

Shadow 781

Chapter 781: Sins Of Greed

Damon sneered and raised his brows, why was he a demon was it just because it rhymed with his name.

Or was his nature actually demonic.

"Wow that actually rhymes."

His gaze turned cold as he looked at the Archivist.

"What sins would those be? Let me guess. Is it murder, cannibalism, or theft. I did it, sue me. Oh wait, you already are. You hold no power over me."

The Archivist did not respond. The title on the book shifted until it read Damon the demon.

Damon grimaced. He had actually earned one of those cursed names.

The Archivist turned the book to the other side and opened it from the far end.

"You have committed many sins Damon the demon."

Its voice droned as the pages glimmered with shifting ink.

"Born Damon Grey in the war continent Soltheon, you walked the path of depravity from a young age. A disgrace upon a legacy of nobility. A lowly wretch who could not accept the world and refused to change to fit. Vile, unspeakable and damned, you made no effort to understand others and you never wished to be understood."

It analyzed Damon Grey with calm cruelty. Damon listened without flinching. After several minutes the Archivist stopped. Black chains rose from the ground like serpents and snapped onto Damon's wrists, ankles, throat and torso.

"We shall now begin your trial. How do you plead."

Damon refused to show any fear.

"What gives you the right to cast judgement upon me? What makes you better than me."

The Archivist picked up its quill. It did not try to refute him.

"Very well. I shall now call your sins and let your guilt serve as punishment."

Its voice was a hissing vibration that echoed through the Pedestal.

"Guilt is a cage. Your guilt will punish your sins."

The Archivist raised its hand high above its head.

"All sins are born from seven primordial deadly sins. You shall suffer for every one of them."

It looked at Damon with empty, pitiless eyes.

"Damon the demon has committed many sins. The earliest is the sin of theft. You have stolen from many, filling your pockets with abundance taken from the sweat of others."

The scene around Damon shimmered and dissolved. He suddenly stood in the streets of Valerion. A younger version of himself weaved through the crowds. The boy wore rags, ribs showing through skinny skin. With every passerby he slipped a hand into pockets and bags, gathering coins with practiced ease.

A woman froze. She touched her pouch.

"My zeni... it is gone..." Her voice cracked with despair.

"What a grave sin," the Archivist hissed.

Damon frowned and bit his lip.

"I was hungry. I did what I could to survive."

The Archivist shook its head.

"The sin of greed."

Its voice stayed locked onto him.

"You did not need that much. You could have worked for your own income. For your greed that innocent woman paid the price. She sold herself into prostitution to feed her family and pay her debts. Eventually she took her own life."

The Archivist raised its quill and pointed at Damon.

"Do you regret it?"

The vision twisted. Damon now saw the woman hanging from a rope. Two children clung to her corpse, sobbing. The amount he had stolen from her was less than ten thousand zeni. Such a small amount. Yet it had destroyed a family.

"I... I was trying to survive. Valerion is a harsh place. This is not on me."

"I didn't kill her."

He said the words but he did not believe them. The poison of guilt throbbed in his chest.

"Guilt is a cage and sin is a stain. It must be washed." The Archivist hissed with rising anger.

"Your punishment is the feast of empty pockets."

It pointed its quill upward.

"You must eat the equivalent of your wealth."

The chains rattled. Damon felt his soul dragged downward.

When he opened his eyes he was in a colossal banquet hall. People in gold ornaments and robes sat at tables heaped with wealth. They were feasting, but not on food. They devoured piles of money, jewels and treasure. They ate even when their mouths bled.

A voice thundered inside his mind.

"Eat until you have eaten all your wealth. Only then shall you be absolved of your guilt."

Damon's body moved without his command. His hands reached for a mound of gold. In a polished tray he saw his reflection. His real body. Not an illusion. His original flesh.

"Ahh... ahhh..." He strained to resist but the image of the woman's corpse pressed against his mind, crushing his will.

Cold gold coins pressed against his palms. His fingers clenched. His hands shoved the metal into his mouth. His iron bones shattered the coins. Shards sliced his tongue and gums. The metallic taste of blood pooled under his tongue.

More treasure was forced between his lips. Gems scraped against enamel. Diamonds cracked between his teeth. His jaw bled. His gums tore. His throat swelled until it darkened into deep purple. Still his body devoured without pause.

His teeth fractured. Splinters of enamel mixed with gold and gems and were swallowed. His stomach swelled until it bruised red and black. Blood trickled down his chin.

Images of the woman. Her children. Her final despair. Every life he stole from. Every pocket he emptied. They all crashed into him with every bite.

Finally, after what felt like days, Damon finished eating the total of his wealth.

Listless and half broken, he sagged as the chains dragged him back to the Pedestal. Blood covered him from neck to waist. His stomach bulged unnaturally. He retched on the floor, spitting out gold dust, silver fragments and glittering pieces of magic crystal.

"Your guilt remains but your sin has been punished."

The Archivist raised its quill again.

"Your next sin."

Damon felt his soul tremble. His bleeding frame stood locked before the Archivist as the quill began to move.

This was not a mental projection. It was physical. The Archivist was rewriting reality itself to punish him.

Chapter 782: Sin Of Sloth

Damon laughed despite himself.

"Hahahah hahah."

His teeth had shattered. His tongue and gums had no sense of taste or feeling left. There was only the ache and the overwhelming flavor of blood, metal and torn flesh.

"My sin has been punished. If only it was that easy."

The Archivist tilted its head. It did not understand Damon's laughter. There was a strange, unhinged madness in his tone.

"You have eaten millions in gold coins until your stomach swelled with metals and ores of the earth. Why do you still laugh."

Damon shook his head and stared at the Archivist.

"If this agony is meant to absolve me of my sins then you have failed. If your intentions are to break me then you will fail. We will be here today, tomorrow and a thousand years from now. No anguish you imagine will cause me to crumble. I will continue to laugh at your futile attempts to break me."

The Archivist slowly shook its head.

"I do not seek to break you. I intend to free you from your cage. Guilt is a terrible prison. Once you break free from it you will walk free."

Damon scoffed. Blood dripped from his mouth as he spat. He felt his heart pounding inside his chest. He felt the familiar sensation of being in his own body again. It had been returned only so it could be torn apart.

The sound of the quill striking the pages continued. Each sharp tap marked another word written about him.

The Archivist paused. It scanned the book once more. Damon mentally braced himself. The chains around him rattled as if anticipating what would come.

"You have committed many sins. Vile and unforgivable. Yet your heart lingers in this one the most."

Damon felt his stomach drop. His heart sank as if thrown into glacial waters.

