Demon Rising II: Homecoming

by shadow Mage

Summary

After two decades, Vergil has returned home to a brother stronger than he remembered and a son he failed to protect. Why does Dante now believe there is something horribly wrong with his brother? What secrets does the Dark Slayer cling to and who lingers in the shadows watching? This is the beginning of a new chapter of demon slaying and only God knows how it will all turn out and he's not talking.

Notes

I do not own any of the Capcom characters but sometimes wish I did.
Chapter Summary

Vergil was lost in Hell but Dante and Nero found the Dark Slayer and have brought him home to heal. His memories scattered and his mission, a promise, but to whom? Let's set the stage shall we?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Time has long been a concept that challenged scholars of both theory and practice. A variable that both hindered or advanced knowledge and understanding. It’s mere presence long thought to be fluid, dynamic and linear. Its passage marked by small ticks forward, ever forward. But here in this place, in this time, its very understanding had long been lost to those damned souls that inhabited its spaces.

In Hell, time passed differently than the laws set forth by mere mortals, humans. Here as in many other realms that were connected by tenuous threads of energy, legends and beliefs, time was not linear. But for anyone that remembered, those that could, hell was especially cruel. It took youth and vitality and replaced it with despair and fatigue only to moments later cycle again with the malicious intent to cause one to relive painful moments again and again. It was within these temporal rifts of hell that Vergil, the eldest son of Sparda, found himself adrift and searching. Although he had forgotten just how he had come to this place, he relived his decisions over and over. He experienced his loss again and again. His soul weary and broken from years turned decades of war, slavery, and despair. How long had he been lost? His memory flickered as he staggered toward something, no someone that called him. He struggled to remember why he was here anymore, what he had learned and why he still fought for his freedom. He had made a promise and he clung to the flickering weight of that promise that drove him toward his goal. As he fell once more, he remembered a Sparda always kept his promises.

Shadowy creatures and those with disfigured forms of varied substance moved without end in the surrounding plains; restless. Their hunger never sated, their desires amplified tenfold under a fiery orange sky of Hell. He was so close to being free. Free; the thought echoed thru his thoughts. The now ashen haired man pulled his weakened and battered body from the edge of a merciless black pool he trudged thru to get closer to his goal.

His deathly pale skin was covered in a thick cake of dried blood and shame. His fingers dug thru brittle bones until they found purchase in rocky soil. He clutched at the tattered shreds of clothing and armor left to cover him. Armor? Had he been in a battle? Yes, many, he remembered this clearly. Yamato long gone from his grasp and yet still he felt her loss. He missed her, desperately; her power, her consul, her companionship. He shook from his melancholy and rose defiant yet wiser. He finally felt he understood the price for the power he could now wield but it was the sacrifices that he understood best. Sacrifices his father made to protect them, to protect their mother and to protect others. Lives lost, in a battle older and more ancient than even Vergil had realized, until now. Without a backward glance, he strode silently thru the mired edges of blood filled pools some of which he had helped to create. Finally, his time had come, and he emerged from the depths of his last and most consuming sin. Pride.
His body had been reshaped and reformed into its former image from the broken shards of his very soul. A soul he fought for, a powerful soul he clung to, a soul that needed its other half. Finally, free from the influence of others, he was no longer controlled. His path finally clear. He shivered at the raw power he felt return to him and was terrified at the realization of what he had almost become. A puppet no longer. He hesitated unsure where he should escape to and his head swiveled to see the horror of other souls trying to flee, trying to escape the chaos that swelled in this place. For so long he had traveled deeper and deeper into hell never once did he consider he would one day need to find his way back out. He had planned to rule this realm, but he was wrong. That feat, that honor, belonged to another. He accepted this now. It was at this moment when despair once more reached with its cold fingers to strangle him from behind. And yet, somehow the dark slayer slipped thru those icy fingers, as if immune to her embrace. He was drawn to a thin blue-white light that appeared before him. The portal. The portal he was promised. He stumbled as bony half decayed hands reached from darkened pools of fetid blood. They taunted him with words that were nothing more than lies. He knew this now. He saw things much more clearly. He had fought harder than any one before him. He gained knowledge and power almost equal to if not surpassing that of his foes and yet still he lost. He had lost everything; his freedom, his brother, his sword, his future. He blamed his pride as he walked. He was not his father, nor would he ever be. The secrets he knew now haunted him as much as his father’s shadow ever would. Had he but asked for help in his heart he knew his brother would have said yes. Had he stayed she might have lived. But now, both of those paths were closed to him. He had to find another. In the end, it was his brother that proved himself worthy to fall the king of hell and in doing so had wrought havoc in the realm. Chaos and war raged allowing the once powerful dark slayer to finally see that all he wanted was to protect his family or, at least, what was left of it. Vergil now controlled his own destiny and although unsure where to begin he knew where he must go before he could start again and who he must find first. He had made a promise but to whom?

Dante.

He focused with pin point precision on the portal. The demon he had made his deal with kept his promise; Vergil would do no less. He trudged past the lakes of fire and the burnt cinders of rock while braving the putrid stagnant winds and heated air. He pushed away thoughts of his past and what could have been instead he focused on keeping his promise. He had much to do once on the other side. He muttered darkly with dry lips on a parched throat. He had already forgotten so much, but this was to be expected. It would return with time. He would find his brother and he would beg forgiveness. He focused on this and no other. This was where he would start.

Dante.

Voices that had taunted him, since his youth, since their separation, no longer held sway over him. They shriveled and fell silent to their death no longer able to feed on his pain, for Vergil was truly numb and felt nothing. He had been broken and rebuilt so many times that he himself did not know if what he saw around him was real. The last tethers of Mundus fell from his bruised and bloodied skin long ago. How long had it been since he left behind the remains of his Nelo Angelo armor? He had freed him. He kept his promises. With the defeat of Mundus, this realm had fallen into chaos. The demon lords left in the wake of the great war now fought in the vacuum of power and for a moment he traveled unnoticed. Yes, Vergil knew his time was short. He had to escape in this brief window of opportunity, but his thoughts began to waver with fatigue. He needed something. Yamato? No, he needed someone. Dante? Yes Dante. Painfully he remembered the way back.

“Forgive me brother!”

A voice whispered to him from the flickering portal light. So close, so close, he could almost touch the cooling chasm that split the air before him. Home. Not here in the demon realm but out there with his brother, Dante. He knew what he needed to do now. He knew exactly who he wanted to see.
“Dante!”

His voice rattled in his chest and he coughed feeling pain wrack his body. His eyes could no longer focus as the scarlet and orange of Hell’s skies were gone replaced with soft pale blue light of, my god, daylight? He shut his eyes to feel them burn from lack of use and he pushed against the bonds that held him tightly. In his new self-imposed darkness, he felt warmth to his cool skin and a gentle strength that supported him as he felt a myriad of new wounds littered across his body. He couldn’t remember where and what had happened as despair and fatigue settled into him once more. Then like the low rumble of distant thunder, he heard the voice that for so long he believed he would never hear again.

“Easy Verge, I’m here. I’m right here. I’ve got ya. It’s ok! You’re safe.” His voice shushed his brother softly as he clutched him tightly to his chest. Again, he repeated his words softly… calmly until the bewildered dark slayer finally understood what he was being told and sighed before letting a lung full of cool air enter and exit his pained chest. “That’s it. I’m right here I won’t let anything hurt you. You’re home.” The colder twin wanted to laugh, at his brother’s foolish notion, but the pain took hold once more and instead he groaned. The irony settled over him like a thick wet blanket as his mind cleared and he remembered bits of the long tortuous journey to find his way back to his brother. Had he really made it? All he had wanted to do was protect his little brother, but fate had led him down a path he would never have chosen on his own had he known of the betrayal, the lies, and the future others had laid out for them. Now he lay helpless in his brother’s arms fighting to breathe, struggling to remember. As darkness slipped over him once more, he offered one last thought; a plea. He had made a promise.

“I’m sorry.”

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Nero waited until Dante had stopped rocking his brother and crept silently into the room. He had heard the fitful nightmare the same as the red hunter who now knelt over his brother’s pale body and stroked his hair. He watched Dante tuck his brother, his father, safely back in to bed. He looked so pale and weak. His body was ravaged by Agnus’s poisons, the battle, and other horrors left vivid patterns to his body, but Nero could still clearly see the family resemblance. A strange eerie thought beckoned to him as he looked over the brothers. It was almost as if he were looking at some twisted doppelganger version of Dante. One that laid on his death bed while the other healthy imposter stood over him and waited for him to pass. Nero drew himself from this morbid thought.

Dante withdrew from his brother cautiously and he caught the youth’s troubled gaze. “Whoa, easy there, kid. He’ll be fine. He made it this far. We’ll get him the rest of the way. We just need time.”

“It’s just,” he paused running his bringer thru his hair. Dante noticed the kid’s bringer glowed a deep blue and grinned with relief. It hadn’t glowed like that in a long time. “…It’s just he looks so… frail. I mean after all the stories and then to actually see what he could do back at the Hell Gate; I guess I expected him to bounce back like nothing happened.” Nero finally looked at Dante and saw that his friend, his uncle, was tired, exhausted even, but he wore the most beautiful smile to currently adorn his face. “What?”

“Your bringer.” He motioned to the strong glow.

“Yeah, what about it?”

“It’s glowing like a Christmas tree. It only glows like that around strong demons, right?”

“Well, yeah, but it doesn’t normally glow around you anymore unless your pissed, or triggered and right now I don’t sense…,” his voice dropped. He never finished his sentence as he understood what Dante hinted at. “It’s not reacting to you; it’s reacting to him? That means he’s getting stronger?”
“Yup. It’s only been a few days and it hasn’t glowed that strongly since we got back. He isn’t strong enough to make it glow like a constant night light, sure, and eventually your demon will get used to having him around like you did with me, but still I’d consider that the first real proof that we are headed in the right direction. Wouldn’t you?”

The youth chuffed in agreement and rubbed his human hand up his arm to give his bringer a light scratch over his sleeve. “Huh, Yamato said my arm keeps itching, because of him. Something to do with part of me acclimating to his power being so close and, well, she’s also rambling about her master’s return and something about him being an Alpha, missing parts of himself, a future path and yadda yaddah. Honestly, I’m still trying to figure it all out. She’s very excited to have him back but she still whispers in those damn riddles.”

“Hmm,” he mused getting a distant look in his eyes. “Makes sense, I suppose. He made me itch when I was young too. Maybe…” Nero didn’t understand but his uncle had drifted to watch his brother sleep and he didn’t question; there would be time for that later. Time. His thoughts lingered on the moments that had led to this point. Not too long ago he found out he was not as alone as he once believed and now, now, he had a family. He turned to leave again but this time hesitated at the door. He looked over his shoulder and cleared his throat. The red twin stirred to look at his nephew. Nero felt a strange but welcome responsibility rise within him.

“You need to eat, you know stay strong for him an all. I’ve made dinner, so, come down and eat ok?”

Dante grinned, “Yes, mom.”

“Asshole!” he mumbled. He knew Dante would tease. He just didn’t think it would be this soon from their return. He was glad for it, actually. The past few days had been grim. Vergil appeared dead and hadn’t moved till now. He took it as another good sign and gave him a feigned glare of disgust that made the red twin chuckle lightly. Laughter, he missed that too.

“What?” His expression was reminiscent of more carefree days that seemed to have been ages ago. “C’mon kid, just cause my brother is back doesn’t mean…” The words suddenly choked in his throat and Nero saw tears prick at his eyes as a gambit of emotion rippled across his face. “My brother’s back,” he whispered before he panted a moment like he was about to hyperventilate. Nero came close and placed a hand to his shoulder as Dante bent his head down towards his knees and grabbed them with his hands. The snowy youth feared if the hunter fainted he would struggle to get him off the floor, so he began to rub circles on his back.

“Breathe, old man, breathe. I’m not hauling your ass off this floor.” After a minute or so Dante chuckled and stood quickly. He took the bewildered Nero into his arms for a crushing hug.

“Thanks kid. I never could have done this without you. I owe you.”

“Not a chance. This is what family does for one another, besides I just got tired of all your mopey bullshit.” They separated from their hug and he gave him a small grunt. “I had my own reasons for helping but we have time for that later.” Dante grinned and ruffled his hair only to earn a quiet growl. “Damn it! Not the hair. Now get downstairs and eat something.” Dante listened as Nero grumbled under his breath all the way to the stairs and took one last look at his brother. His breath rose and fell evenly, and he could tell he was in a deep healing sleep. He smiled before wiping the few tears that remained on his face away and backed toward the door. He needed this. It was the turning point he prayed for. Silently he thanked whatever god or deity that answered his prayers. He had his brother back.

“Welcome home, bro!”
He slipped away quietly but not before he reached his energies out to his brother in hopes that he would continue to feel him near. He would curl up with him soon enough and create a physical barrier against whatever haunted his brother. Their bond had once been strong enough that he could feel his brother even in Hell, both after he fell and then again after Mallet Island. The intensity ebbed and flowed but it was always, just… there. Dante once compared it to a leaky faucet, but it was more like a barely audible hum that came and went but was always there even when he couldn’t ‘hear’ it. It was the feeling that drove him to initially look for him even when the link was at best one sided and tenuous. Over the last few years, it had faded to a thin trickle, then a drip that was all but gone a few weeks ago. Even now it was dull and faded but he reached out just the same, hopeful one day they would cling to that link as they did when they were children.

As Dante, trudged tiredly down the stairs the smell of food energized him once more and his thoughts drifted instead to a future he had not yet planned. He needed to heal first, then there was the issue of him having a son. Did he know? What about Yamato? So many things swirled in his head. There would be complications and he wasn’t naïve to think they were in the clear. Eventually Agnus or Mundus, maybe even Belial, would come looking for him when they realized he was free but, for now, they had time and he smiled. Then it happened. Two steps from the office floor, he felt it. At first, it was a soft feathery tug in the back of his mind but slowly it grew stronger. “Vergil!?” He looked back up to the hallway and smiled letting their energy touch like threads slowly rebuilding a tapestry between them. Each thread grasping eagerly at one another until Dante felt the familiar weight of his brother just on the other side of their link, resting, quiet, and present.

After a moment, he hummed content for the first time in years and headed for the kitchen. The kid was right. He was hungry, and he had a whole slew of new reasons to take better care of himself. He felt a strange but welcome sense of completeness as their link continued to hum softly no longer one sided and no longer silent.

Chapter End Notes

I will update tags as I go. Can't give anything away too early ;)
Broken Memories

Chapter Summary

Vergil still drifts while healing in his dark dreams but as his memories begin to coalesce his brother comes up with a plan for him to heal faster.

His sleep was fitful and filled with dark shadows, pain, and blood. Currently, he moved thru a viscous fluid the color of burnt blood that seemed to cling to him as if it were alive. Something tried to pull him back into the darkness that lingered around him. This place was familiar and yet more dream-like and he wandered into the darkness searching. Mundus had thrown him into this pit just after his awakening on Mallet Island but that was so very long ago. He remembered desperate attempts to escape the depressing sludge that tugged at his very soul as if to shred what made him, him. Redemption and the chance to return to his brother to protect him from Mundus machinations already in motion spurred him to keep fighting. This place was filled with malice and raw dark power that perverted the Dark Slayer’s will to bend to his master. Illusions so grand and intricate as they were woven with half-truths that Vergil bent with their weight. He remembered the pain, the humiliation. It left him raw and exposed to emotions and open to the suggestion of doubt.

The demonic voices whispered constantly and occasionally broke thru his defenses. Sparda was flawed, they said. Vergil was flawed, this he knew this. The voices told him the demon Vergil had so aspired to be was nothing more than a puppet for heaven. He sold out the demonic realm for nothing more than the promise of being given his own angel, a pet to do with as he pleased, and a kingdom to rule. He betrayed his brother just as Dante had betrayed Vergil. Sparda lied to them. Demons lied. Yet, as these voices whispered to him a spark of reason lifted and doubt filtered in amongst these twisted words. Why would Sparda lie to them? Did he not learn the real reason for his father’s betrayal of a realm? Vergil remembered the scribe, the archivist, long imprisoned for his knowledge of the beginning. He had spared him, and he had listened. He fought in the abyss that held him, suddenly aware of the deceptions they fed him. Demons lied. He flailed thrashing as the voices laughed and it left him cold. So cold.

Had the demons that served Mundus known how close Vergil was to breaking then surely, they would not have freed him. Mire its cold never-ending darkness nothing more than a pit for damned, lost, and tortured souls forced from their living hosts with no new hosts or vessels to leave for. It was where the ‘nothing’ spawned from, the reavers, and other creatures so damned that only Hell could contain them. He fought within the Mire until he could no longer fight but it was then that something, someone, pulled him from the Mire. He couldn’t remember those details, only a shadowy figure that promised the chance for redemption, for revenge. Someone not unlike his father, someone that had the answers he sought. They were not, however, the answers he wanted. They gave rise to more questions, more darkness. Demons lied but so too did Angels, for why would an angel help a demon?

“In time, you will see the truth of my words. Your path is your own to follow. I cannot make your decisions for you, no one can. That is the gift of the divine to all. I need you Vergil. I need you whole. I cannot win this war without you. I see even now the divine guides us both. I need them, you need them, and you are the key. You have always been the key. Keep your promise and protect my legacy.”
His memory fluttered the voice now sounded familiar and close. Where was he now? Finally, all the voices faded. His promise? What? What did he promise? The details were lost in the fog of a mind fatigued from fighting so long. Now this new dream space held a strange kind of warmth that was comforting and familiar and he stirred; he wasn’t dreaming.

Vergil opened his eyes. To his surprise, it had only been a dream peppered with reality. His vision blurred at first as he was forced to relive those past events in a decayed fragmented flipbook of events. He struggled to decipher what was real, a memory, or a nightmare. He listened focusing on his soundings and discovered he was not in hell nor in the Mire but rather in a darkened room. His eyes struggled to focus. The warmth he felt emanated from a body tucked tightly to the curve of his back. He shivered in humiliation as an image of succubae and harpies pawing over his battered and abused body with lewd intentions lingered in his mind, but this body, this, felt different, familiar and not threatening.

Vergil took in the view around him cautiously as he felt the very real physical weakness pulse thru his body. The darkened shapes that surrounded him where strange and unfamiliar, but he felt he was somewhere far from his lingering memories. He almost felt… safe. Internally he laughed at himself. There was nowhere he was safe. The figure behind him continued to sleep snoring softly. Familiar. He shifted his shoulders against the weight behind him and felt a familiar burning ache in his veins that reminded him of exactly where he was. He may no longer be in hell proper, but he was in his newest kind of hell; a prison for a lab rat. Vergil reasoned dully that the figure behind him must be none other than the orc that cuddled him incessantly in the dark hovel of the cell Agnus had given them. He had always wondered what had happened to him. Vergil shivered again remembering the large maw of hands that roamed his broken body on more than one occasion as the lobotomized orc familiarized himself with his cellmate. He was often too tired to fight him, painfully exhausted from being forced to trigger repeatedly. His chest hurt briefly and he hesitated in his thoughts. He had to focus. He lay on a soft bed, not on stone or metal. The smells, while stale and strangely reminiscent of pizza, were not of blood, medicines, or bleach. Vergil’s memory flickered before him to remind him of the first disoriented days when he realized he was no longer in hell. When he met Agnus, he understood how far he had fallen from his plans. Now it was others who had plans for him. They had plans for his power. The power he had struggled to gain. They dared to take the strength he acquired. Forced to trigger daily. His seemingly petty experiments held a darker purpose and Vergil knew this. Slowly, he felt himself torn apart with each successful trigger event and he found he was unable to affect any useful resistance. His torture was cruel, driven, and unrelenting. He shivered remembering the drugs, the magic, the witch, as well as the shards of Yamato herself used to elicit the required results.

After a few ‘sessions’ the dark slayer shamefully learned his fate was to be a perpetual source of energy for his other experiments. He was relegated to that of a life as a battery. A far cry from the would-be ruler of Hell he had sought to become. When his beloved Yamato was found, she too suffered at the hands of the false demon. He felt her loss as deeply as he had the others. He struggled against the attempts to control him. He remembered the anger that fed him, it burned in him still, but again those details were lost. He tried to shift in the bed but the weight behind him held him close. He was so tired. He let his eyes close.

He was free of Mundus this much he could feel for his uncle had at one time had a tangible leash around his neck that was blessedly absent. The insidious dark voice in his head was also gone but then he thought he heard whispers; Yamato. That was not possible she was gone. Confusion washed over him as he remembered holding her in his hand once more; whole. Didn’t he just speak to Dante?

Time seemed to tumble in on itself and as he struggled to focus on where he was once more, he stumbled thru memories. The tyrant was gone yet he remembered the brutal beating and being
dumped back into the cold viscous Mire, that cursed sea of lost and damned souls that pulled at him. He shivered. He remembered Yamato was broken but why? But he held her did he not? Where was she? He could hear her voice soft and comforting but he pushed it away. Wis...ful wanton charades, folly, weakness. His dreams and memories were blurred. He steered himself feeling a small measure of the ancient power that lingered within him. He reached for the anger that had been his fuel. He would let no one control him again. No fake intentions, no misguided plans, no more secrets and no more lies. He would not be controlled. He would be a pawn no longer.

His anger grew, and his demon stirred sluggish. The memories began to make more sense to him as he now looked around the cluttered room. He was back in the human realm and far away from the cold sterile lab. How did he get here? New strange memories come unbidden into his mind. Angels, demons, specters all clamored to control him. He felt rage bubble within him as his demon woke. Too long had he been controlled by others and it was time for them all to pay for underestimating him. Suddenly, the figure behind him moved to hug him tighter whispering his name. The cold twin tensed amazed that he had simply dismissed the body holding him; it was as if it were a second skin and a part of him and therefore of no consequence in his mind. And yet...

"Vergil? Vergil? Hey, snap out of it. It’s ok. It’s me Dante. Verge? Hey, it’s ok bro. I’m here. You’re safe, just relax, you’re still weak from whatever Agnus had you pumped up with. You’ve been out cold for a while." The voice was so familiar so reassuring, even the energy it now emanated was comforting but this was not possible. A sort of panic flooded Vergil and his inner demon calmed soothed by these words before it fell silent still exhausted. Mundus had once used images of his brother to control him. They were twisted tortuous scenarios that proved only to break the elder twin a little more. But as the figure released him, Vergil painfully turned and moved his body to face the voice. Finally, he saw the figure that held him.

"Dante?" The words escaped parched lips and he shivered but the soft tug deep within his mind told him this was no mirage. Mundus could never replicate the warm compassion that welled within the cerulean blue eyes that watched him now. A hand softly stroked his face brushing hair that was too long from his face.

"Yeah, it’s me. You gave me a scare bro. You’ve been out cold for a long time, longer than I expected. I thought I..." The words caught in his brother’s throat and Vergil watched amazed as he sensed for the first time in over a decade the stirring of his inner demon to reach out and embrace the energy that now flowed effortlessly between them. This was his brother and no one else. Only his brother knew how to share his energy like this and only his brother was permitted to touch him and to be this close, to be this intimate, with him. He craved the warmth and love he now felt come from his brother. He wanted to be forgiven to explain.

"I..." Vergil coughed violently his throat burned from its use and he felt nausea overwhelm him as he was shifted in the bed.

"Easy Verge, drink this. It’s water” The later statement in response to the hardened expression that he gave his brother. “I promise no drugs, no poisons, just water.”

His hand shook as he reached for the cup and Dante pulled close to his brother helping him to drink. The water was cool and instantly made his dry throat sigh in relief. The sick aching feeling that had overwhelmed him quieted yet remained persistently. He frowned watching the blue eyes that looked down at him with concern. “I don’t need to tell you you’re weak, but I have a plan; I’m gonna let you feed from me. My blood will sustain you until that crap is completely out of your system.” Vergil looked blankly at his brother as more images came unbidden into his mind. Images of a woman, an angel, more demons, and even another younger Dante haunted him at the moment. Dante felt him slip from him. “Verge?” He shook him gently. “Are you with me? Come on bro, you’re
scaring me. Do you remember what happened? You’re free. Agnus, Belial, Mundus all gone. We sent them back to hell and this… here now… this is real… you’re alive and…”

“… you brought me to your crappy hovel of a home. It smells.” His eyes, suddenly, became focused and sharp while his expression morphed into that of disdain. He remembered enough to know that this was indeed his brother, Dante. He had found him. His brother reached over to softly touch his face. Vergil flinched at the contact but pressed lightly into his hand. He pulled away with his hardened stare fixated on his brother. He did not want to seem weak despite the shaking he felt his body being overcome with.

Dante chuckled seeing his brother fight back with his words. He was weakened and barely able to spit such venom, but he spat them just the same. It was classic Vergil not some specter or fervent wish…this was real. He nodded more to himself than to his brother He sensed he would not receive an answer to his suggesting to feed and he slit his wrist with a clawed finger before he quickly pressed the bleeding wound to his brother’s lips. Shock crossed his face, but Dante had already decided he wouldn’t give him a chance to refuse until he could physically back up any threats offered.

Dante pulled him close cradling his beloved brother as he succumbed to the transient high he received from the raw life essence his body craved. His veins pulsed a deep purple as he gripped his brother’s wrist roughly holding it to gain stability as much as to stop his arms from shaking. The red twin noted silently that Vergil was weaker than he realized being unable to drop his fangs and he scanned him feeling the unevenness to his energy and the small….no missing…something. Dante frowned he had felt this before but was unable to determine just what was wrong. The elder quickly faded to sleep in the oblivion of his dreams. Dante laid his older brother back to the bed and wrapped his shivering body in a blanket. He watched as Vergil fell into unconsciousness once more and stroked his hair gently. Something nagged at him as he watched him sleep. The door squeaked softly behind him. It was late but not so late that he should have realized Nero was keeping an eye on him. He was glad he was there.

“Everything ok?” Dante loved that his nephew had offered to stay and hearing his voice drift to him from the door caused him to smile. Over the past year or so, they had grown closer and he had to admit he was dependent on the kid in some ways.

“Yeah, he was awake for a few minutes.” He watched his brother’s chest rise and fall as the shivering subsided.

“Told you. It’s only been a couple days. See? Still glowing brightly, still itching like crazy.” He scratched his bringer absently. “Did he recognize you?” He ventured a step into the room aware that Vergil was out cold again. It had been two days since he first spoke to his brother and honestly Dante believed Vergil would just snap out of it the next morning. When he didn’t, Nero started doing research and Dante started pacing.

“He was disoriented at first, but he recognized me. I managed to get a little water into him.” He crinkled his brow. Something was most definitely off with his brother, but it had been so long perhaps he was looking for trouble. He shook the thought from his head and moved a step from the bed.

“He’s dehydrated, and I think it’s part of the reason why he’s sleeping so much.” Nero hesitated with his next question, “What about blood? I mean were you able to, you know, get him to…”

“He can’t drop his fangs. He’s too weak but I didn’t give him the option. I managed to get a little in him. It’s a start. It’s still too early to see how well my blood can flush the poisons out.”
“Hang in there. I think he is getting stronger. It’s just really slow. We don’t know how long he was under, I mean not really. My research points to a type of hibernation sickness on top of everything else that’s going on. Yamato said he’s sleeping not dying. She keeps trying to reach out to him but he keeps shutting her out. Your blood should help him fend off the sludge.” The red twin nodded absentely stroking his brother’s face. They had talked about the pros and cons of sharing his blood. The risks were few considering they were brothers, but nothing was without risk. It could make him dangerous with blood lust.

Nero watched the red hunter and marveled that someone so brash and loud could be so gentle and quiet. He hesitated when he looked to the man he knew to be his father. He scared him without really having a reason why. Nero reminded himself he had a job to do. Yamato hummed in agreement. He needed to keep them focused on recovery and in order for one to heal the other had to stay healthy. “You need to eat. I know how you love to sleep all day but come on. If you want to support him until he can do so himself, you’ve got to keep yourself healthy both the human half and the demon half. He’ll sleep for a bit, so come downstairs. I’ll get you something.”

“Mmmm”

“Dante? You know I’m right.”

“Ok, kid. I don’t want him to be alone. Stay here and I’ll grab something.”

Nero hummed softly, getting Dante to step away from his brother was getting harder. If he wasn’t sleeping next to him he was pacing the halls. Dante didn’t say it, but Nero could tell he was fearful that his brother would just up and leave or worse. “He doesn’t know me, and we don’t know what he remembers.” The youth rubbed the back of his neck, his bringer flickered with his nervous energy. He remembered what the Dark Slayer could do even in his weakened state and he knew of the stories. “What if he wakes up? What if your blood … ? Never mind, I’ll just bring food to you, but so help me I’m cleaning this room up. It’s a pigsty and it smells in here, old man.” The snowy-haired youth closed the door and shuffled down the stairs, for now, he chose not to be alone with Vergil.

Dante half chuckled at his words as he sat back to the edge of the bed and stroked his brother’s hair, “That’s just what he said.”
It's all in the Name

Chapter Summary

Vergil struggles a bit with control and Dante wants things to be different this time.

The office was quiet, and Dante lifted his head from the bed. It was too quiet. Instinctively, he reached for his brother, but he gripped only the sheet. “Not again!” he whispered as panic flooded him, and he jumped to his feet. Movement from the corner caused him to snap his head in that direction.

“Why did you bring me here, clone?” a cold voice ground out from the shadows.

“Verge?”

“Answer me doppelganger! This illusion you have created is wrought with foolish inconsistencies. Dante would never bring me here to his circle of influence! I gave him many reasons to not trust me. Should I fall, he will never believe I am not the devil I wanted him to see nor the puppet you would have me remain. My cruel ways and misguided intentions shall serve me well in keeping him from the likes of you. Did you really think I would fall for such deceit?” Blue eyes glowed angrily from the darkness and the air crackled with his energy. Dante shivered at the cold hatred in his brother’s words. As the air around him crackled, he felt his own demon rising to answer the challenge. He needed to act fast. He couldn’t have another incident where his brother triggered only to destroy everything around him before he fell from his demon form in agonizing pain. To watch him writhe in such agony had broken Dante’s heart. He always believed his brother to be stronger but to see him so vulnerable was hard to swallow. The room was now spartan of the clutter and furniture that normally littered his room. His room looked like a battlefield of sorts. Keeping his brother quarantined to a single bedroom had first been out of a desire to care for him but now it was a necessity to keep him from destroying the office. Vergil was quite the bull in a china shop when he triggered. He seemed irrational, angry, and confused which was a far cry from his normal cool and composed self. Dante felt like he was witness to two personalities trapped within a single body, and very similar to when he was young and first felt his demon rising within him. As the seconds ticked by a sudden thought came to the red hunter, he needed to quickly pull his brother from whatever delusion played out in his mind. The memory of his youthful demon gave rise to a new memory. It was an idiotic plan but one worth the attempt.

He straightened sharply as the air became thicker with the dark energy he recognized as his brother’s trigger about to explode forth and he did his best imitation of his father’s authoritative voice. “Vergil Vyrthur Aurelius Redgrave! Stop this nonsense and listen! You are not a prisoner, not a pawn. You are free of Mundus, free of Agnus. Belial was sent back to hell where his ass belongs. You are here in the human realm in my shop and if you tear this place up any further I will grab Rebellion and remind you why pops gave that powerful brute of a sword to me and not you!” The shadowy twin visibly shook, and Dante ventured to step forward a single step in an attempt to intimidate or at least show him that he meant business. He kept his eyes leveled at his brother. The air crackled as if it teetered between the ignition of a flame or the smother of that same ember. He felt the flicker of power weaken and he held his breath.

“Do not use that name...” His voice was unsteady, and Dante could now see through the shadows
that he leaned a hand to the wall for support and panted. His aura faded before he also took a step forward to scrutinize Dante’s face. “... Dante Ezio Lorenzo,” he growled.

Dante grinned, “Would you rather I just call you ‘Lucy’ then?” He sighed as he relaxed the air becoming less static.

“I would not. Clearly, it agitates me... moron.” His aura faded sharply, and Dante sighed. When they were old enough to know their full names, the twins swore never to use them. Their full names were grand and extravagant and carried as much weight to them as the beleaguered yet simple characters of the Inferno from which they were named first. Occasionally and often out of anger, they reverted to bouts of extravagant name calling, sometimes with elements of their true names as well as several made-up ones. It was ridiculous and foolish but it often ended in the few rare times that Vergil laughed. If he remembered correctly, he had been called Olivia while Dante thought Vergil was more of a Lucy at the time. The name calling was a predecessor to other terms such as fool, and imbecile and in a way, Dante missed all the names they came up with. He missed those rare glimmers of his brother smiling. It was an event Vergil would never share with anyone and it was this fact that Vergil used to correctly gauge that the now grinning man-child before him was indeed his idiot brother. He sighed as he braced to the wall harder, his stature shrinking, and Dante stepped up to him.

“It’s OK, Verge. You get disoriented easily when you fall asleep for prolonged periods. I’m not sure why but at least I can still pull you back from these delusions. I’m not sure this place can handle another trigger event.” He wrapped an arm around his shoulder to support him.

“They are not delusions. My mind is tortured with nightmares and filled with half memories that I cannot shake easily. How long?” He started to shake his fever had no doubt returned but he allowed his brother to support him rather than the wall. They moved slowly back toward the bed. Dawn would break thru the low clouds outside their window soon, but sleep beckoned once more to at least one of the twins.

“About eighteen hours since you were awake and last triggered. I don’t know if you remember but you fed after I got you calmed down again. You about took my head off, but you were exhausted afterwards. At least this time you didn’t trigger. I gotta admit you look better.” He casually brushed his hair back out of his face. He knew his brother hated it in his face.

“Liar,” he grumbled as his brother helped him sit to the bed. “I am not healing fast enough. I need to get out of here, I have…”

“Things to do, people to see, possibly kill, yeah I get it. But until you know where you are every time you wake up, you’re staying here. No questions.” Dante was agitated by his brother’s desire to leave. He knew he would leave eventually but he was still hopeful he would stay.

“Hnnn…I have a promise to keep. Someone to find now that I know you are alright.” Dante crinkled his brow at the open admission he had someone else to find but also the admission he was concerned for him. He started to ask but as his mouth opened Vergil must have realized he had spoken aloud rather than letting that thought run silently through his head. “I sense someone else here. We are not alone?” He narrowed his eyes at his brother as if he dared him to call him out on what he had just said but Dante knew better. Vergil had secrets and it was obvious he wanted to keep them to himself.

“It’s just the kid, uh… Nero. Do you remember him?” Dante turned away from the glare and let out a long sigh. He rolled his shoulders and searched the sky for some sign that the worst was over. He didn’t find it.

“I’m not sure. I remember a woman, no she was a witch, and perhaps the boy you speak of. His
energy does seem familiar. I believe they rendered some sort of assistance, but the details seem strained. Do you trust him?"

“More than you can possibly imagine. We’ll talk about him later. You ready for another infusion?” Selfishly, he wanted his brother to sleep again so he could figure out what to do next. He felt he might be running out of time with him. He feared the next time he woke up alone, he would be gone for good.

“I do not like this. My dependency is a weakness. I should try real food.” Dante turned and eyed him as he leaned forward to his knees and ran an exasperated hand thru his hair. He should give him a haircut.

“Vergil, you don’t like anything. Except maybe for tea, and reading, oh, then there is killing stuff and your sword. Remember the last time we tried food, I cleaned it up off the floor. I don’t really feel up to it right now. Only God knows what kind of crap they had you on. At least, my blood you tolerate.” The elder twin sneered at his brother, but the action was taxing, and he grumbled.

“Imbecile. Where is Yamato? You found her, didn’t you? I want to see her. I can sense she is near.” He snorted as his brother now glared at him with tepid thinly veiled disgust. The sword would become an issue. He knew this and worse he knew she had to remain with Nero. He needed to distract him. “I missed being your imbecile. Nero isn’t quite so colorful, unless, you account for the profanity, but he’s young. I like knowing you didn’t completely lose those traits of yourself in Hell.” He pushed his brother to lay back in the bed and waited as he seemed to gain a measure of comfort now that he was lying down again.

“I lost many things in hell my grasp of illustrative vocabulary was not one of them, do not be fooled,” he snapped coldly. Dante grinned again and awkwardly straddled him as he crawled over his prone body only to then pull his brother close as he lay next to him. Too tired to argue with him, the dark slayer rolled his eyes and sighed. “Must you make this awkward at every opportunity?”

“Yep,” he chuckled. “See, the way I see it you’ll be all better in no time and won’t ever let me touch you again. I’m taking what I can. I missed you.” He kissed his brother’s forehead causing him to shiver. His fever had returned. Dante let a short chuckle rumble in his chest.

“You avoided my question.” Vergil knew his brother was keeping something from him but in truth, wasn’t he? It came as no suprise, but he thought the sword was lost to him despite the nagging wraith like voice in his head and the errant feeling that she was close.

“Yes, I did. Now what do you say? Ready for a little AB negative?” Vergil sighed shifting to get comfortable. “You know, I’m itching for a few beers now that you’re on the mend would you like your blood leaded or unleaded next time around?” He snorted at his own comment. He knew Vergil abhorred beer.

“Unless you drink something other than the warm piss you call beer, I prefer unleaded, thank you all the same. I’m quite sure you wouldn’t know quality alcohol if it walked up and slapped you on the…”

“Woah there, language! Guess someone else in the office likes to be moody!” Vergil glared at his brother as he chuckled again before he morphed into a serious face. “Just kidding. Feel free to slap me anytime.” He wriggled his eyebrows and Vergil made a gagging face before he answered.

“Keep this up and I will!” His cheeks dusted pink in anger and Dante was reminded where the snowy youth downstairs got a few of his traits.
“That’a boy. You keep up the will to live and I shall graciously provide you with the entertainment to keep you appropriately agitated.”

“Oh joy!” he snarked. Dante quickly pressed his wrist to his lips stopping any further comments being possible as he laughed at Vergil’s obvious discomfort. He was pretty sure he would pay for this in the coming weeks but right now he didn’t care. Vergil struggled a moment but settled next to him finally letting his fangs drop to accept Dante’s gift.

The red twin sighed with contentment after the initial prick caused him to tense. As they relaxed into the bed, he reached over and covered both with a blanket and patiently stared at the ceiling deep in thought until his brother drifted off to sleep. He wondered how long he would be out this time and as he scanned him over again, his inner demon chirped an update on his health. There was no doubt about it. Vergil had some sort of parasite lodged deep within him. Since he started feeding, Dante had become more acutely aware of something that did not like his blood. His blood was obviously disrupting the poison that disoriented his brother and slowed his healing. Vergil was taking a turn for the stronger and something didn’t like that.

Just before his brother dropped into a deep sleep, it happened again. Unknown to Vergil, Dante would catch glimpses of memories. This time he saw things more clearly although their context made no sense. Vergil had been thru more than he realized but the images were confusing at best. He saw Mundus and Hell, several battles, a stone gargoyle demon that looked very familiar and then the lingering shadowy image of a large dark angel? It was an image he had seen linger in Vergil’s memories just out of focus before. He frowned. Why would Vergil have met an angel in Hell? He focused on positive memories from their childhood and tried to leave him with pleasant memories as he drifted into a deeper sleep. He would have to watch him. He was getting stronger and sooner rather than later he would want to rejoin the world. He wasn’t sure someone in the house was quite ready for that and frankly, he wasn’t convinced the world was ready for the return of the Dark Slayer in all his dangerous and dark glory. But what he did know was simple. He didn’t want the second coming of evil with another Sparda obsessed mission to drive them apart again; he just wanted his brother. He just wanted Vergil.
Chapter Summary

Vergil may think he's having a rough recovery but it's about to get a little more awkward. Time to meet your son. No really, he's your son and he wields Yamato.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay. A computer problem forced a rewrite. I hope you like the direction that sprung from that chaos.

Nero was shocked that much was obvious from his wide-eyed expression. His breath left him suddenly as his head slammed to the wall. The pale lifeless body that once lay still on the bed now snarled in his face. He had thrown him across the floor and pinned him with little effort to the wall. A frail hand, in appearance only, clutched Nero’s throat tightly and he glared hatred from steel grey eyes that bled to red. Dante heard the sudden commotion from downstairs and raced up the stairs to find Vergil in a feral state. The youth pressed into the wall struggled to breathe as Vergil’s aura pulsed an eerie purple with his eyes scarlet red.

"Who are you?" he hissed. “Does Mundus think he can sway me with this altered visage of my brother?" Nero clawed and gripped the hand to his throat trying to break its hold. He had been caught off guard by the attack and didn’t want to hurt him but as the world around him darkened he had no choice and swiped his father across the face with his claws. His bringer pulsed at the action and Vergil froze as dark blood seeped at the superficial scratches on his cheek.

The blue twin roared not from the scratches but from the sudden realization that his beloved sword was inches from his grasp. He grabbed the bringer in his free hand and smashed it into the wall knocking several items from shelves to shatter on the floor and the drywall gave way beneath the strain. “Give her to me! Yamato is mine! Insolent whelp, I will rip this arm from its socket!” His anger vibrated thru the room as he roared and even before Dante reached the door he felt his demon rise to the surface.

Nero howled his head thrust back to hit the wall as his legs kicked at the hardened body before him. Yamato pressed her energy into the boy and his trigger began to crawl over him. Vergil tilted his head in confusion. “Why does she protect you? She’s mine!” Dante didn’t hesitate as he burst thru the door. He saw all he needed as he entered the room and tackled his brother back into his bed just as both twins exploded into triggered forms. The bed groaned under the weight of both demons and Nero slumped to the floor gasping for air.

"Vergil, No! Stop!" He straddled his brother but was quickly thrown as Vergil rolled away to lunge at Nero who scrambled away trying to get to his feet. Vergil thrashed violently against the hands that grabbed him from behind as what little bits of furniture left in the room shattered with a violent swipe of claws and bodies as the twins struggled against each other.

Nero shook his head to clear the dizziness just as Vergil tore from his brother and summoned swords
all aimed at the youth who now stood in his full spectral trigger. Time slowed as the swords raced toward him but suddenly they disappeared, and Vergil collapsed to his knees on the floor with a guttural roar that ended in a painful howl. His aura faded, and his trigger slipped from him but the veins beneath his pale skin pulsed in that same eerie deep purple they had seen on Fortuna. For all the sheer power his brother flexed, Dante was surprised he seemed unable to hold his trigger for longer. He glanced to Nero who seemed a man suddenly possessed and before he could stop him Nero stabbed Yamato straight thru his father’s gut with a powerful thrust. Horrified, Dante heard himself cry out as he fell from his own trigger and knelt beside his fallen brother to grab his shoulders and support him.

Yamato glistened darkly as she protruded thru his back. Dark blood dripped from her edge. The roar of his own blood rushed thru Dante’s ears and disoriented him as he felt both shock and excruciating pain reverberate thru their link. Suddenly, Yamato pulsed again, and her color returned to a near blinding blue-white flicker that made Dante flinch. Nero yanked the sword from him. The wound seemed to flood his shirt and pants first in dark blood but then a vivid scarlet red. Vergil fell forward to his hands and unceremoniously wretched a horrid mass of brackish purple material before him before he suttered to the floor and wheezed. His eyes glittered like shards of glass as he glared hatred at the boy. The mass suddenly moved having been exposed to light and before Dante could process what was before them Nero crushed the creature into a dark wet smear with his spectral bringer. Vergil coughed blood, clear bright vivid red blood, and Dante scrambled to help his brother into a seated position against the side of the bed. Frantically, he felt his wounds to feel his blood slick the floor and his hands. Nero fell from his trigger and promptly fell to his own knees in obvious shock. Yamato flickered back into his bringer when Vergil suddenly snapped his head up and roared again.

“You fool!? How could you leave one of the most powerful weapons in this or any other realm and the very weapon capable of separating this world from the demon realm with, with that, that child? She’s is mine! You had no right to pawn her off like some cheap trinket. My power, my responsibility, mine!” His voice seemed to reverberate with pain as much as it did power but also confusion and Dante felt his brother’s irrational panic rise to cloud his mind as he struggled to stand defiantly.

Before Dante could clamor to stand next to him, the elder twin thrust his hand forward and called for Yamato. “Vergil, no!” Again, time seemed to bend warping in on itself as Nero physically felt him call for the sword. At first, he felt the tingle of pain flicker across him as if he had stuck his finger in a light socket and he expected to feel the sword pull from his bringer in a most spectacular and painful fashion but instead he swore he felt something akin to a yawn as the flicker of pain dissipated. Vergil’s face morphed into one of anger and he growled baring fangs. Nero looked to him then to Dante before he lifted his bringer to inspect it and saw the colors swirl softly within its glowing fissure. She pulsed softly, calmly, and Nero looked up at Vergil again, surprised. Yamato had denied him, with a simple but clear, ‘No’. The elder twin blinked at him his expression having changed back to one that wavered between disgust and disapproval as blood trickled from his mouth and he wiped absently at it. He dropped his hand to his side as his stance waivered with obvious fatigue. His veins pulsed softly in a pale shade or blue that Nero had not seen to date when suddenly his color began to return and before their eyes his wounds seemed to close. He seemed as if he were made of marble within minutes as Dante clutched at his brother and stared at him.

“Verge?”

“Explain.” He shrugged away from his brother leveling a cold gaze at the youth. His voice was thin and curt with the promise of new found strength to back up the unspoken threat to obey.

“What?” Dante and Nero looked to one another not sure which of them had spoken first. Nero
stood shaky at first but the flicker in his bringer caused Vergil to raise an eyebrow.

“That is impossible. I am no fool. My son was murdered as was his mother. Mundus was not so careless as to allow either to live.” For a split second, Dante thought his brother had lost his ever-loving mind and then he realized; Yamato answered him. “Do you mean you succeeded where I failed? How? You are bound to me! Not even Mundus himself could pull you from my grasp....”

Yamato urged Nero to speak of when they first met. It was an awkward moment but Nero found his voice again. “Agnus had her. I don’t know when or where he found her, but she was shattered. I stumbled into something Agnus didn’t want me to find and he tried to...” Nero pushed up with a grunt from the floor and shivered but glared back at the man before him. “... he tried to kill me, but this sword, Yamato, she...”

“She heard your demon call for more power; the power to save yourself, the power to save those you love. She recognized your blood. My blood. She awakened your demon much like I did the same to your uncle. It was your voice, your power, that pulled her from her slumber.” The room was quiet as they stared at one another. “She fulfilled a promise I was unable to keep.”

“Nero? You ok?” Vergil sat hard to the edge of the bed and hung his arms over his knees with his head down. Nero nodded at Dante but stared at the man on the bed then looked around what was left of the room, the blood on the floor and the wet smear.

After a moment of shock, the reality of everything that had just happened tripped from his tongue. “What the hell? How the hell can he move that fast? I thought you said he was asleep? What the Hell was that! Was that inside him?” His voice rasped as he rubbed at his throat which no longer pained him but the memory of the cold hand once curled around it remained. “I just checked on him. He was shivering so I tried to cover him. I just... Fuck! What just happened?”

“Reaver, they are creatures that dwell in the mire that I was once cast into with the hopes of forcing me to obey. I did not, and the first creature withered and died. This one apparently was inserted while I was somehow unaware. I do not remember many things from my time in that abhorrent lab.”

“Vergil I’m...I’m sorry. I...”

“There is no need to apologize. Yamato sensed I was compromised. She merely waited for the right opportunity to free me. I will heal much faster now.” He did not lift his head as he spoke in his low raspy voice, but Dante shook himself from his fugue and stepped toward his brother. He knelt with a hand to his shoulder and looked at him concerned. “She will serve you well for the time being and I shall allow her to remain with you... for now.”

“Verge?”

“I need time brother. I must evaluate my failings. Please leave me.” Something in his words caused Dante to shudder. Vergil shouldn’t be left alone, not now, not after this. He could feel so many thoughts and emotions bubbled just under the surface. He shook his head and turned to Nero.

“Kid, this is my fault, mine, not yours. I should have taken better precautions and I should have told you about the parasite. Honestly, I didn't know what it was and I just didn’t know how to... never mind. Look, just head downstairs and once I get him settled I’ll be down, Ok?”

“Yeah, whatever.” Dante could tell more than his body was hurt. He should have warned him. This was his fault. He felt his brother gaining in strength even as he seemed near exhaustion sitting next to him. There were so many questions he didn’t have answers for. He hadn't been there for his
nephew and he knew it. He felt torn watching him leave. Nero rolled his shoulders and stalked out the door. It was false bravado, but Dante wasn’t so sure that if this had happened to him that he could have pulled it off half as well.

He looked back to his brother only to see his brother staring at him with a calm placid expression. One gently arched eyebrow raised as he reached over and brushed his cheek to rid it of dried blood. “You should really try to not tear your son apart. It makes it hard to get to know him.” Vergil narrowed his eyes at his brother and Dante grinned. He relaxed his grip to his shoulder and sat next to him. The bed groaned under the combined weight but held once more. “So...You knew. You knew you had a son, didn’t you?” Dante looked at his brother with surprise and disbelief. “Just what do you remember Verge? I want to know everything, and I want to start with, why?” The silence hung between them like a thick curtain but slowly he felt tendrils of Vergil’s energy reach for him and he closed his eyes and let his brother ‘sense’ that it was really him. It may have only been a few days since they rekindled their link, but Dante understood it was the only thing that currently anchored his brother in this reality. He opened his eyes again feeling the tendrils recede as slowly as they crept over him.

“In time, I will tell you all but first, brother, tell me. What do you know of our father? Do you know our family heritage? Do you know why he left?”

“My lady?” The whisper preceded the ghostly figure of Eae as he entered the edge of the garden. Injured by his subjugation by the demon lord Belial, Vergil’s true guardian angel had lost most of his corporeal form and now wandered in heaven a mere sliver of his form self. He grew stronger with the passing days and wanted to return to help the twins as soon as possible. So much was currently at stake. He traversed the distance along the pristine path quickly to find the still healing mother of the twins lingering at the edge of a pond. Her hand hovered above an image of her sons.

“I wanted to be the ones to tell them our story. They were too young to understand all the complexities of our lives and then suddenly Sparda was gone and then I didn't know when was the right time.” she whispered. “They believed me to be human as their father wished and I was for a time. Mundus would have corrupted and twisted the story. I hope Vergil can see this.”

“Your eldest is smart perhaps more so than is good for him at this time, but do not fret Sparda had his reasons.” Eae answered having finally reached the graceful figure leaning at the water’s edge. He stood behind her a moment and heard her breathe catch as the image shifted before her and Dante seemed angry. “Even now he protects them, guides them. Have faith that they are finally together after all this time.”

“While I am relegated to watching my sons suffer. What good does this do?” Her words were angry but her clipped tone suggested she tried not to show her pain.

“We do not know the plans made for us, m’lady.” His blue-white spectral image knelt beside her and touched her shoulder. She straightened and flicked her hand across the pond to disperse the image of her sons as they argued in the wrecked room. She looked at him with sad crystal blue eyes. “We must have faith.”

“I had faith... once, but now I am bitter and tired of watching things unfurl as the chaos within the realms grows deeper. And now, where are all these divine plans the arch angels spoke of? The council bickers on how to decipher God’s word and endlessly waivers on getting involved while we the ones actually seeing and living with their decisions are on the brink of a new war. Angels are dying Eae, my sons are being led by the nose on a wild goose chase, and Sparda is still missing from my sight. How do I know what you say is true? Is he really still alive?”
Eae flinched at her questions and she turned from him. “Surely, it will not come to war.”

Eva stood dusting herself off as she looked out over the expanse of the rose filled garden. “Yes, I believe that is where we are inching with every passing day. Several divine weapons are missing, Lucifer is missing, Belial gathers his forces in hell as does Mundus. That fiasco at the gate was but the tip of the iceberg. It took every trick we had to send them back. If it were up to me I would let them destroy the realm between themselves with their petty squabble for power but we both know if either gets their hand on the Mire all of mankind would be doomed and angels may cease to exist entirely.”

“Do you truly believe this? Surely you do not believe the rumors of his absence, his demise? Lucifer works in the shadows. He has always been…”

“...faithful to the realm. I’ve heard the propaganda but remember my friend Lucifer is the paragon of deceit. I have learned the hard way to not believe his serpent tongue. I will depend on my own virtues, my own strengths, not his lies and half-truths. I will save my family and they will save mankind, just as their father did.” She stood as he spoke.

“Then what do you propose? There are many who would follow your lead. The council has grown divisive, unyielding, and oppressive with their edicts and rules. By not allowing us to intervene where and when we can, they have divided us into mindless drones or dare I say headstrong rebels. Many of us want to be freed from these rules that bind us from helping as we could, as we should. Those that have disappeared were solitary and unorganized. You would do well to lead this rebellion.”

“Well…” She smiled brightly and took in a deep breath then she took Eae’s hand into her own before she pulled him lightly to follow her. He chuckled softly shaking his head. It wouldn’t be the first time the Lady Eva had been headstrong with ideas. At least one if not both of her sons held the same trait. “First I think I shall explore just how far I can stretch these rules. I mean to gain a spot on one of the councils and really what can they do to me? But... I will not endanger other angels. I will, however, use their help if they offer. I will not overstep any of these so-called rules so that I may have continued access to those who can make the necessary changes. I will abide by the golden rules, the original mandates. I will ask only that those who wish to see angels free once more and to follow me on this mad crusade to do no less.”

“Ahhh... let me guess, you might have them run right up to the edge and peek over?”

“Of course, sometimes my dear friend rules just beg to be broken.” She laughed softly as her head found space on Eae’s shoulder and they walked deeper into the garden. As hey walked his form lost its former transparency.

“So where do we start?”

“I’m glad you asked, see there is the issue of Casey still being blind. She is healing well but she still lacks the eyesight I require to ‘see’ more clearly myself. Her current lack of eyesight does not work well for me since she needs to help my sons find a wayward soul. They must pick up where their father left off.”

“Shall I…”

“Pop downstairs? Why, I never thought of that! Your current weakened form allows you to travel unhindered to check on her without tripping any alarms doesn’t it? Oh, Eae that would be splendid and since you’re there could you give her a message? I can’t risk trying to contact the boys. They wouldn’t believe it was me, especially Vergil. He will struggle with the truth.” The guardian angel
sighed stopping short. Eva stopped too and looked at him as if oblivious to what she asked.
“Please?”

“Eva, you little devil. If I didn’t know better, I’d think you have a plan and have had one from the start.” She snickered and gave him a wink as she ruffled her tired and still sore wings.

She whispered leaning close, “Oh, you have no idea! Sparda always did say I was exceptionally good at manipulating things in my favor.” Her index finger rested lightly to her lips before she continued, “I just hope I’m not too late.”

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“Vergil, you’re nuts. I mean really you’re absolutely nuts.” The younger twin had spent the last half hour listening to Vergil give a condensed version of their father’s life. He had alluded that he went to Hell not just to gain their father’s power, but that he went for answers and perhaps something else as he was predictably evasive to specifics. Dante in his frustration decided to just let Vergil talk. He knew eventually he would tell him everything, but for now he wanted to be careful with what he shared. Truthfully with the glimpses of memories he had already seen and with what he was being told, Dante thought he had a pretty good idea good picture of what the final puzzle would look like.

“I admit. I uncovered answers that were not as I expected. In fact, there are many aspects of the story that do not seem to align with what we were told and believed all our lives. Our mother being an angel for example is preposterous. We quite obviously do not have any angelic traits and offspring between demons and angels is impossible.”

“Dude! Demons lie! And, she put up with the two of us, so of course, she was an angel.”

“I meant in the veritable sense of being an actual angel, besides I was not the child that gave her such grief but yes, demons lie, especially when it suits their own needs. But Mundus was insistent that father betrayed an entire realm for a woman of questionable and celestial heritage. That father was somehow enchanted by this celestial being. This seems impractical and foolish plus the woman did not live, so why would he continue on in her name if he were enchanted? The fact that this woman perished was made abundantly clear the many times the story was told to me. It felt as if they were trying to indoctrinate me to this belief. Mundus’ version of Sparda’s early life seemed rife with half-truths meant to break me rather than dispel my desire to learn more. In the end, I came to believe Mundus was a petulant child angry with his brother not so much for leaving the realm as much as betraying him and taking something very dear to him, whether or not it was a person or a thing was never made clear until I met Jerome. He was a demonic general under Lucifer, he had nothing to gain from deception in retelling what he knew of Sparda's story. He merely followed Lucifer's order to retrieve me when you defeated Mundus. Jerome seemed to prove my point that a very tailored story was told to the masses regarding Sparda's betrayal. He expounded quite a different story.” Vergil’s brows furrowed as if the pieces still didn’t fit for him.”I am not sure I believe either version.”

“Well it sounds to me like pops made poor friend choices, and Lucifer, the smug angelic bastard, betrayed him and wasn’t there to protect mom as he promised. Apparently, angels lie too,” he growled.

Dante was angry. Vergil expected this. Their past was complicated, filled with lies and shadows but it always revolved back to Eva and Sparda their presence or their lack thereof. He stood from the bed to look around the mostly destroyed room and sighed heavily. He had so much to tell his brother but he didn’t know where to begin in earnest. So much had happened. He made a binding promise to Lucifer. He cursed himself. It was nothing more than a contract for his soul thinly veiled as a promise, after all Lucifer had helped him escape not once but twice. This pseudo-promise threatened
to pull him from his brother and from his son. A contract that he knew he would be better served by
not explaining it to his brother. Not yet and maybe not ever. He swallowed hard. So many
complications cropped up after the contract was made and even more after he was sent back to this
realm. Agnus had stolen more than his power, his dignity. He had stolen time. Time that he had
precious little left. Time he could have spent with a son he did not know. He had no clue of how to
be a father and his son wasn’t a child. He had skipped twenty years of his son’s life and had no clue
as to where to begin. He felt lost in the subtle emotions that tried to creep in from the fringes of his
memory of Nero’s mother. He had no input in the man he had become and he was angry at this. He
should have been there for him. Especially with her gone.

As Vergil was deep in thought, Dante now stood and adjusted the bed. It would survive, so at least
they could get some sleep tonight. He was pretty sure Vergil had no clue how tired he looked. As he
mused over what would happen tomorrow or even beyond, it was bitterly obvious the elder would
move on, and soon. He felt his brother’s eyes upon him once more and worse he heard the words he
had spoken earlier roll thru his head like thunder. A storm was coming. “So, you’re telling me
Mundus is our uncle?”

“I am.” He was relieved Dante had pulled him from his thoughts.

“And that our father, Sparda, left the ruling family of hell and eventually became a general under
Lucifer during the great war of darkness; the angelic war between heaven and hell but in the end
protected the human realm to stop demons from claiming human souls just so Lucifer could regain
the throne in Hell?”

“More specifically, Bellum Umbra, the war of shadow, but yes, that is what I am saying. I must
continue my research for the specifics. Many of the texts recounting the war were brought to this
realm to serve as guides for those trained to return and assist the angels. The war ended in a deadly
stalemate.” Vergil ran his hand thru his hair and let out a huff. His memories flooded back to him, but
his strength waned. He had fought for so long, that at times, he forgot himself and his purpose. His
accelerated healing had kicked in but soon he would fall into a deep sleep to repair years of unseen
physical damage and he hoped his demon would mend the tiny cracks he felt littered thru his body
and psyche. He remembered what had happened. Most he did not wish to remember but he
remembered Belial and having his soul yanked from his body. He remembered the cold nothing of
being in stasis. He also remembered again with a nagging persistence that he had made a promise,
and a Sparda always kept their promises. Believing it was a promise made it easier to stomach. It
would make it easier when he had to leave. “Dante? I am… tired.”

“Sure Verge, I can feel it. Let’s get you cleaned up and I’ll pull the room back together. Geez, I
know you like to destroy stuff, but did it really have to be my room? Never mind don’t answer that.”
He made a mental note that the other bedroom would be cleared out by the end of the week. Vergil
wouldn’t allow their closeness to continue.

“I will make this right, brother. You have been lenient with my temper and recovery, far more so
than I would have been with you. I will repay this kindness but not tonight.” His hand rubbed his
face and he rather liked the idea of taking a shower alone for a change. He did not like being weak
and least of all in front of his brother. He had been too weak up to this point for Dante to leave him
for more than a few minutes.

“Knock it off… You’re my brother, your family, that’s what family does.”

“Indeed. Dante?”

“Yeah?”
“I promise I have no intentions of leaving you again, but I have a mission, or shall I say a debt to repay. A debt I must repay, a promise to someone that helped me. I find I am in need of your help to regain my strength for this task to be completed.”

He turned to eye the elder twin and crossed his arms over his chest, “Ouch, that had to hurt asking me for help but I’m sensing a but somewhere in all those words.”

He glared at his initial comment but let it pass, “Your intuition serves you well, for I did not expect to return to find my son alive, nor did I expect to be so debilitated by a power mad scientist. Things are not as I expected. Further, I can now see things are much more complicated than I first understood them to be when I came to be under Agnus’ control.”

“Sure, I'll help you train and regain your strength but before you go off on some power trip you need to understand something very simple. Vergil, you’re not ready to go out and fight hordes of demons. Not yet... because you…”

“Dante, I am missing a fragment of my soul. Yes, I feel its jagged emptiness within me. I can only surmise that its absence is how Belial was able to trick me as he did. It is quite likely the reason he was able to separate me from my body in the first place. Yamato was quite clear in pointing out several facts and as such I will be unable to attend to my duties if I am unable to tap my full power. It was also this, surgically imposed weakness, that allowed Agnus to gain control over my triggered state to feed his experiments. I will need to find that fragment sooner rather than later.”

“How the hell do you know all this? You’ve been asleep, loopy, or at the very least angry for the last three weeks or so.”

“Yamato did more than cleanse my body of the reaver. She opened my eyes to other matters.” He found he looked to the now dried smear on the floor. It had slowly turned to dust and would no doubt be gone and forgotten with hours.

“Right,” he drawled. “You did ask her to explain, and once she gets going you can't stop her. She sort of beats you with the truth.” He uncrossed his arms and ran his hands over his face then up thru his hair with a grunt.

“Yes, and even now I am in a bit of shock at all that has transpired. Despite her not being with me for a time, she has now filled me in on some of my mental blanks as to what happened around me.”

“There’s something you’re not telling me.” The red twin couldn't put his finger on it but he just knew. Something was bothering his twin deep down under all of his well-crafted bravado.

“There is a lot I am not telling you, nor will I.” They glared at each other but finally Vergil broke the stare and shook his head, “Patience, brother, I will share what you need to know when it is time and no sooner. You see, I have been gone much longer than you realize and much has transpired in my absence but for now it is of no consequence. Somethings are best left unknown and others are safest this way. I will get cleaned up then rest while you attend to my son.”

“Nero!” Dante smacked himself in the head. He had been so wrapped up in what had happened and the fact that his mute of a brother was finally talking that he had almost forgotten about the kid.

“Nero,” the elder breathed quietly. “His name means strength in the elder tongues. How ironic and how very like her.” He moved stiffly walking toward the bathroom and Dante was next to him offering support.

“How so?” He didn’t expect an answer. He was wrong.
“Because in order for him to be conceived, I had to give in to my greatest weakness.”

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Nero turned and left the room. He didn’t know what else to do. He remembered what had happened on Fortuna; how Vergil had rose to a triggered state and battled Belial, but he couldn’t shake the sudden urge to rid himself of Yamato. He felt the power his father had over her and despite her resolute ‘no’ he felt the link between them suddenly snap into place. He was an intermediary and her second choice. He suddenly felt guilty and angry at the turn of events. His mind whirled with emotion. To his surprise, as he descended the stairs, Yamato took it upon herself to extract herself from his bringer. As he gripped the tsuka, her weight felt good in his hands. It felt right and she calmed his troubled mind.

“I am yours Nero, son of Vergil, grandson of Sparda. I have been reawakened, re-forged and tempered with your blood and I shall guide and protect you as I have been so charged. One day I will return to him, as it has been foretold, for we have a bond that remains unbroken, a future yet to reveal itself, but today is not that day and I shall not leave you for as long as you have need of me. I will know when you are ready and more importantly, so will you. This is my promise to you, young master. I am yours…”

Nero shuddered hearing her so clearly in his mind. Sure, this was not the first time he had heard her, but in the past, it had always been single words, a flicker of emotion, or a surge of energy, even glimpses of images, but at this moment he heard her as clear as if she were standing in front of him and she called him ‘master’. A smile curled at his lips, for so long he had felt unworthy to wield her, like he would never be able to match the stories of what his father could do with her. He always felt the sword was a little disappointed that he could not do more. He had big shoes to fill and an even greater shadow to come out from behind but at this moment he felt like one day he could achieve all these things and that he could do it on his terms. He was grateful that she chose now to make clear her part in his decision and his life. She would be faithful to him for as long as it took without denying the obvious fact that she would always be his sword.

His claws curled around the tsuka and he twirled her in his hand admiring her craftsmanship as he had so many times before. Her tsuba, her guard, was solid bronze adorned with rolling shapes that he had always assumed were clouds and reminiscent of an omen for a rising storm. The guard’s oval shape and weight were perfect to balance the weight and length of the blade. The kashira or buttcap was not often seen while she was in use but often he admired the figure while he meticulously cleaned her. It was adorned with a crouching dragon that traditionally meant a guardian spirit. How ironic he thought that he realized only now how true the symbolism was. Yamato pulsed gently with this assertion and Nero found he smiled again.

His bringer flickered softly as he gave her a few light swings. The metal sang with intent as he stopped to note the soft ripple of her temper line on the brutally sharp edge. It had been weeks since he last cleaned her thoroughly and he resolutely decided it was time he rectified this. Nero moved to the bar setting Yamato gently atop it as he bent to grab supplies from behind the bar counter. His mind sharpened on his task and as he began to wipe the blade down he realized Red Queen could use some attention as well. ‘Rosalie’ was nowhere near as powerful as Yamato but truth be told she would always be his and he knew with time and training her spirit would grow. The next time he felt his bringer flicker, he looked up from his work to find Dante anxiously searching for him from over the balcony. He glanced at the clock and realized he had been at his task for quite some time. He was surprised and yet not. He often became fixated while working with his weapons. It had become something of a sore spot between him and Kyrie before he left. His father didn’t appear to talk much so the fact that Dante had stayed upstairs talking to him seemed superfluous. He snorted at his thoughts. Dante scurried down the stairs while running his hand through his hair. He looked worried and distantly the youth wondered what else his uncle wasn’t telling him. It was obvious to him that
Vergil kept secrets and that was something he was not used to with his uncle.

“Hey kid, you... ok?” His voice was almost rushed but the unasked questions lingered. Did he hurt you?

Nero had to admit he had lost his anger quite some time ago. The simple act of cleaning his swords had brought him a sense of peace. His uncertainty about his father would probably never truly disappear until they had a chance to get to know one another but when he opened his mouth to answer his reply came out clipped. “I’ll figure it out.” He rubbed his human hand across his nose. He caught himself doing this at times and knew it was a nervous habit and his father made him nervous. Currently, Dante was staring at him and it made him feel uncomfortable until he realized he was being scanned for injuries. His demon chirped at the contact and Dante shifted having been caught. Shame he couldn’t just come out and ask. Then again Nero knew himself well enough to know he might just tell him to ‘eff’ off. He snorted out loud. He loved how he censored his inner voice. The youth had found a sense of balance in the current situation so he opted to not be as anti-social as his father. “He doesn’t seem to be the touchy-feely, talk your ear off kind of dad, which I have to say I appreciate. I don’t like being touched and I talk when I want to. But seriously, the whole throwing me across the room shit, I could do without.” He returned to his work with a slight shrug. Red Queen hummed at him pleased with his attention.

Dante chuckled crossing his arms over his chest. They had come to know each other well over the past few years but this was unfamiliar territory for them both. His answer belayed a sort of precarious balance but it also told the hunter that the kid would be fine. The situation was still his fault however. Why would he know what to expect from his father? He didn’t know him and the few interactions he had with him to date were not a resounding success. Welcome to the Sparda family, he thought dryly. He also had to concede he was probably acting different as well. Nero needed someone to confide in and truth be told Dante realized he may not be the right person for that job. Red Queen was sprawled across the bar in all her little pieces and parts. The kid must have been at work on her since he came downstairs and left the twins to their discussion. Nero attended to each section as he slowly reassembled her ignition system and Dante watched with interest. Yamato chirped softly at him and Dante let his gaze rest on the katana. “Woah, kid, I’ve never seen her shine like that.” It was a lie and he hoped Nero didn’t see thru it. Vergil loved to clean his sword and she was rarely without a polish. He stepped closer to inspect the blade. She hummed in his grip and he felt his link with his twin ripple at their contact.

The youth shrugged as he completed Red Queen’s assembly and began wiping down the blade. “I like to give her a good once over a few times a month. It’s just been awhile.”

Dante heard the distance in his voice and returned the sword to the bar top from which she promptly levitated and disappeared with a flicker back into his bringer. Nero hesitated a moment and rolled his neck before he continued to work on his sword. Leave it to Yamato to bring subtle attention to his nephew. The kid wasn’t as fine as he acted. “Want to talk?”

“No”

“Mad at me?”

He paused his brow furrowed but he returned to polishing, “Not sure. Maybe.”

“Fair enough. I should have told you about the parasite. I should have told you more about him. It was just hard at times to talk about him. Remember my drunken depressed fits? It’s been hard being separated from him. Now, now it’s just different. In a way I’m still surprised he's back.”

“Yeah, I guess.” He stood from his bar stool and walked over to the door. He reached for his coat.
“You should have told me about the parasite thing. It’s not like he’s gonna tell me about something like that himself and I do have contacts at the Order I can trust. I could’ve helped.”

“Nero, I…”

“Don’t … we had it good with just the two of us. We balanced each other in a weird unhealthy co-dependent kind of way. We learned what to expect from one another and we didn’t keep secrets. I get that it probably wasn’t the healthiest of relationships but it was ours. But things change and now it’s the three of us and I don’t know where I fit in this new puzzle. I don’t know who I am to him and right now your priorities are with him. I get that. I do, really, but I’m not ready to bend to his wishes at the snap of a finger. Not sure I ever will. Father or not.”

“I respect that Nero. I know I’ve been wrapped up in his recovery and with my own personal demons but he should never have tried to take her from you. Not like that and I’m glad she’s chosen to stay with you. You’ve earned her.”

“No, he shouldn’t have done that but I don’t exactly get the impression he asks permission for anything he does. But then again…” He paused looking to his bringer that flickered softly. “She is his sword. His devil arm. A piece of his power. Said as much herself. One day I will have no choice but to give her up. I just hope he understands until I’m ready, until I figure out my own path, and my devil trigger, she’s mine and I need her.” He slipped his coat on and turned to face his uncle. His eyes glowed blue and his expression was determined. “I won’t underestimate him again. He may be my father, but I’ve worked hard for what I have. I have earned her respect and her allegiance. And for now that means… she’s mine.”

“Kid…” He wanted to assure him that what had happened upstairs was not likely to ever happen again. Vergil had said he would not take her from Nero at least not anytime in the near future and Vergil always kept his word. Nero’s aura ruffled. He wasn’t about to listen to Dante and the older hunter knew it. So he wasn’t the least bit surprised when he was interrupted in trying to comfort him.

“You want to make it up to me? Then let’s go out back and train. I need to kick some ass and I think yours will do nicely.” He grinned a feral and wicked grin and Dante couldn’t help but chuckle. He was most definitely a Sparda, full of fire and fight, and more so like his father and unwilling or perhaps unable to give up.

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Kyrie enjoyed having someone in the house. It had always been a place so full of life, but then one by one people left. She looked out the kitchen window. The bare trees seemed to echo the emptiness of the house, but she shook the melancholy from her thoughts and grabbed the kettle from the stove. She poured the hot water over the tea bags, one in each mug and turned to grab sugar. That was when she felt as if someone had opened the front door letting in the evening chill. She shivered. Something was in the house. She hurried to grab her knife hidden not far from her and hurried to the stairs.

Casey hated being blind, but she counted her blessings she could’ve been dead. She still hoped her blindness was temporary. The first week was the worst with the pain and the damn headaches. Kyrie was a good friend and took her in the moment she was able to leave the hospital and truthfully it had only been a few weeks. She needed to be patient. She found she managed quite well and her other senses seemed to be much sharper with each passing day. They heard from Nero roughly every few days and she was glad to hear what was going on. She could tell Nero was worried and she sensed something was off between the three of them, but it would come to light soon enough. It didn’t surprise the witch that Vergil was scattered mentally. The confusion and angry outbursts were to be expected. He was a prisoner for a very long time. First under Mundus then Agnus and finally
manipulated under Belial's influence. Honestly, as she sat in her small room practicing ‘sensing’ the world around her, she wasn’t the least bit surprised to find the elder twin wasn’t healing as fast as they expected. Agnus was known to ‘experiment’ in the cruelest ways, certainly Vergil was not excluded from this trend. When she could see she would investigate why he was so slow to heal. Maybe she could help. But that was physically, when it came to his mind and his soul, well, that was another topic. She was pretty sure his memories would return and stabilize with time. The potential damage to his soul on the other hand? Belial was once known as the King of Hell and quite possible the oldest demon in known texts. As such, he probably knew a multitude of ways to torture a soul, but it was this single thought that she kept coming back to. How? How did he latch onto Vergil in stasis and where was the elder twin’s real guardian angel?

She shivered suddenly shifting in her chair as she felt the cold draft linger around her shoulders. Something ethereal was present, something that could pass thru the demonic ward set around the house. “Look whomever you are. I know you’re here so… out with it. Who are you and what do you want?” She heard a soft chuckle in one then both ears as her body felt downright frigid and she shivered uncontrollably squeezing her eyes shut and crossing her arms over her chest as if she could ward off the sudden dip in temperature. Her headache flickered behind her darkened eyelids. The door swung open with a bang and made her jump from her chair to immediately cast a shield around her.

“Casey? Are you alright?” Kyrie panted having run the stairs. Her small hunting knife was gripped tightly in her hands and she looked as if she had seen a ghost. “I felt something enter the house.”

“I’m fine… Kyrie? What in the world are you gonna do with that little knife? Seriously? If it were a demon up here, they would use that to pick their teeth with.” Kyrie looked at her perturbed.

“I know how to defend myself. I’m not helpless.” Her stance relaxed a bit and she looked at the floor unsure of herself. “I’m not that weak anymore. I’d fight this time.”

Casey dropped her shield and stepped forward, “Kyrie, I’m sorry of course you would. It’s just odd to see you with a…” The girls suddenly snapped their faces toward one another and stared at each other with matching expressions of surprise.

“Casey?”

“Kyrie? I can see!” she beamed before waving her hand before her face while wriggling her fingers. She then touched Kyrie on the shoulder with her smile reaching from ear to ear. “I can see!” They hugged tightly bouncing slightly with excitement, but their excitement was cut short as the warm chuckle returned only this time from the corner next to the window. Startled by the appearance of a young man with short dirty blonde hair and vivid gold eyes, the girls quickly adopted defensive stances. He waved their actions aside and sat casually to the chair.

“Of course, she can see. It was only temporary. Now ladies, we need talk. But first, Casey? Eva sent me with a message.”
Dante decided to let Vergil sleep until he woke up on his own. Thus, he proudly announced he would spar all night if Nero was up to it. He felt his brother needed to mend without him watching him obsessively and he decided that he should work things out with Nero. He started off by fooling around, but Nero knocked the red hunter over and missed hitting him with a painful blow by milliseconds. The kid was out for blood and he probably deserved it. It wasn’t like he hadn’t told the kid about his father, but he really didn’t prepare him for this either. As he parried and dipped dodging skillful strike after strike, he realized that in truth he wasn’t prepared for his brother’s return. He swore he heard Yamato laugh at his utter lack of preparedness and concentration and Rebellion seemed perturbed in his hands. He snarled at the surly pair of swords, sometimes his gift to hear the devil arms chatter was a curse. The ferocity with which his nephew currently attacked had him on his toes. The youth quickly garnered an obvious win against his uncle and that was simply an eye opener. Dante considered that he had become wrapped up in the minutia of getting Vergil back on his feet at the expense of all else. He was reminded of the one rule he gave Nero when he first moved in to Devil May Cry. ‘Don’t ever forget you hunt demons and not the other way around and never become complacent with your skills. You are only as good as your last battle.’ Maybe that was two rules but either way the red hunter needed this wake-up call. It had been a quiet month since his return, but winter solstice always brought out the crazies and some of them were sure to hunt his brother. He needed to be prepared. They practiced, trained, and battled until late before Dante fell asleep on the couch during a break and Nero toddled off to bed. He playfully snarked at the kid needing his beauty rest, but it was Nero that was bright eyed and raring to go early the next morning to leve Dante feeling a bit exhausted.

They had a quick breakfast after checking in on the elder and were off to trade swords again in the courtyard out back. The courtyard was not visible from the street, and only his friends even knew the area existed. It was quiet, secluded and large despite being tucked between the buildings that Dante secretly owned behind the office. The courtyard featured a few small trees plus an large old gnarled oak tree with spreading branches, a small garden and lots of open space that Dante often took advantage of. Sure, he had the armory downstairs and years of practicing spells and shifting energies had helped to create a rather extensive underground cave, partially because of a triggering accident as much as the spells but all in all Dante liked what he had out here the best. In a way it reminded him of home, his real home and practicing out past his mother’s garden. It was probably why he kept repairing the store front and staying put. There were memories and potential here. He looked around as they headed out the back door together and he thought absently that it was time to do more than just repair the shop. He wanted to remodel a few things.

Nero grunted as the hunter peeled off his jacket and rolled his head then shoulders to loosen up. “What’s this? Getting ready for an ass whooping this morning?” The kid grinned at him and Dante liked knowing he was in a good mood. It had been awhile since either of them had let off steam like this. He knew Nero was taking small jobs to get away, but this was how they learned what one another could really do and it was here that they learned new skills. Recently, Dante had shown him a few new tricks with Yamato. He explained Sparda had given each of them a sword that was to be
their own, but he insisted at times in switching it up. His father had his own rule about being complacent and he touted that skill was required on a variety of weapons to truly survive. As luck, or rather genetics, would have it Nero was a quick study and picked up the basics quickly. But this morning Dante had decided he needed to remind the kid he was still a novice compared to him. The red hunter was pleased to see the kid was gaining on him, and Nero enjoyed proving he could hold his own right up until his phone rang and it distracted the pair. Nero dodged the incoming sword strike easily but walked away to the small picnic table under the oak to view the screen. He tapped the screen ignoring the man-child whine behind him. He’d live.

“Hey! Anything wrong?” Dante paced clearly agitated that he was being dissed for a phone call. He slowed his pace when he realized Nero wasn’t talking but listening. The youth looked up toward the back of the office then over to Dante before he answered. “For how long?” He sighed rubbing the bridge of his nose with his human hand. His eyes closed as he nodded then looked back toward Dante. “Yeah, I got it. The adults need to talk. Fine. Sure, give me fifteen minutes. Ok, ok... Hey? Why St Michael’s? …Whatever.” He tapped the screen and shoved it into his pocket while hefting Red Queen to his shoulder.

“Who was that?”

“Trouble from the sound of it,” he grumbled.

“Huh?” He walked toward the kid but thrust Rebellion to partially bury him in the ground.

“Casey needs to talk to you.”

“K”

“It’s about Vergil.”

“Oh!”

“Look…” He hooked Red Queen to her holster and extracted the katana from his bringer. “Yamato wants to stay here. Says something about him being antsy and needing her for the moment. She also insists that I not be here, something about needing something that is not here or some nonsense, you know how she gets. Personally, I think she’s getting anxious with the growing demon activity in the area. Here. We are getting close to the solstice.” Nero handed the sword over to Dante. Her saya appeared over the blade as he flipped her around to present her to him properly. “Don’t screw this up old man.”

“Me? Screw what up? I don’t even know what is going on. Can Casey even see yet?” He threw his hands up in submission and pouted slightly. Then he snatched the sword and continued to pout. Nero shook his head.

“Yeah you. She said she’d explain once she got here so think before you open your mouth and listen ‘cause I’m pretty sure your gonna need to talk him in to doing whatever needs to happen.” He shrugged and walked off grabbing Blue Rose from her resting place on the table.

“You going to see the Padre? I heard you say St Michael’s?”

“Yeah, Casey said a package was sent to him that I need to pick up.”

“That seems odd. Hey, I talked to him just before we got the call from Captain Durante on Fortuna about Vergil, so you’ll need to catch him up.” Nero nodded as he spoke and fidgeted with his gear. Dante grabbed his coat.
“Odd, huh? You, don’t know the half of it.” He strapped his gun to his thigh and headed for the door.

“Nero? What’s really going on? If you give me something to work with I might not bungle it so bad.” He was being facetious.

Nero let out a short snort. He was right, but there was no need to tell him everything. “In a nutshell Casey got her eyesight back from an angel who is asking for an audience with the two of you. I’m going to stay with Father McCabe so that Vergil will listen to his proposal and you need to shut your mouth and listen.”

“Casey said that didn’t she? The shut your mouth thing, right?”

“Not as dumb as you look.”

“Don’t get cheeky.”

“Nah, I do pissy better.” He gave him a cheeky wink and Dante snorted. “Go get him up. Casey will be here shortly, and you need to prepare him.”

“Prepare him? For what?”

“Helloo, anybody home? The angel you oversized oaf. Dear god you are getting old. You can’t even hear and I’m standing right beside ya.” Again, he snorted, and Dante caught a glimpse of a smile. Nero knew more than he was letting on.

“Hey!” He stepped in front of him before he hit the steps to the office. “You know something.”

“I know a lot of things. Doesn’t mean I’m gonna tell ya.” He patted him on the cheek and pushed past him heading thru the back door. Dante stood there a minute and blinked. Dammit the kid was more like his father then he realized. He scurried after him.

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Unbeknownst to Dante and Nero, when they clashed in the courtyard that morning, Vergil awoke with a start not having a clear clue of where he was or what was going on. He didn’t clearly remember a thing and as he looked around the chaotic bedroom, his memory flickered. He distinctly felt his brother close and although he didn’t tap into it, he could feel the reassurance of their link intact once more. A strong survival instinct and compulsive habit from many long years of being hunted and tortured caused him to quickly tamp his demonic signature. No reason to broadcast where he was now that he was awake. He followed the sounds of metal on metal and the rhythmic scrape of swords, two swords, heavy in design from the sounds of battle, or was it practice? Eventually he found himself standing in what could be mistaken for a kitchen. Dirty dishes sat in the sink. The stove still had remnants of what might have been egg in a skillet. Vergil’s stomach growled, but movement caught his eye and his growing hunger was dismissed. He watched with interest as his brother and his son vigorously sparred. His view from the back window over the sink was limited but he could clearly see his son had a good measure of talent, still raw but talent none the less. He watched with half remembered memories of himself sparring years ago with his brother just as Dante now did with his son.

Dante pulled a few of his strikes as they whirled and clashed. He lulled Nero into a false sense of security as he enticed him to get closer and closer until finally he braced against a particularly effective downward slash, then casually knocked his feet out from under him. Frustrated, Nero rolled from Dante’s expected strike but lashed out with his spectral bringer sending Dante flying. The two
of them huffed and panted until they both broke into smiles and laughed. They dove back into their exercises with an almost joyful abandon. Dante hadn’t changed a bit in his flamboyant fighting style and it made the elder twin snort. Somehow it was also comforting to see. Vergil watched them practice and listened to their banter for a few more minutes until Nero’s phone rang. It was then that he felt the weariness tug at him again. Reluctantly he made his way back thru the office. He remembered with a twinge of disgust why he felt so stiff and sore. Damn reaver. That thing must have clung to him for an extended period feeding from him. He drew a complete blank as to how the creature was expelled from him, but he knew it was gone. He rolled his neck and stretched sore muscles. He felt his strength returning but he also found he was agitated. Evidently the reaver had numbed the sensation of his soul being fragmented. This was no longer the case and he felt the urge to trigger into his demonic form. He wanted to make the attempt to pull the fragment back into himself. That was how Agnus kept the portal open, perhaps with Vergil free from the mad scientist machinations he could just rectify the situation himself. Yamato quickly chastised this thought and flickered her energy toward him giving him a measure of comfort from the irritation. Apparently, he could not just wish this problem away and he granted. He could feel his body healing around him, undoing years of physical abuse but he knew the mental healing would take time. He discovered he was quite hungry, but he was so damn tired that he almost stopped to sleep on the couch.

As these thoughts traipsed thru his mind her discovered he was aimlessly walking around the office looking at the trophies Dante had acquired along with the small notions, tokens and artifacts that were collected here and there. He took in the office with a more discerning eye than when he first remembered the place. He knew he had been in this very room at least once before but somehow it looked and felt different. Things did not appear to be so dire as he last remembered, perhaps his little brother was growing up, but then he concluded it was probably his son keeping things tidy. He moved toward the stairs, sleep having won over food, when a strange feeling rippled across the space and a familiar energy pulled at him. He turned to see something he never in his wildest dreams ever thought he would see and he grunted with surprise. There on the wall just behind Dante’s desk hung the Sparda sword, the focal point for his father’s power. The focal point for his misguided quest into the demonic realm. For some reason he thought it had been lost but a flicker of giving Dante his half of the amulet seemed to tickle at the back of his mind. It seemed so long ago. Stunned he adjusted his step to take a closer look. How could he have possibly missed this before? Why had he not felt the familiar flicker of his father right here within the same space that he currently occupied?

His mind abruptly drifted to a time back before Agnus but after Mundus. It was part of his time in Hell that remained hidden from Dante and even Yamato. It was from a time where he made no better decisions but at least he paid penance for some of the horrors he was a part of while under the control of the Prince of Darkness. The hellish sky surrounded him in a brilliant blaze of crimson, scarlet, indigo, and orange as if it were a brilliant sunset. In fact, if his memory served him correctly they were in a place called the dessert of fading light. The air, though warm, was temperate and the wind clean which was surprising for being in hell. Vergil had stopped questioning things that occurred in Hell long ago. Dark armored trolls, and all manner of demonic creatures trudged thru the dry bone strewn sandy soil beneath his feet. They all had places to be just as he did. Vergil moved decisively thru the soldiers that milled around the camp. His own armor, while similar to those around him, had a distinctive sheen to it, showing he was favored amongst Lucifer’s troops, a general, and he was easy to pick out in the crowd. His target was the main tent of sooty grey with black and violet trim and covered with Enochian symbols that stood near the center of the camp. The guards at the entrance bowed as Vergil approached and one soldier pulled aside the flap covering the door. Few met with Lucifer, fewer still met with the fallen angel as often as Vergil did. He didn’t hesitate to announce his entrance, “You sent for me?” As expected the tent was dark. Lucifer had never been seen in the lights of hell and his form was that of a shadowy dark winged creature of mist that lacked true humanoid substance, but it reminded Vergil that he was both
shadow and darkness. Movement rustled at the back of a wide table littered with maps, diagrams, and battle plans.

“Ah, yes. Vergil your time has finally come. I need to discuss our contract, and I have stumbled upon my final request to fulfill said contract as it were. While I find your skills invaluable to me here I have decided I want, no I require you to go home.”

“Have I failed you in some way my lord?”

“Heavens no, in fact, you have exceeded my expectations. Your sword has cleared dozens of skirmishes decisively alone, but I have need of you on the other side.”

“In the human realm?”

“Yes, I have left something very precious there to…incubate…and this… something has come of age and needs to be… tended to until I can come for them myself. Vergil you are to find my legacy and keep it safe until my return.”

“My liege? Your return but what of the war and your throne…”

“Vergil do not question my decisions nor this request. You are to find my legacy, my vessel, as I shall call it, and protect it with your very life. You will give your life to protect it above all others. You will be challenged in many ways to achieve this task, but I think you will discover you are uniquely gifted to handle this task in my stead. I do not give this task lightly. Many have died trying to stop the usurpers from gaining my power stored within this vessel, but I have recently discovered it has fallen into the hands of a very dangerous demon. A demon under Belial’s sway named Anzu.”

The shadow shifted with agitation. “You will fetch my vessel before that scourge can rip away the unawakened power hidden deep within… it. You must hurry. My vessel could destroy that realm and then all would be lost. You will know the signs of my coming and meet me in the palace of the crows, the corvi de domo regis.”

“I am not sure I understand. Am I looking for a weapon, a person…a…?”

“Yes.”

“I do not understand.”

“Let’s just say, I’ve never seen this vessel, but I have felt it’s growth, it’s development, if you will. You will know once you have found it. Come closer and kneel.” Vergil tensed, he had been commanded to do this often before Mundus but with Lucifer it felt different, still distasteful and forced, but the lesser of two evils. He could resist this request, unlike with Mundus, and frequently he did. Often Lucifer would chuckle or click his tongue when he decided to show such blatant defiance reminding the dark slayer he could continue to believe he had that choice. The fallen angel had freed him from Mundus, pulling him from the Mire where he was dumped after his final battle with his brother but he had also giving the dark slayer so much more. “Vergil? Do not test me today. I am not in the mood. Kneel!” He took a deep breath and stepped forward bending to one knee his helmet resting on the other knee his head bowed. “I have a gift for you.”

“My lord?” Dark violet energy crackled over the kneeling form and Vergil wanted to scream but felt no air left in his lungs to achieve this feat. His skin began to crawl and then it was over, and he fell forward to both hands. His helmet rolled away useless.

