

JENNA RECKTENWALD

# **The Red god: Free Teaser**

## **Chapter 1: Invitations**

Why is an empty room so boring yet comforting at the same time? The young girl, Mara, thought as she lay on her bed. She idly kicked her feet in the air, pretending to pedal a bike.

Normally she might be reading a book, scribbling on her drawing papers, or playing her Switch. But she wasn't tonight. She wanted to stay quiet and focused so she could try and make out her parents' latest argument, although it was boring waiting between loud remarks. She couldn't hear the softer speaking from her room.

"What's more important?! You know how..." Mara strained her ear and stopped kicking her feet for a moment, but the voice of her mother dissolved into the walls again. She thought she picked up a few more words but wasn't confident enough to make up her mind what the latest outburst was about.

Did she just mention Dad's new car? She resumed her imaginary bicycle, this time a little harder and more frustrated. It was a nice car. It smelled much less than his old red one. The girl didn't understand why her mother would complain about it again. Sure, they had argued about the money it cost at first. They always argued about money. But that argument didn't last a terribly long time.

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How long had this argument been going again? Mara rolled over to grab her bedside clock and pulled the face towards her. 7:34 p.m. Only about forty minutes, but it didn't seem to be wrapping up. If anything, the snippets she could hear were getting louder and more frequent now.

"Whatever! Just make all the decisions! You'll be happy then!" The latest voice rung out. Her dad usually ended the arguments, so she wasn't surprised to hear his voice this time.

The girl slowly stood up off the bed. She liked to pretend she was a spy, a ninja, or a ballerina at times like these. Tonight she decided she was a detective. Not a big-shot cop one, but one like Sherlock Holmes. She slinked one foot in front of the other, quietly making her way to her bedroom door.

As she put her ear to the crack of the door nearest the knob, she thought more about the latest detective book she read. Listening to doors was completely normal for detectives. She reassured herself and brushed her long brunette hair out of the way of her ear. She needed to maximize her listening powers to be a good detective, after all.

"...and then we'll need a sitter for Marigold too, but the neighbor can probably do that." Mara scrunched up her face in thought after hearing her mother's planning. It sounded to her like they were going somewhere. She wasn't sure how she felt about that yet. She didn't hate trips, but she often didn't love them either.

Planning, packing, and long car trips with both of her parents were usually draining. If they weren't prodding each other with comments, they were uncomfortably silent when it was just the three of them.

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The girl looked back to her bed where 'Marigold' lay curled up. She was Mara's cat, a short-haired tortoiseshell. She brought her home after finding the kitten dirty and alone in the woods behind their family house. Hershey was the name Mara started calling her due to her mostly brown coat, but her mother had crinkled her nose and said she could only keep her if she got 'a better name'. After shooting a dozen names down, her mother insisted on Marigold. It wasn't a terrible name, but it didn't suit her.

Mara frowned while remembering that day, but it turned into an impish grin as she walked over and started petting her furry friend. "Hershey," she whispered, so as to avoid any chance of her mother hearing, "it's okay as long as you don't mind me calling you it."

Hershey rolled over and let out a soft trill in response, begging for belly pets too. The girl obliged and gently ruffled the cat's stomach fur. After a few moments, Mara turned her head and noted that her parents had been quiet for the past minutes. Her dad's loud remark had been the last of the argument as she had thought. He always seemed to end arguments, but did it count if he did so by giving in to her mother? Mara wasn't sure.

Suddenly, she heard footsteps coming up the stairs. The girl panicked for a split second and grabbed her headphones and a nearby drawing paper. She hurriedly positioned herself on her bed, headphones on and paper in lap.

In one movement, her mother knocked and opened her bedroom door. "Mara, your dad and I want to tell you about your cousin's wedding." Her mother started. She was a slender-built woman, not

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exactly short, but a head below her husband who stepped into the room behind her.

"Samantha is getting married in January. She and her fiancé have invited the whole family to the wedding, but it's a bit far away." Her mother sat on the end of Mara's bed and continued. "Because it's so far away, at a ski resort in Austria, we have to plan to be there for the week."

Mara looked thoughtful, trying to recall where that would be on the globe she and her classmates would take turns spinning around in geography class.