"Pray tell," he whispered. He tried to mask the unease in his voice. He needed to know which sin this was.

He understood the trial only in fragments. The rules were based on distortions of reality. That meant the trial had a structure. If he could just figure it out before he went insane again...

'I need to understand the pattern. I need to stay sane long enough to break the cycle.'

"Do not fear. Your insanity will not save you from your guilt." The Archivist answered Damon's thoughts with a cold hiss. Nothing escaped him in this place.

"This sin is the start of your wretched path. A path that harmed many."

There was a brief pause.

"The crime of desertion."

When the words struck his ears Damon realized which memory the trial would attack. Desertion was the crime of abandoning responsibility. It was betrayal born from selfish retreat. It left others in fear and pain.

The scene formed in front of him. A young girl with white hair and grey eyes sat outside a small house. Night had fallen. She should have gone inside but she had not. She only cried silently. She waited with fragile hope for her brother to return.

Every second magnified her anxiety. She imagined him mauled by monsters in the woods. She imagined him bleeding out under a tree. Her fear grew until her voice cracked.

"He will come back."

She repeated the words at first but they weakened with every repetition. Eventually she whispered.

"Damon, please come back. I am scared."

Damon remembered this day. It was the day he had gone into the woods planning to kill himself.

"Do not go big brother." The young girl had trembled because she feared the worst.

"Your sister was your responsibility. For a little hardship you deserted her. This is the sin of sloth."

Damon's chest tightened. This was the guilt he carried. This was the shame he buried. He never told Luna what he had intended to do in the woods. Yet she had always been intuitive. She saw the hollow look in his eyes.

"I... I..." He fought to speak.

"I came back. I am alive. I took my sister out of that place. I saved her. I am always there for her when she needs me."

The Archivist pointed its quill at him.

"Have you never thought she was a burden. If not for her you would not have endured humiliation at the Aether Academy. If not for her you would be free and unfettered. You may not have deserted her physically but in your mind she was an obstacle."

Damon's lips quivered. His chains rattled as he shook his head.

"That is not true. That is not true."

"For the crime of desertion and the sin of sloth Damon the demon, I sentence you to the bed of needles. May this ordeal absolve you of your guilt and set you free. We are all prisoners of our guilt."

The ground opened beneath him. The chains pulled him downward into a massive chamber.

Thud.

His body crashed into the floor. When he lifted his head he saw the surface in front of him. A field of glittering tips. Needles. Thousands of them. Thinner than strands of hair. Sharper than sword points. Each one rose and fell with mechanical rhythm.

As he stared at them an overwhelming desire filled his chest. A desire to lie down on them. A desire to rest.

Damon clenched his teeth and shook his head.

"This is my true body. I am immune to mental domination."

He forced himself upright. Before he could take a step the chains tightened around him. They constricted his chest and limbs. They twisted violently.

Damon groaned as he tried to resist. The chains lifted him into the air. They dragged him forward until he was suspended over the bed of needles.

His body dropped.

He watched himself fall toward the glittering field. He hit the needles with a sickening crunch. Blood sprayed in every direction as his flesh was torn open.

Every muscle and organ was pierced. Soft tissue shredded. Bones were gouged by countless needle points. His eyes were punctured. His vision went dark and bleeding.

"Rest slothful sinner on the bed of needles."

Chapter 783: Sin Of Wrath

Drip drip drip...drip drip

The sounds of dripping echoed through the library. Along with it came a deep fishy smell of blood that overwhelmed every sense.

Dripdrip.

It was a heavy stench that triggered nausea in anyone unfortunate enough to be exposed to the thick scent of fresh blood in such quantities.

"Ahhh" He groaned, the sound echoing in the vast hall.

He was blind in the sense that he could not see anything. It was not darkness. It was nothing. Nothing was a difficult concept to describe. Nothing was deeper than darkness.

Perhaps humans were never meant to define it.

His eyes were gone.

Drip... drip.

Blood fell freely onto the ground around him. His form was covered in deep gashes as if he had been impaled by hundreds of porcupines. Muscles were mangled and flesh torn open. Red ichor flowed as his lifeblood drained away.

Damon had tried preserving as much of his body as possible.

"Hehehehe... I had quite a good rest. Is that all you have?"

It was a strange sight, but torture had never been able to make Damon surrender. Pain only fed the flames of his insanity further. For him, this trial was a battle of attrition.

"Your sin has been punished."

Damon's eyes were blind, but he still had his shadow perception. It was almost comforting, since this trial had recreated his original body and brought back his familiar senses.

Though he was mangled, he did not want to know what his face looked like or whether he even still had one. It would surely be a bloody mess.

From his perception born of shadows, Damon watched the Archivist writing in his book.

He had an idea.

"I get it now. How you managed to create books made from the living flesh of prisoners. Each of them had to go through this trial and for every sin they were broken down until they were made into books."

The Archivist did not answer. Damon did not mind. He slowly raised his hand with a soft exhalation.

He unleashed a blast of Ashborn flames at the Archivist. The flames spread outward, black as shadows, but they never reached him.

"It is futile to resort to violence here. We must adhere to the rules of the trial."

The Archivist's tone was flat, revealing nothing. But Damon noticed one word.

"We. So even you are bound to the rules here."

Damon sneered, then laughed as blood dripped from his face.

"Is that all you have? Or are you saving my worst crimes?" He paused. His voice grew cold. "Fellow prisoner."

It was a conjecture, based on what Root ore had said. In the trial of self, everyone in Eidolon was a prisoner.

Even the wardens were prisoners in their own way. Damon had not thought about it much because the Mirror Seraph seemed so dedicated to its duty and did everything in its power to stop challengers, even when they passed.

But that was because it served Seraph Null, the lesser god who ran this world.

The Archivist did not seem bothered by Damon's words. He simply glanced up.

"Your thoughts are correct on the matter. However, they will do little to ease your plight. While I may be a prisoner, you are still a greater sinner and must face the trial of your sin."

Damon breathed heavily as the Archivist began to write with his quill.

"What terrible sins. Your unrelenting nature has brought more suffering. Guided by this spiteful nature, you have committed the crime of murder of passion."

Damon raised a brow. Murder of passion. A romantic crime? A womanizing crime? That did not seem right.

The Archivist continued, clearly reading Damon's thoughts.

"Murder of passion is violence driven by rage. Your wrath has consumed many. Your unforgiving nature has killed many innocent people."

"You have committed the sin of wrath."

As he said this, a new image appeared. Damon recognized the mountains and rivers, the familiar meadow, the old windmills.

It was his village.

