

Saints and Sinners

Chapter 9

It'd been a difficult choice to make. Wear the ring to school, or keep it hidden.

On the one hand; if he wore the ring, he'd be aware the *moment* his counterpart stopped time. The White Ring's wearer wouldn't be able to take him by surprise, and knowing when his unmet rival was using their ring's powers might give Jack a hint as to who he might be.

On the other hand; wearing the ring in public came with its own set of risks. If the White Ring's owner saw Jack wearing a pitch-black ring, it'd expose him. And, possibly more likely, if Drake Damilio saw Jack wearing a ring, the asshole might try to take it from him for no other reason than to fuck with Jack.

In the end, he'd decided not to put it on. He kept it close at all times – in his pocket, within quick reach – but out of sight.

When *anyone* could turn out to be Jack's mortal enemy, it seemed prudent to not leave himself exposed in any way. Not until the threat had been dealt with, at least.

Whoever had the White Ring, Jack would find them.

Until then, caution and vigilance.

As he entered the school grounds, hand pressed to his pocket – feeling the outline of the ring though the cloth – he glanced around.

Early morning, plenty of time before classes began. Chilly and quiet, save for the hum of a dozen conversations from the many small friend groups clustered around. The sun wasn't quite up yet, the sky still a deep, dark navy-blue.

Jack noticed it immediately.

Something was off. *Different*.

That hum of voices – Jack's fellow students – was wrong. Not the tired, soft greetings and complaints as usual. There was an energy to the chattering today. An excitement.

At first, Jack rolled his eyes and ignored it. Probably some school drama that'd caught everyone's attention.

But, as words drifted into his ears, he felt himself perking up – listening in on conversations. Words like 'hospital' and 'miracle', words that put images of a crippled Drake Damilio in Jack's head. Had the White Ring's powers backfired on Drake? Had his injuries returned?

No, Jack realised as he caught more and more gossip.

No, this was something *bigger*.

The pieces of the puzzle came together quickly, thanks to how excited everybody seemed to be. It took only a few seconds of snooping and eavesdropping for Jack to get the full picture.

The nearby children's hospital - there'd been a 'miracle' there.

Overnight, every child staying there – every single one – had recovered from their ailments. Every sickness and injury vanished overnight. Dozens of sick kids – some terminally ill – had completely healed in the blink of an eye.

These idiots might want to attribute that to religion, but Jack knew the truth.

The White Ring's owner had kept time frozen for quite a while yesterday. Now Jack knew why. They'd been at the children's hospital, using their powers to heal a bunch of kids.

But why?

To learn and practice their abilities? To make themselves seem saintly and kind? To challenge Jack somehow?

How did *they* benefit from this stunt?

And how could Jack use it against them?

Waiting in line, eyes on the back of Alyssa's head.

How would the people around her react if they knew what the girl's deep desires were? What would they think of her if they knew how desperately she wanted to have sex with her own father?

She looked so normal.

A regular - if large-chested – girl. Dark skin, dark hair tied back in a ponytail, bright eyes. She was pretty, easily one of the prettiest girls at school. Not overly popular, but with a decent group of friends. Not a loner or social outcast. Even her hobby was normal enough – she was an artist.

And yet, she wasn't. Not any more.

Thanks to Jack, Alyssa might well be one of the sluttiest girls in school. A girl who wanted to have sex with her father. Who, very soon, would do just that.

Perhaps Jack should record it when it happened, leak the footage online.

How would the world react?

He turned his gaze away from Alyssa before anyone noticed him staring. Eyes forward, food tray in his hands, he moved to go collect his food.

Commotion on the other side of the cafeteria.

It drew gazes like moths to a flame – Jack's included.

The school's principal and two other teachers, marching into the cafeteria and heading straight for the 'cool kids' table. A brief few words spoken to Drake Damilio was all it took for a little crowd to form – people trying to listen in.

Where Jack stood, he couldn't hear what was said.

All he saw was the principal and teachers leading Drake away from the table, out of the cafeteria and down a corridor out of sight.

"It should be any minute now," Devyn said eagerly, speaking over the voices on the television. "He said they asked him a bunch of questions about it."

I glared at the screen, fists clenched and jaw tight.

The news anchor continued to talk about the 'miracle' that'd gripped the attention of people all over the world. Sick children being magically healed. Then, a segue line – the news anchor directing the broadcast to an *exclusive* interview.

Drake Damilio's face appeared on the television screen.

Jack had never wanted to punch that smug, smiling face more.

"Hello Drake," the interviewer began – the words sounding far away, barely audible in Jack's ears.

Devyn's bubbly excitement was fuel on the fires of Jack's loathing. The eagerness with which his sister and mother and father were watching the interview – it made Jack sick. Disgusted. *Angry*.

"Tell us a little bit about what happened," the interviewer said.