“You are now bound to my vessel in a way I cannot properly articulate but know this, I will know if you choose to disobey me and I will know if you fail me while in the human realm. I recommend you
do neither.” The shadow form floated before him. “You may rise. Gather yourself. Now was that really that difficult?” He drifted back behind the table as pages levitated and moved as if held by invisible fingers. “In many ways my vessel is not unlike your father’s sword so full of potential and yet it slumbers in one form waiting to be awakened into its true form. It’s more powerful form.”

Vergil stood on unsteady feet having retrieved his helmet once more. “That reminds me, you are to find and return your father’s sword, the Sparda sword, to me as payment for securing your release from Mundus and freeing you from the Mire. I will consider this repayment of that debt, but you still owe me for unwittingly releasing Belial back into this realm, amongst other sins.” His dark laugh floated thru the air as Vergil shuddered. The shadow fluttered its dark wings growing in size and his glowing violet eyes bled to red within the darkness as it rose to lean over the table in a show of obvious intimidation. “Remember Vergil, I have the answers you seek. I may even tell you what became of your father when this is over. I believe I am being more than generous.”

“How do I know you do not lie? Demons lie!” Vergil braced himself to be struck.

“Ah, there it is. The spark of defiance that he nearly muted. Your tenacity is a badge you should wear with honor but remember to whom you speak. I am no witless demon, you half-breed. I am no devil, I am a seraphim and God’s favorite, this assignment is but a temporary nuisance that I must endure so that I may clean up the mess made by other’s, such as your father. Pity your father’s sins have become yours as have his failings. Nevertheless, you will do as I command, for your soul belongs to me.” His last words rolled with a low threat as if thunder.

Vergil suddenly felt a strange all-consuming weakness suffuse him that reminded him of being trapped within Lucifer’s energy. Snapped back from the memory the air escaped his lungs and he fell. However, he never touched the ground, and as he looked around confused by his surroundings, he realized he was being supported by the same spectral arm he watched so effectively throttle Dante mere minutes ago. Dante rushed to Vergil as the strength left his twin and he lay fatigued in his brother’s arms; his eyes, however, never left his son. The sins of the father, Vergil thought. I have followed the footsteps into my father’s failings. Could he have already cursed his son? The son he knew so little about, save for the knowledge that she had gifted him with the impossible. And her gift was simply…

“Incredible,” he murmured as he still lingered between memories and reality. Nero blushed slightly but maintained his distance as Dante scooped his brother up and headed for the stairs, but Vergil now having regained his wits resisted and after a minute of arguing, Dante stood him back to his feet. Vergil looked at the glowing appendage as if he saw it for the first time. “Can he control it?” He did not mean to ask the question aloud, but Dante grinned.

“Makes a great flashlight too when you’re in a pinch.”

“Asshole.” The word tripped from his tongue so quickly the elder was sure Dante had earned the moniker.

“Come on don’t tell me you’ve never used it as a flashlight thingy…”

“Shut up.” His voice cracked as he spoke.

“See, like I said a flashlight, a demonic face smasher, it even rips up those nasty little chimera thingies over in the forest. I mean really that thing has 101 uses.” Dante directed his brother towards the stairs with a chuckle and Vergil sighed leaning against his brother for support. “Later, when you’re up to it Verge, we’ll get you better acquainted with your son. I bet if we’re nice to him he might even make us dinner tonight.”

“I would very much like that. It would seem I have much to learn of him.” Nero smiled nervously
and looked to the floor. Vergil looked to his brother and caught the flicker of concern that resided within their link. “What is it?”

“Uh, nothing. I mean nothing big.”

“Spit it out imbecile. You are incapable of withholding information from me with any efficacy.”

“Fine! Remember Casey? Well, she is coming to visit. You know she wants to check on you, see how you’re doing, introduce you to an angel, make sure I’m taking care of you, that sort of thing. Nothing really to get worked up over.”

“An angel?”

“Oh yeah, caught that did ya? Well, I’m kind of fuzzy on the specifics but yeah someone needs to talk to you.” He felt his brother tense in his arms before he pushed away to grasp the handrail of the stairs.

“Dante!”

“Look you learned to trust Casey, right? She helped you regain control from Belial. She trusts this angel, so we should hear them out. Come on let’s get you upstairs and changed into something respectable.” Nero felt the flutter of anger ripple thru the office as Vergil’s aura shifted and became visible. Yamato suddenly appeared, from where ever Dante had left her, before the dark slayer and he grasped her saya almost as if by instinct. His aura faded, and he took a deep breath as he closed his eyes.

“I have been informed I do not get a choice in this matter, but I do not want my son anywhere near this angel. I will not allow him to be used as a pawn in some Celestial game.”

“Fine, Nero! Go somewhere,” Dante snarked looking at the youth before looking back to his brother. Nero rolled his eyes at them and crossed his arms over his chest.

“Yeah, ok.”

“There, happy?”

“Happy?” Vergil’s aura rose again.

“Don’t answer that, just go upstairs.”

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Chapter Summary

Chapter 6 was long and felt awkward to leave it there... Vergil is tangled in the web he weaves.

The next few minutes consisted of Dante and Vergil arguing in hushed voices upstairs. Nero had to chuckle it was as if they didn’t realize he could hear them. Quietly he returned a call to Casey and explained they might need a little more time. He was relieved to discover she understood and even expected this. Now that the cat was out of the bag so to speak, Nero asked how she was doing in earnest. He had spoken to Kyrie just a couple of days ago, so he was pleased but surprised at the details of her regaining her sight. She further explained she knew about the ‘incident’ the other day and that it was this event that in part was the reason for the impromptu visit with said divine intervention. Nero was slightly creeped out by this, but Casey assured him that he would understand when everything came together. He shrugged as she spoke, and the action came through the phone in his tone as he balked a ‘whatever’ at her. They ended the call when the twin’s argument increased in volume upstairs. Nero listened a minute then snickered. He had an idea and he too headed for the stairs. Casey told him to take his time. She would know.

Vergil requested to dress in something other than a pair of Dante’s sweatpants and one of his red t-shirts. Much to Nero’s amusement he listened to his father percolate with anger at his uncle’s antics. Apparently, Dante wanted to put Vergil into a clean outfit exactly like the one he had on.

“What? Red is an awesome color.”

“I detest red.”

“Unless, it’s dripping from my busted nose, am I right?”

“Imbecile!”

“God, I missed that.”

“Missed what? My disdain for your penchant for the horrid color of red? Or did you just discover you are an idiot?”

“Nah, I missed all those colorful adjectives and descriptive sentences. I mean the kid has quite the vocabulary but his is a bit more profane.”

Vergil ignored his brother. “You are a moron. Can I not have pants that fit? I find I have not gained any weight to do anything more than swim in these abhorrent textiles and for the love of Sparda can I have underwear?”

“Those abhorrent textiles are called sweatpants. They are supposed to be loose, and I don’t wear underwear,” he chuckled.

“They are a repugnant raiment that should be burned.”

Nero took a deep breath but opted this was one argument he could help with. He knocked at the door
frame. “Uh, I don’t mean to intrude but what about these? I think they should fit until we can get you out and pick out your own clothing.” He entered cautiously bearing gifts in the form of a few soft worn denim pants, a few t-shirts in blue and gray, a soft heathered navy zip up hoodie and a new pack each of underwear and socks. He had noticed days ago that his father seemed to be built more on par to his own physique. He thought these should do in a pinch. As he peered around the room he saw Dante grinned like a Cheshire cat while Vergil grumbled holding the waist of the sweat pants in one hand and a red t-shirt clutched in the other. His bare chest had a myriad of pale soft feathery pink healing scars but what impressed Nero the most was the distinct lack of purple veins, anywhere. The poison was completely out of his system. It was truly an impressive and speedy recovery from the other day.

It was at that moment, that Nero felt the weight of an icy stare upon him. Dante had warned him that he’d know it when he felt it and as he lifted his eyes from Vergil’s skin they fell on the icy orbs that glared at him. It would seem as Dante had predicted that even he would not be immune to his cold gaze. He felt Yamato pulse with strength and reassurance to him and Vergil’s eyes flickered with both recognition and surprise. The sword flickered back into his bringer from the bed upon which she was laid as Vergil began to dress. She ascertained that the danger of her master losing his mind had passed. Vergil growled.

“What? The sword is right Verge, you were close to losing it there.”

“I still might.” His eyes snapped coldly to his brother, who seemed immune and shrugged.

“Oh, sure but now the surprise is over, and Nero has promised to be gone when our friends visit.” Dante was greeted with a shirt to his face as his brother stepped toward his son.

“I have no friends.”

“Yes, and that is why you’re cranky.” Vergil glared over his shoulder. Nero looked at his hands to keep from laughing.

“Imbecile!”

“What? You know I’m right. You’ve always been surly and unapproachable. Spread your wings and branch out a little.”

Vergil snapped a clearly agitated face toward his son. He reached for the clothing. “Thank you for the clothing. Now leave.”

“Vergil!”

“Please leave quickly. I must kill your uncle.”

“Fine, I’m going, and you’re welcome.” He waved with his bringer and scooted out the door no need to tell him twice. Relief washed over him to know Yamato had once again chosen to stay with him, but he felt a twinge of regret that he was taking something from his father. He felt rather than saw the disappointment when the sword had returned to him.

“I find I enjoy your rebellious streak. It makes me feel young again.” Nero snorted. The sword had become chatty since their little dust up and he wasn’t sure he needed a running commentary on events, but he had to admit he did like hearing her voice. It always seemed to bring him a sense of calm. “All will be made clear soon. Let us hurry to the cathedral. They are waiting for us.”

“Who?”
“The Father… yes, Father McCabe. He awaits us.” Her response was weird and for a split-second his step hesitated. He felt her fall silent within his bringer and he continued toward the stairs. The twins were at it again. Seriously, didn’t they realize he could hear them?

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The grandson of Sparda decided to grab a quick shower before heading to the cathedral. He felt more than awkward walking into a place of worship smelling of blood and sweat. Thank the gods it wasn’t demon blood, he stopped mid thought, yeah actually it was. He chuckled out loud at his thoughts and remembered on one occasion he threw caution to the wind and showed in the grand cathedral fresh from a fight in the marsh. He remembered arguing with Credo that he rinsed off in the waterfall before coming but didn’t have time to change. Did he want him there or did he want him clean? Apparently, he wanted both. Credo had been none too pleased and gave him an extra shift as punishment. Turned out Kyrie was learning to cook a new recipe that night, so Nero was not the one punished. He snorted as he fluffed his hair and walked to the guest room where he lived. The twins had grown thankfully quiet. He imagined Vergil strangled Dante and was currently stepping over his unconscious body to dress, meh, whatever. He smiled at his thoughts.

His room was small, Nero didn’t need nor, did he want much, but he often had to snicker that Dante had never made the guest room officially his room. Didn’t matter though, he knew this was where he belonged.

“Except for now young master, you must hurry.”

“Alright, alright, I’m going.” He grabbed clothes and dressed quickly opting for more casual dress. Jeans, boots, and a short sleeve dark grey shirt that he slipped a black hoodie over. Although many along the route to the cathedral knew of his arm, he didn’t like to broadcast it. Sheepishly, he realized he had been too busy to check on the kids at St Michael’s orphanage since the week before they found Vergil. It was a bittersweet moment that he realized he would enjoy catching up with them even if she wasn’t there. He hurried back down the stairs to find his father pacing before the window. He looked so different and it caused the youth to let his surprise show. Cold eyes surveyed him as he stopped pacing and headed toward him.

Vergil may have been Dante’s twin but as he strode toward Nero he realized two things. First, Dante really was a hot mess and second this man was deathly dangerous. He must have shivered at the thought because his father stopped just in front of him and raised an eyebrow, narrowed his eyes slightly and questioned his son.

“Do I frighten you?”

“Huh? Uh no, no, not in the way you think. I just didn’t realize how different the two of you were until just now.”

“Hnn, I can assure you we are quite different from one another.”

“Yeah, got that. Hey, the clothes fit well. I’m sure they won’t once you start training again, but you can borrow whatever you need till you feel up to shopping.” He broke from his father’s gaze finding the man more intimidating being upright and obviously stronger. He turned to gather his phone and keys.

“Thank you. Where will you be going while we have…visitors?”

“Uh, over to St Michael’s. It’s not far from here. I have friends there and Casey wants me to pick up some sort of package from the Father there.” Nero swore he felt the temperature drop as he turned.
“Do you know if there is a Father Arthur McCabe still serving there? He would be in his late forties maybe fifties by now.”

“Yeah that’s who I’m to meet. I understand you two had a bit of history together back in the day. Something about him helping you find the location of Temen-ni-gru.” Vergil’s eyes widened at this revelation with yet another twist to his plans.

“I forbid you to speak to him.”

“Yeah, well fuck you!” It came out unexpectedly, sharp, and quick as he combed his angry red bringer thru damp white hair. Nero had a real problem with authority and his father reeked of it. His mouth often got him into trouble, but he’d managed to tamp that streak down over the years. “You can’t tell me what to do!” That supposed control had completely failed him as his words tripped from his tongue and he felt the fire churn in his gut. Just who did he think he was to tell him anything? The temperature dipped further, and he felt Yamato tingle at the challenge given.

“Hey, what’s going on with you two? Testosterone is not your friend!” Dante appeared from the kitchen and threw an apple at his brother. Surprised but not caught off guard he snatched the piece of fruit from the air and growled.

“The child is being insolent.” His eyes flicked back to his son. Nero snorted and shook his head stuffing his phone into his pocket. He grabbed Blue Rose and stuffed her into the back of his pants before heading to the door.

“That child is a young man and can make his own decisions. Kid, stop being insolent, watch the language and Vergil, dude, your blood sugar is low.” Dante grinned as he spoke. Nero was pretty sure that the red oaf had heard their conversation and was opting to just stay as neutral as possible. Nero continued out the door. He acknowledged the argument that ensued between the twins with a snort but, really, he couldn’t have cared less. He was anxious to get away. He had a funny feeling this was only the beginning of the contentious interactions he could expect with his father.

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It didn’t take long for Nero to get lost in the sights and sounds of the city. He hadn’t been to this side of Capulet in months and he found walking in the temperate winter afternoon was somehow rejuvenating. As he wandered into the section of the city often referred to as Limbo, he felt eyes on him. Not the cold harsh and critical eyes of his father but the subtle curiosity of something perhaps on the hunt and looking for a meal. It was early, and Nero made note that most demons didn’t hunt this close to noon. He’d have to come back to visit this spot later to make sure nothing was hunting citizens in the area.

Despite telling Lady to buzz off weeks ago, they had kept in touch. She even offered small jobs that popped up close to the office. She figured Nero could use the break and in truth he was thankful to the huntress. Everyone knew Dante was a hot mess and sometimes hard to get along with, but Nero found the old man suffered from depression and loneliness. It was a bad combination when you added booze and women to the mix but as in all things in Nero’s life there was a balance to be found. Dante was often just lonely, and Nero needed to feel like he belonged. The arrangement worked well in the beginning but now? Now, Nero wasn’t so sure. His brother would fill that lonely hole in his uncle’s heart and where did that leave Nero? He shook from this line of thought and refocused on Lady. He thought about the last time they had talked and then he stopped mid step. A young woman ran right into the back of him and sputtered at his abrupt change in direction.

He apologized profusely and looked around getting his bearings. He had been so deep in thought that he had walked into the edge of an area that Lady had recently heard reports of a black wolf.
prowling about. She had only seen it once but it seemed she couldn’t catch the thing and she also couldn’t tell that it was hurting anyone. It just frightened the hell out of a few people. She figured it was a barghest or maybe a rage but either way she had told Nero to keep an eye open if he was in the area. A sudden flutter of recognition made his lips curl into a smile. He didn’t know why he hadn't made the connection sooner. Maybe she was at the orphanage. Checking afternoon traffic, he darted across the street and made a beeline for the Cathedral.

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“He’s been on his own for a very long time Vergil. You cannot give him orders, especially when it comes to Father McCabe. The man has been good to him.”

“How is it that he knows of Father McCabe? Have you been digging into secrets you have no business with?” Rolling the apple in his hand. Dante could clearly see he was agitated. Now was not the time to discover how much of the Padre’s story was true but one thing was for sure; Vergil didn’t like knowing that his brother knew of their connection. Vergil suddenly bit into the apple waiting for his brother’s reply and Dante snickered, it was obvious Vergil needed to eat from the way his eyes practically rolled into the back of his head as he chewed.

“Well, Vergil,” he drawled. “We ran into someone who helped out at the orphanage there at St Michael’s about a year ago, and I spent some time there back when we were separated. He kept me out of trouble, well sort of, a teenager with a gun out hunting demons with some twisted sort of death wish really wasn’t exactly up his alley, but, he managed. Anyway, we were reunited because of her, this friend I mentioned. Nero met him then, and I can’t deny I was more than surprised when he asked after you.” Vergil slowed his chewing and wiped the corner of his mouth with the back of his hand. Damn reaver he cursed silently. His need to recover was taking even more time than he liked. He had no way of telling where Lucifer’s vessel was especially since Agnus had sidetracked his original time table. He struggled to maintain his calm and his hunger. The buzzing drone of his soul being fractured was making him irritable and finding out Father McCabe was likely to be in his life again added to his irritability.

“I had no idea you spent time there.” Vergil felt a sudden pang of regret as he recognized what Dante had said. He had not really asked how his brother had fared while they were separated.

“Yes, well the good ole Padre told me you weren’t exactly asking about me when your visited him. I’m sure I never came up.”

“Dante, I did not know at that time you were even alive. It never occurred to me that…”

“Stop, this isn’t the time to delve into that. I have a feeling there is so much more to this part of your life, that I don’t know, that I’d bet it could fill a library. Nero’s conception being only one of the many questions I have. Look, after we talk to Casey we can go grab some lunch or an early dinner? I can show you around the neighborhood and then we can talk about some stuff.”

“Stuff? Could you use a word that was not so mundane and generic? What stuff, do you wish to talk about?” He returned to eating his apple.

“Stuff Vergil, you know, Nero, our sleeping arrangements, your training, oh then there is Yamato and probably more about how the hell are we going to find your soul fragment, piece whatever, but I’m pretty sure Casey will fill us in on the later.”

“Hnn… stuff.”

“Look, I’m just glossing over what I really want to discuss but I’ve got a suspicion its falls into the
“I do have things I must attend to and yes I think it best if we separate our sleeping arrangements. My schedule will…”

“Take you away from here for extended periods, like years. Yeah, I get that, but you’re not whole yet, so don’t make plans on leaving just yet.” Vergil felt the distinct tug on their link as Dante withdrew from him. He was hurt, and worse Vergil could not fathom why his brother did not understand he had obligations. Then he remembered, he couldn’t exactly tell him. He was to protect the vessel above all others, surely that didn’t mean his brother? Or did it? These secrets were getting burdensome.

“Dante, I meant nothing more than I tend to not sleep all day. My schedule will quickly irritate you and I have little patience for your more hedonistic ways, though I have not seen them as of late, I am sure they will return, big bosoms and all.” Vergil tossed the remains of the apple into the trash bin next to the desk and made a mental note to make sure his brother felt secure with his comings and goings even if it meant he had to bring the vessel here. If it were a weapon, that should not be a problem, but he had a feeling it was living weapon most likely a person and something much harder to keep concealed. The Sparda sword glinted at him and he flinched as he turned to see Dante watched him closely.

“You know Verge, I never would have gotten that sword were it not for you.” His brother stilled and gave him a cold look over his shoulder. Dante tapped his head and leaned against the pool table across from him “Wonder twin super powers remember? Anyhoo, you may not remember but you gave me your half of the amulet and made the whole thing possible. I thought I had killed you and with you being a puppet and your final fight against his control, well, it gave me one of the best reasons I had to fight Mundus. I had too, I needed to make everything you suffered mean something.”

“You did kill me, but Mundus forbade me to actually die a true death.” He shivered stuffing that memory from rising any further. The elder missed the expression on his brother’s face that flickered. “I was weak and deserved punishment for my arrogance and pride.”

“So you... you don’t get it do you? I guess I came close to killing you on more than one occasion, but a lot of people wanted you to die, to just simply not exist anymore, but you didn’t die, and you never gave up. If you had, you wouldn’t be standing here, and we wouldn’t be having this conversation. Hell, I even thought I succeeded twice, and that messed me up pretty bad ‘cause you were all I had left of family. Then I discovered Nero and everything I thought I knew about you was blown out of the water, again. I think I get why you did what you did, even though I hated you for it at the time. In many ways you prepared me for everything up till now but this…” He motioned between them, “…this right here is all new, and I’m struggling with how to help you. Vergil, I want to help you, even with your so-called obligations.” He air-quoted as he spoke, “I want to understand. Killing demons is easy next to figuring out how to get you to understand that… I. Love. You. Even if you are my evil twin, I won’t give up on you, ever.”

“And that will be your undoing.” He sighed heavily, ”Do you know what possessed me to raise the tower or why I decided after our battle to fall into Hell?”

Dante squinted at him and shook his head, “No. Don’t need to, not right now. Maybe it was for power or more likely because of Nero. Does it really matter? You came back, and you are obviously regretful for something. I know you’re hiding something, I can feel it. Just promise to keep trying to let me in. Bro, together we can figure out whatever trouble you’re in.” Surprise must have flickered across the elder’s face because Dante snorted at him. “You think you’re good at keeping secrets,
don’t you? I’ve got news for you. I may not know what it is, but I know that it’s there, and it’s sitting
on your chest like a boulder. You’re in trouble and I can feel it. Please let me help you. Don’t do it
alone. You’ve got family to lean on, no matter what.”

“You are a fool!”

“Who’s more foolish, the fool or the fool who follows him?”

“Did you just quote Star Wars?”

“Crap your memory is better than I thought.” Vergil stared with disbelief at his brother until he felt
himself laugh out loud and a foreign feeling fluttered in his chest. Dante grinned pushing away from
the pool table to give him a gentle hug and to Dante’s surprise Vergil returned the embrace. “I missed
you, Vergil. I have missed you so much I thought I would go crazy.”

“I have missed you too. Someday very soon, I will tell you the whys of my departure but for now let
us just have peace between us. I promise I will not leave you again, not like that, but I do have things
I need to, no, I must sort out. I promise to try to ask for help when I can, but for now you are safer
not knowing and so is my son.” Dante pulled from his brother and gave him a wrinkled frown. It
was a start and maybe he shouldn’t look a gift horse in the mouth. He nodded and remembered a
friend recently reminded him ‘Sometimes the longest journeys begin with the first step.’ God, he
prayed she was right.

“Are you ready?”

“I am. When do you expect them?”

“Well, I’ve been doing some thinking since we discovered Casey was coming and the way I see it.
They are just waiting for the right moment.”

“They? Then you know the angel she speaks of?”

“Actually, so do you.” Vergil crinkled his brow at his brother before understanding settled to his
expression.

“Eae,” he growled. Both twins sensing the shift in energy, turned as a young man with dirty blonde
short layered hair in his thirties appeared to the worn red couch with his arm casually draped over the
back.

“I’m pleased to see you too, Vergil. It’s been a long time since I could speak with you unhindered
and of my own faculties.”

“Belial, possessed you and destroyed you,” he countered flatly. He should have guessed there would
be complications when dealing with angels.

“No, he subjugated me and returned me to a protean form. Slight difference but you will be pleased
to know this is the first time I’ve been able to hold my human form this long since that most
unfortunate incident, thanks to a mutual friend.”

“Oh, goody!” Vergil sneered, and Dante had to chuckle. He hadn’t seen his brother this snarky
since… well, in a very long time.

A flash of blue white light behind them drew everyone’s attention. Casey lowered her hands to her
hips from their previously splayed position and raised an eyebrow toward the elder. “Did you miss
me?”
“Hardly.”

“Then let’s get started, shall we? Someone wants to keep your soul squirreled away like an angry elf kicking at his bottle and we can’t let that happen. Does the name Celeste ring a bell?” Vergil sighed deeply pressing his fingers to the bridge of his nose as he closed his eyes. He was getting a headache and his stomach growled softly. Dammit! Things had just become more complicated.

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Sister Teresa startled as Nero opened the door to the narthex. The youth in his exuberance, hit on the door a bit harder than he meant to. “Sorry!” he whispered, and the nun smiled to rise from prayer.

“Nero, I had a feeling I’d see you before long.” She offered outstretched arms as she come from the pews.

“Then she is here?” He hugged the elder nun whose scent reminded him of cookies and almonds. She smiled folding her hands before her and nodded her head.

“She’s in with the Father in his study. Will you be stopping in to see the children too?”

“Uh, I want to but…”

“No need to explain. I understand sometimes your job does not leave much time to be social but please do stop by if you find you can. Riley would especially like to see you.” He nodded glad he didn’t have to explain himself. She ushered him down the hall with a wave of her hand. “Off with ya, and I shall continue to pray for you both.” She dropped her head in a nod.

“Make it for the three of us, we found my father.” He couldn’t keep the tinge of uncertainty from slipping into his voice, but he smiled at her none the less and she returned the gesture with her own smile. Nero was happy that they had found Vergil even if he didn’t know what it really meant for any of them. He was also pleased to see someone genuinely happy for him.

She grabbed his demon arm without a flinch and smiled, “I’m so pleased and I shall pray for you all, now off.” He suppressed his urge to run but he heard the sister giggle softly. “No one else is here, you may run, but be careful.” He didn’t need to be told twice and before he could even remember how he got there he knocked at the priest’s door. He was almost giddy, he could smell her scent from down the hall. Danica was back.

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Puzzle Pieces

Chapter Summary

Nero talks with a priest and is reminded there may be a greater purpose to all of this. 
Vergil gets backed into a corner by his past. 
Dante discovers the true depths to which his brother will go for power.

Nero knocked at the door and a familiar voice called for him to come in. He opened the door carefully to see Father McCabe stood at the edge of his desk. He smiled and waved him in. “Well, my son, it’s about time you stopped by.” He offered his hand which Nero clasped with his demonic hand and the priest simply clasped his other hand over it as they shook, oblivious to the purple twinge of color the bringer took on. “How have you been. Did you find him? Tell me… everything, oh and later we will go find Dani.” He grinned as Nero smiled.

The priest was in his mid to late fifties, but you would be hard pressed to believe he was not the same age as Dante if not younger. He wore his hair cut close on the side and back but longer on top with a habit of letting his hair fall into his face much like Nero did. His sooty dark hair had traces of grey that always amazed Nero, in short because they came off as looking like highlights instead of stress and age. He maintained a short stubbled beard and mustache and Nero often thought that the man reminded him more of a college professor with his sharp astute appearance than a world-weary priest.

Father Arthur McCabe was not your typical priest and as the two men began catching up Nero realized it was not surprising that they had met only that they hadn’t met sooner. He lived in an area of town called Limbo, and Limbo was a hard and gritty neighborhood where people struggled with both their own demons as much as the real demons that broke thru the veil between the realms. The Cathedral of St Michael’s had been attacked not once but at least six times that Nero knew of by demons in the past few years. A low average if you considered the rest of the town and outlying area. The Cathedral itself rivaled the Grand Cathedral in Fortuna so far as age, and Gothic design but it was the grounds which contained an extensive library and was home to a small sheltered orphanage that held the most significance.

Nero let the priest put an arm around him and offer him words of comfort once he discovered they had indeed found his father and that Nero was for the lack of any better words ‘unsure’ as to how he really felt about the situation. The priest led him down the back hallway to the gallery that overlooked the private courtyard and lead to the living quarters and orphanage side of the church. It was more secure as well as secluded from the remaining public areas of the church and offered several places one could discuss sensitive issues away from prying eyes. A part of Nero became nervous knowing he was minutes from being reunited with both his newest and arguably his best friend and the children he feared he had neglected at the same time.

“Nero you look nervous, please, don’t be. The kids understand what you and Dante do for a living. Danica is often away for months between visits. They are just glad to see you when they can. I expect to find Danica doing research in the library. She spent the morning with the kids and now they are in their own studies.”

Nero nodded and pulled his sleeve down to partially cover his demonic arm. He then shivered and
drew his hand thru his hair. “I just know what it’s like to... well... be stuck in an orphanage. I should have made more of an attempt once I knew they were here. I mean…”

“Huh,” the priest chirped before he could finish. “I do not believe my children have quite the same experience that you did, and I am sorry for that, my son. I wish Gloria and Benedict had found you sooner, but for some unknown reason God had other plans. Perhaps, we shall never know. Again, they understand fighting demons day in and day out doesn’t leave much time to feign a normal life much less offer a chance to visit every week. Just knowing that they have not been forgotten is enough. Besides, they know it was you that sent the case of Fruit Loops last month.” He winked at him and gave him a knowing grin. Nero chuckled. He recently discovered online shopping and thought it funny when he found a case of the multi colored cereal rings on sale in bulk. Of course, he knew just who to send it to. They continued a bit in silence which was nothing unusual. Nero sometimes needed the silence to gather his thoughts and somehow the priest always knew he needed that space.

“So, why did Casey act all cloak and dagger to get me here? She said I needed to pick up a package or something.”

“A package? Ah, your father will no doubt be unhappy with the turn events have taken.”

Nero stopped and looked at him with an odd quirk of his eyebrows, his hair drifted into his face. “You knew.” It was a statement, flat and emotionless. Nero could never figure out how McCabe sometimes just knew things. It was like he had some kind of supernatural gift of awareness or omniscience. Either way it was unsettling at times.

He returned Nero’s expression with one of calm and smiled gently, “Danica. She meant that she is somehow meant to help, I’m sure of it. She showed up a few days ago disoriented and well to put it bluntly… worn out. She said she felt a shift in power somewhere close and was drawn here.”

“Hmmph.” Nero lifted his bringer and its light flickered from beneath the sleeve as he clenched his fist. “I wonder,” he mumbled. Dani had always been fascinated with his bringer and he felt her energy fluctuate within the appendage even from this distance. She was close now. Yamato felt heavy within him and his mind drifted. Perhaps McCabe was right, if Danica was the so-called package that Nero was to retrieve then his father would no doubt be angered once he discovered the tangled web of a past she shared with both his brother and his son. She was after all a hybrid herself and if Dante was right she was some type of celestial, and Vergil didn’t take kindly to angels of any kind at the moment. He lifted his head and smirked seeing a familiar figure pace in the library ahead of them. “I have a suspicion, you’re right. Vergil, as Yamato tells me, is missing a fraction of his soul, a tether of sorts that needs to be retrieved before he can truly regain his power. I don’t think they know that I know this but if its true then she is the one to help.”

“She has a knack for finding lost things.” Nero snorted at the priest. He apparently was all too aware that they searched for a fragment of Vergil’s soul. “I am aware of a great many things Nero,” he answered the unspoken question. “But, I often have nothing more than puzzle pieces that I don’t understand as to how they fit together until they just suddenly... do.” He stopped walking and gave the youth a squeeze to his shoulder. “Just like I am confident that she has ties to both twins and even to you. She is meant to help. She is meant to be here.”

“Ties?”

“Humans, angels, demons, they have all been playing games with one another since each was given breath. I find it no surprise that the salvation of each species may lie within the combination of them all.”
“Your being cryptic.”

“Aah, such is my… curse.”

“Puzzle pieces?”

“Puzzle pieces.” He released Nero’s shoulder with a smile and ran his hand thru his hair with a sigh. “Go! I’m sure the two of you can sense one another so there is no need to make your reunion any more awkward than it need be. Remember, her reasons for leaving and staying away are complicated just as Dante’s demand for her to leave was necessary. The bottom line is that they both had your best interests in mind even if neither of them handled it correctly.”

“Is there anything you don’t know?”

He chuckled turning on his heel to return they way they had come. “Well, I haven’t a clue as to how this all ends, only a prayer that I fervently wish to have answered.” He motioned with his hands as he spoke.

“What prayer, if I may ask?”

“I believe God has plans for all of us. Demons included. I pray that the twins discover their peace, their balance, their respective places within the scheme of things to come. Finding one another after so much time was lost is only the beginning for them.”

“And for me? Do I figure into this… prayer for balance and peace, as you say?”

“Of course, my son, you are the key to greater understanding for us all. You are a gift and the strength that reminds us what is possible.” He walked off leaving the youth a bit stunned. It was not the first time the priest had suggested Nero had a kind of destiny ahead of him and it was a touch nauseating. His bringer flickered a deep purple color before it returned to its normal pale blue. “Don’t be such a stranger and stop in to visit the children whenever you can, even if it’s not today.” His voice trailed into the quiet of the hallway as he disappeared.

“Dammit,” he muttered hunching his shoulders and shoving his hands deep into his pockets. He let his mind muddle with thoughts of her leaving about a year ago. He grumbled. Seeing her now shouldn’t be so hard. He was pretty sure no one knew that they had kept in touch after she left. It was brief texts at first then a few calls finally about six months ago she came to visit but then she went dark a couple months ago, and he feared the worse. He took a breath and regained his composure. He lifted his head and walked toward the library.

The priest watched for a moment from the shadows of the hall to see a glimpse of their reunion thru the open double door of the library. Whatever Nero’s reservations, she obviously didn’t hold a grudge. He smiled and turned on his heel as he folded his hands behind him and bowed his head slightly. He greeted another nun then a priest that were around the corner and he continued to his private study. The small door gave with a slight nudge on the doorknob and he realized he must have left it unlocked. Not likely. As his eyes lifted into the space, he snorted. “Taking a bit of a chance, aren’t you?” A familiar sandy blonde-haired male looked up from his chair at his desk and smiled.

“Yes, well time is of the essence in this case.” He stood and walked around the desk. “I see she made it back. He will be pleased.”

“Does he even know she is here?”

He flipped a hand up in an open admission. “I really do not know. I’m not her guardian angel nor am I privileged to the plans they have for her but the fact that the elder requires a vessel and she just
“I do not believe we have been abandoned, but I do think we are being tested.” He stroked his beard absently and Eae smiled before he leaned back to the desk as the priest sat down and pulled something from his desk. “She will need a set of eyes to help her on this quest, I think.”

“Does she not already possess the blade?”

“She does, but she refuses to awaken its power. She fears it as much as she fears the darkness within her, but perhaps this is for the best. She is strong but she chokes her own potential. Perhaps this task will show her, her greater destiny.”

“Shadow is not darkness. Evil is not all darkness. All that walk in shadow do not shun the light.”

“True, but shadows sometimes hide the truth, and none of them are ready to know just yet.” The priest stroked something in his hand and rested his elbows to the desk with a small sigh.

“You are confident in this path for them? This is how you see things come to fruition?” Eae reached to pluck the silky black feather from his friend’s hand. He inspected it and nodded indicating he would take care of this matter.

McCabe leaned back in his chair and looked off toward the window. “I see many possible paths but this one provides the best chance for all of them. Nothing is set in stone, the future is clouded with emotion only the past has been set, so to speak, however, I cannot waver from this path now, Nero’s very life may well depend on it.”

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“Celeste?” Dante looked at his brother trying to imagine whether the woman was a lover, an enemy, or even possibly Nero’s mother. He doubted the later, however, seeing his brother’s face morph with disgust before returning to its normal cold façade. Their mental link shrunk between them. The name had obviously struck a nerve with the elder twin who grumbled. “You gettin’ your freak on in Hell?” he teased out of habit.

“You idiot!” the cold twin snapped. “Celeste is a witch.”

“You say that about most women, Verge, or at least you did. Do you even like women?” Dante moved to his desk and leaned on its edge. Vergil glared with lips pressed into a thin line.

“No, really she is a witch. Though, she is more like a sorceress. She is extremely powerful in the arcane arts, specifically the darks arts.” Casey took up residence on the pool table across from the desk. She absently tucked fingers into her hair that was tied in a simple scarf and smoothed a rough patch near her temple. Once she heard the message meant for her she had been forced to dress quickly and prepare for the sudden visit to Vergil. She didn’t feel as composed and put together as she should have for facing the Dark Slayer. It was still a bit disorienting to have her sight back. She
found she closed her eyes often to think about how she was to proceed. She opened her eyes and looked at Dante. “Celeste was one of the first humans to fall into Hell.”

“Willingly?”

“She was infatuated with Mundus or at least the power he wields.” His tone was short, but Dante felt his anger bubbled just under the surface. Just what had happened between them?

“In part, she seeks power and Mundus is a means to that power. Whether she loves him in any way remains to be seen.” He glared at her words, but she ignored him, and Dante chuckled. If he didn’t know better, he thought Casey liked to goad his brother. She always did like to play with fire.

“Celeste is, however, Mundus’s lover. She was there when Mundus battled Belial the first time and she now helps heal wounds inflicted by Belial and the angel they faced.”

“You mean the angel you hosted?”

“Yes. Eva..ah.. Evangeline as I’ll call her, you know her real angelic name is hard to pronounce even for me.” Vergil’s eyebrow shot up at her stutter, but he quickly dismissed it. Her excuse was a valid one, not many could properly pronounce angelic names any more than they could speak the demonic ones. He sighed as she continued to explain to his brother who Celeste was. He knew the story and he turned to question Eae on another matter entirely only to find his guardian was gone.

“You see, Celeste had a bone to pick with Sparda.”

“But she lost her opportunity and took it out on Verge. Got it. But that still doesn’t explain something.” Vergil looked to his brother who stared at him. the elder twin had obviously missed an important part of the conversation while lost in thought over where his damn useless guardian angel had disappeared to. “How long was Vergil in Hell? Seems to me, that something doesn’t add up.”

“I can’t answer that only he can. Time does not move in the same way there as it does here and I have a feeling it is not something he will discuss in front of anyone other than you. So, let’s get to the nuts and bolts of your situation. I have a lead as to where that fragment might be but there is a problem. We not only have the distinct problem of where the fragment is located but that Vergil will not be able to retrieve the fragment himself.”

“Why not?” he snapped. Dante gave him a warning glare that the elder ignored. He would speak to her as he wished.

“To put it simply, Celeste used you as much as Agnus did. While Agnus drew power thru the rift created by her spell work every time you were forced to trigger, Celeste used the rift to visit with Agnus. They formed an alliance of sorts in the name of Mundus. It was how Agnus learned so very much about demons and angels for his work.”

“Wait, so Agnus actually worked for Mundus?”

“And what does this have to do with me not being able to retrieve my own soul?”

“Yep, but Agnus may not have known or even cared by the end. He was led to believe that he was working for an angel that wanted to evolve mankind to fight the next great war.”

“Woah, now that explains all the celestial energy, he had access to.”

“That still does not answer my question.” The elder twin crossed his arms over his chest and despite his growing hunger he felt his headache more acutely. He growled.
“Well, I’m getting to that. See, Agnus used you to gain power, but her spell was meant for another purpose. She meant to use you to find something else, more specifically someone.” Casey stood away from the pool table and smoothed her dark purple tunic. Vergil stood still glaring at her, but Dante noticed the drop in temperature. His brother knew what she was about to say next and worse Dante now sensed this was the real reason he wanted Nero away from the office. This was in some way a part of that ever-present small shadow deep within his brother that gnawed at him. It was the secret Dante knew was there like a heavy stone around his cold twin’s throat. “You can’t retrieve your own soul lest she achieve her goal and in doing so possibly trap you in Hell, again, but this time as her servant. Remember, a soul wants nothing more than to be whole. You of all people should understand this. That was how Belial tricked you and weakened Eae. She foresaw this. She counted on this.”

“Wait, who does she hope to find thru Vergil? Nero? Are we protecting him again?” Vergil snapped a look to his brother. What did he mean by again?

“No.” Casey fidgeted but she had resolved to face this problem head on just as she had every other thing in her life. She leveled her gaze at Vergil.

“Be silent witch. Do not speak his name.”

“Who is it Vergil? You workin’ for Lord Voldemort?” Dante chuckled but suddenly stiffened feeling Vergil’s aura rise. His brother’s hand curved dangerously around the caramel skinned witch and she gripped his hand in return as his trigger crawled over him.

“Vergil Stop! Dante must… ah aahh…”

“Vergil stop it!” Dante grabbed at his brother’s now clawed hand and placed himself between his brother and Casey. She gasped for air, but Vergil suddenly lost his trigger and fell into his brother before pulling sharply away to lean against the desk braced by both hands his breath heavy. “What the hell? Casey? You ok?” He helped her to stand and took a defensive space before her.

She nodded rubbing her throat but never took her eyes off Vergil. “I'm OK. He wouldn't really hurt me. He's defensive because I've backed him into a corner. He just wants to frighten me into silence but your brother needs to know. Tell him Vergil or I will! Tell him whom you serve!” she snapped with an eerie calm.

“Witch!”

“What? Verge? What is she talking about?”

“You cannot hold your trigger as long as that fragment is kept within the phylactery she trapped it in. She will find you if you continue to try and trigger in some vain attempt to retrieve your soul. The fact that you can even trigger into your demon form without being brought to near death is amazing. Isn’t that how Agnus did it? Tortured you, bled you, until you were near death?” Vergil shivered his memory clear even as her words stung. “But, this time, when she finds you and that is not an if, you will have no choice but to lead her to your master. Your soul will beg it of you to be free. That's why you can not retrieve your own soul. You need a vessel to carry it for you. A vessel strong enough to break the bonds between her and you. Tell me who do you fear more? Telling your brother what really happened in Hell or defying your new master?” She glared defiantly at his back and the twin slowly stood and turned to look at them. There was no use in trying to hide this and a small part of him thought his brother could not possibly think any lower of him. Even the soft reassurance of Yamato had left him in these moments and Vergil stood alone.

He answered emotionless, cold, distant, “Lucifer. I serve Lucifer. He released me from the prison
Mundus held me in and it is by his will that I am tasked with responsibilities in this realm now.”

“Vergil!? What have you done?”

He hissed with eyes burning red, “I did what I had to, to survive!”

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Catching Up

Chapter Summary

Nero catches up with a friend

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Danica often paced when she read. Nero learned it was a nervous habit she developed over the years when she dealt with something that weighed heavy on her. He had found her in this very library many times during her stay at Devil May Cry while on probation. He smiled thinking about how lively she made the place back then. It was like having an older sister that got into as much trouble as he did, and as a bonus they drove Dante nuts. His smile deepened, who would have thought this young woman had a past, tattoos, and a set of wings. He let his energy lift toward her and his demon eagerly chirped deep within his mind. Physically she appeared to be fine and a part of his anxiety waned. She snapped her book shut and laid it to the table as he entered the library. She turned quickly, and her ashen grey hair seemed to float around her a moment. It was longer than he remembered but her blue-green eyes were just as brilliant. His smile became a mischievous grin as they stood there and stared a moment. She felt his energy brush her and she returned his smile.

“Nero!” The young man chuckled as she barreled into him and hugged him so hard that for a minute he thought she might crush him, but he returned the hug picking her up from the floor. “I’ve missed you. I was hoping you’d come.”

“Woah wait a minute sister.” He slipped easily into his moody teen act at her words dropped her and gave her a hard stare as she chuckled then sighed and shrugged. “How was I supposed to know you were here? You didn’t exactly call.” His glare softened as she cocked her head at him and tilted her hips.

She pursed her lips a moment then shrugged. “I sensed something…different… at the office plus Dante and I haven’t exactly made nice, yet. He may still be mad at me or at least I still have issues with him.” She put her hands on her hips and gave the young man the once over. “You look good. He’s been treating you well then?”

“It’s Dante, he eats pizza, kills demons, and… well you know.” He blushed at his almost words and rubbed the back of his neck with his human hand nervously.

“Yeah, I know,” she laughed. “How is he? Does he even know we’ve been… you know?”

“Wow, way to make something as innocent as texting sound dirty,” he chuckled. She rolled her eyes before she slapped him playfully to the shoulder.

“Hey! I’d expect that from him not you.”

“Guess you shouldn’t have left me for so long without responsible adult supervision.” He raised his eyebrows feigning a serious expression. “…and No, I didn’t have the heart to tell him I was still conspiring with a wanted woman.” He snickered as he spoke, and he felt the weight of anxiety lift from him. He should have known seeing her again wouldn’t be as hard as he played it up in his
“Hah! Wanted? Yeah, I suppose I am but not by the police this time. Look, you’re the adult one in our little group, despite the whole moody teen thing,” she snorted. “Seriously?”

“Yeah, well if you want serious you should meet my father. He’s got that wrapped up in spades.”

“So, it’s true then? You guys found him? I had heard rumors.”

“What rumors? What have you heard?” Nero’s curiosity overtook his current train of thought. Danica had a knack of hearing things or finding out things that others couldn’t or wouldn’t share. In this respect he found her quite engaging and honestly it was the excuse he used to reconnect with her. You had to pay Lady for info. You had to pay Lady a lot.

“Demons. There is a lot of chatter in the underworld and some of my contacts have gone dark since I returned here. It seems several factions of demons have been looking for someone recently, someone powerful, and it was rumored he was the son of the traitor, or some such wording. The way I understand it there is quite a bounty out for the Dark Slayer. His escape from Hell threw the realm into quite the kerfuffle, or maybe it was the kerfuffle that let him escape. Anyway, I’ve heard rumors about him being involved in a rebellion, a coo, of course a lot of deaths, but then silence, nothing for years, until now. I’ve already told you my theory that he had an opportunity to escape Mundus back when Dante fought him but recently I heard some sketchy rumors that two demon lords came to this world and scrapped over a powerful soul or vessel or something. Those details aren’t reliable, but I figure since you did find him you can fill me in. The latest rumors started to surface just a few months ago that the Dark Slayer is back here in the human realm.”

“Really? Wow, that’s like… a lot of info. I love your contacts. Some of the details are right but I’m not sure how right. It’s not like Dante nor my father explained what went on in hell or for that matter what’s going on between them anyway, but the gist seems right. Anything else?” She motioned for them to sit in one of the large leather couches that dotted the front of the library and he nodded amiably.

“Well if the rumors are true. Lucifer has lost the battle for the throne in Hell and has disappeared. Some say his general left him, maybe disappeared, and that Lucifer no longer has a corporeal form after his battle with Belial, the first king of Hell. Mundus was summoned and fought both Belial and some ancient angel. There is a whole mess with that however, some say the angel was Lucifer, but I think that’s nothing more than propaganda for his cause and that it was some other angel. Angels have been scarce of late due to a certain mad alchemist apparently not being dead, but we’ll talk about that later.” She waved off Nero’s apparent alarm and he shrugged. He knew she would tell him eventually. “Either way it’s hard to lay claim to a throne without a body, so one of Mundus’s generals is scouring this realm for a vessel, specifically one strong enough to hold him. Supposedly it’s here in this realm but no one and I mean no one knows what they are looking for. Lucifer is after all the king of deception.” Nero sat next to her and blew air thru his lips as he rubbed his neck then raked his clawed fingers thru his hair. It was a lot to take in at once and somehow the possibility of Agnus being alive didn’t surprise him. Dante had come across similar indications the past few months while looking for Vergil. Her blue-green eyes fixated a moment on his bringer which flickered with his mental state. He leaned forward to his knees and gave her an arched eyebrow. She continued, “The underground started buzzing about three weeks ago, with bounties and rumors of another turnover in Hell. Mundus is apparently on the mend from his encounter with both the angel and Belial and his servants and minions are getting antsy. Something big is brewing. I’m guessing that’s when you found him, three maybe four weeks ago?” She too leaned forward to mirror his position.
“We found him over Halloween. It was a tough three days getting his soul back then fighting off Belial who apparently hid himself as his guardian angel. Who knew my dad had a guardian angel? Who knew any demon had a guardian angel?” He snorted and after giving the room a quick look he shifted into the corner of the couch and threw his arm over the back. For a church and more specifically a place like the Order’s headquarters, this place felt safe and safer than the Order ever did.

She watched him a moment and tilted her head before sitting up. “It’s not as odd as you may think; it’s rare but it does happen. I mean I could cite examples but what’s more important is that it means if your father has one then so does Dante, and that means they were chosen at birth for protection and guidance.”

“You’re kidding right?”

“No... It could mean they harbor ancient souls or that they were meant to carry out some celestial plan, or even as quirky as this seems, perhaps one of their parents prayed for protection. Of course, it could be as simple as they have human souls. I always did think Dante was touched.” Her expression drifted as her brow came together in thought. She then chuckled realizing how she worded her thought. “I didn’t quite mean that how it sounded.”

Nero shook his head and joined her in a soft laugh, “So Dante and my father are ‘touched’ gotta say that makes me feel better about the situation. I mean currently I seem to be the only one between them that has a level head.” He shrugged, and Dani could tell something nagged at him, but she opted to talk about it later when they weren’t under the watchful eye of Father McCabe. “So, tell me oracle of knowledge. What do you see for me?”

“Well, you…” she shook her finger at him like she wanted to pin the words on him “You are full of so much damn potential it’s scary.” She shrugged. “You sort of remind me of me but in a much cooler... you have real potential kind of way. I don’t know maybe it’s the lineage of Sparda. Still that’s some pretty big shoes to fill, for all of you.” She paused to scrub her hair thru her fingers before she stood and paced a bit. “Still every human has access to an angel, a guardian, to help guide them in times of strife. Sometimes they stick around throughout their whole life whispering and guiding from birth, sometimes they just show up for the important bits. Dante has a balanced... blended... human and demonic soul. I’ve never seen or felt anything like it. Twice the responsibility I suppose so it doesn’t surprise me to find out he has a celestial guide. I don’t know about your father, but I would assume the same since they are twins.”

“Still it does surprise me,” he scoffed rubbing the tip of his nose. “Cause, I would have thought an angel could have talked him out of half the stupid stuff the old man does. Dante is just an overgrown...well...child.” Danica laughed and stopped pacing long enough to look down at her friend. She returned to sit next to him.

“Ok, Nero we’ve both seen how stubborn he is, and it doesn’t really work like that. Hmm, I wonder. I suppose it does seem strange to think demons and angels ever work together, but my research and experience seem to indicate just about anything is possible. In a nutshell, not all angels are categorically good and not all demons are categorically bad.” She ‘air-quoted’ as she spoke, and Nero snorted. She gave him a quick glare and continued. “Peace is always possible but it’s often complicated.”

“Complicated? Yuh think? Sounds more like impossible. Besides other than you I’ve never even seen an angel.” He snorted again and tilted his head. She looked good, not tired like he expected. She drifted from him in the following moments of silence. Something was bothering her and despite her inability or her unwillingness to talk about it, Nero knew. “Seriously, are you ok? Let the realms
fend for themselves right now. Let’s talk about you. What’s got you bothered?” He put his demonic hand on her shoulder. His bringer flickered before he visibly relaxed. He had his answer. The good the bad and the ugly but even as he felt her magic rise to hide what he already knew. He understood abuse and he knew why he kept his quiet. He would be respectful and let her come to him when she was ready. That’s how it worked between them. It was a silent understanding they came to a long time ago.

“Angels are closer than you think. So, do you feel better now?” She gave him a knowing grin and gathered his bringer in her hand. It flickered again, and she smiled watching the colors swirl. “This is an incredible gift Nero, but I will tell you what happened when I’m ready, ok?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah, sorry. I didn’t mean to pry, but that little voice in my head was nagging on me to check you out.”

“Which one Beelzebub or Yamato?”

“Pfftt, wouldn’t you like to know.” He hugged her again and they laughed shortly which led to a long but comfortable silence as they remained embraced. Finally, they pulled from one another and she smiled.

“I’m sorry I left like I did. Dante meant well. I truly think he thought by pushing me away he was protecting me as well as you. I was sort of dealing with my own demons when all of that happened. I was reactive and hot headed, but more than anything I needed him to push me away. I felt I deserved it. I know better, but it was best that I left.” She reached up and flicked a stray hair from his forehead. He sighed and shook his head. “I still say shooting you was the best thing to happen to me in years.”

“Yeah, for you. I’m the one that got shot, and twice no less once when we met and the other time when you left. I guess you like to bookend your entrances and exits.” She frowned looking away from him but returned his smile when he tilted her head back up to look at him. “But… all things considered, everything worked out until the Vatican and Trinity found you.” Shock crossed her expression and he gently stroked her cheek. “Yeah I know they threatened me and I also paid good money to find out that team of hunters suddenly disappeared around the same time you reappeared. I don’t want to know the details…but… thank you. I have a funny suspicion you took a bullet for both of us.” She pulled from him and crinkled her brows but simply nodded. “So, tell me why are you even back in a church? I mean I know this church is special, but I would have thought the symbolic ties would have kept you away for a while.”

“Pfftt… why do you still work for The Order?”

“Touché.”

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Chapter End Notes

- Ok, so, I’ve introduced a major original character. She will become an integral part of the story for a variety of reasons. Some more obvious than others. We will learn more about her as we go.
- How they met will be dealt with at a more organic point in the story. It’s a sort of story best dealt with thru flashbacks and quite possibly thru its own short story. I will see how interest sparks.
- Thank you for reading, leaving kudos and bookmarking.
- Next up… Vergil what were you thinking???
Chapter Summary

Vergil reveals more of his time in Hell. Dante struggles to prove he will do anything to keep his brother.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“What did you do Vergil?”

“I did what I had to, to survive!”

The office hung silent with this exchange of words. Dante was both shocked and hurt. Clearly, he had underestimated what his brother was capable of. Vergil clenched his fists. Their heated exchange of glare filled admonitions culminated in the blood he felt drip thru his fingers. This was the moment Vergil had subconsciously avoided. It was the moment he believed his brother would discover the truth and never forgive him. In the next few moments, Vergil was convinced he would lose his brother and thru him any hopes of learning more about the man his son had become. He would be alone. He stared at his brother struggling to figure out what to say, how to say it, and a dark realization came to him. He had never lied, and he wasn’t about to start now. If he was asked directly, he would answer. Time and the very space between them seemed to ripple and shimmer. Time slowed to a crawl as the office disappeared; only Dante remained.

“So, you want me to understand, you sold your soul? Is… is that what you did? So, that’s how you did it, gained your power? The honorable high and mighty stick up my ass I can do no wrong Vergil resorted to selling his soul, for what? Power? Was it worth it? Why’d you do it Vergil? Why?” Dante’s voice rose with anger as he spoke, and his aura flickered with menace as he stepped toward his brother. Vergil stood his ground as his brother railed at him. He deserved this outburst. He expected it. He endured it as his own aura flickered in response. Dante then grew quiet and looked at him with his expression blank, “Why?” His last words were haunted, quiet.

Vergil didn’t expect him to understand. He wasn’t sure he understood the woven complexities of his coming to be both indebted to Lucifer then indentured to him. His red half continued to step forward and reached a hand out to touch his brother. Vergil flinched. He didn’t want their last touch between them to be one of anger. It was only then that he realized they were no longer in the reality of the office but instead they were inside their shared mindscape, their mental link personified and tangible. Here, in this space, no one else could see them, touch them, or hear them. Only each other.

“My choices were limited. I miscalculated. Lucifer offered me a new chance to make things…” right was that the word? There was so much he had yet to explain and yet the Dark Slayer knew perhaps now was not the right time. “to make things better for me. His servant pulled me from the Mire offering me a chance. Yes, to serve him, but also to attain my revenge. I could not have foreseen what consequences laid ahead. My choice was to serve or to be a puppet.”

“So, you just chose a different master.”

Vergil could not sense his brother’s mood. He wanted to use those emotions to gauge what he
needed to tell him and what he could spare. Not knowing if he taunted or struggled with understanding frustrated him. He growled under his breath, “I had no choice Dante. I had no other options. After our last encounter, I sunk deep into the desolate cold Mire one last time and prayed for death. But what I found was not relief nor freedom, I was unable to just die to give up or even give in and as I fought my way back I wanted… no I needed to make amends for those mistakes that were… that are more far reaching than I knew. I needed forgiveness but more than that I still wanted my revenge. Revenge for mother, revenge for you, revenge for… them.” Vergil turned from him sharply the colors of their space fluxed like drops of paint dripped into oil and water. The sphere of their bubble was lit with a warm golden color behind Dante while the space was shadowed with a sooty grey and purple color that danced and swirled like a storm behind Vergil. He snorted with disgust to see this. It was the same pairing of colors that adorned Lucifer’s banners in Hell. “He saved me.”

His voice came out bitter and terse. Dante was unsure if that was supposed to be a statement. Whether it was to be some culmination of all his thoughts that would explain his actions because it came out rather like a question instead. His voice was unsure, his body movements timid and Dante stepped closer. He felt how twisted, angry, and confused his brother’s mind was despite the cold lack of emotion to his face. He knew his brother better than he knew himself, at times. He knew to admit he needed help of any kind devastated his pride. Casey didn’t need to be a part of this; it was why he pulled his brother here for just a moment in the hopes of giving him the chance to be vulnerable. Dante understood his brother’s choices. He didn’t like them, but he understood. Vergil felt responsible. He burdened himself with the same irrational and debilitating idea that he could have done more to save her.

He steeled himself for more revelations as Vergil turned back and stared at him with an expression he had not seen in over a decade and it still haunted him. It was the broken and confused expression of a child who had lost a father. A child who had lost the one person he looked up to dare he say revered. Dante sighed heavily. He knew his brother would not tell him everything. He knew there was even more to this story of his fall, but he would hear no more. Already he felt his brother closing himself off to his advances. He knew he would hide behind some shred of hope that by keeping things from him it would protect him. Vergil was more like their father than he realized. As he stepped forward again he became aware of Vergil’s fragile state of mind. He felt as if his brother was some exquisite piece of art about to crack before his very eyes. Vergil had become a sculpture of divine design on the brink of being shattered to dust. “I owe him.” Again, his voice was unsure.

“Tell me.”

“I…” He tried to turn away again, but this time Dante reached out and touched him gently and not out of anger as Vergil had expected. He held him by his shoulder to look deep into his eyes and Vergil nodded. “I remembered you. I remembered what I had done, what was done to me. Then for a moment I was free, and I wanted nothing more than to come home.” His voice faltered but Dante brought his other hand up to rest on his brother’s upper arm giving it a small squeeze for reassurance. “Slowly the compulsions, the rage, and the blind obedience came crashing back upon me as if it were a wave. So, I fought. I fought to keep those memories. I fought for my power, and my very soul. That was when I left my half of the amulet with you and I sent Yamato away. These two things Mundus was never able to separate from me no matter how hard he tried. I see now they were the two things that kept me from being controlled entirely. I willed them as far from me as possible in my moment of death.”

“So, you did die. I was witness to your destruction your literal obliteration; then Lucifer brought you back? I mean if you died, how are you here? How?”

“I did die, brother, what you saw was not the first time I fell under his wrath for my failure to comply to his wishes. There were other times I disobeyed him. Yes, I defied him before with much
the same consequences but this time it felt different. At first it was wonderful, peaceful. I welcomed the thought of seeing mother and father, even my son, but Mundus denied me passage into the ether and pulled me back into the Mire. He reforged my broken body to be his plaything once more and I sunk into despair.”

“The Mire, the sea of damned souls. I remember pops talking about it a few times. It’s a place dark with malice once guarded by angels to protect the raw power of the souls it contained. If I remember correctly, it was once a part of the celestial realm but was fractured and became part of Hell. But still, how did you survive?”

“I do not know.” He dropped his head no longer able to look at Dante and his brother released him. Vergil turned to see his wall of color behind him was darker now and churned as if about to explode. “I just remembered the agony. I relived my mistakes. I felt the losses I had wrought over and over again. I knew I was truly alone with only myself to blame. I was the foolish one. I had rushed in before I was strong enough. Then suddenly I heard a voice.”

“Whose voice?”

“It was a woman, not unlike mother. This voice told me to fight until my final breath, to not forget that I am the eldest son of Sparda and I was meant for something greater than what I had become. I was the key to my own salvation. I had only to see thru the deception and deny their lies.”

“Cryptic so far as voices go but…meh… you were sort of between life and death.”

Vergil looked to his brother confused at his calm flippant demeanor. Was he mocking him? “I made mistakes, but I would gladly fall into Hell again if it meant I could save them, if I could protect them. I would do this again.” He hissed angrily but his voice faltered again as he paused, “I need you to forgive me. I fear I will destroy you, but I find I need you.”

“Vergil…I forgave you a long time ago and I meant that the first time I said it. I was angry with you back then, sure, hell I’m angry with you right now, but that doesn’t mean I’ve given up on you.” He stroked both hands thru his hair and let out an exasperated sound. “Let me help you! Dammit, I want to help you, maybe I even need to help you. Back then, I didn’t understand. Pfft…I still don’t understand now half of the reasons why you do what you do but… What I’m trying to say is maybe there are times even a demon must have faith. Faith that he’ll make the right decisions. Faith that he can make a difference. Faith that he isn’t some evil son of a bitch bent on world domination. Faith that he can be just as strong as his father but make better choices, or at least ones that his son doesn’t have to clean up…” He frowned and looked from his brother a moment to stare at the dark clouds before he raised his voice in conviction. “Faith that you’re doing the right thing because it feels like the right thing to do. What you’ve done is screw up … like a lot… but so have I. It’s called being human and guess what humans don’t have the corner on that market. Still, in its own way things worked out. Because of what happened I accepted who and what I was, and I was ready for the real demons and every horror after that. I’ve cleaned up more of pop’s messes than I can count, and we can continue to make things right. We can figure out what happened to him and keep Mundus from rising again. Maybe that’s what we are supposed to do, together.”

Dante paced a bit. He knew Vergil was still holding back but he had to decide. He couldn’t force his brother to do anything. He understood it was some sort of misplaced guilt that drove him to such a dark path. A path that grew darker. How could he make him see? “Dammit Verge, I didn’t give up on you then and I won’t give up on you now. I never will. I thought I killed you not once but twice and somehow thru that haze of loneliness and depression I felt you. I still feel you.” Dante abruptly pulled Vergil close hugging him tightly. “It broke me not having you near. It broke me knowing I couldn’t do more. I will help you whether you want it or not. I won’t let you go so easily ever again.
They will have to pull you from my cold dead hands.” Vergil carefully and slowly returned the embrace. He was confused as to why his brother would so fervently support him despite his errors in judgment, but he accepted his brother’s love and slowly felt the slim frail fingers of hope begin to weave their way into the cracks of his time worn façade.

“When you learn all that I have done, you will not be so glib in your support of me.” Dante pushed him away and gave him a small shake surprising the cold twin as his head shook comically like a child’s toy.

“Knock it off Verge! I love you.” He stopped shaking him and smiled. Vergil blinked unsure what to expect next. “So, tell me how did you get tangled up with Lucifer? Just the important parts save the details for when you’re ready and we’re alone.”

Chapter End Notes

- This chapter was tough. Vergil knows more than he is telling because... uh... it's Vergil, but Dante knows this. The length became an issue but I think I pulled off the tension despite the sudden word diet I placed this chapter on.
- Next up: Vergil shares why he came back in his own limited I need to make new plans way.
The Calm Before the Storm

Chapter Summary

Vergil elaborates details from Hell that few know. Dante discovers a past decision will now determine their future chances.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Vergil was a bit disoriented when he felt himself dropped back into reality. Dante gave him the slightest of smirks before him and Vergil unclenched his fists looking down to see the small puddles of blood on the floor. He flexed his hands and sighed. Casey was none the wiser of what had happened between the brother’s. In fact, she noticed nothing more than an extended pause between them. Vergil was honestly surprised that Dante even knew how to do that, but he was grateful. It had given him time to think.

“Dante, wait! Vergil I am sorry about this. I needed to provoke you. This isn’t the kind of thing you would speak of. When I hosted the angel a handful of weeks ago, I could see a demonic mark, a brand of service. The angel disregarded it seeing as how she was more concerned with returning your soul to your body and stopping Belial, but it worried her. Your guardian angel, Eae, tells me Lucifer has a long and sorted history with your family and that it appeared to be one of his marks. The mark itself, however, complicates us getting your soul back. We will need a vessel other than you to gather the fragment for you. This vessel will act as an intermediary to break any spells Celeste, may have cast.”

“What are you saying?” he gruffed. Vergil looked up feeling a bit foolish at how complicated his life had become.

“I’m saying you cannot retrieve your own soul. Evangeline dismissed your mark as a remnant of the tether to Mundus. Eae, however, has since informed me it is not a remnant. With the recent purge of the reaver, some things have been made clear. The mark is now free to compel you once more. It will draw you toward the goal that elicited him to mark you in the first place. Whatever task that may be.” From her expression and pause everyone present could tell Casey was hoping Vergil would give them something more, anything toward understanding what task was expected of him. What did he want?

Vergil sighed, this much he could and would admit to. There were advantages to using their help to locate the vessel, and once found the elder twin was content he would shorten his tenure to the fallen angel. “Lucifer requires his own vessel. He lost his corporeal form at some point in the last few decades and I was sent to retrieve this vessel amongst other things.” Involuntarily his gaze drifted to the Sparda sword which suddenly shimmered. Dante caught the faint distraction in his attention and coughed clearing his throat hoping to refocus his brother.

“So, let me get this straight. Lucifer wants your soul as payment for all the things he’s done for you or you can gather some vessel here in this realm and he’ll call you even? Still sounds to me like there’s more to it.” Dante shrugged throwing his hands up in feigned surrender. “But what the hell do I know? Please, continue.” Vergil narrowed his eyes at his brother.
“Specifically, his vessel. No other vessel is strong enough to contain his power, but I am unsure whether I am to look for a weapon, a person, or…”

“Ok now you’re talking. Is it possible it’s an enchanted puppy? Just think, he’s got some super-secret hybrid puppy that can carry his soul. That would be cool. I’ve always wanted a dog. Please can it be a puppy?” Dante relaxed his stance moving toward his desk and became the man child everyone came to know and love. Vergil was annoyed at first, but he quickly realized Dante was neither stupid nor crazy as he first appeared. Instead he was mildly brilliant. Casey distracted by his off handed comedy, quirked her face in confusion and couldn’t help but laugh at his comically out of place words. The tension shifted in the office and was utterly broken. To Vergil’s surprise, the distraction proved to break any further lines of inquiry on Casey’s part regarding his tenure or tasks with Lucifer. Instead, they now focused on the one task Vergil was willing to share. The task that allowed Vergil to return to this realm and nothing more. He was grateful to his brother and gave him a small inclination of his head to indicate this. Dante just grinned bigger.

“No, you nitwit. A vessel can be many things, but not an enchanted dog. Its form depends on the job it is to perform. Often, it’s a weapon or a shard, like a crystal, or even a stone, but if Lucifer has no form, then he will need a living soul with a body. After all, he needs a body to rule hell.”

“Woah wait a minute. Rule hell? An angel? Ok granted a fallen angel. But we are looking at the next ruler of Hell to be an angel that defied God? Lucifer the angel who goes where angels fear to tread. The guy who is in an ongoing war with the multiple demon lords? So, we are to look for a vessel that can help him achieve a win to rule hell and save my brother’s soul? It’s like body snatching nut weirder. This sounds vaguely like a weird sci-fi show or a really bad episode of Supernatural.” Casey giggled shaking her head as Dante caught his brother’s perplexed look and raised eyebrow. “What? I’ll explain later.”

Vergil pinched the bridge of his nose closing his eyes a moment. When he spoke, his eyes were unfocused but clear and he paced, “Lucifer’s story is complicated and rather lengthy with many parts either unknown or untold. From what I have learned, Lucifer was sent, not cast out of the Celestial realm, to quell the growing rebellion Belial started several millennia ago. Belial was the true entity whose malice grew so great that he split the realms creating hell for himself to rule and taking his minions with him. When negotiations failed it seemed the realms were headed to war, but there was still some semblance of order to this dysfunction. Some were still loyal to the celestial realm, some wanted freedom, free will, but not a new servitude, other just wanted to watch it all burn. Rumors tell us, it was Mundus who initiated what many consider to be the beginning of the great war with his great act of heresy.”

“What did he do? No one who has ever known has ever told. Not even the first witches recorded the events that lead to the war.” Casey fidgeted uneasily. She would be the only living witch to know.

“Oh, they recorded it. They watched, and wrought their spells, many died. Then Belial wiped them from realm. Only Celeste survived. But it was Mundus that was the flashpoint for he captured then brutally murdered an angel; a very powerful angel with a very powerful human soul. Father became involved with this event, although his true actions are shrouded in deceit. This is how Lucifer first came to know of him. The war raged between Belial with his son and general Mundus against those who followed Lucifer and his general.”

“Sparda?”

“Yes, our father. There are many stories that shroud the last millennia when father rose to power. Then one day the war stilted in a precarious state of unending stalemate. The balance between the realms was frail and the veil between realms was weakest to this realm. Our father’s story rises from
this time. Mundus trapped Belial and thwarted his plans to sacrifice more angels to gain the power needed to attack the celestial realm directly. It is said he did so with Lucifer’s help. Although, I believe help is a tenuous word in this situation. What choice did Lucifer have? Face two enemies at once or face them one at a time? Father discovered Mundus’s plan to rule Hell for himself. The dark prince aspired to use this realm to gain his power and to feed his armies. He wanted to rule both realms before taking on the celestial realm. Father then sealed the human realm from his brother to protect the humans and to stop the demonic armies from enslaving them. Some say his actions were out of love for this realm others say it was due to him being too weak to overthrow Mundus alone. Either way, Sparda was trapped here in this realm unable to stop his brothers continued rise to power. But Lucifer deceived him. Temin-ni-gru was the gateway to all the realms with anchors in each realm and unknown to our father, he would not retain his power once the gate was sealed nor would he be able to return to hell, as it is said he intended. The gate he closed hid this realm from both sides for a time. The lie Lucifer told our father made sure to shunt his power into the perfect amulet while his sword retained the remnants of his demonic true form. Those artifacts would become the key to our father’s return to Hell, but he disappeared before that came to pass. Although he retained his strength, his stamina, and his magicka, Sparda was left to drift in this world a mere shell of his former self. In the end, his lack of foresight and loss of his power, that was what killed him.”

“Verge?” The elder twin snapped back to himself and his gazed drifted away from the window he had unknowingly walked toward as he spoke. He looked at his brother first then Casey. Both looked upon him with a sense of awe given the story they just listened to. Dante learned some of this after his return. He had no idea about their father being a general and his pale complexion furrowed and darkened as he rested heavily against the corner of the desk. But, still there was much more to their father’s story. Vergil had come across journals while in Hell. Journals that were both demonic and celestial that told more of the story. Journals that Lucifer found and took from him promising him he was not ready for such knowledge. The dark angel promised one day to reveal all to him. Vergil distant wondered if he would ever know the truth.

Casey shook her head trying to refocus, “I don’t know what Lucifer is really after. Maybe it really is just that simple. He needs a body and you need to find it for him, but I fear that maybe there is more to it. You might unwittingly hold the key to understanding what is going on. Lucifer has disappeared, Hell churns with another uprising of the demon lords, the angels are tethered in the celestial realm, and you were sent back to retrieve a vessel that has had seven years or more to either develop or fall apart while you were trapped with Agnus. I don’t know about you two, but I for one do not believe Lucifer can be trusted. He once betrayed Sparda. Perhaps now he toys with his son.” Vergil shuddered at her words. She was insightful but even Vergil would admit he did not know Lucifer’s end game.

“Vergil, Lucifer’s obligations, his contract, with you will become stronger and harder to resist. You think that nagging buzz from your missing soul is annoying, wait until you are thoroughly obsessed with finding that vessel. I dare say it may drive you to do some very unsavory things that your brother needs to be aware of. Not only to protect you from yourself, but to keep you from doing harm to others. Belial may have taken the human half of your soul, and tried to twist it to his whims, but Lucifer tethered the demonic half; the half that had acquired great power thru great trials. This is the soul fragment Celeste clings to in the hopes of finding Lucifer. You don’t understand how complicated this has become but now, right now, may be our only chance to get you free from at least her control. Celeste is currently occupied with healing Mundus and Agnus while rumored to be dead seems to hide the shadows. If he really is alive, it is my belief that even from the shadows he is not currently in any position to stop us. So, now is your chance. We have to find this fragment quickly.” Dante looked at her sharply. Agnus would complicate matters and his own recent experience had proved his own growing theory of the alchemist’s resurrection. He’d discuss this with her later. No need to trouble Vergil with anything more, for now.
The trio stood in silence for several minutes before Vergil stood taller and folded his hands behind his back. He paced before the large panel of windows at the front of the office. It was late afternoon now and the sun was already low on the winter horizon. Night would be upon them soon. In the periphery of his sight he noticed Dante rubbed Casey’s shoulder and she shook her head as they murmured between one another. Ever the boy scout, Dante protected those weaker than him. Vergil wavered on whether he found it disgusting or admirable. After a few more minutes, he turned to address them. “My son is to know nothing of this. I would keep him from being involved and thus endangering him. He is only to know that Lucifer...”

“...pulled you from the Mire after you fell to me the final time. You owe him a debt of gratitude for this service and have offered to assist him in finding him a vessel. Finding this vessel just so happens to be in our best interest at this time because it keeps Belial and Mundus bound in Hell with somebody else to occupy their time. As for keeping him out of harm’s way. Fat chance. He’s stubborn like you and we need his skills. You’ve got to let him make his own decisions or he’ll do exactly what you tell him not too. I learned that the hard way more than once.” Dante was stern but assured with his statement. Should Vergil wish to share more, it would be his choice and everyone currently standing in Devil May Cry knew the elder twin would speak no more of this. Vergil’s gaze lingered on his brother and finally he conceded that Dante knew his son better than he did. Slowly, he nodded in agreement.

“How then am I to retrieve this fragment if I cannot retrieve it myself and how soon can this be completed?”

Casey smiled meekly before glancing at Dante. She indicated toward him with both her thumb and head. “Well, that depends on him.”

“Me?” Dante stood from the corner of his desk and unfolded his arms.

“Him? Why?”

“Because he needs to apologize to a certain rogue hybrid angel that he turned in to the Vatican for reintegration into the Celestial doctrine.”

“He what?”

“Ah, Crap!”

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Chapter End Notes

What two chapters in a week?
- Up next, a long chapter with action, hunting, and a bit of Vergil snark.
Chapter Summary

Danica needs help with a job. Dante and Vergil tentatively test the boundaries of their relationship and Casey notices a shift in Kyrie.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“What’s he like, your father? Anything like Dante?” She turned toward him in her seat. The fireplace on the far wall crackled nicely warming the space to create a relaxed atmosphere. Her hands lifted to and flicked thru her long ashen hair to both tame and braid the length into a quick messy braid that she twisted and tucked until it lifted from her shoulders. He could faintly see the thin and heavy strokes of her collar tattoo and Nero gave a soft chuff.

“Hell no. Vergil is strong, not that Dante isn’t, but he’s predatorily strong, like you need to watch your every move because he is already three steps ahead of you.” She noted his bringer flickered with emotion as he spoke. She noted he did not call him a familiar name either. Her own anxieties about him began to lift as he continued. For a minute his voice faded to a soft murmur and she remembered that night.

A few nights ago, she was drawn to Capulet or more specifically to Devil May Cry itself. She stood out front feeling the surge of three distinct demonic entities within. She recognized both Dante and Nero, but it was the third source of energy that flickered and all but screamed out to her in agony. A soul damaged and in pain. Yamato whispered to her in her cryptic words to help them. Surely, they did not need help with the few low-level demons that she quickly dispersed or the hell hounds that searched the alleys. These were entities that seemed to look for something just as she did. Perhaps they too heard the cry of pain. Predators sensing a wounded animal and an opportunity. So, she did the only thing she knew to do, she flared her celestial energies to both calm and dampen the rage she felt inside that office. Her energy offset his and made it invisible for now, but for how long? She would not get that chance again. He would sense her if she tried again.

She drifted back from this thought as Nero continued. “He’s quiet, always watching, judgmental, condescending, smart. Oh, and he’s blunt, and that’s only with him being fully conscious for the last seventy-two hours.” He snorted at his words. He spoke as if they had been together for months when it had only been weeks. A long few weeks.

“Guess I’ll know where I stand with him then.” She shifted in her seat again before rubbing her hands to the thighs on her jeans to distract herself.

“I wouldn’t waste my time trying to impress him. He’s likely to think you’re beneath his standards. Who am I kidding? Everyone is beneath him.” Nero threw his hands up before letting his breath motor boat thru his lips only then to turn into a growl. He finished his expressive sign of agitation with a good scrub of fingers and claws thru his hair which he quickly stroked back into its normal and less Albert Einstein-esque appearance. Danica smiled.

“It’s just a defense mechanism. Yamato tells me he likes to test people to see how they react under pressure. It tells him a lot about how they would fight.”
“Oh yeah, well she is a point of contention between us. She used to be his sword.”

“She still is…” Nero snapped a look at her in surprise at her frankness and she shrugged. “It’s of no consequence right now. She has chosen to be your guide until you no longer need her. She likes you, respects you even. Although she thinks you anger easily. I think you inherited the trait.” Nero raised an eyebrow and shook his head.

“What aren’t you telling me?” He paused. She seemed distant for a moment. “So, Yamato? She’s talking to you again? Here I thought that privilege was reserved for the master of the devil arm. What lets you hear her?”

“Don’t know, well, not really. I mean obviously I’m of celestial decent. You know the wings and all.” She made wing movements with her hands as if she would fly away. “I mean how else could I hear her?”

He knitted his brows as he answered her, “I really couldn’t tell you why being of celestial decent has anything to do with hearing a demonic devil arm?” He squinted at her. He knew her well enough that there was something going on, something that she either couldn’t or didn’t want to talk about. She shrugged at him again and stood from the couch.

“Nero, seriously, I don’t have a clue. I don’t know my heritage like you do. This sort of weird stuff has happened to me all my life. Sometimes, I hear sentient voices, oh, and angels and demons and even my own despair …” He quirked an eyebrow at her, but she grinned with mischief, so he let the comment pass as the joke it was probably meant to be. “Maybe I’m not a Nephilim but a demon angel hybrid or something. Although, a demonic angel seems to be more of an oxymoron… maybe it should be angelic demon? Meh! Who knows? Maybe, I’m just a mutt of no particular importance.” She paced and furrowed her brow. “The Vatican, however, seems to think I’m some kind of threat to their ideals of celestial order and servitude, like I’m some sort of spawn from the devil incarnate.” She snorted, and Nero noticed her gaze drifted as if to a memory. She raised her eyebrow briefly, “They might have a point. I’m not very angel-like.” Her gaze suddenly sharpened, and she smirked at him, “Then there are our old pals on Fortuna, The Order. They seem to think I’m a threat to everyone. It really is exhausting being different and a threat the world over. I don’t even know who I’m related to. Damn annoying really!” Her tone was mocking, and she flicked her hands into the air as if she were done with everything. Nero smiled he missed her sardonic wit. She wasn’t afraid of getting her hands dirty and she saw how the world was, especially for their kind, but Nero always appreciated that she never gave up on wanting to make it better. She didn’t give up easily on anything. It just wasn’t in her.

“Alright, alright, take it easy you drama queen. Yamato says your lovely just the way you are. I, on the other hand, say you’re just as messed up as the rest of us, so welcome to the club. Nice to have ya aboard.” He stood and chuckled as she whipped around and glared at him her hands firmly on her hips.

“Revoke my membership this very moment. Your little club sucks, you half-breed brat!” She snapped her hand down to point at the floor like she was deathly offended by his comment. Yeah, he missed this. She reminded him to laugh when you could. In their business that didn’t happen often.

“Takes one to know one.” He stuck his tongue out at her and she giggled. He lifted his bringer to capture her cheek having closed the space between them again. Its light flickered a warm blue. “No running off this time. No secret missions. No saving the world without backup and no letting Dante push you away. He moped for months and still does, but don’t mention this to him because he says he is so over you and he’ll just mope again. I cannot keep babysitting him. I have my own life.”

“Filled with broads and booze?” She smiled hopefully, and he laughed.
“No! Wrong Sparda. I have standards... and video games.”

“Nice, I feared the worst for a moment.” They laughed comfortably and hugged again. Danica pulled from him sharply and grabbed his shoulders. “Hey, you got time to hunt today? I’d love help, with this thing I need to take care of. It’s kind of personal and I would love a second set of eyes on the demons and not my ass!”

Nero snorted, “Ah geez.” She snickered in return wriggling her eyebrows. She knew he’d say yes but waited to be polite. “Yeah, sure for you I’ve got all the time you need.” She pumped her fist with excitement.

“Let me grab my gear and we can scoot.” She took off for the door but then stopped to look over her shoulder. “Hey, what made you come here today? I’ve been keeping a low profile for a mix of reasons. How did you know I was here?”

“I didn’t, but Casey sent me here for an obviously made up reason and then I came across Fenris. He was watching my in the boroughs on the edge of Limbo.”

“Hunting probably. Hmm, so Casey knows I’m here. Interesting.”

“You off to say goodbye then, or are you sticking around for a bit after this job?”

“Nah, goodbyes give a false sense of finality I’m not ready to accept yet. I want to stick around for a little bit. You know wrap up some loose ends. How about you? You want to say ‘hi’ to anyone while you’re here? Although, we really should get going. We can visit later.”

“It’s been hard keeping in touch with the kids. It’s been a few months really. I guess the last time I stopped in was before we found Vergil. How are they?”

“Growing like weeds. They will understand given the circumstances, but you really should stop by in the next few weeks. That’s not pressure, it’s just they idolize you. Stupid pretty glowing arm thing.” She smiled and gave him a wink. He shook his head.

“Yeah, I will but like you said we have a job tonight. Let’s get set before dark. Kyrie asked me to come visit her too. She wants to visit Credo’s grave and I promised to spend time with her over the solstice during her school break. I promise to stop here and visit before I leave for Fortuna in the next few days.”

“So, Kyrie? She did go off to the School?” Nero nodded. “Good, good tell me all the details as we walk to the site. Ok, then its settled. Work now and visit later.” She turned to continue out into the hallway.

“That simple?”

“Yep no strings. The web of our lives is tangled enough as it is.”

“So, tying up loose ends?” He yelled after her following her a bit as she left. “Anyone you want to reunite with?

She stopped but never looked back, “Sneaky.”

“So, I’ve been told.”

She turned back to face him this time as he leaned in the doorway her back to a panel of windows that over looked the garden. “I’ll go see him. We’ll talk. I can’t promise it will fix things. It won’t be
tonight, but I’ll see him before I leave. I promise.”

“I’ll hold you to that.”

“Hmm, I’m sure you will.” She waved as she hurried off down the hall. Nero crossed his arms over his chest and smiled. It was good to have her back.

Considering the sheer amount of information that Vergil divulged Casey decided it was in everyone’s best interest if she leave and return to Fortuna to begin her search for any clues as to where Celeste had hidden Vergil’s soul fragment. She had a lot of information to sift thru. Eae was always close. She could sense him near, but as expected he was not waiting for her when she arrived home. She pulled charts and maps from her bookcase and began the job of creating tracking spells. Considering Vergil was found here, she thought it best to look on the island first. Pouring over her papers she missed a soft knock at the door. She looked up to discover the light was thin as it streamed thru her open door.

“Casey?” called a soft voice from the other side of the doorway.

“Kyrie?” She looked over her shoulder to see the young lady looking pensive as she pushed the door open. “What’s wrong?”

“You didn’t come back. I was worried.”

Understanding floated to her and she shook herself lifting from the table. “I’m sorry. I got so involved in what is going on, I sort of, forgot.”

“I thought as much, but it’s not smart for you to stay here. Let’s take everything you think you’ll need and ward the rest.”

“Why?” It was an odd statement for her friend, but Kyrie had changed over the last few weeks. She had gained a new uncanny ability to sense danger and not just the demonic kind.

“A little bird told me there might be trouble.”

“Did you sleep with her, this… angel hybrid?” Vergil was rather enjoying how uncomfortable his brother was discussing the subject. It was obvious in the slight twitch to his back as he walked ahead of him. He needed to learn more about what had happened to his brother after he left but he also needed to learn as much about this angel as he could if they were to convince her to help him.

“Her name is Danica and well… define sleep?”

“No! No, absolutely not. It’s dangerous and volatile being a demon with an angel. Who knows what kind of attention I’d draw to me or the kid. I’m not that irresponsible.” Vergil stopped mid-stride and glared at his brother. His mouth opened then snapped closed. While his brother was prone to bouts of exaggerating, it was more often than not to exemplify how awesome he believed himself. Vergil had to consider the situation and his brother’s peculiar choice of words. Irresponsible? He didn’t believe for a minute that he had not made a move on this woman, but he had his own secrets and it seemed Dante wanted to keep this relationship a secret in whatever way he could. Vergil would let his brother think he was unaware of this attempt to deceive him.
“So, you slept next to one another but there was no sex. Because, why? Did the fates grant my wish for your forced celibacy?”

“Cute, and no. I kept the nightmares from returning,” he mumbled softly. “Look, it’s complicated and none of your business.” Dante continued to the Italian restaurant down the street from the office. The restaurant was situated in the relative direction of the cathedral and since Vergil was well into hangry by the time Casey left, anything close would have sufficed for food. Plus, Tony, the restaurant owner, would give them privacy and wouldn’t question his brother’s anti-social tendencies. Dante continued his last thought on Danica. “She’s… complicated.”

“Oh, she prefers women.” Vergil sighed following him easily through the streets. He remembered parts of the neighbor despite the physical changes.

“What? No! I mean, woah, maybe? That would totally explain...” He shook his head and snorted. “No, no, she was definitely into me. I am awesome. It’s just complicated.”

“Indeed.” That was the brother he remembered. “Then she has standards and a sense of taste. Perhaps, I will like her despite her misfortunate heritage.”

“You really don’t like angels, do you?”

“Dante, I cannot say I have had the best interactions with them. We are by our very nature at odds with one another. I am sure God has no divine inspiration for my future and I have never given their realm much thought. The lore and history tells us that angels and demons do not work well together.”

“I don’t know. I’m starting to believe anything is possible.” He paused in his thought and he motioned his brother toward a neat store front lined with outdoor tables that stood like statues in the growing cold. “She’s beautiful.” Dante ignored his brother’s snort of indifference and instead drifted back thinking about their first time together without Nero around. She had let her guard down not realizing he was still around and he got the chance to see her and not her persona. It was a few months after the incident with the werewolves and Patty. He made a mental note to tell Vergil about Patty too. His to-do list was stacking up.

“I would imagine one could call her divine.” The blue twin smirked with amusement at his words and tilted his head back feeling the last warmth of the sun to his face. He missed his brother’s side glance appraisal of him.

“She’s got this sooty ashen grey hair. Said it used to be darker when she was young but one day she woke up and it started to go grey.”

“Was this before or after becoming involved with you?”

Dante snorted at him. For being in a mood an hour ago, Vergil now seemed bipolar. He chuckled and realized it had to be the hunger. He continued in his description, “And her skin, ah let me tell you it’s amazing. She’s got this warm olive tone like she’s been kissed by the sun and her eyes are this amazing tropical blue-green color like... like...”

“The Caribbean Sea of your dreams?” He let his voice sound soft and dreamy and Dante knew he mocked him. It was his turn to stop and face his brother who smirked darkly. They glared at each other for a moment on the sidewalk as people passed. The faint lilt of voices lifted by comments of them being twins.

“You can stop mocking me. You’ll understand when you meet her.” He continued down the
sidewalk. Something had his brother in a mood and he figured he would never know what it was. He also didn’t want to let the opportunity slip so he let any open observation as to his brother’s mood pass lest he spoil it.

“I’m sure I will.”

“Vergil! I’m trying to prepare you, so you don’t gawk at her, like some love-sick puppy.”

“I assure you, I will not.”

“I just want you to give her a chance. Don’t assume like I did and don’t... you know what never mind. Chances are the first time you see her will be a lot like the first time we met. She’ll be in trouble.” He snorted before he fell into a protracted state of quiet. Vergil was enjoying the silence when he continued. “Did I tell you how we met?” It was a rhetorical question and he didn’t wait for an answer from his twin. “She was stealing a car. Even managed to frame Nero for the gig while he was innocently hunting demons. Oh, she took out the demons too.” He snorted as he spoke, and Vergil found himself tilting away from his brother to raise his eyebrow at him. “She shot him too.”

“Sounds like she’s a thug.”

“Well, she does have a record. She’s got a few bad habits, like she’s been known to drink me under the table. She may have stolen a few things and was unjustly framed for a few other things. Oh, and she has these tattoos on her neck and on her... Not important.” He caught Vergil raise an eyebrow to his almost admission of where on her body the tattoos were located. “Seriously it’s hot. Obviously, Nero is fine. She wasn’t trying to kill him or anything, but it was her way of pulling us into a job that had been right under our noses for months. We had no clue.”

“Yes, that sounds like a perfectly logical thing to do. Frame a person for theft and shoot him. I detest guns you know this.”

“Say what you want but in hind sight I realize what choice did she have? Hi, I’m an angel and you’re a demon and I need your help to overthrow this evil Werewolf biker dude who is involved in human and demon trafficking, drugs and wanton mayhem, by the way don’t eat me or steal my grace. Pfitt...come on Verge give her more credit than that. You’ve just got to meet her. You’ll see.”

“I’m sure I will have little trouble eliciting her help, whereas you will apparently have some explaining to do.”

“Yeah, about that. We didn’t part on good terms. I told her to get out.”

“I shudder to ask why?”

“It’s sort of a long story.”