In the vision, an innocent child stood under the sky as a man in dark armor, full of wrath and grievance, sent a sphere of destruction toward the village, condemning them to a fiery death. Their souls were devoured by burning shadows.

The child was young, perhaps seven. He understood nothing of the conflicts around him, nothing about Damon Grey, the stranger who had come to their village.

The child did not understand the grown-up world, the shouting, the arguments. He did not understand anything. But when death came, he understood fear.

The sins of the father fell upon the child, and the entire village suffered under the wrath of Damon Grey.

"This is your guilt. This is your cage. Murder driven by the passion of the moment could have been forgiven. Look at your hands, Damon the Demon, and tell me you are not a demon. Tell me you have no innocent blood on your hands. Tell me you have not killed in fury."

Damon gritted his teeth. The broken fragments dug into his bleeding gums.

He did not speak in his defense. He understood what his heart was showing him. He knew the village had innocents, yet he could not let those people live.

"Do what you have to."

"You offer no arguments for your sin of wrath." The Archivist asked the question, but Damon remained silent. His expression was unreadable in his mangled flesh.

"For your punishment, you will face the furnace of melting mirrors until the flames burn hotter than your wrath."

Damon felt chains tighten around him as the ground opened beneath his feet. The moment he began to fall he felt heat rising to meet him. When he finally struck the ground, his feet sank into molten stone. Mirrors surrounded him, each one replaying the moments of his greatest wrath.

Each reflection fanned the flames that burned him.

As white fire consumed his body, he raised his head. Smoke seared his wounds and tore at his flesh.

Chapter 784: Sin Of Envy

The stench of something burning filled the room. Thick black smoke drifted through the air as a figure stepped forward, his entire body blackened and scarred, skin peeling away to reveal raw layers beneath.

Its thick smoke seemed to smother his burnt lungs, overwhelming what was left of his senses with the stench of his burnt flesh.

He smiled indifferently, the pain was fleeting compared to his defiant spirit.

"Is this what I must endure? The punishment for all my sins before the trial ends. Is that it?"

This was a simple question, one he may not receive an answer to.

He let out a low chuckle, shoulders shaking despite the way charred flesh clung to his bones.

"The pain of burning is nothing. I experience it every day. Perhaps an immolating hell can break the mind, but this pain is one I inflict upon myself. I have grown used to fire."

The Archivist did not show emotion, though something in his posture hinted at faint, reluctant respect. Still, he shook his head.

"You are wrong. This place is hell and the guilty shall be punished. It does not matter if you endure for a thousand years. It would be easier to give in and close your book."

Damon slowly lifted his head. Even without skin on his face, his expression showed defiance. Matia and Lazarak would not be far. He could hold on.

"I would not put that much faith in others," the Archivist replied as he adjusted his grip on his quill.

"This is a separate trial. They will not come here. They wander the library until you fail, and then one of them will succeed you and begin a new trial."

A serene calm settled over Damon's ruined features. That was fine. He was not relying on anyone. He was Damon Grey, and he would persist even if he stood alone.

"You lie even to yourself." The Archivist dipped his quill, ink glistening as it touched the page.

"It is in your nature to do so. This is the crime of false witness."

"For your whole life you have told many lies. False witness is the act of lying to harm others. This is the sin of envy, for envy poisons truth to wound those above or below us."

Damon sneered, flakes of charred skin crumbling from his jaw.

"I lie often and have told far too many. Which one will you drag out this time, and what punishment will you choose to match it?"

The Archivist watched him silently. Damon lifted his hands slightly, burned fingers twitching.

"I understand. Each of my crimes ties to a deadly sin. You began with greed, then sloth, then wrath, now envy. Though this one is a stretch. I lie even when I do not need to. Calling that envy feels thin. After envy there is only lust, pride and gluttony."

The Archivist leaned toward the book bearing Damon's name.

"That is a lie. You envy. You always have."

The air darkened. An image formed before Damon. A handsome young man with brown hair and blue eyes stood before him. Tall, wealthy and well regarded by his peers. A man who had everything Damon lacked. A man free to choose his morality.

"Are you not envious of Xander Ravenscroft?" the Archivist hissed.

Damon bit his lip hard enough to tear it open.

"He had everything I did not. I disliked him. I understood why. I simply did not care. But I hated how he looked down on me. I wanted to drag him into the dirt. All that honor, morality, and righteous posturing. But what lie ties to this? I only see envy. Explain the lie."

The Archivist sighed, unimpressed by Damon's attempt to dodge the truth.

The image shifted. Now it was Xander's face but mere weeks ago, when he came to Damon seeking help. His brother had been murdered. He had wanted revenge.

The Archivist spoke quietly.

"Why did you not tell him?"

Shame rippled through Damon, a cold tremor running along the exposed muscle of his spine.

"I... it was for his own good."

The quill scratched against parchment.

"You killed his brother. You could have told him revenge was pointless. You could have told him the truth about why you killed him. Yet you chose to lie."

"Admit it." The Archivist's voice curled through the air like smoke.

"This was an opportunity to pull him into darkness. To watch him betray his morals in pursuit of a shadow he could never catch. You hated how honorable he was. You wanted to stain him."

Damon drew a slow breath. His burnt fingers trembled. Was this truly why he had stayed silent? Why he had allowed Xander to fall?

The Archivist's aura intensified.

"To secure your help you demanded he sign a contract. One that required he offer you his firstborn child."

Damon lowered his head. His burned flesh reddened and split.

"For your sin of envy, your punishment is the tongue rack."

"I did not. That is not true. I... I..." Damon tried to deny it, but the trial of sin had no patience for self-deception.

The floor cracked open beneath him. Damon fell, chains clattering as they followed him down. The trial had three more sins to judge.

He hit the ground hard. Skin peeled off in sheets, black and putrid blood smearing the stone. He tried to rise, but chains instantly coiled around him. A metal device forced his jaw open.

Damon's tongue was stretched across a spiked rack.

The mechanism tightened.

Every lie he had ever spoken began to claw its way out of his mouth like worms.

Damon had told countless lies. The spikes pierced deeper as each lie whispered its memory back to him. Some he recognized. Some he had long forgotten. Some he wished he had forgotten.

Time dissolved. Damon endured the tongue rack in silent, shaking agony until finally the stream of lies slowed.

Four sins had passed. Damon's body was close to breaking, but his mind remained defiantly clear.

Chapter 785: A Man Who Has Mastered Lust

Many things cause agony. Once again, standing here, Damon's body was in shambles. His legs trembled as if they might buckle at any moment, yet he forced them to remain locked beneath him. Blood dripped from his elbows to the floor in slow, stubborn taps, but still there was a fierce will in his eyes.

