

“Sydero!” Her eyes slowly open, her body stiffens, and a heart begins to thud heavily in her chest. She didn’t want to turn around, to ruin this one moment in time where she could imagine that everything would be okay. It always ended far too quickly for her, and as she has learned countless times, this was always the best part.

“Syd?” the voice questions again, this time closer, and she can feel their hand against her skin. And thus, the moment is gone. An odd sense of reality comes back to her as she opens her eyes and looks into Roe’s familiar eyes. The excitement she heard earlier in their voice is no longer portrayed on their face as they examine her in worry.

“Is it really you?” they whisper. They seek to cradle her face, and she allows it, her eyes moving from their hand to their face. She remains quiet despite the constant questioning on Roe’s part.

“Sydero, answer me. For fucks sake, say something.”

“Leave.”

“What?”

“You’re not real, leave.”

Roe’s face contorts into confusion, and Syd feels the uncertainty crawling up her spine. Maybe this time is different. Maybe Roe is actually here this time.

“Leave,” Syd growls again, turning her back on them as Roe grabs her, spinning her back around with rage.

“The fuck, Syd? No, fuck it. I don’t even care what your reasoning is. I’m prepared to drag you out of here if that’s needed. I didn’t go through literal hell just for you to tell me no. So I’m done asking nicely; either come on or get dragged.”

“I’d like to see you try it.” Surprisingly, Roe grabs her hand with a strength she hadn’t been prepared for, dragging her towards the days.

“Okay, release me. I can walk.” She snatches her hand back, and Roe allows it, looking more than prepared to do it again. She looks them over, her heart thudding harder.

"It's really you?"

"Who else would it be? Chris?" She chuckles, daring herself to be content. The more she believed in what just may be a lie, the more her heart grew heavy.

"What's going on, Syd? Why would you think it wasn't me?"

"I ..." she shakes her head, "I just need you to be real. Please, I'm tired."

Roe's hand touched her cheek, and Sydero shook her head, throwing caution to the wind as she captured their hand and held it there.

"What did they do to you?"

She snorts, "they didn't do shit. This is your fault."

"My fault?" they question, glancing around in confusion, "Syd, what are you talking -"

"Don't question it," she whimpers, fighting the feeling of something tearing her mind in two.

"Syd?" She opens her eyes to look upon Roe's face, their hands gripping her arms, "I need you to focus. I don't know what happened to you, but we must get out first. We can figure it all out then." They're silent for a moment before moving in, their forehead mere inches away from hers as they whisper, "I missed you."

"Roe," she growls, but they shush her.

"I'm serious. Every day, every moment. You don't have to say anything back. It's okay. I just needed to say that."

"Please be real," she growls, more to herself than to them.

"Why do you keep saying that? What happened?" She didn't want to fight it, but she felt that was her only choice.

"We gotta go, so tell me what I need to do to prove that I'm here right now?" Her following action had less to do with proving Roe was real. Somewhere in the back of her mind, a voice knew they weren't, and that was the end of it. But that voice was

not as loud as it should be, not as adamant, and far too weak compared to the sparks of hope and yearning that stood before it. And those feelings are what win out as she leans forward, capturing Roe's lips and indulging herself in the sense of their lips gracing hers.

"You missed me too, huh?" Roe questions, and though Syd's eyes are closed, she knows they're smirking.

"I'll give you an answer when we get out of here."

"Then let's go now," Roe laughs, squeezing her hands, "I can't wait to hear this." But something inside her refused to let them go, so she reignited the kiss.

The need to devour them begins to overwhelm her. Her mind thrums with combatting thoughts, one wishing to give in to the darkness that wishes to be released, the other warning her against it. The need to be close to Roe, to release all the pent-up energy she had regarding them, explodes. She denies any chance of escape as she deepens the kiss, her hand exploring a body that she has dreamed of investigating. Every curve, scar, dip, now hers to chart.

The darkness roars and thrashes, and her doubts about containing such energy begin to lessen. *And why not?* A soothing and hypnotic voice questions, *why not simply take what you want?*

Because this is Roe, she answers. The same Roe that ended up gaining not only her curiosity but her respect. The same Roe that made sure they wouldn't just be another number on her list; they were something more. And that thought causes her to pull away, her body screaming as it wishes to feel their touch again.

"Is something wrong?" Roe questions, and Syd moves a step backward, shaking her head.

"You're a horrible intoxication. I hope you know that."

"Addicted?" Syd doesn't answer, not because she doesn't have an answer, but because Roe's figure grows blurry.

She clenches her fist, fighting tears that refuse to be shed. Shedding them means that, yet again, she fell for something so obvious. And not only did she fall for it, but she also let it take and swallow her willingly. She jumped into the hole, knowing damn well what rested at the bottom. Allowing them to fall is admitting that she's corrupted in a way she never knew she could be, and she didn't hate it.

Soon, the entire illusion disappears, Roe's eyes being the last thing Syd saw before imps rushed towards her. She knows what awaits her and the only thing she can do is prepare.

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"Syd, you have to get up." She suddenly returns to the now, and everything from the past ten minutes rushes back to her. She wishes she could say her body is sore, but that would simply be a lie. Her regenerative healing has kicked in, eliminating every bruise and scar and even the little cricks that don't have proper time to annoy her.

"I'm up," she grumbles, pushing herself out of bed.

"I'd almost say you're disappointing your Uncles. But I don't think you care."

"Are you disappointed?"

"No."

