



# Gluttony (Seven Deadly Sins #2)

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**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** Gluttony doesn't remember the past; Saeran is haunted by it. Their love could save them all, or it could signal their doom.

Saeran

I've spent so long hiding in the shadows, I've forgotten what it's like to live any other way. I lost Gluttony lifetimes ago and watching him now is agony. I didn't mean to get this close, not after being careful for so long.

Whoever we were is gone. I wish we could have just one more moment. If only giving in to my need for him wouldn't mean the end for us all.

Gluttony

He came to me in the shadows, offering gifts with his silver tongue. I refuse to be taken for a fool like my brothers. A pretty face isn't enough to lure me in. I just want one more gift and answers to the promises he whispers in my ear.

I've no interest in love or physical connections. And yet this stranger comes waltzing in with his secrets and his lies, and I've never wanted to hoard anything more than him.

**Total Pages (Source):** 25

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:06 am*

## Gluttony

“I love you.” “My heart beats for you, Saeran.” “Don’t leave me.” “Oh, baby. Never.”

Wood splinters spray everywhere with a well-placed shot of lightning. Not nearly enough damage, considering the foul mood I’m in. The stench of Fae makes me want to kill something. Several somethings, in fact. The weapon at my hip—a white, translucent handgun—will ensure that any Fae stays down. I have one Fae in mind and a future date to shoot him directly between the eyes. The longer Conor keeps us on this wild-goose chase, the more I’ll make it hurt when I get my hands on him.

“It smells rancid in here,” Lazarus says, moving past me and further into the random suburban house. His nose is wrinkled, and he pulls his suit jacket closer to him, like he can keep it clean in this mess.

Not that there’s much of a mess. The front door leads into a living room with mismatched furniture and a half-decent TV. A coffee table with used mugs. Lived in. Normal. Boring.

We could have gone into any house on this block and found the same scenario. What a goddamn waste of time. And a car ride with Envy I can never get back.

“Two guesses what happened to the occupants who lived here,” Envy says, leaning a shoulder against the doorframe. The bright-orange T-shirt he’s wearing says “I’m a good bad influence” on it. I might have been inclined to ignore it since he has worse outfits, but the sneakers he’s matched it with—one orange and one black—and the

jeans that have more holes than fabric are too much. Not caring about fashion isn't an excuse for looking like a two-year-old's painting gone wrong. His entire wardrobe needs to be burned to the ground.

"I only need one guess," I grunt, my boots crunching on the broken pieces of the door. Conor's stench is all over this place; no one would have been left alive. I don't care about human life, or preserving it, but it's easier to torture someone into talking if they're still breathing. And Envy can't get access to their souls if they've been dead too long.

Something doesn't feel right in this house. It has nothing to do with the smell of the dead that follows us everywhere these days, haunting our steps. The stench of it is in my pores. Killing brings me joy when I'm the one in charge. Having it behind me, with my family in its sight? I'll destroy the entire world before I let it take any of us.

"I can smell them."

"We can all smell them," Lazarus drawls, shooting Envy a disdainful look. If I have to listen to these two bitching at each other like an old married couple for even five more minutes, I'll kill them both. I could have come here on my own.

"The dead were ripped from this place. Whatever happened here, it was violent. And messy." Envy grins and pats my black vest. "They took their time, making it linger. They did it on purpose."

To draw us here. "Think they'd give us hints?"

"You don't need hints," Lazarus says. "Are they still here?"

Envy tips his head back, eyes closing. Lazarus glances at the expanse of his throat, not subtle at all. His eyes meet mine, and then he looks away. That's even worse than

listening to them bicker. I should have brought Wrath.

“Well?” I say impatiently. The sooner we get this over with, the sooner we can go home. Or to a new location where there might be someone I can hurt and take my frustration out on.

“There’s nothing here. I can smell the dead, like they’re lingering. I can’t see them, though. They might have been killed here, but the bodies were moved.” Envy pauses, tilting his head. “Did you hear that?”

Lazarus is already moving. “Upstairs?”

“Think it’s a trap?” Envy throws over his shoulder, in hot pursuit of the demon.

I hope so. That means I can kill someone.

My gaze settles on a jumper slung over the banister. It smells fresh, like it’s just been laundered. There’s a kid’s scooter lying in the narrow corridor leading to the back door. A brand-new scooter, without telltale scuff marks from use. A glance through the open archway into the kitchen shows a similar setting. Dishes are stacked on the sink, like they’re waiting to be washed. Sparkling, clean dishes.

Deliberate. Staged.

I take the stairs three at a time, bellowing Envy’s name. He and Lazarus are in a children’s bedroom, their focus on a man tied to a chair in the middle of it. What the fuck? The man’s eyes widen at the sight of me, and he screams through the fabric covering his mouth, muffling him.

Lazarus has already dragged Envy behind him, protecting him. I can smell the metallic scent of blood. Not from where it coats the bed, the curtains, or the dried

splash of it across the windows. It's fresh. Coming from the man. Like fishermen baiting a shark.

"Don't touch him. Get out here." A shove at the back of Envy's neck gets him moving back out the door, Lazarus a step behind him. Sticking close.

"Bait for us or a trap?" Envy asks, once we're out in the hallway. The same thought I had.

"A trap and bait are the same thing," Lazarus says, crossing his arms over his chest, unimpressed.

"Actually, they use bait to set the trap. Not the same thing."

"Shut up." Semantics mean nothing to me, and their voices are grating. "Whether they left him here for us or not, it doesn't fucking matter. Whatever information he has, I want to know it."

Lazarus's lips flatten. "And how do you propose we accomplish that?"

"Can't use your imagination, Zara?" I goad. His quick trigger is even quicker with his husband out there dealing with who-the-fuck-knows what. The right motivation and he'll kill everything in his path. I relish the day he finally snaps.

"What do you think?" Lazarus asks Envy. He leans back against the wall and curls a hand around the doorframe. Ready to be the first to attack, to defend. Always ready.

Envy shrugs and shoves his hands in his pockets, rocking back on his heels. It brings my attention back to his eyesore shoes. "I think he's not dead. What am I supposed to do with him?"

“Are you incapable of torturing someone if they’re alive?”

“I’m not really into screaming. Unless it’s me, and I’m on my knees.”

A hint of emotion flashes in Lazarus’s eyes that I’m not remotely interested in exploring further. “You’re—”

A lightning streak crashes between them, cutting off their conversation. They can eye-fuck in their own time.

“No one is getting tortured.” Torture is slow, messy, and too unpredictable. Those that should break don’t, and those that shouldn’t do. Anything they say under duress can’t be trusted at face value. I don’t have time for that bullshit.

And I refuse to play whatever games Conor has planned for us. Wrath might dance to his tune, but I won’t. I don’t care about his magic fucking dick or replaying history.

Striding back into the room, lightning flickers around my hands. The captive’s eyes widen further, horror prominent in them. He jerks against his bonds, like somehow he can get away. He can see his death coming, and he’s afraid. I’ll make it a lot quicker for him than Greed or Wrath would. My cruelty stems from the result, not the journey.

The chair tips as he struggles, a futile attempt to put distance between us. I kick it the rest of the way over, splintering wood. A well-placed lightning strike destroys the rest of the chair, and the man collapses amongst the wreckage. His jaw breaks when I slam my boot down on it, the cloth over his mouth drooping uselessly. Blood sprays over my dark slacks, specks of it reaching my black vest. Another crack of lightning, directly into his mouth this time, causes him to spasm violently. His eyes roll into the back of his head as he burns from the inside.

He's gone almost instantly, but I do it again just to be sure. The light above breaks with a pop . The window implodes from the sheer strength of the electricity in the room with us.

Envy nudges me with his shoulder, his head barely reaching my upper arm. "Crude."

"Effective." Dead's dead, regardless of the finesse used to get there. I don't need fancy flourishes to get the job done.

"They aren't mutually exclusive."

I'm not in the mood to banter with him or waste any more time in this filth. "Just get him out; we don't have time to take him back to the mansion." The soul won't stay long, and once it's gone, Envy can't retrieve it. It's the first lead we've had in over a week as to the whereabouts of our missing brothers. I won't risk losing it.

"We could have tried asking him first," Lazarus points out. "Envy doesn't need more—"

"Aww, are you worried about me?" Envy coos.

Lazarus immediately sneers in response, shoulders stiffening defensively. "Perhaps the man doesn't deserve to be shackled to you for eternity."

If they don't shut the fuck up, I'm going to put their bodies next to this idiot's. One corpse. Three corpses. It's all the same to me. Numbers don't matter.

Envy crouches beside the body, experimentally moving the broken jaw. "Sounds like it's not his lucky day, then."

"Get on with it." We don't have all day, for fuck's sake.

Envy's hand hovers over the body, his eyes closing on a shudder. He slips down to one knee, bracing himself. Wrinkles cross his forehead, and then a husky shadow rises from the body, hovering and twisting grotesquely.

The screams begin, and I grimace against the sudden pain. I despise this aspect. They don't need to announce their presence so fucking loudly.

Words eventually come through as Envy pushes through the endless noise with practiced ease. More dead than I care to count haunt him because of him touching their souls. Not a skill I want to have. Conversing with the dead doesn't gain me anything except information. While useful, it isn't tangible. I can't hoard it, it's not quantifiable in that way. Therefore, it's useless to me.

The shadow reaches for the corpse, screeches louder when it can't get back inside. It goes for Envy next, somehow knowing he's the one responsible for separating them. A barrier keeps it away, but it's slowly getting through it. Lazarus pushes off the wall and moves closer, his hip shielding Envy from it. As if he can do anything if the shadow gets free. Only Envy can bury the dead once they walk.

"Envy," I warn.

"Yeah, I know," he says, strain in his voice. "Just one more—there."

Evil.

Deserves it.

Feed him to the Sins like scraps given to a dog.

Raven.



Lazarus twists to look down at Envy. “Raven? As in my husband?”

Envy falters on the last word, and his thin shield wobbles. A shadowed hand pushes through, using his distraction to its advantage. My lightning crackles, even when I know I can’t do anything. It doesn’t mean I won’t try, the same as Lazarus. Nothing is going to drag my brother under with them. Until then he needs his concentration intact, and Lazarus has never been good for that.

Placing a hand on Lazarus’s shoulder, I drag him away from Envy. I don’t give a single fuck about his feelings for the demon that he’s married to; he’s not fucking up this summoning. This is bigger than just one of us. They have my fucking brothers, and we’re getting them all back. None of this “sacrificing one for the many” bullshit. All of them, or I’ll destroy everything and leave none of this world standing.

Lead them here and give them a message.

Greed.

Evil.

Deserves it.

You get an end worthy of the scum that you are.

Who the fuck is he talking about? Himself? Someone else? This is the problem with Envy’s magic. The vagueness is fucking irritating. I like answers, not more questions or riddles to solve.

“Feels like... someone is talking to me,” Envy gets out through gritted teeth. He collapses, his other knee sinking to the floor. The shadow shrieks louder, breaking the windows. Lazarus shoves past me to get to him, and I let him. Dropping down beside

him, Lazarus presses a hand to his collarbone, straightening him.

As soon as Lazarus touches Envy, the screams somehow lessen enough for me to think. “Does he know something useful?” I ask impatiently.

Hidden. Secrets.

Dead men tell no tales, but Envy can give them a bedtime story.

Lead them to the promised land and wash away their sins.

“Something coherent, Envy,” I press. I’m not like Lust; I don’t have a soft heart, and the information we’re looking for is too important to mess around. So long as the shield holds, and he’s not in danger, I’ll keep Envy connected to this soul until we find what we need.

The ones you seek are scattered in the city. A maze for mice. Will you find the cheese before it rots?

The shadow suddenly sucks back into the corpse, and Envy drops, eyes closing as he falls, unconscious. Lazarus catches him before he hits the ground.

My heart skips a beat. What the fuck ? Our victim has one of the weakest souls I’ve ever seen Envy lift. It shouldn’t zap him like this. Not enough to make him collapse.

Lazarus presses two fingers against Envy’s neck. “Alive,” he says, releasing a breath of relief.

Disgusted, I kick the wrist of the fried body. “Is he stronger than he looks or...?”

“Or, I think. I couldn’t sense anything hidden. He’s completely ordinary.”

“We thought Deacon was ordinary too.” Snuck right under Lust’s radar like a traitorous sneak. I’ll watch him closely; if he turns on us again, I’ll be ready.

“This is different.”

Is it? They might like to think that, but they all dropped the ball in not figuring out that Deacon isn’t what he seems. They let him walk right into the heart of our home and almost kill Lust in the process. Right now my trust in their instincts is tenuous at best.

“It sounds like they’ve separated them, making it harder for us to track,” Lazarus says. He stands, lifting Envy with him and shifting him into a more comfortable position in his arms. “It gives us something to concentrate on, at least. We know to sift out their signatures and look for them one by one.”

“Maybe.” I can agree it’s useful information. If it’s the truth. The messenger is my problem. The one giving the message through this idiot wanted us to find it. Had known that Envy would be the one who came looking for it. Why else would they deliver it like that? It means there’s a purpose to it, and I highly doubt it’s to be helpful.

“You think it’s a lie?”

“I think that believing something at face value is what got us in this mess in the first place.” I grunt. “Let’s go, I’m fucking sick of the stench in this house.” The death cloaking us is more than just the corpse in the middle of the room. And unless an entire battalion of men lived here, it’s coming from more than the occupants. Whoever recently walked these halls is drowning in the dead. Enough that I can see it, and I’ve never had an affinity with the dead. I can’t imagine the agony it causes Envy. He maintains that easygoing facade too effortlessly these days.

Lazarus leads the way downstairs, taking the stairs carefully. “He’s struggling to speak to the dead. Waning power?” He readjusts Envy in his arms. By human standards, Envy is bigger than average. For us, he’s too small—more fragile than any of us—to contain the magic he holds. He looks smaller than usual with Lazarus carrying him bridal style.

“He’s been stuck at home too long. Hasn’t fed his sin nearly enough.” It’s not easy to feed, and there’s only place he’s ever found that can give him what he needs.

“We can’t send him away, not with everything going on.”

“Speak to Lust about it.” While Lazarus is right, we can’t help him. The burden of the dead falls on Envy alone. Unfortunately, the only way to feed Envy’s sin is to deprive it and give it no oxygen. The Odesa catacombs, near Ukraine, are the only place deep enough to give him his solace, where the dead don’t haunt him.

The hair on the back of my neck stands on end, and I stop halfway down the pathway to our car. A quick survey of the area doesn’t confirm the prickling suspicion. No one on the roofs, the entryways, other houses, or down either side of the street. No gawkers or bystanders. Not even a bird. We’re standing in a dead zone; Envy’s influence. So what am I feeling?

“What is it?” Lazarus asks, turning back. Envy murmurs something and twists his head, curling further into Lazarus’s chest, one fist clenching in his pale-green button-down shirt. Lazarus tightens his hold, keeping him secure, not one comment about his shirt getting wrinkled.

The sensation gets worse. An undercurrent of awareness. Someone is watching us. I may not be able to see anything, but I can feel it. Sparks light up my vision as lightning flickers in them. If they want a fight, I’ll gladly give it to them. All they have to do is show their face, and I’ll make their dreams come true.

“Gluttony?”

My fists clench. Come out and play, coward. It’s not the first time I’ve felt this recently, and I’m getting fucking sick and tired of having an observer that won’t reveal themselves.

“It’s nothing,” I say shortly. It’s not nothing. If they can’t feel it, it’s also not their problem. That means it’s directed at me. I’ll find out who’s watching us, and I’ll deal with it myself.

Are they waiting for us to leave, so they can poke around inside themselves? I don’t fucking think so.

Lightning erupts over the house, three perfect strikes that light a spark. The entire house goes up in flames in seconds. Not as effective, or as damaging, as Wrath’s flames, but it does the job. Either way, there’ll be nothing left but ash and rubble when it finishes burning.

There’s no one in this world now that can find a clue in that mess.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:06 am*

Saeran

A teasing smile. Beguiling lips. Every memory of him haunts me.

The feel of connection ebbs as the black SUV drives further and further away. Like a piece of my soul being dragged out and ripped away. Good thing I've had a lot of time to get used to it.

My gaze flicks to the burning house. What were they doing in there? I want to go in and look around before it's reduced to nothing.

I can still get in, so long as I move fast. Spreading my wings and stepping off the side of the two-story house, my bare feet land softly on the grass. My guardian companion, a phantom vision, appears at my shoulder, her small wings flapping as I stride toward the towering inferno.

Each guardian specter takes a different form. My own has been with me as long as I can remember, having appeared only days after my birth. A sign of my connection to the Sins.

My rainbow-colored semi-translucent dragon dances around my head, tiny lightning bolts curling out of her nostrils like she's being electrocuted. I think I have some nuts in my pocket—there they are. I give her a few until she attempts to shove her nose in my closed fist where the rest are. A quick tap makes her rear back. “No, Gyro. Last time you gorged, you got a stomachache, remember?”

She doesn't remember.

Her little claws dig at my hand, and wings flap rapidly as she exerts energy.

“You can have some more later.” They’re going back in my pocket before she tries to rip my hand off to get them. I’m pretty attached to it.

Standing at the front door, heat flickers at my face from the destructive flames coming from inside. No normal human could go in there and survive. Good thing I’m not normal, or human.

Magic moves across my face, the black tattoos there turning white and lighting as I concentrate. My white-blond hair stands on end, lengthening and twining into a perfect braid. When it’s done, an almost-invisible protective bubble surrounds me.

The flames flick harmlessly at my shield. Nothing on this side of the shroud can penetrate it and especially not something of Gluttony’s making. A white, glowing strand trails out of my open palm, leading upstairs.

Gyro sneezes, the force of it flinging her back a few feet.

With one foot resting on the bottom step of the stairs leading to the second floor, I raise an eyebrow. She wags her tail, a burst of lightning shooting from it. It causes another small fire, adding itself to the ones already ravishing the interior. I hold out a hand, beckoning. “Come here before you get yourself into trouble.”

Her tongue comes out playfully, more crackling energy sneaking out. I’d prefer she didn’t add more flames; I want to be out of here before the entire building collapses in on itself. She flies over to me, twirls three times, and then curls into a ball, nestling herself in the crook of my neck. Her legs dangle down my front, her tail wrapping around her.

My strand of magic leads me to a child’s bedroom, where a burnt-out husk lies in the

middle of the room. Easy to spot the handiwork of the Demigod of Hunger. Gluttony's essence thrums from it, a warm, familiar comfort that I've avoided for years. A taste on the tip of my tongue that burns. A cruel tease. Being this close is akin to torture.

Gyro immediately goes for the toy box in the corner, diving into the soft toys peeking out.

One plus about Gluttony's magic is that there's no blood to avoid when I kneel beside the body. The broken jaw moves under my grip, barely connected. Gluttony's cruelty is well-known on this side of the shroud. The things he's done would make most people's stomachs turn. Not mine. He's always been like that. Wrong or not, I've never cared. So long as he belonged to me, I never cared about the rest.

It doesn't matter that the flames haven't reached high enough yet to destroy evidence. There's no sign on his clothing of who the man is. If he had something useful on him, Gluttony and the others have taken it.

Luckily for me, I have a few unexpected tricks up my sleeve. I gather the white strand that led me here and wrap it around the body, lifting it and turning it over. Sparks of light rise out of the body, like stars being pulled into a planet's gravity. The strand absorbs them until there's nothing left.

Someone Fae touched this body; the essence of their magic is strong.

Conor.

Unpredictable Dark Fae magic, with a tainted smell that only comes from a half-turning. One that came too late, and violently. I've never seen anything like it, and I still don't know why it happened this way. Fae children are born human—at their most vulnerable and extremely protected—and their Fae genes kick in naturally



during their teen years. Stronger Fae can sometimes develop earlier than that. No one has ever gone into adulthood without activating.

If Conor is who I think he is, there's even more reason why he should have developed early, not late. Not like this.

The strand gathers back around my hand, and I clench my fist, pulling it back inside myself. Everything about these events worries me. I've waited so long for one of the seven sons to find their Sin, in a way that I can't. My Sin is right in front of me, and I'll never be able to connect with him again. It's up to the others to do what I can't. I never in a million years thought it would happen during this lifetime. It's the most erratic reincarnation cycle that I've ever seen. None of the pieces are where they should be, and I can't even find half of them. If I could choose, this lifetime wouldn't be my first choice for everything coming to a head.

Gyro nudges my hip and then the arm of the corpse. She sneezes, and a streak of lightning erupts, turning it to nothing but ash in seconds.

I sigh heavily and scold her. "I told you to be careful."

She's already halfway across the room, poking at a bookshelf, completely disregarding me. Careful isn't in her vocabulary.

Wood cracks in the distance, letting me know it won't be long before the second floor collapses. I'm not in the mood to dig my way out of a burned-out building. I have to get back before anyone notices that I'm missing. Tiernan will notice if I have ash all over me, and I'll never hear the end of it.

The bubble drops as soon as we're out of danger, the heat licking at me from behind barely enough to keep me warm on a cold night. The white strand dances around my hand, and I shake it off, pushing it back in. I'm losing control of it. I don't have long

left. Centuries severed from the one who feeds me, the deprivation's finally affecting me. The others don't have the same ill effects; they were never as strong as me, and as they die in each reincarnation, their clocks reset, giving them infinite time to find one another.

Those I lead are going to notice soon, and I still don't know what to tell them. They need to prepare for what happens when I'm gone.

Gyro nudges me, her nose against my jaw. I smile softly in an attempt to reassure her. What will happen to her when I die? All the other companions disappeared the night I was left all alone to carry the memories by myself. Did they follow their masters? Or are they simply gone? I've searched for answers and never found anything.

When we first came here, escaping the slaughter of the rest of our kind, answers weren't my focus. My duty was to keep them safe. Hidden. It still is. We worked hard to develop the ability to hide our Fae signature, so we could hide in plain sight. Camouflage was the only way we survived this long.

I've spent so long fitting myself into the shadows that I can't remember what it's like to live in the light, in the open. What it's like to live with the touch of a lover or the happiness that fulfillment brings.

Gyro sneezes again, and a strike of lightning hits the pathway, cracking the concrete. I pat her head gently, and she mews, leaning into the touch. She moves down to bite at my pocket.

"Not yet. You can have more when—"

A loud growl erupts, and I freeze.

Chimera.

Far too close.

Are they here for me, or because of the energy Gluttony left behind? It doesn't matter. As soon as it catches my scent, it won't stop hunting.

"Go." Gyro hesitates and then disappears with a "pop." She can't fight it. Right now, neither can I. I can't protect her the way I'm supposed to.

The second she's gone I bolt, running straight through someone's backyard and vaulting over their wooden fence into another yard and then down a darkening, dead street.

The shrieking and growls follow me, easily keeping pace. It's so fast, I can't outrun it. On a stretch of road like this, it'll catch up within minutes.

I need a tall building. One high enough that a chimera can't reach. They can jump long distances, but they can't fly. And that's where my only advantage comes in. It means getting into the city without letting it catch me first.

I'd prefer not going anywhere near populated areas. At least out here in the suburbs, there's less traffic and bystanders. The chimera is a danger to them, and they are a danger to me. I can't risk exposure, not after being careful for so long.

Easier to do when a chimera isn't chasing me.

It gets too close on the next turn, large fangs snapping at me and almost taking one of my wings with it. Not happening on my watch. Even if they're not as vibrant as they used to be, I'd prefer that my wings stay right where they are. I run up the side of a house and twist, kicking it in the head. One ducking movement and my bow slides from my shoulders. Notching an arrow into it, I wrap a light strand around it and then fire, hitting it in the side of the head. It staggers, giving me enough time to get

moving and put some considerable distance between us.

Distance it's going to eat up in a matter of seconds.

The first thing I run into in the city is a dead-end alleyway, blocked off from the other side by a ten-foot wire fence. Great. Fantastic. What a wonderful sense of direction that won't get me killed.

I spread my four translucent wings, not unlike those of a butterfly, and use them to propel myself up and over the fence. I land on a single knee, palm to the concrete surface. A quick glance behind me forces me to get up and moving again. It's too damn fast, and there's no time to rest. The chain-link fence isn't going to keep it occupied for long. Reinforced steel won't even do the trick. They're mindless organic tanks with a one-track mind.

Finally, a tall enough building comes into view. Perfect for my needs and only two blocks away. I simply need to reach it before the chimera catches me. That's the tricky part. I pull off my bow again, getting it ready. The sun is going down fast, and I don't want to be out here with that thing when true darkness falls. The moon no longer strengthens me the way it once did. Not the way it's supposed to. The shadows still give me solace, allowing me to fade until I barely exist, making travel across town that much easier. They don't, however, give me the power they should. The connection is severed the same way my soul is.

"Sae!"

My heels dig in, and one foot slips out from under me, almost unbalancing me completely. Tiernan. Where is he? A whistle above gives me a direction. Rooftop. Not the building I'd eyed and not as high as I want, but if the chimera manages to reach us, at least it's two against one. Better odds.

The next problem, however, is me making the jump before I become chimera food. I'm more than capable if I can find half a second to calm my racing heart and focus. A bit harder when a hybrid abomination is dead set on making me its chew toy, and when it takes considerably more effort than it used to.

“Get up here!” Tiernan hisses.

Looking behind myself again is a mistake. The chimera isn't far enough away and closing in too fast. Concentrate. I can do this. I used to do this in my sleep. Quite literally as a child not in control of my magic. My eyes slide closed, and familiar heat brushes against my cheek. The tips of my ears curl, magic pushing out and surrounding my wings, giving them the strength they need to—pushing up, I dive into the sky like a rocket. Chimera claws slash at me, aiming for my jugular, missing me by mere inches.

Not today, hybrid.

Tiernan sweeps a critical gaze over me—my face stays deliberately blank—and then looks over the edge of the building. He throws a ball of psychic energy at the chimera, and it yelps, going down. Another shot gouges its side. He fires his own arrow, a perfect hit between the eyes. The arrow explodes and so does the chimera's head. I wish that meant it's dead, but I know better. It won't stay down forever, only long enough for us to get away from it.

“Why didn't you do that?” Tiernan asks tersely, his blue eyes blazing angrily. “Were you trying to play with it or something?” A head taller than me, he frequently uses it to his advantage when scolding me. Attempts to, anyway. He forgets that I'm older than him, that I was fully grown before he'd even been born. It doesn't stop him from acting like a mother hen whenever I stray too far from the safety of our homes.

Gyro pops into view, landing heavily on my shoulder. Her butt sticks up in the air,

her tail wagging to and fro and smacking me in the face like a whip. I hold it down, stroking gently over her rainbow scales. “There are you. Are you alright?” I need her safe, always. She’s all I have left of my heart.

She wriggles and turns, facing Tiernan and poking me in the cheek with her horns.

Tiernan ignores us both, too lost in his rant. “Where did you go? You should have taken someone with you if it was so important. Why did you flee from the chimera? You ran all this way to avoid fighting it when it’s no match for you. What was the purpose of that?”

A loaded question. They all are. I’ve hidden this illness for so long that I don’t know where to start. The rot took hold over a hundred years ago, a slow wasting disease that’s nearing completion. There’s only one man who can heal me. A demigod who doesn’t even remember who I am. Won’t ever remember.

My choice. My burden. My loss.

“Saeran, what is going on?” Tiernan asks with a frown. One filled with concern and softness. We’ve been looking after each other for so long that it’s second nature. He’s the closest thing to family that I have left. “You promised you wouldn’t roam on your own anymore. Talk to me.”

I can’t. Not yet. I don’t know how to explain. To even begin to apologize.

“Let’s just go, it won’t be safe when it wakes up.” My knees buckle, and I stagger, dizziness swamping me. My vision blurs, everything suddenly too heavy. Oh, no. I used too much energy getting away from the chimera. I know better than to do something so stupid, but I had no choice.

The last thing I see is Tiernan’s wide, horrified blue eyes.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:06 am*

### Gluttony

“Come back to bed.” “Don’t tempt me.” “Do I tempt you, Gluttony?” “Every second of the day.”

Listening to my brothers run around in circles is a test of my patience. The same discussion we’ve had too many times over the last two weeks. My foot taps impatiently, my back against the wall. The urge to tell them all to shut the fuck up grows by the second. I’m sick of hearing it, of talking instead of doing something. Turning over every leaf in Denver hasn’t given us any answers, or leads, or clues. Nothing. Dead end after dead end. My suggestion to raze the entire city to the ground is becoming more appealing every day. It will leave our brothers and demons unscathed and easily tracible. I don’t care about any human that lives here, or anywhere. Not against the safety of my kin.

When we run out of options, I’ll be ready and waiting.

“Perhaps there’s a pattern to how they scattered them?” Lust taps his lips thoughtfully. “Clear separation and not close to each other.”

“What, like four-corners-of-the-Earth bullshit?” Wrath asks. He places a hand on the edge of the map we’re using to tick off our searched areas. The entire thing is marked up, with barely a single untouched space in the city. How can we have searched everywhere and still have come up with nothing? Where the fuck is Conor holding our family? We’re fucking Sins, and this world belongs to us. That anyone can so easily stay under our radar pisses me off.

Lust discreetly moves Wrath's burning hand away from the paper. "No," he answers. "But each of them has a unique ability. They could be taking them into different areas to test their skills?"

My stomach turns at the thought. We're no one's lab rats. "Nero's ability to disguise himself and completely hide his demonic energy would be of interest." They're already too good at hiding; imagine what they could do with Nero's level of cloaking. My hands itch to strangle something. "Conor never learned about Greed's shape-shifting, so at least we're safe from them discovering it." Greed won't get it out, no matter what they do to him. It can't be brought out involuntarily, it doesn't work like that. Small mercies.

Lazarus scowls, golden eyes blazing. "If they're experimenting with chimeras, Raven is the one they'll be focused on," he says, pain etched in his tone.

He's not wrong. Raven is the only instance of a successful turning that exists. What they have the potential of learning with Raven is more than worrying.

"I want all of us back under the same roof," Lust says. "Including Sloth."

"Morgan's left on his search. Let's hope he has some luck sooner rather than later." Lazarus fiddles with the cuffs of his jacket. "We could use Sloth right now, but we can't rely on Morgan finding him."

I snort derisively. Sloth won't be found until he wants to be. Morgan's search is futile at best. Useless, and a complete waste of time at worst. Our brother isn't much into interpersonal relations. Or people in general. The kind of power he has, the way it evolves around him, I don't blame him for isolating himself. I wouldn't want to be around people either. I barely want to now.

Sloth's ability to manipulate time around him means that even if by some miracle



Morgan finds him, he won't remember finding him. Sloth will turn back time, and it will be like Morgan was never there. There are limitations to what Sloth can do; that isn't one of them.

"Kicking in every door in the city hasn't worked," Envy says, absently flicking a knife in his hand where he's slouched back in a computer chair. "What do we do now, then?"

Lust smooths the pads of his fingers over the map. "We need a more deliberate approach."

"Searching every place top to bottom wasn't deliberate enough for you?" Envy asks sarcastically. "Because I think—"

Thankfully, none of us have to hear what Envy thinks. Deacon—Lust's lover and a man I don't trust whatsoever—pushes through the door into the room. He goes straight for Lust, who immediately makes room for him, the two of them curling around each other.

It's a disgusting display of affection that I have no time for. "We've searched almost every inch of the city. Are we still convinced they haven't moved them out of the state? Possibly even the country?" I'm not. This is our seat of power, where we're strongest. Smarter to move them farther afield. They won't ever get far enough away to be out of our reach, but it's not an unreasonable assumption.

"No," Lust admits. "I'm also not convinced that we've finished searching here. When we went into that building where we were ambushed, we didn't feel anything Fae upstairs whatsoever. It was only when we were below ground that we felt it. Deacon smelled it quicker than us. Unfortunately, we don't know how reliable that is."

"Thanks."

Lust kisses Deacon's temple. "Should I show you much I adore you, love? We need to tread carefully when it comes to your Fae side. We don't know yet how to pull it out, or what it will do to you when it does emerge."

"You know, now that I think about it, we never once saw a Fae child. Not that I can remember anyway. Do we know why?" Envy asks.

"Not a subject I've spent a lot of time dwelling on," I drawl. A pointless exercise. The Fae aren't my concern. So long as the Light stay on their side of the shroud, I have no reason to think about them. If Lust is right about there being pockets of Dark Fae, we'll deal with that when we get there.

"I'm just saying that there's no record of Deke before he was eight, and he doesn't remember it. Who's to say he wasn't with them? That they didn't do something to him?"

Deacon stiffens, and Lust smooths a hand up and down his back.

"Irrelevant," I say dismissively. Whatever the reason, speculating won't get us anywhere. We don't have the answers or know who does. The mystery will remain unsolved, and I'm not about to lose any sleep over it. "Knowing isn't going to get our brothers back from Conor."

"You're his brother; why don't you tell us?" Wrath says angrily.

Deacon scowls right back at him, unafraid. I can almost respect him for that. "You were his lover, why don't you tell us?" he shoots back.

Flames lick at Wrath's hands, and he clenches them, dousing them. "The man I knew never existed. You're the one who holds his past. I still don't believe that you had no idea who he worked with. What his purpose was."

“He wasn’t into espionage or murder. And he certainly didn’t work for some shadow organization that’s hell-bent on taking you down. I don’t know anything about this, and if you ask me again, we’re gonna have a big fucking problem.”

“We already have a problem.” Wrath menacingly steps toward him.

I’m inclined to agree with Wrath. Deacon may sing a different tune these days, firmly at Lust’s side, but can we really trust him? He already held one secret. Who’s to say there isn’t more? I’m not against Pride rooting around inside his head when we get Pride back. If it turns Deacon into nothing but a husk, I won’t be sorry about it.

Lust holds up a hand. “Enough. Fighting amongst ourselves will get us nowhere and putting a hand on Deacon will only upset me. We’ll do one more sweep over the city, more deliberately this time. With this new information, we can attempt to locate them by pinpointing their specific signatures.”

“You seriously just found some random dude—in a random house in a suburb we never go to—who all but pinged your radar like a fucking beacon, and he happens to have this information, and we’re not the least bit suspicious?”

No disagreement there; Wrath has a point. Regardless of the risk, it’s the only lead we’ve found in weeks, and we have no other options. Being able to focus on one signature at a time can only help us. Having them all together doesn’t mean a large confluence of energy to follow; it means that they’re muddled and harder to pinpoint. That’s information that Conor and his lackies aren’t smart enough to figure out.

Lust shrugs. “Whether it’s the truth or not, it won’t hurt us to use it to do another sweep of the city.”

“Say we’re wrong, and they’re outside the city, where the fuck would we even start?” Envy asks. “I want to know where they are, Lust. I want them now , not a year from

now after we've wiped every goddamn fucking person off this planet for taking them from us."

We can just do that now, save ourselves a lot of trouble. The humans will repopulate and come back. It might take them a couple thousand years, but they're resilient, and we don't need them in order to survive.

Lust doesn't respond, his gaze sweeping over the map. "If Conor is attempting to learn about the chimeras, and himself, there's only one place he should go."

"Asia," Envy guesses. "But he doesn't know that it's the only place where the Fae ever mounted an assault. That the gateway between the two worlds is weakest there for the same reason."

"He shouldn't know half the information he does," Lust points out. "We have no way of knowing what he does and doesn't know. That makes him extremely dangerous."

Even if he knows nothing, he's still extremely dangerous. He managed to kidnap some of us and get out of a confrontation unscathed. He needs to be put down like the rabid dog he is.

"I say we find him, torture him, and find out," Wrath suggests darkly.

"That's my brother you're talking about!"

"I'm aware of who we have in our midst. Don't think I'm not watching you."

"Go fuck yourself," Deacon snarls.

"I said enough," Lust says quietly. "Our family is out there, and they're the only thing that matters right now. We'll start the new search tomorrow. Divide and conquer.

Until then, we all need to rest.”

I highly doubt that Lust’s plans only involve resting. In fact, I wager it doesn’t involve rest at all. His magic pours off him like liquid. It may not affect any of us the way it does humans—and some of the lesser species across the shroud—but I can still smell it. Lust, and desire, and other nuances of arousal. None of which appeals to me. I’ve never desired anyone. The mere thought of being naked and touching another person makes my stomach churn uncomfortably. The idea of sleeping with them is unfathomable to me. To feel another person under my hands, to bury my cock inside them? It leaves a sour taste in my mouth. There’s only one thing I enjoy doing with another person, and their screams aren’t ones of pleasure.

I grimace and tear out of the room without a word.

A fucking waste of time. I’m going to rest, and I’m not going to fuck. I plan to hunt.

Slamming my bedroom door behind me is supremely satisfying, frustration and helplessness a rot inside me.

The noise of the outside world disappears, and I freeze. Someone is in here with me. I can’t see them even as I circle the room, searching it thoroughly. That doesn’t change facts; I would bet my entire hoard that I’m not alone.

How the hell did they get through the estate’s defenses, and why can’t I see them? Invisibility isn’t possible, not even for the most powerful of us. It would be a hell of a useful skill, but none of us have that kind of magic. Sin , Fae, or any other creature that stalks the cumhdach and beyond.

A force nudges me in the upper arm, and I whirl around, lightning striking the floor directly in front of me. I catch a glimpse of tiny... dragon wings? What the fuck? No. That’s impossible.

My ears pop painfully, and then the feeling of another presence is gone.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:06 am*

Saeran

His face lights when I offer him a gift to add to his hoard. A joy only I ever get to see. I ache to see it one more time.

I can't help myself. The moment I wake in the bedroom of the apartment I share with Tiernan, I sneak out through the window before he can catch me. Now that things are in motion, I have no patience left. Or control. I've waited thousands of years for this moment, for this iteration. So many years of being alone with my memories and feeling the devastation that those I love are forever separated from the other halves of their souls.

The shadows keep me out of sight as I traverse the quiet streets, allowing me to move around without using up precious energy. It's so much a part of me now, after so many years bending it to my will, that it takes nothing to become a shadow myself. A dangerous path to walk. One slip, one wrong move, and I'll become nothing but a shadow. I don't exist when the shadows surround me, and if I'm not careful, I won't exist at all.

Gyro follows me for a few streets and then disappears to make her own mischief. She knows how to keep herself hidden and safe.

I get myself lost down twists and turns in the city, not really knowing what I'm looking for. The need to be out here overwhelms me, and I don't fight it.

Gliding past crowds of people who have no idea I'm here, the loneliness sinks in deeper than it has in a long time. Bright lights and neon signs are too loud, the city

coming to life under the night sky, like a flower opening its petals under the sun.

The smells and sights and sounds are nothing compared to the world I came from. I don't mind it, and civilization's grown over the last century with appreciative advancements. Luxuries. Delicacies. I still miss home most days, but at least banishment is somewhat comfortable even if I can never truly settle here. While there are so many parts of this world that disgust me, there's also so much beauty too. Good and bad, merging together like the sun and moon. Two halves of a whole. That's something I can relate to.

I drift aimlessly, uncaring which direction I go. My feet are taking me somewhere, and I'm content to let them lead. What does it matter where we end up, when I'll never get where I really want to go?

The scent turns my head first. So familiar to me, feeding my soul and making it sin.

Gluttony.

My heart skips a painful beat. He's nearby.

The pull is easy to follow. Hope wars with caution. It may not be Gluttony himself. If he's used his magic in the area recently, or if one of his glamours exist here—they do in so many parts of the city—the scent will be the same. Any traces of him call to me instinctively. They always have; they always will.

The lone figure walking through a dark alleyway and onto a back street devoid of humans isn't a trick, a glamour, or leftover magic.

Gluttony is here, right in front of me.

Within reaching distance.



My heart thunders in my ears, the yearning so agonizing I clutch at my stomach as it contracts. He's right here.

I've always been so careful to keep my distance, keep us apart. It's the only way that my kind has been able to survive, the only way I've been able to protect what's left of my world. I sacrificed everything to be what they needed because it's my duty to lead them.

I failed them once; I won't again. The broken pieces of my heart lie on the floor as my penance.

I know I should leave, and at the same time, I know that I won't. Gluttony will forever be my siren, and I'll break upon the rocks and destroy myself for a mere glimpse of him.

Gluttony stops as though sensing me. Of course, he does. Neither of us can ignore the other. Especially not this close. He turns in a full circle, his downturned head moving back and forth. Using his senses to pinpoint where I am. He won't find me, not when I'm using the shadows like this. And Gluttony's magic, his sheer power, won't work on me.

"Show yourself," Gluttony growls.

A shiver runs through me at the sound. How many times over the years have I dreamed of it? How long has it been since I've heard it in person? Even longer than that last time I heard it while Gluttony filled me, making me whole. The demigod standing in front of me is a stranger. He looks, and talks, and breathes like the man I've loved forever. But he's not. Not where it matters. He'll never look at me the way he once did.

"And if I don't want to?" I ask, unable to resist interacting with him. This glimpse is

too much for me to walk away from. Being this close to him is painful and perfect, and I could cry at the mix of emotions in my chest that are too large to handle.

“Then I’ll make sure you regret it. Who are you?”

I dance around him, through the shadows, throwing my voice as I speak. “Someone who wants to help you.” I shouldn’t, it’s too dangerous. In the end, that doesn’t matter. If he calls, I will come. Always.