"What grave sin have I committed now..."

Damon whispered through the pain in his body. His fingers twitched uncontrollably, as if every nerve screamed.

"I have come to certain conclusions about the trial of sin. At first I thought what this trial punished was the crime linked to a sin, but after all I was wrong."

He raised his mangled hand. Bone cracked audibly beneath torn flesh. His tongue had been shredded, and every word scraped his throat like shards of metal, but Damon endured. He had relived every lie he had ever told, and the agony clung to him like a second skin.

"I was wrong because I thought I had to be punished for my sins. What you are punishing is not the sin but the guilt."

Raising his head, he laughed arrogantly.

The motion tore open half-healed wounds across his jaw. His broken body trembled, yet it carried his insane will.

What else could you call it but insanity. Insanity was doing the same thing and expecting a different outcome.

"I could not challenge your words, and my words and actions were an admission of guilt. This place is like a court. What is punished is guilt."

Damon breathed heavily. Each inhalation scraped against ribs that felt splintered. His skin peeled in strips, scattered from his burns. His knees buckled, but he forced himself upright again.

"You said it yourself. Guilt is a cage."

The Archivist was quiet, though his quill paused mid-air. He seemed impressed by Damon's words. His voice echoed in a hiss, the sound brushing the air like parchment turning itself.

"Many brilliant men and women have stood here. Where are they now? Broken and turned into books that record their deeds."

His quill moved slightly as if he were lost in memory. His eyes flickered with old exhaustion, the kind earned over centuries.

"Very few of them could remain lucid after going through four sins. I am impressed by the depth of your endurance, Damon the demon. However, it is pointless. Knowing will not change anything."

The Archivist flipped the pages of the book in front of him. His long fingers stroked the spine like one might soothe a loyal pet.

"Hell is our guilt, and that deep darkness in our hearts creates a need for atonement, a desire to right our wrongs. It is a cage we cannot break free from."

Damon was blind, his blood smeared over his eyes. Still, he could see with his shadow perception. He tilted his head, tracking the Archivist's every movement through the shadows in the library.

"Spoken like someone with experience in guilt."

The Archivist stilled, his motions freezing for a single breath.

"The truth shall set us free, and punishment is our door to salvation."

Damon shook his head slowly. His neck scraped against the collar of chains, leaving a fresh line of torn skin.

"I do not think so. If I do not succeed by the last sin, I would become a book. Of that I am sure."

The Archivist wrote slowly in the book, each stroke deliberate.

"Liberate yourself from the cage of your guilt and you shall be free, or sink into despair."

"Many things are made dirty by guilt, and that defiles your heart much like your crime. You defile beautiful things."

The crime of defilement, profaning what others hold sacred, bodies and places alike.

"This is the sin of lust. Lust in its broad sense. Violation, boundary breaking, taking without permission."

The Archivist seemed disgusted by the very words he spoke. His lip curled slightly, his eyes narrowing to fine slits.

"A man who is a slave to lust is the lowest of slaves. Desire devours him, strips him of will. He thinks he is free but is chained by his own hands. The lustful are deluded into thinking themselves free. They laugh while they fall. They die when they pretend to live. A man who cannot master himself is unfit to master anything. A captive of his own weakness, his spirit decays. A man who has failed to conquer the flesh decays."

"For your sin," he said as an image appeared before Damon.

It was a beautiful image of a woman. She wore no clothes. Her body was pristine and lush like a flower in full bloom. Her curves, her pale skin, all enough to drive any man mad with lust.

Even the intensity of her red eyes pulled you in with the desire to ravage her.

They stood in a cave, or in this case a dungeon. The air was cold and damp, the stones wet beneath her bare feet. Here, no rules applied. It was just a man and a woman. No one to tell him he could not have his way with her.

Her breath was heavy. Her face reddened as she tried to resist the arousal caused by the aphrodisiac curse placed on her. Her hands trembled as she reached for him.

She threw herself on Damon, pushing her flesh against his own.

He stiffened at the memory, every muscle in his body recoiling despite the chains binding him.

Damon frowned, then smiled coldly. His eyes narrowed, sharpening like blades.

"Hehehehe. You can catch me with many sins and vices. Sadly, I am a bit weak in the lust department. I care less about a naked woman. And I could not agree with you more."

Damon's eyes were forced open as his flesh broke apart, blood spurting from the tear. His teeth clenched so hard his jaw clicked.

"How lowly and pathetic a man must be to lose himself to the flesh of a woman. How small must you be to be a slave to your lustful desire."

The Archivist's quill stopped mid-air. His expression shifted, not with anger but confusion. This was not what he had expected.

"I am lustful, but I am a master of my desire. If you had shown me kissing a lake of gold coins then maybe I would have felt something, but this is nothing. On that day I could have touched Abellona."

Damon's gaze cleared. His posture straightened despite the chains pulling at his limbs.

"I really wanted to. I wanted to. I intended to. But I would never defile a woman, not in her state of mind. I succeeded in saving her that day because I had a cure that did not demand her chastity. But even if I did not, I would very well make the choice to let her die than compromise on my ideal, letting myself carry the vile title of rapist. I would rather burn in a million hells than be among such ilk."

He pulled the chains holding him. The links rattled violently, echoing through the library.

"Read my lips. I feel no guilt for what happened that day. And yes, I may have taken a few liberties with her, but it was necessary."

His heart was clear, maybe more than ever. Damon did not feel guilt toward Abellona, because when push came to shove, Damon did what a lesser man could not and mastered his own lust.

He had the desire, and even to this day her body still lingered in his heart.

"The forbidden fruit you did not taste."

"Those who are lustful deserve the punishment of the skin chapel, where all their skin will be peeled off."

The Archivist paused as he spoke, then slowly sighed. His shoulders rose and fell in a subtle motion.

"You are absolved of any guilt for lust."

As soon as he said those words, the entire library shook. Two chains fell from Damon's body, the ones on his waist and the ones on his neck. His body sagged forward as the weight lifted, then he caught himself with a sharp inhale.

The world distorted as two figures appeared before him.

"Damon..."

A soft, chilling voice called out.

Chapter 786: Sin Of Gluttony

When Damon heard Matia's familiar cold voice he felt relieved. He let out a shaky sigh as he glanced in their direction. By Damon's side two people had appeared.

A woman in black armor made of shattered ice stood with her shoulders tight, a freezing chill following her.

There was a wave of killing intent in her eyes directed at the Archivist; however, she must have realized she could not touch the warden of the library.

