

Saints and Sinners

Chapter 11

Devyn flinched back, hands against the wall behind her as she stared at Jack. Her head flicked to the side – to an empty corner of the room – before snapping right back to him.

"Hmm..." Jack hummed, nodding his head and pointing over at Damien. "Do you see him there, or is he invisible to you?"

Slowly, like a frightened rabbit, her head turned to the spot Jack was pointing at.

"What..." Devyn's sweet voice squeaked, her attention returning to Jack again. "Who are you? What do you want?"

"You don't see him, do you?" Jack said, more to himself than Devyn.

She couldn't see his immortal - Damien. And Jack couldn't see her immortal. Both of them – angel and demon – would be in this room right then, watching events unfold. Damien and Angela. Their little game reaching a pivotal moment.

"Relax Devyn," Jack said. "I'm not here to hurt you. It's me. Jack. Your twin brother."

The White Ring and the Black Ring. The two immortals and their game. Jack was certain he understood it now. He was *sure*. But there was just one more thing he needed to know...

Despite the brightness of his sister's face – her almost indistinguishable features – he thought he saw the realisation flit through her. Eyes widening, mouth dropping open, shock shaking her to the core.

"Jack?" She said, disbelieving. Then, more firm and confident, "*Jack?!?*"

"Yep," he shrugged, tension leaving his body. "It's me. Listen, sis. We have a lot to talk about and-"

"*You're* the evil one?"

"Evil?" Jack smiled. "I wouldn't go *that* far."

"You... You attacked Drake! You *broke* his *leg*! His spine was-"

"That *bastard* got what he deserved," Jack grunted. "You shouldn't have healed him. He doesn't deserve-"

"He's my boyfriend!" Devyn half-shouted, finally finding the courage to stop cowering. She jumped out of bed, faced Jack head-on. "Why would you *do* that to someone? Why would you-"

"He *deserved* it," Jack growled. "Fucker deserves a whole lot worse, too. And he'll get it, one way or another."

"Drake?" Devyn shook her head. "He's a good person. He's-"

"No, Devyn, he's not." Jack said, stared his sister right her her glowing white face. "Drake Damilio is an asshole. A piece of shit scumbag who torments me every chance he gets. He *pretends* to be a good guy. But really, he's a bully and a dick who doesn't deserve to breathe. He's trash, Devyn. You're just too blind to see it."

"You're lying," Devyn said. "He's not-"

"He is what he is," Jack grunted. "And I'll deal with him soon enough. That's not important right now. What *is* important, are *these*."

He held up his right hand, displaying the glowing red symbols rotating around the base of his middle finger. The Black Ring, indistinguishable from the rest of Jack's darkness-shrouded body.

Lowering his hand, he nodded to his sister's. To the glowing blue text rotating around the base of her bright white finger.

"I have the Black Ring," Jack stated. "And you have the White Ring. So, where do we go from here?"

That was the important question. The pivotal moment.

Would Devyn try to take the Black Ring from him?

It was possible. If she thought she was protecting someone, or believed she'd use

the powers more 'benevolently', she might well risk a confrontation – try wrestling Jack's Ring from him.

But then, would she really decide to attack her own brother for power? Was that something Devyn was capable of?

Jack crossed his hands behind his back – hiding the Black Ring from sight and hopefully reducing the temptation his sister must be feeling to steal it. He stared at her, waited for her to speak. Unlike him, Devyn was slow – she hadn't caught on to who he was right away. He'd had time to process the information, whereas she was still dealing with the revelation.

"I'm not giving it to you," Devyn said at last.

"The White Ring?" Jack shrugged. "I didn't expect you would."

"And I'm not just going to sit around and watch you hurt people. I-"

"Who ever said I was going to hurt anyone?"

"You already have."

"Shitbags," Jack stated coldly, "don't count."

"You didn't try to take it from her," Damien noted as Jack left his home. "And you outed yourself. Bold choice."

Jack waited until he was a street or two away from his house before speaking – didn't want Devyn overhearing, after all.

"Not yet," he said, eyes forward. "I'll get her Ring, sooner or later. Ideally, she'll give it to me herself. But, if not..."

He didn't want to have to take it from her.

Devyn was cute and kind. Naive, sure. No rationally-thinking person would've done the things she had. Healing the sick and injured like some old saint or something. But she was *good*. Innocent and compassionate.

Taking the White Ring by force – seeing that betrayal and hurt in her eyes – it wasn't something he was looking forward to.

"You can always make her forget afterwards," Damien said from the shadows at Jack's feet.

"I'm aware."

Yes, he could make her forget. And would do, if he needed to.

But all the same, attacking Devyn felt *wrong*.

Would it really be so bad not having the White Ring? He already had godlike powers with the Black Ring. Did he *really* need more?

Need? What did *that* have to do with anything.

He *wanted* more.

Jack sighed.

He was going to do it, wasn't he? Attack Devyn and take her White Ring – snatch it right off her finger.

