waist and kissed her lower back. “I love you, and you’re gorgeous; you should never be afraid of showing your body,” he reassured her between kisses.

She took his hand in hers and brought it to her mouth, lightly kissing his knuckles to thank him. She was still slightly nervous when she finally got out of the bed. Without looking back, she walked to the bathroom feeling Red’s stare following her.

Once the door closed behind her, she felt the tears she had held slide down her cheek. She knew Red could feel her on the other side of the door, she knew he was perfectly aware of what was going on in her mind but she couldn’t help it.

The fulfillment of their bond had drowned her under waves of feelings; her brain was still overwhelmed by what happened in the shower and later in the bed. She had known they were destined to be together. They were soulmates. They had been created for each other. But nothing had prepared her for such an experience.

Taking a deep breath, Liz wiped her tears away and walked into the shower that would always be special for her. She let the water wash the sweat off her body, her thoughts drifting away, when she felt Red’s ghostly hands brush against her skin. She smiled tenderly, pushing his mind from her softly. Her body was so sensitive that she didn’t think she could manage another wave of pleasure so soon.

“I love you,” she heard in an echoing voice, from far away.

Turning around, Liz peered through the stream filling the room, but no one was there. She shrugged and went back under the spray.

When Liz got out of the bathroom wearing Red’s robe, he was waiting for her laying on the bed, wearing sleep pants, his hands under his head on the pillow. She grabbed his previously discarded shirt from the chair corner of the room and, turning her back to him, slid the robe from her shoulders.
and covered her body with his shirt.

She then turned around and smiled shyly when she saw Red’s crooked eyebrow. She knew she was stupid to feel timid with him but she couldn’t help it. Walking to the bed, she realized he had changed the sheets when she was in the bathroom.

“You left your mark,” she breathed seeing the imprint of his hand burned in the headboard. “And I plan on leaving more,” he smiled, opening his arms and waiting for her to join him.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much Literary Bitca for your help, suggestions and comments. Love you!
Lyrics: Right Here Waiting by Richard Marx

When Liz woke up next, the room was still dark, no light filtering from the closed curtains, and she was alone in bed. Frowning, she focused her mind on her link with Red but didn’t feel anything. What was going on? Where was Red? Why did he leave her alone in the small morning hours? She perfectly remembered falling asleep in his arms, his lips brushing against her temple, his fingers grazing her side. But then, why was his mind closed to her? Liz felt fear seep slowly into her heart. Did she do something wrong before they fell asleep? Did he think her tears had been sad tears?

They were soulmates for God’s sake! He must have felt her emotions when she closed the bathroom door. Why did he leave her waking up alone in what had become their bed? Pushing the sheets from her body, she got up and buttoned the shirt Red had taken pleasure unbuttoning when she joined him in the bed earlier.

She smiled at the memory of the light that had shone in Red’s eyes when he had once again let his hands, mouth and eyes map her body still warm from the shower. He hadn’t asked any questions about her tears, leaving her the choice to explain. But Liz knew he must have felt the beatitude that had overwhelmed her the moment she had closed that bathroom door.

That’s why she didn’t understand him not being here with her. Not turning the light on, Liz tiptoed out of the bedroom and walked down the darkened corridor, passing the closed doors she had opened on her discovery of the house, knowing now what was hidden behind those wood panels.

She frowned when, closing the distance between her and the living room, she heard a soft melody drift to her ears. Even if she couldn’t feel him through their link, Red was here. She let out the breath she hadn’t been aware she was holding and felt some of the tension leave her shoulders.

Silently, she pushed the door open and froze at the sight. It wasn’t a record; Red was sitting behind the piano, his hands moving slowly, his fingers brushing the ivory keys almost lovingly, eyes closed. She leaned against the doorframe and watched him. An unbuttoned black shirt she had never seen hung from his shoulders, and she could see his bare foot on the pedals and the bottom of his sleep pants between the legs of the piano. He wasn’t singing, but the melody was familiar to her. She couldn’t remember the title but she knew she had heard that song before.

She was still watching him when, suddenly, his mind opened and a wave of feelings rushed into her body and from far away, she heard Red’s voice echoing in her mind:

Wherever you go
Whatever you do
I will be right here waiting for you
Whatever it takes
His eyes were open when she focused back on him. A small smile was playing on his lips and she already could feel his presence around her. His love and warmth were surrounding her like a cocoon.

“I woke you,” he murmured, his hands immobile on the keys, the last notes dying in the silence.
“You didn’t,” she replied, walking slowly to him when he extended his hand toward her. “I missed you when I woke up all alone,” she added, taking his hand in hers and sitting on his lap when he pulled her to him.
“I couldn’t sleep and I didn’t want to wake you,” he breathed, his lips brushing against the thin skin of her neck.
“Your mind was closed to me,” she pouted, her nails scratching on his scalp. “I don’t like it.”
“I’m sorry,” he nipped at her throat, his hands caressing the soft curves of her behind through the fabric of the shirt. “How do you feel?” he asked almost cautiously after a few seconds of silence.

Liz tensed in his arms, knowing he was thinking about the tears she had shed earlier.

“Did I… I lost control and…”
“Red, look at me. You didn’t hurt me. I already told you, my Gift protects me. And Soulmates can’t hurt each other,” she explained calmly, her fingers tracing the lines of his face. “I love you,” she whispered, against his lips.

He kissed her deeply, his tongue brushing against hers. He still couldn’t believe his luck. After spending half of his life waiting for her, seeing her with other men, living her life without knowing he was a dream away, now he was free to kiss her whenever he wanted.

“Are you hungry? I made sandwiches,” he broke the kiss, laughing at the mental growl she sent through their link at the loss.

She still hadn’t realized the slight modification of their bond. He had felt it as soon as their bodies had joined. Red knew he had to wait until she discovered it by herself before starting to work on it in earnest, so for now he would keep his mouth shut and wait until she realized what the fulfillment of the Soulmate bond had given them.

He closed his hands on her hips and tenderly pushed her off his thighs. Linking their fingers, he led her to the kitchen where a plate of cheese sandwiches was waiting on the kitchen island.

Untangling their fingers, Liz smiled and hopped on the counter top, already reaching for the food. As soon as she had seen the plate she had felt ravenous. Red laughed at the eagerness on her face and went to pour a glass of water for her before sitting on the stool next to her leg, watching her wolf down her first sandwich.

She was eating her second sandwich when Red’s fingertips started to trail along her bare thigh. She looked down at him and met his stare, head tilted to the side, a small smile on his lips. She could feel through their bond what he wanted. And to be perfectly honest, she wanted it too. Putting her half eaten sandwich back on the plate, she pushed it to the side and, using her hands to keep balance, she swung her leg over Red’s head, settling her feet on the back of the stool on each side of him.

“You’re killing me,” he growled when he caught a glimpse of her most private parts as she moved.
She laughed at the sound of his voice, hissing a few seconds later when she felt Red’s fingers run up her thighs and push the fabric of the shirt up her hips.

“So beautiful,” he breathed, his finger tracing her folds. “And already wet.”

His hand left her center to caress her thighs, his mouth rapidly replacing it. She whimpered at the hotness of his tongue on her, his hands on her hips pulling her closer. His mouth ravishing her, she could feel how close she was. She knew she wouldn’t last long if he kept going like this. The softness of his tongue contrasting with the light grazes of his teeth coupled with the love she could feel through their shared link would be the death of her.

He was assaulting her fiercely when the phone on the countertop behind them started buzzing.

“Leave it,” Red growled between her legs, the vibrations of his voice sending shivers up her spine. “I can’t.” she whimpered, putting her hand on his head. “We’ve been away from the Post Office for too long. It must be Ressler.”

She scratched her nails to his scalp before pushing him back on his stool. His hands trailed her thighs and he licked her wetness from his pouting lips, his eyes never leaving the dark spot between her still spread legs. Liz bent to kiss him, tasting her own flavor on his lips before sliding down from her perch when she moved his stool back to leave her some room to move. She kissed his exposed chest on her way to the phone. To be honest, Ressler couldn’t have chosen a worse moment to call them and she was ready to shorten the call and resume the activities they had to interrupt.

“What?” she answered the call.
“Wow, Keen. Is it a bad time?” Ressler laughed.
“As a matter of fact. Yes, it’s a bad time. What do you want?” she replied, angry at the smugness she could hear in his voice.
“You disappeared from the surface of earth and there’s blood everywhere in your house. We were worried,” Ressler said, suddenly serious. “Are you okay?”
“Yes. The blood is not mine. It’s Tom’s. There was… there was a man in the house when I came home,” she explained, replaying the events that led them to that kitchen in her mind.

“Who?”
She didn’t reply. She couldn’t say a word. Pure fear had taken control of her body.

“Ranko Zamani,” Red supplied, taking the phone from her shaking hand, his free hand suddenly on her shoulders, pulling her to his chest and trailing his fingers down her arms to caress the soft skin of her belly between the buttons of her shirt. He had sensed the terror she felt through their link and was here to give her strength.

“Ranko Zamani? The Passe-muraille? The Order’s henchman?”
“Yes. He tortured her husband to get answers about me,” he explained, Liz’s trembling hand cradling his head when he kissed her neck.

Her mind was a mess; he couldn’t dissociate one thought from the other.

“You have to get back to the Post Office. We have to debrief both of you,” Ressler said, suddenly worried.
“No. We won’t,” Red replied harshly. “She’s safe with me. More than she would be at the Post Office.”
“But…”
“No buts Donald. Find him, kill him. It’s my job to protect my Soulmate. Don’t worry, nothing will happen to her as long as she’s with me.” His voice didn’t leave any room for argument; he would never let Lizzie set a foot into the Guild’s facilities until it was safe. “I’ll send Dembe to give you
every piece of information we have on Zamani,” he added before hanging up.

He put back the phone on the counter top and turned slowly Lizzie toward him.

“What’s wrong? What did you remember?” he asked, leaning tenderly his forehead against hers. “Zamani,” she began, terror in her shaking voice. “He won’t find you here. I’ll protect you,” Red tried to reassure her. “I know. It’s not that. He called me Miss Milhoan…”

The silence spread between them for a few second, leaving the information sink into Red’s mind. Suddenly, they both reached for the phone at the same time. Red closed his fingers around it first, unlocked it and typed the number they both knew by heart.

“It’s Raymond. Where are you?” Red asked when the correspondent picked up.

Liz wide eyes followed Red’s movements across the room when he started pacing. She could feel his own fear merge with hers.

“Someone will come shortly to protect you. Don’t even try to argue…. Please Sam, for Lizzie’s sake do as I say,” Red’s tone was sharp. “Yes she’s with me. We’ll explain everything as soon as we get there.”

“Red?” she called when he hung up. But he ignored her, already dialing another number. “Red? Raymond!”

He finally turned to her, the phone midway to his ear. He had closed his mind, trying unconsciously to protect her from his feeling. Without even thinking about it, he sent his presence to engulf her in warmth before closing the distance between them and taking her back in his arms. He knew he would have to explain himself, but he had more urgent things to take care of.

“Kate? Where are you?” he asked to the phone, his free arm around Liz’s body keeping her close to him. “I’m going to text you an address; get there as fast as you can. I’ll explain later,” he said before hanging up.

He kissed Liz’s head while sending the address before once again dialing a number. He talked a few seconds with Dembe before putting the phone back on the counter and closing both his arms around Liz’s shaking body.

“You need to get dressed, the plane is waiting for us at the airport. I’ll explain everything on the way. Someone is with him. He’s safe, Lizzie,” he breathed against her hair, kissing her head between each word.

She nodded against his chest and followed his lead to the bedroom where she found a bag of her own clothes waiting for her in the closet. She didn’t even bother to ask who had brought the clothes, or when. Taking off Red’s shirt she was still wearing, she stepped into clean clothes, feeling her Soulmate’s eyes on her the whole time. Even under those circumstances, he couldn’t keep his lust at bay. She couldn’t help the smile that spread on her lips at the realization. They would have time later. But now they had to move fast. In a matter of minutes, Red was closing the front door and leading her to the black car waiting for them. They climbed into the back seat, linking their fingers as the car immediately started moving.

Twenty minutes later, Red’s jet was wheels up.

“How do you know my father?” Liz asked as soon as the stewardess left the cabin after pouring them some drinks.
“I’ve known him for a long time. Even before your birth. He was the one who directed me to the Post Office when I burned down my uncle’s house. He found me in the street after my parents closed their doors on me. He followed my story in the paper and chased me down, knowing what I was and sent me where I could be trained. Where I wouldn’t hurt anyone,” Red explained.

“You brought me to him after the fire,” Liz said, a memory from that night flashing before her eyes. “Yes,” he answered even if she didn’t really ask.

“How did he know of the Post Office’s existence?” Liz asked. The Guild was supposed to be a secret. Only Dream Walkers were supposed to be aware that it existed. “Is he… Is he one of ours?” “It’s not my place to answer that question, my love,” he replied, bringing her hand to his lips.