"Is that near Switzerland?" Mara guessed, thinking back to one of her classmates that bragged their dad had gone skiing there.

"It is! You're such a smart kid!" her mother exclaimed, but this compliment only made Mara wary. Her mother always acted nicer when she wanted her to do something, and she thought her own answer wasn't that special to warrant her mother's sudden smile.

She didn't notice or take concern at Mara's lack of response to her praise and continued. "It'll be a great time seeing the whole family! Some of your distant uncles, aunts, and second cousins haven't seen you since you were a baby! I'll get you a few new dresses for the trip, and we'll do both our hair up nice! It'll be a treat for all of us to go."

The girl sunk into her bed slightly. Not enough to visibly sulk, lest she get reprimanded, but enough to put a few extra inches between her and her mother sitting on the bed's edge. She thought for a moment while her mother rattled off more family facts, who on Samantha's

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fiancé's side would be there, who her mother was most interested in meeting or catching up with, and who she couldn't believe would get an invite.

"...and Samantha still talked to them after that. I don't know why."

Mara wanted to break out of the current tangent, so she looked over at her dad, still standing stoically a few feet inside the doorway. "Are kids really allowed there, Dad? It sounds far..." Mara trailed off with a worried expression. She hoped neither parent caught on that it wasn't entirely genuine. Yes, the long trip did worry her a bit, but she wasn't a scaredy baby. It was more the fact that she was sure the trip was entirely the kind of event her mother would enjoy, not her.

Her dad spoke for the first time since entering, "Your cousin specifically included you on the invite, Mara. You don't have to worry about that. We will have to get you a passport before the flight though."

"Oh! The passport photo!" her mother exclaimed, "I'll pick you out something to wear for it, and let's get it done tomorrow!"

Mara didn't have much hope of escaping the trip, but she was stubborn and thought it worth one more attempt. "Do passports cost money? I could stay with Beth instead!"

Her mother stood up from the edge of the bed and crossed her arms. The change in demeanor was one Mara was used to but hated. "Beth is a schoolmate, not your family. You're going on a family trip with your family." Her mother punctuated the last phrase with an air of finality.

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Mara snuck a side glance at her father. He was starting to check his phone, apparently done with the conversation as well. She knew he wouldn't help her out of this, so she faced further away from her mother, reaching to pet Hershey to relieve some of the tension. She replied, "Okay."

"Good. Me and your dad will take care of the appointment for the passport and take you tomorrow." Her mother loosened her crossed arms but kept a serious look on her face. "David, you and your new car can take us tomorrow, right?"

Mara felt bad for her dad after that comment, but she had to hide a little smile knowing her detective skills were top notch. She has been right about her mother bringing up the car in the earlier argument. She liked to imagine Sherlock would have ruffled her hair and told her good job. While lost in that imagined scenario, her dad and mother walked out of her room with some quiet remarks between them.

Mara was relieved to hear the door shut behind them. She let out a breath she didn't realize she was holding in and relaxed into her bed's headboard.

CONTINUED IN THE FULL BOOK: THE RED GOD

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## **THE RED GOD**

A suspenseful horror novel following Mara, an 11-year-old girl, as she navigates a difficult childhood and a sinister game. The Red god serves as an allegory of abuse consequences avalanching across a family and generations.

The matriarch of the Rockner family holds strangle-tight control over their public appearance, as did her mother before her. This is nothing new to the family's daughter, Mara. But when they are invited to their cousin's lavish wedding at a ski resort in Austria, something begins to expose their cracks and crawl inside.

A must-read for anyone who has their own family monsters. The consequences can stop at YOUR generation.

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## **THE OVERLAP**

Life in the 2020s has been hard worldwide due to climate changes, rising food prices, and political unrest. To Jas, a mid-20s woman living in the Midwest, this is daily life and nothing more.

Her life of work and more work is interrupted by a cataclysmic event dubbed later as ‘The Overlap’. Her city is turned into a war zone as half of the land is unrecognizably changed. As she struggles to survive the latest ‘once in a lifetime’ disaster in her Millennial existence, she meets him, an Overlapper man.

Going against her xenophobic neighbors, she makes friends instead of enemies. Together they find understanding and begin to uncover the real danger in this world.

The Overlap is book one of the Overlap series, slated for early 2025 release!

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