

## Saints and Sinners

### Chapter 10

He didn't put in on right away. Not so close to...

No, instead he gripped the small, metal ring. His fist clenched around it, eyes forward, feet stomping towards his house's front door.

He didn't stop, didn't think. Not until his home was far behind him. Way out of sight.

Then - and only then – did Jack unclench his fist.

He glared down at the black ring, cold as it was in the palm of his hand. Heart pounding, he reached down, lifted the ring, slipped it on his finger.

The world froze, colour bleeding away.

"Did you know?"

At first, nothing happen. The shadows didn't respond. But Jack had all the time in the world to wait.

"Did you *know*?" He repeated.

The shadows sighed, shifted in front of Jack and took the form of a pale man in a business suit – red eyes met Jack's cold stare.

"Would it matter if I did?" Damien asked.

"She's my *sister*!"

"Yes," Damien said simply.

Of all the people in the entire world, why did it have to be *Devyn*? Anyone else, and Jack wouldn't have had a problem ending them. Damien had said – or at least implied – that it'd be a 'kill or be killed' situation when it came to the White Ring's owner. He'd accepted that. Accepted what he'd have to do to gain the White Ring's power. But... Not *Devyn*...

"Why?" Jack demanded. "Why her?"

"You're asking the wrong immortal," Damien smiled. "Though, I must say I'm curious about *her* decision myself. She's never chosen someone so close. Her champion living under the same roof as mine... It's a first."

Devyn had the White Ring.

Jack's nemesis – his rival – was his *sister*.

The one who'd visited that children's hospital, cured all those brats. The one who'd healed *Drake*. It was all Devyn.

Did *she* know?

He hadn't worn the Black Ring around her – at least not in the ordinary, unfrozen world. Save for that one interaction – him chasing her through a hospital and losing her in the city streets – he'd never worn the Black Ring near her or tried using its powers on her. And that time – the chase – his face had been hidden by the blackness that coated his body whenever time stopped.

Jack had seen enough of the White Ring's owner – the curves of her body – to suspect who it might've been. But did Devyn have those same suspicions?

No. No, she couldn't.

She wouldn't have worn the White Ring so openly if she thought Jack might be her enemy.

"How do I get the White Ring from her?"

"The same way, I imagine, you'd take any other non-magical ring from a person," Damien shrugged, a grin splitting his lips. "Take it off them before they can stop you."

Could he do that?

A brief scene played out in Jack's imagination. Him tackling Devyn to the ground, wrestling the White Ring off her finger.

And, after that scene, an image of his sister's face. The betrayal and hurt, the hatred she'd have towards him if he attacked her like that.

But... But he could *erase* that. He could make her forget that he'd taken it from her. Make her forget the White Ring even existed. He was confident enough in his control over the Black Ring and its powers now. Erasing a few memories wouldn't be too difficult.

"The last time you underestimated her," Damien said, reading Jack's mind, "she got away from you. She was too fast for you to catch. Are you sure you'd be able to overpower her?"

"I have the height advantage," Jack muttered. And, even though his face was covered in chilly, total darkness, he still felt his cheeks warm. "And I outweigh her. I-"

"If you say so," Damien smiled. "Just so long as you're confident you're stronger than her. After all, should she manage to overpower *you*..."

Damien didn't need to finish the sentence. The implication was clear enough. If Devyn managed to turn the tables on him, turn Jack's attack around and overpower him, it'd be *Jack* who lost his ring – not her. And, for as short and cute as his sister might be, she *was* athletic. She *was* strong.

"Fuck!"

He had to do *something*. Get the White Ring off her *somehow*.

"Why *her*?!"

Jack strode forward, brushed past Damien.

He couldn't deal with this now. It was too much to process. He needed to think, needed time to come up with a plan. He needed a *distraction*.

Twisting the daughter's mind so that she found her father attractive and desirable had been simple enough. Likewise, making the father want to fuck his sexy daughter had been a walk in the park. The two of them – daddy and daughter – were on the brink of caving in. All they needed was one solid push.

But the mother? That was a different story.

Jack's goal with Alyssa's mother wasn't as simple as creating sexual attraction where there had been none before. Humans *existed* to fuck and procreate, the few limiters that existed when it came to family members were frail at best. All it took was a bit of gentle encouragement and a man or woman would set aside those bonds easily enough, embrace the taboo of it all.

But making it so that a wife – a mother – would accept her husband having an affair, with their daughter no less, was challenging.

At first, Jack had been tempted to do the same thing he'd done with Alyssa's father – make the mother attracted to her daughter. But, while do-able, it wouldn't have given him the opportunity to practice more subtle alterations of a human mind.

Mastering the Black Ring meant more than just making two people want to fuck.

It meant learning how to rewrite a person's entire identity – reshaping it to his will. From their interests and hobbies to their morals and ethics to their instincts and their fears. Unless he could take one person, give them an entirely new personality, the Black Ring's true potential would be wasted.