And Drake did – giving his version of events. Sitting at a cafeteria table, eating lunch. A sudden burst of agony all over his body, bones shattering randomly. Being rushed to hospital. Then, when prompted, Drake spoke of his amazing, impossible recovery.

"It was odd," Drake said to the camera. "I woke up and I felt fine. Nothing broken. No bruises. Nothing. Just this warmth inside me. A hand on me, like I'd been touched by an angel."

"An angel?" The interviewer asked immediately. "Is that what you attribute your recovery to?"

"I don't know," Drake shrugged – feigning modesty, a charming smile on his face. "I'm just thankful to be healthy again."

He glanced up, as if to the heavens, still smiling.

The interview didn't last long at all, a few minutes at most. But every second of it

was rage-inducing. Watching Drake sit there and pretend to be blessed, pretend that he was some innocent person who'd been touched by an angel.

"You should invite him over again," Jack's mother said. "Such a nice boy. He's a keeper for sure."

"Mom," Devyn blushed.

Jack stood, walked out of the room – resisting the urge to put on his ring and turn his mother's brains to mush. He stomped his way upstairs.

Of course Drake was milking what'd happened.

How much had they paid him for that 'exclusive' interview anyway? Drake was already loaded. His family had more money than they'd ever need. Greedy bastard. Jack should've melted Drake's mind when he'd had the chance. Turned the asshole into a vegetable.

He shook his head.

Pointless thinking about that now.

The only thing that mattered was the White Ring and its owner.

They'd revealed themselves. Not completely, they hadn't announced who they were or anything. But they'd acted publicly, done something that was impossible to ignore.

A children's hospital.

Why there?

What motives could they have had?

Were they trying to tell Jack that *he* was a child in need of healing? Or were children somehow easier to heal than adults? Was the children's hospital just closer to where they lived?

Jack pulled the Black Ring out of his pocket, slipped it on.

Time froze, colour draining away and leaving only shades of grey.

And there, leaning against one of Jack's bedroom walls, was the self-proclaimed demon. Damien.

"Before you ask," the red-eyed man said. "No. I don't know why they chose a children's hospital. Though, I could hazard a guess."

Jack crossed his arms, waited.

"She – Angela – always chooses what she considers to be the 'truest' of humanity. In her eyes, that means kindness and compassion – caring, virtuous individuals. It's part of our game. She picks her champion, the one she deems to be most 'human', and I do the same. It's likely that your counterpart – Angela's champion – had no ulterior motive for their actions."

"So what," Jack said, "they just wanted to heal those brats out of kindness? That's it?"

"Most likely," Damien said, red eyes twinkling.

"So they're a moron. Good to know."

Jack shut his eyes, began thinking. Laying out everything he knew, sorting through the information, searching. If it was true – if the White Ring's owner was so stupid that they'd expose themselves just so they'd feel like a 'good person' – then they were too stupid to play this game against Jack.

Idiots, while not exactly predictable, were prone to making mistakes. And their mistakes were Jack's advantage.

"It's a decent plan," Damien said as Jack thought it. "But you might want to consider what you'll do if it actually works."

"Simple," Jack said, eyes snapping open. "Subdue him. Take the White Ring for myself."

"Easier said than done."

"I already know I'm vastly more intelligent than him," Jack smiled. "How hard could it possibly be to take him by surprise?"

Jack waited in the shadows of the hospital, hidden from sight thanks to his ring's powers. He wasn't just in the shadows, he *was* the shadows. And, with only a moon and street lamps and lights from the building to illuminate the world, the shadows were *strong*. He was invisible.

When time froze, he was ready for it. He grinned, waited.

It was a long shot – there were three regular hospitals in the city. The one he was at now was simply the closest to his home. But, if he was right, it was only a matter of time.

The White Ring's owner thought they were a good samaritan. They wanted to 'heal the world'. First, the poor, sick children. Then, the adults. Hospitals and hospices and whatever else they could think of. The White Ring, just like the Black Ring, had limitless power. It couldn't 'run out'. So, why not use that power as much as possible, 'help' as many people as possible?

They'd come to this hospital eventually. If not tonight, then soon. That's how goody-two-shoes idiots acted. They wouldn't put off helping 'til later, they'd do it as soon as they could.

The moment time froze, Jack knew he was right.

Whoever had the White Ring, they were on their way to one of the three hospitals in the city – or somewhere else where people needed healing.

All Jack had to do was wait, and they'd come to him.

If not today, then tomorrow or the day after.

He'd wait as long as it took.

Where he hid, he had clear view of the hospital's main entrance. Presumably the way a time-freezing do-gooder would enter the building. If he didn't see any sign of motion for a while, Jack would head inside and search the place room by room – just in case his target had used a different entrance. And, if he didn't find them, he'd come back tomorrow and try again.

It only took a couple of minutes waiting, though.

There, in the distance, there was light. Movement.

A shining white *something*.