Her hands lingered on her sword, her cold blue eyes flaring dangerously.

The second was a toddler in gaudy black robes made of pure darkness. He looked chubby and adorable, yet his eyes held deep profundity. He clasped his hands behind his back as he looked at Damon.

There seemed to be an ancient and divine elegance to him, as if there was a purity and solemnness to his otherwise cute form.

Damon raised his arm that was barely held together. His fingers twitched from the pain. He was all but destroyed, though he had managed to avoid one sin and spare himself the pain of being flayed alive.

Come to think of it Damon used to flay people in his childhood. He had the habit of putting flay powder in people's clothes, watching their skin burn and peel away leaving grotesque scars.

Many people wanted him dead for that, though he was still here, and most of them were dead.

Lazarak looked at Damon with a frown, then at the Archivist. Slowly he let out a sigh.

He seemed to have gotten the picture by just standing there. The wisdom of a god who had lived for ages could not be underestimated.

"I see. I think I understand how this trial works now."

Damon's flesh was burned so severely that parts of it seemed melted into the rest. Still he spoke clearly.

"A little too late for that. I already figured it out. You are accused of a crime linked to a deadly sin. If you feel the slightest guilt for that crime you will be punished for the sin."

Lazarak nodded from where he stood.

"Yes I figured as much. That is not what I was going to tell you. I expected you to see that by now, seeing as you must have suffered a few ordeals. And the fact that you are still alive means you have not experienced the sin of pride."

Damon nodded, trying to take advantage of the moment of rest.

"I have experienced greed, sloth, wrath, envy and well they left me looking like this."

"You do not look so good my friend." Lazarak winced as he looked at Damon's state.

"I do not feel so good either. Though I did manage to not feel guilty for lust." Damon answered casually.

Lazarak nodded with understanding on his small face.

"No surprise there. You do not get ladies. I mean you are ugly. And more by possessing others.... Wise choice abandoning lust."

Damon winced, bitterness flashing across his expression.

"Can you help already.."

Lazarak shook his head.

"I am. We cannot interfere in the trial of sin. It seems the Archivist chose you because in our group you are the greatest of sinners. That said, overcoming lust gave you an advantage. That is why we were brought here."

Lazarak glanced at the Archivist.

"Isn't that right, warden of the trial of sin, Archivist."

The Archivist nodded slowly.

"For every sin you fail you are punished. For every one you overcome you are closer to freedom."

Lazarak nodded, his eyes steady.

"Listen. You have to overcome this trial. Someone has to pass it. Either you or him."

"Him." Damon replied, confused.

"Yes, him. He is a prisoner here as well and trapped by his own guilt just like you."

"Sins are not measured by deed, Damon, but by the truths you refuse to accept."

Damon glanced at the Archivist.

"So that is how it is. For every sin I overcome you take damage while I do not. Matia and Lazarak being here was not your will. It was you taking damage so your power waned."

The Archivist did not say anything. His quill moved slower. Damon noticed one of his bony fingers looked mangled.

He raised his head and looked at Damon.

"You fear judgment because somewhere in the marrow of your being you know you deserve it."

Matia's eyes narrowed. Her hands tightened slightly, as if she wanted to reach for a weapon she could not move. It was as if some rule here prevented her body from acting.

Still all she could do was have faith Damon would succeed.

"Don't worry he will find a way." Lazarak whispered softly to her. His fingers fidgeted behind him.

"And if things go awry I will burn my very soul to make sure he survives."

This was Lazarak's promise.

The Archivist glared at Damon. There was a silent acknowledgment in his eyes.

"You have carried this one for so long. This is your greatest lie and your biggest shame. You have hidden it in the shadows where it was born."

The Archivist raised his quill as he spoke coldly.

At the same time Lazarak spoke from Damon's side.

"Guilt is a cage you lock yourself into. Shame is the key. Forgiveness breaks the bars not from others but from yourself."

Lazarak bit his lips as he whispered inaudibly

"Defy yourself Damon."

The Archivist pointed his quill at Damon and his cold voice echoed in the library.

"Hunger is no excuse. How vile for you to walk among us while you feast on the flesh of others. How deplorable to view your fellow man as food for your satisfaction."

Damon's eyes trembled when he heard these words. He knew it was only a matter of time before this crime surfaced.

"You are insatiable. You kill and devour your peers without end, feasting to expand the deep dark pits. Your crime is cannibalism. You have feasted on the flesh of your fellow man."

"What a grave sin, the sin of gluttony."

Damon bit his lips, already knowing which memory would be called out to invoke the most guilt.

Chapter 787: Hard Trials

It was the same familiar memory of that same day of the same kind old man.

Damon sighed when he saw the memory return. His heart felt cold. He was tired. He was tired of seeing it, of reliving it. His shoulders sagged and his burned chest rose and fell in a rough rhythm.

The day he had killed Carmen Vale.

"What a pain .. its like every single entity that wants to fuck with me mentally resorts to the same tired old trick ... don't you have something original.."

He spat the words out, his jaw tightening, his fingers twitching with irritation. Guilt was not what filled him now. What Damon felt was anger.

What the hell. It was like the whole world was trying its best to make sure he never forgot that day.

"So what I screwed up.... I always screw up nothing new there ... I was wrong back then I admit it I accept my own weakness.."

He let out a sharp chuckle. His voice was cold as ice and his burned, battered body ached everywhere. His hands curled slightly from the pain but he kept standing.

"But that is not an excuse to become stagnant and trapped. I lived up to my sins and acknowledged my own faults and regrets but I won't feel guilt and give you the satisfaction."

Damon slowly shook his head, the movement stiff from the lingering burns.

"Not anymore."

The Archivist had been quiet, waiting for Damon to finish speaking. Slowly he moved his quill, the movement deliberate and precise.

"You are a splendid liar. Sadly you can not lie to your own heart. The trial punishes guilt and your heart is full of it .."

Damon's expression stayed cold. He wanted nothing more than to wipe out the guilt inside him but he could not.

Something that deep was carved into the heart. It could not be washed off or forgotten simply because one wished it so.

"Maybe you can argue for your crime of cannibalism. But you never changed your ways. You carried on as a glutton, feasting on many souls."

Lazarak gritted his teeth and shouted.

"Don't let him get in your head. You have to argue back. Convince yourself not him.."

Damon bit his lips with his half destroyed teeth, his hands trembling slightly.

'Convince myself easier said than done'

"I didn't have much of a choice. Can you blame a bear for hunting deer, can you blame a goat for eating grass. This is just the nature of the food chain. Someone must die for one to live..."