Whether the Sins can be trusted or not remains to be seen. My court was betrayed in the worst way, rocked to the core and slaughtered in a single night. The Light can’t have done it on their own. We still don’t know who helped them. Even without their memories intact, the Sins benefited greatly from the results. They gained power and a whole world to rule over. A status that they couldn’t have achieved across the shroud.

Are they partly responsible for the death of my family, for all I hold dear? My heart breaks at the idea that any of them could have had anything to do with the massacre. I refuse to believe it, but I can’t risk those left on a feeling with no proof. Gluttony is my everything, and yet I can’t trust him with any of this. Not even if I want to. Not after everything I’ve gone through to survive. More than my own life is at stake here, and my sacrifices can’t be for nothing.

“A clever lie. Show your face.”

I want nothing more than to give him that. Still, I can’t. Even if one single glimpse could fix the evil magic that caused this in the first place, it doesn’t matter. Fixing it would mean the end for us all.

“We can’t always get what we want.” A truth that haunts me.

“I get what I want,” Gluttony says with absolute confidence.

You can't have me.

I can't have him back in my arms where I need him. Where I ache for him to be.

"You want your brothers back," I say, knowing that's really what he's talking about. "And they're still missing." I risk moving closer, the need too strong to completely ignore. It's why I've kept my distance all these years. How much temptation can I take? I fear the answer.

Gluttony turns in the correct direction, and I swiftly move out of eyesight. If he looks too closely, for too long, will he see me? His glours are nothing for me to see through. I wonder if it works both ways? I've never tried to deliberately hide from him before.

He half turns his head, again directly facing me. He's more careful this time as if he knows that I'm nearby, and that if he makes any sudden movements, I'll disappear.

"What makes you think any of the Sins are missing?"

He's right. Only Lust is ever in the spotlight, and it won't have been noticed by the general public that the others aren't around. They're as much in the shadows as I am. "You might be able to keep it out of the media, but not everyone is so ignorant."

"Not everyone, meaning you?"

"Me," I agree, moving further back into the shadows. "And others." I'm not the only one watching their every move. Not every set of eyes on them are friendly. In fact, most of them aren't. I can't blame him for thinking I'm just another.

"Who want to help me?" Gluttony asks disdainfully.

Not answering tells him what he wants to know. There are many with opinions about what to do with the Sins, both from my own kind and from other humans that don't like the oppression of their rulers. The most popular opinion among mine is to leave them here to rot and take a shot at getting our home back ourselves. Another is to simply learn to live with what we have left and accept that we'll never be what we once were. An era lost to us forever.

I choose not to believe the worst of them. My heart belongs to one of them, and I need them to be better than that. Being separated from Gluttony is one thing; to be on the opposite side of a fight from him? I can't accept that. I won't .

Gluttony sneers. "But you. You want to help me?"

I come up behind Gluttony. Too close. Not close enough. I'm hovering high enough above the ground that I could glance my lips across the back of Gluttony's neck. I once knew the taste of him intimately. The familiar masculine scent sends a shudder through me, tears pricking at my eyes. Oh, that scent. What I wouldn't give to have it wrapped around me, to feel that familiar heavy weight against me. Holding me, loving me.

This is a mistake. I should never have come here or lingered.

Now it's too late. Everything I buried deep, everything I try so hard every day to forget, crashes over me like waves against the rocks. Every memory, a curse and a blessing, pulls me under until all that's left is the two of us. Of what we had that had once been so precious and perfect.

"Yes," I say, unable to mask the crack in my voice. Yes. Let me help you. I've tried searching for his family, for him, hindered by the fact that I can't risk exposure. I need more time, more power. I wish that I could do more. I'll do everything that I possibly can for this man who's held my heart for eternity. A man I can never touch

again, never hold or kiss or love .

This is one thing that I can do for him before I die and take all the memories of the past with me. I'm the only one who remembers, and I'll be the last to take it to my grave.

Gluttony swivels around, almost too fast for me. I retreat into the shadows, out of his path, blanketing myself so deep I almost lose myself in it. I pull back at the last moment before it can swallow me, its tendrils wrapping around me.

"Allies don't hide in the shadows."

"I want to trust you."

" You want to trust me ?" Gluttony scoffs. "Try the other way around."

Trust is in short supply for us both. The last time my people trusted, we'd been almost wiped out. The last time the Sins had trusted, they'd been betrayed in the worst way. Conor's true identity remains a mystery to both of us. Does he belong with the Sins, or is he a block in the road to their true path? Wrath's reaction to him makes me suspicious, but I need to get closer to him to confirm or disprove it. He's extremely slippery, more than he should be. Emerging as Fae isn't enough to confirm it. My weakened state means I can't be sure of anything, and making assumptions like that without proof is dangerous. Especially given Conor's volatility and the magic he's throwing around like confetti.

Gyro pops into sight, right in front of Gluttony. He jerks in surprise and grabs for her. His hand slips through her, and she ducks away from him, crackling lightning curling up around her snout and over her back, lighting up her rainbow colors until they resemble an otherworldly glow. The strikes empower, feed, and delight her simultaneously. She's stunning under the darkness, her face happy and bright. It's

been a long time since she's been quite this animated.

Being this close to Gluttony would be incredible for her. I understand completely. Too much of the past bleeds around us, not nearly enough at the same time.

A blast of lightning goes through her. Gluttony's attempting to attack. She lights up, squealing happily and whirling around in circles. I can feel the absolute pure joy bursting from her. She doesn't understand that this isn't a game. That Gluttony isn't doing it for her enjoyment.

"That's not you," Gluttony surmises.

"No." I hesitate. Will revealing her do irreparable damage? Is it just us joining together that will undo years of concealment, or is she part of the equation as well? "Her name is Gyro," I say before I can take it back. Will he recognize her? Is there some part of the past still left in there? Do I want there to be? My heart does. Except bringing my Gluttony back to me will mean losing everything else.

"What is she?"

"A specter. A companion. My guide and my friend." The proof that you and I will forever be bound together, no matter where our souls lead us.

"You're from across the shroud," Gluttony says, lips curling up into a snarl.

"I won't hurt you." I could never. I've destroyed myself to ensure he's safe. That they all are.

"Forgive me if I don't take you at your word."

Gyro turns in a circle and then tumbles onto her back, kicking through the air like

she's swimming. She presents Gluttony with a single orb, filled with Fae magic. Our only way to help him.

It won't lead him directly to his brothers, but if there's Fae energy, it will lead him there. There's not enough magic left in me to use it properly, not the way it's meant to be. It won't open for me anymore. Others will; not this one. There are only seven Fae in existence that can use ones like this, and I'm the last one left with that innate knowledge. The strands I can do but nothing of this magnitude. Being cut off from so much of my magic is debilitating, and at first the struggle almost killed me, but I've had time to get used to it.

I can only hope that Deacon will be able to work it out on his own.

"What is this?" Gluttony asks, not touching it.

"A gift. It will help you find your brothers."

Gluttony hesitates and then wraps his large hand around it, engulfing it completely. A flutter of warmth dances in my chest at the trust he shows, no matter how miniscule. Instinct.

"If you're lying to me," Gluttony threatens.

"You can do nothing to me." Nothing he hasn't already done. Simply by existing in this state, he destroys me. "I'm not lying to you." I can't reveal the truth; that isn't the same as lying.

Gluttony's hand clenches around the orb. "We'll see."

We will. He'll learn that I can be trusted. And by then it will be too late to do anything about it.

I leave without another word, having done my good deed. If I'm around him much longer, I know I'll do something that I can't take back. Like reveal myself and beg him to love me again.

Gyro circles me as I walk, her big eyes wide and confused. She meows and looks back at the streets we're turning from. Away from Gluttony until I can't smell him anymore or feel his magic.

"No, Gyro. That's not him," I tell her quietly, stroking her head.

He doesn't exist anymore.



## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:06 am*

### Gluttony

“I missed you.” “I came back as soon as I could.” “Will you always come back to me?” “Always.”

The orb sits heavy in my pocket when I return to the estate. Who the fuck is the stranger that gave it to me, and what the hell is it supposed to do? Why give me something and not explain?

Everyone is in the kitchen, and I drop the glowing orb on the table in the middle of the small room without a word. They all rear back from it. Deacon leaps from his chair to move behind it. Cowardice or smarts? A little of both. Smart to be afraid, but his first instinct should be to destroy the thing he’s afraid of, not move away from it.

“What the hell is that?” Lazarus’s lips curl in distaste. “It has the smell of Dark Fae all over it.”

“Where’s Wrath?” I ask instead of answering. Envy still sleeps—he’s sleeping a lot later these days, and even I’m worrying about it, especially after yesterday’s display and his lack of control over his magic. If he loses complete control over it, we’ll have a lot more to worry about. Wrath, however, should be here.

“He disappeared around the same time you did,” Lust drawls. He reaches behind himself and gathers Deacon closer to him, hand settling on his hip. Comforting him. Another useless emotion I have no time for. If Deacon is worried, he can soothe himself instead of relying on someone else to do it for him.

They let Wrath loose in the city? That spells trouble. Though I won't mind if he levels a few buildings in his search. The subtle approach isn't working, and it's time for Lust to step aside and let us handle it.

"Care to share where you went?" Lust gestures at the orb. "And what that is?" Lazarus reaches forward, and Lust grasps his wrist, halting him. "Don't touch it. Gluttony, an explanation."

"I don't know what it is." I have zero fucking clue. The mystery stranger left before I could ask as if I'm expected to already know. I'm more interested in him than the orb. The orb belongs to me now, and I'll figure it out. And the stranger? Who do they belong to?

"Where did you get it?" Deacon asks, peering around Lust's arm.

"It was given to me." It's mine. If they were meant to have it, it would have been given to them. Showing it to them doesn't make it a free-for-all.

"By whom?" Lazarus asks. "Did you find a Dark Fae? Where?"

The information belongs to me—what little of it I have—and part of me doesn't want to share it. "I don't know who they were." The stranger isn't Fae. They can't hide their scent. Conor may have figured out a way to mask himself, but he's not fully blooded. A weak, pathetic creature would find it easier to hide since there's barely any power to mask. A true Dark Fae, with their mass of magic, would never be able to do that.

"You touched it. It's safe?" Lust asks.

"Seems to be." It could be a ticking time bomb, rigged to wait until they're sure I'm back here, where we're relaxed and at our most vulnerable. Conor's bullshit

organization found their way in here once. While we've bolstered the security, it may not mean anything. We don't know what resources they have. Until we do, we can't be sure of anything.

Lust plucks it up, twirling it in his palm. "It's cold. Heavy. Definitely a Dark Fae object of some kind. Some stranger gave this to you? What did they look like?"

My fingers itch to snatch it from him, squirrel it away, so that no one else can even look at it. The stranger gave it to me. It's mine .

"They didn't show themselves. All they said was that this could help us find our brothers." They'd said a hell of a lot more than that. Those things are for me, and I'm not sharing. None of it is relevant to this, and so it remains mine.

The strange words, the broken words, with a glimmer of something else beneath them. Whispered in my ear, all around me. For me alone. I know there's more to the conversation than the words themselves. There's no doubt the stranger will be back. I'll be waiting for him.

Lazarus frowns at it. "How?"

An excellent question. The orb hasn't done anything since I got it. Not when I touch it, not when I push my magic into it, or when I squeeze it with my full strength. Not even a crack to show for it. All I have are the words of a man who refused to come out of the shadows and a weird-as-fuck rainbow-colored specter in the form of a baby dragon that isn't affected by my lightning. Neither of those give me a lot of confidence. There's no explanation for why I chose to take it despite all that. A blind instinct driving me.

Deacon ducks his head to get a closer look. It lights up suddenly, a bright-white strand peeking out of it like growing grass. It wriggles as if searching for something.

Deacon steps back in surprise, and the light disappears, going dormant.

“Well, that took on an entirely creepy turn,” Lazarus says, leaning back with a perfectly arched eyebrow. His dark suit jacket shifts as he moves. “Is it sentient?”

“No.” I don’t think. Maybe it is. Who gives a fuck? It’s an orb made of Dark Fae energy. They can all just calm the fuck down, acting like I brought some live bomb in here.

“It’s certainly responding to Deacon,” Lazarus remarks thoughtfully.

Lust hums in agreement. He strokes his chin and then says, “Deacon, come closer. Don’t worry, I won’t let it hurt you.”

“Yeah, that would be such a shame,” I mutter darkly. I won’t be mad if it’s a trick to kill him. Won’t even pretend to shed a tear for Lust’s sake. The less we have to do with the traitorous brothers, the better.

Lust sends me a look that I give right back. He gestures for Deacon. “If it is Dark, you may be the only one who can activate it.”

I have to shove a clenched fist into my pocket when Deacon approaches the orb again. It reaches for him properly now, tentacle strands lengthening and moving up his chest. My lips twist in a sneer, the urge for violence rising in me. I hate that it responds to him and not me.

I want it back. It’s mine. My gift. Not theirs. Not for them. Especially not for Deacon, who doesn’t belong here in the first place. How dare he think he can touch what doesn’t belong to him?

“Gluttony?” Lazarus asks, tilting his head. He’s watching me too closely, seeing too

much.

“I’m fine,” I bite out, anger like a physical presence in my chest. The stranger must have known that Deacon’s the only one who can get the orb to work. “Let’s just get this over with. The sooner we find everyone, the sooner we can hunt Conor down and kill him.”

“We’re not killing him,” Deacon says, shooting me a glare.

“I’m not having this argument with you.” Deacon has no horse in this race. If he wants to fight both Wrath and me, he’s welcome to try. I’ll make him regret he ever stepped foot in these walls. This road will only end when Conor is six feet under, for real this time. I’ll make sure he doesn’t have a body left to resurrect in.

“Let’s focus on the orb right now.” Lust lays a hand on Deacon’s, stopping his tirade in its tracks. He knows when not to push me. “Here, hold it.”

Deacon tenses as Lust places the orb in his palm. It glows brighter, and strands like silk twine out and around him. I hate everything about it.

“And I thought I’d seen everything,” Lazarus says with a low whistle. He runs a finger over his bottom lip thoughtfully. “What is this? Have you seen it before?”

“It seems... familiar?” Lust admits. To me as well, in a way that sits on the edge of my tongue, not quite within reach. “I can’t pinpoint why. If it’s Dark Fae magic, then it’s possible we’ve seen it before.”

The Dark were our allies, and we once worked closely together, from the little that I can remember. It’s been so long that there are gaps in memory that fade with time.

“It’s...” Deacon frowns, brows drawing in. “Talking to me?”

“And what exactly does an orb talk about?” Lazarus asks with a derisive snort, somehow making the undignified sound sophisticated.

It better be something fucking good. He can figure it out and then give it back to me.

“Not words,” Deacon says, eyes narrowing as he studies the orb. “Just... reaching for me?”

“How is that talking to you? It’s like the blind leading the blind,” I say angrily. This is ridiculous. “It’s supposed to lead us somewhere. Can you make it do that?” We need answers, and we need them now, not in a week when he finally works out how to use it.

I’m not waiting that long. Deacon needs to return that orb as soon as he’s done with it.

Hurry up and give it back to me. I want to see it in my room, displayed like a trophy on my shelf. I’ll carve a wooden stand for it to sit perfectly in. If I examine it for long enough, can I make it come to life for me? If I study it enough, I’m sure I can. I’ll find a way.

“I don’t even know how I’m doing what I’m doing!” Deacon’s frustration leaks out of him, words sharp, with jagged edges.

“You better learn.” If he can’t get it to work, then he can hand it over.

“Let’s perhaps give him some time to look at it without everyone breathing down his neck?” Lust says, ever the mediator. “We’ll see what we can do. In the meantime, Lazarus, I need you to find Envy and let him know what’s going on. Gluttony, go get some rest. You look tired. Did you sleep last night?”

With arms folded over my chest defensively, I ask, “Are you trying to manage me, Lust?” in a dangerous tone.

“Just a suggestion.”

“If I want your suggestion, I’ll give it to you.” Shoving through the door, I stalk out into the hallway. Fury curls around my throat, moving down my chest like a heavy weight. Deacon hasn’t given my gift back. He’s keeping it, and I don’t like that. It doesn’t belong to him. It was given to me .

I don’t know why it’s bothering me. It’s a meaningless trinket that may not get us anywhere, because it’s being used by an idiot. And yet the irrational urge to go back and snatch it away and squirrel it where no one can find it overwhelms me enough that I turn around and take a step back toward the kitchen.

My movements halt, hands clenching. “What the hell is wrong with you?” I stalk off in the opposite direction, determined to get as far away as possible. I can control myself better than this.

It’s a dangerous artifact, given to me by who-the-fuck-knows what. It could be a trick, a trap, something meant to hurt us. After everything we’ve been through, and the number of assholes that have done nothing but betray us at every turn, blindly trusting is the last thing we should be doing. It’s what got us in this mess in the first place and hardly what’ll get us out of it.

The orb doesn’t mean anything, and I don’t need it.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:06 am*

Saeran

When it storms, I find the highest possible location and sit, hoping that the lightning might hit me. Basking in the sounds of the rain and the thunder rumbling in the sky. Anything to feel like he's sitting here with me. When it strikes true, I'm as close to Gluttony as I ever will be again.

I'm not surprised to find Tiernan waiting in my room when I return. The scowl on his face could freeze half the continent. I'm tempted to look out the window, just in case it has actually started snowing.

"Do I have to lock you up?"

"Nothing you can do would keep me chained." A lie or the truth? I'm not sure anymore. At full strength I could say it with certainty. There isn't anything that exists strong enough to hold me captive. But now? Not a theory I'm confident testing. I hope the bluff works; I won't be caged in here like an animal, because Tiernan worries too much.

"Where were you? How many times do we have to have this conversation? It is not safe for you when Virtus roam and chimeras have your scent. Conor's being careless and reckless, and it's only a matter of time before the Light decide it's time to cross over and clean up the mess."

They won't. Conor isn't strong enough to ping their radar. Not yet. And I've sacrificed everything to make sure my own magic doesn't alert them. We should never have had to hide like this; the Light were never able to match our strength.



Until suddenly, they were. How they wiped us out... I still don't know. Taking over my court in a single night is unfathomable. And now what are they doing on our side of the shroud? They've been left alone there for so long, my heart hurts at what they may have done to my home. My forests.

What will be left when we finally reclaim it? I won't ever find out, and I can only hope that Tiernan and the others will be able to rebuild and get back even a small part of what we lost.

"I wasn't in any danger." My clothes are filthy, and I need to change into something more comfortable. And then do some maintenance on my bow. Find time to get down the street and buy more of the nuts Gyro likes best.

"You don't know that."

"I do." There's no safer place in the world for me than when I'm with Gluttony. I refuse to believe otherwise, no matter how far we've drifted from who we were.

Understanding dawns on Tiernan's face, and I brace myself. "Are you serious ? You went to him? Are you insane?"

"It wasn't on purpose." Maybe I should have done more to avoid it once I sensed him. I've been strong for so long that I refuse to feel guilty about one single moment of weakness.

My shirt and pants go in the basket near the door, and I rustle through my drawers for some three-quarter cargo pants and a fresh pair of briefs to replace the black ones I'm wearing.

"What did you do?"

Annoying how well he knows me. “I didn’t do anything.” Technically the truth. Gyro had been the one to give Gluttony his gift.

“Saeran.”

I throw the clothes I have onto the bed and rustle through the closet, looking for my navy button-down. “I gave him an orb.”

Tiernan’s eyes close briefly. “Why?”

“I wanted to help him.”

“If you get too close—”

“I know what’s at stake.” I’m unable to mask the venom in my tone, the biting sharpness to my words. He doesn’t need to remind me why it’s important to keep my distance. I’m acutely aware.

Tiernan sits heavily on my bed. Gyro appears behind him and stretches out, shoving her back feet against his thigh as she rolls like a cat all over my clothing, covering it in her scent.

“Do you mind? I’m about to put those on.”

“He could have caught you, Sae. Do you have any idea what he would have done to you?”

Not what I’d like him to do to me. Things that keep me awake at night, aching for him. Even after this long, I still crave him. That won’t ever stop. Not even after I die. “I didn’t let him see me.”

“This time. You were lucky . That won’t last forever.”

My voice cracks on my next words, emotions too strong to keep at bay. “He was right there in front of me for the first time since the night I lost him. Right there, and I—” Wasn’t strong enough to keep resisting. I’ve been alone and left wanting for a hundred lifetimes. More. There are times when I think the loss is going to kill me, where the holes he left behind are too many.

Tiernan swears in Gaelic and pulls me to him, wrapping me in a hug, his hands warm against my back. “I’m sorry. I wish you could have what you want, that things were different.” But they aren’t. They never will be. I can never get back what I lost. I won’t live long enough to even contemplate the possibility.

“Even if you could, Saeran, we don’t know whose side they’re on. We don’t know who our enemies are and what obstacles we need to get through in order to take back our home. What happens if he draws the line between you?”

He already has even if he’s unaware of it. At the same time— “We don’t know it was them.” Until we figure out the truth, there’s no way to know if the Sins can be trusted, or if they’re the ones behind the ultimate betrayal. All I can go by is my own instincts. And they’re screaming at me that nothing is as it seems, and that Gluttony, mine or not, can always be trusted.

“Who else could it have been, Saeran? They were the only ones outside of our own that had the knowledge they needed to ambush us so perfectly. They rendered us powerless in one sweep. It couldn’t have been one of us.”

I’d sooner accuse one of our own before I point the finger at Gluttony or the other Sins. What does that say about me? Something harsh and unflattering.

“You can’t see him again. Not just for your sake, but for ours. Not to mention that if

you're killed, we'll be lost. Your leadership is needed, especially now."

I open my mouth to tell him the truth—I need to tell him before it's too late—but nothing comes out. It won't be long before Tiernan, Riordan, and Diarmuid will have to lead the charge without me. And they deserve to know. I hope they're strong enough to hold the mantle when the time comes. For the sake of what remains of our kind, they need to make it all the way through. They'll need strong leaders to face what's next.

"You really think that he'd kill me?" I ask instead. Are Gluttony and I so lost that a violent outcome is a certainty?

"Riordan and Diarmuid are downstairs," Tiernan says, not answering my question. A deliberate sidestep and a telling one. He truly believes that Gluttony will harm me. That there's nothing whatsoever left of us that will stop that killing blow. It slashes across my chest like a physical cut. "A chimera's been spotted, prowling near one of our buildings, and we're coordinating where to shift them while we investigate and hunt it down if we need to."

It's worrying that the chimeras are that intelligent, able to prowl and hunt a specific target instead of resorting to baser instincts and killing everything in sight. More than worrying. Training them as weapons? It shouldn't be possible.

"I need to shower." My chest aches, a familiar heavy sadness that's been a part of me for too long. Scooping up my clothes, I pat Gyro on the head. "I'll meet you downstairs when I'm done."

"Promise that you won't return to him," Tiernan insists.

"I can't promise that." Not unless Tiernan wants me to lie. Seeing Gluttony tonight opened the gates. I can only do my best. How long can I really stay strong? Not

nearly long enough.

Tiernan cradles my face, and I have no choice but to look into his green eyes. Filled with concern and a sadness that isn't his own. It's my burden, and he doesn't deserve to have to carry it with me. No one does.

"You and he don't walk the same path anymore. He doesn't know you, and you don't know the person he is now. There isn't a way to return there, no matter how much you wish it."

"Lust found his again." The response makes me too vulnerable, peeling back the layers I've built up for years. It's a stubborn hope that I cling to. One I've hung onto by the tips of my fingers all this time. That maybe something can change, that it doesn't always have to be so helpless. If Gluttony lives, if they all do, then there's still a chance. There has to be. After seeing Lust and Daithí find each other again... that hope is my only lifeline. It's all I have left. Even if it's fruitless, it keeps me going.

"They don't know that. They don't know who they were, or what they meant to each other when you ruled. Yes, they found each other but not as them. It's not the same thing."

"Their souls knew. They're paving the way. They'll all find each other again."

"It doesn't matter," Tiernan hisses. "You can't. Will you sacrifice all of us to take that chance?"

"Of course not." I haven't been alone all this time because I wanted to be. I've had no choice.

"Then stay away from him." He kisses my forehead and then pats Gyro's head. He

stops at the doorway, hand curling around the doorframe as he glances back at me.  
“I’m sorry, Saeran.”

“I know.” That won’t mend the broken pieces of my heart. Or get my court back.

“We’ll be downstairs when you’re ready.”

Gyro rolls over onto her back, and the light above her breaks with a spark of lightning. She mewls in delight, her wings flapping.

“Gyro, I said no more breaking things.”

She sneezes, rocketing herself off the bed. I leave her to it, gathering my clothes and heading for the bathroom. I can replace the bulb later.

THE FOLLOWING NIGHT THE shadows are calling to me so loudly that sleep eludes me. Eventually, I give up trying and sit up in bed, sweat soaking my skin. Gyro tumbles off from where she’s asleep on my back. Lifting a knee, I brace my elbow on it and stare out the open window. A light breeze moves the shimmery curtain. I can’t sleep with it closed, too far away from the outside. I’d sleep under the moon if I could. Sometimes I do, on the roof. I always sleep better that way, surrounded by the things that are still most familiar to me.

I doubt I’ll get back to sleep tonight. With a growl, I kick the sheets off and head for my closet. I choose all black and lift a mask up over the bottom half of my face, covering my mouth and nose. No shoes. I move faster in bare feet, and I like the way different surfaces feel, especially natural ones.

“Stay here, Gyro. I won’t be long.” I need to see him, at least once more before I stay away. For good this time. I’ve managed to for so long, only catching glimpses as we’ve tried to regroup, rebuild, and get back even a fraction of the culture so

violently ripped from us.

It doesn't take long to reach my destination. Not at this time of night, with the shadows speeding my path. They embrace me, as they always do, and the temptation to give up and sink into them completely beckons me. If I had nothing else to live for, maybe I would.

The protections around the Sin estate are nothing to me, not when they're created by Sin magic. Every symbol carved into doors, walls, objects, they're all flooded with Sin magic. I'm immune to every single one of them.

Soon enough I'm gliding in through Gluttony's bedroom window. Always open, like mine. Does he remember instinctively my need to have it open? Emotion clogs my throat, and I linger, crouched on the windowsill, my feet curling over the edge. I want him to remember just as much as I know it would destroy everything. Sometimes I wonder if it wouldn't be worth it.

Gluttony isn't inside, and I drop to the floor, the thick, dark carpet soft underneath me. It's decadent. If Gyro were here, she'd roll in it.

The entire room is all deep blues, matching the shirt I wore mere hours ago. A myriad of items are cluttered everywhere. Shelves full of knickknacks, bookshelves with tomes that are hundreds of years old. I run my finger over the spines. Perfectly preserved. Collector's items. There are cupboards filled with more items, the room packed with so many wondrous things. To most it would feel cramped. To me it feels like home. Gluttony has always gathered things around him, found ways to fill every space of his with more, and more. And then even more.

I deliberately skirt around the bed tucked in the corner, trying not to so much as glimpse at it. Even I have my limits, and seeing where Gluttony lays his head at night? Where he might touch himself? That's beyond my limit.

The door flings open, and I freeze, one hand on a skull. I didn't notice his approach. His scent is so strong in this room it's impossible to track him. I should have been more careful.

Gluttony stops in the doorway, tense and ready. He knows I'm here.

"You again," he snarls, kicking the door shut behind him. "Who the fuck are you?"

I instinctively glance back at the window even though I know I'm not going to leave. The temptation to be near him is too strong. "I told you already."

"You didn't tell me shit. Why won't you show yourself?"

I wish that I could, and that we could have our happily ever after. "Did you use the orb?"

"He doesn't know how to use it."

I feared that. Deacon hasn't been taught, and his latent abilities are still buried deep. His wings aren't out, and he doesn't know the power his key tattoo holds. The things he could tap into simply because of his intrinsic connection to a Sin.

I wish I could teach him the way we teach our children, guide him and hope it's enough to finish his growth. But I can't, not when it means being impossibly close to Gluttony. Revealing myself and exposing my secrets is too risky. And he's too compelling.

"How did you get in here? What do you want from me?"

I needed to see you, to be close to you.



“Checking.” A half-truth, at least. Part of me hoped that Deacon would recognize the orb, that his muscle memory would be enough. A trap I’ve fallen into more than once: getting too close to the reincarnations, part of me thinking that if I just show them something familiar, they’ll come back to me. That I’ll have them back. It doesn’t work like that, and every time I try, I break more of my own heart. The scattered pieces will never mend.

“For what? Whether the orb worked?” Gluttony pauses. “The gift wasn’t meant for me, was it?”

He sounds angry, a curl of a growl in his throat. I bite my bottom lip at the guttural sound, my body responding on all levels. “Did you want it to be?”

“You gave it to me . What else was I supposed to think?”

My heart flutters, and I move closer without thought. I’d almost forgotten this aspect of his sin. How much I used to indulge it. Gluttony can never get enough, always needing more, and I never tire of giving him what he wants. His every desire is mine.

My heart beats wildly in my chest, the urge to reach out and touch so strong I almost do it. So long since I’ve added to his hoard. So long since he’s come to me, demanding more. “Would you like a gift just for you, Gluttony?” You have only to ask, and I’ll give you anything.

“No. I want you to show yourself.” He moves to flick the light on, and panic flares in my chest. I don’t want this to be over yet.

“Please don’t,” I plead. If Gluttony floods the room with light, I’ll have nowhere to hide and be forced to leave. The last thing I want; I’d rather stay here forever, have his arms wrap around me, hold me against his chest. Have one single moment where I can feel his warmth and pretend that we were never apart. That we’ll never be apart

again.

Gluttony hesitates, fingers on the switch. I wait with bated breath, wondering if this is it and the last time I'll be so close to him. He lowers his hand slowly, and my relieved sigh is involuntary.

"What are you?"

"I'm a friend." A lover. An ally. Yours. Whatever Gluttony wants, I can be.

"I didn't ask who you are, I asked what you are. You need the dark?"

"The shadows," I admit. There's no harm in telling him that much. "They protect me."

"From what? Me?"

"From everything." Not quite everything, but I have no desire to get into the hurts inside that nothing can protect me from. The aches that will never go away while this chasm sits between us.

Gluttony moves further into the room, eyes darting around. Looking for me.

"Where are you?" His hand clenches and unclenches. Because he wants to hurt me? I worry what it means that I don't even care. If it means his skin against mine, I'll take anything. Pride, shame, respect, it has no meaning here.

"Should I come closer?" Tell me no. We can't do this.

"Yes."

“Do you want to trap me, Gluttony?” I drift closer, unable to help myself. It’s too close and not nearly close enough. All I have to do is reach out, and I can touch him. The naked need for it is overwhelming. “You can’t.”

“And if I turn on the light?” Gluttony says in another low growl, one that stirs my arousal and almost has me gasping in pleasure. “What happens to you then?”

“Then I leave. And I won’t return.” I shouldn’t be here in the first place. Tempting fate in a way I can’t afford to. Nothing short of him revealing me will get me back out that window.

“What makes you think I care?”

“Then why didn’t you turn on the light?” He let me keep my anonymity, unknowing who I am or whether I’m an ally. I love this Sin more than breathing, more than anything else in the world. I reach out to touch him, the need a real, physical ache. I would sacrifice myself for just one more minute with him.

My hand lowers.

It’s not just myself I would be sacrificing.

“Come here.”

Oh. My lips part, a shudder running through me. Come here, Saeran. Show me all that loveliness. It’s mine, and I won’t have you hide it from me. Words that haunt my dreams.

I can’t resist them. My feet don’t touch the floor as I glide with my wings and twist to stand at Gluttony’s side.

“I can feel you.”

“Yes.” I can feel him too, his body heat so close to me that I can’t breathe. I want to roll in it the same way Gyro rolled in my clothes earlier.

“Not properly. Tell me what you are. The same as your dragon? A specter? The dead?”

“I’m not dead.” It hurts too much for me to be dead.

“Prove it.”

This is a bad idea. The worst. I lay a hand on his arm anyway. My eyes slide closed at the first contact. It’s not the same as a real touch, but it’s close enough and so much more than we’ve had in years. Everything inside me lights up, the truest pleasure I’ve experienced in forever racing through me like it’s being directly injected into my veins.

A brief flash of lightning lights up the room, and I blink into view between one heartbeat and the next. Not long enough for Gluttony to get a look. It doesn’t feel deliberate, more his own emotions reacting to me. Some things are never forgotten.

“Why do I feel like I know you?”

“I told you, I’m a friend.”

“I don’t believe you.”

Gluttony moves too fast, grasping my forearm in a tight clamp. A whine too close to a whimper leaves my lips. Don’t stop, hold me tighter.

“Why can’t I see you? You said the shadows protect you. There’s more to it than that, isn’t there?” His hold is meant to hurt, and Gluttony has no idea how much it does. Deeper than physical. I’m so close to begging him to keep touching, to slide over my skin, reach lower, make me feel . Never let go.

I lean in, reaching up, our bodies almost touching. He’s so much bigger than me, and I know intimately how good all that weight feels pressing against me. “I can help you,” I whisper. Too close, too close.

“I don’t want your help. Tell me why I shouldn’t kill you.”

“You can’t kill me.”

Lightning sparks around us. It flickers in Gluttony’s eyes and races down his arms. It moves across me, and I tense, desire pulsing through me as Gluttony’s magic settles over me like an aphrodisiac.

“I can make you wish I could,” Gluttony threatens.

“I’m sure you could.” He already does. I snatch my arm away before I do any more. I’m already flirting with danger. I jump out of range, creating distance between us. “But then who will help you?”

“So insistent that we need it.”

“You don’t know what you’re fighting.”

“A Dark Fae wannabe who doesn’t know his own power? I’m not afraid.”

“You should be. The power that stands behind him is the real threat.” An organization that’s been building for years. They’re as proficient at using the shadows as I am. Not

in the same way, but something is helping them beyond their scope. Not even Tiernan and I can flush them out. Every time we find pieces and cut a head off, more grow in its place. Like a serpent of the deep, the ones my parents warned me about as a child.

Don't stray too far beneath the waves of the aerie oceans, Saeran, or the serpent of the deep will take you for his own.

Not "eaten by it" but "take you for his own." That always sounded worse than being murdered. I stayed far away from those oceans. Not a hardship; water has never been my friend. It's too volatile when mixed with the Sin that makes up half my soul. Water and electricity don't play nice. I learned that the hard way as a child, with scars across my back to prove it.

"You know who they are?"

"I know enough." Enough to worry. We haven't been able to take down the threat ourselves, even with the information we have. I know they desire the death of the Sins but not for what purpose. To take their place? To free the world? To cause anarchy?

There have been rebellious groups who wished to take down the Sins. None of them amounted to anything. This time? It's different, in so many ways. Gaining the ability to make chimeras makes them dangerous. Conor gives them an edge they'd never have found alone.

The war will begin soon. Who comes out the victor? I don't know this time. It's nothing like when the Light attempted their invasion this side of the shroud. That was a skirmish, a testing of the waters. Nothing like it would be if they were truly wanting to conquer.

"But you won't tell me?"

“You wouldn’t believe me.”

“Try me.”

I want to, more than anything. I wish we could figure this out together. Connect and be a team, like we once were.

I conjure a different colored orb, this one a deep blue that sparkles with bright lightning, covering it like a miniature storm. “Here.”

Gluttony catches it automatically, his reflexes finely tuned. He twists it in his hand, an intense frown marring his face. The crackles of magic drift over his hand and to the tip of his fingers, a perfect fit with his own. “What is this?”

“A gift.” It belongs to him already. Something I’ve kept all this time. I can make him new ones anytime he wants, but this one? This one is one of my most precious possessions. Seeing him hold it... Tears prick at the back of my eyes, and a lump forms in my throat. “For you alone.”

Gluttony turns in surprise, his hand clenching around the ball. “Why ?” he demands angrily.

There’s no answer that will satisfy either of us. Coming here, seeing him, smelling him, has been the worst decision I’ve made in a long time. One that will haunt me for the rest of my life, added to the long list of memories that do the same.

I spread my wings and jump from the window, opening them wide and disappearing into the shadows below. With one last glance up to where Gluttony looks over the edge, searching for me, I run.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:06 am*

Gluttony

“I composed a new melody today.” “Play it for me?” “It’s for your ears only.” “Don’t ever let anyone else hear it.”

The shadows. He’d said he needed the shadows.

I’ll find out who this person is even if it means staying within the shadows for eternity. Why is he stalking me? He could have attacked at any point. He hides himself so well I may not even see it coming.

I’m a friend.

“Friend” comes under a lot of categories. What kind is he? A trustworthy one or someone waiting for the right moment to strike? A liar or an ally?

Sparks of lightning caress my skin as I roll the orb around my palm. It’s warm, and my magic accepts it like an old friend. Nothing like the other one. It doesn’t glow white or have tendrils. It’s filled with lightning. With me .

A satisfied smile curves my lips.

Mine . He said this one is for me alone. Deacon can’t touch it. No one else can. I’ll find a place for it on my shelves, where I can look at it whenever I want to.

It opens when I push a little of my magic into it, and I almost drop it in surprise. A sweet sound fills the room. A music box.



It's a fucking music box. What the hell?

A set of silver scales rotates in the center of it. On the left side, a heart sits on the scale, lit up gold like the original orb. Infused with Dark Fae magic. I can smell it, but something about it is different. Sweeter. Somehow familiar. Like the stranger. He's not Fae, though. He doesn't smell like anything. Cloaking himself somehow. I can't think of a single creature from that side that has the ability. Something else forgotten from the past?

"Weighing of the soul," I murmur. Judgment. There are plenty of customs that deal with using the weight of a heart to determine the purity of the soul. Egypt is one of the most notable. Envy spent considerable years there in the past, studying them and even helping guide some of their customs. His fascination with how they handle the dead led him to hope they could help him carry his burdens.

A futile effort. He carries them alone.

There must be some significance to the gift. A reason. Deacon alone can activate the original orb, and I alone can open this one. What's the difference? How are they created?

The melody is so familiar to me that despite having never heard it before, I know it. It reaches deep inside me, a hand squeezing my chest and sending an unfamiliar thrill through me.

Holding tightly to it, I move to stand at the window that he'd used to escape. And enter? It's an ingrained habit in me to leave the window open. Between the protections we place on the grounds and the gargoyles guarding from above, there's no danger.

Yet the stranger made it this far. The estate is quiet and calm, the rest of the world

asleep. Except for one thief in the night, trespassing where he doesn't belong.

Why didn't I turn on the light?

The sweet sound abruptly cuts off when I close the music orb. The urge to open it again almost forces me to do just that. What about it compels me? Why do I know it?

Putting it on my bedside table instead of a shelf, I find a blue silk cloth to use as a makeshift nest for it. Something about it makes me want to keep it close, have it beside me while I sleep. Pulling off my clothes, I leave them hanging on the end of the bed and slide into the sheets.

Flipping to the side, I turn my back on the orb. I'm not so weak that I need to be facing it. It takes less than a minute before I turn over and stare for a long time. The lightning strikes coming from within are soothing, a live snow globe showcasing my magic. A single zap from me opens it again, and the music drifts through the quiet room. A soothing calm.

I fall asleep to the sound of it.

It can't be more than an hour later when Lust interrupts, sweeping into my room without knocking. His attention locks onto my orb straightaway.

"You have another one," he says, with interest in his gaze.

I close it, the sound cutting off. The music is for me alone. Lust has no right to hear it.

"Do you want something?" It takes me a few seconds to get myself sorted and properly awake, swinging my legs over the side of the bed. I need way more fucking sleep than this to be functional.

“Deacon thinks he might have figured out how to use the orb. At least... enough to give us a direction. I imagine it can do more than we think it can. For example, yours plays music.” Lust leans against the bedpost, crossing his arms over his chest. “Who did you say you got it from, again?”

“I told you I don’t know.” Uncaring of my state of undress, I grab my clothes from the end of the bed, tugging on my jeans. “How did he figure it out?”

“Intense focus. I think with time, he could use it with more ease, but he doesn’t know how to reliably tap into his Fae magic. I’m afraid we don’t have enough knowledge to help him with it.”

What little we know of the Dark fades over time, and we didn’t know much to begin with. They’re secretive and hold traditions centuries old.

I drop down onto the bed and grab my boots, shoving my feet into them. “And what direction is it telling us to go?”

“East.”

That makes me look up incredulously. “East? That’s it, that’s all you’ve got?”

Lust’s lips slant in amusement. “For now. Hopefully it will tell us more as we get closer.”

Hopefully. Maybe. We think. Too many unknowns. I’m not convinced this stranger’s objective is to help us. He knows more than he’s saying. This could all be a guise to send us on a hunt with no end, to keep us chasing our tails. Keep us busy... while they do what?

The man refuses to show his face. Secrecy doesn’t sit well with me, and there’s no

way I'm blindly trusting him. If this doesn't work, I'll track him down and make him regret wasting our time.

The shirt needs a wash, so I grab a fresh white button-down and a navy-blue vest, flicking the collar up. "What the fuck are we waiting for, then? Let's go."