As it grew closer, Jack could make out its shape. A human female bathed in an almost blinding light – too bright to see anything past the woman's perky figure. It was like staring at a lightbulb.

The bright woman was jogging towards the hospital, slowing down near the entrance. She came to a full stop a few feet away from the open doors, hopped on the spot.

And, as she began walking inside the building, Jack moved too. Pulled out of the shadow he was hiding in and followed behind her.

Inside the hospital was well lit – few shadows for him to hide in. So he followed slowly, carefully. He hid around corners, waited. He did his best at being stealthy.

But it wasn't enough.

As the bright woman walked down a hospital corridor – Jack following behind her – she stopped in place, turned slowly around.

She saw him. Stared directly at him.

He couldn't see her face – she was shining too brightly. But there was something *familiar* about the woman. Something that sent a shiver running down Jack's spine.

Both remained frozen in place for a long moment. One coated in midnight black, the other shining a blindly bright white.

"How's that 'take him by surprise' plan going for you?" Damien's voice spoke from Jack's shadow, sounding amused.

Jack took a step forward – towards the woman.

She turned on the spot, bolted away from him.

"Shit," Jack muttered, jumping into action and sprinting after her.

He didn't know what the plan was. Didn't *have* a plan. He just ran after her, fists clenched. Eyes on a faint, barely visible band of blue around one of the woman's fingers.

They sprinted down hospital hallway after hospital hallway, through open rooms, down staff-only sections of the building. Neither one growing tired or winded, neither needed to stop to breathe or drink water.

More than once, Jack almost caught her – hand coming within inches of grabbing her. But, each time, she just barely escaped.

It was a stalemate, at least until they burst out into the night again. No corridors or corners. Just a huge parking lot and an endless maze of city streets to race through.

The woman ran. Jack sprinted after her.

And, unfortunately, the woman was faster.

As they ran, the woman steadily increased her lead over him. What began as just a few feet soon became much further. Jack went from being mere inches away from catching her, to watching her disappear into the distance. In the end, he had no choice. He stopped chasing, watched her round a corner several blocks away – lost in the maze of city streets.

Behind him, the shadows spoke.

"Well," they chuckled, "that could've gone better."

"Shut it," Jack snapped.

The shadows laughed.

Jack stood there for a long time. Staring down the time-frozen street, eyebrow knit together. Thoughts whirring around in his head.

"No," he whispered to himself. That body... Even bathed in light as it'd been, he *knew* that body. "It can't be..."

He heard the voices as he descended the stairs, approached the dining room. He didn't enter right away, just listened.

"Are you sure you need them, honey?" Jack's father was saying. "Diligence is the best defence. If you don't put yourself in situations where you'll need-"

"Yes," Devyn interrupted, sounded unusually firm and assertive. "I'm sure. I can be the most diligent person in the world, but it's still important to have some form of protection for myself, just in case."

"But both? Are you certain?"

"Yes," Devyn answered. "I'm certain. Pepper spray and a tazer."

"Okay," their father sighed. "If it'll help make you feel safe when you're out and about, I'll buy them for you. Just be careful."

"Thanks Dad."

Jack shook his head. Opened the door and walked inside, saw his father and sister at the table eating breakfast – their backs to him.

"Don't suppose you made any for me?" He said, noting the pancakes his sister and father were eating.

"No," Devyn said, looking back at him apologetically. "You're not usually up this early. If you want, I can go make-"

"It's fine," Jack said, forcing a smile.

She couldn't be...

Devyn smiled back at him, radiantly beautiful. Face framed by blonde and brown hair, lips glossy and round cheeks rosy. She was wearing a pink top with sleeves so long they covered most of her hands, a top that hung loose over her body.

"What're you talking about?" Jack asked, circling the table and taking a seat opposite his sister.

"Oh, nothing," Devyn shrugged. "Just asking Dad to buy me some stuff. Pepper

spray and a tazer.”

“Really?” Jack said. “You think you’ll need that?”

“It never hurts to be prepared,” their father grunted, eyes narrowed at Jack. “Your sister is a smart young woman, wanting to have some form of protection. If you looked out for her more, maybe she wouldn’t feel the need to arm herself.”

Jack ignored him, kept his eyes on his sister.

“Something happen last night?” Jack asked her.

Devyn blushed, eyes widening slightly. “No. I was here all afternoon,” she said a little too quickly. “Just never hurts to be prepared, is all.”

It *couldn’t* be...

And yet, as Devyn raised her fork to her mouth, ate a small cut of pancake, Jack saw it. Her right hand, the middle finger.

A white metal ring.

Of all the people in the world, why did it have to be *her*?

Jack stood up, earning him a raised eyebrow from his sister and a grumpy glare from his father.

“I’m gonna go make some pancakes for myself, either of you want anything from the kitchen?”

“No thanks,” Devyn smiled.

“No,” their father grunted.

As soon as he was out of the dining room, Jack reached into his pocket and pulled out the Black Ring.