Damon raised his head weakly, blood and thick pus clinging to his chin.

"I had no choice .. I chose to live.. maybe I hurt a few people by my choice. Maybe I fed into the same vicious cycle that cultivated someone like me. In the end I survived and there is nothing wrong with that ..."

Right. He did not have to feel guilty for cannibalism. Maybe other options existed, but for him back then there were none.

"I have tried to atone and right my wrong..."

While he killed Carmen he also took the man's daughter under his wings. If anyone was to judge him it would only be her.

The Archivist raised his quill and shook his head calmly at Damon.

"Your words are moving. Sadly your guilt remains. You shall be punished for the sin of gluttony with the cradle court."

The familiar sensation of chains wrapped around him. Damon heard them clatter and tighten around his limbs as he was pulled forcibly down into the chamber of his punishment.

Dozens of cradles filled the room. Inside each lay a figure Damon had once devoured. Every face here was vivid, trapped in the haunted expression they wore in their final moments.

The first was Lark Bonaire who wore an expression of fear. His mouth silently formed the same pleading words he had offered Damon that day.

Slowly Damon walked through the cradles, each step heavy from hunger and pain. He saw different faces as he passed them until he reached the one he was looking for.

He stopped. The expression on this cradle's face was gentle. He wore a warm smile. Unlike the others he did not look like he had seen a monster.

No. There was a weary yet gentle expression to him, almost resigned.

Damon stood there staring at Carmen Vale's face, then sighed and looked away. He raised his head slowly.

"I wonder what horrible torture I'd suffer this time.."

As soon as he said it Damon heard a small ringing in his ears. He touched his head, his fingers trembling, feeling his skull grow heavy as a familiar sensation overtook him.

"Grrriuii"

His stomach growled loudly. His head throbbed hard as the feeling of intense hunger coursed through him.

Damon struggled to breathe but every breath through his empty stomach made him nauseous.

'Ahhh ..' he groaned softly as he reached into his shadow storage to pull out some food supplies.

But he felt something sticky on his hand as he pulled something out. It was large enough to fill his palm and dripping with red liquid that was slightly viscous.

The smell was familiar. It was a common smell. The smell of blood.

A human heart instead of the apple he had wanted to retrieve.

Damon threw it away without hesitation, falling to one knee from the hunger. His vision blurred. His eyes were darker with fatigue, then his nose picked up an overwhelming delicious scent. Something edible.

It came from all around him, from the cradles. He forced himself up and walked to one. Inside lay a pile of human organs with the face of one of the people he had devoured through his shadow in the past staring up at him.

"Don't eat me, please." the face called out.

Damon's hands trembled but he no longer had any control of his body. His fingers plunged into the bleeding pile of organs and shoved them into his mouth. The vile taste of raw flesh overwhelmed his senses even more than the hunger.

He gagged but his mouth refused to open except to take more. Blood smeared across his mouth, face and chest as the crunch of raw organs echoed from his teeth.

The face among the organs watched him with every bite. It cried out in pain, begging him not to eat it, calling out memories and relationships it once had.

"For the gluttonous cannibal a feast in cradles. From the raw flesh of your victims let them bear witness to how you consume their remains."

The voice of the Archivist echoed as Damon moved from cradle to cradle, feasting again on his victims. Except this time it was not his shadow devouring them. He was eating with his own mouth, consumed by the sin of gluttony.

Chapter 788: Bird

The sound of violent vomiting echoed out as Damon threw up everything he had been forced to eat. He doubled over, his hands braced weakly on the floor while his chest heaved. He scratched at his tongue in a panic, as if terrified the taste of human flesh and organs would cling to his taste buds forever.

There was a tired and hollow look in his eyes. It was as if this single trial had drained his soul away.

Lazarak took a step toward him, hands rising on instinct to help, but he stopped himself and bit his lips hard. His fingers curled behind his back in frustration.

There was a barrier between them.

Damon had not been physically tortured by this trial. It was not like when he had been tossed onto a bed of needles, nor like when he had been burned alive in melted mirrors.

He had not had his tongue pulled out and pierced with spikes. He had not been forced to eat piles of gold, diamonds, money and anything else the trial demanded until his gums bled and his stomach bloated.

None of that had broken him. None of those trials had made him think I don't deserve this suffering this is not fair.

Damon understood things were not fair. That was just life. Deal with it.

"You take the hand you are dealt and move on.."

He muttered weakly. Had that not been what had driven him to survive all this time? His back ached.

He was used to being tossed around, used to learning that life was unfair.

Damon could no longer stand. His legs trembled, so he simply sat down with a heavy drop. His body was mangled, yet his spirit had never dulled. Not until now. Not until he was forced to eat raw flesh and organs while the faces of people he had killed begged him not to consume them.

"When ..." he muttered. Blood clung to his lips, making him look like a savage beast with the remains of its prey still on its mouth.

He did not look at the Archivist. Damon lowered his head and spoke anyway.

"I wish it was possible to turn off our emotions. I wish I could not feel shame, guilt or regret. I wish I was some inhumane monster that didn't have to deal with all this crap. If I have a next life ... I want to be a bird. I would only worry about finding worms. I would build a small nest and carry none of the complexities that come with being human.."

He mumbled softly. It sounded like madness, but it was a quiet madness. A tired one.

"I always feel ashamed. I feel guilty for everything because deep down I hate that trying to survive has turned me in.. into this.."

He gestured weakly to himself, his fingers trembling. As if the very sight of his own body was something grotesque.

"I never really understood why anyone would tolerate or even like me, especially when they see the real me ... I... I understand... no I don't understand it ... emotions are too complex a thing for me to understand.."

Damon lowered his head slightly, his expression strangely calm.

"Its far easier for me when people hate me. That way I don't have to walk on eggshells trying to be good enough. It's easier if people tell me they want something and everything is transactional..."

He let out a weak chuckle, mocking his own thoughts.

"It was easier to wish to die than live and face it. Growth comes. True growth always comes from torment. When I fail enough it gives me clarity. I see things for what they are. Failure is my greatest teacher..."

He winced slightly, not from his wounds but from the thoughts swirling in his head.

"Its all a lie..." he whispered. Everyone watched him quietly. His tone was cold and hollow, almost emotionally muted.

"I didn't have a choice ... that was a lie. There is always a choice."

"Hahaha hahaha." He raised his head and laughed maniacally.

"I say I don't feel guilty but that is a lie. I feel guilt deeply ... not because I killed to survive but because I hate what surviving turned me into"

This contradiction sat deep in Damon's heart. It might not have been a complicated truth, but Damon was seventeen. To him it might as well have been impossible.