I almost grab the orb to put in my pocket. For safekeeping. It's silent on my bedside table, waiting for me to make it sing. A ridiculous fucking urge. I slam the door shut in annoyance, shoving it to the back of my mind.

Lust glances at me but doesn't say a word. Wise decision.

Envy, Wrath, Deacon, and Lazarus are waiting for us in the garage, standing beside one of our standard SUVs. Not quite as flashy as the other cars, but one that's big enough to transport us all, and it has protections the others don't. More discreet as well, not easily identified as one of ours. A preference when we're operating under the radar.

Deacon holds my glowing orb in his palm, and I look away with a sneer. When we're done here, I want it back. They're all mine. Does the stranger have more of them tucked away? Does he give them out like candy? To others? The visceral no tears through me. I want them all. Every single one that exists, I'll add them to my hoard. Fill every room in my suite with them. Do others have different tricks?

They're touching a piece of me deep down that not even I can reach, and I need them. Answers are sitting there just out of reach, and if I can gather enough of the orbs, maybe I can find those answers.

My hand clenches into a fist at my side. "Let's get this over with." The sooner we find our brothers, the sooner I can get to ripping Conor into pieces. And getting my orb back. "I'm driving."

Since Nero isn't here, I'm the next best thing. He's our best driver and has the skills to outmaneuver anyone on the road, no matter what he's driving. Too bad he isn't here, because some fucking psycho that Wrath chose to save and then fuck has kidnapped him for who-the-fuck-knows-what reason.

None of us are lab rats, and I'll shed blood for every second they aren't here where they should be.

We set out without another word. An unsettling uneasiness cloaks the city like a heavy weight. On the surface nothing has changed. The humans move about as normal, living their boring lives and doing the same thing on repeat like a broken record. No purpose other than the ones we give them.

They don't know any Sins are missing or the danger lurking under the surface. Ignorant as always. The war fought in Asia has been erased from existence, twisted into the reality we want them to know. The new threat isn't coming from the Light Fae. They're not subtle enough for this. And they'd never work with a Dark, no matter who he's working with or for.

There have always been pockets of dissent, and we deal with them when we feel like it. They aren't a threat, more an annoyance. Conor's group is too organized, too hidden. It rubs me the wrong way. I want them all dead.

"Left," Deacon says. Just as I'm about to turn that way, he changes it to, "No, right."

Fucking hell. I stop in the middle of the road and force traffic to go around me. The honks and swearing are easy to ignore. If we weren't trying to be at least somewhat subtle, I'd fry them all. "Left or right?" I bark, resisting the urge to lean over and strangle him. He's using my orb; the least he can do is use it properly. "Fucking work it out, Deacon."

“It’s not an exact science! You want to try?”

I bite back the yes, I fucking do. It won’t work, because it doesn’t respond to me. But it would mean having it back in my possession. I’m taking it back the second Deacon is done with it.

“It’s difficult to see where the strand leads from in here. It’s not going through the metal.”

Sounds like a lot of excuses to me. “Why don’t you just admit you don’t know what you’re doing?” I say snidely.

“It didn’t come with a manual,” Deacon shoots back angrily.

“Should we walk?” Envy asks, leaning through the gap between the two front seats and glancing between me and Deacon. “Would that make it easier?”

“No one is walking.” I take the corner sharply and force Envy back in his seat, pushing him against Lazarus, who grasps his nape to keep him still.

All of us in an unmarked car won’t attract attention. All of us walking the streets together, following a magical glowing strand? People are bound to notice. We prefer to keep most of what we can do out of sight. The humans know only what we want them to. Only an idiot shows all their cards. There are things we can do that they could never imagine. Things we can use to our advantage when we need to. I suppose I could use a glamour to keep us hidden if we’re forced to abandon the car. It’s not my first choice, considering we have no idea where we’re going. I’ll use it when we get there and not before.

The orb leads us to a six-story building deep in the heart of the city. Not tucked away or hidden like the places the others had been ambushed when our brothers and demon

were taken.

“Burks I have better things to worry about. If there’s Fae magic here, I’ll find it; in this proximity it’s impossible to mask. Even Conor gave himself away once we were on the right level of the building. It seeps into everything eventually, too strong to keep hidden.

We search every office on the first floor, moving everyone to the front reception area so we can pull everything apart. I’d prefer to just kill them all; Lust vetoes it. I’d have thought regular sex would make him more agreeable.

We don’t bother going up. If something’s hidden here, we need to go underground.

Lazarus approaches us, a scowl on his face.

“Well?” He better have some answers. If there’s another dead end, I’m killing every person in this building, regardless of what Lust says. To make myself feel better and keep anyone from talking.

Lazarus glances at Envy, his mask falling for a frozen moment in time before his cold, red eyes return to me. “There’s another door, hidden behind a bookshelf, that leads downstairs.”

“How cooperative of them.” A shame. I could do with a little torture. Feels like a lifetime since I had those idiots that Deacon let onto the estate under my thumb.

The bookcase is laughably easy to find now that we know what we’re looking for. Before we’d looked right past it. An ordinary piece of furniture, filled with boring law textbooks and disgustingly happy family photos.

Once it’s out of the way and the secret door’s open, I peer down. Nothing to see

except a set of stone steps leading into darkness. Jackpot.

“These digs are nicer than the last one,” Wrath says. He lights up a ball of flame and steers it down, giving us a light to follow.

“Should I try the orb again?” Deacon asks, holding it up.

“No,” Lust answers, kissing his temple, “We don’t know whether it only has a certain level of magic in it. We’ve found the entrance, and we’ll explore. No use wasting it if we don’t need to.”

If Deacon gives it back to me empty, his head will roll. Who takes something off someone, essentially breaks it, and then gives it back? Disrespectful assholes, that’s who.

The steps lead to an actual room this time instead of the open space where Pride and the others went missing. From Lust’s accounting of their own situation, they’d been identical spaces. Not like this.

The bright lights in the room mean we have no more need of Wrath’s fire. The small space is completely white. Clinical. Also empty. Three doors lead in three different directions. It means splitting up or taking longer to search everywhere. Fantastic.

“Definitely a distinct Fae smell down here,” Wrath says. “Not as strong as last time, but it’s here.”

“At least we know the orb works.” Lust slips a hand into Deacon’s pocket, aligning their hips. “Which direction should we go?”

“Pick a random door.” As if any of us know the layout of this place.



“Close our eyes and point?” Envy suggests.

“Wait,” Deacon says, holding up a hand to halt us. He clenches around the orb, and strands dance around it. One drifts away toward the middle door. “It’s singing.”

It’s in my hands before I realize I moved. The orb instantly closes, the strands disappearing.

“What did you do that for?” Deacon snaps.

“What singing?” I ask in a low, dangerous voice. Like my music box? Better not be. I’ll kill anyone who hears it that isn’t me. They’ll never hear anything again once I’m done with them.

“You didn’t give me a chance to find out!”

“Are you alright?” Lust asks, staring curiously at me. I turn away before he can see too much.

I’m fucking fine. I toss the orb back to Deacon without looking his way. The sense of loss is a physical ache in my gut, and I want to slit his throat and take it back. Completely irrational. The Dark artifact means nothing to me. Nothing.

I know the instant Deacon opens it again, like I’m connected to it on a deeper level. Why can I feel it if I can’t activate it myself? Something to do with the stranger who’d gifted it to me? Maybe it really is mine, no matter whether it speaks to me or not.

“This way,” Deacon says, going through the door straight ahead of us. It leads into another room, not a hallway. One as empty as the last. Except for the full wall of glass.

“What the fuck?” Envy looks through it. And then down. His lips part, eyes widening. “It’s an observation deck. Look.”

The glass gives an overview onto some kind of medical room. As if we’re in a hospital, watching a surgery, or a university lecture hall.

“That’s fucked up.” Envy’s face twists in anger. “What the hell were they watching? Are they dissecting our brothers?”

“We need to get down there,” Lust says. Deacon’s already moving to where there’s another door, a set of stairs leading further down. We’re being herded like rats in a maze.

The smell of Fae gets stronger as we go down. Enough for me to wonder if Conor is nearby. Are other Dark Fae helping them? We still consider them our allies, but we also thought they were all dead. Times have changed, and our alliances may have as well. Why else wouldn’t they have come to us?

The smell abruptly cuts off, and I pause, one foot on the bottom step. We all glance at each other in confusion. The fuck just happened?

“Well, that was weird,” Envy says. “We all smelled that, right?”

“Yes.” Lust peers around the corner, squinting. “Even if there was a Fae, and they were killed, that scent would linger. For it to just stop like that?”

Unheard of. Like a vault sealed shut. “Let’s keep moving.” I’m at the end of my patience for gathering questions and no answers.

The first room we go into is the same one we saw from above. A glance up confirms where we are. There’s the glass opening. What were they watching from up there?

Chimeras aren't made in here; there's not enough damage. If anyone dissected my brothers, I'll be doing a lot worse to them in return.

The next room holds a different surprise. Greed, unconscious and strapped to a gurney. Along with two figures bending over him. What the hell are they doing to him?

“Hey!” Wrath yells.

I burst forward, lightning crackling around my fist. “Get the fuck away from him!”

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:06 am*

Saeran

There are times when I wake and forget for a single moment everything that's happened. I reach across the space for him, anticipating warm skin and an inviting smile. Then reality reminds me that I'm broken beyond repair.

Transporting Fae is never as easy as it sounds. So much of us needs to be contained. The younger ones that are new to their wings have trouble containing their magic. Older Fae help shield them. We have tunnels that take us between certain locations but not everywhere. It's difficult to transport dozens at a time on the surface.

Harder still when chimeras prowl the streets.

Tiernan, Diarmuid, and I bracket the group of cars, me at the head, easing through traffic and guiding the way, Tiernan in the middle, and Diarmuid at the rear, in case of trouble and to ensure no one gets lost. I'm not sure where Riordan is; he does what he wants. Could be jumping across the roofs for all I know. He'll be around if we need him.

The decision to move them so far, all the way to the other side of the city, isn't one we make lightly. Keeping them to the outskirts is the smarter choice even if getting them there is problematic. There are too many eyes watching, and some of us stand out more than others. Good thing that our wings can be removed from sight, and even the newest transitioned can do it with ease. We don't retract them, exactly; they don't fit inside us. It's more like a shimmer, close to an illusion. Light reflections and a kind of "trick" to stop the humans from noticing they exist.

We're not even halfway there when something makes me pause. A tugging deep in my gut. Feels like—there. A pulse of energy. A Sin. It's strong, like a beacon pointing me in the right direction. If they were that easy to find, Gluttony would have found them by now. It has to be a deliberate signal.

It could be a trap.

Odds are it's definitely a trap. I don't care. If there's a chance that there's a Sin being held nearby, I have to take the risk. I can't just leave them.

Quickly finding a nearly empty car park, I park and then grab my bow from the passenger's side. The rest of the fleet follows, with Tiernan and Diarmuid bracketing them. Fae peer curiously at me, but only my inner circle get out to approach.

"What's wrong?" Riordan asks, appearing from out of nowhere, Tiernan hot on his heels.

"One of the Sins is here." The scent is too strong for it to be anything else.

"So?" Riordan crosses his arms over his chest. "They live here, Sae. It's not unusual for them to be walking around."

"It came from underneath. Like a pulse. A cry for help."

"All the more reason to leave it alone," Tiernan says, shaking his head. "We need to transport our people and get them safely set up."

"I'm going." Stubborn stupidity, maybe, but I'm still going, with or without their support.

"This obsession will get you killed."

Obsession. As if that could come close to what I feel for Gluttony. Besides, it's not just about him. All the Sins are my family. They may not remember, but I do.

Riordan doesn't understand. He was born here, in this foreign world, in this place that doesn't nurture his magic or hug him like a warm blanket. He's never seen our homeland. And he can never comprehend how important the Sins once were to all of us, or what Gluttony means to me alone.

He doesn't know what home really means, and what we lost. I'll fight to the last to get them back there, to show the younger generation what they could have, why it's so important for them to find their roots again. I can't do it at the expense of the man I love.

Tiernan sighs and rubs his forehead. "You're not going alone. Riordan, you and Diarmuid need to finish this. Saeran and I will rendezvous with you once we're done."

"Done what? Rescuing a Sin? What if Virtus catch you and put you in a cage the way they put the Sins there?"

They're worth the risk. "We're stronger than the Sins." Conor's traps are useless against us.

"Maybe once. The unhinged fanatics have been building their strength for centuries while we've been hiding behind the bushes. Whatever advantage you used to have, you don't have it now. What if their goal is to lure you in?"

"They can't hold us."

"What if this is a trap from the Sins themselves, to finish what they started?" Riordan adds.

“They didn’t start anything,” I say fiercely. I hate the tendril of doubt the words cause. No matter the hope I hold in my heart, we don’t know . And the unknowing leaves room for doubt. And being horribly, irrevocably wrong.

Until there’s undeniable proof, I choose not to believe the worst of them. Benefiting from a terrible action doesn’t mean they were the cause.

“I’m leaving. You don’t have to come with me, but I’m going. You aren’t stopping me, and if I have to make that an order, I will.” I’ve sacrificed what’s left of myself to get them this far. I rarely ask for things for myself. This I will ask for. Demand.

Riordan’s lips flatten. “Don’t be stupid about this. We can’t afford to lose you.”

The last of my line.

Except I’m not. Daithí found his Sin. I haven’t stopped and allowed myself to think about what that means. Nothing, in the grand scheme. A reincarnation of a soul. Another one that doesn’t remember me. He has no loyalty to us.

We find the building with ease. Some lawyer’s office. Once inside, the strands are easy to follow. We manage to guide ourselves through the rooms without garnering attention—it’s amazing how much people will ignore, so long as we look confident walking around; they assume we’re meant to be here and leave us alone. The strands take us to a bookcase and a hidden entrance behind it.

“What happens when we get trapped down here?” Tiernan mutters, following behind me. “Is this worth it?”

The Sins will always be worth it. I’ve been loyal to them my entire life, and I have no desire to change that now. Our trust in them is a little shaky—for good reason—but my loyalty never will be. I know what they’ve done, who they are, and the danger

they pose. I also know the parts they keep from others. I'll follow them forever and protect them where I can. They're my responsibility and my biggest failure.

When I die, I should reincarnate, just like they all do. I won't remember the way I do now, and all I can hope is that I find my way to Gluttony anyway, even without the memories to guide me. The same way Daithí found Lust.

The instant we make it down to an area of white rooms, devoid of anything, we lift our shields, hair lengthening and twisting to braids. One hand on the end of my bow keeps me steady while we move through each room. There's no way to tell who's down here with us, or how many enemies are between us and whichever Sin is here.

The feeling gets stronger the deeper we go. I stop, tilting my head, concentrating on it. "This way." Instinct guides me down a set of stairs and through clinical rooms that give me the creeps. It sickens me, imagining what they might do if they found any Fae. What would they do to them down here? What are they doing here now?

Why does Conor follow them? Does he experiment on himself to see what makes his magic work? I hate the thought of it. He deserves better than that. He needs another Dark to guide him, help him. He's not where he's supposed to be. I've never fought one of my own. We're not like that. I hope to never have to.

We find the youngest Sin, Greed, tied to a medical bed in the center of a room, an IV attached to his arm. Whatever they're injecting him with smells disgusting. Rot and decay that makes my nose scrunch up in horror.

"We have to get this out. Help me with him." I follow the tube to where the needle is pressed into his skin, just below his inner elbow. I'm careful pulling it out before dropping it with a scowl and stepping on it. Pointless, but it makes me feel a little better. Though it smells worse now. "Sedation?" Is that what's keeping Greed unconscious? He's still breathing.



“They’d need something strong,” Tiernan says. He studies the bag hanging on the metal rack, lifting it and turning it. “We should take a sample, so we can find out what it is.”

A good idea. If we can figure out what it’s made of, maybe we can find something to counteract it, so it’s useless, and they can’t use it against the Sins anymore.

Sounds nearby make us freeze. We share a panicked look and drop our protections, shoving our Fae scent deep and cutting it off until we resemble nothing but humans. They’re coming from behind us, where we came from. Who?

Virtus, or someone else? If it’s Conor and his organization, we can at least catch them by surprise. Ideally, I’d like to get out before anyone reaches us at all.

“Quickly, get him out,” I say, panic clawing my throat. There have to be clips holding the straps down. Where are they? We need to leave, and I’m not going anywhere without Greed. Not now that we’ve found him.

“Hey!”

“Get the fuck away from him!”

Terror ices my veins. Oh, no. No, this can’t be happening. That second voice is intimately familiar.

Gluttony.

So focused on Greed and the unnatural state of this place, I didn’t notice the ones nearby are Sins . A dangerous mistake and one that will cost me. How are we going to get out of this?

I don't move, staring down at Greed. Can we make it to the door before we're caught? They're right in front of it, and there's no other way out. We trapped ourselves.

"Turn around," Wrath orders in an icy tone. "Slowly."

My eyes close, limbs heavy in defeat. I'm so tired. Tired of running, of yearning, of being so close and so far away. Tired of having to be strong for my people, remain strong even as I weaken.

"Hands where we can see if you please," Lust adds, almost pleasantly.

I nod imperceptibly to Tiernan and then spread my fingers, carefully lifting my arms. Tiernan follows suit.

"Search them." Lust again.

Wrath moves swiftly, and Tiernan grabs me, shoving me behind him and out of the demigod's path. Protecting me. I wish I could say I don't need it. Standing in front of my Sin? I more than need it.

I grasp Tiernan's arm and shift him back, so we're side by side. The last thing we need is for them to realize Tiernan thinks of me as someone important. We can't let them become suspicious. Maybe if they think we're harmless, they'll let us go without a fuss.

Wrath pats us down, checking for weapons. He finds the knives strapped to our inner thighs and ankles and drops them on the floor, out of reach. Then he rips my bow from my shoulders, flinging it on the ground. "That's a nice toy you have there."

I'm not rising to the bait and giving him a reason to dispose of me. I let myself be

manhandled and moved away from Greed. I can't blame them for their caution, and I'd prefer not to give them a reason to use their magic on me. If they find out I'm immune, we're in a world of trouble.

Tiernan slides in front of me again, and this time I allow it. He is bigger than me; maybe they'll think it's merely for that reason.

Deacon stands nearby, holding the orb I gave him. Having him right there hurts. How much I've lost somehow feels heavier, a weight against my heart that threatens to crush me.

"Can he not talk?" Envy asks. "I don't know sign language, but the big guy does."

Tiernan glances back at me. "He doesn't speak to you."

Gluttony sneers, and I lower my eyes, so I don't have to look at him. Being this close kills me. This isn't like the shadows; I have no protection here, no veil between the two of us. He's right there within touching distance. And watching me like I'm the enemy. That hurts more than anything else.

"Who are you?" Lust asks. "Scientists here? What kind of fucked-up experiments are you doing?"

"No, we're not part of this. We were trying to help."

My face stays blank, but inside I'm screaming. What is Tiernan doing? That's the worst excuse I've ever heard in my life. They'll see right through it.

"And you just happened to stumble in here?" Wrath asks with a mocking huff. "I don't fucking think so."

“They kidnapped us, locked us in here. We found a way to get out of the cells. On our way out we saw him. Wanted to help.”

What if there aren't cells? We have no idea what the layout is. I wish we had a subtle signal that amounts to “please shut up.” Never thought we'd need it. Terrible oversight on my part. Tiernan is a lot of wonderful things; an actor is not one of them.

“Why?”

“You think we can't recognize a Sin?” Tiernan injects some disbelief into his tone. Of course, now he decides to lay it on thick. He's all but pointing a neon sign at us that says “liars.”

I grip the back of Tiernan's shirt—whether to warn him or use it to settle my thoughts, I don't know. Gluttony's gaze flits down to it, darkness flickering in his gray eyes. I let go, and those eyes meet mine. The most beautiful liquid-gray eyes, lightning sparking every few seconds. I adore everything about them. Can I pause this moment forever, just stay here and never move? Where's Sloth when you need him?

“What do you think?” Envy asks, looking at Lust. “Kill 'em?”

Please, no. If we're forced to fight, there's no hiding what we are. We can't get through a barricade made of Sins without using our magic. Maybe Gluttony doesn't know me, maybe he'll be the one to kill me. Either way, I'm not about to invite my demise at the hands of my soulmate.

“We take them with us,” Lust answers. “We have some questions.”

Tiernan shifts further in front of me, almost blocking my view. A pointless gesture now. “We'll do what we can to help.”

This isn't quite how I imagined helping them. Be careful what you wish for.

"Lazarus, find us another transport." Lust inclines his head, expecting to be obeyed without question.

Lazarus disappears without a word.

"Why would they take humans?" Deacon asks, pocketing the orb. Gluttony tracks the movement.

"To make chimeras," Wrath says with a sneer. "Were there more of you?"

Tiernan shakes his head. "No. Just us."

"The start of a new batch?" Envy wonders. "We've picked off a few of them in the last few weeks. They aren't easy to make. They can't have that many just lying around, can they?"

Lust turns his head briefly to look us over. He sees too much, and I can't hold his gaze. "We'll discuss it later. Do you see Greed's glasses anywhere?" he asks, glancing around.

Glasses?

"Not in any of these," Envy says, kicking the door of the last cabinet. "Let's hope he doesn't wake up on our way back."

"There might be a spare pair in the car."

"Wait," Deacon says, confused. "He wears those for an actual reason?"

“Why did you think he wore them?” Wrath asks, giving him a derisive look. “For decorative purposes?”

“Well, yeah. A fashion statement or something.”

I’m curious as well. I bite my tongue to stop from telling them to answer Deacon’s question. What glasses? The Greed I knew didn’t need them. I always thought they were a fashion statement as well. Greed’s always been concerned about how he looks, even when we were all back home.

“He has light sensitivity. He carries all the Sin’s powers in his eyes, and bright lights fuck with them,” Lust answers. “He needs them to block out the world.”

That makes no sense. Has he forgotten how to shield himself? How much have they forgotten?

“Let’s go.” Wrath shoves us forward. “Don’t try anything funny, or Gluttony and I will be forced to hurt you. But hey, we’d like that, so never mind, do whatever you want.”

I have no intention of doing anything that will make them look more closely than they already are. We have to escape before they discover too much.

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*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:06 am*

### Gluttony

“Let’s play a game.” “Not now, Saeran.” “What if it’s a naughty game?” “... fine. One.”

The two figures in the cell talk quietly to each other, unaware they’re being watched. Too low for our speakers to pick up, however. Smart. Deliberate. Why don’t they want us to hear them?

I barely notice as the security room fills, unable to look away from our new “guests.” There’s something about the smaller one. I can’t quite put my finger on it. They’re dangerous, that I’m certain of.

Envy collapses into a chair, spreading himself with zero finesse. He’s wearing another hoodie, this one saying “no need to drive me crazy, I’m close enough to walk.” At least it’s a truthful one this time. Wrath moves in behind him, leaning a hip against Envy’s shoulder.

Lazarus comes in next, observing from a spot against the far wall. Keeping his distance. Lust arrives last. He and Lazarus have been with Greed, getting him comfortable and running tests to find out what might be in his bloodstream that’s keeping him from waking.

“What do you think?” Lust asks immediately.

I cross my arms over my chest. That answer should be obvious. “We torture them, find out what they know, then kill them.” A tried-and-true plan. The words feel like

ash in my mouth for an unknown reason.

“That’s your answer to everything,” Envy says with a lopsided grin.

“Don’t fix it if it isn’t broken.”

Envy spreads out further, stretching his arms back and behind his head. “Break it first?”

“Precisely.”

“There’s something about them,” Lust says, eerily close to my feelings. “What do we know?”

“You mean other than the fact they were found in a hidden facility with Greed strapped to a fucking bed with drugs in his system?” Wrath asks, flames flickering in his gaze and heat pouring off him in waves. “Nothing.”

“Has Greed woken up?” Lazarus asks.

“Not yet. Deacon is watching him; he’ll let us know when he does.”

Flames flicker in Wrath’s hair, signaling his loss of control. “Said the spider to the fly.”

“Wrath, go cool off,” Lust tells him. “Gluttony, walk with me.”

Envy mock salutes us and goes back to watching the feed.

I want to stay, a niggle in the back of my mind telling me I need to. Instead, I force myself to look away from the two conversing men and follow Lust out of the room



and into the hallway.

“I want you to speak to our guests,” Lust says immediately, turning to face me.

“Speak to them or speak to them?” I know which option I’d prefer. With the smaller one, especially. Get him alone and make him talk.

“Let’s keep violence to a minimum for the moment. Envy is... off-kilter right now, and it’s unusual enough to be of concern to me. Wrath is particularly volatile as well, and I’m actively trying to keep Deacon out of your sight. And his.”

“Good to know.” Smart. If it were up to me, he’d be right in that cell beside the strangers. Trust is in short supply right now.

Lust stops me with a hand on my forearm. “Gluttony, I know you don’t like him—”

“I like him just fine. I simply don’t trust him.”

“He saved Zara’s life. He saved mine. Is that not reason enough to try?”

“He came in here—”

“To save his brother. You would have done worse.”

I refuse to give that the consideration it deserves. Whatever Deacon’s reasons, he almost got us all killed. Changing his mind and redeeming himself doesn’t alter the fact he intended to do us harm. “That’s not a sufficient argument.”

“I’m not debating this with you. Please.”

The sneer comes automatically. “This is going to bite us all in the ass. You can feel it

in the air, can't you? Something is shifting, and I don't fucking like it."

"We need everyone back under the same roof, so we can face whatever the storm is together."

"You've always been too sentimental, brother."

"It helps balance you and Wrath out."

Now there's an argument I won't win. "Tell me when Greed wakes up. We need to find out what he knows, and what they did to him."

Lust tilts his head in acknowledgment, and I switch direction, heading for my rooms. I'll let our prisoners sit and sweat for a little longer. Silence and isolation are useful tools when breaking someone down.

The second I open the door to my bedroom, I feel it. A presence that's familiar to me. A swift kick traps us in there together. The light remains off.

"Back again." Is he following me? "Do you have more gifts for me?" I mean for it come out as a snide comment, to throw these visits in his face. It doesn't, because I want another one. All of them. Anything he has.

"Do you want another one?"

Yes. "Why do you keep coming back here?"

"Did you find what you were looking for today?"

Circling the room doesn't reveal my quarry. They blend completely into the darkness. I still haven't found an answer for what can do that. No creature I know of. The

temptation to turn on the light isn't strong enough to act on it. I know what happens if I do. For reasons I can't explain, I want him to stay. If only so he can answer my questions. And give me more gifts.

"Do you expect me to believe you don't already know?" He knows a lot more than he's letting on.

"I'm not all-seeing."

"Just a shadow in the dark."

"Your shadow in the dark."

My chest clenches at the intimate words. What does he mean by that? It has to be a lie. A trick. A way to manipulate me. "You don't visit other men in their bedrooms?" I ask derisively. I don't know why the question slipped out.

"No."

The answer shouldn't please me. Or send a thrill down my spine. Or make me want to flick on the light, only so I can see his face. He's a stranger to me and can't be trusted. Pretty words in poisonous wrapping. That's all they are. My brothers and I have suffered enough by baselessly trusting strangers whose only goal is to destroy us from the inside. Just because this whatever-he-is has shown his ability to get in here undetected and hasn't used that knowledge against us doesn't mean he isn't biding his time to do it later. His entire plan could be to gain my trust for nefarious purposes. Just like Conor. Just like Deacon.

I refuse to fall into the same trap. Especially not with someone I've never set eyes on. I don't know this man's face, only how his presence feels, what he sounds like in the dark. His smell. All senses bar two. What would he taste like? How would his skin

feel under my lips?

“Are you real?” I ask.

“I told you that I’m not dead.”

“That doesn’t make you real.” The distinction sits heavy between us.

“I’m real.”

“Prove it.” The same words I threw at him another day. Prove it. What I really mean is touch me , and we both know it.

I remember the featherlight hand against my arm. Like wind settling over skin. Not nearly enough. If he’s not dead, if he’s real, and he speaks the truth, then I want to feel it. Prove it. The orb came from him, Fae energy or not.

Whoever hides in the shadows, beckoning me, can’t be Fae. Has to be something else, based on the lack of anything radiating from him. The orb isn’t his creation, but he possesses it. And now so do I. I’ll never settle for anything less than what I want. This man will give me more gifts, and he’ll touch me because I ask. It’s as simple as that.

“Where?” the smoky voice asks.

The familiarity of it irks me. A secret being kept from me.

“A dangerous question,” I rumble.

“It was a dangerous request.”

Was it? “Who are you? What’s your name?”

No answer. Not that I expect one. He’s not particularly forthcoming with information that may reveal his identity. Careful to remain anonymous.

The barest hint of a touch brushes across my back, traveling from my shoulder blade down and around to the curve of my hip. A small hand. The smell of strawberries and something subtler, like melted caramel, flavors the air. The stranger. Will it taste as good under my tongue? I’m tempted to find out, for the first time in my life.

They circle around my arm and to my front, over my stomach and up my chest. He’s exploring me.

I’ve never once allowed someone to be this close to me. Not outside of my family. If someone is close, it’s because I’m about to kill them with a personal touch. I certainly haven’t let anyone treat me like this. Like I’m theirs, even in a small way. I have no use for sex or intimacy. Lust uses it as a weapon, and I have more than enough of my own without needing to add to my repertoire with that bullshit.

I lick my lips, imagining that I can almost taste the sweetness in the air. The shadow continues, gliding the pads of his fingers up to my throat, over my cheeks. My eyes close as he drifts up across my nose and my forehead. It’s as though he’s mapping out my face. If he’s as small as his hands, he’s not touching the ground. Not if he’s reaching this high. I can’t feel the heat of him against me. If I try to gather him close, will he run?

He puts distance between us, the pleasant sensations disappearing before I can truly enjoy them. It leaves me cold. An orb appears in front of me before I can examine the feeling. Hints of fingers wrap around it, translucent black like a shadow come to life.

“What is that?”

“A gift. You wanted another one, didn’t you?”

Yes. All of them. “Another music box?” Will it sing the same melody?

“No, this is something else.” The orb floats through the air and lands in my larger hand. How small would his look in mine? I almost reach forward to find out. “To open it, you’ll have to find the key.”

What the fuck does that mean?

I can’t ask, because I’m alone again. The presence is gone, and the feeling of ice in the air gets stronger, everything bereft of warmth.

Saeran

He smells like home. My heartbeat. My soul. I wish I could forget like he has, take this pain away.

It takes a few disorienting seconds to settle back into being flesh and bone. When I open my eyes, Tiernan is standing over me with a scowl.

“Don’t do that again. If they find out we’re manipulating their recordings, they’re going to do much worse than stick us in a cell,” he hisses. “Is it not good enough that you’re under his roof?”

The bench is uncomfortable under my back, and I sit up, swinging my legs over the side. It’s unbelievably cold down here, and not even my Fae genes can keep me from the worst of it. I assume they do it on purpose. One of their more subtle torture techniques. “You think I did this on purpose? I was trying to help.” It’s all I’ve ever done.

“They would have found him on their own.”

“I didn’t know that.” If Gluttony and the others hadn’t shown up, we would have rescued Greed. That alone is a risk I’ll always take. Either way, one of theirs has returned, and I won’t regret my decision.

“Would it have changed anything?”

I’m smart enough not to answer that. My loyalty will always be to Gluttony first and

then to everyone else. I may have sacrificed us both to keep my people alive and safe, but I would never do it to him alone, and not if it means his suffering. He thrives here, and it's the only reason I haven't changed trajectory. He doesn't remember me; the past doesn't hurt him.

It destroyed what little was left of me to stand back and let the Sins fight the last battles with the Light on their own. To watch from the shadows as the Light threw so much at them that whole continents were nothing but ash and death in the end. The only reason I stayed my hand was that they weren't throwing everything at the Sins. It was nothing compared to their might when they attacked us long ago. And the Sins won their fight.

I couldn't risk the Light discovering that some of us live. That I, specifically, live. They'd never stop hunting me if they knew. It would put everyone in danger. In many ways, my passing will give them more breathing room, give them more time to build something in relative safety. As much as I protect them, in this state I also damage them.

The last left, and the one the Light would burn everything down to get to. They can't ever know I still exist. That means staying far from Gluttony. Something that I'd managed until now.

The discovery of Deacon and who he is, along with Conor—who I hope with everything is who I think he is—means that things are changing. Whether they're good changes or not remains to be seen. They've started an avalanche, with no way of knowing who it will land on.

“You need to leave, escape,” Tiernan says adamantly.

“How?” I ask, frowning. “I don't think they're letting us just walk out of here.” Not without a fight I'm not willing to engage in.



“Use the shadows. To get out properly instead of looking for your lover. Get help.”

Not an option. There’s no way in hell I’m leaving him here by himself. I lift a foot up onto the bench, the metal cold under my bare skin, and rest an elbow on my bent knee. “Then they’ll know that we aren’t what we seem. We being plural. They’ll know you’re something else, and they’ll torture you to find out.” Throw Tiernan to the wolves in order to leave? No, not happening.

“And risking exposure just for a visit is worth it?”

“That isn’t fair.” Rubbing a hand down my face doesn’t help alleviate the tension. “Can we not do this now?” The knife already twisted in my heart causes me to suffer every day of my life; I don’t need help to shove it deeper.

Every muscle in my body tenses at the sound of footsteps.

Gluttony appears moments later, and everything inside me comes to life. I can still feel him under my fingers. Even the short, not-real contact has bolstered my magic in a way nothing else ever will. Not enough to make a difference, but enough to feel it. What I would do with this man if we had even one more lifetime together.

My knuckles turn white from the strength I grip with. What is he doing here?

Gluttony searches our faces, and I do my best to keep mine neutral instead of tracking all of his features, soaking them in and refreshing my memories of him.

“Get up,” he says, gesturing at me. “You’re first.”

First for what? I don’t have many pieces of my heart left, and being physically hurt—intentionally hurt—by the man who holds all of them will destroy the rest.

“No,” Tiernan stands, putting himself between us. “If you want to know something, I can tell you.”

“Sit the fuck down, or I’ll do it for you. Get up .”

Urging Tiernan back, I push myself ahead of him, with a hopefully reassuring smile. I can’t ignore an order from my Sin. Whatever happens, we’ll get through it. We always do.

“What’s your name?” Gluttony asks, grasping me by the elbow and jerking me forward so abruptly I almost trip. Everything stills. His skin is on mine. His real skin. I almost forgot what it feels like. Warm. He’s so much bigger than me. Even as hard as the grip is, there’s nothing in it for me but pleasure. Pathetic. Dangerous. Perfect.

“It’s Seth,” Tiernan answers for me.

“I wasn’t asking you.”

“I’m not Seth. He is. My name is Tristan.”

“Still wasn’t asking you.”

I swallow hard, my heart beating out of rhythm. Speaking will give the game away. My voice isn’t masked in the shadows, and Gluttony isn’t an idiot. He’ll easily put two and two together.

Gluttony sneers, his face twisted in such anger that it physically hurts me, my stomach clenching in response. “Fine. You want to do this the hard way?” He half throws me in front of him. “Move.”

Tiernan’s terrified face follows me. He’s worrying about more than my physical

health. If Gluttony and I connect again, it spells the end for all of us. I wish I could say or do something to reassure him. I have no idea what happens next, or where we go from here.

I'm scared too.

"Please, he doesn't know anything. If you have questions, I can answer them."

"The more you argue with me about this, the more intrigued I am." Gluttony hauls me against him. It takes everything in me not to beg him to keep going. To kiss me. How long has it been since I felt his lips against mine? Too long. And they're right there. Thick and surrounded by his beard, a perfect shade of pink. Made to kiss me. Made for me. "You care about him, which gives me a weapon. I'm going to ask him a few questions, and he's going to answer me."

"He can't talk to you."

"He can talk just fine." His grip tightens, and a whimper slips out, the pain increasing. The brief look he shoots me before turning back to Tiernan is one of undisguised glee. He likes it. He likes hurting me.

He doesn't know you. Even if he goes further than this, even if he breaks the fragile pieces holding me together, it's not him. It's not my Gluttony. That makes all the difference. I'll survive this, so that he can survive it.

"You think we can't see you? I'll make him talk. How uncomfortable that gets is up to him."

I don't like the way his attention is centered on Tiernan, like I'm not even here. Look at me. I want his eyes on me, always.

“We can help you,” Tiernan blurts out. “We know about Conor and his organization. We know where you can find him.”

What is he doing? I mouth “stop it,” but he’s not looking at me. There’s an ugly emotion twisting in my chest at the way Tiernan and Gluttony are focused on each other.

“Do you, now?” Gluttony drawls. The grip on me eases but in no way becomes pleasant. Escape isn’t going to happen. That he hasn’t let go only feeds the parts of me that need him. “Isn’t that interesting? We never said anything about Conor.”

“You think we didn’t know where we were, or who held us?”

“You do an awful lot of talking for him”—he shakes me gently—“but I’m not hearing anything useful.”

“Let him go, and I’ll tell you what we know.”

Gluttony throws his head back and laughs. I shiver under the sound even as Tiernan flinches. “You think you have a right to make any demands of us? That’s brave of you. And stupid. This isn’t a negotiation or a barter. Seth is going to tell me what we want to know, not you.”

Hope flutters in my heart like a butterfly desperately trying to survive. He’s fixated on speaking to me specifically. Does he feel the pull like I do? That greedy urge to be close all the time?

“You can torture us until we’re nothing but the husks you use to do your dirty work,” Tiernan says, a tiny waver in his voice that belies his words, “but we’ll never tell you what we know through coercion or torture. And since you don’t have Pride right now, there’s nothing you can do about it.”

Gluttony tenses, eyes narrowing dangerously.

Horror spreads. Tiernan reveals too much. The Sins will never let us go now. Not to mention we don't have the information Tiernan is attempting to bargain with. We know where Conor has been, not where he is now. Always too late to catch him. For someone who hasn't come into his Dark magic and has no idea what he's doing, he's surprisingly adept at evading notice. Even at full power, I might have had trouble finding him in this mess. The human world has so many distracting scents and sounds; sifting through it can be difficult at the best of times.

"I'm very interested to know how you know anything about Pride. And Conor."

Tiernan finally looks at me, but it's too late. He's already said too much. How am I supposed to fix that? Gluttony has his claws dug in now.

"You think playing games with me is a smart idea? When you play with a Sin, you lose."

Lazarus appears behind us, silent as an assassin. "Gluttony."

"What?" Gluttony snaps.

"Greed is awake. Put him back in the cell; we can deal with him later."

Gluttony growls low in his throat, the sound going straight to my groin, making my knees weak. He leans in, lips so close I can feel his breath. My own trembles. I hope he thinks it's fear and not what it really is: arousal and all-encompassing need. I want him to throw me down right here on the floor and remind me how it feels to have him inside me. How it feels to be wanted by him.

"I'll be back for you. I dare you to try something before then. In fact, I encourage it."

The only thing on my mind has nothing to do with escaping.

### Gluttony

“The stars are bright tonight. Celebratory.” “Astronomy doesn’t care about our wedding.” “There’s nothing worth caring for more.”

Seeing Greed awake and sitting up in his bed relieves me more than I’ll ever admit. One down, three to go. Then everyone who took them from us will die. Slowly. Painfully.

“What happened to you? Where are the others?”

“Fuckin’ hell, Glutt, give a guy a second to breathe.”

We don’t have a second. The others are still out there. He can focus on recovery once we find everyone. Lust gives me a look, and I roll my eyes. “Fine. One second.” I lift a boot to rest on the side rail of the bed, waiting.

“Let me look at you,” Lazarus says. He tilts Greed’s chin and turns his head from side to side, checking him over. “How are you feeling?”

“Groggy. Like I’ve been used as a pincushion,” Greed says dryly. “And I have a goddamn fucking headache that’s threatening to explode my skull.”

“Likely all the light exposure. It should pass in a few days, but we’ll keep an eye on it.”

“Great,” Greed grumbles.

“I’ve flushed your system as much as I can. The grogginess should fade as you get the rest of it out. Open your eyes for me.”

Greed’s eyelids flutter, and then his multicolored gaze comes into view. A kaleidoscope of all our magic. We’ve never figured out why they’re like that, or what it means. When he shape-shifts, his eyes always remain the same. He can’t hide them, no matter what form he takes.

Right now, there’s a tinge of red at the corners of them. Light burned into them? No wonder he has a fucking headache. I’ll kill every person who held that light and anyone that watched like he’s some kind of lab rat. My brothers belong to me; every time they bleed, I make someone else bleed.

“There’s some damage,” Lazarus says. “It will heal, given some time. What did they do, specifically?”

“Wanted to see what made them that color. Extracted something from them. Kept shining different shades of light, along with colors. They used a goddamn flashing one, like I was at some seventies disco. I got out of the binds when they did that. That’s when they injected me with something, and I don’t remember anything else.”

My lips curl up in a scowl. Death won’t come swiftly for any of them. I might even throw them in a cell and keep them on the cusp between the living and the dead for years.

Lazarus pulls a black blindfold that smells like lavender from his bag and places it over Greed’s eyes, wrapping it around the back of his head and securing it in place. “Don’t take this off for at least twenty-four hours if not a little longer.”