After that, they spent the two hours flight to Nebraska cuddling in silence, trying to keep their fear for their loved one at bay.
The moment the plane touched down, Red felt Liz’s stress peak. He knew she was worried about her father. And even his promise that Zamani couldn’t reach Sam wasn’t enough to reassure her. He knew she would be furious with him when she realized they weren’t going to her childhood house but the hospital.

Red led Liz to the car waiting for them at the airport and, together, settled on the back seat. He missed Dembe dearly in these kind of situations. Even if the driver could be trusted, he didn’t like to have personal conversations in front of a stranger; even less when he was with his soulmate.

“That’s not the route to my father’s,” Liz said after a few minutes.
“No, it’s not,” Red replied, bringing her hand to his lips.
“Where is my father? Did Zamani get to him?”

She could feel fear burst into her gut. Images of Sam lying lifeless on the floor, blood pooling around him flashed in her mind. She could see him crawling on the floor to reach the phone. She could see Zamani in Sam’s kitchen, her father tied to a chair and the Order’s henchman playing his knife on Sam’s skin. She could clearly see those scenarios in her mind. And, through their link, so could Red.

“Please, please, calm down, Sweetheart,” Red said, pulling her close to him. “Sam is safe and Dembe and Donald are taking care of Zamani.”
“Then why is my father at the hospital? What are you hiding, Red?” She pushed him back angrily, searching the answers in his eyes.

Red let out a shivering breath, trying to control his emotions while being flooded by Liz’s. He had known she would recognize the route. Sam’s lung cancer had taken them there too many times for her to forget.

“It’s his lungs, isn’t it?” she asked resigned.
“Yes.”

The hurt in Red’s eyes smothered her anger before she could burst at him. He loved Sam as much as she did. But why didn’t he tell her before?

“How long have you known?” she asked calmly.
“Since our earlier phone call,” Red replied, shaking his head.
“Why didn’t you tell me?”
“I thought…”
“Yes, you thought,” she cut him off. “What did I tell you when we met? Never think for me, I’m a big girl Red. I can take care of myself and shoulder bad news. Sam is my father, for God’s sake! You had no right to hide something like this!” she finally said in an angry whisper.
Red closed his eyes, trying to forget the betrayal he saw shine in her eyes, but what his eyes couldn’t see, he could feel it though their link. She was flooding him with every feeling bursting in her body, and he wasn’t even sure she was aware of it. Since the fulfillment of their bond, the way they felt each other had changed and she was still adjusting.

“I’m sorry,” he finally said.

Liz sighed, shaking her head.

“I know you’re sorry, I can feel it,” she said, linking her fingers to his. “One day, saying ‘I’m sorry’ won’t be enough anymore. Please Red, look at me.” She waited for him to open his eyes before cradling his head in her free hand. “I know you have your secrets, I saw those closed doors in your mind, and I understand. But please, trust me. I’m not a child anymore. I’m not a dream. I’m your Soulmate. And I love you,” she said, leaning to kiss his lips tenderly, pouring her love and trust into their link.

His hands framed her face, keeping her close. He deepened the kiss, drawing a muffled moan from her lips. They broke the kiss when the driver cleared his throat and they realized the car had stopped and the back door was open. Liz felt heat rise up her face in embarrassment while Red smiled smugly at her reaction. She hit him on the shoulder before getting out of the car, avoiding the driver’s eyes.

The moment they stepped through the doors, Red’s phone buzzed in his pocket.

“He’s room 832,” Red said after flapping his phone closed.

She nodded and, hand in hand, they walked to her father’s room. She didn’t know what to expect, Red had told her someone was there to protect Sam, and she had pictured every scenario except the one that welcomed them.

Sam was lying on his bed, the covers up to his waist and he was laughing out loud. His laugh periodically interrupted by bout of coughing and a wheezy breath. At his side, sitting on a chair was a woman she didn’t know.

She was small and lean, her sharp eyes fixed on Sam, gleaming behind her black-framed glasses. Her short hair was marked by streaks of silver, her light brown coat perfectly folded on the back of the spare chair against the wall along with a black purse. Liz took in the scene in less than a second but when she was about to turn her stare back to her father, she found herself facing the muzzle of a Smith & Wesson .357 Magnum and the dark serious face of the woman.

“Liz?” Sam said out of breath. “What are you doing here?” he asked.

“I’ll leave the two of you alone,” the strange woman said, getting up and sliding her gun in her purse before walking to Liz.

At that moment, Liz realized that Red wasn’t holding her hand anymore. He was watching her, a few inches on her left, hidden from Sam’s view. Go on, he mouthed when she looked at him surprised.

“Butterball?”

Liz turned back to her father, sidestepping to let the small woman leave the room, obviously the protection Red had sent when everything went down. Kate, he had called her. She felt Red’s ghostly finger caress tenderly the nape of her neck, sending shivers down her spine. She couldn’t help but turn her head to smile at him, but he wasn’t here anymore, neither was the woman. Liz shook her
head and walked in the room, taking in her father’s frame. He was thinner than he used to be. Even the oxygen delivered by his nasal cannula couldn’t keep the bluish hue his lips had taken.

“Daddy,” she breathed, her voice cracking.

She stepped into the room, rushing to her father’s side, her eyes full of tears. He looked so small and fragile.

"Why didn't you tell me!?” she asked, tears finally winning the battle and running down her cheeks. "I didn't want to worry you," Sam replied, squeezing her hand. "You were busy with your work and Tom and the baby."

Liz winced at Tom's name. She knew she had to talk with Sam, to explain what happened and who Tom really was. And she had to know what Sam already knew about the Guild. She couldn't believe he had kept his knowledge of her true nature that long. She felt anger rise in her chest at her father's deception and, immediately felt guilty about it. Sam was dying and she couldn't do anything to prevent it, she had no right to be angry with him at that moment.

She suddenly took a sharp breath when she felt Red's ghostly presence beside her, his hand on her shoulder, squeezing lightly to calm her down and making her aware of his presence. She opened her mind, realizing suddenly she had closed it in the first place.

"I'm good," she thought without really knowing why. They couldn't communicate that way; she had already tried in the past.

But, at her utmost surprise, she heard Red's chuckle in her mind, making her almost jump out of her skin.

"How... What..."

"We'll talk about it later, love." His voice seemed far away, almost as if she had imagined it. Or dreamed it.

Her surprise must have had shown on her face because when she looked at Sam he was frowning and watching her closely. His eyes turned to the door before coming back on her. As if he was looking for someone that wasn’t there. Liz suddenly realized that it was Red he was looking for.

“He’ll be here shortly,” she said, watching Sam’s reaction closely.

“Who?”

“Raymond. I know you didn’t expect me,” she couldn’t keep the bitterness from her voice.

Her father was dying and he was expecting someone supposedly dead for years, not his own daughter. Sam looked hurt by her tone, but she couldn’t find in her heart to care.

“You know about Soulmates. You know about the Guild and you know that Tom was not meant to be my soulmate,” Liz said. She didn’t ask, she knew the truth and the look on Sam’s face confirmed she was right. “Why didn’t you tell me? Why didn’t you stop me when I married Tom? You knew!”

“I hoped he had been wrong. When he brought you, he told me you were his soulmate, but I couldn’t believe it! You were so small, so young. It couldn’t be true!”

One of the monitor behind Sam’s bed flashed red and a nurse burst into the room, sending a dark look to Liz before adjusting Sam’s oxygen influx.

“You have to calm down. And you, Ma’am, keep him calm or I’ll have to ask you to leave,” the nurse said before leaving the room.
Liz collapsed on the chair beside the bed. The one Kate had sat on when Liz arrived. She opened her mouth to apologize but Sam rose his hand to stop her.

“Let me explain. When Raymond came that night, I hadn’t seen him for years. I knew he was working undercover in the Order. I knew that for most of the Guild, he was a traitor, the man who betrayed them and I had started to believe it,” he shook his head, eyes filled with tears. “I’m sorry but that is true,” he added looking away from Liz.

“It’s all right, Sam,” Red’s voice startled her.

She had been so focused on Sam’s words that she had almost forgotten Red. He smiled tenderly and walked to Sam’s bedside. At her surprise, he kissed Sam’s forehead, squeezing his hand before walking around the bed to take his place at Liz’s side.

“It’s good to see you, my friend,” Red said, his hand on Liz’s shoulder, his fingers brushing the skin of her neck.

The moment their skin touched, she felt some of the tension leave her body. Meera had told them that touching sometimes helped, but it was the first time she really felt it. She slipped her hand under the hem of his vest and hooked her fingers on the rear cinch of his waistcoat. Sam didn’t miss their posture and smiled faintly. It was as if they were trying to assert the reality of their relationship.

“Why didn’t you stop me when I met Tom?” Liz asked. She needed to know the truth.

“As I said, I didn’t believe Raymond when he told me the link had been formed when you were four. When you grew up and started to talk about the dreams, I thought it was a coincidence, that your mind had found a way to restore some of your memories of that night.”

Liz closed her eyes, trying to contain the hurt she felt at Sam’s words. He had been part of the people taking away her memories. But she didn’t stop him; she had to know why he had kept that secret so long.

“Then you’ve been recruited by the Guild and sent to the HQ. I was so proud of you, not many Dream Walkers had that chance. When you came home alone after your twentieth birthday, the fear that Raymond had been right disappeared. You were a Loner. I was so relieved. Yes, your life would be lonely without a soulmate, but you’d be safe.”

“Then I met Tom and you thought everything would be alright for me,” she nodded, finally understanding why her father had hidden the truth. He had been afraid for his child. “He works for the Order,” she said. “I’m… We’re the ones the Prophecy talks about,” she added, looking up at Red.

Sam cringed when Red’s hand moved from Liz’s shoulder to cradle her face and she loved her cheek into his palm, smiling tenderly. The light in their eyes, the smile on their faces, the energy vibrating from their bodies, everything spoke of an intimacy Sam didn’t want to be witness of.

The sound of heels popped their bubble and the three of them turned to the door. The woman that had been with Sam when they arrived was in the doorway.

“Kate, this is Lizzie. Lizzie, meet Mr. Kaplan,” Red said smiling.

“Mr. Kaplan? The Mr. Kaplan?” Liz asked.

Liz watched the woman closely. Mr. Kaplan has been as much a legend as the Phoenix. He… She was the wind and the storm, the evasive entity the Guild had spent years trying to catch. No one had ever seen her, she was too fast, a glimpse at the corner of your eye before she was gone.

“Nice to meet you, dearie,” the small woman said. Liz blinked and the woman was suddenly at the
“Raymond, Dembe called. Zamani is dead.”
“How?” Liz asked confused. How could someone move that fast?
“He was cornered and chose to jump,” Mr. Kaplan said, choosing to ignore the double meaning of Liz’s question.
"Are you sure it was the right guy?” Liz asked. She had to be sure the menace had been taken care of.
"Yes, I'm sure," the small woman replied, her eyes on Liz.

Liz was about to ask for precision when her phone rang.
"Donald. I have to take it," she said getting up. "I'll be right back."

She kissed Red on the cheek and left the room already talking with her partner.

In the room, the three of them watched her disappear in the hospital hall silently.

"So..." Sam began, not sure how to finish.
"So," Red replied, a faint smile at the corner of his mouth.

He knew what Sam wanted to ask and he wasn't sure to be ready for that conversation. Sam had always been nice to him, always supportive. He had saved him, helped him make a life for himself. But now, facing him, wasn't his old friend, Red realized suddenly. On that bed, was lying his Soulmate's father. Red felt his body temperature rise, heat waves seeping from his skin and hitting the walls.

"Calm down, Ray," Sam said, sweat beading at his brow. "I'm not going to bite your head off, she's a big girl, and she knows what she's doing."

Red felt the heat recede, his heartbeat calming down slowly.

"And even if I had something to say about your relationship, she wouldn't listen to me. She's stubborn that way, my little girl," Sam smiled tenderly.
"Yes, she is," Red said, shaking his head at the memories of the Lizzie's stubbornness he had experienced in the short time he had known her in person.

They stayed silent a few seconds, sharing the love they both felt for the same woman, before Red sighed deeply.

"What's wrong?" Sam asked. He had always known when Raymond tried to hide something.
"She knows. Liz knows what we did when she was just a little girl. She knows and she remembers."
"How? I made sure she couldn't break the block I put on her memories of that night by herself," Sam said frowning.
"Have you ever heard the name Meera Malik? She's the head of the Psychic team at the Post Office."
"Yes, I've heard of her. She's good."
"She's better than good. Liz trained with her a few days ago; she realized something was wrong with Liz's memories after just a few seconds. She helped Liz to open the door of her past," Red explained rapidly.
"Why would Liz need to train with someone like that Meera?" Sam asked worried.
"It's not my place to say, my friend. You'll have to ask your daughter."