So, how would he do it?

How would he make a wife accept her husband and daughter having an affair without complaint?

It'd been a question he'd been asking himself ever since picking Alyssa as his practice doll. And it was that question he'd decided to distract himself with.

"I can make sex and incest less taboo in your eyes," Jack said as he circled the woman. "Give you a swinger's mindset where you don't care that your husband is fucking other women."

They were in the attic of Alyssa's home. The mother's work space. All around, there were drawers and cabinets filled with different fabrics. Silks and cottons and linen and lace and more. All in different colours and shades. A handful of mannequins dotted the attic

room, each one displaying an incomplete dress.

The woman herself sat on a wooden stool in front of one of the mannequins, measuring tape in hand.

"Or, I can strip away your ability to care. Make it so that you don't give a shit about them."

No, that wouldn't do. Jack wanted solutions, not more problems. Turning the mother into an uncaring, heartless puppet wasn't the answer. It was too ham-fisted. Not the delicate solution he was looking for.

"The most real 'answer' I can think of," Jack mused, "is to make you willingly oblivious. You'll know – or at least suspect – that something is going on, but you'll be too afraid to find out and know for sure. So you'll go out of your way to avoid learning the truth."

How many wives looked the other way when they knew their husband was cheating on them? How many pretended not to notice even the most obvious signs?

It was, in a way, self-preservation. Them not wanting to confront reality and risk changing their lives forever. Much easier to just ignore it; pretend it wasn't happening and go on living life as usual.

He could do that – make this woman look the other way.

Build up her willingness to be content first. Make it so she didn't have a drive to be 'happy' and would instead settle with 'comfortable'. Then drive home a fear of change. Make it so she dreaded the idea of losing everything. Build up her trust in her husband while also destroying the idea of 'love' in her mind – so she'd both be fine 'settling' for a decent marriage and home life while also not questioning anything too closely.

It'd take a lot of work on Jack's part. More than Alyssa and her father combined. But the end result would be worth it.

To the outside world, Alyssa's mother would be the same woman she'd always been. Unchanged. No-one would ever think she'd been altered.

It was exactly the kind of challenge Jack needed.

"Probably better this way, too," Jack told the woman as he placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. Above her head, the first cloud formed. "You won't actually have to deal with the betrayal or knowing that you're being replaced. You can just pretend everything is fine."

"Has anyone ever worn both rings at the same time?"

Damien tilted his head to one side, didn't answer.

"One way or another, either me or my sister is going to end up with both. I'd rather you tell me now than find out for myself later."

"You seem confident that it's you who'll win," Damien noted.

"She healed a bunch of kids for no reason," Jack shrugged. "She went to a hospital to do the same there. I love my sister, but she's not going to beat me. She's too short sighted. Too trapped by wanting to be a 'good person', whatever *that* means."

"If you say so," Damien shrugged.

"So, *has* anyone every worn both rings before?"

The demon man rolled his glowing red eyes.

Jack stared at him. Waited.

"Yes," Damien answered at last. "More than a few."

"So it *is* possible. When I have the White Ring, will I be able to alter peoples' bodies with it, like Devyn can?"

"If," Damien stated. "If you get her ring, then yes – you'll be able to use its powers. More than that, those marked by the White Ring will no longer be outside of your control."

"Drake," Jack said. "I'll be able to touch him?"

Damien nodded his head.

"Will I only be able to use the White Ring's power on him, because that's what's

claimed him, or will I be able to use the Black Ring on him too?"

"Both," Damien answered simply.

Jack paused, gave himself a moment to digest that information.

The white aura around Drake Damilio – the thing that protected him from Jack's mental manipulations – it'd be rendered useless when Jack got his hands on the White Ring.

He'd be able to erase Drake's mind. Remove that thorn from his life once and for all.

But, more than that...

"The White Ring's power," Jack said, staring hard at Damien's face. "If I have the ring, can I use it on myself?"

The shadow man let out a deep, amused chuckle.

"So close," he whispered to himself. "And yet so far."

"What?"

"Yes," Damien grinned. "You can use a ring's power on yourself. No, you can't use the White Ring to make yourself immortal. It can do many things, but granting agelessness is not one."

"I figured," Jack sighed, pushing down his disappointment. "If it could, one of my predecessors would've done it already. They'd still be alive and the rings would still be theirs."

It was subtle. A little twitch at the corner of Damien's mouth.

Jack's eyes narrowed.

"The rings," he said, watching Damien closely. "You immortals. You move on when the ring owner dies, right? You start looking for new owners."

"Yes," Damien answered, face unusually blank. "That's correct."

He was hiding something.

"They move on when their owner dies," Jack spoke slowly, piecing it together. "But that's not the *only* time they move on to find a new owner, is it?"