“Then I shall abstain. I truly could not care less what happened between you unless you screw this up for me and she is unwilling to even consider my proposal.” Dante grinned there was the old Vergil back.

It would be nightfall by the time they had dinner and arrived at the cathedral. Nero didn’t answer his phone and he left a message. Dante assured Vergil it was normal and reminded him Nero was likely still angry. Furthermore, he explained Limbo didn’t have the best cell service. Vergil agreed to return to the office and wait for Nero to pick up his messages. He had no interest in seeing the priest just yet. To the elder twin’s distress, he may need to wait at least another day before he could learn if Danica would help him. His inner demon groused at the prospect but at least with the reaver gone healing continued while he waited. He needed to train and gather his strength. He would not be
caught off guard again.

Dante introduced his brother to Tony upon their arrival and the elder Italian quickly understood Vergil was different and more solitary from his boisterous brother and accommodated them in a small quiet corner of the restaurant. He tended to them himself and kept a generous distance from other patrons knowing they may discuss sensitive issues. The soft murmurs of people talking still touched sensitive ears. Observations of Vergil ran the gambit of questions and observations from why he was gone to how quiet he was. Then there was the blatant talk of how attractive the twins were and how much they would love to see if Vergil was anything like his brother. Vergil scoffed at how humans tried to fill their lives with such minuitia. It was none of their business.

Dinner was uneventful and quiet much to Vergil’s gratitude. It was punctuated with conversation about Nero. He listened eagerly about his son noting he maintained some of his own similar tendencies despite his brother’s influence. However, the conversation soon turned to concern about Vergil’s health. Dante’s interest irritated the Dark Slayer and yet he understood Dante needed reassurance. When prodded about his soul, Vergil described the constant subtle irritation that he felt. He described it like a low vibration that was just under the intensity to make sound. As he described it, Dante suggested he would just get used to it. Vergil then pronounced him an idiot and dinner ended.

“Good to meet you Vergil. Please visit again. Your brother need not attend should you require solace.” Tony grinned at Dante with his greying bushy eyebrows knitted with feigned concern. As Vergil inclined his head to answer, Dante sighed maybe Vergil did need some solace. As a child, Vergil always needs space and time to recharge. He seemed to wear his brother out mentally. He needed to get the spare room cleared. He rolled his neck and shoulders thinking about all the things he needed to do. His to-do list grew just a bit more.

“Thank you. I’m sure I will see your delivery boxes soon enough.” The old man chuckled in agreement.

“That you will, but maybe convince him to pay his tab first.” Dante rolled his eyes and Tony suddenly pricked his ears up and waved them close. “Out the back, quickly. Dante show him.”

Vergil wasn’t sure what happened as he was abruptly moved out the back thru the kitchen and into the cool evening air. Dante motioned him to follow him up the alley. “Want to walk? You seem up to it.”

“Why were we forced into the alley?”

“Hunter. A trouble maker who likes to cause scenes, but he’s human and for the most part not dangerous. He likes to invade my territory every so often and I’m sure with my absence recently he’s trying to push me out, steal jobs that sort of thing. He’s not smart enough to figure out the reason this area has more demons…”

“Is because of you. I see. Why not just deal with him?” It seemed an obvious question, but Vergil struggled to determine why his brother did not protect his ‘territory’ more vigorously. It was not very demon like, but Vergil suspected it was Dante’s human half that kept him from being more aggressive. It was weakness.

“Well, I’m not exactly sure what you mean by deal with him, but Lady is sort of sweet on him and I was hoping to get her laid, so she would forget about my debt to her for a while. Besides, I want to keep you out of this sort of thing until, well, you know. Once you’re hunting with me. He’ll move on. You are simply not as nice as I am.” He motioned for him to follow him thru the thinly lit alley.
“Lady?”

“Oh, right, you’ve met, back in the tower. Arkham’s daughter.” Dante hoped Vergil would drop the line of thought, but he knew eventually his brother would need to meet his friends and promise not to kill them.

“Ah... is her name not Mary? Arkham’s spawn? The child touched with the essence of Hell. She is now your friend? Curious. Arkham’s daughter is more tenacious than I thought. Tell me is she more trustworthy than her traitorous father?”

“First, do not call her Mary and second, she hates demons, especially her father. She is, however, amazingly well suited to killing them. I mean she’s deadly. We’ve run many hunts together over the past twenty or so years. She finds me jobs and then I owe her a portion of the take, hence the debt. Sometimes, I help her out with the larger stuff. Although, she does not regard my smokin’ style of hunting as efficient as hers. I tend to make a mess which is ironic because she has a bazooka. No worries though, for me, Nero, and Trish she makes an exception, to her no demons rule.”

Vergil stilled as if frozen in place. Dante had taken two more steps before he realized what he said and wanted to face palm himself. He felt the temperature drop as he turned to see his brother crackle with energy. “Trish? The clone? The demon whore whose likeness is that of our mother?”

“Easy Verge. I need to explain a few things.” The air vibrated around them and Dante realized Vergil was about to lose control and trigger. “No! Seriously Vergil... Do not trigger here. Don’t do it!”

His twin stepped toward him stiff with the timber in his voice low bordering on a growl. “Do you know what that... filthy... lying... whore... did to me? What degrading tortures she...”

“Stop!” Dante boomed his own aura rising. The brick in the darkened alley glowed faintly in red and blue and looked like the police were just around the corner to any passersby. “I don’t want to know! Not now, not here, later. She told me enough and it’s in her past Vergil! She didn’t know any better. How could she? He created her from ether for his own foul use. She could not have disobeyed him regardless, not in the beginning. You know this! She didn’t know right from wrong. She did as she was told and only what she was told because she didn’t question. She never knew she had that choice, but she learned. She’s not mom, she doesn’t try to be, and in the end, we helped one another. Mundus does not control her any more than he controls you! She turned on him and saved me! We’ve had ten long years of friendship that you’ll just have to suck it up and get used to.”

Dante seethed for a moment as he allowed his anger to roll off him. He didn’t want to take a side against his brother, but he wouldn’t deny his friends. As his own words sunk in, Dante realized he would make that choice, he just hoped he didn’t have to. Deep within their rekindled mental link Vergil felt his unspoken decision twist at him. He felt that his brother was both torn by his loyalty to his friends and to him. He considered perhaps it was their friendship, the human trait that it was, that might have been where Dante gained his passion and drive to continue when things undoubtedly had gotten dark for him. He was fiercely loyal to his friends, his surrogate family, while he was gone, regardless of who or what they were, and the blue twin respected this. After several long minutes of silent staring and thought, a few bright flakes of snow drifted between them and despite the anger and irritation he still felt Vergil let it go. His aura faded, and he walked passed his brother without another word. He was too tired to focus on his brother’s more human traits. This was something he would address later.

“You will not force some human friendship between us. The clone and I will settle our own issues when the timing is more advantageous to me. I trust you will keep her away from me until then or you will not like the words that are likely to rise between us.” The moment passed as quickly as it
had erupted and for his part Dante could do nothing but blink. He watched Vergil navigate down the alley and out onto the sidewalk. The moment he was out of sight, Dante bent to his knees and let out his breath. His heart raced with adrenaline and his inner demon grumbled with irritation.

“That really just happened?” he mumbled in disbelief. He shook his head and stood. He drew in a deep cool breath and hurried after his brother. He never noticed the snowflakes were left where they once stood in a small swirl. Vergil had conceded the issue even if it was just a little and only temporarily. Dante wondered if Vergil perhaps had changed. Sure, the threat was still delivered, and he knew not to broach the subject again for a time, but the startling fact still hung between them; ten years ago, that would never have happened without swords and bloodshed. For now, Dante had made a choice that he would at least tolerate. Maybe his brother would never be friends with Lady or Trish but at least he hadn’t tried to forbid him to see the girls as he did Nero and Father McCabe. Then again, maybe, Vergil had learned something from that. As he stepped in line with his brother, he became aware of something he had not considered until now. He still had a lot to figure out with regards to his brother. They weren’t kids anymore and they really didn’t know each other as well as they both perhaps pretended. This whole series of events from him reawakening to now had to be jarring to his brother. This was not what he had planned for his life even if it was what Dante wanted with his brother. Perhaps it was time to admit, he didn’t know how to help his brother assimilate into the human world, worse he didn’t know if he even wanted to. His inner demon groused, and he must have overtly grumbled because he heard Vergil make a soft ‘hnn’ sound as if he too were thinking.

Danica slipped into the shadows behind the warehouse and reappeared with a frown. “He’s not here.” She smoothed her hand over the dark gray tunic that rode over her hips and pulled back the mahogany red hood over her head letting the material create a cowl at her neck as her hair spilled out.

“I didn’t actually see him earlier but from what Lady told me he’s been here for a few weeks. No attacks, just a few close calls and random scary sightings.”

“Strange. He’s closed his mind to me, but I can sense he’s been here just not where he is now.” She shrugged and walked toward Nero. “He isn’t usually this distant from me.”

“Did you make him mad?” Nero remembered the first time he met her living devil arm Fenris. The large black and silver demonic dire wolf had a penchant for mischief and the strength of a mountain. During a heated exchange between them early in her probation, the wolf suddenly appeared and trounced him to the ground before he laid on top of him and licked his face furiously. Danica tried to comically pull him off the young half breed as she explained she really had no control over him. She wasn’t even sure why he listened to her at all, but he just seemed to appear when she needed him. Of course, this brought up questions of why he wasn’t there when they faced the werewolves but as she explained it, he had been needed elsewhere.

“No, I mean not that I’m aware of, but he is extremely temperamental, and moody, and prone to angry outbursts.” She laughed squeezing her eyes shut, “Just like you!”

“Oh, ha ha. Very funny. So are you princess.”

“But I can get away with it cause I’m cute.” She blinked as she grinned and pointed to her nonexistent dimples. “See, cute.”

“You are not cute. You’re annoying.”

“But in a cute way! Come on you missed this. Admit it.” She rushed up to him grabbing his shoulder and spun him around to face the other direction. She then gently pushed him toward the
street. Apparently, she had no intentions of looking for the wolf any further.

“No, I didn’t!” he pouted and the moment the words slipped from his lips he cursed quietly. She giggled.

“Ok, ok, I’ll stop. I missed teasing you. Sometimes you’re so easy to rile and I just can’t stop myself. I know I really should grow up. I mean, what am I like thirteen years older than you? Can you even legally drink yet?” She snarked knowing damn well he could.

“Wow, way to make yourself sound really old. I might have to reconsider calling you princess. I mean he’s the old man and batty old woman just doesn’t have the same ring to it. How about crone?” She stopped and quirked an eyebrow as he taunted her.

“Woah, I really did make myself sound old. Geez!” They laughed, and she bumped his shoulder grabbing his bringer before lacing fingers with her own hand. “So, Fenris will show up on his own. I say we head into the city.”

“Any ideas what we’re hunting?”

“Yeah, I think we have a Striga prowling.”

“A what now?”

“A Striga also known as a strix or shtriga, depends on the culture. It’s sort of like a vampiric witch but it has a fondness for children.”

“Ah, that makes sense as to why you took the job so close to us. So, the kids are safe?”

“Yep, warded and safe. This all started a few weeks ago. Father McCabe received a call about several strange occurrences in another orphanage not far from here. A child died, others had a sort of wasting sickness.”

“Anything tie the events to the kids here?”

“Didn’t think so at first, but it was… odd. I poked my head in several days ago and sensed something elusive. It was almost like it knew I was coming. See a Striga will sometimes feed from a child or more than one child a few times before death occurs. The girl was sick on and off for months, but she took a turn for the worse a week after Father McCabe stopped for a visit. Meanwhile, another child fell ill. Honestly, the child that died never encountered my kids but the little girl that got sick was Riley’s friend.”

“Did she go with McCabe?”

“Yeah, she did but I just can’t nail this one down. I’ve seen several strange things since, well, October.”

“You think this witch sensed the children?”

“Maybe. A hybrid child could hypothetically feed one of these things for a longer time due to their healing factors but that’s only if the child is awakened to their powers yet.”

“Got it, so Riley and Evan are at risk.” She nodded and quirked her head behind her something was following them just outside of her perception. It was just an odd nagging feeling. She squeezed Nero’s hand and lifted his bringer. It remained in a calm state and she shrugged. “My guess is Fenris took off to protect the kids. He either sensed something I didn’t or didn’t want to take the
chance because of what happened with Evan the last time. I did reconnaissance a few days ago at the other orphanage. The presence there is long gone, hence, why I think she’s here and it’s a Striga. Yesterday I found evidence of a lair near the cliffs outside the city, but I’ve got no real clue where she is. Just a hunch that she’s hunting.”

“Whelp…your hunches are better than most. Where we off to the cliffs?”

“No… I think she’s closer.” She lifted Nero’s bringer again and he felt the flash before they saw it.

“But you said it hunts children?”

“I said it had a fondness for children. Technically, you are someone’s child and so am I.”

“Hybrids.” He glanced around getting a feel for the area, if it was going to go down here, he needed to understand his terrain.

“See why I wanted back up? I just had a feeling about this.”

“Always take backup, don’t go in without someone knowing where you are. It’s one of the top ten rules of survival as a hunter, remember?” She smiled at his words but then her attention drifted.

“Yamato?”

Nero’s bringer flickered, and he snickered. “Figures. She has informed him that we are hunting. She’s become a flare for him. Great!”

“Don’t say that like it’s a bad thing. Something doesn’t feel right about this, and there is a chance I didn’t exactly tell you everything.” He cocked his head at her and rolled his eyes. It didn’t surprise him she was tight lipped about the details. This did after all effect the kids she had sworn to protect.

“I just can’t put my finger on it, but it’s like I’m being hunted, but who would know I’m here?”

“So, you think this was a carefully laid trap for you? Then we need to be careful.”

“We need to be very careful.”

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Chapter End Notes

- Time to kick this melancholy aside and get back into the action. I’ve introduce the pieces that need to be in place.
- Next up: the Shadows have names and some of them are not pretty. Vergil discovers he is being watched and Danica proves she's not the classic angelic entity the Dark Slayer expected.
- next chapter up shortly
Shadows Have Names

Chapter Summary

Vergil insists on going to assist with Nero’s hunt and comes face to face with the shadows that hunt him. Dante reunites with Danica.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was dark as the twins approached the shop. Night fell quickly once the sun was down for its evening respite. Vergil grew agitated as they entered the office and Dante was unsure if it was their conversation or something else. He was betting on something else since he looked to the Sparda sword more than once.

“Verge?”

“Yamato has informed me he is hunting.”

“He does that.” Dante sat at the desk and looked thru a few things he had been putting off when suddenly it came to him. “I’m rearranging the office this week. Seems with you here this place is missing a few things I think will make you more comfortable.” His twin was distracted in thought and sat to the end of the couch. He shifted in the seat several times before he appeared to find some modicum of comfort. Dante smiled, “I think I’ll stop by the thrift store and pick up a few things tomorrow. Would you like to come?”

“Hnn…” He picked up one of the few books available to him and glanced thru it with a sigh. Dante chuckled softly and was met with a cool gaze.

“Come on, let’s go. Something feels out of place to me and I think we both know it’s the demons we attracted earlier with our light show.” He stood walking towards the Sparda sword and stopped before it. “Yamato stays with him, but you were pretty handy with Force Edge. Guess it’s time for pops to slumber again.” He bowed his head closing his eyes and reached his hand forward. The sword glowed resonating with the red hunter and Vergil stood with a mixture of concern and then awe that flickered to his face before his cold calculated expression returned.

Dante whispered in an ancient demonic tongue and the sword vibrated. Vergil stepped behind his brother just as the sword glowed and fell to its lesser form, Dante’s amulet appeared around his neck and Vergil’s floated to his outstretched hand. “If you’re gonna stick around you need a weapon. Beowulf will obey you but it’s unlikely I can talk any of the others to do so, except maybe Nevan.”

“The witch? I prefer not.” A dull thunk and scraping sound could be heard from the basement and Vergil raised an eyebrow. Dante raised his own and gave his brother a look that indicated he should apologize in some way. Vergil hesitated and sighed as he slipped the pendant to his neck and hid it beneath his shirt. “But perhaps, she will be of use to me at some later date. Thank you.”

The red twin smirked and handed the sword to his brother. “Tell Yamato we are on our way, but I want you to stay out of the line of fire until we know what we are dealing with. You are still not up to strength and I really do not like the idea of attracting more demons. Honestly, they are probably
spotters looking for you anyway.”

“Agreed, we will disperse with the ones in the parking lot first. I may be a bit rusty in my skills and could use the training. Then we find my son.”

Danica started with a conjured bow and arrow. She took out several small fry that clambered down the sides of the building toward them with their dripping maw of sharp teeth glistening in the ambient light. Nero had drawn Red Queen and Dani gave him a side glance when she felt something stir within the sword, something new. Poised and ready the demons held back waiting for something or someone.

Nero gave Danica a look and they closed ranks back to back as she called for her own swords. The two swords glinted darkly with their slightly curved edges and Nero smiled as he remembered the first time he saw those blades, somehow, they seemed even more deadly in her hands. They had maneuvered themselves into a large open parking lot in the warehouse district. Several rusted shipping containers surrounded them, and they were flanked by tall buildings with several large paned windows. There was no real chance for innocents to stumble into the desolate area at this time of night. The narrow alley behind them was cut off by quick lanky insectoid-like demons with sharp razor like arm blades and claws mixed with several stocky thick skinned muscular demons that were no doubt tanks. The wide delivery entrance before them was gated closed but neither would hesitate to discard the wire barrier if needed. The few cars scattered about looked abandoned with a few missing tires and other noticeable parts. It was the perfect place to battle a few demons.

Nero’s bringer flickered with the incoming first wave and his growing excitement. He kept his head on a swivel as he noted they were waiting to attack them. “Ideas?”

“Nah. This is not typical behavior for a Striga. Being a witch, she can summon other demons but being part vampire, she also tends to hunt solitary. This is different. She’s using energy like she’s borrowing it from somewhere. She shouldn’t be able to pull this many at once.” As she finished her sentence a thick rolling cloud pressed thru the wire fencing making it bow and groan with the weight pressed to it. The cloud then settled several feet before them as the surrounding demons clicked and chattered. A breath of foul wind pressed away from the cloud as an image took shape, a feminine shape that reminded Nero of Nevan, Dante’s sentient devil arm.

“That’s a Striga?”

“Careful, Nero. That’s not her true form. She’s using something familiar to you to cast that form. It’s a glamour, she’s stronger than she looks, don’t be deceived.” He nodded at her words seeing as how even now he thought more and more of Nevan.

“Mmm… are you teaching the child? Are you his mother?” The tall lanky woman stepped from the cloud as it dispersed to reveal a voluptuous curved pale green skinned woman with long auburn hair. “She’s right child. I am deceptive even now I search for the easiest way to separate you from her. Someone would like to see you, and I have business with her. So, you can imagine my surprise when you both showed up together. It’s… fate.” She swirled swiftly with fingernails that shifted to be as sharp as any claws and a sudden distorted dog like maw of teeth barreled towards them. Nero tensed ready for the first strike, but then relaxed instead he eyed the small group of larger demons that stepped forward to the Striga’s left. They would all attack at once and he needed to choose his target wisely.

A thin shimmer of golden light told him he had made the right decision to stay put. The Striga screamed howling in pain the moment she touched the barrier. Nero glanced over his shoulder to see Danica now down by one sword held her hand up casting a shield spell. “You got this?”
As always, go do what you do best.”

He grinned with eyes flickering red, “Let’s dance!”

It wasn’t long before the Striga withdrew to the top of a container. She watched her quarry defeat her minions one by one and the damned angel had managed to get a few hits in to her as well. She had underestimated the angel for the last time, but unlike a few nights ago, this time she knew her weakness. She called on her borrowed power and began to cast a new spell. Danica snapped a look toward the Striga and climbed the containers with a few well-placed jumps and a flip. The Striga hissed as one sword caught her in the shoulder but she maneuvered away knocking Danica off balance before a demon charged into her side lifting her from the container. They fell hard to the ground below. Fortunately, the collision stunned the demon as Danica caught her breathe and gathered her feet underneath her once more.

Nero toyed with the wave of lesser demons and proceeded to slice one after the other with a sort of gleeful rhythm. Danica caught herself snicker as he threw one demon into the air with an upward strike, grab another with his bringer and throw him into the trio of advancing demons, all before the first demon fell to the ground. He was beheaded shortly after landing as Nero then advanced on his toppled group of demons.

Danica spun on her knees dodging two lanky long armed demons who managed to both jump at the same time. They collided before her as she rose slightly and drove a sword thru each of them. She yanked one sword free as she left the other sticking into the ground and cast another shield behind her. The incoming demon from before buffeted off the shield and staggered to which Danica snatched her sword again and used both swords to sever the head of the disoriented demon.

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Dante and Vergil watched from above on a rooftop just over the parking lot. “See? I told you. Trouble. Stay here and I mean it Vergil. Take out stragglers from here and this will be over quickly.” His twin grumbled but the air was electric around them and Vergil could not dissuade the feeling that he was being watched. He would also not admit he was tired from their earlier encounter with demons. Dante turned backward on the edge of the building to salute him as he stepped off the edge. His brother gave him an eyeroll, but Dante’s smirk lingered a second before it disappeared.

Danica felt his presence before she saw him, and a trill of nausea overtook her. She wasn’t sure if it was fear or excitement either way she was angry. Dante fell for the ploy to separate them just as it was intended. The Vatican wanted her isolated and alone for the sole purpose of reeducation. They played on her fears. But as she looked up to see a familiar claymore swing past her head strike a demon who lunged over her shield, she knew she wouldn’t stay mad at him. Just as he did now, had he known then, he would have protected her. It wasn’t in her to stay mad at him. Maybe she never was mad at him, maybe all this time that she made excuses not to come back was all her. The thought made her stomach churn. She hated it when she had mid crisis realizations. She lowered her shield and confronted the next demon.

Once it was dead, they held each other’s gaze for only a moment before she slipped to his side seeing the injured crone come for them over his shoulder. As if in slow motion, she grabbed the red hunter’s shoulder with her left hand and pushed him away, hard. Surprised, he stepped aside as she had intended. Her swords already gone and back into the ether. She pushed her energy forward and spoke a spell that quickly trapped the witch. She howled as a series of runes swirled around her on concentric circles and she tried to claw and break thru the boundary. That was almost too easy.

“Dante, I can’t hold her. You and Nero must clear the remaining demons. She can still conjure if she has even one minion outside my barrier. She just summoned several new demons into the fray so
hurry! It takes a few minutes before her energy is up again to conjure the next set.”

“Got it!” Dante didn’t question and gleefully spun his sword to decapitate another insectoid like lanky demon from reaching forward to Danica. Nero was smashing one demon into another like he was lawn bowling. He gave Dante a nod and revved Red Queen taking down two more.

With the demons being attended to, Danica straightened her stance but maintained eye contact with the seething witch. Electricity rebounded within the sphere and the runes slowly gained a golden tint to them. She hissed at her captor but sneered darkly, “He warned me you were strong. I was careless to not heed his words. It took me a long time to find you and your little clan. Who would have believed you would return here? Tell me who will protect the spawn when I return you to Lucien?”

She flinched at his name. That cursed vampire had been a bane to her existence since her birth. The Striga being one of the lesser vampire clans possibly spoke only of what she had heard to rile her. Perhaps she didn’t work for Lucien. Perhaps he had not found her, again. Demons often lied so she kept her mouth shut. “Ah, the silent type or do you not believe my words? No matter, with those fools distracted by my demons I have this chance to talk. Tell me is the little girl dead yet? She tasted simply delicious. Her delicate exotic flavor made me want her even more.” This time Danica snarled. There were vital details she had omitted in telling Nero. Namely that the sick child returned with Father McCabe to draw out what he initially believed to be a wraith. Unaware of what they had done, it forced the Striga to find a new meal just after they left. It also gave the witch a trail to follow. Danica knew what she had to do to save the sick child. “She will die unless I release her. You do know this right?”

“Then release her,” she hissed.

“Ah, so easily taunted. The child lives. Therefore, you haven’t killed me yet. You… need… me.” She cackled suddenly as her true horrid form flickered before her. “Time’s up love.” The witch glowed with menace as the electricity imploded in on itself before expanding outward again and thru the barrier tracing electric lines outside the barrier striking cars, buildings, and Danica.

“No!” Danica fell to her knees feeling the surge in energy thru the barrier. She looked up with eyes gold and her nose began to bleed.

“Patience my pet. I’ve called for the ones drawn to you blood; descendants of the Fallen themselves.” She cackled mercilessly, and Danica grunted thru her nose pushing up to her feet once more. She wiped her nose to her shoulder but maintained the barrier.

“Dante, Nero! Harpies incoming. You must kill everything, or she can still summon. I can’t hold her much longer!”

“We did!” whined Dante looking around the empty lot helplessly. Both Nero and Dante snapped their attention to a flurry of screeches produced by maybe twenty winged creatures coming in low and fast over the buildings. They headed straight toward them.

Suddenly, Dante looked up toward where he had left his brother. “Dammit! Kid watch her!”

“Wait, where are you… what? Where the hell are you going?”

Dante was already running at breakneck speed back toward the direction he initially appeared. “To stop my brother from doing something stupid.”

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Vergil complied with his brother’s wishes for approximately three long minutes before he became bored watching them below. He had regained a measure of strength in his brief respite and determined he was perfectly capable of handling a few more demons. As he stepped forward to join them he sensed the demon rise from the shadows behind him. The Nosferatu started as a shadowy figure with red eyes but coalesced into a pale skinned gargoyle looking creature, although without the bulk one would normally associate with the creatures. Many assumed Nosferatu were low amongst the vampiric clans, but this was not the case and Vergil knew this well. He would not underestimate what appeared to be a frail and underfed vampire. A sneer formed to thin grey lips as his thin clawed limbs pointed toward him. Vergil knew this was a foe that could injure him greatly in his current weakened state. Force Edge tingled with anticipation.

“Dark Slayer,” he hissed thru misshapen sharp teeth. “I would say it is an honor, but I am not given to such formalities nor pleasantries. Let us just say there are those amongst us who knew you would resurface.”

“Then why speak to me at all?”

“Fair point, I suppose you have become such a, what is the banal human term? A celebrity? Yes, a celebrity that speaking is the equivalent of pinching myself to see that it is true.” He whispered a soft laugh that sounded more like an asthmatic wheeze than a laugh. “Oh, how the mighty have fallen.” He wheezed at the end. Vergil growled.

“Am I to infer that you were ordered to watch for my resurrection? Indeed, then you have found me. How lucky for you. I needed a plaything to sate my boredom.”

“Oh, do not be so pleased with yourself, half-breed. I sense something off with you Slayer, lesser, could it be Mundus clipped your claws? Could it be that Lucifer did? After all one does not simply wreak havoc in the realm as you did, nor does one simply… stop… being a Knight of Hell without consequences. You may have run like your father to save some hapless human but unlike your father, we will not suffer another traitor. You belong back in Hell! Your master awaits.” Vergil felt a buzzing tingling and all too familiar pain ripple across his body as the creature leapt at him. The pain was distractive, and his demon clamored at him to trigger to garner some release. Reflexively he teleported to the other side of the roof and glared at his opponent. “I was told you may be slow, tired even. I did not believe it, but I see now he was correct. You are not quite yourself Dark Slayer. Come show me your power.” The pain increased as the creature drew closer. Vergil summoned several swords all hitting their target, but not infused with enough energy to do any lasting damage. The Nosferatu sneered as thick dark blood oozed from the already half-healed wounds. Vergil was indeed not strong enough. “Oh, I’m gonna enjoy this.”

When Dante arrived, Vergil’s aura was already thick with anger. He was holding his own against this opponent but not able to gain the slightest of edges. From what he could see, Vergil was being taunted. “No! Whatever he says Vergil. Don’t trigger. He wants this too much something isn’t right.” The nosferatu glared and hissed at the twin while Vergil staggered a bit with the break.

“Leave us child, you are not needed nor wanted here.” The creatures mocking tone reminded the red twin if perhaps Vergil didn’t spend time with one of their kind when he was younger.

“I don’t think so. Whatever your plans for my brother, they’ll have to wait, more importantly you’re keeping my friend down there from doing what she does best.”

“Do you mean die? She will do this soon enough,” he wheezed humorlessly.

“No, I mean reap souls.” If it were possible, Dante thought he saw the nosferatu grow a shade
Danica felt the first claws rake her back before Nero could reach her and with an anguished moan she released the Striga and rolled away from the second pair of claws. The witch laughed with a triumphant whoop and swirled up into the air just out of reach of Nero’s sword. Her eyes again searching the frosty winter sky she seemed to direct the swarm of Harpies to attack at once.

“Dani!” Nero threw himself over her body and pulled her head in close to his chest. “Hang on.” As he lifted her, the first wings brushed them then claws like daggers followed shortly thereafter. Nero dashed toward a container opposite of the Striga who now chanted and whirled. “Shit, she’s strong and what the hell are these things? Not like any Harpies I’ve even seen.”

“That’s because they aren’t. They are Furies, in some ways the first Harpies, one of the first angels to fall, descendants of those banished from their service to Zeus for their corrupted bloodlust of all things celestial. It’s a long story but their stronger and faster than the harpies you’ve dealt with.”

Nero snapped a look of concern toward her as she slumped in his arms. His bringer managed to snatch one of the beasts as it dove at them. The surprised Fury tugged and clawed but Nero managed to crus her and let her fall to the ground. “Well, they die like other harpies.” He glanced to really inspect the creatures that were attacking them. They were more humanoid than other harpies with a creepy distorted china doll appearance. Their wings were feathered in black and the shadows to their faces made them appear as if they wore makeup to accentuate their skeletal features. Their eyes glowed any eerie silver. He was mesmerized as he attempted to snatch at another one.

“Nero watch out…” She shoved the youth away from her as a barbed lance struck deep into the soil where he once stood. Nero could smell the poison laced blade and it made him gag.

“Where the …”

“No time, we’re on the clock. She will keep calling more if we don’t stop her. They are faster, deadlier, and they have those poisoned lances. They are incredibly agile and intelligent they learn how to fight you as you fight them. Decapitate or relieve them of their wings as fast as you can.” She scooted out from behind him and a smear of blood to the container wall that told him all he needed to know before the next wave dove toward them. Conjuring her bow, she once more felled creatures from the sky with vivid blue arrows slowing them enough for Nero to be able to grab them. A rhythm to the battle was short lived as the Striga cackled and summoned more.

Chapter End Notes

- What? Two chapters in a week? I have set myself an ambitious goal.
- Next up: Vergil meets Danica
Faced with few options Danica shows off abilities against the Striga and Vergil meets his savior? He might want to search elsewhere.
Typical demon gore ensues.

“Vergil! Are you ok?” His brother panted standing over the headless body of the nosferatu. Force Edge dripped dark with blood. The droning scream of Harpies distracted Dante as he saw a new wave of the creatures float toward them. “Dammit, Verge we gotta go.” Vergil looked at him with a flick of his cold grey eyes then returned to staring at the body before him. Dante immediately noticed it did not dissipate as creatures of the other realms were apt to do. “What the Hell?”

“This is a doppler. There is another one out there.”

“Pity, I cannot allow them to feed. They are so hungry…so hungry.” Danica struggled in the Striga’s grip. Thick claw like fingernails held fast in her shoulder biting into flesh. “Lucien will be most pleased to have you back; your father will pay for his deception.”

“You know nothing of me, witch.” She struggled harder and the witch cackled. Nero roared with rage as another Fury nicked him with a lance. The creature made the mistake of getting too close and he ripped a wing from her before he beheaded her with his sword.

“I know he protects you as if you were his child but how is that possible? Are you not a celestial mongrel? Did your mother whore herself out to some base angel? You are no child of prophecy. No child of ancient blood.” A loud thud surprised the witch as she stepped back pulling Danica with her. Dante rose from a cloud of dust with Vergil next to him.

“I think you might want to let my friend go.” He dusted his coat off casually as Vergil rose a bit slower and his eyes darted to his son. Nero rose with a grunt as the last of the remaining Fury looked between the demon kin and joined her sisters near the Striga.

“Why ever would I do that sons of the traitorous Sparda?” A small flock of close to seven Furies were left to be dealt with and they gathered behind the witch as she sneered. “Time to summon a few…”

“No…” Vergil’s voice was gravelly and low, but he held up the head of the nosferatu and sneered. “No, that was your last summoning.”

“Elder son did you really think me stupid enough to leave my ace in plain sight?”

“Witch, did you really think me stupid enough to fall for your plan?” As he spoke the Striga began to chant her summoning spell as she gripped Danica closer to her.

Dante suddenly blurred red as he charged forward just left of the Striga grabbing the shadow behind her that glowed with hollow red eyes. The nosferatu taken unaware by the red twin’s ability to slow time stumbled backward as the demon hunter partially triggered and ripped the stunned creature’s
head from his body with a roar. It fell with a wet thud as the Striga tried to complete her chant but suddenly choked and howled as she was laid victim to another’s blade.

Vergil watched stunned as the woman once held captive fell to her knees pulling the witch with her. The shift in weight tore the woman’s shoulder from the Striga’s unrelenting grip. She twisted and screamed as she flipped the Striga to the ground and straddled her while pulling a silvered dagger from her belt and slicing her tongue from her with a surprising move. The witch howled in pain as blood gushed from her. The sudden smell of blood drove the Furies into a frenzy. Dante was swept aside as several Furies lunged for Danica and the witch while others aimed for Nero and Vergil. Dropping the head of the former nosferatu, Dante summoned his devil arm Lucifer and speared several Furies to the ground near his brother. Nero rapid fired Blue Rose knocking the disoriented creatures from the sky. Vergil summoned swords.

Danica spread her own dark wings knocking the incoming Furies away as she now chanted her own spell and a low rumbling howl was heard. A thin golden light appeared around her as she stood over the writhing witch with wriggling grey tongue still clutched in one hand. As another Fury rose to attack her a sudden flash of black fur swept the creature aside and an unearthly scream echoed thru the alley as dark clouds rolled in and thunder echoed above them. The witch crawled from the angel in the flash of wings and fur. She sought solace in the lingering shadow of the nosferatu whose heads somehow ended close to one another. They beckoned with the borrowed power she had squandered. Her master bade her to return with his silent plea. She reached out for the heads.

Danica stood from the dust in an armored form replete with wings and bringers. Vergil narrowed his eyes at how similar her clawed appendages were to that of his son. Her clothing torn with previous fighting hinted at ebony scale-like armor the length of her arm and across her neck and upper chest. It was incomplete and graduated into textured skin, but Vergil could easily see vulnerable areas were more protected in this form. She turned to hold his gaze for a moment before she strode the short length over to the witch grabbing her by the head.

What few Furies were left dispersed quickly and Dante made note of the direction they flew but it was Danica that drew his attention now. It was unlike her to reveal herself, it tended to attract unwanted demonic entities. He noted her form had changed since he last saw it and a twinge of guilt overtook him as he realized the form itself probably evolved to protect her. Her wings seemed frail and smaller than he remembered, and her skin had taken on an armored appearance similar to her bringers. Dante approached with care. Despite their frail appearance those wings hurt. The witch writhed beneath her, but a flurry of summoned arrows stilled her.

“You have something that belongs to me, witch. Don’t bother answering, the cat has your tongue, or shall I say wolf?” A dark lumbering shadow appeared and growled showing a sharp row of blood stained teeth. The dire wolf lowered his head and shook himself free of feathers as he approached, and Danica offered the grey fleshy tongue to him. He snorted, and Danica flashed a smile of amusement. “You know what to do.” The wolf snorted and shook his body again only this time his hackles rest to his body once more and took the tongue. As he turned from her, she called back to him focused once more on the witch beneath her. “Fenris, Thank you.” She could have sworn she heard him grumble.

“Dani?” Dante’s voice was unsure as he approached but it was Nero who stopped him several feet away by placing a hand to his shoulder.

“No, whatever this is, don’t, don’t get involved.” Nero looked back toward her concern laced his features. Vergil approached from behind them and Nero flickered his gaze toward him. “You alright? You look…”
“I will be fine.” His cold glare was enough to stop Nero from questioning any further. He turned back to Danica with a sigh and missed his father’s expression of concern as he looked over his son’s healing wounds.

“I’m surprised Lucien sent someone like you. He should know when you threaten my children you threaten me. Then again, he was counting on that wasn’t he? Thought he could draw me out? He’s probably had a time finding me of late, but I assure you I’m not hiding. Let’s just say I’ve been otherwise engaged. Now let’s settle the score once and for all, shall we? I need a little more of your blood.” One of her hands now freed from holding the tongue slipped to her belt pulling a small pouch that jingled as if filled with coins. Deftly, she slipped a finger into the pull string and opened the pouch one handed before spilling a handful of the silver coins to the ground beneath her. She tossed the pouch aside and summoned her blade to return to her hand. Dante flinched behind her. He recognized the blade from this distance. It was constructed of celestial silver; a blade capable of harming any creature with a soul. A deadly blade he had seen in action before. A blade that carried a price to wield. The witch writhed anew with terror flickering thru her eyes as Danica spoke clearly “May the divine have mercy on your soul,” and she slit the witch’s neck letting the blood flow freely over the coins. The witch didn't twitch for long.

Nero pulled from Dante and turned from the scene even as Dante did the same. Vergil, however, watched with fascination as she stood from her work and sheathed her curved knife to the small of her back and then with both hands now freed she drew the witch’s soul from her lifeless body. The light extracted was dark being a mixture of purple and red mixing in places but distinct in others. It stretched and hissed as if it were a flock of birds or a school of fish darting from a predator but in the end Danica whose eyes now glowed gold brought her clawed hands together and the soul formed a jagged pulsing ball whose light glowed against the brick walls of the warehouses that surrounded them.

Nero was the first to look back and a soft, ‘woah’ escaped his lips causing Dante to look back toward her as well. The fissures in her bringers glowed softly with a pale blue light and soon the soul softened rounding itself out and pulsing with the same colors as the deep purple and crimson seemed to bleed away. Beneath them the body of the witch dispersed to dust leaving a blood-soaked pile of coins and their pouch.

Danica sighed as she watched the soul synch with her bringers and then she looked to the sky. She seemed to glow brighter as the soul leeched the last of its malice into the ether. Tears pricked at the corners but never fell. The clouds that once converged on them now broke apart to reveal twinkling starlight. “Go. They may take mercy on you, but I shall not. Your chances are better with the All father.” She released the soul and it drifted as if uncertain before it raced up toward the light of the stars and disappeared.

She fell to her human form and landed on her knees with a grunt. Dante was behind her in that moment and took her gently in his arms. Blood streamed from her shoulder where the witch once held her. Although not life threatening, it would take time to heal and it might leave a scar. He remembered she liked the scars. They reminded her of her mistakes. “You should have kept the soul. It would have let you heal faster.”

“I didn’t want it. That creature traded its life for that of a child, an innocent, all for nothing more than a shiny new title in a clan that will still despise her. Knowing the victim, what was lost from this world, made it harder to justify harboring that power. Though no longer touched with malice, it was too much for me to forgive. I meant what I said. That soul will have a better chance finding its way back to the celestial realm without me.”

Dante nodded, “Come on, princess, let’s get you home.” He shifted to pick her up and was promptly
punched. “Ow! What was that for?” They both knew she couldn’t hurt him, but the surprise was evident as she pursed her lips and he scowled.

“Don’t what me. You know! Let go of me. I don’t need your help. I’ve done quite well on my own.” She pushed away from him and gathered herself first to all four then to her feet. Nero offered his hand at the end and she sighed tiredly but took it. He steadied her and she leaned against him a moment. Vergil eyed her warily. He could see they were close even their energy seemed to resonate between them.

“Look, I’m sorry. I should never have sent you away. I should have listened to you. I’m sorry, please let’s talk about this…” He held his hands up in surrender.

“No!” She walked from him and Dante furrowed his brows. “Not now.” She turned and checked out Vergil a small chuckle escaped her lips as if he wasn’t quite what she expected. “So, this is your brother? I mean he looks like you, well sort of.” She narrowed her eyes at him and gave him the once over. Vergil kept a grin from surfacing as he felt she was ignoring his brother more out of spite than a desire to keep him out of their conversation. For a moment, he wished he had let Dante tell him why he sent her away.

“Huh? Uh yeah, that’s Vergil. Look I’m trying real hard to apologize here.” Dante faltered in his response. He immediately realized even before he felt his brother’s pinch to his head that he was being rude in his introduction. He quickly snapped internally that she had started it. She had a way of shredding his bravado.

“And… I am rudely ignoring said attempts. I said not now, that means later, which is a comparative adjective for late meaning to be continued at a proper time.” Nero choked his laughter back with a feigned cough. Danica raised an eyebrow at him and pulled from him, “You my sullen pouty friend are missing a part of your soul. Interesting.” Nero shot a glare between the twins. Seemed they forgot to mention a few things to him earlier.

“Yeah. We can talk about that in a minute, Babe.” Vergil crossed his arms over his chest and watched with mild interest. It was obvious she was powerful and even more capable of carrying his soul than he hoped for, but there was also something else, something he could not quite put a finger on but he knew he should keep her close to his circle of influence. Plus, she was a delightful thorn in his brother’s side. He was fairly confident she would help him if only to spite Dante. He would wait to see how this played out.

“I suppose you want me to fix that don’t you? Find his soul, give it a little laundering, then pop it back into him?”

“Uh, well, I guess, yeah, I…I mean we would be…”

“Appreciative? Grateful even? Would you pay me? Pfft… course not but I mean it is the kind of thing I can do.” She wriggled her fingers and smiled sweetly only giving Dante the faintest of looks. "But should I?"

“Dani, I…”

“He’s not like you, is he?” She almost pointed to Vergil. Dante rolled his eyes aware that she would not listen to him. Oh she heard him but she was pointedly ignoring his discomfort. She would force him to play her game until she was ready to talk. So he opted to play his way.

“No, he’s mean. Extremely. I’m not sure you can handle this job without me.” Vergil looked at his brother with disgust. Dante stuck his tongue out.
“Mean as in evil or mean as in incredibly blunt and dismissive, and I still do not need nor want your help.” She stalked around him casually not taking issue with what the red twin had scoffed. Nero feigned a cough trying to get her to stop poking the bear, either of them.

“The later.”

“Hnn… I am capable of speaking for myself.”

“Oh goody, that makes for a more lively conversation but I’m not through with your brother just yet. Well, maybe I am.” She stopped in front of the pair of nosferatu heads that had not dispersed as had the other fallen demons. She lifted her head to look at the elder twin when Vergil growled in her direction. “Don’t worry, I’ll grow on you too.”

“Like mildew?” he sneered.

She squatted before the heads, “More like a virus. I’ll inject parts of myself into your life changing it irrevocably.”

“Joy” he muttered. Perhaps he would do well to distance himself from her now, he thought.

“Yeah, I’ve been known to make that happen too, but its clearly by happenstance. I’m a little self destructive and yet I know how to have a good time.” Nero snorted again. She stood and tossed one of the heads to Vergil. He grunted as he caught it. “Here, I this is yours.”

“What is the mean… ngh” Vergil felt a painful jolt of electricity shoot through him similar to the jolt he felt from Lucifer when tasked with finding his vessel. Surprised he dropped the head, but it dissolved into the air before it struck the ground. “What? What just happened.”

“Possibly a coincidence but I find it unlikely. That particular nosferatu and his doppelganger was impressed with an essence of your soul. It most likely allowed him to track you when you got close enough and more than likely it was done to cause you pain. The hoped-for effect of a would be target for this kind of soul spell is kind of like running into a succubus during mating season. It would make you nauseous and needy to be complete. In fact you may feel so desperate that you would try to trigger into your full form and thus drawing it to you.” Dante looked at his brother with an ‘I told you so’ grin. Vergil rolled his eyes. “Fortunately you didn't or you'd be an unconscious drunk with no chance of waking up for awhile. Now, whoever he worked for was pining for you, not me. Which is a surprise. The spell could have tipped off your location. I don’t know.” She dusted off her hands letting the other head disperse as well. “I hope you don’t mind, I’ve taken that essence. It will help me find your soul. Sort of a key to a lock. I’ll get to work on it after I check on something first. I’ll be honest, though, something isn’t right about all of this. Me being here is way too convenient. I mean how is it that the only angel capable of cleansing souls and willing to work with demons within several hundred if not thousands of miles is right where you are? Then again, I seem to attract and be attracted to trouble like a moth to flame. Could be nothing.” She tapped her chin thoughtfully and rolled her shoulder with discomfort. Dante shook his head unfolded his arms and stepped forward again.

“Dani you don’t have to…”

“Dante, look, I’m angry at you, but I’m also mad at myself and we both know how hard I am on myself. The events that lead to our split were cold, calculated, and very well planned. They knew exactly what made you and I tick. The people sent after me turned me inside out and when I finally righted myself, I discovered they had changed me, but not in the way they expected. When I climbed out of the rubble it made me realize some of the things you said about me were true.”
“Dani, I didn’t mean those things. Really, I can’t tell you how sorry I am. I looked for you when I realized what happened. They deceived…” She heard the catch in his voice and gave him a bittersweet smile.

“They lied to you. I know. I knew. But with everything that happened it still hurt. I’ve done some horrid things to survive. Things I can’t come back from, or take back, or undo. I’m no angel. So, for now, just … keep your distance. It’s better that way.” She turned to look at Nero who looked at her with a mix of worry and concern. He hadn’t expected her to be so blunt, but he also didn’t expect she would say anything at all. She took a breath and straightened herself before she walked back toward the pile of coins.

There was a long silence as she knelt grabbing at the pouch. “Why? Why did you kill her like that?” Nero’s voice was strained, and Vergil saw her lips curl slightly.

“Because, if a Striga found the children thru me. I’m gonna make damn sure no Striga ever finds them again.”

“A spell?”

“An amulet. One for each child should they ever leave the safety of the wards in the cathedral again.”

“And the tongue? I mean that seemed a bit aggressive for you?” Dante questioned finding his courage as Nero had.

“An antidote,” Vergil offered. “Only the Striga that infects a victim can cure it. The antidote is in the salivary glands whereas the poison is in the fangs. It is why a Striga cannot be killed by their own poison but can be severely debilitated or killed with the poison from another Striga. I assume you took the sublingual glands”

“I see your smart as well as handsome.” She snickered at Vergil’s ‘tch’ of his tongue and Dante’s short sigh.

“We’re identical,” Dante groused, and Vergil shot him a glare of indignation.

“Yeah, not so much to me.”

“Wait! You told me one child died already but it wasn’t the same child that was sick was it? You brought the sick child back here. That’s how she tracked you.”

“McCabe couldn’t be way from the cathedral for long. He just had a feeling about this child and as it turns out I discovered she is as a Japanese elemental, a kami of sorts. She lost her mother about a year ago and had been in the other orphanage ever since.” She stood with the coin pouch firmly attached to her belt.

“So, Fenris went back to the sanctuary.”

“Uh hmm… McCabe will know what to do.”

“Ok, enough, the kids are safe, but you’re still hurt, Nero needs stitches and a bath and we need to get Vergil off the streets. I don’t like that the nosferatu worked for someone other than the witch.” She had already started to walk down the alley and Nero followed.

“Indeed, it would seem I have a bounty on my head from his demeanor.” Vergil fell into step with his brother who was obviously irritated.
“No surprise there. Mundus wants you dead, and Celeste just wants you for something, but what I don’t understand is what does Lucifer want with you?” The trio stopped dead in their tracks as Danica gave a thin smile over her shoulder and disappeared into the shadows.

Nero scoffed, “What is she talking about?”
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Enough with the Secrets

Chapter Summary

Nero confronts the twins. Vergil loses his calm facade and Dante finally begins to see thru the deception.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“What is she talking about? Lucifer?”

“Kid, it’s complicated.”

“Then let’s see if I understand then. Vergil is not whole like we both thought he was after the whole Belial thing. He’s missing a fragment of his soul and unable to retain his devil trigger. He’s sort-of at half power. But apparently, he also has some shady ties with the fallen angel, more commonly known as Lucifer. Sounds pretty straight forward to me,” he snarked angrily. Dante flinched as he spoke. He knew where this was going from the kid’s tone. “Were you gonna tell me this before or after explaining the whole bit about his soul or is this just like the reaver and you’d figure out how to tell me sooner or later?” Vergil stood a few steps from his son, but Nero pointedly looked to Dante who walked up to stand next to his brother. The twins answered together but not in unison.

“No
“Yes”

The twins looked at one another. Nero threw his hands up and walked away. Vergil growled.

“How did you know about his soul?” Dante gave any angry pout to his brother but followed Nero. “Yamato. She felt it was too important to not share it with me.” Dante grimaced at his words. Nero spun around and pointed a finger at Dante his bringer glowing a deep red. “No! No secrets! No fucking secrets! Remember where that got me the last time? Well let me remind you. Apparently, I have demon blood in my veins and not just any blood but the blood of a traitor or some shit. I am the half-breed, tainted spawn, descendant of the traitor Sparda and a worthless waste of demonic blood. But that’s only half of it, apparently, I am also the son of the Dark Slayer! The magnanimous son of a bitch that killed hordes of demons, possibly quite a few humans, has quite the plethora of enemies and who tried to quite literally bring hell on earth. Shall I go on? It’s like I have a spotlight on me and do I need to remind you how fun that was while training with the Order or hey just trying to grow up and not get killed by some random demon with a grudge to prove. Yoo-hoo I’m a descendant of Sparda come screw with me! People got hurt because I didn’t know. Hell, I got hurt …” He flexed his bringer reflexively like it still hurt.

“Kid! Come on. I didn’t even know you were born! I would have come sooner.” Dante knew the kid still hurt over being ‘left behind’ but he also felt horrible about not knowing. They both held this against Vergil even if Vergil was currently oblivious to this fact. Or maybe he wasn’t. Dante felt a tremble of energy flutter against him as Vergil grew agitated.

“I’m not a goddamn kid! I have a name and you did know about this. Haven’t I lived in the dark for too long, seriously, when does it end?”
“Nero!” Vergil’s voice commanded their attention. His son snapped his attention to his father for the first time since he began to vent his anger only to meet his cold eyes. He spoke thru gritted teeth in a low and annoyed tone, “It is not in my nature to share information. It is not in my nature to ask for help. I am not my brother with an easy smile and carefree attitude. I bear the weight of my responsibilities and the consequences of my decisions. I cannot allow myself to show weakness. I will not accept failure. Your ‘idiot’ uncle had nothing to do with this series of events. This is my doing and I didn’t tell you for my own selfish reasons. I am tasked with a job, a favor, to complete for Lucifer, nothing more. This is in exchange for his previous assistance in my escape from Mundus. Lucifer is how I escaped Hell and that vapid pool of Mire, not any treacherous or brilliant planning on my part. Unfortunately, a cruel or rather deserved twist of fate landed me in to the hands of Agnus. My glorious failure culminated in my being used as a demonic battery to the underworld until my captivity ended several weeks ago with the two of you rescuing me from the clutches of, yet another would be plot by, a wannabe god of Hell.” Vergil paced with his aura growing. Suddenly he seemed to snap and unconsciously Dante stepped closer to Nero. “I do not want to be constantly reminded of how ‘fucked up’ everything has become. I had one job, one, and I failed. So now, this, this is what I must now resort to, begging an angel for help. Pathetic. I am disgusted in myself and did not want you to be burdened by your deadweight and lacking father. I am overwhelmed at how irritating all of this has become.” Vergil was somewhat blue in the face by the time he finished his tirade and Dante huffed softly crossing his arms. Father and son had a lot in common, but Dante also knew that his admission had come at a price. He was also vaguely surprised at his language, maybe his son inherited that too. Mentally he chuckled.

Nero crossed his arms and looked at him with disbelief, “Go on. What’s this ‘favor’ you owe him. Are you to recruit him some minions, find him a legendary weapon, kill someone, bring him a sacrifice, ooh maybe get him a date?” He was clearly trying to provoke his father as he snorted his quip. Vergil glared daggers at him and stepped forward. Nero didn’t flinch as his aura rose to meet his father’s.

“Lucifer has been in hell for far too long without touching the celestial realm. The last time I had an audience with him, he had substance, consciousness and was more than capable of manifesting his power but he carried no physical form. It burned away some time ago in some campaign he described as trying to undo a great tragedy. He cannot return to the celestial realm nor can he tap into that power in the same way without a physical form to channel and absorb the energy thru. For now, he is weak, and he requires a new vessel.” Strangely, Vergil felt a sense of relief having explained this to his son. Perhaps Dante was right about keeping things bottled up.

“A vessel?” He snorted at him and looked to the ground. “Like a living vessel! So, a person?” He huffed again with obvious agitation and looked up thru his snowy hair after shaking his head. “Like Dani! You mean like Dani?” He swiped an arm out to point at his uncle in disbelief. “Dante seriously? You didn’t see this coming? You didn’t think this through? You told me your brother kept secrets even from you. You told me you learned the hard way not to trust him and you didn’t see him using you to find an answer for his problem. How do you even know he’s not under Lucifer’s control now? So, he’s here to make nice with Dani, get his soul back then what… take her to Lucifer? Is that it?”

“Nero no, that’s not… wait Vergil? Is it?” Vergil listened to the bite in Nero’s voice. He heard the sudden dismayed realization in his brother’s voice that asked if he was duped by him yet again. He did nothing to dissuade either of them that he was not trying to manipulate them for his own means. In fact, he had done little short of healing and conserving energy only to then tear half of the office to pieces. He had attacked Dante multiple times and he attacked his son, further adding insult to injury by trying to rip Yamato from him. Why would they or even should they believe anything he intimated? Silence, it was his most common method of achieving any goal. His silence was not the only skill at his disposal and it was a skill intertwined seamlessly with patience, observation, cunning,
deceit, and strategy to name a few. He sighed now hearing the silence in the alley for what it was. A
plea that they had not been made fools. A prayer that he had changed, but had he?

They were correct, Vergil did have ulterior motives. Experience taught Dante to expect this of him at
some point but his son? Already the child seemed to sense there was more to his father than Dante
could have explained. It was something you just had to see to believe. Could this be why he kept
asking if he would stay? He gave his brother no real reason to believe he wouldn’t become that same
‘bastard’ that hurt and betrayed him again years ago. And yet, Dante was eager to accept him, eager
to forgive and forget just to feel whole once more and Vergil was so willing to let him do it. But, he
did have ulterior motives.

His son’s words rang thru his head. Yamato prodded him gently. It was time to bow to fate. His son
looked at him with cold anger, but his brother looked at him with an expression that belied the fact
that he teetered between disappointment and anger. He had betrayed them. Vergil clenched his jaw
then his fist, but Yamato was not in hand to comfort him. He felt cold. His mind suddenly raced to
protect him, to ebb the growing discomfort, and he spoke before he even realized he was about to
spin a new web.

“Do not be preposterous, until a few hours ago I had no clue how I was to retrieve the soul fragment.
Three days ago, I discovered some damn demonic parasite was lying dormant in my body and thus
hid the dull throbbing pain of its absence. Furthermore, I did not know there was even an angel
within reach much less that they had the ability to reap souls, to even make it possible for my soul’s
retrieval. I dare say it is akin to a coincidence, though I do not believe in such things. Regardless, her
ability alone does not equate, nor does it make her a vessel worthy of Lucifer.” The twins looked at
one another for several sustained minutes and then back to the red faced angry young man. Vergil
deflated. He did sense something, but he could not tell if it was the droning hum of opportunity that
was about to drive him mad or something else. Whatever this new feeling was it was nothing if not
elusive. He didn’t realize he flexed his hands again nor did he notice Nero saw this physical twitch.

“Nnngh...Damnit...” Nero growled at his response and ran his hand thru his hair to dislodge dried
and caked blood. He then rolled his shoulders. The wounds and nicks from the Furies lances were
healing slower than usual, but otherwise they were irritating like his father. “What if Lucifer is
looking for someone to corrupt and take over? What if he is using you and you don’t know it?”
Vergil paced away from them trapped in his own thoughts. His son was wise for his concern but still
he did not sense that she was Lucifer’s target. Honestly, he expected pain to tell him he had found
the object of his infatuation.

“Don’t you think she’s suffered enough recently? Can we really take
this chance with her life? We don’t even know how his soul will affect her.”

“Nero, I don’t know of anyone else that could help us. Angels typically stray from helping demons
and the only demons I know to strip souls...”

“Currently do no have a corporeal form. There are others, but Dante is correct. The remaining
demonic creatures that could assist us would rather steal that power for themselves. I would then be
their puppet.” His hand twitched.

“Fine, so she can help us, but I think something stinks about the whole thing and I think she’s knows
this and is trying to warn us.”

“Warn us?”

“Think about it. Isn’t it a bit too convenient she’s here right when we need her and she’s the one
person who has the very specific skill set he requires? And who or what is Celeste and why does she
want him too? Look, I get that he’s tight lipped and defensive. I can almost forgive that if I didn’t
know the stories. We may be father and son, but we don’t know one another, but you? Damnit old
man. Vergil is like the holy grail compared to me. You worship him. You’d do anything for him, but I don’t deserve to be tossed aside like some cheap copy. I deserve to be treated like the adult I am with my own skills and experiences. I’d like to think we are more than just family but friends too. I’ve earned the respect you seem to have set aside to protect his currently frail ego.” He caught his breath after his last statement then sighed. “No more secrets. Good, bad, ugly or demonic. We face it together, remember?”

Vergil growled but opted not to voice any further comments. Dante opened his mouth to rebuff but then simply took a deep breath and promptly agreed. “You’re absolutely right. We should have told you, and I think we still need to explain a lot, but we honestly don’t know what we’re up against. I should have made more of an effort to let you know. Look, I promise you this, if he proves to be a threat to her, in any way, we will find another way, simple as that. As to the coincidence or shall I say miracle of this event, yeah, I’m sure it’s a trap because nothing screams trap like convenience, but truthfully, we don’t know if this trap is for her, or him, or both, or just us in general. All of us have a list of people who’d like to see us squirm. Fortunately, she’s seen those slim threads, the clues, as it were, and she’ll be careful. Nero, you know her well enough to realize she won’t go into this blind. So, for now, we just need to keep on our toes.”

“Fine. Fine!” Nero looked to his father and they held each other’s gaze. “So, tell me; is it her? Is she to be Lucifer’s next vessel or can we take that card off the table right now? I’m gonna be straightforward. I will be pissed if you lie to me!” Again, he saw his father twitch but this time he felt the response deep within his bringer.

“Whelp! I do not lie! I was tasked with finding his vessel not just any like sized vessel. I will know when I have found it.”

“You didn’t answer my question.” He closed his eyes and sighed. This was going nowhere.

“I don’t know.” He glared as he answered over his shoulder. “I don’t have all the answers and I can’t see beyond the fact that I have a real chance to be whole again.” His mind whispered, ‘I need power’ and he felt the dull rise of need within him.

Nero’s aura flickered with anger as his eyes snapped open, “New question then. Could he force her to carry his soul? Could he overtake her?”

“He is Lucifer there are few that can resist him, but I do not get the sense she is whom or what I search for.” His mind again tortured him, ‘you could not.’

“Hey Nero, Casey dumped a lot of info on us today and things seem to have just blown up maybe we should all just cool down and think about this rationally in the morning. I mean we are pumped up on adrenaline.” Nero maintained his gaze to his father as he listened to his uncle and again he noticed Vergil gripped for a sword that wasn’t there.

Nero now glared at his father who remained looking away from them. “Yeah, boom!” He made an exploding gesture with his hands and abruptly turned walking into the alley. “I’ve gotten the answer I’m worthy of for now.” He snipped coldly. He needed to clear his head and think. “I need my space don’t expect me home.”

“Nero!” Vergil turned to follow his son. “We will finish this discussion now!”

“Yeah, when you two get your stories straight we can talk. I’m not interested right now any more than you are interested in telling me.” Dante stopped his brother’s forward motion and he glared daggers at him. Vergil did not lie; withhold information of course but he never outright lied. He wasn’t lying, was he?
“Not now, let ‘em go. You heard him. He needs space. And you need to calm down.”

“We need to… I need to…”

“No, whatever you think you need. It can wait. You need to listen, not just go thru the motions of hearing him, but understand. He only told you he needed space, so that you understood him. I know where he’ll be if we need him. Let him go. Let him have his space and breathe. Don’t try to force this. He has been cooped up with us for a few very long and chaotic weeks. He needs the break before we get any deeper into this.” He waved his hands to encompass some vague space around them as if the universe cared what was going on in the small parking lot they currently occupied.

Vergil sighed watching Nero’s coat flicker out of sight down the alley. “Damnit!” He paced away and if the red hunter didn’t know better, Vergil would have sliced thru something in that moment, instead his hand curled reflexively as if he still had Yamato. Force Edge flickered with his anger on his back. Vergil was slowly losing it and Dante could not help but wonder if his behavior was because of the missing part of his soul or the missing part of his power. He’d be fool to believe someone that worked that hard to gain that much power was comfortable not having it.

He decided to add another kink to Vergil’s slowly deteriorating mental health. “Look, Danica was hurt so we’re taking a shortcut to the cathedral. Whether she wants help or not, she’s getting it.”

“I do not wish for an audience with the priest. I will return home.”

“No can do. You stay with me. I want you where I can keep and eye on you.” Vergil visibly scoffed at him but Dante just grinned. “Forgot about the nosferatu didn’t you? We now know someone is looking for you. The shadows have eyes right now and as much as you hate to admit it. You. Need. Me. You’re not strong enough to hold out against a prolonged attack. This could be a trap for you too, besides I can feel your fatigue. You look beat. Just let me deal with this, humor me, and then we’ll call it quits for the day. Maybe two. We have things to address at the office.”

“No.”

Dante wrapped an arm around his brother’s and chuckled. “Not giving you the choice, so suck it up. We’re going. Sit and pout in the narthex, light a candle, pray, do whatever it is you do in a church. I know visit the library. I’m going to check on her and you are coming with me.”

“What about Nero?”

“Nero went to sit out his anger with friends, maybe ask for advice, maybe grab a few drinks. He’ll be fine. He’s stronger than you give him credit for. I doubt he’ll go to Fortuna this late, but he hasn’t seen Kyrie in a while so that’s a possibility too, but he’ll tell me if he leaves. That’s the rule. We tell each other if we leave the city, mad or not.” Dante tugged his brother in the direction of the cathedral and Vergil sighed. It didn’t look like he would be given an option as he considered the grip on his arm.

“Kyrie?” He let his mind wander to the first time he remembered seeing her, although she could not see him. “Ah, the waif with reddish hair. A songstress, I believe. They were in a relationship.”

“Were? They still are, even if they don’t know it. Wait, waif? Vergil when did you meet her?”

“It happened when Belial separated me from my body. Casey was trying to help me find you. I…” Vergil suddenly stopped hard and Dante released his arm and looked at him with concern.

“Verge?”
“I understand his concern now. I understand why my son thinks I’m an idiot.”

“I wouldn’t say he thinks…”

“I did not ask for your opinion,” he snapped. Dante raised an eyebrow at him. “Casey may help us. She knows of being possessed or at least about the ways in which an attempt can be made. Perhaps she can tell us what risk Danica will face if Lucifer is in fact using me for more than he states. What if I am his pawn and unaware. What if she is the target?”

“He is the prince of deception and I doubt Nero, or I would forgive you so easily if that were the case.”

“Indeed, and it would not be the first time a Sparda has been a puppet.”

“Okay, but Vergil what about your…”

“Not now! Let’s get this over with. I am tired and maintaining human pleasantries is taxing. I have grown to have a headache.” He sighed and continued walking down the alley. Dante closed his eyes a moment and shook his head. Vergil was more than likely hiding something. It was so like him. Maybe Nero was right and there were secrets. Secrets even he was being kept in the dark from.

“Yes, so do I.” He hurried to catch up to his brother.

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The walk to the cathedral wasn’t far. They proceeded in dead silence for most of the trip. A few people strayed in and out of the bars and a few shops were still open with their holiday hours, but the city was slowly winding down for a cold night’s rest. Few stayed out after the darkness settled in. It was just a given in Capulet, a reality to inhabitants, whether the rest of the world believed in demons or not. It was not particularly late but by the time they walked to the cathedral and back home it would be close to midnight depending on Danica’s injuries. The weather felt wet and heavy in its coldness. It reminded the red hunter of the feeling in the air just before a snow and Dante snorted lost in the thought. It hadn’t snowed in Fortuna for years and here on the mainland it had been even longer. It felt like rain. He tumbled all the events thru his head from the last few weeks. Nero was right, Vergil was holding them at arm’s length and keeping them in the dark. Taking the step back he could see that he was being lead carefully to make certain discoveries, but Vergil was unaware of the fleeting memories he had shared with his brother while feeding. Dante had to consider much more happened to Vergil than he thought and perhaps the shadowy figure in those memories was in fact Lucifer and that gave those images a whole new perspective. In a way, he felt tricked. He knew it was normal for him to want his brother back and his willingness to accept his flaws even the most glaring ones should not be a surprise. Vergil was no angel and Dante wasn’t sure what he had hoped to gain with closing the kid out. Worship? The word rolled in his head. He realized maybe, just maybe, he did sort of look up to Vergil as if he could do no wrong. Maybe Vergil was his weakness. Damnit, it had taken him a long time to get the kid to open up to him in the first place. He had to do better and he had to repair the damage he knew he was doing. Nero deserved better and he had earned more than just respect.

Surprisingly, it was Vergil that broke their silence as they walked, and Dante found he startled just a bit. “A park? There is a park to honor our father? How ridiculous,” The cold twin snorted with disgust. “I bet next you will tell me of a children’s school or even a hospital blessed with his name.” His voice clipped in the chilly air and Dante thought how perfect it was that Vergil reappeared after all this time on the cusp of winter. It was cold like him.

“No hospital that I know of but there is an island country that worships him as a god and you’re worried about the park? It’s all weird, bro. People just need heroes. They need someone to look up
to. Someone with the same flaws as them. It makes their heroes believable and it gives the people hope. You should go walk thru the park some time, it’s quite peaceful. Mom would have loved it. They even planted white roses. Coincidence, I’m sure.”

“Hnnn…” The cathedral’s silhouette loomed before them in the deepening blue of the night sky and Vergil’s gaze drifted. He did not remember the park when he visited the priest, but then again, he was focused on tasks other than sight seeing when he was last here. “This place, does it remain a sanctuary?” He gestured with his head as he spoke.

“Yeah, supernatural creatures come and go thru here seeking answers, asylum, even assistance. Father McCabe does what he can then sends them on their way. I’m sure he prays that they find what they seek and other godly endeavors. Perhaps a bit of a contradiction since most believe the individuals he helps are damned, but he’s good at it. Occasionally, I get called to clean up some evil that crops up too close to the orphanage, but that’s been more recent. The good ole padre just has a way with helping lost souls.”

“You mean individuals like me.” Dante stopped short at his brother’s clipped words. He never considered the perspective that maybe Vergil was lost at some point, maybe even now. Was it possible that the brother he always believed was driven with a single-minded purpose could have became lost just like so many others before him? Dante floundered early on without family and a sense of worth, but he was blessed with people who cared and helped him on his way. Later, he had Lady then Trish. He created a new family, but Vergil could have needed direction back then too. Ironically, the priest’s guidance now would be a true godsend, but Dante was pretty sure dragging out a long visit tonight might get several people skewered including the priest.

During their separation, Dante had never once considered that maybe, just maybe, everything Vergil had done before his fall was in some way tied to the protection of him or his family. Sure, he suspected something when he found Nero but even then, it hadn’t sunk in as it did in this moment. Did Vergil know about Nero before he left? He was nineteen with a child on the way of course he needed direction. Did he plan to abandon them for the singular selfish thought of avenging their mother? No, there was something more Vergil had not told him. Something he was too cautious to share with him, something that he struggled with then as much as he did now. He felt his absence was necessary, but why? His actions though seemingly twisted were perhaps meant to change the course of events Vergil believed to be coming. He pulled from his thoughts to see his colder twin was at the intersection across from the cathedral. Vergil realized his younger brother had stopped and turned. There several paces behind him stood his brother and he looked to him questioningly.

Dante hurried to catch up to him and gave a soft snort answering the unasked question that lingered between them. “Yeah, Verge, just like you.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading. I hope you enjoy this roller coaster of a story.
I have the next two chapters ready and will post multiple times this week as time allows.
- Next up: Vergil why did you raise the tower? Time to stumble around the awkwardness that is Nero’s mother. Well sort of…
Can We Talk?

Chapter Summary

Dante’s mind whirls with previous events up to this point and tries to talk to a very tired Dark Slayer. The result is enlightening. Vergil makes a stunning realization.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was later than expected when they returned home, and the weather had turned to a cold drizzle. A storm was brewing, and the twins were wet, cold and tired after a very long day. Vergil had remained silent and aloof at the cathedral and surprisingly Father McCabe did nothing more than acknowledge him before leaving him in the narthex. Dante then followed the priest to tend to Danica who was not surprisingly in the library and unconscious. It wasn’t long before a curious elder twin appeared in the hall across from the library and watched them. Even before his fall he had always held himself at a distance. Dante felt him close but was focused on his task before him. Father McCabe gestured that he was welcome to join them in the library but received only a cold glare. Once the immediate task was handled the priest stepped out to speak with Vergil only to have the man glare at him and nod to his brother before he briskly walked away without a single word spoken within the hallowed building. Once home, they took turns showering to rid themselves of the day each in their own way and to warm cold limbs. Vergil was still awake as Dante crawled into bed his mind still racing.

“So, why did you really raise the tower? The truth this time.” The silence between them was palpable and Dante knew he pushed his chances with his brother considering how miserable the day ended. He half expected the colder twin to push him away and stalk off into the darkness of the quiet office. Instead his twin sighed and rolled away from him to leave a wide gap between them in the bed. “I don’t believe it was just to avenge mom. I think part of it was because of Nero, wasn’t it? I think you knew about him, but you left anyway. From what you said earlier, the existence of that tower and the key to pop’s power was something Mundus made sure you learned of and it drew you like a moth to a flame.” Still there was silence between them. Dante sighed and rolled off his elbow and onto his back. He stared at the worn stucco ceiling that danced with faint neon light from the bars and surrounding businesses that his bedroom window faced.

He tucked his hands under his head to both support his head and to keep from fidgeting. He could feel the low din of his brother’s energy next to him. He was like a storm slowly building steam, just like the rain outside. “You know I used to think you were just a glorified asshole wanting power just for the sake of power, but it was afterwards that I realized I missed more than I caught on to.” The room shrouded in darkness seemed to resonate with the soft sound of the rain that pattered on the window. The world outside became muffled. Vergil lifted his head slightly. At first, he thought Dante who as a child had been known to fall asleep mid activity, had drifted off but his brother wriggled slightly adjusting the sheet over himself before he laid an arm across his chest. “Remember what you said? Might controls everything and without strength you cannot protect anything. Let alone yourself.”

The words stung Vergil and he felt his chest tighten. He remembered. He remained torn in what and how to tell his brother of what he had learned especially of his time in Hell. He sighed and listened as
Dante continued. “That’s what you said. Those words haunted me, like I missed something, something big, something important, something I should have seen, something I still can’t see clearly.”

“It is complicated,” he offered quietly over the low rushing sound of rain outside.

“I’m not surprised. In the end, I saw you were angry with me for not helping you, for not wanting to follow you on your quest. You were… disappointed. I betrayed you somehow because I didn’t understand that you wanted from me, but you couldn’t just ask. It wasn’t in you back then.”

“Go to sleep Dante, we will discuss this at another time,” he stated firmly but with a softer edge than was normal for the elder twin. He recognized his brother only wanted to understand. The younger twin noted that there was not bitter tone, and no anger in his brother’s response just a weariness that came from more than this long day.

“The thing is, Vergil, I couldn’t exactly explain to you that I feared you had gone feral. That you had let your demon control you and not the other way around. I thought you wanted all humans dead and I couldn’t let that happen. You seemed perfectly willing to sacrifice everyone round you for power. It was like you spit on the very fact that you are partly human, like you were angry at mom for who she was. You didn’t care who you hurt to achieve your goal.” Thunder rolled in the distance as lightning flickered across the sky. Odd for this time of year but not unheard of. The light illuminated the room briefly. Vergil now lay on his back as well. “I finally think I figured it out though, I put some of it together when I found Nero. I told you before you fell that you could never be like father.”

“I remember.” He didn’t know what else to say but his lips trembled with the need to say something and it was obvious that Dante had found his voice tonight and would not wait for tomorrow.

“I was so very wrong. You had already become more like father than you ever intended. You were expecting a kid. I think his mother didn’t even know, not yet, but you discovered something, something big and it made it necessary for you to go before he was born.” Maybe if he proceeded slowly, he could draw this out of his twin rather than drag it out of him. He had a theory of what had happened to him and even why, but he needed to be patient something he wasn’t really known for. He also hoped his brother was tired enough to let something slip.

“You are correct. She did not know she was to bear my child. I made her believe I courted another. I had not intended for her to so captivate me that a thing such as that was even possible. The child was not planned but I foolishly convinced myself that if she didn’t know of the child then she would let me go and she would be safer should I not return. It wasn’t that I didn’t want her or our child, I just had to know. I had to finish things for them to truly be safe. Where we were on the isle was not safe. I was being watched, observed at a distance and she had her own secrets. I had endangered her enough already by my presence alone but then…then I did discover something big. I discovered Mundus held a grudge against his brother. A grudge that tainted his view on many things. A view that would lead him to hunt my family just as he continued to hunt us. He would hunt them because of father, because of…me. I too had sinned as did father and I coveted a family.”

“Wait, do you mean if mom and dad had never had us, then Mundus would never have hunted our family?”

“I doubt it was ever that simple, but the fact is that true cambion are rare and powerful and a means by which Mundus can be defeated. He knows this. Our existence is a taint to the ancient bloodline that Mundus believed descended from the first ruler of Hell. The demon responsible for the schism from heaven.”

“Belial?”
“Indeed. Mundus believed Sparda fathered children out of spite for him and not out of the love he had for mother.”

“I don’t believe that. I never once felt like pops didn’t want us.” Dante frowned if anything he felt like Sparda was eager to experience things with them, which at times required Eva to mother three children. He smiled softly as he remembered a few of the more memorable times that all three of them had gotten in proverbial trouble.

“Nor do I.” The pause hung between them, but Dante could feel Vergil fidgeted until finally he turned his head to look at Dante for a moment then back to the ceiling. “I believe I found evidence that Eva defied Sparda to have us. She chose to become human.” The words seemed to tangle on his brother’s tongue, but it was for this very reason that Dante believed him.

“So, what was she if not human? Are you saying she was an angel? Parts of the story you told me a few weeks ago was…true?” Dante had to admit he never once really considered this a possibility. He figured Vergil was loopy when he first returned and spoke gibberish. What if what his brother said was true, then what did that mean for them?

“It is one of a few possibilities, yes, but only they know the truth.” He paused in his speech, but Dante could tell he wanted to say something more, so he waited. The rain sounded harder outside; a downpour on the world outside their window seemed to mirror what was happening inside. “I needed to face Mundus, to deny him the satisfaction that he had killed us too. I wanted to face him with you, but I saw you were not ready. What I did not see in myself was that neither was I. Mundus wanted us to come for him. He had planned our fall. We were to follow our father and make the same mistake of underestimating just how powerful he had become.”

“Vergil? How did you really get mixed up with Lucifer?”

His twin sighed but knew his time had come, “It was as I said but he wanted, no he needed my help to secure his hold within the realm. He was losing. It would seem he lost one of his greatest generals when Sparda died.”

“So, Sparda worked with Lucifer to end Mundus’s attempt on this realm? That’s why he was a considered a traitor?”

“Yes. Sparda helped close this realm. It kept Mundus sealed in Hell and therefore unable to gain a clear advantage over Lucifer but as I said we underestimated him.”

“So, then you were his soldier too? Did you take Sparda’s place?”

“In a way, and for a time, yes, but he offered me the chance to learn more about our father and a way to overcome my curse.”

“Curse? You mean find a way to protect your family?”

“By the time we met, my family was dead or, so I believed. I only wanted to protect you and keep you from following in my path. It would seem I share traits with our uncle and I did not wish you to fall as I had.”

“You may be an asshole at times and cold, but no way do I think you’re like Mundus!”

“In certain ways, I believe I was…I am. It’s complicated.”

“Vergil?” The light danced across the sky and Dante could see his brother was struggling to say more. “No! I won’t believe it. You are nothing like Mundus. Don’t even let that thought continue.
Let’s stop here for tonight. Don’t try to explain this to me. Not just yet. I’ve got a lot to think about for now.”

They both lay quietly listening to the rain and thunder as the lightning continued to dance outside and illuminate the cold black of the room. It was an easy silence and not forced. It reminded them both of how often as children they would sneak into one another’s rooms and watch the storms. And yet, something nagged at the younger twin.

“I’m sorry, I’ve just got to know. You sought father’s power to aid you. It was revenge, plain and simple, that’s where you started from, not world domination or senseless power. You clung to your revenge like a mantra, but it changed over the years and wasn’t just about Mom anymore; it was about father too. You wanted to succeed him in some way, to overcome his shadow. You wanted revenge for his death but more than that you wanted to protect your family better than he protected us.”

“I simply wanted to end this for all of us. No more cycles of pain, of loss. No more looking over our shoulders or guessing when he would return. Mundus is a twisted evil creature who feeds on pain and misery. His lust for power knows no bounds. He would willingly destroy Hell itself if he thought he could become even more powerful. He must be put down. He must be stopped at all costs. He will not stop with all of Hell. I learned many things while under his control and he has his sights clearly set on the human realm. He intends to use the humans as food and the hybrids and other creatures for power and once he has achieved this then he will march on heaven and bring about the second great war. Once I learned this, I wanted to stop him. If I assisted Lucifer, I might be able to achieve this goal, and, in that respect, I could succeed our father. My goal was so simple, but I was foolish. Again, I could not see the real danger in my designs.” Vergil let his voice fall to a whisper in the end. His brother had stilled next to him and he was sure with everything they had taken in for the day this was enough.

He hoped his brother would stop pressing him for now. He wasn’t ready to share everything. Dante didn’t have the innate need to tortuously dig and dig until he found answers. Vergil however did, and he found answers to questions that made him question himself. He was no longer sure of the path he walked. Dante, however, was happy in his blissfully oblivious world and he wanted to protect that for his brother. He wanted him to worry about nothing but when he would get his next pizza and beer and how he would eventually pay for it. He did not need the burden of the knowledge that he now carried. He would bear the sins of their father for him. Mundus knew if the twins joined together he would eventually lose and as such he would never stop until the spawn of Sparda were destroyed. He would destroy everything they loved just to keep them at odds. He had almost succeeded in severing their ties and thus destroying them both, but somehow Dante had saved them both. He succeeded where Vergil failed, and it was his sacrifices, his power and sheer force of will and determination that allowed Vergil the chance, the opportunity, to escape. The eldest knew this now and understood he had a long way to go. Dante was smarter than he had given him credit for, he had figured out that there was more to his mad hormone fueled teenage rage into Hell all those years ago.

Vergil tried to gauge how much and what to tell his brother early by weaving the tale of their mother and father filled with enough truth and snippets of the stories told of them in the demon realm to appease his curiosity but obviously his brother still questioned, but so did he. Was Eva an angel? Did she truly give up her celestial soul to become human just so that she could bear Sparda a child? Despite, all the stories and half-truths that he searched thru Vergil knew he could only learn the truth from his father and as such Lucifer had promised him to find a way to do just that. Perhaps Vergil was being more than foolish, perhaps he was being naïve. And what of the stories of their mother? Was it true Eva was once one of Lucifer’s fallen, later turned to a witch, with her own contract to fill. Was she Celestial, Umbrian, Lumen, or human? Did it even matter? Every story of their mother was
different with the ending always the same. He mulled this over and over in his mind but finally let it have a voice.

“In the end, the stories and legends don’t matter. We are the children of Sparda, Dante, and as such we have responsibilities. I have responsibilities, but I am weak and cannot do this alone. I understand now why I failed. There was a reason father always told us to stay together, because together we can defeat Mundus for good.”

“I’m tired of cleaning up his messes but I’m not opposed to kicking Mundus back into the furthest reaches of hell.”

“I am sure father never intended things to become so tangled.”

“Yeah, I guess neither one of us foresaw how complicated the truth really was.” Dante paused, and Vergil felt him searching for words. As if he was careful to choose which words he used. He wondered if he did this because he didn’t know how to say something or if he was avoiding something himself. Finally, after a deep breath, “Nero’s right, you’re not telling us the whole story. You are still hiding something. Something that changed how you looked at yourself. Something scared you enough to make you think leaving before your child was born was the better option then whatever staying here meant for you. You believed leaving gave them the best chance to escape whatever you were hiding from.” He paused listening to the wind batter the shutter as the thunder crashed around them. Seemed the storm kept pace with their words inside the darkness of their room.

“She warned me my arrogance had made me blind. That my pride would define my end, but I did not listen. I think somehow, she knew what was to come. Not that I would listen. Not that I would change my mind.” Vergil rolled to the side and stared at his brother. “Dante.” The twins looked at each other as the lighting flickered around them. “When I found mother before I was finally pulled away by demons. I made several promises to myself. I made a promise to avenge her death. I swore to find out who betrayed our family and make them pay for the father they took from us. I swore to protect you. I was irrationally angry at father for leaving us exposed and vulnerable. It was my thirst for power in which I drown, so much like our uncle. I had followed in father’s footsteps only to find I had become more like Mundus. I didn’t just fall. I clattered to the ground like the useless weapon I had become. I fell because he succeeded in luring me there. He left clues, hints meant for me to find. The damn priest even warned me it was farce, but I didn’t listen. Mundus took me just as he would have taken you had you been fool enough to follow my path. I believed I deserved my fate. Now, now it just feels like my past is some horrid nightmare that I am trapped in, forced to remember over and over. I have been given another chance because of Lucifer. I owe him this small favor and I cannot fail. Not again.”

“Verge…” His brother waved at him to be silent. Dante took a breath and listened. Tonight, Vergil had said more than he had in years and it was both surreal as it was needed.

“We were separated for far too long and I lost my way. I lost myself to a sort of madness that infected me. I misjudged that you followed in my path of vengeance. I shunned and silenced that part of me which was human. You may have hunted demons, but your code was different than mine. You still respected life and the possibility that everything black was not dark. You clung to your humanity like the beacon it is and not the bane I believed it to be. You saw the light in others I had long since lost. All I could see was darkness. I was obsessed and when I discovered how to resurrect father’s power, I… I had to try. I was compelled to take it for my own. Despite Arkham’s machinations, I never raised that tower with the belief you would not join me. I’m glad you didn’t see things my way.”

“Do you trust him?”
“I don’t know.”

“I think you need to see this from my perspective. You’ve been lied to, tortured, used, brainwashed, and who knows what else. Take your time to figure this one out. You have never been one to do anything without thinking it thru first. So… think this thru. We get your soul back first.”

“Indeed.”

“I get that you had a lot at stake. I wish I had understood, and I wish I had known about Nero sooner.”

“I understand your bitterness. I wish I had been able to tell you. I was not of sound mind to see that you were not my enemy.” Dante felt the anguish in his words and he reached across the bed to place a hand to his cheek.

“I would have gone with you had I known, had you asked. I’d still go if you needed me to now. Do you understand? I forgave you a long time ago. So, if you need me, just ask.”

He believed at one time that his brother would never forgive him but here after all this time he saw he was wrong. He considered their argument earlier, but saw that Dante meant what he said, and he did forgive him. “It doesn’t matter. I was wrong. Mundus underestimated you and we still have a chance. Things have changed now. I serve a new master. It’s so damn complicated.” He took a long pause and his twin waited patiently. “I was never good at asking for help.” Dante smiled and released his brother.

“Is this your way of saying, hey bro I need help?”

“Well, obviously I still suck at it, but I do need your help. I don’t want to relive the pain and for now it serves no purpose to tell you everything. Trust that there are good reasons why I cannot divulge everything. I need time. Perhaps once I am whole once more.” He flopped to the bed in a mildly dramatic way that reminded Dante of when they were small kids and he did the same in the quiet of his room when he believed no one saw him. He smiled at his brother watching the emotion ripple across him. Would he ever learn to accept his emotions? Would he ever learn to accept he was half human? Back when they were children, Dante often frustrated the hell out of his straight laced by the rules brother for a myriad of reasons. He could see it in him now. Vergil struggled with the emotional part of him that was human. He struggled the same as their father, no, more than their father and Sparda was a full devil.

“It’s not just a human thing, these emotions, pops struggled with them too, remember? You can learn to embrace that part of yourself. Being human is a struggle but in a good way. I think it makes us better at being able to see the subtle differences that can make all the difference. I can help…if you want me too.”

“Father was a demon, a devil of the highest breeding. His emotions were… different from those of humans. They served a purpose in his life. They defined directions to take but did not control them. My emotions are chaotic at best and better off suppressed where they can do no harm. I remember he remained calm andundaunted thru many crises. I have always strived to emulate his authoritative calm.”

“Calm. Yeah, well you didn’t cause most of those disasters, but I remember him being strong when things went wrong. He was definitely goofy at times but in a funny and innocent sort of way. God knows he was patient with me, but he was always dependable and calm for you. I also remember he was easily bribed which made mom the major domo of punishment.” He chortled and looked to his brother to see a faint smile curl at his lips. “He wanted so much to be whatever mom needed him to
be, but he just couldn’t pull off the stern and totally strict father figure.”
“Yes, and we all suffered your pranks and tom foolery because of it.”
“Meh, when I got out of hand mom always set me straight.”
“So, did a swift punch to the gut.”
“Pffftt…that too. But what I’m saying is that dad wanted to experience as much as we did. He just
forgot we didn’t fit into either world and I think that lack of acceptance made him sad. Thank god for
mom, she always knew how to make each of us smile. Even you. It wasn’t often, it still isn’t, but I
remember.”

“Hnnn…Yes, I do remember. She would smile often. I never acquired that trait as easily, but it seems
that you have her smile at times.”

“Verge?” He turned his head to look at his brother.

“Yes?” he sighed thru his nose and looked at him.

“Promise me something.”

“Dante, what promises can I make that will change what has already happened?”

“No, not what happened but what will be. Verge. Promise me that you will ask for help when you
get stuck and you will get stuck. It’s part of being human and accepting that we all have limitations
but embracing that part of yourself isn’t all that bad. In fact, I think in many ways it makes me
stronger. I know I can be an annoying pain in the ass at times but promise me this, promise me you
won’t just run off. I’m really not sure I can take you leaving again.”

“I will…try,” he sighed. He couldn’t outright lie to his brother.

“Vergil!” He sounded perturbed more than angry, but Vergil still flinched even if just a fraction.

“Dante!” He returned in a similar tone. “I am trying to meet your expectations of me. I am not sure I
am worthy of such adore, but I can promise this. I will not leave without reason, move out, get my
own place so I do not kill you perhaps, but I promise not to just up and leave. You are my brother
and I have learned the hard way that we are stronger together. We belong together.”

“That almost sounded sincere,” he chirped with a hint of amusement. Vergil rolled his eyes.

“I thought it sounded quite convincing. I will stay in the human realm.” He clicked his tongue and
covered his eyes with the back of his forearm as the lighting flashed again and the thunder gently
vibrated the windows. It sounded like the storm had plans to linger for a bit.

“We’ll work on your delivery.” Dante chuckled and looked back at the ceiling. Vergil hummed
appreciatively. A part of him appreciated that his brother had not changed in some ways and it
comforted him. “We will get your soul back, all of it this time. You’ll be back to you highly
motivated demon self in no time. Just…just be patient a little longer. Dani will come thru for you. I
may have let her down in the past, but I know she’ll come thru for us, for you, at the very least
simply because she considers Nero to be her friend. I guess he’s being protective of her in his own
way.”

“Hnn…” It was quiet and they both listened to the rain outside. It pattered against the window in a
windblown pattern that soon gained a semblance of a steady pattern. Had this been snow they would
be having a blizzard but this was nice. It was comforting being together like this, no need to kill one
another, no outright hatred for one another, just them.

“She isn’t what you expected, is she?”
“No, but I’m not sure what I expected despite your attempt to prepare me.” Vergil liked that they had moved on in their conversation. It felt natural and nice in that Dante had heard him and respected his wish to leave the rest for another time. He was curious, however, about the angel.

“Oh, I warned you. You just didn’t listen. She’s sort of an enigma. Guess you were too focused on food to really listen.”

“Hnn…Perhaps. I didn’t expect her to be so human for some reason. Angels have various forms depending where they are in the hierarchy while others can take on additional forms, some very similar to the altered form we saw her take. By their very design, angels were meant to terrify humans into obedience during their early evolution. They are not as a rule these wispy beautiful winged creatures the humans love to tout as watching over us. Angels were designed to battle demons amongst other orders from their holy source. She is obviously a hybrid of some lineage, and her celestial aura is strong and clearly delineated. I sense she has untapped potential that could yet prove to our advantage or even to our detriment, but I have no concern that she will betray us. I sense she was drawn to this task perhaps even expected it. What concerns me is her fondness with my son. She seems as protective of him as he is of her.”

“They seem to have a lot in common, oddly enough, including the likeness in their bringers.”