Liz walking back in the room cut Sam's next question.

"Donald confirms that Zamani is dead, he's not a menace anymore," Liz said happily crossing the room to join Red. "What's going on here?" she asked when Sam end Red kept looking at each other
in silence.
“We have to talk, Butterball,” Sam finally sighed.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry for the long wait, I still hope you'll like this chapter.

Thank you so much Literary Bitca and MinP1072 for your help, suggestions and comments. Love you!

Liz's stare went from her father to Red, not seeing any clues about what they wanted to talk with her about. Anxiety didn't even have the time to settle in before she felt Red's presence around her, his ghostly arms closing around her body, engulfing her in his warmth.

"I told you, you would have the answers you seek about your childhood when we first met. The time has come," Red said almost solemnly.
"Why here? Why now?" Liz asked.

She was confused about their reaction, but deep inside, she had known that time would come. Since the moment she saw that door keeping her from her memories of that dreadful night in her mind, she had known her father had been part of it at some point. She didn't know how, but the mechanisms closing that door had been awfully familiar. And when she had confronted her will against it, she had known where to push and where to hold back to break through the block.

"Because we may not have much time left, sweetie," Sam replied, his breath wheezing on its way out.

Liz looked her father closely, realizing only now that his condition was worse than she had thought. She suddenly realized that it might be the last time she could talk with her father. Tears began to pool into her eyes, her shoulders shaking slightly under the pressure she could feel building in her body.

Without a word, Red went to join her and added his physical presence to the mental one to support her before she broke down in front of Sam. Now wasn't the time.

"Lizzie," Red said tenderly, his hands running down her back when she hid her head in the crook of his neck. "Please look at me."

After a few seconds of silence he heard her sniff into his neck and finally raised her red-rimed eyes to him. Their eyes locked, Liz took a deep breath and squeezed Red’s hands once before turning back to her father waiting silently. When she met Sam’s stare, she saw the small smile spread on his lips.

"I’m glad to see you won’t be alone when I’ll be gone," Sam said, smiling tenderly at the sight before him.

"Don’t say…” Liz began but her father cut her off, raising a shaking hand.
"The cancer spread to my liver, Lizzie. The doctors told me I have six months left. I wished it were six hours," Sam said, avoiding his daughter’s eyes. He couldn’t bear to see the fear and hurt in her eyes. "We have to talk about what happened when you were five, before it’s too late."
"Five?” Liz asked, acceding to Sam’s wish not to talk about his health, for now.
"Yes. As you must have understood now, I’m also a Dream Walker, Lizzie. A Loner."
"Why didn’t you tell me when I started using my powers?” Liz demanded, a faint trace of
anger in her voice.

“Because it’s forbidden. You have to learn how to use your powers by yourself or you’ll run the risk of enclosing yourself in someone else’s limits. Dream Walkers’ children almost never show potential so it’s not really a problem in the community, but you’re not my biological daughter. And you are a powerful Dream Walker, sweetie, never doubt that,” Sam smiled tenderly, love shining in his eyes.

“That’s not the full story, is it?” Liz asked when she caught the look Red and Sam exchanged.

“I wasn’t welcome in the Guild’s facilities anymore,” he sighed.

“Why? Is it because you helped Red?”

“It’s a long story, Lizzie and one I’m not sure I’m strong enough to tell.”

Liz was about to talk when Red’s hand on hers cut her off. The look in his eyes when she turned her eyes to him told her that now wasn’t the time. She nodded and smiled faintly.

“What happened?” she finally asked.

“When I found Raymond on my doorstep that night, you were so small. So fragile. The moment I saw you, I knew I’d do anything to keep you safe, so when Raymond told me what happened and why he was there; I didn’t hesitate. You needed help and I’d never had the chance to have a child. It was as if I had been waiting for you all my life,” Sam smiled, his unfocused stare hovering over Liz.

“The first week was… difficult. You wouldn’t let go of Ray. You couldn’t let him be more than a few feet away from you. It was the soulmate link. We are not build to endure that much power so young,” Sam said breathless, his eyes pleading Red to continue.

“We had to do something. You couldn’t sleep anymore; you couldn’t eat anymore. You were dying, Lizzie. We had to do something to save you. Sam is a powerful Dream Walker, so powerful that he should have been part of the Elders, but she refused his nomination,” Red couldn’t keep the disgust out of his voice. “But that’s a story for another time,” he added when he felt the questions forming in Liz’s mind.

“You have to understand, butterball. I was an outcast and Ray was supposed to be dead. We couldn’t ask for help or advices from our peers. We did what we thought would be the best for you,” Sam said, tears shinning in his eyes.

“You blocked the memories of that night,” Liz breathed, shaking her head.

“That wasn’t exactly what we were aiming for, but yes. What we did blocked your memories of the fire,” Red said, waiting for Sam to explain.

“Dad?”

“I was trying to block your powers and…”

“And?” Liz asked, knowing she wouldn’t like what her father would add.

“Break the link between Raymond and you,” Sam finished pitifully.

The sadness in Liz’s eyes broke their hearts all over again. It was the same they had seen in her eyes after they robbed her of the memories of their first meeting. The emptiness; the void in her usually bright eyes was killing them. She looked dead.

Liz’s breath froze in her chest. She felt as if she had been punched. She couldn’t believe they had made the decision to sever the link between two Soulmates. Her eyes went from Sam to Red and back.

“I don’t know who you are anymore, both of you,” she said, taking a step back and breaking the contact with Red. She felt his hand slid from her shoulder and her walls rise to push him out of her mind.

“Lizzie…”

“No! Don’t touch me!” She took another step back. “How could you do that? I spent my whole life feeling lonely, unloved, an outcast because of you! You let me think I was a Loner; I would never have a Soulmate! Why? Why did you do this to me?”

“You were dying, Lizzie! There were no other choices!” Red cried out, hands shaking at his sides.
“What do you think it cost me to let you go? What do you think I went through when I felt our link unravel? I almost went mad! You were a child; your mind wasn’t strong enough to survive the inheritance of your Gift; it was the only solution and I won’t apologize for saving your life,” he breathed, tears shining on his eyelashes, his pleading stare begging her to understand.

The desperation she could see in Red’s eyes, hit Liz squarely in the heart. The force of the blow vaporizing her mental walls into dust, she felt her mind flooded by his emotions. The guilt mixed with longing and love. And the fear. So much fear. Fear she would never forgive him. Fear she would turn and leave him. Fear he would lose her once again.

And suddenly, she understood. She understood what breaking their link had cost him. He had lived years with that thorn in his side, settling for being her imaginary friend because it was too dangerous to let her know the truth. She could feel the agony of restraining himself to seduce her in her dreams when she had inherited her powers. She could feel the torture of knowing her with another man. His pain should have been hers.

Her forgetfulness had been a blessing, not a curse, she realized.

Slowly, she centered herself in her own mind, letting Red’s feelings rush around her and, focusing her stare on his lowered head, she projected her presence around him. Her immaterial hand caressing tenderly the nape of his neck, she took a step forward the exact moment he raised his head and locked eyes with her. She closed the distance between them, her ghostly touch never leaving his skin; she could feel warmth seeping where cold had settled in his body. She tenderly cupped his face in her hands and pulled his lips to hers.

The kiss was soft, loving, tender, just a brush of lips before she inched back, smiling.

“I love you,” she breathed against his lips. “Thank you,” she added when he closed his arms around her, burying his face in the crook of her neck.

They stayed silent, basking in the sensation of the other’s body pressed against their own. Liz felt a shiver run down her spine when she felt Red’s lips brush the spot where the neck met the shoulder. Her hands instantaneously ran up his back and he moaned when her nails scratched at his scalp, her fingers pulling at the short hair at the nape of his neck.

They jumped apart when Sam cleared his throat behind them, both looking guiltily at the man lying in the bed.

“You should go home,” Sam said, a small smile on his lips.
“Dad…”
“No, go home. You have to talk and I’m tired. Raymond can tell you what you need to know,” Sam cut her off, his voice a whisper.

She went to grab the hand the hand switching on the bed, tears running down her cheeks.

“We’ll come back tomorrow,” Liz breathed, bending to kiss her father on the forehead. “I love you, dad.”
“I love you, butterball,” Sam replied squeezing her hand. “Take care of her,” he added, his eyes on Red.

He nodded, a tight smile on his lips, and took Liz’s hand when she joined him. They left the room hand in hand, not seeing Sam sag in his bed, his eyes closing under the pain burning in his dying body.
“You should have told them the truth,” he heard a soft voice say beside him.
“Why are you still here? I’m not in danger anymore,” he groaned, not opening his eyes.
“They’re facing the Order. I remembered you smarter, Sam.”
“I know, Kate. I know,” he breathed, feeling her hand close around his.

OoO

They arrived at Sam’s house after a drive spent in silence. They stepped out of the car and watched it disappear after a few seconds at the corner of the street before turning back toward the house. Liz felt a pang of nostalgia at the familiar décor. She had spent her entire childhood in that house, she smiled tenderly at the sight of the tree she fell from when she was eight and broke her wrist.

“Come on,” Red breathed, closing his fingers around hers to lead her to the door.
“You have my father’s key?” she said surprised when Red took a single key out of his breast pocket.
“Sam gave it to me a long time ago. I thought it would be useful,” he smiled.

Liz smiled back and, rising on tiptoes, she kissed his lips lovingly. They had left in such a hurry after realizing Sam was in danger that she hadn’t thought about anything. They hadn’t even packed any change of clothes.

“Don’t worry, Lizzie,” Red said, stroking her cheek tenderly.

She nodded, not sure she could trust her voice. The sensations she could feel through their link were overwhelming. Red’s feelings for her were taming her fear for her father. She knew he was doing it on purpose, to calm her down, to anchor her. And she was grateful.

Grabbing his hand, she pulled him into the dark house. Every curtain was closed and the house smelled of disuse. Leaving Red in the foyer, Liz walked around the room, opening window after window on her way. She hadn’t realized how long her father had been in hospital.

“What’s that?” Liz asked pointing at the lonely duffel bag on the table.
“I had Kate bring some of our clothes when it was clear we had to stay here a while,” Red replied. “I should have told her to open the house.”
“When?”
“When we were talking with your father.”
“But… Never mind,” Liz said shaking her head. She knew about Mr. Kaplan legendary prowess.
“You okay?” Red asked after a moment of silence wrapping his arms around Liz from behind.
“No. But I will be,” she smiled sadly, turning her head to kiss the corner of his jaw.

Leaning against Red’s chest, Liz let her eyes take in the room. Nothing had changed; everything was as she remembered it.

“What is it?” Red asked when she silently chuckled in his arms.
“I had so much fun on that sofa,” she replied, pointing at a curvy piece of furniture.

The narrow couch looked out of place in the room. Its dark brown leathery color at odds with the light tones of the room. The backless sofa was roughly twenty inches wide, hip-high at its highest curving gently downward to knee-length at its lowest.

“I’m not sure I want to know about that,” Red said.

Liz turned in his arms when she felt him slightly withdraw from her mind. He seemed upset.

“Red?” she called, her fingertip tracing his lips.
He dropped his arms from her shoulders and took a step back, shaking his head. She obviously didn’t understand why he was closing himself off.

“Red!” she called again when he took another step before turning around and walking to the nearest window.

He knew she had had lovers before him. He had been the spectator of her dreams for almost her entire life. It had been his only link with her. But hearing her talk about it in front of him. Knowing what must have happened on that sofa was too much.

“I don’t want to know what you did on that sofa or with whom you did it,” he said coldly, his stare fixed on the street.

“What are you talking about?” she asked puzzled.

“I don’t want to know what you did on that fucking sex sofa!” he barked, finally turning around to face her.

The coldness in his eyes froze her on the spot. She could feel his jealousy and hurt seep from the crack in his mind shield. She could see it in way he was standing in front of her, his muscles tensed, his jaw set, his lips reduced to a thin line. Her eyes went from him to the couch behind her. Sex sofa. Her eyes went wide at the realization.

“No, no, no!” she blurred. “I never… Red, look at me,” she took a step forward but stopped when he shook his head.

He didn’t want to listen to her, she realized. Closing her eyes, she did the only thing she could; she opened her mind.

Red took a step back at the force she used to break his defenses and suddenly, he felt her presence engulfing his body, the softness of her curves against him, the impalpable heat of her love and trust. He closed his eyes at the sensation and saw her, the childhood memories she chose to share with him.

Sam forbidding her to play on the sofa; Liz waiting for him to leave the room to climb the furniture and slide along its curve, her mirth filling the room. He didn’t need anything more to understand.

When he finally opened his eyes, she was standing there, in front of him, their bodies just shy of touching.

“You used a sex sofa as a slide?” he asked dumbfounded.

“I didn’t know what it was until you told me,” she replied her cheeks flushed with embarrassment.