The look in Damien's eyes was unreadable.

He didn't answer the question, didn't speak a single word. Instead, the demon broke apart – returned to the shadows at Jack's feet.

Curious.

Jack sat outside a hospital – the same one he'd chased his sister through last time. It was night, same as it'd been then. Late and quiet and calm.

Rather than hiding in the shadows like last time, Jack was content to sit comfortably while eating some snacks.

People would walk by him every now and then; hospital staff and patients and visitors and the like. A few – mostly the hospital's staff – gave him odd looks. Pursued lips and curious glances.

Probably wondering why he was there, sitting on that bench. Why he'd been there for hours, unmoving but to eat his snacks.

A few had probably guessed that he was waiting. But for what, they had no idea. He was – to them – a mystery. But not a very enticing one. They had questions, but didn't care about the answers and so they didn't ask him or bother him.

He was waiting.

As unlikely as it might be, there was a possibility that Devyn would return here. Her kind, caring nature would compel her to help those 'less fortunate' than herself. She'd *want* to be here, helping all the sick and broken.

The only thing that was stopping her was Jack.

Or, more accurately, the Black Ring's shrouded champion.

Knowing his sister, Devyn would avoid confrontation. She knew she was being hunted, knew that someone else had prepared an ambush for her. So she'd avoid places

like this – hospitals and hospices and anywhere else sick or injured people would gather. Her fear of another ambush would keep her at bay, despite how much she wanted to help.

Chances were, she wouldn't come here tonight.

But she *might*.

Slim as those odds were, it *was* possible.

"What will I even do if she *does* show up?" Jack muttered, glancing around to make sure no-one could hear him. "She knows about me. Knows I'm after her."

Pepper spray and a taser. Devyn had asked their father to buy her pepper spray and a taser.

Would those things even *work* in frozen time?

"Probably best not to find out," Jack sighed.

He reached into his pocket – Black Ring glinting on his middle finger – and pulled out his phone.

He checked the time, let out another sigh.

Pretty soon, the sun would be coming up. No sign of Devyn, no hint of her being near. She hadn't stopped time for them, wasn't using her White Ring's powers in any way Jack could detect.

"She's probably asleep," he muttered. "I'm wasting my time."

But he didn't move. Didn't get up.

"Devyn..."

The White Ring. Jack wanted it. *Needed* it.

And his sister had it.

Which meant he'd have to take it from her. Somehow.

"I have the advantage of surprise, at least."

If she was sleeping, maybe he could slip the ring right off her finger before she woke? Simple and easy.

"She'd wake up," Jack shook his head. "No way I'd be able to get it off her like that. Not unless..."

Not unless he made sure she *couldn't* wake up.

His eyes flicked to the hospital. A building that'd have all kinds of drugs and medicines in it. The kind that would knock a person out for hours, keep them asleep even as they were being cut open and operated on.

He could stop time, snatch some.

"No," Jack grunted, forced himself to stand. "No, that's not the answer. It's not..."

Turning his back on the hospital, Jack nodded his head.

He knew what he had to do.

The bedroom door opened without a sound.

Dark and shadowed, the only sources of light were the LEDs of her digital alarm clock and the faint glow behind the curtains.

Outside, the sky was beginning to lighten. Wouldn't be long 'til the sun hit the horizon. Not long until that alarm clock began to buzz and woke her up. Just a few minutes.

But, for Jack, a few minutes could last a lifetime.

He stalked towards the bed, careful not to wake her.

She was already shifting, beginning to wake up. His sister always had been an early bird. He didn't have long to-

No. There it was.

His last ounce of hope faded away when he saw it.

Devyn was laying on her left side, facing away from him. And there, on the blanket, her right hand – White Ring visible on her middle finger.

So close, and yet impossible to claim.

If only she'd taken it off before bed. Set it down on her side table or something. But no. She'd worn it to bed. Just like she'd wear it when she showered, and when she was washing dishes.

When one had the power of a god at their fingertip, they didn't set it aside without reason. Not when another wanted to claim it from them.

That settled it, then.

Jack took a step back from her, focusing on the power of the Black Ring.

An instant later, his body was coated in pure darkness – cold and comforting. Time stopped flowing, and all colour vanished from the world. Off to one side, Damien manifested – leaning against one of Devyn's bedroom walls, watching silently.

The moment time froze, light shone out from his sister's White Ring – coating Devyn from head to toes. Her body shone brightly, beams of light poking through her blanked.

She shifted, pushed herself upright.

He couldn't see her face, but Jack could guess how confused his sister must've been right then.

Just like he'd guessed – correctly – what'd happen when he stopped time while she was sleeping.

Devyn, awake now, sat up in bed. Didn't notice him standing there.

“Huh?” Her soft voice spoke. “What's-”

“Hey sis,” Jack said, heart frozen, lips curled into a muted smile. “Rise and shine.”