"Surviving has always been everything to me ... live a second longer. Am I a victim of my circumstances or the agent of my choice..."

He shook his head slowly.

"I am guilty... I am guilty because I put the fear of hurting others over myself.. when I am also a victim. I feel guilty knowing that I have betrayed myself..."

He stood up slowly. His legs shook but he held his own weight. His eyes were calm. Matia clenched her fist when she saw his expression, sensing the shift in him.

"I am done feeling sorry for surviving. Apologizing for existing. I made my choices. There is no use torturing myself for them ..."

Damon pointed at the Archivist with his mangled hand.

"We are always the ones who decide and we are the ones who make our choices. I have made mine and I will live by them if you hoped to break me... then you have failed."

The Archivist's eyes widened slightly. He looked almost moved. He had been certain Damon was broken for good.

"No one has ever survived the sixth sin ... you are the first "

He lowered his head for a moment, as if collecting himself.

"Then may I ask what purpose does your death serve if you are unfettered by your guilt..."

Damon laughed. His voice echoed into the halls of the library.

"I wish to be a bird ... my wings will touch the clouds.."

These words might not have made sense without context, yet somehow the Archivist and all who heard him understood.

He was saying:

I want to be free. I want to soar by choosing to fall.

Lazarak felt a tear slide down his cheek when he heard those words. By choosing death Damon was making a choice of his own.

Damon smiled with deep clarity in his eyes.

"We are not asked when we are born... we didn't exist so we never made that choice. Those who bring us into this world do.

Where we are born, who we are, how we look, none of us get to choose that. What we can choose is how we live, but that is difficult when our birth influences so much. Our scars will never heal. Still we can choose how we live and how we die. Because our choices begin when we are born and end when we die."

The Archivist lowered his head. The quill in his hand shook slightly.

"May I ask one final question before you face the last sin ... I may not get another chance to ask it. You may die or become lost in perpetual torment..."

Damon nodded slowly.

"You may .. I'm in a giving mood ..." He flashed a soft smile.

The Archivist nodded.

"What happens when you fail to die ..."

Damon went silent for a moment, then smiled softly.

"Then I will learn to live.... I will choose to make a choice for my future... since a coward's existence is no longer an option."

"You are interesting... I see why you are called the demon Your choices are confusing and I may never understand you.."

Damon shook his head slightly.

"No there is nothing wrong... it is human nature to have conflicting desires."

The Archivist seemed to smile.

"Let the final trial begin."

Chapter 789: Hubris Against The Divine

'If he can choose death and still survive, then surviving becomes an active choice instead of a reaction.'

These were the thoughts swirling in Lazarak's mind as he watched with a downcast expression. His shoulders slumped slightly, his fingers curling as he processed what he was witnessing.

It was important that Damon made the choice himself without anyone stepping in or choosing for him.

Then living would become a choice. It would be a rebirth he carved with his own will.

Lazarak clenched his fist. He would have to act now. This was Damon's final sin and, going by the order of things, this was the last one. The sin of pride. As for what crime was tied to it, he did not know. He was not a mind reader and Damon's past was a mystery to him.

'If he fails I'll intervene and unleash my authority and domain. It will put us at risk in the long run but so be it.'

Matia's eyes remained as cold as ever. He could feel raw hostility radiating from them, directed entirely at the Archivist. If she could have her way, the Archivist would regret ever existing.

He raised his small hand slightly so she would notice him. After all, he still looked like a toddler. She looked over, her cold glare sharp enough to freeze his soul.

He lowered his hand quickly.

"Ahem ahem. Forget I said anything." He did not want to end up on her bad side.

Damon remained calm, his gaze steady as it met the Archivist who was ready to announce the last crime and sin.

"You are a very proud man. You despise everyone with your words and actions and never acknowledge your limits even when they are meager."

The Archivist shook his head at Damon, almost pitying him.

"Of all the crimes you have committed, all pale in comparison to your greatest crime."

He whispered the next words as if afraid someone else might hear them.

"Hubris against the divine." His voice was soft but the words cracked through the library like thunder.

"Challenging gods without acknowledging one's limits."

Lazarak gritted his teeth as darkness crept across his eyes. His aura flared slightly as he prepared to fight. Damon glanced in his direction and raised his hand to stop him, his attention never leaving the Archivist.

"This is the sin of pride."

The images before Damon shifted, transforming into something he had nearly forgotten. It hadn't even been long ago, just a few months, yet seeing it replay was comical.

There was a young man whispering to a sound stone modified to resemble a god's totem. On the other side of that stone was Damon, pretending to be a god and guiding his chosen apostle Marcus.

"Hahahahaha." Damon laughed aloud as he saw the scene. Back then he had been walking on eggshells, wanting to kill Marcus Fayjoy.

He had used arrows tipped with cursed ore and planted them under Marcus's bed. Each night Marcus slept, they corroded his mind until he was half deranged. Then Damon decided to play god, using the sound stone to give Marcus revelations.

He twisted the young man against his friends until Damon killed them all.

Lazarak's unease grew. Being a lesser god, he knew the gravity of this sin. Gods should never be questioned by mortals. That rule was enforced even if he hated it.

This was simply the way of the world.

"Why are you laughing?" the Archivist asked.

Damon smiled as he looked down at the manifestation of the sin of pride.

"Ahhh I thought that book showed you everything about me. Suppose I was wrong."

His tone dipped into a cold whisper.

"I pride myself on having no pride so the concept is lost on me."

He clenched his fist until it made a crunching sound. Blood dripped from his burned peeling skin.

"Hubris against the divine. Hahaha. I laugh at that supposed crime. What crime have I committed when I know the gods are imperfect like me. When I know they weep like me, feel like me, shame like me, love like me and lose like me."

He gritted his teeth, thinking back to the Unknown God's criticism of what a god was. It had been difficult to understand the Unknown God, who was both god and demon, but his words had not been without merit.

"Isn't God supposed to be all good and all great."

"Hashanah." Damon laughed with pure disdain. Yes, this was hubris. Inflated pride and unshaken self-confidence.

He could accept his human flaws and weakness. He could feel guilt for them. But hubris against the divine.

Pathetic.

"I feel no guilt for that. I did it once and I will do it again. We are living in a hell created by a so-called God. I see God, I see their power, and all I see is their senseless cruelty."

He felt nothing wrong with saying it. Anyone could look at the world, at any world, and see the same thing.