He laughed. The sound bubbling in his chest when he pulled her to him, closing his arms around her, his head buried on the crook of her neck, his mental walls crumbling before her, filling the both of them with joy.

Slowly, she felt his laugh recede to give place for something else. She felt his lips brush against the thin skin of her neck, nipping lightly at her pulse point. Liz moaned softly when she felt his hands travel down her back to settle on her buttocks. Without any warning, he lifted her, forcing her to wrap her legs around his waist to keep her balance.

Raising his head from her neck, he smiled smugly before leaning forward to capture her lips in a searing kiss. His tongue immediately invaded her mouth, distracting her long enough to bring her to the sofa.

“Hold on to me,” he breathed against her lips.
Her arms closed around his neck and her legs locked behind his back. She ground her hips against his when she felt his hardness press against her center. Red hissed at the sensation, bucking against her in a desperate attempt to find some more friction. She felt his hands leave her body, her grip on him tightening when he leaned forward.

Red’s arms braced on the upper curve of the sofa, Liz felt the material touch her back and loosened her grip on him, sliding slowly from his arms to the couch. She looked up and smiled. He was standing in front of her, his legs on each side of the couch, a smug smile on his lips, the tensed material of his pants hiding nothing of his arousal. Without a word, he let his hands caress her thighs, traveling up until his fingers sneaked under the hem of her blouse. Slowly he inched it up, the sensation of his skin on her sending shivers up her spine, her body covered with goose bumps.

“Don’t burn my childhood house to ashes,” she warned when she felt the heat radiating from his body.

Red smiled, closing his eyes to reign in his powers. Once sure he was the master of his emotions, he closed his fingers on her top and pulled it up. Liz had no choices but follow the movement. Her back leaving the couch, she raised her arms and let him take her blouse off. She could feel the cold wind from the opened windows brush against her skin, but the heat emanating from Red’s body was enough to keep her warm.

“So beautiful,” he breathed, taking the exposed curves of her body in.

Liz felt heat invade her cheeks. She’d need time to get used to the devotion and love in Red’s eyes when he was looking at her.

Slowly, almost reverently, Red’s fingers traced her curves, brushing tenderly the side of her breasts before heading south. Liz wriggled under his touch when his fingertips caressed her sides, her breath itching in her throat when he stopped, his hand flat on her lower belly. His other hand landing near her head on the upper curve of the sofa; he bended forward, his lips brushing hers sensuously.

She gasped when she felt his fingers slid under the waistband of her pants and he used her surprise to invade her mouth. His tongue seeking hers, battling for control, she closed her arms around his neck, keeping him in place. He drank the moan that escaped her lips when the button popped open under the pressure of the hand teasing her in her pants.

His mouth leaving hers to trace her jaw, Liz’s hands left his neck to busy themselves with the buttons of his shirt. She loosened the tie around his neck, sliding the collar of his shirt out before pushing the shirt down his shoulders, leaving the strip of fabric hanging from his neck.

His mouth was sucking gently at her pulse point when she put her hands flat on his chest, histing her fingers in the salt and pepper hair she found there. She gasped at the sensation of his teeth on her throat, the hand near her head moving to fist in her hair. She moved her hands down his chest, groaning when the remaining buttons of his shirt and waistcoat stopped her.

“Up,” she said, pushing him in an upward position. “Take off your clothes,” she ordered when he looked at her puzzled.

Smiling smugly, he took a step back, licking his fingers wet from her arousal clean before finishing to unbutton his shirt letting it slide down his arms along with his waistcoat.

“Leave the tie,” she said form her spot on the sofa, when he crooked an eyebrow at her, his hands on the knot at his neck.

“Kinky,” he said under his breath, bending to untie his shoes.
He toed them off before sitting on the couch at her feet to take off his socks. From the corner of his
eyes, he saw her straightening, her feet sliding from the couch to land on each side, straddling the
piece of furniture. She watched him stand up and her hands shot up to grab him by his belt when he
was about to take a step back. She pulled him back to her, her fingers working his belt open.

He hissed when she nipped at his lower belly, the sound of his zipper being slid down almost
drowned by their ragged breath. She let his pants slide down his legs and pool around his ankles, her
hands running up his torso and closing on his tie to pull him down. She kissed him, smiling when he
parted his lips to let her in. She moaned at the heat of him, wondering for a fraction of second how
he could manage to keep his powers in check.

She suddenly felt a heat wave brush her when she slowly slid his underwear down his hips. Too bad
for being in control, she thought. Once the offensive piece of clothing was on the floor, she broke the
kiss, looking him in the eyes. The hungered darkness in his stare sent a shiver up her spine. Slowly,
deliberately, she took hold of his tie, coiling it around her hand and pulled, forcing him to, once
again, stand a leg on each side of the narrow sofa.

She smiled at the sight, his nakedness proudly displayed in front of her while she was still mainly
dressed. She could feel the heat radiating from his body when she let her eye roam his body. He was
gorgeous. A wicked smile on her lips, Liz straightened, her hands running up and down his stomach,
she suddenly kissed the tip of him, making his hips jerk forward.

“No need…”
“I want to,” she whispered, her breath grazing the heated skin throbbing in front of her.

Her eyes never leaving his face, she let her mouth trace his length before going back to the tip and
taking him slowly in her mouth. She could feel the muscles of his thigh tense under her hands and
heard the sharp intake of air he took at the hotness of her mouth around him. She could tell it was
taking all of his self-control not to thrust his hips into her mouth.

She smiled around him when his hand landed on her head, his fingers fistig in her hair before
releasing. She run the flat of her tongue on the underside of his cock, tracing slowly the vein running
up his length. Hollowing her cheek, her lips closed around the ridge, she swirled her tongue around
the head, probing the small hollow she found there with the tip of her tongue, tasting the saltiness of
his arousal.

The cry that left his lips was music to her ears and she let him slid as far as she could into her mouth
when his hips jerked forward, the tip of him hitting the back of her throat. She fought the gag reflex,
her hands gripping his hips to keep him in place when he started to thrust uncontrollably into her
mouth.

“Sorry,” he panted when he felt Liz’s nails dig into his hips.

He felt her smile around him, her teeth scratching at the heated skin with every movement of her
head, the burning heat of her mouth almost sending him over the edge. He knew he was close, he
knew he had to stop her, but he was weak. The Phoenix, the most elusive and feared entity in the
world, the legend, was rendered powerless by his Soulmate’s mouth.

“Stop! Stop! Stop!” His fingers fistig in her hair stopped her movements, and she opened her eyes,
looking up. “Not like this.”

She let go of him with a popping sound and, her eyes never leaving his, she run teasingly her tongue
up his length.
“For God’s sake, Lizzie!” Red cried out at the unexpected gesture.

Her smug smile left her lips when his hands flashed to her waistband, peeling her pants and underwear form her in a swift movement. He groaned when the boots still on her feet stopped his movement. Fumbling with the laces, he finally threw her shoes over his shoulder, taking off her socks, pants and underwear in the same pull, leaving her only clad in her bra.

She was trembling with need on the surface of the sofa, her legs parting to let him see how ready for him she was. He growled deep in his chest at her wetness, his cock throbbing at the need to be buried in her. He took a deep breath to calm himself; he was so close that the sight of her was almost enough to send him over the edge.

A knee between her parted legs, he bent forward, a hand next to her head supporting his weight, he let his other hand creep up her torso to stop at the valley between her breasts. He smiled smugly, his head tilted to the side and Liz looked down when he put a single finger on the bridge at the front of her bra.

Suddenly, she felt heat on her skin, her nipples hardening at the sensation and the bra fell open, releasing her breasts. Looking down, she saw the still smoking burned edges of her bra.

“I liked this one,” she said reproving.
“I’ll buy you another one,” he replied.

Her retort was lost in a gasp when his mouth closed on her nipple, his tongue swirling around the taut peak, his teeth scraping at the tender skin. His free hand sneaked down her belly, caressing her skin, sending jolts of electricity to collide with the ones from his mouth around her nipple, at the pulsating heat burning between her legs.

“Red,” she breathed, pleading.

He looked up, bright ice blue eyes smiling at her. His tongue curling around her nipple, his fingers buried themselves into her tight nest of curls at the apex of her legs. He moaned at the slick heat he found there. Parting her slowly, he let his fingers spread the wetness pooling between her legs, using his fingers, as a painter would use his brushes, to paint her. She cried out, her back arching when he brushed against the tight nub of nerves hidden there. Red let her nipple slide from his mouth, his eyes locked on her face, drinking in the sight of her bliss. His thumb applying a subtle pressure on her clit, he suddenly buried two fingers into her core, turning her into a mass of wriggling flesh. Her inner muscles gripping around his fingers, pulling him deeper, he kept moving, prolonging her climax until she lay boneless on the couch, its curves supporting her spent body.

Panting, she clumsily grabbed his tie hanging just before her eyes, brushing her chest, and pulled his mouth to hers forcefully. She moaned into his mouth when she felt his fingers slip from her, his hand sticky with her arousal gripping her hip. She could feel the maddening need to be buried deep inside her burning through their link, tainting his emotions in red.

She squealed when, breaking the kiss, he stood up, both is hands closing on her hips, he suddenly turned her around, forcing her to kneel on the couch, her hands on the upper curve. His hand flat between her shoulders pushed her tenderly forward. She followed his lead, her belly and hips against the soft curve of the sofa, displaying her backside to his hungry eyes. Liz felt goose bumps spread on her skin at the intensity of his stare. She turned her head when she felt his heat behind her, his left hand landing beside her elbow.

His mouth capturing her in a fierce kiss, he closed his free hand around his length, positioning himself at her entrance, he slipped into her from behind, the kiss breaking against the intensity of
their union, cries echoing in the room. Both hands braced on the couch, they stayed still basking in the mingling of their heat, their body, and their soul. Kissing tenderly the skin of her back, he started to move, his hand closing on her breast when she raised her uppéd body, arching her back, meeting his thrusts.

Liz gasped at the novelty, the position allowing him to bury himself deeper into her, his length brushing against her soft spot with each thrust. She missed the feeling of his whole body sliding against hers, the feeling of his eyes on her, drinking her in, but the tenderness and slow pace Red had set making it up for what was missing. As if sensing her unease, Red’s lips brushed the nape of her neck, his tongue tracing her spine, the change of angle turning his deep thrusts into shallow ones, his length almost slipping out of her when he bent to kiss the small of her back.

“I love you,” he breathed against her skin.

With one of his hand braced on the couch next to her elbow, the other one pinching tenderly her nipple, she squealed when she felt a ghostly finger circling her clit, not touching it directly. She could feel another immaterial fingertip teasing her where they were joined. He was touching everywhere, his ethereal presence wrapped around her shivering body while he thrust deeply into her, his lower belly rubbing against her buttocks.

“Come for me, my love.”

The sound of his voice echoing in her mind was enough to send her over the edge. Her walls closing around him, she cried out, light bursting behind her closed eyelids and he kept thrusting and thrusting, prolonging her orgasm until she collapsed on the couch, her sweaty brow on the leathery material. She could feel him still hard inside her, his hips jerking, losing his rhythm. And, suddenly, he went still, his muscles tensed, his ghostly presence fading away to let place to a burning heat spreading in her belly before he collapsed on her back, his arms barely strong enough to keep him from crushing her under his weight. He kissed the nape of her neck clumsily, his ragged breath cooling her sweaty skin.
“Tell me what happened between my father and the Guild,” Liz asked softly, feeling Red’s arms tighten around her body.

They were both seated on the couch in the living room of Jefferson’s house, Red’s back against the armrest, Liz sitting between his spread legs, her back against his chest. After cleaning the mess they’d made on Sam’s sex sofa – why Sam had a sex sofa was something Liz didn’t want to think about – they’d ordered Chinese take out and, after eating, retired to Liz’s childhood bedroom. If she concentrated on the sensation, Liz could feel Red’s sleeping body curled against her back in the bed they were sharing, her own body dead to the world. They had both been exhausted by the time the sun started to set in Nebraska.

“I can only tell you what he told me when we were thinking about calling on the Guild to help you after the fire. I don’t know the whole story,” Red said, almost reluctantly.

Liz nodded silently. She was glad to be here and not in the real world to have this conversation. Things seemed less frightening in a dream. She traced Red’s fingers where they rested on her belly slowly, waiting for him to start his story.

“When we were looking for a way to…”
“Break our link,” she supplied, when he was obvious he wouldn’t say the words. It was still difficult for her to think about all those years they could have spent together, but she knew Red and Sam had made the right decision.

“Save you. We tried to save you,” he said firmly, his fingers gripping hers on her belly. “Anyway. We were discussing the options and I suggested calling upon the Guild to help us. I knew it would mean being stripped of my powers, and most likely being thrown into a dark hole of a prison and forgotten. But my only concern at the time was your safety. I would have endured years of torture if I only knew that you’d be alive and happy.”