Luckily, Greed’s learned over the years to not rely on his sight, not when it’s so unpredictable and vulnerable. He doesn’t need his sight to navigate the world



anymore.

“They extracted something from your eyes?” Lust asks. “Did they say why?”

“They weren’t much for conversation. I had a few questions of my own, which they didn’t appreciate.”

“Were you always in that room?” I ask. If they didn’t move him around, they may not be moving the others either.

“Nah, they had me in some cell covered in fuckin’ Fae magic that I couldn’t touch. I tried a couple times and got some nasty-as-fuck burns for the trouble. Smelled like Dark Fae, which is impossible, right? I figured my senses were playing havoc with me because of the fucked-up experiments they were doing on me.”

“No. We’re familiar with it,” Lust answers. He taps his nails on the bedpost. “Conor produces it, and it seems to incapacitate us all.”

Greed turns his head toward Lust, lips parting in shock. “Did you just say Conor ?” He swivels to each of us, tracking us perfectly. He probably has a better view of the room than I do. “What the fuck did I miss?”

“Oh, you know, all the fun stuff,” Wrath says dismissively. “More chimeras, a little murder, Dark Fae and Conor coming back from the dead.”

“Just a few things, then,” Greed replies dryly. “I saw you kill him. He’s really alive?”

“Not for long.”

My sentiments exactly. Wrath and I will make sure he’s nothing but a stain on the earth by the time we’re done. Gone for good this time.

“Latent Fae genes, the same as Deacon,” Lust explains. “We haven’t been able to deduce why or how. Both activated when they were near death’s door. Or in Conor’s case, after death.”

Lazarus pulls out a syringe and stretches Greed’s arm out, finding a vein before pushing it in to extract blood. “It may be the reason why he seems stronger than Deacon and has more control over his magic.”

“Have I not been poked and prodded enough?” Greed complains, grimacing at where Lazarus holds him.

“I need to make sure everything is out of your system. Stop being a child; you didn’t even feel it.”

The second he finishes, Greed swings his legs over the side of the bed and tries to stand. He wobbles and sits back down with a frustrated sigh. “Fucking hell,” he curses.

“You need to rest,” Lazarus chastises him. “Get back in bed.”

“Where is everyone else?”

“We haven’t found them,” I say tersely. Hard enough to find Greed in the first place, and I’m thoroughly sick of this game of cat and mouse. “You’re the first. We need to know if they said or did anything that might indicate where they are. When did they split you up?”

“Pretty much straightaway. They did something to Nero and Raven when we first went in; they dropped like a sack of potatoes. Then they trapped Pride and me in this dome that we couldn’t get out of. Same stuff they used to keep me caged at the facility. Dragged the demons out; I didn’t see them again after that. We didn’t see any

chimeras or Conor, though, so it sounds like you had a more interesting time than us. How did you get out?"

"Deacon," Lust says shortly. "He's immune to whatever Dark magic Conor is using. I'm concerned about the fact they seem to have weapons at their disposal that render us useless, even without Conor nearby. If he's feeding them pieces of himself to make them, he's walking a dangerous path."

Dangerous for us all. If he tips over that particular cliff, we'll have bigger problems than chimeras walking around and a hidden organization gunning for us. Conor has no idea what he's playing with, and what it will do to him.

"You don't know where they took Raven?" Lazarus asks, insistent. "What they might be doing to him?"

"Based on what they did to me, I'm not sure we want to know," Greed admits with a pained expression. "But I don't have any clue where they are. They injected Pride and me with something that made us both puke, and then I passed out. Woke up in that room alone. You know the rest."

More questions. No fucking answers. Kicking the bed in frustration doesn't make me feel better. "I can reduce this entire fucking city into rubble in a couple of hours. The only ones left standing will be us. Easy to find them then." It's the best solution, and if they had agreed with my plan in the first place, we'd already have all our people back. The humans will get over it.

"I'd like to avoid a massacre if at all possible," Lust says. "We're all frustrated, but we can't upset the balance we've created."

"Why not?" I snap. How long do we have to wait? Until they kill one of us? "They'll recover, they always do."

“Sometimes they don’t, Gluttony. And we need their strength. Something is coming, can’t you feel it?”

Of course, I fucking can. We all can. “One dead city won’t turn the tide.”

“Our city. Our home. This is where we’re strongest. It’s not an advantage I’m willing to give up just yet.” Lust lays a hand on my arm. “We’re getting them back,” he says softly. Trying to reassure me. It won’t work.

“You don’t know that. What do you think they’re gonna do with them once they get what they want?”

“We’re too valuable to kill,” Greed argues. “Based on the mutterings I managed to hear, they don’t know how to kill any of us. Plus, they’re more interested in gathering data than straight-out murder. They won’t dispose of us—or try to—until they get what they want.”

“The concoction Deacon had on him could have,” Lust says, looking to Lazarus for confirmation.

Lazarus shakes his head. “It would have taken you to the brink, but it’s not enough to push you over. Wouldn’t have taken much after that, though. They don’t seem to realize how close they are to working out the right formula. They think we’re more immortal than we are, and I’d prefer they not figure out the truth.”

Him and me both. Our strength lies in our secrets. Not revealing all our cards means they underestimate just how much damage we can do. It also masks the vulnerable parts we hide. Our weaknesses.

“Greed, rest. We’ll be in the kitchen if you need us.”

Greed is already asleep by the time we leave the room.

“How is he, really?” Lust asks Lazarus as we head through the hallways to our private kitchen.

“He’s malnourished, has internal damage, and had more drugs than blood in his system. Still, it shouldn’t take more than a few days of rest and proper nutrition before he’s back on his feet.”

“Good, we’ll need him.”

Envy’s already there, waiting for us with a freshly made loaf of bread—doesn’t smell as good as when Pride makes it—and various condiments strewn over the table. He has a plate of chocolate-chip cookies and a glass of milk in front of him.

Wrath drops into a chair, kicking back on it and dropping his boots on the table with crossed ankles. “So, what are we doing about these ‘guests’ of ours? We don’t actually believe their bullshit story, right?”

“They’re lying through their teeth,” I agree, sitting beside him and pulling the loaf toward myself. “They weren’t locked up and they certainly didn’t escape. I’ll find out who they are, and what they were doing with Greed.” And why the small one intrigues me so much. His eyes are a bright blue, like a cloudless summer sky. I have questions, and the sooner we’re done here, the sooner I’ll find them, no matter what I have to do to get them.

They’re hiding something, I’d bet my life on it. I’ve had enough of letting people into our home who are deliberately keeping secrets.

“You think Greed knows them?” Envy asks. He dunks a cookie into the milk before shoving the entire thing in his mouth. “What if they’re telling the truth, and they

really were victims too?”

“They’re lying,” I repeat. Maybe they weren’t there to do harm, and maybe they aren’t some of the scientists that experimented on Greed. That doesn’t negate the fact they chose to lie to us instead of telling the truth. That alone puts them on my shit list and firmly in the enemy column.

“Either way, it’s still prudent to watch them,” Lust says reasonably. “Considering that Conor and whoever is behind him found a way to create chimeras, who knows what else they’ve been playing with?”

Wrath sneers at the mere mention of Conor’s name. Can’t blame him. The name doesn’t inspire particularly fond feelings in me either.

I slice up the rest of the bread and butter it. Enough to make myself three sandwiches. Wrath tries to grab one, and I zap him with a burst of electricity. It won’t hurt, but the warning speaks for itself. I’ll punch him next time. That will hurt.

“That’s the last of the bread,” Wrath growls. “You can’t hoard the food!”

I can hoard whatever the fuck I want. “You can always make more.”

“It never comes out like Pride’s,” he says, grumbling.

Envy offers him a cookie. Wrath stares at it for a second before taking it with a nod of thanks.

Deacon strides into the room, carrying my orb. Handling it like he thinks it’s his. It’s not. It’s also not glowing anymore even though he’s touching it.

“Did you break it?” I ask angrily, sitting up straighter. Do I go into his house and

break his shit? Actually, there's an idea.

"It's not broken . I just... can't get it to work." Deacon sits beside Lust and drags the chair closer, so their thighs are touching. "It's closed up tight, and even holding it isn't doing anything anymore."

"Like it's out of juice," Envy muses. "Do you think it needs Fae magic to power back up? Like a battery?"

It couldn't. Not when a non-Fae created it in the first place. It may simply only have a finite number of uses. Though "out of juice" seems an apt description, considering how dormant it looks. I'd ask my shadow friend except I don't know how to contact him or have any idea when he'll show up again.

"Give it to me."

"Why?" Deacon asks suspiciously. "You couldn't make it work before."

"It seems that now neither can you," I drawl acidly. "It belongs to me. You've passed your usefulness, and I'll have it back now." If he doesn't hand it over, he'll have a fight on his hands. I won't be leaving this room without it, and he won't be leaving with it. No discussion.

Deacon glances at Lust, who nods and then tosses it to me.

The tightness in my chest eases as my fingers wrap around it. Good. The entire collection returned to me. Does my shadow have more of them? How many? I'll have them all. I pocket it, the weight at my side strangely comforting.

Lust sighs and drags Deacon closer, smelling the top of his head. "I'd like to spend some time surveying the area around the lawyer's office. There may be things we've

missed. We'll secure the building, relocate everyone, and take it for ourselves so that we can explore the rooms underneath at our leisure. Carefully." He kisses Deacon's temple. "Tomorrow."

"Let me guess," I say slowly. "We should rest."

"Rest is important, Gluttony. We need to be at full strength and ready for anything."

I hate that he's right. "What about the prisoners?"

"We can give them another day to sweat. Wear them down that way, so when we come for them, they're more amenable to answering our questions."

A boring tactic. Lust favors the long game. I prefer to make them scream up front.

"Whatever," I mutter. Gathering my sandwiches, I stalk from the room. I'll rest. And then tomorrow I'll make the world burn.



## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:06 am*

### Gluttony

“You look good on your throne.” “Yeah, you like that?” “I like it better when you’re naked on it.” “I’m your servant, Gluttony. Undress me.” “Whatever you wish, my king.”

I don’t make it back to my room, Lazarus waylaying me halfway there. “Come with me.”

“Do I look like your lackey?” I ask with a scowl. I don’t take orders; I give them. And I’m busy.

“You’ll want to see this.”

Under normal circumstance I might have told him to go fuck himself. However, he isn’t prone to exaggeration, not like Nero. Has to be serious. That or he wants to get fried.

He leads us down to the security suite and into one of the many rooms filled with cameras and other equipment that keeps the estate safe from physical threats. The supernatural kinds are dealt with differently.

“See that?” Lazarus says, pointing at the screen.

Dropping my plate of sandwiches, I lean down. “What are we looking at?” The video shows our two guests in their cell. One on their back on the floor and the smaller one, Seth, curled up on the bench. They’re sleeping. Riveting. This better not be what

Lazarus brought me here for.

“Give it a second.”

That’s a second too long. I don’t have time for this bull—My veins turn to ice. The shadows are moving , wrapping themselves around the figure. The one who calls himself Seth. As if I believed for a second that it was his real name.

“Well, that’s not normal,” Lust says, striding into the room and catching the tail end of it. “I’ve never seen anything like it. It’s like the shadows are embracing him.”

“Not human, then. What do you think he is?”

The shadows. Son of a bitch . “Turn it off,” I order, anger swamping me. “Don’t turn it back on.” I stalk out of the room before they can question me. My fury rises with every step I take. Are all my brothers and I destined to be surrounded by manipulative men? Whoever— whatever —this “Seth” is, he fucking knows what he’s doing. Did he get caught on purpose? What the hell does he want with me? With all of us?

He’s hiding something, and I’ll find out what it is even if I have to take him to edge of death to do it. I’ll break him down into nothing and get the answers I want.

The second I burst into the cell, both men wake from their slumber. Seth scrambles into a sitting position, and the other one—his protection?—moves to shield him. A burst of lightning forces him to move, and I throw him against the opposite wall, out of the way.

Seth reaches for him, mouth open like he wants to say something. He doesn’t, of course. He’s not speaking on purpose. Too afraid that I’ll recognize his voice. That smoky tone whispered in my ear? Damn fucking right I would have.

I'll hear it now.

Seth backs up as I advance, huddling against the wall as if it's going to protect him. Nothing will. He's my prize, and I don't give up anything that's mine. He was mine from the moment he gave me a gift.

Wrapping my hand around his throat, I lift him and pin him to the wall. He's not a mirage in the shadows now. Real flesh and blood under my control.

"Leave him alone!"

"If you don't stay where you are, I'll kill him and then you," I growl, not looking away from my target. "Speak. Now."

He swallows hard, his throat working under my palm. Still silent. Still trying to hide himself. There will be no more hiding. I'll strip him bare until I know every single thing about him.

"I know who you are," I say, lowering my voice and speaking through gritted teeth. We're so close I can see the spark of fear in his blue eyes and something deeper, impossible to interpret. "Is this how you help me? By sneaking into my home under false pretenses? By harming my brother? By lying to my face and trying to hide the truth, like you honestly believe it wouldn't eventually come out?"

"No, I—"

I let go, and he drops to the bench. My anger twists until it's dark and dangerous and all-consuming. I knew I was right, but hearing the voice, confirming it, crashes reality against me like violent waves in the ocean.

"What are you?"

“I told you—”

“You’re a friend,” I repeat with a sneer. “You’re no friend. Try again. Tell me your real name.”

He hesitates before curling his legs up under him, jamming his hands between his calf and thigh. “Saeran.”

Saeran.

The name settles inside me. It feels foreign and yet somehow familiar at the same time. It suits him more than Seth. Better. A piece of him that I take ownership of.

“What were you doing with Greed?”

“We were trying to get him out. I didn’t know—I didn’t know if Deacon would find a way to use the orb.”

The orb. The one he gave me. The one snug in my pocket even as we speak. “Where did you get it?” How does he even know who Deacon is? These glimpses into our life are private and not something we’ve made public in any way. As far as the world is concerned, Deacon ceased to exist the moment he stepped through our doors.

Saeran doesn’t answer me, and I’m thoroughly sick of his silence. I’ll have him sing like a canary whenever I fucking want him to. “Do friends keep secrets, Saeran?”

He shudders, muscles in his arms flexing as he tenses. His reactions to me are intriguing, drawing me to him like a moth to flame.

“Ones that protect them,” he answers, hint of husk to his tone.

“You think I need protection?” Conor and his wannabe group of rebels will be nothing but a black stain on the ground once I’m finished with them.

“I think that I do.”

Not a wrong assumption; I’m close to ripping his lying throat out, among other things. “Show me,” I demand. He knows what I’m talking about.

He doesn’t hesitate, and it’s the only thing saving him right now. He opens his hand, an orb slowly manifesting in his palm. Instead of taking the offered gift, I wrap my fingers around Saeran’s wrist and tug him forward.

We’re so close now that I can see flecks in his eyes. Blue sparks, almost like lightning. Like my own.

“Open it.”

His eyes flit down to where I hold him. “It’s for you.”

Satisfaction roars in me. My gift. Mine. “No key this time?” I still can’t open the last one. If he’s given me another one that I can’t get open, he’ll have something else to regret.

“Not for this one.”

It opens the second my lightning crackles over it. Not a music box, nor one like the original. It expands, a small storm brewing inside. Lightning and rain and dark clouds giving off a thunderous noise that echoes around the cell. A perfect representation of my magic. “What are they? Toys?”

“They’re—” Saeran stops, clamming up. More secrets. He infuriates me with his

secrets. I'll have them all until every inch of him is uncovered. I've never felt more of an urge to know a person. Who is he, what is he, where did he come from? Why does he keep coming back to me?

"Get up," I growl, pulling him to his feet without waiting for him to do it. Closing the globe, I shove it in my pocket next to the other one. My property now. "Let's go."

"Wait, where are you taking him?" The other man in the room—the one I completely forgot about—tugs at my forearm. "He's given you what you want, let him go."

"He hasn't begun to give me what I want. Get your hand off me before I kill you, and be grateful that I'm giving you a warning."

"It's okay," Saeran says gently. "Please."

The hand slips off me. An order obeyed. Interesting. Without glancing back, I shove Saeran through the door. "Move."

"Where are we going?"

"Wherever I want to go." If he isn't willing to give real answers, neither am I. "Now walk."

Disappointment thrums in my chest when he complies. I wouldn't mind putting him over my shoulder.

"How do you do that with the shadows?"

"It just—it happens."

"Bullshit." I've scoured the books, searching for so much as a hint of that magic in all

the creatures and species that call the Fae side of the shroud their home. I found nothing.

“Giving you an answer that you don’t want doesn’t mean I’m lying.”

Doesn’t mean he’s not either.

His steps are smaller than mine, slow and measured. He’s still wearing the clothes we found him in. Soft black pants that cling to him, matching sneakers that blend in, and a loose-fitting, black long-sleeved linen shirt with four laced buttons at the collar, string hanging free down his chest. Comfortable, good for moving around unhindered. A deliberate outfit. One that allows for hidden weapons. Along with the toned and sculpted shape of him, that shows he’s clearly trained. The need to know who he is only strengthens as I learn more.

“This isn’t necessary,” he says, breaking the silence. “I’m trying to help you. I’m not trying to escape, and I won’t.”

The last of my control snaps, and I shove him against the nearest wall, crowding him. Leaning a forearm on the wall beside his head, I lean in until our lips are almost touching. He sucks in a harsh breath. “Your word means nothing to me. Less than nothing. I don’t know what you consider ‘help,’ and frankly, I don’t give a flying fuck. I don’t trust you, I don’t trust the one with you, and I will find out what you’re doing here. I’m not like Lust or Wrath; your pretty face won’t sway me.”

Saeran’s pupils dilate, and all my muscles freeze as I study him.

What I can scent in the air isn’t fear, it’s desire. When I lay my hands on his throat loosely, it only deepens. The sweetest smell I’ve ever encountered. Like black raspberries and melted chocolate. His skin is so damn soft. Certainly not dead and more than real. Not lying about that, at least. I don’t know how he blends into the

shadows like the wind. I'll find out, later.

Stroking my thumb up his throat is like opening the floodgates. Saeran's eyes flutter closed, his pulse point throbbing under my touch. Likes danger, does he?

"You want me," I whisper. There's no denying it.

"No, I—"

"I'm getting sick of your lies, Saeran. I want a truth." Just one. For whatever reason, I need to hear something come out of his mouth that shows that some part of him is trustworthy. Not enough to trust, but enough to start.

"I can't," he says brokenly.

It feels like the truth. A half-truth at least. Not that he doesn't want to, but that he can't. An important distinction, though not one that pisses me off any less. I refuse to accept half anything.

"All of your secrets, give them to me."

His fingers skim my upper arms before they drop. He's holding himself back, the restraint in every tense line of his face. His eyes open, and the blue is worse, flickering in them like a storm is held within. They pull me in, and I hate that I don't know why. Hate that I have no answers. "You can't have them."

"I don't respond well to being told I can't have something." I respond with violence, and destruction, and flaying skin from bones until the screams linger when the soul is already gone.

"I know." Light panic flits over his face as soon as the words leave his mouth.



“You know?” I ask, a threat in my voice that he better heed, or things will get worse for him very quickly. “And do tell me, Saeran, what else do you know?”

“Stop saying my name like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like it means something.”

It feels like we’re having two different conversations. A mirror image of the same words. How do I step across to his side and find out what he’s talking about? His riddles have riddles and a lockbox surrounding them.

“You visit me in my room, in the dead of the night. You give me gifts. Tell me you want to help me. What does that mean to you?” It’s a pattern that’s starting to take shape, and the final image intrigues me. He’s beautiful, and his presence appeals to me in a way it never has with anyone else. Ever.

He falters, searching my face. I shift away from those eyes, grazing my beard over his chin. The shudder reminds me of the one in the cell, when I first spoke his name. Neither were because he’s afraid of me. Stupidity or something else? Other than my family, there isn’t a person alive that isn’t afraid of me.

Now I can add someone else to the list. Someone with secrets, the face of an angel, and an ability to lie without giving anything away in his expression. A deadly combination I refuse to trust. One that I can’t seem to stay away from.

“Touch me,” I whisper in his ear. “Like you did last night.”

“No,” he moans. A flutter against my arms that disappears before I can properly feel it.

“Do it.” He’d explored me in the shadows, and now I’ll have him do it in the light. I’ll feel that soft skin against my own, with nothing between us.

The contact is firmer now, sliding up my arms with trembling fingers. They dip around the curve of my elbow, tracing the same path. One we both remember vividly. My chest, lingering and shaping me before moving down to my stomach. An unfamiliar pool of arousal follows in his wake, chasing him. It’s a new experience for me, exhilarating. Another piece of him that’s mine alone?

Our eyes meet when he travels back up to my throat, brushing over my beard. His cheeks are flushed, chest heaving, his eyes glazed over, with desire in every facet.

“Please don’t,” he says, so softly I almost don’t hear it. More a whisper on the wind than spoken words.

Don’t what? Touch him? Kiss him? I’ve never kissed a single person in my life. I know the mechanics and how to avoid it. Instead of repulsing me like everyone else’s do, his lips beckon me. Smooth and lush, begging me to lean forward. I don’t deny myself what I want.

I’ll taste him, and he’ll let me. He’s all but throbbing with need for me. And I want , for the first time in my life. A flutter of an unfamiliar sensation in my stomach. Pleasing, satisfying.

“Why should I stop?” Our lips brush with every word. I apply a fraction of pressure before retreating. Not enough. He trembles, chin tilting to reach for me.

“I don’t know,” he says on a shuddered breath. “I need—I need—”

“Yeah.”

And then our mouths meet, lips open enough that he's breathing into me. The intimacy staggers me, both addictive and uncomfortable. He waits, patient, while I learn the foreign feel of him. He's unbelievably delicate, like a flower glancing over skin. I give an experimental lick inside his mouth, tasting him. It's even better than he smells. When I coax his mouth open further, he presses closer, fingers curling against my throat as he stretches, chest against mine.

The small whimper he lets out urges me on, an uncontrollable need erupting inside. I line our bodies together, trapping him securely against the wall, and deepen the kiss with an overwhelming urgency. His small tongue flicks over mine, and I'm hard as steel from those tiny, hesitant flutters. What does the rest of him taste like? I want to know. I'll strip him bare and feast on him. I grip his shirt, intending to tear it from him and see what's underneath.

Cold metal presses to my collarbone and I freeze, almost proud of his move. What does he hope to accomplish here?

Saeran's face is devoid of emotion when I pull back, though the flatness of his lips gives away his inner turmoil. The blade he holds in his hand has my familiar carvings on it. Well, well. The prisoner has some bite, then.

"What are you going to do with that?" I can have it from him in a matter of seconds, slit his throat with it, and leave him here bleeding out on the floor. Does he think he's a match for me? That stealing my own weapon and threatening me with it is going to do him any favors?

"Get away from me," he says shakily. There's an edge to it, simultaneously hard and vulnerable. He responds to me like someone deprived, eager and pliant and needy. He doesn't want me to get away from him, not really. And yet the determination in his gaze tells me he's not kidding around. Not playing "hard to get." Once again, I have the distinct feeling that I'm missing important pieces of the puzzle and can't see the

whole picture.

The blade cuts into me as I move, the sting easy to ignore. It clatters to the ground when I grasp his wrist and slam him back against the wall with a hand around his throat.

“Checkmate, Saeran. What’s your plan now?” His lips are still red and a little swollen from earlier. I did that to him. Even after this, it’s all I can think about. He’s so pretty, especially like this. I want to take him to my rooms and put him on a shelf as a decoration. A possession. Mine . Might even give him his own space and display him like a focal feature.

“Don’t.”

Don’t what? Display him? Kiss him again? Force him to kneel and do as I tell him to? I’ll do whatever the fuck I want, and there’s nothing he can do to stop me.

“I think it’s time that you and I have a little chat.”

If he plays his cards right, we both might enjoy it.

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:06 am*

Saeran

It's impossible not to think of the Sins at least once a day. Their impact on the world they rule ensures that ignorance can never be bliss. I can only be thankful that Gluttony's face isn't everywhere, like Lust's is. My memories conjure him enough.

The room where Gluttony takes me is barren except for a single chair in the middle of the space. A hanging bulb right above it. Concrete floor and walls. Soundproof.

A torture room.

He shoves me forward, and I stumble, my legs still weak from our earlier kiss. It had taken every ounce of control I possess to take that knife and make Gluttony stop. He wouldn't have without intervention, and I didn't want him to. Wanted with every fiber of my being for him to take me, right there. The kiss alone brought a rush of memories that threaten to overwhelm me. Pleasure and pain vying for control. The feel of his lips against mine will haunt me.

It's different from the kisses that I remember, more tentative and unsure. This is a Gluttony that's never experienced it, never experienced us. He's not confident or assured. It's been so long that the images and feelings blur together with others, but it reminds me of our original first kiss. Both of us too young to understand what would be expected of us. Before an entire court looked to us for guidance. Before we'd honed ourselves into lethal weapons.

We'd grown together, become who we are by each other's side.

That isn't who I'm standing in front of. No matter how much he looks like him, he's not. He doesn't share the same memories. Doesn't know . What shaped me doesn't shape him. His recollections of the Fae world, of me, are either skewed or removed. The mystery of how still eludes me.

I wish I knew why we're here now, on opposite sides, with a stranger staring down at me, wearing my lover's face.

He pushes me into the chair, and I don't resist. I'd rather sit anyway. The tiredness has reached my bones, reached my very soul, and standing takes effort I don't have.

What happens now? What is he going to do to me? I've endured a lot in my life. I don't think I can endure this.

I keep my head forward when he circles around to my back. If he's going to hurt me, I'd prefer not to see it coming. Warm hands land on my shoulders. and I jump, the sudden touch causing an involuntary shiver. Not one of fear. He's too close, especially after that kiss.

"I can smell it," he whispers, bending to press his lips against my ear. Another shiver and my heart maintains an unsteady beat. "You're reeking with it."

I'm too afraid to ask what.

"Why shouldn't I kiss you, Saeran? I've been around Lust and his sycophants enough to know what real desire is. And you? You're dripping with how much you want me."

He's always been too clever. Seeing right through me, never letting me have any secrets. Even now, instincts ride him, and he knows me. Nothing but the truth will satisfy him.

“Should we start with something simpler, then?” My chair spins around, and Gluttony crouches in front of me, hands on my thighs. Trapping me in. He’s still taller than me like this, still larger than life, eclipsing everything around him. He sucks up all the oxygen in any room and demands my attention, always.

“Tell me about Conor.”

“You know about Conor.”

Is he aware of his thumb, rubbing my thigh? That the warmth of his spread palm seeps into me until I ache for him? If he knew how flimsy my resolve was, how easy it would be for me to tip over the edge and take everything offered—even if it means dooming those I’m supposed to protect—he’d be pressing his advantage. I can’t let him have that. It’s too easy for him to be selfish, to take and take, expecting me to keep giving. And I do. I did. Gave him everything, whatever he wanted. I took great pride in being the only one to satisfy him.

“Your friend seemed quite eager to tell us all about him. Should I get him in here?”

“No,” I blurt, my cheeks heating from the quick refusal. I wish I could say it’s only because I need to keep Tiernan safe. The truth is that my greatest desire is to always have Gluttony’s attention on me. I’ve been deprived of it for so long, and it belongs to me. I never thought I’d be in a room with him again, and yet here we are. Less than ideal in more than one way.

Together less than a day, and he’s already kissed me.

The smug look on Gluttony’s face shouldn’t be attractive. All I want to do is trace it with my fingers, soak it in, and refresh past memories.

“Then you tell me, Saeran.”

He's saying my name like that on purpose, and my intense reaction to it every time shows just how pathetic I am, begging for any scraps he gives me.

"Tell you what?"

"He said you know where he is. I'm very interested in that information."

"We don't," I say, resigned. "He was trying to protect me. We know where he's been, not where he is now."

"And where has he been?"

"He owned an apartment, in the middle of the city. By the time we got there, it was gutted."

Gluttony takes a deep breath. His thumbs dig in, massaging, and I almost bite my tongue off. "It interests me why you're chasing him. Bit of a fan?"

"He has something of mine." A half-truth. He is something of mine. I think. I need to get closer to him to confirm my suspicions, and he continues to elude me.

"Does he, now?" He moves, wrapping a hand loosely around my throat. Not threatening, more like he can't help himself, just like I can't. The draw has never been one-sided, and some part of him remembers. Buried but never gone. "And where else have you followed him?"

"A—" I swallow hard. He keeps caressing me, and it's hard to think. He's too dangerous, and I'm wading through a storm. Right into his arms, which is the last place I should be. I have to get out of here. "A—facility, where they were making the chimeras." One of what has to be many, at the rate they're doing it. I have no idea where they're getting the human fuel. Nothing in the media has reported on excess of



missing people. They had to have taken dozens, if not hundreds, for what they've done.

His thumbs pause. "Where?"

"It's gone. They destroyed it." They're frustratingly efficient at erasing any traces they were ever there. The order has been around for so long, keeping under the radar of the Sins—and of us—that it worries me. They're too good at it now, like rats in a sewer. Conor screwed up when he half transitioned, and it's the only reason we've learned as much as we have in such a short amount of time. It's helped them advance at the same time it's given us a beacon of sorts.

"Destroyed before or after you got to it?"

Loaded, clever question. "During, actually." I may have thought they were using it as bait to lure us in and kill us, but Conor doesn't know about us. A trap for the Sins, perhaps. We almost paid the ultimate price for it.

"Did you discover something?"

"No." I wish I had. The failures continue to stack up. "They're kidnapping people to create them. There were discarded bodies and parts. Conor can make them because—" I snap my mouth shut, horrified at what I almost revealed.

"Because..." Gluttony prompts.

I shake my head silently. I want to give him everything, but there's a line I have to draw. To protect myself, to protect all of us.

Gluttony tugs me forward before I can react, and suddenly, I'm in his lap, straddling his hips while he remains in a crouch.

“You’re lying to me, and we both know it. Maybe you know so much because you’re working with him.”

“No.” It’s hard to concentrate on what he’s saying when he’s so hot underneath me, muscles straining and body heat rising to surround me.

“What were you doing with Greed, then? No more lies, Saeran. I’m thoroughly sick of them, and you won’t like what happens next.”

“We were trying to help him, to get him out.” That’s at least the whole truth in that regard.

“How did you know he was there, hidden deep underground? The same way you knew where to look for Conor?”

I don’t answer. At least that way I won’t have to lie. There are enough of them between us.

“That’s how it’s going to be?” His hand curls around my hips, dragging me even closer. I can feel the shape of him snuggled against my ass, and my eyes flutter closed momentarily. The urge to rock on him, to take this further, overwhelms me, taking over all my senses. “I said, no lies.”

“Not—lying. Not speaking isn’t the same as lying,” I say breathlessly. I need him to keep touching me as much as I need him to stop. Don’t stop.

“Semantics piss me off.” He grips my ass, and my answering groan is automatic. I couldn’t have held it back if I’d tried. My hips move on their own, pressing down on his hardness. Yes, please . It’s been so long. Lifetimes. I’m at breaking point after spending eternity without him. It would barely take anything to have him inside me again, filling me and making me whole. Making us both whole.

“They’re all I have.” The last word ends on a moan as he guides me to rock on him. He pulls back, our eyes meeting. The streaks of lightning in the gray are breathtaking, irrefutable proof that this is affecting him too. “They’re all I have,” I repeat.

“Who are you?”

The truth comes tumbling out of my mouth before I can take it back. “Yours.” Forever. Always. It doesn’t matter where we end up, how far apart we are, or what memories we take with us. He’ll always be mine, and I’ll always be his.

“What does that mean?”

There’s no answer that will satisfy him. Not without revealing everything.

“I could kill you right here, right now,” he growls. “Tell me why I shouldn’t.”

Silence is my only weapon here, and it cuts through both of us. He hates it; the anger brimming under the surface a physical entity between us. He’s never allowed me to be anything but one hundred percent his. He doesn’t know why it bothers him now, but I do.

He yanks me even closer, our chests plastered together. His breath is hot against my cheek as he grasps my nape, holding me in place. “You’re testing my patience.”

“What patience?”

He chuckles deeply, the sound reverberating through me. “Give me another gift,” he whispers in my ear. “I want more. What else do you have?”

I clutch at his muscles, the rough hair on his forearm a pleasant scratch. Anything he wants. Anything. “Do you—what do you want?”

“Everything, Saeran.”

A tall order. So many years together once resulted in our home full of what he claims is “everything.” Never satisfied, always wanting more, and I considered it my life’s work to feed him. He’s not the only one that’s been starved all this time.

He watches intently as I spread my hand out. Lightning strikes the center, and a small tornado rises until it covers my hand, a mini storm literally in the palm of my hand. When it dies out, there’s a set of cuff links resting there, in the shape of lightning bolts.

“Put them on me.” The husk in his tone feeds my soul. I’d do anything for him when he speaks to me like that.

My fingers glide over the back of his hand and circle his wrist. I can’t span around it, he’s so much bigger than I am. He’s not wearing cuff links on his white shirt, so it’s easy to clip these on. Every time I brush over them, a small jolt runs through me. They’re saturated with him. A good thing it doesn’t hurt me.

“I can feel them. How?”

“They’re filled with your magic.”

“How’d you do that?” He snatches my wrist and holds it, eyes hard. “How can you use my magic?”

“I—I didn’t.” An unforgiveable mistake. All I want is to satisfy him, to the detriment of all my other brain cells. “I used yours and pulled it in to make them.” A simplification of something far more complicated and intrinsic.

“That’s still using it. How do you pull it? What are you, Saeran?”

My Fae abilities have always skewed differently, simply for being the mate of a Sin. What we have at our disposal is so much more because of them. I've been cut off from it, with only drips of it available to me, but pieces are coming back, simply from being this close to him.

“You crossed the shroud to be here.”

That much I can give him. “Yes.” We both know I'm not of this world. Neither is he.

“We haven't crossed for a long time.”

It doesn't sound like a question, so I stay quiet. Where is he going with this?

“What does it look like now?”

Oh. Part of him yearns for home just as much as my entire being does. To walk among the grass, walk the tree bridges, be one with nature. There will always be a piece missing, so long as we're stuck on this side.

“I don't know,” I admit painfully. I don't know. I wish I did. What have the Light done to it? Is there anything left to salvage? Our entire culture, our customs, everything that makes us us, wiped out in a single night. The hate I have for them is a real, physical thing.

He lifts my chin with a thumb without dislodging the hold he has around the back of my neck. The difference in our sizes makes me shiver. I know exactly what he can do with that strength—both good and bad—and it never fails to make my body go from zero to a hundred in a single moment.

“Why not?”

“I haven’t—I haven’t been home in a long time.” Here isn’t home, and it never will be. This place will always smell wrong.

“And why is that?”

More silence.

He huffs a laugh and stands, dislodging me. “The things that I can do to you to make you scream, to make you beg to die, are infinite. Is that the path you want to go down?” He yanks me to my feet.

Part of me still hopes there’s enough left that he won’t harm me. He’s already allowed me more than he’s allowed anyone else. I know that he would have already started the torture if someone else refused to answer his questions like I have. I’m not ignorant about who he is, and what he’s done. His reputation is the same as it’s always been. Kind to the ones he considers his, ruthless with our enemies.

Gentle with me.

“What if I start on your friend? I wonder if that will make you talk?”

Fear chokes me, wrapping around my throat. No . I can’t have someone else get hurt because of me. I’ve failed Tiernan, and all the others, too many times already. “Please don’t,” comes out of me, revealing all my cards as I plead.

“No?” Gluttony drawls, pulling me closer again, forcing me to tip my head back to maintain eye contact. An attempt to intimidate me. Even now, I’m not afraid of him. Only of how much power he has over me. How easy it would be for him to break the pieces of me that are left. “You won’t answer any of my questions, and now you think to ask me for something?”

He drags me out of the room before I can respond. He's silent as he takes me back down to the cells and shoves me inside. Tiernan rises from the seat as soon as I enter and comes toward me. The deep growl that Gluttony emits stops him in his tracks.

I subtly shake my head. There's no use riling Gluttony up further. I'm trying to avoid violence, not invite it.

"My patience"—his lips curl up in a sneer—"Will only go so far. Think about that while you rot in here."

The cell door slams shut, and I flinch at the sudden noise.

I stay at the door, a hand wrapped around the bar, waiting for the receding footsteps to die out. Only when I'm sure we're alone do I turn to Tiernan. "We have to get out of here."

He checks me over with a frown. "Did he hurt you?"

"Not the way you think." Impossible not to hurt when we're so close. When I have to put distance between us. "But we need to leave."

"You said we couldn't. That we'd be revealing our hand."

Revealing ourselves as Fae is the least of our worries. "He kissed me." The touch has faded, but it's cemented in my mind. "If we stay here..." I don't have to say it out loud. He knows. My control is paper-thin right now. If I let Gluttony in, we're all dead. We're not ready for an assault. We were at the top of the food chain once, and we still weren't ready.

"I told you that we should have left it alone."

“Can you lecture me later? We have to go.”

“How? There’s no safe way for us to get out. We’re underground. Guards are watching our every move. The Sins are watching our every move.”

“Mess with the footage again, and then break the door. I’ll take us the rest of the way.” The shadows will guide us. The Sins are going to know what we are after this; they aren’t stupid, and they’ll work it out. Best for us to be far from here when they do.

“The shadows are going to consume you,” Tiernan warns. “You rely on them too much.”

I’m not in the mood to debate the dangers, and we don’t have time. He can lecture me later.

“I need you to trust me.”

“I trust no one else more. I follow your lead.”

A mistake. “I need you to—” I gesture at the door. Using that kind of energy will make it impossible for me to leave. I’m too weak. The kiss with Gluttony has both reinvigorated and drained me. A half connection that tells my body exactly what it’s missing, like sucking in a breath after being underwater for too long and then being dragged under in the next second. More harm than good if it’s not completed. The breath has put water in my lungs.

Tiernan narrows his eyes suspiciously. “Why can’t you do it?”

It isn’t the time to get into this. “I’ll explain everything when we’re out, I promise. Right now, could you please?” The sooner we’re out of here, the sooner I can check



on Diarmuid and Riordan. And put distance between Gluttony and me.

Tiernan nods, and then with a loud, booming blast of psychic energy, the jail cell door is lodged in the opposite wall. “They’ll have heard that.”

“Well, let’s make sure we’re gone from here before they organize themselves.”

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*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:06 am*

Gluttony

“Stop, that tickles!” “Telling me to stop only means it will last longer.” “I know.”  
“Come here and kiss me.”

The blast rocks through the entire mansion, unbalancing me. A vase smashes to the ground when my hip hits the corner of the stand. What the fuck was that?

Envy darts around the corner, vines wrapping around his arms and over his palm, the spikes glistening with poison. “Was that you?”

“No, it fucking wasn’t me.” Why would I cause destruction to our own home when there’s plenty of more scintillating targets in the city?

Lazarus comes up behind Envy and grasps his nape, holding him in place. “It came from the cells.”

Saeran.

I expect to find the place caved in, with the bodies of the two men lying in the wreckage. Instead, the cell door’s embedded in the wall, and some of the bars are bent. They’re made of titanium alloy and infused with our magic. Nothing should get through that.

Envy’s nose wrinkles. “Anyone smell that?”

Yeah, I can smell it. And fury is making my blood boil and my hands clench.

“They’re Dark Fae.” Mother fucker . How did we not see it? Saeran is a Dark Fae.

“That makes no sense,” Lazarus says with a frown. “We’d have felt it. They can’t hide like that.”

“Apparently, now they can.” Envy touches the edges of the bent bars and whistles low. “A little sloppy but impressive power. How’d they get past the rest of the security, though?”

An excellent question. Between the markings on all entrance doors, the gargoyles and various other magics on the grounds, and the walls surrounding the estate, they shouldn’t have been able to so easily walk out. Of course, Saeran has made a habit of sneaking into my room, so maybe it isn’t that unreasonable.

Footsteps signal the arrival of Lust and Wrath.

“What happened?” Lust asks.

Wrath’s face twists in anger, and he takes three long strides to reach the broken cell. “Dark Fae ,” he spits out. “The prisoners? How?”

Lust studies the damage curiously. “Why wouldn’t they simply tell us? Are we not allies?”

“I want to know where they came from. Are there more of them?” Envy asks.

“Do they know about Conor?” Wrath adds. “Or where our fucking family is?”

If they do, they weren’t forthcoming with it. “Dark Fae are powerful. They could have left at any time. Why didn’t they?” Why did Saeran stay? Why did he let me kiss him? There are few in the world that are a match for us; the Dark are one of

them. Even the Light bowed to them until they didn't.

"Maybe he was too busy with your tongue down his throat?" Envy suggests.

"Fuck off." Doesn't he have better things to do than spy on everyone in the place? How'd he even manage that when technology goes haywire around him?

"Do you know him?" Lazarus tilts his head in confusion.

"No."

"Just a friendly little make-out session with the enemy?" Envy snickers at his words, and I'm about to shove them down his throat.

"Do you have anything useful to say?"

"No, just making noise. We going after them?"

Hell fucking yes, we're going after them. Saeran doesn't get to leave, not until I have more answers. Not until I get more, period. If I have to drag him back here by his hair, so be it.