"This game of yours," Jack said as he walked streets in the pre-dawn light. "You and Angela. You disagree about human nature. Something about if people are inherently good or bad? Selfish or selfless? Something like that."

Damien didn't reply.

"You each give your powers to someone you think will prove you right, someone who personifies the traits you believe define humans. Then you let them use those powers. Angela's champion heals people to make the world a 'better place'. Your champion manipulates people for their own gain. But... Not always."

Jack stopped, crossed his arms, waited. Sure enough, Damien formed from the shadows, stood in front of Jack with a curious expression.

"Power corrupts, right? People are notoriously self-loathing. We humans hate how we look, more often than not. How many owners of the White Ring have used its powers

on themselves – made themselves prettier or their dicks bigger? How many have given in to the temptation to make their lovers hotter?”

The corners of Damien's lips twitched. A tiny smile.

“And how many Black Ring owners tried manipulating a person's mind, only to find them hurting and suffering? How many of my predecessors set aside their personal desires and used the Black Ring's powers to heal a person's mental issues – depression and anxiety and all that shit?”

“Who can say?” Damien smirked.

“Good people doing selfish things, bad people being selfless. That's the game. To see which is more true – that people are good or evil. Naturally prone to being selfish or selfless.”

Damien said nothing, just smiled.

“You let your champions have your powers until one of you decides – are humans predisposed to being good or bad.”

“It has to be unanimous,” Damien said, giving a little shake of his head. “We have to *agree* with each other. Sometimes, Angela's champions cave to temptation and she's forced to agree with me to end that round of our game – lest her powers be used to cause more harm. And sometimes it's my champion that grows a conscience and becomes exceptionally boring, and I'm the one forced to agree with my counterpart in order to end that round and move on to the next.”

“So, if Devyn starts acting out of self-interest, starts being selfish with the White Ring's powers, the game ends?”

“Yes,” Damien nodded.

“And, when the game ends, both Rings disappear. We can't use their powers any more.”

“Yes.”

It was a good thing Devyn was so selfless, then. Her acting in any kind of malicious way was beyond Jack's ability to imagine. The odds of her ever giving in to temptation, turning into a selfish bitch, were slim at best.

Unless...

“If I were to take the White Ring,” Jack said, looking directly into those bright red eyes. “Would Angela – your counterpart – would she still treat Devyn as her champion, or would it be *me* she'd judge?”

“Whoever wears a Ring becomes the champion,” Damien smiled.

“So even if I got the White Ring, Angela would just see how 'selfish' her champion is and agree that you win the round. I'd lose both Rings right away.”

“Not right away,” Damien said. “We both give some time to our new champions. See what they do with both powers, and how it changes them.”

“How much time?” Jack asked. “If I get the White Ring, how much time is Angela likely to give me to 'change' before she throws in the towel?”

“A week or two,” Damien grinned.

Great. 'A week or two' of godhood before losing all that power and returning back to a normal, mundane, powerless life.

The information swirled around inside Jack's skull. Difficult to grasp onto all at once, but it was all there. The full puzzle. All he had to do was find the solution – a way of having everything and losing nothing. Some way of cheating the system, breaking the game.

“One last thing,” Jack said, following through with the thought before it'd even fully formed in his head.

He reached out his hand, poked Damien's bone-white cheek.

And there, above the demon's head, a thought cloud appeared. A black, smoke-like cloud with white symbols scratched into it – connected to Damien's head by a thin, black string.

Jack began reaching up to touch that cloud – the demon's mind. But his hand stopped short – wrist caught in an iron grip. Damien's fist curled around Jack's forearm.

"Careful now, Jack," Damien said, a cold smile on his face. "Don't go making the same mistake as Icarus."

The iron grip released, and Jack pulled his hand back, nodded his head.

So, in theory, he *could* alter the minds of immortals.

"In theory, perhaps," Damien noted. "But I wouldn't recommend trying it. We 'immortals' tend to be very *touchy* when it comes to mortals attempting to manipulate us."

"I'll keep that in mind," Jack said.

Damien shook his head, chuckled.

A moment later, he was gone – dissolved into the shadows.

Unfreeze time, knock door several times, step aside, wait for the door to open, freeze time again. It was a simple process, but one that put Jack on edge. What if – somehow – Devyn had followed him, was waiting for him to unfreeze time for himself so she could steal the Black Ring from his frozen body?

But no, it all went off without a hitch.

Sally Saunders opened her apartment's door and Jack slid himself past her – ducking under her arm and into the apartment.

He gave the place a once-over, searching for anyone unexpected. But no, Sally was alone. Just gotten out of bed, by the look of things. It *was* early morning. Chances were, Jack had been the one to wake her up with the knocking.

She was in a thin nightie, bathrobe tossed haphazardly over her shoulders. Under that nightie? Nothing up top – no bra straps, at least. And downstairs? No way of telling. Not yet, at least.

Jack headed to an empty room. Not the bathroom or bedroom; Sally could head to either of those once he unfroze time again. And there he waited, mentally willing his powers back into the Black Ring.