“But my father refused?” she prompted when he stopped talking, obviously lost in his memories.

“Yes. He had had some… problems with someone in the Guild. It happened before I joined, I heard some whispers after he brought me to the Post Office when he found me. Something about falling in love with someone he shouldn’t have. When I asked, he didn’t want to tell me; the only thing he would say is that Diane cast them out when she discovered their relationship, but I think that wasn’t the only reason,” he explained.

“Diane? But she’s an Elder! It’s part of her job to keep us safe,” Liz exclaimed, surprised.

“She’s not what she seems to be, Lizzie,” he whispered. She could feel him looking around as if searching for some eavesdropper.

“Can someone listen when we share a dream? I already know we can feel it, but…”
“I don’t know, but we still have to be prudent,” he replied, tenderly kissing the nape of her neck to reassure her.

“Who was the woman Sam fell in love with?” she asked suddenly, and felt Red chuckle behind her.

“You’ve already met her.” She could hear his smile in his voice.

“Is she part of the Guild?” she asked, frowning, trying to remember the female Dream Walkers of
her father’s age.
“No.”
“No way!” she burst out, after a few seconds of silence.
“Yes.” Red was laughing in earnest now. In their shared dream, they couldn’t hide their thoughts
and Red knew exactly what conclusions Liz had drawn.
“Really? Mr. Kaplan? I can’t believe it!”
“You should! What a scandal!” he laughed. “You know the rules. As Loners, we can marry outside
the Guild, but God forbid we fall in love with another Loner,” he continued in a bitter tone.
“What did Diane do?” Liz asked reluctantly — she could feel anger and disgust emanating from
Red.
“She tried to kill Kate,” he replied, matter of fact.
“What?” Liz left his arms to turn around and look at him. She couldn’t believe it.
“Kate’s Gift is not as useful as Sam’s.” He shook his head sadly. “When Sam found out a few
months after Kate disappeared, he confronted Diane and threatened to expose her, so she banished
him. She would have curbed his powers, closed him into his own mind, but Sam was too powerful.
He escaped and left Washington to hide here, in Nebraska.”
“Did he… Did they… Mr. Kaplan and Sam…?” She didn’t know how to ask the question.

Children liked to think that their parents didn’t have a life outside taking care of them. Even less a
sex life.

“I met Kate here when I visited your father with Jennifer. I don’t know what happened to them after
that. The next time I saw Sam was the night of the fire, and he was alone,” Red explained, taking
Liz’s hands in his.
“How did you end up working with her?”
“I heard about a Dream Walker who specialized in ‘cleaning’ for hire. Imagine my surprise when I
realized it was Kate. We’ve been working together since then.” He smiled at the fond memory.

Liz stayed silent, lost in her thoughts, slowly tracing Red’s fingers with her own. She still had
questions about the Guild and Diane, but she had to integrate this new information with the picture
of Sam she had in her mind. She’d always known her father wasn’t a monk – even if she didn’t want
to think about that aspect of his life – but meeting the living proof of that assumption was different.

“Is that why Diane doesn’t like me?” she asked suddenly, raising her eyes to Red.
“Partly, yes, although I suspect that the fondness of her Soulmate toward you is the main problem.”
“Alan… He’s always been nice to me. Since the moment I joined the Guild, he has looked after me.
Do you think he knows about what Diane did?”
“I’m sure he knows,” he replied, waiting to see if she would ask the question he was waiting for.
“You told me that… something was… rotten in the Guild…” she began hesitantly. “Was that what
you meant?”

Red hesitated, hiding his thoughts behind his mental shield; he pondered what he could tell her
without putting her in any more danger. He knew that the truth would be in the open soon. He could
feel it; their quest for the Fulcrum would lead them to dangerous places.

“Come here,” he said instead, opening his arms for Liz to scoot closer.
“You’re still hiding things from me,” she said reprovingly, feeling his arms wrap around her.
“The truth will be out soon enough. Let’s make the most of the calm before the storm,” he replied,
kissing the crown of her head tenderly.

Liz raised her head to look at him with a knowing smile. She could feel him hardening against her
belly. Her hands on his shoulders, she kissed his lips, her tongue breaching the barrier of his teeth to
taste him. She moaned at the heat that welcomed her, the brush of his tongue against hers clouding
her mind. She gasped at the strange sensation engulfing her suddenly, but Red kept her against his chest, his arms and legs encircling her body. When she opened her eyes, she realized they weren’t in the living room anymore, but in their bed, completely naked under the sheets.

“How...?” she breathed.
“We’re in a dream, my love,” he said softly, releasing his hold on her.
“I really have to learn how to do that,” she murmured, her hands cradling Red’s head when he started to kiss her throat.

She was lying between his spread legs, his foot caressing her calf tenderly; she looked down at him, the ice blue of his eyes battling with the darkness of his arousal. Her hands on his chest, she straddled his hips, his burning hardness trapped between her legs, she could feel heat waves seeping from his body every time she moved her hips. She ran her fingers through his chest hair, her nails scraping lightly at his skin, his cock sliding between her lower lips and grinding against her clit with each of her thrusts.

“You’re killing me, sweetheart,” he groaned, raising his hips to increase the friction.
She looked down smugly, eyebrow crooked, waiting to see what he would do to reciprocate her teasing. She yelped when his hands gripped her hips suddenly, pulling her upward on his chest until she was straddling his head, the width of his shoulders spreading her open.

“Lovely,” he groaned, admiring her glistening core.

She took a sharp breath when he lowered her, her knees sliding on the mattress, until his lips met her wetness. She knew she should have felt exposed and embarrassed, but the moment his tongue brushed against her clit, every single thought left her mind, her hips bucking with each assault of his mouth. He sucked on the tight nub of nerves, his hands on her hips trying to keep her in place with no luck. With her hands gripping the headboard – covering the imprint he had left there – she had the leverage to fight his grip.

Looking up from between her legs, Red groaned around her clit at the sight before him. Sweat glistened on her skin; the bouncing of her breasts while she rode his mouth mesmerized him.

“That’s it, my love,” he rumbled, his mouth leaving her clit to thrust his tongue into her wet entrance.
He whimpered at the taste of her, her arousal coating his tongue, his hands tenderly caressing her buttocks, encouraging her to find her release. She kept moving on him, her hips thrusting faster; he chuckled at the sound that left her lips when he moved his tongue back to her clit, his hand sliding down her buttocks, his fingers stopping at her entrance waiting for her to thrust downward.

“Raymond!” she cried out as two fingers slid into her core, finally sending her over the edge.
Her muscles gripped his fingers, and he kept thrusting, humming against her clit, prolonging her orgasm, her bliss coating his hand and chin. She was magnificent.

The moment his fingers slid into her, Liz knew she was lost. A howl left her throat and her vision blackened, her body tensing around him, then she felt something strange happen. She suddenly felt as if she was in two places at the same time.

Liz gasped, her fingers linked with Red’s on her belly, she could feel him move behind her, inside her. She opened her eyes suddenly, her breath hitching in her chest when she realized her leg was over his hip and he was thrusting slowly into her from behind.
“What…?” she breathed, feeling heat coil in her lower belly.
“Shhh… Enjoy,” he rasped into her ear.

She closed her eyes when he kissed the nape of her neck and suddenly, she was back in their dream.

_Liz opened her eyes, and found herself in their bed, sprawled on her back, Red looking down at her. The moment he saw her eyes were open, he inched his hips forward and she felt his length slide into her. She looked at him, eyes wide. She could feel him in both places, thrusting slowly into her. She could feel him filling her in their dream when he withdrew in real life and vice versa. The sensation was overwhelming._

“How?” she breathed out, her eyes opening, as she felt Red’s body slide against her back.
“I don’t know,” he panted, his hand sliding down her body to tease her clit.

She gasped at the sensation, suddenly realizing how close she was. She could feel him increase his pace in their dream, his sweaty body sliding against hers, his chest hair rubbing against her hardened nipples.

“Come for me,” he breathed in her ear, his fingers pinching her clit.

She could hear his voice reverberating in her mind, trapped between his ethereal body and the solidity of him behind her; she knew she wouldn’t last any longer. Closing her eyes when she felt the first wave of heat spreading from the point they were joined, she felt her consciousness rip in two.

“Stay with me,” he groaned, when he felt her muscles tightening around him.

But she couldn’t. It was too much. Her vision blackened and she wasn’t there anymore.

_“Lizzie!” he cried out when he felt her back in their dream._

_She was wriggling underneath his body. Linked as they were, he could feel her release spread into her body, her muscles gripping at his length to keep him inside her as long as possible, her nails biting into the skin of his back._

Her fingers crushed his hand in a vice-like grip on her belly and he kissed the back of her neck. He could feel her consciousness shifting from dream to reality and back again without her consent. She was lost and he was the only anchor keeping her whole. His hips still thrusting, he wrapped his mind around hers, engulfing her in his heat and love. A wave of love flooded his mind and he let go of the meager control he had left. His muscles tensing, he lost his grip on reality and let the heat of his release carrying them to another world. Linked as they were, they both experienced the blow of their joined orgasm as one, the sensation nothing they had ever felt before.

“Oh my God,” Liz breathed when she finally came back to her senses.

Red’s arms, still around her body, pulled her close, molding her curves to his, short breaths brushing the nape of her neck. She turned her head around as much as she could and kissed the corner of his mouth. Their barriers had collapsed under the intensity of their lovemaking and their minds were fully open for the first time since they met. They both could feel the heat of the flames burning their shared dream down to ashes.

“You lost control,” Liz murmured, smiling at the realization that he had burned their imaginary bedroom instead of Sam’s house.
“You did too, my love,” he replied, feeling the scarred skin of his back tingle. “Sleep now,” he added on a breath, his fingertips brushing against her belly.
She didn’t reply; interweaving their fingers, she squeezed his hand once before drifting into a dreamless sleep. Red smiled behind her, his lips brushing her shoulder tenderly, he looked at the clock on her bedside table. 3:42 am.

*********

The sound of Red’s phone ringing jerked them awake a few hours later. Leaving Liz’s body reluctantly, Red turned around and picked up the phone.

“Yes,” he answered, his voice a murmur. “We’ll be there in a moment,” he said after a few seconds listening to the caller.

Hanging up, he put the phone back on the bedside table and sat on the edge of the bed, his head low.

“What is it?” Liz’s sleepy voice asked.

When he didn’t reply, she tried to read his emotion through their link, but his thoughts were closed to her — all she could feel was the faint pulsing of hurt seeping through the cracks in his mental shield. Scooting closer, she put her hand on his shoulder and felt the shiver that ran through his body. His muscles were tense under her touch.

“Red,” she said tenderly. “Talk to me.”

“We have to get to the hospital,” he replied, his voice breaking.

“No! No, no, no, no,” she breathed. Her hand leaving his shoulder, she curled her body into a fetal position and felt the tears burn her skin.

It wasn’t possible. It wasn’t true. They had made a mistake. Pain burst through her and she let out a wracking sob. She immediately felt Red’s arms around her, his mind wrapped around hers, trying to shield her against the agony, but only adding his pain to hers.

“We have to shower and go, sweetheart,” he breathed against her hair after a moment of silence.

Slowly, he disengaged his body from her grip and took her hand to help her up. Through his own tears, he saw her distraught state, the light he loved so much gone from her eyes.
I'm so sorry for the long wait. I know it's been almost a year since my last chapter but I hope you'll still enjoy that new chapter.

Thank you so much MinP1072 for your help!

Mr. Kaplan was waiting in the entrance hall when they arrived at the hospital. Liz took a look at the woman’s ashen face and stopped dead in her tracks, her fingers slipping from Red’s grip. She could feel the ice spreading in her bones now that Red’s presence wasn’t keeping it at bay anymore.

“Lizzie, no,” Red said, scared when he felt her shield rise between them.

She couldn’t face it. She couldn’t face the death of Sam. Her father was dead and she was, once again, an orphan. She tried to close her mind, to lose herself in the agony of her loss, when she felt Red’s hands squeeze her shoulders forcefully.

“Look at me,” he ordered.

She could feel his mind pushing against her shield, seeping through the cracks until she felt it shatter and her soulmate’s presence invade her mind.

“I won’t let you shut me out,” he said softly, his lips brushing her forehead.

“It’s too much,” she murmured, her eyes filled with tears.

He took her in his arms, his chin resting on the top of her head, and felt the first tears soak into his shirt.

He remembered the months after losing his family. He had closed himself in so tightly that even Sam hadn’t been able to reach him. He had spent days walking in his mind palace, seeking solace in the memories of his time with his daughter. He had almost died, letting his body wither, too caught up with his memories to care.

Until Alan had come. He had given Red a purpose, a reason to fight. Revenge. Revenge against the ones responsible for his loss. He knew now that he had been played, manipulated, but he couldn’t help being grateful. Without Alan, he would be dead and Lizzie would still be a Loner.