"Yes," Lust says, eyeing me. Whatever he sees, he can keep it to himself.

Lazarus sighs heavily. "I'll get the car."

"I'll grab some weapons. You're coming with me," Wrath says, tugging Envy behind him. "I need an extra set of hands."

"Lucky for you, I have two of them."

“Two sets or two hands?”

“It’s a mystery.”

Their voices fade as they retreat.

Lust snags my arm so I can’t leave with everyone else.

“What?” I snap.

“What’s going on with you?” Lust asks quietly. “You kissed him? Why?”

He knows I don’t kiss. That I don’t anything. I know how it looks. “I don’t know.” There’s something about him, like I know him. I’m positive he knows why. Not particularly good at communicating, the lying little Fae.

“We can look for him on our own. Stay here and see what you can find out about them. It sounds like they’ve been here a while, right under our noses. I want to know how many of them there are, and what they’re doing here.”

“You’re not going without me.” He’s my prey, and I’ll be the one to run him down. All those questions Lust wants answers for, Saeran has them. And they’re mine to discover.

“Be careful, Gluttony.”

The time for careful is long gone if it ever existed. “Do we know which direction they went?”

“I assume they went back to town. There’s nothing else out here to keep their interest.”

We don't know that. They could be hiding deep in the Cheyenne Mountains, somewhere far away from the populace, where they won't risk exposure. Lust is right, though; the city makes more sense. Maybe we'll stumble upon some of our missing brethren during the search since it seems to be the only way we're getting anywhere at the fucking moment.

I'd prefer more active involvement, with destruction and tearing the city apart until we're all back under the same roof.

Once we reach the garage, I head for a motorcycle instead of one of the cars and swing my legs over, straddling it.

"What are you doing?" Lazarus asks, an SUV door open, Envy already inside.

"I'm going hunting." I'll find him on my own. Something tells me I want to be alone when I find my quarry. We have things to discuss that are private. "If you find him before I do, don't touch him."

Ignoring Lust's curious look, I take off without looking back. The gates are open long before I get to them, allowing me to roar out of the grounds and toward town. No one gets in my way, the markings on the bike easy to identify. I don't care about hiding or going unnoticed. They'll fucking move, or I'll kill them. I have more important things to deal with.

I have no idea where I'm going, yet somehow every corner I turn as I drive through the city is deliberate. Some subconscious part of me knows. I can't feel him or even sense where he is. But I know .

And sure enough, in the heart of the city, I find him. He's alone, standing on the side of a deserted street. Almost like he's waiting for someone.

I doubt it's me, but I'm who he's going to get.

He doesn't look surprised when I screech to a halt in front of him. More resigned than anything. I can't see his wings, but that's at least a trick I know about. There are tattoos on the side of his face that I've never seen before. Something else he's hidden from me. A kind of glamour? Another magic that Fae don't have access to. Who the hell is he, and why doesn't he exhibit the right signs to identify him? A hybrid? Not possible. The Fae don't breed outside of their kind, especially not the Dark. They're far too ritualistic and stuck in their ways to turn from tradition.

He's still wearing the same outfit as before. All black, decked out and ready for battle. A new bow is strung over his shoulders. I'm sure if I frisk him, I'll find new blades hidden everywhere too. Now that I know what he is, the cache of weapons makes more sense. I can't imagine that he and whoever he's with have done anything but fight since they were forced out of their home.

In hiding.

Anger flashes through me that they didn't come to us for protection. Why didn't they? We would have helped them.

"How did you find me?" he asks.

"The same way you find me, I gather." We're connected somehow, and I'm sure he knows all about it. "How are you hiding what you are?"

He stiffens and looks away, jamming a hand into his pocket. "We learned to protect ourselves."

I've heard that excuse before. "From us?"

“I don’t know.”

“Stop sidestepping my questions,” I growl. Kicking the stand of the bike down, I get off so that I can stalk toward him. He holds his ground, staring up defiantly. I can’t decide if I want to shake him or kiss him. How dare he run from me?

“We don’t know whose side you’re on,” Saeran says. “Whether we can trust you.”

If there are trust issues, they’re not coming from our side. We aren’t lying or skulking in the shadows like we have dangerous secrets. “That why you’re running from me and why you haven’t shown your face before now?”

“That. And other reasons.”

“Which are?”

His throat works, and my gaze is drawn to it. The urge to be closer is strong enough that I don’t fight it. Heat radiates off him, and he doesn’t pull away when I lay a hand against his throat. If anything, his heart rate speeds up.

“I can’t tell you.”

How convenient. “Because you don’t know whose side we’re on? I don’t buy it. What reasons do you have not to trust us?” Have they been here the whole time? We could have protected them, worked with them the way we used to. I could have met him a long time ago.

“None that you would remember.”

“What do you know about that?” How does he know there are gaps in our memories about what happened the night everything changed? Even before then. It’s all fuzzy,



like a movie with nothing but static. From what little I do remember, we guarded them, supported them. What the hell happened that they would be so scared they'd run from us? That they would keep themselves apart all this time?

“Too many things and not nearly enough.”

He's certainly keeping them all close to his chest. The cat-and-mouse game we're playing is already old. “Are you going to cooperate with us? Or scurry back into your hole?”

“I'm doing the best I can to keep them safe and alive. Staying away from you was the key to all that.”

“You think we're going to destroy what's left of you?” Did he forget the use of the word “ally”? I don't kill people that are on our side. Granted, very few are on our level enough to be considered allies. The Dark are the only ones I can even think of.

“Not... exactly.”

Fisting his hair, I yank him against me, closing the last of the distance between us. Forcing his head back to look at me, I can't help but get sucked in by his large, beguiling blue eyes. The intricate tattoos on his face accentuate the perfect lines of his face. He's a divine creature, built to lure in unsuspecting victims.

“Let me see.” It's not what I mean to say. Despite how much he talks, he hasn't told me a goddamn thing. But I need to see. I know what happens when they use their magic. And I want to see his.

He doesn't deny me. Fae energy rises from him, his eyes lighting like there's a glow behind them. His tattoos light up as well, slowly turning white, like a river being filled. Unexpected and incredibly beautiful. When his ears curl, I trace the edges of

them with the pads of my fingers. Sharp and soft at the same time. And then the last part, the one I want to see most. His hair gets longer until the length traces down to his waist. The strands grow and wrap around my hand, silky and smooth.

“How do you contain it so that we can’t see?”

“It’s like creating a box inside,” he says in a low voice. My hand rests on his throat, the thrum of his pulse under my palm. His breathing elevates at the contact. So attuned to my every touch. “We push all our magic into it and close the lid. It took us years to perfect it. Years of”—his lips quirk—“staying underground like rats. Harder back then to get lost in the crowds, when the population was vastly lower than it is now.”

“You were there that night.”

He knows what I’m talking about. All he does is nod in response, pain flitting across his face.

I lean down, nuzzling the tattoos with my nose. It’s warm and almost buzzing from the magic entwined with it. What does it taste like? No time like the present to find out.

He shudders underneath me as I trace the intricate design with my tongue. It tastes like him, the same sweet smell that all but leaks from him whenever we’re near each other. I move across and down his face, capturing his lips. The taste multiplies, his tongue reaching for mine. His hands fist against my biceps, and he arches up into me. He’s light enough to pull up and into my arms. He doesn’t resist, knees hooking over my hips. Staggering to my left, I push him up against the wall, sandwiching him between his bow, the rough brick, and my body.

He tilts his head, changing the angle of the kiss, his moans vibrating through me. The

friction as I rock against him is driving me insane.

“Why do you make me feel like this?” Like my skin is vibrating, like I will destroy everything if he stops touching me, like there’s nothing more important than getting his mouth on me.

Panting heavily, we stare at each other. The electricity between us is more than just my magic. More than the lightning streaking across the sky from my elevated emotions.

When I cup his cheek, he turns into my palm with an open mouth, his eyes fluttering closed. Absolute bliss covers his face, like I’m fulfilling his every need simply by being nearby. My thumb slides into his mouth, and he closes his lips around it. The idea of pleasure is foreign to me, and yet with him, it’s all stark reality in bright lights and the only thing that matters. He’s turning me inside out, and I hate it as much as I want to give in to it. There’s a reason we’re so drawn to each other, I’m sure of it.

“Tell me,” I demand.

“It’s because we’re—”

He’s interrupted by a low, familiar growl. One too close. Allowing a chimera to get this close to us is a grave error on my part. Unforgiveable and proving just how pathetic this Fae makes me. Blinded, too ultra-focused on him.

Keeping my eyes on the hideous creature, I lower Saeran to his feet and then shift him so that he’s behind me. “Stay there.”

“Did you miss the part where I can look after myself?” he says, attempting to push me out of the way. No can do. He might be powerful; I’m still bigger. Unless he wants to fight me with his magic, then he’s shit out of luck.

“Gluttony.”

“No.” For whatever reason, I need to protect him.

It stalks closer on three legs. The fourth drags after it, not properly formed. It’s almost cruel, the way they’re created. Not even I would make them on purpose. What Conor has done is unforgiveable. He’ll die, just like they all will. Whoever he works for and anyone else involved.

Its mouth opens wide, jaws hard as steel that will cut through anything, and dripping with blood. Its own, not from a victim. It hasn’t killed anything on its way here; I’d be able to smell it. It only has designs on one target. An intelligence it shouldn’t be capable of.

Me or Saeran? It won’t get either of us.

“ Please. I’m your equal, Gluttony, not someone who cowers behind you.”

Every muscle in my body tenses at the words. They’re familiar, tugging low at my gut. Sparking something that may be a memory but can’t be.

We’re in this together, always.

“Stay close to me,” I growl, yanking him to my side. “And get your fucking weapon out.”

He slings the bow off his shoulder and into his hands, notching an arrow in it with ease. He’s done it a few times. More than. Equals, then. It’s only one chimera, at least. Easy pickings.

It leaves a trail of dripping flesh behind itself. Its eyes are locked onto Saeran, so I

guess I have my answer. Not one single talon will touch him.

“Gluttony.” Saeran’s small hand touches my elbow, and I turn to where he’s indicating.

Another chimera is coming at us from the left. And one on the right. We’re being hedged in. Chimeras are mindless animals, caused by a wrong turning. They aren’t manufactured, and they sure as hell can’t think for themselves or lay a trap.

Until now, apparently. For fuck’s sake.

“You take the left; I’ll take the other two.” Two against one are fair odds.

“Why don’t you take the left, and I’ll take the other two?”

“Are you seriously arguing with me about this right now?”

“I’m not weak.”

“I didn’t say you are.” It’s like we’re having two different conversations, and the defensiveness in his tone makes me think there’s more to his words than he’s letting on. Does he think he’s weak? “Are you?” I ask, risking turning around to see his face.

The fear etched on it doesn’t exactly give me a lot of confidence. The determined cut of his jaw won’t help him if he really is too weak to fight. “Stay close to me,” I repeat through gritted teeth. I don’t care. I won’t allow anyone or anything to touch him, regardless.

The chimera in front of us bursts into action, charging as the other two hang back. Saeran immediately fires an arrow, hitting one of its front legs. It yelps, tripping. My lightning rips through it, and it staggers, getting back up. Doesn’t stop it, though.

Their healing abilities are always a pain in the fucking ass.

I didn't even bring a weapon. Another tick in the "mistake" column. Everything about Saeran makes me lose my mind, and I doubt I've scratched the surface of who he really is.

The small dragon I've seen him with appears at our side with a "pop," her wings flapping.

"No, Gyro," Saeran says firmly. "This isn't your fight."

She ignores him, circling them, lightning crackling from her wings.

"What is she?" He didn't give me a real answer before, and it's unlikely he will now. That doesn't mean I'll ever stop asking the questions. Eventually, he'll answer all of them. He'll have no choice.

"She's yours," Saeran says, surprising me. "A physical representation of your guardian." He hesitates. "She's here to protect you, like she used to."

The truth isn't nearly as satisfying as I'd hoped. It only brings more questions.

The chimera is up again, already running toward us. The one to our left does the same, both surging forward and gaining speed. A small cyclone bursts out of Gyro and swings one of them up into the air. The strong wind carries it high into the sky and then drops it. It's the most glorious thing I've seen all day.

"She can stay. You need to hang back."

"Excuse me?" Saeran snarls. "I already told you—"

I whirl on him, hand against his throat, leaning close. The chimera is breathing down our necks, and it's going to reach us in a matter of seconds, and I still can't take my hands off him. "I won't allow you to be hurt. Don't be stupid about this."

He has to—there; I pull a blade out from the flap on his back. It made zero sense for him to have it there since the difficulty of reaching it hardly seems practical for battle. Having it there for someone else to use? That makes more sense.

I twist, slashing out, getting the chimera right across the jugular. A push kick flips it onto its back. A flash of lightning, not mine, twists into his chest, right where its heart should be.

"Is that why she can use my magic?" I ask even as I kneel and plunge my hand right where Gyro had struck. Ripping out its heart, I throw it out of reach. Even crushing it here won't keep it down. It has to be disposed of properly.

Once we deal with the other two. The broken bones in the one Gyro dropped have already healed, and the two of them circle us, waiting for the right opportunity to strike.

Wearing us down one by one. Giving the third time to recover from the heart removal. The level of intelligence is astounding, and part of me wants to study it. How is it being done? What kind of magic is Conor using? I don't care about the ethics of it, not like Lust and his boy toy, only that Conor's using them against us. What if we can turn the tide and use them against him instead?

"I want one alive," I say abruptly.

"Are you kidding me?"

"No. Once they're down, we dispose of all but one."

The chimera on the right pounces, and I catch it by the throat, throwing it to the side and away from Saeran. He fires another arrow right into its heart. It staggers before righting itself and ripping it out with its own teeth.

“That’s... not normal,” Saeran breaths out.

Nothing about this is normal.

Saeran notches two more arrows, each one hitting the exact same place, directly into the chimera’s heart and splitting down the middle of the one before it. It rips out each one as it advances on us. Clenching my fist and pulling magic around it, crackles dancing and currents rising in the air, I wait until it’s in range. Then with a mighty swing, I connect with its jaw. The electricity smashes into it like a freight train, and it explodes from the inside, blood and sinew spraying everywhere.

“Well, that’s one way to do it,” Saeran says, staring unblinking at the carcass left behind.

“Won’t keep it down forever.” Resilient assholes that don’t like to stay fucking dead. There’s a reason we haven’t attempted to turn anyone since Raven, and not for a long time before that. He was a special circumstance.

“Saeran!”

Lightning strikes automatically in the vicinity of the newcomers, standing on a nearby rooftop. Three men. One I recognize as Tiernan, Saeran’s companion in the cells. The one who’d tried to protect him as if anyone could stop me from going to him. The other two I don’t know.

I glance at Saeran, ready to attack them if need be. They don’t smell like anything, either, and I hate everything about that. How can we know who’s on our side if we



can't even tell the Fae from each other, let alone them from a human?

Saeran's small hand rests on my forearm, forcing me to turn back to him. "They're friends, here to help us."

So he says. He'll forgive me if I'm not inclined to believe that without some form of evidence. "If you don't stay behind me, I'll kill all three of them." It's not an idle threat. I don't know them, I don't care about them, and he can damn well listen to me for once.

Saeran's grip tightens, and then he steps back, keeping my body between him and them.

A chimera comes at us from the side, and a swift kick to its front leg snaps it. It lets out a deafening screech as it stumbles, still snapping at me with its large claws.

It should have been the last one, but a fourth jumps out of nowhere, heading straight for Saeran. Before I can let out a warning, Saeran's silky wings come into view, glistening under the sun. He leaps to the side, half running across the wall, and more arrows are let loose, strategically placed to slow the creature down.

A blast of energy smashes into it from the side as the three Dark enter the fight. Tiernan comes to me, using a dagger to slice across the chimera's flesh. Are they all still living in the past, with their primitive weapons? Have they never heard of a gun before? Normally, I'd be carrying one on me, but my focus had been so heavily on finding Saeran and dragging him back to the estate by his hair that it had completely slipped my mind.

Good thing that I don't need a weapon to be dangerous.

"Protect him," I growl, grabbing the chimera by the throat and smashing it back into

the ground hard enough to break its neck. “Now.”

Tiernan nods once and moves away to take care of the last chimera.

Removing the heart of this one is harder, some kind of steel encasing it. What the fuck? More experiments? Using all my strength, I pry it away, the metal slicing my fingers open. Finally, it comes free, and I can rip out the beating heart. There’s something different about it. Different enough that I don’t crush it instantly. I want Nero to study it, when we get him back.

“Saeran!”

The yelled word has me turning just as Saeran’s eyes roll back in his head. His four wings go limp as he drops. Tossing the heart to the side, I dart toward him. By some miracle, I manage to get there before he hits the ground, diving under and catching him against me. He’s out cold, dead weight in my arms.

“What the fuck happened?”

“Nothing,” Tiernan says, brows drawn in, concerned eyes darting between us. “He was fighting, and then he just collapsed. Nothing hit him.”

I check him for injuries anyway, but there are none. Still breathing though his forehead is burning. No matter where I search, I can’t find the problem. Gyro nudges his cheek with her nose. He doesn’t stir. The small mewl that comes out of her mouth is more like a cat than a dragon. And not particularly reassuring. What’s wrong with him?

“How do I fix this?” I ask her. She sits herself on my shoulder and droops over it. Sad, dejected. The worry twisting in my stomach worsens. “Saeran. Saeran, wake up.” Gentle slaps against his face do nothing. His wings are like the softest silk under

my fingertips and yet somehow lifeless. I want to see them properly, so he'll have to recover from whatever this is. I refuse to allow anything else.

The other two Fae get to us, and one tries to reach for Saeran. I growl low in my throat and stand, taking him with me. "Touch him and I'll rip your fucking head off." He doesn't want to test me right now. I'll follow through, with prejudice. "Tell me what's wrong with him."

"We don't know," Tiernan says. "This happened about a week ago, after he ran from a chimera. He recovered with rest."

"How long?" I demand. Fae are strong, they're not like this. They should know what's wrong with him and stop it from happening again. Bullshit nonanswers aren't good enough.

"A few hours. His body just needs to replenish."

"From what?" I snarl. I didn't once see him using his Fae magic, aside from the wall jump. His arrows and his knives. Not enough magic to require this kind of replenishment.

"We don't know," one of the others says, looking as frustrated as I feel.

"Who the fuck are you, and why shouldn't I kill you right now?" If they can't help me, they're useless and can be disposed of.

The Fae tenses, ready to fight. If he wants to die first, be my guest.

"Diarmuid, stand down," Tiernan says tiredly. "Our inability to answer your questions doesn't make us the enemy, Gluttony. Saeran keeps many things to himself. I would wager this is one of them, and I'd like to know what's going on just as much

as you do.”

I highly doubt that. “Who is he to you?”

“He’s our king,” Diarmuid said angrily. “So you better be careful with him.”

“We’re going with you,” Riordan says firmly. “Wherever you go. Wherever he is. And if you harm one hair on his head—”

“Threatening me is bad for your health.” I may tolerate a lot from the one in my arms, but I won’t tolerate it from anyone else. I pause, the anger fleeing. “Did you say king?” I stare down at Saeran’s soft face. “He’s a Tenebris.” The strongest bloodline to ever grace Fae walls. I know the name, the lineage. For some reason, the name of their king, who has ruled for over a thousand years, always eludes me. Saeran. If that’s true, then he’s as old as my brothers and me are. Possibly older.

How much he’s seen, how much he’s been through... the answers he can give us are endless. He needs to wake, so I can ask more.

Tiernan nods sharply. “The last of his line.”

The last of his line. The only legacy to royalty the Dark Fae has left. I can understand wanting to protect him. “You,” I throw at the one with the temper. “Take my bike. I’m taking your car. You can drive.” That order’s directed at Tiernan. I expect them to obey, and if they don’t, I’ll kill them. I don’t have time for any of this nonsense.

They don’t argue with me, which is suspicious in and of itself. If they’re thinking to lure me into an ambush, they’ll find out why it’s a bad idea to fuck with the Sins.

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:07 am*

Saeran

We used to play our own version of hide-and-seek. I would make him a gift and hide it among the hundreds of others he has. He always found it. What I wouldn't give for one more game. One more triumphant look on his face when he finally gets his prize.

Softness surrounds me as I slowly come back to consciousness. I roll into it, the scent invading my senses and warming me from the inside. A completeness that I haven't felt in centuries washes over me. Contentment. Happiness. Fulfillment.

I already know what I'll see when I open my eyes.

I'm in the heart of Gluttony's domain. His bedroom, surrounded by his hoard.

What am I doing here? What happened? The last thing I remember is—

The chimeras.

I sit up with a jolt, a tremor rising into my throat. Is Gluttony okay? All I remember is aiming another shot at the chimera's head to wear it down so that Diarmuid and Riordan could finish it. And then nothing.

My fingers glide over the soft sheets. Gluttony's scent is all around me, and I wish I could pause time to roll around and take it in. To enjoy it and refresh all my memories. Give myself something new to hold onto during the lonely nights.

A twinge of pain at the top of my spine stops my pointless, and dangerous,

daydreams. My wings. They sit lifeless underneath me, dull even in the barely there light spilling in from the open window. My magic is almost gone. That explains why I blacked out. I thought I had more time. It's only going to get worse until I don't wake again. It won't be long now, and I can't hold off from telling Tiernan and the others anymore.

Not exactly a conversation I'm looking forward to and one I've avoided for too long.

The lights flick on suddenly, blinding me. Wincing, I shut my eyes and twist away from them. Maybe if I keep them closed, reality can't intrude.

Gluttony's scent tickles my senses when he walks further into the room, kicking the door shut behind him. I tentatively peek out, wanting a glimpse of him. He's wearing dark suit pants, a white shirt open at the throat and tantalizingly teasing the hair on his chest, and a navy vest. He's mouthwateringly handsome.

He lowers himself into the armchair directly in the middle of the room. It wasn't there the last time I was here. Not in his bedroom. From the outer suite? Was he using it to watch me while I slept?

"You've been keeping secrets, Tenebris."

Everything in me stills and then deflates. They told him. Why would they do that?

"Why do I know you, but I can't remember you?" Gluttony asks. "I've heard your family name, but I didn't recall yours specifically. I know what you are and how long you've reigned. Why don't I remember your face, or you? You would have ruled when we were there. I've met you before."

"Everything about me was erased from your memory. The important bits." Someone took everything from the Sins.

Gluttony's eyes narrow. He stands from his chair, and my heart jumps into my throat. He can't come closer. We can't be here, in this room, together, with nothing to put between us. He has the lights so bright that there are no shadows to hide in. Nowhere to run. I know he's done it deliberately. His way of trapping me here.

It wouldn't matter even if I could find a way to escape. He'll follow me everywhere now. I've already created too much of a link. Healed parts of the broken link that should have stayed in pieces forever.

"By you?"

"No." Nothing in the world should have had that power. To wipe out an entire culture overnight, erase so much of it and make it unrecognizable to those who once called it home. The Light certainly don't have that behind them. Wherever they got it, whatever evil they used to destroy everything I love, I don't know. I wish that I did. It would make fighting against it that much easier. Right now, we're chasing ghosts and building ourselves up in the hopes that something we do will allow us to turn the tide. That anything we do is always a step closer to getting our home back. It's the only thing keeping us going.

"You didn't answer my question."

"Which one?" I want to give him everything he asks, but I can't. Not all of it. Not if I still want to protect what little I have left. Gluttony threatens all of that even before the trust issues. He's my savior and the one that will herald our doom if I take what I want. I haven't allowed myself to be that selfish. I can't.

"We've met before."

"That wasn't a question."

He doesn't respond to that, his liquid-gray eyes boring into me. So sure that I'll give him an answer.

"We have." That much is safe to admit, at least.

He scowls, shifting in his chair. It drags my gaze to his large thighs. He's so magnificently built. Once upon a time, all that had been mine. Mine to touch, to taste, to pleasure.

Now he's like an exquisite centerpiece. I can look but never touch.

"Why do you remember, and I don't?"

He knows the right questions to ask. Always so clever. A trait I admire. A little less right now when it's directed at me like this.

"I escaped."

You saved me. He sacrificed himself and forced me across the shroud. I'd moved so many across myself and had planned to stay until the bitter end to protect my court. I'd have stayed and died with those already gone and felt fulfilled, knowing that others were safe. Instead, I got saved, and I thought Gluttony had died that night.

Instead, he and his brothers appeared on this side, stronger than ever, ruling over this newborn world ever since. I know why the others are suspicious of them, why we've steered clear of them for so long. It's not as though they don't have good reason. And yet, after everything that's happened, my gut says we're only seeing what someone else wants us to see. That blind faith in who they were to us, who they are to me, is what will save us. Except that my intuition isn't enough, not when being wrong means risking the last of us alive. I'm too close, with too much of a personal stake on both sides, to be neutral enough, rational enough, to truly know the right answer here.



“During the battle?” Gluttony questions.

“Battle isn’t the right word for it. We didn’t get a chance to respond, to prepare, or to fight back.” Massacre is the only way to describe it accurately. Or slaughter. Anger ripples inside me at just the thought of how horrific it had been. It haunts me, like so many memories from back there do.

“Why didn’t my brothers and I fight?”

Fear and desire in equal measure tighten my muscles when he stands, moving closer and hovering over me. His dark look only makes both feelings so much worse.

I’m acutely aware of the fact that I’m in his bed, under his sheets. In his private space. No one else is here, the attraction that crackles between us impossible to ignore. Memories bombard me, of hands gliding across warm skin, lips against curves, sighs of pleasure, and cries that are for us alone.

“You did,” I say brokenly. “You lost. We all did.” Lost is such an inadequate way to describe the devastation. How much was ripped from me. I shudder to think what my court looks like now. Did the Light take over or leave it to fall into disrepair? The forest can’t “take it back;” it is the forest.

“How?”

“I told you; we weren’t prepared. It was so quick. Even I don’t know what really happened.” I was there, but that doesn’t mean anything. The reason behind it still eludes me. Anyone that may have the answers is either dead or not on our side. It’s not viable to ask them.

Gluttony leans a knee on the bed. I swallow hard around the sudden lump in my throat. He needs to move away before I do something incredibly stupid. My mouth

opens to tell him that, and nothing comes out.

“There’s more to it than that.”

There always is. “I don’t have the answers you’re looking for.”

He presses a palm to the wall above the headboard, leaning down to crowd me. “I don’t believe that for a second. You’re lying to me, and I don’t recommend that you continue to do so.” His palm rests above my collarbone, a subtle threat, and he lifts my chin with his thumb. “Why do you call to me, when no one ever has?”

Because I’m yours. I can’t tell him that. Can’t let him know just what we once meant to each other. A step too far into the path of destruction. I don’t have enough resistance against him. “You want more gifts.”

He leans in close, lips whispering against the curve of my throat. “Do you have more?” His voice is meant to seduce, and it works too easily. “Give them to me.”

“I—” He’s too close to think properly. And I don’t have enough energy to even conjure that much, not without concentrating and depleting myself further. “I can’t.”

He bites down, sucking hard. A moan slips out of me, and I arch into his touch, my hands helplessly gripping his vest and pulling him closer.

“No?” he growls. “I want them, and you won’t deny me.”

I wouldn’t. I couldn’t. He doesn’t understand that when I say I can’t, I mean it physically. My eyes flutter closed, and I attempt to still my breathing. Pull out the energy from deep within. He wants his gift, and I’ll give it to him even if it kills me.

It just may.

Slower than it ever should be—newly transitioned Fae would have an easier time than me right now—an orb forms in my palm. A basic one, without Gluttony’s magic within. Without mine. It glows and would illuminate the room if the lights were off. A simple guide in the dark. One of the first things we’re taught.

He pulls back enough to see it, then takes it from me, our skin brushing. My breath hitches at the tiny contact, so sensitive to all of him. He notices, our eyes meeting for a single heartbeat.

“Not like the other one.”

“No. It doesn’t take you anywhere. It won’t show you the way, only light it for you.”

“How long?”

He means how long will it last. “Forever.” A lie. It’s still tied to me. I still created it. Once I die, it will no longer work. The storms I gave him, the ones with him in them, should stay. I hope they do. I hope that he’s enough to sustain them. A memory of me that even this version of him will keep.

“It’s cold.”

“Yes.” Light itself is cold. Nothing like the sun or being too close to an inferno. The shadows blend, they comfort and wrap around those they wish to protect. The light reveals too much; it doesn’t protect, only reveals and flushes out its prey.

He presses it to my temple and rolls it down across my cheek. I shiver as the cold settles against my skin, a shock against the heat pouring from me. He continues gliding it over my skin, down across my shoulder and then my chest. “Does that feel good?”

I shouldn't answer. A dangerous path to walk. "Yes," falls from my lips.

His lips twitch smugly, something knowing and dark in his gaze. As he slowly pulls the sheet from my chest, it dawns on me that I'm naked. So focused on him that I hadn't noticed. Gripping tight to the sheets to stop him from revealing me does nothing. He's too strong, and I've been too weak for years. I have to admit that I don't try very hard; a big part of me wants this.

"Don't ever hide from me."

It's suddenly hard to breath, my lungs forgetting how they work.

Don't ever hide from me. The past coming to haunt me, the way it always does. My hold loosens, and he tugs the sheet down to pool at my hips.

He moves the orb down my chest, the tips of his fingers brushing my skin. Tingles like lightning follow in its wake, bumps rising as though seeking more. My own hands clench the sheets, scrunching them into my palms. To stop myself from reaching out and exploring as well. As though I don't already have every inch of him memorized. He invades my dreams and my every waking thought. I never imagined I could have him this close again.

Even now he's still so far out of my reach that I can't bear it.

The orb lingers against a nipple, causing it to pebble. When Gluttony's large hand takes over, pinching it between his thumb and forefinger, I can't help the sounds that come out.

He searches my eyes, and then his lips are against mine. What little strength I have left leaves me, and I willingly open my mouth under his onslaught, surrendering. Why did I think I could ever do anything else?

I'll end up being the cause of the extinction of my court, and I'm too weak to say no. "We can't," I moan brokenly even as I seek his touch. If he continues to push, I know that I'll give in, and everything I did to protect my kind will be for nothing. Even at full strength, even with Gluttony feeding me, I'm no match for the Light. Not alone and not with the warriors we've honed into the sharpest weapons. Gluttony may want to sleep with me, but would he and the Sins fight to protect me and mine?

I don't know the answer, and that frightens me. I could take the risk and doom us all because I was wrong and thought with my heart and not my head.

He doesn't understand what's at stake and that lust has nothing to do with the connection between us. He doesn't understand why I can't let it go down this path.

He stops when I push at his chest, even leaning back enough that I can breathe and think for a second. Except it isn't to give me space. Instead, he shifts, and then his mouth is closing over my nipple, his tongue flicking out.

Instead of telling him to stop, all that comes out as I slide my hands into his thick hair is, "Please ."

He hums and then tugs at me with his teeth, strikes of pleasure racing through me. He may not remember how talented a lover he once was, but something in him remembers. He's seeking out the parts of me that are most sensitive, like following a bright beacon. The way his fingers trail over the curve of my hip. The way he gives just enough pressure to cause nothing but pleasure. He knows what I like. Pure instinct guides him.

His hand twists into the sheet, and he pulls it away from my lower half. Or tries to. This I keep hold of. "Wait." I can't let him do this. Not without knowing.

His gray eyes meet mine, sparks of lightning in them revealing just how much he's

feeling even if his face shows none of it. This is affecting him the same way it is me; he's just better at keeping it behind a mask. He always has been. His love is a feeling, not a look.

“Ready to tell me all your secrets, Saeran?”

The way he says my name sends another shiver down my spine. Like a secret just between the two of us. An undercurrent of everything we once were to each other.

“Yes.”

Be careful what you wish for.

### Gluttony

“This fruit is shaped like your head.” “It looks nothing like my head.” “It does. Gluttony, look. See, if you turn it? That’s your nose.” “I think I’m offended.” “You’re right, the fruit doesn’t deserve that.”

He tempts me in a way no one else ever has. I want to get my hands and mouth all over him, and I don’t know why. Sex has never interested me. Kissing, touching, being that close to another person? Fuck no. I’d rather fight someone.

But this man? This Fae ? The urge to touch him is strong. Impossible to ignore. Fighting isn’t what I have in mind.

Bared to me like this, he’s a delicacy that makes my mouth water. And the way he responds to me? I could watch it all night. A tremor runs down his entire body as I slide my palm over his chest, down his side, and around to his inner thighs.

“I—we’re—” He gasps when my knuckles graze his hard cock. He’s not very big and will fit perfectly in my hand, like it’s made for me to hold. It’s jutting forward, it hovers over his stomach, begging for a touch. For my touch. What will he feel like?

What will he taste like?

“We’re what?” I ask huskily. The first touch of his silkiness is heady, soft and hard in equal measure. Heavy. He’s unbelievably sensitive, every slide causing his body to twitch under me. It feeds my own hunger, my cock throbbing in my pants.

He arches into my touch, small hands clutching at my shoulders. I squeeze at the top, twisting my wrist, and our eyes meet. The sight of lightning in his gaze shocks me to my core. What the fuck?

“We’re what?” I demand to know. Why does he wield my magic? That’s not Fae. They don’t have that power.

His lips part, fingers digging in. “I’m king... I was.”

He still is, I’m sure, even if he no longer has a court to rule over. No doubt the other Fae still look to him. The three that joined us earlier certainly do. “I’m aware.” So many lies hidden in this pretty package. Somehow I’m still drawn to him, still want him. I can understand Wrath and Lust a little more. “What does that have to do with me?”

“Because you’re—” His breath hitches. Interesting. The vein on the underside of his length is extra sensitive right at the base. Rubbing over it with slow, steady swipes of my thumb causes his nails to graze my shirt, like they’re trying to rip through to my skin. If he wants me naked, then he better answer my questions. Neither of us are leaving this room until I get what I want. Then I’ll make him feel good.

“I’m what, Saeran?”

“You’re my consort.”

I freeze, sure I heard that wrong. “Consort sounds an awful lot like husband.”

One single nod, and my entire world tilts.

“No.”



He doesn't respond.

My limbs shake as I surge back, out of reach and off the bed, staring down at him with heaving breaths. "I would remember that." I would remember that. Husband implies so many things. Familiarity. Sex. I would remember having sex with this creature. Not to mention it implies love. An emotion I can't fathom outside of my family.

"They took your memories. All of yours."

"All of ours," I repeat. "You mean my brothers."

"Yes."

"Who is 'they'? No one besides Pride has that power, and he didn't do it." If he tries to say that Pride had anything to do with any of this, then our conversation is about to get a lot more unpleasant. I trust Pride. He would never do that to us under any circumstances.

"He didn't," Saeran agrees. "It was the Light Fae. They took everything from us, from me, in one night. And then somehow made it so that none of you remember the important parts of your past."

Not surprising. They're the ones that attacked that night; it makes sense they're the ones who are behind erasing everything and changing the trajectory of our future. "That was... a long fucking time ago. If we were really that important to each other, why have you stayed away so long? Why didn't you show yourself? Why did you lie to me?" That doesn't sound like married behavior to me.

"It's complicated."

“Un-complicate it.”

“I can’t.”

The word husband plays in my mind on a loop. Husband. Husband. We’re married. Too difficult a concept to accept. “King-consort.” That sounds important. I’ve never been interested in leading or being in the front of the masses. I like mess, destruction, and murder. I come in the back with the guns and kill everything that moves. I don’t mingle, and I don’t help people. Lust is the face of the Sins for a reason. He’s much better at public relations. There’s no way I ruled over an entire court with him. No one could make me palatable enough for that. “Us. You and me. Together?”

Another single nod, fear and desire swirling in his eyes. And my lightning. “It’s more than just marriage, isn’t it?”

He looks at me like I know him, but he’s a stranger to me. He watches me from the shadows, gives me gifts, touches me with meaning. Carries memories that I no longer have. He’s more than that. We are.

His lips tremble, and he reaches for the sheet to cover himself.

No .

Yanking it out of the way and off onto the floor so he can’t reach it, I climb back onto the bed. Straddling his hips allows me to crowd him, my palms flat against the wall on either side of him. “You don’t get to hide from me. After everything you just told me, there will be no hiding.”

“I—we—we can’t,” he says brokenly. His hand lifts as if reaching for me and then drops. His cock is still hard, glistening pre-cum at the tip. Still responding to the heat between us that hasn’t dissipated. We could be talking about the weather, and I know

it wouldn't make a difference. There's something electric here, uncontrollable, a natural disaster.

Is this why I'm so drawn to him? Some part of me recognizes him? The idea that there are parts of my past that I don't remember enrages me. It makes me want to raze entire cities to the ground, find who did this to me, and tear them limb from limb. They'll regret touching me and my brothers. Regret ever thinking that we wouldn't find out, that we won't exact our revenge when we do.

A single tug is all it takes to have Saeran under me. So much smaller than me, helpless.

His clear blue eyes glisten with desire. The points of his ears have curled a little. Wings trapped under him.

Not helpless. The Fae never are.

Will he let me do whatever I want to him anyway? He's done nothing but indulge me at every turn.

My hand travels down his side, and his back curves, lips parting on a sigh. He responds like he hasn't been touched like this for an age. Maybe he hasn't. He said he belongs to me. Has he waited all this time and not allowed anyone else to touch him?

Satisfaction roars through me. Mine . Just like his gifts. I get all of them, and I want more. Everything.

The word husband rolls around in my mind. Husband. The idea of marriage is foreign. I dislike anyone outside of my immediate family—and sometimes that's touch and go. I have no time for the pursuit of idiots, and having them fawn over me like they do over Lust disgusts me. A pathetic attempt to get to power they'll never

have.

But this Fae? It means ownership. And I'll take the most precious gift he's given me: himself. Why would I turn that prize down?

A strangled cry tears from his throat when I take his cock in hand again. He's throbbing, leaking and eager. A red flush runs from his cheeks all the way down his hairless chest. Fae are always pretty, like porcelain dolls with teeth, doomed to be a siren lure to the other species of the world. Coveted, revered, and feared all at once.

And this one has given himself to me. Freely. A trophy for my shelf. An addition to my hoard. The diamond among the ashes.

Centerpiece. Perfection.

Mine.

Every stroke of my wrist and slide over his cock is written all over his face. "Please," he begs. The word settles over us like a blanket, the torment a tangible echo. He's asking me to stop, and he's asking me not to.

I won't stop.

I'll see his face when he comes. When I make him come. It's mine too, and I'll have it.

"You like that?" Holding the back of his neck, I force him to look up at me, hovering over his body and controlling his every move. Controlling him.

"Y-ye—" He moans low in his throat, eyes closing and his hips jerking into my touch, seeking more.

“Lift your legs. Cradle my hips—yes, just like that. Very good.” My cock fits nice and snug against his ass, and he pushes down on me, hip movements desperate and greedy. My groin clenches, and the need to be inside him, feel him stretch around me, is almost unbearable. What will it feel like? He’ll be the one to show me.

“We’ve done this before.”

It’s not a question, not really; I know the answer. I want him to say it out loud. Admit it.

“Y-yes.” Another moaned word. Exactly how I want to hear it.

His ass is soft and pliant in my palm, and a squeeze elicits a whimper. I do it again just to hear the sound. And then again. He’ll sing for me. My beautiful siren. “I’ve been in here. Look at me, Saeran.”

Lightning flickers across the blue, and his hands flex on my forearms.

“You love me.” It’s implied. Or perhaps not. Marriage can mean an alliance of sorts. A business transaction. I’ve never been surer in my life of the fact this isn’t like that. Not with the way he looks at me. I want to hear him say it. Give me a real truth among all the lies he’s told me.

He hesitates before saying, “I do.”

It’s not good enough. They’re not the words that I want.

I drop closer, covering him completely and pushing him firmly against the bed, bracing myself with a forearm beside his head. It gives me a better angle to roll my hips and add pressure against his ass while still allowing me to keep a hand on his cock. Nails dig against my back as he cradles me to him. I wish I’d taken my clothes

off so that I can feel him skin to skin.

“Say it.”

He lifts his hips, rolling them. He’s leaking like a sieve, giving me an easier slide. I could use it, rub it against his hole, and bury myself inside him. I plan to. Once he complies with my demands.

“I—I can’t.”

Not acceptable. I’ll hear the words from those pretty lips, have them linger in the air.

Before he says a word, I swoop down and capture those lips, unable to resist. His moan reverberates pleasantly. He tastes like sugar and wine, sweetness and decadence. Not a combination that usually appeals to me. I’ll never have it again without thinking of him.

“Say it,” I whisper, mouths brushing.

“I love you.” The words sound like they’re being torn violently from him.

My fist speeds up, and he cries out, gripping me tight.

He’s going to say it again, and then he’s going to come for me, with my name on his lips.

His knees lift, heels digging into my back, urging me on and pushing my dick harder against his ass. He’s so close I can smell it, can feel it in the way he’s pulsing in my grip.

“Say it again.”

He doesn't hesitate anymore, repeating it over and over again for me. I never want to stop hearing it. I need it in a way I don't understand. That doesn't stop me from demanding it.

