

*twelve years ago ...*

Sydero's focus was unwavering as she slowly approached the giant statue before her. She wasn't too young to believe that she should fear the figure coming to life, but nor was she old enough to totally dismiss it. She wasn't human, growing up in a world where many believed that the supernatural was just another bedtime story told to young children to let their minds soar. To further her own fear, she knew there was a devil, though she had never personally met the fallen angel she was supposed to revere. But if he was real ... then who's to say God wasn't? Wouldn't it only make sense?

She plopped down, her mind buckling along with her knees as her small frame gazed up at the mighty marble statue. She hadn't been in many churches, but this one, by far, took the cake. Whether that was because people just had an odd way of showing God their love, or because the church got lucky with gaining an artistic and willing patron. Shiny tile flooring, murals telling stories on the dome-shaped ceilings, and stain-glassed windows fracturing the little light from outside. The sun perfectly hitting the statue to cause the marble to produce just enough of a shine to make the figure seem even more ethereal.

"I ... I don't know how to start this," Syd said underneath her breath, "frankly, I don't even know if I'm supposed to be talking to you. See, I've never prayed before, and I'm not exactly one of your beloved children. But ... I heard that you're forgiving and that you ... I don't know." She gazed at the statue's feet, trying to hold in tears and failing pitifully, "my brother says I'm a monster, and I think my mom agrees. And ... and I don't want to be a monster. I try to do good things, I really do, but I ..." Her voice trailed off as his words replayed in her mind, screaming at her to go away. She did, though not by choice, and when she returned, she learned that they had gone away too.

"I just wish I had a sign, something to show me that there's a way to fix this, to fix myself. I don't want to be like this anymore," she sobbed, her body shaking as she sat on the floor. She heard the sound of the door opening behind her, heavy footsteps rubbing against the floor as the person approached.

"Child? Are you lost? What is the matter?" she turned to see a man dressed in heavy robes gazing down at her in worry. She wiped some of the tears away and pointed up to the man.

"I was hoping for ... something." He nodded in understanding, sitting on the closest pew as he too gazed up at the statue.

“He doesn’t always answer us immediately. Instead, he chooses to answer us when he knows we need it the most.”

“Well, I need it now,” she growled.

“Be patient. One thing I have learned from following in his guidance is that patience is a necessity. Trust in his guidance. Trust in your faith, lean on it in times of great struggle. He will lead you out of darkness, this I swear.” He stood and rested a hand on top of Sydero’s head, “but first, let us get you a warm bed and something to eat, hmm?” Sydero gazed up at him in thanks, knowing that it would be a while before she was able to come across things again. She turned to follow the priest out, a rare and small smile upon her face as she replayed his words.

*Be patient ... trust in your faith ...*

*What a load of utter shit.*

*Were you not patient?*

*Did you not trust in his guidance?*

*In your faith?*

Sydero pounded her fist against the coal toned walls that surrounded her on all four sides. Other than a sizeable peephole in one of the walls, the room had no discrepancies, showed no outside light. She didn’t remember how she got in here, besides her father and his pet demons dragging her from her room, but after that, everything went blank. She hardly could recall the question that echoed through her head in her father’s voice: what unites the seven princes?

She recalled her father asking her the question a while back, urging her on random occasions and she continued to get it wrong. Each time she did, he grew angrier, less patient. Perhaps this was her punishment for it.

“Father!” she shouted, pounding on the wall with the peephole, telling herself not to cry. What was the point? Was it normal for a twelve-year-old to be afraid of the dark? Especially when they spent their whole life practically surrounded by it? Maybe it wasn’t the darkness that caused the hair on her arm to stand, but then what? Sydero backed away from the wall, realizing that there was something on the other side, she looked through the peephole, only to

see a giant eye glancing back at her. She shrieked in fear, scrambling back as it watched her keenly. It twitched with life. If she moved left, it followed her, if she walked right, it followed her. What was this beast, and what did it want? It made no noise; it gave her no other signs of life other than its moving eye.

“Get me out of here!” Sydero screamed, of course, she received no answer. She went to the corner, farthest from the eye, her knees close to her chest as she prayed. Yet every word came out tainted. Every good intention and every last thread of hope, dipping itself in a pot of poison. She screamed. She screamed for the past few years and her stupidity. She cried for her cursed mother and brother, for her uncaring father, and her own horrible origins. She screamed at that statue and that ridiculous priest, at the notion that she, a cambion, could be loved by a force of good.

She pounded her fist on the wall until her hands were in pain, and she could feel the sheer liquid speed down her closed fists. Her head hit the hard ground as she laid there, hearing the breathing of whatever creature rested outside of the box that she was in. Fear and regret clawed at her defenses until they were able to get in. And they flooded her systems and her being, and there on that floor did she beg for death.

*When you struggled the most, did you not seek out his light and his hand?*

Hell had a tendency for moving at a much faster pace than the real world. A day in hell was an hour or so above, a week was maybe two days, and a month, was closer to a week. With that in mind, she felt as if she had been in here for years. The eye of the beast watched over her, though there were times where she would look over and notice it gone. Those were the times where she felt fear rattle her bones and nearly stop her heart. She could still hear its breathing, but where it lingered, she didn't know. She felt as if it would jump through the wall and grab her. It would rip her apart slowly, allowing every tear to be thought about. But before anything could happen, it would be back at the hole, its eye watching her.