“I did notice the similarity but his ‘bringer’ as you call it is due to a partially awakened and underdeveloped devil trigger, a suspect he had a trauma of some sort, while her ‘bringers’ are meant to ‘soul rend’. They quite literally reap souls, purify them, and return them to the ether. I have heard of angels being able to hold or carry souls and those that to can consume them, if you will, in a way that produces a benefit for the angel. The benefit would be similar to that of a devil arm when we vanquish a powerful demon. The function of her ‘bringers’ is different on many levels from what I have seen Nero capable of so far. No, I just sense a connection between them that is strong, and I for one do not trust angels.”

“She took to him when we first met despite that she shot him, but that led to her seeking him out because of her guilt and well it was the start of a great friendship. They just clicked.” Dante paused wondering why his brother struggled with the idea of angels and demons cooperating. In his life time he had seen humans more monstrous than any beast and likewise some creatures more genuinely compassionate than the humans that hunted them. Somehow their relationship seemed natural almost like they were meant to be friends despite the fox and hound analogy. He wondered if Vergil knew more about her physiology than she had told them. She always kept quiet about herself. “So, that purification thing she can do with her bringer things. Do you know what it is?”

“I do not know what it is called, per se, but I was aware of it. I have never seen it in action until tonight. I heard you mention she should’ve kept the soul to heal with. This implies that souls for her are like defeated souls of some of the greater demons we face. Perhaps she acquires some of their energy were as we acquire powerful devil arms. I admit, I find the entire process…intriguing. I will do more research on the topic when time allows. I am also curious about her ability to summon and cast. Those are not typical skills of the lower casts of angels but more like abilities of non-celestials, witches or even higher vampires.”

“Careful Verge, you seem to have taken an interest in her. If you’re not careful you might find yourself quite smitten with her. I know I am and I call dibs.”

“Imbecile. She could be of use beyond being a temporary vessel for my soul or mere amusement for you fantasies.”

“Of use? Woah dial down the power hungry inuendo.”
“I meant only… that,” he grumbled as he spoke and uncovered his eyes. Dante frowned down at him from his now propped up position on both elbows.

“That what? Vergil choose your next words very carefully.” The threat was leveled, and Vergil ruffled. Seems his brother was protective of her too. Apparently, he did not seem to understand the fine intricacies of having access to that level of potential power. Vergil grumbled audibly, then again in a stuttered afterthought perhaps neither did he. Angels were by their nature trouble.

He glared at his brother sharply his eyes flickering in the darkness. “She is an angelic hybrid. I do not expect much from her. I expect her to be trite and condescending, but it would be nice to have one of them on our side for once. Clearly, she has forgiven you for being an idiot and whatever missteps you took with her. Therefore, she may graciously overlook my ties to Lucifer and help us when we need such intervention. I fear I may need all the help I can garner to break this damned contract, while I agree I owe him for his assistance, I also feel enough is enough.”

“Wow, even though I think, you think, you’re saying something positive, I just don’t think you realize how manipulative it sounds.”

“Hnnn… Manipulative? You’ve slept with her; don’t you think that is a form of manipulation? She is an angel. Demons and angels should not be together.” He bit his tongue. Those words tripped from his tongue with more scorn than he meant.

“Woah, hey, that’s, that’s not what we are talking about and no I did not. I told you…”

“Fabulous, then if you have not yet, I am sure you have intimations to do so. It is in your demonic nature to dominate her, but I would recommend against it. It is an unwise union.”

“No! You don’t get a say in who I pursue. Besides, it’s not like that. I’m not manipulating anyone. What about you?”

“Surely, you do not believe I am so calculating as to be able to plan for someone whom I barely know and only just witnessed some of what she is capable of. It would take longer than tonight’s events for me to decide if she is of value to me in some future event I have yet to even determine. I am not omniscient, much to my own distaste, I only appear that way.” Vergil grunted and looked to the ceiling again but now he crossed his arms over his chest. He let his angry flicker but truthfully, he found he was too tired to argue. This had been a long day and his energy waned. He hated his weakness and struggled a moment to not let his own self hatred bleed into the tangible presence of his brother within their headspace. He wanted to push him out but instead opted to just close him off. Dante gave a soft grunt as lightning again flickered through the room.

“Oh, I get it! This really isn’t about her so much as it is about finding some way to be nice to her so maybe your son won’t think you’re such as ass. You want to use her to find a way to get to know your son.” Dante flopped back down and chuckled. “I swear you take the hard way to do everything! Just be yourself Verge, you two will figure one another out. Give it time.”

“I have wasted enough time.” He wasn’t about to argue with his brother. He was correct in part of his reasoning. She may just be able to provide a bridge to better understand his son.

“Vergil, you two are going to butt heads. It is inevitable. You are a lot alike. I mean I think it’s part of the whole bloodline of Sparda thing, no maybe it was mom’s genes. She was sort of stubborn too when I think back on it. Besides, you cannot rush a relationship with him. You’ll drive him further away. Yamato is out of the picture for now. Leave that dog to sleep, but maybe talk to him about his mother or even better tell him things about you. He’s curious.”
“I will not speak of his mother.”

“Like ever? Cause that’s says more about your relationship than just wanting to know your son. Geez Verge, she…”

“She died because of me. How do I discuss this with my son? How do I ask for his forgiveness? I am the one responsible for his mother’s death. I am the reason he grew up alone and feeling discarded.” So, Dante was right, Vergil did sense the underlying anger in Nero this evening. Vergil choked on his words as the thunder boomed thru the walls after a particularly bright streak of lightening. “Were she alive, she would only hate me. I expect no less from our son.”

“She still had him, that doesn’t sound like she hated you. Look, I get it, you’re afraid he won’t forgive you, is that it?”

His lack of an answer said more than actual words and Dante sighed. The rain tapped harder on the window as the wind rattled a loose shutter outside. The storm seemed to have reached its peak as did the emotions within their bed. The bedroom was quiet for a long time save for the sounds of the rain, thunder, and wind.

“It’s called guilt Vergil and I’m sorry I can’t answer this for you. I don’t know what happened, but I’m not convinced there is fault to be cast. I know you well enough to know you did the absolute best you could, which in any given circumstance is more than most. You don’t half ass anything, Vergil. God, I know there were times I wish you had but that’s just not you. If you say you had a reason to leave, then you had a reason. I believe you did what you thought was right. I know this isn’t what you want to hear right now, but I’ll listen when you’re ready and I bet he would too. In fact, I’d bet on Rebellion that he just needs to hear that you’re at least a tad bit human. Show him you feel guilty, maybe even a bit vulnerable. You know sort of have a small fit like you did earlier.” Vergil shot him a glare and Dante snorted. “You know what I mean. Don’t be so unapproachable with him. Let your guard down just a bit with him. You don’t know how to be his father any more than he knows how to be your son. Your demonic side is disciplined tactical and boring. It’d be nice for him to see your human side too. It’s in there, buried, deep, like really deep, but, well, you know, it’s there.”

“Perhaps.”

“Bro don’t try to change the world in a day. It doesn’t work. Things like this need time, especially with him. He takes after his father and is a bit volatile at times. So, find some natural way to speak with him. Ask him about his sword, being in the Order, Kyrie, anything really but don’t expect an answer right away. You must build trust first. Considering your lack of social skills perhaps just listen. Let me draw things out of him for you. You’re a stranger to him and him to you. Maybe use some of that devilish charm and just take baby steps.”

Vergil knew his brother was trying to be helpful, but his words echoed in his head reminding him of another conversation a long time ago and his answer then. “I want to be there for him. I just do not know how.”

“Good, that means you’ll try and it means you won’t give up. Giving up is just not in you. Never has been.”

He let out a soft protracted sigh. If he only knew how much he sounded like her. Vergil covered his face again with his arm and Dante rolled over and away from him taking part of the sheet, but Vergil was lost in thought and didn’t notice. “G’night Vergil. Tomorrow we work on getting this place cleaned up. That spare room across the hall I always fancied would be yours someday. Let’s start there tomorrow.”
“So, am I to understand you always believed I would return and join you some day?”

“Yep, I never gave up either, that just wasn’t in me. I figured eventually you’d come to see things my way.”

“Your way?” He moved his arm away from his face to stare at the ceiling. He doubted he would ever see things the same way his brother did. It was a foolish endeavor. Ridiculous even.

“Yeah,” his brother yawned in earnest this time and the storm outside slowed to a soft rain. “…albeit with your own style. My sense of style is just too smokin’ hot for you, but I knew you’d come around to everything else. Being part human. It isn’t so bad. In fact, I think it can make you stronger if you just accept yourself.” He snorted softly already drifting off to sleep.

Vergil grumbled. Leave it to his brother to whittle his existential crisis down to a latent memory of childish bravado and competitive swordsmanship. Style? His fighting style? Or did he mean his fashion sense? It couldn’t possibly be his life choice or choices in sexual partners. He childishly wanted to argue just then to deny that his younger brother had any sense of style at all in any aspect of his life. Did he even see how he dressed himself or how he decorated his office with crude trophies garnered from his garish over the top fighting skills? He wanted to sit up and push his brother to the floor in a childish fit to claim the bed as his and prove his dominance, but… he didn’t. Instead, he listened to his brother fall asleep into soft snores and marveled that his younger brother by five and a half glorious minutes had once again proved he was skilled at breaking Vergil from his beleaguered self.

He stilled to listen as the rain fell into a slow comforting white noise. Vergil drifted to childhood memories long buried and was reminded of a time in their shared childhood when evil dragons were slain with mere wooden swords and honorable deeds were rewarded with hugs, and cookies. Smiles were not spared, and joy was not weakness. It was a time when twin brothers grew unfettered by the concerns of a world that would one day scorn and shun them as different and damned. It was a place where they competed not to humiliate one another but to force one another to become better, stronger. It was a place of safety where they explored who and what they could be and found despite their differences that they were always better together. They complemented one another with styles each as unique as their personalities and the swords they were gifted with. Different sides of the same coin, always together but always different. It shouldn’t have surprised Vergil that his brother always believed he would find him and bring him home. His younger brother always did believe in the impossible. It shouldn’t have surprised him that he was forgiven but he was. His younger brother didn’t believe in holding grudges. Vergil paused listening to the rain mixed with the soft breath of his brother. Their heartbeats echoed one another and finally as he drifted to sleep he understood.

Just as he planned to change Dante by forcing him to accept his demon half all those years ago, fate had played a well-crafted trick on him, for everything he had faced prepared him for this moment, right now. His brother was right, it was time to embrace his human nature. It was time for him to embrace his true potential. He finally drifted to sleep curled against his brother. This was where he belonged.

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Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the length. I felt there was a lot to say and finally the time was right. Things will change for these two come tomorrow.
I slipped a few references in and some we will see played out later.
- Next up Danica has her own faith rattled and is reminded why she keeps going.
What have Casey and Kyrie been up to and where is Eva?
A Question of Faith

Chapter Summary

Danica and Father McCabe have a heart to heart about what is expected of her. Eva gets a bit of good news and is reminded she has friends in high places.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

She woke to what felt like every joint in her body being on fire. The warm light of the fireplace flickered around her and she smiled feeling a familiar presence near. The smell of leather and paper surrounded her as did the lilting aroma of fresh coffee. She stretched opening her eyes to see the all too familiar arched ceiling.

Someone shuffled just out of her eyesight and a warm masculine voice hummed with relief, “I was wondering how long till you woke. I was afraid we gave you too much of the Valerian elixir. I assume from both your wounds and the coin pouch that your hunt for the Striga went well.”

“Hmm,” she mumbled shifting to sit up on the couch and stretch a bit more before she answered. So far as couches were concerned this one was not bad to sleep on, but it still wasn’t a bed. She hadn’t stayed put long enough to need one really, but her mind drifted a moment wondering if when she was the priest’s age if she would finally settle down in one spot. The thought made her scoff audibly. She finally lifted her head to look at him and smirked. “Yes, I suppose it went better than expected. There were complications, of course, but I had help. The coins should be made into amulets as soon as is possible maybe Mia and Bella?”

He nodded, “Of course. The girls will be eager to try their hand at making them. I know the ritual and so do sisters Agnes and Teresa. It will be a valuable experience for the children.”

She stretched her back hissing softly at the feel of fresh scars to pull at her body. Her shoulder was stiff, which was to be expected but she marveled she could move it at all. She had gambled the Striga would not expect the sudden drop to her knees which forced her to release her grip. It could have been much worse. Still, the pain of her shoulder gnawed at her like something rough was rubbing inside the joints. She might need to give it a day or two before she faced anything close range. As she tested what range of mobility she did retain, she noticed the gash was neatly bandaged. She also felt the tug of stitches. “You’re handy work? Seems a bit field for you.” She rolled her shoulder noting she could still move despite the bandage. She then flicked her shirt to the side to get a closer look but noticed her shirt smelled of musk and gun oil. She suddenly remembered the words the priest had used, ‘afraid we gave you too much of the Valerian elixir’. He had no doubt given her something to keep her unconscious while she was stitched and bandaged. She growled softly, the priest meddled entirely too much. “Now I understand why my joints ache,” she grumbled. As to his scent, he had no doubt taken the shirt off her and laid it with his coat. The faint scent of gun oil, leather and his musk lingered pleasantly. She felt a pang of melancholy and missed his laid-back attitude, his quick smile, and his fierce desire to protect those he cared for. He had not been at all what she expected. She once counted herself amongst those he trusted. She shook from her contemplation and sighed. She was overthinking again. She noted the priest eyed her gently in his silence.
“I didn’t let him stay. I figured if you came back alone despite those injuries, then perhaps you still needed space. Shame really, you two worked well together.” He sipped his coffee and watched emotions flicker across her face. He spoke nothing of it but motioned with his eyes and an inclination of his head toward her mug of coffee on the side table.

“Thanks,” she offered. He wasn’t sure if it was for the coffee or for giving her ‘space’. He assumed it was for both.

“He told me to ask you … so are things settled? Can I quit pretending you aren’t here and call for him again? I like to subtly pressure him into helping me out on occasion.” He chuckled softly and sipped his coffee.

“And you call yourself a priest,” she snorted. “He will eventually catch on to your little game.”

“Oh, I think he knows already, but I think it gives him the excuse to come and be helpful. I just don’t think he wants it known that he has a soft spot for these kids.”

She sighed and stood taking her mug with her to the window. Although she sensed it was morning it was dark and grey outside. She compared her thoughts to the angry clouds outside and sighed. “I will help them find Vergil’s soul. There is something about him.”

“Hmmm, I thought you might. I believe you were destined to cross both their paths sooner or later.”

“I was drawn here.”

“Drawn? Here?”. She was pretty sure he didn’t mean his surprise to sound as forced as it did. Someday she’d have to call him out on his occasional misfires in his attempts to act innocent. She knew him perhaps better than he realized. Still it didn’t hurt to play along, for now.

“Several nights ago, I was drawn here, and more specifically back to their office. It’s why that damn Striga got away from me in the first place.” She rolled her shoulder painfully then set her mug to the low bookcase near the window before she leaned to it.

“What drew you here?” He hummed innocently enough as he sipped again. She shook her head at him.

“Not what, who. She… said only that I could help them. At first, I thought it was Nero but when I arrived I realized that she meant him.” She paced before the window. “I felt it. His soul. It’s ragged and raw like it’s been torn at the edges. He’s in pain, conflicted, consumed by anger, and so divided between what he believes is right and wanting to protect those he loves, that he fails to see it is eating him alive.”

“Like you?”

“No.” she glared over her shoulder. “Not like me. We are nothing alike. The secrets I keep are meant to protect these children. They were forgotten, discarded, cast off undesirables because of their blood, their differences or shall I say their heritage. They deserve better.”

“Like you.” This time, he said it softer not a question but a statement. They held each other’s gaze for a long time until the soft patter of rain pulled her from her thoughts and she looked back out the window and over the at the garden outside. It’s skeleton of trees and stone structures seemed as cold and barren as the thin light. For a moment she let the anger of the words she wanted to say slip away like the rain that fell to the window.

“How long was I out?”
“No longer than a decent night’s sleep for the average person, however, I imagine its more sleep than you’ve had in a very long time. He arrived shortly after you passed out. I let him tend to your wounds then kicked them out. Vergil was not happy to see me and kept his distance.”

“I’m not sure he could be happy about anything. Strange that he’s Nero’s father. He doesn’t seem the type to father a child.”

“Perhaps he found his soulmate?” He tilted his head and hummed in thought. “He had many responsibilities placed on his shoulders at an early age. It changes a person.”

“So, did I but you don’t see me being such an asshole.” She twisted her lips and sighed, “Well, not all the time.”

The priest let a smile pull at the corner of his mouth. “I think you will find that he will grow on you. You will see you have many things in common.”

“If I have anything in common with the Dark Slayer, I’ll be surprised. He’s dangerous, stubborn and opinionated.” The priest chuckled earning him a quick glare, but she continued. “He injured Nero and tried to force Yamato from him. He is every bit the demon, a devil. A very powerful devil that happens to be attached to the one creature in this universe I’d like to avoid.” She sighed looking back to the priest. Father McCabe was at times an enigma to her. His expression told her he knew about Lucifer’s involvement but was not going to comment unless she did. Dammit. She scoffed mentally that she still trusted him despite everything. He was the only male figure in the last ten years of her life that didn’t try to use her solely for her abilities, or did he? She knew he kept things from her, too many things she thought. She spared a side glance at him. It was at times like this that they played a kind of mental game of wits and whichever of them moved first lost. “I’m walking away after this. I won’t get tangled up in whatever this is. The Sparda twins do not need me in their lives any more than I need them.”

“That has always been your choice. One of God’s greatest gifts; free will.”

“Please don’t. Have I ever really had a choice?”

He ran a hand thru his hair letting a small sigh escape his lips. “I believe the divine has plans for you little one.”

“God? Again, with this? Why would he waste his time with me? Arrgghh…” She wanted to scream suddenly as she snapped mentally. She felt her veins pulse in her neck as her eye twitched. She wanted nothing more than to rebuke his faith and strangle his attempts at offering her any semblance of hope. His skewed idea of some new manifest destiny that she shared with others like her was exhausting. She didn’t need or want his thin threads of hope. This was a discussion that had been regurgitated over and over and it left a sour taste in her mouth. Instead she turned and crossed her arms over her chest. The movement hurt but it also served to remind her of a more obvious answer she needed. She would argue with him about God’s plan for a broken angel some other time. “How’s Keiko? Did the antidote work?”

The priest had expected his words spat back at him but instead he saw her decision to refute him quietly and change the subject. A new tactic for her. Usually they would argue back and forth until they reached a stalemate of thoughts and words. She was angry. He understood this. She was not much different than the children in his small orphanage looking for something to make them feel whole and worthy of those things they believed they lacked. Each of them was angry in some way or another at having been left behind. There was just one small difference between her and the children here in his orphanage, she was not a true orphan. She still had family alive. She just refused to except them as much as they refused to accept her. Hers was a family that had been torn apart and she was
left behind, forced to fend for herself when she was shunned and turned away. He sighed and set his mug to the table next to him as he rose from his chair. He understood what happened to broken families; what could happen. He understood all to well that sometimes the best thing to do was to let those that remained be given a chance to find themselves and hope they saw they still needed family in whatever form it remained. “She is doing well. Fenris was not pleased at his task but, then again, I think he likes to grumble? It’s so Nordic of him.”

She smiled distracting herself with the thought of the noble wolf grumbling and reached to grab her coffee. She finished it quickly and walked up to the priest setting her mug next to his. “May I see her?”

“You mean before you leave? I sense his essence within you. It should lead you in the right direction, but it will fade before long.”

She quirked an eyebrow at him. His ability to detect these things was uncanny and completely inhuman. “Yes, before I leave. I will find the fragment as I said. Stop meddling.”

“Meddling? Hmmm…stay for breakfast then. You need energy and the children would love to spend a little more time with you. I suspect you may be gone awhile with this latest undertaking.” He wrapped an arm around her and tugged her in the direction of the infirmary. “I’ve already taken the liberty of packing your supplies they are in the alcove…and the sisters will be expecting to feed you this morning.”

“Why do you do that?”

“Do what?”

“Meddle. Push me toward some new goal, my next target, my next mission. I already told you that I feel that I’m meant to help them, so why push me? I don’t even know what it will cost me yet, but I know this is what I’m supposed to do. I get it, but can’t you at least let me believe I have some choice in the matter? Didn’t you just tell me I have a choice?”

He snorted as they walked and took his free hand to slick back his hair again. It was a nervous habit he had acquired over the years. “I’m sure I don’t know what you’re talking about. You help people. They need help. Yamato has taken a liking to you and no doubt sensed you were near. I would have to be some sort of archdemon or archangel to arrange such events to be so well laid out, and I am neither. As for whether these events are traps? If you sense it, then it is. Just be careful. What you undertake is a heavy burden and though the cost will be equal in weight, I believe it is worth the risk. His soul will be angry having been trapped for so long.”

“So, this is just coincidence?”

“I have already spoken my thoughts on the matter.”

“Oh, right. God. Fate. Destiny. Not coincidence. A planned choice that I must follow and obey,” she sniped bitterly. She dropped her head and pulled from the comfort of his grasp. She didn’t want comfort.

“Yes, my child God, the All Father, the Almighty, use whichever name and moniker that suits you as he has many masks and forms so that all may see him.” She tried to ignore him and bit her lip. They walked in silence to the infirmary. The sounds of small bodies began to scurry thru the halls of the dormitory around them. She wouldn’t have much time to visit with Keiko before the others would sense her and descend like a flock of ravens eyeing a shiny coin. She hesitated several steps from the door that he indicated toward. It was cracked open and she could hear Riley speaking softly to her
new friend on the other side. She smiled involuntarily feeling the warmth between them as she flexed her senses.

“Tell me something.” She looked over her shoulder as she spoke softly. “Why do you watch over them, the twins and Nero? Something binds you to them, I just can’t figure out what. You take a vested interest in them as you would any other of your wards but from a greater distance. Why?”

The question surprised him. She even heard his heart skip a beat, but she had to give it to him his face never flickered once with emotion. He smiled warmly and looked down a moment before he looked up and held her gaze with his silvered blue eyes. “Because a long time ago I made a promise that changed my life and the life of those I loved. I should have made better decisions back then. I was wrong to hide from my problems then and I want to repay those affected by my missteps. I will make this right and continue to help where and when I can. Perhaps I am trying to pay for the sins of my father. The descendants of Sparda have a place in a much greater tapestry of a story. They still have roles to play, each of them. My duty, my calling is to guide and protect people just as yours is to help them. I watch them because it’s the right thing to do and I have faith that this,” he held his hands out towards her gesturing to the greater world around them. “…this means something. Our actions our decisions, they have meaning and we my child have both worth and value in something greater than ourselves. We are the sentinels meant to hold back the coming darkness or we would not have been given such grand tools to fight with.”

She narrowed her eyes at him. “Clever, you avoided my question with more vague secrets and hid behind religion, prophecies and end of the world dogma. I’m too damn young to be this bitter and cynical. Worth? Value? Those are nothing more than labels for what I can do for you or the next person either today or tomorrow. Faith? It’s nothing more than a feel-good bedtime story to help you sleep at night. Faith tells us that tomorrow won’t be as bad. Just keep fighting the good fight. Good things happen to those that believe while the rest of us just suffer in our misfortune of not being chosen.” She snorted softly, “But I know better, bad things happen to good people because good people chose to not see the real evil and they do nothing to stop it. I’ll keep fighting and scavenging until I make it better for those who can’t or won’t fight because I can’t stand by and wait for the miracle. The only faith I have is that one day I’ll meet my end at the end of a gun or the tip of a sword having lived long enough to see myself turn villain and my beliefs having become the unyielding stone around my neck. I know how this story ends. I am no angel, father, and make no mistake, this mask is slowly cracking. I’ll help him because I feel this nauseating compulsion to, but not because I am such a good and worthy being.” Her eyes flickered a moment, but the priest held her gaze.

“You will do what you believe is the right thing to do. You do not seek power just for its own sake. What you feel is his power and it guides you. You need him as an ally as much as he needs you for your gifts. You know as do I, Yamato has found her master her champion and you… you will do this thing because you can, because you need this win against evil to prove you do have purpose. The fact that you can help Nero and rekindle the friendship with him and Dante, well that, that is divine intervention. Nero is a key to stopping this darkness we feel rising. I believe in this. Besides is he not your friend? Do you not help friends?”

“You know something, and you keep it under lock and key. You think I hide secrets? You hide behind spells and human clothing, but you know something. Tell me. Help me.”

“I have never given you reason to believe I am anything other than what I have said. What you see is what you get with me. You have become paranoid since Trinity captured you. Do you not think this was their plan all along? To divide us from within? Nero is your friend, and you will help because you can do this thing for them. Nero needs to find out who he really is, and this is the first step. Save Vergil from himself. Find his core, his center and return it to him so that he may return his true
“Enough!” She waved her hand at him in exasperation and heard a shuffle in the room behind them. She did not want to argue theology in front of the children. “I’ll help because of Nero, but I’m not falling for that grand design bullshit. God doesn’t have plans for me.” She turned to go in the door, but he stopped her with a gentle hand to her good shoulder.

“You will help them because it is in helping others that we find we can truly help ourselves.” He left without another word and she watched him walk down the hall her hand still on the doorknob.

“Goddamn cryptic help. I’d rather he just pat me on the head and tell me tomorrow will be better.” She turned back to the door just in time to see an amber eyed red-haired little girl grin a toothy smile at her.

“But today is better than yesterday, see?” She pointed behind her opening the door. “Keiko is feeling much better and you know you shouldn’t swear like that. Father McCabe gets awfully upset when you say such things. He says it’s undignified for a lady to speak that way.” Danica loved that this child slipped from cheerful to offering serious admonitions all within the span of a few sentences. Then again Riley wasn’t your average eight-year-old.

“My apologies. I should learn to curb my tongue.” She knelt and ran her fingers thru the child’s hair. They hugged briefly and when they separated she absentely asked, “Want me to braid your hair while I check on Keiko?”

“Sure!” She wriggled in excitement, hugged her again, and pulled her thru the door as she continued to talk. “Ok, so, Fenris was so funny about that tongue. He said it tasted like old sweaty shoe leather and I asked him how did he know what old sweaty shoe leather tasted like? Then…” Danica laughed softly as Riley proceeded to catch her up on last night and the early hours of this morning as she pulled her in the door. Keiko smiled brightly with dark eyes from under a dark shroud of hair, perhaps she would have time to braid her hair too before breakfast. For the kids, it didn’t matter if she questioned her faith, her existence, or even if she questioned what her purpose was. They didn’t care if she was jaded at the world. They just knew she helped people, people like them and those that weren’t. To the children in the orphanage, they just loved having their big sister visit and extoll tales of her most recent adventures. It gave them hope. It let them dream and it gave them hope for their futures. Something Danica forgot on occasion, perhaps the damn priest knew what he was doing all along. Mentally she tallied the imaginary score between them and realized he was winning.

“Eae?” Eva strode quietly into the hall covered in dark blue marble following a sandy blonde man dressed in simple clothing. He had no doubt recently been in the human realm. The grand council had called for a meeting for all who could attend, and she had hoped to run into the guardian angel since finding a black feather in her quarters. She reached for his shoulder and spoke softly as he turned to greet her and not draw attention in the growing throng of angels.

“Good Day Lady Eva.”

“Eae, did you find him?” she whispered. She flicked a dark feather from beneath her sleeve. “I assumed this was from you?”

“Indeed, it was. I have not seen you for a bit and wanted to let you know he was found. I was able to free him, and he will return to giving us insight on events as soon as he is able.”

“Do we know who did this or how?” She stuffed the feather away and Eae took her arm in his and they continued down toward the large amphitheater near the city center. His voice became but a
whisper that only she could hear.

“Nothing is for certain my lady. The raven recalled only shadows and spell work. There was the faint smell of …” Eae hesitated and frowned.

“Of what?”

“Violets.”

“I see.” Eva sighed heavily and leaned to Eae as she flicked her pale golden blonde hair over her shoulder. He stopped and lifted her head with a gentle hand to her chin.

“Please do not lose hope. She made her choice a very long time ago. You are not responsible for her choices.”

“But I will always wonder if I could have handled it differently, if I could have done something different.”

“She chose power. She chose to serve him of her own free will. You know this. Yamato saw the truth that lay within their demon hearts and chose Sparda. She saw the truth in their souls and she chose his kindness over her cruelty. Never forget you were offered the same choices, the same trials, and faced the same decisions she did but you chose love. It is why your paths are as they are now.” She nodded pulling from him. Eva had always been such a bright spot in his life since the day they met but he sensed she struggled with the uncertainty of her sons future as well as her own. “Love, Eva. I think of the two fates yours has been peppered with true joy and hope. Do not give up that hope now. She cannot claim these things. She has only known false hope and the bitter sting of unrequited love. That is her burden not yours. Please do not forget this.” Blue eyes closed, and she pulled from his grip completely. A few passing angels acknowledged them as they moved around the pair that had stopped. In the distance, a pair of angels caught sight of the change in the steady flow of moving bodies and made their way toward the pair that continued to speak quietly.

“I know, but it is still so hard even after all these years. I still mourn her loss.” She frowned and looked to the floor remembering how she loved the way the blue color seemed to swirl in the brightly polished marble floor. Blue was one of her favorite colors filled with mystery and emotion. She gazed about her home and breathed in the soft scent of flowers that surrounded the amphitheater.

When she looked back at Eae she realized he looked tired and the halls that they traversed seemed to have dulled in recent history. Everyone in the celestial realm seemed to border on fatigue and lack of hope. She steeled herself once more and focused on what she could do to change this. First, she needed to know her sons were alright.

“That is to be expected. But unlike your sons, she never saw the truth of accepting one’s self and growing stronger from within. She depends on fear and deceit to gain power.” Eae leaned down toward Eva and felt his throat catch as he spoke. He was not immune to the suffering he knew she felt being kept from her family. “Vergil is home because he realized he must accept certain truths about himself. He is ready. He has suffered but he grows stronger every day and soon, soon they will find the essence she stole from him and he will remember, and he will prepare them for the coming war. He too will someday know joy and peace, milady. He is not cursed; I am sure of this. I do not believe for one moment that Lucifer deceived you or Sparda. Don’t believe the rumors, the lies. You are smart enough to discern the truth for yourself and I believe that scares the council. They want someone to blame and I believe they are among those who took on that burden to protect those of us who remain and who still believe in His greater plan.”

“Power seduces. It corrupts.” Her voice was small and Eae placed an arm around her and held her tightly.
“True, power can be quite seductive and ultimately it can corrupt those not worthy or responsible. I do not believe Vergil is corrupted any longer. He feels different to me. He is ready for the changes ahead of him and so is your youngest. Lucifer worked hard to remove the corruption Mundus forced upon him. I do not believe one who is corrupted themselves would work so hard to relive that pain in another. After all misery loves company.” He smiled wondering if she understood what he was trying to impress on her. “I have faith that in time all will be known.” She nodded her head on his shoulder and lifted wiping the few tears she allowed to fall. She yearned to be with them again and not trapped here.

“My apologies, I should stop feeling sorry for myself and focus on what I can do. And I can help him even if I can’t hold him in my arms.” She sniffled and stood straight again. Her golden hair shimmered as she physically shook her melancholy from her. Eae nodded to the angels that now stood next to them with warm smiles.

“Malia, Aurelius, I am glad you made it. I fear our Lady Eva has been feeling a bit blue of late.”

“Yes, I have experience with these winter blues.” The female of the duo stepped forward with her lacy blue-white wings flickering in the light as silvery white frost fell from their edges to the ground leaving a trail at her passing. She bowed her head respectfully as dark ringlets of black hair fell forward framing her round face. “We are ready to lift spirits at you insistence.” Eva smiled broadly taking her wrists into her hands and beaming at her. Malia let a broad smile light her face and she winked at her coyly.

“Then?”

“Jack couldn’t refuse you. Did you really think he would? I will lead the squadron myself.”

“Thank you!” she whispered on the verge of real tears. Malia hugged her briefly then returned to a more somber expression more indicative of her status.

“No need milady many of us still believe your sons give us the best chance we have at actually winning this war. Your elder will come around. Just be patient. He always was the stubborn one.” Aurelius stepped forward his own dark hair escaped from his half helmet as he too bowed with respect. His silver and black armor was new and indicated he was now a guardian to the Thrones and she blinked seeing the three ringed symbol that was their insignia.

Eva smiled again gentle fingers touching the insignia that seemed to hum with energy. “I shall let you know the moment I hear anything, but I expect with the coming solstice it will be soon. Aurelius, I see you wear a new insignia. You’ve been promoted? I will miss your company on my walks to the garden.”

“On the contrary, one of my benefactors wanted to remind those around you that you have sway in many of the classes. While it is true many of them prefer their solitude with their duties, they like to remind others that they exist, and they ‘see’. I am still your appointed guardian my lady and I am honored.” He bowed again, and she mirrored his action. The foursome then continued toward their destination speaking softly back and forth about random bits of overheard gossip and news, when suddenly an angry voice lifted to their ears.

“Whore! Demonic whore! What makes her think we will ever except her spawn much less her?”

“Shhh, can you not see she has a guardian who bears the mark of a Throne?”

“Think I care? They are as corrupt as the Seraphim above them.”
“Shhh…”

Eae gazed thru the crowd but could not see where the voices came from as more and more angels milled into the hallways. Aurelius met his gaze and shook his head. He did not find the voices either. Eae felt her squeeze his arm again and he folded his own hand over her grip to comfort her.

“They do not know him. I for one much prefer the Dark Knight’s company over the likes of them. Such vipers and amidst angels. Rude!” He clicked his tongue and carried himself with pride. Eva smiled her courage once more bolstered and she lifted her head proudly. She could do this, she would do this.

“Indeed. Shall we see what news the council has for us today? I’m eager to get back to my sons.”

Chapter End Notes

- Next up... Vergil discovers a secret about the mansion. Danica discovers who is hunting them and Nero makes a decision that leaves Vergil out in the cold.
Waiting is the Hardest Part

Chapter Summary

Vergil starts to rejoin the world at his brother’s behest one step at a time. Nero has excellent timing and Kyrie, well, let’s just say its time to give the girl a bit of love and character development.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Vergil dreamed pleasantly for the first time since he returned to this realm. There were no haunting memories or regurgitated events or even the slightest of pained whimpers from the dark slayer. Dante rose to one elbow and watched as his brother twitched softly and hummed. Ironically, it was the short random movements that at first told Dante to prepare for a nightmare. He was pleased to see he was wrong. If he had to guess, his dream had something to do with Yamato since he continually clutched his right hand and flicked his wrist as if in practice of some move. I didn’t surprise him, not really. He used to sleep with that sword. He imagined not having her now was hard given his lack of strength, but he had remained silent after the incident with Nero. Dante wouldn’t speak of her again until Nero did. He smirked seeing whatever dream he was having was a pleasant one and he brushed the cold twin’s hair from his eyes. The touch startled him, and Dante instantly felt bad for waking him.

“I’m sorry Vergil. You just looked so cute dreaming.” Surprisingly his brother closed his eyes again and let out a sigh. The younger twin had expected to be yelled at or worse pelted with summoned swords.

“It has been a long time since I’ve dreamed. I truly thought I was incapable of doing so.” He sat up and swung his legs over the edge of the bed. Dante furrowed his brow as he watched him. Vergil was tired, and it wasn’t just the events of the previous few days or even months. Sure, they began cleaning out the other spare bedroom across the hall and moving boxes and furniture, cleaning and moving items into the attic was tedious but what he saw in his brother was the type of tired a person felt in their bones. The type of fatigue that showed when something had worn on a person over years not days. In their relative silence, Dante slid next to his brother and wrapped an arm around him.

“You’re tired, just come back to sleep. I have a few errands to run and tomorrow we can get you in your own bed. It doesn’t have to be tonight.”

“I am fine.”

“Verge, you can’t hide it from me. I’ve been where you are maybe not for the same reasons, but I know what it’s like to get to the point when you must force yourself to find something, anything to get you out of bed and keep you moving. I have a good feeling about today. We will hear something, I know it.”

“You said that yesterday.”

“Hold up, it was good news. Nero should be here today maybe tomorrow. Don’t tell me that’s not a good thing. I know you were worried.”
Vergil held his head in his hands with his elbows to his knees and took a deep breath that bordered on another sigh. “Yes, that is good news. I was just rather hopeful that…yes, perhaps you are right. Perhaps today we will hear something of my wayward soul.”

He hugged his brother as he grumbled. “That’s the spirit. Besides, I came across a box of the cool stuff yesterday. I put it aside for you to have something quiet to do while I run errands.”

“A box?”

“Yeah, it’s stuff I pulled from pop’s old library. I managed to find several of his old hunting journals too.” Vergil lifted from his hands and looked at him with a blank expression.

“So that was why I never found anything.”

Dante blinked back at him then grinned. “You know I’m still kind of amazed we didn’t bump into each other before we did back then. We think alike.” He tapped his temple. “Let that thought perish, please. We occasionally have similar ideas, but my execution is far more refined.” Dante smirked at his words. Vergil stood and stretched. His brother watched as he stretched then headed to the bathroom. It hadn’t been long, but he was gaining his former appearance. He was troubled, however, at how much younger Vergil appeared than him. “I would be curious,” he continued. “… to see what you managed to save from the mansion.”

“Sure, if you’re up to it I have a lot of other stuff in storage not far from here. It’s warded and locked tight. I haven’t touched it since it was moved there.” Vergil stopped mid step and turned as his brother climbed off the bed and yawned loudly.

“What do you mean? The mansion burnt to the ground. There should have been nothing left and what was left should be remnants charred and unusable. I didn’t return for years. I’m sure you didn’t either. Why would you need a storage unit?”

“Oh yeah,” he snickered rubbing a hand to the nape of his neck and giving him a sheepish look. “You don’t know. Apparently, the mansion was protected by some kind of guardian, a shisa, maybe? Not real sure but it sort-a reminded me of that sort of creature. I guess no one knew especially considering your current expression but it only made the place look like it had burned down. It wasn’t strong enough to fight off the demons, but it was strong enough to fool them into thinking the place was burning. I mean parts of it did actually burn and it looks pretty shabby and rundown now, so, yeah.”

“What!” Vergil was pale and suddenly felt dizzy with this news. “Why didn’t you say something!”

“Easy Verge, I just didn’t think of it. Honestly, the place gives me the creeps standing there all empty and frankly it’s just easier to let people think its abandoned. Most of the people who remember the fire are gone now. I keep tabs on the property but that’s about it. I got the nerve to go back once and that was only to look for anything that might help me find you. I was like you I didn’t expect to find anything but was I wrong. Funny to think that pops inspired such loyalty because that guardian protected the place for years without ever knowing if any descendant would come back.” He paused mulling that thought over in his head, but it was a conversation to be had another day. “Anyway, the box I found has a lot of references on portals. Some spells to get in and out of hell plus, some real random things that caught my attention. I had Father McCabe clear the rest of the place for me later. Guess it was emptied by the time you came looking because if you know nothing of the guardian then he had already moved on. Hmmmm I wonder if he just disappeared or if we find him at the storage locker?” Dante had walked to meet Vergil still dumbstruck a few feet from the bathroom. “Verge?”
“You imbecile! Father…the guardian…the priest?” He bit his lip and turned from Dante to look at the floor. Surprisingly he appeared lost for words. “Yes, I would be interested in looking thru what you have here.”

“Ah come on Vergil. Stop trying to be so nice to me. It’s freaking me out. Just spit it out!”

“I have no right to be angry. I wasn’t here. I am just surprised you trust the priest.”

“Verge?”

“Yes, it’s better this way. I would have taken what knowledge I gained and only made things worse even the priest tried to stop me perhaps that is why I do not like him.” He turned before his brother could reach out to comfort him. “Perhaps when I am whole we can re-visit the mansion together. I would like to find closure over the loss of our mother.”

Dante stared as his brother disappeared into the bathroom. Vergil almost seemed defeated and that shook his brother to his core. “Being human doesn’t mean giving up, bro,” he whispered. He ran his hand thru his hair and motor boated his lips as his hand rubbed over his face. “Ok, today we need a break and I think I know just what to do.” He stalked over to the night stand and grabbed his phone pulling up his contacts and dialing. “Hey… morning sunshine. Yeah, I am capable of getting up before noon. Funny. Yeah, yeah, no the world has not come to an end. Ah geez keep it up and I’ll… ok, ok… I gotta a favor to ask and I need you to listen close. It’s about my brother.”

Vergil spent the morning following his newest routine. He trained with Force Edge before he took a shower then settled for left over pizza for breakfast. Occasionally, there was fruit but often Vergil stood in the kitchen and grumbled. Dante needed help, but he was reluctant to offer and even less likely to argue over it or even ask. It didn’t matter, not really, considering how little he could survive on and at this point his inner demon accepted anything it was offered. Vergil momentarily wondered if this was what depression was. He shrugged making tea and decided even though he would try to be more human-like for his brother’s sake, depression just seemed… well… too depressive. He didn’t need it like he didn’t need any other emotion. He sighed. If it was depression, surely, he could snap himself from it by focusing on retrieving his soul. Once he had his power back he would make changes.

A strange trill flickered thru the elder twin as he walked into the front office and his eyes lifted to see nothing in the room but a large black raven who paced on the bar top. Vergil glanced around the office not seeing an open window or other means of entrance. Strange. The creature eyed him with his amber eyes and a head cocked to the side before making a low guttural cough. Vergil was pretty sure he was not hallucinating but he would also be the first to admit he was confused as to the creatures appearance. The bird tilted his head to the other side and stared at him. He then hunched his back raising his wings and let out the gurgle of sound that was his deep caw. Something fell upstairs and thumped to the floor causing the raven to tilt his head up to the sound. Dante’s heavy footfalls followed, and the bird seemed to listen through the rafters above before looking to Vergil again who now had placed his tea to a side table and watched the scene with growing interest.

He knew his brother was a slob but truthfully, he did not think it was so bad as to cause wild animals to move in. Perhaps he should reconsider cleaning the place down here too. As he muddled thoughts thru his brain about how to dispatch the creature, he decided letting his younger brother deal with the nuisance best. A thin smirk curled to his lips as he imagined the red oaf attempting several garish flips and loud overly dramatic moves to rid themselves of the creature. He on the other hand could place a single summoned sword thru the creatures heart and end their torment with a single stroke. He gave pause in his thoughts as Dante tumbled down the stairs and the raven began laughing? Yes,
that was as close to the actual noise coming from the black bird as Vergil could define. Wait they knew each other?

“Corvus? Corvus…” His brother was practically a blur trying to reach the bar. He chuckled as the creature seemed to scold him then lifted to his shoulder and nuzzled into the side of his head. Disgusting. Dante lifted his hand and pet the creature now on his shoulder and laughed with relief? Yes, Vergil was pretty sure he was relieved to see this bird and the questions began to whirl about him as if they were tangible. “Buddy where have you been? I was worried.” The next several minutes was a cacophony of his brother’s voice combined with the bird’s dirge-like deep resonance of caws, gurgles and chirps. Vergil now looked upon them unamused perhaps even a touch disappointed.

“Hey Verge, this is Corvus.”

“You do know his name quite literally is Latin for raven? I knew you were simple minded but…”

“Hey… be nice. I didn’t name him. In fact, I’m not sure who did but this is Danica’s friend, no familiar?” The raven cawed bouncing his head as if answering the hanging question. “Right, you prefer guide. Sorry forgot the whole witchcraft thing isn’t your schtick.” The bird voiced additional sounds and Dante laughed. Vergil cocked his head to the side realizing his brother could apparently understand the creature as easily as he heard devil arms. Strange. Why would an angel hybrid have any type of sentient guide? He thought a moment about the wolf he had seen a few days ago. Strange. She was ‘friendly’ with both a wolf and a raven. The pairing meant something other than chance was taking place. Perhaps, she came from a family steeped in magic. This would answer several questions he had about her. His mind drifted back to the present as he was reminded of what Dante said earlier. He wondered if any of his father’s books or journals could give him insight into their celestial cohort. He had to admit his knowledge of angels was limited although not absent. Suddenly, Vergil realized he was being stared at intently by both. “Hey Verge?”

“Yes,” he sighed.

“This is the good news.” Vergil sneered at him. Surely, he was joking, a bird? How on earth could a rat with wings be good news. He wanted his soul back not the feathered rat. Dante must have felt his brother’s growing disgust. “Before you get your panties in a wad, Corvus helps her find things. He is good at it too, but he sort-of got caught up in trouble and disappeared. I bet he can help her find your soul. In fact, I bet that’s why he’s here.” The raven gurgled and bobbed his head again flitting over to the bar once more. Dante looked at him then back to his brother who raised an eyebrow at them with his patience obviously waning. “He said he needs something from you.”

“Needs something from me? So, it’s a bloodhound not a bird? Splendid,” he scoffed.

“Uh, Verge, he’s a lot more than that, he…” Corvus fluttered and suddenly appeared over Vergil. His movements were so fast that Vergil was shocked realizing the bird could obviously teleport in some capacity. He felt a tuft of hair suddenly pulled from his scalp with a quick yank. In the same instance he summoned swords which buried themselves into the ceiling and wall without touching the bird who was now mysteriously gone. A single dark feather floated between the brothers and Dante blinked at his brother who rubbed the spot on his head hissing. He lifted his fingers to see a spot of blood.

“I will kill that thing if it ever shows here again.” The spot really didn’t hurt him as he rubbed it again, but it was the suddenness and the audacity of the creature that surprised Vergil. Dante snorted in clear disbelief.

“I. Did. Not… see that coming,” he offered slowly.
“Fool.” Vergil pushed away from the pool table with a hiss, even his aura visibly flickered.

“No, really. He said he needed something from you, but he never said what and he surely didn’t mention assault and battery. He just said it had to be something…personal.” Dante began to snicker as he continued. “Your hair? Of all the things he chose. Dude! He snagged a piece of your hair. That’s, that’s rich. I forgot how touchy you are about your hair!”

“What are you talking about?” Vergil was now thoroughly pissed and stepped toward his brother as his aura flared.

“You can’t stand anyone messing with your hair. Haven’t since before pops disappeared.” Dante laughed. It was a deep solid laugh born of the sudden realization that Vergil just got punked by a bird. He continued to laugh hesitating only briefly to acknowledge several painful summoned swords that ripped into his flesh and pinned him to the floor. “Oww!”

“Imbecile.”

Danica smiled when she saw the raven return. She did not expect him to return so soon. Then again, she also didn’t expect to find him trapped in a spell here in the one place she felt drawn to look for Vergil’s soul. “Did you get something and are you sure it’s Vergil’s?” The raven landed softly to the altar and left his gift for her on the silver plate. The silvery strands were unmistakable. “How in the world? No, no, don’t tell me, but I think you will want to give him a very wide berth, like forever,” she snorted. The raven cawed in agreement. “Okay, let’s get this spell started. It takes time to get to full potency.”

Casey wasn’t sure why but something about the new Captain of the guard gave her the chills. He had risen thru the ranks quickly after the Savior incident. Kyrie spoke of him a few times especially after Nero ran into him and then there was the question of him leaving The Order. She still didn’t know where he stood on the whole ‘purge’ movement that had risen over the last two years, but Durante did not seem to be swayed easily by the waves of hysteria that were felt throughout the island. Honestly, he was rarely seen outside Order headquarters or the parliament building. Few really knew why he had been chosen to succeed Credo or why he seemed distant from the people he professed to protect.

Sure, from a strictly public view, he seemed quite generous and kind having appeared at enough public events to be known, and the man was attractive; very attractive. He was dark haired with a warm Mediterranean skin tone, high cheekbones, muscular build and height that made most think of the tall dark and handsome mantra, but there was something about his aura. It pulsed with energy and quiet threat that made her leery and worse made her fear for Kyrie. Not more than twenty minutes ago they had been upstairs pouring over old maps when a raven tapped at the window and startled Kyrie. She quickly began packing Casey’s materials together explaining she was no longer safe to continue looking for Vergil’s soul here. That was strange enough in its own right but currently Casey now found herself a spectator to a strange impromptu tea party. She had the nagging feeling that she was no in Kansas anymore.

“No sir, he isn’t expected back for several days but he will be here after the winter solstice for sure and I will tell him of your concerns. I’m sure he will check up on any demon activity you need him too. If you believe it is a real emergency, I have other friends who are hunters too.” She served the tea and Captain Durante nodded politely taking the cup and sipping.

“I understand he is attending to family issues that cannot be helped, but we have need of his type of expertise in the field. Most of our members do not have the needed experience to check out these leads. Further, he appears to be more ‘durable’ than most.” The small side glance between the guards
that had accompanied the Captain was not missed by Casey albeit Kyrie seemed oblivious.

“I understand. Nero is quite well suited for his job.” Casey found it almost maddening how proper and polite the pair seemed to be as they sipped their tea. It was obvious to her reading his aura and feeling the growing tension that the Captain was slowly unraveling. After a few moments of silence his gaze fell upon Casey. She felt herself straighten.

“You must be Cassandra. I’ve heard so much about you.” He paused as if to give her the indication that he knew much about her. “My apologies for not coming to introduce myself sooner. Many of our citizens tell me you are just the person to see for minor bothers, ailments, and other helpful shall I say ‘treatments’ of the magical persuasion? Magic seems to be such a precarious business these days.” He took a deliberate sip of tea while letting a predatory stare fall on her. “Tell me have you any idea why we have seen a surge in demon activity near Lamina Peak?”

She cleared her throat seeing the threat for what it was. “Please call me Casey, sir, and no I’m not that kind of wit… herbalist. I do not have the ability to sense portals or…” She could tell by how the Captain narrowed his eyes at her that he didn’t believe her for a moment. Portals, yeah, she knew of five currently and one seemed older than all of them put together but was heavily warded and it was near Lamina Peak.

The captain stood suddenly which caused Casey to stop mid-sentence and step closer to the bookcase she leaned on. The two knights also present looked about the room with concern. “Leave us!” he snapped. They bowed and exited thru the front door from which they came. Kyrie continued to sip her tea. Durante stepped over to the front window and sighed with clear agitation. “What do the two of you think you are doing? This is not some game. You could be unknowingly drawing these creatures to you and unwittingly endangering the city and it’s people. Nero is obviously not here to protect you so why are you so careless?”

“I’m sure I don’t have any idea of what you’re talking about. We are not doing anything more than spending quiet days together at home while Casey heals from injuries sustained protecting the city from wayward souls on All Hallows Eve, and I am studying for my upcoming clinicals. Nero isn’t here as often as I’d like but that is not ‘my’ doing. Casey is one of my dearest friends; why wouldn’t I have taken her in? What possibly could we be getting ourselves into?”

He did not turn as he spoke but his voice lowered dripping with subtlety, “I am aware of her ‘illness’. I also can plainly see that her eyesight has returned. Remarkable considering her medical report.” He glanced over his shoulder coldly. “She was involved in the incident at the hell gate a few months ago, and I am not speaking of the wayward souls of All Hallows Eve. I have it on good authority that there was another attempted demonic incursion that was stifled. I also am very much aware that you are now looking for something, something that appears to be on this very island. I want to know what you are doing! Do you think me a fool?”

“I certainly do not think you’re a fool, inexperienced perhaps. You are worried about the city and its people, I understand this. You even seem very capable and intelligent. I heard whispers from the council. They spoke highly of you to replace my brother, although I doubt you will ever be as well liked. He didn’t threaten obedience. He commanded respect.” Kyrie set the cup down and folded her hands lightly to her lap without raising her voice or lifting her eyes to meet his icy gaze. Casey tried to hide her dismay but ended up gaping instead at Kyrie’s reaction to the Captain. “I’m sure that you believe you have this country’s best interest at heart, but I am not convinced that you know the best way to achieve this. Purging those deemed as outcasts and dangerous but who have bolstered this community against the evils that linger due to both Agnus and Sanctus is senseless and worse it’s harmful and divisive. To divide us from within let’s the outsiders…”
“Do not toy with me, Kyrie, and do not speak on matters you know nothing about! You may have had leniency once, but Credo was not who you thought he was. He was nothing but a puppet whose strings were pulled taut. Do not compare us lest you know what you speak of. I think you know something about that incursion, I think there is a greater reason as to why Nero has yet to return to the island despite my more than pleasant requests, and I intend to find out what it is. I will not tolerate any further desecration of our beliefs, or vilification of our lifestyle.” The captain clasped his hands behind his back rocking slightly to the balls of his feet. “There was a test subject that went missing from the lab discovered in the headquarters. This test subject was suspiciously described as being Dante’s twin brother, Vergil. You do realize if you have knowledge of this so called Dark Slayer that he is considered an enemy of the state? His crimes include many deaths and the loss of one of our port villages. You could be tried for treason if you withhold information and I would hate to see something so publicly embarrassing happen to you. It could affect your life here. I would truly hate to see you forced out.”

Casey gasped quietly but Kyrie stood and smiled softly with eyes fierce. “My father was a general, my brother a captain for the Order of the Sword. They both gave their lives for this country. My mother was an esteemed member of the Order of the Rose and may I remind you this ‘family’ can trace it’s lineage to the first general’s under Sparda. I may be just some simple foolish girl, a songstress, and devout member of our religion to you but make no mistake I can and will defend myself by any means necessary. I was trained by the best, so, forgive my tongue when I say, I know a threat when I hear one and I do not appreciate you coming here with your implications that I have done wrong. I will not tolerate your implications that Credo or Nero has done wrong.”

Durante turned and leveled his gaze at Kyrie. “You misunderstand me. I am merely warning you of consequences you may have been unaware of.”

“You misunderstand me, I am not some frail flower that wilts with your veiled attempts to threaten me into silence nor obedience, and I am quite sure Nero would be quite interested in hearing of this turn of events. We both know he does not believe the Order is worthy of his trust considering their handling of his dismissal!” She smiled sweetly as the captain raised an eyebrow in obvious surprise at the bite in her voice. Her face suddenly brightened. She half giggled her next words as she stared a the doorway just out of the Captain’s line of sight, “He’s also been known to stop by quite unexpectedly.”

“Yeah, I do, don’t I, and apparently I have excellent timing to boot.”

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(Two days ago)

“Hey Ki…”

“Shhhh…don’t let him know I called. I don’t want to talk to him, not yet. I’m heading to Fortuna. Something doesn’t feel right, and Yamato agrees with me.”

“Uh, okay, he’s upstairs so he can’t hear us. Your timing couldn’t be better. I’m out by the dumpster.”

“Wait, why? Did he kick you out?” Dante wasn’t sure, but he swore he heard the kid half expect him to say yes.

“Funny, no, he’s actually been a little weird since… never mind. What’s this about Fortuna?”

“No, you first why are you at the dumpster?” The youth paused, and the red hunter heard a soft protracted gasp, “My God are you cleaning!?” The disbelief in his nephew’s voice was comical.
Dante paused taking in a deep breath and pinching the bridge of his nose. He then grumbled an answer. “Yeah, I’m cleaning up the spare room across from me. I think Vergil needs some space.”

Nero snorted, “Space. Guess we have that in common. Look I’d love to rib you about this, but I really don’t have time. I’ve got a bad feeling about something and I’m not sure if it’s Kyrie, the suddenly chatty sword in my head, my anxieties, or maybe it’s Danica but something is making me antsy. I just need to make sure Kyrie’s ok.”

“Fair enough, be careful.”

“More so than you.”

“I mean it. You remember the last time you went off without telling me.”

“That’s why I’m telling you. Look, I needed to talk to you. I…I want to come back to the office. I think running from this will make it worse, but I’ve got something I need to figure out first and I need to know something too.”

“Can I help?”

“Maybe, answer me this and be completely honest with me, and do not say anything to him, understood?”

“Sure, kid what’s troubling you?”

Vergil paced about the room that was now cleared enough that he could pace before the window. Unlike his brother’s room, this room faced the rising sun and overlooked part of the green space that lay hidden between the buildings behind the office. Truth be told Dante owned all the surrounding buildings. It was a little-known fact that Vergil had discovered thru Arkham. He stilled remembering that time in his life. It felt so long ago, and truth be told it was. It was a lifetime ago.

“Verge?” He startled from his thoughts and glared at his brother. “Woah hey, no sword thingies, they hurt. I just wanted to see if you wanted something other than pizza for dinner?”

“I get a choice?”

“Of course, Chinese?”

“I should have guessed more take out. Honestly, Dante your diet is atrocious.”

“Meh, I get by. Hey, there is this whole in the wall mom and pop diner not far from here. It’s pretty good and they have all kinds of stuff like yucky salad and vegetables.” He made a face and Vergil couldn’t help but snicker. His brother was a mess. He was convinced if a vegetable was not deep fried or presented to him on top of a pizza that it was surely going to kill him, but Vergil thought seriously he might kill his brother himself if he didn’t get something different to eat. He abhorred pizza.

“Fine.”

“Awesome! Let’s take a walk and get our lungs full of crisp clean air and afterwards maybe we can stop at the grocery store.”

“Why? Do we need more frozen pizza or are we out of pop tarts?”
Dante snorted as his brother rolled his eyes. Nero was to blame for his latest food addiction. The kid had a sweet tooth that was ridiculous. Sugar was extremely addictive to some demons and apparently it was the needed key to keeping Nero’s demon half particularly cheerful when separated from Kyrie. Dante never told Nero that he could figure out whether they were currently dating or not just by the changes in his diet. He snickered. Dante couldn’t deny he too found he felt a certain ‘high’ from polishing off a box but that was solely because of the sugar. He was part human after all. “Always, but we need stuff that you like in the kitchen too. I’ve sort of been negligent in taking care of you.”

“I’m fine.”

“Yeah, no you’re not but we can address that later. Come on stop moping I want to introduce you to some people.” Vergil sighed. He should have known his brother wanted to take him out on parade and introduce him to the world. It was exhausting but he promised he would try. He nodded at his oafish brother. "Just be polite, preferably don’t kill anyone or maim them, but you don’t have to force conversation or fake a smile. Seriously, you smiling is creepy and reminds me that someone might get hurt, usually me. Humans come in all shapes and sizes, you don’t have to like everyone. Hell I’d settle for you just not killing my friends. You do not need to pretend to be like me. I know it is exhausting for you, so stop. Baby steps remember?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. I haven’t killed anyone, and threats do not count unless I follow thru with them.” Surely he was not being reminded about his not so subtle threat to kill the delivery boy if Dante didn’t stop ordering pizza.

“I am me and I am awesome and you, you are Vergil and not so... never mind. It is okay for you to be quiet, cold, and stand offish. Besides you relish the chance to snark and show off your intelligence, but remember you’re unbearably handsome so you unavoidably attract people and are forced into social situations that you abhor. They will figure out real quick you are not me.” Vergil rolled his eyes. “Remember, I am your other half… literally your other half. I am roguishly good looking, witty, friendly and...”

“Dumb as a box of rocks?” Vergil could not stop himself from smirking. Dante chuckled and stepped up to his brother to wrap an arm around him.

“I prefer crazy like a fox. So, let’s go get dinner.” Vergil was pretty sure he had just stepped into another of his brother’s social traps.

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Chapter End Notes

Hello Tuesday!
Strange things are afoot this month and has made updates slow, sorry.

Next up:
- Casey sees Kyrie as the friend she is. Danica comes up with a plan.
The Revelation

Chapter Summary

Dante takes Vergil out to dinner but will a phone call spoil his plans? Kyrie stands up for herself and Casey must flee.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The spell did its job perhaps a bit too well. Danica coughed as she sat up and blinked dumbfounded. She heard the distinct rasp of the raven laughing at her. “Yeah, well apparently he is one powerful bastard and I didn’t account for that in the spell.” The raven rasped at her as if in admonition of her words. Her vision cleared, and she shook her head. The stone walls around her held in the small remnant of a home but they also looked a little worse for the wear. “Ok, so that wasn’t meant to be a snipe at his legitimacy. Pfftt, he has legitimately become a pain in my ass, however.” Her arms ached, and she rubbed her forearms one at a time before she stood and dusted herself off. “Ok this is definitely the place where that nosferatu came from but where is the portal? Seriously this place reeks of energy and demons.” She looked around and sighed. The raven fluttered from the makeshift and now broken alter to the window and rasped again.

“Sealed, it’s sealed not shut not traditionally hidden.” She closed her eyes a moment to think. “It’s artificial somehow or they couldn’t seal it like this.” She opened her eyes again and stretched her hands out to splay her fingers as if trying to balance on an invisible wire. “Or its part of the natural rift that was once here but somehow they artificially augmented it to control it. I think the key is that it is not completely natural. It feels like its grafted or…” Whatever it was it was elusive and yet familiar. She was frustrated but had a better grasp on what she would need to do to get the last fragment of Vergil’s soul back. She gave the raven an exasperated look. “Want to take a guess who controls where and when the portal opens. Great! So how do I get an invitation in? No… how do I slip in unnoticed?”

Danica sighed heavily and trudged over to the open window to overlook the ruined city. “Dammit, I knew this wasn’t gonna be easy, but did it need to be back here?” The raven gurgled in answer and hopped over toward the hand that rested to the stones. Absently she lifted her hand to pet him softly. She had forgotten how much she missed his simple comfort. She sighed with a heaviness that even the raven seemed to feel, but just as quickly as she appeared overcome she shook it off and lifted from the window. “Come on we’ve got to get back. I need to apologize for you. Thank you for making things a bit more delicate.” The raven seemed to laugh as he fluttered his ebony wings. She drawled her words out as if needing an excuse to continue her thought, “aaa…nd they need an update. Go on. Head over to see Casey. Let’s see how her end is coming along and let’s get prepared for the inevitable excursion into Hell shall we?” Corvus pulled from her and cawed softly his amber eyes blinked at her reminding her. “Right, Nero,” she paused biting her lip. “He’s, here… right or still coming here?” The raven answered with a gurgle and chuff causing Danica to smile lightly. If anyone saw them they would think she was crazy, and the bird was well trained. They would be further from the truth. “Well let’s let him deal with him and hopefully spend some time with Kyrie. He needs the break from Dante and his father. After the solstice we come back, prepared. We don’t want to try opening the portal until after then or we risk more demons and they may move his soul if they realize what we are after. I can’t battle the hordes of demons like they can, and we do not have
the luxury of Dante covering us. We need him to keep Vergil from this place. At least now I have a better idea of what and who we are dealing with.” She shrugged and grabbed her coat pulling the long deep green wool about her shoulders. “Let’s head ho… let’s head back.” The raven tilted its head at her words but remained quiet.

She looked out over the ruins again. Firenza. Firenza had once been a city as grand as the castle city of Fortuna, but somewhere along the way this city was hit hard by demons, famine, disease, more demons and finally a sweeping fire that all but destroyed this once thriving port city. No one ever returned to rebuild it after the events surrounding the fire believing it was cursed. “Hmm, cursed,” she muttered in her thoughts. She always believed she would die here. “Just a child’s nightmares nothing more.”

The frame work of wood and stucco jutted up from the barren winter trees and broken fences. The cobbled streets were uneven and broken with tufts of tough scrub grass peeking thru. All in all, she liked her memories of this place years ago, but she was a very young child and things had a way of seeming more than they really were when you were a child whether god or bad. She shivered feeling the movement of lost souls that lingered here. She had avoided the library, the church, the graveyard, and all the places she felt souls clinging to this realm. Her own memories were painful enough she didn’t need to relieve any one else’s. She sighed again. It was time to face Vergil and tell him where his essence had led her. She shivered as she walked out into the lonely and broken landscape. There was a storm brewing and she hoped to get to the mainland before it settled in.

Casey was thrilled with Nero’s unannounced arrival, however there were others present that were not so thrilled. The Captain stood silently glaring at the perturbed youth who was obviously angered with his bringer glowing closer to red than purple. She was also pleasantly surprised to see the faint blue glow of his aura and the fact that he was not trying to hide it. Durante regarded him cautiously. Casey knew of their somewhat contentious but somewhat amicable efforts to work together over the years since Sanctus. Recently, it seemed Durante called on Nero more and more. She wondered if he thought Nero was at his beck and call especially after his rather underhanded dismissal of him from the Order. One thing was for sure, though, if he thought Kyrie was in trouble he’d do anything to protect her that much was crystal clear by the young man’s still unwavering expression.

“So, let’s get one thing perfectly clear. You are not Credo! He may not have been himself in the end, but he would never threaten, and I won’t tolerate it. If you wish your symbol of hope to remain here on the island. I suggest you bite your tongue and apologize.”

Durante dropped his head slightly turning his face from the young man and sighed before he growled softly. “My apologies. I have no excuse for my behavior; you are correct. Kyrie is not the one at fault here.” He gazed back up to Nero and made the small but intentional implication that someone else was to blame. Nero however did not take the bait and instead crossed his arms stepping fully into the room and raising an eyebrow. Casey smiled for a moment as she was reminded of his father. “Nero, I mean only that winter solstice is upon us. We have seen an increase in demonic rifts throughout the island. The increase started after your ‘relative’ disappeared from the lab in the headquarters and then there was an incident at the Hell gate. Small rifts and demons have been sighted to the west on the coast and deep in the snow heavy mountains. I will remind you as well that he is an enemy of the state.”

“My relative, as you call him, is not your concern, period, and don’t try to drum up some treason charge because you think he did something to your precious secret port. I heard that there were rifts and demons seen but I was not informed of additional demon attacks. Whatever they want isn’t here.” They stared at each other for several moments until finally Durante cleared his throat and Nero stroked his clawed bringer thru his hair. “Do you really think I don’t know what’s going on here or
out there? Eyes and ears are not yours alone. I’ve told you once. I don’t trust the Order and I don’t trust you!” It was a statement that Casey didn’t expect. Looking back to Kyrie she noted the songstress was quietly cleaning up the tea as if this was just another everyday event in her home, but it was when their gazes met that she understood. There were many reasons why Kyrie had stayed on Fortuna but the silent one, the one no one mentioned, currently stared her in the face. She was his eyes and ears on Fortuna. Sure, Nero still had contacts and friends scattered about the island and in the Order, but none had the sheer amount of contacts that Kyrie did. Casey felt the air sucked from her lungs as Kyrie nodded for her to leave them and her earlier words now made complete sense. ‘It is no longer safe for you to look for his soul here. They are watching us.’

Kyrie was insistent she come live with her for a time even though at the time of her ‘blinding’ they were not as close as she claimed earlier. She knew there would be questions about the Hell gate incident a few months ago but she thought she could bluff her way through them. She was surprised the questions never came and even now this was the first time she had met the Captain in person. While she never outright claimed to be a witch to the public, she maintained enough credible patrons to be an honest herbalist and holistic healer following ancient Fortunian traditions. Those that needed her other services knew how to contact her. She was one of the very few witches left on Fortuna.

By staying with Kyrie, Casey had probably not been interrogated as Durante no doubt felt she should have been considering his words. Casey wasn’t a potential threat until now because Kyrie seemed to be gracious and innocent like always. Kyrie was after all both devout and highly visible. It would be hard to make her disappear without someone noticing and not without questions. Lots of questions. Casey smiled and scurried quietly away to grab her things as the men argued. Their voices slowly raised and lowered like the tides on a stormy sea. Once upstairs she knew she was short on time. She would stay in one of the safe houses created for those she helped hide for several reasons. Reasons she would need to consider if she ever returned to her small cottage. She had a few favors she could pull if she had to as well. Finally, she heard Nero insist that Durante leave. She was out of time. It was no surprise to find Corvus pacing on the window sill in her room. She opened the window to let him in and saw Danica leaning to the tree outside in the waning light. Relief swept through her. She wouldn’t have to do this alone and Danica was well versed in hiding from the things that go bump in the night.

“You should really be more specific when you warn people,” she whispered as she gathered practically everything not nailed down and wrapped it into a pocket spell. The pocket spell was temporary, but she could carry everything out without physically carrying it. Creating a portal would be dangerous and left energy signatures so once she gave the room a once over and determined everything that was hers was now gone, she crawled out the window and escaped like a thief.

Fortuna had changed over the years; the Order had changed too; it was a good thing so had she. --

Nero glanced at his phone when the buzz distracted the drone of silence in the room. He was still agitated about the Captain, but his departure made him feel a bit easier. His demonic senses told him there was something about the man that was not quite human, but he had never done anything overt or aggressive until now and even this could fall well within the realm of being human. Durante had big shoes to fill and an even harder time balancing what was left of the triumvirate and the council. He sighed seeing the text message and a request; no, a suggestion. As he read, he couldn’t stop the slight curl to his lips. She thought she knew him so well even after all this time had passed. Kyrie stepped up behind him wrapping her arms across his waist. She peeked down at the screen. “So, she’s ok?” He flipped off the phone and turned. Kyrie stepped back trying to gauge his current mental state. She knew Durante irritated him, but she also knew how to tame his anger if need be. She smiled at him and let a shiver ripple thru her shoulders. She missed having him here.

“Yeah, Casey is away safely and apparently Danica has news.” He slipped the phone into his denim
and turned taking Kyrie’s small frame into his arms. He brushed his fingers thru her hair lightly
letting it curl to his fingertips and bumped her forehead with his own. “I’m afraid I can’t stay.” She
rested comfortably against his chest to listen. “I just had to make sure you were ok. I’m proud of you
sticking up for yourself like that, but it makes me worry. I can’t always be here to protect you.” His
inner demon grumbled. He wanted to stay and make sure she stayed safe, but he also knew the
danger he put her in by doing so.

“I’m fine. I’m a big girl and I was trained by the best. He just didn’t need to know it was you.”

“Kyrie, I taught you some simple self-defense moves. Standing up to Durante. You took a risk. Are
you so sure you want to leave everything here behind?” He looked down at her sternly, but she
could see the concern flicker to his face.

“I’m not going anywhere, not yet. I have a few promises to keep yet. We’ve talked about this. I don’t
want to be some shy damsel in distress anymore. I can watch out for myself and help you and I can
help Fortuna. It’s just not what either of us expected.” They hugged tighter, and Nero nuzzled her
head under his chin wrapping his arms around her small frame. Kyrie was always a bit stubborn but
truthfully once she set her mind to something she did it. It was something that he always admired in
her. Even after the loss of her parents she continued with her singing despite seeing people and
places that survived the demon attack that took them. She always saw it as a way of honoring her
parents, a way to honor their sacrifice. It was why she didn’t start school until later but in the end, she
seemed happy with her decisions. He just worried that she was alone.

She pulled from him slightly. “I miss you. Are you sure you can’t stay?” She blushed as she looked
up at him and Nero felt a nervous flutter in his gut. He knew that look and he wanted to stay for so
many reasons. They both accepted they needed time apart to grow into their own personas, but
neither realized it would mean being separated by an ocean, nor did they realize what that growth
meant for them as friends, as people, and as a couple. “Nero, I want you to stay… with me…
tonight.” Her blush deepened, and Nero felt his own face flush even before his bringer flickered a
deep blue.

“Kyrie,” he whispered leaning into her. He pressed his pale lips just below her ear. “You know what
will happen if I stay.” She pushed her hands to his chest pushing away from him just enough to let
her own lips brush his.

“I’m counting on it.”

--

A small bell tinkled above his brother as he walked into Freddy’s dinner. The elder twin couldn’t
stop the sigh and subsequent eyeroll that overcame him as the red oaf immediately stepped up to the
counter and flirted with the waitress behind it. Predictable. Vergil scanned the place to find it
relatively empty and he headed for the far booth against the wall. He sat expecting his brother to be
awhile but was surprised to find him grinning at him when he grabbed a menu and opened it.

“So, Verge, this is Cindy. She’s a friend.”

“Pleasure to meet you,” he offered with a nod. Even without looking at her directly, he sensed the
obvious question that lingered in her sharp intake of air. Cindy immediately eyed him scrutinizing
him like she disbelieved her own senses and the familiar question all but fell from her lips. ‘Again,
predictable,’ he thought.

“So, you’re twins, like as in identical? Huh, who knew? So where have you been?” Dante continued
to grin as he sat, and Vergil felt the sudden urge to kick his brother. It was exhausting to be his
brother at times.
“Hell,” he snarked icily flicking the menu.

“Really?” She blinked at him and then turned to blink at Dante who just shrugged. “He’s serious?” She snapped her gum. “He means…demons and all?” She whispered the last part and Dante snickered leaning towards her to explain.

“Yeah, Vergil is not much on pleasantries or explanations. Let’s just say he’s been away on an extended sentence.”

“Oh…” She blinked at Vergil who now glared daggers at his brother. Of course, she took his meaning to imply prison, not that he didn’t feel like he was imprisoned, but her next words did nothing to dissuade Vergil from feeling the itching desire to kill something, preferably his brother. “So, what did ya do?” She cocked her head to the side and her chocolate brown eyes twinkled as if she would start listing off her own guesses if Vergil didn’t answer her quickly enough.

“I tried to kill my brother,” he deadpanned.

“Pffttt… you two… definitely see the resemblance…you almost had me going there. So, what’ll it be, the usual?”

“Nah, tonight I’ll have more than a sundae.”

“Really? Like a meal?”

“Yep!”

“Well, stop my beating heart. I’ll go tell Freddy before he starts closing the grill. Check out the specials today. I’ve heard nothing but compliments from our customers.”

“What customers? This establishment is empty.” Vergil had his head down to review the assorted items. He realized he was quite hungry and for some unknown reason he now looked forward to eating tonight. Perhaps he was ‘hangry’ as his brother so enjoyed telling him.

“Hmpffh, salty. Kind of a pleasant change from this one.” She thumbed toward the grinning baboon. “Well, whatever, I’m not sure I could handle the two of you being identical in more than looks. Your mother must have been an angel.” Vergil felt a pinch in his head at her words and looked up. She winked and skated away leaving Vergil to ponder why anyone would wear wheels on their feet. He cocked his head slightly to watch her leave.

“See that wasn’t so bad was it?” Vergil reverted to glaring back at his brother then returned to the menu.

“Stop treating me like a child.”

“Stop acting like a pouty kid then. Geez, no wonder Nero is such a punk. He takes after his old man.” Dante chuckled settling back into the bench seat and laying his arm over the back of the seat. Vergil snapped the menu shut. Dante smirked.

“I do not relish being on display for your amusement.”

“Oh, knock it off you big baby. You need to be somewhat social. One day you’ll want to go out alone and I’d like to think you won’t piss off or insult everyone you meet. I remember having a time with Nero when he first came over from Fortuna. He wouldn’t make eye contact, he mumbled, and he inhaled his food to avoid conversations. Not the same, but still, you are both a handful.”
“Consider our quirks survival skills when one is forced to live with you. You are dramatic, loud and I for one do not like to draw attention to myself.”

“Nice, that’s exactly what he said.” Suddenly distracted by the whirling waitress, Vergil lifted his gaze away from his brother. She set water before each of them and smiled. Vergil could not fathom why she smiled so much. Humans.

“So, sweetie what will it be?” Dante’s phone chirped distracting him. He lifted his phone seeing who called and put up a single finger excusing himself from the table.

“Sorry, I gotta take this call. Verge, order for me. You know what I like.” Cindy smiled brighter when she saw a playfully dark sneer creep to his twin’s face as he watched Dante excuse himself out the door.

“Tell me Cindy, what do you have in the way of vegetables and do not suggest anything that resides on a pizza.” She couldn’t help but giggle.

“I had a feeling you’d call.”

“Can you talk?”

“Yeah, I stepped away.” He stepped over to the sidewalk and glancing around decided to walk around to the side of the building. He didn’t want to bring attention to himself despite what his brother said.

“Good, I’m not sure how happy he will be to hear the news.”

“Bad?”

“Well, I know where his soul should be, but I don’t know how to get to it, and I can’t confirm its actual location until I pass into Limbo.”

“That’s a problem. Where are you?”

“Fortuna near a ruined city to the west on the coast, a place once known as…”

“Firenza. Yeah, I know the area. Long story.”

“Okay?”

“Nero spent time there in the orphanage before the city burned. I scouted the area a few years ago because people claimed demons and other supernatural creatures still wandered there, but it just gave me a bad vibe and I opted to avoid it. Nero felt the same.”

“Hmm… and I thought I was the only one. This place has quite the history to it but that’s not what’s wholly important. If I had to guess, there is some sort of artificial portal here. Whether is was always here, I couldn’t tell you, but I’m pretty sure from my own history with this place that in its present sealed form it wasn’t. Which means collectively only one person is behind at least some part of this.”

“Agnus? You’re kidding me. We’re back to that again?”

“I know, I know, you said you shot him but I’m pretty sure he survived and I’m pretty sure he’s working with Celeste, again.”

“Dani what’s really going on? Sounds like you know more than your letting on.”
“Okay, I’m gonna spill so listen.” She paused waiting for him to have some sort of comeback but when he remained quiet she sighed and continued. “I came back to Capulet shortly before you found Vergil. I’ve been in the area for almost three months.” She heard his breath shift to a soft growl and countered before he could speak. “Don’t even try to comment, yet, I had my reasons for not contacting you. I was following several leads that seem to have ties here on Fortuna. With you and Nero spending most of your time on the mainland it was easy for us to not run into one another. You know I like to research and that’s exactly what I did. I first realized what happened with the Savior was more than what it seemed. I believe Agnus was involved in more than just the building of a God with Sanctus and the Order of the Sword and now I have a bit more proof, but I still can’t see his endgame. Celeste, however, is the bigger problem. I believe she controls this portal and she wants Vergil, badly. My connections point to a group of nosferatu that have been trading any know information about your brother. Seems he was busy in Hell, anyway…did I mention Celeste wants Vergil. She’s paid a contract on him.”

“So, she has a hit out on him? She must want him for something other than just power? As a battery we both know that isn’t forever. Sounds like she has a vested interest in what he can do for her. Sounds like she really wants to find Lucifer. Do you think she sapped his soul and that’s what caused Agnus to lose control of him? Is that what forced him into stasis?”

“Possibly.”

“Dani?”

“All I know is what a certain feathered friend told me he remembers.”

“He disappeared about the same time you were under surveillance and…” Dante paused looking around suddenly feeling eyes on him. “Are we being watched?”

“Human spotters trained to look for very specific things and paid very well to remain hidden.”

“Then why are they waiting if they know where he’s at?”

“Depends on who knows where he’s at. Celeste isn’t the only one looking.”

“Agnus, he’d want to keep tabs on those that could disrupt his plans.”

“Listen, I am not trying to be alarmist here, but someone made damn sure I had enough clues to lead me here before you found him in a very well-hidden lab. A lab essentially in plain sight.”

“Someone wanted to make sure we found him at that time. Belial isn’t the only player?”

“Dante there is a vacuum in hell with Mundus not at full strength anymore. Belial was set free, Celeste is working with Mundus and Agnus has ties to both. You do not even want me to list the other demons all vying for the throne.”

“Agnus doesn’t have a chance to the throne.”

“Hell isn’t the only place to rule.”

“You think Agnus is using Vergil as bait for Celeste?”

“I think Celeste holds the keys to something Agnus wants, and they’ve made a new deal. It would make sense with some of the weird and crazy I’ve seen of late and there is something else. Something big. Celeste is a fallen angel. She embraced her malice, sacrificed her grace, and now appears as a full very powerful archdemon. Corvus says she became a type of Naga. She could be
every bit as old as your dad was. The story I’ve been told is that she was originally tasked to mend
the rift between the celestial and demonic realms as a member of the Ars Goetia…”

“Wait! Are you kidding me? Then her grudge against Lucifer is personal.”

“Extremely so, and if I had to guess, when Agnus lost control of Vergil, she lost her link to this
realm.”

“She was feeding on angels. That’s how the headquarters obtained their holy artifacts.”

“There was a reason she approached Agnus. He needed access to demons and the demonic realm for
his experiments without initially opening the Hell Gate, remember Yamato was shattered at the time.
Sanctus was probably a crazy fanatic and really did just want to protect us from demons. Demons
who did not believe as your father, but he was twisted.”

“Or pushed over the crazy ledge.” He scratched his head in distraction.

“Either way she was driven by hunger and Vergil allowed her a hole thru which to hunt. I bet she
discovered his mark of servitude to Lucifer and…”

“Viola! She had someone to bring her take out and a guide to show her where her greatest threat to
her own ascension was. You’ve been very busy.”

“Dante?” She needed to warn him, and she took a breath that she half expected him to hear thru the
phone.

He nodded before he chuckled realizing she couldn’t see him doing so. “Go ahead.”

“I spoke to Nero. There has been an influx of demonic rifts throughout Fortuna but no attacks and
other than a few random livestock incidents and a fisherman sounding more than drunk, nothing has
changed here.”

“Then they do know where he is.”

“I think they know thanks to my encounter with the Striga and that nosferatu. You asked why they
are waiting… winter solstice and this year it falls on new moon.”

“Of course, longest night of the year means without moonlight to give them away, they have even
more darkness to work with.”

“Dante, please be careful ward the office.”

“Already done, reset the wards yesterday. We have three days.”

“We will also have weather to contend with over the next three days. Be prepared.”

“Please don’t tell me it’s gonna snow. I haven’t been completely oblivious, and I hear people talking.
It’s just wishful thinking.”

“The coming storm maybe a coincidence but explain to me why it is ten degrees colder over here and
not there, and why is it even colder in a straight line from Lamina Peak to Port Caerulea?”

“Damn it!”

“They are waiting for that storm to break over Capulet and even if it wasn’t actually going to do
more than send down a few flakes, you can bet you will get snow now.”
“Damn Frost demons!”

“Nero will be home late tomorrow. I suggested he stay at least one night with Kyrie. I will be there after I stop for my weapons and get Casey safe.”

“I can protect my brother.”

“Of course, you can, but I want to help and so does Nero. This is important to him.”

Dante pinched the bridge of his nose. “Yeah I get it. So, Kyrie, she’s ok? He went to check on her.”

“Kyrie has her own guardian angel and yes she’s fine.”

“What about Corvus? He popped in…”

“Yeah, about that. I’m really sorry. He took me quite literally.” Dante snorted at her sudden apologetic demeanor. He wondered if Vergil would accept the apology.

“So, what happened to him? Where did he run off too?”

“It was Celeste. She somehow discovered he was my link to the celestial realm, but that’s for another time it’s Vergil we need to focus on.”

“Right!” He paused taking a breath. They needed to prepare. “Dani, thanks.”

“Don’t thank me yet. This won’t be easy, and I’ll be honest.” She paused and held her breath before she closed her eyes and continued, “I’m scared. I’ve never returned a soul to a living person. I’ve never healed a fractured soul. I… I’m really not sure…”

“If anyone can do this, it’s you. I don’t believe in a lot of things but those that I do have never let me down. I’ve got faith in you.”

“Gee, no pressure.” They paused silent on the phone a moment until Dante suddenly snapped out of his thoughts.

“Crap, I just let Vergil order dinner for me. I gotta go. I’ll see you in a couple of days.” She laughed as the phone went dead. She knew little of his brother’s eating habits but if she had to guess Dante was getting the furthest thing from pizza possible.

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Chapter End Notes

What another chapter so soon? Yep, I hope to finish one more chapter this week too.

Tags updated

Next up...

We find out who Dante called in a favor to in the last chapter and Nero spends some much needed time winding out his frustrations with Kyrie.

*Beware the Lemon*
Fun Friends and Lovers

Chapter Summary

Dante and Vergil round out their evening with a visit from Lady. Nero indulges in the moment with Kyrie. (Lemon warning)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Vergil couldn’t stop a smirk from lingering to his lips as they walked the short distance home. Evening was calling with a hint a damp chill as the sun disappeared into the swirling colors of deep purple and orange. Dante remained quiet which never bothered the elder twin. Dinner had been the most enjoyable moment the elder twin could remember in a very long time. It was simple and unfettered with their current predicament. It was just two brothers taunting each other and Vergil felt the soft tug at his cold heart. He again remembered Dante’s expression when he returned to the table to the large salad. It was indeed priceless. Vergil felt his chest tighten to stifle a growing chuckle just at remembering the event. The fool should have known given his recent proclivity to annoy him that he would get even. Dante cleared his throat behind him and Vergil suddenly realized he walked past their turn back to the office.

“Seriously dude, it was not that funny.” Dante’s face was somber but no longer as perturbed as it had once been.

“Hmm, speak for yourself. I have not felt the desire to laugh in years.” He grinned and let the chuckle escape as he turned on his heel to head down the alley. It all felt very out of character for him but something about the evening had indeed made him feel better. It was at this moment that a thought came to him. “Thank you.”

“Oh, don’t thank me. I’m ordering pizza when we get home.”

“Why? Still hungry?” he sneered with a playful wickedness that made the red twin snort. He missed this part of his brother. The part of him that relished their sibling rivalry and childish banter. He didn’t let it show often, at least not often enough.

“Yeah something like that.” Dante shook his head and motioned down the street. Vergil fell into stride with him and he broached the subject of what Danica had told him earlier. Not surprisingly, Vergil took the news quietly and he felt him withdraw from him back into his silence. He knew this was only natural but still he wanted to know what his brother was thinking. As they walked up to the office Vergil was first to notice the sleek red motorcycle parked at the front of the steps.

“Are you expecting someone?” he asked arching a brow and turning to hos brother still deep in thought. Dante lit up with the sudden expression of surprise first and then something akin to anger.

“Oh crap, I forgot with dinner and Dani calling that this might happen. Uh, Vergil. Don’t get mad. Don’t kill anything.”

“What did you do?”
“I called Lady. I sort of needed her opinion on something and well I thought she’d be here tomorrow. Obviously, she still follows her own rules, but I thought just this once she’d…” Dante trailed into a ramble as he spoke, and Vergil slowed his steps as he felt the mix of irritation and concern bubble within him. He couldn’t help but wonder if his brother was concerned for him or, perhaps, Mary. Either way Vergil was about to meet Dante’s best friend and he did not feel his confidence swell within him as he would have in the past. He had always felt superior to those around him and yet he understood Mary, or Lady as she preferred, this human had been there for his brother when he could not. It pained him to know that he sought solace in a human. It pained him that he had pushed him to that choice.

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"Nero was glad he let Kyrie talk him into staying. He also realized it really didn’t take much convincing. It started with her damnable blush downstairs and her soft doe-like eyes that she batted at him. The blush was the soft red kind that let him know she was thinking of his hands roaming her body. The kind of blush he had only seen since she let his hands roam her body. His mind sort of hiccupped when it happened, and he felt his gut churn with nervousness and excitement all at once. Then the siren had to clinch his moment of indecision. She reached to grab his hair tugging just enough to let him know she wanted him to kiss her. Tugging on him just the way he liked.

Tonight, when she kissed him, he felt desperate for an anchor, and his memory blurred as to just how fast he managed to get her upstairs, naked, and beneath him between their kissing and touching. He vaguely remembered asking permission once more before he sank into her as she gasped, and he groaned. It was like he needed to breathe, and she was his air. He thrust slowly with his snowy hair falling into his eyes as he watched her face. She was beautiful beneath him with her soft red hair spilling away from her. She reached up to weave her fingers thru his hair with one hand while she scratched her other hand down his back. He hissed with sensitivity, but it turned into a growl as she let her nails bite into his skin hard enough to draw beads of blood and he closed his eyes letting his head droop to the soft curve of her neck. He was lost to the sensations that gripped him and if her soft moans were any indication, so was she. He wanted to devour her in this moment, but he pulled himself from the edges of the insanity she caused and kissed along her neck down to one of her firm breasts. She gasped as he bit her only to suck gently at the red mark.

His mind wandered to when they first took their relationship to this level. They always second guessed that they rushed into the decision heightened by the shock of events surrounding the Savior. After all they were teenagers and their normal ups and downs seemed more dramatic than they probably were. Eventually, they opted to see other people for fear that the intensity they shared with one another surely couldn’t be real. But it didn’t seem to matter who he dated or who she dated they always ended up together and every time he was with her he couldn’t imagine anyone else. He wondered if she felt the same.

She must have noticed he lingered in his head and she shifted. He stopped his assault to her breast to catch concern flicker across her face and instinctively he kissed the curve of her neck and trapped her beneath him a moment as he leaned to an elbow and cupped her other breast with his bringer. She pulled him into her as she lifted meeting him halfway kissing and gasping. His hips jerked, and she bucked as they moved together causing even more delicious sensations and moans between them. Their breath was heavy as he nipped and kissed at her collarbone, and she returned the attentions favoring his earlobe and biting. His inner demon had a predictable habit of surfacing at moments like these deepening his urge to be rough, bruising tender soft skin and drawing blood. A snarl escaped his lips as he fought this rising almost desperate urge to grasp her hips harshly and snap into her just to hear her scream his name over and over. It wasn’t often that his demon rose within him outside of battle or anger but right now as she wrapped her legs around his waist drawing him in deeper, he heard the familiar change to the timber of his voice. He snapped his head up to watch her writhe she was so close, and it thrilled him."
“I don’t want to hurt you,” he grunted as he felt her arch beneath him hitting a particularly sensitive spot deep within. Her throaty moans spurred him on as he felt his desire thicken in his gut begging for release. Her breaths became short and ragged as he thrust deeper and faster slowly losing his battle with himself. Suddenly, her amber eyes met his blue ones and she begged.