With a hoarse cry of my name, more a scream than a word, he comes all over my hand. His head presses back into the pillow, exposing his tense throat, mouth open wide.

He looks debauched, wrecked, an absolute mess. I have to know what it tastes like. Latching onto the pulse point at the curve of his throat, his very essence floods my mouth. More sweetness, like spun sugar, melted caramel, and glazed fruit.

I move up, our mouths meeting. He cries out, and I swallow every sound that he makes. They're mine to do what I want with.

The second that I let him go, he drops back to the bed, limp and panting. He freezes when I go for my belt buckle, undoing it to pull out my cock. Before I can react, a blast of energy flings me across the room. I hit one of my bookcases, and the contents rattle and fall, my possessions scattering across the floor around me. None of it matters compared to the look of pain on his face.

"What the fuck?" I growl, getting to my feet, anger coursing through my veins. It only makes my cock throb harder. Is this how he wants to play it?

"We can't," he says, his voice both firm and trembling. He slides onto the thick carpet and grabs the sheet I discarded earlier, tugging it up and around himself. His wings, strangely brighter and no longer hanging uselessly, flicker as he speaks. "You and I will never happen again. What we had is lost. It's gone." The thickness of his voice tugs at something deep inside me. "Don't touch me again."

"Do you need a more romantic setting?" I ask mockingly. "Should I create something

for you?”

“Your illusions don’t work on me.”

Of course, they don’t. They never have on the Dark Fae. Every other creature and species that exists bends to our will. Even the Light are vulnerable to us. But not the Dark. In a world of sharks, they’re the orca. Yet something in the way he says that makes me pause. “They don’t work on you, but you can see them, can’t you?” The lightning in his eyes, the orbs he creates. They’re mine, in more ways than one.

He doesn’t answer, his jaw tight. “Where are my clothes?” His hands clench around the sheet, and I viscerally hate the fabric. How dare he hide himself from me?

“Answer me.”

“I’ve answered enough.”

“You think so, do you?” I drawl. He’s barely scratched the surface of all the things that I’ll demand from him.

His gaze doesn’t falter even as his chin trembles. “I told you about our past out of courtesy. Don’t make the mistake of thinking that it means I care. I’m not here for you.”

A blatant lie. He fell apart too easily in my arms for there to be nothing left. Trying to convince himself? I have every intention of exploring him and finding out more of that past that I can’t remember. The idea of having memories taken from me is enough for fury to all but live inside me. Nothing is taken from me. I’ll have them returned to me if it’s the last thing I do. And the one who took them will regret the day they ever thought they could steal from the Demigod of Hunger.



“Your clothes are hanging up.” Right next to mine. Sharing a space I’ve never allowed anyone into. Knowing why eases some of the tension inside me. This isn’t some nameless attraction that came from nowhere. There’s real history there. A connection. Based on what Lust has told me about him and Deacon, if we’re anything like them, then there’s more than mere attraction at play here.

Saeran knows more than he’s revealing.

If I have to peel back every layer of his skin, make him beg for me, ache for me, in order to find out... His head rears back in real fear as a smile curves my lips. It won’t be a hardship.

Saeran

There's a special time in the night, a quiet in-between, where everything and nothing exists. A moment where the world stops and revitalizes itself for a new day. That's when it all hurts the most.

The bedroom door closes behind Gluttony, leaving me alone here in the heart of his domain. I fully expected him to push me further. I'm a crumbling Greek building, and one more push would have been enough to collapse everything I've spent so long building.

My hands shake as I let go of the sheet, letting it pool at my feet. I can still feel his hands on me, his body pressing me firmly into the bed. A lifetime of wanting him, and it seems like a dream that will slip through my fingers.

It has, in a way. I can't allow it to happen again. I'm too weak for him. And in a split second, I'd almost ruined everything.

It takes a few minutes of searching random wardrobes, cupboards, and drawers to find where Gluttony put my clothes. Then another few to have a quick wash in the bathroom and get dressed. At least I don't feel quite so vulnerable now, my clothing a kind of shield between me and the world.

When I try the door to the hallway connected to the suite, the handle turns under my palm. He didn't lock it. I doubt it's out of trust. Simply that I'm sure my every move is being watched, so there's no need to cage me in.

The second I step out, I spot a familiar face striding toward me, a scowl on his face.

“I felt it,” he says. He’s not angry at me, but the anger is there regardless. Along with a hint of sadness. That’s always present when we talk about Gluttony. I’m not the only one who feels the loss. Their friendship broke just as firmly as our relationship did. Mostly there’s resignation. If I’m the reason the Light find us, that the rest of us die, he won’t blame me. He’ll stand at my side until the end. And I can’t let him do that, or let him know just how soon that end will come for me, no matter what we do here.

What happened between Gluttony and me fed me enough that I’ll last longer than I originally thought, but it will only carry me so far. The miniscule magic dancing in my veins is like drinking water after years of dehydration. My wings feel more powerful than they have in years. I feel like I could take on the world and win. A small portion of the force I once held is in my palm, awake and ready for battle. Unfortunately, it will fade quickly.

“It wasn’t enough,” is all I say in response. So many meanings to the words. Not enough to bring attention to ourselves. Akin to the same level that blasted out when Lust and Deacon found each other. Formidable in its own right. A power to be reckoned with that will only get stronger the longer they’re together. Lust found his key and with it, the untapped part of his magic that’s been lost to him. But it’s not powerful enough for the Light to feel it on the other side of the shroud.

Gluttony and I didn’t connect at the level that’s needed. Not just a physical thing but one that brings our souls back in touch with each other. I almost gave in and allowed it to get that far, and even now, I have no idea where I got the strength to say no. It killed me, and my heart still aches. That won’t ever go away. I had everything I’ve been dreaming of for so many years right there, mine for the taking, and turning my back on it has destroyed what’s left of me.

“Saeran.”

“It’s done.” There’s no use talking about things that can’t be changed. “I need to speak to Deacon; do you know where he is?”

“No. They’re watching me like a hawk, and I haven’t been able to get eyes anywhere. Diarmuid and Riordan are searching elsewhere. We need to find a way to get word back to the others.”

“The time for hiding is over.” We’re not ready for the Light to find us, but now that we’ve shown ourselves to the Sins, there’s no way to keep the two worlds separate. I can only hope that Gluttony and his brothers will protect them where I couldn’t. Where I can’t .

“You want to join forces with them.” The judgment comes in loud and clear this time. When it’s about Gluttony, he won’t push. But this? This he’ll fight me on.

“What choice do we have? Without our connection to home, we’re never going to be the strength we once were. Gluttony has proven—”

“Nothing. He’s proven nothing. We still don’t know if we can trust them.”

“They haven’t hurt us.”

Tiernan grips my elbow and drags me closer to the wall as if doing that will somehow mean we’re not overheard. I know they can see and hear everything here. There are no secrets within these walls that the Sins don’t know. “Yet, Saeran. Yet. Don’t let your feelings about Gluttony cloud the reality of our situation. He doesn’t know you. Neither do they. Make no mistake that they’re biding their time to see what we do, and how they react to the rest of us remains to be seen. Is that a risk you’re willing to take?”

I don't know. I want to, but maybe Tiernan's right. I'm trying to merge the past and the present, and they're too different. It will never be what it once was. I have no idea what the future will hold, and trusting the Sins could be the final nail in our coffin.

I just want to get back what was lost to me. Gluttony. My family. Home. I wish that wasn't too much to ask for.

“Get your hands off him, right now.”

We startle, twisting to where Gluttony stands at the end of the long hallway. His dark, angry face should scare me. My visceral reaction to him is anything but fear. And entirely inappropriate, given the circumstances. Being this close to him isn't good for my peace of mind. The longer we're in proximity to each other, the worse it will get. Everything in me is screaming to consummate the bond, to reconnect us. Soon it will become painful, an ache that twists and spreads in an attempt to force us together. Gluttony will start to feel it as well. An inevitable pull.

There's nothing I can do about it.

Tiernan shoves me behind him and stands straighter. As if he's a match for Gluttony. He isn't in this circumstance. Not when he's between us. “I have more right to touch him than you do.”

“From what I've been told, that's not true. Get your hands off him now. I won't tell you again.”

“No.”

A blast of lightning flings Tiernan against the wall, the plaster cracking under the force. He drops to his knees with a pained groan, bracing himself with hands on the floor.

“Stop!” I yell, moving so I’m the one in the middle this time. Gluttony could kill Tiernan when he’s in this mood, and I can’t lose him. He’s been all that I’ve had for so long. My closest friend. The only tether to a world lost. Someone that once would have given his life to protect Gluttony, would have walked through fire for him, done anything that he asked without question. “Stop,” I say more quietly, holding one hand out to stave Gluttony off. “Please. He’s only trying to protect me.”

“The next person who tries to protect you from me will die, I promise you that.”

“It’s their sworn duty to protect me from anything. Don’t make a promise that I can’t forgive.” I hate pulling the sovereign card. But I’ll do whatever I have to, to keep them safe. To keep everyone safe. That’s who I’m supposed to be even if I’ve failed too many times to count. One day I might be worthy of the crown that my parents passed on to me.

“What makes you think I care whether you forgive me or not?” Gluttony snarls, grasping my elbow and dragging me against him. “Do you think you need protecting from me?”

I wish I could say yes. I want to say yes. I just don’t know. After everything that’s occurred between us... Even then, I still can’t. I’ve buried those parts of myself for so long it’s not that easy to simply uncover them and have everything be back how it was. Nothing is like how it was.

“I need to speak to Deacon,” I say instead.

“And why is that?” Gluttony asks.

I open my mouth, try to find some reason to give him that sounds at least halfway believable. The look on his face stops me. I’m just as sick of the lies between us as he is. “Because he’s my brother.”

Brother.

No longer brother, not really. A fake imitation of him.

The real him is lost, like everything else.

I wish I'd never come here. So many people dear to me are right here in this building, and yet none of them are here. Being surrounded by them only makes me lonelier. I miss my family. And these people may look like them, but they'll never be them.

He drops my arm like I've burned him. "No. Conor is his brother."

"I—yes. But I don't know who Conor is." That came out wrong. I really don't know who he is. There were once three of us, but that doesn't mean that Conor is one of us. Reincarnations don't always work like that. Finding them is difficult enough at the best of times. For them both to present like this is too good to be true, and I learned a long time ago not to hope.

When there's hope, the pain only gets worse.

"What the fuck does that mean?"

I know I'm not making sense. I wish I could explain all of it, but there are still pieces that I can't. I know Gluttony, and if he knew the reason I'm trying to keep distance between us, he wouldn't allow it. And that would spell death for all of us. "He's not my brother. Conor. I mean, maybe he's not. Maybe he is—I don't know."

That all sounds like a lie even though it isn't. I could have made up a better one than that, given time to think and work things out. One that's far more believable. I don't expect him to trust me without question, not after all the lies I've already told.

And yet he gives a sharp nod and steps back. “You’re not going to explain it, are you?”

“I—I don’t want to explain it twice. Please take me to Deacon.” Then I’ll tell them as much as I can. Enough to know if I can trust them or not.

Gluttony wraps his hand around my throat and adds pressure upward, forcing me to lift my chin. “Trying manners now, Saeran? This all sounds like you’re trying to manipulate me.”

“I know you too well to try that.” Except I know that it works. He’s incredibly easy to manipulate. Just not with words. One sniff of the promise of a gift, and he’s putty in my hands. That need for more drives him. It doesn’t work with anyone else. What he needs is me and the things that only I can provide. Gifts only I can give. Satisfaction that’s mine alone.

“Deacon will be in the kitchen, with Lust,” Gluttony answers finally. He trails his hand down to my chest and then lower, resting against my stomach and then around to my back. “Tell your guard to leave. They’re all free to go, without harm. I only want you.”

Swallowing hard, I glance back to where Tiernan watches us with wary, angry eyes. “It’s alright.”

It’s not, and we both know it. But what choice do we have? All choices were taken from us a long time ago, and we can only do the best with what we have.



### Gluttony

“Will you dance with me?” “You know I can’t dance.” “I’ll forgive you.” “Saeran.”  
“A slow dance, with you holding me. Please?” “Just one.”

Saeran’s wings have more life to them than they had earlier. Something’s wrong with him, and he’s still keeping secrets. Big fucking surprise.

His hips sway enticingly as he walks ahead of me, and my eyes are drawn to them. Is he doing it on purpose, or am I imagining it? Everything about him makes my mind fuzzy, like everything else in the world is blurred, and all I can see with perfect clarity is him. I hate it as much as I’m slowly starting to crave it. I want more of it. More of him . With no more fucking secrets.

Curling my hands around his waist, I halt him. My stomach clenches at his stuttered breath. It becomes ragged when I press my lips to his ear. “Why did you collapse earlier? You weren’t injured.” Far from it. He’d been holding his own remarkably well. The Fae are strong in their own right, but it’s been so long since we’ve fought beside or against them, it’s easy to forget just how formidable they are. We managed to push back the Light the last time they tried to invade this side of the shroud, but it was by the skin of our teeth, and I hate to admit how much luck was with us during that war. And yet... “Why are you so weak?”

“I’m not.”

“Why?” I demand impatiently. No more lies or half-truths. No more skirting around the real issues . Considering who he is, how old he has to be, he shouldn’t be this

vulnerable. He should have dominated that battlefield. Chimeras are nothing to a man who once held the palm of the world in his hand. When he ruled, there was no equal. He was the strongest player on the board. Adding in my magic that he can somehow wield? His lack of real strength doesn't make any sense.

I don't really expect him to answer, not after everything we've been through to get here and how good he is at being evasive. When he does, I want it to be another lie. Another trick.

"I'm dying."

Nothing but truth in those words. There's no waver, no hesitation.

"How?" He can't be. There are very few things in the world that can kill a Fae, even less on this side. And nothing that wouldn't be visible. They're immune to disease, to waste, to anything that's nefarious under the surface. There'd be a wound. Something.

To the naked eye, he's healthy. The picture of health. Except the wings. Not long ago, they were dull, lifeless. What the fuck's wrong with his wings? The realization hits me like a fist to the gut, and I answer for him. "Your magic is fading."

He settles his hands over mine. Clinging to me. "Yes."

"That's not possible." It's quite literally what he's made of. Nothing can separate that. One without the other doesn't exist.

I force him around to face me. "How is that possible? Who did this to you?"

He opens his mouth, closes it, opens it again. No sound comes out.

I shake him a little, frustration pouring out of me. “Tell me.”

“I can’t.”

Is he fucking kidding me? “And why not?” If he doesn’t have a good enough reason for not telling me something so important, we’re going to have more problems than we already have. I need to know what’s wrong with him, so I can fix it. I also need to know if it can affect my brothers, what’s powerful enough to infect him from the inside.

“If you knew, you would undo everything I’ve sacrificed.”

Does he think that will make me back off? I don’t care about anyone outside these walls. I’m certainly not willing to sacrifice anything for them and especially not my life. Or his.

“And what exactly is it that you’ve sacrificed, Saeran? What’s worth that? Who is worth that?”

He doesn’t answer, of course. The stubborn tilt to his chin is familiar. So defiant, so fucking beautiful I want to display him in my trophy room. Putting a hand around his neck forces him to look at me. No shielding himself from me.

“Who?” I demand. I want answers, and he’s going to give them to me. “Tiernan? The other two?” No, there’s more to it than that. “Others.” His gaze flickers. Jackpot. “How many Fae are right here under our noses?” Hundreds? Thousands? How have we not noticed they’ve been here this whole time?

His lips part, and still nothing comes out. He’s trying to protect them, from me. “Why don’t you trust us?” Why is he still hiding from me?

“We don’t trust anyone. We can’t.”

“What do you know that we don’t?” How many memories have I lost? It’s an acutely uncomfortable feeling, knowing that pieces are missing. That someone fucked with my mind. That they are still doing it. What kind of magic outside of Pride can even do that?

“The problem is that we don’t know everything that happened.”

“The night your court fell, you mean.” The night everything changed. Is it better or worse that I don’t remember? He’s been living with that loss every day since then. No, fuck that. I’d rather be aware than have the choice taken from me. To live with the pain than have it taken from me without getting a say in it. No one does anything to me without my permission.

“I’ll try to explain what I know, once I speak to Deacon.”

Right. His brother . I don’t recall the king having any heirs, sibling or otherwise. “How is he your brother? He doesn’t know he’s Fae, let alone royalty.” There are so many things that I want to ask him. About our connection, about us . He hasn’t been a font of information so far, keeping too many things close to his chest. I want to rip it all out, lay him bare, and learn everything.

He has the key to that locked door, and I’ll make him open it. No matter what I have to do.

“It’s complicated.”

“It always is.” Especially with this man. Seems to be his mission in life to complicate things. “Let’s go see your brother, then.” I’m dying to hear about the secrets he has hidden underneath.

Deacon's exactly where I thought he would be: in the kitchen, with Lust. They're cooking something together in a disgusting display of domesticity. The half Fae should never have been let through the front doors, let alone this far into our inner circle. A wolf in sheep's clothing. What will he do to protect Conor? What won't he do? Lust may not be watching him for more betrayal, but I am, for both of us.

Lust raises an eyebrow at Saeran but simply says, "The soup is almost ready. Will you be joining us?"

With a grip on Saeran's elbow, I pull him further into the room and yank a chair out from under the table. "Sit." I dare him to argue with me.

With a glance at Deacon and Lust, Saeran gracefully slides into the chair, his wings moving out of the way to drape over the back of it. He can't hide the shudder when I brush my knuckles across them. They're like the finest silk, soft and delicate. The light, translucent coloring flickers, blues and purples and pinks flashing over it, like delicate glass panes.

Lust stares curiously at Saeran as he places a bowl of steaming soup in front of him and then three slices of bread. The smell isn't the same, not a loaf of Pride's making. It fills the stomach, though it's not half as satisfying.

"I don't believe we've officially met," Lust says, taking his place opposite. Deacon chooses the seat next to him. I remain behind Saeran, using his shoulders as a resting place. "I'm Lust. This is Deacon."

"I know who you are."

"Yeah, how's that?" Deacon asks, suspicion in his gaze. As if he has a right to be suspicious of anyone. He was the snake in the pit, no one else. He's the one who came into our home with ill intentions, set on betraying us for a man who previously

did the same. Are all three brothers built from the same cloth? Will Saeran complete the triangle of betrayal?

“Everyone knows who the Sins are.”

“And what about me?”

“The man who stole the Demigod of Desire’s heart?” Saeran asks, a smile flirting on his lips.

“That’s not public knowledge.”

“I’m not the public.”

“No, you’re Dark Fae. Once allies, now... what?” Lust breaks off a piece of bread and drops it in his soup. “Are we to trust you blindly? You lied to us about who you are.”

“To protect myself.”

“Which begs the question: why would you need protection from us?”

Saeran’s wings flutter a fraction, barely noticeable. I feel the silk glide against my wrists. The ends twitch when my thumbs press lightly into the back of his neck. Not quite a warning, not quite a caress. Mostly I can’t seem to stop myself from touching him.

“You tell me,” Saeran answers. He tilts his head a fraction as if he wants to look over his shoulder at me, stopping himself at the last second.

“No, I believe you’re the one giving the answers today,” Lust says lightly. “You owe

us that much.”

Saeran takes a deep breath, absently stirs his soup with a spoon, and then lets go. “I know you, Deacon, because I once called you brother.”

Deacon pauses, brows drawing down in confusion. “What kind of bullshit is that?” Lust places a hand on his forearm, squeezing lightly.

“It’s the truth.”

“That’s not even possible. You’re... that ”—Saeran raises an eyebrow at the emphasis—“and I have a brother. One. I’d know if I had more.”

“Would you?” Saeran leans back against me as if seeking strength. Is that what he wants? For me to be his pillar? Is that what I once was?

A different kind of satisfaction roars through me. Protector. Guardian. Mine to protect. There’s history there. I may not know it, but somehow I feel it. An alignment of souls, instinct guiding without thought. I don’t need to know him to know him. I sensed him long before I saw him for the first time, and some part of me welcomed him even then.

“Explain. Now,” Deacon says forcefully, half standing, his palms braced on the table. “What the fucking hell are you talking about?”

“Watch it,” I growl in warning. If he takes even one malicious step toward Saeran, I don’t care what he means to Lust, I’ll rip his guts out and leave him bleeding out all over the floor.

Saeran turns his head at that, our eyes meeting. Heat flares, and my heart beats thick and heavy in my chest. Lightning flickers in his gaze, and I know mine are doing the

same in return. An answering call. Entwining souls.

“Reincarnation,” Saeran explains, not looking away. “The night we fell, the night everyone in my court was murdered and our culture as we know it was destroyed, you died. You all did. I watched almost every one of you fall, and I couldn’t—I couldn’t—”

“Who is ‘we’?” Deacon asks. “Do you mean Conor?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know if Conor is one of us, or whether he’s simply collateral in this.”

“Collateral doesn’t lead the charge against us.” It’s not coincidence the viper so easily got into our midst. He’s playing some kind of part, and his play will end in tragedy. For him.

“What makes you think that we believe a word you’re saying?” Lust asks. “Reincarnation? Memories taken from us? A little fantastical, no?”

“Pride takes memories,” Saeran points out. “Why is it so hard to believe it can happen to you?” He stirs his soup again, clearly not intending to eat it. When was the last time he ate?

“Because Pride is the only one who has the ability, and he wouldn’t do that to us. In our world, we trust family.”

Saeran stiffens, his features hardening. “You think I don’t?”

“I think you’re feeding us scraps and leaving enough breadcrumbs to pique our curiosity without enough to sate it. Manipulative tactics that aren’t earning you any favors here.”



I can't argue with Lust. He's right. Saeran still has an agenda here. Whether it's to hurt us or simply because he's trying to keep distance, I don't know.

I'll find out. He can't hide from me. There will be no more shadows between us, no distance, and no lies .

He's tied to me now, and there's nothing he can do to change that.

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:07 am*

Saeran

Gyro calls out to him in her sleep, small storms circling her. He's the only one who can soothe her when she's like this. He'll never be here to comfort her again. Or me. Nightmares come for us both.

Sitting at the same table as Deacon, with Gluttony's warmth right behind me, is agony that I could never have prepared for. Of all the outcomes I spent years working toward, this isn't one of them. Reuniting with my very soul has never been an option, even at my worst, when my entire being ached for him, and the pain crippled me. More manageable now, never gone.

Being this close to him, his scent lingering in the air from our proximity, doesn't mean that it's suddenly an option. This is all a creative kind of torture.

"Let's say we believe you," Lust says, dragging my attention back to him. "Deacon is your long-lost brother, making him a Fae prince. I highly doubt that you're here for a family reunion, or you would have approached him years ago. So what brought you out of hiding?"

"I didn't know who Deacon was until he came in contact with you." I've been able to work it out during some of his past reincarnations, but it's never as easy as seeing him across a street and knowing immediately. It's only when I actively look that I find them, and there were generations where I didn't, because I was so fucking tired of watching them live and then die, over and over again in a recurring nightmare. "When you... connected, it had a ripple effect."

What they unleashed is nothing compared to what Gluttony and I will if I continue letting him touch me. It wouldn't take much for our souls to become one again. None of us can afford what would happen then.

"My question still stands," Lust says. The way he leans forward and moves his arm in front of Deacon, stretching across the table, isn't subtle in the least. No matter what he thinks, I am the last thing from a threat to him. I would never harm him. Having him die in my arms is more than enough trauma for me. I don't need to kill him to torment myself further. Whatever happens next, I've never wanted anything more than for them to be safe.

"You're the one who brought me here. I can leave whenever I want," I lie. "I'm staying because I want to help."

"Is that all? Because I don't think so. You want something with Gluttony; every time you look at him, or he moves closer to you, your desire spikes. It fills the room."

Gluttony's hand tightens on my shoulder, and it takes thousands of years of honing a discipline that's ingrained now to not turn and look at him.

My heart clenches before fracturing as I say, "Gluttony has nothing to do with this. He isn't my concern."

Lust's golden gaze flits up and then back to me. "And what is your concern? Deacon?"

Gluttony retreats from me, physically and mentally, and everything goes cold, my life sucked out in a single moment until there's nothing left but a bottomless pit.

I can't let it affect me. This is more important than a dream I let go of a long time ago. It has to be because I don't know how else to live, not anymore.

If it were only my soul at risk, I'd have given it up already. My life is meaningless without him.

"I'm here to protect what I have left."

"Protect it from what, exactly?" Gluttony asks. He drops into the seat beside me, still too close for comfort. He's pushing me, seeing where the boundaries are and deliberately stepping right over them. Looking at him is hard. All I want to do is fall into his arms and take everything he'd offer me. What he's already offering me even if he doesn't understand it.

"The order that Conor works with? His discovery of his latent abilities, and what he really is, means they're on both our doorsteps. They don't know what he is, not completely"—at least I hope not; none of my intel says they're aware of the shroud or what's on the other side—"but that only makes them search harder for answers." And those answers lead to what's left of my court. I can't allow that to happen. I never meant to come here for help, but now that we're at this point, it would be stupid of me not to extend some kind of tentative branch, no matter what Tiernan, Diarmuid, and Riordan think.

"What makes you think we care?" Gluttony drawls. He stretches out, his foot resting against my ankle. "We're stronger than you; we can handle it."

"Can you? You're at half strength because of them." They were able to trap every single one of the Sins and some of their demons. Without Deacon sweeping in with Lazarus, I would have been forced to intervene. I should have. Maybe we wouldn't be in this mess now if I hadn't kept my distance and simply observed all this time.

"They caught us unawares. They won't be doing that again."

Brash confidence won't save them here. "They call themselves Virtus. They're a

religious order that think sin should be purged. You can imagine how they feel about you. They believe that you upset the natural order, and their goal is to eradicate you. They were founded in—”

“We know who they are,” Lust interrupts, “and when they were founded.”

“We’ve had run-ins with them before, of varying degrees,” Gluttony adds. “They’re rats, scurrying in the sewer, thinking that their little rebellions are subtle. We know their symbols and their patterns.”

“Not anymore you don’t.” Having Conor with them has changed everything. They aren’t the same as they were when they first erupted over the planet like a plague. “You don’t know anything about them or the power they’ve amassed.” Even I didn’t realize until recently. They’ve concealed themselves well, the same way we’ve been all these years. The Sins’ arrogance has blinded them to a lot of things that are all coming to fruition now.

Another failure of mine. Thinking that if I kept to the shadows, kept us separate, that everyone I love would be safe. My focus has always been watching for Light Fae, in case they find out some of us survived and come hunting. Waiting for the chance when we would be strong again, strong enough to fight back. To start the war that would take us home. Having another entity in that struggle never entered my mind as a possibility.

Lust moves his arm to circle Deacon, tugging him close. Deacon is quiet, watching me like he can figure out who I am, what I’m thinking, if he only stares hard enough. The brother I knew would never have kept his mouth shut this long, far more inclined to loud outbursts to get attention. Lust always gave it to him. I doubt anything has changed.

“Why don’t you enlighten us, then?” the Demigod of Desire suggests.

“They already took some of you.” That should be enough for them to at least consider the idea they’re a dangerous threat. They kidnapped them and have managed to evade discovery even while being hunted.

“We’re getting them back,” he replies flippantly.

Anyone who doesn’t know Lust may be fooled, but he forgets that I do know him. I was there when he fell in love with his soul, and when he fell in battle. He was family once. He may look at me like a stranger, but I can still read him.

He’s worried. They all are.

So am I.

“Are you saying Conor is, what, leading them?” Deacon asks, grimacing with his lower lip stuck between his teeth. “I don’t understand. Why?”

I wish I knew the answer to that. Even if he’s one of us, just like Deacon, he doesn’t have the memories that go with that. His experiences as “Conor” will shape who he is now. I haven’t managed to find them all each generation, but when I do, there are differences in who they are. They’ll never fully be the people that I remember. I can’t ever get that back. And Conor may already be lost to us in this iteration.

“I didn’t find either of you until after he was deeply involved with them. He didn’t discover that he was Fae at all until Wrath killed him. He’s been... elusive since then.” That’s one way to put it. He disappeared from one moment to the next. I thought that was it for him until the next reincarnation. Death has never triggered their change. In fact, nothing ever has. Why it did now likely has everything to do with Wrath striking the final blow. Not something I’d ever considered as a possibility. The Wrath I knew wasn’t like that. His sin didn’t manifest in anger or vengeance. He’s the shield, not the sword. It’s been twisted and turned from its path.

Once sweet, gentle, and a guiding light, he's now fire and brimstone.

Nothing is unfolding the way I thought it would. Unpredictable. Dangerous. I'm doing everything that I can to avoid giving the Light Fae a reason to cross the shroud. We're not ready to face them and take back our home. We couldn't match them if they came now. We may never be able to.

I've sat in the shadows for a long time now, monitoring the underground organizations that are unhappy with the Sins' rules to ensure they never become a risk. And until now, they hadn't. Even Virtus, at the top of their game, weren't a threat like they are now. Their only rebellion was put down by the Sins, hundreds of years ago. They retreated after that, licking their wounds. I should have known it was too good to be true.

Their sudden ability to create chimeras and kidnap Sins without consequences... it's disturbing at the very least. I'm worried about what it all means.

"Elusive is a good word for it," Gluttony says. "A fucking pain in the ass is a better one."

"Tell me more about Deacon," Lust says, ignoring his brother.

Deacon scowls, shooting his lover a look. "I'm right here."

"Daithí."

Deacon's lips part, like he knows the name but doesn't know how. It convinces me that their memories are still there, buried down deep. I don't know if they're recoverable, but they're there. "What is that?" he asks.

"It was your name. Daithí Tenebris. Heir to my throne. You're one of the Seven

Sons. Five born under the moon, two under the sun.” Light and Dark, connected in unity. So much for that.

“And we’re all brothers?” Deacon asks skeptically. “I have five other brothers I know nothing about?”

“No, there are only three of us blood related.” The seven of us are all connected in ways far deeper than mere blood, but Daithí, possibly Conor, and I are the ones who share blood. The nuances are complicated and not worth getting into right now.

“What marks the others, then?” Lust raises an eyebrow. “And why are you all so important?”

Gluttony snorts out a derisive laugh. “Seven Sons. Seven Sins.”

Clever. “We were all born with guardian avatars and guardians themselves.”

Gluttony drums his fingers on the table. “Your dragon,” he surmises.

“You have a dragon?” Deacon asks. “Now I know you’re fucking with us.”

“She’s not a dragon like you’re thinking. A specter, small enough to sit on my shoulder. She won’t be burning villages down any time soon. She’s not a living creature but made purely of magic.”

Gluttony spreads his arm across the back of my chair, fingers brushing my shoulder. He leans in close. “Not made of your magic, though, is she?”

I want to lie and keep something of myself away from his prying eyes. Staying away from him gets harder every time I look at him. I’ve been empty for so long, and now I can feel the indents of his fingers in my skin again, the taste of him on my lips.



“No.” She’s pure lightning, of course. My conduit to Gluttony’s magic.

“And we’re your guardians?” Lust guesses in disbelief.

“Yes.”

“I don’t have a dragon,” Deacon says, with almost a pout.

“Calypso isn’t—” I cut off abruptly, pain at the back of my throat, choking me. I haven’t thought of any of this in years. Echoes of a past lost long ago. Easier to shove it to the back of my mind and focus on the now.

“Isn’t what? A dragon? Is it something else? How come I’ve never seen one of these, whatever they are?” Deacon crosses his arms over his chest, and that is definitely a pout now.

“You don’t have your wings.” The answer isn’t quite that simple. I don’t know what happened to her, to any of them. Gyro has searched and found nothing, not so much as a trace of them. If Calypso lives, she won’t be able to find her way to Deacon, not while he’s in this half state. He’s not powerful enough to draw her. She’ll be lost until then. Possibly even after. She may never return. It’s all just guesswork at this point.

Deacon’s upper lip curls. His eyes flick to where my wings are draped over the back of my chair. They’re all but vibrating, being this close to Gluttony and after the power surge earlier. I won’t get this chance to feel them so alive ever again, and I wish I had more time to simply enjoy them.

“And how do I do that? The Sins mentioned Conor doesn’t have his either. Why does that matter?”

“It’s a sign of maturity, when your full Fae magic activates. It’s your immortality,

your power, your strength.” So intrinsically entwined with us. Mine are losing life because my very essence—my magic—is slipping away. Conor will slowly go mad if he doesn’t get help. Lust will help Deacon avoid that, especially now that he has his tattoo, but we still need him at full strength.

Lust purses his lips, still unsure whether to believe me or not. Not about the wings but about Calypso. He can look all he wants; my expression won’t give me away. I don’t need his trust, I just need them to listen and help me. I won’t allow it to be more than that. They wear the faces of those I loved most, but they hold nothing of the memories that connect us. Husks filled with experiences that don’t carry me in them.

“What is she?” Lust asks eventually.

This conversation isn’t going the way that I want it to. It’s too personal. Our specters don’t matter, only the survival of what’s left of my court. It’s what I sacrificed everything for. And Gluttony. I’ll do whatever I have to, to keep him safe. Even if that means being alone for the rest of eternity. Even if it means destroying myself.

“Conor hasn’t discovered his wings,” I say instead, veering away from the topic. “And the Sins are right to be concerned about what will happen when he does.” Not if. When. If he’s who I think... he’s always been too smart for his own good. A troublemaker, but not one that’s ever been on the opposite side of the fight before. Wrath tempered him, soothed the jagged edges. No longer. He’s not an enemy I’d ever wish for. “What he’s already accomplished... chimeras are the dredges of the monsters across the shroud. Mistakes born of misuse of magic.”

The only reason they exist is because the Sins have lost so much of who they once were. They never made mistakes like that. They commanded legions of demons, and not once did they slip and create a monstrosity. The one they call Nero, he’s the closest to the original powerful demons they once created. Lazarus is a close second. A miracle, all things considered. The rest of them are formidable in their own right

but still weak imitations of those that made up their vast armies.

“There are worse things out there?” Deacon asks, mouth dropping open in shock. “Seriously?”

“Yes.” Not just monsters. Though they aren’t able to cross over. Those dangers are on the other side. The Light Fae are the worst of them all. If Conor gets their attention, we’re all in trouble. Especially if he happens to be one of the Seven chosen. The Light have no idea that any of us survived, whether in my form or as a reincarnation of themselves. They’d never let it stand if they knew, would have hunted us with a vengeance. “You need to find the rest of your missing kin, and I’m here to help.” Easier to do now that they know who I am.

“Are you?” Gluttony drawls. “Playing allies again?”

Not the kind of bait I’ll rise to. He’ll have to do better than that. “I can train you,” I say to Deacon. “Help you free your wings. You’re going to need them for the coming fight.” Virtus won’t go down easily, not now that they’ve risen this far. “Teach you what it means to be Dark Fae.” Not just the power, but our customs, our traditions, who we are, and the pieces we still hold tight to. Just like you taught me a thousand lifetimes ago. He was my teacher, my guide, my brother. A much quicker study than me.

And now he’s nothing.

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:07 am*

### Gluttony

“Would you follow me to the stars?” “I’d follow you anywhere.” “Into the frozen depths? The raging inferno?” “Yes.” “Dinner with my parents?” “Now you’re pushing it.”

Saeran was once nothing more to me than an illusion in the shadows, taunting me with the unknown. In too many ways, he still is, trapped in the dark, protecting himself with it.

He says he’s mine, and then he turns his back to me.

Not any longer.

I’ll shred every shield that he has, strip him bare, and take everything . It all belongs to me, just like he does.

“What’s in it for you?” Lust asks Saeran, distrust written all over his face. Pretty fucking rich, considering just how much he let Deacon get away with. He once said that Deacon was his to deal with; Saeran is mine. “Something made you come forward, and I highly doubt it was just to help us.”

Unfortunately, none of that’s untrue. There has to be more to it. If it were only about us, then he would have stepped into the light long before now.

Saeran’s face gives nothing away. A blank slate. I hate it, a potent anger curling around my heart and squeezing. If I touch him, make him scream for me, will he still

be able to remain so passive? I don't think so, not after how he melted earlier in my arms. My fingers itch to do just that.

"Things are in motion now," is all Saeran says.

"And what the fuck does that even mean?" Deacon asks angrily. "Start making sense!"

Something almost like pain flickers in Saeran's gaze. "In all your reincarnations, a Sin and their guardian have never reunited. I tried to force it a few times, manipulate events to bring you closer, and it always made your deaths worse. Immediate. You came together this time on your own, and that means something about this time is different."

Things are in motion. Lust and Deacon finding each other changed something. But what? These half-truths that Saeran is giving us, never enough, is pissing me off. He knows what's going on, and he needs to just fucking spit it out.

Bare answers won't cut it.

Forcefully turning Saeran in his chair, I drag it between my knees, trapping him there. "The truth."

"It is the truth."

"Your version of it. You're leaving out some important pieces, I think." I know. A master liar. I'm not putting up with it anymore.

His eyes flash—some anger in there, which only makes desire pool in my belly—and I know I'm right. Rage swirls with the desire, like an erupting volcano inside me. No more fucking secrets.

“Everyone out.” My words are sharp, and if anyone tries to argue with me, they’ll find out my strength is as well.

Once the door is closed and it’s just the two of us, I yank Saeran off his chair and into my lap. He doesn’t fight me even though I know he’s perfectly capable of it. The blast of energy he used on me earlier wasn’t low-level magic.

“You’re the one that came to me,” I whisper huskily, lips hovering over his. “Enticed me, lured me in, used me—”

“I didn’t—”

“—and now you think you can just continue giving me nonanswers, and I’ll simply accept that and go on my merry way?”

“Gluttony, I—” He falters, lips parting on a broken exhale.

I curl a hand around his ass and pull him even closer, my dick snug against him. He can’t miss the way I’m hard for him. I want to rip his pants off and bury myself inside him, lose myself in his warmth, and fuck every inch of resistance out of him. When he’s pliant and spent in my arms, he’ll give me everything I want.

“The truth, Saeran. Now. Or you won’t like what I do next.” Our mouths brush together, and I slide my tongue over his bottom lips. “Or maybe you will. Try me.”

His hands claw at my shirt, nails digging into my chest. “No, we can’t.”

“Can’t we?” His body is all but begging me to do exactly what I want. What we both want. He’s a liar, and a threat, and I need him.

“Please.”

Asking me to stop or keep going? I slip a hand into his pants, his soft flesh warm in my palm. He whimpers and falls against me, lips finding mine, like he can't help himself. Kissing him is unlike anything I've ever experienced. My first, my only. He makes me feel like I've been under water my whole life, and now I've broken the surface and can breathe again. Endlessly drowning and now I'm free.

Arms twine around my neck, and Saeran lifts himself, rubbing against my dick. Fuck. Yes. Cupping his nape with a hard grip, I dive deeper, tasting. He moans, fingers sliding into my hair and hanging on.

One second I have a warm, wriggling dream in my arms, and the next, he's halfway across the room, putting as much distance between us as he can. So quick to retreat from me.

I stand with a dark scowl, prepared to stride across the room to finish what we started.

"We can't," he repeats shakily, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. He's visibly trembling, one hand on the wall to keep himself upright. He wants me, I know he does. He's hard as a fucking rock in his pants, his heart's beating out of his chest, and the lust in the air is so thick even I can feel it. I don't need my brother in here to work that out.

"Tell me why." If he can't explain this time, I'm going to tie him down and fuck him so hard he'll feel me in his ass for eternity.

"It would kill us."

Not what I was expecting. "Excuse me?"

"It's—" Saeran briefly closes his eyes and then sits heavily in a nearby chair. "When a Sin and their guardian reconnect, it creates an echo, a... buildup of power, I guess?"

I can't explain it. Didn't you feel it when Deacon and Lust slept together the first time?"

"No. But I wasn't in the country; how close do you have to be to feel it?"

"It depends. I don't have specifics. What you have to understand is that what Lust and Deacon can create is nothing compared to what you and I would."

I can't deny the sense of pride that conjures.

"So what?"

Saeran bites his bottom lip, and with a resigned sigh, he says, "It would be powerful enough to be felt on the other side of the shroud. The Light would know I'm alive. And they'll come for me."

I fucking dare them to try. "I'm not afraid of them."

"It's not about being afraid. They won't just come for me. They'll know it's not just me. They'll come for those I protect, those I care about."

"We'll protect them." Whoever the fuck they are. I can't believe there's an entire fucking flock of Fae in the city, and none of us ever felt it. That he's been here for so long, and I didn't notice.

"You can't. We've been building our strength for centuries, and we're still not back to where we used to be. Our population is nothing compared to what it was when we had our home. The Light destroyed us then; what do you think will happen this time?"

"We aren't who we were then." Not me. Not my brothers. Whatever life we had then,



it's gone. "They came for us once, remember? And we sent them running home with their tails tucked between their legs."

"No, they were testing you. Testing your strength. Making sure you weren't becoming more than they could handle. They didn't run; they were finished with their experiment, and they left."

Gritting my teeth, I sneer. The idea that they're toying with us rubs me the wrong way. It makes me want to storm their gates and rip every single fucking one of them to pieces. They don't scare me. Not then. Not now. They'll pay for everything they've done to us. To Saeran. "If they want a war, we can give it to them."