Colour returned to the world, Jack's heart started beating again, and a woman began cussing.

Not a fan of being woken up so early, it seemed.

He shrugged, smiled, waited.

After slamming her apartment door shut, Sally went to use the bathroom, then returned to the apartment's main room. He heard her muttering, though couldn't tell *exactly* what she was saying.

When the timing felt right, he stopped time again.

Would Devyn wonder what he was doing? Why he was starting and stopping time like this?

It felt odd – thinking of her that way. Like she was somehow involved in his plots and schemes. But then... she *was* involved. She was his 'nemesis'. His antithesis.

"Don't think about it," Jack told himself. "Focus."

He left the small room he was in, found Sally Saunders sitting on her sofa with her head tilted back – glaring at her apartment's ceiling.

The television wasn't on, there wasn't any music playing that Jack was aware of. The woman was just sitting there.

"What am I going to do with you?"

He already knew. He'd decided it some time ago.

Two test subjects. Two different focuses.

With Alyssa and her family, Jack was testing the subtle changes he could make – the faint tugs and pulls that'd change people, modify their thoughts. The kinds of changes that didn't alter who they were as people, but simply changed their viewpoint on specific subject.

Alyssa was still an artist, still liked and disliked the exact same things. Her personality hadn't changed. The only thing that was different was her desire to fuck her father. Same with him. Same with the mother.

But Sally? Jack wanted to try out other things with her.

Bigger things.

Sally Saunders was an attractive woman. Too attractive to be working at some small store in the middle of nowhere. If not for those tired eyes and her perpetually slumped shoulders, she could have made it as an adult model easily. Put a bit of make-up on that pretty face, style her hair, strip her naked, and pull out a nice camera.

Dark brown hair past her shoulders – it looked lifeless and dull right then, but Jack could easily imagine it flowing in a fake breeze. Dark eyes made for smouldering looks, but wasted on a dull nine-to-five job. And that rack of hers. Two huge melons on her chest, massive tits that Sally should've been displaying proudly.

Who she was – her personality – didn't matter.

She was – should be – just a pair of amazing tits with a nice face and an equally nice body. To go beyond that was pointless.

For Alyssa and her family, subtle changes were the goal.

For Sally? It was time for something *different*.

Completely erasing someone's identity, replacing it with something new. Creating a personality from nothing – one that'd obey Jack and do whatever he wanted them to.

How hard could it be?

He stepped up to the woman, pressed a hand to her brow.

Above her head, a black cloud formed. Her 'root' bubble for all the thoughts and feelings she was experiencing in that moment.

Frustration and annoyance at being awoken, probably. Anger too.

Jack reached up, snatched the black cloud away.

The string connected it to Sally's head snapped and, when he released the cloud, it evaporated into nothing.

Just like that. The woman should be thoughtless.

A quick glance around the room was all it took to find a shadow to hide in. It was still early in the morning, the light dim and faint. Jack walked over to that corner of the room, sank into the shadows, becoming practically invisible.

Then he unfroze time.

Sally remained in place. Unmoving. Eyes on the ceiling, unfocused. Mouth hanging open. Blank.

She looked like she'd zoned out – stopped thinking.

Jack waited.

He hadn't erased her whole mind. Just the thoughts and feelings she'd been having at that exact moment. 'Zoning out' was exactly what he'd made her do. He'd emptied her of thoughts, left her dissociated.

But how long would it take for her to snap out of it?

In the end, it took outside stimuli to jolt Sally out of her mindless stupor. Her phone ringing the morning alarm.

She shook herself, seemed momentarily confused, then turned the alarm off – rose from her seat on the sofa. Likely, she was about to go shower, change clothes - regular morning stuff.

Jack froze time.

What would Devyn be thinking? She was wearing the White Ring. She'd *know* he was stopping time.

He left the shadows, walked over to Sally.

"I can make you stop thinking," he said, touching her hand and watching as a new black cloud appeared above her head. "That's easy enough. But can I make you stop

being *you*. Can I make you forget who you are? And, if I can, can I make someone *new* to replace you?"

It was the beginnings of an idea. The seeds of something far greater and grander. But he couldn't think about that right then. Not with the Black Ring on his finger.

"Can I make you mine?"

It should be possible. With the Black Ring's powers, Jack should have total control over the human mind. Absolute power over thoughts and personalities and identities. The human brain was his playground, and nothing was off-limits.

Holding on to Sally's hand, Jack closed his eyes.

"Show me who you are, Sally Saunders," he said – thinking the command, forcing it upon her mentally. "Show me the core of you. Show me *everything*."

When he opened his eyes, there were several new clouds above Sally's head.

All connected to her skull by black strings. Several connected to each other in the same way. Nine in total.

The roots of Sally's identity.

"Now," Jack said, taking a step back. "What'll happen when I erase *those*?"

Only one way to find out.

Jack reached up, snatched the first cloud away – let it evaporate into nothingness. Then he did the same thing with the next one. And the next.