“Please Nero.” She shifted ever so slightly allowing him deeper access to her body and she moved his bringer to her hip. “I’m not a china doll. I want to feel your marks on my body. Nero, please.” He couldn’t even process what she said as he growled throwing his head back and feeling his demon seize on those words and movements. She screamed his name coming undone beneath him. His aura filled the room with an electric blue glow as he followed her seconds later. The relief was overwhelming, and his hips stuttered, as he fell forward to rest his head in the crook of her neck and thread her legs with his. He covered their tired bodies with a sheet. They lay like that for several blissful minutes before Nero tensed.

“Kyrie! Did I hurt you?” She giggled softly tracing random figures on his bare chest and tilted her head up to meet his worried expression. She wore a light sheen of sweat and appeared a bit tired. He knew he was.

“Only in the ways I like.” She blushed at her words and Nero blushed as well. He snorted softly before he pulled her close kissing her forehead.

“Gods, I love you,” he half whispered.

“I know.” She replied with confidence then sighed. ‘So tired’, he thought. He hadn’t been sleeping well since his father was back and he had missed Kyrie. She always seemed to settle his restless sleep. As he started to settle in for sleep, she shifted herself to straddle over him. He gazed over her body still flush from sex and reached up gently to caress her breasts. His bringer glowed softly giving the room a soft blue-white glow once more. “Nero, I love you. I always have.”

He let his hands trail lightly down to her hips causing her to squirm as she leaned over him. Her hair fell in long messy beautiful strands over her pale skin. “I’m hearing a ‘but’ in there somewhere,” he mused out loud reaching up to draw a strand of sweat dampened hair from her angelic face. She smiled at him with a crinkle of mirth in her eyes.

“…but, nothing silly, I just haven’t told you in a very long time. We don’t say it often enough. I’ve missed you.”

He grinned back at her. Sleep could wait. He felt his urges return as he gazed over her supple skin. “I know, Kyrie. You tell me every time I see you even when you don’t say it. There is an aura about you that just, it just seems different, brighter, when you’re with me. I know you love me from the way you smile.” He traced her lips as she blushed. “The way your eyes light up when you see me.” He brushed a thumb over the outside corner of her eye and she leaned her head into his touch as he held her cheek. “The way you hold my hand.” He laced his bringer into her other hand and lifted the arm pulling her down toward him. “The way your tongue teases me.” He lifted his head and kissed her feeling her heart race. When they broke from their kiss, he admired her warm amber eyes and saw them blown wide with lust. He grinned, and she gasped as he flipped their positions. “The way your body submits to mine.” He pulled at one leg with his bringer and held her hip teasing her backside with his claws only to cause her skin to pebble at his touch. She drew her other leg up to mirror its mate and hummed in approval at the turn things were taking. “Kyrie, someday when you’re ready, we’ll stop playing this game and I’ll make you mine.”

“Someday, I’ll let you.” She moaned wistfully as he pressed into her once more.

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“Well, well, look what the cat dragged in? He told me you were back, but I just couldn’t believe it. Dante, please tell me you got a receipt?” Lady looked up from the desk as she casually closed the magazine she read and lifted her chin from her hand. The soft red press to the skin told Dante she had been waiting for a bit. He wasn’t sure he was comfortable with her roaming his office while they were gone. He shrugged the thought away. She’d found the office in far worse condition than it currently was.

“Uh Lady? I thought I told you to give me a day to talk to him.”

“Pfftt… You can’t possibly think giving him time to think about anything is a clever idea. Besides, I had to come see the devil myself. He is sort of a celebrity to be honest but I’m here for a completely different reason. Mine!”

“Ahhh, Mary, how pleasantly droll. Such bliss fills me to see you again.” Had Lady been anyone else they would have withered under Vergil’s current glare. His eyes flickered as a sneer spread to his face. He walked to the side of the desk and hung his black leather jacket to the hook. He gave her an assessment, noting her hand lingered at her gun. He then turned walking over to the bar while running a hand thru his hair. He needed a drink if he was to pretend pleasantries with her. She watched him like a tiger.

Suddenly her appraisal of him reflected on her face in surprise and she looked to the younger twin, “Wow, you did not tell me…”

Dante cut her off stepping between her and Vergil. The elder pouted mentally wondering what she meant to say. “You shouldn’t just pop in Lady. It could be dangerous here.”

“Pfffttt, I’m a big girl.” She punched his shoulder playfully. “Besides you wanted my opinion, right? That’s something I like to deliver in person, so you don’t miss the subtlety of what I’m saying.” Dante snorted as she adjusted the collar to her half jacket and brushed imaginary lent from the hip of her dark denim.

“Still headstrong and foolish I see.” He wondered how her life had changed after that night. He wondered if she had better luck than he did.

“Still condescending and tepid, I see,” she replied to him from over his brother’s shoulder. The remark made Vergil smirk. He liked that she had not backed down from him, yet.

“Hnn…” He set a pair of glasses to the bar top and pulled a bottle of whiskey from the back wall. “Shall I pour, or do you need a sippy cup with juice?” Dante rolled his eyes and turned to follow Lady who pushed past him with a growl. Her bicolor eyes glittered dangerously at the smug expression Vergil held. He swept his hand thru his hair to make sure he did not resemble his brother in any way and leaned back as she approached, again appraising her.

“Think again devil boy. I can drink your pale ass under the table.” He had not meant his quip to be a challenge, but he inclined his head to her.

“Ah come on guys this should not be a competition. Can’t we just have a friendly talk?”

“We could… but what fun would there be in doing that, brother? Mary…” he accentuated his use of her name and watched her face stiffen. He purred with amusement, “…needs to catch me up on all your nonsense while I was indisposed. Did you not say she was your… oh, what was the word… friend?” Vergil leaned forward poured his drink and swigged it back with a smooth predatory movement that made Lady hesitate at the end of the bar. She then snatched the other glass, not to be outdone, and followed suit pouring her own drink once offered the bottle.
“He’s right what kind of fun is that? I want him tipsy and spilling his share of secrets. You must have learned something of interest during your little frolic in hell.”

Dante moaned. Perhaps, this was a very bad idea. Of course, it was a bad idea, what had he been thinking?

When Nero woke the next morning, he was not surprised to find himself alone. Kyrie had a job, a life, and responsibilities that often did not match his own crazy schedule. She seemed happy despite the mercurial nature of morale on the island. Outsiders poured in immediately after the incident to lend a hand in what they saw as a militant attack on its own people, but with the influx of people came a shift to more secrecy rather than a welcoming of new ideas. Outsiders were already shunned but now those that embraced outside ideas were slowly shut out as well. Then there was the growing witch hunt for, well, witches and other supernatural beings that lingered within their society. Many needed a scape goat and blamed ‘unnatural’ beings such as witches and other super natural habitants that had naturally flocked to an island that worshipped a demon. It was a contradiction really, but fear was ugly no matter what form it took and the fear that these degenerates influenced the downfall of their leaders.

He sighed that his mind had already found something to fixate on again and he rolled over to face the mattress. She was right. He got stuck in his head at times. Another sigh and he thought that Fortuna had about as many issues as their relationship did. He often wondered how they managed to make such a whirlwind and chaotic on and off relationship work with everything they had both been thru but thinking back to last night he smiled. It was the moments like those that they shared that he clung to. It wasn’t just the sex. He chuckled, no the sex was great, but she complemented him in so many ways and he missed that. She was his reminder that he did have something to fight for even when he felt so alone. She accepted him quirks and all. Somehow, he just felt they would always end up together and he meant what he said last night. Someday he would mark her as his. He felt his inner power rumble with agreement and even Yamato chirped with her blessing. He snorted. At times, it was like having his own pep squad in his head.

Face down in the mattress, he rubbed his face into the sheets to take in her scent once more. He then groaned at the voice that prodded him gently reminding him he too had things to accomplish while still on the island. He wanted to see Durante, no he would see the captain, and then catch the last ferry to Capulet. He had to face his father sooner or later and before solstice seemed the best timing, but he was cutting it close. Danica had warned him of what she learned and hopefully with Casey now away safely hidden they would find a way to retrieve his father’s power. He pushed up from the bed and wandered to the shower still deep in thought. Predictably, Kyrie had laid his clothes out along with fresh towels. He smiled at the gesture. He had to admit she spoiled him, and he liked it. He wondered if they would stop playing the cat and mouse game that currently hallmarkd their relationship but selfishly he also realized it made him look forward to their alone time even more. He paled a moment with a lingering fear that haunted him. Maybe this game was his inner demon at play here. At times he felt like a caged animal and their game of chase always excited him. Maybe he’d never settle down. He frowned slightly. She deserved better than a Dante-like here today and gone tomorrow kind of lover. He made a mental note to ask Dante, no scratch that, he’d ask Trish or even Danica, about this later.

He turned on the shower faucet letting the water warm as he stepped back and brushed his teeth at the sink. When he looked to the mirror, he noticed in the reflection behind him her robe hanging on the hook. He grinned, spit, and tapped his toothbrush to the sink turning off the water. He lingered close enough to take in her scent once more but this time it went straight to his groin. He grumbled and entered the shower with the need to take care of more than just washing. He swore he heard his inner demon chuckle.
Vergil was in a word impressed. Mary was confident, smart, capable, and knew exactly how to handle his oft times infantile brother. It was almost disturbing but as he watched their interaction it became clear that they were very close friends and if Vergil knew his brother he knew that meant at one time she warmed his bed. He felt a twinge of disgust but the pinch in his head reminded him of his own past relationships and thus silences any further judgement of the pair. For a human, she truly surprised him but of course he would never let her know this.

He listened to their back and forth banter and quickly discerned that she cared for the dolt and likewise he wanted to protect her. They had indeed been thru much together. He watched curiously as Dante tempered his anger when she became relentless in her teasing. It was further obvious to him that Lady didn’t trust easily. Her eyes watched his movements with razor precision even while she maintained a relaxed air next to his brother. He was impressed with her constant assessment of him, never letting her guard down and yet he could see that because of Dante’s presence she tried to give him more leniency than her average short temper allowed. He accepted she was a part of his brother’s life and he swigged another shot.

Suddenly he felt his head whirl a moment and he realized with this simple statement of acceptance in his head, how anticlimactic their meeting had become. He had expected at least an argument between them, he had hoped for a bit of bloodshed, but he knew Dante would have been angered with him had he relented to his normal tendencies to hurt things and ask questions later. He thought back to their conversation over the last hour about the tower, her father, even his stint in Hell, but found the conversation mostly revolved around Dante. He saw they both guarded their tongues while speaking to him. Were they hiding something? No, that was not possible. He was too observant.

It was as he downed another shot that he realized he was no longer had the tolerance for alcohol he once did and chuckled. Fortunately, it was a well-timed laugh that corresponded to Lady telling another story about how reckless he was. Him reckless? He snorted. If she only knew how preoccupied Vergil had become to keep himself from appearing tipsy. To Dante his signs of intoxication were subtle and with Lady not having commented yet, he was pretty sure she hadn’t noticed. Yet. He knew as did his brother in the brief time they had been talking, Lady is not the type to let your guard down in front of.

Unfortunately for Vergil, the worst trait of him being intoxicated was that he became chatty the more he drank, and his brother knew this. It made for a dangerous situation considering alcohol did not keep Vergil from tempering what he thought. His filter disappeared, and he became aggressive if not downright brutal with his tongue. Therefore, a very real argument regarding any number of topics was playfully awaiting the opportunity to trip from his lips. An aggressive opiniated devil with anger management issues drinking with a demon hunter not afraid to shoot him in the head was just a clear recipe for disaster. Whether it was the years of torture, the lack of sleep, or the lack of a something else, he didn’t know, but he had to come up with a plausible reason to let Vergil stop drinking and save his pride before the inevitable happened. Lady could be unforgiving, and Vergil could be violent.

“Alright Lady, I’m cutting you off,” he offered mid-sentence as she described how often Dante was
caught drinking alone. He probably should have been paying attention to what she was saying.

“What?” She blinked at him giving him a confused expression. Surely, he didn’t think this topic was off limits considering Vergil’s admission to several unsavory drinking habits in his youth.

“I already owe you money so stop drinking my good liqueur. You know how broke I am.”

“You’re kidding right? It’s one of the few things you responsibly spend money on.” She narrowed her eyes at him then waggled a finger at him. “What are you up to?”

“No, I’m not kidding and if you haven’t noticed I haven’t been working lately so…”

A soft blush kissed her cheeks and she set her drink down. “Right, family matters.” She eyed Vergil with a raised eyebrow and snorted. “I want a rematch when your nanny let’s you stay up past bedtime.” She stood and cocked a hip at him. Vergil growled. “Oh, please growl all you want.”

“I should take you home.” Dante stood too.

“I’m fine.” She waved him off and snickered. He was such a boy scout at times. It was annoying as it was endearing.

“I’m sure you are, but if you haven’t noticed I wasn’t drinking so I’m finer than you.” He winked at her and thumbed her out towards the door.

“Pfftt… finer? You two are up to something and honestly, I don’t want to be involved. Trish and I have a job tomorrow anyway. Seems we have a small clutch of Frosts that appeared last week and killed off an entire grove of olive trees.”

Dante went rigid. “Frosts? You sure you don’t need Nero on that? He’s supposed to be here tomorrow. I can send him along.”

“Oh please, those icy bastards are nothing if I can stand to sit in the same room as your brother.” She chuckled with a smile before turning to glare at Vergil who sat watching them from the other side of the bar on propped elbows with his chin resting on laced fingers. He seemed a bit unfocused although his perpetual glare lingered to his face.

“How very clever, Mary. Do you do parties too?” She squinted at him using her legal name yet again and huffed turning toward the door.

“Asshole.”

“Such language and from such a delicately pretty little mouth.” She stiffened at his words but didn’t turn around. Dante however glared at him before mouthing silently ‘you owe me’ and followed her out of the office grabbing his guns. He dodged more than the proverbial bullet with that one. Silently, he wondered why she let him get away with saying that. Perhaps she noticed Vergil was… nah, not likely.

Once Vergil was alone he let out a long sigh of relief and shook his head to clear the growing cobwebs. He needed a shower and bed but not perhaps in that order. He never noticed the pair of amber eyes that watched from the shadows above.

Outside Dante took Lady by the elbow and she looked at him with a slight furrow to his brow.

“Look, I know I said I’d call you, but you didn’t answer and frankly I wanted to see the change for myself. By the way he’s drunk. I stopped drinking three shots in. I know my limit.”
He cocked his head at her and made a confused face before he opened his mouth. “That’s… that’s not what I’m worried about.”

“Really?” She gave him the ‘look’ and Dante wilted. Lady knew when he was trying to avoid something just like she knew when he called he wanted more than the number for a local armorer. She could practically read his current confused expression. “You didn’t call me this morning to get my opinion on his fashion sense, and by the way I did find her. She set up shop here in Capulet in the narrows outside of Limbo. Seems the purification of Fortuna continues.” She smiled and patted his face with a freshly gloved hand. “Look, my human ‘evil demon ahead’ warning system is not going off and while I still think he’s an evil bastard and gonna fool us all to take over the world, I understand why you didn’t tell me. I also know you’re gonna have your hands full with that hangover tomorrow. Good thing I have you covered.” She withdrew her hand and finished slipping a glove to her other hand. Dante now blinked realizing he had more than one thought currently rolling thru his head.

“You.” She looked up at him with the subtle ‘what?’ expression replete with furrowed brows but seeing the understanding in Dante’s eyes she softened and smiled.

“Lil’ ole me.”

“How long?”

“Since Nero so nicely told me to take a hike. There have been spikes but this week has been quiet, except for the Frosts.”

“I thought it was weird that nothing had found him yet.”

‘Yeah, well I’m not that gracious. It’s been a bump in my income, sooo…” She lifted her leg showing him a nice leather boot he didn’t remember seeing before and finished fooling with her glove. Her phone chirped from her pant pocket. She tugged the phone out, read the text, replied, and smiled again. “Trish. Wanted to make sure she didn’t need to bring the rain.” She snickered and suddenly realized Dante, the man with a comeback for everything, was quiet. “Dante?”

“You could’ve been hurt.”

“I wasn’t.”

“But”

“Big girl panties remember? Did you really think that with everything we’ve been thru that I wouldn’t have your back, especially when you didn’t realize you needed it? Come on, he’s your brother. You get this weird blind spot when it comes to him and you forget everything and everyone else. I even made sure the kid didn’t lose his ever-loving marbles with a few odd jobs during his recovery. I get it. He’s the only thing ‘like you’ and he’s family. You had to try to find him or find closure. I do understand, but yeah, I would have tried to talk you out of it, maybe. You are irrationally codependent on him but you’re so much better than him. I realize I’m biased but…ooff!” Dante scooped her up and hugged her small frame against his chest. At first, she struggled as he lifted her from the ground but then just let him have his moment and returned the hug.

“Why didn’t we work? Why didn’t we try again? You know me better than I know myself.”

She chuckled into his chest and answered softly although a bit garbled, “Because as much as I love you, you’re a slob, you’re lazy, you have no fashion sense, you have no money sense, you eat pizza entirely to much, you have a penchant for destruction, did I mention lazy?” He chuckled and let her
go. She brushed a tear from his face and shook her head. “It has nothing to do with what you are. I just found I loved someone else in that way. You know that. Ok, ok, tough guy stop with the waterworks. I get it some demons aren’t evil just like some angels aren’t good.”

“Leave Danica out of this.”

“What? I can’t change the subject because your human side is getting a bit too emotional? How did you know I was talking about her, anyway?” she cocked her hip to the side and they pulled from one another.

“You may know me, but I know you, Lady. If you’ve been keeping the demons clear of this office, then you know she’s back.”

“She’s been back for awhile and I’ve just been protecting my oaf of a friend who has a soft spot for shiny baubles. Sure, she’s talented and pretty but seriously every pair of legs that walks past you? I thought you were into men this month.” She snorted at her comment and Dante sighed leaning back and crossing his arms over his chest.

“I know, she told me.”

“You two work things out?”

“We’re talking.”

“Don’t expect her to forgive easily. Not that I’m judging you. I would have turned her in months before you did.” Dante uncrossed his arms and sagged with a sigh.

“It’s not like that. I had to protect Nero. They would have come for him next.”

“Does he know that?”

“No.” They stood in silence and cold chill made Lady shiver. She turned to grab her riding jacket off the bike and pull it over her current ensemble. She grabbed her helmet and looked over to him as he watched her.

“Dante we’re getting side tracked. This is about Vergil.”

“What if it was about him all along?” She cocked an eyebrow at him.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s something that’s been bothering me since she called earlier.”

“Care to explain?”

“Not now, but just be careful ok? According to Dani, Fortuna has gone quiet but that doesn’t mean that the rifts have remained closed. Something big is coming for him and if I had to guess it’ll be here on Thursday.”

“Winter solstice, right, I forgot.”

Dante quirked a disbelieving brow at her. “You don’t forget things like that.”

“Hmmm, you got me. I’ve made a few calls. We will keep the streets clear from the narrows over to Ashbury. I let slip a rumor that Temen-ni-gru was giving off some bad vibes that should keep your immediate area free of the human type of pests. Talked to your detective friend, Thom, and let him
know Danica was back. I’m sure he’ll make sure the right sort of cop is on duty the next several days.”

“You really do care.” He smirked.

“Don’t let it go to your head. You still owe me money and I for one know a cash cow when I see one.”

He audibly guffawed at her words, “Nice, I’ve been demoted from a lazy, pizza eating, slob, to a cash cow.”

“…with a penchant for expensive destruction.” He snorted, and she smiled tucking her helmet under her arm. “Take care. Call me when he’s back to full power and I’ll give you another ‘assessment’.” She slipped on her helmet and flipped the visor up. “By the way, you need to go to the grocery store. I left the website info and phone number for the place that delivers. Use it! You could get snow bound for a few days and I’d hate to find out you starved you pizza freak.”

“Whatever, fashion Nazi.” They both chuckled, and she straddled her bike. The engine purred to life and Dante realized how blessed he was to have her in his life even if they weren’t lovers anymore. He thought he had screwed things up more than once with her. He thought he pushed her away at one point only to realize she wasn’t going anywhere. She really was his best friend. They were part of the same dysfunctional family. She rode off and he watched thankful that she had already prepared for the worse case scenario. As he turned to head back into the office, he was struck with the reality of the situation. They were coming for his brother and he’d be damned if he would let them succeed.

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Chapter End Notes

A bit lengthy this time around. Working on shorter more frequent chapters. Continued tag updates.

Next up:
- The twins must face a challenge to their relationship (heavily implied incest)
- Nero flexes his muscle
- Danica comes back to the office but not before realizing something that may help them in the days ahead
- The storm builds
A Moth to his Flame

Chapter Summary

Dante lets old hidden wounds resurface from a road once traveled and approaches his brother about it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Today was a whirlwind from start to finish and Dante felt the cold clutch of need fester within him. Things were happening fast now, and he knew the next few days would be akin to chaos. He saw his brother half way up the stairs by the time he came in from the parking lot. Predictably, Vergil had cleared the bar and probably even washed their glasses before heading up to bed. Dante could feel his energy low, saw the small missteps to his normally ethereal movements, smelled the whiskey heavy in his blood. He should have stopped him when he saw his guard down. He should have slowed this descent into his madness. Drinking to forget was his schtick. So why did Danica’s news weigh so heavily on him too? He took the steps by two after he shed his coat at the bottom of the stairs on the hook next to his brother’s and caught Vergil just outside his door in the hall.

“Stay with me tonight. Things will happen fast the next few days. You’ll sleep better. I know I will, not worrying about you.”

“Nonsense, I am not a child and you need other hobbies.” He took a step toward his newly cleared and cleaned room but hesitated and his younger twin pounced on the slight indecision.

“Verge, just until after you get your power back, ok? I mean then we won’t be able to sleep next to each other because your devil half will insist on dominating me later and then no one sleeps.” He snorted with the thinly veiled innuendo. He was pressing his luck. He was testing the limits of his inebriation. Vergil glared over his shoulder.

“Imbecile!”

“Don’t make me play the ‘lonely’ card, ‘cause I’ll do it… I’ll do it.” Vergil sighed heavily with a strained breath then turned back toward Dante’s room and almost as if defeated pushed past him into what was currently their room. “Wanna cuddle?” he pressed hoping to be cheeky.

“Keep your hands off me!” He threw a dismissive hand at him but did not strike him. “You and your strange hedonistic perversions, my little moth,” he half mumbled the later part and Dante grinned.

“Pffftt...if you didn’t look so damn sexy just like me, then maybe I could.” He accosted his brother from behind wrapping himself into the curve of his back and just holding him. He knew better than to rub against him even if in jest. He knew not to move because of what he might do not in jest. Vergil needed to be handled with kid gloves. It wasn’t always this hard. He wasn’t always averse to touch but he suspected the last few years had pushed past his already slim comfort level and returned him to the raw angry brother that shunned even gentle touch. “Don’t push me away, I promise I will be good,” he pouted yet thrilled with being able to hold his brother for as long as he had. He missed the closeness they once shared and suddenly he realized how frail he felt tonight. He felt alone in this turbulent sea of change that the tide of his emotions swept through. They would come for his brother,
his other half, in the next forty-eight hours and somehow, he felt like he needed more time. He just needed more. Vergil remained stiff standing in the semi-darkness of their room but as Dante started to let him go he heard a soft hum and his stance relaxed ever so slightly. Dante stayed his hands and remained wrapped around him.

“Your damn whiskey makes me consider this perversion, this utter foolishness.” He stepped to pull from his brother, but Dante clung to him.

“Then the damn whiskey takes the blame for whatever happens between us,” he all but whispered. “You have nothing to do with it.” They stood embraced for several long moments until Vergil was relaxed in his brother’s awkward embrace. Slowly, Dante leaned his head to his brothers shoulders. As they let their energy softly intertwine, Dante felt emotion choke at him again. He thought about how Lady and Trish had been keeping the demons from the office and letting his brother get stronger. He thought about how Danica was risking her life for him and how Nero struggled to stay connected in their dysfunctional family. Every one of his friends knew how important his brother was to him and the raw sliver of sanity left within him, but did he?

“Verge, I can’t lose you again. I can’t…” I won’t go thru that hell again. I just can’t be alone. I need you. Do you understand? They will come for you and soon. I’ll die before I let them take you from me again. I’ll never let them take you from me, not again.”

“I understand.” His voice was cold, tight, controlled, and lacked the emotion Dante felt slip into his own voice.

“Do you understand? I need you.” It came out almost as a whimper and he hated himself for it. He hated himself for the need, the compulsion that never left him even though years had passed. Vergil was a flame that always flickered just out of his reach yet always drew him closer. He clutched his brother harder. He would not back away now. He had to know if he felt the same.

“I know.” The pause between them was palpable and yet expected. “I pushed you away. I made a mistake leaving.”

“I made the mistake letting you.” Dante turned his brother to face him. Cerulean blue met steel blue. ‘Whiskey’ he thought. He could blame it on the whiskey and he would never ask this of him again. Dante was very good at keeping secrets. Did he give his brother enough of an excuse to let him do what he had so desperately wanted to do since he was free of the reaver? Sharing his blood had only made his desire deepen and he wondered if his brother understood what it did to him to have him close like this. To be this close but not fighting or yelling or drawing each other’s blood? This was wrong, taboo, incestuous, but why, why did it feel so very right? Why did Vergil consume his thoughts? Lady was right he had a blind spot a weird sort of dependency on his brother, his blood. He stuttered in his movement as he reached to stroke his brother’s face and ran a thumb along his lower lip. Vergil closed his eyes and leaned into the touch and Dante felt his heart race. No, he couldn’t do this no matter how inexplicably he wanted to. He would leave this fire to smolder itself into nothingness and he prayed the embers would die as well. His brother, his blood, his twin, and nothing more.

Tempered steel blue eyes now met his own as he started to pull away. “Do not walk away, brother. You worked so hard to get me tipsy, to strip me of my inhibitions, to make me lose reason. Lady was nothing more than a diversion from your true intentions, wasn’t she?” His hand snapped up to latch onto his belt as slim fingers held him from stepping away any further. “Do not tease me my sybaritic twin.” His voice dropped into a soft rasp he could barely hear over the rush of blood in his own ears.

“Verge, I…I can’t do this to you. This compulsion, this sickness I feel for you it’s…it’s wrong.”
“Hnnn, did you not just plead to have me in your bed like some common harlot? Am I not to assume you want something other than sleep? Do you mock me?” He paused his eyes flickered to some point on the floor before becoming fierce and cold upon him once more. “Was it not I that gave you this sickness in all its revolting glory? Did I not seed this mad incest between us?” His free hand lifted to grasp Dante’s hair just behind his ear tugging his head to the side. “Where is the whore I created?” The throaty growl that accompanied his query went straight to Dante’s groin. He felt the press of stitching to his fully aroused self and choked back a moan. Vergil stepped into him letting him feel his own arousal and pulled his head toward him to meet his lips.

Vergil swallowed the moan his brother finally let escape as their lips touched. Soft chaste lips quickly devolved into tangled tongues and soft nips as they reacquainted themselves. He pulled from his brother and stroked his hand over his temple and down to rest a thumb to his jaw as he gently held his face. His eyes seemed to burn into his very soul as he disclosed he deepest secret, “What I did to you was wrong. What I’m doing to you is wrong, unclean. So many things I have done are wrong, but I regret leaving you like that the most. I shamelessly wanted to leave you with a part of me that you would never forget. A part of me that I wanted to extinguish, my little moth.”

“Verge, you may think you forced yourself on me but we both know, that is not what happened. We wanted that, we needed that, and I fear I want and need it still. That night at Temen-ni-gru haunt me for years, but it wasn’t the sex, not just the sex. That night was about more than blood and power. We are a part of each other that I still don’t understand. We just denied that part of ourselves and I…” Dante kissed him again returning every nip and growl his brother offered. “…I wanted to do the same to you, to make you want to stay with me.” He chuckled bitterly. “I guess neither of us understood. I still don’t understand now and I’m afraid.”

Vergil pulled from his brother and his eyes softened a moment. The twins mirrored one another and echoed each other’s longing. They both understood the weight of the decision they were about to make. Dante felt himself twitch and he shifted uncomfortably. Vergil’s eyes darkened. “Then let me show you what I should have done that night all those years ago.” A dark smile pulled at the corner of his lips and Dante shivered. “Come my little moth, I don’t need my power tonight. I have all the strength I need to dominate you.” He grabbed Dante’s collar and swiveled him around only to push him to the bed where he bounced on his elbows in surprise. Vergil leaned over him pulling his shirt off his shoulder. “Your safe word is blue.” The red hunter moaned rolling his head back into the mattress. He prayed to be forgiven this sin even as he felt his brother press against him relieving him of his own shirt. He prayed that all the world would just turn their eyes and let him have this moment with his brother, his beautifully broken brother, the other half of his own broken psyche.

Chapter End Notes

Decided to clip this scene into it's own chapter for a few reasons.

Inspired by the song "Moth" by HellYeah

Still to come:
- Nero makes a surprise visit to Durante
- Danica seeks help from the celestial realm and the storm builds...
Faith and Determination

Chapter Summary

Nero visits the powers that be on Fortuna with a little message of his own. Danica prepares to face what she must do.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Nero had thought long and hard about what happened between him and Durante not only last night but in the previous years. He didn’t honestly believe that he was a bad guy, per se, there was just something about him that was… Nero could not put a word to the feeling. Durante was voted into his position rather quickly after the Savior incident. Nero was also quickly ousted in his first year despite being called a hero and being offered the chance time and time again to help clear demons for meager pay. Confusion muddled any chance Nero had of getting people to trust him, and when he was making headway in several areas, Durante announced Nero would be moving to the mainland and would visit when needed. Funny, he didn’t remember wanting to move. Things were contentious after that. He chuckled dryly as he finished strapping on his holster and resting Blue Rose to his hip. The Order was highly against guns and Nero knew Credo had not been happy about his use of one, but his step brother had also once commented that perhaps things should change. He also secretly helped him acquire parts and let him field the backlash. He always guessed it was because someone had to go first.

He felt Durante had brought up Credo to push Kyrie’s buttons and that angered him. Credo was even to this day a bit of an open wound. Nero hadn’t been able to sway him early on when he noticed a change in him and then in the end he couldn’t save him at all. For Kyrie it was much different, she always said she felt him near, even now. Well if he was he certainly would not exactly approve of what Nero planned, but then again, he was pretty sure Credo might let it slid considering it was Kyrie whom he protected. He grinned feeling Red Queen’s grip as he stood and shifted her to his back. The young devil arm was growing despite her nontraditional incarnation. Yamato hummed softly his sword had immense potential. He looked to his bringer that flickered whenever Yamato was active and smiled.

“Ok ladies, we have a mission today and then we head home. Anybody have questions?” He chuckled when both swords merely remained silent save for their pulse of energy that they were ready. Checking the house one last time, Nero slipped outside into the early morning bustle of people. A few greeted him cheerily while others smoldered or were fearful and snippets of the tired ‘did he stay with her last night’, ‘what is he doing here’, ‘should we be worried’, conversations touched his ears. He smiled for once not holding his head down nor did he hide his bringer today. This was his choice and Captain Durante was about to find out why he shouldn’t cross a descendant of Sparda.

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Vergil woke to the cold light of mid-day beaming thru the window. He lifted his tired head from the mattress and immediately noticed his brother was nowhere in the messy room. “Dante?” he rasped
pushing up from the mattress. He tensed hearing the soft click of nails to the wood floor. His mind flickered painfully to a memory, of another time and place where hellhounds paced the floors before his cell. He shook his head reminding himself he was no longer in Hell and pushed up to his knees just as the large black wolf appeared at the door. Amber-green eyes snapped their focus to him on the bed and Vergil felt the animals cold fingers of power reach toward him. He hissed baring teeth and standing. The wolf snorted and lay at the doorway unphased by the threat. Vergil watched him cautiously. He glanced around him remembering wisps and moments of last night and a strange feeling gripped at his chest. The wolf lifted his head as Vergil growled and stepped forward with only his skin between them and the faint glow of summoned swords hovering near. “What have you done with my brother?” he bellowed.

“Verge?” His voice came from downstairs and lifted to him as did a cold draft of wind. His voice reassured him in its presence, yet Vergil felt oddly disoriented. A strange nightmare like panic suddenly gripped him. Where had Dante gone? Why had he left his side? Questions swirled as he felt the odd sensation of raw emotion traipse thru his brain. He growled gaining control of himself but letting anger flicker thru him. This emotion he knew, he understood and welcomed the calm that came over him. The wolf cocked his head sideways as if he could visibly see the twins head spin with confusion. The wolf snorted before he stood once more and ambled back down the hall with the slow click of nails. Dante appeared in his place. “Verge? Woah, bro. You’re a bit underdressed. I mean I did not expect to see that again. Well at least not this soon.” He snickered like a child who never saw a naked body before and wriggled his eyebrows. Belatedly Vergil realized he physical state and glared at the man child before him.

“Imbecile. Where were you?” He actively searched the room for some semblance of his clothing and snapped before his brother could reply. “Where are my clothes? Why is that creature here?” Dante unfolded his arms and lifted from the door. Vergil growled and headed for the bathroom like a petulant child, but Dante was not about to point this out.

“Easy Verge, you were exhausted and more than a bit hungover, don’t you remember? Lady and whiskey do not mix, so, I let you sleep. I ran out to grab a few things before the weather turns, and that wolf, that wolf is Fenris, remember? You last saw him with Danica when she took down the striga a few days ago.” His brother paused at the door and looked over his shoulder. If Dante didn’t know better his brother acted as if drugged. “Vergil, are you ok? You seem really out of it.”

He waved his brother off. “Is she here? That winged creature?” He leaned to the doorframe now and Dante rushed to his side. He grabbed a towel from the wall and wrapped him in it out of modesty. Maybe letting him sleep the day away had been a poor choice. Once he finally stopped hurling his whiskey-soaked dinner he sort-of passed out. Honestly, he just wanted him sobered by the time Nero came home, which would be soon. He wouldn’t know how to explain this to the kid.

“No, not yet. She’ll be here tonight. Nero should be here shortly. I just got off the phone with him not to long ago. He expects to be here about the same time as the snow is expected to start. He watched Vergil lean to the other side of the doorframe and suddenly he was weak in his arms. “Hey, you alright?” This was more than the regret he half expected, more than the remnants of his hangover.

“I feel quite ill. I believe this is a side effect of the constant droning in my head from my soul being damaged.”

“Well, you did sort of get this side of hammered last night and things sort of happened.” Dante didn’t want to speak of what transpired between them fearing the regret, the judgement, and the shame. He just wanted to keep what happened to himself as his secret memory, well at least right up until the point where Vergil hit bottom and threw up. Yeah, he’d let that pass an if Vergil didn’t remember he
was not going to remind him.

Vergil narrowed eyes at him and growled. “Buffoon. That does not cause fever and neither does a hangover.” Dante creased his brow and felt his forehead. He was right. He hadn’t noticed it earlier, but his twin usually felt much cooler than him and right now he was anything but.

“Yeah, yeah you’re right. Hey, let’s get you in the shower get you dressed and get you downstairs. Maybe this is lack of food and fatigue and well years of whatever flushing out of your system. Maybe its something else but either way let’s get you presentable for company, ok?”

“Fine” He helped his brother off to the shower. The wolf wandered back into the bedroom giving the place a sniff before he growled and his eyes flickered green.

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Durante flicked another paper across his desk in disgust. Another report of demons leaving the island, several sightings, and a few new oddities he needed to follow up on. He had a big job before him and little resources to work with. He wondered if he should be happy or concerned with the demons seeming to leave the island. Chances were that they would return, and the sheer number of demons recorded meant they were after something important and he had a funny feeling it was a who, not a what. A knock to his door pulled his attention.

“Yes? Come in.”

A young man with dark short hair entered wearing the mandated white dress uniform. “Captain, the council requests an update on the demon sightings and any progress on the search for Agnus. Shall I give them your most recent reports?” He stood patiently by the door with his hand still on the handle. Durante narrowed his eyes and gave a small huff as he returned to the mass of paper sprawled across his desk.

“Which report? The one about the rift in the mines, or the strange lights reported at the old watch tower, maybe the report about the sightings of strange angels seen near the forests outside the castle?” He threw his hands up.

“Sir?” The young knight looked uneasy and cleared his throat nervously. “I meant only…”

Durante sighed heavily, “Evan, correct?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Come back to me in thirty minutes and I will put something together to keep the council happy.”

“Very well.” He bowed and stepped away closing the door after him. Durante huffed tossing his head back as he covered his eyes with his forearms only to groan before dropping them again to look at the confused mess on his desk. His gaze quickly leveled at the blue eyes that seemed to glow as they perused the papers for themselves. His bringer flickered as claws moved one paper aside to look at the next.

“Looks like you have a problem and it looks like you shouldn’t have pissed off the one person who could help you.” Nero flicked his eyes up to study Durante. He felt his eyes flicker red. “It also sounds like I’ve got twenty-eight minutes to illuminate that error. Let’s start with, you will stay away from Kyrie.”

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Danica felt the cold settling in her bones on the trip over from Fortuna. She took the first early ferry after making sure Casey was safe in Caminus. The small mining town had its own secrets including a
demonic blacksmith who once worked with Sparda and was well acquainted with slipping between realms. The elder demon offered to help Casey with regards to the portal near Firenze. Braxus believed the disparate feelings Danica had within the ruined city had more to do with the ancient hell gate that resided there. The hell gate was hidden next to a celestial portal. The duality of the situation was not missed on any of them, but as Braxus explained it. “It is because these two rifts exist so closely to one another that they both can remain hidden. Shadow does not exist without flame.” He also believed that it was this same fact as to why Celeste and Agnus chose there to hide their little pocket into purgatory. Truthfully it made sense for a slew of reasons Danica didn’t even broach with Casey. She was too excited to meet a forge master and his adorably handsome grandson. The pair created a clever enchanted amulet that would be used to open the portal where she sensed Vergil’s soul might be held. Getting out again was apparently a whole different matter but they’d investigate thru their sources and see what panned out.

The water had been choppy with white peaks giving the dark water an iced appearance, and many travelers complained of the cold as dark skies only lightened to a soft gray with sunrise. As the ferry came into port, she noted the clouds building in the distance. She decided a quick stop at the cathedral would still be possible and as she pulled her cloak tighter around her frame she admitted facing both twins together was making her feel uneasy. Her short journey over to the cathedral was marked by bits of conversations that quickly caught her up on the news and rumors of the area. Apparently, Temen-ni-gru was said to active again. She prayed this was a rumor. They really didn’t need that mess open again. The good news she could take from this was that people were frightened enough that many left the immediate area when the storm and rumors collided, too much could go wrong if this storm really did dump twelve heavy inches of snow as predicted.

Father McCabe greeted her brightly. He must have had some inkling that she was coming beforehand. That wasn't unusual, he often felt when she was about to show up. But what really tipped off the tattling culprit was when Dani received a new duffel filled with new hunting clothes courtesy of the new armorer that now lived in the narrows of Capulet. The gift included a collection of assorted alchemy supplies also. That was when she knew a certain precognitive child was behind it. Riley hugged her tightly as she visited her between classes. The other children hovered, but the nuns shushed them along leaving the two of them for a few minutes. Dani felt badly for not showing sooner. She wanted to visit with them all, but she had to make sure Riley was okay. Riley was her seven-year-old reminder that good things could happen from horrible events. She was an instant pep talk wrapped in wisps of strawberry blonde hair, a soft blush of freckles and a bright toothy grin that could always make you smile. She also had a way with words.

“Stop worrying. You can figure this out too. As for Mr. Vergil, I just think he needs to learn to trust again, just like you, so the way I see it, you two have something in common.” She sat next to Danica who had sort of flopped on to a bench in the hallway. Riley had a way of just knowing that sometimes sucked the wind out of you.

“Oh, really, and where did you hear about Mr. Vergil?” She quirked an eyebrow at her then smiled.

“Father McCabe was talking to his invisible friend again. You know the guardian angel. I can see him but others can’t.”

She looked at her surprised, a guardian angel? She licked her lips and scrunched her face a moment as she was blindsided by the reality of situation. She knew Riley could sense things and more importantly she often saw things others didn’t. She was quite sensitive to the supernatural, but the fact that Father McCabe was talking to an ‘invisible’ angel meant they were likely hiding something from her. She opted to dismiss it, for now. He helped many people and creatures. It was entirely possible what Riley saw or heard was something benign and surely, he would tell her if it was important. No doubt there were a few in the celestial realm interested in Vergil’s reappearance
especially since it was obvious someone in the demonic realm was moving to retrieve him. She must have taken too long to think about this notion as Riley grinned crawled to her knees to grab her face with both hands.

“Corvus! He came back. I was so happy.”

“You’re changing the subject.”

“I’m a kid its what I do. Besides if its important he’ll tell you, you know that. He’s sneaky but in a clever way.”

“Corvus or Father McCabe? I’m confused. What are we talking about?” Riley released her face and giggled as Danica quirked her expression into exaggerated confusion.

“Dani, just go! Bring Nero back next time ‘kay?”

“M’kay” They hugged and whispered that they loved one another before Riley scooted off the bench quickly and ran down the hall just as Sister Teresa had come for her. She smiled down at her stroking her head lovingly and then smiled and nodded to Danica. That kid had timing. She stood had headed back to McCabe’s office to gather her stuff. It was time to face Mr. Vergil. She smiled and snickered to herself. She wondered if Riley knew she just needed her confidence.

She knew she was as ready as she’d ever be and that she should get going but Father McCabe knew her too well. He stopped her passing thru the gallery to the narthex. “My child? You seem troubled.”

“I’m not ready.”

“Did we forget something? Oh, I also sent in an order for groceries to be delivered to the office. Corvus tells me it’s a bit of a mess over there and not ready for all four of you under the same roof.”

“Corvus, that little stinker is trying to get back into my good graces.”

“Trouble?”

“Meh, I’ll let him tell you. The new clothes are a surprise, though.” She lifted the duffel then let it fall back in place. “Should I be made aware of anything?”

“Evelyn was forced from Fortuna and came to visit letting us know she was close should I need anything. It was just a random happenstance that Riley turned into an opportunity.”

“Sounds like Riley.”

“Indeed. Evelyn was also anxious to get the news out of her move. I told her I knew a few new hunters and would let them know. I did not realize she had never met Riley before. So, you know the child, she turned on the charm and Evelyn found her designs quite insightful and together they determined your normal attire would not fair well for any extended time in hell.”

“Just wanna visit for like the shortest time possible. Brimstone and Hellfire wreaks havoc with my hair, not to mention my wings and grace. I’m not planning on staying,” she clipped nervously.

“Of course not. But, you must remember there are rifts in hell that can get one turned around both in space and time. You would do well to remember all that you have learned and be prepared for anything.”
Corvus appeared from seemingly nowhere and alighted to her shoulder. “Well, well, little bird how did you disappear so easily? Any good news?” He dipped his head and cawed softly then lifted to land on the priests shoulder. “Wow, really? They must know someone very high up.”

“Or they have impressed the right people.” The priest nodded his head as he spoke. “You should go. I will keep an eye on our feathered friend. He will be best utilized if he remains unseen.”

“You’re just going to spoil him.” She cocked a hip at the pair and adjusted the weight of the bags slung to her shoulders. She shrugged. “I guess he deserves the break. I was glad to have him the past couple of days. Being a prisoner for as long as he was, he looks a little thin. Thanks, to both of you. See ya soon.” He bobbed his head and she snorted as she turned away from them. “Hey! Don’t think I don’t know you’re letting me deal with that snafu with his hair, again, thanks.” The priest eyed the bird who laughed causing the priest to chuckle before lifting his hand as she reached the door.

“Blessings my child, may god smile upon you.” She only offered a short wave of her hand then disappeared into the quickly receding afternoon light. “She has all the tools we can give her, lets hope she has the faith in herself.” The raven bobbed again. “Right, perhaps a pep talk wouldn’t hurt.” He smiled looking toward the door until it finally shut and blocked the icy cold air from entering the cathedral. “Come. I believe you were promised food.”

Danica noted the sky was darker than normal for this time of year and checking her phone she saw the latest weather report, not that she needed it. She could feel the damp and smell the snow heavy clouds. It would probably be snowing before she got to the office. She pulled her hood over her face and headed for the park. It was sort of on the way to the office and for some reason she felt like Sparda might bolster her confidence tonight. The park was near empty. A few children played as the first flakes drifted thru the air but mothers wary of the growing dark gathered them and were taking long steps thru the snow that had already started to stick to the cold ground before she made her way across the manicured garden and over to the grand statue.

Sparda stood watching over the park replete with full armor on a horse as stoic and muscular as he himself was sculpted. She mused how the dark metal statue looked more like a well-muscled man in his prime with demonic armor than the devil he truly was. But that was alright, people needed heroes and this one made more since to the people of Capulet. She took in her surroundings a moment letting her senses flicker, as expected it was quiet, too quiet. She felt a brush of frigid wind and turned to find only a swirl of snowflakes. She was getting paranoid.

Again, she looked up to the dark statue and spoke, “You know I never could figure out why I come here to talk to you. I guess since I can’t visit my mother’s grave and supposedly if the rumors are true you knew my real father… ahh… it doesn’t matter; you listen and don’t judge. Does it really matter why I come here to talk to a statue? People think I’m crazy as it is.” She sighed and kicked at the snow as she paced before him. “Look, I didn’t mean to get messed up in whatever is going on here. I just seem to get drawn into things. So if it’s not to much trouble could you please help me, not so much for me but for your sons. Yep, you heard me sons, as in plural, as in Vergil is back.”

She looked up and closed her eyes letting the snow fall on her face. The flakes felt nice against her heated skin. “I think I can help him, but I’m not sure how to give his soul back to him if I can successfully carry it across the veil.” She looked to her hands covered in black leather gloves and rubbed her forearms partially covered in a dark green cloak she wore. “Still not convinced these things aren’t a curse. I’ve always had to keep myself hidden and these don’t make it any easier, at least the wings seem to stay hidden.” She snorted adjusted her hood back over her head feeling that her hair was now damp with snow. “I used to think all I could do was hurt people. Like I was some kind of weapon or just a mistake, but I think it would be nice if what I was meant more. Maybe this is my opportunity to make a difference, maybe he really wasn’t supposed to fall. Things changed
over the past few years since I got involved with your family. I’m grateful. I’ve been given a chance to heal those damaged, or beaten, or just lost, but to think I might be able to make someone whole once more. To give and not take.”

She scrunched her eyes and shut them tight holding back tears before she shook herself sighed and looked back up at the statue. “Just wish I knew how this is all supposed to work. I mean it would be nice just once to actually know I’m on the right path as opposed to guessing. I couldn’t help mom, I couldn’t save Riley’s mom… I couldn’t even save my own son with these gifts… so I guess I’ll settle for saving yours. I just pray I don’t screw this up too, but you can’t tell Father McCabe. He’ll never let it go that I actually said a prayer even if I did it in a roundabout way.” She dropped her hands to her sides as she watched the pristine white snow swirl and land on the ground around her. It was coming down in large fluffy flakes and the grass was almost completely covered with only the tallest of leaves sticking up like stubble on a man’s face. “I know why I come here. You listen, and you keep my secrets. Thank you.” She smiled a bittersweet smile and turned to leave when suddenly she faced vivid gold eyes that hovered before her.

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Durante was not one to startle or for that matter fear just about anything. He had his own secrets, his own inner strength honed thru years of arduous work and his own kind of tragedy that had shaped him but seeing how utterly pissed Nero was in front of him made him question his decision to approach Kyrie. He was desperate to get Nero’s attention and he let himself get carried away.

“Nero, I promise. I…I made a bad call, a very poor decision. I will not make that mistake again.” He took a breath and stood pushing away from the desk and folding his hands behind his back and pacing to the balcony. “Tell me. How did you get passed the guards? I never even sensed you in here.”

“Oh, I have my ways.”

“If I had to guess, Credo taught you much while you were under his tutelage. Don’t get me wrong I liked Credo. Admired him even.”

“I’m hearing a but,” he snarked mesmerized by something in the map and a journal that he came across.

“You must admit in the end, he was different.” Nero looked up from the desk then stood crossing his arms over his chest. His bringer glowed a deep purple.

“Since Kyrie is not here, yeah, I can admit that. Agnus changed him somehow.”

“Or replaced him.” He looked over his shoulder.

“Excuse me?”

“Look, we are not friends and I have in the past treated you less than admirably, but I have something for you. I hope you will take it as a token of my earnest hope to find a compromise between us.” He walked to the bookcase by the door. “This was found in the archives of the new labs you and your uncle discovered. The same lab in which Vergil was found.” He handed over a small journal paired with a few other files and another journal that he readjusted to be on top. The last journal had the same cover as the one seen on the desk.

“What’s this?” Nero flipped thru the items and Durante huffed clearly agitated by something.

“Something that makes me question several things. Especially a few recent decisions the council has
made. Look, I understand this is not the time and truthfully this is only one reason why I needed to
see you. The badgering about the demons are quite literally the councils doing. I needed a plausible
cover to approach her.”

Nero leafed thru the pieces but stopped on a page in one of the journals. “This is Credo’s
handwriting.” He looked up at Durante with disbelief that suddenly morphed into suspicion. “What
game are you playing?”

“One where I must be mindful for whom I work. I thought being family you may want those. Come
find me again after you’ve read thru… everything. I really could use your help with this and other
than your family, show no one else.”

“Bullshit!” Durante held his gaze then chanced to pull the other journal that was not Credo’s from
Nero’s hands and press it back to him on top of the small stack.

“Nero, there are things that you do not understand. Please, read.” He stalked off and leaned to his
desk again. “Now if you would excuse me, I need to come up with something to tell the council, and
I believe you have twenty extra minutes to catch the next ferry.”

Nero watched him sigh over his desk and looked down to the journal he pressed at him again. He
flicked it open to notice it was the same handwriting as the journal on the desk when he noticed a
phrase written neatly to the top corner of the very first page, ‘And with a rose as white as snow, the
Count offered the bloom to his lover, his wife, the other half of his soul, as a symbol of his promise
to protect this world from the evils of his own, for between them and in their forbidden love they
discovered not all who wander in darkness know sin and not all who live in the light know virtue.’
He snapped his eyes up to watch the back of the Captain. Oblivious to the silent movements Nero
made behind him, Durante flipped open the journal on the desk and wrote something then marked
his map. Nero closed the journal in his hand and cleared his throat. Durante surprised lifted to look
over his shoulder.

“The reports you are receiving are too random. Demons like organized chaos. Find the pattern. You
are fishing for a red herring that throws the pattern off. Let me and my hunter friends handle this for
now.”

He looked to the desk. “How do you…” Durante felt a clawed hand suddenly grip his throat as Nero
whispered in his ear, his body keeping him from turning.

“If you lie to me. I will know. I’m not a child who believes in fairytales. I’m not a child at all and this
game your playing is dangerous.”

Durante coughed spinning around the moment he felt air enter his lungs freely, but his assailant was
gone. He heard the soft thud of something strike the pavement outside his balcony and rushed over to
see in the bright morning light, but again he saw nothing. No one ran, no one screamed in surprise,
no one showed any signs of surprise nor dismay. Nero was nowhere to be seen in the throng of
people bustling the city streets. He returned to his office blowing air thru his lips then ran a hand thru
his dark hair. He wasn’t sure Nero understood what he really needed. He had played his role for too
long to not succeed now. Frustrated he stepped over to pour himself some water when he saw it. The
single page torn from what was once his journal lay next to the vase filled with white roses he kept
on the sill marked simply ‘Stay away from Firenze.’ He smiled. He had his answer.

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Chapter End Notes
Next up: It's a long night before the longest night we've been waiting for. Fluff and sparks are in order to prepare every one for the solstice. Danica explains what she knows.
Chapter Summary

A little domestic fluff sets the opening stage for Vergil to see what life could be. Nero speaks his mind and his father accepts the terms. Danica needs Vergil’s help as they prepare for what is to come, and a shocking surprise awaits them all. Buckle in for the ride it’s about to get rough… Let’s Rock!
- Part one of a back to back chapter posting

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It hadn’t snowed in Capulet in years. Capulet and snow where two words that to Dante’s knowledge had never been uttered in the same sentence, it was a rare event, and yet now everyone spoke of the coming white precipitation as if it were both a blessing and a curse. The whole city was a buzz with that same mixture of excitement and anxiety, so it was no surprise that the city shuddered to a halt with the first few snowflakes. Forecasters estimated the weather event would last a few days and the accumulation of snow could be upward of twelve inches.

Dante scoffed at the news clicking of the small radio in the kitchen. People should worry about other things in the city besides snow. He scoffed when Nero told him three days ago. He supposed it wasn’t the first time he should have listened to the kid. He texted Lady earlier to make sure they had what they needed to go after the Frosts northwest of the city. She at least was nice enough to text back to buzz off and take care of his pretentious brother, but she texted again a few minutes ago to tell him the Frosts were nowhere to be found.

Lost in thought, the hunter turned caretaker made sandwiches for him and his brother. It was the knock on the front door that pulled him from his meandering thoughts and the kitchen. Fortunately, Vergil felt better, but his low-grade fever lingered, and his headache seemed to be getting worse. He hoped it wasn’t something serious, but he honestly didn’t know so he offered to make them something to eat. It was about all he felt he could do. Dante gathered everything to plates and stepped into the main room. He set the sandwiches on the table next to his brother and headed quickly for the door as another louder knock resounded in the room. Vergil finally looked up from his book.

“Now who the heck knocks at my door?”

“Whoever it is be rid of them. I am in no mood to dispense pleasantries.” Dante snorted at his brother who grabbed his sandwich with irritation and began to eat after a quick inspection. He opened the door to find two young people, maybe in their late teens, a boy and a girl who from outward indications appeared to be siblings.

“Is this the residence of uh a…Danica McCabe? We have a grocery order to deliver,” asked the young lady. She blushed once she looked up at Dante who merely grinned.

“Dude, please, say yes. I’m cold and this is our last delivery,” the young man groaned.

“We sort of got turned around. Uhmm, you don’t live in the best part of town,” she added.
Dante snorted and leaned back on his doorframe. “Yeah, yeah, Dani lives here from time to time. So, what’d she order? Anything good?”

“Well apparently you’ve got some lucky teenagers because there are enough frozen pizzas and pop tarts for like two months.” The boy snorted before he stepped down the steps to drop the tailgate of the small truck. He untied the tarp that covered the back and flicked snow into the parking lot.

“Where do you want us to put it?” blushed the girl. Dante smiled before the sound of someone clearing their throat garnered his attention. He glared at Vergil over his shoulder but thumbed over toward the bar to the right of the door.

“Oh, just stick everything over there on the bar. Let me do one thing and I’ll help.” He raised an eyebrow seeing the load in the back of the truck. “Looks like someone thinks we might get snowbound.” He gave her a wink and spun around toward his brother. “Geez Verge, I didn’t say or try anything,” he chirped. The young girl had already headed back outside and was out of earshot.

“Good thing. That one will get you arrested.” Vergil lifted an eyebrow to him before returning to his book having clearly already eaten his sandwich.

“I’m not dense,” he retorted wondering if maybe Vergil just didn’t eat enough. The man did eat like a bird. He shrugged.

“Could have fooled me. You are a magnet for trouble and that girl is trouble. Some things have not changed.” Dante narrowed his eyes at him then without looking grabbed his sandwich and handed it to his brother.

“Just eat something else before your blood sugar gets any lower. My god Mr. crabby pants, who knew you were the jealous type,” he mumbled as the kids returned with bags in hand.

“Imbecile.”

The kids started stacking bags on the bar. Dante bowed to his brother with a flourish of his hand and backed away. “Your highness, I shall take my leave.” Vergil grumbled looked at the offered sandwich and shrugged before he ate it too.

They cleared the truck quickly despite the cold wind that seemed to pick up and the snow which only fell harder causing them to leave a wet trail from the door to the bar. After roughly a dozen bags and a few boxes later, they were done. The hunter noticed the boys eyes trail more than once across his macabre trophy wall, but the rule was simple. You had to ask about them. He didn’t offer the story anymore. The youth shook his hat off exposing his dark hair and questioned him.

“So, you into horror and stuff?”

“Something like that.” He walked around to the desk and snatched the invoice that the girl motioned for him to sign. She shivered looking at the wall and it was not from the cold.

“Cool. Do you believe the stories around here about the demons and other weird stuff that happens?”

“I do.” Vergil lifted his eyes to his brother watching him but then returned to his book. Dante was fully aware Vergil was not actually reading but listened instead.

“So, do I.” Dante snorted at the kid’s response. “My friends and I know this guy that’s friends with a real hunter. Says this city crawls with ‘em.” The girl shivered again and said she didn’t want to know but Dante noticed she bent an ear to listen as he explained that he was a hunter and those trophies were real. A few years ago, he would have avoided the questions and subsequent chatter altogether.
but these days he just kept it short. Experience had proven only the people who believed in such supernatural events tended to be the ones to ask and the rest didn’t want to know. The boy grunted clearly impressed at the scarecrow head and he poked at something lizard-like. “Heard there’s been signs of stuff going on over at Temen-ni-gru. Think you’ll see anything this week?” The girl blanched hearing this and Dante chuckled.

“Maybe. Demons aren’t predictable. Guess it’s a good thing this is your last delivery.” He scrounged in his top desk drawer and gave the kids a generous tip seeing the bill was already paid. They both blinked at the offer and gave a small whoop.

“Thanks, dude.” Dante snickered seeing the bills stuffed haphazardly into his front pocket while the girl blinked then stuck the bills neatly into her back pocket.

“Yes, thank you… uhh Mr.

“Dante just call me Dante.”

“Like as in the Dante? No way! Darren this is that hunter guy Meg talked about.”

“No”

“Yes!”

“Meg?”

“Our sister. Looks like me but…”

“…with bigger boobs,” Darren chuckled. Vergil snorted quietly behind them. He was not the least bit surprised his brother was somehow involved with an older sister. It seemed distinctly like the cliched type of thing his brother did. Humans were so… predictable just like his brother.

Dante tilted his head back and tried to recall a ‘Meg’ when it finally came to him. ‘Oh yeah,’ he thought. ‘The girl at the market over in Limbo this past summer. Blonde. Sweet. Funny. Nice rack and a great kisser.’ He felt a pinch in his head and eyed Vergil. Maybe he was jealous. He felt another pinch before he heard the soft growl. He knew he wasn’t reading. As he recalled, he and Meg parted on good terms.

“Shut up!” snorted the girl oblivious to Dante’s mental wanderings and his brother’s admonitions. “Women are more than boobs, you… ass!” She hit her brother and glared at him.

“So, says the flat chested nerdy younger sister. Ahhh, don’t worry, Penny. I’m sure there is someone out there just for you too.” He snorted heading out the door. The girl followed him clearly angry.

“Hey Darren, you asshole, at least I’m not gonna lose driving privileges because I failed algebra, again!”

“Shut up…”

Dante closed the door not sure he wanted to hear the end of their argument. It reminded him of some of the random arguments he had with Vergil when they were kids. He took a few steps from the door when it opened suddenly and in walked a rather cold looking and snow-covered Nero. His nose and cheeks were a bright cheery pink as he stomped his feet on the mat. Dante grinned from ear to ear happy to have him home. “Nero! How ya doing?”

“I’m cold, old man. Can you move outta the way?”
“Sure, sure, sorry. So, kid, ya sticking around?” Nero cocked his head at the hunter and growled.

“That’s usually what one does when they live in a particular place. Why? Did you already rent out my room?” He tossed his duffle to the corner next to the jukebox giving his father a nod.

“Nope no takers, bummed really I could use the income.” They both grinned at one another. “Hey, your dad doesn’t feel so good so can you help me put the groceries away?”

“Like as in sick? You two don’t get sick. Wait a minute!” He spun having caught a glimpse of the bountifully covered bar. Who bought groceries? Cause you sure as hell did not remember to shop before this storm and you can’t afford that much of anything.” Vergil caught himself snort then cover it with a small cough. Apparently, his son was quite adept at seeing Dante was nothing more than a lucky freeloader.

“Dani.” He wriggled his eyebrows and Nero just shook his head.

“Seriously? You lucky bastard. She’s too good for you, but I’m not gonna lie. I know she got me something too, so Pffft…” He saw the grin on his uncle’s face brighten and punched him in the arm.

“Don’t go getting ideas. I remember a certain someone who couldn’t wait to get out of here after her probation and then… well… don’t get your hopes up that she’s staying long term.” He looked over to his father on the couch still reading. Nero shook his head convinced the man was trying to avoid him but then again Vergil tended to avoid everyone, so he settled on him trying to just survive his brother. He knew from his own experience it took practice. Vergil pinched his nose and closed his eyes feeling his son watch him, or should he say inspect him. “What did Dani say?” He took a step toward the rather unassuming figure on the couch and was met with eyes that glared fiercely at him.

“The angel? Why would I let her look at me? I am fine, it is just fatigue.” Nero caught the subtle drift in focus to his eyes just as he felt her enter the office.

“There could be a reason for you not feeling well which has little to do with lack of actual sleep. I’d like to have a look.” Danica offered softly as she entered the front door then closed it to the harsh frigid wind. Nero immediately turned to hug her. The snow fell thick from her shoulders. She smiled but continued to address Vergil, “I promise no snide remarks. I cannot guarantee I will not make an inappropriate joke, though. I’ve been around him for too long.” She thumbed at Dante who looked like the cat that swallowed a canary and several mackerel. He narrowed his eyes at her.

“I have better things to do than indulge your sadistic curiosity in me. No!” He returned to reading and she shrugged.

“Man, it’s really starting to come down huh?” Nero glanced at the floor and the growing puddle from melting snow. “I didn’t expect it to get this heavy until tomorrow. I also didn’t expect you until much later.”

She smiled placing a gloved hand to his face and nodded. “I’ve got some news but I’m sure we can take a break. Do you wanna build a snowman?” She sang the last part and Nero’s face fell. He cocked his head to the side releasing her. They both knew Kyrie insisted watching that movie more than once plus joy amongst joys, she loved to sing the songs like a love-struck preschooler. Granted it was one of the first movies that Fortuna allowed over from the mainland and everyone knew at least some of the songs, but with Kyrie and her actual ability to sing it had taken on a crazed fervor in her house. He was quite happy when she moved on to something else.

“Nope!” He stomped away grabbing his duffle. “…and you can help him put the groceries away for that little remark.”
“Ahh kid, don’t stomp away pouty. There. Are. Pop tarts!” Dante teased in a sing-song sort of voice with a half expectant expression. He choked back his need to make a ‘Let it Go’ reference knowing that it would get him pummeled to the ground by the youth. The young man growled as he hesitated a step and turned.

“No, not even for pop tarts.” He started up the stairs again and Dante crossed his arms waiting. Danica giggled watching him. “Damn it, fine I’ll help. Let me get my stuff stowed first.”

Dante and Danica cheered. Nero blushed and stomped up the stairs while Vergil just looked bewildered. Clearly, they knew something of his son that he did not.

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Vergil watched with growing apathy as Dante grew slightly nervous at Danica’s presence. Likewise, he noted she also seemed anxious. He offered to take her cape and her duffle, but she politely declined setting these things aside after shaking off her cape. She stepped over toward the bar and examined several bags which started a mundane conversation he had little use for listening to any further, instead he returned to his book. It was an interesting tome he had found in the box Dante had spoken of earlier and it was coincidentally replete with information on angels, including assorted spells. He flicked to the next page as his eyes rapidly devoured the words. Apparently, Dante’s pretty little trollop was a Nephilim and not a true angel. Somehow the news that she was a hybrid sat easier with him than thinking she was a full blood angel. He continued to read as he heard Nero come downstairs and head toward the kitchen that was filled with inane chatter that persisted from them as they carried things into the kitchen.

Vergil listened patiently from the couch and determined the angel was quite deft at handling Dante’s innuendos while teasing his son in a good-natured way. He suddenly stopped reading as he realized this was real. She genuinely liked them, regardless of whatever happened to make her leave, and as indicated by their casual banter and occasional quips they seemed to genuinely like her in return. Odd that he found himself the outsider when it was her who should feel misplaced. He was reminded that she had mentioned she had news and even as his head seemed to drone louder, he wondered if she could help him. He truly found he was eager to see if she could help return his soul. He heard his name mentioned in the other room and his thoughts drifted back to their chatter. Dante was telling them of his sudden weakness and headache. Damn him. Appearing weak in front of either of them irritated him.

Strangely enough, Force Edge pulsed with reassurance from the wall and he turned to look at the sword. Her well-worn duffle lay beneath the sword on the floor. He pondered why she appeared to waver closer to some traveling college student than a well-traveled hunter. He didn’t really know her and yet he was willing to let her carry his soul? He must truly be desperate. She undoubtedly would be staying for the night maybe longer and he wondered where she would sleep. A sudden anger flushed him. Dante was his. Nero was his. He let a jealous and possessive growl slip passed his lips as he snapped his already forgotten book closed. He closed his eyes and took a few small breaths, his head droned with the incessant buzzing that told him something was very wrong. If he had to listen to this much longer surely, he would go crazy. He wanted his power. He needed his soul fragment. He needed her to obtain it for him. Yes, perhaps she would be useful to him. He felt her presence before he smelled the fragrant scent of tea. He opened his eyes and saw she lingered a few steps away with concern.

“Vergil, I’ve made you tea,” she offered warmly obviously trying not to agitate him as she had done earlier.

“I don’t need your concoctions, witch.”

“That’s grand master witch third degree to you.” His breathe hitched in subtle surprise and she chuckled at his response. “Kidding, you big baby. It’s Earl grey tea with a bit of aspirin for your headache and regardless of what ails you, it’s still just tea and it won’t hurt you. God forbid it
actually helps.” She set it on the table next to him and walked away. Nero let an anxious sigh that morphed into a chuckle as he sat next to him on the couch. His bringer glowed faintly, and he scratched the side of his head before he spoke.

“She drinks a lot of tea. So, no more dirt coffee and beer.”

“I heard that!” came a disembodied voice from the kitchen.

“Just talk to her you idiot!” He rubbed his nose and Vergil immediately felt the nervousness in him. “I saw her put in an aspirin so it’s just like she said. Surprisingly, she has a way with small ailments. Not that we get sick often but it’s the little things sometimes.”

“Nero, I…”

“No, let me start. You’ve got to let me get this out first then… then we can talk.”

“Very well.” He leaned forward and placed the book on the table before sitting back with his hands folded to his lap. He glared at the tea while Nero tried to get comfortable next to him.

“I was mad at you for a long time. I was mad at everyone for a long time. I felt abandoned. Then I was given a chance with a family and I started to settle in but then… then this happened.” He shook his bringer and it flickered softly. “I hated it. I hated being different again, so I tried to hide it. I tried to hide what was happening to me.” He huffed. “I hated being more than just different. I hated that nagging feeling that I was different. My thoughts. The feelings that grew inside me. I thought for a long time I was turning into a monster. I was becoming like the things I hunted, and it hurt. Worse, I had no one to turn to. I always had a real tough time fitting in. About three years ago that changed, and one day I woke up in my own skin and felt like I had a chance. I felt like I belonged somewhere, and I owe it all to…”

“Dante.”

“Yeah, Dante, the greatest man child ever known to grace this realm and possibly any other.” He snickered affectionately as he leaned forward to his knees and let his hands hang limply between bouts of expressive clenching and nervous knuckle cracking. “Look, I’ve worked hard for everything I have, and you just came in and took it all away in a few weeks. I know it seems childish but if you haven’t noticed there are not a lot of other people out there who I can go to and I don’t know you.” He let out an exaggerated sigh and ran his bringer thru his hair.

“He didn’t talk about you much. You could see it in his eyes how much it hurt when he did. He told me his version of things between you. I’ve heard other versions too, but all I really know is that he missed you so bad that it nearly killed him, and he can’t see that what you did to him… well it was just plain shitty… no matter what the reason. After years of being in that orphanage, always looked over, never wanted, I had a family and then I found my family in Dante. He taught me so much about who and what I was, and he taught me family means something. Family helps each other out and sticks together thru thick and thin. So, I’d be remiss in not saying this to you now. You don’t treat family like that, ever. You can’t hurt people for your own gain and you can’t just waltz in and tell me what to do. You don’t get a free pass to suddenly be my father, others have filled that role when I needed it most. I’ve been on my own longer than I’ve ever felt like I belonged somewhere.”

He scuffed his glowing bringer thru his hair and sighed. “I’m not telling you this to be angry or insolent or childish or irritating, I just needed to tell you where I’m coming from. I needed you to understand why it hurt so much to get left out especially when I might have been able to help. I can help, and I will. I’m stronger than you think.”

Vergil looked to his son in surprise. He hadn’t realized, “It was never my intention to hurt him or
“Yeah, well, the road to hell is paved with good intentions, isn’t it?” Vergil chuffed looking away. Of all the cliched phrases his son could have chosen, this one hurt the most. He had good intentions for what he did, but there had been complications. He was trying to make things right but, in the end, he only made it worse and people died. The wrong people died, and other lives were changed irrevocably.

“I mean, you probably had your reasons. I don’t know. I wasn’t in your shoes but from my perspective, you were blinded by a self-centered need for power.” They were both silent for several minutes. Vergil mulled over what his son said, and he felt a pain ripple thru his chest and a nervousness churn in his gut. He had so many things he wanted to blurt out but telling him or his brother right now would only lend itself to doubt and confusion. He needed them to keep it together until he was right again. Then he would tell them. Then he could explain.

“I’ve noticed he’s got a blind spot when it comes to you. If you try to hurt him, he won’t see it coming.” Nero paused taking in a deep breather before finishing his thought. “Don’t try ‘cause I won’t forgive you.”

“You are looking out for him. I understand. Nero, you are correct in your thoughts, especially that you do not know me, and my past does not lend itself towards respect or the warm furries of emotion.” He was unsure of the words he wanted to use but when Nero snickered, he quickly determined he had said something wrong. He furrowed his brows.

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“Fuzzies,” Nero corrected.

“What?”

“Warm fuzzies.”

“Ah, yes.”

“Guess this is new for you too.”

“Indeed.”

“Look, I want to know about mom and I want to know other stuff too, but I get now is not the time. I know you don’t want to talk about her, and I understand that you feel guilty somehow, but you owe me that, at least.” He stood suddenly and started to walk away. Vergil felt his chest grip at him again and he too stood.

“Nero!” He turned and looked at his father with his confidence wavering. The snowy youth said most of what he wanted to. The rest could be said later, when he wasn’t distracted with the weight of what was going on around them. The elder twin raised and opened his arms to him. “I believe it is appropriate for me to hug you at this time. I wish to do this action.”

Nero snorted with relief and amusement, “Now I know where I get my awkwardness from,” he chortled.

“Indeed. Your mother never met someone she could not talk to. She took awkward and made it into opportunities. I tried quite hard to intimidate her but failed… wonderfully. I found her traits both annoying and endearing at the same time. She even had the audacity to tell me that I was both emotionally awkward and socially stunted.” Nero snorted having left him hanging with his arms drooping and he stepped back to hug his father.
“I think I would’ve liked her.”

“Indeed. You are very much like her.” Nero felt something new and strange as his demon rose within him and their energies greeted each other for the first time since his return as father and son. In a strange way, Nero now felt he understood his father just a bit better now. He was guarded and cold on the outside so that he could protect a part of himself hidden deep within. A part he either didn’t understand or feared either way, Nero could relate and as they pulled from one another just as awkwardly as they had embraced, he smiled. “I promise my son, I will never choose to leave you or my brother again. I have been given a second chance, that I shall not squander.”

Nero nodded, “And I promise, I’ll give you that chance.” Vergil closed his eyes and smiled. Finally, he had his chance to understand his son.

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The Dark Slayer was confused when he opened his eyes again to find Danica in front of him stroking his face gently and speaking in another language. He blinked at her and swatted her hand away. She smiled with relief and stood from the bed.

“About time you woke. I was about to have Fenris lick you.” Vergil sat up to his elbows abruptly. He was unsure why he was currently in Dante’s bed. He thought he had been talking to his son but now he was confused as to whether the event he remembered was a dream.

“What nonsense are you blathering about? Why are you here and why are you touching me?” She grinned and called over her shoulder while crossing her arms.

“Dante! Grumpy is awake!”

“Insolent woman,” he clipped but it only made her twitter before biting her tongue.

Vergil looked toward the door when he heard the wolf approaching once more but it was his brother’s familiar grin that he saw first. “Hey bro, how you feeling?” Danica stepped softly toward the door and greeted Fenris with a scratch behind his ear. He sat to her feet lolling a tongue out the side of his mouth before rubbing against her. Vergil was distracted by their obvious fondness for one another and Dante snorted. “Bro?” He snapped his fingers in front of him and Vergil looked to him with even more annoyance than he had to start.

“What?”

“Are. You. Ok?”

“I am not a child. I am fine.” They glared at each other for a few seconds until Dante pressed.

“Then why are you here?”

Vergil turned from him with a blank expression and sat all the way up in the bed. He crossed his legs and sat in an almost meditative pose. Stubborn. Dante knew he had no clue. He could even sense he was trying to be sneaky and poke around in their shared consciousness to find an answer. “Well?”

“I do not know.” Dante snorted and sat down on the bed next to him causing his stoic brother to wobble on the mattress.

“You passed out.”

“Oh, you swooned like a wee woman,” she lilted with a faux Gaelic accent to her voice.

“Dani!”

“What?” Dante now glared at her and even Fenris seemed to stiffen at her words before he snorted his disapproval. “Okay, okay, I’m sorry. That was uncalled for. Funny but uncalled for. He’s just so surly, he reminds me of Nero and we both know how much I love to pick on him.”

“Yeah, but he’s not me and you’re playing with a very angry fire.” Nero petted Fenris as he passed and brought Vergil a mug. “Here drink this. It will make you feel better.”

Vergil continued to glare at Danica who eventually shrugged and left the room. “What is it?” he asked.

“It’s kind of like a tea but it will help with your headache and give you some strength. I watched her make it and I understand the ingredients she used and why. So, I trust it. It will help you get back on your feet for the next few days, but…” He looked to his uncle as Vergil took the mug from him. He was suspicious of the dark clear liquid and could smell a variety of ingredients although none were toxic.

Vergil looked between them, “…but what?”

“Verge, we’re running out of time. Dani knows where your soul should be, and Casey made a key to get to it.”

“But?”

“We believe Celeste is trying to gain control in some way possibly trying to manipulate your energy to force you to trigger and we believe Agnus is behind the nosferatu and the recent demon spotters and several other demon events I may not have been forthright in sharing with you.”

“Explain”

“The droning buzz you feel and hear in your head and the headaches…” He nodded looking down again at the mug then back to his brother. “…I bet if you think back, you’ll remember a time when you felt something similar.”

Vergil crinkled his eyes and let the mug rest to his lap. Its warmth felt nice on his hands as he shivered from being a touch cold. Nero moved away from the bed and grabbed his fleece jacket placing it over his shoulders. “I do remember, but this… this feels different. Surely you do not believe they are trying to affect me from here. I thought you said the portal was outside of Firenze on Fortuna.”

“It is, and I think we both know why that particular portal is very important that they hold onto it.” Vergil narrowed his eyes at the angel. She appeared at the doorframe but entered the room cautiously. Vergil’s aura flared, and Nero took a step back as his own inner demon became irritated. He noticed she too carried a mug. “I apologize for my frivolity earlier. I understand how important the events up to this point have been. I also understand that unless you give me some measure of your trust, I will fail.”

“But isn’t this what you do, angel? Help the lesser and lower beings. Give hope to us poor damned demonic souls?” Vergil practically growled as he spoke with the timber of his voice edging toward that of his triggered state. Dante placed a hand to his shoulder and let his own aura flare.

“Hear her out Vergil. In several hours they will be coming for you and the decisions we make now
could determine if we succeed or fail.”

“You mean to tell me everything we are to do hinges on her! Everything I’ve suffered is to be left up to a half breed angel!”

“No Vergil.” Dante paused looking over to Danica before turning back to him. He knew his words hurt her deeply, although she did not flinch rather, she focused at some point near the edge of the bed. He also knew his brother was irrationally angry. “Whether or not she succeeds will depend on you. Whether or not we succeed depends on you. Everything hinges on you and apparently, it always has.”

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A shadow crept silently to stand before the office in the thin light. Night wrapped its arms around the city much like the cold and snow blanketed the buildings in an eerie silence. The proverbial calm before the storm. Dawn would break this spell soon and time ran short. The shadow drifted from the windows to the door then back again until finally it hovered just before the window as if looking for a way in. It swirled and fluttered in a growing panic until a low growl caught its attention and it whirled into a distorted humanoid form and stepped to the ground. It held an elongated hand up in submission toward the black wolf that softly crunched thru the snow to emerge from the shadows.

“Wait, please. I beg you ‘World Eater’. I must warn them. I must warn my little Asami!” The nosferatu fully materialized and knelt to one knee his long dark hair clung to a gaunt and pale skinned creature that wore ragged robes to hide his malformed back and shoulder. “Agnus, Agnus is here. He stepped thru the veil several days ago and was not seen again until tonight. He carries a damned weapon taken from Hell’s armory. He intends to kill one twin and enslave the other to forever break the line of Sparda. He serves two masters. He means to raise another.”

The wolf lowered his head and growled softly continuing his forward step. His eyes flickered green as he shook his mane and glanced at the rooftops before lowering his head, his gaze returned to the nosferatu. the creature again shook his uplifted hand. “No please, there is more. The lost king pulls the strings behind them all but bides his time. The realms are in danger of the shadows that linger from time past. A fallen angel serves Mundus. I serve another. I serve the one hidden yet not gone. I beg you give them this warning. I beg you bring me to the angel, she knows me! Please help me before they find me!” In the distance the wind muffled the slurred growl of demons, the nosferatu jerked his head to the side his dark eyes wide with fear. Fenris stepped closer his size slowly increasing with each step until he had doubled in size. He lifted his head and howled into the wind.

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Danica shifted in place but held Vergil’s gaze. She knew he would struggle to believe her much as did Dante and Nero earlier, but she had to try. She wanted to survive this mission as much as Vergil wanted his soul back. She tugged nervously at her hunting tunic having changed before coming back upstairs. She would save her new hunting clothes for Fortuna, but she still expected things to move quickly despite dawn being only a few scant hours away.

“Explain yourself, witch! Blood spells? What lies does her forked tongue tell? What lies do you believe?”

“Vergil, enough! She found …” The sudden bitter rattle of a warning howl outside paired with the shatter of glass made everyone snap their heads to Danica who fell to her knees the mug shattering to the ground as the dark liquid raced for its freedom across the worn wood floor. “Dani!” Dante bolted to help but she held up a hand to him with her head down as she grunted as if in pain. Vergil shifted from the bed setting aside his own mug as Nero was torn in helping her and seeing that his father was alright having been unconscious for the past several hours. Vergil shook his head trying to clear
the incessant droning that seemed to grow louder. He stumbled gripping his head in pain as Nero caught him.

“Vergil!” Dante whipped his head around to see Nero supporting his father but as he turned back to Danica, she flicked her head up to stare at him with unfocused eyes of green that flickered to gold as her bringers appeared and she pushed herself up to stand. He watched in amazement as her skin crawled with living scales up to her elbows and just beyond as she spun from the room and blurred down the hall.

Vergil gave a pained growl as he tilted his head to the ceiling and made a choked scream before grabbing his head. His aura flickered as he teetered on the edge of triggering. Dante raced to him as they sunk to the floor. He moved to relieve Nero and shook him. “Vergil! Fight this! Don’t trigger don’t give in to what they want. She will use you as a puppet! Vergil! Don’t leave me!”

Vergil’s scream became a roar as he flickered into his triggered form. Dante also triggered with the concussive force to match his brother’s. Their transformation tossed furniture to its side as if a small bomb exploded around them. Nero stumbled and shook his head fighting the urge to join them. Yamato whispered in his ear. As his senses returned, he felt the shift between the brothers.

“Damn it Vergil! You promised me! Remember? You promised!” The blue scaled form flickered, and his head turned to look up at his brother as he screamed again in pain. Suddenly, Nero pushed Dante aside and poured the tea long forgotten into Vergil’s mouth holding his mouth shut as he coughed and sputtered then suddenly fell from his trigger and choked before falling to the floor unconscious.

Dante fell from his demonic form griping his brother and pulling him back into his chest. “What the… what the hell did you do?”

“Explain later, gotta help Dani. Do not let him leave this room, no matter what happens, no matter what you hear outside and do not leave him alone!” Nero was gone before Dante could attempt to understand what was happening around him. In the near distance he heard demons surround the office.

Danica burst thru the front door just as she saw a demon brutally slash what appeared to be a nosferatu on their front steps. She leapt over the bodies twisting and grabbing the demon as her wings shimmered into existence and she flipped the attacker to the ground with a succinct dull thud. She clawed the lizard like demon as Fenris wrestled and snapped at its twin. Calling for a weapon the dark blade she rarely sent for shimmered into her hand the size of a bastard sword with elegant dual edge and made of a material as black as the span of voids that flickered to life around her. Brilliant blue-white runes glistened against the blade edge as it whistled thru the air slicing thru all that met its edge. From above she felt the wind buffet her as not one, but two Harpies screamed into existence from the void and tried to spear her. Strange random rifts mysteriously scattered about producing one or two assailants before they snapped closed and a new one formed in its wake. She dodged the attack but felt the slick of warm blood as the lizard demon gained purchase on her arm and shoulder. She winced in pain but gestured a ward that caused a golden shield of light to form around her just as the Harpies attempted a second hit. Danica dropped to her knees and rolled to avoid new strikes from the lizard just as Fenris launched himself over her body and grabbed a spear within his teeth. He pulled the Harpy to the ground and brutally ripped one wing from its body leaving it to scream in pain as the sister Harpy turned from Danica to address the wolf. Successfully distracted from her Fenris made sure to keep himself between her and the winged assailants.

Another crackle of energy ignited around them and two more rifts appeared with the sharp tang of
ozone scalding her nose and throat. Danica felt the sharp sting of a blade pierce thru her now weakened shield and deep into her thigh. The pain rippled thru her and she screamed. She remained on her back holding her sword across her body to keep the lizard from snapping her throat. She recognized the pain but was helpless to do anything about it now that she was pinned by what felt like a sword. She chanced a look as she punched the lizard snout hard enough to make him pull up. She kicked him in the gut knocking him to the ground. She scrambled to a defensive stance on one knee but favoring her leg as her eyes caught sight of the malicious red masked face and pale gangly arms and legs of a Drekavac.

She cursed mentally. Whatever energy that had caused the portals to appear earlier was now fading but the pulsating energy of the Drekavac more than made up for its loss and it made her head hurt. There had to be more than one of the creatures and they were drawing something large into this realm. She feared the worst as a roar shook the ground beneath her. Her heart skipped a beat as the gangly masked creature disappeared from her direct line of sight. Gathering her strength, she whispered a spell and drew its symbol to the air which crackled into existence then wrapped itself around the lizard as she pushed it toward him. The creature screamed as the caustic Holy light singed and contracted around the creature. With her bringer now free she sent her sword away and snapped the sword still buried in her leg off near the skin. With a pained groan, she pushed the sword further into her leg as she sat awkwardly in the snow and bled. As expected, the sword was barbed and twisted. Had she yanked it out as was her first thought she would have made the wound larger. Fenris was suddenly next to her as a spectral hand launched a Drekavac into the wall next to her. She gasped and coughed as the wolf hovered protecting her. Two more of the creatures appeared but seemed unwilling to engage either of them directly.

Nero knelt next to her, his eyes scanned the parking lot as he targeted each of the remaining creatures. “You ok?”

“No! Pull out that blade. We need to get back up to your father. Hurry!”

He nodded and grasped the short blade tip slick with her blood. “Ok, on three.” She never heard him say a single number, but it was all the same to her as she called on her power once more and sent a pillar of flame toward the quickly advancing Drekavac pair. She pushed Nero from her as she struggled to her feet and pulsed her wings clearing the snow and blood from around them to ensure their footing. Nero stood to her back and revved Red Queen before he launched at another pair of lizard-like demons that hissed and attempted to flank the youth. Danica again called for her sword but suddenly wide eyed the Drekavac stopped only to look at one another as a third joined their ranks and they all looked to some point along the roofline. Their twitchy movements and jerky head movements reminded the angel of bird as they chattered then called for portals and disappeared. Fenris appeared again and sniffed the air before barking and running for the front step. She turned to see Nero had the remaining demons under control and she stumbled with pain but followed the wolf toward the shadowy lump that lay on the steps.

Chapter End Notes

- conclusion of this little drama will be posted same day. So, no lengthy notes. Just go.
Go read and shamelessly feel free to critique.
Smoke...

Chapter Summary

Straight into it... Part two of a chapter I just couldn't stop writing. Vergil and Dante receive a visit from an unwanted guest and all Hell breaks loose.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Vergil jerked awake and clutched at Dante. His eyes wide then narrowed as he focused on his brother. “Dante!” He gripped his shirt and pulled him close as if he needed to say something more but convulsed suddenly. His eyes rolled into the back of his head. The red twin shifted him from his lap to the floor and straddled him while using one hand to pull his belt from his pants folding the length then forcing it between his teeth.

A droning pain echoed in his head as he attended to his brother when a sudden frigid wind burst open the window. There outside on the window’s edge and on the expanse of roof, he heard horrid screams and rasping growls. Red eyes flickered as far as he could see. It was then that Dante heard a voice that seemed to swirl around them, thru them even, all while Vergil continued to thrash beneath him. “Fight Vergil, fight!” he whispered.

“What is the saying child? It is darkest before the dawn?” the voices echoed in his head. Hell speak the language of the Demon Lords. The language used by Belial. Dante let his anger grow knowing it was him who had come for his brother and for a moment he was blinded by the snow and ice that whirled around them. “I never did like the dawn or its children. So, I have come to gather what is mine!” He felt the ominous presence he recognized as Belial drawing near. Finally, his eyesight cleared, and he saw not snow but heavy thick gray smoke that floated in thru the now battered open window. Vergil stilled beneath him with his eyes open and glazed. “Vergil!” He shook him but received no response.

“Do not worry son of Sparda I shall take care of your brother…” His chuckle rumbled thru him and made him nauseous with the dark threat that it was. “In fact, I shall care for him as if he were my own son!” A foul stench lingered with the smoke and Dante coughed feeling his lungs tighten as they were slowly starved for air. His eyesight wavered as he thought he saw the familiar shadow of the great horned beast with the face of a dog.

“Why? Why Vergil? Lea...ve...hrgn,” he sputtered leaning over his brother to protect him as much as keep himself upright.

“I am wounded child. Do you not understand, I want what is mine? He will give this to me. I will drain him to acquire my revenge. He will feed me until I become death. I will have my vengeance. Mundus will kneel before me! They will all kneel before me! I am your god! Know that your peace has finally come, and I shall make your death quick. I will feast on your blood and remain tethered forever to this realm.”

“Nuh...No!” He instinctively called for Rebellion but instead it was Alastor who answered and appeared with a crackle that turned to a deafening roar. The sword lodged itself deep in the wooden floor before the window. The walls shook as the smoke receded and Dante gasped for a breath.
Beneath him he felt Vergil begin to cough and he lifted from him to hold his gaze for a moment. He sensed his brother was drained and weaker than he was before. Rebellion suddenly appeared to his back, the sword’s weight felt strong and reassuring, but it was the sound of her voice that bolstered him the most.

“Belial, you will never be my god and I’m here to deny you his soul.” Danica cast another Holy spell but this time she let her wings lift her from the floor as her body arched with a golden light. “I deny you his power. I deny you his blood!”

“Gregori witch! How dare you live?” He roared at them as the spell she cast anchored itself to Alastor and the walls suddenly became a barrier Belial could not cross. His physical form twitched and burned as it was forced back beyond the window edge that continued to crumble to reveal more demons just beyond the demon lord. Vergil suddenly gasped free from the spells, and smoke. He coughed and panted next to Dante who hesitated to stand as he rubbed a thumb over his cheek and cupped his jaw.

“Hang on bro, I need to kick out an uninvited guest.” He moved to stand again but Vergil grabbed his shirt weakly.

“No! Help. Her. You alone cannot win. Not here not now. He did not expect her. He is not prepared for her. Help her. Show her the true power of a son of Sparda.” Vergil faded from consciousness as suddenly the world seemed to slow around them. Dante stood and felt the echo of his own power tremble deep within him. Yamato warbled in his mind as he felt Nero approach thru the hall. “His power in this realm is limited. Master is correct. He did not expect to find her kind already here. Keep him from us long enough to force him to return back to the depths of Hell, empty handed.”

“We need time,” he breathed. “I can give us that time.” Belial roared causing the building to shudder once more as Danica stumbled falling to one knee, but she maintained the spell. Dante exchanged places with Nero who was now behind her supporting her. The youth’s expression warped into one of confusion. “Get your father, I’ll help her.” The youth nodded diving for his father and pulling him from the grasp of a grisly clawed hand. The claw pushed into the runic web of the spell as it pulsed and crackled augmented by Alastor’s power. Suddenly, Yamato appeared and struck the now burning claw of her own volition before wedging herself into the floor between Belial and Vergil. The walls shook as the creature bellowed in pain and Belial’s forefinger fell to the ground severed just below the second knuckle. Belial jerked his hand away. Dante grabbed Danica’s waist as she now fell on both knees and blood trickled from her nose and ears. Nero pulled Vergil to safety next to them placing himself between his father and the beast before them.