"Not one we can survive."

Realization dawns. "You're scared of them."

"Of course, I am!" Saeran bursts out, voice elevating. He rises from the chair, hands curled into fists. "You may not remember, but I was there when they tore my family apart. When they slaughtered my entire court and left those few of us remaining running for our lives. They destroyed everything that I care about. I watched you die. Daithi. Lust. All of you. One by one, they cut you down, and if I hadn't run, they would have killed me too. I'm the last one left, and I've been alone with that for what feels like forever." He licks his lips, and I don't miss the way they're trembling. "I relive that nightmare every day, and the idea that they could sweep through and do it all over again... I can't, Gluttony. I can't. I will do everything I can do stop that from happening again."

"Including dying?"

He lifts his chin defiantly. "Yes."

“No.” There’s no fucking way. “I’ll kill all of them if I have to, but they won’t ever hurt you again.”

“You can’t guarantee that.”

“Yes, I can.” Anyone tries to take him from me, and I’ll make sure they regret it for the rest of their short life. “Tell me how to fix it.”

“You can’t.”

“You’re lying. You think I can’t tell? You’re very good at it, but I know you.” I don’t know how I can read him so well. Lingering pieces of the past? Memories that are still there, just not accessible. Searching his face, trying so hard to hide from me. “Tell me.”

“It requires... feeding,” he says hesitantly.

“Explain that to me.” Food? Something else? Fucking what ? Getting answers from him is like pulling teeth.

“Just as a Sin needs their connection to their sin, Fae like me need ours too.”

“Like you? The Seven brothers.”

Saeran nods and goes silent. The dots begin to connect.

“And their guardians .” Mother fucker. “You need me. Your wings. That’s why they came back to life when I got you off.” When I take a step closer to him, he takes one away from me. Keeping that fucking distance that makes me want to tie him to me so he can never put it between us again. “Is that what you mean?” This time when I take a step, he has nowhere to go, backing himself into a corner. “We fuck, and you’re

cured?”

“You don’t have to say it like that,” Saeran says weakly. “It’s more complicated than that reduces it to. It’s how we connect.”

“That’s the answer, though, isn’t it?” He can shy away from it if he wants, but I know what he’s saying.

“It’s... yes,” he admits.

I can’t say that doesn’t please me. I can save him, and all I have to do is sleep with him. I would have done it anyway. Already planned to get him into my bed again, with both of us naked. “Well, what are we waiting for?”

“We’re not having sex.” Saeran’s mouth flattens, determined. “You knowing doesn’t change my mind. I won’t be the one that invites the Light to come and kill us, no matter how much I want you. I don’t know how much their power has grown since we were torn from our home. They’ve had no opposition for centuries. Whatever force drove them last time will be more powerful now. None of us stand a chance if they cross over. Not if they know I’m alive. It’s not worth the risk.”

“Yes, it is.” He is. They can rebuild again. I don’t care. My brothers and I are ready for whatever they throw at us. With the weapons we created through Sloth, we’ll wipe them out completely if they come for us. They aren’t as invulnerable as they think. “Time for you to learn how to trust, Saeran.”

His fingers curl against the wall. “You asked me to tell you the truth, and I did. Just because you don’t like what that truth is, doesn’t mean that you can ignore it like it doesn’t matter. I need you to respect that this is what I want. Just let me look at you, see you, until I die. Once I’m gone, I need you to protect those I leave behind.”

“No.”

“Please, promise me.”

The words get stuck in my throat. I may not have the memories that he does, the scars that he holds, wounds he’s never healed from, but I have him now. And he’s not fucking going anywhere. “Fine,” I bite out, knowing there’s no way in hell that I’ll allow it. If sleeping with him is what will save his life, then he has to know I’ll have him under me well before he dies. “That’s not all you want, though, is it? Lust is right; you came back to us for a reason.” It’s not only about us. If he wants something, I’ll help him get it.

Saeran lets out a breath, visibly swallows, and then says, “We want to take back our home.”

“You just said you aren’t strong enough to take on the Light,” I say with a snort. “What makes you think you can ever fight them on their own soil?” We might have been tempted a few times because their self-righteous bullshit is fucking annoying, but even we haven’t actually tried it. We almost followed them the last time they were here, to finish them off. We should have. Would Saeran have come to me sooner, then?

“With the revitalized strength of the Sins and their guardians, we could have a chance.”

He doesn’t sound certain. “You don’t have the time to wait for them to all find each other,” I surmise. Not enough time for him. Lust and Deacon are just the start. And it took them long enough.

Saeran wordlessly shakes his head.

“It still doesn’t make any sense. We fought them once before, right? When all fourteen of us were connected. And we all died. What makes you think this time would be different?” I know why, and I have confidence in us that he doesn’t. If he works through it, he can see, and then he can stop this martyr bullshit.

Saeran bites his bottom lip. “There are Fae here that have never seen our homeland. That have never experienced the cities in the trees, the vast forests, the feel of the power we take from the earth, the smell of our flowers. Have never walked the road of flames. They’ve never had connection to the land and been one with the air itself. I’ll make sure that with my dying breathe, they’ll get back what they lost when I failed them.”

“Is that what you think? That you failed them?”

“I was their king, and I take full responsibility for what happened.”

I doubt that’s all he takes responsibility for.

“So that’s your plan? Be matchmaker, and then wage war against the very Fae that drove you from your home in the first place?” A war on that scale won’t be pretty. “You can’t avoid casualties. Not to mention, what’s your plan for avoiding what happened last time?”

“We’ll be more prepared this time. We just need more time to build. Between that and the weapons you have? It will be enough. In time.”

Well, well. “Aren’t you clever.”

“I see right through your illusions.”

So he’s said. “And that’s your plan? Reunite everyone like a good Samaritan, die, and

then leave everyone else to clean up the mess you create?”

Saeran scowls. “That’s not fair.”

I cross my arms over my chest and lean my hip against the side of my table. “No, it sounds like your bullshit plan, actually. I have a better one.” One that doesn’t involve meaningless sacrifices.

He already knows what I’m going to say, what I’m thinking. “We’re not ready.”

“Sure we are.” The Light come through the shroud, and I’ll be more than happy to shove my fist down their throats and choke them. None of us will have a problem killing every last one of them. Not even before we had a personal stake in it. No love lost there.

But now? Now it’s fucking personal.

“My people aren’t ,” Saeran insists. “There are families, children. We need to be stronger.”

I tip Saeran’s chin up with a finger underneath. “You’re stalling, darling. When do you think you’ll be ready? I think the answer is never. You want your home back, but the fear is choking you.”

Saeran yanks his head to the side, away from my touch. “That’s not—” He cuts off when I grip his chin hard, forcing him to look back at me. I won’t have him turn from me.

“When you face them again, you’ll defeat them. I’ll be right beside you, and so will my brothers. The past won’t repeat itself. Trust, and let go, Saeran. Let me in, properly.”

He doesn't fight me when I cover his mouth with mine.

Saeran

The air smells different here. Stale in a way it never was back home. The lights in the sky aren't from the stars. The noise is deafening. No quiet. No peace. No love. Sometimes I dream of taking Gluttony away from all of this, finding a way to recover his memories together. He conveniently doesn't question it, when conjured from my imagination. I sleep well those nights.

I need to say no, to push him away, use the last of the reserves of energy he gave to me to keep him at arm's length.

I never stood a chance. The feel of Gluttony's weight against mine is too much. He feels too good. What would one more kiss hurt? One more touch. Just one more time.

He easily lifts me into his arms and pushes me against the wall, trapping me. Memories of nights spent under him, even in sleep, comforts me and heightens all the sensations he's drowning me in.

What's haunted me for centuries is suddenly a blessing, and I can't help but moan and reach for the buttons of the vest covering his dress shirt. The second I get my hands on his warm, smooth skin, feeling the hardness of his pecs, my insides explode like fireworks.

His kisses turn more aggressive, demanding and hard. I surrender everything to him. I don't know how I held out this long.

A flash of sanity returns.



I know how. There's more at stake than me. I have to be strong for them if I can't be for myself.

I tear my mouth from his and turn my head. "No. Gluttony, we can't."

"I'm not afraid of your enemies," Gluttony whispers harshly. "I'll have you, and then I'll kill them for daring to think they have any right to you."

"It's not that simple." My heart's beating too fast, and the swelling of my cock is begging for attention, for him. I have to be stronger than that. "We need a better plan. We need time."

"How much time? Enough for you to die? I don't fucking think so."

"Not—is it enough if I say not now? And not no forever."

Gluttony growls deep in his chest, and I almost reach for him again. To deny myself something I've been craving for so long is akin to ripping out my own heart and crushing it between my fingers. A sacrifice that hurts so much I don't know how I'm still alive. How much more I can take.

Gluttony lowers me to the floor and steps away, finally listening to me. I almost close the gap again, my arm lifting before dropping again. This is the right thing to do. This is something I have to do. I failed my court once already. I won't again even if it means turning from the other half of me.

"Give me another one."

The words take my breath away. He's said them before, so many times. Always wanting one more. I know exactly what he's asking for. My fond smile is for him alone.

He returns it, an almost-shy curl of his lips, like it's not a familiar gesture for him. Not like that. Not soft, one just for me. I remember it well. He was always the kind one, giving as much as he demanded in return. I fed him, so he could feed others. We've travelled so far from who we were, but the important pieces, the ones that matter, those are still there. Waiting to return.

"What would you like?"

"Anything."

I can hear the unspoken word. Everything.

I open my palm, and a tiny spark of lightning strikes the middle, swirling to form a sphere. The lightning doesn't hurt, it's more of an awareness, a light flicking on inside me. Inside the sphere, a miniature version of Gyro twirls in circles, a torrent building around her.

"Can she do that?"

"Once." Neither of us have the energy left for that kind of power. Once upon a time, we would have been able to flatten countries. Been more than a match for anything this world could throw at us. I wasn't strong enough to stop the Light from destroying us, but I was at least strong enough to keep everyone safe as we established ourselves here, hidden among the humans. Now I'm depleted, and she's not far behind. It won't be long now.

Gluttony's face hardens. "Not now, because you're dying? Will she go with you?"

"I don't know." Maybe that's what happened to the others. Maybe they're lying dormant until those they're destined to watch return to them. There are so many unknowns, and even after all these years, I haven't uncovered all the answers. I still

don't even know how the Light overpowered us, when they've never been more powerful than us. I'm just as in the dark as the shadows I use to comfort myself.

As if summoned, Gyro pops into sight and immediately makes a beeline for Gluttony. He tenses as she lands on his arm, her tail flicking, sparks crackling around it.

"Explain her to me."

"Each of us got a specter; it's a representation of our guardian and holds their power. She wields lightning because you do."

"What about illusions?"

My lips twitch. "She can do that too." It used to drive the others crazy, her playful nature always leading her to play tricks. They can all see through her illusions, too, but only if they concentrate; and if they aren't expecting it, they work for a few critical seconds.

"Clever girl." He rubs under her chin, and she preens and purrs, the sound loud in the quiet room. She always loved Gluttony's attention, thrived under it. She's never fully understood why we've been away from him. "She protects you?"

"She does." My only connection left to him. I would sacrifice my court for her. Let the world burn. Let my home burn. Nothing is more important than keeping her safe. Keeping my piece of Gluttony safe.

Gluttony holds out a hand, and I deposit the sphere into it. Primal satisfaction crosses his expression, and he wraps his fingers around it. It responds to him, the storm getting worse, cracks appearing in the glass around it before repairing itself. A vivid representation of my heart. Except that the cracks inside me don't heal.

“How do I unlock the one you gave me?”

“I don’t know,” I say honestly. I didn’t create it. Whatever’s inside is for him alone, and I’ve never been able to open it myself. It appeared the night I lost him, and I’ve carried it ever since.

Gluttony pockets the storm sphere. “Any guesses?”

“All I know is that it’s for you, and you’re the only one who can.” Centuries of trying have told me that. I never thought I’d be able to give it to him.

Before he can reply to that, Tiernan bursts into the room, eyes wild. Envy is right behind him, barely visible over Tiernan’s shoulders. All I can see is a tuft of black hair and something bright yellow. When Tiernan comes further into the room, I get a better look at Envy’s outfit. Bright yellow hoodie. Striped shorts that barely reach his knees. And thick, steel-capped black boots. That’s certainly some kind of statement. He reminds me of the cartoon characters on some of the video games the younger Fae like to play. All he needs is a bigger head with bigger eyes. And bigger feet.

Gyro scrambles up to Gluttony’s shoulder and perches there. Gluttony places a hand on her back, steadying her. She won’t fall; she’s very nimble.

“What’s wrong?” I ask.

“I just got off the phone to Diarmuid. I didn’t get the full details since this one”—Tiernan gestures angrily at Envy—“fried it before he could get it all out.”

“I said I was sorry!” Envy splutters.

My eyes narrow at the way he’s holding the doorframe. Like he’s using it to hold himself up. The fact he’s ruining technology tells me he’s not in control of his magic.

He used to be better at locking it up tight. Of course, his guardian helped with that. He's been alone for a long time, and he's starting to unravel. They all are. I can't imagine the state Sloth must be in. He's more powerful than any of us, and he was never very good at control in the first place. No wonder he's isolated himself so well. I've barely caught a glimpse of him in years.

"Details of what?"

"The East building is under attack. Chimeras are circling, and they said something else is driving them. They haven't entered yet, but it'll only be a matter of time."

No . Most of our families are located there. It's extremely guarded, with the help of our magic and Gyro's illusions. Something must have failed. I should have expected it, with our deterioration.

Gyro sneezes, and lightning strikes the wall close to Tiernan's head. He glares at her, lips twisting in a snarl.

"We're coming." We can at least create a distraction to get everyone out if they haven't already.

I go to rush past Gluttony, and he grabs my elbow, halting me. "Where are you going?"

"To help them."

"You're in no position to be doing anything."

"Let go of me." There's no way I'm leaving them alone to fend for themselves. This attack is deliberate. I don't know why. The only way to find out is to go. I have just enough leftover energy from what Gluttony gave me to be dangerous for a short time.

“Where are Lust, Deacon, Wrath, and Lazarus? You aren’t going alone.”

“Zara was with us; he’s gone to get a car,” Envy says, with a wicked grin. “Like we’d let you have all the fun. It’s been too long since I’ve been in a knock-down drag-out fight worth my time.”

Lust and Wrath appear behind Envy, towering over him.

“What do you think they meant by ‘something else is driving them’?” Lust asks. “Do we think Conor is there?”

“If he is, we can torture him and find out the locations of the rest of our brothers and our demon,” Wrath snarls. “I’ll do it.”

Shrugging off Gluttony’s hold, I stalk to the door. “We’re wasting time speculating. I’m leaving, now.” Pushing past the Sins, I throw over my shoulder, “I’ll meet you there.” If I go by the shadows, I’ll get there quicker than they can.

“The fuck does that mean?” Gluttony asks, following me down the passageway.

I turn, and our eyes meet. Realization dawns in his eyes, and he reaches for me, but he’s too late. I fade into the shadows, and I’m gone.

It’s much easier to navigate the streets, even during daylight, by hiding in the shadows. I move faster, unseen, nothing but wind as I glide through.

It feels like a blink of an eye, and then I’m on the edge of my destination. I’ve worked out roughly how time works when I’m moving in shadow, and I know that everyone else will be at least halfway here.

Finding a good vantage point at the corner of a building, I peek around to see what’s

happening at the East building. To the ordinary eye, it looks like every other apartment building in the area. People packed in like sardines, how the humans seem to prefer it. It's one of our oldest safe havens, protections around it that have been there for over a hundred years. There are hidden passages below, a way out that no one knows about. I hope that Riordan or Diarmuid are guiding the vulnerable out, keeping them safe from the siege.

Crouching low, I summon my bow and notch an arrow. I can see three chimeras pacing the sidewalk on the block. Every so often, they let out a loud howl that makes the hair on the back of my neck stand on end. I can't see anyone or anything else. Controlling them from afar, or lying in wait?

A heavy weight settles on my head as Gyro sits on me. One of her wings flicks across my cheek.

"See that one closest?" I whisper, pointing to the one pacing near the corner. Close enough it would have smelled me if I wasn't still cloaked in shadow. "Bring him to me, okay?" Fighting three on one isn't good odds. If I can pick them off one at a time, it will make my life a lot easier. Who knows how many are around the other side?

Gyro nudges my cheek, and then she disappears out of sight, popping back up right next to the chimera's head. She flicks its ear—one that's half torn off and bleeding—with her tail and then zaps it with lightning. It snarls and attempts to bite her, but she's too quick.

The other two chimera hear the noise, stopping to look. All they can see is the third chimera sitting quietly. Illusions don't mask sound, unfortunately. There's nothing out of the ordinary to rile them up enough to check it out, though. Good thing for us that they aren't particularly intelligent. Whatever targeting programming they've had, it doesn't extend far.

Gyro zips back to me, the chimera following like a carrot being dangled in front of a horse. Too easy. I slip further back into the shadows, putting more distance between us. It needs to be fully around the corner and out of sight before I make my move. Can't risk the others seeing.

I close my eyes and concentrate, my wings stretching out. There's still a little life in them, and it feels so amazingly good. Magic flares within me, and the tattoos on my face light up. Power rushes through, and my hair lengthens, braiding itself. I pour it all into my weapon, needing the arrow to strike true and strike hard. I'll only get one chance to surprise it.

It comes close enough I can smell the rotting flesh and the metallic tang of blood. It's feasted recently. If it's hurt any of my Fae, I'll make sure every single one of its kind suffers an excruciatingly painful death. None of mine deserve it, not after everything we've endured.

My hands are steady as I aim, and the arrow hits the target perfectly, sliding right into its eye, burying itself so deep I can barely see the fletching and nock. It yelps and thrashes around, snapping wildly. Not dead yet, but blinding it will help me finish the job.

Another arrow goes through its neck and another in its hind leg. Debilitating it enough for me to get close and slit its throat and then shove it onto its back. Those deadly teeth are still biting the air, looking for a victim. The tip of a canine slices through my upper arm, and blood gushes out, dripping down my forearm. Ignoring the pain, I bury my dagger into the casing around its heart. The new steel takes more effort to get through, and I use the last of my magic to rip it apart and get beneath.

I hold the heart out to Gyro, and she aims lightning at it until it's nothing but ash in my palm.



I stumble when I push away and stand. Crap . That took too much energy. There's no way I can fight the other two. There has to be more around the other sides, or Diarmuid and Riordan would have killed them already. Other warriors live in there too. Three chimeras would be no match for them. How many more are there, and what's driving them? I can't sense anything else.

Conor is giving off strong Fae vibes right now, with no training on how to contain it. He may have been able to at the start, but the stronger he gets, the harder it will be for him. It will consume him, turn him into something dark and twisted.

I need to find a better way inside and find out what's happening. Why does everything feel like it's standing still? Siege tactics always make me uneasy. It not only means a long haul but also reinforcements in vast numbers.

"Find me a way in," I whisper to Gyro, nuzzling her wing. She mewls, rolls over in the air, and looks at me upside down, her tongue hanging out the side of her mouth. She zaps with me a burst of lightning, more a tickle than anything resembling painful, and then darts off. No one will see her unless she wants them to.

I move back to my position on the corner, crouched and waiting. The two remaining chimeras haven't noticed their third missing, still pacing. Almost like they're waiting for something too.

I highly doubt I want any of my people here when it comes. Whatever, or whoever, it is.

It doesn't take long for Gyro to return. She twirls in a circle, and words appear in the air, like streaks of lightning. I've left a window open on the third floor, right side facing the sun. Be careful.

The message smells distinctly like Riordan. Perfect.

Fishing nuts out of my pocket, I feed her a handful. “Good job. Now I need you to stay here to tell Gluttony and the others not to engage until I give the word. I need to make sure that everyone is out first.” There’s no room for collateral damage here. If it goes well, we may even be able to get out of here without fighting at all. Silent and efficient.

There’s no breeze in the air, but the window I’m searching for has curtains swinging like there is. Interesting. Glancing back at where I know Gyro is watching even if I can’t see her, I step out of the shadows, spread my wings, and push off the ground. The nearest chimera is too slow to notice I’m there, and I’m well out of reach of the snapping jaws by the time they come. Nasty snarls follow me.

Riordan is the only one in the room. There’s a fan close to the window, aimed at it. That explains the fake breeze. I raise a brow at him, the corner of my lips twitching in amusement.

Riordan shrugs. “Got your attention, didn’t it?”

Can’t argue with that; it did help me spot it quicker. “Tell me why you’re all still here.” I can feel them all, now that I’m inside. They should have left already. I expected him, and maybe a handful of others, to have stayed behind to ensure that everyone got out safely. Not for everyone to still be here.

“The passages are blocked,” Riordan says with a scowl. “Something’s stopping us from going through them. Diarmuid is down there with a few of us who are strongest with magic, but they’re having trouble getting through.”

That’s not possible. “How?”

Riordan blows out a breath and glances around the room with a helpless shrug. “It feels like...” He trails off, hesitating.

“Feels like what?” I bark out, frustration eating at me. They should all be gone. Fighting our way out with the force waiting for us—and likely more on the way—will be a bloodbath, and it won’t be all from the chimeras.

“It feels like you. Like your magic. Though yours hasn’t felt like that for a while.”

My blood goes cold. There’s no way he could be saying what I think he is. “What do you mean, it feels like me?” Like I used to feel. When I was at full strength. Very few have that kind of power. The ones that do are all dead, and Conor isn’t at that level yet. Riordan can’t have felt what he thinks he did.

Though now he’s said that, I can sense a familiar energy coming from further into the building. In and up. What is it? My feet are moving before my mind catches up.

I need to find it. It smells like home . How is that possible?

“Stay here,” I tell Riordan firmly. I’m going alone. I don’t know what I’ll find, and the last thing I want to do is be responsible for an avoidable death.

It’s three floors up. Apartment 6B. An older Fae couple that’s been around almost as long as Riordan himself. I hesitate with my hand flat on the door. They’ll have evacuated every apartment.

What will I find inside? I’m not sure I want to know.

Keeping my guard up as I walk inside doesn’t protect me. The second I step foot over the threshold, a powerful blast sends me flying to the left. My shoulder hits the wall painfully, almost dislocating it, and I fall to my knees, struggling to take in a breath.

What in the world was that?

I look up into the face of a ghost. It can't be.

“You're dead,” I whisper.

Saeran

Watching my Fae grow and find themselves again—have families, find love, teach the next generation as much of our legacy as we can—is a particular kind of nightmare. It brings me pride, and envy in equal measures. Gluttony should be here to witness this, to be part of it. I miss him every day with a ferocity that brings me to my knees.

Emrys, one of the two Seven Sons born under the sun, and once a close friend and confidant, looks down at himself. There's a smirk on his face that I've never seen on him before. It looks wrong, twisted. This isn't him. It can't be. It has to be an imposter wearing his face.

“It was you.” The pain in my chest hurts worse than the dull ache in my shoulder. “You're the one who helped them, the reason they got in so easily.” I knew that someone had to have betrayed us. But I didn't expect it to be one of us . It never crossed my mind. Even the idea of the Sins being involved never struck true for me.

The smirk deepens, a dimple appearing. “Don't sound so shocked, Saeran. You'll hurt my feelings.”

“No. No, this can't be right.” My mind reels, trying to make sense of this. Emrys is the one who doomed us all? He wouldn't. It's not in his nature. He was loyal to us. “I refuse to believe that you would betray Greed like that.”

His bright sunset eyes flicker. “A regret.”

I laugh mirthlessly. A regret? Is he fucking kidding me? “You killed him.”

“Not by my hand.”

“He fucking died anyway!” I yell furiously. Movement is difficult after that knock, breathing a struggle. Somehow I manage to get myself to a standing position. The sheer power that Emrys commands isn’t his. I’ve never felt that from him before, from any of us. It’s more than he was ever capable of. It has to be part of how they were so easily able to kill us all. Where are they getting it from? What forces have they called upon, and what did they sacrifice to get it? No power like this is gained without giving up something in return. Something important.

“Why are you doing this?” I choke out. I thought he’d died in the flames of our home. He’s never resurrected, and I’ve never been able to work out why. I thought maybe his soul had needed more time to heal. He’d always been the most vulnerable of us. I’d give everything to remain ignorant and stay in the dark.

“How are you alive?” Emrys asks. “I felt you through the shroud. You’re supposed to be dead, along with the rest of you.”

So casually throwing all the Sons into the bowels of the beyond, like he doesn’t care. How is this the man I once would have laid down my life for? “You did this. You destroyed everything . Our home. Our people. Your own guardian! For what? Tell me what was worth this.”

Emrys approaches and wraps a hand around my throat, lifting me off my feet and slamming me against the wall. I’m powerless to stop him. If he wants to kill me here, I can’t do anything about it. Not with the strength he possesses now.

“I didn’t betray anyone.” He hisses as if something I’ve said has offended him. “I did what I had to.”

“You had to kill your own? You had to betray all of us and hunt us to extinction? You would have felt your soul ripping out when Greed died! That’s ‘what you had to do’?”

He squeezes my throat harder. “You wouldn’t understand. Why didn’t you stay hidden? Why couldn’t you leave it alone?”

“You know why.” The moment my hand touched Gluttony’s, there hadn’t been any way to stop this. I should have stayed away, and I couldn’t. Not anymore. “I tried,” I say brokenly. “I tried so hard, Em, I spent so many years alone.” Lonely, miserable years thinking that all my family and my friends were dead because I was too weak to help them.

And here he is. Alive. And a traitor.

Emrys curses in Gaelic and lets me go, throwing me down to the ground in disgust. “We weren’t here for you. The power we felt across the shroud, it wasn’t yours. It was someone else. Not anywhere near your power.”

“I know who it was.” Conor has no idea what he’s doing with the magic he’s been given, and the havoc he’s causing has consequences he can never imagine. If the Light are coming for him, he’s already dead. We all are.

“You aren’t going to tell me.”

I laugh again, borderline hysterical. “You expect me to help you kill more of us? Go to hell, Emrys. I’ll never forgive you for this.”

“I don’t need your forgiveness.”

“What do you need? What made all this worth it?” How could anything be worth

betraying the person that was meant for him? Greed was his guardian, his protector, his lover. How could taking action that led to his death be worth it? I can't imagine it. I could never do anything that I know would lead to Gluttony's death. I've flayed myself alive to keep him safe. To keep them all safe.

The idea that someone I considered family could be the one that did this to us... The pain is unbearable. Why would he do this? What possible reason could he have to justify it?

"You won't understand. You should have stayed dead."

I want to throw the words back in his face, tell him that he should have stayed dead. But I wouldn't mean them. How could I? I thought I was alone with my memories, and it turns out that I'm not. I share them with the man responsible for this. His intel would have been invaluable and paved the way for our end.

All I can do is stare and hope this is some kind of nightmare.

"I could kill you right now."

"So why am I still breathing?" Part of me wants him to. I'm so fucking tired.

Emrys' hand does that weird twitch again, and a muscle in his jaw moves. "Consider this a warning. When I tell them you're alive—"

"I know." They'll be coming. After all this time trying to avoid this, it looks like Emrys is destroying everything a second time. The harbinger of everything that's killed me every day for centuries.

Emrys takes one more look at me, and then he's gone out the window. The urge to follow him is fleeting. What would I be able to do? He's more powerful than me,



especially right now. Whatever's giving him power, it's unique and painful. There's nothing I could do even if I did find where he's going. I have more immediate problems; he'll have to wait.

The door bursts open, Riordan rushing through. "Saeran, the Sins are fighting the chimeras downstairs. I've sent for Diarmuid but—"

I'm already moving, heading for the stairs. I won't make the jump, not if I want enough energy left to fight. I'm almost quite literally on my last legs, especially after the knock from Emrys. Whatever he did took more from me.

What is Gluttony doing? I gave Gyro instructions, and she wouldn't have failed to deliver them.

The carnage outside is mayhem, and it takes me a few frantic moments to find Gluttony. To my far left, taking on three chimeras, with Gyro at his shoulder. Envy and Lazarus are nearby, with Lust, Deacon, and Wrath on the other side with the remaining chimeras. Contained mayhem, maybe, but we could have gotten out of this without a fight. Has no one ever taught them that the kick-in-doors method isn't always the best way?

"Gyro was supposed to tell you to hang back!" I yell as soon as I get closer to Gluttony. I punch a chimera trying to bite me in the side of the head and pull my bow from my back. I'm lucky Emrys didn't break it.

"You actually expected us to listen?" Gluttony asks. He grabs one of their faces and rips their jaw clean off, tossing it to the side. It gets back up in seconds, still snarling and biting. It runs straight for us, uncaring about the blood and sinew dripping from what's left of its mouth.

Gluttony creates an illusion to his side, another version of himself. The chimera

falters, looking between them, and then changes tracks, heading for the fake instead. It goes straight through, and lightning hits its tail. It yelps and twists around. Another strike, this time between its eyes. My nose wrinkles at the strong smell of burning flesh.

I fire an arrow into its side, knocking it off balance. Gyro jumps onto its chest as soon as it's down and scratches around where its heart is, her claws digging in and ripping out flesh.

"There are innocents in this building, and I can't have them getting hurt because you rushed in!"

"We weren't planning on letting them get away alive," Gluttony snorts. With a grin, he dodges a claw and then returns the favor, slicing its stomach open and then grabbing its throat, electrocuting it from the inside. "No faith in our abilities?"

"I don't know," I shoot back sarcastically. "Are they as good as your ability to listen?" Spreading my wings, I somersault over the chimera and sweep its legs out from under it. I stumble a little from the force of it, and Gluttony grabs my arm, steadying me.

"Should you be out here?"

"I'm not leaving you out here while I cower inside." I'm not so useless that I can't stand by his side, in all things.

Gluttony lifts a hand, and the illusion of a brick wall shields us. The chimera growls, stopping right before it, and then paces back and forth, looking for some kind of break in it to get through. It snaps its teeth in the air in frustration.

"That won't hold for long." What's the purpose of it? Sneak around and surprise

them from behind?

“Take a breath. Stand up. If you’re a liability, the only thing you’re doing out here is trying to get yourself—and others—killed. If you gave in and let us have what we both want, we wouldn’t be in this mess.”

“Really? You’re bringing that up now?”

The second chimera joins the first and sniffs the wall. It’s working things out. It won’t be long before they come through. Some illusions can be made solid; this one is nothing but hope and dreams.

Gluttony cups my cheek and tilts my head up. “Let me heal you. If you want to fight, then do it. This half existence you’re living for some fucked-up-martyr reason? You aren’t of any use to anyone. Show me how good you are.”

I have no words to reply. All I have is me. He meets me halfway, our lips meeting hungrily. He lifts me up and into his arms, cupping my nape and holding me in place. He feels like an illusion as well, a dream conjured by my wildest fantasies, memories that have kept me warm all these years. Freedom from the chains that have weighed me down since that horrible night. He doesn’t look at me the same way he used to, but there are years of friendship, and then love, accompanying that look. He’s here, with me, wanting me, and that’s enough. It’s more than enough. The rest will come, just like it did before.

“Could you two focus, please?” Envy yells. One of the chimeras jumps through the wall, disrupting the illusion, but it doesn’t get more than two steps before poison-spiked vines wrap around its hind legs. The creature howls, and then Envy finishes it off by wrapping it completely in the vines and squeezing until it’s nothing but a pulverized mess on the ground. His self-satisfied smirk drops slowly, eyes unfocusing.

“Envy?” Oh no. I recognize that look. I’ve felt it before. He used too much magic, and he has no reserves left. How long has he been this bad without telling anyone?

Envy falters, knee wobbling, and then he goes down. He hits the ground before any of us can get to him, falling unnaturally still.

“ Envy!” Lazarus yells and gets to him first, scooping him up and into his arms. He presses fingers to Envy’s neck. “He’s not breathing. Envy, wake up. This isn’t fucking funny, you asshole.” He looks up at me, eyes wide. “Fix it!”

Why is he directing that at me? I’m no healer even if I had the energy to do anything. Besides, it doesn’t look like we need one. “You already are.” Color’s returning to Envy’s face, and the ebb of his magic that had all but disappeared a moment ago is replenishing. Powering back up. Because of the demon?

All the Seven Sons are Fae; they can’t be demons. Our blood doesn’t mix well with their kind. And yet I can’t deny that it’s Lazarus’s touch that’s reviving Envy. Only one person in existence can do that.

“What the fuck?” Wrath breathes out as he, Lust, and Deacon join us.

“I’m more concerned about what happened in the first place,” Lust says, frowning. “Was he injured?” Deacon moves closer to Lust, who rests a hand on his hip, keeping in contact.

“He just dropped,” Gluttony replies gruffly. “One second he was fine, next second he was dead.”

“Dead?” Lust’s eyes widen.

“He’s alright now,” Gluttony says, shrugging. “Ask Zara; I don’t know what

happened.”

“He collapsed the other week as well, didn’t he?” Deacon says, glancing between us.

“Is that normal for him?”

Wrath shifts his weight from one foot to the other, scowling. “No.”

“He’s depleted,” I explain. “We all only have a certain level of magic inside us, and especially for us—the Seven and their guardian Sins—we need constant replenishing. None of you have had that for a long time. Envy is worse off than you because he uses more every day, just dealing with the dead haunting him.” Trapped with them while they feed off him. He used to be able to shut them out, had ironclad control over them; they worked for him, not against him.

There’s only one way for him to get back to that place. I look down to where Lazarus is still holding Envy, cradling him against his chest. Murmuring something to him that none of us can hear.

Unfortunately, his recovery involves someone who’s married to another. What a fucking mess. How did they get themselves here? I don’t understand it.

“How does he ‘feed’ himself?” Lust asks. “He suffers enough when he raises the dead; I won’t subject him to more of that.”

“That’s the opposite of feeding him.” Every spirit he raises only adds to his burden. I don’t think he realizes just how many souls he carries. Not just this lifetime but the one across the shroud. He and Sloth were always the ones with the most volatile magic, not so easily contained as the rest of us.

“So what do we do?” Lazarus asks through gritted teeth. “All this information is useless if you can’t tell us how to make him better.”

“It’s... look, I can explain more, but we can’t stay here. More chimeras will come.” And along with them, Conor. Complications we don’t need right now. They need to leave, and I need to finish evacuating the building.

“Tell us now,” Lazarus demands.

It’s not really a conversation I want to have on the sidewalk, surrounded by chimera corpses. Apparently, we’re doing this here anyway.

“He’ll die if his sin isn’t fed.” Without his other half, Envy won’t make it much longer. He’s already too weak. If I’d known how close he’d gotten, maybe I could have done something about it sooner.

“And how do we feed it?” Lust repeats, frustration leaking into his tone.

“By silencing it.”

“I’m starting to get real sick of your riddles,” Wrath growls, taking a step forward and lifting a hand like he wants to strangle me.

Gluttony steps in his way without a word, standing tall and acting as my shield. I don’t need one, but it makes me feel warm and protected. Loved. I want to hold on to that feeling as long as I can.

“Lazarus,” Lust says slowly, catching on quicker than I thought any of them would.

“What?” Lazarus raises an eyebrow at Lust. “I don’t know what he means either.”

“Envy said that when you touch him, when you’re near him, he can’t hear the dead. You give him silence.”

I'm still not sure how this happened, how one of ours ended up as a demon. What will happen to him if his Fae blood activates? He could die. Worse. Or nothing could happen. We've never attempted it before, because the two races have never been compatible. Not that way. A union between the two has never resulted in a child, so there's never been someone mixed. Lazarus will be the first. If he can tap into that half of him. Without a connection to Envy, a real one—not the one they've clearly been dancing around for years—he never will.

They'll both eventually die because of it.

“Was Envy there when you created Zara?” I ask Wrath.

“Yes, why?”

His soul must have been pulled here because of him. “He drew you here.” The odds of that happening are astronomical. In fact, nonexistent. In all the possibilities I ever considered about reincarnation, demon was never one of them. What does it mean?

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Lazarus asks.

“You're his solace; you feed his sin. The same way that Deacon feeds Lust. That I feed Gluttony.” The way they feed us in return. Symbiosis that once kept us all sane and powerful. It didn't save us before, but it should have.

“Nobody feeds me,” Gluttony says, affronted.

I beg to differ, though now isn't the time to debate it.

“The point is that you're the key to strengthening him. You need to be in contact with him, stay close.” Love him. I know better than to say that. With the addition of Raven, the entire thing is sure to blow up in everyone's faces. Raven doesn't belong,

has no place here. Not in the middle of these two. But I can't blatantly point it out that way. It's clear that Envy and Lazarus aren't where they need to be. Not yet. Soon if they want to survive.

Just like their souls, they'll find their way back to each other. They have to. Any other outcome would be catastrophic.

"What do you mean by 'stay close'?" Lazarus asks suspiciously.

"Preferably physical contact. Like what you're doing now, when you brought him back like that." It wouldn't have worked if Lazarus hadn't grabbed him so quickly. We'd been scarily close to losing the youngest Sin. I know more than anyone how everything can change in the blink of an eye. It hits so quickly that there's no time to process until it's too late. "It's a slow process, with him being this bad."

Lazarus's mouth flattens, and he stares down at Envy. He looks peaceful like this, restful in Lazarus's arms. There's no evidence of what has to be eating him from the inside. A feeling I'm intimately familiar with.

"Now it's time for you to leave."

"For 'us' to leave?" Gluttony says, scowling. "And where do you think you're going?"

"I need to help the others move the rest of the Fae here. There are—" I hesitate and glance to where Diarmuid's hovering in the doorway, wings out. He missed the party. "There are tunnels below the building we use to move them around when we can." It's not always possible, as their locations are limited, but we use them when we can so that we don't have to bring any attention to ourselves. There aren't many of us—only a few hundred or so—and we try our best to keep to ourselves. With Conor on the rampage, and now Emrys back, it's going to get harder and harder to keep



ourselves in the dark.

Emrys. Alive. And a traitor. I rub my chest absently, wishing that particular ache would go away. I don't know how to match the man I saw upstairs with the one I remember.

How do I tell Greed?

I don't have to, of course; Greed doesn't even remember. I owe it to him, anyway, even if the betrayal he would have felt won't be there. Those memories don't exist for him. There's nothing for him to feel betrayed over. Greed will look at me with a blank face and not care that the man that's supposed to love him, that he's supposed to protect, killed us all. I'm not sure which side of that coin hurts me more.

"I have to help get them somewhere safe and secure. I'll meet you at your estate when I'm done." With Emrys on the board now, and with the fact that there are Dark Fae in the city exposed, safety is relative. We have to try and keep going the way we always do.

"If you aren't back in three hours, I'll hunt you down," Gluttony promises, eyes hard.

"I'll come back."

I always do.

### Gluttony

“Lust and Emrys are looking for Gyro.” “Do I want to know why?” “I highly doubt that.” “I’ll make sure to send them in the wrong direction.”

I’m ready to go out and hunt Saeran down by the time he appears in my bedroom window. He perches himself on the sill, white-blond hair glowing from the moon at his back. His intense stare is focused completely on me, the way it should be.

“There’s a front door.” I’ve been keeping an eye on the wrong entrance.

Saeran smiles at me in a way that makes my heart flip, equal parts warm and cheeky. Somehow I know I’ve seen it before. Not in this lifetime, but another, I’m sure of it.

“Habit,” he says, almost sheepishly. He gestures behind himself with a hand over his shoulder. “Should I...?”

“Don’t even think about it.” I’m not letting him out of my sight. He’s fucking lucky that I didn’t put up a fight about him staying behind, especially after the chimera fight and the way he’s barely standing upright. If he thinks I haven’t been worrying about him very second, he’s wrong.

How does no one else notice how tired he looks? The lack of color in his skin and the dead drop of his wings? It’s easy to see how quickly he’s deteriorating every day. He can’t have much magic left, and he used up a lot of it this afternoon.

That ends tonight.

I have a lifetime to learn about, and he's the only one who can show me. Not to mention all the gifts I'll demand from him. Only from him. I'm not in the mood to wait and find his reincarnation. I'm not like him, and he doesn't get to leave.

Saeran drops from the window, moving from a crouch to standing in a single fluid step. He has a gorgeous body. Lithe, graceful. The epitome of Fae elegance.

"Gluttony, the Light know that I'm alive." He clenches his hands to fists at his side, lips pulling down. "They're going to come looking for me. We need to speak to the others and—"

"Later." They aren't here now, coming for what's mine, and we can deal with it tomorrow. I have different plans tonight, and I won't be made to wait any longer.

"It won't wait till later," Saeran insists, striding toward me.

"Tell me about us."

He stops directly in front of where I'm sitting on the edge of my— our —bed. "What do you want to know?"

"Everything." Clasp ing his hips, I rub my thumbs over the soft fabric of his shirt. He has too many layers on. Time to rectify that.

"I—um—" He licks his lips and glances at where I'm holding him. "You and your brothers were raised by druids on the outskirts of my court. It wasn't mine at the time but my parents'. We don't know if you had any parents; the druids are a secretive bunch, and from what we know, one day you were just there."

"Bringing sin to your perfect world," I say with a smirk. Shifting the hem of his shirt up allows me to feel the warmth of his skin. It's perfect. Bitable.