He couldn’t let her fall into the same trap; couldn’t let her stop caring. He couldn’t let her die.

He was lost in Liz, when he felt a hand touch his shoulder. He slowly disengaged his consciousness from hers and opened his eyes to face Kate.

“The doctor asked if you wanted to see him,” she said, her voice hoarse.

“No…”

“Yes.” Liz cut him off, her eyes fixed on Kate.

“Lizzie, sweetheart, you don’t have to…” Red said softly.

“I do,” she replied, leaving his arms.
She was hiding her thoughts from him, but he still could feel that something had suddenly changed in her mind. He watched her take a step toward Kate and slowly take the older woman in her arms.

“Lead the way,” Liz said, as she let go of Kate.

Something passed between the two women before Kate broke eye contact and turned around. Red took Liz’s extended hand, puzzled by her attitude. He went along silently when she tugged at his hand, following Kate to the morgue.

It wasn’t until he saw Liz in front of her father’s covered body that he understood what she was about to do.

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Feeling Red’s mind brush her mental shield brought Liz out of her trance. She could see what he had gone through when he lost his family. Images of his daughter filled her mind with a strange kind of serenity. She could still feel the pain tainting every memory, but love was the predominant emotion. The love he felt for his daughter, for his wife, for Sam. And for her.

“You’re a Healer, Lizzie. You can’t give up. You’re a Healer,” she heard his voice, tender in her mind.

Yes, she was a Healer, she was born to help people, to save them. She couldn’t give up.

“Yes,” she said, cutting Red off when he was about to refuse to see Sam.

She was a Healer. She couldn’t give up.

“Lizzie, sweetheart, you don’t have to…,” he said softly.
“ ‘I do,” she replied leaving Red’s arms to take a step toward Kate.

This woman had been Sam’s lover. She had been the woman he loved. The woman he had risked his life for. The woman he had left the protection of the Guild for.

She was a Healer. She couldn’t give up.

Taking another step forward, she closed her arms around the other woman’s small frame and closed her eyes a few seconds. If it hadn’t been for Diane, this woman could have been her mother. She had to do something for her.

Looking into Kate’s eyes, a hint of a smile spread on her lips.

She was a Healer. She couldn’t give up.

“Lead the way,” she said, letting go of Kate.

Extending her hand, she waited until Red linked his fingers with hers before following Kate through the labyrinth of hospital corridors. When they reached the morgue, the doctor waiting for them started to speak, but Liz didn’t hear a single word she said. Red’s words were still echoing in her mind again and again.

She was a Healer. She couldn’t give up.

He was right. She had been trained to save lives. It was in her blood, the essence of her power as a Dream Walker. And with Red by her side, she knew she could achieve the impossible.
Without a word, she followed the doctor into the dimly lit room and, still holding on Red’s hand, they stopped in front of a metallic table covered by a dark grey sheet. She felt her resolution quiver when she saw the still form of Sam’s body under the sheet.

“Can you leave us?” she asked the doctor, her eyes never leaving the table.

“Of course. Ask a nurse to bring you to my office when you’re done. I’ll be waiting,” the doctor replied.

She squeezed Kate’s shoulder and nodded to Red before leaving the room.

Unshed tears shining in her eyes, Liz took a deep breath before stepping forward. Her fingers slipped from Red’s and she felt him tense behind her. He clearly didn’t know exactly what she was planning on doing, but she knew that he could feel her resolve. And he was afraid; so was she. But she had to try.

“NO!” Red cried. But it was too late. Liz’s fingers were wrapped around Sam’s ankles and her eyes closed.

She could feel Red trying to pull her back but he was powerless in the face of her determination. Pushing him away, she let her consciousness seep slowly from her body to Sam’s, leaving behind only a thin thread to keep her linked to her own self.

It felt strange. She was used to live bodies — to the movement of blood around her, to feeling a heartbeat giving her a pace, a rhythm to follow to heal her patient, to keep her from taking too much, too fast. But now, she was welcomed only by stillness and cold. She could see the damage to Sam’s lungs and liver, but couldn’t do anything.

Slowly, carefully, she tried to move things around. Pushing lightly at the still heart, she infused some of her strength into the dead muscle. She stood still for a few seconds, waiting for movement, waiting to see the heart pinken and beat, starting the blood flow again so she could really begin healing her father. But nothing happened.

At the back of her mind, Liz could faintly feel Red’s presence. He was calling her back to her own body. But she couldn’t go back.

She was a Healer. She couldn’t give up.

So, she let go. She let go of everything that was her, everything that held her back.

She let her life force flow from her body to Sam’s.

And suddenly, she felt it. A flutter of Sam’s heart, just a tiny shiver across the muscle. She tried to pour more of her life into his heart, but she wasn’t strong enough, She couldn’t keep it beating. She was desperate — she had to do something, had to find the force to bring him back.

Without warning, she felt a wave of fresh power flow through her mind and she directed it toward Sam’s heart. Joy overtook her when she saw the grey hue of death retreat from the flesh and the blood start to move again around her, rapidly followed by the inflation of the lungs.

She had done it! She could see life spread in the previously dead body.

Then, abruptly everything went still, the life force she was still pouring into Sam’s body to keep it moving stopped; she felt a wave of pure heat burst through her mind and she understood.
To save Sam, she was killing Red.

Panic took hold of her and she thrashed wildly, trying to find a way back to her own body, but she couldn’t. The thread she had left behind had been severed when she had decided to let go of her life to save Sam’s. She was now trapped in a dead body, not knowing what was happening to Red.

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The moment Liz closed her fingers around Sam’s ankles; Red knew what she had in mind. He had to stop her or he would lose her, too.

“NO!” he cried, but it was too late.

He could feel her slipping away from him, her consciousness leaving her body and flowing into Sam’s. With all his strength, he closed immaterial arms around her, trying to pull her back into her own body, but he soon realized it was useless. He could feel her life draining through his fingers until nothing was left for him to hold onto.

Opening his eyes, he took in his Soulmate’s stiff form, her fingers clenched around the dead body’s legs, the veins bulging at her neck and sweat shining on her brow.

“What’s going on?” Kate asked, panic in her voice.

“She’s killing herself to save Sam!” he exclaimed, exasperation and fear battling in his tone.

“Do something! Sam would never have wanted that!”

“Don’t you think I already know that? She’s too deep into his body, I can’t reach her!”

Suddenly, without warning, Liz’s body collapsed on the cold floor of the morgue and Red felt his heart miss a beat at the feeling of his link with Liz unravelling. He knew he had to act swiftly or he would lose her forever.

“Watch over us,” he said to Kate, his arms already around Liz’s still body.

“What…”

He had already closed his eyes. Liz’s inert body cradled against his chest, he sent a wave of pure strength across the thin bridge still linking them, taking the risk to make it crumble under his assault. But he couldn’t let her go without a fight.

He could feel her, her consciousness taking his life in and pouring it back into Sam’s body.

“Red! Stop!” he heard Kate’s voice from far away. “You’re going to kill yourself! Stop!” He felt a sharp pain sting his jaw and opened his eyes, confused.

Kate was kneeling in front of him, her hand cradled against her chest, tears running down her cheeks. She had punched him, he realized. She had punched him in the face and severed the thin link he still had with Lizzie.

He couldn’t feel her soul anymore. In his arms, her body was barely breathing. Her unseeing eyes were open, the light fading rapidly. Pressing his trembling fingers against her neck, he felt her pulse slowing down.

“She’s dying,” he murmured, suddenly calm, looking up to meet Kate’s stare.

“What are you waiting for, you moron? Go get her!”

“I can’t! The link is gone. I can’t reach her!”

“Raymond! Listen to me.” She waited until his eyes finally focused on her. “You are the most powerful Dream Walker we have ever seen. Even when Sam broke your link when Elizabeth was
child, you were still able to find her. You were her imaginary friend. Even without the Soulmate link, you were able to find each other. You can find her. You can bring her back.”

Red eyes stayed focused on Kaplan’s for a few seconds, marveling at the strength and confidence he could see there, before closing his own eyes and diving deeper into his own mind than he had ever done before.

“I can feel her, but she’s avoiding me. It’s… it’s like she’s dancing around me but I can’t catch her,” he said under his breath.

“Bring her to place she feels safe. Somewhere calm and familiar. Somewhere she can find herself again.”

Red nodded and started to build the Writer’s House around them.

She was still out of his reach, but she seemed to calm down slightly. Once the room was fully formed around them, Red stepped into the living room, taking in the familiar smell of old books and sunshine, and took place behind the piano while Liz’s presence stayed abstract. He knew she was there with him, but she had no physical shape yet.

His hands on the keys, he started to play softly. His fingers dancing at the familiar rhythm of Richard Marx’s *Right Here Waiting*, he watched as the energy making Liz started to gather and, under his scrutiny, he watched her body slowly appear in the middle of the room.

He saw her take a deep breath, then she opened her eyes and looked at him.

“I’m sorry,” she sobbed suddenly. Her arms wrapped protectively around her shaking body, and she collapsed on the couch, tears running down her face.

In a matter of seconds, Red had her in his arms, his nose buried in her hair, tears of relief shining in his eyes.

“Don’t you dare do anything like that again. I thought I had lost you,” he breathed against her scalp.

“I love you,”

“I’m sorry,” she repeated, finally looking up at him. “I had to try. I had to,” she said trying to make him understand.

“I know sweetheart, but… You scared me. I couldn’t feel you anymore. Your body was dying and I couldn’t find you.”

She saw and felt the raw fear he had felt when she had plunged into Sam’s body, an echo of what she had felt when she had realized she was stuck there.

“My daddy is dead,” she breathed against Red’s neck, sobs wracking her body as she finally faced the truth.

Red pulled her even closer against his chest and let the tears of relief at having her back, and sorrow at the loss of Sam flow freely from his eyes.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Once again, I'm so sorry for the long wait.

Thank you so much MinP1072 for your help!

Four days. It had been four days of pure agony. Her heart was broken beyond repair, but she couldn’t help being relieved it was finally over. Sam had been buried an hour ago and she had stood in front of that gaping hole in the ground alone.

Red had deemed it too dangerous for him to attend. The Order was after them, and even though Tom Keen had probably reported the new development in her life to his boss – the forging of the Soulmate link between her and Red – Red didn’t want to make an easy target for them. So Liz had gone alone, at least physically – Red’s mental presence had surrounded her the whole time, lending her his strength when she needed it, whispering soft words of comfort through their link.

After almost losing herself in her father’s dead body, they had practiced, had worked on strengthening this new aspect of their link. They could now use their bond to communicate outside their shared dreams. It wasn't perfect, but thankfully, it was enough to help Liz through the funeral.

Liz walked up the front steps of what was now her house, knowing it was full of people she had no wish to see or talk to. Her fellow Dream Walkers from the Post Office were here, along with the Elders Harold Cooper, Alan Fitch and Diane Fowler. Liz had ground her teeth when she had seen Diane arrive. Diane was the one who banished Sam from the Guild; she was the one who ordered the murder of Mr. Kaplan. The moment she had seen Diane, Liz had looked for Kate, but the small woman had been nowhere to be seen.

Donald, Aram and Samar had been an added source of comfort — even if they had stayed on the sidelines, she had been happy to see them. Even Meera Malik had made the trip. Whatever her motives in coming, Liz had been touched to see her there.

But now that the ceremony was over, Liz dreaded the moment she would have to actually talk to those people. And knowing that so many powerful Dream Walkers were mingling with Sam’s perfectly normal friends was an added stress.

She was standing on the porch when the door finally opened and Red appeared in front of her. She had known for a while that he had been waiting for her to find the strength to open that door, but seeing him there silently waiting for her, sent warmth through her body. She crossed the space between them and buried herself in his embrace.

“I love you”, she breathed against his chest, feeling his arms tighten around her shivering body. “Come on in, sweetheart. The sooner you show yourself, the sooner it will be over.” He kissed the crown of her head tenderly before leading her inside.

When Liz stepped in the living room, she froze. The tension in the room was palpable. On one side stood Sam’s friends, and on the other, the Dream Walkers, but the rift between them wasn’t the origin of the tension. At the center of the Dream Walkers’ group, Diane and Kate were facing each
other. The wind was soaring around the two women, their eyes blazing. Behind Mr. Kaplan, Liz could see Donald, beads of perspiration forming at his brow as he tried to contain Diane’s unleashed power. Behind Diane, Alan was whispering furiously, trying in vain to calm his Soulmate.

“Fuck,” Red breathed behind her.

Stopping Red with her hand on his arm when he moved to intervene, Liz walked toward the group, her back straight, fury written on her features.

“Meera, can you make it so my father’s friends won’t remember what is about to happen?” she asked when she reached the woman.

“Yes.”