“What did you do?” he whispered in astonishment. Nero sighed with relief that Vergil appeared disoriented but otherwise unhurt. Compulsively his inner demon scanned over his father to determine he was indeed alright.

Dante gently laid Danica to the ground as he stood still projecting energy around the quartet.

“Everyone stay still.”

He flexed open his wings and curled them back protectively as he took a single step forward. He
reached for Rebellion. The bubble he had created slowly melted away around them until two figures became the only creatures left in the room before them, Eae and an angel Dante had never seen before.

“Belial and his minions are gone. You did well my ward.” Eae grinned in his human form and stepped up to the hulking visage that was demonic Dante and patted his arm. “Belial could not sustain a materialized form in this realm without someone assisting him, and that assistance was short lived.” Dante swiveled his head to look at the dark-skinned angel with beautiful ringlets of dark hair and what appeared to be body armor of ice and wings made of frost, both stained and dark from a skirmish. She smiled warmly her eyes flickering from gold to a rich chocolate brown. Noticing his gaze, Eae chuckled. “Ah yes, she is lovely is she not? Deadly too. This is Malia and she was sent to help us.”

Dante fell from his trigger and the air around them seemed to lift. “Malia?” His shoulders slouched a moment before he regained his stature, but he turned first to check Vergil then Nero and finally Danica.

“Yes, your…” she paused her words to look at Eae suddenly, but the sandy haired man simply shrugged.

“Isn’t as easy as it looks is it? It is not yet time.” She nodded and let her face look to the floor a moment in a blush. Dante looked between them still tense. They were hiding something. Malia returned his gaze.

“Your power is great son of Sparda. You should be pleased that you were so quick to remember this power. I sense you seldom use it.”

“It wears me out to be honest, probably because I don’t use it often.”

“Ah, that is why you triggered, you were taking advantage of the energy his portals drew from the demonic realm. I see. Very clever. Come I must attend to your brother. Malia will help Nero with our Nephilim child.” Eae stepped forward kneeling as Dante turned to see Vergil shaking his head and sitting up but leaning to one hand. Nero meanwhile cradled Danica who no longer sported wings nor armor. She was pale and lifeless with a wounded thigh, clawed shoulder and bloody face. Nero gently wiped the blood from her ears.

“Please, allow me.” The angel brushed Nero’s shoulder leaving a soft dusting of frost as she whispered something in what he believed to be Enochian. A soft golden light expanding from her splayed fingers and she hovered her hand first over her face then over her shoulder. Nero saw the wound stitching itself closed as he watched in amazement. Her eyes glanced over to him as she worked but she returned her focus to the woman before her. Eae helped Vergil up and they moved him back over toward the overturned bed. Dante reset the bed before he arrived and dusted and smoothed a corner for his brother to sit.

A wind blew in thru the now broken window and surrounding wall. The sudden unwanted remodeling that Belial had ravaged left the room open to the elements which currently fell to the floor. Dante looked around as Eae knelt next to Vergil with his own hand glowing. Vergil growled and swatted at him, insisting he was fine, but he became distracted watching Malia with Nero and Danica. Eae took the distraction and healed wounds both seen and unseen within the Dark Slayer. “Belial made a mess. I need to get this fixed before…”

“Do not worry. Belial cannot return for some time. Board and nail what you can and commence formal repairs after this is over. I have marked the interior with wards and spells that will keep demons and other unwanted visitors from entering thru this opening. The elements not so much but
you will manage.” Dante nodded looking back to his brother then over to Danica. Malia now focused on the wound on her thigh.

“They’ll be ok?”

“Hmm, your brother has been taxed but I sense nothing wayward within him that should not be there. I do sense alchemy at work, but it was made with her hand, so I can only guess that it was what helped pull him from Belial’s control. He fought Dante. He wants to remain in this realm.”

“He is sitting right here and can hear you idiots.” Steel grey eyes lifted to meet Dante’s amused blue ones.

Dante ignored him but placed a hand to his shoulder sending him a wave of reassurance. “She said they were coming for him but I never…”

“None of us did. Belial has somehow acquired a means of slipping between the realms. When Eva… nthia sent him back with Nero’s help he should have remained there for much longer than this.” Eae felt his chest constrict knowing he had almost let slip their mother’s name just as Malia had earlier. The angels looked to one another hoping neither twin caught the hesitation in his voice, but from Vergil’s glare he assumed he was now under suspicion of hiding something. He needed something to distract them. Fortunately, Nero provided just that.

“Drekavac!” mumbled Nero. He shifted Danica into his lap as Malia worked. “There were at least three of them downstairs.”

“Are you quite sure?” Vergil stirred once more to look at his son but not before growling at Eae, who took the hint and moved away. Vergil stood. Dante caught him as he wobbled. “Enough! Nero are you sure they were…”

“Dreamrunners, or Dreamas, are frequently solitary. They are smaller and have those creepy broken white masks. No, I know what we fought, they were the elder species, the Drekavac. They were larger, faster, long limbs, sharp claws, twin swords, and blood red masks. That is what speared her.”

“Well, this changes things.” Eae stood and pouted as he crossed his arms. “I am confident the council never expected he could regain his form, or that he could rally his allies so quickly.”

“Council?” the twins queried in unison. Again, Eae fought the urge to smack himself in the forehead. He needed the secrets to be exposed so he could speak more freely. Malia gave him a subtle raised eyebrow and tilted her head. Nero caught the expression and gave Dante his own head tilt.

“Not your concern now, just celestial politics. How did you find them? The Drekavac? They must have been hidden to slip this close to the office. Your wards have been kept quite diligently. They would not be able to manifest their powers while cloaked and the wards would have alerted you otherwise.”

Danica stirred groggily as Malia stood and stepped back to give her room. “Because a nosferatu came to warn us, but he was followed, and they in turn tipped off the Drekavac who wanted to keep their presence hidden. No one expected Fenris to be guarding the perimeter. Someone didn’t plan this very well, like we are working against more than one faction and everyone wants Vergil back in chains for themselves.”

“Dani?” Dante stepped to her side to give her a stroke of his thumb to her cheek before grasping her hair gently and kissing her head. “We were worried. What the hell did you do with that spell and Alastor… and… Alastor?” He stood from her to look for the sword that had come to his aid. Of all
his devil arms, Dante never expected Alastor to be the one to come to him unbidden. Alastor was surly and temperamental and a sudden thought that he was like his brother flickered through his brain. The great sword remained embedded deeply into the floor boards where great scrawling burn marks etched the floor around him. “Thank you, Alastor! I…” He gripped the sword tugging it from the ground.

“Master, I would be negligent in my duties were I to do nothing. There is no need to honor me with gratitude. I serve only those worthy.” Alastor disappeared with a crackle and snap of electricity as he discharged and faded. Dante could only imagine he had returned to the armory. He would question his actions later. Rebellion hummed softly on his back reminding him that all his devil arms remained on high alert. It was oddly reassuring to know they stood with him especially Alastor, who was once one of Belial’s generals but that was a lifetime ago.

Danica moaned softly and shifted to sit on her own no longer leaning to Nero. She smiled to herself shaking her head. “What?” Nero questioned. He could see something troubled her beyond her healing wounds.

“Nothing. Nothing, I just… I just got a lot of information dumped on me when I healed our friend downstairs. I’m still sorting things out.”

“You said it brought us a warning. What was it if it was not to warn us of Belial?” She took a deep breath and looked up to hold Vergil’s gaze. He was unrelenting and stubborn, and she would probably die because of his grasping ways and yet she saw something in his eyes that made her believe he had reasons. Reasons that needed to be hidden, reasons that made him like he was and in that way they were alike. She had her reasons for not telling them all that she knew or how she had met Malia earlier in the park. Reasons that needed to stay hidden, for now.

“He came with information about Agnus and Celeste. Agnus slipped back into this realm from Hell about a week ago and has not been seen, until tonight and he wasn’t alone.” She broke her gaze and looked to Eae. The twins followed her gaze.

“Well are you looking to me? I did not meet, nor have I seen him.”

“He was seen in the company of an angel.” She now drifted her gaze to Malia.

“Me?”

“You are the only two angels other than myself, and I, for one, have nothing to gain from working with him, save for a prolonged and torturous death.”

“How do you know it was an angel?” Vergil again held her gaze as if plotting something.

“It is in a nosferatu’s best interests to know the subtle differences between species. It makes his information more valuable. People pay more.” Vergil narrowed his eyes at her.

“Then we have a greater problem.” Eae straightened as he spoke. “If what you say is true then the celestial realm has a spy in its midst. This would explain why we are kept in the dark and made to believe all is well.”

“You’re kidding right? Hybrids are being killed left and right down here. The war is closer than ever and the Nephilim, well, we face extinction. How can you not know?”

“It is complicated, my child.”

“Don’t patronize me. I’m not your child. He can get away with it because he is the only father figure I want to know. You cannot be that blind.”

“And Celeste? You said he brought word of Celeste. What of her?” Danica glared at Vergil with a heat that dissipated when she saw his subtle plead to change the subject. Did he know something?

“Yeah, Celeste gave Agnus something. Something of a stowaway that he transported out of the demonic realm.”

“A stowaway? Explain.”
“Agnus is now in possession of the axe of Asmodeus. He brought Arbitor into this realm.” Malia gasped and quickly covered her mouth. Eae narrowed his eyes and uncrossed his arms.

“You are sure?”

“He serves the one who remains hidden but is not gone.”

Malia shivered, and her wings seemed to glitter with fresh frost. “Lucifer? Are you absolutely that is what he said?”

Vergil narrowed his eyes and pressed his lips together as he took a measured breath in thru his nose. “Lucifer it seems cannot wait either.”

“This nosferatu spy, I must speak to him at once.” Eae paced the short distance between the wall and the bed. Annoyed with the cold he waved his hand repairing the wall himself. Dante made a mental note that Eae probably could have done that all along.

“He’s gone.” Nero answered. “We let him go.”

“He needs to return to Lucifer and tell him what has happened here. Vergil is not at fault for what Agnus has done.” She struggled to her feet as her bringers flicked into view once more. “I for one plan on spoiling all of their plans.”

Eae stepped forward holding one elbow while the other hand supported his chin with a tapping finger to his lips. “Is there anything else you remember? I am assuming you paid the blood price, so does his voice still speak in your head?”

“No, it’s a whisper not a voice. Something tells me we’ll see him again.”

“Very well, we must prepare for tomorrow and the four of you need rest. Dawn is nearly upon us. Celeste and Agnus will make their move tonight. As for Agnus, his appearance with the axe means Celeste has her hands into more than just Mundus and his dealings. If I had to guess the axe is meant as payment, perhaps to another demon lord or someone that wishes to become a demon lord. Perhaps the rumors of him working for more than one master are true.”

“What do you mean?” Malia spun in concern leaving a thin shimmer of frost to fall to the ground around her.

“Aribitor is powerful but it is also the only weapon capable of severing blood ties, oaths and… familial bonds.” He spun to look from twin to twin. “Heed my words, sons of Sparda, do not separate this night. Do not allow yourselves to be drawn apart or surely this is what Celeste meant by giving him the axe. He means to sever the last of the Sparda line. He means to kill one of you!”

“There would be no reason for Agnus to use the axe on either of us, but if he has learned of Nero’s parentage.” Vergil looked to his son with obvious concern.

“Then we go now.” Danica straightened and looked to Nero. “…and you need to come with me. They will never expect you to leave your father after all this.” She motioned to the destruction around them. “Nero we may not get another chance.”

“And they’re right. I can’t leave now! I won’t.”

Dante looked to his brother and nodded. “She’s right. You can catch the first ferry over.”

“No!” Anger flushed his face as he looked between them.
“Nero, they will not take me alive.”

“What the hell? Dante?”

“Kid, I won’t let them take him as long as I’m alive.” The weight of the words between them suddenly struck him.

“Vergil, if I’m to succeed? We don’t have much time.” Danica looked to the floor as he glared at her. She missed the sudden lift of one eyebrow as he turned to address the angels in the room.

Vergil glared from Eae to Malia then over to Danica. “Being surrounded by so many celestials makes my head ache. I find it hard to fathom that you have any real reason to be here other than to watch us suffer, begone.” Malia chuckled at the elder’s abrupt dismissal of them.

“Child, careful with your words. You would deny our help in your time of need?”

“I deny your very existence, leave us. I have a soul to regain and I will not have you stopping me.”

“Elder son, you have a role yet to play, careful your words and admonitions.” Eae placed a hand to her shoulder as Malia spoke and squeezed gently. She looked to him and he shook his head.

“I care not for your presence unless you intend to raise a small army to address the hordes that are no doubt coming. We have work to do and you are wasting our time.”

“Vergil!”

“He’s right. I never knew of guardian angels or any angel to do more than just watch.” Danica crossed her arms and stared hard at Eae.

“You have no need for a guardian my child you are Nephilim, you have the power within you.”

“Good to know. Thanks for the manual as to how all this works. I’ll remember that the next time I have nightmares about the torture I endured. I’ll especially remember this moment the next time I’m faced with an angel as malicious as the one they called Xander. The one who butchered innocent children, Nephilim like me by ripping their wings from them. Laughing as they bleed out thanks to having their very grace drained from them as they died. I’ll remember that when I’m bound in collars and tethers and they hold me down to do the same. Do you even realize we face extinction down here? Mundus is hunting us. He’s hunting hybrids. Feeding on their power. Vergil is only his prize because of his father. He means to destroy us all!”

“Did you say Xander? Xander is alive? Do you mean to say you’ve seen… child I am…” Eae stepped forward with a sorrowful look even as Malia looked as if she were on the verge of tears. Vergil gave his brother a flicker of a look. They dared not brush their mental link for fear that their plan would be sensed.

“Don’t you dare say you’re sorry. It’s too late for that. Look thanks for the help I don’t mean to appear ungrateful, but Vergil is right, get out, you’re making my head hurt and we need to prepare.” Danica turned and left the room. Vergil followed with a growl, and Dante and Nero were left stunned as Eae looked to Malia.

“Go. Tell her, quickly. Gather your flights. We prepare to fight!” Malia nodded and disappeared as a flurry of snow thru now repaired window.

“What was that about? Mundus is hunting hybrids? Agnus has an axe and means to kill Nero and possibly myself and they are sending an army to take Vergil?” Dante looked around and suddenly
roared. “Hell no! I’ll kill every goddamn bastard that takes a step near either one of them.” This time his triggered form crept over him like the anger that burned brighter within him. His voice vibrated even as Nero furrowed his brows trying to wrap his head around what was going on. His bringer flickered, and he looked to it suddenly aware of what he must do.

“No! Dante don’t you get it? Dani’s right. They won’t expect both of us to be there so I’m going. She needs me. He needs you. Come on you took down Mundus. You’ve got this!” He felt his skin crawl as the truth of what was going on sunk in.

“What a mess. This is chaos…this is…” he looked to Dante and Nero. He again touched the demonic Dante and then he touched Nero. “I have failed you both and I’m sorry. I did not see until it was too late.”

“See what? Eae slow down what is going on?” Nero pulled quickly from his grip.

“We know of the mark that Vergil bears, but we misunderstood his intentions. Lucifer sent him as a warning not as a slave. He sent him to protect his legacy. To protect his heir.” He grabbed his head in his hands and paced. Dante fell from his trigger again but seethed none the less. Eae distracted in his panic missed the subtle nod Nero gave Dante when he flickered a look of concern in his direction.

“Explain Eae or so help me…”

“Lucifer has been trying to warn us all along and no one would listen. That’s why he chose your brother. Belial may have been the one to split the realms, but he did it with the help of three other demon lords. Berial, whom Agnus reawakened with the help of Vergil’s soul albeit in a weakened form, Mundus, who was raised with Vergil’s blood at the gate and now the only demon left is… Urizen.”

“Urizen?”

“We still do not understand how Belial was freed but if Vergil had anything to do with his return then it’s Vergil who has become key in allowing the last demon to rise.”

“I still don’t understand,” Nero chanced with confusion.

“Urizen is the dark god. He is older than memory older than words. He is destruction, and he will destroy us all!” Eae paced mumbling incoherently in Enochian. “I must warn her. I must warn him. What if they found him. Dear god the children!” Eae shimmered into his angelic form.

“Eae?”

“We still have a chance Vergil is still with us. To release Urizen, a very intricate spell is required. A spell that requires the sacrifice of both Nephilim and cambion and the oceans of blood that only humans can provide. Agnus must have discovered why Vergil returned while building those hell gates. His interception of Vergil must have been chance and he must have approached Celeste when he freed Berial, breaking the first seal. If this is true then they splintered his soul to make him forget, to disorient him, not just to weaken him. Thru him they could find Lucifer and perhaps Michael the only remaining creatures capable of stopping their plans. By working in small slow steps, they prevented us from seeing the true darkness that grew not just here but in the celestial realms as well. They are pitting the demon lords against one another to keep Lucifer busy protecting the Mire and the armory, but no one expected a Fallen Angel to help Mundus. Lucifer must have discovered some part of their plan and made it possible for Vergil to return to this realm. Meanwhile, Belial has been gaining strength for who knows how many years while Agnus has learned how to genetically create
hybrids and control demons. Dante! That’s how they retrieved the axe! It’s why he stole it! I believe they mean to free Urizen! They mean to sacrifice a descendant of Sparda. The traitor that started the rebellion in Hell.”

“And use my brother’s blood to do it!”

“Not just him but…” he snapped his head toward Nero.

“Me?”

“You are a very special child Nero. A child born of the blood of a devil and that of an angel, just like…”

“Silence! Lies, she was human. Our mother was human. He has no trace of celestial blood only mine and that of a very skilled human sorceress. You fabricate these lies to keep us under your celestial control. I deny you the words to speak of this. You will muddle his head with lies so that he too will be drawn into this senseless game. He is my son not your pawn! I have been a pawn, a tool, a weapon for others. No more! I will regain my power and I will silence them all! I will have my revenge and I will make right the wrongs I have wrought, so begone angel! We don’t need you!” Vergil flickered on the edge of triggering and finished drawing a sigil to the wall in his own blood.

“Vergil, Nooo!” Eae disappeared as Vergil spoke the incantation and pressed his bloodied palm to the wall. The sigil burned brightly and when the light subsided Eae was gone only his clothing remained in a pile on the floor.

“Vergil! What the Hell did you do?” He knew his brother was up to something but that was not what he expected.

“What I should have done a long time ago! We do not need their help. We are descendants of the great Sparda. We will succeed on our own, or we will die. Either way, tonight, this ends.”

“Vergil, what did you do? Did you just use an Enochian spell to purge…? What about Dani? Did you send her away too?” Nero shot off down the hall calling for her only to stop at the top of the stairs. Below him on the main floor lay what was left of her clothing as Fenris appeared thru the door and howled in anguish.

Chapter End Notes

Wow what just happened? What the Hell Vergil? You’re hiding something pretty epic to be sending away the only person who can help you. From here to the end we should have action, betrayal, revelations and lots of angst.

I am so psyched about the upcoming game. I’ve been reading and doing research and think the possibilities of what could happen is exciting and a bit scary for our beloved characters. Anyway, I like pulling elements from all the stories, the reboot included, and I have a very distinct ending for this story as part of my own head cannon, but Urizen… yeah. It's like he was meant to be here all along.

Up Next…

Vergil shows no remorse as he prepares to dominate this realm once more.
Eva returns to the story.
Nero makes his choice and the demons come for their plaything…
...and Mirrors

Chapter Summary

In theory, he believed this would work. Vergil moves the chess pieces to retrieve his soul.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“What did you do!” Nero seethed as he descended the stairs. Dante stood at the top of the railing to look down as Vergil cracked his neck as he followed along with disinterest.

“What I must. Eae was compromised.”

“Not him, where did you send Danica?” The youth practically sneered at his father and Dante felt himself flinch. He could only imagine the surprise his brother would feel when that phantom arm snatched him into a wall. Nero picked up her clothing and half folded it into a pile placing them on the desk. Dante descended the stairs and glanced up to his brother still baffled as to his nonchalant attitude towards her. Didn’t he realize he needed her? His mind wandered as his brother began to speak.

“I was not aware that Nephilim would be affected in quite the same way, therefore I do not know where she has gone to.”

“You don’t know?” Nero slammed his fist to the desk, but Dante walked past him and rubbed his shoulder.

“Easy Kid.” He picked up her shirt and scented it noting the faint hint of ozone and lifted an eyebrow. Nero quirked an eye at him as he returned his glare to his father with his bringer glowing red.

“Vergil what the hell? Then where did you send Eae? Maybe Danica was sent there too.”

“Doubtful.” His father quirked an eyebrow looking to his brother as Nero practically roared in frustration and pulled at his bangs. “That spell returns angels to the place of their creation. Essentially it returns them to the Celestial realm. It will also purge him of any remnants of Belials essence since Belial was born deep within the realm and not created.” Nero rolled his eyes like he cared about the subtle differences his father spoke of, but Dante caught on quickly that Vergil knew more than he was letting on. More secrets. He bit his tongue and they glared at each other before Dante rolled his shoulders and sat.

Nero began to pace, “So, wait. You’re saying…” He spun on his heel and pointed to the red hunter who watched the scene with his own distanced expression. “Dante call father McCabe found out where she was born. It’s our only clue.”

“Don’t have to, I already know but we still need to call him.” Leaned forward to grab the antiquated phone. “Corvus can pinpoint her exact location.” He dialed slowly feeling Nero’s anger shift toward him.
“What? You know where she was born?” His uncle gave a sheepish shrug. It was one of the few slips she made the night she got drunk and fell asleep in his arms. He hadn’t really told Nero about the event.

“Yeah it’s something the two of you share.” He deflected the kids now redirected glare. This was not a secret from him but a favor to her in her moment of utter weakness. He didn’t need to tell of the specifics.

“You mean… she was born… Damnit man we’ve got to hurry.” But his uncle was already way ahead of him and talking to the priest already.

“You!” His father had approached them at the desk noting he too could faintly smell ozone. He flicked a disinterested glare at his son. He’d address his insolence later but for now he remained placid wanting his child to follow her and to remain far from whatever creatures would be sent for him. “You’re coming to fix this!” His demand was almost petulant and yet Vergil could see he truly cared for the angel and it fascinated him. He’d find out soon enough. Nero stepped forward his energy rolling from him, but Dante interceded, and Vergil turned gathering his fathers journal from the table and sitting to read.

“No can-do kid, you’re on your own. I can’t leave your father despite my current urges and he cannot be caught anywhere near that portal right now. Grab your stiff and take her duffle. As luck would have it McCabe has a way to get to Fortuna faster.” Vergil lifted from his book.

“What are you two babbling about?”

“She was born outside of Firenze. Her point of creation, well sort of, eww I don’t… never mind. She’ll be on Fortuna.” Dante lifted the duffle from its place on the floor and handed it Nero. “Head over to the cathedral. Father McCabe will explain, and I’ll take care of Mr. Badass but still making poor decisions here.”

“Fascinating.” Nero lunged at his father but again Dante caught him. Vergil never even looked up once.

“Woah, woah, no kid. I’m pissed too, but we both knew something was off with Eae. Hell, this situation is messed up. He almost let slip something big, something they don’t want us to know about. Then his whole freak out over some god no one has ever heard of. Come on kid the world has spun out of control and I for one just want my brother back so the three of us can kick ass and let god sort them out. Okay?” Nero nodded wrinkling his nose before letting a growl slip from his throat. He set the bag to the pool table and wandered the office quickly gathering his things.

“I have heard of Urizen.” His voice was soft almost distant.

“Not talking to you right now.”

“Very well.”

“What if she was right about him? What if Celeste does have some sort of control over him?” He thumbed at his father.

“I beg your pardon?” He wanted to tell them he had put into motion a person who would do what needed to be done to return his autonomy but opted to remain silent. Instead he glared at them as they looked to him as if he were a problem they needed to solve. In a way he was, but Vergil was confident she would succeed, something about her made him sure of his decision. Nero glared at him but then lifted a soft smile as if he pitied him. Vergil’s face darkened.
“Right now, you can be controlled. Danica was trying to tell us while you were unconscious what she had learned about the process by which Celeste stripped you of that fragment of your soul. You are key to Celeste’s plans. She needs you to find Lucifer and I’m willing to bet she’d use you against us or anyone else that might stop you from locating whatever Lucifer sent you here for and returning to him. She wants you to succeed in that mission and you may have just handed her the other half of that key.”

“Do not be so naive boy! The angels want me to lead them to Lucifer too and in doing so they hope to raise one of their own. Michael has been missing for almost as long as his brother and I’m tired of being a pawn between two realms.” Vergil stood his aura flickering. “That is why tonight this ends!”

Danica gasped for breath like her head was drug thru stagnant water that choked and filled her lungs. The world spun as she tried to focus on dark objects around her. She saw nothing more than bits of broken rubble and charred stone and wood littered around her. It’s faint familiarity originated only from her having been in plenty of charred and broken places before. The sudden bite of bitter cold and the wet sting of snow on bare skin confused her. Disoriented, frightened, and naked, she scrambled back from the chill that blew on her skin. Where was she? She felt her skin crawl both with cold and with a strange burning pain. She rubbed at her arms while hugging herself still she searched the darkness. Frantic, she tried to calm herself enough to remember what had happened. When that failed, she cast her senses around her in the hope of discovering where she was, but she discovered she was essentially blind and powerless. After a few ragged breaths, she felt what she feared the most, demonic energy. Trying to call on her abilities was excruciating and worse she could not feel the presence of her sword nor could she touch Fenris or Corvus. She felt utterly alone. It was the first time since her mother died and her world burned. She shivered, maybe if she stayed still and quiet, she could hide her energy and figure out where she was.

The demonic energy she sensed paced close to her but never seemed to come too close. This was good indicating whatever was out there was perhaps patrolling an area not directly near her but the nagging nausea that had spread thru her meant she needed to put distance between her and them and soon. Suddenly, she recognized the faint draw of energy that could only mean one thing, a demonic portal, worse she thought she felt the presence of something different something celestial and there were very few places like that. Being at even one of those dual portal locations was very bad. As she searched in the dark her head clouded, and she tried again to touch Fenris or Corvus. To her shock and surprise, the dark bird appeared before her and she had never been happier to see the little troublemaker.

He hunched his wings and hopped toward her tentatively with a muffled caw warning her where she was. “How the Hell did I get here?” she struggled to whisper without letting her voice rise in panic. Pain seized her head like an ice pick to the area just behind her eyes. Her shadowy silver hair tangled around her in a matted mess that she pushed from her face as she tried to focus her eyes on Corvus who waddled off into a dark corner as if hiding. God he wasn’t leaving her, was he? She felt the agitated wariness of several more demons that were close, too close. She had to remain hidden until she could figure out how to get out of danger. Her lungs screamed for air as she held her breath in a vain attempt to try and abate the inevitable end to the nausea within her. Her heart raced as her head continued to whirl with pain. Whatever happened it was like being teleported and she never did well with teleporting. Finally, she fell forward to retch what little food she had left in her stomach and couldn’t stop until she threw up blood. Any chance of staying hidden was lost as she lifted from her dry heaves wiping at the corners of her mouth to see a twin set of red eyes peering at her in the darkness and she could smell the lifting scent of brimstone.

“Look brothers, someone dropped off dinner.”
“And what is that I smell? Could it be… divine?”

Earlier…

“I have use for you witch. You will leave now and retrieve my soul. Do you understand?” Vergil’s voice was low and all but a whisper at her ear. Danica startled at his sudden proximity, but it was his unnervingly cold and strong hands that grabbed her shoulders and spun her to face him that surprised her the most. He grabbed her wrists painfully pulling her arms over her head and shoving her into the wall before her dulled brain could adjust to the position and fight back. Instinctively she pulled from him, but he shifted her outstretched arms pinning both wrists with a single hand that flickered with blue scales and claws. She hissed at him with furrowed brows as he growled with fanged teeth his other hand now clutched her throat limiting her airway. His grip was painful to start but made even more so by the fact that he now lifted her just to the point of being unable to touch the floor. Her joints strained at the abuse. “Do you understand me, angel? You will retrieve my soul and I will send my son to you. Your mutual attachment to one another should work in my favor. He is not safe here with me, that much has been made clear. That fool angel is still tainted and worse he keeps secrets the other side should not have access to.” He sneered at her as she struggled to free herself. “But you… you I can work with. You have potential yet untapped and that I can use to my benefit. When Celeste realizes what you have come for, she will fight back. She will pull you into a space that sits between realms. It is from there that you must discover where she has taken my soul. I will have my revenge and you are going to help me get this. Do you understand?”

“You’d use your own son as bait? What kind of heartless bastard?…”

“You misunderstand witch. Once my spell takes hold you will protect him as if he were your own flesh and blood. You will die for him should that need arise. Belial is not the only one who can subjugate an angel.”

She heard the words. Heard the not so thinly veiled threat to protect Nero, but her mind tumbled as he spoke. She tried to piece together the events that took place before the angels mere moments ago, the years she spent fighting what appeared to be after him all along, no it was after them, and now with his sudden and desperate press for her to go. What was he up to? What happened next shocked her into silence and her struggling ceased. He roughly grabbed her chin and forced her face toward his own to kiss her roughly, painfully. The momentary shock stilled her but was quickly followed with a desperate bid to push him from her, but he was much stronger than he appeared. She felt him bite her lip sucking on the wound even as she tasted the acrid taste of blood. His blood! She struggled against his grip only to feel herself dropped to the floor without warning.

She fell ungracefully with a dull thump to the floor as he wiped the corner of his mouth as if in disgust at what he did. She too shuddered and wiped at the quickly healing bite to her lip. His blood burned in her mouth and she shook her head trying to spit what she could. He must have bitten his own lip or even tongue using their mouths as a sort of flask to combine their blood. She felt sick and not just because of what he did but what she feared he would do. His following words chilled her to the bone. “Tell me witch, do you know of the ancient rites of blood spells? I do, and you will now do my bidding. You belong to me,” he sneered.

She looked up to him wide eyed as he reached down grabbing her hair roughly. He spoke again in a deep voice that rumbled at the edge of a trigger, but this time he spoke in an ancient demonic language she did not recognize. Her mind raced trying to understand the words that fell thick and guttural from his lips. She had no clue how to reverse what he was doing to her but jerked against his grip trying to escape. She tried to repeat the words in her head committing them to memory for some possible recall later, but her mind tingled as her body stiffened reacting to both blood and spell. He
locked eyes with her and finished the spell adding in a more familiar language, “Seek. Return what is mine. Protect my son. You will not rest until you return what is mine and you will tell no one of this, in fact you will not even remember what I have done to you, but I will… as I may have need for you later.” He released her again suddenly. “Go. Now! I must stop that wretched angel from meddling with my son’s head.”

“Vergil?” she panted as a strange compulsion to stand forced her to her feet. Her mind muddied to the thoughts of what she was doing just moments ago. Didn’t she have somewhere to be? Why was she on the floor?

“Insolent woman, go! Do as you were told before I chose a different path.” Vergil whirled on his heels and strode back towards Dante’s bedroom. Deep within her something trembled and she felt a cold finger travel her spine as a voice called to her.

“Run!”

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Now…

Nero paced the hall waiting for Danica. She had put up a valiant fight but unable to trigger and as weak as she was Nero knew had they not shown up when they did, she would be dead. He didn’t know whether to swear again or punch a wall. His father was reckless.

“He did not know. I tried to warn her.”

“Wait a minute how did you know what he was gonna do? Better yet how did you know where she would appear?” The sword remained silent although she was oddly still within the space of his bringer. “Oh, so you’re back to your keeping secrets too? Great! Just simply fan’fucking’tastic.”

“Language, my child.” Nero felt his strong hand clamp to his shoulder just as he heard his words. He always found it odd that he was able to slip in so closely without him noticing.

“Sorry father but apparently my father is a freaking… Dani!”

“Hey!” Nero step away from the priest to approach the young lady that looked a little worse for wear. She seemed a little confused and gently fingered the new red and angry scratches that stretched across her eye and cheek. She had plaited her silver-gray hair back from her face, but the length lay at the top of her shoulder where she obviously stopped braiding now distracted by what would undoubtedly become scars.

He pulled her hand from her face and looked at her, “Hey, you ok?”

“I will be.” She smiled a small bittersweet smile and touched her lip and the half scar there before shaking her and taking a breath like she was resolving some internal issue that meant she was forcing herself to believe her words. Nero frowned, and Yamato pulsed softly reminding him his father did not know. “Oh, he will,” he whispered mentally.

“That looks nasty, does it hurt much?”

“Hurts like hell,” she countered to his surprise. Agitated she talked with her hands stepping away from him and looking at Father McCabe. “It’ll scar maybe not too badly but I was practically human for a time. I’m lucky I didn’t lose the eye.”

“Dani, I’m so sorry.” Guilt washed over him although he knew it wasn’t his fault. He was just glad they got there when they did. “We didn’t know what Vergil had planned. We both just had a feeling
he was up to something. He said Eae was corrupted and needed to be returned to the celestial realm. Yamato insists he had no idea this would happen to you.”

She took another breath closed her eyes and cracked her neck side to side. She was angry Nero could feel that much but she was also trying extremely hard to bite her tongue. “I’m sure he thinks he has his own reasons, but does anybody really know what he’s after? It seems to me from the stories his drive has always been power, but maybe there is something else. Frankly right now we don’t know if he’s compelled by Celeste or the mark of Lucifer or even if he is himself at all.” She threw her hands up in feigned surrender and cocked her hip. A smirk lifted to her lips and Nero sighed. She’d be ok.

“Danica,” retorted the priest as if admonishing her before she even completed her thought.

“What? We don’t. Do you know something we don’t?!” Nero inclined his head away from them. He knew that look that danced in the corner of her eyes. She was digging for something, perhaps he’d help. Seemed the only one here, next to Dante, that knew anything about the Dark Slayer was the priest that was strangely quite when normally he would be exposing words of encouragement.

“She’s right.” He faced them again and Yamato made his bringer flicker. She reminded him that she sensed a shift in the room last night once Belial was expelled perhaps there was something more to the events of last night.

“Vergil does not need Mundus, Belial, Celeste or Lucifer to be as he is. He was always a difficult child.” He paused looking to the marbled floor before stepping away to rub his stubbled chin. “Gifted and yet grasping as oft are the first born. He strove to prove himself at such an early age that he awakened a part of his demon half that has hungered ever since.” Nero and Danica looked to one another before starting dumbfounded at the priest. He spun to face them again as if caught with his hand in the cookie jar. “His father told me this. Sparda feared Vergil would push himself too hard and burn himself out but instead it would seem he drove himself mad. I’m sorry Nero. I speak of things I do not truly know of.”

“Right,” he drawled in response. Seemed everyone had secrets.

“Who are you? I mean really who are you?” Danica leaned to the wall with her arms crossed. If Nero knew half of what she had done over the past several years with his aid and guidance, it might have been him speaking those words. He was an enigma wrapped in a conundrum.

“I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“Never mind, we need to go, and I don’t have time for your vague bull…stuff.” She quirked her words dropping her tone of voice remembering he would comment on her ‘language’. Why did she even care?

“Go? Go where exactly?”

“Have you been present for the last 36 hours or so? We need to retrieve his soul. Let’s just get this over with. I’m tired of dealing with the Spardas. I have my own issues that need addressed. Sorry, Nero no disrespect.”

“None taken. I’m tired of their bullshit too and I’m calling a spade a spade.” He flicked his eyes to the priest daring him to comment on his language.

“Woah, both of you, not so fast. You need rest. He needs to prepare. Inari will teleport you both when you are ready. You are still not able to fully tap into your abilities. Leaving now would be
suicide, and we can wait until nightfall. Most of those troops will move out expecting to hunt tonight. Didn’t Casey and Braxus conceive a key to locate and hold open the door?”

“They did but since the key was embedded within me with magic and I was near the portal…” She shrugged as she spoke.

“Your time has been shortened to be able to use it properly. That fool child will be the…” The priest looked up caught in a moment and Danica shrugged pushing off from the wall.

“I need to go now. I felt it when I was there. It was close.”

“Felt it? His soul? So, does that mean she’s there too?” Nero wasn’t quite sure how he felt about this. He wasn’t confident about their plan. There was so much they did not know. He knew little of what to really expect and so far, everything appeared to have been shaken up in a way that the two of them would be forced to ad lib this rescue. The original plan had been worked up while Vergil was unconscious. It seemed more important once the three of them could see the physical toll his fragmented self was suffering but those plans were now skewed and thrown out the proverbial window since he woke up.

“Yeah, at least I think it was his soul, but it felt like it was in this realm. It’s like it called to me.”

“Did he share his blood with you?”

“Uh, no. Yes? I’m kind of fuzzy on that.”

“Fuzzy?” The priest quirked an eyebrow.

“I did ask. I mean, I figured that unless his soul recognized me as a viable vessel it might try and kill me, but I don’t remember. We talked in the hall. He suggested Nero come with me something about being safer with… no… no I need his help or something about... Dammit, who cares can we go?”

“Father?” Nero squinted his eyes at her and looked at the priest with concern in his voice.

“I’m sure it’s nothing, temporary if anything. He is a devil after all. She has never carried a soul this powerful his blood would be needed to prove she intended to return the soul to its source. His blood, however, may have had a side effect.”

“Pfftt… you mean I’ve never returned a soul to a leaving creature. Yeah this is all new. Can we go?”

“Sure, sure, but first I want to talk to Inari and get your hunting clothes. I mean surely you aren’t planning to go face Celeste in jeans and a t shirt?”

“Huh? Yeah guess my new clothes would come in handy.” Corvus lit to her shoulder and nuzzled her cheek. “Hey buddy. I haven’t seen you for days.”

Nero looked at the priest, but Father McCabe was already taking her by the elbow and directing her back toward the library and a certain Nosferatu that might have a few answers.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this seems to jump around in time but I think it was the best way to show the different threads of this story.
We are coming to the end only a few more chapters and of those I expect another one to post today.
Life just keeps throwing punches so I apologize for the delays.

Next up:
Dante knows the endgame is near. Eva sees the bigger picture.
Changing of the Guard

Chapter Summary

Just when you thought things made sense.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A few hours ago…

Vergil grumbled as he paced. He touched the hilt of Force Edge more than once in the last hour. Dante felt he knew what was going thru his head even if he didn’t want to show it. Nero shook himself from packing the small duffle he intended to stow not far from the portal just in case they ran into trouble. Unlike Dante, Nero did not depend on his healing factor, sometimes it just didn’t seem to work right, and Dani was a different matter. He wanted to be prepared and truth was being this close to actual Hell was inducing some anxieties he thought long put to bed after Dante disappeared for a time. He never really did explain what happened on Dummary Island and Lucia had kept details short after Dante made it known he didn’t want to talk about it.

He stopped packing to check he had everything before he headed to the door. He snatched her duffle from the pool table and headed out.

“Kid, be careful and let us know.”

“I…” Corvus suddenly appeared above them in a pulse of purplish vapor cawing loudly. Several seconds later a nosferatu also appeared. Force Edge was in Vergil’s hand and at the vampires throat before Dante could even explain what Corvus said.

“Vergil, No!”

Angry red eyes flickered to his brother as a feral growl pressed from thin lips. Blood dripped at the thin red line on pale gray skin. “Why?”

“He’s here for Nero. They found Dani!”

Now…

Last night was the longest night since first bringing Vergil home several weeks ago. Time had passed quickly and now here they were planning to see this to its end. Dante snorted to himself. If the sluggish and very late start to their day was any indicator of what was to come, then Dante was pretty sure it was gonna be an even longer night tonight. After the events and subsequent fight over what happened to Danica, Nero left, and the twins dispersed to their own corners of the office and then finally to bed. Surprisingly, Vergil joined him silently a few hours after their split but even that didn’t give him any sense of peace. He had wanted his brother back so badly he never once wondered if it was the right thing to do. Now, something played thru his head like a broken record. He chastised himself for his indecision and yet her knew Vergil here was better than Vergil there. Everything would be made right once he was truly whole. He believed this but still it was like he had
all the pieces but no clue what the puzzle was supposed to look like. Maybe they would always be at odds. He thought back to his father and the lessons that the then five-year-old child could remember.

“Stay together. Together you are stronger. Together you will do what I could not do alone.”

“Dammit pops, I’m tired of cleaning up your messes.” He shuffled from the bed covered his brother and paced the floors.

Dante currently sat at his desk where he spent the wee hours of the morning mulling his thoughts over a cup of coffee. It was unusual for him to see the office before noon and that thought was little comfort to him. Corvus had tugged at his hair when he fell asleep at the desk waking him as gently as a raven could to let him know Dani was alive. He was glad, no, he was thrilled. Somehow, he just knew she would be okay.

The red hunter unfolded his laced together fingers and sighed. She was compelled to do his bidding. Inari confirmed Vergil had shared a bit of his blood and thus was sending her to retrieve his soul with what ‘blessings’ he could. His brother’s manipulation of the situation still stung, worse he made no apologies for his actions. Not that Dante expected it but, still, Vergil had planned to use her all along. He wondered how he would have pulled it off though without Belial showing or the strained behavior of Eae. It was clear no one knew what was going on in Hell. Nero’s possible paternity was questioned then just as quickly shut down and Dante felt there was something there that Vergil would never share, not even with Nero. Knowing his brother, he did know somehow that things would go down like this and as chaotic as it all seemed, something bothered him. Vergil was a master at strategy. So why the chaos? Unless… he was hiding something else. He shook his head.

Dante never thought the stuttering madman would be this much trouble and he wasn’t even front and center, yet. His thoughts now drifted to Danica hinting more than once that he was alive. He wished he had listened closer to what she said and maybe that was what bothered him. She disappeared for all sorts of ‘reasons’ while winding out her probation at the office after the job that brought the three of them together. She seemed to be testing him in some way and then Trinity happened. Angrily he scratched thru his hair and leaned over his desk. He led them to her to protect Nero. They hunted hybrids. She could take care of herself. His head snapped up and he stared across the empty space in the office.

“ She said they hunted hybrids. How did I miss that? She has been protecting us all along!”

Everyone around him seemed to have plans, and some seemed to have plans for his family and even his own life. Everyone but him. He shook his head and sighed. He swirled the last inch of coffee in his mug and picked it up while scooting the chair from the desk and heading back to the kitchen. Surely the next cup would steer him straight. Surely the answers would come to him.

Dante found Vergil at the kitchen table with the heel of his hands pressed to his temple with his eyes closed. A mug of deep brown liquid swirled gently before him with a thin trail of steam visible in the chilly air. He should probably get that furnace fixed. The sputter of the coffee maker finishing a new cycle drew his attention. Had he really drunk an entire pot? He smiled softly grabbing the carafe to pour another cup. It didn’t matter. Coffee was the one commodity they could afford. Staying awake and alert seemed better than the alternative and his inner demon stirred with agreement. They just needed to get thru tonight. With tomorrow’s sunrise, they would head back to Fortuna. Inari had warned that with complications in the celestial realm that Eae was not to be taken literally. His prior subjugation by Belial may have scrambled him a bit. He had also said something strange about only a limited number of angels passing thru the veil any more. It gave him pause to wonder. What if angels were being hunted as well as hybrids? Dante wouldn’t know if Eae’s changes were out of character for him. He never knew him until recently. So, his rant did little more than raise more
questions. Urizen was another matter but apparently, he lived only on the fringes of awareness according to the nosferatu but that was it. The return of Belial had shocked many in the underworld and even more in the celestial realm. Someone had to break that elaborate seal, but the question was who? There was no doubt the wards and seals to Urizen’s prison would be more closely watched. Then there was the talk of the chaos that riddled the celestial realm. He was glad Corvus visited him last night or this morning, he really wasn’t sure when he was there but at least now things seemed to be swirling into a more cohesive picture. He had relayed quite a bit of info in a short amount of time. Speaking of swirling, he watched the mug fill beneath him and he suddenly had a thought.

“Did you know what would happen to her? Did you have any clue?”

“Hnn, I assumed she would reappear at the cathedral, if she were affected at all. How fortuitous that she is already there.” Vergil snatched his mug vigorously and drank the piping hot liquid feeling a satisfying burn down his throat. At least he could feel something other than the heavy drone in his head. The witches concoction had run its course and he was now feeling the pull of Celeste once more. His brother glared at him.

“I don’t agree with what you did it, and I am not so naïve to believe that you didn’t plan this to some degree.” He blinked into the oblivion of his own mug. “Verge we both know how this might end, so be straight with me. Do you think she can do it?”

“Yes.” His confidence was unwavering, and Dante snorted. He used to believe in his bravado.

“Is that before or after you cast a blood spell?” Vergil stopped his mug inches from his lips and glared at his brother. “Did you think I wouldn’t figure it out? I know you. I know you perhaps better than you think. You did more than just share enough blood to let her become a temporary vessel.” The pause between them spoke volumes and Dante downed his mug before smacking it to the counter. “Vergil, I swear you’re gonna be the death of me.”

“She is the ace up my sleeve. I do not regret for one instance my decision. She is the one person who will be unaffected by Celeste’s machinations and she will protect my son. Once I am in complete control of my soul, once I have regained my true power…I will kill those that imprisoned me. I will be no one’s puppet ever again and neither will my son!” He drank again while Dante shivered watching his brother. There was no doubt in his mind. Vergil would have his bloody violent revenge. He just prayed his son didn’t pay for his vengeance. He prayed his brother wouldn’t take the world with him.

“You could have done this differently. She’s not your enemy.”

“Oh? Could I? Dante, I have been a pawn, a tool, a living weapon and of all things a battery! I am taking a risk sending Nero with her, but I also recognize she has the best chance to achieve success with him. I just wanted insurance. By doing this my way, I will know the moment she has possession of my soul.”

“So, you didn’t ask permission but is this really asking for forgiveness? You could have told me.”

“So, we could find a better way?” he spat in a mocking sing song tone. “So, we could what, hold hands and pray to a god that could not care any less as to what happens to us in the end? Why would I risk you stopping me or worse her leaving? No, I could not take that chance! I did not!” He sipped his own coffee not daring to look at his brother until he once more felt the burn to his throat. “Dante I will release her once things have settled. Once I have my soul. There is no need to tell Nero or her for that matter. The spell lingers deep within her subconscious and other than drawing her to my soul, it, nor I control her. It is a matter that will resolve itself once my soul is returned.”
“I want to believe you, but…” His voice was low and broken.

“I have not been forthcoming. I understand. Once I am whole…”

“You’ll leave, or worse Lady is right, and I’ll have to stop you… again.” This time Vergil heard the uneasy determination that Dante was resolving himself to. A decision he could not let his brother make.

“I assure you that is not what is going on.” Vergil pushed from the table and walked toward his brother who was learning against the counter but looking at the floor. “Dante, my little moth.” Cold fingertips trailed the short stubble of his chin drawing it up to force him to look at him. “I’m not going anywhere, and your friend will be fine. If my soul has been tortured, as I expect, this spell will help me to hold her together and draw it from her once she is back in this realm. Yes, I should have told you, but the strength of the spell would have frightened you. My power has grown significantly since last we met. I couldn’t let you stop me. I have too much to lose” He kissed his brother suddenly, gently and with a lingering passion that made Dante shiver.

He pulled from him with eyes bright and clearly determined, “No! It’s ‘we’ Vergil, ‘we’ have too much to lose. I’m not some pawn for you to manipulate like we're playing chess. When we were kids you used to find ways to manipulate me, so I wouldn’t tell mom and dad about your magic, about your experiments, and all because I couldn’t stand to be apart from you. You gifted me with your presence if I behaved. Now you’re just using the promise of sex because you know how lonely I’ve been without you. Stop! Stop and let me in. Let me understand. Whatever it is ‘we’ can deal with it together.” Vergil narrowed his eyes at his brother and hummed softly before he turned and walked toward the door.

“As you wish, but I always get what I want, brother,” he paused turning to settle his eyes upon him once more. His voice low he continued his lingering sentence, “You cannot deny my flame. Moth or not, my fire burns everything I love.” Somewhere in the back of his mind Dante felt his brain tingle with disgust, he was lost, and Vergil was right.

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Eae startled at the touch of a soft hand to his hairline. “Good afternoon Eae. Did you sleep well?” Eva smiled warmly down at his confused and prone body. He sat up abruptly to find he was back in his own quarters in the scholars district. He was back in the celestial realm and his head screamed in pain.

“Dammit, your little hellion purged me from the office. Do you know how much that hurts?” She shrugged, and he snorted shifting covers off his body and scooting to the edge of the bed to stand. Something felt different. Even as his head seemed to clear he felt, lighter.

“I warned Sparda to be wary of what he left behind,” she mused softly before moving from the bed. “Perhaps we should gather those journals to keep such knowledge from falling into the wrong hands.”

Eva flicked her long golden hair over her shoulders and ran quick fingers thru it plaiting it. “You will do no such thing. Sparda left those for our sons and they will need their knowledge before long. Malia returned with news while you lay unconscious in the garden. I must admit quite a few angels were surprised by your sudden wayward and bare appearance.” She snickered as he growled.

“Yes, it would seem Lucifer has failed to protect the armory amongst other things.”
“Hmm. Forgive me but I flickered thru your memories on the matter. It would seem my son was correct. Belial lingered as a shadow within you. It was how he knew where he was and when Celeste planned to make her move. He is more resourceful than we imagined.” Eae sat to the edge of the bed in shock. Had he helped Belial all along? He shook himself, no, no he sensed deep within him her words were true enough, but he also felt his inner spirit remind him he was not one to ever give up, no matter the situation. Chances are he frustrated Belial more than helped him. Eva took his silence as resignation to the truth and continued. “Remember when you told me to believe. To have faith?”

“I have said this a few times. I am not sure as to which specific instance we speak of.”

“Arbiter can indeed do all the things you say, but you forget its greatest power.” She turned and brushed imaginary lint from her friends shoulder. “Arbiter was once wielded by Sparda himself, and he told me stories of the axe. Arbiter was an I believe still is very loyal and will not serve another so willingly. Asmodeus was once a different being and the axe remembers this. Even before angels fell and the realms were split by his great edge, Arbiter remembers. He is one of seven artifacts, seven relics, if you will, left behind for our sons. How Agnus and Celeste found him concerns me.”

“Then, Agnus means to summon Sparda? To free him once more, but to what end? Heavens forgive me, I have failed them all! Agnus is seeking Sparda?”

“No, I believe Agnus means to summon another. I believe he means to summon Michael and to return him to his corporeal form. I believe he wants to make a deal with the arch angel. He will use Arbiter as a token of his sincerity and I believe he wants to offer my sons as the sacrifice needed to bring the arch angel the one person who can stop him.”

“Lucifer.” Even though his voice was but a whisper the room shook. Eva dropped her head but just as quickly lifted it to look over her shoulder at the door to Eae’s room.

“It would seem my sons have something in common with the first twins born of the divine.”

The door opened in a burst of golden light and a shadowy figure steeped thru. After a moment their eyesight recovered, and they saw it was Aurelius his face grim though his brows carried concern on them. Eva held her breath.

“My lady, I bade you be silent. You have been summoned before the council of Thrones. It is their wish to converse with you on this subject most urgently.”

“I understand.”

“No! I spoke his name I will…” Eae clutched at Eva’s arm as if he could protect his friend.

“Forgive me. I was not clear. You will both be coming with me.” Two additional shadows hovered in the light behind him as the wall that once divide this space from the hallway outside seemed to fade into nothing. Their forms seemed blurry and yet they seemed to be spinning with flames licking from those forms. “You will follow me, now.” He stepped forward again but this time he was followed by the flame that seemed to engulf the small room and he whispered. “I am so sorry, my lady.”

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Next up:
Exactly what is a Frost angel and after everything Vergil has done why are they still helping him? Danica seeks inner guidance and Nero gets a taste of what his devil trigger should be.
This is the second chapter in less than 12 hours, so if you are really confused it's okay. You may have missed a chapter. I needed to write tonight so this chapter came out different than my original notes. I hope you enjoy it. Only a few more chapters till we reach the end of this ride.

Thank you for reading.

Next up:
Exactly what is a Frost angel and after everything Vergil has done why are they still helping him? Danica and Nero infiltrate into the fringes of hell.
Oh, the Tangled Web He Weaves

Chapter Summary

Vergil weighs the consequences of his actions. Nero and Danica arrive on Fortuna.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Night fell quickly. The darkness surrounding the office felt surreal as the light glistened off the snow giving it a strange fluorescent glow. Dark and light played against each other only to make the shadows seem darker. The flakes that continued to fall were deceptively large and made catching movement down the street hard to discern. Vergil found himself alternating between pacing in the office and staring into the night as his brother checked the wards for roughly the ninth time in the last hour. Force Edge hissed with anticipation and the Dark Slayer found he longed for Yamato. He called for his beloved sword just to feel her reassurance but found Nero’s anxiety seemed to match his own. Vergil said a silent prayer for his safe return. Then paused adding the angel that he hoped he had not misjudged in ability. The foreign action of prayer caused him to stop mid-step as his memory flickered. Something about this situation made him remember the last time he prayed. That prayer inducing conversation took place on the dusty barren fields of some nameless battle in Hell before a shadowy figure in a tent of gray.

--Several years ago--

“You are not God!” he spat from his kneeling position. He had learned over time that it never hurt to show Lucifer a modicum of respect while outright disrespecting him.

“I never asked to be nor, do I wish to be so. My father can wear that crown. I think he’s much better at it than I would be. I’m too soft and generous.” His voice was soft and never betrayed a hint of anger the was expected. Vergil was sure that if the shadow before him could smirk he would have seen his lips curl into the familiar expression. The thought made him think of his brother.

“What you promise is impossible.” This time he growled having been reminded of the hole he felt inside. He missed her, and the guilt of his families death gnawed at him. He missed his brother. He wondered if this was the pain his father was trying to avoid by leaving.

“No, it’s complicated, my dear Vergil, not impossible, but I will need my brother to make it happen. That’s where you come in. Vergil, she doesn’t have to die. I have found a way. It is the only way if any of us are to survive what is coming.”

Dark eyes lifted to meet the shadow that lingered before him. He wanted to believe, to have the faith in an outcome that Lucifer seemed to hold as truth against all odds. Vergil was loath to admit he prayed on many cold nights when he had nothing else to cling to. He prayed for death, he prayed for vengeance, he prayed for forgiveness, and yet this chance being offered to him felt like raw deceit. The kind of lie that blurred possibilities because of what it offered. He felt the desire for this lie to be true lick with thin tendrils of hope at a psyche to battered to tell the dark angel before him no. “What is dead should remain dead. What you summon will not be her it will be a lie, false, twisted, and dark.”
“I do not wholly disagree, if I were to summon her from here in this time and space, but I found a loophole; a way to save her before she dies. I have set many things in motion for this chance and now I see it is truly possible. Now I must make you believe.” He flourished his hand but quickly returned to staring down at Vergil still knelt before him. “Like I said, it’s complicated and it takes sacrifice. A sacrifice only you can make.”

--Present--

The distinct sound of snapping in his ear caused the eldest son to blink seeing his brothers face hover before him. The vision of the shadowy angel gone. His memory faded as the reality of the here and now grounded him. “Verge? You spaced out. Where were you?”

He let out a heavy sigh and felt the stinging prick of emotion that tried to escape his cold control. “A lifetime away,” he rasped indifferently. This was not the time nor place to delve into such matters.

“Share with me?” Whatever his brother had been thinking of it had clearly affected him.

“He can’t believe a word out of your mouth right now. So, stop.”

“I detest acknowledging the mistakes made that have brought us to this moment. It would seem I am making the same mistakes yet again.” Vergil stopped looking up the tall length of glass that separated him from the outside world of city and snow. He could feel the cold radiate thru the glass as the snow continued to fall but he felt himself to be colder. He felt regret in saying what he did to Dante earlier but not for the reasons he knew he should. He was angry because he had been caught. He knew many spells, but he was not vampire as Inari was quick to point out. Blood spells were reserved for only the eldest most ancient of their kind because of the numerous complications. Vergil scoffed mentally being further lectured by his brother was tiring. He had not planned on her reaction plain and simple. She was something more than she seemed that much was obvious. Furthermore, he had not planned on his son knowing of his deceit. It would take time to repair that error in judgement. Meanwhile, the relationship with his brother was now strained and awkward. Already he found he missed the reliable calm that was his brother. Despite his cool façade, he felt Dante’s anger boiling within him, but if his plan failed, he wanted his brother to hate him rather than pine over his loss. Dante needed to be free.

“You think too highly of yourself.” The familiar half chuckle in his voice told the elder son that Dante still held out hope for his rehabilitation and a part of him warmed that perhaps there was hope, even now as Yamato flickered into the other realm and he knew it would be over soon.

“Perhaps I do. Tell me. If you loved someone so deeply that you felt they burned in your veins when you were apart but said person was lost to you, what would you do? How far would you go, if you
discovered a way to bring them back?"

Dante didn’t let the flicker of anger cross his expression instead he remained cold and indifferent. His brother had not just asked this of him, had he? “Seriously? You’re asking me that question?” he deadpanned. He shook his head what was going on in his brother’s twisted brain?

“Yes, I suppose you are biased in your answer and yet I want to know. How far would you have gone for me?” Vergil turned to look at his brother and Dante saw a face haunted and uncertain. He shook his head again and blew air thru his lips. He couldn’t blame his brother for the guilt that surfaced. He could always say no. He could have said no the other night and he knew from experience Vergil never crossed a line with him that he didn’t want. He had to much control for that. His betrayal hurt not because he did it. Frankly, he believed as did Lady; Vergil had his own agenda. No, his betrayal hurt because he let his brother manipulate him. He liked to follow where Vergil lead. Dante blinked at his brother. He liked him that way, determined, strong and sure of himself, although a bit narrow minded. He hated the confused and broken version of his brother that was unsure and drifting. No, he didn’t hate him, he just didn’t understand him, if he only understood the context in which his change transpired. He blinked and took a breath.

“Vergil, I never, never, stopped looking for you. I hated myself for not stopping you from falling. I always felt like I could have done more that night but that I was being nothing more than petulant and angry. Hell, I killed you, twice, and yet here stands your dumb ass because you’ve got me wrapped around your damn fingers. I’m your fucking puppet and I both love it and hate it. Stop asking stupid questions. Just don’t expect me to fall in line at the snap of your fingers, I’m not that person anymore. I’m not the younger brother with starry eyes for his big brother. I haven’t been for a long time. I’ve grown. I’ve faced my growing pains and I came out the other side. I see things now, even if I don’t want to.”

The younger twin took in a slow measured breath. He didn’t know his brother anymore. They had spent so much time apart that it was like learning all over again. A part of him feared that Vergil would never let him in like he had decades ago. Sure, there were some things that were the same. You can’t grow up with someone as intimately as they did being twins, hybrid or not and not pick up on the subtle behaviors that had become ‘tells’ between them. Human twins seemed to have this preternatural gift that made them seem as if psychic. Even without their psychic bond that was ultimately thanks to their hybrid natures, they could still read one another, but right now, right here, Dante struggled. His brother wanted to confess, to apologize, to let something fall from his lips. He could see even feel that struggle and yet Vergil remained tight lipped, stoic, and distant. The creeping sensation in the back of his brain finally had an audience and Dante understood. His brother was afraid, and that was something he couldn’t face right now any more than his brother could. So, they would continue to deny that elephant that had become a dragon sitting between them. It would sit and wait and fetter with some nattering memory until they could address it. He had to keep him alive long enough to strangle him for the stupid things he’d done over the last two months. He snorted. Two months and already he wanted to strangle him. That did not take long.

A smile touched his lips and is heart. They would get thru this. “I’m gonna go check the wards again. It’s getting late.” He stood up and walked around the desk to the corner.

His brother smiled a thin bittersweet smile mistaking Dante’s smile as an admission that he gave up trying to understand him. “I left her to find father, to discover the truth, to face the reality of what I did so long ago. I could have been happy. I could have made amends with you. She wanted me too, but the weight of what I needed to know burned at me. It ate me alive from the inside. I gave Belial the ‘in’ he needed without realizing how much I hurt. But what surprised me was that I discovered they were coming for you, and you were not ready.” He bit back another sentence and Dante could see this was hard for him. Vergil couldn’t see that whatever this was it was still eating him alive. “The angels, the demons, they all thought I was dead. I wanted it that way, so I could have peace in
my research. I had become a wraith to those that sought after me, until they thought surely, I was
dead. I was once hunted for the secrets I stole, but the truth was that I hid from those prying eyes. I
needed more power to protect myself, to protect you, to avenge mother. Once I fell, once Mundus
broke me, I became forever lost to their machinations but then… then he offered me a chance. A
chance I couldn’t refuse. A chance that I have again squandered.”

“Vergil?” His brother stepped forward grasping Dante’s arms. His eyes burned with a dark fire that
Dante likened to a man haunted by some horrid memory that kept repeating as if a broken record in
his mind. He released Dante as suddenly as he had grabbed him before pacing back to the window.
Dante sat on the corner of the desk and felt the weight of emotions that emanated from his brother
and it shocked him. He blamed himself for their mothers death and even now he was trapped in some
loop where he felt guilty for Nero’s mother as well. His words echoed again in his head... “You
cannot deny my flame. Moth or not, my fire burns everything I love.”

“He promised he could bring her back. Not as some shade or revenant but as flesh reborn, whole and
living. Agnus caught me when I was weak, wounded from one too many battles. He stripped me of
my strength, my purpose, of everything that gave me that chance for happiness. I hate him, no I
despise him, and I will have my revenge. Then came the witch, the fallen angel who bedded a
demon lord for power. She picked, and prodded, and dug, and scratched until I bled secrets, but it
was her plans, her lies that stripped me of a lifetime of memories only to pervert them for her use. It
would seem I am making the very same mistakes just to get back to her and I hate myself for it. You
are correct in being angry with me for using the angel. I must retrieve my soul and that spell
resembled the only option I had of ensuring compliance from her. I don’t trust angels. I can’t. I
won’t.”

“Vergil! You knew the risks, the damage it could have done to her, too you. The damage it
apparently has done to her. Did you ever think about the fact that you could ask for help? You’d be
surprised. People actually want to help, hell some of them feel sorry for your ass and think of it as a
challenge.”

“I do not want their pity! There is no sympathy for the devil!”

“You’re right, you’ve always gotten your way, but you forget, nothing was ever handed to either one
of us. Now is no different. You just want things your way because you believe you’ve suffered long
enough. You act like you’re the only one that blamed themselves for mom’s death. I’m not like you
Vergil. I’ve got this huge fucking whole in me. I never found someone to love that I didn’t fear
would get hurt. It’s why I have so few friends and why I won’t take on a mate. Yeah, yeah, I get it.
You like to be in control but guess what it’s an illusion. She explained the risks. She knew what she
would be asking of you, but you are not vampire. Blood spells, subjugations, thralling, all of that is
their realm not ours. Our blood is like poison to others. What were you thinking?” Dante stood then
sat again. “No don’t. I can’t stomach your reasoning right now. Hopefully your angry little elf of a
soul fragment will recognize what you’ve done to her and let her bring it back to you.”

“Dante.”

“I know you had or have your reasons. I get it, I do, but dammit I want to know more. Not secrets, no
half truths or hidden agendas. I want to know what happened. What changed you, what the hell
happened to you not just now but way back then? Something flipped in you when we were kids.
You started keeping secrets and…” the red twin furrowed his brows as he spoke, “…and now you
still cling to them like they protect you, but they don’t. I know Vergil. I can feel them writhe inside
you like the poison you infected her with. Where does it end and to what end? Father told us to stick
together because we could do what he couldn’t but only together. Stop doing this alone! Stop
pushing me away!”
“I am trying to protect you! I am trying to protect my son!”

Dante snorted bitterly, “Don’t you think that’s what I’m trying to do? Don’t you care what I want? I’m trying to protect my asshole brother.” He punched out at the air his aura flickering angrily. “I’m trying to protect my wonderful lifeline of a nephew but unlike you I’m trying to save myself too. Sometimes, it’s like you’ve already given up.”

“He deserves to know his mother. She was better than me. She was meant to live. Mundus was supposed to kill me, not her. I am to blame for her death. I am the one that got mother killed.”

“Oh, Verge. Demons lie. He lied to you. He tricked you and now you’re paying the price for your pride.” He crossed his feet at the ankles. Then crossed his arms over his chest and sighed. “Damnit Vergil, you are gonna be the death of me and I’m just your little lemming of a brother. I’ll follow you all the way down.” He lifted his head feeling the first tingle to his periphery, they were coming. He pushed from the desk to stand as Rebellion shimmered to his back. He reached out and tucked Ebony and Ivory to their holster. “Mundus lied to you,” he said flatly his gaze washing over his brother as the light behind coming from the street lights seemed to dim. The shadows were coming.

“Oh brother, if it were only that simple. It was not Mundus with whom I made my pact.”

“What now?” Nero rolled his neck and shoulders. Inari teleported them more smoothly than if they had walked thru one of Casey’s portals.

“Arck…excuse me!” Nero quirked an eyebrow as Danica darted from where Inari had brought them. The nosferatu chuckled.

“She does not do well with teleportation in any form. Fortune smiles on her in other ways and the nausea is but temporary. You will be safe here for a brief time. The portals create a small blind spot here. A nexus of sorts where one may hide from the awareness of Celeste and her minions. It is how Corvus found her so quickly. I must leave, my presence may draw unwanted attention. Good luck young Sparda. We will await a sign.” The vampire bowed before he disappeared. Nero had to admit he had never met a vampire so helpful and selfless. He would ask later how they all knew one another. He snickered hearing Danica retch not far behind them. He felt badly for her but something about her ability to rip souls from creatures and yet she couldn’t tolerate a small jump thru the dimensional veil. Yamato did the equivalent of a head thwap on him mentally and he chuckled out loud in response.

“Ok, ok, I get it. I didn’t do so well the first few times Casey walked us thru a portal either. I get it.”

“Making fun of me?” She appeared with a distinct but fading tinge of green to her complexion and he chuckled before he answered.

“Maybe,” he admitted with a snort.

“Good, keeps me grounded and honest. Come on let’s find a place to stow your med kit. I have a funny feeling I might need this later.” She shifted her shoulders and took the small knapsack from the snowy youth.

“Nervous?”

“Scared senseless, but that has never stopped me before.”

“Glad to hear it.”
“Nero you’ll be fine. You can feed off the energy that surrounds us and stay triggered for an extended period. You will constantly heal should we get into something other than a few head cracks. The key is to not let yourself get too banged up. I expect demons but not hordes. I will be weakened but not helpless like before.” She looked around and found a stone table broken in a way that it would protect the knapsack from the elements if she stuffed it underneath. “There. Now remember where we parked.” He caught her grimace slightly as she smiled. The new scars pulled on her face and she wanted to forget them. He felt for her. They all had scars, it was just these were painfully visible and fresh.

“You’re amazing you know that?”

“I’m not but thank you. Why do you say that?”

“You are about to walk straight into the fringes of Hell just to carry that asshole’s soul. After the stunt he pulled, I would just tell him to kiss my ass. Doesn’t it scare you?”

“That asshole is your father and yeah it terrifies me. I keep trying to tell you guys I’ve never returned a living soul, but he did give me a bit of his blood, so he must have some faith in me.”

“Or he was desperate. He could have told one of us. I don’t like that he cornered you in the hall.”

“Ok, now who’s being an asshole? He barely trusts me, he’s a bit lost and you were not happy with the possible side effects. He took a chance. He didn’t ask permission because he couldn’t tolerate rejection. He has too much to lose.”

He shrugged. She punched his shoulder. They were both nervous, but the banter and subsequent argument helped. Frankly, Nero was still slightly amazed that she dismissed Vergil from blame the moment they determined she was infected with his blood. Inari was able to snap her from her fog, but she still seemed distracted. He’d have a word with Vergil upon their return. Thinking of which,

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“Ok, we’ll take this up with him later. Come on. You take the lead princess.” She curtsied at him then punched his arm but harder this time.

“Fine… Tony Snark.” She stalked off carefully scanning the darkness. She couldn’t sense a thing other than Nero and the flicker of the portals in the distance.

“Cute.”

“Meh, I’m off my game and you’re just moody.” She crouched and started weaving thru the rubble taking the most direct route to the portal. Her senses were still off but she wouldn’t let it worry Nero. She had a job to do and she was confident she could do it. She just had to find his soul. His voice suddenly distracted her.

“Tell you what. Let’s make a little wager. You know make it fun.” Nero stopped her with a soft grasp to her forearm. The fingers of his human hand pointed first to his eyes then over to a pile of rubble where a gray-green snake like creature swayed gently to and fro with its back to them. Naga. They were deadly, poisonous, and had a way of hiding in shadows.

“You’ve been around Dante too much.” She nodded pointing to her own eyes then over to two additional piles of rubble with Naga sentries. The place was crawling with them and the portal seemed to be hiding their energy as they swayed. Probably some strange harmonic with their own energy and that of the demonic portal. They both lowered their voices.

“Pfft... ‘cept I don’t make dumb wagers then lose.” He motioned that they back up and circumvent this area. Danica nodded and followed him back to a crossroad of sorts in the rubble and they angled
their approach. She let her gaze drift and determined the Naga were clustered together as if protecting something when she felt the pull of energy. She focused and determined the soul was close and oddly enough his wasn’t the only one she sensed.

She continued their conversation. “Oh really? Okay. I bet you a week with Yamato that you get caught first.” She smirked because; one Vergil would freak that she even held his sword much less used her to hunt with for a week and two she could have a lot of fun training with her while freaking the man out. What a delicious punishment for poisoning her.

“Are you saying, I’m not sneaky?”

“Yep. I mean you are much quieter than your uncle but…” She stopped him this time. There was movement just outside where she felt the strongest pull near the gate.

“Fine! Then I get uh…oh, a week of you coming over to cook for all three of us when you get caught. Anything we want, ‘cept pizza. This is not a win for Dante.”

“Pfft… deal.” She loved to cook for people and he knew it. No matter what she liked the arrangement. Seemed like a win-win. She could either annoy Vergil in person or through Yamato.

“What do I get when we capture you together?” Nero and Danica blanched as they turned their heads slowly as if in a bad horror movie to see a lizard like creature hiss at them from above. “Did you really think Celeste did not sense that crude spell hidden within your forearm?”

“Well, damn.” Danica grinned her hands already gripping her silvered blades.

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A sudden shift of energy around the office drew the twins from their dark conversation only to find the entire panel of glass that framed the office front was suddenly and completely covered in a thin white sheen of frost. Random shapes flickered thru the lights.

“Woah, I never realized frost could spread that fast.”

“Nor did I.” Vergil stepped closer looking at the delicate lacey patterns that seemed to grow from every corner of the paneled glass leaving only a small center section where you could see through clearly. “Remarkable.” Moments ago, he had stared out the clear window pondering how to tell Dante of his sins.

“Verge promise me you stay inside tonight. We both know someone, or something will come to taunt you, but inside you have the wards and now these wards.” Vergil raised his brow and turned to look at his brother. Danica had explained to Dante and Nero that a flight of Frost angels would be visiting the office to ward it from whatever Celeste and Agnus had sent for him. He forgot to tell his brother who was passed out at the time. “I’ve got to know you’re safe, so I can stay focused.”

“Wards? Frost Angels? Dante, explain.”

“Dani explained it while you were out. Ok I will not do it nearly as elegantly as her but here I go. You know the tales of Jack Frost? Well forget that, Jack is an angel and his slice of heaven deals with fall and winter, like as in the seasonal side of angels. Reminded me of fairies but she punched me, so not like fairies. Don’t look at me like that, it’s a thing apparently. Any way he guides what are known as frost angels. I believe Malia is one of them. I’d never actually seen one before much less heard of ‘em. They help protect the innocent, mostly children, on the long dark nights of winter
when the demons roam the earth for longer periods. Haven’t you ever wondered about the intricate patterns of frost on our windows when we were children? Take a closer look with this new knowledge in your head; they are angelic wards of protection.” Dante had moved to the window tapping at the glass to look for himself while he talked.

Vergil hummed and watched as Dante examined the frost closely. He followed and sure enough now that he knew what he was looking for he found hints to the patterns of simple Enochian letters that made up greater runes and wards. “Fascinating.”

“So, like I said, extra wards. You stay inside. I fight the demonic scum.” His brother’s bravado never failed to amaze him, although he sensed he was so much stronger than when they had battled atop of Temen-ni-gru. So much had changed since then.

“I cannot let you fight alone!” he grumbled.

“Vergil! Not negotiable. Swear it!”

“Dante!”

“Dammit Vergil, swear it on pops, no, swear it on mom!”

“Dante I cannot sit back and watch you fight quite possibly to your death just to protect me! I must do something.”

“Then do something! Stay here!” Vergil’s face fell to look at the ground. Dante’s eyes were moist and on the edge of tears. He couldn’t look at his brother like that. Someone else a long time ago looked at him with the same helpless expression and asked him to stay. He hadn’t stayed back then and look where it got him. He sighed heavily and nodded. “Fine. I will stay.” They both understood he wouldn’t but at least in Dante’s mind he would delay long enough to clear the biggest threats first.

Dante took his brother by the arms and turned him, so they faced one another. Vergil looked up at the intentional shift made in his position and as he did Dante rested his forehead to his own. They stood there for several long moments until Vergil relaxed and remembered. It was a memory so deep, so precious it remained hidden until now. When they were children their mother would make them settle arguments and specifically the bitter physical ones with lingering hugs that forced the boys to feel one another, not just physically but to feel the energy that so easily passed between them. Very early on Eva knew her sons were different. She knew they needed one another even before they themselves understood it. She understood in some way what they today still struggled with. Fast forward a few years of her attention and this was the result, a unique greeting as both brothers and as devils. Their energy shifted like tendrils gripping and melding into one. Vergil shifted his arms twisting his palms to face up as he bent his elbows and Dante pulled his own arms down to mirror the position so that they grasped forearms. They both stilled in the moment.

Outside the wind began to swirl as the demons drew closer, they both felt their agitation and their power, but for now they took this fleeting moment to be fully present with one another. Physically they mirrored one another, and their energies twisted and wrapped around them but deep in their private mental link they expressed their love and Vergil understood a single simple fact. It would kill Dante if he were to leave again but in the sublime peace of their bond Vergil shared his own secret on the matter. He didn’t want to leave, and the world would be hard pressed to ever separate them again.

“You really think getting caught was a promising idea?” Nero leaned against her shoulder whispering in her ear. The skirmish with the guard had been short but he was missed quickly and
that lead to another and slightly louder entanglement. They were now bound in simple bonds but so far no one sensed the spell of illusion she held over both. To these lower demons they were nothing more than hunters. They did not see a Nephilim or the grandson of Sparda.

“It didn’t make sense to waste our energy outside the rift. You need to heal and obviously so do I. We haven’t gotten to the main event yet. Pace yourself. There are still too many demons here. I think we stumbled on to something distinctly Celeste. I don’t sense Agnus or his ‘creations’.”

“Ok, you explain how you know that later, right now it looks like we have company.” A large crocodilian looking demon lumbered forth. His skin had a gray-green quality that seemed sickly in the garish orange light of the portal in the distance. His slit iris yellow eyes flicked to scan the immediate area while the sneer to his broad and toothy snout disappeared into his wide thick neck that further melted into a muscular form that seemed top heavy. Nero snorted. Danica elbowed him. “What he looks like a Batman villain on steroids.”

“Stop.” Fortunately, before he could formulate another quip, they were yanked to their feet by the soldiers behind them.

“Lord Agnus will see to their re-education. Bring them.”

“So, uh where is the sss-tu-tuttering mad man?” Danica elbowed him again. Nero grinned and wriggled his eyebrows. The demon growled leaning forward and snorting in his face. “Aww dude, brush your teeth.”

“Insolent bag of flesh. Perhaps I shall eat you instead.”

“Gotta say it looks like you’ve eaten enough.” One of the soldiers behind him chuffed causing the larger demon to ripple with anger and growl at him.

“Your tongue will get you into trouble snip of a half breed. Let us see if Celeste is hungry instead. She likes to play with her food and you appear to be her type.”

“Celeste? She’s…” blurted Danica before she could stop herself. The demon eyed her suspiciously. “Who the hell is that?” Nice save she thought but the demon leaned forward and sniffed her then lowered his face to glare directly at her.

“You smell funny, not like the hunters we normally see on this island.”

“Well, I keep telling her to stop joking around.” Nero snorted at the sheer stupidity of his joke. If Danica could have strangled him with her looks, she would have but fortunately the demon guards began to snort. Suddenly, they were shoved to the ground as the larger of the three whipped his heavy tail around knocking one guard to the ground and in the short skirmish to follow ripped the head off the other guard.

Danica choked back bile as she was sprayed with blood and being this close to the portal it remained thick to her skin rather than dissipate. “Oh, great that’s gonna stain.” She shifted to her knees, but it was the sudden flurry of demonic activity just ahead of them that caught her attention. Several naga slithered toward them but it was the female, the nagini, that stood just in shadow that caught her attention. “Celeste,” she hissed softly but her name was heard, and the creature lifted and gazed toward the prisoners.

“Bring them. I am hungry but more importantly I’d like a word with the Dark Slayer’s son. I was told he was dead.”
Happy New Year!

Next up:
Nero and Danica face Celeste and the fight to take back his soul.
Chapter Summary

Captured Nero faces Celeste while Danica searches for the remaining piece to Vergil's soul.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The initial push thru the demonic portal disoriented them. Nero was yanked one way and her the other. Her head swam for several minutes as she tried to see where they were. The guards had cut the hidden spell from her upper arm once Celeste pointed to its location. The amulet crafted by Braxus and charmed by Casey was meant to keep her safe in whatever Hell-like environment she might find herself in while offering the added benefit of opening and holding open the portal for a brief time. Both benefits now gone, Danica felt sick. Or maybe that was just the recent hard knock to her head which throbbed heavily.

The recent debacle with Vergil using the Enochian spell meant they knew someone was coming. She should have realized and as she took in the withering darkness around her, she remembered the old nagging prophecy about her death in Firenze and she wondered if it just might come true. She shook the thought from her head as a guard shoved her roughly to her knees, bones and rocks cutting into her legs and palms as she fell forward. She couldn't see Nero easily but Celeste's intent with him was obvious. He was to be her new toy.

She felt the presence of something calling in the back of her mind and tried to refocus. She had to find his soul, this had to work. She gasped with pain as a guard bent to linger at her ear while gripping the injured arm. The creature hissed his intent to play with her before Celeste finished her off. She dismissed his words instead finding herself petulant and bitter about yet another scar to her body because of him. The amulet was not placed deep, but the lizard-like guard made sure to leave an open wound. The ensuing struggle caused the remaining tendrils of her energy to fail her. She was exhausted even before the real work began, and the illusion she cast faltered allowing Celeste to see exactly what she was. Not that it mattered, Celeste seemed to know all along.

Dani saw the worry flicker in Nero’s eyes before they were separated by a wall of demons that fluttered between the realms. Several ventured back into the portal while others left. He wasn’t far from her, but she could see him heavily bound and forced to his knees just like her. The most glaring exception was the wound to his chest endured trying to protect her and the fact that he appeared to be next to an altar in the cluttered ruins of some temple as if the place phased thru various points on the island but converged here. She paused that information could be useful but at this point she didn’t know why. It just tingled in her brain. As she looked around, a shiver overtook her. The bloody altar was littered with bodies. Their broken and battered forms at first hid the horrors of their death, but as Celeste circled them, Danica realized many of those bodies were angels. Their wings severed or broken, and their bodies crushed, withered, and drained of both life and grace. This was where she fed. That cold sobering thought made Danica’s already sick stomach turn.

She remembered not more than a year ago watching Xander, a converted Trinity soldier, rip the wings off a child, a young Nephilim, no older than her beloved Riley at the orphanage and drain her
very essence. Disgust rippled thru her as she looked around. Demons, angels, even humans littered the place. Celeste had been doing this for a while. Another ripple appeared in the sometimes-translucent space around them as a trio of heavily armed guards carried something between them and disappeared. The moment they blinked away, she knew she had to follow them. The movement from the Nephilim alerted one of the guards who in turn alerted their queen. Celeste let a smile curl to her lips dangerously as she hesitated her advance on Nero. She chuckled as she shifted to face the woman. She wanted to take her time with Vergil’s son anyway, and it would seem the Nephilim knew she was about to be dinner.

Celeste licked her blood red lips and slithered forward. She raised her upper body and arms away from the floor as she moved. Her thick muscular tail adorned with sleek blue-black scales glided across the floor as if it were smooth ice and not littered with bones. “How s-simply…divine. She wakes,” she voiced with syrupy sarcasm. “Do you see your brethren amongst those I’ve tasted? They too realized all too late not to cross me.” Her voice was like smoke soft and sultry and it lifted to their ears as if she spoke to a lover.

Nero pulled against his bonds and growled as this queen naga, moved past him making a sudden bee-line for Danica. He was mesmerized by her undulating movements and yet he anticipated she would be very similar to the other naga demons he had fought in the past. She was just much larger and more powerful. Just being in the same room made his bringer tingle with the power she radiated. Stolen power he thought bitterly. He noticed the bones and obvious signs that this was no mere ante chamber but rather her feeding parlor. Yamato whispered to her young master remaining small within his mind and the youth glanced around the room taking note of the various windows to other parts of the island. He had read about places like this in the archives of The Order, specifically while looking for his father. This was a nexus. A place between worlds and fed with energy from two, no all three, realms. Several things made abundant sense to him as her watched her pass thru the area.

Nero quickly found himself transfixed watching her. He needed to find a weakness and yet he also needed to distract her from Danica. He eyed her carefully. Her upper body from her head to her lower hips was smooth skin tawny and warm in complexion while her hair was as dark as ebony that moved with her while seeming to cling to her body in modesty. She was also nearly nude save for a few scraps of silk, gold and jewels that draped about her neck waist and wrists. The youth swallowed hard when she curved toward him giving him an ample view of her full rounded breast that were adorned with a strappy halter like top in black that left nothing to his imagination. She hesitated and undulated her tail into a coil were her legs and feet should have been and watched him as his cerulean eyes glided over her. She smiled flicking her long blood red nails thru her silky dark hair. “Do you find me… alluring… young Sparda?”

He shook his head with eyes glazed, “Uh…no…no mam.” Internally Yamato cautioned him of his growing plan.

She smirked her dark eyes sparkled then narrowed before flickering to a deep hunter green as she hummed softly and moved closer to him forgetting for the moment the Nephilim. He swallowed again but this time he licked parched lips. She shimmied down to eye level with him and hovered before him raising an elegant thin arched brow to whisper. “Shall you satisfy my desires, young Sparda? Shall I…taste you and see? Will you feed me as your father once did? Such power in those veins.”

“No,” he whispered closing his eyes and turning from her in disgust as he felt her thick tail wrap around him and squeeze tightly. He felt his bringer tingle and burn as she wove gentle fingers into his hair and tugged for him to look at her again.

“So polite, your mother must have raised you… oh my apologies,” she purred purposefully. “...I
forgot with whom I speak. Your mother had little to do with your upbringing. I made sure of that for my master.” He tensed growling against her grip and she chuckled at his reaction. Belatedly, he realized she wanted him to shift and tense. It allowed her to grip him tighter, as she squeezed up his body effecting his ability to breathe. He needed to be careful. She was more than capable of choking the life from him before he even got the chance to fight her. “By now the terror most prisoners in your position are filled with prevents them from even speaking. So, refreshing to hear pleasantries. It is hard to believe Vergil is your father. I thought we killed you as an infant. I am so glad we failed.” She stroked thru his hair then shifted his head to the side as she let fangs rake across his now exposed jugular. “What would your father say? So easily caught, fool. Although to be fair I scattered as many of his memories as I could, so he could not warn you of my tricks…my desires.” She hissed hovering her heated breath at his neck as he tried to pull from her. “He would have growled and threatened me by now, but you…you I believe I can make you a bit more …compliant to my whims.” She lifted to look at his eyes that now seemed muddy and distant.

She leaned over Nero again to whisper a low hiss as she sniffed at his hair playfully. She was completely distracted by him and on the far side of the room a plan was forming. She pulled back slightly forcing him to look at her with a yank of his snowy locks. “I suppose you are here to retrieve that little glimmer of hope he needs to trigger and touch the power I am so addicted to.” Her eyes glittered, and she bent closer to his ear ghosting the outer shell with a soft tongue. Nero jerked in his chains. Their rattle and echo in the eerily quiet chamber pulled him from the momentary heady feeling that fogged his brain. “I brought it here to lure him back to me, but it would seem instead I have lured you. How delicious. I will take you then draw him to you. Then I shall have you both. Think of the possibilities, my power would rival Mundus himself. I could do so many things with both of you to feed me.” She pulled one hand from his hair and traced down his chest scratching exposed skin thru the cuts in his clothing. His scattered wounds were now completely healed from earlier but the tears in the cloth exposed soft pink sensitive new skin. He shivered at the touch snapping his gaze to finally look at her directly. One must be careful to never look a naga in the eyes. One of the guards to Nero’s right chuckled darkly knowing what would come next, and Celeste tilted her head toward him with an unnatural angular twist. The guard in question suddenly choked spewing thick dark demonic blood across the already bloody floor before he wilted with a thud. The tip of Celeste’s tail appeared before Nero and she delicately licked the appendage clean. His stomach fluttered with nausea and she laughed.

“I despise distractions when I’m plotting. Now, where was I? Oh, yes seducing you.” She crudely reached down and grabbed the bulge between his legs. “Hmm…What’s this? Not aroused? So much like your father. I shall change that.” She grinned flicking his chin with her free hand before she shook her head and shoulders. Nero was accosted with a sweet floral aroma that was a bit rancid for his taste and he gagged. He pulled again against his bonds and growled her grip loosened from him. His eyes flickered red and his bringer now burned irritating him as his inner demon grew restless and angry from waiting. She moved back from him with narrowed eyes. “Seems you take after your father after all. He was immune to my pheromones as well. Pity really. I rather liked the idea of riding you till you broke.”

“Get a pony, circus freak.” Nero sneered with his eyes bright and no trace of the muddy glazed appearance they had before. “Or do you prefer the bearded ladies. Look I’m not here to judge.”

“Tainted spawn! I’ve heard you have quite the mouth. Perhaps I shall teach you manners.” Celeste reared back with fangs clearly visible as she struck Nero clawing at his chest. He hissed with pain and pulled against his chains. The remaining guard at his side moved to grab Nero as he attempted to stand despite being held on his knees but misjudged how Nero would attempt to free himself and ended up in the path of Celeste’s second clawed strike. The guard convulsed quickly bleeding out as Nero stood and chuckled. Unbeknownst to her he flexed his bringer behind him while she nattered away, and he now felt the metal give. Guards flurried around them but to his surprise they seemed to
give Celeste a wide berth. There job was to keep him here. He snickered running scenarios thru his head as realized, they had no idea he had not intentions of leaving just yet.

“No wonder you can’t keep this place clean. You’re very messy.” He clicked his tongue at her as her tail coiled tightly around her both for support and defense as she raised up her upper body and wavered above him. He wagged a finger from his newly freed hands as he charged up his devil bringer and punched the snake creature square in the mouth. Celeste blinked with surprise staggering back as she was knocked from her coiled perch and was forced to quickly gather her length of tail. Nero, however, was faster than she expected and gripped the end of her tail giving her a swing away from Danica and her guards and clearing a bit more space.

“Care to dance?”

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A few minutes ago, …

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Nero helped Danica sit up pressing his hand to her bloodied arm. “You ok?”

She hissed with pain but nodded. “So much for sticking with the plan. You ok?”

“Yeah, just cut that a bit close. Now what?”

“Did you see the phylactery those two guards had?”

“The Phil what?”

“Phylactery. Never mind I’ll explain later. That was Vergil’s soul I’m sure of it.”

“Great they already went into the portal.”

“My guess is that she can’t have it in this realm for too long or it will escape. I bet she’s transporting back to her domain in Hell.”

“Then how do we find it again?”

“We need a distraction.”

“We sort of got caught. So, what can I do?”

“Besides throw shade? I don’t know. Be sexy.”

“What?”

“She’ll no doubt pull us thru the portal too, but my guess is that she will want to gloat a bit at catching us before she decides what to do with us. Oh! I know! You pull a Dante and be all like, ‘Hey Babe you’re cute.’ That should work.”

“That’s disgusting. She’s a snake. I mean part of her is attractive, but I can’t fake that!”

“Look you need to stay here on this side of Hell. I need someone here to run for help if it goes horribly wrong.”

“Like now. You’re still bleeding, and your hair is back to gray what happened to the illusion. Dani?”

“It’s not important now. Promise me not to draw Yamato unless you absolutely must. She can feed you energy while still in your bringer. She’s safer there and the moment she is loosed Vergil will
come.” Nero nodded. The guards brought a length of chain and sneered as they approached. Danica
gave him a quick one armed hug and whispered. “I need to find out where they went with your
father’s soul. Distract her!” She scuffled with the guards as they bound her hands when suddenly the
lights went out.