He arches into my touch with a little gasp. “Sin didn’t have the same meaning back then. Virtus, the group Conor is with, they changed all of that on this side. It was more... like a sign from our gods. A blessing. Sin didn’t mean evil. Virtue didn’t mean good. Light, Dark, it was about the sun and the moon. Harmony of nature and balance. Never so black-and-white as they make it.”

“And us, Saeran?” He’s not wearing a belt, three buttons keeping his black pants secure. Easily undone. All his clothes are dark, I’ve noticed. Still trying to hide in the shadows. Not with me, he won’t.

“What are you doing?” Saeran asks on a stuttered breath.

“And us, Saeran?” I prompt. Tracing the sharp lines of his hip bones makes me want to run my tongue over the groove and travel further down.

“They kept you all sequestered. I didn’t meet you until I was fifteen. Gyro’s been with me since birth, and she knew who you were straightaway.”

“Yours.” A strange concept, fated from birth. Never a chance to try other options or know what other experiences are out there waiting. Not given a choice.

And yet, looking at Saeran standing in front of me, a light-red hue over his cheeks, white-blond hair messy and damp, the barest hint of skin teasing me... I’ve never had anyone else, not in all the time my memory exists.

It doesn’t make a difference for me. I don’t want anyone else. I want him. All of him, willingly surrendered.

Mine.

“Yes. We were inseparable after that. We married on my twentieth birthday and took

our place on the throne when I was one hundred and three.”

He ruled for a long time after that. More than a few lifetimes together before it all got taken from us. “Lift your arms.” With one sweeping motion, his top layers are gone, his chest exposed to me. “What did we do before then?”

He gives another secret, half-happy, half-sad smile. “We lived. We drove my parents mad.” He cups my face in his hands, small and warm. “You hated the aerie palace. Too clean and organized. Not enough stuff everywhere. Every time you tried to add ‘life’ to it, as you called it, it disappeared the next day.”

That sounds like me. Neat and structured isn’t my style. Where would I put my hoard? Hide it away? Fuck that.

“We didn’t live there. Our home was less sleek sophistication and more loving clutter.”

“Yeah?” He shudders when I kiss his belly, muscles shifting under me. Hands dig into my shoulders, nails scratching when I give an experimental bite.

“Gluttony, please.” He says my name like a curse, and I can’t get enough.

“I won’t stop,” I promise, sliding my beard over his hard, smooth skin. “Does it feel good?”

“Y-yes.” His hands move from my shoulders to my neck and back. “Yes.”

“Tell me more about us and our home.”

“I—” He sucks in a sharp breath when I travel up his chest to his nipple. I plan on tasting every inch of him tonight.

“We built ourselves a home, deep in the Dorcha forest. There were rooms filled with gifts that I made you, so many that you had to keep adding space. Our bedroom held all your favorite gifts; our bed was in the middle of the room, surrounded by them.”

That sounds perfect to me. Except something in the tone of his voice and the way he’s suddenly tense under my touch tells me something’s wrong. “What is it?”

“I don’t know what’s happened to it. They would have found it by now. Destroyed it.”

A sharp bite on his nipple diverts his attention, and he threads his fingers in my hair, cradling me to him. I lick and suck until the pebble is wet and swollen, thoroughly stimulated by teeth and tongue.

My rock-hard dick aches when he moans my name again. The powerful response that I have to him, when I’ve never much cared for physical pleasure, makes me a believer. If he was made for me, then I get to enjoy all of him. And enjoy I’m going to.

Pulling back, I coax him into my lap. He doesn’t fight me, settling comfortably.

“We’ll make them pay for all of it.” Every one of them will die for what they’ve done. “Right now, I want you to forget all of that and kiss me.”

“Gluttony, we—”

“You said yourself, they already know you’re here. Why are you still holding yourself back?” Why won’t he give me all of him, even now?

“I’m afraid,” he admits, hands running down my chest. Back up again. Motions to soothe himself.

“Of what?”

He plucks at the buttons of my vest. “Us. Losing you again. They’re so powerful, Gluttony; you have no idea.”

“I won’t let that happen again.” The Light can suck my dick; they aren’t taking any of this from me.

“You may not have a choice. They killed you last time, remember?”

“I’m not who I was then.” That causes him pain, but it might be what changes the outcome this time. I don’t lose, and whatever happens next, that’s not changing.

He opens his mouth—probably to argue with me more, the stubborn Fae—and I drag him forward by his nape. He whimpers into the kiss, holding on as I demand everything from him. He gives it to me, further settling his weight on me and rocking his hips.

Electricity arcs up my back, and a crack of lightning illuminates the sky outside.

“You taste sweet.” Like caramel.

“You taste like home,” Saeran breathes out.

My gut clenches at the words. I’m missing so many pieces, and I can see them jagged and broken in his bright-blue eyes. “Stand up for me.”

His pants sit low on his hips, the undone buttons no longer keeping them in place. Black briefs underneath, of course. I skim fingers across the skin above his waistband, and his breath catches. So responsive to me that I’m the one that feels like a king.

My lips trace over his flat stomach—soft and hairless—and I hook my fingers to slowly drag his clothes down, following the trajectory with kisses and long licks. I drag my tongue across exactly where I wanted to, the curve of his hip somehow even sweeter than the rest. Fingers find my hair again, tugging, not to lead but to hold on.

I stop when his cock is fully bared to me, hard and leaking. Will he taste sweet there too? I've never cared enough to wonder about it before now.

My large hand engulfs him obscenely, and I'm salivating in anticipation. Tilting his length toward me, I give the tip an experimental lick.

He cries out, knees buckling. He holds tighter to my head to keep himself upright, all but covering me.

Sweet doesn't even begin to describe the taste of him. A perfect blend of bitter and sweetness along with hints of something entirely him. Musky and delicious. Sucking on the head gives me more of his sticky essence, and it coats my mouth. What will it feel like when he comes in my mouth?

Saeran makes unintelligible noises, rocking his hips and clenching and unclenching in my hair.

"That's it, let me hear you," I whisper before swallowing him down completely. His cry surrounds us, and he bends forward, chest against the top of my head. Sliding an arm around his waist, I encourage him to get as close as he can. He doesn't stretch my mouth to its limit, giving me more room to curl my tongue around him and explore every bump and vein.

I don't need to have done this before to know the mechanics of it. Or how to pay attention to Saeran's reactions. Suction makes him groan. He likes it when I play with his balls. Likes it more when I roll them in my mouth.



It's easier to suck him with my hands on his ass, holding him in place for my pleasure. By the time I find a nice, steady rhythm, he's begging and cursing me in equal measures.

"Please—please, Gluttony—I'm so close—I need to—"

My pace doesn't change. The swollen, well-used throbbing in my mouth is too fucking good. He doesn't need to tell me he's close; he's leaking like a broken tap, and I'm licking up every drop of it.

Saeran lets out a surprised, strangled cry when I take him to the floor in one swift move. Without letting his dick out of my mouth, I spread him out on the thick carpet. He immediately wraps his legs around my shoulders, squirming and pushing up into me.

I squeeze an ass cheek, using the hold as leverage to lift him up so I can bob on him faster, speeding up to get him where I want him: coming for me.

He's repeating my name like a litany, like it's all he remembers in his mindless need. Even when there's nothing else left, I'm still there.

The first press of my thumb against his entrance sends him skyrocketing. Thunder rumbles outside, more lightning turning the night to day. A strike hits beside Saeran's head as he comes.

Saeran writhes on the floor, heels digging into my back. I continue sucking him, determined to lick him clean and not waste any of it. I'm glad that I've never done this with anyone else. This belongs to us alone.

I keep the tip of my thumb inside him, even when I pull off and lick up and down his shaft. Getting him used to me. He may have had my dick inside him before, but it's

been a long time.

An ugly thought occurs to me.

I tug at Saeran, getting him completely under me in a split second, my hips anchoring his to the floor. “We’ve been apart a long time.”

He stares at me without comprehension, his eyes foggy glass. Lost to the pleasure I’m giving him. He eventually nods. “Yes,” he says hoarsely. The pain is a physical entity between us, a shadow that’s been strangling him.

“How many people have you been with during that time?”

How many people do I have to kill?

His eyes widen, and he reaches for me, nails raking my vest. “No one.” His hands fist, twisting fabric. “No one,” he repeats. “It’s only you. I could never—it’s only you.”

There’s nothing but truth in his earnest expression, beseeching me to believe him.

Maybe I am as much a fool as Lust and Wrath. Because I do believe him. I have no reason to, not when he’s done nothing but lie to me at every turn since we met. Even so, I’m willing to leap without knowing where I’ll land.

Hauling him to me, I fuse our lips together. He arches into it with a sweet gasp, his hands tugging at my clothing. It doesn’t take us long to get me naked and to carry Saeran to the bed. Seeing him on my sheets, naked, his whole body vibrating with how much he needs me, awakens a raw desire to possess. To own.

He’s another gift to me.

He looks at me like I'm the answer to all his questions, the medicine for all his ails, his savior. I could get used to that. Something that's mine alone, without stipulations.

I'll keep him safe, like I do with everything that belongs to me. I don't break anything that's mine. Only everything else.

Saeran spreads his legs, beckoning me forward. "I want to touch you."

"When I'm ready." It's my turn, first. I'm not done feasting on him. "Don't move."

Without waiting for a reply, I lean in to lick at his collarbone, dragging my tongue over the bone. Then to his nipples to give them more attention. I love the way they fit in my mouth, how they feel between my teeth.

Saeran arches his back. "Ngh. Gluttony."

He doesn't follow up my name with anything, and I grin, tugging at the pebbled nub before continuing, kissing every inch of him. I've never wanted to savor or hoard anything more.

He squirms under me when I tongue at his belly button, and I have to hold him down, hands spanned over his slim hips.

I take my time, skirting around where he's hardening again already. Grazing my beard across his inner thighs has him a trembling mess, his legs falling open to give me more room. His small keening cries and pleading almost make me change my mind about going slow. Almost.

We have all the time in the world. The finish line isn't the point, only the destination.

"Please, can I—I want to—"

“Put your hands in my hair.”

He moves instantly, a pulling sting erupting in my scalp. He tugs hard as I nip at his sensitive flesh. I could do this for hours, soaking him in to enjoy every sound that he makes. Try new things and see what other sounds I can bring out.

By the time I’m done exploring, going all the way to his ankles and back up, he’s panting, his toes curling in the sheets and my name an agonized whisper on his lips.

Fisting his now fully hard cock, I shift to grab lube from the nightstand. I don’t often need it, but it makes my infrequent solo sessions more pleasant. There’s plenty left, and what I’m about to do with it is going to be a hell of a lot more pleasant.

Saeran bites his bottom lip, watching me with his intense blue eyes. He doesn’t watch me like he’s waiting for me to be someone, to turn back time and have me be the version that remembers our vast history.

He’s watching me like a man in love whose dreams have come true.

I can’t resist moving up to kiss him, biting gently on that bottom lip myself and drinking deep of all the whines rising from the back of his throat.

A crackle of thunder echoes loudly in the room, and lightning hits the nightstand, then another on the carpet. Physical manifestations of my emotions. I’ve never seen it quite like this. A reaction purely born from Saeran.

“Spread for me.” I lift under his knee to encourage him to move where I want him. He reaches for me at the same time, and I allow it, his palm warm against my chest. He needs the constant contact, and so do I.

I skim his hole with my thumb, and he lets out a sharp, “ Ah! ”

“Sensitive?” I do it again, taking in his face as I add pressure. He doesn’t try to shield how it feels, expression open, guileless. He kept so much from me at the start, and now there’s nothing but pure unadulterated truth. Everything open.

Lifting a leg even higher, I get my first look at the place I plan to bury myself very soon. He’s so fucking small. If I was more ignorant about sex, I’d wonder how I’ll fit. If I’ll fit. Being a virgin in this lifetime doesn’t mean I don’t know what I’m doing. Impossible to share a home with Lust and his parties and not have a pretty good idea of how it all works.

His tight muscles spasm when I drizzle lube over him, spreading it around and pushing some inside. Our eyes meet in a heated stare, and nails scratch at my chest, leaving their mark.

My finger disappears into him, all the way to the third knuckle. He’s so fucking hot and tight, and I can’t wait to feel it around my cock. A storm brews in his eyes, arcs of lightning, like he’s drawing magic directly from me.

It continues to rage—both in the blue of his gaze and outside—as I slowly slide in and out of him, getting him ready for a larger intrusion. He clutches my wrist in an attempt to make me go faster.

Leaning over him, I brace my free hand next to his head and hover, still fucking him with one finger. At my pace. “I’m in control here.”

Saeran rotates his hips, still silently demanding more. “I need you.”

“You have me.” There’s no letting go. Not now.

I add a second finger, and he throws his head back with a guttural groan. “More, Gluttony. Please .”

“Soon,” I soothe. I’m enjoying the way he begs, the way he’s squeezing me. Too much so to rush this. Besides, he needs thorough preparation to take me, so that I can slide in nice and easy.

Dragging him into another kiss, I swallow all his sounds while I stretch him, speeding up and slowing down. He moans at the addition of a third finger. So damn responsive to me. His legs hook around the middle of my back, and he rises, meeting me thrust for thrust. He tries to pull away from my kiss, and I don’t let him, dominating his mouth along with the rest of him.

I’ll give him what he wants. When I’m ready.

Pulling my fingers out, I lift him up to straddle my bent legs, gliding my cock up and down his crease. The lube already there helps the friction, but it’s not enough. We’re going to need more.

He clings to my neck, and I lift him one-handed, using the other to coat my cock generously.

“Are you ready?” I don’t need his answer; he’s been greedy for me from the moment I put my hands on him. He’s been mine from the very beginning.

“Forever,” he gasps, burying his head in my shoulder, teeth digging into my skin. “I’ve been waiting forever.”

Good answer.

I don’t enter him straightaway. Instead, I line myself up, my cockhead pushing against his entrance with teasing strokes over his hole and along his crease. It leads to more gorgeous begging in my ear. I could listen to it all night. He tries to force me inside, hands gripping so tightly to my scalp that it stings.

With a chuckle, I turn my head, cheek against his temple. “Do you want something?”

“You. All of you. Please,” he breathes out, unashamed of the naked need in his tone. He wants me so badly he’s shaking with it. I’m at the end of my patience too.

Our mouths hover, breath mingling. The lightning is an almost constant now as I lower him onto me. Matching our rapid heartbeats.

Fuck me . He’s tighter than I imagined, holding onto my dick like a vice. He moans, lips brushing mine. He stills once he’s fully seated as if the urgency is suddenly gone. I’m in no hurry either. I haven’t known him nearly as long as he’s known me, and this still feels like I’ve waited forever too.

Mine.

Grasping his neck, I pull his head back so that I can see his eyes again. They look fucking incredible with the streaks of lightning making the blue that much brighter. I lift his hips, sliding almost all the way out and then down again, feeling every inch of him in excruciating detail.

Saeran gets the hint, his thighs locking in mine as he keeps up the pace. I can’t look away from him, the dark flush on his cheeks, the shimmering color of his wings in my periphery. He’s magnificent, and he belongs to me.

He relaxes in my arms, trusting me implicitly when I take him to his back, stretching over him. It gives me a different angle, and I take advantage with slow, hard thrusts. His breath hitches every time I bury myself to the hilt.

“You like that? Feel good?” I mouth at his jaw, creeping down to his throat to bite down on his pulse point. His cock twitches between us, and a broken, unintelligible noise that’s all raw emotion spills out of his mouth.

“Answer me, Saeran.”

Nails scrape at my shoulders, hips meeting mine on every thrust. “There’s nothing—nothing like it. It’s everything. Don’t stop.”

I do the opposite, speeding up and changing my angle again. Nothing short of him saying a resounding “no” could stop me now. There should be a nerve—right there.

Saeran screams, coming a second time as I ruthlessly drive against his prostate. Need to put that sound in a music box. One to listen to when we do this again.

Gathering him close, I cover his body with my own, all his limbs holding me tight and locking us together. Every snap of my hips hurtles me toward the inevitable end. The only reason I don’t slow down and prolong it further is because I know there’ll be a next time. And a next. And a next.

He writhes underneath me, and I capture his lips, tongues tangling as I desperately seek my own release. The thunder cracks outside, louder now. Lightning keeping the room lit up. Constant groans sit between us, and I can’t tell if they’re mine or his. My eyes squeeze shut when pleasure races over me, balls drawing in tight.

“Yes, please, please, please,” Saeran begs breathlessly.

This time I give him exactly what he wants, my orgasm hitting me like a freight train. Lightning hits the pillow beside Saeran’s head, disintegrating it. Another hits the edge, splitting wood. A surge of energy pulses out of us, breaking shelves, bursting lights, and shattering the windows into a million shards. Echoes of destruction cascading through the mansion filter to us.

How far did the energy go?



Saeran pulls me in for a lazy kiss, and I indulge him, needing to remain close to him just as much.

“I missed you, so much,” Saeran whispers, cracked words that linger. Centuries of pain and hurt that won’t so easily be mended.

I don’t know how, but I find that I’ve missed him too.

A strange noise close by drags my attention away from him. The sphere that Saeran gave me, the one that needed a key.

It’s open.

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:07 am*

Saeran

It took years for Gyro not to search every room in a building for him, sparking electricity as if playing a game. Excepting him to appear, and shoot her that grin that's never failed to make me weak for him. Even I still do it with her sometimes, because my heart needs to make sure. Just in case.

I should have expected that. Of course, the key is tied to us. And it explains why I haven't been able to open it myself. It needed both our energies.

Gluttony stays in bed, stretched out languidly while I retrieve it. My mouth drops open in surprise when I spy the contents. Oh .

“What is it?” Gluttony asks, sitting up and leaning against the backboard. “Show it to me.”

Crawling across the bed, I straddle his hips and pull out the necklace nuzzled inside. The scales rest heavy in my palm, with a low hum of static. The tattoos on my cheek light up, warming my face. Gluttony tracks it with interest and then trails his fingers over the lines.

“You're reacting to it. Yours?”

“No, it's yours.” Just like Lust's locket and Deacon's tattoo, it's the physical manifestation of our connection. It makes us both stronger and keeps up entwined. My tattoos remained, but I thought this was lost with him. He would have been wearing it when he was killed. He never took it off.

“Put it on me.”

Resting the empty orb beside me, I carefully lift the chain over his head until the scales are resting on his chest. Right where they should have been all along.

“The music box had scales as well,” Gluttony muses. “What’s the significance? I assume there is one.”

I kiss him softly, lingering before saying, “Balance.” I curl my fingers around the scales, the warmth of his skin against my knuckles. “Dark and light. Day and night. You represent balance.”

Gluttony snorts in surprise. “Since when?”

I smile at the disbelief in his words. I understand his nature better than he does. What it was before this place twisted it. “Since always. You expected everything from our court, but you gave everything in return. Every gift that I gave you, you returned the sentiment in spades. You showed me every day that I was yours.” I never once felt anything less than cherished and loved. Gluttony doesn’t look at me now with the same level of devotion, one built from years of being together. But there are hints, the potential for growth. It will come back, I know it will. That kind of comfort takes time.

If we survive that long.

“What’s that look for?” He cups my cheek and forces me to look at him, a warm hand curving around my back.

“The Light are—”

“Tomorrow’s problem.” He urges me forward, slanting his lips over mine. When his

tongue slides across my bottom lip, I open for him, letting him in. Being back in his arms again is intoxicating, and I can finally breathe again. Live again. “The only thing you should be thinking about right now is getting back on my dick and taking me for a ride.”

I can't say no to that. He's already hard and ready for me, and I'm still dripping with him, my ass slick and open. I easily take him inside, filling me so full I can feel it in my heart. There's nothing like this, having him this close and taking over every one of my senses. I'm afraid that I'll wake up and find this was just a dream, a fantasy conjured in my sleep.

He kisses me slowly, and I rock on him, in no hurry this time. The worst of the desperation has been tempered. It will rise again, of course, but knowing that Gluttony will sate the hunger inside me whenever I need it makes all the difference. I won't be starved for millennia. Not anymore.

I never let go of his necklace, and by the time I bring us to a slow, powerful climax, my hair has completely extended, braid hanging low on my back. Gluttony holds tight to it, using it to thrust up into me. I fall asleep just like that, in his lap, with him still buried deep. I haven't been so content in a long time.

A KNOCK AT THE door abruptly wakes me, and I have psychic energy hovering above my hand in an instant, rising into a crouch without thought. Even after being deprived of the full strength of it, my body remembers the depths of my magic. It's as easy as walking, breathing, eating.

Gluttony chuckles beside me. “Easy there,” he says, running knuckles up my back. “It's just Lust.”

Now that he's said that, I can tell that he's right. Lust's energy is right on the other side of the door. Probably a good thing he knocked. I can't remember the last time I

felt this alive, this brimming with energy and magic. My wings are all but vibrating on my back, and I'm almost overflowing with it. Not back to one hundred percent but so much closer than ever. A formidable ally again. Able to protect Gluttony. Protect the ones that rely on me.

And without the guilt of having sacrificed them for it. Us joining hasn't brought the attention of the Light. They already had their sights set on me and mine. They know, and it has nothing to do with my connection to Gluttony. Emrys got so close to the other Dark who are still alive that it was inevitable he would find me. We've always been drawn to one another, all the Seven Sons and their guardians.

Gluttony tugs me back against his chest, covering us with a sheet before he tells Lust to enter.

Lust glances around at the room and the broken furniture. "I take it that was your doing?"

"I heard what happened when you and Deacon had sex the first time, so you can shove that judgment up your ass."

"I don't believe that Deacon and I destroyed half of the building," Lust replies dryly.

I can't hide my wince. I knew it would be powerful, but that doesn't mean I don't feel bad for the destruction. Gluttony caresses my shoulder and then kisses the curve.

"It'll fix. What do you want, Lust?"

"There have been numerous situations all over the city and across America." He turns to me. "We've confirmed some are from Virtus, possibly purging some of their facilities, including the one we found the other day. Others are... interesting. Deliberate."

“What kind of deliberate?” Gluttony asks. His hands moves under the sheet, and I grasp his wrist before he can go further. He’s not touching my dick while his brother is in the room.

“Messages, though I can’t even begin to work out what they’re meant to convey. I can only assume they’re Light Fae, based on the magic used. Unless you and yours are into public destruction for the fun of it?”

I shake my head wordlessly. We’re not into drawing attention to ourselves. The Light move quickly. Why send messages, though? Why not kill us outright? “Do you have visuals?”

Lust gestures with his head. “Get dressed and meet us in the kitchen.” He leaves without another word.

I raise a brow at Gluttony. “The kitchen again?”

Gluttony shrugs. “We get hungry when we’re strategizing.” He stretches, impressive chest twisting. Seemingly in no hurry. “Do you think they’re after you already?”

“I guarantee it.” No matter how powerless I was and am even now, I’m still a threat in their eyes. They won’t stop until I’m dead. And then they’ll start a hunt to ensure I really am the last one.

Gluttony drags me into a long kiss, and only when my brain has switched off completely does he let go to get out of the bed. He walks naked over to the door leading to his bathroom and then looks over his shoulder. “Time to shower, Saeran.”

I almost trip in the sheets in my haste to go to him.

It doesn’t take him long to have me sandwiched against the glass, thrusting deep, my

screams echoing off the tiling. I'll never get enough of this.

I refuse to lose it again.

ENVY, GREED, WRATH, LUST , and Deacon are all waiting for us in the kitchen when we finally get there. None of them are surprised by our lateness, though Envy does give me a wicked grin before offering me some bread.

“No, thank you,” I say politely. Envy shrugs and shoves my slice into his mouth. He's wearing cupcake pajama bottoms and a bright-orange tank top, with “marry me” written on it. His pink bear slippers with floppy ears, tucked under him where he's sitting cross-legged on his chair, complete the look. I remember the bright clothes he once wore, scandalizing some of the older Fae. It makes my heart happy to see that he hasn't changed at all.

Though the dark lines under his eyes worry me. As does the way he winces every so often, and his head turns like someone is talking to him. The dead speaking and taunting. He shouldn't be allowing them this close without his permission. That he can't control them to that level is a frightening prospect.

My gaze moves to Greed, wearing a pair of dark sunglasses, and I know I can't stay silent. “I need to tell you something.”

An eyebrow raises above the line of his glasses. “Perhaps introductions first? Saeran, right?”

Oh. Right. He doesn't know me. For a moment, I'd almost forgotten that I'm in a roomful of what amounts to total strangers. It felt for a moment like I'd been transported back in time.

“Yes. Sorry. It's been a while.” This isn't the most awkward conversation I've ever

had, but it's up there.

Envy snickers beside me and then kicks out a chair. "Sit down, man, you're making the place look untidy. What did you want to tell him?"

Part of me wants to go back to the awkward part of the conversation. Clenching my hands into fists on my lap, I stir up the courage to just get it out. "When we were attacked, and you were killed, I thought you had all died. I thought I was the only one left. It turns out I was wrong, and that one of our own is still out there."

"One of our own?" Wrath asks. "What does that mean? There are only seven Sins."

"His name is Emrys." I glance at Greed, so tense that I'm surprised I haven't turned into stone. Gluttony sits beside me, so close I can feel his body heat. He squeezes my hip, letting me know that he's here. That helps more than he knows. "He's Light Fae, but he was one of us. Your other half."

Greed frowns, the colors moving in his gaze, visible even through the glasses. "My what?"

Envy leans over the table and pats his hand. "I'll explain later. You missed a lot."

"Apparently."

"You want some bread?"

"Sure." Greed takes the offered slice and the jar of strawberry jelly.

"He's not here, though," Lust says. He slides his plate with a peanut butter sandwich to Deacon, who bites into it without a word. I deliberately look away from that side of the table. "Why didn't he come back with you?"



He's always known how to get to the heart of everything.

"Well?" Greed asks, insistent. "Where is he, this 'other half' of mine?" He looks around as if Emrys will somehow materialize out of thin air. Unfortunately, none of us want that.

"He's with the Light. He... had something to do with the night we lost everything. I don't know what, I didn't get time to ask him. He left quickly." A good thing, too, since he could have killed me with one snap of his fingers. I'd gotten lucky. Very lucky.

"It's safe to say that he's not on our side and poses a great threat to our survival." I can't disguise the thickness in my throat. Emrys. Our enemy. I can't process it properly.

"You know, I think we have great taste in men," Envy says dryly. "Deacon tried to kill Lust, Saeran's been deliberately hiding from us for centuries, Conor is on a crusade to wipe us all out, and Greed's asshole was one of the main players that destroyed us in the first place. Good job, guys, we're doing great. Four out of seven is a passing mark."

I want to argue with him, but I can't. None of it is a lie. We're not exactly covering ourselves in glory.

"Stop running your mouth," Lazarus says with a roll of his eyes.

"Conor is not one of ours," Wrath snarls. "Once we find him, we're killing him."

"You're not," Deacon says angrily, looking ready to fight. I imagine they've had this conversation more than a few times already.

“I don’t even know who this Emrys is. Can it be counted as my taste in men when I haven’t even met the guy?” Greed’s mouth tips sideways. “Seems a little unfair to lump me in there.”

“Not in this lifetime, but you chose him once,” Envy points out.

“I still don’t think it counts.”

“That gives us a long list of enemies,” Lust says, lips flat. “What’s the plan here?”

“We need to find the rest of the Sins and your demons. If Virtus learn too much, we’ll be at even more of a disadvantage. Now that I’m... stronger”—I’m not ready to get into that; the last thing that we need is for the conversation to devolve into sex and ribbing—“I can help you pinpoint them better.”

“Like the orb you gave Gluttony earlier that Deacon used?”

“Sort of.” I won’t need the orb now, though it will definitely be useful. “Where is it?”

“I have it,” Gluttony says with a scowl. “He’s not getting it back.”

With a small secretive smile, I rub his thigh, comforting. I would never ask him to give up his gifts. The only reason I did before was because I had no other choice. There was no way I could get it into Deacon’s hands without going through Gluttony. It was the only way to ensure they actually used it and didn’t simply discard it.

“Does it still work?” I ask.

“No,” Deacon answers. “It went dormant and wouldn’t respond to me. Like it was out of power.”

I'm not even sure where to start with my brother and how to sift through all the feelings he brings up in me. Bracing myself, I turn to look at him. So familiar to me and yet a complete stranger. Even more than the others. There at least I have some history to draw from. "That sounds right. You'll need to inject more of your Fae magic into it, in order to get it working again. You can even do it yourself. I can show you how."

Gluttony tenses underneath me, and I squeeze. I'll give him ten times more gifts to make him feel better. Shower him with them every day until they spill out into the rest of the building. Until we have to build our own home again just to house them all.

"You're really going to train me?" Deacon asks, squinting suspiciously at me.

"I have to." The honest truth. If we can't get his wings out, we're all in trouble. The level of magic he has was never meant to be contained. It will start feeding on him from the inside. Luckily, he was always a fast learner, and it shouldn't take much. He just needs a push, one that only one of his own can give him.

Deacon grins, and he looks so much like my brother that my breath catches, pain in my chest. "When do we start?"

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 8:07 am*

Gluttony

“When I die, I want my remains mixed with yours and scattered underneath our favorite tree.” “You’re immortal.” “Don’t ruin my fantasy, Gluttony.” “Your fantasy is for us to die?” “Of course not. I’m just saying that if it happens, that’s what I want. For the remainder of my body to be forever tied with yours. Don’t you want that?” “Wherever you are, I’ll be there too.”

“Again.”

Deacon scowls at Saeran and wipes the blood from the corner of his mouth. “Are you fucking kidding me?”

“No,” Saeran answers coldly. “You’re not nearly strong enough for what’s coming. Get up, and try again.”

“If you wanted to kill me, slicing me with that sword would be quicker,” Deacon mutters.

Saeran’s lips quirk.

Tiernan snorts from where he’s standing on the other side of the training area, opposite where I’m standing near the door.

“What the fuck is that noise for?” Deacon asks, turning on the other Fae. The two of them have been on rocky footing for days, and I’m looking forward to when it all eventually comes to a head. There’s clearly some history there that Deacon has no

idea about.

“Saeran is a master at the bow. He’s”—he makes a so-so gesture with his hand—“with the sword. And he’s still kicking your ass.”

“I’ll try not to be offended by that,” Saeran says dryly. He looks stronger again today, his wings bright and spread out while he taunts his brother. He’s shirtless, only wearing soft black pants and going barefooted. He looks so fucking sexy I want to bend him over right here and reacquaint myself with how good he feels. It doesn’t matter how many times I get my hands on him, every time leaves me wanting more. I’m well and truly addicted and need my regular fix.

“You were a terrible student,” Tiernan replies, crossing his arms over his chest. “Should I tell some stories?”

“I’d rather you didn’t.”

“And you’re giving me shit?” Deacon asks incredulously.

“I was a terrible student at fourteen, Daithí. So were you. I learned. You need to learn again.”

“I hate that there’s this whole life I had that I don’t remember.”

Pain flits across Saeran’s gaze. I know what it’s for. He’s talked to me about how much it hurts that Deacon looks at him like a stranger. About the experiences they once had together that Deacon no longer remembers. It’s not like I’m not in the same boat. He tells me about our life together, but none of it triggers any memories for me. Nothing overtly familiar, and nothing is coming back. Whoever took them did a good job.

I’ll find a way to get them back.

“Again,” Saeran says, his tone brooking no argument. As soft as he is in bed with me, pliable and under my command, he’s a hard taskmaster as a trainer. It gets me so hot it’s difficult to stay standing where I am instead of dragging him out of the room to have my wicked way with him.

Deacon snarls and readies himself. Even I can tell his stance is still all wrong. He’s too defensive and tense, not properly listening to Saeran’s instructions. He’ll learn after he hits the floor a couple more dozen times. Maybe. He’s not all that smart.

“You’re unbalanced.”

“I’m fine.”

Saeran shrugs nonchalantly, looking so effortlessly powerful. Every time I look at him, I fall harder. It might not be what it used to be, but I think we’re getting there. It grows every day, faster than I could have imagined. “Alright,” he says. “If you want to spend the rest of the day on the floor, who am I to deny you?”

Deacon rushes him, and it takes all of five seconds for Saeran to trip him and knock him flat on his back, smacking his hip with the flat of his sword.

“You’re unbalanced,” Saeran repeats. “Shift your left leg back further, bend your knees. Distribute your weight evenly. And anticipate my movements.”

“You want me to solve world hunger at the same time?” Deacon asks sarcastically. “I know how to fight.”

Saeran twirls the hilt of the sword in his palm. “Humans. You know how to fight humans. You might be able to hold a gun and aim, but those coming for us are not human. They don’t play by your rules. They have power you can’t even imagine, and they’re coming here to wipe you out. There’s no negotiation, no kidnapping. Conor wants to talk to you, and he has a purpose we don’t understand. They also want to

learn about the Sins and their demons and what they can do and how, which means they won't kill first, ask questions later. The Light? Their only purpose is to kill us all. And you must be ready."

Deacon's lips flatten, determination in the curve of his jaw. "I'll be ready."

"Then stop and think. Again."

The door opens behind me, and Lust quietly takes a spot beside me. "How are they doing?"

"Depends who you ask," I reply in amusement. It's vastly entertaining for me at the very least. And I don't mind watching Saeran own Lust's boy toy. "Where have you been?"

"Looking into the two locations that Saeran gave us. He's quite handy when he's actively on our side." Lust's mouth lifts at the corner. "We've also finished the repairs on all the windows and have almost replaced all the broken décor, in case you were wondering."

"I wasn't." Worth it. "What about the locations?"

Lust leans back against the wall, not taking his eyes off Deacon. Who's at least listening better now; it's taking Saeran longer to knock him on his ass. Or find a vulnerable spot and mimic slicing him into pieces. "Greed and Wrath are looking at one, and Envy and Lazarus have taken the other."

"Is it smart to send them by themselves?" With everything going on, we have to be smarter than that.

"They aren't alone, Gluttony. They've equipped themselves with our special weaponry and taken three teams of soldiers with them. If they find resistance, they'll

be prepared. Besides, it's just reconnaissance right now."

"You armed them to the teeth, and it's 'just' reconnaissance?" Sounds like overkill to me.

"They have orders not to go inside. We're trying to find out what's drawing Saeran's magic there, and then we'll decide what to do next."

"If Raven's inside, do you really think that Lazarus will simply leave?"

"I trust him to make the right judgment and keep Envy safe."

As much animosity as the two have for each other, and how derisively Lazarus treats our youngest brother, there's no doubting that he'd sacrifice himself to keep Envy safe. "What do you think about what Saeran said?"

"Your Fae has said a lot of things, Gluttony. What specifically are you talking about?"

Asshole already knows exactly what I'm talking about. "Envy and Lazarus."

Lust frowns, sadness crossing his expression. "I don't know what to think. There's no path forward that won't hurt them all. We can't even be sure that Saeran is correct in this regard."

Wishful thinking, or does he actually believe that? Saeran knows better than all of us how this works, and more importantly, why it works. If Envy and Lazarus are meant to be—fated, the same as Lust and Deacon, and Saeran and I—then Raven is about to be in a world of pain. And Lazarus is a stubborn son of a bitch who loves his husband. There's no telling how this will end.

"Put your sword down," Saeran says, tossing his own to the side. "Let's try



something else.”

Deacon cautiously places his next to Saeran’s, like he’s waiting for the punchline. Saeran doesn’t strike me as the sucker punch kind of person. Deacon could still get smacked in the face, but he’ll see it coming.

Saeran lifts his hand, palm up, and a translucent silvery ball appears, moving like melted silver in a lava lamp. I saw him do it the morning after we had sex the first time.

“What the fuck is that?” Deacon asks, taking a step backward and almost tripping in his haste.

“Psychic energy,” Saeran says, bouncing it a few times. Then he throws it, hard. It hits the far wall, creating a deep hole.

Lust pinches the bridge of his nose. “Do I need to hire a live-in carpenter to handle the damage you two seem prone to?”

“Probably.”

“Fuck me,” Deacon breaths out, mouth open as he stares at the damage. “Can I do that?”

“If you concentrate, yes. All Dark Fae can do it.” Saeran creates another ball but keeps it close instead of flinging it around. Something about him using his magic has me so fucking hard and aching for him. I want to carry him back to our room and get him fully naked.

“I can smell you, you know,” Lust says lazily, a self-satisfied smirk on his face.

“What?” Oh. “Considering some of the places that you and Deacon have sex, you

have zero room to be looking at me all smug like that.” At least we’ve kept it to our suite.

“I wasn’t looking at you like anything.”

Bullshit.

“It’s a part of you,” Saeran explains, flipping his hand so the ball hovers above it. “You can feel it inside.”

“Seriously? That’s your advice? Look inside yourself?” Deacon looks unimpressed.

Saeran tosses the ball to his opposite hand. “Stop being a smartass and concentrate. Close your eyes and push out with your mind. Think about the ocean, the trees: nature. We’re tied to it on an intrinsic level. It wants to be one with you; let it.”

Deacon rolls his eyes before he closes them. “Fine. This better work,” he bites out sharply.

“That entirely depends on you and whether you want to continue being a belligerent student.”

Tiernan stifles a laugh.

“I can’t decide who I feel sorrier for,” Lust says wryly. “I’m glad that Deacon is getting the training that he needs. Saeran will be good for him, teach him things we would never have been able to. Considering that he goes back to long before we came over from the shroud, his expertise and experience will be invaluable.”

Small specs of the melted silvery energy appear around Deacon’s hand, and then he falters. The energy disappears, and he drops to one knee. Lust is at his side instantly, getting there before even Saeran can.

“Deacon?”

“My back—it hurts.”

“His shirt, get it off,” Saeran says immediately.

Lust doesn’t hesitate, ripping it in half and letting the fabric fall to the ground. There are two jagged scars running down Deacon’s back, bracketing his spine. Fresh and bleeding.

“What is it?” Deacon asks. “Get it off.”

Saeran laughs, and it’s a beautiful, almost carefree sound. “You can’t get it off. Just give it a second. The pain won’t last long; they’re trying to come out.”

“What is?” Deacon tries to twist and see what it is, to no avail. Does he think he can turn his head one hundred eighty degrees or something? Idiot.

Wings emerge through the slits, blood running down the grooves of Deacon’s back. The wings themselves are identical to Saeran’s, shimmering colors and the shape of a butterfly’s. Lust runs his knuckles down one, and Deacon shivers, back arching comically to get away from the touch.

“Ow! Stop that!”

“Sensitive, love?” Lust asks, pulling his hand back.

“Did I—are those my wings?” Deacon turns enough to see the edges of them, drooped over on the mat. “How do they—are they—did they grow alright?”

“They’re perfect,” Lust assures him. “A little bloody, but we can wash them once they aren’t so vulnerable and new.”

“Wasn’t expecting that to happen so quickly, but I shouldn’t be surprised,” Saeran says with a fond smile. “You always picked things up faster than me.”

Deacon glares at him. “You couldn’t have told me that earlier? Especially after all that crap about being a lousy student, and the shit you’ve been giving me for days ?”

Saeran’s smile widens, turning a little wicked. “Can’t have you getting a big head.”

Something in the way he says it makes Deacon pause. “We’re really brothers, aren’t we?”

Saeran doesn’t look away from Deacon, eyes locked. He takes a long moment to answer, and I know he’s struggling with his emotions. “Yeah. We are.”

Deacon lets out a breath. “Will they stay like this all the time?”

“Give them a day or two, minimum, before you stimulate them too much. When you’re ready, I’ll show you how to hide them, and how to use them. They aren’t just pretty ornaments.”

“Do you need help standing?” Lust asks, gently grasping under Deacon’s elbow. Deacon takes hold of Lust’s bicep, and together they get him upright.

Saeran sways toward me, and I tug him the rest of the way into my arms. He doesn’t say anything as Lust fusses over Deacon, or when they share a sweet kiss.

“Saeran?” I whisper in his ear. He’s in emotional pain, and I can feel it.

“I’m fine. He’s happy, and he has Lust. That’s all I need for him.”

So selfless. It’s time he stops sacrificing pieces of himself for everyone else. I kiss his temple, lingering and breathing in the subtle, fruity scent of his hair. It grounds me.

His entire presence does. I'm more content than I've ever been, having him in my space and in my home. He belongs here, with me. This was all inevitable from the moment he came to me, hiding in the shadows.

He's always belonged to me.

"What happens now?" I ask, nuzzling Saeran's neck. "You're back to full strength, and Deacon got his wings. Ready to go to war?" I'm only half joking.

"No! I'm not even close to full strength, that will take time. And Deacon getting his wings is only the start of his training." He looks up at me, the tips of his fingers lightly caressing my beard and then down to the scales hanging around my neck. "This is going to get worse. And it may not ever get better."

He's too focused on his previous losses. This is a different time, and we're all different people. Not to mention, we know they're coming this time, and we're prepared. They won't catch us unawares like they did before. "We'll be fine." No one is getting through me.

"The Light are coming for us, and if we're not ready when they do, we're all going to die."

I can hear the unspoken word that he holds close to chest.

Again.

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Envy, Book 3 in the Seven Deadly Sins series, is available for preorder [here](#).