She was going crazy, her body withering away as her only source of food was the stale air that she was breathing. She had begun to talk to herself, too afraid to speak to the eye. Her hatred festered, and horrifying images of those she wished to see suffer would plague her mind. Her powers now obeyed her, seeing as she had nothing else to do but improve them. But to what end? She would die in this box, and that eye would devour her.

Long has she thought about that question: what unites the seven princes? And no matter what answer she gave; it always was the wrong one. The answer was the key to leaving

this place, but that key seemed like a faraway thought. A grand quest needing to be completed for her to even learn of it.

Sydero rubbed at her eye, her body far too weak to do anything more as she laid there. Who would miss her? Who would even remember that she resided in this box? Her brother and mother cared not, and though that shouldn't bother her any longer, it did. Her father, well his love for her wasn't actually love. He had told her how important she was, but also said to her that her uncles had felt the same about their children. She wasn't the first, and if she didn't do everything right, then she wouldn't be the last.

So the answer was no one. No one would care for her disappearance. She was another speck riding the wind, to be deposited wherever the current felt it should drop her at. Her brother, her mother, her father, her uncles ... they were all the same. They cared only for themselves.

Sydero paused, her mind replaying her words. *They were all the same.* It was the answer that she had never understood, but now she did. The seven princes of hell were their own kind of sin: lust, gluttony, pride, wrath, sloth, greed, and envy. They were different, of course, but they were also the same. They had so many elements of themselves in the others that it almost made a sinner a sinner, it matters not which sin they partook in. A sinner partook in all.

And yet, even with the answer on the tip of her tongue, she had no energy. Her throat was dry, and it burned even when she thought about speaking. It was too late. Yet again, Sydero had managed to fail. It was a feeling she had become so acquainted with. Her eyes drifted closed, right as the eye of the beast disappeared, and a bright light was shown.

*But what does one expect from one born of those casted out of his great heavens? What does one expect from a monster? You'll never find that so called light.*

*present day ...*

"Blessed are those who seek shelter under the Lord's watchful eye. He guides us, my children, and as long as we seek that guidance, we will find ourselves at his side when our time comes." Sydero's eyes didn't stray from the statue as she slowly approached, ignoring the priest as he continued his sermon. Her matured amber eyes looking over the figure, attempting to spot at least one blemish. And yet, she could not, she couldn't find anything on that damn statue that wasn't there so many years ago. The priest had aged, the pews had been chipped, the murals above faded. And yet the statue hadn't shifted.

For a while, she had tried to live her life like she thought God wanted her too. A hard task when you didn't know what the silent spirit wanted. She believed that no matter what foul things became of her, she was following him, leaning on faith that was wrongly placed. After years of torture in hell itself, you soon figure out that God was never on your side. And if he was, then he had such a funny and cruel way of playing with his toys.

"Excuse me?" the priest asked, grabbing her attention, looking at her in worry, "are you alright, my child?"

She stared at the older man for a while before a smirk played across her face, her eyes going to the statue again. "You might not remember me priest, but I came in here approximately twelve years ago. Staring up at this statue and hoping for a sign. You told me to be devout, to trust my faith and be ... patient."

The priest smiled upon her gently, opening his arms to those in attendance, "I remember you, child. I helped her when she was younger. And here she is, a fellow child of God who has found her way to his light and –"

"Yea, I wouldn't say all that," Sydero interrupted, getting closer to the statue, suddenly it didn't seem so big and mighty, it almost seemed small.

"Can you ... can you get down from there?" the priest asked politely, but Sydero ignored him as she circled the statue.

"You see priest, I did what you said. I was **patient**, I reminded myself of my **faith**, and even in the darkest times of my life, I reminded myself that God **loves** me and would **help** me through. Only to realize far too late, it was a lie."

"Excuse me?"

"Tell me, priest. Someone devout watches their family die, gets tortured, and everything they ever knew suddenly disappears right in front of them." Sydero paused, turning to the priest who was now standing nearby. "Where is God in all that?"

"It is common to have doubts, but I assure you God is always at your side."

"God has a funny way of showing it. Seems more like a dick move to me." The audience gasped at her words, immediately clasping their hands together as they prayed for forgiveness. Sydero watched them, rolling her eyes as they mumbled.

“If you will continue to disrespect his name then I suggest you leave.”

“Oh, and what kind of message is that sending to all those who are in doubt? Can I not question?”

“You insult,” he hissed.

“Your great spirit cast out his most beloved angel with a shrug of the shoulders, I think he can deal with being called a dick.”

“I will ask you to leave.”

“And I will, Sydero responded her eyes connecting with the face of the statue. She didn’t have to concentrate hard on his face, the emotions plus her abilities made it quite effortless. A crack formed in the middle of the statue’s forehead before spreading, and before long, rupturing. It came crashing to the ground, the congregation gasping and screaming in shock. She stared at the rubble that now laid at her feet, kicking a piece of stone lazily.

She turned on her heel and headed towards the exit, ignoring the cries and prayers going up at the most recent events.

“I beg God to forgive you,” the priest yelled after her.

“Yea, fuck you and him,” Sydero snorted, throwing open the doors and leaving the church.

*So why not thrive in the darkness?*