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Currently…
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Danica shook her head to clear the last remnants of fog in her head caused by the guard striking her
shortly after she woke the first time. The last thing she remembered was Celeste heading straight for
her. Fortunately, she came too just in time to see the snake queen distracted by Nero. At first, the
angel had no clue as to what Nero was trying to do as her view was now partially blocked by
distracted guards. She could feel the ebbing of energy from the soul fragment and knew she had to
hurry lest she lose the trail somewhere in the maze she expected be on the other side of the portal. To
her utter surprise only one of the lizard guards stayed to watch over her and he wasn’t watching his
supposedly unconscious prisoner. His mistake. Calling on her strength she flexed her wrists and
snapped the metal with just a little effort. The soft thunk of metal caused the guard to look down only
to have Danica slice his head of with the twin karambits she hid in her tunic. She whirled around
expecting an immediate fight only to see her timing could not have been better. Celeste wrapped her
tail around the chuckling guard and thrust the armored portion of her tail thru his torso effectively
eviscerating him in a single motion. Whatever Nero was doing was working and she quietly slipped
away.

She knew the pocket dimension they had been pulled into was a sort of nexus, but she had never
seen one. She had read about them a few times when she snuck into the archives at The Order but
seeing one and the possibilities of its use rattled her. ‘Agnus and Celeste could have been perfecting
whatever experiments they’ve concocted for years hidden in here.’ She had hoped to not actually be
forced into Hell to retrieve his soul but as she again felt the soul’s energy tremble, she knew she had
no choice. The ashen haired Nephilim stumbled into the next space with a thud. She came out at an
angle not the same as the one she had entered. She glanced around quickly feeling her blood tingle
and the pull of his soul guiding her to some point across the room. It was then that Danica realized
two things. First, this place was still within the mortal realm, but deeper than the ante chamber behind
her, and second Celeste was there to oversee the souls transport out of that realm. She stayed close to
his soul and that meant time would be short. Another thought crossed her mind, Celeste was
supposed to be caring for Mundus. Was it possible he too could slip back into this realm as Belial
had done? No, no she shook the thought from her mind. That wasn’t possible. The tethers that bound
Mundus and Belial were different. She ran thru the remnants of what appeared to be a pseudo
medical lab aka a torture chamber, she sniped bitterly. She had seen many places like this and
wondered if mad scientists all shopped at the same ACME warehouse. She chided herself for making
such jokes but there was a strange levity that lightened her mental load, one of the souls she still
harbored found it amusing enough to give her a boost of confidence.

Like the ante chamber she just left, this floor was riddled with corpses although these were charred
and desiccated rather than eviscerated. What the hell happened in here? As she continued forward,
the floor seemed to warble as if she had touched a puddle of water. She stopped to investigate closer.
The soul’s energy had become faint again. Where ever those guards had gone, they did not stop on
the other side of this rift. Her head spun. She had to leave Nero behind, but she couldn’t just give up.
She swallowed hard and surged forward knowing she was quite literally going into Hell. The rift
appeared suddenly before her. Something about her proximity made it become visible. Danica could
feel the ebb and flow of torturous heat thru the rift in time and space. The edges of the rift crackled
and sparked as if caught in an endless loop of burning and regenerating. The orange white edges
flexed and writhed like thick string blowing in the breeze and she could catch glimpses of the realm
beyond. With only a moment of hesitation she took a breath and dove thru the rift.

Shock crossed her face as she landed in a deep drift of icy snow. She gasped and scrambled to her feet but not before the cold began to burn thru her leather tunic. Confused she looked around only to see the fleeting image of a guards tail disappear into mid air at the edge of an icy cliff.

“Dammit,” she grumbled fighting to keep her limbs moving in the bitter cold. She charged after the fleeting image and stopped abruptly wind milling her arms to keep from falling into the obvious abyss before her. The wind had already frosted her hair and lashes as a blinding snow began to swirl.

“There has got to be some sort of…” She looked around hoping to see some sliver of a new rift, but it was a sudden puff of heated air that made her look to her left and down. Sure, enough near her knee she caught a glimmer of the new rift. She adjusted her stance and suddenly the whole rift came into view. “Yes! Crap no… no.” Her moment of happiness quickly spiraled as she realized the rifts were directional and quite possibly one way only. She would only find them if she knew what direction to look. As she turned to see where the rift was behind her, she realized her theory was correct. Behind her was a sheer icy cliff with about a thousand beady eyes glowing down at her.

“Great!” She dove thru the next rift just as the first shrieks from whatever those creatures were echoed toward her.

Somewhat prepared for anything, Danica found herself submerged in brackish water. Barely able to see she started for the surface, her lungs burning for clean air, but her bringers pulled her down deeper and forward. A sinking feeling bloomed in her gut and she followed her instinct. Diving deeper into the water. With the scant amount of air left in her lungs exhausted she caught sight of the ripple indicating the next rift. As she entered this one she fell to a sand covered floor and gasped for air. The air was thick with Sulphur and brimstone and Danica coughed violently until she was able to get her bearings in the caustic and dry air. She wouldn’t be able to last long here but fortunately the trio of guards, two of which carried the phylactery that carried Vergil’s soul, were only several steps ahead of her.

A growling hiss sent the two guards into the next rift at a dead run and Danica cursed as she stumbled to her feet. The third guard turned with polearm in hand and slashed at her first with one edge then the second. She barely missed the swipe of his armored tail but fell backwards as he headbut her away. She tasted her own blood as her head whirled disoriented. She moved back from the guard and barely dodged the downward strike of his blade. She caught a glimpse as the guards and phylactery disappeared into another rift and she choked as the lizard guard wrapped the polearm to her neck and choked her. She grabbed the weapon’s grip and let him pull her upright and back from the ground, however, the moment he released the tension to shift his weight she dropped to her knees and threw him over her.

The movement was smooth and quick surprising the lizard. He blinked with double lidded eyes at her visage that now hovered over his body. Danica wanted nothing more than to rip the soul from him but knew she couldn’t risk complicating the possibility of taking Vergil’s soul without issue. Instead she knelt over him and brutally cut his head from him with his own weapon spraying a plume of blood across her face. She breathed in the acrid metallic tang of the blood. It’s pungent scent made her wheeze with nausea. She shot a look over her shoulder. So far no one followed her nor did the apparent wandering demons care that she was there. Oddly they seemed to watch then continue along with whatever they had been doing. Her sooty grey hair now dark with blood. She lifted her hand to tug loose strands from her face and stood. She then darted for the spot where she felt her bringers pull her and hoped to find the next rift.

Celeste roared grabbing a pillar in the ante chamber and stopping her forward motion as she snapped back her tail and surprised Nero with the sudden change in direction. He dropped to his knees and
rolled from the freight train move she launched at him. She slammed into the pillar next to where he once stood. Her eyes flared red as armor plated scales as dark as the scales on her tail appeared over her tawny skin protecting her once vulnerable torso. Her transformation was complete once her delicate round face morphed into a rounded snout and her fangs enlarged dripping venom.

“Woah, now that’s a face only a momma could love. Ahh, what’s that your momma kicked you out?” he sneered as he taunted in sing-song the final sentence. Celeste screamed in anger and they traded strikes pressing closer to the altar then back toward the entrance. Neither seemed to have an outright advantage but for Nero’s part he was holding back, and he believed so was she.

“I see you have your father’s fight in you,” she hissed. “It didn’t take me long to discover his weakness and I already know yours.” She dove at him, but Nero feigned left then rolled straight into the guards who acted as if they were providing crowd control watching in shock as he moved passed them. He snickered gathering a long polearm as she took out three of her own people in her anger. “Do you think you can run from me? Do you think you can hide from me? Even now my shadows seek your beloved Kyrie.” Nero faltered. Celeste struck quickly knocking him to the ground and sinking her fangs deep into his leg. With a twist of his upper body and a kick with free leg he speared the armored tail as it dove towards his face. Celeste screamed in pain releasing him.

Yamato softly assured him his lover would be fine. “Stay focused young master. She knows not of the wolf.” Nero longed for a weapon. He snatched one guard hurling him into Celeste as she gained ground on his maneuvers thru the rubble. Celeste halted her forward motion and hovered on her bloody coiled tail. Even as Nero felt himself healing, he saw she too was healing from her own wounds. A sick thought came to him, however. Her bite had introduced a poison and he could feel his wounds slowing in their repair as a strange crawling sensation ebbed from her bite wound. He felt as if the world slowed around him and the fringes of his eyesight crept in on him until he only saw her.

“Oh, hell no!” he barked, and the snake queen sneered a self-satisfied grin.

“Oh, but yes tainted spawn of Sparda. I but needed to taste you to know how to best control you.” His head whirred a bit and he felt Yamato slowly become a conduit for his rage as she fed him energy from the portals. His bringer flickered red with rage and Nero tilted his head down to search the floor. He could feel his weapon close, but where? Celeste swayed forward a step, but Nero snapped his eyes up to look thru his snowy locks.

“You. Leave. Her. Alone.” His breath became labored and he staggered under the weight of thoughts that rolled thru his mind much less the burning poison that now coursed thru him.

“Oh, I like to feed on souls like hers. So, filled with loss and tragedy. First her parents. Then her brother. Ah, yes, Credo. I did enjoy him too. Strong. Right. Up. Till. The. End.” Celeste sped across the floor quicker than Nero could react. He felt her claws rake his back and he staggered his landing. As he tumbled across the brittle bones, he felt his mind clearing as Yamato helped burn the last of the poison from him without him resorting to a full trigger. He needed to keep back a few surprises for when Danica returned. The bits of bone broke and splintered spearing him like small needles as he rolled. He flinched with the pain, but the real charm came as he felt Celeste thwack him hard enough to knock the wind from him. Propelled forward he landed with a hard thud where once stood the remaining handful of guards and just to his left glinted the shining edge of his beloved Red Queen. He sputtered almost giddy at the turn and let his grin spread to his face as he rose to his knees his pain long forgotten.

“Sweet… Let’s kick this up a notch!” He whirled revving his sword and feeling her power surge in his grip as the flames laced at her edge. The guards rushed him, but he only smiled taking out the
first guards to greet him. “Next?”

Once inside the new rift, Danica was deposited into what she believed to the unbearable heated lands of Yovethera. It’s meaning roughly translated to fields of despair but it was a transient name so who knew what the demons called it now. Her references had been ancient texts and the descriptions much less titles and references were often obscure if not just outright wrong. This place seemed to fit the descriptions, however, of the largest open domain constantly embroiled in a war between Mundus and Lucifer or Argosax or any one of the demon lords. The location of this land was just about dead center to everything if one could geographically map it and at least as far as the texts told. It would also make sense that Celeste would choose to be close to the frontlines if Mundus were incapacitated. Even if he weren’t, Celeste could gather a bevy of intel thru her tight control of the nexus and then direct the hordes from here. This place was not easily traversed alone thus giving her the unique opportunity to work unfettered. Her bringers began to buzz warning her of the danger that still lie ahead. She wondered if the phylactery could house Vergil’s soul back thru the portals. If so, she wouldn’t need to be a conduit for him and the damage to her would be minimal. She snarked bitterly. He had caused her enough pain.

The guards ahead had taken a leisurely pace in carrying their spoils completely unaware that their brethren had fallen. It was an asset she hoped to take full advantage of as she rushed the pair. Danica killed one guard with one of her blades thru his heart the other slit his throat before snatching the phylactery. Th remaining guard was caught unaware and gaped at her. Its moment of hesitation gave her the chance to get away. She had what she wanted and had lost her element of surprise. She needed to regroup to take out the final guard. Despite her intentions when she turned to run, she realized she didn’t know where to go.

The lizard roared swiping elongated claws at her and knocking her to the ground. He was much faster than the previous guards and apparently much stronger. The phylactery rolled from her hands as the creature snapped at her. She found she had to crab walk backward just to get away from him. He pinned her by the throat easily and she stabbed him in the back with both blades. He screamed kneeling up from her and she called upon the blades whispering their incantation as electricity seared thru his body as the energy traveled from blade to blade. He stood jerking from her trying to reach the blades. She rolled to her hands and knees gasping for air. Her lungs ached for air and not just because of his attempts to choke her, but the arid dryness around them seemed to eat at her and her eyesight wavered. Frantically she searched thru the dusty rocky ground for the phylactery but found nothing.

A polearm blade tore thru her shoulder as she reached forward and tried to stand. She hissed in pain yanking her arm back and rolling to her rear to see what attacked her. A new trio of guards larger than the previous ones stared down at her their forms resembling some horrific praying mantis. “No!” she squeaked dodging another strike and rolling quickly to her feet. She called again to her blades and the silvered edges reappeared in her hand. She stood ready to defend herself, but the trio had already surrounded her. Their dark sneers and rasping voices cooed at her to submit or pay the price for her heresy.

She had only one chance and she called to the dark blade buried deep within her soul. It listened but refused to come forth and suddenly Danica realized she was tapped. Her wound was bleeding freely, and her lack of clean air had taken its toll. She was out of options and as she watched one guard motion his head toward the phylactery she had tried unsuccessfully to locate, she understood she must do with what she had. Bitter and angry, she steeled herself. She would not go quietly and if she had to do this the hard way then so be it. Her mind raced with ideas as she searched her surroundings
for anything she could use against her assailants. “No! I won’t go with you and I won’t give up” she uttered in one of the few demonic tongues she could speak but they obviously understood her from the change in their somber expressions. “I will die here if I must but more than one of you is coming with me! I will not be food for that whore!” She braced her stance.

The first hit was fast. Her mind blanked as to any successive movements, but she felt her body respond as if she were back in the training yard of her childhood. She moved as if a robot. Hit after hit she suffered learning to anticipate without thought, to react without hesitation. Again, she tasted blood but this time she felt a growing surge of energy deep within her that fueled her to continue. She felt being stabbed and cut. She felt her skin tear and her blood spill freely but what she did not sense was the hilt of the dark sword materialize in her hand as she cut the head off one creature. In the blinding blur of battle and in the heat of her anger the sword had answered her call and just as she had done as she faced Belial, she cast another holy spell and the final two creatures withered to their knees. But then, so did she. Spent, she lay face first in the red ore dust and tasted the bitter metallic tang of her own blood. She gasped for air like a fish out of water and struggled again to her hands and knees. Shadowy feet appeared before her, but she refused to react in haste. She was spent, and she knew it. If her end was to be here it would be done with grace. She struggled to her feet slowly. The shadowy feet were attached to shadowy legs then a torso then wings? She struggled to stand straight as she heard someone speak to her.

“Not all who walk in shadow live for darkness. Not all who live in the light are guided by it. Seek the truth. Let this be your guide.” The shadowy handed her the phylactery and she reached for it looking to see who had handed it to her, but she only saw violet eyes that shifted to gold then disappeared. Confused she looked around only to be greeted with several stunned faces. Demons of many sizes, and shapes, some scaled, some torn, many thin and broken in appearance now surrounded her. She wobbled on her feet as she began to cough and clutched the phylactery to her chest. Her sword long gone, she felt her head throb and her eyesight blurred.

One of the demons stepped forward. “Et liberabo animarum!” She blinked unsure of what she heard then turned and ran.

The sky was a dark orange with a molten quality to it that was both disturbing and disorienting. She ran for her life not knowing where to go as she avoided jagged rocky outcroppings which rose and fell throughout the landscape. Once she gained some distance, she looked across the scattered desert landscape with its scrub filled patches of meager vegetation. Although it appeared to be desolate at first, she spied large cricket and grasshopper like demons roam thru the patches of razor-sharp grasses and no doubt poisonous plants. Tall dark trees twisted and gnarled like tortured skeletons creaked and moaned when she passed. Something told her to keep going that she was not safe here and so she again ran. Her lungs burned begging for clean air as her legs tired beneath her. She continued to run as if drawn to some unforeseen point when suddenly she felt a cool breeze tug at her senses. It was painfully obvious she did not know how to get back from here and she couldn’t last much longer without help. Angels weren’t meant to remain in Hell. So, without another thought, she dove into the rift the moment it became visible.

“Angelos… Angelos Orire!”

Danica jerked awake. She slammed her head hard against a cold stone wall behind her and wilted immediately with pain. She had no idea where she was nor, did she know what happened to her. Vague dark and shadowy images flitted behind closed eyes. She was cold and just about everything on her body ached including her teeth. As she rubbed her head and opened her eyes, she was greeted with what appeared to dark purplish grey skinned child grinning at her with almost elven features. The child shook the phylactery at her which now seemed to be damaged and sparked between them.
“Libera animam suam!” he voiced with a thick guttural demonic accent.

“What?” The child shook the phylactery again, but this time pressed it toward her. Confused she grabbed the box and felt her bringers tingle beneath her skin only to become visible on their own. “Where am I?” She looked up to the child again, but this time as her gaze drifted around her, she saw several similar creatures cluster behind the child as he motioned with excitement.

This time the child pressed closer and spoke clearly. “Free his soul!”

Chapter End Notes

So, I don't speak Latin, but the rough translations should be: “Free the souls”, “Angel, Angel Wake up”, and “Free his soul.” I’m pretty sure I blew the proper use of tense. Apologies. This chapter grew rather than getting a reduced word count during my final edit. I hope this story continues to entertain.

Next up: Vergil and Dante
Retreat from the Darkness

Chapter Summary

Knock, knock someone wants in…

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I…” whatever Vergil was about to say as the brothers parted from their embrace was never finished as a sudden roar of demons shook the windows. For a moment, Dante wondered if the demons knew of the angelic wards and tried to shatter the windows. The appearance of both the demons and then the warding had been swift and sudden.

Vergil called for Force Edge as he mentally tried to touch Yamato. Her silence told him she was beyond him for now and even as he tried to feel the angel hoping he was right about knowing when she had his soul, only emptiness touched him. This was it. They had come for him and he suddenly felt unprepared his inner demon grumbled softly with its inability to surge forth and take its revenge. Force Edge hummed in his mind assuring him all was ready.

The twins detected a flurry of movement thru the front window but as Dante stepped forward a crimson and purple wave of Mephisto demons barreled down the alley toward the office. An electric crackle of light flickered from the far rooftop as one after another demon exploded or fell by the wayside whirled into a strange cocoon of ice and snow. The light illuminated the collection of Prides and Lusts along with several newer enemies like the Stygian. The not so distant sound of gun fire hailed down on the demons as they scattered and whirled others screamed altering their course to attack their unseen assailants. Someone was helping them, and Dante had a pretty good idea who. He shook his head feeling the catch in his throat. He expected a few frost angels, hell from the wards alone he knew they were about even if he could not see them, but his friends surprised him. Lady and Trish knew what they were doing but he still wished they were not so stubborn. He didn’t want them hurt not because of him, not because of his brother.

The building seemed to shake, and Dante felt the shudder of energy from every devil arm in his possession. His mind clamored with their voices as they practically role called and began formulating their own plans should he call on them. Ever the one to be full of surprises, Alastor sparked appearing before the men. Again unbidden, he buried himself into the worn wood floor sending an electric current thru the walls creating a barrier very much like when Belial had attacked. Cerberus too appeared but rather in a small ghostly form more reminiscent of his true demon form while his weapon form remained on the wall.

“Master,” he growled softly. “There are many, please, allow me to hunt with you, not as your weapon but as your guardian.” The red twin stood at the ready with Rebellion and he sized up the ghostly apparition with a single raised eyebrow. He knew such a thing was possible, but it was very rare to see a devil arm return to their previous form in any capacity. It required trust between master and weapon and more than that it required permission. Of all his weapons, Cerberus was perhaps the one he trusted ever so slightly more than any other and he knew his reasons for why were slightly faulty.

“You got a plan?” He scanned first the dog then the weapon on the far wall. Both entities glowed
with a soft deep reddish-purple mist a thin tendril between them.

“Aye master, I shall remind them that there are depths to Hell the likes of which are so cold they… burrrn,” all three heads growled in unison as they spoke the final word.

“Well then, permission granted. I trust you understand the situation.” Cerberus the weapon disappeared from the wall as the energy pulled from it to reform into a solid corporeal version of his demonic body replete with fur, claws, and fangs. He was however smaller, and Dante wasn’t sure if he liked or disliked this obvious reminder that he had submitted to Dante’s will. He grew roughly to the size of an elephant before he phased thru the front window and out into the parking lot. The angelic wards crackled but held tight to the window flashing with the creatures passing. Once outside, the three headed beast more than doubled in size. His teeth gnashed together as all three heads swiveled to assess the incoming demons. “Oh, we are so having words about this later frosty paws!” The red hunter grinned now aware that things had decidedly tipped in their favor.

“Why do they hesitate? Why are they not coming in? Their numbers alone should have overwhelmed us by now. They are assessing our abilities.” Dante huffed hearing his brother’s strangely vocal musings. Vergil wasn’t one to make idle conversation so there was something to the observation that troubled his colder twin.

“For now, they can’t. So, let’s not show them all our tricks. You stay put and so help me Vergil, I mean it. I won’t lose you again. I still have a few questions and more than one bone to pick with you.” Dante smirked as he charged at the front door while morphing into his demonic form. His body crackled with red energy as he kicked the door open and it grunted from the abuse but miraculously, though barely, held to its hinges. He exited through the front door only managing by a slim margin to miss slicing the door frame as his full form radiated from him and wings unfurled.

Vergil could not help but be awed by the sheer power his brother radiated. He was so much stronger than he remembered. A pang of guilt or was it regret stuck the older twin. Dante had evolved.

The sound of howling wind permeated the small front office until Vergil realized it was the growing hoard of demons and not solely the winds. He growled in anger and tried to call upon his demon form furious to be left behind. Force Edge chided him that he was safe behind the wards and to not be a fool. He retreated from his efforts to draw on his demonic strength even as he felt the blood rise within him. A strange new feeling had crept from his heart a pain of bitter longing that caused him to still in the window; his soul was close. He felt its power call to him thinly as if struggling as he himself was. It begged him to feel whole once more. He snapped his head toward the chaos outside the window again but was drawn to a spot just on the edge of said chaos. A shadowy spot just beyond were his brother and his friends waged an impressive charge. Where was the angel, where was his son? Something wasn’t right. They should be here, shouldn’t they? If the passage of time had taught him anything it was that he had learned too much of the forbidden magic, he had suffered because of this knowledge and he knew how easily one could be seduced and he saw the inner workings of so many spells. He felt one play with him now. His mind raged against the tethers he knew were unseen by others, something was wrong and yet it called to him and he wanted nothing more than to follow. He moved to leave the office finally succumbing to its call, when suddenly Nevan appeared before him with her feminine wiles prominently displayed and licking her lips seductively. He growled seeing his brother allowed his weapons such unbridled freedom. He flinched avoiding her outstretched hand as he stepped back from the door.

“No, my sweet decadent lover, you need to stay put. What you sense… that my love is a soul trap, a very cleverly crafted one too. I’ve set a few in my lifetime but this one is very strong. Your soul is not really here.” She again tried to reach for him but the elder twin growled daring her to touch him and she deepened her smile. “What you feel pulling you close is only a powerful spell that whispers of its essence nothing more.” Nevan motioned for the door to close. It obeyed her silent command
while simultaneously repairing the damage to the hinges and glowing with a renewed ward like the one Dante checked only a few minutes earlier. “Stay! Like the good little boy, we know you can be,” she taunted.

“Liar!” he snarled his hands crackling into their demonic claws. Their argument cut short, they were drawn to a haunting wail from the parking lot. Thru the window a feminine figure swarmed with both shadow and mist. She was escorted by ghastly creatures with melting forms wielding chainsaws. As the creatures parted, they more clearly saw a witch that could have been Nevan’s distant relative in appearance. She glowered at Vergil thru crimson black hair and eyes to match. Her form shifted crackling with electricity as a flurry of bats screamed toward the window. Vergil braced for them gripping Force Edge tight. He expected them to finally burst thru the window only to discover they fell instantly into soot as they hit the window with a ringing bell like tone that seemed to echo thru the shop. The main window clouded with a glow of silver then returned to its previous frosted state.

“Told you sweetie, she’s not half as good as I am. I know what stands between me and you and it isn’t a window.” Nevan disappeared with a nod leaving Vergil to adjust is grip on Force Edge. He angrily threw the door open again and darted outside feeling the wards tug at him to return. Alastor chirped to Dante of the situation lowering his protection. The Dark Slayer stilled just outside the door watching as his brother deftly cut down one demon after another. Though the numbers seemed stacked against him his little brother relished the quick-fire attacks and shifted with ease between his favored weapons as well as flitting between triggered states. He caught the quick glare followed by the grunted yell for him to ‘get back inside’ but Vergil turned from his brother feeling something again tug at his senses. A shadowy yet familiar figure shot several rounds of ammunition through the witch that Vergil had momentarily forgotten yet still heard her call. To his surprise, the creature lifted from the ground as electricity crackled thru her and subsequently turned her to soot against the brick wall of the alley. The blonde demoness moved quickly to protect Lady and Vergil seethed knowing that of all things to assist them, it was her, and yet as he watched them turn to battle a cluster of Prides, he saw she was not his mother. No, she was what Mundus had wanted his mother to be and even in this he had failed, for she was something else. Even though she was a copy, a clone, a shadow of his mother, she too left Mundus. A sneer lifted to his lips as an advantage became clear. His mind raced at the new possibilities even as he deftly freed several smaller demons from their pathetic existence as they attempted to gain purchase on his position. His moves were precision. Each stroke true and each move honed over years of training, so much so that as Dante turned to see his brother enter the fray of battle, he saw not a weakened brother but a capable and deadly hunter. Regardless he had to get him back into the shielded protection of the office.

“Vergil!? Get back in the office!” Distracted by his brother’s voice he turned to see the red twin split a demon in two cleaved asunder by his demonic claymore. Force Edge tingled whispering a warning even as the blue twin felt the ripple of energies around him. He turned to face a pair of blood rages. The horrific dark werecat entities screamed at him, their toothy maws anxious to taste blood. He spun from them immediately summoning swords. The brilliant blue-white light flashed in the darkness to pin one creature to the nearest brick wall while claws of a third rage found purchase and forced the elder twin away from the front steps. In his surprise at not having predicted such a stunt, he triggered instinctively with the intention to make short work of all three, but his form only flickered. He remained human as his heart screamed with pain and he fell to his knees clutching his chest with one hand. He managed only to dispatch one of the creatures. Force Edge flared pushing the rages back and away from the pained man, but several demons had smelled the blood of their intended prize and now converged on him like flies.

Vergil now stood several feet from the steps of the office. His tussle with the rages had forced him towards the thick of the fighting and further from his brother. He turned with bitter determination to face these creatures on his terms and easily sliced thru a poorly timed twin attack from his flank. As
more rages and then Lusts and Prides appeared, Cerberus appeared again and snapped one of the
demons in two as the newly gathered creatures phased or disappeared. Several lingered attempting to
draw Cerberus from his post but they faltered falling if not to one head then to another that swooped
in on any missed opportunities. Dante cleared the demons immediately surrounding him and moved
to intercept the ravagers that once protected the witch but remained after her demise with their sights
now shifted to the wounded slayer.

Several tense minutes passed as Vergil felt his strength wane dramatically. Unlike when he faced
Belial and Mundus months ago, he had no portal to feed him power, no Yamato, and his brother
while steadily making his way back to him needed his own strength and could not afford to share his
energies at this time. He summoned more swords clearing anything that got close and stepped back
toward the office. Mephistos swirled above them taking speared shots with any opening they saw. It
wasn’t until electricity again crackled thru the air that Vergil felt a familiar energy close. A chunk of
pavement knocked Vergil from the stairs and back to the parking lot again. He rolled to the side as a
heavy reptilian creature rushed at him. The bony clawed strike hit solid to the ground and
reverberated with electricity. Vergil blocked with Force edge feeling his muscles contract as the
electricity coursed thru him throwing him further from the office. His back struck something hard and
metal. It forced the air from his lungs and his head felt as if it would explode. As his eyesight cleared,
he saw a Blitz now stood between him and the office.

“A rage reappeared unexpectedly to rake claws across Vergil’s back reopening half healed wounds.
He grunted stumbling to the step but then an all too human Dante reached for him. The red twin
grabbed his brother tumbling and shoving him without warning into the office. The wards again
tingled as he felt is body pass thru them. Cerberus now stood between the office and the remaining
demons and clamped down on the cat like creature with his great jaws. The demon screamed in its
death knell as the other two heads unoccupied with prey of their own snarled and snapped keeping
the remaining stragglers at bay.

The twins landed with a heavy thud inside the office and Dante straddled his brother. “Damn it
Vergil I told you to stay put.” He panted the words catching in his throat as he felt across his
brother’s body for wounds. He quickly removed himself from atop him as Vergil was then
unceremoniously rolled to the side and Dante quickly inspected the fresh claw marks. “That was too
close. Dammit! What the hell were you thinking?” Dante stood from his brother abruptly visibly
distraught but allowing some distance between them. He ran his hands thru his hair streaking a heavy
smear of blood thru his snowy hair as he paced. A shrinking Cerberus appeared to the doorway and
trodded silently into the office becoming the nun chucks once more and appearing on the wall.

“It is done master. The remaining flee in fear or face the wrath of the hellions that assisted us. The
human wishes a word.” Dante flicked his head to the open door then looked at Vergil who had
already gathered himself rising to his feet.

“Are you ok?” Vergil glared daggers at his brother, but he was too tired to continue the ruse and
nodded walking over to the couch. “I need five minutes with Lady don’t…you… move.” He turned
toward the door and started out but then turned sharply. “No, I’m not taking chances again! Crazy
selfish son of a… Alastor!”

“Master?” the sword crackled.

“Impale him if he tries to move from that couch!”

“Gladly.” The great sword hefted from his previous spot burying itself between the blue twin’s feet.
The sword sparked in anticipation. Vergil merely lifted his head from his hand as he leaned against
the couch arm and growled.

“I’m not kidding Vergil. I will not lose you!” He disappeared as the snow fell harder outside the
great window. Vergil remembered the ringing sound and how the demons were dispelled when they
struck the window and again, he found himself wondering why he seemed to find himself
surrounded by angels. Had this been what he was missing all along. He shook his head. Eae had
only revealed himself once he was already trapped and dying at the hands of Agnus. He paused
looking out the window. Eae? What if…? His thoughts drifted shortened by the pain his body now
coursed with. His adrenaline high lost, fatigue threaded through him. Again, he reached for Yamato,
again she did not answer.

“Is he alright?” Lady shifted Kalina Ann to her back before she began the task of reloading her guns.

“Come in and see for yourself.” Dante tried to straighten his clothing, but he knew he was a mess.
Lady merely smiled at his attempt.

“No, not tonight. He needs you.” She strapped her guns back to thigh and hip.

“You lied to me.” He stopped short of hugging her. He had already scanned over her and determined
the level of bumps and bruises were acceptable. He could focus on being mad at her over worry. He
crossed his arms over his chest and glared down at her taking advantage of his tall frame as he
towered over her shorter stature.

“No, I just opted to not tell you of our plans. I still don’t trust him, but I trust you.” Trish appeared to
her side and nodded.

“We’ve gotta move, several demons are heading out into the city. Something has shifted in the
energy surrounding our demonic pests and several of the lower demons seem confused as if they no
longer know what to do, so they’ll hunt. We must stop them.” She turned flicking her hair over her
shoulder.

“Trish?”

“Thank us later Dante, go take care of him. He will not be pleased that I stepped in to assist but I
don’t have time to explain why I’m not a threat to him… or you. We have a small network of hunters
patrolling to pick off stragglers, but there will be a lot of them tonight. We can’t afford to get sloppy.
This is what we do, remember? You… you take care of him.”

“Thank you.” She gave him a single nod before motioning with her head at Lady toward the pair of bikes stowed in a quiet dark corner that miraculously remained untouched. Her long legs strode toward them and Lady took an audible breath before smacking her hand against the red hunter’s shoulder.

“Right, you owe me, but I figure we can settle this later.” She gave a salute and followed the demoness.

Dante looked out over the parking lot as the bikes roared to life. He was relieved they were alright and even more relieved that the city would be safe. His beater of a car lay broken beyond repair in the parking lot, but it could be replaced. The office front was a little worse for wear with hunks missing from the parking lot but overall his place was still structurally sound. All in all, the pungent smell of brimstone and demon blood was fading. He took a deep breath closed his eyes and turned to face his brother only to meet warm chocolate eyes and a lovely frozen lady drifting before him.

“Eae has disappeared. He returned to the realm and as Vergil planned, he was purged of the remnants of Belial’s essence, but something happened and I or shall I say we do not know exactly what. Dante, for now, the only angelic help you can expect must come from the Nephilim. Protect her for she is your greatest weapon against the rising demons.”

“She’s not a weapon, or a plaything any more than she is his tool,” he spat angrily. Malia raised her hands in deference. “Besides I have a funny feeling she’s dealing with her own hell right now.”

“You misunderstand me. She is blessed more than she understands herself. The divine has plans for her, but her choices are her own. Her guide seeks only to show her the path. She is free to choose. She is very close now to discovering what she must do. She needs you as much you need her.” Her words disappeared into the wind as the snow whirled away the last bits of demonic evidence. By tomorrow morning, Dante was pretty sure that nothing, but a fresh layer of snow would remain.

Dante stepped into the office and shook his shoulders letting snow fall to the floor in small piles. He closed the front door and locked it flipping the front neon light off and banging his head against the door. He stood there as a shiver ran up his spine and his voice caught ever so slightly. “If I… lost… you again. I wouldn’t be able to fake it a second time. I hate not having you around, I’m more than a little lost without you and I hate that about myself. I know I can’t make you do anything, and I know eventually you will leave but promise me, promise me Vergil…” he sighed unable to put his feelings into words. Alastor felt his need to stand guard had passed and disappeared back to the weapons rack. Dante took a deep breath and lifted from the door but still not looking toward his brother. “I promised you I would figure this out and I will. I can make this work. Just tell me what I’m doing wrong.”

“Dante, stop. Please.” Vergil stood behind his brother and wrapped his arms around him feeling his breath tremble in his chest. “I’m not going anywhere. I’m too damn stubborn and besides I just got my own room, remember?” The red twin chuffed at his brother’s forced attempt at humor, but Vergil could tell he was barely holding it together. “I am sorry, brother. I have been so consumed with being strong again that I forgot I should just be… thankful. I never expected you to come after me. I never expected forgiveness, but I took advantage of these things and I am sorry. I promise… I… will try harder.” Dante finally turned from the door and Vergil held him tightly until slowly Dante was ready to let go.

“I need a shower.”

“Yes, you do.” He wrinkled his nose as they separated. “You smell like a demonic wet dog…and
trash… and blood… lots of blood. How on earth do you get covered like this?”

“You could have stopped at yes.”

“Hnnn, I could have but then it would not have been as much fun.” Dante stared at his brother and they searched one another’s face. Vergil tugged at the blood-soaked smear. “Furthermore, I do not recommend making a fashion statement with this look. It does not suit you.”

“Look who’s talking. I never pegged you as the open back evening wear kind of guy.” He tugged at the loose edges of Vergil’s shirt.

“Hnnn, it is a bit breezy.” Dante snorted at the comment and wrapped his arm around him. “Come on Verge, you stitch me up I’ll stitch you up.”

“Or we could just go to bed and figure this out in the morning. I sense the demons retreating and I doubt they will try a second time. They did not expect the celestial intervention.” He walked stiffly toward the stairs as his brother followed.

“I thought I smelled bad.”

“You do, that’s why we’ll sleep in your bed.”

“What about…?”

“I sense nothing, and Yamato has not called to me. If I failed to properly subjugate the angel, I at least expected Yamato to call for me. I believe we have a bit of time.”

“Subjugate?”

“Apologies, I do not have a better word to explain the type of spell I attempted. She was not what I expected.”

“Fine, we’ll talk about this later. Let’s get a couple hours of sleep. We need to recharge then we head to Fortuna. I’d hate to give Celeste or Agnus any advantages by showing too early. We need to trust that Nero and Danica can handle this for now.”

“Agreed. One way or another by dawn this will end.”

Outside snow drifted to the ground covering the world in a blanket of white. A tall lone figure watched as the lights faded from the front of the office building his shadowy vantage point allowed him to watch the main press of the battle from a safe distance at the end of the street. After a few moments of the office being dark, a second cloaked figure appeared next to the first and spoke softly. His words were deep and barely audible.

“Yes-ss, I can see that. T-tell me, what hap-pened to my witch?” The cloaked figure hummed but the answer did not please the tall shadow as he hissed a response. “Anzu was correct, they draw assistance from the celestial realm. Tell me does Celeste still spy on the Nephilim? She will prove useful to my research.” Whispers followed the command for answers and the figure moved away.

“So, she is protected, and the ruse had been discovered. How unfortunate.” The shadow whispered again. “Nero? He strayed from his father’s side? Interesting. Surely, if I could separate this one from his brother, he would be an easier target to ensnare especially if she let his essence slip from her grasp. Yes, his son would make a wonderful addition to my forces. There is only the matter of incentive and I believe the foul-mouthed brat and his angelic lover will prove useful for this task. Inform Celeste I am altering our plans. I believe Mundus will be pleased with this new plan. I want
them both and advise her the other Nephilim, the one that seems to be so troublesome to our goals, 
tell her I shall take her as well. Go! I will bring her a worthy treat to feed upon in her stead. 
Something fresh from the freezer,” he chuckled softly, then hummed.

The figure disappeared into the wind as the shadow stepped forward his hood over his head not 
completely hiding his dark hair. The snow now fell in large white fluffy flakes changing and 
covering the landscape. The darkness broken by the scant few street lights that lined the sidewalk 
seemed to swallow the distant sounds of hungry demons. The shadowy figure sneered as he stepped 
into the light and walked down the street. No longer in shadow, he appeared as any other civilian 
walking the streets, save for two dark shadows that seemed to dance unnaturally behind him. “Come 
my lovelies, let us find sport in hunting for the angels of frost. I am most intrigued with their abilities 
and wish to add them to my repertoire. I believe I know a place where we can start our search.” The 
sneer deepened on his lips as the shadows suddenly swelled revealing their true hideous and 
misshapen forms. They strode next to him one on either side. “Being that this is such a terrible storm, 
I wonder if the church will offer me refuge till morning?” he chuckled darkly as the wind stirred and 
eyes of gold watched them disappear into the long night.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Fortuna
Chess Pieces

Chapter Summary

Kyrie and Casey face a decision. Vergil and Dante need to rest while Nero has been told No for the last time.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Fortuna had changed over the years. Some would say for the better and others not. Kyrie was one to believe change wasn’t always what it seemed. Just as she believed some people were not always as they seemed. Deception and illusion seemed commonplace in their world and something she saw more clearly the longer she spent time alone. Alone. She chose to stay here in Fortuna more than once and blaming anyone but herself was its own kind of self-deception. She had something to prove if only to herself. Letting Nero discover who he was, living alone and becoming independent were but a few of the ideas she held herself too, but it cost her in ways to innumerable to count right now. Her fingers absently brushed over the edge of the letter she received. Captain Durante’s signature was prominent on the bottom edge. The formal summons read polite enough, but it was still just as she read it; a formal summons to appear before the new Captain of the guard. Well… not so new, she thought.

She sighed heavily then folded the letter and placed it on her dresser. She looked up to her reflection in the mirror and turned her face from side to side wondering if she should tell Nero about the letter. She combed thru her damp hair. No, she decided. He was busy with his father plus experience told her the days surrounding winter solstice were the nights Nero preferred she stay inside and safe. She was pretty sure he was up to something risky and more than likely with Danica. She smiled softly. Nero really thought she had no clue when it came to him making plans to hunt something big, something dangerous, something she would not approve of, but she knew. She sometimes worried more when he managed to come by and spend time with her out of the blue when she knew he should be elsewhere, like with his father. She shook her head. Dante would never let anything happen to him, so her worry was moot. She tingled thinking about the other night and pushed her fears into the dark corner from which they rose. Nero would be fine.

She untangled the damp length of hair she had gathered and again sighed. The house was quiet. She missed the sounds that once occupied this home. It had only been a few days since Casey left but the silence had a way of creeping in slowly. She missed the sounds even from many years ago. Nero being salty. Credo being temperate. Even after all this time, it was the one change she could not get used to. Her wound for Credo’s absence was still fresh. She smiled absentely continuing to comb thru her hair. She missed other things too. Things like the smell of her mother cooking, the sound of her wise words and advice. As odd as it sounded, she missed the smell of antiseptic and medicines that appeared in the parlor when a neighbor stopped by for her mother to tend to simple wounds. The sounds of her father mumbling as he poured over texts and wrote to the council regarding some doctrine or when he researched a case as if he were some cross between a devout scholar and a surly detective. Her father, her papa, he always found answers to the islands problems and he was tireless in his pursuit of truth. It sometimes drove her mother nuts when he stayed up late pacing with his thoughts and observations. But he always took time to give her consul when she needed it and it was his consul she missed the most right now.
“What should I do papa? Should I trust him? My head screams in two voices.” Her voice trembled slightly, and she laid the comb aside. “What would you tell me to do. Surely, me sitting here fretting like some nattering old woman would give you cause to raise an eyebrow.” She smiled picking up a small photo of the family in the grand cathedral celebrating the adoption of Nero. It was one of the few occasions when they were all together. Nero scowled even back then, and she giggled rubbing her thumb over his pouty expression. Credo looked slightly irritated, but her mother laughed while father beamed. They were happy back then, a family. Family. Perhaps it was what she believed a family was that at times caused her to push Nero’s buttons. She wanted him to live with Dante for a time, but he refused to leave her alone. She wanted him to learn about his family. Things had slowly been changing throughout Fortuna before Nero came to live with them, but it was only after her parents death that Kyrie felt Credo begin to pull from her and become secretive. It reminded her of her father at the end of his life. Perhaps there was something more to their deaths but for now it was just lonely. She swept a hand across the photo once more. She felt drawn to Nero since the first day they met. He was her everything and she felt drawn to him now. Her worry for his welfare resurfaced with a vengeance. She sighed as tears pricked to the corner of her eyes.

She refocused her thoughts. “Be true to who I am. That’s what you’d tell me. You’d tell me to look inside my heart and find the truth that I have always known. I am stronger than I realize, and I can, no I will, make a difference. If Captain Durante thinks for one moment, he can intimidate me, or use me as his pawn, then he obviously does not know my family.” She smiled touching the photo again. “Besides there is something more to that man than I can put a finger on. I owe it to my loved ones to find out what he’s up to. I would be remiss if another Sanctus rose to power.”

“Then perhaps, I can go with you?” Kyrie smiled into the reflection of the mirror hearing the warm smoky voice. Casey stepped quietly from the doorway. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to startle you or to intrude on your thoughts.”

“You didn’t. Despite what Nero thinks, nothing gets into this house without my knowing,” she quirked confidently. Casey frowned and crinkled her face. “I’m teasing you, silly.” The witch brightened but confusion still lingered in her expression. “It was Corvus. He fluttered in here a few minutes ago”

“Oh! You had me there. Damn nosey bird. Of course, he told you. But how did he know? I mean I was using a shadow spell and I’ve been in hiding since…”

“He’s been watching the house since a few hours ago. He made some promise to Nero and I guess apparently Danica was coerced into it too because she sent over her familiar to guard me. It would seem they believe I am at risk in some way.”

“Really, Fenris? I never saw him. I don’t even sense him now and I’m usually pretty good at sensing sentient creatures.”

Kyrie shrugged. “He is keeping to the shadows. I don’t even know that he has fully materialized, but I have felt him close. Sparda help anyone that he frightens.” She looked back at the photo still in her hands. “People treat me like I’m a helpless doll, but I’m not. I’m not some naïve damsel in distress.”

“Oh, Kyrie. I really don’t think that’s what’s going on. I just think they worry. Nero especially. He loves you and you’re not a burden to him, you never have been, and you know that. You’re precious to him. Of course, they all want to keep you safe. You have a way with people. You keep Nero grounded and sane in his crazy world. Truth be told I can’t think of a single person who doesn’t want to keep you from harm once they’ve met you. You are beloved for more than just your voice, or fair looks. People look up to you for your kindness, your thoughtfulness and your conviction. You stood against The Order when they treated Nero so horribly. You showed people you truly believe
the edicts Sparda left with these people. You’ve given them hope.”

“Hmm…that would be a gift from my mother. You would have said the same of her. People loved
her for the simple things she did for people; for her kindness. She just seemed to glow when she was
helping others.” She sat the photo down and smiled before turning to face her friend. “So then, tell
me. Do you think Durante is up to something?”

“Yeah, actually, I do.” Casey pulled an identical letter from her pocket and shook it at Kyrie. “Since
when did the underground start delivering official summons?”

“You’re kidding.” The nimble songstress jumped from her seat to snatch the letter in surprise. She
flicked it open and nodded. “He is not what he seems. I’m sure of it now.”

“Which means tomorrow morning… we go together to see him and his summons, and we make
damn sure we go prepared.”

Kyrie gave a single nod and pursed her lips. “Papa always said if someone tries this hard to be seen;
they need to be heard.”

“Well, then I just hope we like what we hear.”

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Dante wasn’t surprised in the least when he finished his shower to find his brother asleep. As
promised downstairs Vergil headed straight for his room, but Dante insisted he’d feel better getting
washed off first and so a short argument ensued. Finally, the eldest conceded rather than waste time
continuing the argument. Dante was very stubborn. While Vergil stripped, Dante checked over his
wounds and grabbed the first aid kit. He didn’t use it often for himself, but he found having one
stocked came in handy especially with the girls. After a he insisted on a few small stitches to ensure
Vergil wouldn’t bleed all over his clean clothes, Dante left him to at least rinse off in the heated
water. Vergil, being Vergil, grumbled about his brother’s prowess with stitches and kept insisting
they bet neat and small to reduce scarring. Dante feigned a scoff but understood. Once complete, he
lightly traced his hand over the soft scars that remained to his brother’s back. Vergil was patient and
allowed this. Those wounds were deep and old, but healing. In a few months maybe longer all but a
stubborn few would be gone. He wanted to put his brother’s time in Hell behind them, but he knew
the reality of the situation was it would always be a part of his brother and in this way, it would be a
part of him too. He ushered the grumbling man off to bed after he stepped from the shower and he
took his own turn to wash away the past few hours. Softly he stepped into the bedroom to find
Vergil asleep face first in the middle of the bed.

Dante felt the energy shift around him as he continued toward the bed. Rebellion was in his hand as
he turned still bare chested with his hair damp to face the nosferatu, Inari. “Shhh… I mean no harm
son of Sparda. I bring news. News and whispers from eyes watching Firenze. They entered the rift
several hours ago.”

“What do you mean hours ago? That’s not good.” A small panic rose in his chest, but he quickly
tamped and stifled his growing emotions. He wanted his brother to rest and not pick up on his
concern.

“Not necessarily. I have received word that the rift in which they were taken moves much slower
than it does here.”

“What do you mean much slower?”

“He means the past two hours of fighting for us have been but seconds to them inside the rift. I do
not remember the dilation amount but initially this event confused me when Agnus took me thru the rift to his lab for his…” Vergil involuntarily shivered as he spoke. “…experiments.” His voice dipped as he finished. It brought to mind the act of someone glad to be rid of something distasteful. The eldest twin now sat at the edge of the bed and Dante saw fatigue weighed heavy on his body and showed in his eyes. Despite his calm demeanor, Vergil was exhausted.

Inari nodded as his shoulder length dark hair clung to his face. “He is correct. They are unaware of this I am sure.” Dante eyed him with suspicion, but it was Rebellion that chirped assurances. The great claymore had a sense about people and creatures, and he felt no ill will from this nosferatu. Rebellion withdrew suddenly as Vergil tapped into his brother’s mental space.

“Nosferatu barter in information. It is their currency. If he has accepted her as clan, he will use what information he can gather to protect her for she would be family to him. We can use this to our advantage. He will transport us safely to her and to Nero.” Vergil’s eyes glittered dangerously as he looked to his brother, but Dante kept from reacting to his silent words.

As he mulled what was going on through his head, Dante suddenly snapped his head around, “Wait! You said taken. They were caught? Does that mean Celeste was there?”

“I am afraid so, but it seemed planned from what little I could see. I have eyes and ears on the far side of the rift. Should we know you will know, but for now rest. I will remain close so that I can take you to the island. Your appearance must be timed perfectly, to avoid a struggle to return your soul. Celeste and Agnus do not realize you are stronger than they believe.”

“Then they believe I am still infected by their reaver?”

“I would assume they do. Father McCabe shared much of the events that have taken place. It is said Agnus came to watch the battle himself though I did not see him. I heard the demoness stepped in to discharge an attack on your person. It was said that while he may have seen this and the destruction of his witch that he knew little of the demon souls liberated by your hand. I understand I missed quite the spectacle, pity.”

“Agnus was here?” Dante felt sick at this notion. For years he believed he had killed the stuttering mad man, but it seemed the red hunter hadn’t killed as many people as he once believed. Frankly, other than Vergil he really wished his vanquished foes would stop coming back from the dead. Rebellion flickered away from his grip to rest by the door again sending him a measure of comfort.

“Indeed. It would seem he had his fingers into much these days.” Vergil put his head in his hands and sighed while resting to his knees.

“His network of shadows now rivals our own. He sees where we cannot, and he hears words not meant for his ears. We must be cautious.”

“In this, I agree vampire.” Inari bowed slightly to the elder. “Brother? We need rest if we are to be in any shape to battle more hordes of demons. I am a liability in this state and soul or not if I can not recharge and fight, then this will be a short and futile attempt. I need you to…” His eyes flickered as he stopped mid-sentence and their eyes met. Dante nodded. Vergil sighed and leaned back to the bed staring blankly at the ceiling. “What of the angels? Do you know if any remain?”

“Some linger, watching, why?”

“Vergil, what are you after?”

“I need to speak with Eae. I need to know Belial has been purged from him. I have a favor to ask.”
“Eae can’t help us right now. We’re on our own.” Vergil lifted to his elbows. His brow arched gently questioning the remark.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I ran into Malia right before I entered the office. She told me Eae has disappeared. Apparently, he is free from Belial’s malicious essence, but he disappeared shortly thereafter. Those that are helping us do not have a clue what happened.”

Vergil flopped to the bed. “Can this become any more complicated?” he groaned.

“Vergil?”

“I will leave you. You do not require and audience for what must be discussed. Call for me when you feel the draw to Fortuna. It will be…unmistakable.” The nosferatu faded into shadow before disappearing.

Dante sighed then looked first to Rebellion whose edge glinted in the flicker of city lights coming in thru the once destroyed window. Eae had fixed that window. Well, he repaired the whole wall and if Dante’s memory served him, he warded the wall as well. Perhaps sleep wasn’t out of the question. They had roughly four hours till sunrise. The light reflections drew Dante’s gaze to the world beyond the window and the snow that still fell. He stood and watched it fall in large flakes and wondered if Malia lingered but he had no way to contact her. His eyes next settled on his brother who lay across the bed with his arm draped over his face almost as if defeated by the apparent change in plans. His breath was slow and steady and had the younger twin not known him to some degree, he would have believed his brother had fallen back to sleep. But this was Vergil, the one who schemed, no, not schemed, Vergil planned everything to it’s inevitable end. The fact that Eae was suddenly no longer available to him had made him pause. He was not sleeping he was planning. These events forced Vergil to rethink his plan and whether Dane knew what that plan was or not, this was disconcerting. For the first time since his return Dante let the thought pass through him. What if this was their new life? What if they failed?

“Don’t be absurd. I just need to… I just need to rest. The answers are here I just need to find them.” Dante snorted. He must have been thinking loudly on his head. “Very loudly. Stop fretting like some frail old woman and come to bed. I need your warmth, I’ve grown chilled from the damn shower you foisted upon me.” Dante let his damnable coy smirk lift to his lips as his brother huffed and scooted to the far side of the bed. He now lay on his side and faced the window.

“I think you need something else,” he taunted rolling his shoulders and quickly towelling off his somewhat damp hair with the towel that still hung to his shoulders. Vergil merely let out a grumble at his comment. Dante chuckled. “It’s hard asking for help from me isn’t it?”

“You make it exceedingly awkward.”

“I do.” He crawled into bed and nuzzled against Vergil’s pale neck causing the man to shiver. “I really do.”

“Dante, stop that. I’m tired.” He flicked his brother’s hair but did not attempt further to move him.

“Stop what?” The younger twin rubbed his cheek against his brother’s jaw and purred like he had suddenly turned into some large cat, but Vergil only let out a heavy sigh.

“I only need a bit of your blood, to share in the power that courses thru your veins so that I may heal, so that I may sleep. I will heal if given enough time without your assistance. Time is what we lack.”
“I can think of other ways to make you sleep. Ways that won’t take too much time,” he purred. Vergil turned his head and eyed his brother who perched partially over his prone body to look down at him. Their blue eyes met locking to one another.

“My God! I have created a monster,” he deadpanned. Dante blinked at him and snickered finally half flopping to the bed behind his brother.

“Yup! But to be fair, I’ve always had issues.” Now it was Vergil’s chance to snort and the odd feeling of a smile spread to his face. This seemingly honest reaction made Dante hum into his neck again. “I’m still mad at you and I’m still waiting for answers, but I get that now may not be the right time.”

“Thank you.”

“I didn’t say you were off the hook.”

“I understand.”

“Do you?” Dante suddenly and awkwardly threaded his legs through Vergil’s and pulled him into a submissive position with Dante all but pushing him face first into the mattress. He clasped both wrists in his own hands and leaned into his ear with a growl. “Cause right now you can’t fight your way out of a paper bag and I’m pretty sure what we are about to go up against is just a bit stronger than that.” Vergil thrashed gnashing his fangs and growling but was successfully trapped by the weight of his obviously stronger brother.

“Get off of me!”

“No! Say it! Say that you need me. Tell me you’ll stop to consider that I might need to protect you tomorrow. I’m not the imbecile you think I am. I know you are trying to protect me from something.”

“Fool! Get off me!”

“No! Say it!”

“You are being a child!”

“NO, I was a child… until he left… until that night … until she died. But we were both forced to grow up quick from that Hell and now we have graduated to out next Hellish existence, but we have a chance to end that. Tell me you want that to end. We can be a family again. Vergil, I want that. I want that with you and Nero.” Vergil stilled beneath him. Dante felt him concede if only physically and he shifted his now more docile brother until he cradled him loosely in his arms at his chest. He draped an arm over him as a reminder that he still offered his blood. He offered him a chance to regain some measure of power thru him. His brother still faced the window, but Dante could see his eyes flickered with uncertainty, perhaps anger. “Don’t take what I will freely give you and just disappear. Don’t use me like I’m just another of your pawns in this game you’ve planned from the beginning. Do you understand what I’m saying? Do you understand what I want?”

“Dante you fool, how could you ever believe I thought of you as a pawn? Clearly you have more potential.” He grasped his brother’s wrist and raked his fangs against the soft inner skin. The younger twin shivered and settled to his back adjusting the pillows with his free hand before shoving said arm beneath his brother’s head allowing him to rest fully against him. They would sleep this way, close, intertwined, tangled yet separate as close as physically allowed by a single soul fractured between two bodies. Vergil kitten licked his wrist indicating his intent to feed as Dante sighed softly relaxing. Vergil smiled pressing his lips to his wrist before he murmured. “Besides, I always thought of you as
my queen. My most valued piece. The piece which moves anywhere I need them. The piece I shall protect the most.”

Dante chuckled then hissed feeling the puncture of his skin, but Vergil’s words fell away from his conscious thought as he thought of Nero and worried for his nephew. Then he thought of Danica and wondered why in the world any of them thought it was a good idea to send an angel to Hell. From the darkest corner of the bedroom, a pair of gold eyes flickered then disappeared as the twins fell into the first peaceful sleep either had had in days.

Nero was pretty sure he should’ve been a comedian, that is of course right up until his demonic night job precluded him from that career path. Inwardly he chuckled even as Yamato chided him for not staying focused as he battled Celeste. Personally, he thought his last pair of snide quips about the snake queen’s momma being a less than designer handbag and her father being nothing but a low-grade pair of boots were both funny. In fact, he thought they were hilarious and mentally ventured into other quips that just needed the right time to deliver. He dodged as Celeste roared in anger and threw another stone pillar at him. “What? No kitchen sink to toss? Seriously you’ve thrown just about everything else in here,” he snorted. Red Queen snickered and Yamato groaned. The youth spun kicking Celeste as she snapped at him with her razor-sharp teeth. Her tail however, managed to trip him as he landed and as the wind in his lungs quickly exited his body as he smashed to the floor, Nero coughed rather than quipped and so ended any further serious thought of being a comedian. He’d need to watch his uncle a little more closely in the future.

“What’s this? No witty words, unclean spawn? Shall I take you to task for your words earlier. Shall I ride you until you break? Or shall I just break you and be done with it? I find your dogged play… boring and uninspired.” He felt her tail wrap to his leg as he scrambled away from her, but she hissed whirling around to grab his other leg with clawed hands. The pain that surged thru him made him grit his teeth and growl. He hefted Red Queen toward the snake’s head only to have her knocked from his grasp by the clumsy blow. The snake laughed as Nero slowly grinned.

Celeste had left herself wide open for the blow that cracked her jaw echoing thru the area. She reared away from him hissing in pain and clutching at the jaw that hung open as she bled from both mouth and nose. Nero stood leisurely dusting himself off as she hissed. He gathered Red Queen once more and revved her engine igniting the blade into an intense flame. The next several minutes consisted of Nero taking the upper hand from the Naga as Red Queen seemed to glow with more than flame. Celeste dodged and blocked blow after blow. Finally, Nero paused with a snarky grin that surely had to be an inherited trait.

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“Fool! Do you truly think you can best me? You are but a fraction of his power. Do you believe this is my true form? I will crush you…” Celeste seethed in anger but caught his gaze drifting from her and realized her mistake. She coiled her body and prepared to strike. “That half breed angel will fail to retrieve his soul. Did you really think she could? I have taken many precautions. There is only one-way Vergil becomes whole again and it shall not be thru her!” She lunged at Nero as she doubled in size and great leathery black wings erupted from her back. Her body hardened no longer showing any hint of skin but rather it was covered in black scales. He dodged her initial strike but found himself dazed and falling to his knees when she screamed at him. The sonic bellow disoriented...
and pained him and even after he saw her mouth close the sound seemed to echo in his head. Instinctively, he called to Yamato, but the sword balked at her young master.

“No! You must not call for me yet! Your father cannot face her in this form. You must try harder to keep her occupied.”

Somewhere deep in Nero’s psyche something broke. Maybe it was lack of sleep, or Maybe it was because he had barely been holding his anger in over the past few weeks. Regardless, he objected at being told no. He groused at the damnable fickle sword. He was unaware of the few choice obscenities that slipped from his lips. Had she not promised to always be there for him? Was he not her master? Sentient or not she was a weapon. Did Yamato honestly just tell him he wasn’t trying hard enough? His inner demon roared in unbridled, albeit petulant, anger sparking something deep within him that felt like a torrent of power. He staggered to his feet and charged at Celeste. The snake queen flinched backwards to coil around the remains of the altar. Nero’s eyes bled to red even as his aura grew around him. His skin seemed to crawl as he stomped forward vowing to show that God Damn sword how hard he would try. Several new guards had entered to assist their master once she triggered but they only shrank away before dying from the brutally sharp clawed hands of the fully triggered demon striking them down.

“That’s impossible! You…you…no… no… th-this is-ss not poss-ssible! You are a child!” Celeste screamed as Red Queen caught the arm blocking Nero’s downward blow to her face. The arm began to burn and the smell of burnt flesh was thick as Nero roared again. He yanked Red Queen away and grabbed Celeste by the throat with his spectral form.

“What is it with Mundus employing stuttering pawns? I think it’s time to for me to show you how motivated I am.” Nero sneered as Celeste paled before him.

“NERO! HELP!”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the wait. This may need additional editing and I apologize. I just needed to get this up. I'll double check tomorrow.

Up Next: A short chapter for Danica
Chapter Summary

Danica meet Vergil, your worst nightmare.
Eva pays the fiddler and Kyrie and Casey enter the fray.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

She sat up suddenly trying to figure out where in the world the incessant humming she heard was coming from. Her room was dark and the shadows unfamiliar as her bleary eyes searched for the intrusive sound. If this continued, she would surely sink further into the depths of insanity that she already traveled. The tune was distantly familiar like she had heard it before and yet just out of reach for her to completely comprehend in her current weary state. She slowly remembered why she was exhausted and rolled her shoulder sore from the abuse of close-range weapons training. Her head throbbed from the dull rote memorization of the path they needed to follow through the various rifts that were scattered thru this realm so that they may return to the Nexus. “They”, she chuckled. She found that she recalled where she was and sighed in acceptance. It had been her choice, right? She mindlessly worked thru the first thirteen points of their path along with the associated dangers and requirements in her head. As she shifted to lie down again the humming resumed but louder.

“Vergil? For the love of god please stop humming. It’s way too early to start the day with your constant badgering. I will get you home when we can go home and no sooner. You woke me up... again. I thought we discussed my need for sleep.” She flopped dramatically back in her small cot and sighed. Her arm rested over her eyes as his voice whispered to her.

“That was my intention. You spend far too much time thinking and sleeping. I need you acting. You may sleep to your heart’s content when we return... and no sooner” His final words seemed to reverberate thru the air around her. She pointedly rolled away from the thin ray of light that crept under her door.

She drew in a long-exaggerated breath and burrowed her head into the thin pillow. “I’m tired you sadist. I dare say worn out. I’m not a demon, as you are so keen on pointing out repeatedly. This place wears me down differently than it does you. Sweet mercy, I’ve had handlers who allowed me more rest. We’ve gone over this like a million times and we are ready. I know you can feel it too; it’s almost time.” She tried to relax back into the cot adjusting the furs around her. Maybe just a few more minutes.

“Utter foolishness! You sorely need the practice and I don’t want to be trapped here... with you. Furthermore, you were about to dream. I didn’t want to see the nightmares you were about to rehash again.”

“Not like I want to relive them either, but you do understand the brain needs rest dreaming is a function of that, right?”

“Dreams are nothing more than misfiring synapses bored from the sleep your weak body requires.”

“Wow, I really never thought of it like that. You’re such an ass. I’m going back to sleep. Do me a
favor and shut up for a bit.”

“This conversation has grown tedious. You are awake now and by the time you fall back to sleep it would be time to get up anyway.”

She shivered trying not to let his words affect her but somehow, she swore she could feel his smug expression despite being unable to see it. He had succeeded yet again, and she knew it. This morning was a new tactic to wake her and he effortlessly barbed her into a conversation and effectively lifted her into a waking state. He was right, she would struggle to get back to sleep now. She hated him. She hated him for a myriad of reasons and not just because he woke her up a little earlier every day over the last two weeks. This man was devious and wickedly intelligent. He seemed to know exactly how to goad her. She snorted at his thought and readjusted the covers. She closed her eyes taking a deep breath. This arrangement was not working in her favor. He was learning more about her than she was about him.

“Do not get comfortable or I shall begin singing. The time for sleep has passed. You need to train.”

“You wouldn’t dare.” He would she knew he would but… maybe ten more minutes.

“…In the jungle… the mighty jungle…the lion…”

She shot up from the bed and growled. His normal husky rasp of a voice had a velvet quality to it, but he didn’t exactly sing, it was more like dramatic speech, very dramatic and angry speech. While it was not wholly unpleasant, every time he used this form of redirection, she ended up with his rather dated choice of songs repeating thru her head. She knew he would eventually strike on something that would drive her crazy. Today’s choice already had her mentally stumbling over the urge to ‘wee-oo and a-whem-a-way’ as he spoke. She growled with disgust. She didn’t even let him finish the first line. A tirade of words she wanted to describe him by rushed to her lips, but she bit her proverbial tongue.

“…and I hate you.”

“Good girl. Also, I am aware of your thoughts on me and could care less. Now go get dressed. I promise I won’t watch.” She snorted at the remark. He saw thru her eyes, felt what she felt, tasted what she tasted, heard what she heard, but he continued to insist he was a separate entity within her capable of not intruding where he was not wanted. He seemed to pride himself on being a gentleman. She didn’t, however, believe him for one solitary moment. She was convinced he was browsing thru her subconscious at will especially considering the weird dreams she had and the sudden recollection of memories, many she had kept suppressed for years. Unfortunately, she was unable to learn anything of him and worse she couldn’t stop him. She clamored out of bed to find clothing. Recent experience had taught her, it was best to not poke the dragon.

Still stiff from yesterday, she moved slowly. The training golem had thrashed her thoroughly during yesterday’s practice. Vergil insisted she take on more and larger creatures despite being handicapped and knowing she would never take on such things in her current state. He kept insisting she refused to use her full power and handicapped herself. Their angry argument from the previous night had finally reawakened in her mind. Did he really think they would fight that hard to keep him in Hell and if so, shouldn’t they be working to find a different route that would get them back to Nero sooner? His silence meant he was either digging in her subconscious again or perhaps giving her real privacy in her thoughts. Either way she couldn’t avoid the feeling that their time was short.

Something grew with agitation within her. A beast restless to be free.

As she dressed, she saw her hunting outfit. It had been set aside since shortly after she arrived in Hell. This was decided to keep her inconspicuous and hidden in the realm. She reached for it feeling the soft supple leather between her fingers. It was familiar unlike most of this realm. She succumbed
to the urge to feel the material next to her skin and tugged the pants on first. Again, there was silence although she felt a shiver of energy indicating he was pleased with her choice. He always led her in the direction of his choice, mostly with subtle clues. She found it disconcerting that she wanted to please him. This strange compulsion to please him reminded her of waking after their initial ‘union’ and his not so subtle attempts to force her do as he wished. The second his soul entered her bringers, she regretted it. She wasn’t prepared for what happened next. He suddenly seized control of her body and forced her to submit to his will and his control. She raged at the walls he used to contain her and fought him from the very first moment. Had Phineas not intervened… well she shuddered. The act of subjugation was something others had tried before, and she succeeded in pushing them out, but he was different, and she felt herself losing to him. Dying souls released into the ether were dangerous things if not handled properly as they could possess the unwary, but his soul was not dying, and his power not anticipated. When she first manifested her power, these warnings were drilled into her from that early age. It was then that she first understood she was different not only from her family but from others and eventually it led to the discovery she would never be excepted as anything other than a freak, a tool, a weapon and should be stripped of her free will so they may use her as such. She snorted pulling the thick linen tunic over her head before she grabbed at the hooded vest. Her brother told her she was gifted, not cursed, while the others they lived with avoided her because of her differences. She was lonely and right now she felt this even more intently. She stopped thinking about her current state of hopelessness convinced Vergil was poking around in her memories again. That was a part of her past he was not privy to and she mentally snapped the door shut.

Still her thoughts drifted back to the first day and how quickly she discovered she was defenseless to him. He thrashed around like a wounded and angry animal when the phylactery finally broke and she snatched up his soul. Quickly, he latched on to the very tangible presence of his own blood. While the compulsive portion of the spell may have been weakened by Inari, she had still transmuted his blood and as such opened herself to an all new susceptibility and he promptly flexed that power. He took control of her body easily. The initial shock was shaken off as they wrestled for control until finally something almost intangible shifted and he seemed to weaken. She managed to stuff him into a psychic net of sorts holding him there as if he were a rogue soul she had reaped and regained control. Fortunately, the dark gray skinned demon with sooty hair and pointed ears, she now knew as Phineas, appeared and explained what happened to them. Furthermore, he elaborated they must work together if either was to survive.

She promptly passed out after his explanation and Vergil’s begrudging consent. When she woke, his voice seemed to roam freely about her mind, like a headache that wouldn’t leave. To her further dismay, she discovered her psychic barriers were also gone. Every psychic trap she had worked so hard to build to keep other attempts to control her out were simply gone and she spent the better part of that day arguing with him over her boundaries and privacy amongst other things. She slipped back into the present and tightened the vest before looking for her coat and boats. Her fingers laced and buckled without a second thought. She grabbed an apple looking piece of fruit from her table and drank some water Phineas had left for her the night before. Vergil’s training had caused her to miss another meal. She found her stomach could so far handle only a few things easily but everything else took time for her body to adapt to and frankly she was hungry. She gathered the last of her stuff and reviewed her supplies with a fastidious and obsessive tenacity. The feeling that this would be her last time in this place grew stronger. Phineas warned the rifts surged with energy no doubt from the activity at the Nexus. She worried about Nero and even as she formed the thought in her head, she felt Vergil blank within her. He kept his feelings very close to the cuff in fact she couldn’t read him.

To think she knew anything about him was stunning, like the fact that he was meant to find her. He was very pleased with himself at having achieved that goal so handily given the span of time that had passed due to Agnus’s intervention. He couldn’t hide his pride in being so efficient. Further she
knew only that she was key to him unlocking something Lucifer needed to bring stability to the war he fought deeper in Hell. He let slip it was a weapon of some kind hidden long before she was born but she knew little else. Of course, she asked, and he refused to answer. The details of both the weapon and its contract with the fallen angel eluded her, but she knew enough. It was the only time she was able to slip into his mind, supposedly she was the descendent of an angel who locked away the weapon Lucifer needed. His blood was required to open the lock to the treasure and therefore by extension her blood should work. She knew little of her biological father and questioning Vergil was like smacking one’s face against a wall. It gets you nowhere. She resolutely decided he was lying about having no idea who her father was and that started an even more heated argument. In the end, he was meant to keep her safe while locating the weapon and awaking some power that would serve Lucifer in his push to restore the demonic realm to a freed sovereign state. She closed her eyes again with a sigh. It was just too damn complicated, like most things in her life.

She made her way out into the relative quiet of the frozen hellish world she currently resided in. Tall gnarled skeletal trees rose from an icy landscape and reminded her of being in a science fiction world of crystals that reflected the angry purple, orange and red colors of the sky, except it wasn’t and the trees moved as if alive and the vines were thorny and poisonous. Really, it might have been beautiful if it wasn’t terrifying. Her mind wandered again as she walked the now very well-known trail to an old temple at the edge of the small village. It was strange to think every day she was here that somewhere out there in the other realm Nero was still fighting Celeste at the Nexus. She imagined them like statues in a museum since from her perspective that was how they would appear. Time moved differently here, much faster in fact, and they wouldn’t move at all. She pulled her cloak tight around her to fend off the bitter cold and headed thru the ice and snow, could you call the black and purple silt like substance snow, toward the old temple to train. Vergil hummed in agreement.

“The displacement of time can be unnerving, but it offers possibilities for those who are brave enough to try and use it to their advantage. As I did once I understood it. I will admit that I too was taken by surprise by what I found here both in landscape and in its inhabitants. In many respects I was young and naïve of what I would find here. My father told stories when we were young children. It has only been since I spent time here myself that I realized he was telling stories of his home.”

“What was it like having a father who’s a devil?”

“I suppose it was no different than your own father. We did not see his triggered form often since most of his power was trapped with the closing of Temen-ni-gru. We always knew we were different from other children, from other people, but it wasn’t until school that we realized how different. We had to learn to control our emerging abilities…and demonic urges.”

“My father?” She stumbled over the word. “No, he doesn’t deserve the title. He left.”

“Was your surrogate father not a Vampire. Though not a devil by any standards, he was demonic.”

“How the hell did you...” She shook her head, of course he knew. "He was my step father and yeah I guess he was but he left too.”

“Yes, they did. You understand both had good reasons? But your memories suggest, you have always had a father figure in your life.”

“Stop poking around and it’s still not the same Vergil. I always felt dependent on others, but not like I was family or whatever, especially after mom… look I was just asking about you forget I said anything.”

“You feel lost, abandoned even now. That pathetic energy vibrates thru you as you struggle to find your own place within the fabric of this word. As much as I loathe your weakness, I understand it. I
once felt as you did especially when I was a young child. I was trapped between worlds but in the
end, I embraced what I am and what I can be. For you it is different. You are still so young, and
your struggle is marred by not having other nephilim around you. You couldn’t possibly learn the
required skills to control your abilities and mistakes are inevitable. I had Dante and for a time a
mother and a father. You did not."

“Thanks, for the reminder. I think I’d rather be getting the crap beat out of me by another golem, than
listening to this pep-talk. Can we change the subject? How is it you can take any question directed at
you and turn it into an in-depth evaluation of my life and personal choices? I thought I had avoidance
issues, geez.”

“You are trying to deflect the issue but regardless you recklessly push your limits. You are dismissive
of your own value and you are a magnet for finding trouble. He sent me to watch over you, to guide
and train you. A task I do not take lightly and one I will not fail as his promise of reward is too great.
I will train you to be more resilient and efficient. I will make you the weapon you were forged to be
instead of the tool you pretend to be.”

“Again, great pep talk! Nice to know you will prosper from this little endeavor.”

“You’re welcome and of course I will. I do not trouble myself with issues in which I do not gin
something in return.”

“That was not a compliment. No wonder you don’t have friends.”

“Hnn… I have no need for them. Neither do you.”

“I chose not to keep close friendships for a reason. What’s you’re excuse? Superiority?”

“Hmm… my choices are irrelevant and my purpose not your concern, furthermore you lie. Your
‘not close friends’ get you into more trouble simply because you allow them to be close. You yearn
to be there for them. You wish to give them what you did not have both in support and
understanding. Both foolish notions considering the reality we face as hybrids.”

“Someone is killing us off, Vergil. It has been going on long enough that it’s not just attrition or
chance; it’s genocide. Someone doesn’t like the purebloods breeding outside their own kind. You
know I’m right.”

“It is of little concern to me.”

“Really? Then why else did Lucifer send you?”

Eva blinked against the radiance of light before her. She knew she was pushing too hard at the thin
walls of her prison. Returning to help her sons thru Casey had used practically every favor she had
pocketed. Now, facing a Throne, she realized she had dragged others into her quest of redemption or
was it her folly of pride? Just like her son.

“Eva do you know why I have sent for you?”

“I am to be punished. Sent to reclamation and charged for treason. I have spoken against the divine
and his children. I have committed great acts of hubris.” She hung her head her wings drooped
behind her as she knelt. She prayed silently that Eae was not paying for her sins. Why must she be so
headstrong and stubborn? A warm voice echoed as large as the room then shrank to stand before her.
Long slim fingers reached out to her chin lifting her face. “Raziel?” she whispered in astonishment.
The visage of a Throne in their true form was glorious and terrifying but that was not what she saw
before her now. No, before her stood a friend she had known since the beginning, a friend since before Sparda and a friend long before her first job as a guardian angel. His delicate pale skin was clearly unnatural as would be the case for any being whose primary form consisted of pure aethereal fire. He sported the familiar shaggy haphazard cut of shoulder length snow white hair and eyes of translucent gold so bright and clear that to study them meant seeing the reflection of your own soul. How she had missed her friend. How she had been deceived that he was anything other than what she now knew him to be.

“The divine hears you my child and weeps with you. I hear you. Your prayers. Your fears. Dear child, dear friend, what ever shall we do with you? Even now you worry for your friends; the others out there who rally to your cause… your family. I think it is time we discuss why you do these things. I think it is time we discuss what you must do next.” He released he chin and indicated she rise. “And, I think we must discuss how you must do them better.”

Kyrie woke with a start in the darkness of her bed it was well before dawn and at some point, during the night it had begun to snow. The light was altered in the twilight of dawn giving her room a cold bluish cast almost as if… he was in the room. Instinctively she reached for her lover only to find him missing her hand grasping at air. The light was not his, but its light reminded her so strongly of him and of her dream. “Nero?” she panted quietly. “Nero?” she voiced louder before clutching her head. Casey rushed in thru the door already conscious and struggling with her own erratic dreams.

“Kyrie? Are you alright? What’s wrong?”

“We have to go! We must confront the Captain.” She flicked the covers from her body and headed for the closet.

“Easy Kyrie. It was just a dream. It’s the middle of the night. We can’t possibly get into the Order now. We should wait till morning. Hey, when did it start to snow?” Even as she said the words her own dream lifted to her consciousness. It was snowing in her dream. It was just a dream wasn’t it? The hedge witch stumbled after her friend confused that perhaps it wasn’t just a dream.

“No! It was not ‘just’ a dream and we both know it. You saw it too. I can see it in your face. It was a… a vision. I… I think I’ve had them before and I’m not waiting for the outcome this time.” She fumbled thru the closet pulling out denim pants and boots. An unusual choice Casey thought, she rarely saw her friend out of the traditional dress of the island. She took what she was handed as Kyrie dove back into the closet. “We must go, now. We need to tell Captain Durante the time for sitting around watching and waiting has ended. They’re coming!”

The women started dressing as the wind rattled the shutters. The silence between was not of unease but of growing anxiety. If they left now, they would arrive at the Captain’s office before dawn. Somehow Kyrie knew not to go to his residence telling Casey they should cut thru the alleys to gain time. They both agreed he would not be there. Casey muttered about being prepared just in case they came across any surprises. They were taking a risk and worse no one would know where they went. Casey stashed supplies in another pocket spell and stood ready to go. Kyrie nodded as she grabbed not one but two dark cloaks and headed for the door. The snow fell heavy and wet, but Kyrie trudged out undeterred with Casey not far behind. A shadow stirred near the far corner of the house and quickly followed the women. The shadow broke into a dead run once the women rounded a corner into an alley just to catch up. “Hey! Hey!” the male voice called after them. Kyrie pulled her hood further over her eyes and continued. “Oh, come on, the Captain will have my head if I lose you in this storm. Suddenly both women stopped. Kyrie turned to see the disheveled soldier of the Order who was winded from his abrupt activity. Above them in the shadows, a pair of amber gold eyes lifted to the skies.
Vergil lifted his head his cold eyes searching the distant horizon thru the frosted glass of the repaired window of Dante’s room. The pale light of distance street lamps was the only light visible outside. He rose with and elegant feline grace to one elbow to look at snow falling outside. The window was a thin surreal barrier between the warmth he felt next to him and the world outside. The heavily frosted window gave the appearance that they were snowbound and separated from the chaos he felt building within him. Perhaps the city coming to a standstill was a good thing even if it was disparate to his own being. Something whispered to him from the edge of the dark stillness and he felt its anger pull at him. “Soon,” he whispered. He laid his head back down exhaustion riding him like the cruel master it was. He closed his eyes feeling Dante shift behind him. For a moment he felt the desperate need for this to be over so that he could simply enjoy the moment for what it was. His brother slipped an arm over his hip pulling him close. Vergil smiled in the darkness. “Soon I will be home and complete and then… then the real work can begin. He nuzzled into his pillow unaware he spoke breathlessly to the night. He felt his brother cuddle into him even as he felt sleep rise to him once more. ‘Very soon,’ he thought. Meanwhile behind him, Dante opened his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for the lengthy delay. If I could only explain. This chapter ended up growing in length but from it I have the next chapter ready to post tomorrow.

Side note the last section with Vergil and Dante came from my listening to the J-pop song by GazettE titled Pledge. Yeah me and my eclectic music tastes.

Next up: Fortuna at Dawn
Chapter Summary

The web draws ever closer to its conclusion.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You are of use to him and his plans. As for your unspoken query, I admit I have made mistakes, but I have learned from them. I will not make those mistakes again. There is no shame in bowing to a greater power when they offer to teach you their secrets to guide you. One must learn to play the game with the rules given, only then may we break them and shape the outcome to our benefit.”

“Of course, you’ll use me as your pawn and get yourself back into the human realm. He’ll use you to get what he wants and then you’ll do what Vergil does best. Watch out for number one. Vergil.”

“I will protect my family and I will keep to the tenants of the agreement I made with Lucifer.”

“You mean the contract. Let’s just call a spade a spade, shall we? He marked you. A demonic mark in all its Faustian glory. A demon conscripted to a demon. Tell me, what is it like to be such a powerful demon conscribed to another more powerful demon? Is it anything like working for Mundus?” She lurched to a sudden stop so hard she trembled with pain. She couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t move. His voice hissed in her head painfully.

“You will be silent, you petulant trite child. I tire of humoring you with pleasantries. You know nothing of me or my reasons, but I assure you… you will return me to my body, and I will have my revenge. So far, you have been inept at completing this task. I suggest we continue in silence to train.” He released control of her body and she stumbled slightly before growling.

“Inept? Hmm, I must be growing on you yesterday I was insufferable or was it incompetent? No that was the day before.” She felt the tingle of his presence crawl over her again. He didn’t hold her still as he did before but this time, he made it apparent that he could at any given time, and she was powerless to do anything if he truly wanted to wrest control from her. Inari may have done what he could to rework the spell, but Vergil had planned for that possibility somehow. She had to concede that as a strategist, Vergil planned this very well. She wondered if he had learned this the hard way. “I’m not stupid Vergil. You will discard me as soon as I am of no further use to you. I only expected you to be a bit subtler about it.”

“I have never implied you were stupid. Susceptible to my suggestions, yes, but not stupid. I never would have chosen someone of inferior intelligence for such an important endeavor. At least you are somewhat challenging and dare I say engaging mentally. Though distasteful your body may be, it is adequate for its current use.”

“Adequate for its current use? You make me sound like luggage. I’d rather be called your glorified chauffeur.”

“I prefer pack mule but yes the tasks are essential the same.”
“I am not a beast of burden!”

“That is a matter of perspective.”

“Get out of my head.”

“Hnn… and now we are back to the very reason why you need to train.” She swore it was as if he stood in front of her. She imagined he tapped an irritated finger against his crossed arms with his smug dissatisfied expression. The tingling to her limbs increased as she smelled something delicious and her mind wandered as her stomach growled angrily. He would not allow her to eat unless she trained. The thought of rebelling against his commanding ways made the flicker of a memory come to her. No, he’d make her nauseous again and she’d throw up and feel worse. Finally, all arguments mentally stilled within her without ever being spoken. She understood she didn’t have any other choice.

“I’m dying inside,” she mumbled aloud.

“Then we should probably hurry. You can die later. Train first.” She could practically feel his damnable smirk.

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“What is the meaning of this?” He pulled the door open angrily and glared at the young guard who seemed a bit worse for wear and covered in melting snow. He had knocked incessantly rousing the captain from his fretful sleep.

“Captain. You said if the uhm… targets moved suddenly, I was to follow them.”

“Ah, yes, yes and?” Durante rubbed his eyes and blinked. He hadn’t recognized the man at first. He must have fallen asleep at his desk again. He needed sleep and in a real bed. If only the nagging feeling that he was missing something would subside. He was convinced Agnus was up to something and worse he feared it was focused on more than one site on the island. He stepped back offering the soldier come in only to be pushed out of the way by a pair of cloaked figures.

“Well we’re here! I apologize for the abrupt nature of this visit and very early hour, but I don’t have time for pleasantries or posturing. There is a series of portals in Firenze my father used to call a nexus, but it was dormant for years. I believe it’s very active and about to fracture. You need to get your knights out there to clear residents. I expect a demonic incursion to happen at the site. Nero went there with another demon hunter last night and has not yet returned.”

Durante blinked in shock at the small young woman whose hair seemed every bit as fiery as her hair. She pulled back her cloak as he answered. “Are you absolutely sure?” He motioned them further into his office and closed the door behind them but not before Casey noticed he motioned instructions to the knight in the hall.

“Nero went there yesterday. I had hoped he would have sent me word by now, but something feels off. I expect his uncle and nephew to be on their way there too.”

“You mean the sons of Sparda?” She nodded. He scratched his dark hair before he bit his lip and shuffled papers until he came to the correct map on his desk. “That’s why Nero told me to stay away from Firenze. Reports indicated Agnus was seen in the area, but we could never get close enough to confirm the reports. He’s a wraith or his has someone on the inside. If you think the nexus is active that would explain a lot and it leaves only one place to start searching.”

“Agnus is not the largest concern we have right now. I can’t tell you why but… you have to trust
me. There is something, someone, just as deadly if not deadlier there."

“Kyrie? How do you know that? Even my vision was not that specific.” Casey wondered why her sudden openness to the man a few hours earlier they considered confronting for his shadowy behavior. She also wondered what kind of vision she had to make her suddenly ‘know’ what was going on. She wondered if it could be that she finally remembered what happened to her on the horrible night her parents were killed.

“It’s ok.” She smiled wistfully to her friend and stroked her upper arm before snapping around to the captain. “Look, I’m not convinced I can trust you, but I think I know you or at least knew you. It’s confusing right now because I’m remembering things I haven’t thought of in years. The bottom line is that people are in danger and we can’t sit back and let them get hurt not when we can do something!” She leaned over his desk as she spoke her hands gripping into the edge until the wood gave slightly at her fingernails and her knuckles turned white.

Durante sat back slowly first in shock but then in understanding. He nodded his head. “Very well my lady. It’s about time I saw your true fire. You are a lot like your mother. Once she made up her mind, she was a force of nature. I was wondering what more I could do to remind you that you are her child.”

Kyrie narrowed her eyes a spark behind her them that had been dulled for too long. “I remember enough. I remember that I am a member of the Order of the Rose, like my mother before me. It is our duty to protect those who cannot or will not protect themselves. Agnus did something to me after my parents died, no, after my parents were killed and I will never fall for his deception again. He will pay for deceiving all of us and I want to start by messing up whatever plans he has at that nexus and with Nero’s father.” Durante lifted an eyebrow and nodded shortly.

A loud rap at the door made Casey jump. Kyrie and Durante turned to the door in unison both barking a ‘come in’. They looked back at one another, a faint curl appeared to the captain’s lips.

“Sir? Sir, the men are ready as requested. We have a faithful garrison awaiting your orders.” He looked at Kyrie who stood from the desk and crossed her arms waiting for Durante’s answer. Several tense moments passed as he took in a deep breath looked again to the map, circled then wrote, something before standing to address them.

“It is time. We have found the source of the disturbances and more importantly we can finally begin to move against Agnus. He is alive and he will be brought to justice. There is a dimensional nexus in Firenze that is on the verge of fracturing.” He shook the map toward the knight. “Take this and her with you. Provide her with anything she needs. Cassandra! My apologies, I mean Casey, I need you to teleport as many of my men over to the Palace of Ravens as soon as possible. Gratian?” He spoke to another knight just over the shoulder of the first.

“Yes sir?”

“Let the men know that our Lady of the Rose is prepared to join us. I will not be with you as I am to guard her as is my duty. You are to assemble your team and scout the nexus while we attend to the civilians in the area.”

“Sir?” He looked to Kyrie first who blushed dropping her head slightly. She was more like her mother than she realized. All those long nights she spent talking to Nero about making a change and doing something important were coming true. He had always believed in her first when she went off to volunteer at the camps after the destruction of the Savior, then again when she found she loved healing others and had a knack for it. She wondered why this felt right to be doing and more importantly she had a feeling she would be needed. She just hoped it wasn’t because Nero was hurt.
She realized things were happening fast, just like in her dream. She took a deep breath and clenched her fists. There was nothing to it. She was going and she was ready. She nodded to the captain and he smiled and nodded in return.

“You heard me. We must get those people to safety.”

“Yes, sir.” The soldier couldn’t keep a smile of anticipation from pulling at his features. He turned to Casey and offered a hand. “Miss Casey, please come with me. We’ll get you fitted with some light armor and we can be on our way.” Casey looked between the soldiers and then back to Kyrie a smile growing to her own lips.

“Kyrie? Will you be ok? Are you sure this is what you want?”

“Yes. I’m ready and I remember Casey. My dream was more than a vision it was slap in the face reminding me who I am, who I can be. I remember the night they were killed, seeing what happened, being separated, Agnus. I remember and I will never again fall under the spell of Agnus or any other shadow again. I am no damsel in distress. I am a Lady of the Holy Order of the Rose, just like my mother before me. I am a daughter of a Knight of the Holy Order of the Sword. My family has stood with Sparda and his army to protect this island and its secrets. I have regained what was stolen from me and now it’s my turn.”

“Girl, Nero is in for one hell of a surprise when he gets back home to you.”

Kyrie cocked her head to the side and grinned. “Who said anything about him coming to me? We are going to him.”

Outside the rustle of feathers and the soft caw of a raven drew everyone’s attention to the balcony. Amber eyes glistened in the light of the brightening sky as the dark bird bobbed his head cawing before he raised his wings and took flight disappearing into the snow.

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Eae dropped to the floor with a thud. Dante was at his throat with Rebellion before he could even gasp. “Eae? Malia said you disappeared.” He lowered his blade and gripped the angel awkwardly before helping him to his feet. “Man am I glad to see you.” The sandy brown man gave him a weak smile and grasped his hand allowing himself to be pulled up.

“You do not want to know my friend.”

Vergil’s eyes seemed to glow in the darkness when Dante looked to him. The room was deathly silent. “Well?” he growled standing from the edge of the bed. Dante turned flicking the light on at his nightstand.

Eae dipped his head. “Belial is at the moment trapped as you expected. Urizen sleeps. Judgement day is not yet nigh, but the nexus is on the edge of fracture and they have not yet emerged.”

“Huh?” Dante looked between the men. Vergil moved to dress and the red twin felt an urgent press to follow suit. “Verge, what’s he talking about?”

“When Belial tore into this place looking for me and we discovered Agnus had obtained Arbiter, it became obvious that Agnus was not working for Belial. His acquisition of the axe puzzled me, however.”

“Yeah. Eae believed it had something to do with freeing Urizen or something.”

“Arbiter is one of several weapons capable of opening a rift thru the veil and allowing passage thru
the realms, like Yamato. Arbiter could indeed reach Urizen in his realm of both nothing and everything. He resides in a nexus of his own creation.”