"Then you're right. I don't care. In fact, the more I piss off Envy, the happier I'll be in the long run."

"I know you, Syd, whether you like that or not. If this Roe character was simply a fun tryst, they wouldn't be your sole rescuer. Who are they to you?"

"You're asking questions I don't have answers to," Syd sighs, opening the window to get some fresh air, and by that, she means the humid heat that plagues the Underworld. It was far more refreshing than the stale and claustrophobic air presented to her in her room, though, so no complaint slips past her lips.

She sits on the windowsill, gazing over the edge at the long drop that means very little to a being possessing wings. The lights appear blurry from the top of the

penthouse, and those in the streets seem nothing more than mere specks. The music and attractions merely whisper amidst the wind, making her feel like she is crazy and hearing things.

“How much do you remember about your life before?” she questions.

“Not much. Simply that it was. I remember having a life and a figure being in that life, and that’s it. I remember telling myself in the past that I had feelings for that figure, but even that has changed, infected by questions of whether it was me or my sin.”

“What do you mean?”

“Remember the question they asked you in that box?”

“How could I forget?” She shivers, trying to block out that eye that stayed on her. The fear that its unblinking stare caused her to feel has still not been trumped by another.

“Well, you realize just how much that’s true when you become Prince. How much your sin actually encompasses. Some like to think there’s a specific area that we cover. Gluttony means over-indulgence and consumption of food and drinks alone. It covers so much more than that. It branches into so much more that you must wonder how much it affected your life. Did I love them, or was I simply over-indulging myself on the pleasures of another?”

“Come on, Glut. You know that’s not true.” The look he gives her has her questioning her thoughts, frowning as they silently speak to one another with nothing more than their eyes.

“We will never learn the truth, and I don’t think I care too. It’s too late for me.”

“Is this the part in the story where you try to encourage me to fight and do better?”

“It is. You have to know that every time you give in to that dream that you’re losing. You’re swaying closer to the demon side, and the following beatings kick you further. You have to start fighting.”

"I wish I could sit here and tell you I'll do just that, Glut." She frowns as she looks up at the sky, watching as a few brimstones fall across the horizon. A common yet always beautiful sight, especially when the sky is at its darkest. She lets the view wash over her before sighing. "I really do, but I've re-learned why I hate lying so much, and telling you that would be lying. I've met so many different Roe's in the past few days, and each of them brings a smile to my face. Fuck logic. Seeing them again makes me feel something, and I feel like I'm growing addicted to it. Call me a masochist, but even knowing what comes with me believing and trusting their apparition, I can't seem to care. I'll take the beatings. Even risk becoming what they want me to be. Just to spend those few minutes with them."

Gluttony is quiet, and Syd couldn't really blame him. She doubts that he had expected her to say those words, and having said them aloud, she was currently cursing herself out. Yet again, she'll just blame Roe, all their fault.

"You love them?"

"No," she says after a moment of thought. "Though their presence has got me thinking more about that word. I'm beginning to think it's just not possible for a succubus to feel it."

"Your father loves you."

"Does he? Or is he simply over-indulging himself because another causes it?"

"Don't use my own deep words against me, you ass," Gluttony laughs, and Sydero follows suit, sighing heavily after a while. At first, she wanted answers and clarity. Now, she's beginning to think that she wants the opposite. Maybe she wants to become the monster everyone expects her to be. At least that's something she can do right. She felt broken. Like she was handing out chipped fragments to the people she cared about when they deserved the entire thing. And it hurts. It hurt more than the beatings ever could.

"Well," Gluttony huffs, "I can't judge you. I think if there was even a chance of me seeing the person I once believed I loved, I would snatch it. Greedily. But, at the same time, I wouldn't be able to recognize them. A million faces would appear, and I'd

think each could be it. I have made a strange peace with that. I'd rather imagine the feeling than find the truth and have that truth be that I feel nothing."

"You're telling me this, why?" she questions, narrowing her eyes on a brimstone rock that seems much smaller than the rest, the fire appearing to eat most of it away.

"Because maybe you should think about whether or not you're ready to face the truth. Or if you believe that sometimes it's best left alone."

He heads for the door, and Sydero pipes up, clearing her throat, "can you kill that imp on your way? I'd do it, but I'm still on house arrest."

"I've invited you down to the training yards. You should make an appearance. Get payback on those demons that jumped you."

"Oh, I will. I just want to be at peak power before doing so. I wouldn't want them to be able to get up afterward." Gluttony snorts, leaving her to her thoughts. She can hear the sound of a sudden whimper, followed closely by a small explosion. Another will soon come to replace that one, but she had a few hours before then, and the knowledge that she was now genuinely alone was comforting.

She moves to the bed, wondering when the next nightmare will appear. As well as all that Gluttony had said. He was right, no doubt about that. But did she care? Part of her did. Her father surmised that breaking her would take a few months. The rate she was going, she'd be broken within a month. She wanted to defy him, to piss him and every one of her uncles off, but that meant fighting the illusions. Ignoring Roe until they vanished from sight. Could she do that? Did she wish to?

The sounds of the door being kicked in grab her attention as she glances over at Roe, an odd mist that she can't place, shrouding some of their body. Rage fills their eyes until they connect with her own, and joy replaces them. And that was all it took for her to start feeling hope, to throw everything Gluttony had said out the window and accept this fantasy as truth. A part of her argued, screaming at everything wrong with this picture. But most of her didn't care. That look in their eyes filled her with a feeling she could neither place nor name.