"They tell us to worship the goddess. They tell us to pray when we are suffering. What good has that done? Is that even logical? We pray. We pay them from our meager earnings in the name of God while they dress in opulence and feast in abundance and we endure rags and hunger."

Damon felt no respect for the temple or the goddess.

"If you question religion it is blasphemy. Only cruel lies fear being questioned. And if the goddess is so great then why is she not fixing the rot she created. If she is good then she is not all powerful. And if she is all powerful then she is not good."

Damon sneered, his voice cold.

"That is what I have to say to your words. My hubris. No. I will not be deluded by the opium you feed the masses. If questioning the will of gods will have me damned then I welcome damnation."

He shook his head slowly.

"But I will not bow."

The Archivist trembled. Damon's heart held not a shred of guilt. No shame. No fear of God. Only disdain, anger and defiance.

The Archivist looked at his hands. The edges slowly began to turn to dust.

He glanced at Damon.

"A demon Only the demon defies god.

Chapter 790: Future Plans

Small crunching sounds came from the body of the Archivist. His form began to collapse, each fracture spreading like a web of cracks across his limbs until pieces broke away and drifted into dust. He glanced at his failing body, then lifted his gaze back to Damon with a thin, cold smile.

"What great hubris you have. You see no guilt. Very well then, move on with your ambitions. I wonder if you will perish, or live."

Damon did not answer. He simply watched the Archivist crumble. As the last fragments of the entity dissolved into dust, the air trembled. The world twisted and folded over itself, reality unspooling and reweaving until the false world vanished.

Damon felt a sharp pull. Then everything snapped back.

His burned flesh was restored. His broken bones mended. The library returned. He stood in the body of the mirror seraph once again, pristine and unmarred.

Well save for its original wounds.

There was no trace of the Archivist, no trace of the trials he had survived. Only the deep scars in his mind remained, throbbing like fresh wounds.

Before he could take a breath, Matia rushed to him. She seized his shoulders, her hands scanning across his chest and arms, searching for wounds with frantic precision. Her eyes were wide, glimmering with a worry she tried to hide.

Damon smiled softly and shook his head.

"I'm fine. Nothing I haven't dealt with before."

She stepped back only a little, her gaze cutting toward where the Archivist had stood. Her voice lost all warmth.

"Is he dead?"

Lazarak shrugged, his tiny shoulders rising and falling with a casual gesture that did not match the tension in his eyes. He tapped his small fingers against his knee as if testing reality itself.

"Who knows. That is hard to say. His power was interesting though. Why do you think his powers could wrap reality."

He looked at Damon this time, waiting.

Damon held his gaze. His voice quieted to something thoughtful.

"Guilt wraps our perception of reality. We live in contexts shaped by our own sins. Prey to our own shame. I learned a lot from this trial."

He placed his hand on the glass chest of the mirror seraph form, feeling the subtle glow of his own soul moving inside it. It felt lighter, almost calm.

"I always felt like I should be punished. I was afraid and ashamed. Now I feel liberated. I carried so much unnecessary guilt. Now I am free from its poison. This does not justify my actions, but it also does not excuse my suffering."

He glanced at Lazarak and smiled faintly.

"Just because I let survival turn me into this does not mean I cannot be happy. And it does not mean I cannot create something beautiful."

Valarie's last words brushed against his memory. She had told him not to live. She had told him to create something beautiful. Damon still did not know what that meant, but he felt closer to understanding it.

Lazarak closed his eyes before asking quietly,

"Then will you live now?"

Damon gazed at him with a tired softness.

"Nah, not a chance. Living is too much sweat. I will take the peaceful death."

Lazarak shook his head with a small, amused chuckle.

"You would probably fail. When the time comes, you can only use Mutawa on one thing. To live or to die."

Damon frowned.

He raised his brows, confused.

Lazarak let out a breathy laugh and tapped his foot on the floor, lost in a thought Damon could not follow.

"What if you had to choose who could be killed by Mutuwa. You can either use it to kill yourself or save yourself."

Damon lowered himself slowly to the ground, exhaustion settling deep into his bones. He leaned back on his hands and stared up at the ceiling.

"Well that is a no brainer. Did you forget I am suicidal. Ending my life is kind of my short term goal."

Lazarak sat down beside him, his infant form shifting as he got comfortable.

"Then what about your long term goal. It is unusual for someone who is suicidal to have a long term goal."

Damon lay flat on his back and rested his head on his arms.

"Well that is nothing new. Men die with wishes and ambitions. Even I have things I want to do."

Lazarak watched him quietly, his expression softening.

"Like what. I am slightly curious to know."

Damon let out a long breath. His eyelids were heavy, and the trial had drained him. A few days of rest sounded merciful, especially with the endless shelves of the library around them. Maybe he could even read for a while.

He glanced at Lazarak.

"Things I want to do. I am afraid I will disappoint you."

Lazarak gently relaxed onto his back, his small form looking strangely lively beside Damon.

"Surprise me."

Damon snorted and closed one eye.

"Well, you asked for it. Let us see. Where to start."

He placed his hand under his chin, rubbing lightly as if searching through shelves of forgotten desires.

"I want to be rich. And I do not mean rich rich. I want to be rich rich rich. Old money rich. High nobility, long family lineage, rich."

Lazarak raised both brows.

"Is that not a bit frivolous?"

Damon sat up slightly and covered his mouth in mock offense.

"Shut up. I am not done. If I was rich you would not be interrupting. Ahem."

He cleared his throat dramatically.

"Where was I."

Matia, who had been silent, answered without looking at him.

"Long family lineage rich."

"Yes yes, thank you. I am going to let the money change me. Let my entire personality do a full one eighty. I want to be spoiled. And when someone touches me I will call someone powerful to back me up."

He spoke faster, almost tripping over his own words.

Lazarak winced.

"Ahh is that all."

"Goodness no, I am just getting started. I am going to eat like a king. The fat kind. And when the people are starving because they have no bread, I will tell them to eat cake."

He nodded proudly.

"I will make sure water is no longer a human right. People will have to pay for it."

He lifted a finger as if lecturing.

"I have not even come to women. I will definitely have a scandalous affair with the princess while being engaged to some other noblewoman. Knowing full well I could trigger a political fallout that could cause the death of millions."

He continued his list with growing enthusiasm.

"I am going to shake down the rich and shake down the poor. I will hoard wealth and surround myself with the top one percent. I will work with religious organizations as a devotee of the goddess, while in the shadows I sponsor and endorse terrorist activities."

He finally stopped and turned to Lazarak.

"Still think it is a good idea for me to live."

Lazarak pressed his lips together.

"I think you should kill yourself now."

"But I'm not even done yet."