“Wait you mean to tell me there is more than one dimensional weapon lying around?”

“There is only one Yamato and she is a very special blade, but her story is for later and yes there are; I have located two additional weapons.”

“What?”

“Focus Dante we do not have much time and I am limited as to what I can explain. Although the timing could not be worse, I must tell you something of utmost importance. I must retrieve my soul and we must get to the nexus before it fractures. Agnus was made aware of these dimensional weapons with my capture and has sought their locations since. It would seem he found Arbiter which is quite strange since I had been led to believe that weapon remained in the celestial realm, but with Danica’s mention of Xander I believe there are many more pieces on the board. That will also be explained later.”

“Vergil?”

“Urizen for now is a distraction a ploy to keep us scattered, but I cannot discount the possibility that Agnus may try to wake him at some point but for now I believe he wishes to gain unhindered access to the other realms”

“But if what has been discovered so far, he has that thru the nexus in Firenze.”

“That portal is partially dormant. The celestial side was closed by an event many years ago. It is the residual energy that keeps the demonic portal hidden. That will end shortly, and Agnus and his secrets will be exposed.”

“Wait did it have something to do with you?”

“I ordered Yamato to close the celestial portal during one of my more lucid moments while imprisoned and in doing so…”

“You shattered her!”

“It was unfortunate but yes. The event was a shock to me, and it led to the degradation of my defenses, but Celeste could no longer feed, and it forced their unholy pact to be stilled in its forward motion. As I do not know the details of the events on Fortuna after I fell into a coma, I believe Agnus found someone else to tempt with power while Celeste licked her wounds.”

“Vergil, why didn’t you tell me?”

“He could not. I was compromised and until he knew whom he could trust bringing you in was not safe, but now we need you and we need you to wield Sparda’s sword once more. You need to close the demonic portal halting whatever pathways they have thru Hell and stopping Mundus from healing and finding a new way back into this world.”

“Woah, woah, wait a damn minute, you’re working with an angel!?”

“Reluctantly. He appears to be capable for the most part, but I question his stamina and wits.”

“I’m, here aren’t I?”

“Hnn…”

“Okay, okay, let’s say I am not blown out of the water by this realization. By the way, you owe me
an explanation and you owe me a bigger one.”

“I am aware but for now understand this. It’s time to go!”

“Indeed, I felt Yamato flutter in the space between our worlds. We need to hurry. I fear they will need our help.”

“Good thing, I planned ahead.” Eae grinned as Inari appeared with Lady, Trish and Father McCabe. Lady cocked her hip shifting Kalina Ann, “Heard you two need some back-up.” She smirked giving Dante a wink.

Dante narrowed his eyes slipping his coat to his shoulders, “You are not getting paid so you should just stay home. We can take care of this.”

“No, Dante I have plans for the clone.” He sneered at Trish. The demoness gave him a confused expression when Eae stepped forward and chuckled.

“Of course! She’ll never see us coming. I’ll just need to get you changed into something a bit less you.”

“Excuse me?” Trish stepped back as Eae stepped forward.

“Don’t worry clone. If you pull this off, I promise to forgive enough of your misgivings to listen to your side of the story without the pressing need to slit your throat.” His voice dipped dangerously as his eyes flickered.

“What the hell?” “Vergil!” Dante and Lady talked over one another as they both moved towards the elder twin. Inari watched in the background while pressing an arm out to the priest’s chest stopping him from interrupting them.

“Let them settle this their way, my lord.”

“We don’t have time for this.”

“His plan has merit. Let them breathe and learn how to work together.”

Trish held a fixed gaze at Vergil who merely raised an eyebrow as the ruckus was joined by Eae. “She’ll know I’m not her.” Her voice was soft, but Vergil heard her.

“I imagine Dante needs less than five minutes to shatter that portal and I think the reward is worth that risk. Don’t you? You can play the part of a wounded copy for that long, can’t you?” Trish furrowed her brow and bit her lip. Lady and Dante hushed as Eae wound out his sentence about her being their best chance at a distraction.

“You’ll hear me out? You’ll give me a chance, just like your brother?”

“I will listen to every depraved word and I give you my word I shall consider a truce, but I am nowhere near as trusting as that buffoon.” He crossed his arms inclining his head toward the brother mentioned.

“Then what are we waiting for?”

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Chapter End Notes
Next up: Dawn
Twisted

Chapter Summary

The pawns are aligned at the nexus as day breaks.

Chapter Notes

In the east over the spine of the Laminas mountains, the sky brightened from its dark blue-black color. The light was slow to seep thru thick clouds still heavy with precipitation. The snowy world before them reflected with an eerie blue light from the discharge of Casey’s portal. Bare branched trees looked as if carved from single blocks of ice. Kyrie shivered thinking how beautiful the landscape would be if it weren’t for the demons lingering on the edge of the forest between them and Firenze.

“Are you cold, my lady?” Durante shifted next to her, his boots crunched on the fresh snow. Light flickered across his face as the last of his soldiers joined them on the trek to Firenze. Casey closed the portal she created with a satisfied smile. Kyrie looked over her shoulder and smiled too. They had opted to drop here outside of Firenze as a precaution. They did not want to run the risk of getting trapped between potential demons here in the Atrias forest and those expected in Firenze.

“I’m fine thank you. How many people do you think live this far away from the city?” Casey nodded to Kyrie as she sighed with relief and shuffled over to join them. Her breath created a small halo of mist that she stepped thru joining them. Durante inclined his head toward her.

“Firenze has a very long history filled with both grandeur and tragedy. It was once a thriving city much like Caminus, but now it boasts only a hundred or so people scattered in small villages. Did you know that the city has burned several times and the last time was only…”

“… about twenty-three years ago. I know. Nero believes he was born here or close by since he spent time in the orphanage once located here until he was about four.”

"I was not aware of that, interesting."

"Few know he doesn't like to talk about it, but what I meant was that I thought rebuilding here was forbidden because of the demonic activity?"

“I guess that fact now makes so much more sense. I cannot believe we missed this.” Durante sighed heavily as if he had been played for a fool and perhaps, he was. Perhaps they all were.

“What do you mean? Did you think something was going on here?”

“People wanted to rebuild and even pushed for it to happen from the very first fire and demon attack. It was not an unreasonable request. In fact, Fortunian citizens have always rebuilt cities after they were damaged or destroyed, just because that destruction was caused by demons is not new to us, despite what the world outside our borders may think.” The ladies nodded as they listened looking over the landscape until their eyes fell on the soft lights that flickered to life in the small village of Sansa below them. “Agnus forbade the rebuilding of Firenze directly. He claimed the demonic
energy had tainted the land the city and made it unstable or some such nonsense. Those that ignored the rules and explored anyway disappeared due to demonic faults and other hazards. Eventually, even Sanctus stepped in with his thoughts on the matter and agreed to Firenze’s continued seclusion and degradation. There is only one problem with that course of action, however. It was a blind spot I suppose, but regardless of the rulings the people still came.”

“The library,” Casey huffed quietly.

“Indeed. Despite everything that happened to Firenze the library, the catacombs, and the church here have withstood time. Many have sought after its hidden knowledge and secrets. It is said Firenze is where Sparda first laid roots to the island of Fortuna and people do not forget such essential matters. We were lulled into a false sense of safety by staying away from the potential danger rather than facing those problems head on as was our custom.”

“And so, Agnus has probably plundered the library for all of its knowledge and probably built his first lab here. He really is a mad genius,” Kyrie mumbled.

“Pardon? A genius?”

“Of course, he figured out how to haunt this place. He kept it free from prying eyes for years. He was giving the perfect opportunity to gather test subjects. Think about it Captain. Those who came here may have been lost in our teachings. They may have searched to find their way again and he preyed on those insecurities and offered them ascension. We have fallen short in our faith. Sparda taught us demons lie and deceive but he also taught us there are those of us whom we should trust those whose hearts knew love regardless of their heritage. He showed us acceptance and patience. He taught us that each of us lives our life on a spectrum of free will whether we be human, demon, or angel. Each of us must choose our own path, to follow our hearts and learn right from wrong. It is the greatest gift given to us by the divine, but it is also a curse a warning to keep us on our toes. We can chose the path of evil. He warned us to protect ourselves from evil. He reminded us that evil was not just grand and frightful but also soft and insidious. We have only forgotten. We hid here on this island so scared of the evil in the outside world that we let evil grow among us. We let this happen. We focused so closely on our fears of the past that we never saw what they planned for our future.”

“And that is why Agnus was puppet master of sorts able to control others from the shadows. No one would ever believe a bumbling stuttering alchemist to be the mastermind behind a demonic incursion.” Casey shook her head finally seeing the full circle of events on the island over the past couple of decades, the seclusion, the fear, the persecution. It seemed implausible and yet this island had basically been neatly gift wrapped to serve a demon disguised as an angel. “He's no fool. He used our fear and our faith against us in equal measure. He let our fear segregate us and then he sat back and waited for us to tear ourselves apart give or take a generation. We did all the hard work for him.”

“People disappeared from these villages. Always from the ones that popped up on the furthest edge of the forest. The ones that grew up around Firenze.” Durante shook his head. “I tried for years to get others to believe me, but I was shunned because I was different and so I hid as much as any of the others. Agnus convinced many of us to ascend and look where that got us. Ascension. We became demonic pawns”

“And so, here we are to make amends for our shortcomings with eyes wide open.” Kyrie paused clutching her cape and pulling it tighter around her. “We know now, and we will do better, we must. We may be the only ones left who know the truth. Uhmm, Captain?”

“Yes, my lady?”
“Why do they hang back?” Their eyes drifted away from the village.

“My men? They await orders.”

“No, the demons. They're watching us.” She pointed toward the tree line of gnarled black branches that now seemed alive with red eyes.

“Hmm… They do seem to be waiting for something. Perhaps they wish to test our strength.”

“Then let’s continue, shall we? I’d hate to make them any more anxious with waiting. One never likes to wait for death. Isn't that something a hunter would say?” Casey chuckled at her friend. Kyrie had a very dark sense of humor that very few knew of and even though the Captain smiled at her, Casey caught his initial surprise.

“Indeed. Gratian!”

“Yes sir!”

“Take your team into the forest. Engage the enemy with extreme prejudice. We don't want them coming back to haunt us later. Send the remaining knights to clear Sansa of all civilians. Send word to other nearby villages that they are to clear out until further notice for their own safety. We will rally back at the edge of the forest near the village and send you backup if required, otherwise we move on to Firenze.”

“Yes sir!” The soldiers all began to scuttle despite Gratian being the one addressed. The orders echoed in the stillness of pre-dawn and the orders were heard. Fifteen men broke away from the remaining thirty or so and headed towards the forest edge which began to crackle with demonic howls. Casey swore she saw Gratian’s eyes flicker as he turned to address his men. “To arms soldiers! We hunt!”

Danica fell to her knees and panted with pain. The golem struck her shoulder hard rolling her to the ground as she struggled to her knees. Distracted by Vergil’s constant grating criticism chiding her every move, she miscalculated the golem's speed and strength. Her sword arm tingled as Vergil took control and lifted the blade to protect her from an incoming follow-up blow, but Danica pushed hard against the cold rocky ground. She lifted her non-Vergil controlled left arm up into an open-handed position casting a strong elemental fire spell. The golem suddenly burst into flame writhing at the unexpected move before he began to melt back into the protean form from which he was summoned. She quickly struggled to her feet and screamed at Vergil.

“Enough! I've had enough!” Her sword fell to the ground with a useless hollow clatter as Vergil released his control of her arm. “I should rip your very soul from my body even if it kills me. I don’t care if you are the dark slayer. I don’t care if Lucifer sent you to find me. I don’t care if you have some grudge against Mundus, Celeste, Agnus, or the whole damn realm of Hell itself! I don’t care if it all just burns. I will not be controlled. I wouldn't let him then and I won't let you now. I am not your puppet any longer!” Her scream became a roar as she let the spell engulf her body. The heat of the flames warmed extremities long chilled by the frigid landscape and she arched her back feeling the familiar ache of her wings extracting themselves. Her bringers flickered as the scaled skin crawled painfully along the edges of her once human skin. Sharp claws twisted one hand into an uplifted open palm which glowed as a brilliant blue-white orb appeared before her.

“So, you have finally found your backbone? I must admit this took longer than I expected.”

“What?” She glared at the soul that danced before her. Her anger felt like it rippled across her body.
Her breath seemed to leave her as her brain stuttered with the thought that he had been trying to anger her this entire time. Her back ached as she first fluttered then stretched her wings long hidden without the benefit of being free. “You’ve been trying to provoke me all along? Why?”

“You do not heed my words any more than you follow my attempts to redirect you, so yes. It would seem pushing you to anger was the only way to make you see my point.”

“What point, that you’re an utter asshole?”

“Your taunts mean little to me. You do not value the potential and raw skill that you already possess. You hide behind skills many can use rather than opening your mind to use your true gifts. From my perspective you squander your power. You are fearful of the outcome and yet you have grown since those bitter first memories of your true power. You let those memories haunt you and therefore you hide behind them. You simply refuse to see what you are. Who you are. I do not have time to coddle your broken psyche. You require diligent training. Training I can provide. Although, I admit you are not easily broken, and I find that trait very impressive.”

“Get out of my head!”

“Then return me to my body!”

“I would love to do nothing more than to throw your smug, self-righteous, indignant, ass back into that cold shell of a creature.”

“Creature? Careful… Seraph. You too are a ‘creature’ imperfect, impure, unworthy, and so are those whelps you protect. I would choose my words more carefully for your reference is not only to me… but my brother. I do not think you find him so distasteful.”

She closed her eyes feeling the energy pulse around her. She needed to remain calm for fear of losing control of the flame or worse. She let the flame softly drift across her before it extinguished. Vergil made his point. She would be forced to face her power sooner rather than later. She did fear what she would become what she had already become. She feared making the same mistakes as her past. She feared the attachment she had for Nero and more importantly her growing feelings for Dante. She would only bring them harm. She didn’t want to hurt anyone else. She couldn’t stay mad at Dante because she was mad at herself, she had tipped Trinity off to her whereabouts not Dante. She was reckless and her imprisonment was her own fault not his. She understood having to make a choice between those that you cared for. She understood being forced to choose the lesser of two evils. She slowly opened her eyes and watched the orb. It flickered and she began tossing it between her bringers as a smirk lifted to her lips. Perhaps there was another way and two could play this game.

“Let’s just say I do fear my own power, that I fear what I might become. So, what if I decided I didn’t want to return you to your body? Perhaps, I just let you go. Perhaps I just let it all go. I have new scars because of you and I’m still very bitter about that among other things.”

“Such a petty childish thing to offer in defense, but fine, I will play your game. Understand whelp, you will gain nothing. It is a funny thing about souls. They are extremely resilient, supremely powerful, and they strive to be whole, to be one with their true vessel. Why, even now I feel the urge to leave you since you have freed me from the shelter that was your form. If you were to release me now, I would eventually dissipate back into the other realm and find my body. It would take time, it would be painful, but I would survive. The question then becomes, do you really care so little for Dante that you would hurt him by making him watch me suffer? Could you watch Nero suffer? Would you risk wounding the relationships you so yearn to repair? The relationship you so yearn to nurture?”
“I hate you!”

“As long as we understand one another. I have no fondness for you either. You are little more than a means to an end. True you are the surest key to my future. A future free of any further ties that bind me, but there are yet ways for me to satisfy Lucifer’s contract without you. You however need me more than I need you. And before you try some feeble words that I lie, remember you came here with your own ulterior motive. You came here to discover clues about who your true father was, it was not just to find me out of the goodness of your heart. You wanted to prove that wraith, the creature that haunts your nightmares, wrong. We are not so different. You used me to get here. You are not as selfless as you proclaim. You wanted to know why an angel chose to fall into Hell rather than stay with his lover and child. Ahh, but you are no closer to those answers, are you? Answers I can provide. I know who your father is, and I believe you can feel that I am not lying, but it frustrates you that our connection is not two way. Only I know how to find him.”

Her gaze flickered beyond the orb as she seethed. Phineas approached them with a sense of urgency scrawled to his fine angular features. “So, we are at a stalemate.”

“No, you are out of options. The Nexus has begun to fluctuate. I would guess the celestial realm has finally decided to get off its collective ass and do something about Celeste inhabiting said nexus. It is time for you to decide. Do we go home together, or do you try and lie your way out of this one?”

Nero roared in anger. “What is it with Mundus employing stuttering pawns? I think it’s time for me to show you just how motivated I am.” To his subtle surprise, he lifted Celeste several inches by her throat as the portal gates surrounding her began to flicker before he both heard and felt a sickening push of heated foul air as Danica fell thru one of the portals behind them.

“No! Help!” Nero flicked Celeste aside immediately as if she was nothing more than an afterthought. He rushed toward the injured Nephilim. “There are three very large demons incoming!” She scrambled from the portal trying to gauge where Celeste went and what had happened in her absence. A strange feeling of comfort filled her as she realized she must have done something right in the last hour of travel since the nexus looked like she had arrived as if she only left him a few minutes ago. Vergil scoffed at her mentally suggesting she get as far away from the demonic portals as possible. Their journey thru the deeper parts of Hell had drained her energy and he was currently supporting her as a conduit of demonic energy.

“Got it! Batter up.” Nero sliced thru the first demon easily. Its body fell into thick wet chunks that forced the remaining two demons to stumble and maneuver around them. Danica lifted to her feet only to feel claws dig into her torso as she was knocked from her stance and spun around to face a seething and fully enraged Celeste.

“Well, well, hello Vergil! Leaving so soon? I can actually say I’m surprised she pulled this off.” Danica felt the jagged rocks pierce her back as she was flung away from Nero and against what was left of an altar. “We really should talk before you leave. We have so much to talk about like why I can’t let you go.” Dani dodged the incoming fist, but her legs were quickly grabbed out from under her again by a coiled tail. “No, I don’t think so! You stay here.”

The deafening scream that reverberated thru her body made the room seem to spin around her. The demonic portals vibrated and flickered dark as angry red eyes and grotesque creatures appeared to be heading directly for the openings. Her stomach churned as she tasted her own blood and felt as if her head were about to explode. “Hell speak. She has called for the portals to open. She is flooding Fortuna with demons! We must close those portals.”
Danica wanted to respond to the obvious nature of his statement, but she was whipped around like a rag doll and barely able to catch her breath to do so much less think about how to close those portals. Crimson red eyes burned down at her as she felt the air being forced from her lungs as she was slowly suffocated. Then suddenly Celeste tore into her throat and shoulder painfully biting her flesh. The pain made her scream but she just as suddenly as she was bit she was dropped. Horror and something else spread to Celeste’s face as she licked her lips. Her expression curled into one of disgust and disbelief as if she tasted something bitter. Danica again felt bones breaking and skin tearing as she struck the rumble strewn ground.

“What sorcery is this? Your blood is…Your blood is tainted. It's tainted by him.”

“Let them go Celeste! It’s time to end this.” The words rose from a familiar female voice Celeste never believed she would hear again. Its cadence rose defiantly over the cacophony of noises from the chaos of battle that surrounded them. Celeste swiveled to see the landscape around her had changed. She had become so engrossed in consuming the nephilim vessel and taking back Vergil’s soul that she missed the sudden activation of the once dormant celestial gate. Armored angels spilled into the nexus skewering her guards while moving on to target the demons that entered the realm thru the Nexus.

Celeste looked around the space and seethed at the shift in power. Demons and angels blurred and collided around her in a heated flurry of battle. She slithered away from Danica who struggled to pull from the rubble as she looked for Nero.

“You?” she hissed adjusting her coiled body. “How is this even possible? Eva you should never have come. Really, of all those I hate and of all those how could appear before me, I will gladly die knowing I will take you with me. You took everything from me!” Celeste blindly lunged toward Eva only to be smacked hard in the side of her head with the blunt edge of a broad sword and thrown back into the altar.

“Hey fly boy! I had it covered!” Trish chuffed indignantly.

“Yep, but I was just making sure. That thing is only good for making a few pairs of really ugly boots. I didn’t think she met your fine standards of dress. So I just saved you the trouble.” Trish shrugged while Dante slung his sword over one shoulder and motioned for Trish to get back thru the portal. “Go, get back and help the others. I’ve got this.” The demoness flicked her hair letting her real clothing appear before she dodged an incoming swipe of claws from a demonic guard. Dante also rolled away but he dodged an angel's lance. The angel didn’t miss the second time and the demon wilted beneath the weapon with a poignant spurt of blood.

“Hey, watch it we’re on your side!”

“Apologies, son of Sparda.” The angel sped away targeting another on of the demons that spilled from the portals and out toward Fortuna.

“Trish! I said go.”

“I'm going, but you better make damn sure you stop her. She’s not the only demon after my head!”

“Yeah, yeah.” He ducked as a body was hurled toward them but not before pushing Trish back thru the doorway they had just entered. “Hey kid? How ya doing over there? Wait is something different, did you change your hair?” The red oaf bent backwards avoiding a spectral punch only to lift-up again and see an angry scowl that he was very glad to see again.

“Funny, we gotta close these portals, old man. So heads up and take Yamato.” Nero stabbed Red
queen backwards causing another insectoid demon to spit blood.

"Way ahead of you. First. Move!"

Celeste barreled past Nero and shoved Dante back towards the door to Fortuna. She tried to snap Rebellion in half with her large maw, but the sword just groaned with disgust at being used as a gag ball. Dante chuckled at the sword in his head and promise a thorough cleaning.

"Hey lady snake, you must be Celeste. Can’t say it’s a pleasure to meet you. I understand you’re one of the people that kept me from my brother. I get cranky when people keep my favorite things from me.” His trigger crawled across him as Celeste reared back flinging the devil thru the high vaulted ceiling and roared. Dante merely flipped elegantly as the ceiling broke around him and he hung in the air on wide leathery wings. “I gotta say so far I’m disappointed. I expected more ompfh and less blah blah same old, same old.” He dodged from side to side drawing Celeste closer to the celestial gate and away from being able to escape into one of the other portals.

"You are nothing spectacular yourself spawn of Sparda. Just another unworthy over-privileged under-powered brat!” She flicked her tail and dodged sideways missing a well-executed Stinger move. Dante sneered landing several feet before the snake queen. Celeste swatted away one angel then snatched another from mid air viciously ripping his wings off then swallowing his screaming body whole.

“Well that was rude and slightly disturbing.” Celeste’s eyes glowed vibrantly as she snatched another angel and roared down at the devil before following the same pattern.

“Dante! You can’t let her feed. She will only get stronger. Stop toying with her and close the damn gate. Angels help or not we can’t let these gates remain active. They will tear this place and possibly the island apart.”

“Dani?” He spun to respond to the voice only to see his own eyes. “I mean, Vergil?” Danica held Yamato out toward Dante and inclined her head in an eerie facsimile of his brothers movement.

“She is present. I do not have time to explain. I am assuming you know what to do?”

“Yeah, but how do we close that celestial gate?” As Dante took Yamato from Danica, her eyes flickered a familiar gold.

“I have a plan. I'll take care of it. Call for your brother. I'll only get one chance at this and when we succeed the nexus will collapse with the closure of these gates.”

“Got it!” He cupped her cheek a moment and she leaned into the touch ever so slightly before she turned and left. "Nero," he called over his shoulder watching her slip thru a line of demons. "It’s showtime!"

The snow slowed the soldiers but did not deter them. They were now just on the edge of Firenze and the smell of blood and ash was thick. Casey and Durante tried to keep Kyrie between them as she ran ahead halting at the ridge line before the city. “There!” she pointed. “We need to hurry!”

“Kyrie, wait!” Casey’s lunged burned as she screamed at her friend. Despite the soldiers surrounding them demons had slipped up thru the buildings as they dove for the young woman now exposed from the group. The snow seemed to shine in a flicker of light as Kyrie gasped aware of her mistake. In her anxiousness, she had gotten too far ahead and now looked down the ragged maw of teeth as claws reached for her pale skin. The world slowed as if she were falling but could do nothing but
watch. It took her several seconds to process what happened next as a blur of dark fur pushed her backwards and she landed in a heavy heap on the cold snow.

“Fenris!” Casey choked out then swatted at Durante who lifted his sword to protect them. “He’s with us,” was all she could manage as the great black wolf ripped thru the small group of demons before heading further ahead to the next pack of chattering and twitching demonic creatures.

“What was that and by Sparda I hope it's on our side?” One of the soldiers stammered.

“An opportunity! Gratian! The portals! Demons! The nexus is fracturing, and the demonic realm is spilling into this world.”

Casey pointed to the sky, “Not just the demonic realm.” There above the deep hellish gleam of fire rose wings of white dipping into the darkness attacking the demons below them. “Look Angels! And over there, that’s Lady and... Wait is that Eae and a priest?”

“Come on we must help them.” Kyrie struggled to her feet but blinked as she watched Gratian’s team from earlier move with unnatural speed. “Oh, by Sparda. They’re... They’re hybrids!”

“Indeed, my lady. It seemed ridiculous to allow Nero to be the only one to be a knight when others wished to help.”

“But you kicked him out!” she exclaimed.

“A poorly planned ruse to keep these knights safe and hidden. I needed a scapegoat to protect the others. Someone well-seasoned that could take the attention and disdain. I meant him no harm. I meant you no harm. I discovered early on that there was yet a tendril of Agnus’s influence within the council and within the order and that put these new recruits in unjust danger. The men and women that join us today are truly the faithful.”

Kyrie punched the captain’s shoulder as hard as she could and he blinked at her. “You owe him an apology and his job back and...” She tried to punch him again, but the captain halted her hand and smiled. His dark eyes glittered with mirth.

“I owe him more than an apology this is true; all of which can be discussed later, for now I believe your friends could use our help.” Kyrie bit her lip and looked over her shoulder the valley teemed with skirmishes. “You and Casey remain here with the wolf. Come tend to the wounded as it becomes safe. Nero will have my head if you are injured.” She nodded distracted as Fenris snorted next to her causing her to jump. She clutched her hand into his thick fur for comfort and watched stunned as Captain Durante disappeared into thin air only to appear next to Lady halting an attack to her from behind.

“So that’s what we felt. He’s not quite human.”

“I got to admit Kyrie. I had no clue.” Casey shivered watching the carnage unfold before them.

“Hmm, come on we need to get closer to that nexus.” Fenris growled causing Kyrie to look at him sternly. “No, I just have a feeling someone is hurt down there. I’m worried for Nero.” Fenris growled again but the field stilled momentarily as a huge snake creature exploded from the center of the ruins and they caught a glance of Nero being hurled thru the air.

“Nero!?"

“Come on kid. Quit playing around.” Dante tossed Yamato back towards him and Nero caught the
blade delivering a series of mid-air cuts that closed the third gate. They were down to the celestial
gate and the final demon gate both of which pulsed furiously sparking against one another.

“If you would stop being all marvelous with your moves, I could.”

“I am pretty awesome,” He countered. Celeste shook the rubble from her shoulders and roared.

“You need to work on your technique. They are supposed to stay down when you knock them
down.”

“Details, I haven’t had a workout this good in months. Remember I’ve been pent up with Vergil for
the past couple months.” He bicycle-kicked a pillar Celeste tossed at him while he was talking. It
split in two with the downward strike from Gilgamesh before he landed to the ground and gave a
seeping arm to one side as if bowing for a crowd.

“Moron.” Nero grunted letting Yamato flicker back into the ether to be shared between them as he
hefted Blue Rose from her holster and ran on what was left of the wall firing as Celeste lunged for
Dante. She shifted addressing Nero as Dante was swarmed by several insectoid creatures and he
grunted from their combined weight and was pushed to the floor. Celeste spun on her coils barely
avoiding most of his well aimed shots, but Nero forgot she currently had wings and she clipped his
forward motion with the dew claw of one wing, then spun to grab his leg tossing him thru the broken
ceiling. She followed him determined that of the two hybrids she now faced, she would rather take
Nero as her prize.

Danica lifted from the pair of naga creatures that had attacked her as she approached the celestial
gate. She faltered in her steps and Vergil urged her on. “Come. You cannot stop now!”

“No planning on it you twit. I just got delayed.” She stumbled feeling her energy wane. Celeste’s
bite severely limited her range of motion to the left side of her body and the journey thru the rifts just
to get here had taxed her more than Vergil expected. She was fading fast and he had no one to blame
but himself for pushing her so hard.

“Close that gate! The longer either one of these gates remains open the more likely we will all die.”

“I heard you the first seven times! Don’t you have somewhere else to be? You know you are free to
escape right out that door. I’m sure Yamato will call for your body.”

Vergil stilled within her a moment as she attempted to call to the blade that could close this rift. “I
will not leave you now. You won’t last long without me,” he almost whispered.

“Oh great! You just want me to carry you out! Lazy bastard. Damnit man just go. If I die with you
still bound to me, it will complicate matters. Just go.” She finally reached the core of her power and
referred at the devil arm that slumbered deep within her psyche. Considering all the barriers Vergil
destroyed while controlling her, she was surprised that he did not speak of the sword until he
informed her, she would be the one to close the celestial gate while Nero and Dante closed the
demonic gates with Yamato.

“I have already made my decision. Continue.”

“And you say I’m stubborn?” At last, the sword flickered to life in her hand and Danica could finally
see the physical manifestation of this hidden power. It was very similar to a hand and a half medieval
sword in both length and weight with a delicate guard constructed of almost lace like metal work that
resembled leaves or perhaps more accurately feathers. It gleamed like black silver and hummed with
energy. “Finally, I want to end this.”

“I agree. So, do I, sister!” She gasped as an angel with long dark hair and eyes as green as chipped emeralds appeared before her his face familiar with its haunting sneer. He flickered thru the sparks of the celestial gate and drove his own celestial dagger deep into her gut twisting it as she choked on her blood and dropped her sword. It clattered with a bell like tone to the broken marble floor. He leaned forward and rasped into her ear laughing as she fell against him in shock. She grasped his shoulders and sucked in a pained breath as he spoke. “I told you we would see each other again and I told you I would take what belongs to me!”

He pushed her violently from him and she crumpled. Dante bellowed racing toward Danica as she fell. He had called Yamato to close the last demonic gate and turned just in time to see this angel step thru the portal and brutally stab her. The angel frowned at his presence but hurried to bend grasping for the fallen sword that glittered dangerously. Suddenly, a second familiar angel appeared thru the gate, and Dante slid to a stunned stop as she grabbed the bent angel by the shoulders and threw him across the nexus like he were a toy. Yamato suddenly wrenched from his hand and buried herself deep into the dark angel causing him to seize and arc with electricity.

“Mom?” Dante panted. She turned and smiled tilting her head toward Danica.

“Take her sword my son. Close the gate. Hurry!”

“But… Mom?” She brushed his cheek with the barest of touches and he gasped.

"I love you my son, protect them."

“Yes, mom.” She disappeared into the gate once more and Dante reached for the sword as Yamato informed him, she would not be able to hold the angel much longer. “I understand.”

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Chapter End Notes

Edited since first upload was my draft file without corrections, my apologies for the error. New Chapter and Finale Thursday.

Next Up:
What do you think Vergil plans to do first? Let's go find out.
The Price We Pay

Chapter Summary

Vergil must reassess how he has gotten here and finally he is home.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Nero rolled across the snow-covered ground and for a split second he thought he had been thrown thru another rift. It wasn’t until he stood dusting himself off and checking his surroundings that he realized this was still Fortuna. It had snowed heavily since they entered the rift. Distantly he thought how pretty it would be without all the demons around. A nagging sensation fluttered in his stomach, but he dismissed it, he knew Kyrie was safe in the castle city. He wondered how much time had passed but his curiosity would have to wait. Celeste slithered after him. She had fallen from her true demonic form and was now without her size and those damned wings. He smiled wryly. Dante must have closed the last demonic gate. Yamato flickered in his bringer briefly before disappearing again. He could only guess it was to return to his father. He felt his own fatigue press at him. How long had they battled back and forth? He rolled his shoulders and drew Red Queen dealing with more than one demon until he heard the telltale movement of something large. “Seriously most people know when to give up.” He turned to see Celeste lifting her body to tower above him.

“I am not most people whelp and if I cannot have your father then I will take you. Body and soul.” She dove at him with fangs bared. He revved Red Queen and leapt airborne snapping an upward strike and following it with a downward cleave. Both strikes hit the demon and she hissed curling backward and striking out with her tail. Nero landed and turned quickly to brace for another swipe only to see the snake jolt and whimper with pain as white-hot electricity raced along her body.

“Well, what do you know Trish, this one conducts electricity too!” Lady’s peel of laughter echoed around them and Nero had never been happier to hear it.

Eae felt the sudden flicker of the celestial gate and motioned Lady should join Trish beyond the edge of the ruins where Celeste now headed. He stilled a moment to watch as Knights of the Order joined the skirmish giving them a clear chance at escaping this alive, but it was as this thought cleared his mind that Eae felt something shift abruptly and a cold knot settled in his stomach. Desperate with a sense of urgency, he looked for Father McCabe and headed closer to the nexus.

Spotting his target, he lifted his blade and shouldered into a large gargoyle like demon that had pinned father McCabe against one of the ruined structures that littered the area. The demon rolled and the priest finally having enough space to cast a holy spell burnt the creature successfully staggering it for Eae to deliver the killing blow and it dispersed to dust.

“Thanks.” He nodded to the guardian angel.

“I would have come sooner. Did you feel that?” He returned the nod but looked over his shoulder to the center of the nexus. Several new demons converged on their location and Eae readied his blade.

“Yes, not good.” Eae suddenly flinched and stepped toward the center of the nexus which had begun
to pulse with ribbons of light streaming into a pillar of light towards the sky. It seemed to burn away
the clouds above and the faint pale pink of dawn was seen in the sky. “Was that?”

“Yes, and if she is here something has gone terribly wrong! Find Inari quickly. We need Vergil
here.” The ground shook beneath them trembling as if their battle had finally reached the very bones
of the earth. The two men looked at each other in shock and a knowing glance passed between them.
Eae didn’t even turn as he stabbed his sword back then spun to relieve one demon of its head.
McCabe pulled two long daggers and scissor cut another demon into pieces. The pair scanned
around them again and McCabe knelt gathering a med kit from beneath a broken table. “This may
come in handy.”

“She…”

“Just go and hurry!”

Dante gently shifted Danica into his arms. “Dani? No Dani!” She didn’t respond but he caught the
small flutter to her eyes as he spoke. “Vergil?” Her sword flickered from his hand and disappeared
the moment the gate closed, but he had no clue how or why. In fact, he had never seen the sword
before and was only following his mother’s request. His mother. The image burned in his mind, like
her request. Yamato had long sense disappeared from the nexus no doubt to fetch his brother. He
snorted bitterly shaking his head. A thought wilting in him before it bloomed. The injured angel who
has attacked her coughed and stood with a slight stagger as he glared at Dante. He chuckled darkly
as he watched Dante move toward the doorway with the limp body. The ground shook as the
residual energy from the closed gates continued to spark against one another and creating light that
swirled into a column that reached for the skies. Rubble toppled as the shaking became worse. This
place was about to shake itself to pieces. For once, Dante was pretty sure no one would complain
about any collateral damage he may or may not have had a hand in.

“Fool! You think just because you have your brother back that this will end? We are at war and she
is but a casualty. She was tainted cursed just like the others of your kind. Impure. Unworthy.
Wretched creatures with wretched undeserving souls. She deserves death. It is a mercy I have given
her. I have freed her of this mortal coil, that she long wished to shed. A burden she carried falsely but
no longer. She never deserved life to begin with, so do not mourn her life as she passes.”

Dante hesitated in his step. “Look, I don’t know who you are, and right now I really don’t care but if
I ever see you again, I will kill you.” His eyes flickered red to drive home his point before he turned
again and headed outside.

“Such big words, I would expect no less from one of her sons. You may try if you wish but it would
be folly, foolishness. I cannot be killed by the likes of you. I am too powerful, and you will fail, just
like your father.” Dante paused as he spoke but looking down at Danica, he furrowed his brows then
continued not bothering to look back as he answered the angel.

“If you really knew my father, you’d realize just how wrong you are and if you really knew a thing
about me and what I am capable of, you would have left without saying a word. Count your
blessings angel. They’re numbered.” He stepped out into the growing light amidst the death knells of
both demon and angel alike. The ground around him trembled as he called for his brother. “Hurry
Vergil. She’s dying.”

Father McCabe stumbled thru the stones and debris scattered around him. He looked with grief as he
saw the bodies of angels littered across the ground. “Why? Why must it always come to this?
Lucifer, I hope you know what you’re doing.” He continued to mumble pushing past skirmishes as
he attempted to reach the edge of the ruins where Dante and Trish had entered the nexus. As he got close, he suddenly saw Dante appear carrying a lifeless Danica. “God no! Not again! Not her!” He let tears fill his eyes as he rushed to Dante’s side.

The red hunter fell to his knees his expression blank as he whispered, “Hurry Vergil. She’s dying.”

The words no more had left his lips than Vergil appeared in a snap of ozone with Yamato. The elder twin fell to his own knees as his aura flickered around him. He brushed her sooty grey hair from her face as Dante held her across his lap and cradled into her chest. His hand was pressed to her wound but did little to staunch the thick spread of blood. “Dante, how? I… I was supposed to protect her. How did this happen?”

“It doesn’t matter. You must hurry. If she dies and... Just take it.”

“But Dante? If I…”

“Vergil just take it and make them pay. Make them all pay. Every. Last. One of them. You promised this ends, so end it!” Dante’s expression was hollow. His eyes dark even as his aura began sparking against Vergil’s. His brother nodded as the priest joined them falling to his own knees and quickly fumbling with the med kit he had strapped over his dark shirt and jeans.

The elder twin didn’t say anything, he couldn’t. He hadn’t planned for this. He didn’t expect another variable within the variables he planned for. His soul called to him thinly and he suddenly felt pain crackle over him. He had failed again. His soul lifted from her body surrounding them all in a brilliant blue light that faded to bright white as it entered his body. She wilted against Dante gasping on her breath no longer supported by the sheer force of his will to survive. Dante held his breath unable to look at his brother as the blue twin jerked to his feet and stumbled back from them with a soft groan. Instead his head quirked to the side and his hand found its way to her cheek stroking it softly. Father McCabe suddenly pulled from his stupor and began muttering. “Where the hell is a god damn guardian angel when you need one?”

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His mind whirled as his soul stitched itself together and he felt the weight of all that had been wrought while his pieces were separated. He failed to protect her as he was charged. He stumbled to the ground coughing as he clawed thru the muddy snow now laced with blood and bone. He grasped at the collar at his neck as he laid to his back and choked on his own blood staring at the clearing sky above him. His mind flickered back to a memory long forgotten and he suddenly remembered the terms of his contract.

He was back in the darkened tent above yet another arid battlefield. The dark grey and purple banners lifted gently in the constant breeze that never brought relief from the heat. “You will have your vengeance. I promise and I will help you, my friend, but for now I must ask you to help me. I have but one task for you. One. Find her and protect her. Train her for what she must endure. Teach her of what she must know. Guide her to where she must be. Do this thing for me and I will reward you not with death but with life, her life. I have seen the one true path that will lead us there and it depends on you. Your choices. Choose wisely. I do not ask this of you lightly for I am asking you to give a life for a life, to serve me and I will protect you by laying claim to your soul, for as long as I hold the contract, no other can bind you. Should you succeed, then you will have your vengeance and your freedom.”

Vergil closed his eyes remembering he had agreed to those terms. The minute details inconsequential until now. “Damnit.” He remembered his pact, his deal and the mark for their contract burned to his hand. He lifted the hand seeing the scalding mark glow on the back of his left hand like it did back on that day. “Lucifer, I’m sorry.” Red eyes suddenly hovered over him.
“Sorry? That is all you can say? He gave you one job! One! And she lays there dying, sort of. Her life dripping away while you stitch that patchwork quilt of a soul back together. Pathetic. Truly pathetic.” Jerome grinned down from his dark cloak to look over the prone dark slayer. “If I had a nickel for every time, he sent me up here to fix botched contracts, well… I should count my blessings really. I wouldn’t get out much if he didn’t. Besides, it is Fortuna. Meh, not as bad as the mire, huh? Definitely smells better.”

He knelt to one knee placing his hand over Vergil’s startled face and covering his eyes. “So, it seems Xander has finally made an appearance. This complicates my master’s plans. Complicates them most definitely.” He removed his hand and Vergil realized he was unable to move. “Are you confused? You look confused. I bet you thought you’d get your soul back and it’d all just be swell, right? Guess again. You didn’t quite fulfill your end of the bargain now did you? And while he is generous, he is also just as unforgiving.” Jerome looked over his shoulder at Danica in the distance who now lay in the cold mud as people hovered around her and Dante stood listless above her but vigilant to the advancing demons that smelled blood. Vergil turned his head and felt something strange and foreign catch in his chest. Jerome lifted an eyebrow and looked back to Vergil who now watched the scene with great interest.

Kyrie had appeared from the ruins and rushed in as Knights from the Order continued to push back demons giving them room to work. Kyrie frantically called out orders as Casey began working spells to stabilize their patient. “Is that guilt you feel? Huh, seems your soul isn’t the only thing you’ll get back this day. Funny thing guilt. It can make us do some pretty unsavory things, you know like summon things we shouldn’t or lose sight of our real purpose.” Vergil growled at the demon who lifted slowly from his knees. “Lucifer has decided to alter the conditions of his deal with you in return he will release his claim to your soul... eventually. What? Don’t give me that look. He never intended you to be completely untethered. You are a Sparda and that bloodline has quite the fine bouquet of power to it. Besides, he must make completely sure you are no longer a puppet to either Mundus or… Belial and we can’t go about all willy-nilly spoiling his plans. Its tiresome.”

“Fine, then who is this Xander? If he were that important why was I not told of him? Why does he want her dead? And what new price must I pay?”

“Well its complicated and you will pay in faithful service as your code of honor demands. You’ve failed him and now he must rally other allies to keep her alive, but I digress. You see, Xander, or Alexander as his father named him, is Lucifer’s first child, for all intents and purpose his true heir by Celeste.” Vergil’s eyes went wide. “Yes, I see you understand the importance of this. But Xander sided with his uncle Michael against his father, a fact that haunts us all to this day, the lousy brat, especially given that Danica is correct. Someone really does not like the purebloods breeding outside of their kind. She’s on to something important, my boy. I think it’s something you are also uniquely attuned to looking into. I suggest this time you don’t get caught off guard.” Jerome snapped his fingers and Vergil was released. He lifted to his elbows and began to rise to his feet.

“Then she will live?” He looked to see Danica stir as Kyrie continued to work on her. Dante had moved to engage demons who had gotten to close, and Casey cast a guardian spell.

“Funny thing about that. She is fated to die in Firenze, just not today. This place is very important in the fabric of time. Oh look, she’s managed to stop the bleeding and the wound is closing. Well done! Seems that little nephilim over there is meant to be quite the healer, just like her mother. You might want to investigate that as well. Her family has served Sparda since, oh, before you were born.” He turned giving two demons that approached a sneer before snapping his fingers and they fell howling in fire. “Be careful my friend, we’d all hate to have you return to us empty handed a second time. Oh, and, by all means, do have fun smiting these pests, would you?” The demon turned to leave as Vergil cocked his head side to side and once again felt the tingle of power.
“That’s it? I am free?”

A huff escaped the devil’s lips “Vergil you were always free. The tethers that bind you are the ones you have created for yourself. You have created your own hell Lucifer does not need you to be bound any further.”

“What am I to do?”

“Well, technically you failed to protect her, then again you failed to protect your mother and Dante and…

“Stop! What is the meaning of this?”

“Perhaps that is the lesson.”

“I do not understand your riddles.”

“What does it mean? What does it all mean? Get out there and find your meaning, find your real reason for being and when he needs you again, he will call for you his pawn, no, his knight. Just like your father before you, Lucifer sent him out into the world once. I guess now it’s your turn. Consider yourself lucky, of all those that work for him, I’m the only one forever bound to him. I’ve been with him since the beginning and I have seen his plans for you. They are most intriguing.”

“You lie.”

“I do. I’ve also been known to use deceptions and illusion quite handedly. It is why Lucifer loves me so.” He partially covered the side of his mouth as if whispering to Vergil. “We are a lot alike.” He laughed as Vergil growled before rolling his shoulders and feeling his energy return to him. “But I have discovered, sometimes the best lie is to simply tell the truth. Oh look! We have a spectator. You might want to go check that out before you lay waste to this place. Oh yeah, welcome back Vergil! I for one have missed the chaos you excel in creating.” The demon bowed with his eyes fixated on the dark slayer. “Don’t spend all that power in one place.” His laughter echoed as he faded away and Vergil suddenly surged free of whatever spell the demon servant held over him.

Vergil staggered under the weight of his regained power. His inner demon trilled with an excitement that bordered on euphoric finally free to express its true nature. His soul whispered to him of secrets it had learned. Remembering Jerome’s words, Vergil looked toward the east against the tree line and saw the familiar shapes of Alto Angelos creatures created by Agnus from remnants of his armor of servitude to Mundus. He twitched with anger as he saw new creatures emerge from new portals and then in the span of a breath Vergil saw him and their eyes met across the sea of demons that raged against angels now greatly thinned in numbers, Agnus.

He surged with near limitless energy and bled into his triggered form. Anger deep and malicious rose from the darkness with him and it slowly seeped into a blind rage as he stepped further from the scene littered around his brother. Agnus would pay. No longer a pawn, this time as he triggered it felt different. He felt different. Unlike when he remembered triggering a few months ago back at the Hell gate and he thought he was free from Belial, Vergil felt the change. He felt the energy rise thru him. A rich rhythmic ebb and flow of power grew in him as his senses stretched to surround him. This was his true trigger, not forced on him by wicked machination not bolstered by a brother’s love. His skin burned pleasantly as scales replaced skin and horns replaced hair. Thick ribbons of muscle arched and twisted as he felt leathery wings erupt from his back and he crooned. “I will destroy you!” His eyes never left Agnus as he shifted and now with his senses sharper and his body stronger, he relished the incoming Angelos as they shifted from whatever target they previously chased and
moved to intercept him. “Come. I need to sharpen my claws, they have dulled with time.” As his devil form shifted around him, he felt complete once more and he bellowed to the skies both in elation and in rage. “I. Am. Free.”

The scene that unfolded next was a violent bloody mess. Vergil cleared a swath between him and the forest edge. Celeste dared to block him from reaching Agnus and she found herself on the other side of his claws as he bent her backward and threatened to rip her head off. He sneered with a predatory grin and disappeared teleporting to where Agnus once stood. Something in him snapped as he turned to see Agnus grab Celeste and disappear thru a new portal.

“I'm afraid I have no time for your petty rage, dark s-slayer. Until next time.” He wanted vengeance dark bloody vengeance and as the hordes converged on him, he felt the hollow ring of his laughter echo around him.

It wasn’t until his brother grabbed him by the shoulders and faced his ragged maw of teeth that a part of him buried deep beneath the rage and the blood lust cried out in exhaustion. Slowly the edges of his eyesight crept from their dark and bloody corners and he heard the slow whirring thump of his own heartbeat. The rush of blood slowed against his ears and the sounds of gurgling choking death settled against the harsh sound of the ocean waves crashing near the shore. Slowly Vergil fell from his demonic state and saw the devastation that lay around him. Nothing was left. The shockwave of his initial trigger burnt the grass and laid bare all vegetation for a great distance around him. He stood at the epicenter of blood and gore as demonic bodies twitched and bled.

Slowly, he lifted Yamato to see the blade dark with blood as her edge rippled with blue white energy. When had he called for her? Why did Nero not have her? Panic settled in his chest as he swiveled his head from side to side until he found his son pressed against a large pile of rubble, exhausted. Rubble from one of the once standing buildings of the old village of Firenze. Rubble he had created. In the distance he saw he had laid the ruins to waste as well and yet he remembered nothing.

He snapped his head back to his brother and was greeted with a familiar smirk as he released his death grip to his shoulders. “Geez Verge, you had me worried there for a minute. I thought you left me.”

“Agnus escaped,” He cracked bitterly.

“I know but we’ll get him. I doubt he can hide from us forever.” Dante pulled him close hugging him. “It’s good to have you back. I’d throw you a homecoming party but well I think you just wiped out any chance of us getting our deposit back.”

Vergil blinked at him awkwardly until Dante laughed shaking his head at him. His throat seemed thick and he suddenly trembled with both fatigue, and residual excitement. This was what it felt like to be whole. It had been so long, so long without his power. He felt it knit thru his bones and burn his veins laying waste to the years. His mind scrambled to replace the puzzle of memories taken from him while other memories returned to their true incarnations no longer trapped by spells and trickery. Yamato. Yamato was full and present in his mind and even as she bid him farewell and returned to Nero he understood now why. He remembered. He remembered everything. Every blood soaked and tear-filled moment. He remembered the loss, the grief, the torture and dying. He remembered the anger and the chance he was given to make a difference. He remembered living and most of all he remembered his purpose. Vergil was whole.

“Vergil?” Dante leaned toward his brother and ran a hand to his cheek then traced fingers thru his hair to his scalp. “You still in there?”
He felt his face burn as his lips curled into a bright smile that Dante at first frowned at and then mirrored back at him as he pressed his mind and energy toward his sibling. “I am myself once more!” He embraced his brother and felt the warmth as their energies tangled between them. He was finally and completely home.

“It’s about damn time bro. Can we not have this explosion of energy happen again. You’re frightening when you get that angry.” Vergil chuckled and felt the mirth lift from a place long dormant.

“Indeed, I fear my soul was taking out a bit of its repressed anger. I am under control once more.” He pushed from his brother suddenly. “Danica? Is she?”

“She’s fine, well not fine she’s pretty banged up but she’s alive. She was rambling something about you leaving her and I see she has a few new scars and she’s thin, so I don’t know what that is all about, but yeah she’s gonna pull thru.”

“I did promise, didn’t I? Hmmpfh… well I suppose I can let her recover before we start her training again.” He half chuckled as Dante gave him the eyebrow and snorted.

“You? Promised anything to a person much less an angel? So, what are you getting out of it?” He capped his brother on the shoulders and turned him to face the ruined landscape he had left in his wake.

“I am simply fulfilling my end of the contract. Nero was correct. Lucifer sent me to find her.”

Dante stopped pressing a hand his chest, “Wait so she is to be his new vessel? Verge?”

“No, she is something infinitely more important to him, she is the key to finding a weapon that can end the conflict between the realms and possible repair the damage.”

“Does she know that?”

“Yes, and I should say she is less than thrilled that she is not rid of me.”

“I can imagine. So, what is this weapon if I may ask?” They continued toward the others.

“Why my dear brother it’s none other than our father.”

Danica blinked at the blue sky above her. It hurt to breath, but she was breathing. Sluggishly, she watched Kyrie flutter over her, but she faded in and out of consciousness until she felt Corvus curl into the crook of her neck and gurgle softly. She lifted a hand to stroke his chin. She shivered but felt something warm press into her and she closed her eyes listening to her heart beat and the glorious silence of no Vergil in her head. The weight of not carrying Vergil’s soul was a relief. Her memory of events after exiting the portal was spotty at best but she did remember Xander and she shivered thinking he almost ended her. She turned her head in the grass and realized the damage Vergil had inflicted on the landscape. A part of her was sad, this used to be her home but then again, she was supposed to die here. She snorted trying to laugh then groaned.

“You really should be more careful.” She smiled as she watched the snowy hair of Nero come into view. The snow was deep just beyond where she lay but the battle had just made everything muddy. She vaguely listened to chatter from Lady and Trish and even Father McCabe. She drifted from consciousness again until she felt a familiar voice tug at her, and she opened her eyes. “Yamato says it should be safe to move you, so come on nice and easy.”
“Woah, there kid. I’ve got her.” Nero put his hands up and backed away, but Danica couldn’t track his movements until Dante came into view. “Hey babe, I’ve been thinking. You’ll need lots of care these next few weeks while those wounds heal. How ‘bout staying with us?” She gave him a drugged smile and Corvus shifted to stand and cawed at him. “Really? Well then let’s go.”

“I will carry her.” Vergil appeared as Dante knelt to lift her. “She is my responsibility.”

“Nah, I’ve got this one. Casey? Would you mind.”

“I’d be honored. Let me know if you need anything. We have some loose ends to clean up here.” Casey motioned with her head over toward the Captain of the guard talking to Kyrie and Father McCabe.

“That the guy?” Nero appeared and stroked Danica’s hair as Dante shifted her into his chest and stood. She grunted softly but settled into his warmth.

“Yeah, Ezio Durante. A far cry from Credo but apparently not the bastard I thought he was. It’s complicated.”

“Since when is anything we do not?”

“Indeed. Nero, am I to assume you are staying with the Kyrie?”

“Yeah. I’m gonna stay here for a bit and figure out what we do next. She remembers what happened the night her parents died, and we found her wandering the streets a few days later. Seems Agnus was trying to cover his tracks. I can’t leave her with all that floating around. She needs me.” Vergil placed a hand to his shoulder and Nero ticked an eyebrow up suspiciously.

“Then by all means watch over her. Do not make the same mistakes I did.”

“I won’t.”

“When you are ready come speak with me. I have much to tell you.” Vergil nodded and stepped away as Casey motioned that she was prepared to cast a portal.

“So kid, take care.”

“You act as if I won’t see you for a while.” Dante shrugged.

“My guess is that you are gonna be busy with the Order and mopping up stragglers. Give ‘em hell and let us know if you need anything. We have our own housekeeping to do.”

“Just don’t scare her off this time.”

“Scout’s honor.”

“You are no scout.” Dante chuckled softly

“And neither are you. Don’t be a stranger, kid.” He nodded turning smoothly to step thru the portal immediately after his brother disappeared.

As the portal flickered closed, he felt a warm set of arms slip around his waist. He grinned smelling her shampoo and he reached around to pull her close to him. “Hey you.”

“Hey back.”
“So, you are a Lady of the Order of the Rose, huh?”

“I guess I am even though technically it’s just by blood.”

“Got anymore secrets I need to know about?”

“Nothing I’m not willing to share.”

“I like the sound of that. Care to start sharing sooner rather than later?” He nuzzled into her neck and she blushed.

“Nero!”

“What? I missed you.” He kissed her lips and her blush deepened. When they parted she shifted into his arms a bit and giggled.

“I missed you to.”

“Now, let’s talk about getting you some training. I can’t have you out in the field and unable to defend yourself.” She gasped and blinked at him, but her smile brightened.

“Are you sure?”

“Hell yeah, I even know who I want to help train you if you’re game.”

“Yes, yes please. Oh, thank you Nero.” She kissed him roughly and he laughed breaking from her.

“Anything for you babe. Anything.”

“You have failed me for the last time, Agnus!” The great marble statue boomed from its dais in the great hall. “You were to break Vergil and bring him back to me so that I may defeat my enemies.”

“Nn- no my lord. I have merely shuffled the players. Vergil is but a part of a much larger picture. He will lead us to a greater prize. My experiments have yielded powerful results and even now the new Angelos grow stronger.” He bowed sweeping his arm out from his body.

“Explain yourself then.”

“While Lucifer may be a thorn in your side, he is not the angel we need to align ourselves with.”

“I do not want an angelic ally. I want him crushed and I want those souls!”

“Yes, my lord but what if I told you there is another way and another source of souls to feed you?”

Chapter End Notes

I actually have a prologue I want to post but honestly I am so excited for DMC 5 tomorrow, it may not get posted until this weekend. I realize that the new game story is supposed to plug a few plot holes and I have avoided spoilers other than seeing the trailers but I have always fancied that Vergil and Dante are at their core siblings with misplaced rivalry. You know just a little over the top at all
times with Vergil being too serious and Dante not so much. Guess I'll find out in a few hours.

I hope you have enjoyed this and I would love comments and criticism. I also have, if it is not completely obvious, another new story I want to add to this sort of series I'm building. The boys still have some lose ends to tie up and in this AU there is a lot of threads woven into a larger tapestry. Lucifer still has plans after all.

Next up: Prologue
Vergil finally shares with Dante his biggest regret. The one that started it all. The twins begin plans to find their father.
Epilogue: To Seek the Light

Chapter Summary

Vergil comes clean finally... Dante proves he can be mature for a few minutes and Nero finds his family.
An angsty emotional and lengthy ending to this story that hopefully explains and connects this tapestry of writing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

-End of March roughly three months after the events at Firenze in the previous chapter-

Vergil watched the sun rise over the city. The cramped urban buildings sprawled before him from his perch atop the roof. His mind no longer dark and stormy with doubt, he cast his sights to the coming dawn. Darkness gave way to the light as long shadows receded and warm inviting swatches of golden light replaced them. He closed his eyes letting his long dormant senses stretch out around him and his demon purred.

“Tell me. What did you miss most while you were gone? I mean really being back, back, as in whole not the last few months of craziness that… yeah… what did you miss most?” Vergil let a faint smile tug at his lips. He lifted his head, if you were a demon you could smell the faint scent of early flowers coming from the park which was home to the statue of their father’s likeness. The world around them was coming back to life a sentiment Vergil shared. He turned slightly to see his brother lean to the frame of the dormer window used to access this part of the roof. “I missed a few things, if I were to be honest.”

“Share?” Dante stepped quietly to the small brick wall that separated this roof from the neighboring one.

“Watching the sunrise. It’s strange but I never realized what a simple act this was or what it actually meant to me.”

“Huh, I never would have pegged you for a romantic type.” He shifted slightly. “What else?”

“Tea. The swill one is forced to imbibe in hell is truly noxious.” His voice fell to disgust and Dante chuckled at this.

“Seriously? There are those who find tea a be a truly noxious substance.” Vergil chuckled at his brother’s comment.

“Perhaps, but I have learned to cherish the subtle qualities of mystery, and remoteness in everyday life, except for pizza. I find it… horrid.” Dante cringed at his words but gave a small chuckle. Their conversation was easy, and he enjoyed their moments like this. They remained quietly for several minutes not out of awkwardness or unease, but they just enjoyed one another’s presence. Dante, however, seemed to be restless and shifted again. “Ask your question.” Vergil narrowed his eyes and looked over the parking lot. “I find I am… open to speaking this morning.” His red twin grinned like a crazed monkey, but quickly controlled himself when he saw that damnable raised eyebrow and
matching smirk watch him. “Careful Dante, your enthusiasm might spoil my good mood.” Dante frowned causing Vergil to chuckle softly. “You are so easy to read at times.”

“Yeah, well, it’s hard not to get excited around the great and powerful Oz.”

“I’ve made my share of mistakes.” He frowned suddenly distracted by something in the distance. His awareness flickered back, and he turned to face his brother.

“How human of you.”

“I prefer to think of it as a smaller part of myself.” The elder twin joined his brother on the wall.

“Meh, it’s a start. At least you admit you have a human part.” The warm breeze lifted a variety of scents to the air and as the twins eyes flickered, they both smiled. “Looks like the kid’s back.” Vergil nodded and stood again almost as if nervous. Dante noticed but tempered his urge to spoil his one chance to get answers. “I just want to know one thing.”

“Lie.” His voice was low but not bitter. He merely stated a fact.

“Ok, true. I want to know at least three things, but those questions will lead to more questions and then we start down a rabbit hole.”

“Agreed. Perhaps, I should start at the beginning?”

“Really? Like the beginning as in why you headed down this dark lonely path of wanton destruction, manipulation, and all-consuming power?” Vergil quirked his head to the side and gave his brother another eyebrow. Dante gave a short snort and raised his hands. “Inquiring minds want to know. You don’t exactly give me a straight answer. Damn big words and literary references. Sometimes a person needs a degree just to understand what the hell you’re saying.” Vergil looked away. Dante just grinned. He missed having his brother around to tease.

“With regards to the issues surrounding Danica now settled, and with Nero’s decision to stay on Fortuna for the foreseeable future, it would seem that the time has come for me, no, for us, to begin focusing on our new goals.”

“Finding Pops, giving Agnus the smack down, running Lucifer’s errands or was there something else?”

“I was actually thinking about us.”

“Us?”

“I believe I owe you some answers. I believe I promised to explain a few things.”

“Ah geez, Verge you’re gonna make me wet myself with excitement. Don’t tease me.”

“I was not aware that bladder control was an issue. Seems Nero calls you an old man for good reason.” The elder twin smirked trying not to look at Dante who gasped.

“Did you just make a joke? You did! Dammit Vergil I don’t think my heart can take this stress.”

“You are being dramatic.”

“Oh ho! So, this is your new tactic you’ll shock me to death rather than plunge Yamato thru another body part? Scary tactic and it just might work.” Vergil shook his head again watching the sky burst into deep colors of red and orange.
“Don’t spoil my fun, Dante. You know I’m still one point ahead in our little competition.”

“Pfft… the score was tied, again. Think I’d quit with you one up. Nah, doesn’t happen, but that last move was a doozy.” He rubbed his shoulder. Vergil smirked.

“You’ve taken too long with your question. I have changed my mind. We should discuss father. There is much that remains a mystery about his whereabouts among other questions that need answered.”

“Damn you and your split personality. Ok, fine but I still have questions you sadist. I’ll bite. You really believe he’s out there somewhere? I mean surely wouldn’t he have come looking for us?”

Vergil turned to look at his brother, but his expression was vacant almost as if he were unsure of his answer. “I must endeavor to change what I believe. My old beliefs have caused too many people to be hurt. Sparda was well known to hide in plain sight, so who am I to say we haven’t come across him at some point. Close your mouth, fool. Your disbelief is not without warrant but I have considered that father sealed away or hid his malice, much like angels do with their own grace, to appear human.” He stared at his brother for several very long moments as Dante rolled that thought thru his head. He then shuffled back to the wall and sat near his brother. “Lucifer was not always fond of our father but as events unfolded, they discovered between them they essentially wanted the same thing and eventually Sparda became one of his generals but more than that I believe they became close friends, if that is the correct word. After Temen-ni-gru, Sparda remained in this realm to continue to protect the humans. It is no secret human blood feeds a great many demons just as their souls feed their need for power. His exile was an onerous task considering he had just lost someone he loved dearly when he closed the gates of Temen-ni-gru, more than that he could never go home. I understand that feeling to some degree.”

“You’re talking about the priestess. The blood sacrifice. I heard some of the stories. That story always struck me, well I guess because of Lady mostly.”

“Lady? Explain.”

“Come on Verge, surely you remember Arkham killed her mother and apparently she was a descendant of that said priestess.” Vergil nodded his memory returning to the more subtle aspects of that day.

“Yes, I remember now. That seems like a different lifetime, another person.”

“It was.” Dante crossed his arms and inspected his boots. “I never knew he was close to the priestess or anything. I mean from the stories he was saddened by her lose but it was necessary, and the priestess offered her life freely. That’s why that place was so damn hard to get into.” He snorted as he gazed up to see the sky brighten with shades of lavender as the red and orange faded to a softer hue. “I always wondered if he had, you know, relations with anyone else. I guess it wasn’t until I discovered my own stunning good looks and witty charm that I even thought about the fact that dad was here for a very long time.”

“Please do not torture me with your most recent sexcapades. We were speaking of Lady. Oh!”

“Oh, what?”

“Did you pursue a relationship with the her? One that was more physical in nature, perhaps?” Vergil smirked feeling his brother ruffle at the edges.

“Things just didn’t work out.” Dante was uncomfortable at first but snapped himself out of it looking
Vergil dead in the eyes. He wasn’t afraid or ashamed of his relationship or lack thereof with Lady. They just didn’t work as a couple. “We have a very special kind of relationship. We depend on each other and we understand one another. Everything else just wasn’t meant to be, but she is one of my closet friends, that, you can count on.”

“I understand. She is fiercely loyal and exceptionally skilled for a human. The fact that she tolerates your stupidity in any form is a sign of her compassion for lesser creatures.”

“Verge!”

His brother laughed “It was meant to be a complement of her, although I would be loath to admit such things to her in person.”

“You should try. It might go a long way to smoothing over her distrust of you.”

“No, she should be wary of me lest I fall to… well, let’s just say I have a habit of blindsiding you. Perhaps her distrust is warranted for now. I actually like the idea of her bias. It should keep me honest.” Vergil hugged his arms before he rubbed one arm and sighed. “Father always loved our mother. She was a very important figure in his life. It was always our mother and only her that he loved. The stories I rambled about months ago were true. Our mother descends from angels.”

“Pfftt… I ain’t no angel.”

“Indeed. Your use of language is atrocious.”

“Maybe if you’d talk more, I’d be gooder wit ‘em words,” he snarked quickly. Vergil merely huffed at the response.

“Mundus plagued out parents lives out of bitterness and rage thru a series of tragedies that brutally claimed Eva’s life more than once. Ironically, being one of the first celestial beings and because of a particularly strong bond with Sparda, she was always reincarnated, and they always found one another. She was in a sense immortal in her own way.”

“Wait, what?”

“Yes, my stunned brother, Sparda fell in love with Eva when they first met. He was but a child himself and she was his guardian angel.” Vergil motioned to Nero who tried to quietly disappear back down the stairs. “No, Nero you should stay for this. It is part of your heritage as well.”

“You sure? This sounds like I sort of intruded on something not even Dante knows.”

“It is. Your presence saves me from repeating myself since what is to come is not easy for me to speak of.” Nero stepped to the roof and leaned to the dormer frame. Dante grinned at him pointing to his head.

“Nice haircut. You know…”

“Yeah, Kyrie pointed it out to me the moment I came downstairs.” He ran his hand thru his hair which now sported a short spiky look just like his father’s. “I got tired of it in my face. It’s easier to wash the guck out too, maybe you should join us… old man.”

“Wow you even cut that yourself? You really are his little nestling.” The red oaf stood quickly closing the distance between them to hook his arm around his neck and ruffle his hair.” Nero quickly pushed him away with a growl.
“Knock it off, asshole!”

“Fine, fine. Look Verge it’s mini you!”

“Dante! Please stay focused.”

“Pffttt… I haven’t seen my adorable little nephew for months and now he comes back looking like you. I’m slightly hurt.”

“You’re slightly an idiot.” Nero grinned giving him both a smirk replete with trademark lifted brows and a head nod. He leaned back to the window frame as Dante threw his hands up and guffawed.

“No respect. Not one little bit. Fine, Vergil I wasn’t dismissing you but I’m still struggling with this whole she was an angel concept. Now you want me to believe she was his guardian angel, like Eae is to us?”

“Indeed.”

“You’re crazy!”

“I have lost myself to insanity once or twice but no I am completely lucid at this moment.” Vergil gave his shocked brother a small nod. “I assure you. I am not crazy. Mundus killed Eva more than once, each time he found them and each time he sank his brother into greater despair. There are several stories as to why he did this both to his brother and to her, but the fact remained Sparda stayed in this realm to protect it even at the cost of losing his beloved over and over. As cruel as it seemed the divine insisted on reincarnating her soul, for only the one divine has the power to leave a soul with the memories of it’s previous life. It was not until Fortuna that this cycle changed.”

“Changed? How? I mean obviously Mundus is one messed up dude but that seems more like an obsession or resentment or… jealousy?” Dante stammered a moment before uncrossing his arms and bracing on the wall. Vergil lifted and stood looking across the sky which now brightened with the sun on the horizon the last traces of color now slowly being replaced by warm golden light and a blue sky. “He loved her too?”

“He was obsessed with Eva I would not call it love, and he was consumed of his malicious desires for a woman who would never return his affection. He was possessive of her. Possessive of someone who loved another.”

“Nah, that’s really twisted. Like Helen of Troy twisted with a side of straight up crazy and maybe a sprinkle of way too much bloodshed. Devils or not that’s screwed up.”

“Indeed, but I learned of this story not from accounts handed down by word of mouth but from someone who witnessed these accounts first hand. I have no reason to doubt my source.”

“Who?” Nero interjected softly as his bringer flickered dully.

“Irrelevant for now. Just know that she can be trusted.”

“So, Sparda really did live part of his life on Fortuna then?”

Vergil nodded while Nero huffed quietly as if not completely surprised the religious training he had as a youth was true. “After the tower, he fled to find seclusion. He wanted to break the cycle of death in his life, so he fled to what we now know as the island country of Fortuna. Due to the location of the multiple portals and the nexus, it was at the time a place steeped with magic, demons, angels, and death. Many battles were fought there, many swords broken, many shields shattered along with the
lives attached to those events. Sparda decided he would settle there and attempt to maintain balance on this small part of a greater world. He never once expected to be recognized on Fortuna as a savior and he never expected to find her yet again. It seemed the divine had plans for our parents.”

“So, then Eva was actually the first Lady of the Order of the Rose.”

“Indeed, she was.”

“The what? Oh, are you talking about that secret sort of society you told me that Kyrie belongs too?”

“Yeah, seems her mother was one of the last. After her parents were killed, the group sort of disappeared. The story is that Agnus wanted them out of the picture so he could infiltrate the Order of the Sword. The Order of the Rose were also hunters, but they were healers and mages who used their skills to heal and to assist the Knights. Seems Agnus had plans much earlier than anyone realized, and he got rid of the one group that might have detected his ruse.”

“Fascinating. I believe that island holds even more answers to our past and perhaps our future. Our parents lived many lifetimes on that island secluded from the rest of the world. It is a truth few know of and it would appear time has a way of hiding its secrets.”

“So, you think we start our search there? Afraid a lot of it has been wrecked to hell and back with everything that’s happened over the last five years.”

“And who’s fault was that?”

“I think I made it pretty clear I am not responsible for all the collateral damage. I may have taken down the hell gate but…” The pair glared at one another as Vergil cleared his throat and dismissed their banter in favor of moving the conversation forward.

“For a time, Sparda remained as his true self, so it is possible there are areas unseen by humans where a devil may hide secrets. For instance, the catacombs in Firenze. Even Lucifer spoke of the library and catacombs beneath as a great repository of knowledge and he hinted that there were others. Firenze is also where I met your mother.”

Nero smiled but it was bittersweet. “With all due respect, this is about you two right now. Mom can wait. I know she tried to keep me safe and I’ve accepted that something forced her to leave me at that orphanage. I’ve managed to scare up a few bits of info over the years. We can compare notes later.”

Vergil inclined his head to his son closing his eyes a moment as if remembering something precious.

“As you wish. After a few centuries, Sparda decided it would be best if he faded into the background becoming a footnote rather than the immortal creature he truly was. I would imagine they did not want to bring any further attention to themselves as they were still hiding from Mundus. Times were changing and humans evolving. Humans cast aside early superstitious beliefs and focused on the more divine religion and on the more dependable knowledge of science. Knowledge that could not possibly accept an immortal devil as being ‘good’.”

“Yeah, guess I can see that but wow, I’m still stuck on mom once being a guardian angel.” Dante shook his head while Nero nodded.

“Understandable. I was struck with the enormity of Sparda when I happened upon Fortuna. My research had led me to many references about the island. This was a huge part of his life we never knew of and in a way I felt betrayed. Father traveled the world taking on the human visage that we remember and appeared in various myths around the world. We knew such a small part of his life that the further I sought information about him the more drawn into a labyrinth of mythologies and
deities most of which were not him but, still the mere lives he touched seems enormous compared to what we knew of him. I felt more than betrayed, I felt as if we were nothing more than footnotes in his life. He helped fight proverbial ‘evil’ and demons who escaped into this realm all his life.”

“Vergil, you do realize his is or was like thousands of years old? I mean we don’t even really know how long we will live. I mean I don’t know about you, but I have a funny suspicion it might be a very longtime.”

“Indeed. I can assure you we have already slowed in our aging, very soon we will no longer age as humans do. In another ten to twenty years this fact will become obvious and we will need to consider how long we stay in any one place. I doubt humans will ever accept that fact about our heritage.”

“Woah, you mean he’s always gonna be an old man?”

“Cute kid. I was just gonna say how excited I am to know I get to keep these good looks. I mean I am pretty smokin’ hot.”

“You wish.”

“Hnn… You’ve reminded me. In his travels, Sparda stumbled upon a man named Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus and his works of translation of the bible from Greek to Latin. This scholar moved to Fortuna to seek enlightenment in his religious studies. Specifically, he wanted to see why Fortunians worshipped a demon as a god. This was sacrilegious and blasphemous to someone such as him.”

“Hey, I know that name isn’t he Saint Jerome?” Vergil smiled lightly and inclined his head.

“I’m very impressed Nero.”

“Yeah, well don’t get too excited. I only remembered that because I had to repeat a year of theology with Sister Beatrice.” Dante chuckled. “Shut it!” His uncle immediately put his hands up in surrender.

“Yeah, well I read it in one of pop’s journals, but all I remember was that he made the first reference to the fallen angel as Lucifer. Prior to that he had no decipherable name… Oooh!”

“And now, you see, the circle is complete. Father found the man who became an immortal faithful servant to the divine and then Lucifer. This was how they came to work with one another.”

“Woah, flashback! You told me the name of the demon servant who came to fetch you from the mire after Mundus threw you in that last time was… Jerome. That cannot be coincidence can it?”

“It was not.”

“Dude this is complicated.”

“Shall I speak more slowly?” Nero choked on his laughter watching his uncle squirm at his brother’s response to him.

“Jerk.” Vergil chuckled clearly not deterred by his brother and strangely Dante found it comforting that they were talking so casually this morning rather than fighting, again. Unconsciously, he rolled his shoulder and rubbed at it remembering their latest spar. Vergil smiled catching his brother’s actions. Nero composed himself quietly.

“The very same. Jerome offered to serve Lucifer in exchange for knowledge and possibly
immortality of his own. I am unsure; the tenants of that contract are no doubt curious as well as deep. Lucifer remained in Hell after the end of the great war to protect the Mire of souls. Some say he was cast out, others say he fought his brother and was forced to take an unwanted position, and still other accounts hint at something quite different. Either way, Jerome wanted to learn more about the divine and his new-found knowledge of the three realms. They have been together ever since. But I digress. Lucifer’s decision to accept exile is a worthy cause when one realizes the true worth of a soul and the stakes that are in play.”

“Souls are pieces of the divine given life. They are purpose and glimpses of what is possible. Huh, guess Sister Beatrice’s constant harping on me did prove useful.”

“So, that is how pops and Lucifer met, thru Jerome?”

“Two beings tainted and yet working to find peace between the realms.”

“So, mom how did she fit into this? Being a guardian angel wasn’t she against Lucifer’s siding with the demons… oh but she was tainted too because she fell in love with Sparda?”

“True love as it was explained to me. Even I do not know why Lucifer’s recent bid to reunify hell has become priority. He has only explained that it is for a greater cause. I am also told that he hid them for a time from other forces that wished to break their bond.”

“Still sounds fishy to me.”

“Perhaps, but Eva and Sparda were nigh inseparable. There were many who could not understand why the divine would let a creature such as Sparda taint someone as pure as mother.”

“But we’re half human not celestial.”

“Ah, yes the point of my ramblings. Like I mentioned earlier, I believe father may have given up his malice to hid after our disappearance. Further, I believe our mother gave up her grace to hide and live among the humans with her last reincarnation. In theory, she could have lived a very long time without aging almost as if she were still tethered to the divine and yet she would for all practical purposes be human. It is complicated and I do not know when or how this occurred, but it would have also allowed her to become pregnant with us, brother.”

“You mean she wasn’t angelic when we were born. I think I understand. Mundus must have been able to find his brother in part because of her but when she gave up that power, she also made it much harder for him to find them.”

“And much harder for Sparda to protect her if they were found. I understand now that Sparda left us to protect us. My research found that someone just as terrifying as Mundus had caught their scent and now hunted Sparda but more specifically hunted us, his children. The idea of possible hybrids with access to such power was disgusting to him.” Dante crinkled his brow. He ran thru everyone that he could think of and he chuckled shortly realizing there were a lot of enemies in the demon world and a lot who harbored ill will toward their father. Berial, Baal, Argosax, Belial, were just a few and of course there were many smaller players who grew in the vacuum created by Mundus’ recent fall. He shook his head and looked at his brother.

“Demons are not our only enemies, dear brother. As hybrids, many demons look at us as tainted unworthy trash and yet there are many who believe it would be thru the manipulation of our gifts that would be mankind’s advantage and demon kind’s undoing.”

“Like Agnus. Hold up, he worked for Mundus.”
“Or does he? We still do not know which angel he was seen with and neither he nor Celeste have been breathed about in the underworld.”

“Then is this about Danica, and why Lucifer wants you to watch over her?”

“Again, I am impressed.”

“Then you’re talking about Michael. Thanks, Sister Beatrice. Our theology paints a different tale of certain events in the bible. The battle between Michael and Lucifer being one of them and even that recounting is split amongst Fortunian scholars. See, Michael is shown to be a guardian of humans while other tales paint him more of an elitist. He found humans to be beneath the angels and worthy only as servants or some such nonsense.” Nero shrugged. “I sort of didn’t listen again and the sister just gave up at that point.”

“Holy crap, you’re talking about Xander, Michael’s pit bull as Father McCabe believes? You mean a freaking arch angel wants our family dead?”

“There are more things in heaven and earth, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

“No poetry please. I need an answer.”

“Yes. We were being hunted by angels and perhaps we are being hunted once more. Angels were something father did not have experience with, and he had no defense against them at the time.”

“So then, you think Sparda is alive but hiding or trapped even?”

“I am not sure where he could be now, but I believe we would have lived our lives significantly longer as a family had I not been so weak and made a dreadful mistake that caused our family to suffer a new tragedy. It is here that I find I must confess my greatest sin.”

“Vergil, what did you do? What could you have possibly done? You were a child.”

“I let fear guide me. I just wanted our father back home.”

“We both did. We both hurt watching mom fall apart at times, but you didn’t bring Mundus to us, you didn’t cause mom’s death.”

“Oh, but I did.”

“Stop, this ends here and now. You couldn’t possibly…”

“I summoned Belial. I broke the seal releasing him into this realm.” Nero and Dante both shared shocked glances. Nero stood from the wall.

“You what? How could you summon him? He was locked away and…” Dante now stood at his brother’s claim.

“I found a spell long forbidden because of how it reaches across time and space. A spell known as the Ancestor’s Call. Sparda was an ancient devil, one of the first. His journals did not contain just the daily musings of his life. They contained his life’s work; every spell, every known weapon, every slip of knowledge he gathered thru as many whole lifetimes as this earth is years old. Yes, I found a spell and I tried to summon Sparda home.”

“Dammit you and your books. No wonder mom forbade you in his private study.”

“I was a fool, young and naïve. I just wanted to be happy again to feel loved and protected. I wanted
us to be a family but, in my haste, I did not see that what I was doing was not summoning a single
devil like any poor lost soul who sought to gain a meager gift from the sale of his soul. No, I
summoned all of our ancestors and it led Mundus straight to us and worse it corrupted my soul letting
Belial in to hide in the cracks of my psyche.”

“Vergil you couldn’t have known.”

“Then on top of the realization of what I had done as I stood locked in the summoning circle, I heard
the demons crying for the hunt and I knew. Mom was defenseless. She was nothing more than a
weak human and Mundus saw an opportunity in what I did, and he knew this time he could take her
forever.”

“But I don’t understand Belial?” Nero asked quietly.

“We descended from his bloodline, he was the first among us. An ancestor.”

Dante shook his head with disbelief, “It all makes sense now, that night, you picked that fight with
me. You wanted to hurt me with what you said, just to keep me from following on your heels. I
looked up to you and followed you around like a love starved puppy, but you were afraid. Afraid I’d
try to stop you. I’ve always held you back. You’re right I would have stopped you too. I’d have
screwed something up. That’s why Mom couldn’t find you. She looked but finally was forced to put
me in the closet under the stairs to keep looking for you. God, I was so scared. But you weren’t in
the house. You were already outside.”

“Do you see? Do you see it now? Do you see my shame brother? My horror and stain? Do you see
why I have sought power? Not for the sake of power itself but to fix that which I had caused. She is
dead because of me! There will be no resurrection, no family reunion. She is dead. They are both
dead because of me. My choices, mine.” Dante lifted his hand to his brother’s shoulder and gave it a
squeeze. Their eyes both wet with tears that had yet to fall. He now understood this was the moment
that defined his brother for the next twenty years. He was a child that thought he could fix a very
grown up problem and he suffered because of it. A pattern of seeking for answers, seeking for power
of finding a way to become strong enough to fix what he felt he had broken, grew from this point
forward. Dante never heard the nattering voices of the demons who captured his brother. He
struggled but found himself in the hands of people who did care about him and pushed him to be a
better person. Vergil had not been so lucky. He knew the story of how demons raised his brother and
how he did little more than survive those years they were separated. Dante always believed that was
where he lost his brother, but now he could see his brother suffered because he thought he deserved
that punishment. His heart broke for him in that moment and he pushed his energy toward his brother
only to feel him shrink from him once more.

He glanced at Nero who stood to the side of them nervously flexing his bringer and it dawned on
Dante how parallel his nephew’s life was to that of his father’s. Nero always believed he was the one
to blame for his mother’s death, just like Vergil. “It is not that we fall down that defines us. It is not
our failures. What defines us and shows us our true character is how many times we get back up
when we get knocked down. You are not your mistakes Vergil, any more than Nero should be
defined by his or me by mine. We learn from our mistakes and that is what makes us stronger. You
are here because you survived, because you figured out what was worth fighting for. Sure, we don’t
know what happened to Pop’s but here we are almost forty years later, and we get the chance to find
out. Nero gets the chance to know his father and thru you his mother. This is a win god dammit and
we are gonna take it.” He shook his brother in the end forcing him to look at him. He then motioned
for Nero to come join them. The red-faced youth stepped closer tentatively as Vergil shifted and
lifted a hand to touch his son’s face.
“I’m sorry are words inadequate to express how I feel in this moment. Though I loved your mother, I couldn’t stop myself from trying to fix this one mistake. I just couldn’t forgive myself and in doing so I made yet another error. I never should have left her behind. I never should have left you.” Dante lifted his hand from his brother and Vergil hugged his son for several long moments. Nero cried softly as Dante felt their energies melt into one another and he smiled feeling a tear roll down his face.

“That’s what she meant,” he whispered but his hushed voice caused both Vergil and Nero to separate one wiping tears the other staunchly refusing to let them fall.

“She?”

“Who?”

“Mom.” Nero looked to his father and wiped at another tear away as Vergil looked to him confusion written plainly to his face. They both looked back at Dante who stretched his arms out and sniffled a bit before he wiped his face and shook himself. “Yeah, see I never did tell you guys what happened at the nexus.”

“You mean with Dani?” Nero asked confused.

“You told us Xander stabbed her.”

“He did and Yamato stabbed him but after those two events, I saw mom appear in the celestial portal. In fact, she threw Xander away from Danica before he could go at her again and I could reach her. Mom kept him from taking her sword too.”

“The one you used to close the celestial gate?” Nero sniffled a bit but was slowly coming back to himself.

“The same.”

“But the sword disappeared?”

“Did Eva take it somehow?”

“No, no she just gave me a message before she told me to close the gate. I frankly don’t know what happened to the sword it disappeared from my hand.”

“A message?”

Dante nodded and blew air thru his lips causing his hair to lift to the side. He stepped back towards his brother and placed a hand to his shoulder once more. “Mom told me to tell you something. Something that didn’t make sense until just now. She said I’d know when to tell you this and well…”

“Dante!”

“Vergil, Mom said she never blamed you for what happened to her. She knew eventually Mundus would catch her. I didn’t understand that until today. More importantly she wanted me to remind you of our favorite story as children. She told me to remind you of Alice.”

“Alice in Wonderland? But that makes no sense…” Vergil suddenly gasped and Dante just grinned. “Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.” Nero snorted at
the quote. Vergil furrowed his brows and pulled from his brother. Dante let him go. He needed to discover this for himself.

“My favorite quote was, ‘I’m not strange, weird, off, nor crazy, my reality is just different from yours.’ It always made me feel… better.” Dante snorted at his nephew.

“She had a message for you too.” He put his nephew in a loose choke hold.

“Me?”

“Sure kid, in the blink of an eye she told me a lot and she showed me that it was her who helped Casey when we retrieved Vergil.”

“But I don’t remember.”

“She planned it that way. Something about keeping herself small so she could keep helping from the other realm.”

“Oh!”

“Anyway, she said you’ve worked hard to find your family and she’s proud of you. Just wanted you to know.”

“Huh, my family. Guess I did although to be fair you sort of found me.”

“Not so sure about that. I’m starting to feel like there are all kinds of little threads and strings that have always connected us in some way.” Nero nodded and Dante gave him a short hug. The sound of laughter caused them both to turn. “Vergil? You ok?”

“It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards”

“Uh, Verge?”

“Don’t you see Dante? ‘I can’t go back to yesterday because I was a different person then.’ I understand now.”

“Good. Then learn to use your damn words so the rest of us can understand.” Dante snorted at his nephew, but Vergil just gave him a short smile and a nod undaunted by the return of his son’s moodiness. They each had their own coping mechanisms.

“Indeed. I have lived in my past long enough. I must forgive myself not to change the past but instead to change my future.”

“Well that sounds like a plan! So, let’s celebrate this moment with a hot fresh pizza.”

“Dante! We had a moment going there.”

“Yep and I have exceeded my limit on emotional maturity. It pains me to say this but being an adult sucks, that’s Vergil’s job and to a lesser extent mini Vergil.” He poked his nephew who promptly swatted him.

“Asshole! And just where the hell do you think we can go and get a fresh hot pizza at 6:30 in the morning?”

“Tony owes me!”
“Fat chance. I’ve got a better idea, actually it’s what I came here for in the first place.”

“Oh yeah? Wow me.”

“I came across something of interest on Fortuna that led me to make a few calls and lo and behold I found something of real interest. You know something right up our alley of expertise.”

“A job?”

“A well-paying job that has surprisingly remained untouched for several years and one that just happens to take us past a certain coffee shop on the east side on our way out of town.” Nero wriggled his eyebrows making him look remarkably like a cross between Vergil with Dante’s expressions.

“Yeah, breakfast!” Vergil shook his head and stepped forward.

“This job, why do I feel you have not told us everything.” Vergil had regained his composure and Dante smiled giving his brother a side glance as the elder twin slipped into his business mode.

They still had much to talk about but somehow it didn’t seem to matter quite as much. Vergil was right, or well, Lewis Carroll was right, none of them was the same person compared to when this all started and truth be told tomorrow, they would fall back into old habits, but that was ok. Dante knew the corner of doubt had finally been turned and none of them would go back down that dark path of uncertainty. They had a future, together. A future that apparently meant they’d eventually face more angels, predictably a lot more demons and possibly a breakfast replete with cinnamon rolls in the next thirty minutes. His stomach growled loudly causing both father and son to look at him and he realized he had not heard a word of what was said. He shrugged sheepishly.

“Well, come on, let’s get the man child something to eat or we’ll never get to the bottom of this.”

“Indeed. How are we even related?”

“I’ve been asking myself that for years.”

“Hey, standing right here!”

The trio walked in thru the dormer window chatting about the job and food and the possibility of stopping at the orphanage to see Dani upon their return. Vergil grumbled as Dante announced he had completely platonic reasons for wanting to visit. Nero laughed.

As the sound of their conversation drifted further into the building a light shimmered on the roof as if the sun had caught the edge of a reflective surface. Eae materialized to the edge of the wall not far from where the twins sat earlier. Corvus appeared next to him in a burst of blue white mist.

“Do you think they understand my feathered friend?” The raven bobbed his head and cawed softly. “I agree they have taken a big step in healing the time line.” Corvus gurgled lifting to the roofline of the window above Eae as he stood. “True. We should remain vigilant, but this time Vergil is with them and no longer consumed with his need for power. They have each other after all and there is strength in their numbers.”

The raven fluttered his dark wings and cocked his head to the side cawing again as the three men were seen walking across the parking lot towards their motor bikes. “Shh… Nero is more sensitive to our presence than the others.” Corvus dipped his head as if scolded. “It is good to see them happy in this moment. Wouldn’t you agree?”
“Yes, let’s just see if we can keep them alive long enough to actually enjoy it this time.” Eae smiled as Jerome stepped forward from the shadows. The dark-haired angel clasped his hands behind his back appearing to be in thought a moment watching them before he turned. “Eae am I correct to assume you still have connections with most of Sparda’s loyal?” The sandy blonde nodded. “Then may I trouble you for a favor on short notice?”

“How may I help?”

“I need to see a Shisha about a house and preferably before they finish breakfast. I’m sending the boys home. There is something they need to see if they wish to find Sparda.”

“Oh, do you mean?”

“Yes, it’s time they discover Firenze isn’t the only library Sparda left behind. There was more than one reason that mansion was attacked that night and it had nothing to do with Vergil.”

Chapter End Notes

First and foremost...Thank You so much for reading this!
I am humbled that so many have read and enjoyed this.

I have to say I want to continue along in the universe created here and to that end I expect you will see it happen.
In the mean time I hope you find the strings tied together and the threads still left untouched and above all I hope you enjoyed this ride...

And so, don’t be surprised if some new Capcom characters make their appearance and we revisit some older ones in the next story. Like I've said before Lucifer has plans...
Thanks again

* The epilogue title pairs nicely with the first chapter title because...foreshadow.
Muwahahaha
ps. I don't own any of the Capcom characters or lore used in the creation of this fictional work but damn if I did ;)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!