“Thank you.” Liz smiled tightly, watching Meera turn her focus on the other side of the room. Once she was sure Meera had them, she turned to Ressler. “Donald, I need you to protect my father’s friends,” she said.

“But… Diane and…” his strained voice was trembling, his eyes never leaving the Elder facing him.

“I’ll take care of her,” Liz replied.

Nodding slowly, Donald’s focus switched suddenly, his power expending around the group on the other side of the room. A hurricane suddenly rose around the two women, destroying half of the room. Liz felt Red’s hand on her shoulder, steadying her against the force of the wind Diane was unleashing.

“STOP!” Liz yelled, leaving Red’s protection and stepping in front of Mr. Kaplan. “Stop it now! My father is dead. The man you banished from the Guild, the man you abandoned simply because he fell in love with the wrong person is dead. I won’t let you disrespect his memory this way. I don’t even know why you came. Sam loved Kate; she has more right to be here than you will ever have,” Liz barked, her words piercing Diane like an arrow.

The wind stopped suddenly, and Diane’s eyes widened in surprise.

“How dare you!” she growled, jaw clenched in rage.

“I dare because my father is dead. I dare because you have no right to attack anyone in my home — especially a woman whose only crime was to love and be loved by the man you thought would be yours!

Silence finally fell over the room, all eyes turning to Liz.

“How…” Diane breathed.

“I’m not stupid; I put the pieces together. I’m sorry, Alan, but you know it’s true.” Alan nodded silently from his place behind his Soulmate. “And now, everybody else knows. Now, either you behave, or you leave. Your choice,” Liz said, physically and mentally exhausted.

She could feel Red’s presence behind her, at once lending her his strength and shielding Kate from Diane’s wrath.

“Don’t even th…”

“Enough!” Alan cut his Soulmate off. “Enough, Diane, let’s go home. I should have known it was a bad idea to come. I’m sorry Elizabeth, your father was a good man, and Kate…”

The small woman smiled sadly from behind Red, nodding her acceptance of Alan’s unspoken apology. Grabbing Diane’s hand, Alan led her to the front door under the eyes of every Dream Walker in the room. Sagging against Red’s chest, Liz finally let out the breath she hadn’t been aware of holding, feeling the tension leave her body with it.
“Can you keep your shields up a little bit longer?” Kate’s voice broke the silence.
“Yes,” Donald and Meera replied simultaneously.
“Alright. I need everybody to stay perfectly still,” Kate ordered, looking at the people standing around her.
“Keep your eyes open, sweetheart, you won’t see something like this every day,” Red whispered in Liz’s ear.

Suddenly, Kate disappeared and everything that had been knocked down by Diane’s temper tantrum flew back to its place and, no more than two seconds later, Mr. Kaplan was back, the living room neat and clean once more.

A collective gasp of amazement came from the assembled Dream Walkers, and Kate smiled almost shyly in return.

“I also took the liberty of cleaning the kitchen, dearie,” she said to Liz.

Red suddenly barked a laugh and Liz couldn’t help but join him. She finally understood why Sam had fallen in love with this severe-looking woman. Leaving Red’s embrace, Liz closed her arms around Kate and breathed a “thank you” into the small woman’s ear.

“Can we…” Ressler’s voice broke the silence and Liz suddenly remembered the people on the other side of the room.
“Oh my God. I’m sorry Donald, Meera. Yes, you can let them go. Although…” she looked at Meera, not knowing how to ask for a last favor.
“Spill,” Meera said, her voice betraying her fatigue at keeping a perception shield around such a large group of people for so long.
“Can you suggest that it’s time to leave?” Liz asked shyly.

Meera nodded curtly before focusing back on Sam’s friends.

“It’s done,” she said, indicating to Ressler that he could withdraw his shield of protection.

Chairs appeared behind them when both of them suddenly collapsed, a faint breeze from Mr. Kaplan the only indication that they hadn’t appeared out of thin air.

Silence fell over the Dream Walkers as, one by one, Sam’s friends came forward to say goodbye to Liz.

When they were gone, Liz felt a tentative hand brush against her shoulder. turning around, she smiled softly at the woman behind her. Slowly, her fellow Dream Walkers walked to the couch on the other side of the room, leaving them alone. Everybody except Red and Cooper.

“Thank you,” Kate said awkwardly. The woman wasn’t used to being helped, but Liz’s intervention had been highly appreciated.
“You’re welcome,” Liz smiled. She liked the strange woman who could have been her mother. She still didn’t know why Kate hadn’t been part of her life with Sam.
“How did you know?” Kate asked, frowning.
“I saw Diane earlier today. I could feel Alan pouring strength into her so she wouldn’t collapse,” she explained before turning to Red. “They’re more powerful than they show. If they can share their strength, it means they know more about our link than we want them to.”
“We’ll figure it out later, sweetheart,” he replied, kissing her brow tenderly.

Liz nodded before turning back to Kate.
“Nobody reacts that strongly in front of a grave if there isn’t more going on,” she explained. “I took a wild guess and got it right.”
“I’m sorry for what happened today,” Cooper said suddenly, his eyes going from Liz to Kate.
“Diane and Alan are the oldest and most experienced Elders, they should have had more restraint.”
“The grudge a scorned woman can hold is the most powerful and lasting thing in the world,” Red murmured.
“You speak from experience, I take it,” Liz retorted. She knew her Soulmate had had a life before her, but hearing him talk about his past lovers hurt her more than she would have thought possible.
“As a matter of fact, yes,” Red replied. “Oh don’t look at me like that, Lizzie! Nothing ever happened between Madeline and I. Not that she didn’t try many times through the years, but you are the only one I’ve ever wanted.”

Sensing the weather turn between the couple, Kate and Harold decided it was time for them to leave them alone and went to join the other Dream Walkers grouped around the couch.

“Trouble in paradise?” Ressler asked, indicating Red and Liz.

He and Meera were sharing the couch, exhaustion written on their features. Aram and Samar were toying with an old broken radio a few feet from them.

“Nothing they can’t overcome,” Harold smiled. “How are you?” he asked, his eyes going from Donald to Meera.
“It’s been a long time since we had to sustain such a large shield for so long,” Meera replied. “I’m not sure I can use my Gift at all right now.”
“Same,” Ressler said. Frowning, he tried to expand the bubble of power that perpetually surrounded him, but nothing happened. “I’m not even protected myself anymore,” he said uneasily.

A sudden calm engulfing their corner of the living room startled them. Liz and Red, their fingers intertwined, had moved behind the couch. The energy flowing back and forth between them was palpable, sending waves of calmness and love around them. They were in perfect harmony; they embodied what a Soulmate bond should be, what every Dream Walker dreamed of.

“Stay with us tonight, we have plenty of room,” Liz said, a soft smile on her lips.

Pain was still written in her eyes and it would be for a long time, but with her friends, her family and more importantly Red beside her, she felt strong enough to overcome her sorrow and keep going forward. They had work to do, a fulcrum – whatever that was – to find and an evil organization to dismantle.

OoO

In the woods that spread behind the house, a group of men was waiting patiently. Among them, sitting on camping chairs, two men were bent over the blueprints of a house. One of the men was pointing each room in turn, explaining the layout of the house to the man in front of him.

“And there,” he pointed a room on the second floor, “that’s her room.”

Blue eyes shining behind his glasses, Tom Keen smiled wickedly.
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

I'm so so sorry for the looonngg wait. I really hope some people still remember this fic and will find the time to read it. I'd like to thank you all for the comments left during that year and a half I've been gone.

I'd like to thank my dear friend and wonderful beta MinP1072 for the amazing work she does on this story. Without her you'd be reading something written mostly in frenglish.

And MarieFieve, who I finally convinced after 4 years of begging to read my fic, for the time she spent reading and brainstorming with me, even though she's not even in The Blacklist fandom. Without you, I would still be stuck, not knowing where I wanted to go with the story.

After everybody was settled for the night, Red and Liz retired to Liz’s childhood bedroom. Both were exhausted after the emotionally tiring day. Kate had chosen to leave shortly after dinner; staying in the house in which she had loved Sam too hard for her. Liz would have done the same, but they still had to do before getting back to Washington and the Post Office.

“Come here,” Red breathed in the silent room, opening his arms for Liz.

Putting the scorched pink stuffed bunny she was holding back on its shelf, Liz smiled tiredly at her Soulmate and walked into his embrace. She needed him. She needed the physical contact even more than the perpetual psychic presence provided by their bond.

“Sam would be so proud of you, sweetheart,” Red said, his nose buried in Liz’s hair. He loved the smell of her, always soothing him when he needed to stay grounded.

“You know, that’s the only memento I have from my time before Sam,” Liz replied, turning in Red’s arms and looking at the bunny.

He looked at the toy, frowning. He didn’t remember Liz having the bunny with her when they got out of the burning house so long ago. Sensing his confusion, Liz left his arms and went to take the bunny off its shelf.

“I tried to save him when the flames got to me. He was my best friend and I didn’t want him to burn so I stuffed him into my shirt. I didn’t remember him until Sam gave him to me after… I guess it was after you blocked my memories and broke the link between us. He told me I had Bunny with me when I got to his place, that it was a gift from my parents. Of course, I didn’t remember but I kept that little guy with me; even when I was old enough to get rid of most of my childhood toys, I kept Bunny.”

Her eyes were distant; lost in her memories as she was, she didn’t hear Red closing the distance between them and slip his arms around her waist, his chin resting on her shoulder. He ran his finger along the scorched side of the bunny, a slight shock of static electricity nipping at his finger, before kissing the side of her neck tenderly.
“Let’s go to bed,” he breathed against her skin.

OoO

“Let’s go,” the man breathed when the lights in the house had been turned off for two hours.

Silently, ten men wearing black military fatigues and tactical vests, assault rifles hanging across their chests, walked out of the woods behind the darkened house.

“Do you know if there is an alarm system in the house?” the leader asked.

“No. Sam was powerful enough not to need any more security,” Tom replied. “Remember that we need them alive, Garrick. Blaine wants to interrogate them.”

“Yeah, I know,” the man named Garrick replied gruffly. “But he only needs the traitor and his girl. The others are mine to do with as I want.”

Tom didn’t understand why Blaine had thought it would be a good idea to pair him with this disfigured trigger-happy mercenary when his own Gift was powerful enough to subdue every obstacle he might encounter in the house. He had had Liz under his influence for years and even with the her bond with Reddington, he knew he could control them. But no, Blaine had decided that Garrick and his men were to “help” him.

When they reached the door, the group stopped and Garrick turned his eyes to Tom. He knew that the other man didn’t like him. He wasn’t a freak like them all, but he knew his job and did it well.

“Care to _persuade_ the door to open by itself?” Garrick hissed mockingly.

“Fuck you, Garrick,” Tom growled. The man was pushing his buttons when he needed to keep his head clear.

Chuckling under his breath, Garrick motioned for one of his men to join them on the landing and watched the man pick the lock. The door opened silently after just a few seconds. One by one, Garrick’s men walked silently through the door and spread through the room. Having studied the blueprints of the house and knowing how many people were staying the night, they knew someone had to be sleeping on the sofa in the living room.

Their best guess was that Elizabeth and Raymond would be in Elizabeth’s room, Aram Mojtabai and Samar Navabi in the master bedroom, Harold Cooper on the sofa in Sam’s office and Meera Malik in the guest room. That left Donald Ressler in the living room.

With a movement of his hand, Garrick ordered his men to stay put and turned to Tom. When the man in front of him didn’t move, he raised an eyebrow.

“What?” Tom breathed, irritated by the mercenary.

“What are you waiting for? Go and use some of that magic you’re so proud of,” Garrick smirked.

“It’s not… Whatever,” Tom replied, slipping silently into the room.

The mercenary was pissing him off. He knew he had to stay focused if he wanted to complete his mission. He knew it was his last chance to please his leader after having been discovered by that stupid bitch — Blaine had been most vocal about what would happen if the mission weren’t successful. Even with how powerful and useful his soulmate was for the Order, he knew that Blaine would not lose any sleep on their death. He had to capture Liz and Reddington and bring them to the
Order; there was no other choice if he wanted to stay alive.

Walking through the living room silently, he stopped behind a couch that faced an old TV, its sound muted. The moving light of the commercial break was enough to see that they had been right. Ressler was sleeping on the couch. Tom knew most weapons would not make a dent in the powerful shield of the young Dream Walker, and that’s why he was the one standing over the guy and not one of Garrick’s men. Taking a deep breath, Tom focused his mind on the sleeping man, blocking everything else in the room. Slowly, he put his hand on Ressler’s shoulder.

“Wha…” Ressler’s eyes shot open.

“Sleep,” Tom murmured. His voice seemed to reverberate in the empty room and soon, Ressler’s eyes closed again and he started to snore lightly. “It’s done,” Tom said, not turning around, making sure that the man would not wake up anytime soon.

“Impressive,” Garrick sneered. “Are you sure Ginger here won’t wake up? More importantly, can you do the same to the Paki upstairs?” he asked hopefully.

“Yes, I’m sure, and no, I can’t. She’s one of the most powerful Dream Walkers alive and a master in her field. I’m pretty sure she would sense me if I even walked into her room,” Tom replied, looking at the ceiling as if he could see Meera Malik stir in her sleep.

“I’ll have to take care of her myself then,” Garrick said with a disturbing gleam in his eyes, sending a disgusted shiver up Tom’s spine.

With a simple hand gesture, Garrick ordered his men to get up the stairs, leaving one behind to make sure the man on the couch would not wake up. With a last look down at Ressler, Tom followed them. Methodically, the group split up, a pair in front of each door. Hands on the handles, everybody waited for the go from Garrick before opening the doors and slipping inside their assigned room, when suddenly, a gunshot from downstairs rang through the house.

OoO

Something was floating in Donald’s head. Something important, but he couldn’t remember what. He knew he was sleeping, that awareness a leftover of his Soulmate link with Audrey. Even if he didn’t have anyone to share a dream with anymore, his brain was still trying to form the link. It was the reason most Dream Walkers didn’t survive the death of their Soulmate long — most of them didn’t have the strength to keep going without half of their soul. Some went crazy and killed themselves. Donald didn’t exactly know what had kept him alive when Audrey died, but he knew that Liz was a big part of the reason he was still breathing.

That awareness even in his sleep was what was nagging him right now; something wasn’t right, he could feel it. Trying to wake up, he found that he couldn’t. It was the first time something like that had happened and it scared him. What could keep him asleep against his will?

Calming his mind, he started forming the clearing he used to share with his Soulmate. It hurt, but the pain helped him focus and, in the darkness of the forest surrounding him, he saw a silhouette emerging. Squinting to make out the face of the man walking toward the opening in the trees, Donald felt his heart miss a beat. Tom Keen was standing at the edge of the clearing, a smug smile on his lips and his eyes twinkling behind his glasses.

“Shit!” Donald thought. There was only one reason Tom Keen would be in his dream. They were all in danger and he was trapped in his own mind without any way to warn his friends sleeping upstairs. Taking a deep breath, Donald closed his eyes and focused all his strength on breaking the
compulsion he knew he was under.

“Sleep… Sleep… Sleep…”

He could hear the voice murmur the word into his ear, clouding his mind, breaking his concentration. He couldn’t let that happen. If Tom Keen was in the house he had to wake up, he had to stop him. Suddenly, he saw another silhouette emerge from the tree, but contrary to Tom the new entity was shapeless and blinding bright.

“Use what you have inside you, my love,” the ethereal voice breathed.

“Audrey?” he choked. Was it possible?

“No, my love. I’m only a trace of what you shared with her, I’m not her.”

“But… why? How?” Donald couldn’t move his eyes from the remnant of his Soulmate.

“You don’t have much time left, my love. If you want to save your friends, you have to use the strength she left with you. You have no other choice. I’m sorry.”

“But if… It’ll burn what’s left of you, won’t it? You’ll cease to exist. I’ll lose you again.” Tears were running down Donald’s face, his hand inches from the light.

“You MUST save them. I’m just a ghost of what she was. A pale imitation. Remember Elizabeth. Remember how she helped you. Today is your chance to help her in return. To help them all.”

“I can’t… Audrey… Please…” he cried, not daring to touch her but not willing to let her go.

“You must. Know that I loved you. I loved you more than anything, but I’m not here anymore, you have to live for both of us and for that, you need to save them.”

The compulsion was still there, he could still hear Tom’s voice pushing him deeper into sleep, but the moment his fingers touched the light, he felt a burst of raw energy flow through his body and the dream shattered around him.

With a sharp breath, Donald opened his eyes. Staying perfectly immobile, he closed them again and looked for the presence that had visited him in his dream but couldn’t find anything. Tears stinging his eyes, he pushed the strange experience to the back of his mind, and focused on the room around him. He could hear the scuffing of a boot on the hardwood floor. One man, walking back and forth in front of the stairs. If he moved fast enough, he could take him down before he could call for help.

His ears following the movements of the man behind him, Donald rolled silently from the couch and, once sure the man hadn’t heard him, he rose to his knees, taking a look over the back of the couch. One man. Military gear. Assault rifle across his chest. Handgun at his hip.

Expanding his shield about a foot around him and making it supple enough to absorb the impact of the bullet he knew the man would shoot as soon as he moved from his cover, Donald took a deep breath and inched to the side of the couch. He had to move fast, so he waited for the man to be as close as possible before launching his body at him.

The shield took the only bullet the man had the time to shoot before he tackled him to the floor; his shield now back to being on the surface of his skin, he grabbed the head of the fallen man and banged it on the wooden floor until he was sure the man would not get up. He took the man’s weapons and ran up the stairs, toward the noise he could hear. He didn’t know how many mercenaries were in the house but the man he had taken down wasn’t a Dream Walker, so maybe
none of them were, except for Tom Keen. Considering how powerful his friends were, it shouldn’t be too complicated to take them down.

Reaching the top of the stairs, he put his back to the wall and sneaked his head in the hallway. Every door was open but he couldn’t see anyone when suddenly, he felt electricity fill the air. With a spark, a man flew from the nearest room to hit the opposite wall; he crumbled to the floor and didn’t get up. Walking silently to the door, he stepped inside ready to shoot but all he saw was Samar, her hand on the shoulder of a kneeling man, arcs of electricity seizing his body until he too, crumbled to the floor.

“What’s going on?” she asked, before turning to make sure her soulmate wasn’t hurt.

“My best guess is eight men and Tom Keen. Split into teams of two, leaving one downstairs,” Ressler replied, already moving to the door. He could hear voices coming from the other rooms.

“Stay here,” Samar ordered to her Soulmate before kissing him. “Ressler, give him your gun.”

Donald did as he was told and together they left the room, leaving Aram behind. The next opened door was Cooper’s and when they looked inside they could see he was in control.

“They’re here for Liz and Reddington! Go!” Cooper exclaimed, his eyes never leaving the two men held against the wall by their own rifles pushing at their throats.

Nodding, they kept walking, knowing before even reaching it which room was Liz’s. Heat waves were rolling from the room; they could see the smoke rising from the floor. Sneaking his head into the room for what was supposed to be a second, Donald froze. Two men were facing away from him, their guns aimed at the bed. He felt his eyes burn and fill with tears at the heat, but even with his watery vision, he could see Red, bare chested, crouched on the bed, ice blue eyes fixed on the men, teeth bared, one hand extended in front of him sending heat waves, the other behind him, resting on Liz’s thigh. She was kneeling behind him, her hand on his shoulder.

“Get out of here,” Red snarled.

Donald saw the man closer to him move slightly and wrapped his shield around the couple on the bed at the exact moment Tom Keen and a man who must be the leader walked out of Meera’s room at the end of the hallway.

“Donald!” Samar called, sending arcs of electricity toward the two men but she was too late.

Two gunshots rang through the house. The one that would have pierced Red through the heart rebounded on Ressler’s shield while the second one shredded Ressler’s thigh.

“Don!” Liz cried when she saw her partner fall to the floor, blood already pooling around him.

Red launched from the bed, hands extended in front of him; he hit the two men simultaneously, wrapping his fingers around their throats, turning them to ashes almost immediately.

“Oh my God! Donald!” Liz ran to the man lying on the floor, but Red stopped her, pushing her behind him.

In the hall, in front of them, stood Anslo Garrick, Tom Keen and Samar. One of Tom’s hands was on Samar’s shoulder, the other holding a gun to her head.

“Let her go,” Red said calmly.

“Nice to see you again, Raymond,” Garrick smiled.
“Let her go, or...”

“Or what? You’ve already taken one of my eyes, what do you want? The other one? Not happening this time, Reddington. You come with us, and I might let her live.”

“Lizzie, can you hear me?” Red asked, hoping she would not be too panicked to use their new power.

“Y... Yes. Oh my God, Red. Donald...”

“He’s not dead. You can still save him. But you have to listen to me now.” He waited a moment to make sure she was once again focused on him. “I’m going with them.”

“No!”

“They want us both, but they know that they only need to kill one of us to make sure the prophecy will never be fulfilled. They know that if they kill you, I won’t stop chasing them until they’re all dead.”

“They’ll kill you!” she sobbed and he could feel her fear through their link and her body trembling against his back.

“They’ll try, but not before they’ll torture me to find out what I know.” He engulfed her in his love, his immaterial presence around her the only thing keeping her on her feet, and slowly poured some of his strength into her body through their link. “You have to be strong now, sweetheart. You’ll have to find me. I know you can — we’ve always found each other, even without the soulmate link.”

And with that, he cut the mental connection. The whole conversation hadn’t taken more time than the blink of an eye.

“Let her go and I’ll come with you,” Red said, feeling Liz’s cold hand at the small of his back. She was scared, he could feel it, but it was the only way to save them all. “Take what is left of your team and let’s go.”

“You know Blaine wants both of you,” Garrick replied, his tone showing he was considering the proposition.

“And you know you can’t control us both. I’ll even let your pet here,” he said, nodding to Tom, “put his hand on my shoulder if it helps.”

Garrick stayed silent a few seconds before nodding.

“Alright. Keen, get ready.”

Red nodded and turned his back to them, locking his eyes with Liz’s.

“I love you,” he breathed, kissing her lips tenderly. “Find me,” he added through their link.

“How sweet,” Garrick mocked.

Ignoring him, Red squeezed Liz’s hands before walking calmly to the men waiting for him. As soon as he was standing in front of them, Tom let go of Samar’s shoulder, letting her drop to the floor unconscious, and grabbed Red’s wrist. Red felt Tom’s presence invade his mind and let his eyes turn blank. He couldn’t be more grateful of the weeks, even months Sam had spent invading his mind until he was capable of blocking him. And Sam had been way more powerful than Tom.
“Find me,” he sent the thought as lightly as he could.

“What’s that?” Garrick asked when Tom startled.

“I thought… Nothing. He’s trying to fight but I’ve got him. Let’s go,” Tom said, still eying Red suspiciously.

“Alright everybody!” Garrick yelled suddenly. “We’re going. We’ve got Reddington. Let us go and nobody will be hurt,” he added. When none of his men showed, he shrugged and turned on his heels to meet Cooper and Aram’s dark stares. “Move.”

The two men stepped aside and let the strange trio walk between them. Once it was clear they were out of the house, Aram ran to his Soulmate. He knew she wasn’t dead, could still feel her through their link, but he couldn’t reach her with his mind. Kneeling at her side, he cradled her head in his hands and kissed her. He could hear the commotion beside him, but Samar was more important right now.

As soon as she felt Red leave the house, Liz ran to Ressler. He was unconscious, blood still pouring from his leg. She knelt beside him, feeling the lukewarm liquid soak her sleep pants.

“Can you save him?” Cooper asked from the other side of Ressler’s body.

“I’ll try,” she replied, putting her hands on Donald’s leg and closing her eyes.

She let her mind slip into Ressler’s body. She met many small injuries — bruises from his fight with the man downstairs, a bump on his head from when he had fallen after being shot — but she focused all her powers on his leg and started working. Ressler was in good shape, his body more muscle than fat, but in that precise moment, Liz would have liked more to work with. Fat could be turned into energy to help the body heal; muscle worked too, but it was harder for her and for her patient. If she burned too much of him, he could spend months in recovery, but she had no other choice. Trying to keep the places she took from him equal, she directed the energy to his leg, feeling his heart beat furiously, his blood transporting everything his body needed to heal itself.

Next to them, Cooper watched with amazement as Ressler’s femoral artery knit itself back together, the blood ceasing to leak from his body. Then came the muscle, the severed fibers extending and merging until it was whole again. Then the flesh and finally the skin. He would have a scar, and the skin would be tender, but he was alive. Cooper’s eyes finally leaving the leg, he took in the young agent’s body as a whole and frowned. Ressler’s face was… skeletal. His cheekbones stood out sharp against his skin, emphasizing the hollowness of his cheeks. He could see the young man’s collarbones poking at the fabric of his t-shirt, the tip of his shoulders pointy now when they had had the roundness of muscles a few minutes before. The sigh leaving Liz’s lips brought him out of his perusal.

“He’s gonna sleep for a few days, but he’ll live,” she said, exhausted. She had poured as much of her own energy as she dared in the healing process, but she had to find Red and she couldn’t afford to lose too much of her strength. Looking around, she frowned. “Where is Meera?” she asked.

“She’s dead,” Aram replied, now sitting against the wall next to his Soulmate. Samar was awake, her eyes full of sadness and anger.

“They shot her in the head,” she added from between clenched teeth.

“They’ll pay. I promise you, they’ll pay for that,” Liz snarled, feeling anger rise into her chest before feeling Red’s immaterial hand caress her cheek. “But first, I have to find Red.”
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